

ZOFIA DAMBEK-GIALLELIS

THE SECRETS OF  
*LORD SINGELWORTH'S SECRET*

*In memory of  
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The novella *Tajemnica lorda Singelworth* [Lord Singelworth's Secret] belonging to the series of the "Italian trilogy" had to draw the attention of Przesmycki, who decided to publish it in the literary journal "Chimera" in the famous volume devoted to Norwid of 1902<sup>1</sup>. In his later commentary on *Pisma zebrane*, Przesmycki emphasised, firstly, the awareness of the loss that accompanied Norwid when Venice became one of the cities of unified Italy in 1860, losing its autonomy and gaining a new life in a young political community; secondly, the significance of Venice for Norwid as an archive of the memory of art:

The artist was captivated by works of Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese, treasures of art and architecture, the Doge's palace and St Mark – the unusual fate and history of the city, "which experienced the idyll, drama, abused tragedy and comedy but remained beautiful and charming."<sup>2</sup>

With hindsight, the voices of the next generations of the readers of *Tajemnica...* combine and complement each other, creating a polyphony about the secret – the secret of Singelworth, Venice and Norwid himself. One of the motifs that reveals itself in this polyphony is the biographical thread. It becomes the main matter

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<sup>1</sup> The term trilogy was used by J.W. Gomulicki as a description of three novellas created at the end of Norwid's life; see. J.W. GOMULICKI, *O "trylogii włoskiej"*, [in:] C. NORWID, *Trylogia włoska*, Warszawa 1963. In this edition, Gomulicki adopted the title "Italian trilogy" for all three of Norwid's stories. Although it is not a term used originally by the author, it will be mentioned here several times in order to emphasise Norwid's compositional and publishing concept.

<sup>2</sup> Z. PRZESMYCKI, *Komentarz*, [in:] C. NORWID, *Pisma zebrane*, vol. E, Kraków 1911, pp. 279-281.

in Przesmycki's commentaries in *Pisma zebrane*, in order to become the axis of the commentaries by Juliusz Wiktor Gomulicki. Above all, both editors tried to determine the time and circumstances of the creation of the novella. Researchers have adopted the thesis postulated by J.W. Gomulicki about the creation of the work in the first quarter of 1883, i.e. in the last weeks of the poet's life (DW VII, 351)<sup>3</sup>. *Tajemnica...*, similarly to *Stygmat* and *Ad leones*, was to be published, and the money obtained from the sale Norwid intended to spend on his travel to the South. According to Przesmycki, the story was written around 1875 simultaneously with the preserved fragments of [*Wspomnienia weneckie*]<sup>4</sup>. The hypothesis about the strongly reminiscent, autobiographical character of the novella returns, among others, in the works of Krzysztof Trybuś, who emphasises the Proustian character of the memory of *Tajemnica...*, which became a kaleidoscope of reminiscences of Italy and the recovered lost time<sup>5</sup>. This desire to integrate the broken life is the driving force of the narrative, which builds the past time from the fragments of memories. In the same way John Ruskin was trying to save Venice, giving his memoirs the form of a treaty on the architecture of Venice *The stones of Venice*. The work was to restore the memory of the sources and beginnings of the traditions of European architecture<sup>6</sup>. With reference to Venice, Norwid evokes numerous historical details that serve as semiophores<sup>7</sup>. They highlight the gap between what is past and non-existent, and the different present in which lives the narrator.

In *Tajemnica...*, already at the very beginning of the work, the narrator juxtaposes the past with the present: "Aeronacja kilkadziesiąt lat temu nie była upowszechnioną tak rzeczą, jaką się ona dziś komu wydać może wszelako i społecznie..." [A few decades ago, aeronation was not as popular a thing as it may seem to be today] and

<sup>3</sup> The authors of *Kalendarz* specify the date of the work "to mid-March 1883", however, the year of the creation of *Tajemnica...* is still questionable – 188[3?]; see Z. TROJANOWICZOWA, E. LIJEWSKA with participation of M. PLUTA, *Kalendarz życia i twórczości Cypriana Norwida*, vols. I-II, Poznań 2007, vol. II, p. 779.

<sup>4</sup> Z. PRZESMYCKI, *Komentarz*.

<sup>5</sup> K. TRYBUŚ, *Maska lorda Singelwortha*, "Studia Norwidiana" 14: 1996, pp. 96-97.

<sup>6</sup> J. RUSKIN, *The stones of Venice*, ed. by J.G. Links, London 1966, pp. 27-28; see also: J. SZCZUKA, "Time present and time past". *Autobiograficzny mit Johna Ruskina*, [in:] *Biografia. Historiografia dawniej i dziś. Biografia nowoczesna, nowoczesność biografii*, eds. R. Kasperowicz, E. Wolicka, Lublin 2005, pp. 74-76.

