

Brzozowski as Precursor to Contemporary Studies on Cyprian Norwid's Legacy

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Norwid as a Commentator on Brzozowski

Cyprian Norwid died when Brzozowski was five years old. I do not intend to compare them, as the scopes of their influence vary. Norwid's poetic achievements determine, or will determine, the direction of modern Polish poetry. However, both of them have been perceived as "opaque," some hold them up as saintly while others deem them monsters. And neither has received a full edition of their works in Poland.¹

The foregoing quotation is from Czesław Miłosz's 1962 book *Człowiek wśród skorpionów* (Man among Scorpions). In addition to the lack of recognition that both writers experienced, Miłosz compares the histories of Brzozowski and Norwid and he recognizes that Brzozowski follows a parallel "line of fate"² as the earlier Norwid in both his life and legacy. The two are not only similar insofar as they experienced rejection and faced near oblivion in the history of literature and Polish culture; Norwid, whose name appears eleven times in Miłosz's reflections, is in fact ubiquitous to Miłosz's reading of Brzozowski's thought and intellectual development. He is also silently present in Miłosz's poetry and it was

1 Czesław Miłosz, *Człowiek wśród skorpionów. Studium o Stanisławie Brzozowskim* [Man among scorpions: A study on Stanisław Brzozowski] (Kraków: Znak, 2000), 72.

2 Czesław Miłosz, "A Controversial Polish Writer: Stanisław Brzozowski," *California Slavic Studies* II (1963): 55.

him who prompted the relevant poetic tropes that allowed the three writers—Norwid, Brzozowski, and Miłosz—to transcend the “damned formulas.”³

Both Brzozowski and Norwid are mainly concerned with the role and meaning of history in molding humanity, or in the shaping of “historical maturity”⁴—this is why Norwid is constantly present in Brzozowski’s discussion of Giambattista Vico and John Henry Newman. This parallel is important in the lives and legacies of both writers as they both represent the vast stratum of destitute Polish nobility and by this the emergence of the post-noble intelligentsia. Earlier, such a sociological explanation of affiliation, or non-affiliation, would have seemed somewhat suspicious to me as it encourages us to find a cause and describe the unexplainable or illogical; the emergence of such genius does not need to be explained. To recall the category once described by Leszek Kołakowski, a great poet just like a “great philosopher”⁵ creates a new epoch or falls outside of it at the same time—they transcend their own epoch. Though both came from nobility, Norwid and Brzozowski contested the customs of their class for its excessive glorification of ritual over reason. Nevertheless, the source that allowed them to constantly confront their contemporaries and developments in contemporary Polish culture can be seen in their sense of mission, which can only be explained by their noble ethos. A comparable sublimation of the chivalrous sense of honor and duty occurs in the works of Joseph Conrad because the behavior of his characters retains a shade of heroism and preserves a memory of obsolete customs.⁶

- 3 Cyprian Norwid, “Klaskaniem mając obrzękle prawice...” [Their hands swollen with applause], in *Pisma wszystkie*, ed. Juliusz W. Gomulicki, vol. 2 (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1971), 16.
- 4 See Eliza Kącka, “‘Ten, co od sumienia historii się oderwał, dziczeje na wyspie oddalonej’. Dojrzałość dziejowa w myśli Stanisława Brzozowskiego i Cypriana Kamila Norwida” [“He who distracts himself from history is decivilized on a faraway island”: historical maturity in Stanisław Brzozowski’s and Cyprian Kamil Norwid’s thought], in *Konstelacje Stanisława Brzozowskiego*, ed. Urszula Kowalczuk et al. (Warszawa: Narodowe Centrum Kultury, 2012); for the Brzozowski and Norwid parallel in a wider perspective, see, Eliza Kącka, *Stanisław Brzozowski wobec Cypriana Norwida* [Stanisław Brzozowski and Cyprian Norwid], (Warszawa: Nakł. Wydziału Polonistyki Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2012).
- 5 Leszek Kołakowski, “*Wielki filozof* jako kategoria historyczna” [*The great philosopher* as a historical category], in *Pochwała niekonsekwencji* [In praise of inconsequence] ed. Zbigniew Mentzel, vol. 1 (Warszawa: Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza, 1989).
- 6 For Brzozowski’s remark on *Lord Jim*, see *Pamiętnik* [Diary], 179: “Znaczenie *Lorda Jima*. Zabija go utrata własnego szacunku, poczucia własnej godności. Od tej chwili

In the case of Norwid and Brzozowski, the old values of the knightly ethos reflect a model of personal endeavor and the productive effort of an individual striving to attain a sense of authentic humanity.⁷

The chivalric ethos in this manner does not refer so much to the values that are beyond the individual, but to those that are continuously being created by a person so that it is a process that enables one's continuous growth. In Norwid and Brzozowski, this leads to an engagement with history and the world as a whole, which, as related to the chivalric ethos, remains a crucial source of the sublime for both authors.⁸ Additionally, this legacy simultaneously reveals an

ginie dla niego cały olbrzymi świat, który materialnie go otacza, w którym bierze on udział. Problem przybiera tu postać bardziej skomplikowaną, nowoczesną, wskutek tego, że ten świat materialny azjatycko-tropikalny jest niewspółmierny z naszą etyką i wobec tego nasza etyka, nasze sumienie, bezwzględne nakazy stanowiące samą istotę naszej osobowości są tylko postulatem, czymś względnym, przypadkiem, który walczy dopiero o swoje istnienie” (The importance of *Lord Jim*. He is oppressed by the loss of self-esteem and of the feeling of his own dignity. From this moment on, the whole world that physically surrounds him, in which he participates, is vanishing for him. Here the problem acquires a more complicated, a more modern character, since this physical, tropical, Asian world is incommensurable with our ethics, and therefore our ethics, our conscience, the reckless commands of which the core of our personality consists are only a postulate, something relative, accidental, only just fighting for its existence).

7 See the comments on the role and meaning of Norwid's chivalric ethos in reference to the observations of Maria Ossowska on knightly ethos in Zofia Dambek, *Cyprian Norwid a tradycje szlacheckie* [Cyprian Norwid and the traditions of the nobility] (Poznań: Wydawn. Naukowe im. Adama Mickiewicza, 2012), 152.

