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“RAGS ON FIRE ARE FLOATING AROUND”.
ON THE DEPRECATED WORLD OF THINGS
IN NORWID’S WRITING

The world of things in Norwid’s work has always been there. Things last, they determine the time and the life of Norwid’s heroes associated with those things. They last in a different way than things present in the works of other Romantic poets. They remain beyond Słowacki’s spiritual imagination but, at the same time, the shape of Norwid’s things does not resemble Mickiewicz’s references to the material world. The difference concerns mainly the intensity of saturation of things with matter, as well as the individual character of their presentation. For instance, Mickiewicz-colourist¹ favoured the colour palette that is irreducible to

¹ This term refers to the classic position by Stanisław Witkiewicz, *Mickiewicz jako kolorysta. Sztuka i krytyka u nas* ([in:] *Pisma zebrane*, vol. I, introduction and compilation by M. Olszaniecka, Kraków 1971). While characterising the visual sphere in the poet’s work, Witkiewicz points to the privilege of colour in relation to things: “[...] everywhere and always Mickiewicz sees the man and nature as a painter. The name or purpose of a thing is not enough for him, he must give it shape and colour” (p. 270). In Witkiewicz’s reflection, the attitude of the artist to the thing and colour in the history of poetry takes on an opposite character, as in the comparison of *Iliad* and *Pan Tadeusz*. Just like in Mickiewicz’s work, the most important role in presenting reality is given to the colour, in Homer’s work this function is given to the object: “Homer’s attitude to the object is self-interested. Objective representation of life within the limits of the means of poetry – presentation of natural phenomena and human actions from an artistic point of view, with the desire to extract the impression of truth and beauty – does not exist here at all. Every word reflects the childlike mind, in constant admiration for the wealth of material things. The impression is clear that the one who sang these songs would with pleasure cover his calves with tin or copper bars, they would shake a bronze spear [...]. The author of *Iliad* and *Odysej* is a genius, but also a barbarian who is simply fascinated, like our peasant, with a piece of metal and craft – Mickiewicz is a genius, but also an artist who recreates the outside world by looking at it from a distance, with utter disinterest” (pp. 284-285).

Norwid's chiaroscuro². We would not repaint the history of the Polish regional council from Wojski's service using Norwid's language, Wojski himself would not recognise it under the allegorical presentation of meanings. Even when in one of his poems Norwid remembers the colour of the confederate peaked cap put on one's head, its amaranth brings to mind the colour of sacrificial blood symbolising redemption. The note on the fur rim as a wreath made of lamb transfers the patriotic headgear to the sphere of the *sacred*. Paradoxically – studying things, delving into their matter allows one to transgress the material sphere. Upon examining the history of the confederate peaked cap, the poet wants to arrive at the original sense of the thing that grants it the status of uniqueness:

I nie dbam wcale, że już zapomniano,
Skąd ona idzie?
Ani dlaczego spopolitowano
Tę rzecz – o! wstydzie.
Na zapytanie: Czemu w konfederatce? Odpowiedź
(PWsz, I, 369-370)

[And I do not care that it has been forgotten,
Where it comes from?
Or why it was made ordinary
This thing – oh! shame.
In reply to the question: Why in a confederate cap?]

While the confederate caps in Mickiewicz's works stand out as common, they exist in the aura of ordinariness, without losing their true purpose with the style of the cap worn that is also a patriotic souvenir – in *Pan Tadeusz* the cap(s) was/were “na łbie rzucone ukosem” [thrown on the head aslant], “spadająca z lewego ucha” [falling from the left ear], “zwieszane na czole” [hang on the forehead], “nad czołem wstrząsane” [shaken over the forehead]. Only once in the entire poem did it rise to the symbolic sense level when “po konopiach ciemnych biała Konfederatka, niby gołąb przeleciała” [over the dark hemp, like a pigeon, flew the white Confederate cap].³

² For the “poverty of professional associations with painting” in Norwid's poetry and, at the same time, for the “grateness and richness of associations with chiaroscuro”, see the old study by K. Wyka, *Cyprian Norwid. Poeta i sztukmistrz* (Kraków 1948, pp. 108-149). For more recent studies, see D. PNIEWSKI, *Między obrazem i słowem. Studia o poglądach estetycznych i twórczości literackiej Norwida*, Lublin 2005, pp. 258-276.

