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POLISH “IMAGINARIUM”: NORWID’S READING OF *ANHELLI*

I

Norwid’s interpretation of J. Słowacki’s prose poem *Anhelli*, presented mainly in Lesson IV of the Parisian lectures *O Juliuszu Słowackim* [*On Juliusz Słowacki*],¹ has so far attracted little interest among researchers. It was usually lost in a sea of general problems addressed in these lectures (such as views on truth, civilisation, Christianity, originality or reading).² It was sometimes supplanted by interpretations of works considered to be more important (especially *Balladyna*),³ and if it

¹ Norwid gave his lectures at six weekly meetings, on Saturdays: 7, 14, 21, 28 April and 5 and 12 May 1860, at 7.30 pm in the Polish Reading Room at Passage du Commerce 25 in Paris. The entire cycle was entitled *O dziełach i stanowisku Juliusza Słowackiego w sprawie narodowej* [*On the Works and Position of Juliusz Słowacki on the National Issue*] (cf. Z. TROJANOWICZOWA, Z. DAMBEK with participation of J. CZARNOMORSKA, *Kalendarz życia i twórczości Cypriana Norwida*, Vol. I: 1821-1860, Poznań 2007, pp. 777-781). The lectures appeared in print in mid-June 1861, entitled *O Juliuszu Słowackim w sześciu publicznych posiedzeniach (z dodatkiem rozbioru „Balladyny”) 1860* [*On Juliusz Słowacki in Six Public Sessions (with the Analysis of “Balladyna”) 1860*], Paris 1861 (cf. Z. TROJANOWICZOWA, E. LIJEWSKA in cooperation with M. PLUTA, *Kalendarz życia i twórczości Cypriana Norwida*, Vol. II: 1861-1883, Poznań 2007, p. 27).

² This is how lectures *On Juliusz Słowacki* are interpreted by, among others, M. STRASZEWSKA (*Norwid o Słowackim (na marginesie prelekcji paryskich)*, [in:] *Nowe studia o Norwidzie*, eds. J.W. Gomulicki, J.Z. Jakubowski, Warszawa 1961, pp. 97-124), E. FELIKSIĄK (*Poezja i myśl. Studia o Norwidzie*, Lublin 2001), G. HALKIEWICZ-SOJAK (*Wobec tajemnicy i prawdy. O Norwidowskich obrazach „całości”*, Toruń 1998, pp. 93-96), P. ABRISZEWSKA (*Literacka hermeneutyka Cypriana Norwida*, Lublin 2011), M. STANISZ (*Norwidowska koncepcja oryginalności literackiej w świetle dziejów poetyki*, “Colloquia Litteraria” 2016, Vol. 1 (20), pp. 175-194).

³ Cf. K. WYKA, *Norwid o Słowackim*, [in:] IDEM, *Cyprian Norwid. Studia, artykuły, recenzje*, Kraków 1989, pp. 267-284; E. CZAPLEJEWICZ, *O „Balladynie”*, [in:] *Cyprian Norwid. Interpretacje*, ed. S. Makowski, Warszawa 1986, pp. 186-196.

had already become the main subject of research, it was almost literally understood as an argument composed of clear declarations.⁴

However, the way Norwid interpreted *Anhelli* deserves more attention – first of all, it presents a different style of reading than the one that dominated the 19th-century reception of Słowacki's poem. Moreover, Norwid's model of reading was as far as possible from simple literalism.⁵ To make this clear it is necessary to take a comparative look at Norwid's interpretation of *Anhelli* in the context of the 19th-century readings of this poem. Above all, we must take into account the assumption that Norwid's most original and acute thoughts on this issue are not visible on the surface of the literal meanings, but require an in-depth analysis, taking into account the context of the whole argument presented in the lectures *On Juliusz Słowacki*, and even in the circumstances of their delivery. In this dissertation, I intend to present an interpretation based on these two foundations.

II

A few reminders to start with. Norwid was neither the discoverer, nor the only interpreter of *Anhelli* at that time. Using a biblical narrative and symbolic images, the work depicts the tragic fate of Polish exiles to Siberia. Published in Paris on 10 August 1838,⁶ the work was not ignored by critics. Moreover, it was not evaluated as negatively as we might be inclined to judge based on stereotypical notions of Słowacki's artistic reputation around the mid-19th century. *Anhelli* was lively discussed by contemporary luminaries of literary life (there are numerous

⁴ Cf. M. STRASZEWSKA, *Norwid o Słowackim*, pp. 116-118; M. CHILIŃSKA, „*Anhelli*” *Juliusza Słowackiego w świetle odczytań modernistycznych. Mistyczna perspektywa recepcji poematu*, „Zeszyty Naukowe Towarzystwa Doktorantów UJ. Nauki Humanistyczne 2(2016),” Vol. 13, pp. 61-65.

⁵ Norwid attached great importance to reading, especially masterpieces, which he always treated as complex and semantically multi-layered works. For a discussion of Norwid's vision of reading, see: P. ABRISZEWSKA, *Literacka hermeneutyka*, pp. 139-153; M. BUŚ, *Cypriana Norwida „O czytania-sztuce pojęcie*,” [in:] IDEM, *Idee i formy. Studia i szkice o Norwidzie*, Lublin 2014, pp. 119-155; M. STANISZ, *Uniwersum arcydzieł. Dyskurs krytycznoliteracki w listach Norwida*, „*Studia Norwidiana*” 32(2014), pp. 41-60.

⁶ Cf. *Sądy współczesnych o twórczości Słowackiego (1826-1862)*, compiled and edited by B. Zakrzewski, K. Pecold and A. Ciemnoczołowski, Wrocław 1963, p. 61. This anthology is henceforth referred to as S, followed by page numbers.

traces of this in the correspondence of Z. Krasiński,⁷ E. Januszkiewicz⁸ or K. Gaszyński.⁹ Mickiewicz himself referred to it in 23 lectures of Course 2 (1842) at the Collège de France (including this work into an extensive and extremely important argument about "exile literature").¹⁰ One of the enthusiasts of this poem (K. Gaszyński) translated it into French already in 1847.¹¹ A number of articles on *Anhelli* were also published at that time – from short mentions in the national and emigrational press¹² to extensive treatises (by J. N. Sadowski,¹³ Z. Krasiński,¹⁴ Z. Kaczkowski¹⁵ and, finally, C. Norwid). The analysis of *Anhelli* became the subject of a lecture at the University of Lviv in 1858 – the lecture was given by Prof. A. Małecki who expanded it a little later in a famous monograph devoted to Słowacki.¹⁶ Thus, when Norwid delivered his lectures twenty-two years after the

⁷ Letter from Z. Krasiński to K. Gaszyński of 18 November 1838, Venice (S, 63-64); Letter from Z. Krasiński to R. Załuski of 26 November 1838, Venice (S, 64); Letter from Z. Krasiński to K. Gaszyński, Freiburg, 19 October 1839 (S, 88); Letter from Z. Krasiński to R. Załuski of 13 May 1840, Rome (S, 108-112); Letter from Z. Krasiński to J. Słowacki, Rome, 18 June 1841 (S, 147); Letter from Z. Krasiński to K. Gaszyński, Nice, 3 May 1847 (S, 251).

⁸ Letter from E. Januszkiewicz to the Larisses, Paris, 27 June 1838. (S, 60-61); Letter from E. Januszkiewicz to L. Niedźwiecki [Paris, 27 July 1838] (S, 61).

⁹ Letter from K. Gaszyński to A. Słowaczyński [25 January 1839] (S, 65).

¹⁰ A. MICKIEWICZ, *Literatura słowiańska. Kurs drugi*, Lecture 23 (S, 189).

¹¹ J. SŁOWACKI, *Anhelli ou les exilés polonais en Sybérie*, [transl. K. Gaszyński], "La Revue Indépendente," Vol. 8, 25 April 1847, pp. 401-435 (information cit. after S, 251).

