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DEOTYMA – NORWID’S “TENTH MUSE”

Jadwiga Łuszczewska sparked controversy not only among the critics but also among the socialites in Romantic Warsaw, who listened to her improvisations. Her contemporaries would hold one-sided, often contrasting opinions regarding her literary talent, which was associated with the late, Biedermeier-like style in Polish Romanticism.¹ Due to her popularity, many of these views would circulate in the press, also making their way into the letters and diaries of friends and admirers. Critics would not spare her praise, including Aleksander Tyszyński, who published an enthusiastic review in “Biblioteka Warszawska”, discussing her 1854 volume *Improwizacje i poezje*. Drawing attention to the virtues of her “inspired” style, he wrote:

The framework and foundation of her poetry are certainly not limited to following a certain pattern, or adopting certain forms, but rely on pursuing her own inspiration. Probably never before in the history of inspirations have we seen such a plethora of detail and flexibility. The author is clearly gifted in terms of grasping and incorporating, in modern terms, all of that which is most subtle in the areas of *memory*, *reflection*, and *beauty*, combining them in *imagination*, and narrating with ingenuity.²

The inspiration, vision, and subtlety displayed by this poet – the critic argues – are accompanied by “fundamental novelty, *imaginativeness*, and usually by beauty of expression.”³

¹ J. BACHÓRZ, *Deotyma 1834-1908*, [in:] *Literatura krajowa w okresie romantyzmu 1831-1863*, eds. M. Janion, M. Dernałowicz, M. Maciejewski, Kraków 1988, p. 932.

² [A. TYSZYŃSKI], *Improwizacje i poezje Deotymy. Warszawa 1854 r.*, “Biblioteka Warszawska” 2 (1854), p. 173.

³ Ibid.

It would be difficult to find better evidence of appreciation for – as Tyszyński put it – “the first steps”⁴ made by Łuszczewska in the literary world. As certain readers of the review noticed, however, it would be equally difficult to discern a stronger impulse forcing the young, twenty-year-old woman into fatal complacency and excessive pride. At the same time, Deotyma’s work was criticised in the Kraków magazine “Czas” by Jan Prusinowski, a journalist, lawyer, poet and friend of Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, hailing from Żytomierz. In the article *Kilka listów o Deotymie* he argues that

[i]magination is busy here only with a kaleidoscope of incoherent images, which show neither real life nor a miraculous world of fantasy made probable by inspiration. These are mere abstract fancies, forcibly elicited. When reading these improvisations, the heart is in constant penance – even if she does occasionally touch a string of feeling, the result is not lively, strong and honest... but sickly, as it were, nervous and artificial, as if dictated by learning and not by internal drive [...]. What strikes the most, however, is the habit of constantly referring to God, humanity, progress, and prophetic future... None of these exclamations have a faith that would be simple, direct, and practical... They rather resemble the humanitarian slogans of the communists [...]. Moving to the outer form and harmony of her poems, they lack melodiousness, which is inseparable from inspiration, as well as life, simplicity, and healthiness... There is only phraseology, excess, exertion, and coldness.⁵

Thus, on the one hand there is originality, inspiration, and imagination, while on the other – “phraseology, excess, exertion, and coldness.” Praise and criticism would also often go hand in hand in reviews of her improvisations and writings. Zygmunt Krasiński, who stayed in Warsaw in 1853 and read circulated copies of her poems, would share the following opinion with August Cieszkowski:

There is no femininity, fervour, arousal, or youthfulness. Yet her speech is most beautiful, clear, and natural, her rhymes “the least forced,” her erudition vast, full of ideas, which are tied with tremendous dexterity, while her wisdom permeates every poem. [...] Still, there are no traces of the heart, although reason, measure and sophistication of spirit manifest to the highest degree, displaying self-mastery.⁶

Krasiński would also note the disastrous influence of the poet’s mother, Magdalena (Nina) Łuszczewska. “It saddens me to look at this girl,” he writes, “who carries the mark of a priestess but has been pushed by motherly vanity to

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ J. PRUSINOWSKI, *Kilka listów o Deotymie*, “Czas” 1854, no. 134, pp. 1-2.

