

COLLOQUIA NORWIDIANA XIII:  
NORWID AND THE JANUARY UPRISING (WIERZCHOWISKA  
DRUGIE, 12-14 DECEMBER 2013)

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On 12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> December 2013, the thirteenth of the cyclic Colloquia Norwidiana meetings took place in Wierzchowiska Drugie near Kraśnik. The meetings are organised by the Institute for the Study of Cyprian Norwid's Literature at the JPII Catholic University of Lublin together with the Norwid Foundation. For many reasons, this edition was exceptional. Organised but a few months after a symposium on Norwid's epistolography (*Listy, listy...*, Kazimierz Dolny, May 2013), the conference broke the traditional biennial rhythm of the Colloquia; also, it changed the usual venue (going to Wierzchowiska instead of the traditional choice of Kazimierz) and had a smaller group of speakers than usual: the conference included 15 papers. The above listed changes resulted from the topic of that particular meeting, titled *Norwid and the January Uprising*. The organisers decided to organise this conference in the jubilee year of 2013, which marks the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the outbreak of the Uprising, at a place related to the events of the insurrection, even indirectly. Thus, participants of the symposium debated in the Sanna manor in Wierzchowiska, which had been witness to the battles of the Uprising, as commemorated e.g. by the Cross of January Insurrectionists located near the manor.

The session was inaugurated by Anna Kozłowska's paper *Pióro na posterunku. Jak Norwid widział rolę słowa w powstaniu? (The Pen Standing Guard. How Norwid Saw the Role of the Word in the Uprising)*. The researcher noted that the matter of word was central to Norwid's reflection on the Uprising. That area concentrated all motifs important in Norwid's thoughts on the Uprising; it was a kind of construction axis of the poet's beliefs and measures from that period. The reflection on the word was expressed mainly in journalistic writing, numerous notes and memorials by Norwid from that time, and in the idea frequently recurring in his life – of establishing a daily which would play various roles during the Uprising (instead of the national press, of which the poet had a low opinion): informative, propaganda, but also idea-forming, aimed at shaping the consciousness of the readers as to the assumed place and mission of Poland and Poles in Europe.

The next paper, presented by Zofia Dambek and titled *Norwid i pamięć Powstania Styczniowego* (*Norwid and the Memory of the January Uprising*), concerned the legacy of the Uprising in Norwid's social and political thought. The researcher analysed the poet's anniversary address held in the Polish Library in 1875, with a view to his possible attitude towards the defeat and the post-Uprising mourning. She focused particularly on the song *Testament Marka Botzarisa*, translated by Norwid or, as it turned out, it would be more precise to say: paraphrased by him in a way, reading it as a hidden judgement of the struggles of the January Uprising. In the song, the Greek hero is surrounded by the enemy, fighting against a group of soldiers, and dies in the battlefield, but he conveys the message to his son – the next generation. In that sense, the Uprising was not viewed by Norwid as a total defeat, as it left “następstwa żywotne” [vital consequences] to the generations following.

The paper by Dominika Wojtasińska was dedicated to the political motifs in Norwid's correspondence with women. Even though, as the researcher noted at the very beginning, the political discourse dominates in Norwid's “male-to-male” correspondence, the issues of the Uprising return also in the letters he wrote to women, such as Konstancja Górska, Joanna Kuczyńska, Michalina Dziekońska, or Lucja Rautenstrauch. A characteristic feature of that correspondence is the fact that political issues do not appear in the foreground, but rather appear within other considerations, often oriented towards the private and the personal. In that context, Norwid's reflections are less of an analytical nature; they are rather synthetic formulas relating to the moral and intellectual condition of the Polish society at a time of historic trial – usually of a strongly critical nature. The researcher concluded that the letters were on the one hand a call for critical thinking aimed at the addressees, and on the other, a lesson of conscious patriotism (conscious also of the mistakes of one's own nation).