8 See the reflections on “catastrophist discourse” in: Jens Herlth, “Epickość życia nowoczesnego. Obrazowość estetyczna i wzorce postępowania katastrofizmu polskiego” [The epic strain in modern life: on the historical imaginary and models of conduct in Polish catastrophism], in *Katastrofizm polski w XIX i XX wieku: idee, obrazy, konsekwencje*, ed. Jerzy Fiećko, Jens Herlth, and Krzysztof Trybuś (Poznań: Wydawnictwo “Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne”, 2014), 267: “In Brzozowski's heroic conception of history, idyllic silence is contrasted with the ‘epic’ character of modern life, where the constant threat of catastrophe may ensure the existence of values. Catastrophism is an answer to the comprehension of modernity as the grand epic of a lone man being put to the test. Facial contours in conditions of modernity are recognizable and recordable only through struggle—this is the fundamental axiom of catastrophism. Therefore, its tendency to decisionism and the exacerbation of conflict, [...] its regular allusions to the world of chivalric romance, and consequently its ‘washbuckler’ spirit.”

emerging doubt in Romanticism concerning the possibility of continuing an old way of thinking, writing, and living. Hence, the continuous presence of this possibility is expressed in the contrast of the principles of chivalry and those of the landholding class as well as in the rejection of the ahistorical mentality of a rural idyll. The preference, then, for choosing such compositional forms enables an ongoing polemic that favors a foregrounded discourse associated with the expression of a subject, which then ensures the uncomplicated transition between different themes and how they are expressed. It can be assumed that Norwid's "fragmentary means of expression"⁹ and the similar method of building a discourse of literary criticism in Brzozowski's works, as characterized by Michał Głowiński as a "great parataxis,"¹⁰ leads to analogous results:

1. the characteristic pansemiotism—the searching for meaning that covers everything being said and everything has a meaning;
2. the person who is speaking is an interpreter of his own thoughts, life, and fate—he is commenting on the world that he is in order to fulfill his own ethos, which mainly leads to understanding and recognizing one's own self in humanity;
3. the work of a hermeneut is always unfinished and unready—thought, word, and pen are in constant flux.

Brzozowski and Norwid share a common heritage in identifying with the chivalric spirit, which demonstrates how Brzozowski is profoundly indebted to Norwid beyond mere literary criticism. Brzozowski identifies with Norwid through his own reflections concerning the writer's as well as literature's role in society and one's own personal life. Therefore, Brzozowski could recognize himself and his own line of fate through Norwid's works.

Zenon Przesmycki worked on Norwid's forgotten poems in the reading room of a Viennese library in 1897 and also brought Polish readers' attention to Norwid's volume *Poezje* (Poems) from 1862. Apart from "Garstka piasku" (A Handful of Sand), which is the source of the motto for Brzozowski's *Idee* (Ideas), the volume also includes "Malarz z konieczności" (A Painter by Necessity), "John Brown," "Do Emira Abdel-Kadera w Damaszku" (To Emir Abdel-

9 Cyprian Norwid, "Letter to Maria Trębicka (January 2–3, 1846)," in *Pisma wszystkie*, ed. Juliusz W. Gomulicki, vol. 8 (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1971), 26.

10 Michał Głowiński, "Wielka parataksa. O budowie dyskursu w *Legendzie Młodej Polski* Stanisława Brzozowskiego" [The great parataxis: on the construction of discourse in *The Legend of Modern Poland*], *Pamiętnik Literacki* 4 (1991).

Kader in Damascus), “Człowiek” (Man); the longer pieces *Pięć zarysów* (Five Drafts) and *Rozmowa umarłych* (Conversation of the Dead); the novellas “Bran-soletka” (Bracelet) and “Cywilizacja” (Civilization); the tragedy *Krakus*; the poem *Epimenides*; and Norwid’s most extensive epic work, *Quidam*. Przesmycki recognized that *Quidam* was crucial for Norwid’s growth as it summarized his poetic works linked to the Romantic era and initiated the period when he wrote *Vade mecum*. Considered as a deconstruction of the romantic epic, *Quidam* recognizes an opportunity for the creation of post-chivalric heroism in literature.

Quidam is the main character of the poem while he also serves as Norwid’s literary double. He is a philosopher of pre-Slavic origins who tries to prove that European civilization is rooted in “Israeli, Greek, and Roman knowledge.”¹¹ *Quidam*’s death at the age of thirty-three presents a martyrological dimension of heroism at the dawn of a new era to which his death is the most important testimony. Simultaneously, *Quidam*’s death is like a theatrical curtain that unveils a blank space in Rome’s historical memory. His death does not save the memory of the hero who came from far away to the capital of European civilization. *Quidam*’s broken line of fate reads almost as if Brzozowski’s philosophical and critical works had been transformed into a poem and Brzozowski’s method of commenting on the works of other writers were used—with the language of the poem being a part of the language of the commentary.

Quidam then discusses the possibility of bringing Christianity back into history, or of rediscovering it in “the middle of time,” while also conceiving history through Vico’s idea of its path as a spiral:

Pomiędzy świtem a nocy zniknięciem
 Płomienne blaski różowe z mrokami
 Walczą, jak Cnota z *świata – tego Księciem* –
 Mgławę, lecz ufne, choć wciąż je coś mami.
 Pomiędzy świtem a nocą jest chwila,
 Gdy hoże łuny z czarnymi krepami
 Błądzą, aż bystry promień je przesila.
 Ostatnia gwiazda wtedy w niebo tonie,
 A słońce rude swe wynosi skronie –
 I periodyczna pamiątka *stworzenia*
 Wciąż o *Pańskiego* kreśli się skinienia.¹²

11 Cyprian Norwid, *Quidam*, in *Pisma wszystkie*, ed. Juliusz W. Gomulicki, vol. 3 (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1971), 80.

12 *Ibid.*, 89.

Between dawn and night's disappearance
Pink flames gleam in the dark
fighting like Virtue with the Prince of this world—
Misty, but hopeful, yet constantly deluded.
Between the light and the night there is a moment,
When comely glows along with black crape,
roving until a bright ray causes its climax.
Then, the last star into the sky will sink,
and the red sun will lift its brow—
And this repeating memento of creation
Is still being drawn by a nod of God's head.

The symbolism in *Quidam* refers to the creation myth in Genesis and foreshadows the eternal conflict between good and evil and the world's spiritual transformation—one that is experienced individually through acts of spiritual labor. Conceived as a Christian epic that alludes to the Parable of the Mustard Seed, the poem is a discourse with Adam Mickiewicz's messianic projects of rebuilding the world and Juliusz Słowacki's revolutionary theory of progress.¹³ *Quidam*'s death takes place in an atmosphere of chaos, which recalls Kierkegaard's split between the eternal and temporal.¹⁴ The irony of his death shows the fragments of a dispersed being belonging to an existing whole; and, conditioning the perception of the status quo, it also gives the reader the point of view of a hermeneut. Such a solution remains in accordance with the traditional allegorical exegesis of the Bible in which irony is derived from allegory; it allows us to translate the meaning of the words of Revelation, but unlike an allegory, it operates so that the truth "is exposed through the negation of the written word."¹⁵ In

13 For a broader perspective see: Krzysztof Trybuś, *Epopeja w twórczości Norwida* [The epic in Norwid's works] (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1993).