⁶ Z. KRASIŃSKI, *Listy do Augusta Cieszkowskiego, Edwarda Jaroszyńskiego, Bronisława Trentowskiego*, ed. Z. Sudolski, vol. 1, Warszawa 1988, p. 662. Letter dated 23-24 January 1853.

become an actress.”⁷ Andrzej Edward Koźmian expressed similar ambivalence, appreciating the poet’s talent yet attempting to dissuade her from improvisation, which he saw as damaging her image.⁸ Such extreme views shed some light on the nineteenth-century reception of Deotyma’s work, including Norwid’s perspective on it. As Józef Bachórz notes, Norwid would turn a blind eye to the various shortcomings of the poetess’s talents:

[...] he was unmoved by her lengthy discussions of religious matters and “dabbling in philosophy.” Before noting that she “smacks of candelabra and sacristy thurible,” he would appreciate her “distinguished theosophical phenomenon,” comparing her to the greatest poets of “men’s word,” defending her improvisations against sceptics, and bestowing on her the gift of his own poem.⁹

The above opinion inclines one to reconsider Norwid’s attitude towards Deotyma. It remains unclear to what extent he expressed actual praise for her talent for improvisation and literature, and to what extent he tolerated her mistakes, in fact offering veiled criticism. Norwid would remember Łuszczewska as a young girl from his Warsaw days, because he would frequent salons, “including gatherings where life would be forced into lordly convention and etiquette, as in the case of Nina Łuszczewska.”¹⁰ Additionally, he was a distant relative of Jadwiga. Norwid’s aunt, Zofia Józefowa Komierowska née Sobieski – he explains in a letter to Maria Trębicka dated 8 April 1856 – was the wife of “the brother of the husband of Deotyma’s sister” (PWsz VIII, 257). Still, he would not come into contact with the publicity-winning improviser before 1853, when they met purely by accident, i.e. through a poem written in response to a piece dedicated by the nineteen-year-old poet to Norwid’s penfriend Józef Komorowski on the occasion of his name day (19 March).¹¹ After receiving a letter from Komorowski in New York, Norwid fell under the charm of Deotyma’s literary talent and commemorated her thus:

⁷ Ibid., p. 666. Letter dated 22 February 1853.

⁸ Opinions about Deotyma held by her contemporaries, alleged praise by Mickiewicz, and mystifications surrounding the poem “Do Deotymy z powodu jej improwizacji (Improwizacja)” [To Deotyma, on the Occasion of her Improvisation (An Improvisation)] published by Edward Rastawiecki in *Tygodnik Petersburski* (20 October / 1 November 1853) and signed with the initial “M.” are discussed at length by Wiktor Weintraub in *Poeta i prorok. Rzecz o profetyzmie Mickiewicza*, Warszawa 1982, p. 94-100).

⁹ J. BACHÓRZ, *Deotyma 1834-1908*, p. 934.

¹⁰ Z. TROJANOWICZ, *Rzecz o młodości Norwida*, Poznań 1968, p. 70.

¹¹ This poem is lost. However, Zbigniew Sudolski is wrong in claiming that it was addressed to Norwid. Cf. Z. SUDOLSKI, *Norwid. Opowieść biograficzna*, Warszawa 2003, pp. 219-220. In a letter to Komorowski dated 6 September 1853 the poet writes: “If I received such a beautiful rhyme

Przez nowożytne plemiona,
W nie swej, lecz Jego świątyni,
Rozmężniona – rozświetlona –
Kmiotka, kseni, monarchini,
Dziesiąta Muza przybywa – –

Ona śpiew z pieśnią jednoczy,
Za-konywa, wy-konywa...
Ona niebieskie ma oczy,
Śpiewając krzepko i smutnie,
Ona z rozwianych warkoczy
Ma sobie arfy i lutnie.

Ona jest – owa dziesiąta – –
Kwintą ją zwano tam dawniej,
Gdyby była tęskna i piąta,
Cierpieć nie mogąc zabawniej...
(DW X, 461)

Deotyma's extraordinary portrait is developed in this poem by referring to classical themes and introducing an elaborate parallel between "the modern" and – as is implied – the oldest poetic tradition. The phrase "dziesiąta Muza" ["tenth Muse"] can be first associated with Plato's praise of Sappho and her poetic accomplishment.¹² In the context sketched by Norwid, the term would refer to a figure of exceptional artistic talent, who deserves to be the patron of one of the arts in Apollo's train. However, the tenth muse is – according to tradition – not only an inspired poet but also, or perhaps even primarily, the patron of poetry and its goddess. Jacek Brzozowski draws attention to the fact that the Muses, as the daughters of Zeus, repeat the cosmic act of creation "at the level of words (*logois*) and sounds (*mousikei*)."¹³ "If Zeus is the cosmic lawgiver," Brzozowski continues, referring to the myth recorded by Pindar, "then the Muses are the guarantors of the cosmos. Therefore, when they appear at the beginning of a poem, its initial formula acquires the status of an act that [...] we could be inclined to call epogony."¹³

from a maiden-prophet on my name day, which I never seem to keep track of, I would respond in this way: [the poem follows]" (PWSz VIII, 194). Cf. also the commentary by Gomulicki (PWSz VIII, 519).

¹² In one of the so-called Plato's *Epigrams* we read: "Some say there are nine Muses. How thoughtless! Look at Sappho of Lesbos; she makes a tenth." PLATO, *Complete Works*, eds. J.M. Cooper and D.S. Hutchinson, Indianapolis 1997, p. 1745. After: <https://archive.org/details/completeworks00plat/page/1743/mode/2up> (accessed 11 January 2021).

