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ON THE MULTIPLIED SPECTACLE
IN TYRTEJ–ZA KULISAMI BY CYPRIAN NORWID

In his poetic imagination Norwid often revisits the idea of a world conceived as a whole with cracks appearing on its surface. This vision should not be surprising to any readers of Romantic texts written – the artist would argue – in order to diagnose the contemporary era: “[...] w Epoce, w której jest więcej / Rozłamań – niżli Dokończeń... / [...] w czasie tym, gdy więcej / Jest Roztrzaskań – niżeli Zamknięć” [an Epoch that features more / Disruptions than Accomplishments... / [...] a time when more / Is shattered than concluded]. Norwid’s vision of reality involves ideas developed in the course of double-track reflection on the human and the divine universe, truth and illusion, life and death, earthly reality and spirit world. The cracks on the world’s composition are not regarded as something negative by the poet. On the contrary, the most significant events can occur – as it happens in the first part of *Dziady* [*Forefathers’ Eve*] by Mickiewicz – “midway” (“na drogi połowie”¹): somewhere in between the two realities – one perceived through senses, and the other hidden from them.

Norwid’s dramatic diptych *Tyrtej-Za kulisami* [*Tyrtej-Backstage*] is also two-fold, already in terms of form. The story about a masquerade society that negatively assesses the theatrical debut of Omegitt is unveiled in parallel to the story about the one-eyed Tyrteusz, a prophet chosen by the oracle yet rejected by society. However, these figures are not connected by strict correspondences or developed on the basis of obvious contrasts. Instead, they complement each other in terms of specific meanings.

It is worth to consider *Za kulisami* and *Tyrtej* as two paintings that – according to Norwid – are supposed to represent two theatrical realities. The first one

¹ A. MICKIEWICZ, *Dziady. Widowisko*, [in:] IDEM, *Utwory dramatyczne*, vol. 3, Warszawa 1979, p. 108.

would be theatre in the strict sense – the entire theatrical machinery, the device of theatre-within-theatre, and variously deployed theatrical terminology. The second one would be imagined theatre – a generalized one transported into the sphere of metaphysics. One reservation is necessary at this point: the use of multiple theatrical means in various ways does not guarantee the coherence of the entire concept. Norwid's unfinished dramatic works, whose large parts have never been discovered, allow us only glimpses of fragmented and incomplete passages. This article does not aim to either demonstrate that these works do or do not have the potential to be staged, or to develop the image of Norwid as a theatre devotee, because in fact his knowledge of contemporary theatre was little² and his notions of the backstage were mainly the product of an ordinary viewer's imagination. Still, he could be regarded as an artist who would reflect on both the theatrical character of reality and the realities of theatre. We may then begin to regard Norwid as an author who utilizes these two repertoires of meaning, compiling them and attempting to represent in mutual reflections. He should be thus considered a playwright who constructs a multiplied spectacle, in which aesthetics would harmonize with ideas, becoming a component of "all true drama" (PWsz VI, 191), and who sets the route of his reflection from self-centred theatre, through real stage, to the theatrical macrocosm.

It is worthwhile to compare at this stage the available information on the organization of theatres, which constituted an important aspect of nineteenth-century cultural landscape of Warsaw, along with their unstable economic situation, repertoires, audiences, and spatial forms, with theatre-related tropes found in Nor-

² The poet's experiences with theatre include participation in the cultural life of Warsaw in the 1840s as well as impressions from his many travels around Europe. Norwid probably attended the premiere of Wagner's *Tannhäuser* in Dresden in 1845. He saw *Macbeth* by Giuseppe Verdi in Rome (in 1848), and *Andromaque* in Paris (1852). Further, he saw plays performed by amateur and farmer-market theatres. He also recalls in his writings the names of actors and actresses, including Helena Modrzejewska, Rachela, Edmund Kean and Talma as well as opera singers, e.g. Adelina Patti. Norwid also familiarized himself with theatre better through Józef Komorowski, a Warsaw actor, with whom he stayed in touch after moving to Paris. The 1863 letter to Marian Sokołowski suggests that he had information about the situation of Warsaw theatres (PWsz IX, 126). As for drama criticism, he interpreted two works: *Balladyna* and *Wolodowie*. It is possible that Norwid even composed an opera together with Antoni Kątski (E. NOWICKA, *Cyprian Norwid pisze operę*, [in:] IDEM, *Zapisane w operze*, Poznań 2012, pp. 191-209). However, there can be no doubt that Norwid often went to theatre, although this does not exclude the possibility of using theatre-related terms, developing ideas about acting on the stage, and utilizing universal themes from this area. Norwid would often draw on his theatrical experiences, giving them various meanings. In his late work, as he was searching for a new dramatic form, they became prominent and were variously thematised.

wid's dramatic diptych. Source material greatly limits the scope of research³ – it is for this reason that this article focuses on theatre in the period between the two great uprisings and before, at the same time relying on some testimonies regarding the functioning of Warsaw's theatres under Sergei Mukhanov (i.e. in the years 1868-1880). Norwid could not have had any knowledge about this period, but it is possible to assume – for the purposes of this article – that no major changes were made in the span of several or a dozen or so years, especially ones that would entirely change the face of theatre in comparison with the time when Norwid frequented them. It also lies beyond the scope of this text to settle questions regarding the setting of events described in *Za kulisami*. Discussion shall only cover characteristic elements of theatrical buildings whose specific architecture could have served as a basis for Norwid's idea of the theatrical edifice.