<sup>7</sup> The term "semiophore" is used by K. Pomian. According to him it is a (material) memory carrier that refers to what does not exist anymore, is invisible, it is a carrier of meanings, signs. This function is fulfilled by all the historical details that saturate the description of Venice in the novella. See K. POMIAN, *Historia. Nauka wobec pamięci*, Lublin 2006, pp. 120-130. For Norwid, the whole of Venice – its architecture, art and residents bear the potential of a semiophore, such as in *Menego*.

here the narrator introduces the bizarre and eccentric figure of Lord Singelworth. This "long ago" is not about historical details but about preferences and habits that are already foreign to the contemporary reader. The narrator wants to recall a special moment from the history of Venice, also related to his personal biography; he does not refer to the moment of a historic triumph or the final fall, but to the everyday life of slavery, to which everyone has got used to, so that it has become an imperceptible element of existence<sup>8</sup>. Of course, Venice itself, the city which the narrator knew from personal experience, does not exist anymore: the city of Austrian officials, the Czech military orchestra, the wife of the Vice-Governor P.<sup>9</sup> The character who brings together all those different elements of both the memories and dreams, is Tonin Bonagrazia<sup>10</sup> – a historical figure, known and inscribed in the urban landscape of Venice (in contrast to the title character of Lord Singelworth), a tourist attraction *sui generis*, the existence of whom was confirmed by travellers, including Michał Wiszniewski during his journey in 1845:

Meanwhile, the improviser, having made a circle of chairs, begins his tale in a quiet voice that is rising higher and higher, growing ever thicker and stronger, and finally turns into a terrible cry. This improviser is called Scior Tonin Bona Grazia, nobile di Torsello<sup>11</sup>.

Years later, Norwid dedicated to him an entire author's commentary in *Tajemnica lorda Singelworth* (an exception in the entire "trilogy", which actually lacks such notes):

Tony di Bona Grazia, znany i ulubiony improwizator, niezbyt dawno zakończył swój żywot. Ilustrowane czasopisma podały wizerunek jego w całej figurze i w ubiorze, jaki zwykł był przywdziawać, który jest podobnym. Lecz co do tekstu przy onym rysunku, śmiemy utrzymywać, że nasze kilka rysów w tej noweli spotkanych i wierniej, i właściwiej malują tę postać i jej talentu rodzaj. (DW VII, 233)

<sup>8</sup> Such a character of the city in the novella is clearly emphasised by E. Dąbrowicz. See E. DĄBROWICZ, "Tajemnica lorda Singelworth" *Cypriana Norwida – strategia publicznego mówienia*, "Studia Norwidiana" 3-4(1985-1986), pp. 221-223.

<sup>9</sup> This refers to Countess Zofia Palffy, the wife of Vice-Governor of Venice, who had to leave the city during the Spring of Nations. Z. TROJANOWICZOWA, Z. DAMBEK with participation of J. CZARNOMORSKA, *Kalendarz...*, vol. I, p. 133.

<sup>10</sup> I use the form Tonin Bonagrazia, although in the texts from the era there are several versions of the spelling of this name: Tonin di Bona Grazia, or Tony di Bona Grazia (Norwid), Tonin Bonabella (Goldoni).

<sup>11</sup> M. WISZNIEWSKI, *Podróż do Włoch, Sycylii i Malty*, compiled by H. Barycz, Warszawa 1982, p. 121. This passage is also quoted by J.W. Gomulicki to confirm the historical authenticity of this character.

[Tony di Bona Grazia, the well-known and favourite improviser, has finished his life not a long time ago. Illustrated magazines produced his image in the whole figure and the clothes he used to wear, which is similar. But as for the text accompanying this drawing, we dare to maintain that our few sketches in this novella deliver a more faithful and appropriate account of this character and the kind of his talent.]

In this author's commentary, one can be intrigued by the mention of reading memories of Bonagrazia in magazines. The memories about the Venetian improviser encountered in the illustrated magazine evoked personal experiences which Norwid contrasts with the memory of "illustrated magazines".

With the help of an Internet search engine, we managed to reach the article that Norwid could have read. It is a memory by Armando Baschet published in "Le Monde Illustré" of 1861 (no. 234-235) *Souvenir de Venise (Sior Tonin Bonagrazia). Type de la comedie vènetienne*, devoted in its entirety to the improviser who died in August 1858<sup>12</sup>. The author of *Tajemnica...* learned from this memory that his character has a literary origin – he adopted the image of the hero of Carlo Goldoni's comedy *Il Frappatore* – Sior Tonin di Bella Grazia (1745). The character was created for a specific person, the actor *D'Arbes*. In his diaries, Goldoni recollects his meeting with the actor that would play this role in the future:

Goldoni: What? Signor D'Arbes? The son of the postmaster in Friuli – that son, considered missing, sought after with such concern and whose absence was so bitterly mourned?  
D'Arbes: Yes, sir, this prodigal son who has not yet fallen to his knees before his father.