+ [Announcement of *Anhelli*'s publication], "Młoda Polska," Paris, supplement to Issue 22 of 10 August 1838. (S, 62); [ANONYMOUS], *Przezor księgarski*, „Kronika Emigracji Polskiej”, Paris, Vol. 7, Sheet 17 of 15 September 1838 (S, 62); *Baraszk*, „Pszonka,” Branch I, Issue 3, (Strasbourg) 1 June 1839 (S, 80); S. ROPELEWSKI, *Wspomnienie o piśmiennictwie polskim w emigracji*, „Kalendarz Pielgrzymstwa Polskiego,” Paris, [January] 1840 (S, 93) [short mention]; E. DEMBOWSKI, *O dramacie w dzisiejszym piśmiennictwie polskim*, „Rok 1843” Poznań, Vol. VI, 29 December 1843 (S, 205, 206, 208) [short mentions]; N. Wr. [E. DEMBOWSKI], *Myśli o życiu*, „Żywie. Pismo zbiorowe,” Poznań 1844 (S, 228); E. DEMBOWSKI, *Piśmiennictwo polskie w zarysie*, Poznań 1845 (S, 238) [short mention]; [ANONYMOUS] [J. KOŹMIAN?], *Nowe „Psalmy przyszłości*,” „Tygodnik Poznański,” Poznań 1848, Vol. 7 (S, 266-267); [ANONYMOUS]. [J. KOŹMIAN], *[Wspomnienie pośmiertne o J. Słowackim]*, „Przegląd Poznański,” Poznań 1849, Vol. 8 (S, 292); C. NORWID, *O sztuce (dla Polaków)*, Paris 1858 (S, 355).

¹³ J.N.S. [J.N. SADOWSKI], *Kilka słów o „Anhellim” Słowackiego*, „Tygodnik Literacki,” Poznań, Issue 1 and 2 of 1 and 8 April 1839 (S, 69-78).

¹⁴ Z. KRASIŃSKI, *Kilka słów o „Anhellim” Słowackiego*, „Tygodnik Literacki,” Poznań, Issues 21, 22 and 23 of 24 and 31 May and 7 June 1841 (S, 132-141; excerpt on *Anhelli* on p. 136).

¹⁵ Z.K. [Z. KACZKOWSKI], *O przesadzie w pojęciach*, „Pamiętnik Literacki,” Lviv, Issue 24 of 13 September 1850 (S, 324-328; excerpt on *Anhelli* on pp. 325-326).

¹⁶ A. MAŁECKI, *Juliusz Słowacki. Jego życie i dzieła w stosunku do współczesnej epoki*, Vol. II, Lviv 1867, pp. 21-39.

publication of *Anhelli*, the work was well known to Polish readers (not only in exile), it was also quite widely discussed and aroused considerable controversy.

There are several dominant features in the reception of *Anhelli* predating Norwid's reading. Relatively numerous opinions drew attention to the beauty of its style and vagueness of the presented thoughts. This work appeared to some – especially the first readers – as “a radiant glow of style with an indistinct reflection of ideas,”¹⁷ a work without “thread and clarity.”¹⁸ E. Januszkiewicz, a distinguished émigré publisher, wrote to a friend about this work: “Wonderfully, nicely written. – But what is it?... If you find out, tell me.”¹⁹ In another letter, the same Januszkiewicz admitted: “Słowacki's poem would be exquisite, because it is nicely written, but it obviously is not so, as you need a thought that would bring to life a dead, though beautifully carved statue. I have read *Anhelli* and I admit in all my naivety that I do not understand it.”²⁰ The editors of the satirical magazine “Pszonka” mocked it: “There was no need to go all the way to the East to write *Anhelli*, whose misfortune nobody understands!”²¹ Z. Kaczkowski expressed his opinion equally bluntly: “And whoever read *Anhelli* should also tell me what they understood, what they made out of it?”²² In turn, during his lectures in Lviv, A. Małecki recalled that *Anhelli* is a work in which “one cannot understand a thought which the author himself probably did not know in his own imagination.”²³

This work gives the impression of a beautiful and clear musical composition, which with its sad tones evokes in the listener wistful thoughts, without any text accompanying it. Such a longing feeling arouses wonderful, clear single thoughts, strange melancholy, densely spread over the sheets, which, however, do not coalesce into a plot, idea or whole that would mean anything. Thus within this understanding, this work does not have a meaning, and it does not need to be put into it (as some have tried to do)... It is like a dream, which still seems beautiful after waking up, and which is impossible to be glued together into a story.²⁴

¹⁷ [Announcement of *Anhelli*'s publication], “Młoda Polska,” Paris, supplement to Issue 22 of 10 August 1838 (S, 62).

¹⁸ [ANONYMOUS], *Przezor księgarski*, „Kronika Emigracji Polskiej,” Paris, Vol. 7, Sheet 17 of 15 September 1838 (S, 62).

¹⁹ Letter from E. Januszkiewicz to L. Niedźwiecki, Paris, 27 July 1838 (S, 61).

²⁰ Letter from E. Januszkiewicz to the Larisses, Paris, 27 June 1838 (S, 61).

²¹ *Baraszk*, “Pszonka,” Branch I, Issue 3, (Strasbourg) 1 June 1839 (S, 80).

²² Z.K. [Z. KACZKOWSKI], *O przesadzie w pojęciach*, „Pamiętnik Literacki,” Lviv, Issue 24 of 13 September 1850 (S, 325).

²³ [Extract from A. Małecki's lectures on Słowacki – summary by B. Gubrynowicz, 1859] (S 384; another mention: S, 386).

²⁴ *Ibid.* (S, 384).

The quoted opinions give an impression of an unperceptive reading based on first impressions and ad hoc analysis. However, in some of the statements, one can sense not only misunderstanding or confusion, but also a sense of distaste caused (as one can suppose) by the dark message of Słowacki's poem, clearly different from "Mickiewicz's messianism," which was then captivating the souls.²⁵ Anyway, the abovementioned reactions met with Z. Krasiński's scorn, who informed R. Załuski about his outrage at "the injustice done to Juliusz by the public." And he asked: "what don't they understand in it? You first tell me: what is it you didn't understand?"²⁶

For Krasiński, who at the end of the 1830s had a very close relationship with Słowacki and read his friend's poem immediately after its publication and experienced it deeply, it was clear from the beginning that it was an important and exceptional work – not only "wonderful in style," but presented an even "deeper truth."²⁷ First, the writer's attention was drawn to the extraordinary truth of *Anhelli* – the tragedy of the collective fate of Poles, "the pessimistic historiosophy and anti-messianistic attitude of the poem,"²⁸ the "emphasis" placed "on the thanatic dimension of the work, on the side of the present death rather than the future resurrection, on despair rather than hope."²⁹ Hence Krasiński wrote that "it is a beautiful work, developed with great art: a transparent, calm, crystal style – the thought is true,"³⁰ subsequently he dwelt on the dark atmosphere of an irreversible end, fall and death, permeating every page of the work, every part of its plot, present in the symbolic death of the Shaman and Ellenai, which manifested itself even more eloquently in the scene of the title character's death. Krasiński explained it as follows:

²⁵ Z. TROJANOWICZOWA (*Sybir romantyków*, memoir materials with participation of J. Fiećko, Poznań 1993, pp. 109-112); J. FIEĆKO („Ostatni” wobec „Anhellego.” *Z dziejów polemik między Krasińskim a Słowackim*, [in:] *Zygmunt Krasiński – nowe spojrzenia*, eds. G. Halkiewicz-Sojak, B. Burdziej, Toruń 2001, cit. on p. 451).

²⁶ Letter from Z. Krasiński to R. Załuski of 13 May 1840, Rome (S, 108).

²⁷ Letter from Z. Krasiński to R. Załuski of 26 November 1838 (S, 64). As Ewa Szczeglacka emphasises („*Anhelli*” w *lekturze Krasińskiego*, [in:] *Zygmunt Krasiński*, p. 432), "Already in his first opinions on *Anhelli*, the author of the letters [Krasiński – M.S.] emphasised the mastery of style, the enormous ease with which Słowacki could create and bring to life unusual worlds, the creative power of imagination."

²⁸ J. FIEĆKO, "Ostatni," p. 452.

²⁹ M. BIEŃCZYK, *Oczy Dürera. O melancholii romantycznej*, Warszawa 2002, p. 27. Bieńczyk adds: "Krasiński found in *Anhelli* an excellent illustration of his own spiritual situation, an image of his deep melancholy, stretched on the poles of faith and doubt." (ibid.)

³⁰ Letter from Z. Krasiński to K. Gaszyński, 18 November 1838, Venice (S, 63).

