

ZDZISŁAW ŁAPIŃSKI

## ITALIAN SOURCES OF NORWID'S SCULPTURAL IMAGINATION

### 1.

P. Cyprian Norwid doskonale niegdyś umiał ujmować oderwane zagadnienia społeczne w obrazki i słówka zwarte, rzeźbione, wdrażające się w umysł jak kamee starożytne. Każdą taką jego syntezkę włożyć mogłeś jak obrączkę złotą na palec.

[Mr Cyprian Norwid used to know how to perfectly frame isolated social issues in compact, sculpted images and words which imprinted themselves on your mind like the ancient cameos. You could take each such synthesis of his and put it on your finger like a golden ring.]

Thus J.T. Hodi (Józef Tokarzewicz) remembered the writer soon after the latter's death<sup>1</sup>. It does seem somewhat alike the ironic image of the widower from *Czułości*, but in fact offers a fitting view of the poet's statements – concise, objectified and memorable. Since that time, many mentions of him, including poetic ones, frequently return to the metaphor of sculpture – from Miriam to Tadeusz Różewicz.

Speaking of poets, it is obviously a frequent, easy metaphor. In his lecture on Słowacki, Norwid himself termed Mickiewicz a “sculptor” (PWsz VI, 465). But probably all sensitive readers of Norwid feel that this term fits him particularly well. Why is that?

It is likely not because of the fact that as a visual artist he sculpted, and on official occasions liked to list this activity first among all his professional abilities. His most famous artefact (at least among Norwid scholars) is more of an anti-sculpture than sculpture, seen by only a few friends of the artist and not surviving. With that I mean the cross, as described by Kraszewski, with Christ absent and only traces

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<sup>1</sup> J.T. HODI [Józef Tokarzewicz], *Z przeżytych dni*, “Kraj” 1884, No. 7 – quoted after: C. NORWID, *Pisma zebrane*, Z. Przesmycki (ed.), T. F. Warszawa 1946, p. 437.

remaining on the bloody wood<sup>2</sup>. The surprisingly modest number of works in that area of activity tempts one to repeat the question asked by a certain lady of the author of the poem *Ziemia*: “Czemu nie rzeźbisz?” [Why don’t you sculpt?] (DW III, 56)<sup>3</sup>.

Neither is it the issue of the high rank assigned by Norwid to sculpture. He never went as far as to glorify that art the way Krasieński did, when he boasted before Delfina: “Modlić się tylko umiem do Madonn Rafaela lub do posągów greckich”<sup>4</sup> [I can only pray to Raphael’s Madonnas or to Greek statues]. And none of his literary characters dared to say the same as Słowacki’s Kordian: “Jam jest posąg człowieka na posągu świata”<sup>5</sup> [I am the statue of man on the statue of the world].

Yet Norwid did indeed highly value “the art of moulding figures”. The main thing is that sculpture-related motifs occur in his work with such frequency, in such structural diversity, and with such semantic richness that no other Polish writer can equal that, likely not even Wyspiański.

It may be stated that since Kazimierz Wyka’s treatise<sup>6</sup> was published, followed by more recent works developing and supplementing the ideas contained therein, the phrase “Norwid’s sculptural imagination” does not require explanations. As to the other adjective from my title – Italian – it is well known that only in Italy the poet was able to make a closer acquaintance with ancient works and their modern continuations. It was also there that he had his sculpting practice under the supervision of a renowned artist (although the conjecture is tempting that he did not apply himself to the practice all too hard) and it was there that his original poetics started to emerge, in which sculpture took a prominent place – as a motif, and as a visual outline which suggested the way of seeing the world. Finally, scenes from “*Ad leones!*”, a poem which a fragment of this paper is also devoted to, take place in Rome.

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<sup>2</sup> J.I. KRASZEWSKI, *Kartki z podróży 1858-1864*, vol. II, notes and afterword by P. Hertz, Warszawa 1977, p. 318.

<sup>3</sup> A list with brief descriptions of Norwid’s sculptural works can be found in an article by Łucja Kondratowicz (Ł. KONDRATOWICZ, *Cyprian Norwid – rzeźbiarz*, “*Studia Norwidiana*” 7(1989), pp. 63-82) and in the dictionary entry by Jolanta Polanowska (J. POLANOWSKA, *Norwid Cyprian*, [in:] *Słownik artystów polskich i obcych w Polsce działających (zmarłych przed 1966 r.). Malarze, rzeźbiarze, graficy*, vol. VI, K. Mikołocka-Rachubowa, M. Biernacka (eds.), Warszawa 1998, pp. 135-150).

<sup>4</sup> Z. KRASIEŃSKI, *Listy do Delfiny Potockiej*, vol. I, prep. by Z. Sudolski, Warszawa 1975 (Zygmunt Krasieński’s correspondence), p. 214.