G.: And why do you delay giving him this consolation?

A: My family, relatives, my country will not see me until the laurels crown my forehead with glory.

G.: What then is your position? [...]

A.: Lord, I am an actor.

G.: Any talents are valuable if the one who has them can use them.

A.: I am the Pantaleon of the troupe currently playing in Livorno. I cannot call myself the least important among my companions, and the audience does not consider it a dishonour to come in crowds to the performances in which I play. [...] Do not think that I have gained the high position that I enjoy with bragging. I am an actor, I introduce myself to the author – and I need him. [...] Indeed, I came here with one purpose: to ask you to write a play for me. I promised my comrades to have a comedy by Goldini and I want to keep my word<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> See <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6228357j/f11.image.r=%22Bonagrazia%22> (access date: 21 January 2016). Its author Armand Baschet (1829-1886) was a French writer, journalist and archivist, known for his research on the history of Venice.

<sup>13</sup> Cit. after: A. NICOLL, *W świecie Arlekina. Studium o komedii dell'arte*, Polish transl. by A. Dębicki, Warszawa 1967, pp. 159-160.

In this way, Tonin Bonagrazia was born as a literary creation built on the traditional types of *comedia dell'arte*, but with its characteristic features. Nobile di Torcello, whose homeland was Serenissima, undoubtedly owed a lot to the characters of the Italian comedy – Captain Boaster, Harlequin and Pulcinella, characters who were famous for unbelievable stories and absurd dialogues<sup>14</sup>. Goldoni Baschet's hero is characterised in this way:

Goldoni créa ce type dans sa comédie dans *Il Frappatore* représentée pour la première fois à Venise pendant l'automne de 1757: j'ai relu cette pièce tout récemment a fin de bien savoir de qui je parlais. Cette figure est extrêmement plaisante, ce prersonnage est des plus comiques; mais il perdrait extraordinairement à être interprété dans une autre langue; le fort plaisant du rôle est le parler patois dont use ce fils de marchand qui s'est affublé pour ses voyages d'un titre de noblesse imaginaire et buffon<sup>15</sup>.

Thus, the historical improviser took on the mask of a hero – an imposter, a liar who is listened to for his vivid stories, knowing that they all are just the fantasy of their author. Their charm consisted not only in what Bonagrazia told, but also how he did it. When Armand Baschet, who was also a polyglot, tried to render the specificity of the speech of the historical improviser, he gives up:

Je voudrais pouvoir reproduire son propre langage, modèle de dialecte vénitien, mais cela ne serait à propos qu'à Venise; aussi me vois-je réduit aux trahisons de la traduction du propre discours de feu sior Tonin Bonagrazia<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> As in one of the classic works on *commedia dell'arte* C. Mic writes: "The figure of the Captain is the product of the collapse of the myth of the knightly spirit. The success of this figure in Italy was born out of hatred for the Spanish rule, and its success throughout Europe is due to the existence, in almost all countries, of mercenary bands of soldiers and professional soldiers, degenerated descendants of the old knights" (C. MIC [K. MIKŁASZEWSKI], *Komedia dell'arte, czyli teatr komediantów włoskich XVI, XVII, XVIII wieku*, Polish transl. by S. and M. Browiński, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1961, p. 63). To paraphrase this paragraph, it can be said that *nobile di Torcello* is the fruit of the fall of the nobility as the class of holders.

<sup>15</sup> A. BASCHET, *Souvenir de Venise...*, p. 635 – "Goldoni created this character in his comedy *Il Frappatore* staged for the first time in Venice in autumn 1757; I read this play once again and I got to know well what I am talking about. This character is a joke, it belongs to the most comic heroes, but it loses very much in translation into another language. The humour of this son of a merchant who takes the strangest noble titles lies in the fact that he speaks a dialect" (from Polish transl. by Z. D.-G.).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. "I would like to be able to render his characteristic style, the pattern of the Venetian dialect, concerning Venice, I do not want to reveal it through literal translation of the speech of sior Tonin Bonagrazia" (from Polish transl. by Z. D.-G.).

From this paragraph, the reader further learns that the historical Bonagrazia was born in Venice in 1774 in Saint-Simon parish, in a family of barbers. However, he did not have a vocation to continue the family tradition, because he was always attracted to the theatre. One evening, he was accidentally passing by the Apollo theatre, in which the above-mentioned Goldoni's comedy was staged. He was so enchanted by the personality of Bonagrazia that around 1820 he adopted the mask of Tonin Bonagrazia to entertain people in Venetian squares and cafes. Riva degli Schiavoni was the usual place of his performance. Next, the author of the sketch quotes the memories of the today forgotten Venetian comedy writer Gherard Rossi:

Et c'est pour cele que dans ces derniers temps on prenait déjà en plaisanterie le prétendante noblesse de Torecello, comme titre plutôt imaginaire que reel. Et ainsi notre Goldoni introduisit sur la scène sior Tonin Bonagrazia, ce ridicule gentilhomme de Torcello. Et ainsi pareillement se répandit le type de sior Tonin Bonagrazia, en sorte qu'aujourd'hui, de par la ville, et habiteuellement sur le rive de Schiavoni, on ne manqué guère de le recontrer. Celui qui représente ce personnage fait rire le peuple par ses exagérations impossibles (*spropositate*) de noblesse et de richesse<sup>17</sup>.