14 Stefan Kolaczowski writes about Kierkegaard's thoughts on irony which were closer to Norwid than Schlegel (the dominating view in Romanticism) in the classic study "Ironia Norwida" [Norwid's irony], *Droga* 11 (1933). He highlights the role of prophetic characters—such as Sokrates in Kierkegaard's *On the Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates* (1841)—who, on the threshold of a new era, refer to irony in their statements by denying the ideas of the old world.

15 Włodzimierz Szturc, *Ironia romantyczna: pojęcie, granice i poetyka* [Romantic irony: concept, limits, and poetics] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1992), 58. By describing the role of allegory and irony in an allegorical reading of the Bible, Szturc pays attention to the rhetorical tradition of Quintilian, which for Isidore of Seville, Julian of Toledo, and Saint Bede was the object of reference.

his poetry, Norwid demonstrates the limitations of being through irony, which constructs the world and shapes his characters; and, consequently, it explores the chivalric tradition of heroism through the concept of Christ the Logos.

To read *Quidam* as a translation of Brzozowski's worldview into poetic language is obviously a stretch, however, the fact that we find the structures and contents of Brzozowski's critical thoughts in Norwid does not conflict with a strict chronological view on literary history. This can be seen in Brzozowski's study *Filozofia romantyzmu polskiego* (The Philosophy of Polish Romanticism). The view of history during the moment of the encounter between classical antiquity and Christianity would seem familiar to anyone reading *Quidam*. This entire somewhat archaeological fragment of Brzozowski's reflections on the theme concerning the formation of early Christianity could provide philosophical insight into Norwid's poem and the exegesis of the "Parable of the Mustard Seed":

Kościół jest niewzruszony, bo jest oparty na Słowie, ale dla człowieka Kościół ma się rozrastać, bo rozrastać się ma w człowieku samo Słowo, bo to jest żywot owego ziarna gorczycznego, które cieniem swym ma okryć ziemię.¹⁶

The Church is imperturbable since it is based on the Word, and for man the Church has to grow since the Word itself has to grow in man, since it is the life of this mustard seed that has to cover the earth with its shadow.

Brzozowski, just like Norwid, brings his own reflections on Christianity back to the origins of the Church's community, to the time of its birth, and he rebuilds its foundations anew.

Brzozowski as a Commentator on Norwid

There has been little criticism linking Norwid and Brzozowski, Norwid is rarely mentioned in the reception of Brzozowski's works, and he is not often cited as a source of inspiration for Brzozowski. What is more, Brzozowski's observations concerning Norwid's thoughts and style have not been recognized as a crucial reference for studies on Norwid. The comparative analysis of Norwid's and Brzozowski's works, initiated by Rafał Marcelli Blüth, was later continued by Miłosz. That work has not been continued in more recent research, although an interpretation of Norwid through Brzozowski would be a significant contribution

16 Stanisław Brzozowski, "Filozofia romantyzmu polskiego" [The philosophy of Polish Romanticism], in *Kultura i życie*, 382. Traces of the reading of *Quidam* in the period of Young Poland may be found in the works of Cezary Jellenta and Tomasz Miciński.

to Norwid studies. One of the reasons for Brzozowski's critical exclusion remains his characteristic style of reading Norwid as being subordinate to Brzozowski's own philosophical thought—Maria Janion describes this as the “holy book of Romanticism's style of exegesis.”¹⁷

On the other hand, Norwid is regularly cited and usually appears in the philosophical and cultural research frame of reference in studies on Brzozowski. Norwid has been used to clarify or more frequently illustrate the meaning of Brzozowski's poetry, which is an advantage for our knowledge of Brzozowski, though it is less useful for understanding Norwid as a poet. In this context, it is worth mentioning Wiesław Rzońca's important book *Norwid a romantyzm polski* (Norwid and Polish Romanticism) precisely because he does *not* mention Brzozowski,¹⁸ even though he undoubtedly deserves credit for returning Norwid to Romanticism—the main outline of Brzozowski's dispute with Przesmycki touched on this particular issue. Brzozowski saw Norwid both as a rejuvenator of Romanticism and as its critic and successor. Long before the more recent debates over the poet's placement in the history of literature, Brzozowski not only opposed himself to Young Poland's usurpation of Norwid, but also pointed to the constant relevance and future significance of the latter's poetry.

What is astonishing even today is the completeness in Brzozowski's recognition of the ideological dimensions of Norwid's works. He acknowledges the pivotal role of history and religion as he surveys Norwid's poetry by going far beyond the discussion of poetic language. His hermeneutic approach to Norwid has its complement in a processual evaluation of Norwid's epoch in *Filozofia romantyzmu polskiego*. Its importance is apparent in the following quote because of the order in which the poets are mentioned—Słowacki after Mickiewicz and, instead of Krasiński who is usually present in the history revealing the formation of the myth of the Three Bards of Polish Romanticism,¹⁹ Norwid:

17 Maria Janion, “Badania nad romantyzmem polskim” [Studies on Polish Romanticism] in *Rozwój wiedzy o literaturze po 1918 roku*, ed., introduction Janusz Maciejewski (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1986), 119.

18 Wiesław Rzońca, *Norwid a romantyzm polski* (Warszawa: Wydział Polonistyki Uniw. Warszawskiego, 2005). Rzońca seems to prefer Cezary Jellenta over Brzozowski, as far as the reception of Norwid in the period of Young Poland is concerned. *Ibid.*, 203.

19 See Henryk Markiewicz, “Rodowód i losy mitu trzech wieszczów” [On the genesis and the fate of the myth of the three bards], in *Świadomość literatury. Rozprawy i szkice* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1985), 217f. The author notices that Brzozowski's criticism of Krasiński is enhanced in *Legenda Młodej Polski*.

W Mickiewiczu, Słowackim, Norwidzie odsłania się właśnie treść romantyzmu polskiego i żyje ona bezpośrednio w duszy ich, i oni sami życiem swoim, całą nieprzymuszoną swego tworzenia dają świadectwo. W Cieszkowskim i Krasińskim znajdujemy bardziej zewnętrzną świadomość romantyzmu naszego i jego zdobyczy.²⁰

Through Mickiewicz, Słowacki, and Norwid, the essence of Polish Romanticism is revealed and it unequivocally lives in their souls; they themselves testify through the story of their lives, through the unconstrainedness of their creation. In Cieszkowski and Krasiński we find a more external consciousness of our Romanticism and its achievements.

Perceiving the period of Romanticism mainly as the domain of Mickiewicz, Słowacki, and Norwid, Brzozowski indicates that they create its substance, formed through time and crowned and enclosed in the works of Norwid:

Norwid to otchłań światła, zbyt niezmacona, by już nawet wybuchem radości być miała; jest to jakieś zatopienie się światłości w sobie: niewzruszoność i cisza.