<sup>5</sup> J. SŁOWACKI, *Dziela*, vol. I-XII, J. Krzyżanowski (ed.), Wrocław 1949, (further as: Dz); IDEM, *Kordian*, act II, Dz, 210.

<sup>6</sup> K. WYKA, *Cyprian Norwid. Poeta i sztukmistrz*, Kraków 1948.

Any doubts as to the issue discussed concern not the importance of the matter, but rather the fact that it has been discussed and interpreted so competently and in such detail in numerous books and articles. It is thus with some trepidation that I add my voice to the discussion.

## 2.

The first appearance of sculpture with Norwid as the topic for a poem is found in *Adam Krafft* (1842). Wyka judged that first attempt harshly: “Są to egzaltacje niefachowego literata, starające się oddać temperaturę zachwyty, nic ponadto” [Those are raptures of a non-professional penman that attempt to reflect the delight’s temperature, and nothing more]. Wyka did not like it that the author looked at the object as if were “[w]ylany z duszy, nie zaś stalą ryty”<sup>7</sup> [poured from the soul, not carved with steel]. Yet soon the dialectics of “spirit” and “matter” took a more sophisticated form in Norwid’s work.

Norwid liked to include sculptural motifs in his complex metaphoric constructions. Their visual essence was subdued at such instances. Yet one can also find visions taking a fully concrete shape in his works. Moreover, the reflection of sculptures in his poetry is matched by the echo of debates, held in the 19<sup>th</sup> century on what sculpture had been like, what it was like, and what it should be like (and whether it could still be practiced at all).

Below, three examples are given, all three combining the image of a woman and the image of a statue. The first example is taken from Song VIII of the above quoted poem *Ziemia*:

[...] stała  
Na progu jak Wenera w Milos znaleziona,  
I również bez rąk – w ciemny szal się tak owiała,  
Iż z dala patrząc do wpół widziałbyś ramiona...  
(DW III, 56)

Wyka was right to distinguish this image, emphasising that “zarówno ruch [kobiety z krwi i kości] nabiera niezapomnianej plastyki, jak i przywiedziony w porównaniu posąg okazuje się czymś żywym i ludzkim w swojej specjalnej, przez czas spowodowanej ułomności”<sup>8</sup> [both the movement [of a real woman] at-

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

tains unforgettable plasticity, and the statue quoted in the comparison turns out to be a living and human entity in its special, time-induced injury].

One of the elements of the then debates concerned the identity of the surviving antique statues, particularly Greek ones, from the classical period. First, the awareness that those were most frequently not the actual Greek works, but their Roman copies, was reinforced. Second, very few works survived unscathed, and those few were also touched by erosion. Statues devoid of eyes, limbs, with the paint faded off the marble, posed a dilemma to their discoverers – should they be kept in the same shape as a testimony to their historic perturbations, or should their original shape be recovered. Since renaissance until this day, the philosophy of restoration went through various phases. At first the works were added to, in order to complete them, then there was a time when no interventions were undertaken, later the previous additions were removed, and finally the various additions were kept, going by the former idea of not falsifying the actual history of the object<sup>9</sup>.

The quoted poem is a very strong argument in favour of leaving historic objects in their surviving shape, quite according to the conviction dominating in Norwid's time.

Below is another sculptural image of a woman, from the poem *Klaskaniem mając obrzękle prawice*:

Niewiast, zaklętych w umarłe formuły,  
Spotkałem tysiąc – i było mi smętno,  
Że wdzięków tyle widziałem – nieczuły! –  
Żrenicą na nie patrząc bez-namiętą.  
Tej, tamtej rękę tknąwszy marmurowę,  
Wzruszyłem fałdy ubrania kamienne,  
A motyl nocny wzleciał jej nad głowę,  
Zadrzał i upadł... i odeszły, senne...  
(PWsz II, 16)

Here, the myth of Pygmalion is reversed. It is not about a statue coming alive, but rather living creatures being shown as dead inside, and thus turned into stone. The marble, a motif often used as a synecdoche of a statue, acting as nobilitation, here becomes a sign of degradation. Folds of clothing do not follow the person's gestures, but are moved with an external touch, as if they were hanging on a peg.

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<sup>9</sup> O.R. PINELLI, *From the Need for Completion to the Cult of the Fragment: How Tastes, Scholarship, and Museum Curator's Choices Changed Our View of Ancient Sculpture*, [in:] *History of Restoration of Ancient Stone Sculptures*, J.B. Grossman, J. Podany and M. True (eds.), Los Angeles 2003, pp. 61-74.

And that touch startles away a moth, the negative counterpart of a butterfly, which is often added to images of statues bathed in the sun, as a symbiosis of steadiness and grace, permanence and elusiveness. I am quoting this poem, as all works on the sculptural connotations with Norwid comment on their sublimating role. It could be confirmed with an overwhelming majority of quotes, easy to find with this poet. The more noteworthy are the departures from that tendency, as they show that in Norwid's works nearly no motif can be established in a laudatory or accusatory role once and for all.