In the quoted passage, the mention of these exaggerated fantasies about the origin and supposed wealth seems extremely important. In this way, the figure of Tonin di Bonagrazia – the Venetian improviser joins the gallery of storytellers and simultaneously adventurers, such as the famous Baron Münchhausen or the Polish prince Karol Radziwiłł.

For us, however, another document will be much more interesting – one which perhaps was unknown to Norwid, although it was mentioned by Baschet – *Ultima volonta o sia vero testamento de sior Tonin Bonagrazia nobile da Torcello* written shortly after the death of the Venetian improviser<sup>18</sup>. *The last will*, as the title could be translated into Polish, is a rhyming adaptation of Bonagrazia's improvisation. It begins with the parodic use of the legal formula that opens the last will:

Ultima volontà o sia testardo Testamento de mi Tonin Bona Grazia del fu Ilustris e Colendis. Corolario mi sior Pare, e da la fu Pisana Marchesa ilustr. Fondachio, Nobile de Torcello discendente de la quinta fiancanda, Conte senza Contea, Marchese (per parte demia siora Mare), possidente de l'aria e del fumo de tutto Torcelo, e in altri siti, che no se pol trovar. San de mente, pien de vita, quanta che ghe ne pol aver un morto, a la presenza

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 637.

<sup>18</sup> The full title on the title page reads: *Ultima volonta o sia vero testamento de sior Tonin Bonagrazia nobile da Torecello famoso conta storie veneziani tolto da un original In prosa scritpa da lui stesso. Poesia strambo-critica* di Francesco Angelini, Venezia 1858.

del Nodaro Asdrubale, e dei soliti Testimoni, dispono dar e aver e quell che resta a tutti, co tutte le mie facultà drete e roverse. Turbina memoranda averzighe palpitato in corda, et ingrespamimi donatione meorum sicut a tombolonem facientis<sup>19</sup>.

In the footnote, the publisher informs that “this introduction in prose gives the flavour of how Bonagrazia told stories” and then adds “all the Latin intrusions that are read are an imitation of those used in his story”. When we carefully study Bonagrazia’s poem written in the form of a testament, we find themes as absurd and paradoxical as those typical of picaresque literature (“full of life as a dead one can only be”). In the rhyming part of the poem, there appear adynata, which bring us closer to poetics and world of the the upside down, e.g. bequeathing Oslo, the capital of Norway etc. The list of possessions from various parts of the world and respective heirs is long. Both the mention in the French “Le Monde Illustré” and the Italian rhyming version of the *Testament* emphasize the poetics of performances based on the absurd, which manifests itself even in numerous Latin intrusions (macaronic Latin). In 19<sup>th</sup>-century Venice, this type of the absurd and comedy was even more distinctive, because the improviser referred to the context of the already non-existent Venetian Republic.

And how do the found materials correspond with Norwid’s literary creation? What meaning do they add to *Tajemnica lorda Singelworth*? It is impossible to treat them solely as a material for editorial commentary. The poet himself emphasised that his Tonin di Bonagrazia from memories has much more credible features than the one from the recollections of “illustrated magazines”. In this way he emphasised his meaning in Norwid’s story. Below we present again a fragment of the author’s remark:

Lecz co do tekstu przy onym rysunku, śmiemy utrzymywać, że nasze kilka rysów w tej noweli spotkanych i wierniej, i właściwiej malują tę postać i jej talentu rodzaj (DW VII, 233).

[But as for the text accompanying this drawing, we dare to maintain that our few sketches in this novella deliver a more faithful and appropriate account of this character and the kind of his talent.]

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 3; “The last will [...] of the descendant and the peer and the marquis of Pisa, the fifth generation descendant (?) of highborn Torcello, the prince without his principality, the owner of the air and the smells of entire Torcello and other places one cannot find (which cannot be reached/ which do not exist). Healthy in mind, full of life as a dead one can only be dead, in the presence of the notary public and other witnesses I decree to bequeath and to keep [...] (from Polish transl. by Z. D.-G.).