I znowu Norwid jest wielką rękojmią. Bo romantyzm polski byłby czymś nieskończonym, jak gdyby nie zamkniętym i niedojrzałym, gdyby nie było w nim tej ciszy i tego spokoju.²¹

Norwid contains an abundance of light, too undiluted as to be even an outbreak of joy; this is an immersion of lightness in and by itself: imperturbability and quietness.

And then again Norwid is a great guarantee because Polish Romanticism would be incomplete, as if it were not concluded and not mature, were it not for his quietness and this tranquility.

The dispute over Norwid's status in the history of Polish literature seems to be never-ending. As in Brzozowski's time, there are constant reevaluations of Norwid's poetry that not only stem from his ingenuity but also from the progression of literature generally, because, to aptly describe it, every age desires its own Norwid. Obviously, the ever-evolving status of Norwid in contemporary research is also determined by literary history itself. Brzozowski's interpretation of Norwid as a part of Romanticism is not the result of an excessively strict categorization of the period, as making it so would ultimately cut off Norwid's influence from Brzozowski and his contemporaries as well as later literature, thus changing the history of Polish poetry. Unquestionably, Brzozowski considers Norwid's works a result of the buildup of contradictions and internal tensions in

20 Brzozowski, "Filozofia romantyzmu polskiego," 397f.

21 Ibid., 397.

nineteenth-century literature, although he also secures a special place for those works which cannot be described using traditional notions of literary history, just as Polish Romanticism cannot be described with them. Brzozowski states,

Bo romantyzm nasz to nie szkoła literacka, nie kierunek artystyczny, nie coś przypadkowo powstałego i powierzchownego, lecz objawienie prawdy. Nie jest to konstrukcja umysłowa ani wizja poetycka – lecz prawda życia przez Słowo prześwieconego.²²

Our Romanticism is not a literary school or an artistic direction and it has nothing superficial that occurs accidentally, but it is a revelation of truth. It is not a rational construction or a poetic vision, but the truth of a life that was illuminated by the Word.

Regardless of the fact that Brzozowski's opinions on literary history are explainable in the context of his ideological assumptions of an aesthetic utopia,²³ they are also a result of treating literature and culture as a kind of totality beyond temporal considerations. From this perspective, the current examples that subordinate Norwid to rigidly defined fields of literature may get muddled, yet the obligatory academic discourse has made us accustomed to finding commentary on Norwid in studies concerning either Romanticism or the literature of the second half of the nineteenth century. The need to organize aspects of Norwid's poetry around the logic of an academic argument negates the inspiration emerging from Brzozowski's thought. Yet, what if we attempt to move beyond the pattern of unequivocal assertions while staying within the realm of hypotheses that negotiate the status of the poet? I would like to make a reference to such an attempt by Janusz Maciejewski who shares Brzozowski's point of view. Maciejewski claims that a crucial role in the formation of Norwid's poetry is played by Romanticism and that which exceeds the boundaries of this period:

Miejsce jego [Norwida] nie jest przed, ale obok pozytywizmu, między romantyzmem a modernizmem. Stanowił wariant literatury polskiej tej doby, nie boczny, ale centralny, bardziej może centralny niż sam pozytywizm, szybciej bowiem i dokładniej zbliżający się

22 Ibid., 401.

23 See an elucidation of "idyllic topics" from Brzozowski's considerations, accompanied by a summary of the studies on this subject, in an article by Maciej Gogler, "O myśleniu utopijnym Stanisława Brzozowskiego" [On Stanisław Brzozowski's utopian thought], in *Ostać się wobec chaosu. Prace ofiarowane Profesorowi Tomaszowi Lewandowskiemu*, ed. Radosław Okulicz-Kozaryn and Mateusz Bourkane (Poznań: Wydawn. Naukowe Uniw. im. Adama Mickiewicza, 2013), 135–151.

do możliwości XX wieku: do symbolizmu, eksperymentów awangardowych, nowego klasycyzmu.²⁴

[Norwid's] place is not prior to Positivism, but alongside it, between Romanticism and Modernism. He was a variant of the Polish literature of the times, though not in a secondary position, but a central one, maybe even more essential than Positivism itself since he approached the possibilities of the twentieth century more quickly and more neatly in regards to symbolism, avant-garde experiments, and new classicism.

Therefore, the significance of Norwid appears here in the context of the important role of his poetry in the history of literature. Paradoxically, this is Przesmycki's point of view, but in this particular case, the twentieth-century successors are the explorers of Norwid's poetic originality.

The importance of the studies on the relationship between Norwid and Romanticism may be most fully illustrated through the influence of Zofia Stefanowska's seminal research. Her classic contributions "Norwid – pisarz wieku kupieckiego i przemysłowego" (Norwid: The Writer of a Mercantile and Industrial Century) and "Norwidowski romantyzm" (Norwid's Romanticism) are a general frame of reference for recent Norwid scholarship. They undoubtedly contributed to the broadening of our understanding of the period,²⁵ but does the characteristic of Norwid's poetical individuality as a nineteenth-century writer allow us to understand the universal meaning of his works?

Certainly, these revisionary attempts remain a great opportunity for analyzing Norwid based on Brzozowski's interpretation; additionally, revisionists strive against periodization using Fernand Braudel's concept of *longue durée*. Romanticism as a pivotal tradition of Polish literature, included in it as a component of its contemporaneity, could participate in the co-creation of what modern

24 Janusz Maciejewski, *Cyprian Norwid* (Warszawa: PEN, 1992), 137. For more on this subject, see my article: Krzysztof Trybuś, "Jaki Norwid? (Między diagnozą a postulatem)" [Which Norwid? Between diagnostics and postulation], *Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne* 4 (1997).

25 Stefanowska's essays remain in line with the tendency of Polish Romantic studies, emphasizing the significance of the great creative individual's dialogue and the role of internal antinomies. See more on this issue in: Janion, "Badania nad romantyzmem polskim," 133: "Polish Romanticism, which seemed to be speaking with a single voice, is returning today in shape of a polyphonic universe of the Great Dialogue. The restoration of the natural and internal dialogic character of Romanticism that reveals conversation as its fundamental structure became the highest ambition of Polish research in this tendency."

readings of Norwid as a poet of our times bring in accordance to Brzozowski's claims.

