

Agnieszka Komorowska – A FEW WORDS ON THE REVIEW
 – IN RESPONSE
 TO KRZYSZTOF ANDRZEJ JEŻEWSKI

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Having been called out to respond, I will try to briefly “defend” my review of the book by Krzysztof Andrzej Jeżewski, entitled *Cyprian Norwid a myśl i poetyka Kraju Środka* [Cyprian Norwid and the Philosophy and Poetry of Middle Kingdom]. I will do it briefly, because many remarks formulated by the Author do not concern as much the book itself or even my review, but the attitudes and beliefs that have impact on both the understanding of Norwid’s works and the interpretation of the reviewed book. Nonetheless, I promise to address all the remarks, starting with the best justified ones.

I was rightly reproached, as it does not befit a philologist to commit such a mistake, for referring to a quote from the poem *Moja Ojczyzna* [My Homeland] as a fragment from *Assunta*. I agree, this was a “stupefying” mistake, and I was also stupefied by it. I can guess how it could – technically – arise, which does not justify my all too cursory text self-correction, a sin the process I did not detect the mistake. I regret that all the more that such a mistake could result in a conviction that the reviewer of the book written by the respected Author was a person by all means incompetent who, at the same time, pointed out similar mistakes in the reviewed book. In my review I wrote: “In addition, throughout the book there are errors in quotes ranging from editorial mistakes, insignificant typos, to those involving serious interference in the text” – the Author considered these observations to be an exaggeration and related them directly to himself. Indeed, I still argue that in the book there are less and more serious typing errors. The latter, even if they are only “printing gremlins”, can distort the whole idea contained in the work, as it was the case with some quotes from Norwid. However, in order not to assign these errors to the Author himself, I put that at the end of my review, concluding: “While reading the book one may often have the feeling that it was published hastily, without thorough proofreading, which disturbs the reception and does not allow for an objective assessment of the work” – by doing this I drew more attention to the occurrence of errors than to any personal responsibility for them.

Subsequent errors that crept into my review related to the Author’s achievements: his translation activity (translation of the works by Sergio Pitòl) and the number of poetry volumes (I wrote about eleven, while fourteen have been published). In my review, I marked reference to the sources used, I referred to an author who in the magazine “Tygiel Kultury” wrote about one of the Author’s poetry volumes and on that occasion presented his achievements. If it comes to

the number of volumes, it turns out that the publishing process and all media do not keep pace with artists' productivity. Writing a review in April 2012 I could not have known the two following volumes, which appeared in print that year¹, and which were probably already known when the review was published. I would just add that the fourteenth volume is rarely listed on the Internet even today (e.g. on the website *Polscy pisarze i badacze literatury przełomu XX i XXI wieku* [Polish writers and literary scholars at the turn of the 20th and the 21st centuries], which must be a digitalised version of the bibliographic dictionary of 2011, or the popular encyclopedia co-edited by Internet users - as of 6 November 2014). I have no doubt that the authors of these listings will quickly supplement this information.

Any mention of Norwid's "influence" on later authors, similarly to searching for influences of the philosophy of the Far East in Norwid's works, was invoked by me as evidence for the essayistic character of the publication, which – judging by the chosen form: numerous references, compiled bibliography, pointing to the gaps in the current state of research etc. – I accepted for review as scientific. In the course of reading the contents of the book, however, I had to reflect on its textual profile. The passage mentioned by the Author, which I erroneously read as elaborating on Norwid's "impact" on Solzhenitsyn, Gombrowicz, Miłosz and Brodsky, I captured as follows:

[...] The same applies to the passage suggesting the impact of Norwid's actions "against everyone and everything [...], but in the name of the TRUTH" on 20th-century writers: Solzhenitsyn, Gombrowicz, Miłosz, Brodsky [...]

...Adding that the invoked passage, similarly to other parts of the book, would be entirely justified on the assumption that the text is an essay. In my opinion, *Cyprian Norwid a myśl i poetyka Kraju Środka* is rich in fragments, in which, through quotations and reflections put next to each other, the Author seems to suggest even more than he expresses directly, but if I wrote something more than the Author would be inclined to consider his own – I do apologize for that, a review is always marked by individual reception. This does not mean, however, that many places, where the Author's idea is expressed directly, remain disputable for me, even after receiving the reply to my text.

Before I address them, I want to clearly state that not for a moment would I dare question the legitimacy of the subject of the Far East in the context of Norwid's works, which the Author probably presumed, judging from his response. Although in this case I would venture the following opinion: it was a blessed

¹ I have found a laudation delivered already in the last quarter of 2012, which also mentions eleven volumes.

misunderstanding, since it resulted in another handful of valuable information related to the subject. In view of Author's extensive knowledge, I realize that if it comes to the facts the conversation is asymmetrical already at the starting point, and through the delimitation of the subject itself the book proved difficult to review: it is hard to find someone equally competent in two such distant areas as the Author. I expect that it is not easy to find a Norwid Studies expert so familiar with the literature and philosophy of the Far East, and there are not many sinologists with expertise in the works by the Polish Romantic poet. Thus, my remarks did not relate to Author's impressive erudition, but to logical confusion² and daring, questionable theses, along with the disparities between the Far Eastern sources referenced in the book and our domestic or even European context.