³ The lexical surrounding of the word “konfederatka” [confederate peaked cap] in Mickiewicz's work is adduced after *Słownik języka Adama Mickiewicza*, vol. III, eds. K. Górski, S. Hra-biec, Wrocław 1968, p. 434.

Norwid's confederate cap known not only from the poem *Na zapytanie: Czemu w konfederatce? Odpowiedź*, but also from a photograph depicting the poet wearing a confederate cap on his head, refers us to the studio of a painter and sculptor – a man living every day amid permanent elements of decoration, wooden mannequins and plaster casts. We know that he had the nature of a collector - being surrounded by objects did not only reflect the artist's need to create the world of his visual works, it expressed the willingness to tame the inhabited space, a clear tendency to its domestication. This was the case when, after returning from America to Paris, and thus from emigration back to exile, he lived in the summer palace of Count Choiseul, a collector of antiquity. He wrote about it himself that the atelier furnished there resembled an old Roman house with fastigium and a garden⁴. Above all, however, it was an atelier which favoured study of antiquity during his work on *Quidam*. It seems that this basic dimension of everyday life for Norwid – home as a studio – also defined the way of perceiving the world outside of the atelier's space. The items of personal wardrobe gathered there could also become, at any moment, an element of decoration or material, such as the aforementioned confederate cap. The poet's photographic and pictorial images reveal the meaning of props in his self-creative depictions – an armchair, a cane, a book, a robe covering almost an entire character – each time, always in another way, they allow to present a person who is unlike himself.

This self-created feature in Norwid's images, a completely dandy-like attitude to the attire, known since the Warsaw time, reflected to some extent the struggle with the form that can be seen in his works.

Asking about the way things exist in Norwid's poetry, we address perhaps the most important question for its understanding, i.e. the question about the relationship between the domain of things and the domain of perception. Attached to the ancient traditions of thinking about this relationship, the author of *Vade-mecum* brings things out of the Platonic shadow, while not once using the concept of form in its Aristotelian sense as the purpose of things and their cause, thus explaining the process of becoming something. It is obvious that this problem in Norwid's work is connected with the dogma of Incarnation, but also the phenomenon of psychophysical parallelism, to which Zdzisław Łapiński drew attention some time ago, pointing to the following fragment of the poet's utterance:

Za długo byłem sam na świecie, za wiele miałem przeciwności i nazbyt wiele razy przymuszony byłem Boga prosić o przyjaźniejszą rzeczywistość – ażeby tej ostatniej dumnie bytu odmawiał [...] (DW X, 52)⁵.

⁴ See Letter to T. Lenartowicz of 23 January 1856 (PWsz VIII, 249-250).

⁵ Letter to Antoni Celiński of 1845, see Z. ŁAPIŃSKI, *Norwid*, Kraków 1984, p. 54.

[I have been alone in the world for too long, I have had too many adversities and too many times I have been forced to ask God for a friendlier reality – so that I could proudly deny the latter its existence...]

However, it is worth remembering that the reality, the existence of which is not denied, in Norwid's work is simultaneously stigmatised by lack, which is best communicated in the epigraph to the poem *Spartacus: ubi defuit orbis...* (PWsz I, 285); "świat, którego nie stało" [the world that was not enough] is the most common form of the poet's world. This had been noticed by one of the first readers of his poetry, Stanisław Brzozowski, thus making the ruins the most important motif determining the properties of the poetic language. We can recall the memorable phrase: "Norwid's works are like the speech of ruins"⁶.