The first day of the conference closed with the paper by Edyta Chlebowska: *Stracone gniazdo. Norwid – Szermentowski* (*Lost Nest. Norwid – Szermentowski*), on the graphic motifs in Norwid's works. The object of the researcher's interest was a drawing of mid-1870s, known only from a reproduction published after WWII, titled *Scena symboliczna* (*Symbolic Scene*). The obscurity of the topic of the picture – which shows a figure lying on a bed with another figure at the side of the first one, surrounded with spirits descending from heaven, with a dilapidated hut in the background – caused diverse interpretations of the image. In her paper, the researcher polemised with the reading of it presented by Aleksandra Melbechowka-Luty who stated that the topic of Norwid's drawing was related to Goethe's drama and presented the scene of Faust's death. The similarity that the researcher saw between Norwid's sketch and the painting *Stracone gniazda*

(*Lost Nests*) by Józef Szermentowski, a painter whom Norwid knew and kept in touch with, allowed Chlebowska to read the image in a new, different light. The researcher actually suggested three possible readings of Norwid's drawing: as a symbolic image of the painter's death, kept in a serene aura; as a national allegory (with the dilapidated hut as the symbol for the homeland); and finally, unrelated to Szermentowski's biography, as a way to illustrate Norwid's understanding of death as a situation of passing. The picture itself confirms the feature so characteristic of Norwid's works, i.e. its literariness, the condensation of senses and meanings, meant to engage both the eye and the mind.

The second day of the conference opened with a paper by Grażyna Halkiewicz-Sojak titled *Norwidowska refleksja o czasie a idea insurekcji (Norwid's Reflection on Time and the Idea of the Insurrection)*. In the beginning, the researcher meticulously reconstructed the state of research on Norwid's attitude towards the January Uprising. As it turned out, opinions of researchers (e.g. Adam Krechowicki, Wiktor Weintraub, Zofia Stefanowska, Jacek Trznadel) on the issue are full of controversies. While asking for the reason for such a state of affairs, the researcher posed a hypothesis that the diversities may result from three causes: the inconsistent, changing attitude of the poet towards the events of 1861-1864 (from enthusiasm towards the Warsaw demonstrations to criticism of the insurrectionists' actions and their motivations in a later period); diverse political and historic conditions of researchers' attempts to solve the issue; and from Norwid's concept of historic time.

Norwid's view of strategy and its aims was the topic of another paper, presented by Edward Kasperski (*Norwid jako strateg – Norwid as a Strategist*). The researcher demonstrated a relatively stable interest of Norwid in issues of strategy, intensified in epochal moments – milestones in the nation's history or in general history. In negation of the determinism of the laws of history, Norwid gave much significance to the issues of strategy, which he saw as a tool for modelling reality. In his concept, Norwid joined strategy – understood as long-term actions, thus different from the short-term tactics – with fight (which he saw as “normal human activity”) but not with war, which he opposed at numerous occasions. The researcher noted that the key element of Norwid's strategy was influence with ideas and with words, standing in contrast to military fight, underground or assassination activity – thus any form of activity related to bloodshed. That was not to mean that Norwid excluded any military action; in specific circumstances, like those of the January Uprising, strategic actions in the field of ideas could only supplement and upgrade military activity. Yet in general, Kasperski's conclusion was that in the whole process of history, Norwid viewed strategy as a necessary condition for maintaining a continuity of various activities supporting the devel-

opment of humanity, including the maintenance of peace among nations as one of the priorities.