To begin with, one could offer a short characteristic of the audience of Warsaw's theatres, which changed only slightly throughout the nineteenth century, chiefly in terms of numbers. After the November Uprising, the city was deserted and certainly did not facilitate cultural development. Beyond this period, however, there was a certain number of regular theatregoers, who were gradually joined by those Varsovians who aspired to elevate their salon status. In this respect Norwid brilliantly characterised his compatriots, who frequented theatre for a variety of reasons. *Za kulisami* features distinguished ladies and a justiciar, a foreign official and a folk poet, a critic and a journalist, an embassy secretary, a commissar, and even a close-knit group of spies. The tastes of the Warsaw public would alter as well, although for many years the greatest popularity was enjoyed by farces and comedies. What would change, however, was the audience's power to determine what could be presented on the stage. In real Warsaw, the derided and "booted" *Tyrtej* would be among the many plays that the audience willed to stop running for ever. This could befall both beloved and hated playwrights and actors. The public would often deprive artists of the chance to make an appearance and present their works to a wider audience. Norwid's protagonist learns about this the hard way, just like the poet himself, who was unable to stage any of his theatrical works.

There is no need to reconstruct here in detail the functioning of Warsaw's theatres after 1832. It was a time of crisis, when theatres were being closed without any hope for reopening and regaining former glory. Luckily, at that time the position of the president of Teatry Rządowe [National Theatres] was filled by the Tsar's gover-

³ See: B. KRÓL-KACZOROWSKA, *Teatry Warszawy*, Warszawa 1986; E. SZWANKOWSKI, *Teatry Warszawy w latach 1765-1918*, Warszawa 1979; A. WANICKA, *Dramat i komedia Teatrów Warszawskich 1868-1880*, Kraków 2011; for context see: J. PUDELEK, *Warszawski balet romantyczny 1802-1886*, Kraków 1968, A. WYPYCH-GAWROŃSKA, *Warszawski teatr operowy w latach 1832-1880*, Częstochowa 2005.

nor Paskiewicz, who gradually began to meticulously develop cultural institutions. The construction of Teatr Wielki [Grand Theatre] was finished under Józef Rautenstrauch in 1833. Eugeniusz Szwankowski described its layout in the following way:

The theatre lacks a grand *foyer*, while the numerous corridors and corners comprise a true labyrinth. The beautiful halls in the left wing have been designed to host parties and masked balls. The right wing contains offices of the director and administration, and the ground floor in both wings is occupied by shops called “Pod kolumnami” [Under the columns].⁴

This short account presenting the tangle of halls and corridors at Warsaw’s Teatr Wielki offers the first hint for those attempting to interpret Norwid’s masquerade drama. After all, it is possible to imagine Podróżnik and Quidam wandering through the labyrinth of masquerade-ball halls and other rooms, where they suddenly encounter actors forming a living image, or scattered, repeating their memorized parts while waiting to enter the stage.

The year 1833 also saw the establishing of Teatr Rozmaitości [Variety Theatre], its seat located in the ball rooms of Teatr Wielki and its repertoire limited to two types of performances: French melodramas and farces. The director and his group of actors would take up less serious subjects – idyllic or comic ones – and stage farces, epigrams, or vaudevilles. During intermission, guests at this theatre would listen to appropriately light music. Let us recall in this context Norwid’s masquerade from the drama *Za kulisami*. Glückschnell, disappointed with the quality of the tragedy he just saw, announces the programme for the rest of the evening, thanks to which the audience should leave in good spirits: “[...] ruszą do różnych komedyjek, przeplatanych gdzieniegdzie baletem i kupлетem –” [setting off to enjoy spirited comedies, interwoven here and there with ballet and satirical songs –] (DW VI, 77).

The masquerade-ball halls were not the only makeshift home to Warsaw’s Teatr Rozmaitości – actually, the first one was Towarzystwo Dobroczyńności [Charity Society] in Krakowskie Przedmieście. The audience would include Juliusz Słowacki, while Stanisław Wyspiański made it the setting of his *Noc listopadowa*⁵ [November Night]. There is evidence from that period that certain plays were staged in order to “support the children of soldiers.” Aside from theatregoers the place was frequented by agents seeking information about secret plots (in *Za kulisami* an appearance is made by a spy and a conspiracy agent).

After the uprising, when Warsaw’s theatres were closed, the seat of the charitable organization was adapted for other purposes and turned into a place that

⁴ E. SZWANKOWSKI, *Teatry Warszawy w latach 1765-1918*, p. 82.

⁵ B. KRÓL-KACZOROWSKA, *Teatry Warszawy*, p. 75.

hosted various theatrical events (notably, readers of Norwid's behind-the-stage drama witness one of them). At the same time, upstairs rooms would host performances by amateur theatres and rehearsals for Teatr Narodowy and later for Teatr Wielki. It thus seems entirely possible that guests at the ball could repeatedly stumble upon members of theatrical troupes preparing themselves in costume for another performance.⁶

In this context it becomes understandable why in Norwid's drama there appears a member of a theatrical company, who announces a comedy that features dancing. However, there is also mention of a criticised tragedy. The custom of interweaving genres was a typical theatrical practice in nineteenth-century Warsaw – grave dramatic works would be presented alongside less serious ones touching on different topics. Traditionally, more than one play would be staged during a single evening in order to entertain guests until late, possibly even concluding with a masquerade ball. This practice could be also connected with the proximity of two important centres: Teatr Wielki and Teatr Rozmaitości. Because the construction of the former was lengthy, a member of the society's management board proposed that a part of the masquerade-ball hall in Teatr Wielki be separated and made available to Teatr Rozmaitości as its stage. It would be thus entirely possible for Teatr Wielki to be staging a tragedy, while the neighbouring Teatr Rozmaitości was turned into a masquerade ball. This would explain why *Za kulisami* features such a diverse cast and a conflicted audience. At the same time, this complicates questions related to establishing details of the tragedy by Omegitt. Readers may not be certain whether it is not simultaneously staged elsewhere, preventing us from seeing it. Nevertheless, this does not mean that one cannot surrender to the emotional atmosphere created by the staged play.