Of the many contexts and phenomena associated with the manifestation of things in the world of Norwid's poetry, the most interesting to me seems to be their weakness, some kind of flaw, defect or secondarity. This does not only concern duplicated items in mass access to them, deprived of otherness and consequently subject to annulment. This process of alienating things which cease to speak to us was captured by Norwid at the beginning of the birth of modernity in France of Louis Bonaparte. At that time, in *A Dorio ad Phrygium* he wrote about the Muse painted on the curtains of operas, fans, perfume boxes (DW III, 375). In the poem *Zapał*, he noticed ironically that "Ogień-boski" [divine-fire] was replaced with cheap "zapałki chemiczne" [chemical matches] (PWsz II, 90). Looking critically at the beginnings of mass culture, he pointed to the type of material deception in the world of counterfeit forms. From the conversation that Quidam has with the Traveller in the diptych *Tyrtej – Za kulisami*, we find out that

⁶ See S. BRZozowski, *Cyprian Norwid. Próba*, [in:] *Kultura i życie*, introduction by A. Walicki, Warszawa 1973, p. 149; See also P. WIERZCHOSŁAWSKI, *Norwid odczytywany przez Brzozowskiego: „Cyprian Norwid. Próba” oraz „testament Cypriana Norwida”*, [in:] *Dwóór mający w sobie osoby i mózgi rozmaite. Studia z dziejów literatury i kultury*, eds. B. Sienkiewicz, B. Judkowiak, Poznań 1991, pp. 190-191. The author of this sketch referred to K. Wyka's critical opinion on the classification of Norwid as a "poet of ruins" in *Próba* by Brzozowski. From today's perspective, it is obvious that the author of *Quidam* did not continue the style of poetry initiated with *The Ruins* by Volney (Wyka aptly pointed to the fact that this interpretation is misleading), the theme and motif of ruins have original manifestation in Norwid's works and are elements of his own aesthetics of ruins (also noticeable in the poet's creativity in the area of fine arts). For more on this subject, see among others the remarks of Grażyna Królikiewicz in her study entitled *Terytorium ruin. Ruina jako obraz i temat romantyczny* (Kraków 1993, p. 123f.). I presented a broader synopsis of the importance of Brzozowski for the contemporary research on Norwid in a paper *Brzozowski jako prekursor współczesnych badań nad Norwidem* delivered at the conference "Always our contemporary". *Stanisław Brzozowski and the Intellectual Field in 20th Century Poland and Beyond*, held in Freiburg (Switzerland), 23-24 December 2014.

“lombardzkie kolumny z marmuru” [the Lombard columns of marble] typical of Parisian architecture at that time are in fact “pomalowaną z wierzchu ogipsowaną cegłą” [plaster brick covered with paint], whereas “czworogranne nagłowia kolumn, ryte bogobojnym dłutem majstrów z dwunastego wieku” [quadruple column heads engraved with god-fearing chisels of the twelfth-century masters] are “odlewane hurtem z cynku” [cast in zinc on a large scale] (DW VI, 13).

The fragments quoted above sound similar to the statements of twentieth-century historians of culture describing the process of degradation of things made available in mass production:

whitewash tin looks like marble, papier-mâché becomes rose wood, plaster becomes shining alabaster. / ... / The wonderful Gutenberg's bible turns out to be a thread box / ... /, a butter knife becomes a Turkish dagger, an ashtray becomes a Prussian helmet / ... / a thermometer becomes a gun⁷.

This process of multiplying things does not only lead to reducing their value, but juxtaposes the man with the thing, which becomes an important theme of the twentieth-century literature, referred to as reification⁸.

As we know, Norwid did not become a painter of modern life described by Baudelaire. He did not leave us any portrayals of the fleeting beauty of his present. However, he knew well that it encompassed, among other things, the delusion of objects devoid of the role of a cultural sign, used simply for public utility, such as the famous Baudelaire's “carriages”: “the entire structure of the carriage-body is perfectly orthodox: every part is in its place and nothing needs to be corrected”⁹.

⁷ Quoted from B. OLSEN, *W obronie rzeczy. Archeologia i ontologia przedmiotów*, transl. by B. Shallcross, Warszawa 2013, p. 146.