In this peculiar review of the article, Norwid writes about the “faithfulness” of the drawing of Tonin di Bonagrazia, claiming that his “spomnienie” [memory] reflects more faithfully the essence of the improviser’s talent. Norwid’s Bonagrazia seems to be distant from the characteristics presented by Armand Baschet, not to mention Wiszniewski’s memories. In the world presented in Norwid’s novella, Bonagrazia seems to play a key role in the creation and demystification of the mysterious lord. On the other hand, Bonagrazia himself is a character whose existence is not called into question. Furthermore, he is the only one whose words in some way not only describe the reality, but also create it. By introducing the character of Singelworth, the narrator gathers opinions about the interest aroused by Lord’s extraordinary hobby. By contrast, Tony di Bona Grazia “względem przybycia Lorda Singelwortha postawił się jako obrońca sławy osobistej podróżnika” “waiting for the arrival of Lord Singelworth he put himself as a defender of traveller’s personal fame” (DW VII, 222). The improviser’s characteristics is very economical, but at the same time, his description is close to Baschet’s memories:

Co zaś Tony do Bona Grazia zmierzył okiem z cieniu galonowego tricorna iskrzącym, co wyseplenił wargami arlekina (atoli *arlekina* klasycznego z czasów etruskich<sup>20</sup>), czemu nadał ton, potrząsając na swoich piersiach wielkimi dekoracjami z kłów wieprzowych, muszli i błyskotliwych blaszek udziałanymi, to nie trzeba myśleć, ażeby znikomym parsknięciem śmiechu będąc, przemijało jak klask i piana uderzonej wiosłem laguny (DW VII, 221).

[What did Tony do Bona Grazia measured with the eye sparkling from the shadow of a braid tricorn, which he lisped with the lips of the harlequin (howbeit, the classical harlequin from the Etruscan times), to which he gave a tone, shaking on his breasts with large decorations of pig’s canines, shells and trinket plates, one should not think, so that with a slim laughter, it passed like a clap and foam of the lagoon struck by the oar.]

From the story, we learn about one more characteristic detail of the improviser’s wardrobe – a brightly coloured scarf, which he used during the performance and to which he collected donations from the audience. The memories of the French traveller and the Venetian comedian Gherardo Rossi quoted by him

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<sup>20</sup> Classical studies on the history of *comedia dell’arte* do not mention the ancient origin of Harlequin, the most characteristic dell’arte mask. The ancient origin validates and ennobles the figure of the jester. Norwid undoubtedly knew the book by M. Sand, *Masques et Bouffons* (Paris 1859), in which the author discusses the history and genesis of the Italian theatre and the various types of *comedia dell’arte*. In search of the genesis of the Italian folk comedy, he reaches to the tradition of ancient comedy. (A few illustrations from the book were included in p. 3 of *Album Orbis*. See PWsz XI, 545-546.) The poet included figures of Harlequin in the history of costume of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries).



emphasise the humour of the improvisations, the fact that he made people laugh, but they do not pay attention to their content<sup>21</sup>. On Norwid's account, the character of Bonagrazia becomes the exponent of the content that cannot appear in any space other than the quasi-theatrical one. On Norwid's account it is difficult to find the features of a cheater or liar (*frappatore*), who makes the audience laugh in tears. While exploring the existence of the public and private sphere in *Tajemnica Lorda*, Elżbieta Dąbrowicz wrote about his nature and role in Norwid's Venice as follows:

Another type of interaction is triggered by Toni di Bona Grazia. External restrictions (the interference of censorship) do not disqualify the word spoken as the initiator of contact. Speaking directly is banned. To be an artist in an enslaved country is to speak the Aesopian language, but to speak. The performance of the improviser takes into account the audience of the twofold type: conspiring listeners and eavesdropping informers. [...] The word spoken among juggling has no chance to break through the cordon separating the spectacle from the "real" life. The contact arranged by the lord and the relation improviser-audience points to the processual nature of the public word. It emerges between the interacting partners. The public word is articulated and interpreted as public. Therefore, it is created by the intention of the speaker and the hearer. But that is not the end. There remains the function of the context. The situation of slavery causes chaos, the collapse of barriers that organize the social organism. Structures and hierarchies break down. It is not known where privacy ends, and the public sphere of existence begins, what is important and what is trivial, what is moral and what is contrary to ethics<sup>22</sup>.

Thus, the truth or "real life" manifests itself between order and chaos, morality and amorality, it is an untamed and unspecified space. According to Dąbrowicz, people who destroy this apparent order of the enslaved city under Austrian rule are both Lord Singelworth and Tony di Bona Grazia. However, in the light of what has been determined above, we can ask further questions: was the improviser really just one of the characters, or is he in fact the hidden *spiritus movens*? Let us look at the structure of the storyline of the novella: the narrator begins writing down his memories with Bonagrazia. Writing down his memories, the narrator introduces the figure of the Lord, but it is Bonagrazia who presents him to the Venetian audience, similarly in the end – the improviser comments on the departure of the Lord. It is owing to him that in the company of exquisite travelers there grows the desire to meet the Lord and learn about his secret. The Lord's

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<sup>21</sup> In the ending of his historical tale, Tonin Bonagrazia stressed that even the Capuchins and the Franciscans burst out laughing ("Les capucines et le franciscans crevaient de rire (schioppage de rider)").

