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SIBERIE BY NORWID

Norwid's poem *Syberie* [*The Two Siberias*] begins with a monumental cry of the earth addressed to the heavens.¹ Based on the subjective criteria of reading poetry, this cry appears to be one of the few such dramatic and sad poetic introductions. As it is well known, the poem comes from the *Vade-mecum* cycle, hence it was probably written in the first half of the 1860s, similar to most poems from this collection. Following an in-depth scrutiny, this very short text, only twelve verses long, belongs to one of Norwid's masterpiece lyrical miniatures, which also comprise the poems *W Weronie* [*In Verona*], *Sfinks* [*Sphinx*] and *Pielgrzym* [*Pilgrim*]. Embedded in numerous contexts, including the author's own, it is an example of lyricism that condenses the content concisely as possible. And this is an objective research-based judgement. Many scholars were interested in *Syberie*. Of fundamental importance, not only from the perspective of the poem, is of course the monograph on the subject of deportations written by Zofia Trojanowiczowa (*Sybir romantyków*²). Equally important are the interpretations by Włodzimierz Toruń, a researcher who probably most intensively explored Russian themes in Norwid's work, scattered throughout the literature on the subject (e.g. in *Norwid o Niepodległej*³). Also, Edward

¹ Włodzimierz Toruń (*Narodowy czyściciel*, [in:] IDEM, *Norwid o Niepodległej*, Lublin 2013, p. 129) began one of his commentaries on the poem *Syberie* with the following statement: "The almost cosmic perspective of the poem's incipit already suggests that the work mainly refers to generalised meanings and uses a far-reaching metaphorical imagery."

² Z. TROJANOWICZOWA, *Sybir romantyków*, Kraków 1993.

³ W. TORUŃ, *Narodowy czyściciel*; IDEM, *Syberia w twórczości Cypriana Norwida*, [in:] *Zesłańcy postyczniowi w Imperium Rosyjskim. Studia dedykowane profesor Wiktorii Śliwowskiej*, ed. E. Niebelski, Lublin–Warszawa 2008, pp. 373-384; IDEM, *Norwid i Ruprecht*, [in:] *Emigracja postyczniowa 1863 roku*, ed. E. Niebelski, Lublin 2010, pp. 179-192; IDEM, *Z Tunką w tle – uwagi Cypriana Norwida*, [in:] *Syberia infernalna – mity i oblicza rzeczywistości*, eds. M. Cwenk, J. Trynkowski, Lublin 2014, pp. 57-67.

Kasperski⁴ proposed his own interpretation of the text. Although the poem has been commented on by many researchers, it is still worthy of attention. Firstly, because it is an intellectually rich poem imbued with important 19th-century ideas, and secondly, because in Norwid's discourse on modernity it gives perhaps one of the harshest poetic commentaries on the Western world, perhaps unparalleled in the poetry of its time.⁵

Trojanowiczowa wrote that the poem is not a work with many surprises. She even considered that its appearance in the *Vade-mecum* cycle "seems natural, almost predictable."⁶ Naturally, it is true, as she writes later that: "The poem was born at the intersection of the poet's two basic experiences: his deep – from his early youth – experience of deportations and his stubborn – rich in poetic discoveries and experiments – wandering through the hell of modern times."⁷ However, it must be admitted that the work presents a surprisingly provocative juxtaposition of two worlds: the North and the West; a juxtaposition which is provocative and rich in interpretative inferences.

Pod-biegunowi! Na dziejów odłogu,
Gdzie całe dnie
Niebo się zdaje przypominać Bogu:
„Zimno i mnie!...”

– Wróćcież kiedy? I którzy? I jacy?
Z śmiertelnych prób:
W drugą Syberię – pieniędzy i pracy –
Gdzie wolnym-grób!

Lub pierw, czy? Obie takowe Syberie
– Niewoli dwóch –
Odepchnie nogą, jak stare liberie,
Wielki-Pan...Duch!⁸

⁴ E. KASPERSKI, *Wokół „Syberii” Norwida. Dwie koncepcje etyki, historiozofii i patriotyzmu*, [in:] IDEM, *Dyskursy romantyków. Norwid i inni*, Warszawa 2003.

⁵ Zdzisław Łapiński (*Norwid*, Warszawa 1971, p. 128) noted: "The contemporary world is primarily divided between the West and Russia. Norwid understood the West not only as a possible political partner, but also as a common heir of the ancient and Judeo-Christian culture; mainly as a representative of the forward-looking civilisational experiences, which must also become our part. [...] The poet was aware of the fact that the processes taking place in the West and largely accepted by him are now driven by the industrial revolution." As it might be assumed, Norwid's poem *Syberie* already expresses an opinion on that period.

⁶ Z. TROJANOWICZOWA, *Sybir romantyków*, p. 135.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ C. NORWID, *Syberie*, [in:] IDEM, *Vade-mecum*, compiled by J. Fert, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków 1999, pp. 72-73; cf. IDEM, *Syberie*, [in:] IDEM, *Pisma wszystkie*, Vol. II, compiled, edited and with introduction and commentaries by J.W. Gomulicki, Warszawa 1971, p. 58.

You, in Arctic land! On history's fallow lot,
 Where for whole days
 The sky seems to be reminding God:
"I am cold as well!"

– Will you return one day? Who will? Looking how?
 From deadly ordeals:
 To second Siberia – of money and work –
 Grave of the free!