At last, *Anhelli* himself, having bowed his head, gives up his spirit. As soon as he dies, a knight on horseback is rushing, a knight similar to the phenomena described in the *Apocalypse*, crying out in a thunder-like voice “to arms!” But Eloë says to him, “Go on, *Anhelli* is already dead, he is mine forever.” That is the end of it. I do not know anything more sad, nothing more poetically conceived and executed. It was difficult to transform Siberia in a sad elegy, yet full of Moorish colours; the poet managed to do it.³¹

Thus, Krasiński read *Anhelli* as a work about the national apocalypse and the actual end of the Polish world, an extremely pessimistic work devoid of illusions and hope. At least that were his first reading impressions. As J. Fiećko proved, over time the writer made “a significant shift in interpretative accents,” withdrawing from his “acceptance of *Anhelli*’s dark historiosophy” in favour of admiration for the aesthetic layer of the work – its stylistic and descriptive qualities.³² Returning to Słowacki’s poem after some time, Krasiński erased those threads which were the most predatory and controversial in the ideological layer of the work (they would become one of the hot spots of the ideological conflict between the former friends in the near future), and instead emphasised the importance of artistic solutions, unusual stylistic effects and romantic Siberian landscapes. Thus, two years after his first statements on *Anhelli*, Krasiński formulated his reading impressions in a slightly different way than before:

It really takes a charming, brilliant, exceptional power to dress up the Siberian abyss in the alabaster of snow and the blue eyes of stars. When I was reading, I sighed – I missed, God save me, Siberia! For a few nights, I was dreaming about Siberia as an Eden of melancholy. [...] Well, the hell of Siberia, without ceasing to be hell, in *Anhelli* began to take on a form of such a strange illusion, beautiful and terrible, horrible and tempting at the same time. Similarly, there is some kind of lustfulness in snake’s slithering, an incomprehensible drive, a magnetism captivating birds. Juliusz turned Siberia into such a snake and made the ghosts of his readers attracted to it.³³

Other readers accompanied Krasiński in emphasising the aesthetic value of the discussed work. K. Gaszyński wrote: “*Anhelli* is a beautiful and poetic work.”³⁴ An anonymous critic argued: “no one will deny that there are some places of poetic beauty, high and new thoughts, engrossing images.”³⁵ Z. Kaczkowski argued that in *Anhelli* Słowacki “offered a few beautiful pictures, a few single wonderful thoughts, and if he did not teach anything, then at least he made a nice impression

³¹ Ibid.

³² J. FIEĆKO, “*Ostatni*,” pp. 451-455 (quotes from pp. 453 and 451).

³³ Letter from Z. Krasiński to R. Załuski of 13 May 1840, Rome (S, 109).

³⁴ Letter from K. Gaszyński to A. Słowczyński, 25 January 1839 (S, 65).

³⁵ [ANONYMOUS], *Przezor księgarski* (S, 62).

on the reader, hit his heart, awoke his thought."³⁶ J.N. Sadowski drew attention to the beautiful style and extraordinary artistic craftsmanship, proving that Słowacki "gave evidence of his great talent and while grading his longing and pain to the highest end, he never goes beyond the boundary of beauty; indeed, with this – as he himself calls it – 'melancholy by power', he enchants the reader's soul."³⁷ It is in the eyes of such recipients that "poetics" was to constitute the first pillar of *Anhelli's* special qualities (it is noteworthy though that *Anhelli* is a work written in prose).

The second pillar was the "thought," i.e. the ideological layer of this work. However, unlike Krasiński, several of *Anhelli's* commentators were looking for the key meanings elsewhere. They were particularly appreciative of the documentary themes and saw them as a faithful description of the reality of exile – an anonymous author wrote: "The poem is set in Siberia, and its almost entire content is composed of images of the agony of our brothers tormented there by the will of the angry tyrant."³⁸ The documentary trail, revealed in the imagery of national martyrdom contained in the poem, was even confirmed by Mickiewicz at the Collège de France – for him, Słowacki's poem belonged to a set of literary works that showed Siberia as one of the key motifs in Polish culture of that time:

[...] this Siberia, so distant and so foreign, is now entering Polish poetry. Siberia is a political hell; it fulfils the same role as the hell, so well described by Dante, in medieval poetry. Every work of contemporary Polish literature mentions Siberia; there are great works depicting the suffering of Poles; there is even a work by Słowacki, the plot of which is set in Siberia [...].³⁹

One could say that this documentary way of reading was based on a mimetic style of reception which in turn directed the attention to the reality reconstructed by the work, the truthfulness understood in a classic way (as conformity with the actual state of affairs), assumed the literalness of the represented world, although it did not rule out its poetisation in accordance with the Romantic aesthetic norm at that time.⁴⁰ It seems that the effect of combining the truth and imagination into a model of mimetic reading was a result of the influence of the interpretive model laid out by Mickiewicz in the foreword to Part III of *Dziady* [*Forefathers' Eve*]. The poet presented his work there as a representation of "several sketches of

³⁶ Z.K. [Z. KACZKOWSKI], *O przesadzie w pojęciach* (S, 325).

³⁷ J.N. SADOWSKI, *Kilka słów o „Anhellim” Słowackiego* (S, 78).

³⁸ [ANONYMOUS], *Przezor księgarski* (S, 62).

³⁹ A. MICKIEWICZ, *Dzieła. Wydanie Rocznicowe*, Vol. IX: *Literatura słowiańska. Kurs drugi*, Warszawa 1997, p. 289.

⁴⁰ Cf. M. GŁOWIŃSKI, *Świadectwa i style odbioru*, [in:] IDEM, *Prace wybrane*, ed. R. Nycz, Vol. III: *Dzieło wobec odbiorcy. Szkice z komunikacji literackiej*, Kraków 1998, pp. 147-148.

a huge image,”⁴¹ which should reveal the truth about past events. At that time, it was probably the most common style of reading works aspiring to be documentary in nature, such as Part III of *Dziady* or *Anhelli*.⁴²

The words of appreciation for *Anhelli*'s documentary layer were accompanied by references to the historiosophical reflection which was popular at that time. Historiosophy in the circle of Polish emigrants of the 19th century was inseparably connected with messianic thinking; it was the foundation on which messianic reasoning and phantasms were built.⁴³ Reconciling *Anhelli*'s dark message with the historiosophical optimism of messianism was not easy, and even required some mental exercise, but the stakes were too high for such attempts not to be made. After all, the aim was to create an optimistic vision of Poland's future fate, to comfort the hearts of depressed compatriots, to deliver a message of hope, and to justify the suffered hardships. It was therefore necessary to perform a peculiar combination of the dark visions of social collapse and death presented in the poem along with hopes for the future rebirth of the homeland not presented in the poem (but highly anticipated by the audience!).

The described interpretive strategy was most clearly revealed in J.N. Sadowski's extensive dissertation, entitled *Kilka słów o „Anhellim” Słowackiego* (1839).⁴⁴ According to this critic, in his work, Słowacki followed the path marked out by the historiosophy of *Irydion*, he introduced readers “to the secrets of the dying nation's soul,” showed the “fall of the old nation,” the decline of the old form of Polish civilisation, and its slow dying in the Siberian exile; he also presented the story of the fall as the “reason of the century,”⁴⁵ i.e. of the moment of dramatic political crisis in the history of Europe. These two processes would be closely linked together in the work. The suffering of Siberian exiles appeared to

⁴¹ A. MICKIEWICZ, *Dziela. Wydanie Rocznicowe*, Vol. III: *Dramaty*, Warszawa 1995, p. 121.

⁴² A similar way of reading *Anhelli* is presented in a somewhat later article by Henryk Stupnicki, entitled *Juliusz Słowacki (Jego żywot i pisma)* (“Przyjaciół Domowy” Lviv 1862, Issue 10-12 (S, 528)). On the relationship between *Anhelli* and the exile memoirs at that time, cf. M. CHROSTEK, *Sybir w „Anhellim” wobec pamiętników zesańców*, [in:] *Przez gwiazdy i błękit jestem z Wami. W 200. rocznicę urodzin Juliusza Słowackiego*, eds. M. Chrostek, T. Pudłocki, J. Starnawski, Przemyśl-Rzeszów 2009, pp. 37-54.

⁴³ According to E. Szczegłańska (“*Anhelli*,” p. 433), “this and, in fact, only this dimension of the work was positively evaluated by the contemporary critics.”

⁴⁴ According to E. Szczegłańska (ibid.): “This work also revealed appreciation for the historical, martyrological thread of the poem and a critical appraisal of the ‘poetics’ and language of the author.”

⁴⁵ J.N. SADOWSKI, *Kilka słów o „Anhellim” Słowackiego* (S, 74, 72, 77).