<sup>22</sup> E. DĄBROWICZ, "*Tajemnica lorda...*", pp. 221-222.

secret has always aroused the most interest and raised many questions on the part of readers and commentators. And yet, if one follows the trail left by the improviser – this secret from the sphere of scatological humour (Wiktor Weintraub's term) is explained<sup>23</sup>. The actual secret lies in the act of communication between what is public and what is secret, and how it is revealed. Bonagrazia only verbalises it and gives it its shape, and thus he is able to guide the emotions of the audience and shape them. The Lord himself, in contrast to Bonagrazia, has little to say, he only mentions his desire for perfect cleanliness:

Trefniś jakiś, do mojej tajemnicy próżno kołając, rzucił był anegdotę, jakoby z wysokości balonu mojego upadł nieczysty papier... Musiałoby to być raczej z okna Ksantypy, a nie z tych sfer, z których cokolwiek się odepchnie, musi się doharmonizować do porządku ogólnego wśród włókien, kryształów, kropli, ruchu, pary i pędu... (DW VII, 231)

[Some fool, in vain requesting my secret, threw an anecdote, as if from the height of my balloon fell an unclean paper... It would have had to be from the window of Xanthippe rather than from these spheres, from which anything is pushed away, must harmonise with the general order among fibers, crystals, drops, movement, steam and momentum...]

He does not realize that to this “fool”, whose name he does not even care to remember, he owes his publicity in Venice, and that the jester, belonging to an unclean, fallen civilization, is his most zealous follower. “Natomiast improwizator *Tony di Bona Grazia* z większym niż kiedy zapalem głosił, że ulatujący podróżnik jest mężem *misji*, jest uprzedzicielem i zwiastunem Wielkiej Epoki nowej [...]” [On the other hand, the improviser *Tony di Bona Grazia* with a greater than ever zeal proclaimed that the traveller flying away is the man of *mission*, he is the forerunner and harbinger of the Great New Era ...] (DW VII, 232).

By contrast to Bonagrazia, the title character had always remained in the focus of interpreters' attention. Different meanings were sought in the creation of this character, starting with the search for traces of an allegory or simply a secret<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> W. Weintraub writes: “Norwid had remained a relentless admirer of American democracy until the end of his life. He expressed this admiration in an articulate way in one of his last works – a strange, disturbing story *The Mystery of Lord Singelworth*, [...] In his story, he criticises the contemporary society. Using scatological humour he channelled his acute misanthropy. Up until then, Norwid's sense of decorum was impeccable and his style was elegant, refined, far from any vulgarity.” W. WEINTRAUB, *Norwid i Ameryka*, “*Studia Norwidiana*” 14(1996), p. 17.

<sup>24</sup> See M. ADAMIEC, *Tajemnica lorda Singelworth albo metafizyka balonu*, “*Studia Norwidiana*” 3-4(1985-1986), pp. 201-215; E. DĄBROWICZ, “*Tajemnica lorda...*”, pp. 217-218, S. RZEPCHYŃSKI, *O umyśle “zgodobliwym”*. “*Tajemnica lorda Singelworth*”, “*Studia Norwidiana*” 14(1996), pp. 105-112 (in his interpretation of the novella, the author above all emphasises the motif

Perhaps because his identity remains deliberately unspecified, devoid of certainties. At the very beginning, the narrator opens his memories with a significant sequence:

Czy rzeczywiście były jakie ziemie Singelworth we ważności baronii nadane przodkowi linii prostej męża, o którym te moje wspomnienie zapisuję? I czy przeto ceremonial eksce-lencji lub lorda tytuł były komu ze Singelworthów na potomność przyznane? Czy zatem, gdy takowy do uniwersytetu w Oxford lub w Edynburgu wstępował, przyjmowało był rektor i profesorowie, mówiąc „*Domine Singelworth?*” (DW VII, 219).