Or before that will both the Siberias
 – Of two servitudes –
 Be kicked aside like some old liveries,
 By Great Lord...Spirit!⁹

First, we should consider the first two stanzas of the poem. The one-word apostrophe to the condemned evokes the hellish world of despotism that is created by authoritarian, crisis-ridden Russia with its polar land of exile. It is a reality "na dziejów odłogu" [on history's fallow lot], as it were, an immobilised "fallow land," abandoned by man and time, plunged into chaos, not taken care of by the hand of the farmer, or perhaps even – as one of the explanations for the word "odłog" [fallow land] in Samuel Linde's¹⁰ *Dictionary* would suggest – the rejection and abomination of history, i.e. a reality where human fate cannot be realised in the spirit of the fundamental good; where the history of man as a fundamental component of his human fate cannot be fulfilled. If even heaven must remind God of itself, cold heaven "forgotten by God," what else can people deported into this void do? What a hellish part of land, a hellish border of the world is it? On the other hand, there is the West, seemingly so very different from the "fallow lot" of history, with its self-awareness of progress, development and human happiness, with the modern mission of which the poet had been aware since the early 1840s; the West, the other Siberia, demanding "wielu zimnych ogólników" [many cold generalities] (as stated already in the poem *W pamiętniku L. A. Improwizacja [L. A.'s Diary. Improvisation]*), eager for money and work, effort and sacrifice, a dynamic, fast-paced world – the apparent opposite of the Siberian stagnation. It is a juxtaposition of two realities, which explains the plural in the title of the poem¹¹.

⁹ Przekład M. MIKOŚ, [in:] IDEM, *Polish Romantic Literature. An Anthology*, Bloomington 2002, p. 136-137.

¹⁰ *Słownik języka polskiego*, Vol. II, Part 1, *M-O*, Warszawa 1809, pp. 440-441.

¹¹ Cf. B. BOLESŁAWITA [J.I. KRASZEWSKI], *Wychodźstwo*, [in:] IDEM, *Rachunki z roku 1866 [Rok pierwszy]*, Poznań 1867, pp. 117-118. Kraszewski lamented the fate of the emigrants, who were alone and manhandled in civilised Europe; he stated that for the emigrant "the destination was often worse than Siberia [...]."

What follows from it? The fact that the world is one great Siberia? Or that the contemporary world destroys human freedom? Or that the world in which a man of the industrial and commercial age lives is just a caricature of the world?

In seeking an answer to these questions, let us turn our attention to the key metaphor for the subject of deportation – “śmiertelna próba” [the deadly ordeal], which can be clearly explained by the hardships of exile, the dramatic conditions of the journey to Siberia, then the difficult conditions of life, the work that often does not respect human dignity due to humiliation, loneliness, and despair. The poet knew that well from the accounts of his friends and correspondents: Karol Ruprecht, Agaton Giller, Bronisław Zaleski, Gustaw Ehrenberg. When he was writing his poem, the subject of deportations had, as we know, already been rooted in Polish awareness, but also in Polish culture and literature; it was constantly present in reflections on the Polish issue in the 19th century. “Deadly ordeals” is a deeper metaphor than it appears at first glance, since it is the metaphor that makes us realise how warped and degraded the world is, in which man fights for salvation. Norwid gives such an interpretive hint. Should it not be treated as a metaphor that defines the eschatological fate of man? At the same time, is it not so much a metaphor that reduces the dimension of the Siberian horror as it is an indication of an even greater evil (which is hard to imagine) that lures man beyond its hellish borders? This metaphor, containing many questions: about the perseverance in martyrdom or losing oneself in a world without value, about the dimension of civil heroism, reveals the depth of poetic synthesis. Its meaning is congruent with the questions about the moral condition of the world and that of man, about his freedom, about how man in a trial situation can face the adversities of fate or judgments that may undermine his dignity and irrevocably disturb his identity. Thus, it is in line with the questions about the chance to save one’s humanity. Therefore, Siberia appears to be a faraway and forgotten land, cursed, but at the same time one that an inwardly free and strong man is capable of defying and capable of saving himself by force that contradicts the spiritual inertia expected at the moment of mortal danger, and this is what the fate of the exile is linked to. It addresses the matter at its core because in the second stanza, expressing his doubts, the poet asks whether this fortitude, owing to which man avoided annihilation, is not by chance a sacrifice in vain? For it is here, in the second stanza, that the West is called a second Siberia, which is both overwhelming and terrifying. It is precisely the West, full of its ideology of development, its (misunderstood) Promethean awareness, that is the land of submissiveness, where even the freedom that has been saved “in deadly trials” will be lost, where it is lost in the abyss – of money and work – as in a grave that is in the end, an annihilating chasm that does not provide any perspective. Norwid is ruthless in the