The next paper titled *Upadek, zwycięstwo? Powstanie Styczniowe w myśli Norwida (Defeat or Victory? The January Uprising in Norwid's Thought)* by Włodzimierz Toruń started with a quotation of key importance for the posed problem, and quoted from an epistolary essay addressed to Marian Sokołowski, *O tszynie i czynie*: “Upadek, który pozostawia po sobie następstwa -- żywotne, jest zwycięstwem (lubo mniej lub więcej dopełnionym, ale zwycięstwem!)”<sup>1</sup> [A fall which leaves in its wake consequences -- vital ones, is a victory (which may or may not be full, but still a victory!)]. According to the author of *Vade-mecum*, the main condition of ventures which would leave such consequences is their “originality” (in Norwid’s understanding). The whole paper by Toruń attempted to analyse Norwid’s attitude to the January Uprising with a view to the above-mentioned category. That attitude changed along with Norwid’s assessment of the originality of the insurrectionists’ actions. The researcher described the poet’s enthusiasm about the society’s actions during the Warsaw demonstrations – which were “original”, as they moved wide masses without unnecessary bloodshed – impacting also the enemy: Russia, both in a direct and in a long-term manner, as fulfilment of the civilisational mission of moral restoration. Yet as time went by, more and more frequently did Norwid complain about the lack of originality in the Uprising, stating bitterly that Poles “bić się umieją, ale nie umieją walczyć” [know how to brawl but not how to battle]. (The researcher noted that at least some of those critical judgements were not based on facts and resulted from the poet’s poor orientation as to the situation in Poland.) In the notes he wrote during the Uprising, Norwid himself enforced “original” solutions: a project of an international congress or the idea of moral impact on Russia.

Wiesław Rzońca’s paper presented Norwid’s image of Warsaw during the January Uprising. First, the researcher sketched some better known representations of Warsaw in literature, both in prose and in poetry, indicating a great prevalence of the former (e.g. Prus, Krasiński, Hłasko). Against that background, Rzońca presented the image of insurrectionist Warsaw as drawn in Norwid’s writings. The researcher posed the thesis that Warsaw from the time of the January Uprising was seen by the poet more like the image of the capital he knew from the time of another insurrection of 30 years prior – the November Uprising. That literary image is thus related to Norwid’s reanimated youthful memories of the heroic city.

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<sup>1</sup> C. NORWID, *Pisma wszystkie*, collection and establishment of texts, introduction and critical remarks by J.W. Gomulicki, vol. VII, Warszawa 1976, p. 55.

That positive vision is completed with a contrary image, that of insurrectionist Warsaw as a city of poor intelligence, of parties, social forms, and conformism.

Another paper, *O naśladownictwie i oryginalności w kontekście "Fortepianu Szopena"* (*On Imitation and Originality in the Context of 'Chopin's Grand Piano'*) was presented by Bartłomiej Łuczak. The speaker analysed the categories of originality and imitation taken from Norwid's writings with respect to two areas of activity: artistic and political. The researcher also used the same categories to explain the changes in Norwid's attitude towards the Uprising, from full approval for originality-indicative patriotic manifestations before the outbreak of the Uprising, to condemning the thoughtless bloodshed resulting from the Uprising heads following such forms of political activity as were inauthentic and inadequate in Polish reality.

*Fortepian Szopena* was also referenced by the next paper, presented by Adam Cedro (*Fortepian na bruku – relacje z epoki (Piano on the Street – Accounts from the Era)*), who based on rich documentation gave a meticulous image of the historical background for the events of 1863, presented in Norwid's poem. The researcher focused mainly on presenting the consequences of the assassination attempt on the then Namestnik/Viceroy of the Kingdom of Poland, Gen. Fyodor Berg<sup>2</sup>, which took place in Warsaw on 19<sup>th</sup> September 1863. Beside accounts from the press of that time, Cedro referred also to the available illustrations, analysed the scope of damage, and presented official attempts to solve the problem of national mourning. In the last part of his paper, the researcher proposed his own interpretation of the category of "Doskonale-wypełnienie" (perfect completion) which decides on the compositional and semantic coherence of *Fortepian Szopena*.

*Rosja w projekcie propagandy powstańczej Cypriana Norwida (Russia in Cyprian Norwid's Project of Uprising Propaganda)* was the topic undertaken by the only historian among the speakers: Marcin Wolniewicz. The researcher noted that for Norwid, the word "propaganda" was very specifically marked – close to evangelisation and preaching the truth. Norwid's vision of propaganda rose from observing the actions of the heads of the Uprising and from their evaluation, and mainly from searching for such forms of activity which in the poet's eyes had an "original" nature, thus in keeping with God's will and the economy of salvation (that observation appeared not for the first time during the conference). The basic element of Norwid's propaganda discussed by the researcher was attitude towards Russia and influencing it through so-called moral pressure. Geopolitical conditions in which Poland found itself forced Poles to not just fight against Russia, but

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<sup>2</sup> Count Friedrich Wilhelm Rembert von Berg (1794-1874) [translator's note].

also develop relations with it in a mature manner. The relations from the Polish side were to be expressed in work on such impact on Russia which would aim for its salvation, understood not as religious conversion but slow “progress in the human”. The author of the paper indicated the correspondence of some elements of a thus understood programme with the political thought of Henryk Kamieński.