After that note, I may return to examples more typical of Norwid, for instance fragments from the poem *Polka* (PWsz I, 359-362). The second Harpist (a representative for the author's views), when extolling "the beauty of the Polish woman", says: "Wiem, że od wierzchu jej ramion do sandału / Każda fałda głównemu służy skinieniu" [I know that from the top of her shoulders down to the sandals / each fold serves the main gesture], and further her look "z iskrą Pigmaliona!" [with the spark of Pygmalion] is mentioned. That is not a description of a living person, but a statue. It is as if you could see a woman's beauty fully only if you change her into a statue in your imagination (as it was in the first example).

The comments on the folds of the robe echo the then debates on sculpture. Following Hegel<sup>10</sup>, Józef Kremer wrote that if

the body itself and its pose is an expression of the spirit, thus the robes covering the figure should in turn express its attitude and soulfulness. [...] And to have the attitude and body expressible through robes, it is fitting they have no own form, but be dependent on the body's form, which is attainable in two ways only: either the robes be a tight fit, i.e. have the form of the body itself, as in e.g. the medieval robes of western Europe – or, they have no form and be a shapeless surface, as can particularly be seen in the clothing of Greek statues. Here the robes fall down, their own weight making them to a flowing drapery, readjusting to each movement of the body.<sup>11</sup>

The first Harpist used mostly colour epithets, thus choosing a more picturesque description. The second Harpist rejects that stylistic repertoire, and describes the image *explicite*: "Jeśli to gdzie pisałem, / To odszukam i podre! –"; „Ale włos, jakiej ma barwy? – zapomniałem. / Ale oko? – nie wiem, doprawdy, czy modre [...]” [If I ever wrote that / I'll find it and tear apart! – But her hair, what colour is it? – I forgot. / The eye? – I know not if it's really blue] etc. The rejection is not because the repertoire be fully trivialised. The second Harpist wants foremostly

<sup>10</sup> Cf. G.W.F. HEGEL, *Wykłady o estetyce* t. II, trans. J. Grabowski, A. Landman, explan. A. Landman, Warszawa 1966, pp. 506-514.

<sup>11</sup> J. KREMER, *Listy z Krakowa*, vol. I: *Wstępne zasady estetyki i Dzieje artystycznej fantazyi*, part 1, Warszawa 1877 (*Dziela*, vol. IV), pp. 140-141.

to emphasise the spiritual features of an ideal woman, and sculptural analogies seem better to achieve that aim. Hence such expression as

Coś matrony, coś wodza w piersi potężde,  
 Podobna Wiktorii bosej z laurem w dłoni,  
 Co wskroś obłoków bystro bywa lecąca;  
 Jak heroicznym koni / Rżenie – do blasku słońca!

[A touch of matron and a touch of commander in the power of the chest, / Like barefoot Victoria with laurel in her hand / darting through the clouds; / Like the neighing of heroic horses / – to the sun's light!]

The fragment is just as expressive in poetic terms as the first example, but in an entirely different manner. It stands in contrast to any descriptions of external beauty on purpose. The former appealed with visual aptness, while this one escapes final concretisation. As in many other poetic visions of Norwid, the particular elements are almost insistently visible, but they cannot be put together in the eye of imagination – unless one realises the need to use the remote archetypes as mediators of the vision. Those could be, for instance, some elements of the relief on the arch of Titus – the same triumphal arch, next to which “the son of Alexander” passed with his Jewish companion in *Quidam*. The relief was thus described by Józef Kremer:

The inside portal has two reliefs showing Titus's triumph. One of them presents the emperor standing on a chariot pulled by four horses hitched abreast, behind him Victoria who is putting a laurel wreath on his head, the horses led by the war goddess, Bellona (i.e. Roma), a female of supernatural size, with a spear in her hand, the chariot surrounded by numerous groups of warriors<sup>12</sup>.

Here, in turn, the issues of that particular form of sculpture – namely, a relief – arise. For Hegel, the great codifier of 19<sup>th</sup>-century thought on art, it was a non-descript form, halfway between actual sculpture and painting, and he wished for a clear essence<sup>13</sup>. Yet for Norwid, as was rightly noted by Dariusz Pniewski, relief was a privileged form<sup>14</sup>.

Still, the above given example of Norwid's imaging is not clear enough as concerns the features of relief stylisation that he found alluring. Neither is the

<sup>12</sup> J. KREMER, *Dziela*, vol. X: *Podróż do Włoch*, vol. V, Warszawa 1879, p. 144.