assessment of his contemporary world. The West, as a land of enslavement or lying on the antipodes of human freedom, plunges into sadness and does not let itself be forgotten even when reading Norwid's texts, which acknowledge the power of the human mind. This ruthless axiological qualification would be an overly suggestive opinion; corresponding to many of the poems from *Vade-mecum*, it would also be a unique commentary in such a two-stanza form, but as we know, it is not the message of the poem. In the third stanza, when the poet sums up the bitter image of "two Siberias," he asks about God's intervention. This is not an obvious or trivial question, as the poet turns it into a prophecy. Indeed, the poem's message is prophetic in nature. Norwid is neither a messianist nor a millenarian, but in the face of the terrifying truth of the world – the contemporary Babylon – he allows the question about the radical transformation of the world, which can only be done by the Great Lord – Spirit. The strong, very literal gesture of pushing away with a leg could be shocking if liveries were to be understood in accordance with the dictionary definitions as servitude, or simply – submissive people. However, it should rather be interpreted as a decisive gesture made by the Lord of History, who through an intervention at a turning point could change the face of "two Siberias." Old liveries, like old uniforms, old robes covering human reality, could fall and resurrect eschatological hope only thanks to him.¹² The last lines of the poem should be read as closing the prophetic frame, which was opened in the first stanza with the image of heaven calling out to God. They are filled with prayerful zeal of the person speaking on behalf of the exiles of both Siberias.

However, commenting on the outline of the work is not enough. Norwid's lyrical miniature points to three great ideological dialogues taking place in the Polish culture of the 19th century. The poet made such synthesising efforts already in his early works, for example, in the poem *Jeszcze słowo* [*One More Word*], written in the turmoil of the late 1840s, where he gave voice to various creators and ideologies of his era, but used a crushing evaluation, calling the world "stepy nicstwa" [the steppes of nothingness]. But here, in the poem *Syberie*, he probably went much further. This was made possible by the new historical context – on one hand, the situation with the uprising, and on the other, the train of modernity that was accelerating before his eyes. The three great themes of the poem – the dialogues should be mentioned in a specific order.

¹² W. Toruń (*Narodowy czyściec*, p. 134) notices it very accurately: "In many biblical texts, the Spirit of God is associated primarily with freedom. Already in Ecclesiastes (8, 8) we read: *No man has power to retain the spirit, or power over the day of death. There is no discharge from war, nor will wickedness deliver those who are given to it.* And St. Paul in 2 Corinthians (3, 17) writes: *Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.* It seems that the *Great-Lord...Spirit* from Norwid's poem *Syberie* refers mainly to this biblical tradition."

The first dialogue in Norwid's poem is a dialogue about the importance of Siberia, a dialogue with a long history in the 1860s. Norwid's intention and merit was to cover – using a concise formula – various threads of the Siberian idea present in Polish culture since the time of Bishop Kajetan Sołtyk's memorable history; present in the literary space and explored more and more intensively since Mickiewicz's *Dziady* [*Forefathers' Eve*], dedicated to *spółuczniom, spółwięzniom, spółwygnańcom* [co-apprentices, co-prisoners, co-exiles]. Mickiewicz's motifs from both *Dziady* (especially *Widzenia ks. Piotra* and *Ustęp* [*Forefather's Eve: Fr. Piotr's Vision; Passages*]) and two well-known *Parisian Lectures* (XXIII and XXIV) resonate in many works of that time. Writing about *Dziady*, Zofia Trojanowiczowa noticed: "There are no images of life in Siberia in the drama, but they are hinted at: in the tormenting sense of the Siberian threat among the imprisoned youth, in Jan Sobolewski's shocking story about the deportation of junior high school students, in the vision of the long white ways of the cross from Fr. Piotr's prophecy, in the fate of Konrad-the exile"¹³. Therefore, it encompasses everything that was realistically a theme of the "night-time conversations between compatriots," part of the stories described in letters¹⁴ and personal experiences. Siberia, the land of white endless roads, the hell, the bulwark of which is St. Petersburg, built by the evil forces; starting from Mickiewicz's works¹⁵ (and later following the accounts of Gustaw Ehrenberg, Józef Bohdan Zaleski, Karol Baliński, Edward Żeligowski) is mostly a land of exile, torment and martyrdom. Norwid must have remembered Mickiewicz's verses of the poem, just as he remembered Zygmunt Krasiński's work *Ostatni* [*The Last One*],¹⁶ which for two reasons constitutes an

¹³ Z. TROJANOWICZOWA, „*Dróg krzyżowych biegi.*” *Mickiewicz o wygnańcach*, [in:] IDEM, *Romantyzm. Od poetyki do polityki*, Kraków 2010, p. 244.

¹⁴ There is a letter written on 27 January 1848 by Zygmunt Krasiński to Delfina Potocka, in which the poet tells Norwid's story about the deportations from Warsaw. See Z. KRASIŃSKI, *Listy do Delfiny Potockiej*, compiled and with introduction by Z. Sudolski, Vol. III, Warszawa 1975, p. 609. Krasiński wrote in his letter of 28 August 1847: "I read the new code in its entirety; it is to be introduced in three months' time. Death and Siberia for anything. For instance, for not reporting about the conspiracy! – when you read it, you seem to descend into the circles of hell." Krasiński probably refers here to the Code of Main and Correctional Punishments, published in 1845, which began to be applied in an abbreviated version from 1847 (to 1876) in the Kingdom of Poland. See IDEM, *Sto listów do Delfiny*, compilation and introduction by J. Kott, Warszawa 1966, p. 263.

¹⁵ Trojanowiczowa writes about the first associations of Siberia with hell in Mickiewicz's works in the anthology *Sybir romantyków* (pp. 102-106).