⁸ For more details, see conference proceedings titled *Człowiek i rzecz. O problemach reifikacji w literaturze i sztuce*, eds. S. Wysłouch, B. Kaniewska, Poznań 1999. A passage from this volume presenting Ryszard K. Przybylski's reflections published in the article *Prześwit między przedmiotami*: “[...]. The man was ensnared by things like the old woman sitting and waiting in a drama by Różewicz. The object lost its secret, the origin of which was influenced by the object's manufacturer, and later all its subsequent users. It became a lumber, an obstacle, an element of a junk room. It is worth recalling here all the attic rooms from *Process* by Franz Kafka. Next to the stack of papers, there are all kinds of poor and ugly objects. Entire cities are overloaded with them. They create a world of appearances. They are worth not much more than a yellowed newspaper from *Ulica Krokodyli* by Bruno Schulz. This is a simulation of the world of beings. Everything that is essential seems to stay away from any object-like entities. Hence, the most painful human experience will be exactly objectification. Reification. The problem that bothers many artists of the twentieth century” (p. 350).

⁹ Ch. BAUDELAIRE, *Malarz życia nowoczesnego*, transl. by J. Guze, foreword by Cz. Miłosz, Gdańsk 1998, p. 52.

Would he agree with Walter Benjamin, that “heat evaporates”¹⁰ from the multiplied thing?

The author of *A Dorio ad Phrygium*, made Apollo whom “[...] Holender obfitym pęzlem / Z dziewięcioma dziewczki stawia na płótnie” (DW III, 373) [... a Dutchman with a heavy brush / with nine girls puts on canvas], as he wrote – “człowieka poczciwego:/ Z narobionych to widać rąk, z chyłego karku / z nóg, co zdarły obuwia różny rodzaj” (DW III, 373) [an honest man: / as can be judged by his toilworn hands, a buckled neck / legs, which have worn out various types of footwear] the god of the world of such things. That Apollo

Przez mieszkańca mokrych kreślony równin,
Zielenieje wawrzynem, a wiatr jest chłodny
I nieumiejtnie pannom szarpie suknie.
(DW III, 373)

[Drawn by an inhabitant of wet plains,
Turns green with laurel, and the wind is cold
And, in vain, it is tearing the maidens' dresses.]

The disadvantage of things in the presented world of Norwid's poetry lies not only in the loss of their individual shape and ability to affect us. The reverse is also possible – it is the damaged thing that speaks to the man through the weakness of its materiality. In this way, it sometimes embodies our transitory nature, like that “torn coat” from the poem

...Nim znów ucieknę, nic nie mając zgoła,
W podartym płaszczu, o porze zawiei,
Od zmienionego w salonik kościoła,
Od zamienionej w karczmę epopei,
Lub i płaszcz może zostawię – acz bywa,
Że kto zostawia i płaszcz – na sąd wzywa.
(PWsz I, 265)

¹⁰ See W. BENJAMIN, *Ulica jednokierunkowa*, transl. by A. Kopacki, Warszawa 1997, pp. 58-59: “Heat evaporates from things. Everyday objects gently but stubbornly push the man away from themselves. In essence, every day he must perform enormous work to combat the hidden – and not only overt – resistance he faces. He must balance their coldness with his own heat so as not to freeze in their presence, and he must touch their spikes with unusual skill, so as not to bleed out due to them”. This passage is referenced by the previously cited author of the book *W obronie rzeczy* (p. 153). For the discussion on the possibility of using Benjamin's interpretative contexts in reading Norwid's works, see my sketch *Benjamin komentatorem Norwida*, [in:] *Wokół Pasaży Waltera Benjamina*, eds. P. Śniedziewski, K. Trybuś, M. Wilczyński, Poznań 2009.

[... Before I run away again, having nothing at all,
 In a torn coat, while there's blizzard,
 From a church tuned into a salon,
 From an epic turned into a tavern,
 Or maybe I will leave the coat – albeit sometimes,
 If one leaves also a coat – he calls to the court.]

The coat torn and left behind is not an unimportant symbol, as if contrary to the whole situation presented here, which characterizes this coat as a damaged and redundant thing; it is thanks to its being torn and left behind that it regains its meaning, it returns from the semantic dustbin and determines the message of this strange fragment of the poem. In this motif of the coat left behind there is a trace of the Christological archetype, just like in a nail protruding from a decaying stairs handrail in the poem *Nerwy*. In the torn coat death is reflected, it transforms the abandoned thing into a souvenir of life. The torn coat becomes a testimony of a bygone presence, paradoxically what has been damaged, and thus is not whole, attenuates in our memory the break caused by death.