¹³ J. BRZOZOWSKI, *Muza epopei: fragment dziejów toposu*, "Pamiętnik Literacki" 1984, vol.

If the Muses are the organizers of the poetic absolute, using this phrase to refer to a young writer who is just beginning to gain popularity, mainly by improvising, should be regarded as either a lofty apotheosis or a playful lyrical compliment. It seems that both intentions can be identified in this case.

Still, Norwid’s comparison of Deotyma to a “tenth Muse” is unconventional. In the first stanza he draws on the ethical and religious context, thus endowing the poet with features untypical for antiquity. The improviser is “Przez nowożytne plemiona, / W nie swej, lecz Jego [!] świątyni, / Rozmężniona – rozświetlona –” [By modern tribes, / Not in her own, but in His temple, / She was made valiant and bright –]. In the image developed in this manner one can identify not a contemporary Sappho – a goddess enshrined in her own, sovereign temple of poetry – but a transformed, Christian Sappho, anointed by “nowożytne plemiona” [modern tribes] and acting within the boundaries of God’s house. The poem also displays reverence for spiritual simplicity – a value that rarely accompanies the classical theme of the muse, and is rather characteristic for the Christian concept of humanity. “Supreme simplicity” is one of the divine attributes mentioned by St. Thomas Aquinas¹⁴ – a virtue that should be cultivated by everyone, both ruler and serf, since everyone was created in the image of God. It does not come as a surprise then that in this piece Deotyma’s *porte parole* is not only “Kmiotka” [a peasant woman] but also “kseni, monarchini” [duchess, monarch], thus combining the vocation to creativity with a passion for singing. Norwid raised the status of simplicity as a lofty characteristic of the spirit, just like Słowacki did when he devoted himself to his geneseic philosophy. The poem to Deotyma is remarkably similar to “Do pastereczki siedzącej na druidów kamieniach w Pornic nad oceanem” [To a shepherdess sitting on druidic stones in Pornic, at the ocean], where the heroine, who is called “królowa Ducha” [the queen of the Spirit], also appears as “Chłopcza” [a peasant girl] and an Italic goddess of nature Diana (“Dyjanna”).¹⁵

Norwid’s piece also references Melpomene – the fifth Muse (“kwinta”), patron of tragedy and lyre – whom Deotyma increasingly resembles when “tęskna” [wistful] and “cierpieć nie mogąc zabawniej” [not being able to suffer more amusingly], although she “podrosła w ramionach, / Wzmogła się w piersi marmurze”

4, p. 13. See also his book *Muzy w poezji polskiej. Dzieje toposu do przełomu romantycznego* (Wrocław 1986).

¹⁴ St. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Compendium of Theology*, trans. Cyril Vollert, S.F., S.T.D., Binghamton 1947, p. 25. After: <https://archive.org/details/CompendiumOfTheologyAquinasSt.Thomas3506> (accessed 11 January 2021).

¹⁵ Cf. J. SŁOWACKI, *Do pastereczki siedzącej na druidów kamieniach w Pornic nad oceanem*, [in:] IDEM, *Dzieła wszystkie*, ed. J. Kleiner, vol. 12, part 1: *Wiersze drobne z lat 1843- 1849*, eds. J. Kleiner, J. Kuźniar, W. Floryan, Wrocław 1960, pp. 188-189.

[grew larger in shoulders, / And in marble breasts] and “jest krzepsza” [is more vigorous] (PWsz VIII, 195). Thus unfolds the theme of the Muses, largely referencing visual arts. Each of the phrases “z rozwianych warkoczy / Ma sobie arfy i lutnie” [Her braids blowing in the wind / Are her harp and lute], “wzmogła się w piersi marmurze” [grew larger in marble breasts], “uderzyła [...] Po strun... architekturze...” [struck the architecture of strings] (PWsz VIII, 195) contains some kind of a visual suggestion or studied form that contributes to the monumental features of the poet as Sappho-Melpomene and her symbolic props.

Developing the image of Deotyma as a contemporary muse, and considering her poetry in terms of simplicity as well as aesthetic and moral freshness, found expression also in other poems by Norwid. In the 1854 piece *Rzeczywistość i marzenia (!)* [*Reality and Dreams (!)*], written on the occasion of an improvisation by Łuszczewska titled *Rzeczywistość i wyobraźnia* [*Reality and Imagination*], preserving faith, simplicity and innocence of heart appears to constitute the addressee’s moral mission.¹⁶ However, the lyrical subject does not adore her, as in the poem *Przez nowożytnie plemiona...* [*By modern tribes...*], but instead cautions and gives advice:

[...] „W trzeźwej trwaj mierności
I chroń się Mistrzów-wielkich, co dziś nucą,
Bo oni klątwę swej wybujałości
Na twoje młode ramiona zarzucą
I, zamiast tobie dać błogosławieństwo,
Przytulic słowem i ogrzać wyznaniem,
Oni ci laurów swych dadzą przekleństwo. [...]