¹⁶ Toruń proposed Zygmunt Krasiński's *Nie-Boska komedia* as the literary context, especially the ending of the drama and Pankracy's words: *Galilae vicisti*. See IDEM, *Narodowy czyściciel*, p. 135.

important literary context here.¹⁷ As we remember, it was here that Krasiński, who was deeply afraid of deportation, described the drama of a man dying in the dungeons of a Siberian fortress. It was in this work that he gave an extremely critical assessment of the contemporary times (see further discussion). Krasiński's poem was published in 1847 in Paris. The author preceded it with an epigraph that he wrote himself. The work gained great popularity especially thanks to Fryderyk Chopin, who composed music to the poem's epigraph.

Z gór, gdzie dźwigali
 Strasznych krzyżów brzemię,
 Widzieli z dała obiecaną ziemię.
 Widzieli światło niebieskich promieni,
 Ku którym w dole ciągnęło ich plemię.
 A sami do tych nie wejdą przestrzeni!
 Do godów życia nigdy nie zasięda,
 I nawet, nawet może zapomnieni będą!¹⁸

Under their crosses' cruel weight they stand
 To see from the mountain top the promised land.
 Their eyes shine with transcendent light
 To see their people descending.
 They see the regions they will never enter,
 The horn of plenty they will never taste!
 And here their bones will lie unremembered,
 Perhaps for ever.¹⁹

Norwid could have heard the song in Paris, perhaps performed by Delfina Potocka herself²⁰. Today we find this composition under the title *Melodia* [*Melody*], Op. 74, No. 9 in the collection *Pieśni polskie* [*Polish Songs*] by Fryderyk Cho-

¹⁷ Rolf Fieguth (*Zaproszenie do „Quidama,”* Kraków 2014, p. 258) wrote: “We have long been well versed in the changing personal contact between Norwid and Krasiński. However, the state of research on the details of a rich literary and thought dialogue that Norwid had held with the older colleague for decades is worse. Could Norwid's references to Krasiński have been so natural and obvious to the older generation of researchers that they did not deem them worthy to be studied separately?”

¹⁸ Z. KRASIŃSKI, *Ostatni*, Paris 1847 (the poem's epigraph signed: Unknown).

¹⁹ ¹⁹ English translation by an anonymous author, retrieved from <https://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/3999> [accessed 20 October 2020]

²⁰ Chopin's 17 songs were published by Julian Fontana as late as in 1859. See J. FERT, *Norwid – Chopin. Korespondencja serc i sztuk*, [in:] IDEM, *Poezja i publicystyka*, Lublin 2012.

pin²¹. The poem was republished in 1862 and translated into English, French and Italian²². Similarly to Mickiewicz's *Dziady*, Zygmunt Krasiński's *Ostatni* further contributed to the collective experience of Siberia as a nationwide phenomenon.²³ The hero of the poem, a young poet sentenced to imprisonment in the depths of the empire, lonely and forgotten, but heroically fighting for his dignity, devoted to the national cause, a fervent patriot became a symbol of spiritual heroism. Siberia was therefore a very concrete reality and a "political hell" associated with the oppressive apparatus of despotic Russia, a world that aroused fear and, at the same time, a world that was hated, which, let us recall, was also very vividly demonstrated by Juliusz Słowacki in his poem *Poema Piasta Dantyszka herbu Leliwa o piekle*, among other things, by making the tsar the foundation of a hellish tower²⁴. This would also be another motif of the Siberian idea – it was a world that created an opportunity for a spiritual and moral breakthrough, as heralded already by Mickiewicz's *Dziady*. The daily sacrifice of the Polish exiles in the mines of Nerchinsk, Ishim and Tunka, was in a way "the gold of the nation perfected in fire."²⁵ This resounds particularly strongly in *Droga z Rosji* from *Ustęp [Forefather's Eve, Part III: Passages – the Road to Russia]*, where the narrator guesses that the drama taking place in Siberia would not be meaningless. On the contrary, it would be part of the war between good and evil.

Kraina pusta, biała i otwarta
 Jak zgotowana do pisania karta.
 Czyż na niej będzie pisać palec Boski,
 I ludzi dobrych używszy za głoski,
 Czyliż tu skryśli prawdę świętej wiary,

²¹ Aleksandra Kurzak's performance of *Melodia* can today be called unique and beautiful. Noteworthy is the record: *Chopin. Pieśni*, Aleksandra Kurzak / Mariusz Kwiecien / Nelson Goerner, NIFCCD 016, 2009. See <http://pl.chopin.nifc.pl/chopin/composition/detail/id/134> [accessed 11 Mai 2017].

²² See Z. TROJANOWICZOWA, *O „Ostatnim” Krasińskiego, czyli o presji mitu syberyjskiego*, [in:] EADEM, *Romantyzm. Od poetyki do polityki*, p. 398.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 407.

²⁴ "Tu cię na wstępie powieści przerażę – Wieża piekielna oparta na Carze, / Na jednym trupie, jak na zgniłym palu, / Cała się trzęsie wisząc na moskalu" [Here, at the beginning of the story, I will frighten you – The hellish tower is based on the Tsar, / On one corpse, as on a rotten stake, / The whole thing is shaking as it hangs on a Muscovite] (J. SŁOWACKI, *Poema Piasta Dantyszka herbu Leliwa o piekle*, Paris 1839, p. 35).

²⁵ See Z. TROJANOWICZOWA, *Tunka*, [in:] EADEM, *Romantyzm. Od poetyki do polityki*, pp. 411-421; cf. W. TORUŃ, *Z Tunką w tle – uwagi Cypriana Norwida*, [in:] *Syberia infernalna*, pp. 57-67.