[Were there really any Singelworth's lands in the importance of the barony given to the ancestor in the straight line of the man, about whom I am writing down these memoirs of mine? And hence, were the ceremonial of excellency or the title of lord granted to any of the Singelworths for posterity? And therefore, when one of them went to the university in Oxford or in Edinburgh, was he received by the rector and professors with "*Domine Singelworth?*" ]

The narrator himself has no doubts about the identity of Singelworth, he calls into question not so much the existence of the Lord, but the connection of his noble title with the specific historical and social reality. Does it exist at all? Many times, attention was drawn to his affinity to Poe's heroes, or the prototypes of the Lord and his balloon passion were sought for. Grażyna Halkiewicz-Sojak appealed to the non-literary context, writing about Norwid's references to Byron's myth:

References to the biographical myth of the English poet, although frequent in the 60s, especially in correspondence, gradually come to an end in the first half of the 70s. Later they do not appear at all. The more surprising is the work which, at the end of Norwid's life in 1883, brings the creation of a hero convergent with the interpretation of Byron's fate, although, at the same time, generalising the problem of interpreting the life of great people. I mean the novella *Tajemnica lorda Singelworth*. The association of the title character with Byron is an interpretative hypothesis that I cannot prove with an irrefutable argument. However, I will try to explain the reasons for this juxtaposition:

1. the title of lord, English origin;
2. the background of the events in the work are places which Byron visited between the end of 1816 and 1819;
3. Lord's visit causes rumours and commotion like Byron's visits;
4. interest of the Austrian police<sup>25</sup>.

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of mystery and riddle, treating it as a leitmotif); K. TRYBUŚ, *Maska lorda...*

<sup>25</sup> G. HALKIEWICZ-SOJAK, *Byron w twórczości Norwida*, Toruń 1994, pp. 112-113.

The indicated trail turns out to be extremely inspiring: instead of finding a specific solution to the puzzle in the character of the Lord, one can find references to great biographical myths. In the novella, Lord Singelworth, like Bonagrazia, is not a person, but a persona, or a certain act created for the use of public and secret police agents. In part – as it has already been mentioned – it is the creation of the improviser Bonagrazia, in part a memory of the narrator who, from the perspective of time, wonders about the identity of the Lord. I suggest only as a hypothesis to indicate another context, since as in the case of the hypothesis put forward by Halkiewicz-Sojak, I am also missing irrefutable arguments. However, both in her and in my proposal, there are some common places, to which I will return later.

The most interesting aspect of Singelworth's character is his studied eccentricity which is supposed to be regarded as natural: avoiding companionship, compulsive cleanliness, separation from the world; these features resemble the portrait of the poet that became embedded in Norwid's memory. This refers to an ironic characteristic of the Greek poet Dionysios Solomos from *Podróż do Ziemi Świętej z Neapolu* by Juliusz Słowacki. We can assume that Norwid probably read Słowacki's poem, published in *Pisma pośmiertne* by Antoni Małecki in 1866. However, this should be taken as a hypothesis, as there is no evidence of his reading this edition of works by the author of *Kordian*. It is known, however, that Norwid was annoyed by A. Małecki's monograph about Słowacki, among others, by his incorrect assignment of the poem *Do L.N.* to Ludwik Nabelak<sup>26</sup>. Moreover, in the chapter devoted to Słowacki's Eastern journey, Małecki left little space for the description of the poet's impressions of Greece and did not even mention a word about Słowacki's meeting with Solomos. The description of Słowacki's journey to the Holy Land was based on the poet's correspondence, without mentioning the details of the travel to Greece. Thus, below we quote this famous episode from the poem:

Na to podniósł się graf Salomon z Zante,  
Poeta grecki; ucho mu rozdziera  
Zmiana wyrazów i kradzież średniówek;  
Więc chciał poprawić – lecz zabrakło słówek.  
[...]  
Wielki poeto! Jako między skały  
Rzucony tyran, tak ty w puchowniczk  
Stracon słabością; a twój surdut biały

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<sup>26</sup> This refers to the monograph by A. Małecki, *Juliusz Słowacki. Jego życie i dzieła w stosunku do współczesnej epoki* (Lwów 1867). See Z. TROJANOWICZOWA, E. LIJEWSKA with participation of M. PLUTA, *Kalendarz*, vol. II, pp. 299-302.

I glansowane białe rękawiczki  
 I twój usłużnych lokajów paszalik  
 Świadczą, żeś jest coxcomb lub migdalik.

[...]

Gdy go raz wieńcem uwieńczyła oda;  
 Mówią, że dzisiaj co napisze, pali;  
 Mówią, że wierszy popalonych szkoda;  
 Mówią, że przy nim wszyscy wieszczę mali  
 Szkoda, że zamiast wiersze chować w szafę  
 Czyni z nich co dzień pan graf *auto da fe!*

[Salomon of Zante got up at that,  
 The greek poet; his ear is torn apart  
 Change of words and theft of caesurae;  
 So he wanted to correct it – but there words were missing.

[...]

You, great poet! As a tyrant thrown  
 Between the rocks, so you into pillows  
 Knocked with weakness; and your white frock coat  
 And polished white gloves  
 And the pashalik of your attentive lackeys  
 Prove that you are a coxcomb or a dandy.

[...]

