

Krzysztof Andrzej J e ż e w s k i – A FEW NOTES TO AGNIESZKA KOMOROWSKA'S ARTICLE *ESEJ SINOLOGICZNY O NORWIDZIE* (*SINOLOGICAL ESSAY ON NORWID*; STUDIA NORWIDIANA 2011, NO. 29) ON MY BOOK *CYPRIAN NORWID A MYŚLI POETYKA KRAJU ŚRODKA* (*CYPRIAN NORWID AND THE THOUGHT AND POETICS OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM*)

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First of all, I would like to note a few glaring errors which have found their way into the aforementioned article:

1. I have never translated Sergio Pitol, although I know him personally.
2. I am an author not of eleven, but of fourteen published poetry volumes.
3. I did by no means write that “Norwid impacted Solzhenitsyn, Gombrowicz, Miłosz and Brodsky”, but that “he is one of those who achieved the greatest victory [...] like Solzhenitsyn, Gombrowicz, Miłosz and Brodsky did later, in the 20th century.”
4. *Moja Ojczyzna* is not a fragment of *Assunta*!!! A bewildering error coming from a Polish philologist!
5. The misspellings in quotation from *Rzecz o wolności słowa* and *Do Walentego Pomiana Z.* are not at all “a serious interference in the text”, but merely bothersome misprints, for which the editor and proofreader of the book bear responsibility.

I am not a scientist, but a poet and essayist. The point is, we poets are often equipped with intuition and imagination which many scientists sadly seem to lack ...

My essay is a result of many years (over 40!) of associating with Norwid, with whom, I dare say, “wszedłem w poufne obcowanie” [I have gotten in an intimate communion], in the words of the Poet from his poem *Bliscy*. Since I translated his poetry into French, I had to make thorough research of his language, his poetics, and his philosophy. Each further step only consolidated my conviction that my hypoth-

esis was right. If the Chinese traces were sporadic with Norwid, the matter would hardly be worth mentioning. Yet it is quite the contrary: there are too many to ignore them. It is they which give his poetry that absolutely inimitable tone and character, which decide of his irresistible originality. Chefs know very well that sometimes a pinch of spice, if it only be well matched, decides on the taste of the given dish, which without that spice would be insipid and trite... Similarly, experts on fashion create completely new attire by adding some minor element to a garment... Besides, does the European literature of the 19th century have at least one author in reference to whom a similar parallel could be used? Perhaps only Victor Segalen (1878-1919), whose *Stèles* I published in Polish in 2009, with the one reservation that the great poet and sinologist created something of a Chinese masterpiece, only in French. With Norwid, the matter is infinitely more subtle and complex. Back when he was still in Poland, in the times of “Paskevich night”¹ and rampant tsarist censorship, Norwid developed his famous poetics of silence and omission. Only later, when he discovered the Chinese thought and ethics, he found it to be a confirmation of his own in a way, which allowed him to deepen and expand it...

As in many other areas, Norwid turned out to be a pioneer also in that field. It was at that time that French writers started showing interest in China and the Far East. The pioneer of that trend was a writer well-known in that time, Judith Gautier, daughter of Théophile. On learning Chinese (her mentor was a Chinese writer and political refugee, Ding Dunling, whom her father had taken in), she published an anthology of Chinese poetry *Le livre du jade* in 1867, later adding two novels with Chinese themes: *Le Dragon impérial* (1869) and *L'Usurpateur* (1875). In his poem *Las de repos amer...*, Stéphane Mallarmé wrote in 1866: *Je veux [...] imiter le Chinois au cœur limpide et fin...* (I would like to imitate a Chinese of a pure and sensitive heart). Even earlier – in 1862 – marquise d’Hervey Saint-Denis issued an anthology *Poésies de l’époque des Thang précédée de l’Art et la prosodie chez les Chinois* (*Poetry of the Tang Period Preceded by the Art and Prosody of the Chinese*). In 1865 there also appeared translations of Confucius’s writings by G. Pauthier, for which Norwid acted as an advisor, as shown by his notes in *Album Orbis*.

Asia in general – its culture and civilisation – was clearly an obsession with Norwid. In 1869, he wrote to Joanna Kuczyńska in French, “Według mnie nigdy nie było Europejczyków, bo my wszyscy przybyliśmy tu z Azji – z tego kraju,

¹ A period of enhanced political repression and economic sanctions imposed by the Russian Empire on Congress Poland (Kingdom of Poland) in the period of 1831-1856 (after the fall of the November Uprising). The name comes from Ivan Paskevich, the then Namestnik (Viceroy) of the Kingdom of Poland [translator’s note].

który tkwi teraz w embrionie naszego umysłu niczym sen o Raju!” And in January 1868, in a letter to Bronisław Zaleski he stated: “Ja od żadnego poety polskiego z żywych i umarłych nigdy nic nie wziąłem – nie do nich należy mię ważyć” [I have never taken anything from any Polish poet, be it a living or a dead one – it is not their place to judge me]. That is to me an obvious clue given by the Poet indicating other, hidden sources of his inspiration. Besides, one of his main objectives was the search for wisdom; it is thus natural that he sought it at the source... *Ex Oriente lux!*

Juliusz Wiktor Gomulicki, whom I informed a few years before his death of my intention of researching the impact of Chinese philosophy and poetics on Norwid, gave an enthusiastic response: “A great idea! It is a matter which need be explored!”