[...] O!... strzeż się przeto Mistrzów tego wieku,
Bo pacholeta bose sto-tysięcy
Razy więcej niż oni wiedzą o człowieku,
I miłszy Bogu ich błąd niemowlęcy...
[...]

Ty – zasłoń oczy na rozpaczne głębie,
I ciągle sercem w chmury patrz gołębie,
I ciągle śpiewaj: „Pokój Boskiej głowie [...]”.

(PWsz I, 225-227)

¹⁶ The poem sent to Komorowski (*Przez nowożytnie plemiona...*) is not the only piece where Norwid indirectly responds to works by Łuszczewska. An almost identical situation occurred in 1854 when the poet received, in a letter from Maria Trębicka, the text of Deotyma’s improvisation *Rzeczywistość i wyobraźnia* and replied with a letter to which he attached the poem *Rzeczywistość i marzenia (!)* addressed to her.

The value of Deotyma’s artistic attitude should be thus measured in terms of her resistance to the curse of exuberance characteristic for “Mistrzowie tego wieku” [Masters of this century]. The topic of these “masters,” who are sometimes referred to as “wielcy i słynni poprzednicy” [noble and renowned forebears], is also addressed in the introduction to *Vade-mecum*, where Norwid complains that “this school, whose members eagerly elucidate and judge broadly historical situations or *the rights of nations*, probably did not have enough time to give considerable space in their works to the question of *duty* and the aspect of *morality*...” (PWsz II, 9). The moral aspect was of particular significance to Norwid – it is for this reason that he shared the following remarks about “Teodata”¹⁷ with Maria Trębicka in his discussion of the improvisation “Rzeczywistość i wyobraźnia” in May 1854: “It seems to me that she is not being poetic for the sake of doing so, but is glad to rejoice secretly about every poem being like a good deed – this is the best criticism and the most courageous way to open the door before one’s Muse – a difficult way yet thoroughly poetic” (DW X, 49).

Norwid considered simplicity to be the noblest property of poetry. Accordingly, he would advise Łuszczewska to adopt it, especially in childlike form (“pacholęca” [childish]), because this kind is dearer to God than the “exuberances” or “deep despair” of allegedly great writers, whose works in fact often lack the crucial value of delivering a moral meaning. He was astonished by the freshness, innovativeness, and orientation towards the future which he discerned in the improviser’s artistic technique. “If I were as clear-headed as she is, I would develop my own Muse entirely differently,” he confided to Trębicka in the above-quoted letter from New York. In turn, when considering the text of the poem “Rzeczywistość i wyobraźnia,” he argues:

Teodata seems to be aware that we are now at a moment when it barely makes sense to look back: her beautiful poem shows, deeply and honestly, that she loves the entire humankind and contains it (in an idea) because this is the truest way – the whole humanity is indeed very poor [...]. (DW X, 49)

He thus views it as valuable and “honestly beautiful” that Deotyma refers to “God, humanity, progress, and a prophetic future,” which Prusinowski criticised the same year in “Czas” as dishonest and “glaring.” Norwid discerned in the young poet a figure that heralds changes in literature, a modern muse who shifts

¹⁷ This is how Norwid referred to Deotyma. Notably, the word comes from the Latin term *Adeodatus* (*deus, datō*) – “given by God.” This name gained popularity in Christianity as a thanksgiving one, given in expression of gratitude for an heir. As Zygmunt Gloger noted, “Teodata” is the female form of the name “Teodat,” which is replaced in Polish by “Bogodan” (“Bogdan”). Cf. Z. GLOGER, *Encyklopedia staropolska*, t. II, Warszawa 1901, p. 269.

attention from the Romantic individual to problems of humanity, and who is very much unlike the “masters” who would set the tone of poetry at the time. Further, he would declare readiness to defend her against the “Pharisees of simplicity.”¹⁸ He twice crossed swords over her with critics, assuming that “adoration is due to God, while defiling – to no one” (DW XI, 79).¹⁹

Compliments from America would be answered by Deotyma as late as on 17 May 1857 in a letter containing poetic excerpts and explaining that she did not have Norwid’s precise postal address. She calls him a multifarious artist worthy of the Renaissance masters, a “figure triply brightened by lute, brush and chisel,” “a poet-prophet as well as woodcarver and painter,” and “the betrothed of the triple art.” She likens him to Michelangelo: “O, triply happy is the one who, with eagle eyes / looks for three stars in life with Buonarroti!” (PWsz VIII, 542). Norwid reacted to this letter with embarrassment and irony. Unappreciated and recognized only by a narrow circle, the writer and graphic artist was compared to a prophet and Renaissance genius. In the poem “Deotymie. Odpowiedź” [To Deotyma. An Answer] we read:

[...] drzę o cię, Warszawo!
 I jeśli dziryt jaki nieśmiertelnych rani,
 Drzę i o Ciebie – Sapho!... Któż słyszał albowiem
 Wawrzynu liściem ż y w y c h pot ocierać z czoła?
 Kto słyszał równać (tego nigdy nie-do-powiem)
 Do Salvatora, albo Michała-Anioła!...
 Prze-bóg, proroki tylko (chwilami wolnemi
 Kamienowane) z pompą oddawane ziemi,
 Ludzie, dla których ż y w e obowiązki znikły,
 Ci, co innego! – takim laury kwitnąć zwykły.
 (PWsz I, 288)

It is difficult not to discern here a note of ironic reproach voiced in the form of an apostrophe to Sappho, the tenth muse, who went too far in her poetic fervour, praising not the dead prophets but a “living” poet, a conjurer without laurels. The poem also features “Salvator,” who is not mentioned by Łuszczewska in her let-

¹⁸ In a letter to Magdalena Łuszczewska (mother to Jadwiga), dated June 1855, Norwid refers, among other things, to the theatrical aspects of the young poet’s improvisations: “I not only wish to congratulate you on the great talent of your daughter, but also wish to appreciate how she wears her laurel and chooses the right dress; if my words are of any value, I would advise her to retain the right proportions of *scene* in her improvisations, which is paramount everywhere today, and perhaps even more so here. Those who consider this shocking or negligible have little idea about the structure of today’s society, or are Pharisees of simplicity” (DW X, 11).

¹⁹ Letter to Jadwiga Łuszczewska dated 18 July 1856.

ter. Salvator Rosa was a multi-talented artist, just like Norwid or Michelangelo: poet, painter, and musician. This specific mention deepens the ironic undertone of Norwid’s words to Deotyma.²⁰ The impression made on him by the comparison with Michelangelo is confirmed by references not only to artistic accomplishment but also to the civic merits contained in a poem that Norwid soon wrote and addressed to Łuszczewska, titled “Odpowiedź” [An Answer]. He indicates in it the fundamental difference between the lot and duty of artists from the “land of marble” (PWsz I, 322) and ones who live in prison: “[...] dziś – co kreślę albo z brązu leję / To tylko jak w murze ćwiekiem / Więzień: kto inny ma laur i nadzieję, / Ja – jeden zaszczyt: być człekiem” [today – whatever I sketch or sculpt in bronze / Is only like scraping with nails on the wall / Of a prison: others enjoy laurels and hope, / While I have only one honour: that of being human] (PWsz I, 323). Despite the awkwardness that Norwid observed in Deotyma’s text, he regarded her as Sappho and the Muse of new poetry, who is still working on her poetic technique and whose errors should meet with understanding.

Her image of a talented and inspired improviser was sealed with the recognition of her prophetic gift. The poem “Zaczepiony przez Sybillę śmiertelnik odpowiedział” [The Mortal Stopped by a Sibyl Replied] offers a lyrical reflection on their first “ice-breaking meeting”²¹ in Paris, shortly before Christmas in 1860. It develops probably the loftiest and most statuesque image among all her depictions in Norwid’s lyrical works. The “pomposity,” “manly shoulders,” the young forehead made “more marble” by the past, monuments wafting folds from tombs at her, the woman’s lyre, and “sunny face” (PWsz I, 331-333) – these are all themes and metaphors that comprise a specific allegory of prophetic poetry. The topos of the Muse is concretized in this poem through the introduction of an originally conceived figure of Sibyl, the prophetess whose “knightly word” is supposed to be the voice of millions. However, this Sibyl also has the features of Melpomene, who is presented in Renaissance and baroque emblems as a woman wearing “a twisted mask denoting Tragedy” and “wedged heels”²²:

²⁰ Norwid’s reception of works by Salvator Rosa is discussed in depth by Grażyna Halkiewicz-Sojak, who identified in the ambivalent and ironic attitude of the lyrical subject in the poem “Deotymie. Odpowiedź” “on the one hand, gratitude to the addressee, who still recognizes his role in Polish culture, calls him a conjuror, and compares him to Michelangelo and Salvator Rosa; and on the other – suppressed bitterness of an underappreciated artist who transcends the intellectual and aesthetic horizons of his epoch, which sentenced him to marginalization and rejection by his contemporaries.” G. HALKIEWICZ-SOJAK, *Salvator Rosa – jeszcze jedna siedemnastowieczna inspiracja Norwida*, “Studia Norwidiana” 22-23 (2004-2005), p. 49.

²¹ Z. SUDOLSKI, *Norwid*, p. 332.

²² C. RIPA, *Ikonologia*, trans. I. Kania, Kraków 2004, p. 291.