<sup>13</sup> G.W.F. HEGEL, *Wykłady o estetyce*, t. II, pp. 544-545.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. D. PNIEWSKI, *Między obrazem i słowem. Studia o poglądach estetycznych i twórczości literackiej Norwida*, Lublin 2005, pp. 217-251.

example given by Pniewski emphatic enough, although it has its strength in that the poet introduced a relief into that comparison in an explicit manner. I shall therefore quote yet another example, from *Bema pamięci żałobny rapsod*. Artur Sandauer thus recorded the scene:

Three initial stanzas have the character of precisely a relief. The poet record the maidens' gestures – as the eye wandering from top to bottom notes them – at first the arms rising with the sheaves, further – conchs pressed to their bosoms, then the eyes, lowered as if searching for the way, and yet the way is so visible, finally – pottery tossed to the ground, which is to serve the dead man in the afterlife<sup>15</sup>.

In his comment, Pniewski stressed – as a distinctive feature of poetic “relief” images – their spatial flatness, the incomplete three-dimensionality; here I mean the issue of the presentation of movement. In its nature, sculpture is static. It may capture a figure in only one moment of its movement, although it may suggest the image of preceding and following movement phases. The issue was animatedly discussed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, starting with the Lessing treatise. A relief works differently. It is worth noting what Goethe had to say on this very topic:

However, there are objects which would not be understandable or interesting by themselves if they weren't linked and explained in a chainlike manner: this could be shown in a series of actions like 12 labours of Hercules or in a sequence of fragments of one action – e.g. in Bacchanalia. According to this manner Juliusz Roman chiselled on a long frieze a march of an army escorting the emperor Sigmund. The whole art of relief is based on its proper understanding<sup>16</sup>.

Thus a relief may present a series of moments one after the other, even though each of them is immobilised and susceptible to contemplation. And it must have been that combination of graphic elements with narrative fragmentariness that attracted Norwid, as these are the features of his own poetics. He liked to present particular scenes in a detailed manner, leaving the reader to find their relation in the story. His narration is that of *s u s p e n s i o n* and *r e n e w a l*. Hence such close conformity of the compositional structure of Norwid's narration and relief structure. In the particular scenes, in turn, his descriptions resemble the relief technique in the understanding suggested by Pniewski.

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<sup>15</sup> A. SANDAUER, *Wyprawa trzecia*, [in:] IDEM, *Zebrane pisma krytyczne*, vol. III, Warszawa 1981, p. 29.

<sup>16</sup> J.W. GOETHE, *O przedmiotach sztuk plastycznych*, transl. by R. Wojnakowski, [in:] *Wybór pism estetycznych*, wybór, oprac. i wstęp T. Namowicz, Warszawa 1981, p. 177.

## 3.

Mid-19<sup>th</sup> century was a critical period for sculpture. Romanticism might have ploughed through various areas of art and some other disciplines, but did not really touch sculpture. Nothing significant happened in that area between Antonio Canova (1757-1822) and August Rodin (1840-1917). And from a bird's eye view, or rather a historiosophical perspective, that period of stagnation can be further extended:

If the history of art consists in developing new stylistic forms rather than repeating the former ones, then the history of sculpture, ending on August Rodin, starts afresh from Rodin. [...] Rodin showed in deed that the classicistic style, usually considered sculptural style in general, is in no way an absolute form, but only a historical one, and next to it, in different historical conditions, other forms may appear.<sup>17</sup>

And Hegel, Georg Simmel's mentor, was of an even stricter opinion. He believed that the evolution of sculpture ended together with the classical Greek sculpture. Yet let us assume a more moderate stand and agree with the following: "In the hundred years between 1780 and 1880, in a general view, sculpture was clearly falling behind painting"<sup>18</sup>. The above was said by Fritz Novotny. And although that outstanding art historian wrote his book for *The Pelican History of Art* over fifty years ago, and from the perspective of the modernist theory of history, it is still a common belief.

Undoubtedly, the condition of sculpture in the West was far from good, and in Poland it merely vegetated: "Pisać o sztuce dla narodu, który ani muzeów, ani pomników, właściwie mówiąc, nie ma; pisać dla publiczności, która zaledwie biernie albo wypadkowo obznajomiona jest z tym przedmiotem – jest to nie pisać o sztuce, ale objawić ją" (PWsz VI, 337) [Writing of art for a nation which, in point of fact, has neither museums nor monuments; writing for a public which is acquainted with the object merely in a passive way or accidentally – that is not writing of art, that is revealing it]. Thus Norwid began his treatise *O sztuce (Dla Polaków)* in 1858. To start with, Poland was simply poor. Sculptors "listed their merits in the press advertisements – not artistic, but technical merits, and most frequently the ability to perform various works in many materials"<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> G. SIMMEL, *Rzeźby Rodina i duchowe tendencje współczesności*, [in:] *Most i drzwi. Wybór esejów*, transl. by M. Łukasiewicz, Warszawa 2006, p. 95.

<sup>18</sup> F. NOVOTNY, *Painting and Sculpture in Europe 1780-1880*, 2nd ed. Harmondsworth 1971, p. 375.

<sup>19</sup> D. KONSTANTYNÓW, *Sztuka i artyści w Warszawie połowy XIX wieku*, "Biuletyn Historii Sztuki" 2012, No. 2.