Sadowski as the first stage of the global crisis. In this spirit, the critic argued that "the old, decayed nation must die, because its soul is plagued by a great deal of misfortune, because its spirit, pressed with sorrow, has already become weak," but "its death cannot be a lonely phenomenon," but turns out to be "a figure of the depletion of the entire social world, which must disappear together with it."⁴⁶

According to Sadowski, the feeling of the collapse of the old world contained in *Anhelli* determined its deeply and irrevocably pessimistic character, but did not exhaust all the meanings of the work. The critic claimed that history cannot simply end in a historical apocalypse. Indeed, the suffering "should be completed," but mainly for the sake of a following rebirth because "the torment should simultaneously be redemption."⁴⁷ Meanwhile, as the reviewer argued, in *Anhelli*, Słowacki was unable to clearly cross the threshold of despair and formulate a message of hope. Thus, he was wrong to remain silent about a new beginning which – similarly to the author of *Irydion* – should be brought to the foreground. As a result, his work remained incomplete, and the poet's reflection stopped halfway:

To him it was an ominous prophecy for the fading generation, and that is why it resounded with a tone of melancholy and sad musing on the things related to death, on the lands of ice and tombs, on "the Siberian day and the sun of perdition." [...] In the struggle of the powers, in the feeling of death of the whole century, the image of a full, organic life shines forth, a germ of true freedom trembles in their sound. This thought, only horizontally and with difficulty, has spread in the mind of the author of *Anhelli*. [...] And thus finally, if it comes to the most expressive revelation of the positive thought of the poem, [...] the germ of the real thought completely disappears, as if it was possessed by the evil spirit of venerable meaningless cosmopolitanism, the author puts the fate of future generations into a common and violent act of all the nations mixed together, and loses his thought in the dark confusion of these aspirations. [...] Thus the author captured both sides of the thought outlined in *Irydion*, but he only brought them together, he did not unite them. He understood quite clearly only the necessity of the negative side, the necessity of the fall of that which, having no further vocation to have a longer life from the already fulfilled one, is still being taken, and in the pain of dying is still violently fighting with death.⁴⁸

As seen above, Sadowski could not imagine *Anhelli* – the work about captivity and the suffering of his compatriots! – without any, even vague, thought of rebirth and hope for a better tomorrow. He probably believed that this was required by his patriotic duty towards his fellow countrymen, sufficiently oppressed by enslavement and deserving words of encouragement, even against the all too well known

⁴⁶ Ibid. (S, 72).

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid. (S, 76-77).

facts. Additional justification for the critic's speculations was the then popular thinking in terms of Hegelian dialectics, according to which every historical fact had to be overcome by its antithesis in order to lead to the reconciliation of opposites. In short, in *Anhelli's* depiction of the slavery of Polish exiles and the decline of the old world, Słowacki created (because he had to create!) space for further continuations. He "was bringing together" (though not "uniting") the tragic history with an optimistic prophecy. After all, "for a new life to arise, all that has so far become the power of the incarnate word must perish,"⁴⁹ since "this nation, after the destruction of all that is insipid and obsolete within itself, must return to the strength of the newly emerging tribe and with this freshness, it must recall the bygone times of its first appearance on earth."⁵⁰ Thus, it must perish in order to subsequently rise from the dead.

Paradoxically, in Sadowski's interpretation, the greatest strength of the work about *Anhelli* was therefore neither the images of martyrdom, nor the pessimistic message of the whole, which were aptly interpreted by the critic, but his postulated idea of a future revival of the homeland. Sadowski made his claim clear: the author of *Anhelli* "proved, which he had not wanted, that the power of melancholy might be great, but nevertheless it is not the greatest power of the prophetic spirit."⁵¹ It is perverse logic, but also so characteristic of that time...

One more thread in *Anhelli's* reception, predating Norwid's interpretation, is worth considering – the interpretation of the title character. His fate, integrated into a general historiosophical vision, brought to mind a whole legion of tragic Romantic individualists not reconciled with themselves and the world. Owing to these features, *Anhelli* appeared as a representative of the lost generation (similarly to Lambro from Słowacki's preface to the third volume of *Poezycy*, 1833), but also as a meaningful symbol of the fall of the old world. Krasieński wrote:

The generation of *Anhelli* will die in tears, in sorrow, in vain lust, and will die the day before their lust is fulfilled. This *Anhelli*, so lonely, abandoned, looking at the death of all his own, is a perfect poetic symbol of our destiny.⁵²

The real picture of the general fate is *Anhelli*, dying in these snows, dying exactly on the eve of a better day.⁵³

⁴⁹ Ibid. (S, 71).

⁵⁰ Ibid. (S, 71-72).

⁵¹ Ibid. (S, 78).

⁵² Letter from Z. Krasieński to K. Gaszyński, 18 November 1838, Venice (S, 63).

⁵³ Letter from Z. Krasieński to R. Załuski of 26 November 1838, Venice (S, 64).

Sadowski agreed with Krasieński. For Sadowski, *Anhelli* was also "sort of personification of the nation's tears over its own death, shed as if with the last breath and moan of the dying generation,"⁵⁴ and his consciousness represented at the same time "all the content of the worn out community."⁵⁵ The feature of Romantic individualism of the title character, his alienation and lack of readiness for a patriotic act was also emphasised by E. Dembowski; however, he juxtaposed this character with the ideals of activism and sacrifice for others, which he promoted:

Slowacki was right to show a man saddened in his misery, to pour all the music of silent sorrow and tearful silence in suffering on the figure of a gentle young man, to not let him rise from the dead at the time when all others are resurrected to fight, to love, to live their full life! What would a sad angel with a tearful eye and wings of rainbow feathers hanging to the ground do, what would this angel do among those with whom he has nothing in common, with whom he is not bound by the only knot that links people – love? He would melt in sorrow, and there one must suffer with iron will and temper, with fiery heat of pain, the heart which is harder than steel.⁵⁶

To recapitulate: the "miraculous" style of the poem and the pessimism of its message, its Romantic beauty and its documentary nature, showing the tragedy of Polish fate against the background of the suggestive dark Siberian landscapes, the images of the suffering of the deportees, the indirectly expressed sense of rebirth, the historiosophical vision that needs to be completed and the figure of the protagonist that becomes a symbol of the lost generation – these are the main threads of readings of *Anhelli* that predate Norwid's interpretation.

III

The interpretation of *Anhelli* presented in Norwid's lectures *O Juliuszu Słowackim* [*On Juliusz Słowacki*] was demonstrably different from that of his predecessors, but at the same time it clearly referred to them. Norwid took up some of the threads directly, while approaching others more allusively or polemically, he omitted some of them, but he remodelled all of them together into a new whole.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ J.N.S. [J.N. SADOWSKI], *Kilka słów* (S, 70-71).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* (S, 71).

⁵⁶ N. Wr. [E. DEMBOWSKI], *Myśli o życiu* (S, 228).

⁵⁷ Norwid's works quoted after the following editions: *Dzieła wszystkie*, ed. S. Sawicki (Vols. III, IV, V, VI, VII, X, XI, Lublin 2007-2016) or *Pisma wszystkie*, compiled, edited and with introduction and critical commentaries by J. W. Gomulicki, Vols. I-XI, Warszawa 1971-1976. The

Norwid's reading of this work considered its layout, basic idea and characteristics of the whole array of characters – from the title character to episodic figures. The mentioned layers of the work were presented by the speaker against the background of general reflections on the history of civilisation and in the context of the original “lecture on the art of reading.”⁵⁸ Thus, it was an extensive and comprehensive interpretation, complemented and enriched by digressions that were seemingly distant from the main thread, but actually inextricably linked to it. We also cannot ignore the fact that *Anhelli's* interpretation was a link in a much more extensive argument concerning “the position of Juliusz Słowacki on the national issue” (as the original title of his lectures informed), and was delivered to a large number of emigrants representing various generations and political factions, as Norwid himself stressed with undisguised satisfaction.⁵⁹

Norwid's argument was based on strong assumptions which, from the beginning, questioned many established opinions about Słowacki's works and his *Anhelli*. Norwid stated that Słowacki had so far been a “źle pojmowany” [misunderstood] and “źle znanym” [badly known] writer (PWsz VI, 431), and *Anhelli* belongs to those works “bez których (...) przewodnictwa nie można być oświeconym patriotą polskim” [without (...) the guidance of which one cannot be an enlightened Polish patriot] (PWsz VI, 438). To make listeners aware of the importance of these statements, he argued that Słowacki's masterpiece (just as this masterpiece!) must be interpreted in “coraz głębszych głębiach” [ever deeper depths] (PWsz VI, 444), through reading that does not stop at the surface of the text, as far as possible from stating the obvious.