After 1843, Teatr Rozmaitości moved to a new seat in Wierzbowa street. It is worth to quote here a passage from a press note regarding the furnishing of the new hall, which is cited by Król-Kaczorowska in her monograph:

It is now a beautiful, elegant and convenient salon. Parapets with bas-reliefs featuring frolicking cupids and groups representing the arts – poetry, sculpture, comedy, tragedy, astronomy, architecture, dance, music, and painting – were made by Józef Głowacki, just like the highly praised curtain.⁷

⁶ Ibid., p. 76. Barbara Król-Kaczorowska also suggests another purpose of theatre's rooms: "the room would often host mechanical and optical performances, or puppet theatre." Such miniature, experimental theatres bring to mind the radial and mirror-like allusions dispersed in the drama's *Dedykacja*, which is interpreted later in the article.

⁷ Ibid., p. 96.

Theatre-goers thus had the occasion to admire paintings and bas-reliefs presenting fantastic figures. It seems that this setting perfectly matches the vision captured in Norwid's drama. Personified arts bring associations with *septem artes liberales*, while their statuesque character harmonizes with mythical figures from *Tyrtej* and the half-Varsovian, half-ancient Atalanta from *Dedykacja*. Unfortunately, there can be no certainty regarding the subject matter of Głowacki's paintings on the curtain, though it is possible that they would introduce other contexts, ones well established in culture.

Thanks to locating Teatr Rozmaitości in the building of Teatr Wielki, a strong theatrical centre emerged in Warsaw, becoming a hotbed of the capital's cultural life in the nineteenth century. Interestingly, in this new location Teatr Rozmaitości was almost deliberately temporary, as confirmed by press comments from that time: "the stage and the seats are set up in the grand ball room in such a way that, if need arises, everything can be dismantled in twenty-four hours without damaging anything."⁸ This information helps to imagine the tremendous flexibility of the space that acts as the setting of Norwid's drama. The set design of the spectacle-reality created by the poet emerges and disappears when the time comes for the ball: "naznaczona pora" [the appointed date] announcing *maskaradowy dzień dzisiejszy* [today's masked ball] (DW VI, 80). Readers can thus imagine the following: certain elements of set design remain in the ball room, becoming part of its decoration. As a result – just like in the diptych treated as a whole⁹ – the two contrasting realities come to coexist, elevating the quasi-theatrical reflection to a more general level.

Agnieszka Wanicka, author of a monograph on Warsaw's theatres in the years 1868-1880, also mentions how the stages of Teatr Rozmaitości and Teatr Wielki were situated in relation to each other, separated by masquerade-ball rooms. The former could be entered from two sides: one route going around the auditorium of Teatr Wielki, passing through masquerade-ball rooms and the entire backstage, beside the props room, dressing rooms, and the director's booth; the other go-

⁸ Ibid., p. 112.

⁹ For more information on parallel or disjunctive reading of the dramas by eminent scholars and theatre professionals see: W. HORZYCA, *O inscenizacji 'Za kulisami' Norwida*, "Teatr" 1947, no. 4/5, pp. 65-76; K. BRAUN, *Kulturowy wymiar 'Za kulisami' Cypriana Norwida*, "Tematy i Konteksty" 2013, no. 3, pp. 302-313; J.W. Gomulicki, *Metryki i objaśnienia*, [in:] C. NORWID, *Pisma wszystkie*, vol. 5, Warszawa 1971, pp. 357-431; I. SŁAWIŃSKA, T. MAKOWIECKI, *Za kulisami 'Tyrteja'*, [in:] I. SŁAWIŃSKA, *Reżyserska ręka Norwida*, Kraków 1971, pp. 167-172; G. HALKIEWICZ-SOJAK, *Nawiązane ogniwo. Studia o poezji Cypriana Norwida i jej kontekstach*. Toruń 2010, pp. 47-63.

ing along narrow corridors from the stage of Teatr Wielki to the hall of Teatr Rozmaitości.¹⁰

Keeping this image in mind, one cannot but be reminded of the situation sketched by Norwid. Quidam and Podróżnik, having found themselves somewhere between the three rooms, could meet actors in costume as well as members of the public from either theatre – the figures appearing in various configurations, mixing *serio* and *buffo*. The sense of the supernatural would be further augmented by costumes representing various registers. Moreover, the wandering protagonists, who can access the backstage and certainly know the passages between the rooms, would also pass randomly scattered elements of set design or props, actually peering behind the curtain and unwittingly observing the rhythmic operation of the theatrical machine. In the metaphysical dimension, they are allowed to unmask the puppet-like audience playing a double or even triple role on the stage of *theatrum mundi*.

Norwid's diptych contains at least several indications that suggest this kind of literal and realistic reading based on knowledge about the functioning of artists and audiences in specific buildings. The first one is a lyrical passage from *Dedykacja* [*Dedication*], whose addressee is the city of Warsaw:

[...] Dlatego Tobie, o! Warszawo,
 Niosę dziś księgę mniej złoconą;
 Dotknij jej swoją ręką krwawą,
 Nie dziewczeczko, Ty – nie! – *Matrono!*
 – Syrena herbem twym zwodnicza,
 Lecz ja zmierzyłem Oceany,
 A pamiętałem Cię z oblicza,
 jak Ty, samotny! – zapomniany!...
 [...]
 Przyjm... i chęciami chęci zamień,
 O! Ty, *młodości mej stolico*;
 Z bruku twego rad bym mieć kamień,
 Na którym krew i łza nie świecą!

(DW VI, 22-23)

Two interpretative paths open up here. On the one hand, the drama can be read in the context of Norwid's post-uprising reflections when he was already an émigré for many years. On the other, events from the backstage can turn into a gallery of images and figures from his contemporary Warsaw. As a result, we are situated inside the building (and atmosphere) of Teatr Wielki and Teatr Rozmaitości, War-

¹⁰ A. Wanicka, *Dramat i komedia*, p. 49.

saw's theatrical centre, which the poet would frequent or learn about from others. All of this is overlaid with the perspective of emigration and distance from a city for which he had ambivalent yet strong feelings.