A separate block of conference papers consisted of interpretative papers. In his study “*Święty-pokój*” – *wiersz o powstaniu?* (*‘Blessed Peace’ – a Poem about the Uprising*), Łukasz Niewczas considered the threads which might bind Norwid’s poem stated in the title – a highly symbolic work – to very specific and tangible political events. Beside the most obvious one – the date of 1863 under the poem, placing it in a specific historic reality – the researcher indicated knightly thematology, which combines poetic imaging of the work with knightly motifs present in Norwid’s journalistic work of the period, and Utopian slogans, which found an opportune comparative context in the rhetoric of the journalism of the Uprising.

The context of events preceding the outbreak of the Uprising – meaning the period of patriotic demonstrations of 1861 – was the background for Bogdan Burdziej’s reading of the poem *Żydowie polscy. 1861* (“*Machabej w Warszawie*”. *Głosy na marginesach wiersza “Żydowie polscy. 1861” – “Maccabee in Warsaw*”. *Voices on the Margins of the poem “Polish Jews. 1861”*). The reading polemicalised with a well-known interpretation of the same text as once suggested by Jacek Leociak. Arent van Nieukerken (*Norwid i Powstanie Styczniowe we francuskich oczach (de Mazade, Montalembert) – Norwid and the January Uprising in French Eyes (de Mazade, Montalembert)*), in turn, concerned himself with reconstructing the position French journalism took towards the Uprising, noting the dominating tone in favour of the Uprising, and in disfavour of the Russians. An isolated example against such a background who the Dutch researcher also focused on, was margrave Hilaire de Boissy (whose critical portrait can be found in Norwid’s poem *Marquis de Boissy*), who in December 1863 held a sharp speech in the French Senate against the Polish Uprising and protested against providing any aid to Poland.

The conference closed with a paper by Piotr Chlebowski titled *Rosjanie w Ameryce – Polacy w Moskwie – Asmodeusz w kraju przyszłości* (*Russians in America – Poles in Moscow – Asmodeus in the Land of the Future*), dedicated in a large part to the figure of Count Adam Gurowski, the Asmodeus from the title, whose stand and political vision were applauded by Norwid in a letter to Karol Ruprecht of 24<sup>th</sup> September 1863. The paper indicated that in his political judgements, Norwid exhibited at times considerable naivety, resulting in part from ignorance of the backstage of the political games of empires, and in part – perhaps – from the desire to profess original views. The positive assessment of the visit of the

Russian fleet in the United States, which in Norwid's view proved the political maturity of the young American democracy, and the positive judgement on the "Belweder fighter"<sup>3</sup> Gurowski ignore – in the researcher's view – the vital fact that Gurowski, an avid enthusiast of Pan-Slavism, was in reality a Russian "agent of influence" in the United States, where he lobbied for a close political relation which would pursue the aims of Russian politics to a much greater extent than those of the American one.

The symposium – both the presented papers and the earnest discussions they induced – proved that the issue of Norwid's attitude towards the January Uprising still evokes much emotion. It seems that despite clarifying many matters and discussing issues which have not been studied in previous research on Norwid, the views of the author of *Vade-mecum* on the Uprising still remain equivocal. Following the findings of Grażyna Halkiewicz-Sojak, it may be proposed that such a situation results both from the complexity and equivocality of Norwid's attitude, and from the beliefs and research determinants of his commentators.

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<sup>3</sup> *Belwederczyk* – participant of the attack on Belweder palace in Warsaw, which marked the beginning of the November Uprising of 1830 [translator's note].