Że miłość rządzi plemieniem człowieczem,
 Że trofeami świata są: ofiary?
 Czyli też Boga nieprzyjaciel stary
 Przyjdzie i w księdze tej wryje mieczem,
 Że ród człowieczy ma być w więzy kuty,
 Że trofeami ludzkości są: knuty?²⁶

An open region, white and desolate,
 A sheaf on which no pen has ever writ.
 Is God's hand to illumine the virgin scroll?
 His characters – the honest human soul?
 Inscribing here truth, faith, and holy peace;
 That loving-kindness shall be mankind's law,
 The trophies of the world: self-sacrifice?
 Or will it be that God's most ancient foe
 Shall come with sword, not pen, the page to stain,
 Declaring man forever to be chained,
 The trophies of the world: from quarter-draw?²⁷

In his Lecture XXIV of Course II on *Slavic Literature*, Mickiewicz wrote: “The exiles and all the convicts deported to Siberia are also, in a way, shamans. Detached from the community, condemned to live alone, to explore to the bottom of their own spirit, they have to consider the past, they have to – so to speak – make an examination of conscience.”²⁸ Often it was these “deadly ordeals” from Norwid’s poem, owing to which the mission of the exiled, the apostles of the national cause became clear. Owing to their testimony, the bond between the Polish community was strengthened and the sense of the drama of Polish history unfolding before the eyes of the world was being uncovered, in a way, spontaneously. The best of Norwid’s context here is undoubtedly both the poem *Ołówkiem. Na książeczce o Tuncie* [*With a Pencil. On a Booklet about Tunka*] with a clear prophetic interpretation, and – perhaps especially – the concept of a national cross with four arms from the much earlier text *Słowo zgody* [*The Word of Consent*]. It is here that the quintessence of the suffering of the Siberian exiles is shown in a parabolic motif of a seed that does not (seemingly) bear fruit and yield, just like in Gorecki’s fable, which the following message is introduced by Żegota: *Kto*

²⁶ A. MICKIEWICZ, *Dziadów części III Ustęp*, [in:] IDEM, *Dziela. Dramaty. Wydanie rocznicowe*, Vol. III, ed. Z. Stefanowska, Warszawa 1999, p. 266, vv. 31-41.

²⁷ A. MICKIEWICZ, *Forefather's Eve, Part III: Passages – the Road to Russia*, transl. by Ch. Kraszewski, London 2016, p. 310.

²⁸ IDEM, *Literatura słowiańska. Kurs II*, [in:] IDEM, *Dziela. Wydanie rocznicowe*, Vol. IX, ed. J. Maślanka, Warszawa 1997, pp. 306-307.

z was wiarę i wolność znajdzie i zagrzebie, / Myśli Boga oszukać – oszuka sam siebie [Whichever of you finds and buries faith and freedom, / Wanting to deceive God – deceives himself].²⁹ We read in Norwid:

Zarzucone ziarna w głąb kazamat, w bezsłonecznym powietrzu bladymi, często pąka kwiatu mieć nie mogącymi, łzawo-przezroczystymi liśćmi i łodygami odrastają. Więzień kwiatu z nich nie ma ani ziarna, ale czuje przez nie to w s k r o ś – p r a w o, któremu grób oprzeć się nie może; ale czuje przez nie nieśmiertelność. (PWsz, VII, s. 45-46).

The seeds thrown deep into the dungeons, in the sunless pale air, often deprived of flower buds, grow back with teary-transparent leaves and stems. The prisoner of the flower has not even seed from them, but he feels through them this law, which the grave cannot resist; but he feels immortality through them.

By the way, it should be added that in Norwid's concise approach (*Podbiegunowi! Na dziejów odłogu...* [You, in the Arctic land! On history's fallow lot...]) we can also hear this – perhaps paradoxical – theme of the uniqueness of Siberia as a geographical area. This uniqueness was, of course, determined by the very location of the unspoiled and mysterious land, so distant and so different from anything that it became part of Romantic peregrinations. Mickiewicz (followed by others) initiated this motif in cultural and anthropological reflection, expressing an authentic interest in the indigenous peoples of Siberia, their living conditions and, not least, in Siberian nature. As we know, this later resulted in many testimonies of this fascination with the polar world, eventually also in scientific studies and serious research.³⁰ To name just a few publications, e.g. Józef Kobyłecki's *Wiadomości o Syberii i podróże w niej odbyte w latach 1831, 1832, 1833, 1834*, published in 1837; Ewa Felińska's *Wspomnienia z podróży do Syberii, pobytu w Berezowie i w Saratowie*, or the excellent work by Agaton Giller, announced in Leipzig in 1867, *Opisanie Zabajkalskiej krainy w Syberii*.³¹

²⁹ IDEM, *Dziady. Część III*, p. 148, vv. 348-349.

³⁰ “Between 1824 and 1922, hundreds of educated Poles were deported behind the Urals to work in scientific societies (including branches of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society, tourist museums, Border Commissions and Statistical Committees). The exiled were mainly stationary researchers, because they stayed for a long time in one place. For this reason, their achievements, especially in exploring nature and ethnography, sometimes surpassed the results obtained by academic research expeditions.” (Z. WÓJCIK, *Uczeni polscy na Syberii do 1922 roku – zarys tematu*, [in:] *Sybir. Wąsiedlenia – Losy – Świadectwa*, eds. J. Ławski, Ł. Zabielski, S. Trzeciakowska, Białystok 2013, p. 99).