It is worth noting that in Norwid's poetry this relationship between deprecated things and memory has a multidimensional character and depends on the different types of memory that things store in themselves. "Biblii Księga zataczająca się w błocie" [The Book of the Bible reeling in the mud] from the poem *Larwa* (PWsz II, 30), a chasuble torn into stripes in one of the epigrams (PWsz I, 168), or a plaster crucifix which came off with a nail and broke into a handful of snow in another epigram (PWsz I, 138), an eagle on the gateway torn by the wind in "zamek ze średnich wieków" [a middle-aged castle] in the poem *Memento* (PWsz I, 385), a destroyed sculpture depicting the martyrdom of the first Christians from the novella "*Ad leones!*" – all these destroyed objects-symbols, bearing the hallmarks of allegory, are carriers of cultural memory. Their destruction is the stigma of the time in which they exist. Memory researchers point out that the manifestation of past symbols in the present is associated with the experience of change in their meanings, which can be described with the term "wound of time"¹¹. It could be claimed that the depreciation of symbols-objects is a manifestation of this "wound of time".

The aforementioned poem *Nerwy* very consistently reveals how the damaged fragments of material reality exist.

¹¹ For the "wound of time" ("Zeitwunde") in reference to Wordsworth's poetry, see A. ASSMANN, *Erinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses*, München 1999, pp. 89-113.

Byłem wczora w miejscu, gdzie mrą z głodu –
 Trumienne izb oglądałem wnętrze;
 Noga powinęła mi się u schodu,
 Na nieobrachowanym piętrze!

Musiał to być cud – cud to był,
 Że chwyciłem się belki spróchniałej...
 (A gwóźdź w niej tkwił,
 Jak w ramionach k r z y ż a!...) – uszedłem cały!

Lecz uniosłem – pół serca – nie więcej:
 Wesołości?... zaledwo ślad!
 Pomiąłem tłum, jak targ bydłęcy;
 Obmierzył mi świat...

Muszę dziś pójść do Pani Baronowej,
 Która przyjmuje bardzo pięknie,
 Siedząc na kanapce atłasowej – –
 Cóż? Powiem jej...

...Zwierciadło pęknie,
 Kandelabry się skrzywią na r e a l i z m,
 I wymalowane papugi
 Na plafonie – jak długi –
 Z dzioba w dziób zawołają: „Socjalizm!”

Dlatego: usiądę z kapeluszem
 W rękę – – a potem go postawię
 I wrócę milczącym faryzeuszem
 – Po zabawie.

(PWsz II, 135-136)

[Yesterday I was in the place where they starve to death –
 I saw the interior of the coffin chambers;
 I came a cropper at a stairstep,
 On the non-enumerated floor!

It had to be a miracle – a miracle it was,
 That I grabbed hold of a decaying beam...
 (And there was a nail in it,
 As in the arms of the c r o s s !...) – I emerged unscathed!

But I lifted – half of my heart – no more:
 Cheerfulness?... just a trace!

I passed by the crowd, like a cattle market;
I have come to loathe the world...

I must go to Mrs. Baroness today,
Who receives guests very beautifully,
Sitting on a satin sofa --
Well? I will tell her...

...The mirror will break,
The candelabras will wince at realism,
And the painted parrots
On the plafond -- on its entire length --
From beak to beak they will call: "Socialism!"

Therefore: I will sit down with a hat
In hand -- and then I will put it down
And I will return as a silent pharisee
-- After the party.]

It should be noted that the decayed beam of the stairs railing, the broken mirror, the candelabra in the living room wincing at realism -- are all immersed in the everyday life of the Norwid's epoch, "w której jest więcej / Rozłam ań -- niżli Dokończeń ..." [in which there is more / Splittings -- than Completions ...] as we can read in the last work which is the closing link of the series *Vade-mecum* (*Na zgon ś.p. Józefa Z.*, PWSz II, 148). The everyday life in the poem *Nerwy* can be seen in the great archetypes evoked in the past owing to things used on a daily basis that "failed", as it was referred to by Martin Heidegger in his reflection on things. The German philosopher pointed to the fact that "failure" makes things visible, especially everyday things. In his view, the dominant way of existence of such thing is "handiness". Bjørnar Olsen, the author of *In Defense of Things* mentioned earlier, comments on this part of Heidegger's reflection in the following way:

Things light up for a moment due to disturbances and soon return to their convenient nap. However, certain objects are "always" visible or we become aware of them in their basic modus of presence. The reason for certain things being constantly visible, being chosen to be under special care, or becoming "insusceptible to alienation", individualised, aesthetised or in yet another way separated from the everyday noiselessness of the accompanying entities, is complex. Whatever the exact reason for this careful persistence, one must cautiously refer to the claims that these things have a special status only because of the needs and/or aesthetic tastes of people, they are related to them. Things attract attention also because they are special,

different or conspicuous in different, inherent, well-known ways. In other words, presence as a way of being of things involves more than their internal “ability” to be disrupted and to fail.¹²

I quote this fragment of reflections referring to Heidegger’s considerations concerning things, because it seems to me that some kind of prefiguration of this reflection can be found in Norwid’s works. Let me just recall this well-known passage from *Quidam*:

Człowiek tak z miejscem bywa solidarny,
Czy myśl tak często łączy się z przestrzenią,
Że jakaś licha rzecz i przedmiot marny
Przez porównanie świecą jej lub cienia? –
(DW III, 145)

[A man can be bound with a place to such an extent,
Or a thought can so often be connected to a space,
That some poor thing and a miserable object
By comparison can shine on it or cast the shadow? –]

The status of objects in this work is derived from the truth of chiaroscuro. Norwid reminds us of that consistently and many times, in particular in the Roman poem:

Słońce co raz to jaśniejszym promieniem
I coraz cieplej wdzierało w mieszkania,
Przedmioty jedne usuwając cieniem,
Zbliżając drugie przez ich wyświeblania.
(DW III, 135)

[The sun with an ever brighter ray
And ever warmer was peeking into flats,
Eclipsing some objects with a shadow,
Bringing closer the others by illuminating them.]

The accidental appearance of things in the world of Norwid’s works does not question their existence, but highlights their presence. In particular everyday objects as well as permanent elements of the material world of our everyday life, such as the handrail “at the stairstep” from the poem *Nerwy*, draw attention to themselves when – following Heidegger – they become “unwieldy”. We should again take a look at the key stanza:

¹² B. OLSEN, *W obronie rzeczy...*, p. 120 [translation from the Polish edition].

Musiał to być cud – cud to był,
 Że chwyciłem się belki spróchniałej...
 (A gwóźdź w niej tkwił,
 Jak w ramionach k r z y ż a!...) – uszedłem cały!
 (PWsz II, 135)

[It had to be a miracle – a miracle it was,
 That I grabbed hold of a decaying beam...
 (And there was a nail in it,
 As in the arms of the c r o s s !...) – I emerged unscathed!]

In this collision of everyday life with the memory of the Lord's Passion, and thus undoubtedly a part of cultural memory, there participates yet another kind of memory, i.e. habit memory connected with the everyday perception of things that surround us. It is this memory, or rather the state of its disturbance, that allows the poet to find the sacred dimension of everyday life established centuries ago.

The unwieldiness of things makes them emerge from the shadow and become present, in spite of our habits that made them invisible. The disruption of habit memory concerns our corporeality, no matter how metaphorically one understands the confession of the poet – "I w doczesności się pijanej gubię" [And in the drunken reality I get lost], it also refers to the trouble with the routine of our habits of everyday life, with which he violates the unwieldiness of the things around us. Besides, in this poetry routine becomes objectified, for example we read about "rusty routines", which – firstly – provides a temporal frame for the message about customs and habits, showing that they are lost in time, secondly – it makes them part of material reality, because rust transfers routines to the dead dimension, typical of things. Also, feelings in this poetry are subject to objectification. Feelings, similarly to things, undergo mechanisation:

Tam – uczuć nie ma, tylko ich sprężyny,
 Zdające z siebie wzajemny rachunek,
 Do nieużytej podobne machiny,
 Puszczonej w obieg – przez pęd lub trafunek.

Tam – *celów* nie ma, lecz same rutyny
 Pozardzewiałe – i nie ma tam wieków –
 Dni – nocy – epok – tam tylko godziny
 Biją, jak tępych utwierdzenie ćwieków.