That artistic crisis was felt particularly acutely in Germany, due to its great tradition of the art of sculpture. Despite that – or perhaps for that very reason – statue became an attractive motif for German romantic writers. An interesting book by Catriona MacLeod describes how sculpture moved from an artist's studio to a writer's office in Germany. The author writes of various forms of sculpture dematerialisation under the pen of romantic writers and their followers, and of its specific “spirituality”:

Displaced, dispossessed, abandoned, denuded, deranged, vanishing and disappearing, statues in German literature and aesthetics of the 19th century have survived that period as ghostly figures, remnants of neoclassic past and harbinger of modernity<sup>20</sup>.

The cohabitation of sculpture and literature had a somewhat different course in Poland. First of all, the country did not have such well developed novel writing, not to mention philosophical writings, which could be found in abundance in German literature, which MacLeod discusses. Our writers focused to a larger extent on visual arts, including sculpture, only in late 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>21</sup>, when sculpture itself experienced some revival.

It is worth noting, however, that it was the novel which formed a haven for sculpture motifs. Poetry turned out to be quite insensitive to that particular art at the given time. Mieczysław Ingot, who studied the history of one of sculpting motifs, thus concludes his report: “Not one of the poets discussed uses the possibility to present sculptural values with literary means. As if a statue were a mere clump of dead matter, and not a work of art!!!”<sup>22</sup>. With Norwid, a statue rarely became a “clump of dead matter”, and if it happened – like in the above-quoted fragment of the poem *Klaskaniem mając obrzękle prawice* – it is done in an artistically sophisticated manner.

#### 4.

It is not an easy task to place the plot of “*Ad leones!*” in a specific moment in history, as proven by the paper by Bogusław Dopart or Elżbieta Dąbrowicz's

<sup>20</sup> C. MACLEOD, *Fugitive Objects. Sculpture and Literature in the German Nineteenth Century*, Evanston 2014, p. 171.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. D. KIELAK, *Figury kryzysu. Rzeźba w młodopolskiej powieści o artyście*, Warszawa 2007.

<sup>22</sup> M. INGLOT, *Wieszcz i pomniki (O Mickiewiczu Leopolda Staffa i nie tylko)*, [in:] IDEM, *Wieszcz i pomniki. W kręgu XIX- i XX-wiecznej recepcji dzieł Adama Mickiewicza*, Wrocław 1999, p. 274.

contribution to the discussion during the Norwid conference in Sansepolcro<sup>23</sup>. That is a combination of experiences of the years spent by the young author in Rome, and of his late Paris period. Traditional artistic life rules clash here with a new economy of art. The environment and background are Roman, and the issues come from more developed industrial countries.

The work has brought about extensive research. For instance, it is worth recalling an old article by Konrad Górski<sup>24</sup>, where Górski discussed in detail e.g. the composition and style of “*Ad leones!*”. Research on the linguistic side was continued by Teresa Skubalanka<sup>25</sup>, but Górski also tried to establish against what (or whom) the accusatory impact of the work was aimed. Further debate of several years on the story concerned mainly that issue: was the satirical edge aimed against the impersonal mechanisms of the market, or against the demoralisation of the artistic community, or perhaps against the frailty of character of the artist himself?

The topic is important, and it is still a current one – the commercialisation of art – but as concerns Norwid’s story, discussion on the issue has likely come to an end. I shall only add that I do not share the common regard for the sociological aptness of the author’s diagnoses. The impact of free market economy on art did not occur in the area of iconography, after all. If anything, that very economy opened the possibility for artists to choose any likely or unlikely topic, and later, even to give up a choice of a specific topic.

And complaints about the American possessiveness and primitivism were not innovative at that time, either. I shall quote here Józef Kremer again. While admiring the paintings of Giovanni Bellini, the author of *Podróż do Włoch* mentioned that one of the maestro’s paintings “was just recently carried off across the seas by some American ruffians” – followed by the angry diatribe:

Americans! What do those people need artworks for, and especially Bellini! May they stay content with the big dollars they boast of so; but may they not rob us, the sons of Europe, of the masterpieces of our grand masters. [...] – what do they have in common with the masters of our Europe? which has earned those heavenly flowers of its genius with such bloody toil, with that centuries-long struggle. [...] And then, shall those very works of the grand Italian masters, ripped away from under their home skies, from their home land, separated from their history, ever be understood among the peddling salesmen? Can the atmosphere, in which enslavement of the black, and butchery trafficking of human beings prospers, ever

<sup>23</sup> Cf. B. DOPART, *Miasto w “trylogii włoskiej” Norwida, Italiam, Italiam...* (Colloquia Norwidiana XIV) conference paper, Sansepolcro, 16-24 IX 2015.

<sup>24</sup> K. GÓRSKI, *Ad leones (próba analizy)*, [in:] IDEM, T. MAKOWIECKI, I. SŁAWIŃSKA, *O Norwidzie pięć studiów*, Toruń 1949, pp. 65-91.