³¹ This subject is well described in Zbigniew J. Wójcik's sketch *Uczeni polscy na Syberii do 1922 roku – zarys tematu*, [in:] *Sybir. Wąsiedlenia – Losy – Świadectwa*, pp. 95-106). Cf. J. FIEĆKO, *Rosja, Polska, misja zesłańców. Syberyjska twórczość Agatona Gillera*, Poznań 1997.

The second ideological dialogue encapsulated in the concise formula of Norwid's poem *Syberie* is a dialogue with the Promethean idea of Western civilisation. Norwid, as a man of the "height" of the 19th century, a watchful observer of the achievements of the industrial revolution, already had a much broader perspective than Mickiewicz. However, it is the author of the poem *Do Matki Polki* [*To the Polish Mother*] that should be recalled here again as the one who in Dresden's *Dziady*, following J.J. Rousseau, undertook to expose Western Prometheism, leaving no illusions about Europe, boasting of the idea of progress. The negation of civilisational optimism included in *Dziady*, but having its roots in enlightened rationalism, explains the scale of the future, late 19th-century disappointments with the world of railways, telegraphs and factories. Bogusław Dopart argued in his monograph on the poem that the Prometheus of *Wielka Improwizacja* and *Ustęp* in *Dziady* Part III [*Great Improvisation* and *Passages from Forefathers' Eve* Part III] was in fact human reason, which made Providentialism obsolete, that redefined the concept of human freedom, desacralized human cognitive motivations and creative ambitions. As a result, it led the mankind to focus on self-improvement and constantly crossing the boundaries of the mind, without taking into account the theological and metaphysical foundations of human freedom. The rationalist rebellion has never consisted in "storming the sky, but in the apostasy and detachment from supernatural reality, falling into matter and engineering."³² The affirmative idea of progress in poetic imagination revealed in Mickiewicz's poem was also rooted in Krasiński's poem *Ostatni*. There, the poet compared the West and the contemporary civilised world to a market ruled by money. A man in the "bad age," seduced by false ideas, is on the verge of being lost.

Bo wiek mój wiekiem był przejścia i złego.
 A w tem złem przejściu osadzić go chcieli
 Ci, którzy sądów Bożych nie pojęli,
 Książęta ziemi i ziemi handlarze! –
 – I jak świątynia niegdyś Salomona,
 Nim gniew Chrystusa wygnał z niej kramarze
 Cała kupiectwem żydów obluźniona –
 Tak za dni moich stał gmach świata
 Bliski upadku – pełny win – bez wiary!
 A w nim dwa tylko dusz kupieckich stany,
 Igrząc walczyły o prym na przemiany.
 Raz zysku chciwość, – to znów wojen trwoga
 – i świat ten cały był Giełdą bez Boga!

³² B. DOPART. *Poemat profetyczny. O „Dziadach” drezdeńskich Adama Mickiewicza*, Kraków 2002, p. 141.

A jako szatan Archanielskiej mocy,
 Ponad tą Giełdą, od lodów północy,
 Wzrastał już wtedy cień tego olbrzyma
 Który mnie dotąd w tych okowach trzyma!
 A oni wszyscy – miasto dziarsko, razem,
 Uderzyć w wroga ogniem i żelazem,
 Z żelaza tylko kuli dróg koleje,
 I w parach wodnych pokładli nadzieje! –
 Bo się nie bali – ni Boga – ni sromu,
 Lecz śmiertelnego pola bitew gromu –
 I dobrze było Mieszczanom tym w domu.³³

Because my century was an era of transition and evil.
 And they wanted to set in this evil transition,
 Those who had not understood God's judgments,
 Princes of the land and land merchants! –
 – – And like once Solomon's temple,
 Before the wrath of Christ banished the merchants from it
 All of it filled with the Jewish merchants' blasphemy –
 This is how the building of the world stood in my days
 Almost collapsing – full of blame – without faith!
 And there were only two states of merchant souls in it,
 Who fought for the lead in the transformation.
 Either greed, – or the fear of war
 – and this whole world was a Market without God!
 And as a Satan with Archangel's power,
 Over this Market, from the ice of the north,
 The shadow of this giant had already been growing
 The one who had been holding me in these fetters!
 And they all – the town, together, with vigour,
 Hit the enemy with fire and iron,
 They only made railroads of iron,
 And put their hopes in the water vapour! –
 Because they were not afraid – either of God – or of disgrace,
 But of a deadly thunderstorm in the battlefield –
 And the Townspeople felt good at home.

Norwid's texts, which uncompromisingly evaluate the merchants' age, are undoubtedly a voice in this matter. It is worth noting, for example, two poems written by the poet, characteristic of the analysed subject and, in a way, poetically balanced in *Syberie* – the poems *Praca* [Work] and *Na zgon*

³³ Z. KRASIŃSKI, *Ostatni*, Paris 1847, pp. 10-11.

śp. Jana Gajewskiego [On the Death of the Late Jan Gajewski]. The poet wants to roughly say that values should be of primary importance in any civilisation, whereas anything that belongs to the sphere of production of goods by man and social institutions should be secondary to that. However, we deal not only with the reversal of this order, but even the annihilation of primary values thorough the secondary order of civilisation, which – I would like to add – has been in effect until this day. Work that is devoid of its essence, devoid of the redeeming feature, owing to which it becomes a merit in the eyes of God, work that annihilates the sacred dimension of humanity is no measure of human dignity. It is slave work with illusory effort.