The Presence of the Absent

Recalling Brzozowski's absence in contemporary interpretations of Norwid, it is worth looking at "Testament Cypriana Norwida" (Cyprian Norwid's Testament). Giving his own statement in the form of a "Testament," Brzozowski centers Norwid's message in his works on three principal topics: (1) the notion of labor and its equivalence to creation, (2) attitudes towards Poland and (3) religiousness in Norwid's poetry. As a consequence, most of the critical disputes over Norwid's legacy were later concerned with how to interpret these three topics. They also constitute the common perspective that link the two poets and highlight the affiliation between their works. As Brzozowski states,

Kulturą byłoby dla Norwida tylko to, co byłoby wynikiem własnej i swobodnej twórczości narodów. On, który pojmował jako krzywdę wyrządzoną polskiej sztuce krzywiznę i koszlawość każdej polskiej stodoły, patrzył na tę kwestię bardzo głęboko.

Zresztą w *Promethidionie* wypowiada się on najzupełniej wyraźnie. Mówi on o tym, że jedną z największych klęsk życia kulturalnego jest całkowite odarcie pracy od twórczości [...]. Twórczość jest w stosunku do pracy momentem zwycięstwa, momentem narodzin godności osobistej.²⁶

Culture for Norwid would be only the result of the independent and free creativity of nations. He understood the crookedness and lopsidedness of every Polish barn as a harm done to Polish culture and looked at this issue very deeply.

Besides, it is in *Promethidion* that he expresses himself most clearly. He says that one of the greatest disasters of cultural life is the complete separation of labor from creativity [...]. Relative to labor, creativity is a moment of victory, a moment of the birth of personal dignity.

This comment reflects Brzozowski's own opinions on the topic of labor—a key concept of his philosophy—and the organizing principle in his polemic against contemporary thought: "Niezrozumienie *istoty pracy jest najbardziej chorym punktem myśli nowoczesnej*"²⁷ (The lack of understanding of the essence of labor is the most defective point in modern thought).

26 Stanisław Brzozowski, "Testament Cypriana Norwida," in *Kultura i życie*, 220f.

27 Brzozowski, *Idee*, 332.

The context of Norwid in consideration of Brzozowski's philosophy of labor became an important area of study in the history of ideas, as it situates Norwid's thought within the context of the philosophy of Cieszkowski, Trentowski, and Libelt. This then undoubtedly connects Norwid with his own period and solidifies the status of his works in history—maybe more in the history of philosophy and aesthetics than in that of literature. What is more, Norwid's notion of labor became the cause of ideological simplification and even propagandic manipulation. As a result, passages of *Promethidion*, which were intended to encourage labor, were stripped of their references to biblical tradition and ultimately ended up sounding like newspaper slogans.

The strongest ideologization in the Norwid reception of the interwar and post-war periods covered such notions as the nation, the fatherland (*ojczyzna*), the relationship between Polish emigration and the homeland (*kraj*), and by extension the relationship between Europe and Poland. Brzozowski perceived all these accumulating layers of political influences by mentioning in "Testament Cypriana Norwida" the patriotism of the "all Poles":

Ale patriotyzm wszechpolaków nie ma nic wspólnego z patriotyzmem romantyków i emigrantów naszych – dla nich Polska była ideą, a więc krajem i narodem, który miał się stać wyrazem tego wszystkiego, co człowiek zdoła stworzyć, wydobyć z siebie pięknego i wzniosłego.²⁸

But the all Poles' patriotism has nothing in common with the patriotism of our Romantics and emigrants, for them Poland was an idea, and, hence, a country and a nation that was supposed to become the expression of everything that a man could create and of everything beautiful and sublime he could draw out of himself.

This passage sounds relevant even today; in relation to the reflections on Norwid's works, it indicates the inevitability of the collision between its message and Polish nationalist thought.

The most spectacular testimony to this collision could be Zygmunt Wasilewski's book on Norwid from 1935 in which he compiled his articles on the poet published over several years in the journal *Mysł Narodowa* (National Thought). One influential essay focuses on Norwid's Masurian origin and how it determines the spiritual aspects of his poetry. Wasilewski states that, "the primitiveness of the Masurian spirit was a definite asset of Norwid's poetry."²⁹ Kazimierz

28 Brzozowski, "Testament Cypriana Norwida," 222.

29 Zygmunt Wasilewski, *Norwid* (Warszawa: Skład Główny w Administracji Myśli Narodowej, 1935), 35.

Wyka, disputing Wasilewski's theses in the magazine *Droga* (Path), points to the conceptual consequences of such assumptions by linking the poet's works—favorably characterized in an axiological manner—with national indigeneness.³⁰ According to Wasilewski, Norwid's more than thirty-year Parisian period represents a time of the poet's decline even though such works as *Quidam*, *Vade-mecum*, *Aktor* (Actor), *Tyrtej* (Tyrtaeus), *Kleopatra i Cezar* (Cleopatra and Caesar), and *Pierścień Wielkiej Damy* (The Ring of a Grand Lady) were written during this period. This was thus a time when Norwid became the Norwid who would turn out to be the precursor of contemporary European poetry. However, a reduction of Norwid's universal significance solely to the Polish backwoods is not consistent with Norwid's writings. In the poem "Moja ojczyzna" (My Fatherland), he wrote for instance:

Naród mię żaden nie zbawił, nie stworzył;
Wieżność pamiętam przed wiekiem,
Klucz Dawidowy usta mi otworzył,
Rzym nazwał człkiem.³¹

No nation fashioned or saved me;
I recall eternity's span;
David's key unlocked my lips,
Rome called me a man.

The most revealing aspect of "Testament Cypriana Norwida" is the issue of religiousness:

Ideał swobody, ideał czysto ludzkiej, swobodnej kultury opierał się u Norwida na całym systemacie teologicznym.

Był on jednym z ostatnich chyba ojców kościoła.

Teologia Norwidowska jest ciekawa i godna uwagi w nie mniejszym stopniu niż filozofia Platona np. albo Boehmego [...]

Osamotnienie dziejowe wytworzyło w Norwidzie, i nie tylko w Norwidzie, stan duszy, w którym ideał tak głęboko ludzki, jak powstanie kultury, będącej wyrazem swobody pracy, stwarzającej własne idee i podstawy, przerastającej w twórczość, ukazywał mu się jako

30 Kazimierz Wyka, *Cyprian Norwid. Studia, artykuły, recenzje* [Cyprian Norwid. Studies, articles, reviews] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1989), 217–223; idem, "Zygmunt Wasilewski: *Norwid*," *Droga* 2 (1935): 185f.

31 Norwid, *Pisma wszystkie* [Complete works], vol. 1, 336. See translation by Adam Czerniawski in: Cyprian K. Norwid, *Selected Poems* (London: Anvil Press, 2004), 41.

wynik woli pozaludzkiej, w każdym razie ponadludzkiej mocy. Dla Norwida była wiara w tę nową, na swobodzie pracy opartą Polskę – częścią wiary religijnej.³²

Norwid's ideal of freedom, of a purely human and free culture, was based on a whole theological system.

He was one of the last Church Fathers.