I am rather amused by the author’s scepticism about the prophetic character of some of Norwid’s statements, e.g. his vision of the First World War (in a letter to Józef Bohdan Zaleski of 10th January 1852), quoted in my book. And yet it would be hard to imagine anything more accurate! Norwid belonged to those rare inspired spirits who have a gift of prophecy (Poland has indeed been privileged in that respect, having Mickiewicz, Słowacki and Krasiński!). Why should he be denied the gift? Examples are aplenty, thus to me the matter is more than obvious. For instance, in the great poems devoted to John Brown, the fighter for freedom of black people, he presaged the Civil War, which soon erupted due to racial conflicts and Negro emancipation. In the poem *Na zgon Jana Gajewskiego* he foretold the dread of nuclear energy (“Skradziony ogień Bogu – bez ofiary”). In the first part of the poem *Vanitas vanitatis* he gave an almost perfectly apt portrait of... John Paul II. In a letter to Mieczysław Geniusz of 29th September 1877 he stated that “Islam przez niewiasty kwestię obali się” [Islam shall fall for the issue of women], which we are starting to witness in the modern world. In the short story *Cywilizacja* (1861), which seems a vision of the Titanic disaster of 1912, as a ship of that very name crashes against an iceberg, he symbolically presaged a disaster of the European civilisation, which occurred a half-century later. And in the poem *Salem* he heralded a situation in which Europe found itself in the interwar period:

Ciemność obległa przywódźce – pochodu,
Apokaliptyczne spięły się rumaki,
A od narodu lecą do narodu,
Spłoszone stadem legendy i znaki...²

² NORWID, C., *Do Hr. Władysława Zamoyskiego. Salem*, [in:] *IBID.*, *Poematy 2*, prep. by S. Sawicki, P. Chlebowski, Lublin 2011, pp. 184-185. *Dzieła IV*. Further as *DWsz IV*, the number after the comma indicating the page.

Norwid reached even further into the future in his clairvoyance. He was convinced that the European civilisation had become “barbarian and dead” (“barbarzyńska i umarła”), for Europe – whose origins grew out of the Christian religion and the crowning achievements of the Greek culture – renounced that cognation for idolatry of money and technology...

What is more, he is self-prophetic, like Gombrowicz: they both foresaw their future victory, although nothing indicated it at the time... That prophetic element with Norwid was indicated by prof. Marek Tomaszewski in his address at the colloquium *Norwid nasz współczesny*, which took place in Paris on 6th and 7th December 2013.

Did St Paul not say: “Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings”? And when Rudolf Steiner was developing his theory of factors defining the psychological development of the human, he listed prophecy among the highest manifestations of the spirit and the minds, as an unfailing sign of progress in intellectual evolution. The subject is extensively broad. It suffices to read the amazing book by Franco Cuomo, *Le grandi profezie* (Roma: Newton Compton 1997), to become aware of the phenomenon, which has been accompanying people for centuries and which had long awoken disbelief... The modern quantum theory seems to confirm it. It does not only concern poetry and literature, but also... music. I have written an extensive essay on that topic – likely the first in the history of Polish musicology – titled *Pro-roctwo muzyki*, published in “Tygiel Kultury” 2009, No. 10/12. I also spoke about the phenomenon in the interview with Wojciech Kudyba (“Topos” 2013 No. 1/2). Incidentally, Norwid himself mentioned prophecy in music in the *Epilog* in *Promethidion* with the words: “Myśli, które jeszcze nie nadleciały na widnokrąg, szumią z dala skrzydłami niby arfy eolskie... i w tym to jest wieszczba muzyki” (DWSz IV, 133-134) [Thoughts which have not yet appeared at the horizon, swoosh their wings from afar like Aeolic harps... and that bears the omen of *music*].

Finally, to confirm the above, I should add that I had the good fortune to personally experience that exceptional gift thanks to my contacts with true clairvoyants in France and in the Philippines. The most astounding was a meeting with a certain Frenchman in 1972 at the Telepathy Salon in Paris. That very interesting and pleasant man who, by the way, could know absolutely nothing about me told me three things: 1. that he saw me in the Far East (I did indeed go there in 1978 on marrying a Filipino), 2. that I would return to music (as a young man I had studied composition, which I later dropped, and in the late 1970s I started writing about music – cf. my volume of poetry *Muzyka* issued in 1995 – and later I devoted myself to the philosophy of music), and 3. that I would publish an EXTREMELY IMPORTANT BOOK ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE EAST!!! Back then, in 1972, all that seemed pure fantasy and impossibility!