„Pracować musisz” – głos ogromny woła,
 Nie z potem dłoni twej, lub twego grzbietu,
 (Bo prac początek doprawdy jest nie tu):
 „Pracować musisz z potem twego CZOŁA!”
 – Bądź sobie, jak tam chcesz, realnym człekiem,
 Nic nie poradzisz! – twoje każde dzieło,
 Choćby się z trudów Herkulejskich wszczęło,
 Niedopełnionem będzie i kalekiem;
 Pokąd pojęcie pracy, korzeń jeden,
 Nie trwa, dopóty wszystkie tracą zgoła;
 Głos brzmi w twej piersi: „Postradałem Eden!”
 Głos brzmi nad tobą: „Pracuj z potem czoła!”
 – Ekonomistów zbierz wszystkich i nagle
 Spytaj ich, co jest pracy abecadłem?
 (PWsz I, p. 387, vv. 1-14)

“You must work” – calls a great voice,
 Not by the sweat of your hand or your back,
 (the work-beginning is not found there.)
 “You must work by the sweat of your BROW!”
 – Be whatever you want to be, a real man,
 There is no escape – your every work,
 Even if it started with Herculean efforts,
 Will be incomplete and deficient;
 Until the concept of work, one root,
 Lasts, all lose all;
 A voice resounds in your chest: “I have lost Eden!”
 The voice resounds above you: “Work by the sweat of your brow!”
 – Gather all the economists and suddenly
 Ask them what are the rudiments of work?

Norwid's great disappointment with the West is also reflected in the text referring to the not at all heroic death of Jan Gajewski, who died during the explosion of the steam engine in Manchester.

Długo patrzyli ludzie prostej wiary
Na dziwowiska oświaty zachodniej,
I myśleć śmieli: że to do pochodni
Skradziony ogień Bogu – bez ofiary!...

Myśleć i szemrać, że Lucifer stary
Podchwyci święte wzajemności ludów,
Nie: heroizmu i miłości-cudów,
Używszy – ale: wyzysku i pary...
(PWsz I, p. 293, vv. 1-8)

People of simple faith have long looked
At the spectacle of Western education,
And they dared think it was the fire
Stolen from God for the torch – without sacrifice!...

Think and murmur that old Lucifer
Will capture the sacred reciprocity of peoples,
Using not: heroism and wonders of love,
But: exploitation and wonders of steam...

The accident involving the engineer and the senseless death evoked in this poem is a symbolic act of the collapse of the entire civilisation. And it is also a suggestive reference to the Luciferic interventions in humanity, heralding its imminent end. However, the good Jan Gajewski – perishing under the steam “boiler” is, in a special sense, a sacrifice made to save man and the world, as suggested by the context introduced by Norwid (invoking the story of biblical John), together with the resurrective message of the poem: *Hallelujah!* The death of Jan Gajewski, similar to that of Quidam, is an anticipation of great historical events. By the way, the prophetic vision of the poem is reinforced not only by the reference to the apocryphal story of how Emperor Domitian, wanting to kill the Apostle John, had him thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil, from which John came out victorious, but also to the Messianic Book of Zechariah (the penultimate Book of the Old Covenant), which states that in the final days – the time that will determine the outcome of the battle between good and evil – “[...] And the pots in the house of the LORD shall be as the bowls before the altar. And every pot in Jerusalem

and Judah shall be holy to the LORD of hosts.”³⁴ The pot is an eschatological symbol from the Old Testament. In the late novella *Ad leones!* Norwid referred to this inverted hierarchy also in the world of art, “building in his novella a rising drama of martyrdom of embodied values and an anti-cadence of the protest of conscience against the overwhelming reduction of the spiritual resources of civilisation.”³⁵ What Zdzisław Łapiński called “the miseries of urban and industrial civilisation,”³⁶ which Norwid perceived in different areas of life, could be called even more bluntly – the destruction of the eternal order of the world and the disintegration of the spiritual life of man, along with the recognition of “the norm of temporal utility as the main moral norm”³⁷ – the collapse of the world.

Finally, the third dialogue present in the examined poem – a dialogue with messianistic and millenarian ideas – also contains a harsh judgement over the western civilisation. As it has been mentioned in the first part of this article, the last stanza clearly allows for such a reading. Norwid’s contexts mentioned above also point to it. The author of *Vade-mecum* had no messianistic or millenarian illusions. To put it simply, he was a supporter of providentialism postulated by the Resurrectionists. He did not believe in the fulfilment of the idea of the kingdom of God on earth, he did not expect the coming of a saviour, nor did he prophesise the imminent coming of the messiah. However in this particular poem he admitted the question of whether God’s intervention in history could become a fact. The crude and ruthless assessment of the West, which in the poet’s mouth becomes an angry insult, in Stanza III, almost as in the final act of a great drama, is replaced by the expression of a prophetic consolation. The last words of the poem imply a prayer – one could use the formula here “Maranatha – Come, Lord Jesus!” It is an act of faith and hope placed in God (the final formula of the Apocalypse of John³⁸), since “a Christian does not curse the world and does not recognise the world as cursed.”³⁹ A Christian does not give into despair and does not insult the Spirit – although it seems that the revealed truth about the “two Siberias” could lead him to. In the sketch “*Apokaliptyczne*” *wiersze Cypriana Norwida*, Grażyna Halkiewicz-Sojak wrote that catastrophism which leads to “existential and histo-

³⁴ Zechariah 14, 20-21 (English Standard Version).