Rycerskie słowo za Tobą zostanie,
Jak szal czerwony:
Choć będzie Twoje – lecz – ile się stanie
Przez milijony.

A Ty swój koturn postawisz u progu,
Gdzie owce strzygą;
I będziesz Trzodzie, czym dziś jesteś Bogu,
– Panno Jadwigo!

(PWsz I, 332)

Łuszczewska thus appears to the poet as a shepherdess and a prophetess who reveals to the nation the way to act in a difficult and tragic historical period.

The ethos of sibylline prophecies has accompanied literature since early antiquity. Such figures were known already in archaic Greece, but later this term began to be used in reference to women matching the pattern of divinely-inspired visionaries able to enter a state of ecstasy and foresee special events (usually tragic) in a given city or country. In the first century CE the Roman poet Varro indicated the existence of as many as ten such figures: in Persia, Libya, Delphi, Cimmeria, Eritrea, Samos, Cumae, Hellespont, Phrygia, and Tibur.²³ Norwid would introduce Deotyma as a Slavic (Polish) Sibyl, but was not very original in this. This name was in fact widely used in the eighteenth and nineteenth century as the synonym of prophetess or oracle. Among other reasons, it became widespread and fashionable due to Sibylline temples and caves placed in English gardens towards the end of the eighteenth century, for example out of the initiative of Izabela Czartoryska in Puławy, or by Helena Radziwiłłowa in Arkadia. Further, Sibyls were popularized in literary works like *Świątynia Sybilli* [*Sibylline Temple*] by Jan Paweł Woronicz (written in 1801 and published in 1818), and even through names of magazines (*Sybilla Nadwiślańska* [*The Vistula Sibyl*] – a “national daily devoted to politics, history, literature and domestic matters,” published in 1821). Regardless of the popularity of this name, calling a poem with the name Sibyl constituted an expression of adoration, appreciation and

²³ As Anna Świderkówna notes, “[t]he same list can be found in a Byzantine lexicon called *Suds*, where the Persian [Sibyl] is identified with the Hebrew. Pausanias, who lived in the second century CE and wrote a guide to Greece, lists four, out of which only the Libyan one does not have a name. The others are: Herófila from Marpossos (Pausanias argues that she is also the Sibyl from Eritrea, Samos, and Delphi), Demo from Cumae, and the Hebrew Sabbe, who – he argues – is also called the Babylonian Sibyl by some and the Egyptian by others”, IDEM, *Bogowie zesзли z Olimpu. Bóstwo i mit w greckiej literaturze świata hellenistycznego*, Warszawa 1999, p. 294.

recognition of the talented improviser-prophetess, complementing her image of a Muse. In fact, in literary practice Sibyl would be commonly identified with the Muses. They are used interchangeably in the invocation contained in the aforementioned poem by Woronicz, where the narrator turns towards the “famous oracle of Hesperian countries,”²⁴ sanctified by “church” through “one of the Sarmatian nymphs”²⁵ – Izabela Czartoryska.

Shortly after the first meeting in Paris in 1860 and a kind lyrical comment by “a mortal provoked by Sibyl” there began a slow and abstruse turn in Norwid’s attitude towards Jadwiga Łuszczewska. Already in the lectures about Juliusz Słowacki (1860) it is possible to detect a certain ambiguity of assessment. Although in the fourth lecture Norwid calls Deotyma a “highly distinguished theosophical phenomenon,” he immediately adds that “her Muse is Sibylline, but she has not recognized woman’s service in Christian society [...]” (PWsz VI, 459). In a letter to Deotyma sent in March 1862 he informs her that she “has gone astray” (PWsz IX, 12) in her reading of his dialogue “Rozmowa umarłych” [Conversation of the Dead] whose manuscript or copy she has probably received. In the autumn of 1867 he wrote to Joanna Kuczyńska about an “exquisite rhyme” composed for him by the daughter of a friend, Helena Szuwałoff: “No Grzmisława has ever written the kind of rhyme she did. (Apologies – with the exception of Deotyma, but her rhyme is not really feminine – it’s preachy and homiletic; the other one is feminine)” (PWsz IX, 320). His criticism of Łuszczewska intensified, culminating in *Estetyczne poglądy* [*Aesthetic Views*] (1881), where Norwid sceptically diagnoses the role of women in Polish literature:

The official names recorded in the history of literature, often very precious, introduce more gravity and ink than a *feminine* perspective on various matters!