In Norwid's play, figures like Podróżnik, Malcher, Lia, or Glückschnell are not merely phantasmagorical. It suffices to recall the plea for care in a hall full of masks, when Quidam turns to Podróżnik: "Umknij nieco ramienia – – lękam się, ażeby mi nie połamali albumu, w którym życzę sobie mieć coś pióra twojego przed rozstaniem..." [Withdraw your arm – – I fear that they may break the sketchbook in which I would like you to leave something for me before we part] (DW VI, 14). Men also discuss the figures they saw at a distance: a woman singer and "przedsiębiorca aplauzu" [a dealer in applause]. Together with Lia and Emma they all hear applause and booing ("grzmot oklasków... czy słyszysz co ci mówię?") [thunderous applause... can you hear what I'm telling you?]), while Omegitt turns to the masked society, suggesting that he is in a crowd:

Odpowiedzi żądaj od Krytyka, który musi być ową postacią przyobleczoną w szatę z drukowanych papierów uklejoną – oto biegnąc wyprzedza się szelestem... wiele masek na prawo i na lewo, i naprzód pędzi przed nim, jakby się uchroniały od pogoni i razów. (DW VI, 93)

Thanks to the above sketch of the context in which Warsaw's theatres would function it becomes possible to clearly refer these signals of reality to actual reports from nineteenth-century press and letters. On the basis of preserved accounts of sumptuous masquerade balls, reviews of "booed" performances, and descriptions of architectural detail as well as theatrical machinery, one can surmise that comments made by Norwid's protagonists do not have to refer – as one might guess – to the fantastic tragedy provided by the poet in manuscript after the drama *Za kulisami*.

In the introductory scene in *Tyrtej*, after the end of the conversation between two friends, the stage directions read: "Omeg i Malcher uchodzą w stronę lewą, gdy od prawej wstępuje Chór-Ateński, a następnie we dwa półokręgi rozłamuje się" [Omeg and Malcher exit to the left as the Athenian Choir enters from the right, splitting into two semicircles] (DW VI, 29). According to Wilam Horzyca¹¹ this moment becomes a turning point when a vision of the ancient world forms in the minds of those who arrived at the ball. Let us note, however, that a real choir, left and right, enters the stage, contrasting with the laughing masked public, synthetically forming an epode. Surrounded with colourful, weird masks,

¹¹ Cf. *Za kulisami*, Teatr Ziemi Pomorskiej, Toruń, 21 December 1946, adapted and directed by Wilam Horzyca, with set design by Lech Torwid; later: *Za kulisami*, Teatr Narodowy, Warszawa, 14 March 1959, adapted and directed by Wilam Horzyca, with set design by Jadwiga Przeradzka and Aleksander Jędrzejewski.

it must have a particularly severe and realistic look, appearing to be more real than the masked crowd, which would seem artificial in terms of both appearance and intellect. Is it then possible to imagine that the described situation occurs on the stage? The necessity to make room for the actors rather confirms that we are dealing here with a stage performance in the strictest sense. It is neither a figment of the imagination produced by “pan na Omegach” nor a group vision experienced by everyone in the ball room. The arrangement of figures rather suggests that choirs and other figures from antiquity form something like a living painting. At the same time, there can be no doubt that this is a show presented in its full form. After all, the wanderers are found in the backstage or in some theatrical middle-space, where they could meet actors rehearsing their lines. This reading would justify the fragmentariness and disjointed character of episodes from the fantastic tragedy. We would then deal with a series of theatrical frames that could but do not have to form a story about ancient Sparta and Athens. If *Tyrtej* is set in several places, what performance is discussed by people at the ball? What play was written by Lia’s lover? This remains uncertain. The complete failure of the staging is discussed at length, but Norwid denies his readers any full and direct knowledge.

The hypothesis about the kind of theatre – real or imagined – that stages the play by Omegitt can be fruitfully supplemented with knowledge about the customs of nineteenth-century theatregoers. For this purpose, it is useful to reconstruct the course of a theatrical evening at Teatr Rozmaitości. Let us recall an account of another event connected with Offenbach’s opera *Les Contes d’Hoffmann*:

The work by Offenbach [...] consists of five parts – three acts preceded by a Prologue and ending with an Epilogue, which frame the events taking place in a wine bar next to the theatre. Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* is being staged at the theatre, the first act coming to an end. The recollections of “Hoffmann” the poet [...] regarding three women, each of whom used to be the love of his life, help him while he is waiting for his beloved prima donna Stella, who sings as Anna in *Don Giovanni*. The time of spinning the story by the poet from Offenbach’s opera is thus co-extensive with the performance of the second act of Mozart’s masterpiece; the theatregoers gathered in the wine bar during the intermission become intrigued by the protagonist’s announcement of a narrative about his “three loves” and never return to the theatre, choosing instead to stay at the bar. [...] At the same time, when “Hoffmann” reminisces about Olympia, Antonia and Giulietta, *Don Giovanni* is staged at the theatre with the participation of three women – Anna, Elwira and Zerlina – who are real people and emblems of Giovanni’s seductive passion.¹²

The audience thus witness a triple theatrical event. Theatregoers become listeners enjoying the poet’s narrative. The coextensive performances – *Don Giovanni*

¹² E. NOWICKA, *Cyprian Norwid pisze operę*, p. 137.

and Hoffman's narrated internal theatre – supplement each other. The history of three women is visualized in the testimony about the amorous conquests of Don Giovanni. Is it possible then to analyse the mutual influence of these performances? In principle, readers of the drama have no direct access to the performance in the theatre. They are left somewhere besides, or in the backstage, just like the public that arrived there to listen to Mozart's work. However, *Don Giovanni* becomes the context and frame of the poet's narration. It remains uncertain what happens on the stage, but this can be guessed. And although both theatrical adventures occur in reality and independently of each other, their simultaneity is not a coincidence. The accompaniment of Mozart's opera does not interfere with Hoffman's performance on the stage. On the contrary, it creates a system of references and a kind of emotional aura that facilitates grasping the meanings of the less known and non-canonical story. In order to interpret *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* it is not necessary to ascertain whether the story of Don Giovanni is actually seen and heard by the public, or exists merely as a set of cultural notions about the damned reveller and his lovers. The potential proximity of these events itself sketches the necessary context and indicates that it is not necessary to settle whether the story is real or not.