³⁵ B. DOPART, *Miriam*, „*Ad leones!*.” *O czytaniu noweli Cypriana Norwida*, [in:] *Literatura, kultura religijna, polskość. Księga jubileuszowa dedykowana prof. dr. hab. Krzysztofowi Dybciakowi w 65. rocznicę urodzin*, eds. K. Koehler, W. Kudyba, J. Sikora, Warszawa 2015, p. 228; see C. NORWID, „*Ad leones!*,” [in:] *Proza I*, ed. R. Skręt, *Dzieła wszystkie*, Vol. VII, Lublin 2007.

³⁶ Z. ŁAPIŃSKI, *Norwid*, p. 130.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Cf. Revelation 22, 20; 1 Corinthians 16, 22.

³⁹ B. DOPART, *Miriam*, “*Ad leones!*,” p. 238.

riosophic despair is foreign to Norwid and actually impossible in the axiological context of his work. The poet persistently and in various ways recalls the virtue of Christian hope [...].”⁴⁰ The same applies here, to this concise poetic synthesis. The memorable scene from the Bible, also recalled in the fragment of Krasieński’s poem quoted here, described Jesus throwing bankers and stallholders out of the temple, should be recalled as an intertextual analogy – it legitimises the eschatological hope from Norwid’s poem in two ways. Jesus with a whip in his hand, throwing over the bankers’ tables, scattering coins, is the same God who could push back the old liveries of the two Siberias, the same one who could save human freedom by putting an end to lawlessness, lies, money laundering, rapes, violence, injustice. Krasieński also hoped for such a gesture in his less studied messianic poem *W Twoim ze śmierci ku życiu odrodzie...*, written in 1858 (similarly to Norwid’s poem *Na zgon ś.p. Jana Gajewskiego*), where, in addition to the pictorial scenes from the “dying” of civilisations, juxtaposed against the background of a great metaphysical conflict between good and evil, there is a message about the imminent and expected coming of the Saviour – the Lord of history.⁴¹

⁴⁰ „Apokaliptyczne” wiersze Cypriana Norwida, [in:] EADEM, *Nawiązane ogniwo. Studia o poezji Cypriana Norwida i jej kontekstach*, Toruń 2010, p. 174.

⁴¹ For instance, consider this passage:

Wokół Europa – bez czucia – bez dumy –
 Zgrzyt kół stalowych – parociągów szumy –
 I do bram giełdy cisnące się tłumy,
 Co nań się czasem obejrzą z daleka
 Przeżydowszczonym chucią zysku wzrokiem
 I rąk zdziwionych wskazują natłokiem
 Krew męczennika, co w proch ziemi ścieka –
 Wtedy głos słyhać tej mieszczańskiej rzeczy:
 „Czemu ten człowiek tak się na śmierć śpieszy?
 Nowożytnego znać nie posiadał zmysłu,
 Co skupia ludy w kościele przemysłu
 I narodowe gluzując przesady,
 Godzi podbitych z zaborczymi rządy,
 Bo im za ojczyzn wywietrzała marę
 Nadają wolność handlową i parę.”

Around there is Europe – without sensation – without pride –
 The clash of steel wheels – the noise of steam engines –
 And the people crowding into the gates of the stock exchange,
 As they sometimes look at it from afar
 With a profit-driven eye

The poem *Syberie* is a monumental synthesis in few words. The gradually deciphered contexts (and there are many more than those indicated here), carefully verified, save the text from overinterpretation. In the end, however, it can probably be asserted that the diagnosis made in this article could be additionally strengthened by means of further hermeneutical justifications.

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And with the crowd of surprised hands they point to
 The martyr's blood that is dripping into the ashes of the earth –
 Then you can hear the voice of the bourgeois:
 “Why is this man in such a hurry to die?
 Apparently he did not acquire the modern sense,
 Which brings peoples together in the church of industry
 And erases national superstitions,
 It reconciles the conquered with the invading governments,
 Because instead of an evanescent vision of the homeland
 They give them commercial freedom and steam.”

Z. KRASIŃSKI, *W Twoim ze śmierci ku życiu odrodzie*, [in:] IDEM, *Wiersze. Poematy. Dramaty*, compiled by M. Bizan, Warszawa 1980, p. 116.

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SIBERIE BY NORWID

S u m m a r y

The article is an interpretation of Norwid's poem entitled *Syberie*, one of the works in the *Vade-mecum* series. Referring to the literature of the subject (inter alia, Zofia Trojanowiczowa, Włodzimierz Toruń), the author puts forward the thesis that the poem is a lyrical masterpiece, maximally condensing the extensive content related to Siberia and the exiles, which is a major subject of 19th-century Polish literature. Norwid's poem, set in author's contexts and in the contexts of the epoch, reveals its depth and possibilities of poetic synthesis. In the article, the author proves the "participation" of the work in the three great dialogues of that time, all provoked by the subject of Siberia.

Key words: Norwid; 19th-century poetry; Siberia; exiles; the exiled.

Translated by Rafał Augustyn

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