The good [Elżbieta] Drużbacka smacks a little of goat cheese and calendar, while Deotyma the canonical – of candelabra and sacristy thurible. (PWsz VI, 85)

The work of Deotyma is thus assessed from the perspective of reflections devoted to the participation of the “feminine factor” in literature, and to the awareness of “feminine service,” which ought to be revealed in her works but is not. Norwid was of the opinion that “everything that men do, in social or historical terms, can be matched by women in a feminine manner...” (*Emancypacja kobiet* [The Emancipation of Women]; PWsz VI, 654). He would also draw attention

²⁴ J.P. WORONICZ, *Świątynia Sybilli. Poema historyczne w IV pieśniach*, [no place of publication] 1828, p. 1.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

to the fact that writings by both Drużbacka and Łuszczewska lack the feminine spirit. Interestingly, the attributes of the “tenth Muse” he previously admired began to bother him. The “masculine” character of her writings did not trouble him before. On the contrary – it allowed him to consider the “poetess” as a master of the “knightly word” (PWsz I, 332), as a Sibyl “z męskimi barki” [with manly shoulders] (PWsz I, 331)²⁶ whose works are distinguished by noble simplicity and sublimity. The presence of God in her poems and improvisations, which he used to like, began to appear to him as “canonical” – a manifestation of a religiosity that is superficial, limited, and parochial. Devotional symbols like candelabra and thurible thus became ironic, marking a profound change of attitude towards “Teodata.”

What made Norwid change his mind about her? What decided that he moved from apotheosis to derisive criticism? It seems that one reason could be connected with the unfulfilled expectation – expressed for example in the poem “Zaczepony przez Sybillę śmiertelnik odpowiedział” – regarding how “Miss Jadwiga” was maturing as a poet and becoming “Mrs Jadwiga.”²⁷ Perhaps Norwid decided, like some of the others who followed Deotyma’s career, that she is not developing as an artist. Or perhaps he concluded that despite the passage of time she still exudes maidenly naivety, refusing to undertake “feminine service” in Christian society, while the religiosity expressed in her poetry boils down to skilful juggling of clichéd phrases from religious education. As a result, instead of the expected divine words of truth the audience is covered in smoke from the “sacristy thurible,” and illuminated with candelabras instead of God’s light. The literary and ideological stagnation of Łuszczewska at a certain level of artistic and intellectual development was also noted by Bronisław Białobłocki, who wrote in 1883 for “Przegląd Tygodniowy” as follows:

As for the outer, artistic side of works by D., it can be ascertained with confidence that from the first to the last all are of equal value since there is no progression, nor could there be any. Deotyma appears closed and finished, without any progress in terms of concepts, ideas, imagination or literary technique. Her poem from twenty years ago and one from today are equally finished, harmonious in their coldness, and unmoved, regardless whether it describes minerals or the trembling of the human heart.²⁸

²⁶ The poem “Zaczepony przez Sybillę śmiertelnik odpowiedział.”

²⁷ “A orły, lubo szybują po niebie, / Cię nie-dościga: / Bo będziesz wtedy tym, czym nikt za Ciebie / – Pani... Jadwigo!” (PWsz I, 333).

²⁸ [B. BIAŁOBŁOCKI], *Życie fikcyjne i obrzędowe. (Przyczynek do studium nad Deotymą i kierunkiem naszej literatury)*, cz. 1, “Przegląd Tygodniowy” 1883, no. 16, pp. 194-195.

Regardless of the multitude of existential and theoretical sensations, Deotyma’s intellect shows no trace of gradual development. In all instances it echoes traditional elements, orthodox in terms of faith, as well as morality, science, art, etc., but without any signs of progress, even in her own domain.²⁹

Norwid’s texts demonstrate that his approach to Deotyma was free from the influence of public opinion and stemmed largely from personal observations and impressions. He would defend her whenever she was criticised for attempting to sound erudite, dabbling excessively in philosophy, bigotry, etc., because he expected that talent and hard work could elevate her to the literary Parnassus. Krasieński also predicted this, arguing that if Deotyma’s gift “does not falter due to vanity or burst like a bubble, as is often the case with premature, abnormal products of intelligence, this woman may become famous and a pride of this land.”³⁰ Although her gift was not wasted, “this ideally obedient daughter,” as Weintraub noted, “who boasted that she would marry without hesitation a man chosen for her by her parents, remained a child for her entire lifetime.”³¹ It can be thus concluded that Łuszczewska failed to meet the expectations of her admirers, including Norwid, by being unable to develop and move beyond the horizon she once defined for herself.

Still, the matter may be also regarded differently by asking the question whether Norwid did not create a myth for her by casting her in the role of a Sibyl, or the “tenth Muse,” which she would never really mature to realize, nor was ever really supposed to. His poems and letters not only praised her literary skills, but also presented her in a heavily idealized manner, leading to a conflict between her real persona and the pompous image of an inspired prophetess. Thus, if Norwid’s idea of Deotyma was exaggerated right from the start, it had to be verified, sooner or later, in a confrontation with reality, causing disappointment. From behind the figure of a woman comforter, Samaritan, oracle, and cherished Muse there emerged the human and thus imperfect person who could be, in certain terms, banal, effused, and philistine.