<sup>25</sup> T. SKUBALANKA, *Styl językowy “Ad leones!”*, [in:] EADEM, *Mickiewicz, Słowacki, Norwid. Studia nad językiem i stylem*, Lublin 1997.

be one for Bellini's spirit, that clear, immaculate spirit, heavenly like cherubim voices, like a spark of a star which has just risen up from the palm of the eternal love?<sup>26</sup>

## 5.

It is known that, as concerns art, Norwid was foremostly interested in the religious aspect. In "*Ad leones!*..." he considered how sculpture with Christian themes was possible in a growingly laicised society, if, in Hegel's words: "The statues are now only stones from which the living soul has flown, just as the hymns are words from which belief has gone"<sup>27</sup>. Of course, Norwid did not agree with the diagnosis formulated by Hegel, but he felt the crisis of sculpture.

The work's story axis rests precisely on that problem from within sociology of art. It is thus no wonder that it drew the attention of most interpreters of the story. But another problem is included there, one stated *expressis verbis*, more universal and at the same time more technical: how sculptural art should express the religious experience of the figures it presents. The first-person narrator, a sculptor, admits it to be the most difficult task, but assumes it is achievable. And another sculptor – the author suggests – has every chance to achieve that. He stumbles, however, over socio-economic pressure and the frailty of own character.

The state of research on the issue is exhaustive and requires no additions, thus I shall move on to the above mentioned technical issues. These concern, among others, two of our senses: sight and touch.

According to Hegel, if the sculpture is not to betray its nature, it should give up any attempts to present human perspective at all like the classical Greek sculpture did. And that is because

in sculpture the sphere of the artist is neither the inner feeling of the soul, the concentration of the whole man into the one simple self which appears in a glance as this ultimate point of illumination, nor with the personality diffused in the complications of the external world. Sculpture has as its aim the entirety of the external form over which it must disperse the soul, and it must present it in this variety, and therefore it is not allowed to bring back this variety to one simple soulful point and the momentary glance of the eye.<sup>28</sup>

It would seem that Caspar Friedrich followed that instruction, although not obligated to it – Hegel did not require similar restraint of painting. Immersed in

<sup>26</sup> J. KREMER, *Dziela*, vol. VI, p. 308.

<sup>27</sup> G.W.F. HEGEL, *Wykłady o estetyce*, t. II, p. 485.

<sup>28</sup> IDEM, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, Vol. 1, transl. by T. M. Knox, 1973, at: <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/ae/contents.htm> (accessed 30.04.2018).

deep inner sensations, Friedrich's figures look away into infinity, but we cannot see their eyes, as they are portrayed with their backs to the viewer. One can only guess their feelings. However, that would quite obviously be impossible in a (full-dimensional) sculpture, and would look grotesque in a relief, due to the difficulty to present distance in that medium.

Sculptors had a different path open to them – the one chosen by Bernini. His saints, eyes half-closed, express their states of mystic ecstasy with convulsive body poses. But for Norwid, that was “dziwne odszczepieństwo od wszelkich zasad sztuki” [a strange apostasy from any principles of the art] (*O rzeźbiarzach florenckich*, PWSz VI, 363). He preferred to follow Ary Scheffer<sup>29</sup>. Hence the task of Norwid's narrator: “ażeby jedna [głowa] podnosiła oczy ku niebu, druga zaś podnosiła oczy, patrząc czy to na plafon-sufitu, czy to na hak, gdzie okrągły świecznik umieszcza się. Tej i tamtej oczy zwrócone są w górę” [to have one [head] raise the eyes to the skies, and the other raise the eyes, looking at the plafond-ceiling or at the hook used to place the round candelabrum. The eyes of one and the other look upwards] (“*Ad leones!*”, DW VII, 209).

The other task was related by the narrator to another sense – touch:

– Co do mnie – rzekłem [mówi to narrator – Z.Ł.] – myślę o tym, iż *ujęcie ręką krzyża* jest ze znanych dotąd najtrudniejszym choreograficznym i plastycznym zadaniem – *palec dotyka symbolu* – to nie może być ani zręczne i wykwindne, ani niezgrabne – ani groźące, ani bez znaczenia – ani łatwe, ani przysadne – ani proste, ani przemysłne... ani piękne, ani niepiękne!... Nic trudniejszego nie znam! – I artysta, który to zrobi, potrafi wszelką kompozycję zrobić... (DW VII, 212)

[“As to me,” I [the narrator – Z.Ł.] said, “I think that *taking the cross in the hand* is the most difficult task of the ones I know, choreographically and visually – *the finger touches a symbol* – that cannot be either deft and refined, or clumsy – neither threatening nor meaningless – neither easy nor overdone – neither simple nor artful... neither beautiful nor non-beautiful!... I know nothing so difficult! – And the artist who achieves that can manage any composition...]