Norwid's theology is worth attention and it is no less interesting than the philosophy of Plato or let's say Boehme [...]

The historical isolation created in Norwid—although not only in Norwid—a state of mind, in which an ideal so profoundly human, like the emergence of a culture, the expression of the freedom of labor, that would create its own ideas and foundation and that would evolve into creativity, seemed to him to be the result of a transhuman, or at least superhuman, force. For Norwid faith in this new Poland through labor was a part of his religious faith.

Both writers have similar ideas when rooting the notion of labor in Christian tradition. Brzozowski perfectly recognizes this integral part of Norwid's legacy in its religious foundations. Calling the poet "one of the last Church Fathers" entails a symbolic meaning, which is not necessarily clear and it does not match the doctrine of contemporary patristics. Unquestionably, just as in present times, the emphasis in such a metaphor is placed on the righteousness of the religious doctrine (*doctrina orthodoxa*), the common acknowledgement of its adherents (*approbatio ecclesiae*) grounded in the sanctity of their lives (*sanctitas vitae*), as well as on recollections of the authority of ancient times, which remains important in this case (*antiquitas*). From early Christianity just after the Apostolic Age up to the beginning of the Middle Ages, but before the schisms of Christianity, the Church Fathers proclaimed that the sources of their faith were rooted in tradition as the central pillar of religious doctrine.

Norwid's religious righteousness is emphasized by Brzozowski in his earlier *Filozofia romantyzmu polskiego* where he distinguishes religious ideas in Norwid from the messianic reflections of other Romantics. Perhaps even today, this hypothesis remains crucial for the significance of Norwid's teaching, as discussed by Stefanowska,

[...] because the Norwid dilemma cannot be limited to the fact that the poet was religious, as some could claim, and thus, keen on reading the world and history in terms of a set of signs created by God. Many Polish Positivists were "privately" religious writers. Norwid is religious in a different way, because it is through Romanticism that he is so. Since

32 Brzozowski, "Testament Cypriana Norwida," 224.

Romantic devoutness is expansive and possessive, it cannot be confined to the private sphere; it conquers every domain of reflection in the world—from politics to the railways, and from the arts to the *faits divers* column. The religiousness that is oriented towards a totally deified vision of the world probably represents the most characteristic feature of Norwid, but we should also add that the poet remains within the boundaries of orthodoxy, his religiousness is not subjected (or it is rarely subjected) to individual transformations. It is more static than the religiousness of the Romantics from the previous generation, which gravitated toward heterodoxy.³³

In many studies, the limits of Norwid's orthodoxy were disputed since his religiousness, just like his works, was always in flux—a fact that is not discussed in Stefanowska. Dealing with the evolution of Norwid's faith, Zofia Trojanowiczowa emphasizes the evident presence of utopian and messianic topics in his works during the revolutionary period of 1848. She claims “such a statement may provoke objections, since the messianic perspective is often called into question by scholars of Norwid's works who are keen on finding fragments that are critical of messianism in his writings.”³⁴

These arguments concerning Norwid's faith, which were formulated many years ago without the slightest mention of Brzozowski (although they are often surprisingly consistent with his discoveries), are returning today in crucial publications on Norwid's works. An example would be *Perspektywiczność sacrum. Studia o Norwidowskim romantyzmie*³⁵ (The Sacred in Perspective: Studies on Norwid's Romanticism) by Arent van Nieuwerkerken, in which Brzozowski is not mentioned neither. Nevertheless, a reader of certain Norwid poems may make use of Brzozowski's remarks on the poet's religiousness, which often give a

33 Zofia Stefanowska, “Norwidowski romantyzm” [Norwid's romanticism], in *Strona romantyków. Studia o Norwidzie* (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniw. Lubelskiego, 1993), 70.

34 See Zofia Trojanowiczowa, “Cypriana Norwida mesjanizm sztuki, czyli o poszukiwaniu *wszchedoskoności*” [Cyprian Norwid's messianism of art, or On the quest for *perfection*], in *Studia Polonistyczne* 14/15 (1986). Broader documentation of this approach may be found in Zofia Trojanowiczowa, *Ostatni spór romantyczny. Cyprian Norwid – Julian Klaczko* [The last romantic controversy. Cyprian Norwid—Julian Klaczko] (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1981). See a polemical review of this book in: Grażyna Halkiewicz-Sojak, “Spór o mesjanizm Norwida” [The dispute on Norwid's messianism], in *Studia Norwidiana* 2 (1984).

35 Arent van Nieuwerkerken, *Perspektywiczność sacrum. Studia o Norwidowskim romantyzmie* (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2007).

more accurate interpretation.³⁶ Stanisław Barańczak once argued that Norwid was like an unseen presence for later Polish poetry—the less the patron's presence is visible, the more it is determinative of his successors.³⁷ Could it then be that the same goes for Brzozowski being a patron of later Norwid scholarship?

Norwid's religiousness in his poetry determined how he was received by Polish audiences. It is worth recalling some instances of this, such as the PRL's use of Norwid in its propaganda, which proclaimed through academic banners that the Polish nation exists as our common obligation, as well as the emphatic reading of Norwid by Karol Wojtyła—the priest and the poet. The Institute for the Study of Cyprian Norwid's Works at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin has constantly and patiently contributed to the recognition of Norwid's poetry; and along with this, the *Colloquia Norwidiana*, a series of conferences organized by Professor Stefan Sawicki and his students, has been a framework for interdisciplinary research among literary scholars, linguists, art historians, philosophers, and religious studies scholars.

The problem of Norwid's religiousness, as described by Stefanowska, often appears in the form of two diametrically differing tendencies. In one, religious meaning is simply eliminated, which seems especially drastic regarding studies concerned with Norwid's values.³⁸ The other tendency is on the contrary a scientific approach that confines Norwid to the illustrator of obvious truths in faith. A large number of articles on Norwid's religiousness do not explain in what it

36 See an example of such a situation in an interesting fragment of parson Antoni Dunajski's reflections, which are somewhat an exception to the rule. They include Brzozowski's classifications of the status of tragedy in the work of Norwid. Antoni Dunajski, *Chrześcijańska interpretacja dziejów w pismach Cypriana Norwida* [A Christian interpretation of history in Cyprian Norwid's works] (Lublin: Redakcja Wydawnictw Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, 1985), 114.

37 Stanisław Barańczak, "Norwid: obecność nieobecnego" [Norwid: the presence of the absent], in *Tablica z Macondo. Osiemnaście prób wytłumaczenia, po co i dlaczego się pisze* (London: Aneks, 1990), 89–105. Cf. also id., "Norwid nie chce podpisać volkslisty" [Norwid does not want to sign the volksliste], in *Przed i po. Szkice o poezji krajowej przelomu lat siedemdziesiątych i osiemdziesiątych* (London: Aneks, 1988).