Notably, the cracks on the portrait of Jadwiga Łuszczewska began to appear only after Norwid met her in person. The reason for his disillusionment could consist in the clash between his notion of her, formed in the course of reading her texts, and her actual personality. This would not come as a surprise, because in

²⁹ Ibid., cz. 4, “Przegląd Tygodniowy” 1883, no. 19, p. 232.

³⁰ Z. KRASIŃSKI, *Listy do Augusta Cieszkowskiego*, p. 662.

³¹ W. WEINTRAUB, *Poeta i prorok*, p. 96.

most cases those who read her works valued them higher than her improvisations or personal charisma.³²

Although the poet was slightly disappointed in “Teodata,” he did not turn away from her. She remained close to him and they exchanged letters – he sent her his poems and cared for her fate. If he received no word from her, he would ask friends about her (PWsz IX, 389).³³ In the criticism and ambivalence with which her poetry would meet he discerned a reflection of the experience characteristic for someone who struggles to break through literary discourse, the fame and authority of those now deemed “great”: “the Masters of this century.”³⁴ The fate of Deotyma was, in part, a reflection of his own. Although he did not see any possibility of changing his own status of an alienated, rejected and despised poet – “dark,” exotic, and failing to meet the criteria of the epoch’s literary standards (the lyrical subject in the poem “Rzeczywistość i marzenia” confesses: “Ja może umrę tu – od was daleko [...] / Przeto, co mówię, nie mówię jak liczni... / Lecz może mówię już jak dzisiaj rzadki / Ptak, i sprzedany, i wsadzon do klatki [...]” [Perhaps I shall die here – far away from you [...] / Thus, I do not speak like most do... / Maybe I speak today already like a rare / Bird, sold and put in a cage] (PWsz I, 225))³⁵ – he hoped for a long time that the new young poet, a promising Muse who was supposed to enliven poetry against all odds, would succeed by introducing fresh ideas and values.

³² Krasieński would not spare praise for poems by Łuszczewska, but would not attend any of her performances during his stay in Warsaw. Cf. A. KOWALCZYKOWA, *Warszawa romantyczna*, Warszawa 1987, p. 244. Koźmian, in turn, would call on her, in his own name and that of other admirers of her talent: “We all beg you, as one choir, not to improvise and squander your talent, not to become accustomed to lengthiness and unfinished ideas [...]” A.E. KOŹMIAN, *Listy*, vol. 2, Lwów 1894, p. 147.

³³ Letter from Joanna Kuczyńska, ca. 1 February 1869.

³⁴ Mateusz Chmurski discerned in Norwid’s portrait of Deotyma “the figure of a rejected prophet.” Cf. IDEM, ‘Światła tkliwość i mistyczna logika’. *Symbole Norwida – między obrazem a słowem*, [in:] *Symbol w dziele Cypriana Norwida*, ed. W. Rzońca, Warszawa 2011, p. 270.

³⁵ Edward Kasperski offers an interesting discussion of Norwid’s reaction to being misunderstood and ostracized. In his view, the poet adhered to the principle of “rhetorical and worldview inversion.” “Norwid,” he explains, “reversed the marginalization imposed on him in terms of his writing and in the personal, autobiographical context. He admitted that many people from Polish opinion-making circles deemed him emotionally unstable or conceited, regarding him as a writer who produces irritating and incomprehensible texts. However, contrary to the general opinion, he argued that he was in fact right, assuming that he is himself – as a person labelled as ‘mad’, ‘abnormal’, deviated, etc. – the true and real representative of social, civilizational and historical normalcy, in contrast to the suave yet passive circles that ostracized him for his ‘fierce’ otherness in terms of artistry and worldview.” E. KASPERSKI, *Tropami Norwida. Studia – interpretacje – paralele*, Warszawa 2018, p. 109.

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S u m m a r y

This article attempts to recreate the image of Jadwiga Łuszczewska from the literary works and letters by Cyprian Norwid. The young improviser sparked controversy not only among the critics, but also among the Warsaw socialites in Romantic period. Norwid, however, considered her personality as original, modern and capable of refreshing Polish poetry. In his poems he describes her as “the tenth Muse” and compares her to Sappho, who was called exactly the same name by Plato in recognition of her poetic talent. Moreover, he depicts her in an idealized manner, like a contemporary sibyl who advises the nation on how to proceed in a tragic historical period. Norwid’s enthusiasm waned at the beginning of the 1860s when it became clear that the poetic works by Deotyma were becoming repetitive, constantly revisiting the same motives, ideas and aesthetic means, unable to go beyond the horizon defined at the onset of her career. He realized that behind the female figure he himself ennobled – as comforter, Samaritan, visionary, and statuesque Muse – there is a human being, imperfect and, in some aspects trivial, affected or even philistine.

Keywords: Romanticism; lyric poetry; improvisation; Muse; inspiration; irony

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