A similar situation can be encountered in Norwid's masquerade drama. Readers cannot claim with certitude that they saw the play by Omegitt. However, we know that nearby – behind the wall, between rooms, somewhere in the backstage – some theatrical stories unveil, providing a colourful background to, or framework of the narration on the stage. They constitute a point of reference for discussions among the masquerade attendees. Just like *Don Giovanni*, *Tyrtej* functions as an easel holding yet another theatrical image. This serves as the context in which Omegitt's play is situated in *Za kulisami*. All of them exist in reality, although not all of them can be seen. The play by the unnamed author takes shape only in his own words and remarks made by the inattentive public. Meanwhile, characters from *Tyrtej* join the backstage meeting, not necessarily staging a fully-fledged performance but only a miniature theatrical event, forming living pictures spread across the ball rooms.

Reflection on the status of events described in the dramas in the context of actual theatrical reality of nineteenth-century Warsaw can be summarized as follows: the phantasmagorical vision is imbued with metaphysical meanings, and the masquerade vortex, which exists beyond time in a vague space, where two worlds collide, can be in fact situated in the particular context of Warsaw. Even if this is confirmed, it would not necessarily mean that the parabolic character of the work is settled – indeed, this would only enrich its metaphorical semantics. By situating the action of the dramas in a real space, Norwid does not strip the presented

events of parabolic potential. This assumption informs the second interpretative proposition, which consists in reading the dramas in such a way as to discern that constitutive, parabolic character of the story.

A metaphysical reading of *Za kulisami* and *Tyrtej* is suggested primarily by passages from *Dedykacja*, which opens with a ray of sunlight that pierces through “szyb brylanty” [diamond-like windows]. Already in the first two lines we encounter two symbols that recur throughout Norwid’s diptych: light and mirror. Rays or flashes appear both in *Tyrtej* and in *Za kulisami* as metaphors of wisdom and knowledge. In his monologue, Omegitt explains it to the masks that consciousness sheds light not only on one aspect – “tę stronę, która najwygodniej bywa przeciwko oku postawioną” [the side that is most conveniently placed in front of the eye] (DW VI, 90) – but on the entire figure. In response, Diogenes mocks him, calling him a lamp and not a human. Lia confides in Emma that “w zawiązywaniu stanowczych węzłów Opatrzność nastroczać zwykła zdarzenia dziwne i oświecające jakoby błyskawicami od stóp do głów całe postacie charakterów” [in tying firm ties Providence would typically use strange events that reveal the entirety of characters, head to toe, as if in a flash of lightning] (DW VI, 80), ascribing a special role to certain events and conversations – ones supposedly allowing one to learn about the true nature of humanity. The flash of a star also accompanies Tyrteusz, who leaves a rock with a flower at the door of his beloved Egeina. The ray that splits, in *Dedykacja*, upon touching a smooth diamond, announces that the national problem shall be filtered through a prism and viewed from many angles. It is possible to identify in the contrary apostrophe devoted to the capital several signs heralding dramatic events.

The phrase “szyb brylanty” corresponds to the theme of the multiplied mirror. Lia turns toward the mirrored wall, although she would prefer to hide from Sofist-off. The mirrored walls of the ball room have symbolic potential. The masquerade evening is a turning point for Lia. She looks into the mirror, from which she can read the truth about herself, i.e. that she is indifferent, possessive, and changes her opinion about possible marriage depending on the failure of the play by her fiancé. This aspect of the furnishing of the rooms where the ball takes place is also mentioned by Krytyk (DW VI, 94), who finds in them the mystery of inspiration. He announces to Omegitt that only irritation can drive him to act critically. Lights and reflections finally return in the masquerade song by Mandolin, who melancholically gazes into the floor of the abandoned room. This setting painfully underscores the petty-mindedness and intellectual atrophy of the theatre’s public.

The elaborate network of mirrored associations brings to mind analogies with the old Polish mirror as the backstage drama turns into a distorting mirror that reflects a reality marked by artificiality. Masks function in the space of social play.

If anyone discovers their true self, it would be only the debuting playwright, who would like to influence people's minds, but depends too much on their opinion.

Two realities are reflected in the ball rooms: the past and the present. Antiquity is represented by the Spartans and the Athenians. Already at this stage we can discern a distorted image reflected in Norwid's mirrors. Parthenians – illegitimate children born in Sparta during the Messenian Wars – exemplify the outcast, the excluded, and the rejected. Impurity of blood does not give them a chance to fully participate in social life: “Bo żaden z nas matki nie miał, i nie miał ojca, i żaden z nas nie miał Ojczyzny!...” [For none of us had a mother or a father, none of us had a Homeland!...] (DW VI, 28). The Athenians are also presented ambiguously. It remains uncertain whether they acknowledged the mission of the one-eyed cripple Tyrtej, or disregarded the choice of the oracle. Tyrteusz himself ironically distances himself from his compatriots, who not long ago would fall silent when he spoke the truth, but now fraternize with him as the chosen one (DW VI, 53).