Norwid's interpretive strategy focused on the hermeneutics of the symbolic meanings of Siberia – the space that was an arena sui generis for the scenes presented in *Anhelli*. The main thesis of the argument immediately placed this key motif in a broader context of a general reflection on civilisations; Norwid argued that “zadaniem poety było po szczególe uprzytomnić narodowi biegun zamierzchu cywilizacji jego” [the principle task of the poet was to make the nation aware of the pole of the fall of its civilisation] (PWsz VI, 446), and “punkt zamierzchu” [the

former collection is indicated with DW, the latter with PWsz; Roman numerals refer to the number of volume, Arabic numerals refer to page numbers.

⁵⁸ The formula used by M. Straszewska (*Norwid o Słowackim*, p. 123).

⁵⁹ Norwid wrote about his lectures: “Ze wszystkich stronnictw Emigracji słuchacze raczyli się zbierać – liczyłem na 60, a dwie sale bywały ściśle pełne. Siwych głów i poważnych kilkanaście osób – dam kilka, ale stałych” [The audience came from all the factions of the Emigration - I hoped for 60 people, but two halls were precisely full. Grey heads and a dozen or so serious people – I'll say a few, but permanent ones]. Letter to A. Cieszkowski, [Paris, after 15 May 1860] (DW XI, 437).

point of the fall] of this civilisation is precisely Siberia (PWsz VI, 437).⁶⁰ In order to explain this idea, Norwid promised to outline its background and context, i.e. "cały przebieg zestroju cywilizacji polskiej" [the entire course of the structure of Polish civilisation] (PWsz VI, 437) and, more broadly, "cały regulamin cywilizacji w czasie danym" [the entire set of rules of civilisation in a given time] (PWsz VI, 437).

Already from these first assumptions, it is evident Norwid read *Anhelli* differently than his predecessors. Being himself accused of incomprehensibility, he did not coax his audience with suggestions about the supposed obscurity or "niedostatek myśli" [lack of thought] in the work. Throughout the whole of his argument, he seemed completely insensitive to the poem's atmospheric tone, picturesque landscapes or emotional qualities of the descriptions (which was so delightful to Krasieński). He also decidedly broke with the model of mimetic reading – he did not treat Siberia as a geographically defined territory, a space with a clear topography and tangible contours, he almost completely reduced the interest in the documentary and martyrological thread and did not stop to discuss the forms of oppression of Polish exiles in the depths of Russia (as it was the case in earlier interpretations of the poem). Rarely did he even mention Siberia as a symbol of the enslavement of the Polish nation by the invader (which was a direct result of a statement by Mickiewicz himself). Indeed, he alluded to this thread – this can be recognised in his double use of the expression "nie godzi się (...) czytać utwory narodu nieszczęśliwego tymi tylko oczyma, którymi się utwory poetów tryumfujących czytają" [it is not acceptable (...) to read the works of an unhappy nation with those eyes which read the works of triumphant poets] (PWsz VI 443, 431), and even more clearly in the adopted nomenclature itself – for instance, he referred to the space presented in *Anhelli* not only as "Syberia" [Siberia] but also as "Sybir," which is a much more ominous and symbolical name.⁶¹

This basic spatial motif of *Anhelli* in Norwid's interpretation grew to the rank of a universal allegory of the native civilisation, and in particular, the mentality and forms of collective life of Polish emigrants.⁶² Norwid declared this idea directly – he argued that Siberia in *Anhelli* represents "sceny należące do

⁶⁰ In his Lesson V, Norwid added that "sybirski bohater daje znowu nazwisko swoje zbiorowi rymów ostateczności socjalne mających za przedmiot" [the Siberian hero (i.e. *Anhelli* – M.S.) again gives his name to a collection of rhymes which treat social necessities as an object] (PWsz VI, 449).

⁶¹ In his lectures *O Juliuszu Słowackim* [*On Juliusz Słowacki*] Norwid used the name 'Syberia' [Siberia], but he also used the terms 'Sybir' [Siberia] (PWsz VI, 439, 463), 'sybirski' [Siberian] (PWsz VI, 438, 444) or 'sybiryjski' [Siberian] (PWsz VI, 443). For a description of the 19th-century meanings of the term 'Sybir', see Z. Trojanowiczowa (*Sybir romantyków*, pp. 11-12, 90-91).

⁶² Allegoresis was a method of reading literary works that was characteristic of Norwid. Cf. P. ABRISZEWSKA, *Literacka hermeneutyka*, pp. 153-164.

całego wygnaństwa” [scenes belonging to the whole exile] (PWsz VI, 437), this “punkt dojścia znajdziemy wszędzie, albowiem nie ma kraju takiego, gdzie by wygnaństwa polskiego już nie było” [point of access can be found everywhere, for there is no country where there hasn’t already been Polish exiles] (PWsz VI, 436-437), at the same time it is “najwyraźniejszym tylko miejscem w biegunie ujemnym” [only the clearest place in the negative pole] (PWsz VI, 437), “tło” [a background] deliberately chosen by Słowacki (PWsz VI, 437) to show the negative features of the Polish civilisation and the mentality of the emigrants at that time.⁶³

However, this figure is special. It is not so much composed of object in a space, neither is it the space itself, but rather people perceived as “fenomenologiczne typy” [phenomenological types] (PWsz VI, 443) of specific life and political attitudes as well as patterns of social relations. At this point Norwid looked closely at a large number of the characters in the poem: Anhelli, the Shaman, a group of children driven into exile, Eloë and Ellenai, a nameless priest and bishop, and finally three peculiar “martyrs” who let others crucified them in order to prove their political superiority. From this plethora of characters – children, men and women, the old, the young and the youngest, representatives of various social groups, political and religious leaders, but also ordinary people – Norwid created a panorama of the whole community. He was interested in the relations between the individual characters, their states awareness, their attitudes and ethical convictions, as well as moral and psychological motivations behind their thoughts and actions, and, finally, the forms of social organisation in which they had to function. He placed everything on important “linie i osie” [lines and axes] (PWsz VI, 436), the impact of which far exceeded the plot and landscape presented in Słowacki’s work.

In Norwid’s view, the image of Siberia in *Anhelli* was closely related to other motifs not presented in the work, but which could be used to recreate the schema of the whole Polish universe of symbols. As it has already been mentioned within this interpretation, Siberia represented only a “punkt zamierzchu” [point of fall] (or “biegun ujemny” [a negative pole]) of Polish civilisation. Although this formula had obvious spatial associations, Norwid’s words left no illusions that he did not refer to its geographical dimension. The writer illustrated this concept with puzzling examples:

[...] dla Ameryki ujemnymi biegunami będą Murzyni, dla Anglii – Irlandia, dla trzech mocarstw – Polska, dla Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, w pewnym okresie jej dziejów – Zaporoska Sicz, dla Niemiec – emigracje niemieckie do Ameryki, dla Francji – własne rewolucje (PWsz VI, 436).

⁶³ A similar reading trail was indicated by Słowacki himself in a letter to E. Januszkiewicz [Florence, first half of June (?) 1838], there he wrote that he presented in *Anhelli* “an idealised Siberia.” See *Korespondencja Juliusza Słowackiego*, ed. E. Sawrymowicz, Vol. I, Wrocław 1962, p. 399.

[...] for America, the negative poles will be Black Men, for England – Ireland, for the three powers – Poland, for the Republic of Poland, at some point in its history – the Zaporozhian Sich, for Germany – German emigration waves to America, for France – its own revolutions.

This is a peculiar juxtaposition (based on a rhetorical generalisation) in which the names of countries are juxtaposed with the terms for ethnic communities, territories inhabited by national minorities and terms referring to turbulent social processes (such as emigration waves and revolutions). However, the common denominator of this list seems quite clear – it is again people: those living in humiliation, vegetating on the margins of rich societies, and the excluded and rebellious...