When he was once crowned with a wreath by an ode;  
 They say that what he writes today burns;  
 They say that the burned poems are worth pity;  
 They say that by comparison to him all the bards are inferior  
 It is a pity that instead of hiding poems in the wardrobe  
 Every day, Mr. Count makes with them *auto-da-fé!*<sup>27</sup>

Upon deconstructing the myth of both the journey and the East in this fragment of the poem, many times Słowacki mentions the commented and described meeting with Dionysios Solomos, who achieved poetic fame throughout Europe with his odes, with the most famous *Hymn to Liberty* and *Ode on the Death of Lord Byron*. Słowacki portrays here a bard of freedom, who as a person is rather repulsive, and in this way presents himself as a prisoner of his neurotic habits. Furthermore, in the quoted fragment, this portrait is complemented with the narrator's reading experiences, which absolutely do not fit the experience of a personal meeting, and rumours that complement the image of the Greek poet. Returning

<sup>27</sup> J. SŁOWACKI, *Pisma pośmiertne*, compiled by A. Małecki, vol. I, Lwów 1866, p. 134. The quotation from the edition that could have been read by Norwid.

again to the hypothesis that Norwid refers to Byron's biographical myth, we can point out that our hypothesis also refers to the poet's myth, or rather his embarrassment. Słowacki shows the incompatibility of the artist's biography with his work. How is it possible, the narrator seems to ask, that such a freak, snob and neurotic was able to create a hymn that became a symbol of battles for freedom? A similar character is Singelworth himself, who in fact wants to escape the dirt of modern civilisation and does not want to have any connection to it. Let us return, however, to the relationship between the improviser and Lord Singelworth. How is Singelworth introduced as a hero? Only through the use of interrogative sentences. No wonder that for many readers he was a disguise, a mask under which there is nothing<sup>28</sup>. The most important commentator is Sior (Dąbrowicz), who actually creates Lord Singelworth. Bonagrazia, baron and the lord of non-existent estates, the owner of the air (as the historical improviser presented himself), creates a mysterious inhabitant of the sky plains. Commentators emphasised that both figures stand on the poles: Sior belongs to the unclean and the Lord is above that<sup>29</sup>. However, instead of opposites, one can see in this pair complementary elements of the reality, in a similar vein to Norwid's theory of Dorianism and Phrygianism ("*A Dorio ad Phrygium*"), both elements complement each other and condition their existence, and – as Stefan Sawicki wrote – create a synthesis<sup>30</sup>. The street jester and his adynata in the retrospective narration of *Tajemnica...* process the matter of the memory, which becomes a mixture of truth and fabrication, history and novel.

*Translated by Rafał Augustyn*

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<sup>28</sup> E. DĄBROWICZ, "*Tajemnica lorda...*"; M. ADAMIEC, *Tajemnica lorda...*; K. TRYBUŚ, *Maska lorda...*

<sup>29</sup> G. HALKIEWICZ-SOJAK, *Byron...*; E. DĄBROWICZ, "*Tajemnica lorda...*"

<sup>30</sup> S. SAWICKI, *Jak rozumieć "A Dorio ad Phrygium"*, [in:] IDEM, *Wartość – sacrum – Norwid. Studia i szkice aksjologiczne*, Lublin 1994, pp. 223-225.



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Sior Tonin Bonagrazia's illustration for the article by A. Baschet, "Le Monde Illustré" 1861 no. 234-235.

Source: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6228357j/f13.item.r=tonin%20di%20bonagrazia.zoom>

TAJEMNICE *TAJEMNICY LORDA SINGELWORTH*

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

W artykule została bliżej zaprezentowana postać historycznego improwizatora weneckiego Tonin di Bonagrazia, jednego z bohaterów noweli Norwida *Tajemnica lorda Singelworth*. Autorka dotarła do artykułu wzmiankowanego przez poetę w przypisie do noweli oraz wizerunku włoskiego aktora i zestawiała wiedzę epoki z kreacją artystyczną Norwida. W drugiej części artykułu autorka wskazała też na hipotetyczną wciąż inspirację dla tytułowego bohatera noweli, którą miałyby być grecki poeta Dionisios Solomos.

**Słowa kluczowe:** nowelistyka; Tonin di Bonagrazia; Dionisios Solomos; geneza.

THE SECRETS OF *LORD SINGELWORTH'S SECRET*

S u m m a r y

This article presents the figure of the Venetian historical improviser Tonin di Bonagrazia, one of the protagonists of Norwid's novel *Tajemnica lorda Singelworth* [Lord Singelworth's Secret]. The author reached the article mentioned by the poet in the footnote to the novella and image of the Italian actor and she put together the knowledge of the era with Norwid's artistic creation. In the second part of the article, the author also pointed to the yet hypothetical inspiration for the title character of the novella – presumably the Greek poet Dionisios Solomos.

**Key words:** short stories; Tonin di Bongrazia; Dionisios Solomos; origin.

*Summary translated by Rafal Augustyn*

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