W pamiętniku (DW VI, 16)

[There – there are no feelings, only their springs,
Counting each other,
Similar to an unused machine,
Put into operation – by momentum or chance.

There – there are no *goals*, but mere routines
Rusted – and there are no ages –
Days – nights – epochs – there only hours
Strike, like fixation of blunt studs.]

The phrase “springs of feelings” expresses here reification depreciating the man, which threatens the anthropocentric worldview. This kind of naming seems to be the opposite of personifying tendencies in poetry – it is not the properties of being the human (in this case feelings) that determine the objective reality but, on the contrary, it is this reality that imposes its objective character on feelings, and, therefore, on what sometimes is a test of humanity¹³.

As I have already mentioned, the disruptions of habit memory are related to our corporeality, as in the opening poem in *Vade-mecum*, in which the erring poet says “Nieraz Obyczaj stary zawadziłem” (PWsz II, 16) [Not once have I brushed the old Custom]. This kind of memory disruption may paradoxically lead to the liberation from the captivity of the reified past, as in the quoted poem *W pamiętniku*. It could be said that the memory of this past lies in an objectified body that becomes a living torch:

Coraz to z ciebie, jako z drzazgi smolnej,
Wokoło lecą szmaty zapalone;
Gorejąc, nie wiesz, czy? stawasz się *wolny*,
Czy to, co *twoje*, ma być zatracone?
Czy popiół tylko zostanie i zamęt,
Co idzie w przepaść z burzą? – czy zostanie
Na dnie popiołu gwiazdzisty dyjament,
Wiekuistego zwycięstwa zaranie!...
(DW VI, 17)

[It is from you, as from a resinous splint,
Rags afire are flying around;
Burning, you don't know, if? you're becoming *free*,
Is what is *yours* to be lost?

¹³ On the role of personifications and catachresis which are in opposition to reification in the literary language, see S. WYSŁOUCH, *Paradoksy reifikacji w literaturze i sztuce*, [in:] *Człowiek i rzecz...*, pp. 63-76.

Will only ash and confusion remain,
 What goes into the abyss with the storm? – will there remain
 At the bottom of the ash a starry diamond,
 The dawn of eternal victory!...]]

It is very different from Baudelaire's poem, entitled *The Living Torch* from the volume *The Flowers of Evil*¹⁴, although the image of flames and the announcement of death, the bright perspective of eternal life and diamond dust, and above all, in both texts the legible theme of awakening, make us ponder over their similarity. What differs in them, however, are things.

“Rags” in this well-known, perhaps the best-known fragment of Norwid's poetry, mean floating pieces, fragments of the lit “resinous splint”, to which the addressee of the whole statement is compared. The use of the word “rag”, indicated in *Słownik Języka Norwida*, allows to combine its meaning not only with the material reference to clothing or fabric, but also with the image of a part, a fragment. The poet referred the word “rag” and its derivatives to different spheres of reality, such as rotten leaves – “wokóło zgniłych liści szmaty obwisną” (*Wieczór w pustkach*, PWSZ I, 31) [around the rotten leaves rags will hang], or fragments of heaven – “Nieba jej poszłę szmatkę, gdy na Olimp wijdę” (*Epimenides*, DW III, 88) [I will send her a rag of heaven when I reach Olympus]. It seems that he was

¹⁴ Ch. BAUDELAIRE, *The Living Torch*, transl. by A. S. Kline, <https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/French/Baudmore.php>:

They go before me, those Eyes full of light
 that some wise Angel has magnetised,
 those divine brothers, my brothers, go, bright,
 flashing their diamond fires in my eyes.

Leading my steps on Beauty's way,
 saving me from snares, from grievous crime,
 they are my servants and I am their slave:
 all my being obeys that living flame.