In the light of the quoted statement, "negative poles" can be considered as referring to the most socially disadvantaged expressions of communal life of any country or nation. This formula includes political conflicts, ethnic antagonisms, contradicting economic interests or unfavourable demographic processes, which result in a real threat to the cohesion of a given political community and its developmental energy. It could be said that these conflicts expose the inhuman dimension of governance systems and reveal the carelessly accepted areas of exclusion and social injustice and thus spoil individual communities making them worse than they could be. Under particular circumstances, these conflicts can even lead to the collapse of states, but usually manifest milder, somewhat asymptomatic forms leading to a state of a chronic, albeit marginal, social crisis.

In Norwid's interpretation, the motif of "negative poles" was supplemented by the concept of an equally symbolic "positive poles." In the case of Poland, the writer noticed the "positive pole" in Rome as the capital of Christianity and the centre of Latin civilisation (he illustrated this thought with a reference to a fragment of Krasiński's *Trzy myśli Ligęzy*, which he referred to as *Wigilia Bożego Narodzenia* [*Christmas Eve*]). He supplemented his vision with a reference to "koczowiska" [encampments], or "bicz Boże" [the scourges of God], which he also treated in an openly allegorical way as yet another component of the imaginarium space of every state body. This is because in favourable circumstances they revealed their ominous power leading to the exposition of hidden civilisational conflicts destroying the apparent harmony of the prevailing social order:

[...] cały nareszcie krąg każdej cywilizacji miał u krańców obwodu swego koczowiska, tj. osoby zbiorowe dziczy wszelakiej, które nazywano olbrzymami, potworami i biczami bożymi, a których to koczowisk ogniska dalekie były jakoby czatami ogni bożych, mieczów i biczów bożych, czekającymi, aż głos krzywdy, choćby tylko oddany powietrzu westchnieniem i jękiem, nie zaświeńie z burzy gwałtownością, aby z nagłą poruszyły się te chmury mieczów, biczów, ogni i szły, karę za krzywdy niosąc (PWSz VI, 436).

[...] finally, the entire circle of every civilisation had encampments at the edge of their perimeter, i.e. masses of all kinds of savages, which were called giants, monsters, and the scourges of God, and whose encampment centres were supposedly the watches of God's flames, the swords and scourges of God, waiting for the voice of injustice, even if only given to the air by sighing and moaning, to lash with the violence of a storm, so that suddenly these clouds of swords, scourges and flames can move and walk, punishing for the injustice caused.

In order to better express the meaning of Norwid's concept of civilisational spaces (positive and negative "poles," and "encampments"), and thus also the allegory of Siberia as the "negative pole" of the Polish national community, it is worthwhile to put this vision within the framework of quite contemporary theories in the field of social philosophy. Here, I refer specifically to Ch. Taylor's idea of the "social imaginarium"⁶⁴ and the related J. Lacan's concept of the "symbolic field,"⁶⁵ implemented in the Polish context by A. Leder.

The "social imaginarium" as construed by Ch. Taylor is not a territory, but a community-specific system of representations of the world (its shape, the principles governing it, its goals, values and directions of development, its past, present and future) which not only define "the way we imagine the societies we inhabit and maintain," but also provide us with "not so much ready-made recipes for reality as a key to understanding it." These forms of "internalised understanding of social space" consequently form a set of social "rules" and "practices" manifested in rituals and other forms of communal life. In this way, representations of the world and community, taking the shape of an "internalised map of social space," enable the public sphere to exist as an area of "mutual understanding." In other words, they create a peculiar catalogue of principles and representations that determine human activities in the public sphere and make them comprehensible, by "giving meaning to our practices, enabling their existence,"⁶⁶ and providing orientation in the "moral space"⁶⁷ that surrounds us.

⁶⁴ Cf. Ch. TAYLOR, *Nowoczesne imaginaria społeczne*, Polish trans. A. Puczejda, K. Szymaniak, Kraków 2010.

⁶⁵ Lieutenant A. LEDER, *Prześlona rewolucja. Ćwiczenie z logiki historycznej*, Warszawa 2014. Leder declares that the "symbolic field" is "a concept derived from Lacanian psychoanalysis" (ibid., p. 11). Being aware of this origin, I will still refer to Leder's monograph, from which I took this category and its meaning.

⁶⁶ CH. TAYLOR, *Nowoczesne imaginaria*, pp. 14, 16, 30, 40, 120, 223.

⁶⁷ I am referring here to yet another concept of Ch. Taylor, who captures human subjectivity as a form of "orientation in the moral space." Cf. Ch. TAYLOR, *Źródła podmiotowości. Narodziny tożsamości nowoczesnej*, Polish trans. M. Gruszczyński, O. Latek, A. Lipszyc, A. Michalak, A. Rostkowska, M. Rychter, Ł. Sommer, ed. T. Gadacz, introduction by A. Bielik-Robson, Warszawa 2001, pp. 49-104.

As A. Leder adds, the "social imaginarium" is accessible through images drawn from the common repository of the collective imagination and from its conscious and unconscious deposits. These images (symbols, characters, myths, stories) are not real objects, but signs of concrete values, social views and emotions associated with them creating a "symbolic field" filled with meaningful figures and objects. The symbolic field represents a network of convictions about the world and one's own community, as well as a set of norms of conduct and moral precepts without which no society could survive. The objects that make up the "symbolic field" provide legitimacy for the various forms of collective life, allow for action to be taken in the name of specific principles, provide models of collective historical memory, set binding value hierarchies and define the goals that a given community should pursue. In short, they form the "skeleton of subjectivity of the entire community,"⁶⁸ they provide it with a body and set it in motion:

Every society is organised around a set of symbols and images. They have their actual vehicles, people who embody them, representing the state, faith, tradition, institutions and everything connected with them, they have functionaries of this order and finally the widest group – those who give meaning to this *imaginarium* through everyday practice.⁶⁹

Going back to Norwid, his idea of the "positive" and "negative" poles can be regarded as an attempt to give the Polish social space the structure of a symbolic field, i.e. a virtual area under a strong tension of opposing forces, configured according to the dynamics of opposing values. These forces and values were polarised in order "ażeby człowiekowi i społeczeństwu, to jest narodowi, uprzytomniały cały promień cywilizacji jego, przywodząc go do uczucia własnego i sprawiedliwego «Ja»" [to make man and the society, i.e. the nation, aware of the whole ray of its civilisation, bringing it to its own feeling and just 'I'] (PWsz VI, 439). Consequently, according to Norwid's understanding, Siberia – as a "negative pole" – would be the image of the Polish collective identity in the state of crisis. *Anhelli*, on the other hand, would be a literary description of the symptoms which testify to the exhaustion of the ideological energy and social capital of Polish culture. I want to stress that this state of crisis would not be a chronological decline of culture or a harbinger of the nation's death, but a chronic state of disease which may occur anywhere and at any time. Several episodes, to which Norwid draws attention in his interpretation, give an idea of the essence of this disintegration.

⁶⁸ Cf. A. LEDER, *Prześlona rewolucja*, pp. 11-12.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

At the centre of the symbolic field outlined in *Anhelli*, between the poles, Norwid placed the figure of the title character, whom he called “personifikacja serca ludzkiego wobec tragedii historii” [the personification of the human heart in the face of the tragedy of history] (PWsz VI, 441). He did not consider him to be another Romantic individualist whose tragedy symbolises the downfall of his homeland, but treated him as an allegory of helplessness, passivity, hopelessness and the despair of a man facing the fatalism of history. In the character of Anhelli (in his attitude, and especially in his symbolic death), Norwid saw a portrait of a man who, in the face of what was tragic and inevitable, lost both his physical ability to act and the ethical sense that would lend moral legitimacy to this act: “gdzie serce już wytrzymać nie może i kończy, tam sąd się zaczyna, bo ulegalizowana jest bezserdeczność. Czas jest, ażeby Anhelli obudził się, ale skoro obudzi się b e z s e r c a, czyliż tak wypełni misję swoją” [where the heart can no longer bear and stops, there the judgment begins, because heartlessness is legalised. The time is ripe for Anhelli to wake up, but since he wakes up w i t h o u t t h e h e a r t, he will fulfil his mission in this way] (PWsz VI, 441). This is the case of Anhelli, the “heart” of a civilisation which stops beating, its conscience that stops pointing the way to goodness. The title character is also a figure of an emigrant who has lost his foothold and does not know what to do with himself. He does not know and perhaps does not even want to know.