38 See the critical outline of Edward Kasperski's book, *Świat wartości Norwida* [Norwid's world of values] (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1981), in Andrzej Tyszczyk, *Studia Norwidiana* 4 (1984): 98–104 (he states that, "in a work containing over 350 pages that are fully dedicated to the subject of the poet's axiology, there is almost nothing about the concept of the arts or the human being fundamental for that axiology, and nothing about the original idea of Christianity, which is elementary for the poet's world view.").

differs from the treatment of religion, e.g., in the writings of Henryk Sienkiewicz.

More attention needs to be paid to the context of Catholic modernism, so present in Brzozowski's reading of Norwid. Could there be someone with the courage to ask about such issues as faith and a Catholic worldview in order to return Norvidian literary criticism into the religious sphere of the poet's values? Such audacity is characteristic of Brzozowski, though not for merely stating that religion is "a factor of cultural, historical, and social isolation,"³⁹ but for being a religious thinker and author of the foreword to the works of Cardinal Newman. Have we already exhausted the topic of Norwid's romantic religiousness as described by Stefanowska as his "totally deified vision of the world"?

In fact, Norwid was not the only nineteenth-century writer whom Brzozowski called "Church Father":

Taki np. Lamennais lub nawet Renan, w pierwszych wiekach chrześcijaństwa mogliby być obrońcami i ojcami kościoła. Dogmaty i legendy religijne mogą iść w zapomnienie, lecz dopóki pozostanie szczere i gorące uczucie religijne, dopóty i sama istota religii pozostanie nietknięta, gdyż religia jest "Bogiem odczuty przez serce" – jak mówi Pascal, a Bóg ten odczuwany jest głęboko przez serca tęskniące za Nim w krwawej męce, jaką sprawia im pustka, szerzona naokół przez umysł badawczy i chłodny.⁴⁰

Thus, someone like Lamennais or even Renan could have been defenders and Church Fathers in the first few centuries in the history of Christianity. Religious dogmas and legends can fall into oblivion, but as long as an honest and ardent religious feeling remains, the very essence of religion will remain unaffected because religion is "God felt by the heart," as Pascal states, and this God is felt deeply by the hearts that long for Him in the bloody ordeal that was brought to them by the emptiness which the inquiring and cold mind sows.

Along with Amiel, Towiański, Newman, as well as Blondel and Loisy, there is no doubt that Norwid, too, is an important guide for Brzozowski on his path to the discovery that "every man finds God within his own fate, and not in an abstract, transcendent space in a vertical dimension."⁴¹ Is there any chance in the

39 "[...] czynnikiem izolacji kulturalnej, dziejowej, społecznej [...]." *Legenda Młodej Polski*, 90f.

40 Brzozowski, *Głosy wśród nocy*, 149.

41 Tomasz Lewandowski, "Młodopolski modernizm katolicki" [Young Poland's Catholic modernism], in *Spotkania młodopolskie* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo "Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne", 2005), 43.

studies on Brzozowski's religiousness of a symbolic return to Café Greco—the one from the novel *Ad leones!*, and from Miłosz's poem "Caffè Greco," where Miłosz talks to Jerzy Turowicz about his juvenile reading of Maritain? Will we encounter there the "others," the "[n]oble minded," the "great[s]," "[t]hose who gave testimony to their faith,"⁴² and among many of them Brzozowski and Norwid?

The phenomenon of the presence of the absent described here appears especially in the studies of Norwid's poetic language. Brzozowski, remarking on the poet's style in the famous text "Cyprian Norwid. Próba" (Cyprian Norwid: An Essay), outlines the most significant areas of reflection on Norwid's aesthetics—an aesthetics of silence and the sublime, of fragments and the whole, of memory and oblivion. Initiating his reflection with the statement, "utwory Norwida są jak mowa ruin"⁴³ (Norwid's works are like ruins talking)—he not only indicates the most crucial image and topic of Norwid as a romantic poet, but also discovers the mystery of the Word in the poet:

Thanks to the author of "Próba" and "Testament," two highly important currents of reading Norwid's works in the period of Young Poland may be taken into account. One of them is founded on worship, the other on comprehension. [...] The better understanding of Norwid's works was to serve his own expressive style of understanding, popularizing the mythic style. In both of Brzozowski's critical texts on Norwid, the highest regard and admiration for the forgotten author is plainly noticeable. It may be observed both on the surface of the works, directly explained, and in many parts of *Testament* or in the voice of a critic, expressing himself indirectly, when he talks about his intertextual attitude towards Norwid's language—as in the critical poems from the fourth and the seventh chapter of "Próba."⁴⁴

42 Czesław Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems, 1931–2001* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), 466.

43 Stanisław Brzozowski, "Cyprian Norwid. Próba," [Cyprian Norwid. An Essay], in *Kultura i życie*, 149.

44 Piotr Wierzchosławski, "Norwid odczytywany przez Brzozowskiego: Cyprian Norwid. Próba oraz Testament Cypriana Norwida" [Norwid read by Brzozowski], in *Dwóje mający w sobie osoby i mózgi rozmaite. Studia z dziejów literatury i kultury*, ed. Barbara Sienkiewicz and Barbara Judkowiak (Poznań: Nakom, 1991), 190f. Wierzchosławski is referring to the critical opinion of Kazimierz Wyka who focuses on the classification of Norwid as a "poet of ruins" in Brzozowski's "Próba." In a contemporary perspective it is obvious that the author of *Quidam* did not follow the style that was initiated in *Les Ruines, ou méditations sur les révolutions des empires* by Volney (Wyka accurately indicates the fallacy of this poetic clue), the topic and motif of ruins

It is necessary to add to Wierchosławski's accurate remarks that Brzozowski makes use of intertextuality in his discourse, and he then demonstrates it also as a fundamental feature of Norwid's style as shown by later research.⁴⁵ The specific phenomenology of ruins in "Próba" allows Wierchosławski not only to address Norwid's historicism—"the essence of the ruins is the presence of the ages. Who wakes the ruins, wakes the ages" (ruin istotą jest obecność wieków. Kto ruiny budzi, wieki budzi)⁴⁶—but also to take into consideration the recollections of old words, and hence a special style that places words into a historical setting. Brzozowski argues this when stating, "Słowo Norwida jest jak odpowiedź wieków na pytanie trafunku. Jest jak wieki omszone, poważne i nieprzewidziane"⁴⁷ (Norwid's word is like the ages' answer to the question of coincidence. Just like the ages, it is moss-covered, serious, and unforeseen.) More recent research has classified Norwid's archaic poetics in three ways: (1) as a tool to render the most precise description of his poetic diction; (2) the omnipresent recognition of the theme of old age; (3) the special status of allegory. Each of these points may then be considered as a continuation of the hermeneutic insights of "Próba" which still need to be further discussed in the criticism on Norwid.