On the other hand, contemporary reality is presented as merely reflecting the disdainful characteristics of ancient society. The potential to act is contrasted with mental sluggishness, which alludes to the post-uprising situation of the Poles. The predestined poet, who prophesies the Truth – in the masquerade drama this is Omegitt – is brutally rejected. The internally divided society does not trust anyone, and in its hypocrisy wonders if it is safe to buy ice-cream from a spy present at the ball.

The ray is dancing in the room described in *Dedykacja*, falling for a while on “rzeźbione czoło Atalanty” [Atalanta's sculpted forehead]. The appearance of the heroine from Arcadian myths is not a coincidence. A warrior abandoned by her father on Mount Parthenion, the figure of Atalanta reflects the fate of Tyrtej and Omegitt, who were also rejected, though not due to their fault. In the broader perspective, this reference invokes the difficult position of a scorned poet unable to carry out his mission. The valiant Atalanta was supposedly saved from death by the goddess Artemis. The thirsty heroine struck a rock, from which water flowed. *Tyrtej* contains at least several references to water-related themes. The key moment occurs when Laon describes his dedication to the motherland, for which he saved Kleokarp from drowning in the sea. Water not only becomes the symbol of a cleansing sacrifice, but also fits the framework of the mirror-metaphor. It flows in a stream, where one can see their reflection in order to learn the truth about humanity. Light and water also have the power to sustain life – in the diptych, these signs call to life imagined and real worlds.

The crystallized and liquefied ray bounces off of the golden book that “powstać chce z trumny święta” [wishes to rise from its coffin, saintly]. However, it remains unopened. Instead, the author introduces Warsaw to a “księga mniej złocona” [a volume less gilded]. Norwid recalls here a series of evaluative contrasts that

reveal the ambivalent face of the capital.¹³ The most important is related to violets, which also appear as a choir in *Za kulisami*. The crinoline flowers symbolize the impermanence of the hastily constructed “bastard” society, while the violets at the graves herald the fall of non-Christian civilization. This image is contrasted with pomegranate flowers, which represent – in the hands of Tyrtej – truth, beauty, and eternity.

The Warsaw depicted in *Dedykacja* is characterized by Norwid as a flighty girl who is nevertheless full of youthful passion. Supported with prophetic guidance and Christian vision, the Warsaw-Matron earns the chance to reject the burden of suffering and difficult history, on the basis of which she shall build a new reality. Inscribed in the symbolism of light and water, the youthful vitality of Warsaw is joined by the wisdom of the past, giving hope for a triumph of Tyrtean boldness over the masquerade-like falsehood and mental sluggishness.

Norwid’s predilection for complex interweaving of many realities provokes searching for other, non-Polish frameworks of his images. Given the insufficient knowledge about his visits to theatres during his European travels, it is difficult to identify in the diptych elements from foreign stages. It can be argued, however, that Podróżnik-Omegitt-Norwid draws from the unique cultural atmosphere of European capitals, influencing Norwid’s notion of theatre.

In *Białe kwiaty* [*White Flowers*] Norwid included an important testimony regarding his visit to the Apollo theatre in Rome, where he saw Verdi’s *Macbeth*. Kazimierz Braun¹⁴ extracts two facts from this record, which are important for interpreting his dramatic works. The first regards the remark that the artist “udał się do teatru, aby publiczność widzieć” [went to the theatre to see the audience] (DW VII, 66), which perfectly justifies making theatrical masks the characters in *Za kulisami*. Due to his poverty, Norwid would rarely go to the theatre but must have been fascinated by the elegance and sophistication of the audience at the opera in Rome. Exaggerating certain aspects, he developed its poetic reflection in his dramatic work. The second fact explains his fascination with the concept of “play within a play,” which he derived from Shakespeare. The account of the evening in Apollo features the idea to expand the repertoire of meanings offered by this device so as to include reality itself. Norwid must have seen the opera performance in Rome on 15 November 1848. In his account he emphasises the specific sociological phenomenon of being at a theatre. He attempts to transfer events from the stage to the actual theatre box, noting the relation between the story of

¹³ Cf. G. HALKIEWICZ-SOJAK, *Liryczne ramy dramatycznego dyptyku Norwida*, [in:] *Liryka Cypriana Norwida*, ed. P. Chlebowski, Toruń, Lublin 2003, p. 273.

¹⁴ K. BRAUN, *Kulturowy wymiar ‘Za kulisami’ Cypriana Norwida*, “Tematy i Konteksty” 2013, no. 3, p. 303.

a stabbed minister who used to frequent the theatre and the story of Macbeth. The stage spirit of Banquo would supposedly greatly affect the audience's imagination. The performance takes place on the stage, but also unfolds in the boxes, where the murdered minister Rossi is missing, which creates a specific tension between the audience and actors.¹⁵

Bearing in mind all the previous findings about the unstable ontology of the tragedy *Tyrtej* and the play by Omegitt, it becomes necessary to consider the aura of another capital that was very important for Norwid – the nineteenth-century Paris. Let us consider a passage from a study by Siegfried Kracauer about the emotional climate of this city in the times of Offenbach (and Norwid):

The wealth gained by speculation might vanish tomorrow as easily as it had come yesterday; so its possessors revelled in luxury in order at least to enjoy today. And because they desired to ignore both the past and the future, they cast themselves headlong not just into enjoying themselves but into enjoying themselves deliriously. The pattern on which they based their lives was, in fact, that of many of Offenbach's finales. At court there was an extraordinary fashion for *tableaux vivants*, the object of which was to seize and eternalize the fleeting moment; and after the *tableaux vivantes* went over, the company would plunge into the whirl of a masked ball, at which Offenbach's music fulfilled the same function as at the theatre.¹⁶

From this account it is possible to abstract several issues that may be crucial for interpreting Norwid's works. Beginning with the most general, Paris in the nineteenth century was the space of a multi-level game, which would spill from the operetta stage onto social relations, the economy, architecture, and many other areas.¹⁷ In the face of dynamic cultural and economic changes during the Second Empire, the theatrical reality became all-pervasive, even insistent. The shimmering, unending feast spread from theatres to reality. The colourful atmosphere of masquerade is reflected in Norwid's works like in a distorting mirror when it turns out that the inhabitants of Warsaw, Paris or Venice "nie są jeszcze czyści... Są dopiero perfumowani..."¹⁸ [are not clean yet... Only perfumed...] (let us also recall Norwid's reprimanding of non-Christian civilization: "Europa jest to stara wariatka i pijaczka" [Europe is an old madwomen and drunkard]).