Other figures in *Anhelli*'s symbolic field are children, a group of little exiles driven to Siberia. In Słowacki's poem, they are led by an Orthodox priest (the poet's term) who gives them real brainwashing in exchange for bread. In his lecture, Norwid quoted a relevant passage from *Anhelli*, highlighting selected words:

W poemacie Słowackiego Anhelli, idąc za Szamanem przy blasku gwiazd, „po śniegiem okrytych stepach, spotyka obóz cały małych dzieciątek i pacholąt, gnanych na Sybir, które odpoczywały przy ogniu. A we środku gromadki siedział pop na tatarskim koniu, mający u siodła dwa kosze z chlebem. I zaczął owe dzieciątka nauczać podług nowej wiary ruskiej [...] nowego katechizmu, i pytał dzieci o rzeczy n i e g o d n e, a pacholęta odpowiadały mu, przymilając się, a l b o w i e m miał u siodła kosze z chlebem i m ó g ł je nakarmić; a były głodne [...]. Oto zapomniały już płakać po matkach swoich i tu się wdzięczą do chleba jak małe szczeniątka, szcękając rzeczy złe i które są przeciwko wierze – powiadając, że Car jest głową wiary, i że w nim jest Bóg, i że nic nie może rozkazać przeciwko Duchowi Świętemu, n a k a z u j ą c n a w e t r z e c z y p o d o b n e z b r o d n i o m, a l b o w i e m w n i m j e s t D u c h Ś w i ę t y.” (PWsz VI, 439)⁷⁰

⁷⁰ An excerpt from *Anhelli* quoted after citations from lectures *O Juliuszu Słowackim*. Norwid probably used the Parisian first edition of *Anhelli* (1838; the next edition was not published until 1860 in Leipzig). He introduced minor changes to his quotations, which were irrelevant to the message of Słowacki's work. These consisted of altered punctuation (a comma instead of a full stop or semicolon) and the emphasis of some fragments that he considered particularly important.

In Słowacki's poem, *Anhelli*, following the Shaman by the starlight, "on the steppes covered with snow, he comes across a camp full of little babies and children, driven to Siberia, who were resting by the fire. And in the middle of that group, there was an Orthodox priest sitting on a Tartar horse, having two baskets of bread at the saddle. And he began to teach these children a new Russian faith [...] a new catechism, and he asked the children about *d e s p i c a b l e* things, and the children answered him, trying to ingratiate themselves with him, *f o r* he had baskets of bread at his saddle and *c o u l d* feed them; and they were hungry [...]. Behold, they forgotten to cry for their mothers, and here they are turning on the charm for the bread like little puppies, barking out evil things that are against the faith – saying that the Tsar is the head of the faith, and that God is in him, and that he can command nothing against the Holy Spirit, *e v e n* ordering things similar to crimes, *f o r* the Holy Spirit is in him."

Norwid's commentary on this passage is very significant: "Widzimy przeto tutaj (...) zapomnienie miłości i wiary, a jednakże anielską przy tym niewinność. Potwór to nie znany starożytnemu światu. Koniec złego zarazem i koniec dobra, koniec wszystkiego: *n i e w i n n o ś ć r ó w n a z e p s u c i u!*" [Here we can thus see (...) forgetting love and faith, and yet angelic innocence. The monster not known to the ancient world. The end of evil and the end of good at the same time, the end of everything: *i n n o c e n c e e q u a l s c o r r u p t i o n!*] (PWsz VI, 339-440). This is a peculiar interpretation so far removed from the message of the relevant scene in *Anhelli!* After all, Słowacki focused on the suffering of the innocent and the punishment that the Shaman inflicted on their caretaker. Norwid's attention was drawn to other issues: the state of deep axiological relativism that arises as a result of ideological manipulation, as well as a premonition of the serious social consequences that result from the manipulation. Here, the features usually attributed to a child – immaturity, dependence, youth – were radically strengthened by Norwid to become the symbols of a loss of moral sense, a retreat into a pre-social state, and a lack of awareness of one's own origin and affiliation. In other words, a deep identity deficit and a regression to the state of nature. This state of nature, however, had nothing to do with Rousseau's vision, who saw it as a recovered gift and a method of returning to the lost innocence. Norwid's vision was rather that of a non-ethical reality which still needed to be managed and directed if it were not to have tragic consequences.

The allegorical Siberia, as interpreted by Norwid, is also inhabited by two women: Ellenai, *Anhelli*'s companion, and simultaneously "zbrodniarka na Syberię zesłana" [a criminal deported to Siberia] (PWsz VI, 445), and Eloë, the tomb mourner born from a tear of the dying Christ, more of a personification than a real person. The former character accompanies *Anhelli* in his wandering, but soon dies devastated by the hardships of travel and longing; the latter witnesses his death and watches over his body. These are significant situations –

death and mourning – especially if we take into account the fact that for Norwid, women were the real foundation of the social fabric, “zawiązaniem człowieka w społeczność” [the element binding man into a society] (PWsz VI, 441).⁷¹ Meanwhile, giving women the aforementioned roles – and only these – had significant consequences: it signalled their absence (or insufficient role) in many other at least equally important areas of the existence of the national community (in politics, culture, family and love life etc.). From this it followed that the Polish “negative pole” (including the emigration) is a state of triple deficiency: women’s underrepresentation in public life, their subordinate role in the sphere of private life, and the disintegration of social ties at the level of the most intimate interpersonal relations.⁷²

In Norwid’s vision of Siberia, the most important role was played by men especially representatives of intellectual and political elites. These included the Shaman, the anonymous clergy (the bishop and the priest) and the three politicians who let themselves be crucified in the name of their own obsessions. Norwid’s “explanation of the Shaman” (a bit of a sorcerer, a bit of a Moses) focused mainly on the failure of his leadership mission – the shaman was supposed to guard “aby lud celowi prawdziwemu oddany był” [that the people are devoted to the true purpose], but he “nie b y ł o d a n o dramy swojej dokończyć” [w a s n o t a l l o w e d to finish his drama] (PWsz VI, 444). The clergy were also helpless here – both the priest, gripped by the idea of vengeance, who betrays his mission, and the bishop, whose “pastorał z rąk (...) wypada przed klątwą z ust mającą wyjść” [crosier slips (...) out of his hands before the curse comes out of his mouth] (PWsz VI, 445). But the worst were the politicians – enraged, biased, and deprived of a sense of community:

⁷¹ Similar thoughts on the social role of women were expressed by Norwid in his essay *Emancypacja kobiet* [*Emancipation of women*] (1882): “(...) kobieta, będąc najżywszym węzłem pomiędzy samotnym Ja a publicznym My, stawia się pierwszą kapłanką naturalnie immolującą egoizm i dającą ugruntowanie zbiorowemu ciału społecznemu” [(...) the woman, being the liveliest knot between the lonely I and the public We, becomes the first priestess who naturally immolates selfishness and gives a solid foundation to the collective social body] (PWsz VI, 653). For Norwid’s vision of femininity, cf. D. WOJTAŚIŃSKA, *O koncepcji kobiety „zupelnej” w pismach Cypriana Norwida*, Toruń 2016.

⁷² A. WITKOWSKA (*Cześć i skandale. O emigracyjnym doświadczeniu Polaków*, Gdańsk 1997, especially the chapter entitled “Kultura samotnych mężczyzn” [“The lonely men culture”], pp. 31-94) emphasises that the 19th-century Polish emigration was dominated by men. In this context, it is worth quoting once again the Norwid’s words describing the circle of listeners of his lectures: “Siwych głów i poważnych kilkanaście osób – dam kilka (...)” [Grey heads and a dozen or so serious people – only a few ladies (...)] (DW XI, 437).

Jest w *Anhellim* jeszcze jedna scena, nie sybirska wcale, albowiem wchodzą do niej trzy partie polityczne, krzyżujące trzech białych ludzi w czerwoności zorzy polarnej. Ukrzyżowanie to objaśnić żadnych nie potrzebuje, bo ukrzyżowań takich (bez żadnych metafor) było i będzie niezmiernie wiele, *n i e z m i e r n i e w i e l e* na wszelkich polarnych zamierzczu punktach! Wszędzie, gdzie jednostronności tak się rozepną łokciami rubasznymi, że aż tło, na którym rysują się postacie, popęka, to chociażby na płótnie tła owego wymalowane były osioł, żaba i kozioł, zawszeć będzie za takim płótnem krzyż drewniany i tablicę obrazu utwierdzający, który zza porozdzieranych nici wyjrzy. (PWsz VI, 446)

There is yet another scene in *Anhelli*, not Siberian at all, involving three political parties, crucifying three pale people in the redness of the aurora. This crucifixion does not need any explanation because such crucifixions (without any metaphors) were and will be conducted in an immeasurable number, *a n i m e a s u r a b l e n u m b e r* on all polar points of the fall! Wherever the one-sidedness is jostling using its broad elbows so that the background on which the figures are drawn will crack, even if a donkey, a frog and a goat were painted on the canvas, there will always be a wooden cross supporting the painting and the plaque, which will come out from behind the torn threads.