And, unfortunately, doubts have remained. I will give a few examples. Upon justifying the importance of the subject of the Orient, the Author notes that "one of his [Norwid's – A.K.] main goals was the search for wisdom, so it is only natural that he sought it where its source lie... *Ex Oriente Lux!*". Well, with all the understanding for enthusiasm exhibited by Juliusz W. Gomulicki at the thought of exploring the Chinese subject and its impact on the work of the Polish poet, I am not able to uncritically share the enthusiasm of the Author, who in this way motivates Norwid's turn to the Orient. It is difficult to agree with the opinion that a poet so deeply rooted in Christianity, looking through a clear prism of faith and strengthened in his attitude by the way of thinking and imagination of the Church Fathers (and their reading of pagan cultures) would place the source of wisdom in the Far East. I presume that in this place, the Author expresses his own deep convictions, perhaps these intuitions of the poet, which "scientists often lack". Well, after all, I feel obliged to stand on the position of an unimaginative scientist, as this was my starting position and through these lenses I perceived the text.

Upon calmly analysing Author's arguments, I must note that a great part of them is in principle beyond any question. These are remarks which cannot be verified, many of them remain in the circle of faith or adopted philosophy. I admit that in this context I was astonished by the remark that my "skepticism about the prophetic character of some of Norwid's statements" is "funny". Prophetism as a way of cognising, like mysticism (on which I will elaborate in a moment),

² Let me quote a passage from the Krzysztof Jeżewski's reply: "My conviction that Sanskrit, Tibetan and Chinese was considered a revealed scripture in the Far East logically follows from what Norwid says in the introduction to the *Rzecz o wolności słowa* [On the Freedom of the Word]: »Słowa człowiek nie wywiódł ze siebie sam – ale słowo było z Człowieka wywołane [...]« [The man did not derive the word from himself alone – but the word was brought from the Man [...]] (DWsz IV, 213). One just has to read the book more carefully..." and add a brief comment: ... Indeed, it does not follow logically.

are more closely related with faith rather than (scientific) knowledge; thus, at the level of knowledge my “skepticism” is much more justified than acknowledging the obviousness (following the Author) of the prophetic nature of the fragments of Norwid’s poetry mentioned by the Author. Moreover, those that do not raise my common-sense objections, such as “stracony ogień Bogu...” [lost fire to God] as a “harbinger of nuclear energy terror” can be better explained by Norwid’s common sense and clear view of reality than by prophetism. I mean here the announcement of the American Civil War and the emancipation of African-Americans included in the poem *Do obywatela Johna Brown* [To citizen John Brown]. Does it not testify to his acumen and ability to predict facts that had to occur in the face of overt injustice? No rebellion is born on the spur of the moment only.

However, I do not want to be misunderstood – I do not generally deny the prophetic dimension of the masterpieces, nor do I “refuse to acknowledge Norwid’s gift” for prophecy. Personally, I am convinced that in this regard the humanities have advantage over exact sciences in that the former allow for taking account of any human cognitive capabilities. However, individual perception of art is different from the requirement to view a particular perception as an interpretation of poetic works (or other works) valid also to others, especially when one approaches the issues relating to faith. Similarly, I am left helpless in the face of arguments in defense of prophetism (did I really attacked it so viciously...? - I cannot find in my review any fragment that could provoke the need for a similar argument), a sequence that opens with the words uttered by the Apostle of the Gentiles so admired by Norwid, continues with Rudolf Steiner’s conclusions, the modern quantum theory, and ends with Author’s personal experience of the meetings with seers from the Far East. This is non-disputable; at most, one can represent a completely different viewpoint, which very quickly became clear to me it was the reason for discrepancies listed by the Author.

Similarly, I miss his understanding of issues associated with mysticism and mystique – my recall of this distinction was aimed at asking about the sense in which Norwid is described as a mystic, and not at expressing objection to using this term with reference to the Polish poet, as the Author thinks. In fact, I could not find this on the pages of the book, and the group of artists associated with mysticism is so diverse that calling Norwid one, does not tell much about himself. A pity, because in this context it seemed very important to me to determine what kind of mystic was Norwid supposed to be. Besides the mentioned distinction, following Agnieszka Nietresta-Zatoń, I considered the issue to be important even only if due to the subject of the book and basic differences between Christian and Far East mysticism. Judging from the Author’s response, I was not mistaken in my conjecture. Let me quote an excerpt: “In the end, what is authentic in mysticism?”

It is the experience of God's immanence and melting, immersing in it one's own *ego*". Well, perhaps this is the essence of authentic mysticism, but... precisely the Far Eastern one. In the Christian domain, human personality in a communion with a personal God is not lost nor "melt" and I suspect that Norwid himself (I do not deny his deep spiritual experiences, but I also do not claim with certainty that we have received their clear evidence), did not write (would not have written) about mysticism in this way. I want to add that this is not the only difference between the Christian and Eastern spirituality. From the literature on the subject, I will mention the book by William Johnston SJ, *The Mysticism of the "Cloud of Unknowing"* (Polish trans., Poznan 2001). The author, an American Jesuit who lived in Japan, in an extensive commentary to an anonymous medieval work, makes a distinction between different forms of mystical experiences. Convinced that the mystical way of thinking is governed by universal laws of the psyche common to Eastern and Western traditions, he subtly captures the differences and similarities between them.

Finally, I would like to repeat more clearly what I tried to include in the above considerations – namely that the basic discrepancy between the Author's and my reception of certain phenomena in Norwid's works does not concern as much Norwid himself, not even his unambiguous fascination with China. We approach a text – hermeneutically speaking – with some pre-understanding, including axiology, with some previously adopted conception of the man, the world... It is in this area, as I can see, that we do differ (apart even from poetic or scientific point of view), and this will lead us neither to a fuller, joint understanding of Norwid nor the book itself.

Translated by Rafał Augustyn

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