Kracauer also foregrounds specific attachment to the current moment, diminishing the value of history and the past. This was rooted in the aforementioned dynamism of changes and the hectic pace of modern life. However, this also

¹⁵ E. Nowicka, *Cyprian Norwid pisze operę*, pp. 191-209.

¹⁶ S. Kraucauer, *Jacques Offenbach and the Paris of His Time*, New York 2002, p. 223.

¹⁷ For information on superficiality and the struggle to keep up appearances in Kracauer and Norwid see: K. TRYBUŚ, *Stary poeta. Studia o Norwidzie*, Poznań 2000, pp. 102-103.

¹⁸ C. NORWID, *Trylogia włoska*, ed. W. Gomulicki, Warszawa 1979, p. 141.

stemmed from the instability of living conditions in Paris.¹⁹ The chance to become wealthy quickly (perhaps suggested by the name of the member of the theatre company – Glücksschnell) by winning at the lottery becomes the dream of many people worried about their future. Norwid analyses one such case also in *Aktor* [*Actor*], where Eliza's private tutor, who is not accustomed to luxury and high society, draws the lucky lottery ticket. Werner wins a fortune, while count Jerzy squanders the family fortune on financial speculation. Events like these make us realize the transient character of human life on earth, where one depends on the whims of life's director, however imagined. This brings to mind the whirling marionettes in the drama *Za kulisami*.

Additionally, Omegitt and Quidam are, in the drama, figures from two temporal orders. On the one hand, their presence at the ball is temporary. They appear out of nowhere, as if "kawiarnia śpiewająca" [the singing café] (DW VI, 13) were only one stop on their long journey, meant to quickly disappear from – *nomen omen* – the theatrical stage, fleeing in panic. One could also surmise, however, that after leaving theatre they would continue their journey, whose destination and direction seem unclear. According to Norwid's idea about the circularity of Greek tragedy²⁰ the wanderers could be ceaselessly repeating their existence – as in a theatre of eternal recurrence – making their appearance first as ancient figures, then embodying Christian sacrifice, and finally taking the role of purveyors of Truth, who confront the duplicitous society.

Finally, what must draw attention is the specificity of what Kracauer called the "fashion for *tableaux vivants*," supposedly rooted in the love of the present and affirmation of life. Living pictures as a para-theatrical form that utilizes the achievements of painting must have appeared to Norwid – a painter and graphic artist – to be particularly full of potential.²¹ If we realize the communal dimension of *tableaux vivants* – which also becomes a cultural show rooted in folklore, carrying

¹⁹ This is a particularly inspiring topic that emerges in many nineteenth-century dramatic works. The German-language Viennese theatre was subjected to the same influences. There are three reasons behind this. During the Napoleonic Wars and later, one particularly popular figure in theatre was that of a stranger who settles on the outskirts of the city, violating the organization of suburban communities. It was a time when new fortunes were made, while generations-old estates were going bankrupt. The market and gambling flourished. The possibility of suddenly enriching yourself or unexpectedly going bankrupt was accordingly allegorized in the form of Fortune.

²⁰ In *Widowiska w ogóle uważane* Norwid argues, recalling the history of ancient tragedy, that "jest to koło, które się samo przeciwnymi końcami obrębu zawiązuje i nowe zeń wywija się" [it is a circle that ties its own opposing edges, producing yet another circle] (PWsz VI, 391).

²¹ For a discussion of Norwid's synthesis of word and image see: A. BOROWIEC, „*Album Orbis*” *Cypriana Norwida jako księga sztukmistrza*, Gdańsk 2016.

huge symbolic and allegorical potential²² – one must conclude that a traveller far from motherland must find this formula of expression very appealing. Does this context also include elements from antiquity incorporated into masquerade scenes in *Za kulisami*? It would mean that we are dealing here with the coexistence of multiple, simultaneously adapted theatrical scenes. Due to their exposition, living images would form something like frames of cultural memory, indicators of an ancient past incorporated into the compositional framework of a realist painting depicting Norwid's times.

To develop an even deeper justification of this concept, it is worthwhile to consult the émigré poet's report from the grand 1867 International Exposition in Paris, although it was written later than the discussed dramatic pieces. Fascinated by the variety of displayed works, he provides his own, typically hyperbolic account in *Podróż po Wystawie Powszechnej [Do Joanny Kuczyńskiej]* [*Journey through International Exhibition*] (PWsz VI, 203-208). Norwid sketches in it a metaphysical vision (in terms of sources) of an elliptical building that contains smaller wholes organized in the same way. This creates obvious associations with Dante's Purgatory, Hell, and Heaven. Inside, he describes, the exhibits are grouped in a single place, grouped in terms of their origin. Our magician thus admires the sunny Mexican temple, soaks in with all his senses the atmosphere of a Chinese tea house, "reads" mysterious Egyptian hieroglyphs, eyes Etruscan handicraft, wanders through Roman catacombs, examines artistic items from the cultures of Portugal, Spain, Brazil, and Sweden, finally stopping at a Tunisian café (PWsz VI, 207). These remarks confirm that Norwid conceptualized art in national formats, each culture having its own specific form. Hence the amassing of images-signs in *Tyrtej-Za kulisami* – ones characteristic for ancient Greece and Sparta, but contributing to the Polish cultural landscape, with all the good and the bad.