All of these motifs were part of a grim anti-Christian grotesque and justified Norwid's diagnosis of the degradation of social ties in *Anhelli*. It manifested itself either in the attitudes of apathy and the ethical loss of the protagonists of this work, in the examples of the barren and devastating struggle of the factions, or, finally, in the images of the narrow-mindedness of the alleged leaders of the Polish community (this is how I would understand the meaning of the motif of the cross covered by the canvas which depicted the figures of a donkey, a frog and a goat). The result of these attitudes was the social atomisation and disintegration of the culture of collective life as a result of which the Polish society became "bliskie zgmniejszenia przez niebyt polityczny" [close to being pauperised due to its political non-existence] (PWsz VI, 438).

Of course, in Norwid's clearly articulated intention, these diagnoses not only referred to *Anhelli*. According to Norwid's interpretation, the space of Siberia (together with the people vegetating there) presented in the work became a universal allegory that included the most important elements of the Polish social imaginari-um. It was an allegory of the Polish collective consciousness in its stillness, frozen in celebrating the national disaster, and hibernating in pain. An allegory of a one-dimensional consciousness which is ethically naive, deprived of historical imagination, having a body memory of the past and powerless in the face of what would happen. An allegory of the consciousness of people who have lost confidence in one another and no longer have anything to offer to each other. An allegory of a society made up of pseudo-individuals who cannot communicate with one another and do not know how to interact with one another, as well as

disoriented elites who have lost the ability to work for the common good, social background and the sense of mission.

Norwid not only explained *Anhelli* in his lectures, but also revealed his own views on Poland's recent history, the moral condition of emigrants and the conditions of the national rebirth. Speaking to the audience gathered in two full halls of the Parisian tenement house at Passage du Commerce 25, he addressed his words to the Polish elite, the representatives of various political groups, and the representatives of various generations in exile: the old one, remembering the January Uprising, and the young one, who recently arrived in the capital of the world.⁷³ He addressed all of them with a reminder that "one cannot be an enlightened Polish patriot" without thinking about and adopting the teachings coming from *Anhelli*. It was for them that he was presenting a catastrophic vision of the Polish world in permanent disintegration, and it is them who he was convincing that the crisis of the community constantly threatens the Polish collective life and the chaos of values constantly poisons the Polish universe of symbols: at home, in emigration and in exile. It is thus hardly surprising that he expressed his message in a cautious way through intricate arguments and under allegorical camouflage – too many bitter words came out from his mouth. After all, these were new "warnings for Poland"...

Norwid also had words of consolation and hope for his listeners – these words were spoken when he was outlining the image of the national community, as shown by Krasieński in *Trzy myśli Ligęzy*. In this work he saw an ideal model of the Polish community: united by strong social and religious ties, united by a common goal and similar values, hierarchical, yet free and lasting, so different from the one he saw in *Anhelli*.

At this point, it should be mentioned where Norwid began his argumentation – I refer to an extensive (seemingly digressive) reflection on the emergence and the collapse of successive civilisations in world history. In his lectures, Norwid spoke about the relativity, incompleteness and inevitability of each one of them, and also about the continuous rebirth of human civilisation in an ever new form. These reflections formed the framework for Norwid's historiosophical concepts. If one were to refer them directly to *Anhelli's* interpretation (which is most legitimate from the point of view of the logic of the argument presented in the lectures

⁷³ Norwid was proud of the success of his lectures – he emphasised the huge number of listeners, drew attention to their generational and political diversity, enjoyed thunderous applause he received, and boasted a commemorative gift – it was the first print of *Anhelli* signed by 43 donors. Cf. Z. TROJANOWICZOWA, Z. DAMBEK with participation of J. CZARNOMORSKA, *Kalendarz życia i twórczości Cypriana Norwida*, Vol. I, p. 781. Z. TROJANOWICZOWA, Z. DAMBEK, I. GRZESZCZAK, *Kalendarz życia i twórczości Cypriana Norwida*, Vol. III: *Aneks, bibliografia, indeksy*, Poznań 2007, pp. 25-26.

O Juliuszu Słowackim), one could risk the following thesis: Norwid's visions of Poland's fate would even include a scenario of its final collapse (in its current form). However, this fall would not mean that "dziejów praca" [the work of the history] has been completed and that one cannot rise again – since History itself has not come to an end, but only its next stage passing by like all the others; there might also be a rebirth – under new conditions and in a new form. The creation of these conditions – in relation to Poland and Poles – would only be a task to be performed, and would have to be based on breaking with the sin of "*niewszanowania osoby-człowieka*" [disrespect for the human being].⁷⁴ Perhaps this is why Norwid claimed (contrary to his predecessors!) that Słowacki's *Anhelli* was "dzieło dopełnione i pogodne" [a complete and serene work] (PWsz VI, 446).⁷⁵

Thus Norwid's intellectual dialogue with *Anhelli* conducted in the lectures *O Juliuszu Słowackim* was multifaceted and rich in non-obvious conclusions. It offered an original reading of this work, formulated goals for the Polish emigration and posed difficult questions about the fate of the entire national community. This dialogue also had its continuation in other works by the author of *Vademecum*. Suffice it to mention a wonderfully symbolic image from a somewhat later lyric entitled *Syberie* [*The Two Siberias*] (ca. 1865-1866), in which the vision of real Siberia ("Gdzie całe dnie / Niebo się zdaje przypominać Bogu: / 'Z i m n o i m n i e!...'") [Where all day long / Heaven seems to remind God: / "I a m a l s o c o l d!..."] accompanied the image of Siberia "pieniędzy i pracy / Gdzie wolnym grób!" [of money and work / Where the grave is for the free!]. Both of these motifs, though taken from quite different systems, were suggestive symbols of the deep enslavement of a man whose freedom could only be delivered by "Wielki Pan... Duch!" [the Great Lord... Spirit!] (PWsz II, 58). The message of this lyric once again referred to the problems of the social imaginarius of that time, and the moral of the work, as if taken directly from *Król-Duch* [*The King-Spirit*], was yet another testimony to Norwid's fascination with Słowacki's works.

And today, for us, it can also be a proof of another "nad grobem zwycięstwo" [victory over the grave] claimed by the other Bard.

⁷⁴ I refer here to Norwid's reflection on the causes of Poland's collapse presented in a letter to Konstancja Górską [Paris, February? 1852] (DW X, 391). For more on this subject, see W. TORUŃ, *Norwid o Niepodeległej*, Lublin 2013.

⁷⁵ Seeing *Anhelli* as "dzieło dopełnione i pogodne" [a complete and serene work], Norwid also referred to its aesthetic values – "pogody twórczości" [the cheerfulness of creation] and "całości toku i rytmu i języka skończoności" [the whole course and rhythm as well as completeness of the language] (PWsz VI, 446).

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POLISH "IMAGINARIUM":
NORWID'S READING OF *ANHELLI*

S u m m a r y

The aim of the article is to answer the question of how Cyprian Norwid understood Juliusz Słowacki's poem entitled *Anhelli* (1838). Norwid's interpretation of *Anhelli*, which was put forward in his lectures *O Juliuszu Słowackim* (1861), was significantly different from the previous ones. Before Norwid, the critics of *Anhelli* admired its aesthetic layer and appreciated the documentary motifs, but could not make sense of its extremely pessimistic message. Norwid, however, interpreted *Anhelli* as an allegorical reflection of what Charles Taylor would call the Polish social imaginarium. Emphasising the role of the metaphorical meaning of a few motifs in the world presented (especially the one of Siberia as the "negative pole" of the Polish civilisation and the picture of characters as supporters of particular ethical views), Norwid interpreted Słowacki's poem as an allegory of a grave crisis of the Polish collective consciousness as well as a picture of the decay of the national community. In this way, Norwid's reflection on *Anhelli* gave him the opportunity to criticise the characteristic features of the 19th-century Polish culture and the mentality of the emigrants of that time.

Key words: Cyprian Norwid; Juliusz Słowacki's *Anhelli*; social imaginarium; allegorical style of reception; history of reception.

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