With that, the author of “*Ad leones!*” joined the traditional discussion on the role of touch-related data in the perception of sculpture, a discussion started by Herder, who posed an extreme thesis on the haptic nature of that art. As was his custom, Norwid considered the problem from the position of the goal. He did not consider directly the role of kinaesthetic data in the reception of statues, but rather how such data could be thematised through sculpture.

The compositional project suggested in Norwid's story, the accumulation of opposing qualities within the composition – resembling the policy of negative the-

<sup>29</sup> Cf. PNIEWSKI, *Między obrazem i słowem*, pp. 179-214.

ology – seems a poetic fancy. Let me thus cite a modern, sufficiently level-headed author, Jesse Prinz, a British analytic philosopher. His “foreword-manifesto” opens a book in which the elite of cognitivists of various scientific denominations writes of the possibilities given to us by that invaluable instrument – human hand. Prinz claims that hands can become “windows to the soul”<sup>30</sup>. He thus writes at the end of his “manifesto”:

The range of functions that hands serve arguably exceeds any other part of the body. Hands sense, like eyes, but they also speak, sculpt, spar, and shape our world. They are both input systems and output systems. They allow us to survive as individuals, and they link us together socially. Hands are integral to who we are as a species, as members of groups, and as individuals. If any anatomical unit deserves a reverent salute, it is the hand. It is high time, then, that cognitive science and philosophy lift up this neglected appendage and attempt to learn more about its role in making us who we are<sup>31</sup>.

From that range of diverse tasks which can be performed using hands, the sculptor-narrator from Norwid’s story chooses something quite specific as the aim of the artist. In Prinz’s words, the work should present “input systems and output systems”. What is meant here is conveying a certain approach, awe-filled attitude towards the addressee and steadfastness in the face of martyr death. I disregard here any complications resulting from the fact that the communication with touch is not direct (like, say, between God the Father and Adam in Michelangelo’s fresco), but takes place by means of an object forming a symbol. It is more important to me that the content of such communication is actually only available to the parties engaged, with outside observers excluded from the intimacy. Sculpture can express the inner states of the artist in various manner, it may also present diverse states of the figures presented, but that can only be done through their outer appearance and behaviour. But how to visualise the inner content of an embrace? I am afraid that goes beyond “the most difficult task”. It is more likely to be an impossible task. Yet ultimately “*Ad leones...*” remains a kind of a parable, and the likelihood is not to be taken literally.

## 6.

The examples given above concerned people, objects and events present in Norwid’s works. It was not the text itself, but rather the objects represented in it

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<sup>30</sup> J.J. PRINZ, *Foreword: Hand Manifesto*, [in:] *The Hand, an Organ of Mind: What the Manual Tells the Mental*, Z. Radman (ed.), London: Cambridge MA 2013, p. XIII.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. XVI-XVII.

that evoked more or less sculptural images. But let me cite here what Tokarzewicz wrote of the writer's words: that they were like "ancient cameos". And Różewicz adds: „he puts a poem... before our eyes... like a statue of Buonarroti's...<sup>32</sup>. Such was also the view on Norwid's works presented by historians of literature. They provided similar comparisons concerning the same works, their stylistics, or syntax. According to Wyka: „In such a syntactic sculpture there is a certain visual alertness which sustains the tension in the reader, an alertness which harmonises perfectly with strictly sculptural associations, and aids their effect”.<sup>33</sup> Such phrasings could, of course, be considered “utterly arbitrary”, like Teresa Skubalanka did<sup>34</sup>. But they do suggest one noteworthy direction for interpretation. Exchanging the image of a cameo with the notions of inscription and epigram, we come to the circle of ancient tradition, with its intimate connection of sculpture and text.

Well-known is the conceited pride of poets, convinced their work be more durable than that of sculptors. Literary attempts to ensure a place in the memory of future generations through an integral fusion of the word and (sculptural) matter are remembered much less. As James I. Porter put it in his book on the sources of the European aesthetic thought:

This situatedness of the epigram, its localization in a time, and a place, and its immobility qua inscribed in that place, all contrast with the qualities of the free-floating textual life of the epigram qua poem, which lives on in the imagination and libraries of readers who, like the poems' authors themselves, may be miles and miles away from the original setting, assuming such settings ever existed to begin with. [...] In presenting themselves as inscriptions on monuments, Hellenistic literary epigrams do not merely evoke materiality: they embody it – inscribe it – in their very substance<sup>35</sup>.

To reach even further into tradition, let me recall here Norwid's fascination with hieroglyphs<sup>36</sup>. Among the numerous reasons for that fascination, one can list the relation of the ideograms not only with the appearance of their designata, but also the physical basis itself. “Think through things” – Porter thus described the

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<sup>32</sup> T. RÓŻEWICZ, *To, co zostało z nienapisanej książki o Norwidzie*, “Kwartalnik Artystyczny” 2002, No. 3, reprinted [in:] IDEM, *Utworki zebrane*, vol. III: *Proza*, Wrocław 2004, pp. 114-135.