These considerations could be also supplemented with one more context from the Parisian *Passages* by Walter Benjamin.²³ All the characters that comprise the polyphonic voice of the author – Omegitt, Podróżnik, Tyrtej – are strangers, wanderers, *flâneurs*. However, it is not *flânerie* that is crucial here. The common denominator of both narratives is their mosaic-like character. Fragments of reality, from which Benjamin assembles his narrative about the ever-developing Paris, correspond to the fragmentary shape of the dramatic diptych that presents the hugely disparate worlds which nevertheless may supplement each other, even

²² For remarks on the contexts of the functioning of living images see: M. PIOTROWSKA, *Narodowe widowiska kulturowe. Uroczystości żałobne i rocznicowe w Wielkopolsce (1815-1914)*, Poznań 2011.

²³ See: K. TRYBUŚ, *Benjamin komentatorem Norwida*, [in:] *Wokół „Pasaży” Waltera Benjamin*, eds. P. Śniedziewski, K. Trybuś, M. Wilczyński, Poznań 2009, pp. 195-204.

without achieving harmony. This leads to the conclusion that regardless of the decision about the temporal scope of several editions of the dramatic pieces or the sequencing of their scenes, they can be read in fragments. It is not necessary to settle these issues if we agree to read these works in terms of images, not events.

Apart from acting onstage, the diptych features other “theatrical” elements: the single volume features a theatrical entourage, a theatrical setting, theatrical poses assumed by those attending the ball, reflection on the reception of theatrical performances, masquerade scenes, performances in *theatrum mundi*, and the internal theatre of Omegitt, whose fate depends on the success of his play. As Sławomir Świontek²⁴ argues, these many theatrical connotations are the proper core of the work and make the two dramatic pieces illuminate each other.

The first and most obvious degree of theatricality is revealed in terms of spatial development. Readers find themselves in the theatre’s building, eavesdropping on the audience’s conversations, and watching the performance with them. Norwid emphasises here the opposition between the stage and the backstage. We learn about the mechanisms of reception: from scathing remarks by the theatre’s director and those attending the ball, through the “booing” and loud comments made by the audience, ending with the tragedy of the play’s author, who suffers defeat both in artistic and personal terms. However, one can have an entirely different impression than in the traditional model of such comparisons, where the stage is the space of play. Generally, the classic version of this strategy involves meticulous development and consistent upholding of theatrical illusion, which constructs an artificial world that only purports to be real. Peeking backstage allows one to deconstruct the theatrical machinery, providing answers to questions regarding the theatre’s audience and the creators of the performance. Norwid offers a different evaluation of the stage and the backstage. Despite the loftiness of construction and the historically distant setting, the scenic reality appears to be free of falsehood, and close to purity or truth. The proper performance in fact plays out during the masquerade ball when the play’s author is caught in a web of intrigue. False tones, theatrical gestures, masks donned by characters – this sphere is characterized by Norwid in his drama as foregrounding duplicity and games of appearances.

Further theatrical associations refer to the masquerade society. Roles played by protagonists have a triple character. The first role is social, necessitated by the circumstances of meeting people from various spheres – from journalist and clerk, through poet and critic, to ambassador or famous French author. Special care for observing proprieties can be noticed in the behaviour of Emma and Lia as well as in the accommodating Glückschnell. However, proprieties are completely ig-

²⁴ S. ŚWIONTEK, *Norwidowski teatr świata*, Łódź 1983, p. 106.

nored by Omegitt, whose character is constructed on the basis of topoi of traveller, artist and lover – all three informally relieving him of the necessity to keep up appearances in contacts with other people. The second corresponds to the masks worn by figures trying to adapt to their appearances with various effect. Finally, the third role of dramatic figures emerges – the one played on *scena vitae*. It is difficult to conceal the ineptitude with which they are trying to emancipate from the role of ruthlessly animated puppets. It is Lia who seems to be most like a doll; her literary provenance could be Shakespeare's Ophelia. Her only aspiration is to live a wealthy and peaceful life besides a generally respected husband. When it turns out that the candidate does not meet these demands, Lia's heart immediately turns cold and she engages with Sofistoff. She may feel that she is independent and controls her fate, but in fact she only realizes a rather obvious script.

Real and imagined theatre jointly become the stage of events in both dramatic works by Norwid. Theatrical gestures and dialogues, the theatrical setting, mixing lyricism with drama as well as theatrical metaphors of human life, contribute to a multi-dimensional narrative, supplementing all meanings contained in these pieces. Their task is primarily to transpose the literal character of events to a general reflection on life as theatre. However, thanks to such devices Norwid also emphasises the fictitious character of the realities presented in these texts. This is so striking that artificiality can be actually the first thing that comes to the minds of those reading *Tyrtej-Za kulisami*. Hypotheses regarding the genesis of certain events, particularly in relation to their probable setting, were not supposed to lay any claim to authenticity. The aim of this argument is rather to demonstrate that both types of reading – the realistic and the visionary – can be utilized in this context, and that Norwid's theatre does not seem to rely on "something" happening on the stage in order to set in motion a multiplicity of metaphorical meanings.

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ABSTRACT

The main object of analysis in this article is the doubly understood category of theatricality, which organizes Norwid's reflections in the dramatic diptych titled *Tyrtej–Za kulisami*, and to demonstrate the influence of Norwid's experiences with theatre on the development of the category of theatricality in these dramatic works. The poet recorded his remarks about theatre in critical writings and art. This article proposes two ways of reading his plays. The first assumes that the described events are realistically motivated because they take place in the space of nineteenth-century theatres in Warsaw and other European countries. The second involves interpreting the metaphorical and parabolic senses in the diptych, with special emphasis on passages from *Dedykacja*.

Keywords: Cyprian Norwid; *Tyrtej*; *Za kulisami*; theatricality; theatrum mundi

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