The author of the review seems to have reservations as concerns defining Norwid as a mystic. Well, there is no point charging an open door; that topic could take a full volume of its own. It is true that each of the poets I mentioned was a mystic in his own way. But what links them can be condensed in the famous statement by Aldous Huxley: "The mystics are channels through which a little knowledge of reality filters down into our human universe of ignorance and illusion. A totally unmythical world would be a world totally blind and insane". Fr. Józef Tischner noted once that Christianity brought about the greatest secularisation of the world in history, stripping the material sphere of mysticism, divinity, eeriness, and limiting the supernatural element to the truths revealed in the Gospel. Norwid is in a position quite contrary to that tendency. Did he not say he had contact with the dead (according to A. Niewiarowski's account of 1849)? Besides, who out of our great 19th-century poets went further in exploring the invisible world (cf. *Mistyryzm, W tej powszedniości..., Do zeszłej...*), eschatology (the poem *Niewola*) and transcendence (*Litania do Najświętszej Marii Panny*)? Finally, what is true mysticism? It is experiencing the immanence of God and having your own "ego" melted, lost in it... Norwid's works are the best example for that. He even practiced apophatic theology, e.g.:

"Tam jest N i k t i jest O s o b ą" (*Do zeszłej*) (PWsz II, 120), I wszystko za nic ma i nie ma za nic (*List*), I znajdziesz tego, który nie istnieje (*Dookoła ziemi naszej*) (PWsz I, 126), [...] nie sam pokój-słów, który jest śmierci-pokojem / Lecz pokój w Słowic-słów, pokój pokojem i bojem. (*Psalmów-psalm*) (DWsz IV, 85).

Henri Bergson (in a letter to E. Krakowski) saw Norwid as a modern mystic related to Plotinus and the mystics of the ancient world. Prof. Edmund Marek wrote quite aptly in his brochure *Cyprian Norwid grand poète et clochard de Dieu*: "For great mystics, reality exists only as far as it opens to the spiritual world, and the concrete and tangible only support what is divine". Paul Cazin, a famous translator of Polish literature, thus stated in his foreword to *Le Stigmate* (Gallimard, 1932), a selection of Norwid's short stories: "Norwid's style is not succinct, as is often stated, as that evokes too strongly the rigid and limited logic of the Greek and Latin genius. It is hieroglyphic, with all the sacrum and mystery that the word entails. Whoever deciphers similar hieroglyphs, fertilises and enriches their own soul. [...] For Norwid can be understood only by a person of highly sensitive intuition. [...] I know not of anyone who would burn with a religious ardour of equal heat, who would praise the Catacombs with an equally great talent, or speak of the sacrament of the dying in equally lofty tones. Among the martyrs of Art and those possessed by divinity, none suffered tortures as refined, smothered and strangled in his fight with the Angel, seeking in vain the voice of earth worthy of heavenly

inspiration, an unrecognised genius bleeding from all wounds, of which one great spiritual man said that «they may only be touched by the hands pierced by nails...» That man, a man of great piety, worshipped the cross. Against such a high, such a pure life one feels more than genius to bow to – there is a sanctity which makes one fall to one’s knees...”Tadeusz Miciński went as far as to write: “If you were to imagine Christ with his apostles appear among our literature, only Norwid could sit with them to the Last Supper”...

My conviction that Norwid “undoubtedly knew that Sanskrit, Tibetan and Chinese were considered revealed writings in the Far East” logically follows what Norwid said in the introduction to *Rzecz o wolności słowa*: “*Słowa człowiek nie wywiódł ze siebie sam – ale słowo było z Człowieka wywołane [...] (DWSz IV, 213)*” [The man did not originate the *word* from himself – *the word was originated from the Man*]. It is enough to read the book more carefully...

The cycle of Norwid’s China-themed graphics, amazingly ignored by authors researching his works of visual art, like Hanna Widacka or Aleksandra Melbetchowska-Luty (only Eligiusz Szymanis published three graphics from that cycle in his book), and attached in my book is, I believe, one more argument, and a unique one at that, to confirm Norwid’s interest in the Chinese civilisation.

As a final word, an anecdote which I find quite characteristic: during a panel discussion at the Colloquium Norvidianum in November 2013 in Lublin, prof. Michał Masłowski complained about Norwid not being understood by French students. But can one wonder? Two centuries of extremely rational thought, renouncing any metaphysics and imposed in a sectarian manner at universities, have depleted and narrowed the French mind and, what is even worse, made it little receptive to other concepts... Fortunately, there are others who are far more open and devoid of doctrinarism, e.g. the British, Americans, and Germans, who increasingly appreciate Norwid’s genius. And not only they. In 2013 at the IV World Congress of Translators of Polish Literature in Kraków, I met a young Chinese translator with whom I have kept in touch by e-mail since. Incidentally, she speaks marvellous Polish... Now, one may wonder who might be her favourite Polish poet: CYPRIAN NORWID!!!

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