<sup>33</sup> K. WYKA, *Cyprian Norwid*, p. 13.

<sup>34</sup> T. SKUBALANKA, *Kategoria ruchu w poezji i malarstwie (na przykładzie poezji Norwida)*, [in:] *Poeta i sztukmistrz. O twórczości poetyckiej i artystycznej Norwida*, P. Chlebowski (ed.), Lublin 2007, p. 10.

<sup>35</sup> J.I. PORTER, *The Origins of Aesthetic Thought in Ancient Greece. Matter, Sensation, and Experience*, Cambridge 2010, p. 482.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *Hieroglifem zapisane. Cyprian Norwid*, T. Korpysz et al (eds.), Warszawa 2012.

tendencies of Hellenistic poetry<sup>37</sup>. Such attitude was close to Norwid's heart. It is a telling fact that he named one of his works on sculpture: *Lapidaria*. And one needs to remember the place he assigned in his *imaginarium* to the arch-inscription of Moses Tables: "Dłonią czujesz, że tknąłeś życie... / Podejmując Prawa odłamy" (*Moralności*, PWSz II, 79) [You feel your hands touching life... / When taking up pieces of the Law].

Another Polish poet, a through-and-through Romantic, wrote: "Bo to jest wieszczą najjaśniejsza chwała, / Że w posąg mieni nawet pożegnanie. / Ta kartka wieki tu będzie płakała i łez jej stanie"<sup>38</sup> [That be the bard's brightest splendour / that even a farewell he turns into a marble. / This card shall forever cry with feeling tender and never lack for tears, either]. In Słowacki's view, the power of his poetic word was the clearer, the more ethereal the material basis for the poem. His unruly student looked for a more substantial ground to root his poems in, a little like epigram writers once used to do, and the work of a sculptor was for him the model of any creative activity, also beyond art:

Żeby to można arcydzieło  
Dłutem wyprowadzić z grubych brył –  
I żeby dłuto nie zgrzytnęło,  
Ni młot je ustawnie bił a bił!...  
(*Ironia*, PWSz II, 54)

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Finally, I would like to quote a remark by Gombrowicz, which concerns a treatise by Waclaw Borowy on the sources of *Noc listopadowa*: "If a mere windmill inspired him [Wyspiański] instead of statues, on the intricate paths of his spirit? Who shall know a poet's associations? And what would come out of it, anyway? Nothing"<sup>39</sup>. I dare disagree with my favourite author in this one. I do not dismiss the motif of a windmill in Norwid's works (I remember *Epos-nasza*, as well as what Agata Seweryn wrote about it<sup>40</sup>), but without sculpture as a source of inspiration, Norwid would have not only been a different artist, but also a completely different writer.

*Translated by Anna Maria Gernand*

<sup>37</sup> J.I. PORTER, *The Origins of Aesthetic Thought in Ancient Greece*, p. 482.

<sup>38</sup> J. SŁOWACKI, *Bo to jest wieszczą najjaśniejsza chwała*, Dz I, 241.

<sup>39</sup> W. GOMBROWICZ, *Dziwne a nawet miejscami dziwaczne*, [in:] IDEM, *Dziela*, vol. XII, J. Błoński, J. Jarzębski (eds.), text selection and layout by J. Jarzębski, Kraków 1995, p. 346.

<sup>40</sup> A. SEWERYN, *Światłocienie i dysonanse. O Norwidzie i tradycji literackiej*, Lublin 2013.



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## WŁOSKIE ŹRÓDŁA RZEŹBIARSKIEJ WYOBRAŹNI NORWIDA

### Streszczenie

Artykuł zajmuje się metaforyką i tematyką rzeźbiarską w twórczości literackiej Norwida na tle dziewiętnastowiecznej teorii i praktyki tej sztuki. Jako przykłady służą fragmenty trzech utworów poetyckich (*Ziemia, Klaskaniem mając obrzękle prawice...*, *Polka*) oraz jednej noweli („*Ad leones!...*”). Zarysowany też zostaje problem: dlaczego tak chętnie zarówno autorzy prac badawczych o Norwidzie, jak i poeci, piszą o jego stylu pisarskim jako o stylu rzeźbiarskim.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Norwid; rzeźba; sztuka religijna; Włochy.

## ITALIAN SOURCES OF NORWID'S SCULPTURAL IMAGINATION

### Summary

The article deals with metaphors and sculptural themes in Norwid's literary work against the background of 19<sup>th</sup>-century sculpture theory and practice. The analysed examples include fragments of three poetic works (*Ziemia* [Earth], *Klaskaniem mając obrzękle prawice...* [With right hands swollen from clapping...], *Polka*) and one novel ("*Ad leones!...*"). It also outlines the main problem: why both the scholars studying Norwid's works and poets define his style of writing as a sculptural style.

**Key words:** Norwid; sculpture; religious art; Italy.

*Summary translated by Rafał Augustyn*

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