Charmed Eyes, you shine with the mystic glow
 of candles lighted in broad day, the sun
 reddens, fails to quench, their eerie flow:

they celebrate Death: you sing the Resurrection:
 you sing the resurrection of my soul,
 Stars whose fires no sun can ever cool!

also interested in the connotations of the accidental kinetics of rags in the windy space, as can be observed in the following passage: “Ale człek jest związany jak te szmaty, które u nas w Polsce pod krzyżami przy drogach uwiązują – co to niby coś na krzyżu męczennym, a lada wiatr w to gwizdże i jest tylko szyfonem!” (DW X, 157) [But the man is bound like those rags that are tied here in Poland under crosses by the roads – as if it was something on a martyr’s cross but slightest wind whistles in it and it is just chiffon!].

This image of rags as fragments of the attire that restrains the spiritual development of the man may refer to the attempts made by Słowacki in his dispute with the literature of the Polish gentry (kontusz literature)¹⁵. However, on no account would I reject the autobiographical and commemorative perspective related to Karol Levittoux’s¹⁶ act of self-immolation, which in this whole story creates a heroic dimension of the history of the doomed generation¹⁷. And, at the same time, is Norwid’s poem not an attempt to go beyond this perspective?

Norwid’s memoir poem entitled *W pamiętniku*, like Baudelaire’s, does not have a fatalistic meaning, and the vanitative motif, emphasising the insignificance of the earthly existence, does not preclude the possibility of rebuilding the sense of existence around individual acts of self-transformation. Its condition is to free oneself from the layers of the fossilised tradition, to cross the bondage of bad memory, which is stored by things-rags, burning rags turning into a living torch – the announcement of death and rebirth, and simultaneously the main message of the entire work of the author of *Vade-mecum*.

Translated by Rafał Augustyn

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¹⁵ See K. TRYBUŚ, *Sarmatyzm i romantyzm – dzisiaj*, [in:] *Nowoczesność i sarmatyzm*, ed. P. Czaplński, Poznań 2011, p. 66f.

¹⁶ See J.W. Gomulicki’s commentary on the poem *W pamiętniku*, [in:] C. NORWID, *Dzieła zebrane. Wiersze. Dodatek krytyczny*, vol. II, Warszawa 1966, pp. 645-646.

¹⁷ See Z. TROJANOWICZOWA, *Rzecz o młodości Norwida*, Poznań 1968, pp. 72-73.

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„WOKOŁO LECA SZMATY ZAPALONE”

O ZDEPRECJONOWANYM ŚWIECIE RZECZY W TWÓRCZOŚCI NORWIDA

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Artykuł jest próbą opisu i określenia roli i funkcji, jaką pełnią w poezji Norwida rzeczy zdeprecjonowane. Autor wskazuje, że ich materialna ułomność jest piętnem współczesności, w której istnieją, zwraca uwagę na to, że poddane destrukcji przedmioty-symbolo o znamionach alegorii są nośnikami pamięci kulturowej, wkraczającej w codzienność Norwidowskich bohaterów. Dominanta problemowa rozważań wiąże się z analizą różnych odmian pamięci w twórczości poety, ich zakłóceń w procesie percepcji rzeczy. Autor odwołuje się m.in. do poglądów Heideggera, dotyczących stanu „awarii” rzeczy w ich codziennym bytowaniu. Kontekstowo w swych rozważaniach przywołuje twórczość Mickiewicza i Baudelaire’a.

Słowa kluczowe: Cyprian Norwid; Drugie Cesarstwo Francji; konfederatka; płaszcz; szmaty; Biblia; pamięć; Benjamin; Heidegger; sztuka.

“RAGS ON FIRE ARE FLOATING AROUND”.
ON THE DEPRECATED WORLD OF THINGS IN NORWID’S WRITING

S u m m a r y

The article is an attempt at describing and defining the role and function of deprecated things in Norwid’s poetry. The author points out that their material imperfection is the stigma of the contemporary world. He also points out that the destroyed things-symbols bearing the hallmarks of allegory are the carriers of cultural memory that is an integral part of everyday life of Norwid’s heroes. The main concern of this analysis involves the examination of different types of memory in the poet’s works, their disturbance in the process of perception of things. The author refers, among others, to Heidegger’s views on the “failure” of things in their existence. In his reflections, he contextually evokes the works by Mickiewicz and Baudelaire.

Summary translated by Rafał Augustyn

Key words: Cyprian Norwid; Second French Empire; confederate peaked cap; coat; rags; Bible; memory; Benjamin; Heidegger; art.

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