In a way, Brzozowski's interpretation of Norwid is similar to Walter Benjamin's use of the ruin allegory in which he discusses the birth of modernity and the subsequent disintegration of cultural discourse. As with Benjamin, Norwid uses allegory as a means of referencing old quotes, creating something from the remains of a vanished culture, and recalling the past as boundless. Brzozowski was one of the first of Norwid's readers to note what would later be termed by

in the works of Norwid are transformed originally and compose his own aesthetics of ruins (also appearing in art works by the poet); see more on that issue, among others, in a survey by Grażyna Królikiewicz, *Terytorium ruin. Ruina jako obraz i temat romantyczny* [The territory of ruins. The ruin as romantic image and topic] (Kraków: Universitas, 1993), 123–133. See also Michał Głowiński, "Intertekstualność w młodopolskiej krytyce literackiej" [Intertextuality in the literary criticism of Young Poland], *Pamiętnik Literacki* 4 (1989).

45 See references to the works of Norwid in the classic essay by Michał Głowiński, "O intertekstualności" [On intertextuality], *Pamiętnik Literacki* 4 (1980). See also, from more recent studies: Krzysztof Trybuś, "Po co Homer. O poematach dygresyjnych Cypriana Norwida" [Why Homer? On Norwid's digressive poems], in *Między tekstami. Intertekstualność jako problem poetyki historycznej*, ed. Jerzy Ziomek, Janusz Sławiński, Michał Głowiński (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1992).

46 Brzozowski, "Cyprian Norwid. Próba," 149

47 Ibid.

Hans-Georg Gadamer the “rehabilitation of allegory.”⁴⁸ Norwid was aiming at a rehabilitation of existence in its ephemeral dimension. In his continuous transcription of reality he evokes old images that acquire the status of cultural archetypes. By emphasizing the extent of antiquity, Brzozowski argues against Young Poland’s interpretation of Norwid; he emphasizes the distance between the writer and French symbolism as it contrasts with Norwid’s use of archaic modes of discourse, the primacy of the theme, and the idea of the historical nature of human existence.⁴⁹

At least two more of Brzozowski’s hermeneutic insights could contribute to finding new ground in Norwid studies, this goes especially for the interpretations concerned with the poet himself and his essence: “[...] zbyt lekkim określeniem jest powiedzieć, że był poetą albo myślicielem ruin, był on duszą ruin. Ruiną był sam we wnętrzu swoim” (It is a bit simplistic to say that he was a poet or thinker of ruins, he was the soul of ruins. He himself was a ruin within).⁵⁰

The other topic that still remains insufficiently developed in Norwid studies is the role and meaning of memory, which is often indicated in “Próba”:

Bo ruiny porasta pleśń: niepamięć o samym sobie. Bo bierze je w posiadanie cisza, co nazbyt ciszą jest, by siebie znała. I by siebie sobie przypomnieć, trzeba coś zwalić; i to się tylko pozna, co się skruszy.

Mową ruin jest tylko zniszczenie. Idąc w perzynę, dochodzą do głosu. I gdy się w nich ozwać coś chce, mówi: „byłem”.⁵¹

Because mold grows on the ruins: an oblivion to itself. Because silence will take possession of it, a silence that is too silent to know itself. And to remember something, one must knock over something; and only that can be recognized that collapses.

Ruins’ talk is only destruction. Crumbling to ashes, they obtain a voice. And when something wants to talk in them, it says: “I was.”

And one more fragment:

48 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. 2nd edition (London, New York: Continuum, 2006), 69.

49 Cf.: Arent van Nieuwerkerken, “O *niewczesności* Norwida, dwóch modernizmach i Miłoszu” [On Norwid’s *timelessness*, two modernisms, and Miłosz], *Teksty Drugie* 6 (1995).

50 Brzozowski, “Cyprian Norwid. Próba,” 151.

51 *Ibid.*, 150.

Ruiny wspominają:

Zniszczenie ożywia w nich pamięć.

Każde słowo, każde stąpienie budzi echo

Krok głupca odbija się w mądrości wieków. Czy nie jest to styl opowiadań czy nowel Norwida?

Ruiny są ironiczne.

Wszystko, co nie dla wieków jest ośmieszająco, kiedy w wieki wchodzi.

Lecz jest ironia dziwna: szydzi spokojem. Jest zbyt mądra, by gniew miała w sobie.

Można rzec, że jest w niej wyrzut: dlaczego przechodniem być chcesz tylko, dlaczego przechodniem? Gościńcą mamy dla wieków, budowały ją wieki: dziecię wieków, czemu chcesz być tułaczem jednej godziny?

Ironii Norwida połysk jest jakby mimowolny: tak szydzić musi zwierciadło, co bohaterów widziało, gdy się odbija w nim błazen.⁵²

Ruins remember:

Destruction revives their memory.

Every word, every step wakes an echo.

The fool's step resounds in the wisdom of the ages. Are they not the style of Norwid's stories or novels?

Ruins are ironic.

Everything that is not predestined for the ages is laughed at when it enters the ages.

But this is a strange irony—it mocks through silence. It is too wise to cherish anger.

One can say that there is a blame in it: why do you only want to be a passerby, why a passerby? We have hospitality for ages, we prepared it for ages: child of the ages, why do you want to be one hour's wanderer?

The shine of Norwid's irony is seemingly involuntary: thus a mirror is mocking when it is reflecting a jester although it saw heroes.

Unlike the issue of Norvidian irony that has been extensively explored in current research, the problem of memory described by Brzozowski as the most crucial feature of the poet's style still awaits a monograph. The role of memory in Norwid's works had been emphasized in Brzozowski's time by Cezary Jellenta who wrote, "The mind of Norwid is like an acquisitive museum, aiming to own all the treasures of ruins and excavations."⁵³

Referring to a distinction established Jan Assmann, we can state that Norwid's poetic imagination constantly moves between biographical memory, which

52 Ibid., 155.

53 Cezary Jellenta, *Cyprian Norwid. Szkic syntezy* [Cyprian Norwid. A synthetic sketch] (Warszawa: E. Wende i Sp., 1909), 98.

records the experiences of its own fate, and collective memory⁵⁴ as the basis of the Polish emigrant community. Figures of memory form this imagination and incorporate images of the past in the poet's presence, which leads to a continuous reconstruction of these images. Reading Norwid may become a reconstruction of different kinds of memory—one of creation referring to the very beginnings of history, another of Rome as a particular memory of place, a memory of allegory that implies the existence of a common range of meanings established in the past, and then a memory of death bringing up images of cessation and commemoration encouraging the self-examination of a waning life.

Can Brzozowski's *Pamiętnik* (Diary) be regarded as an attempt at self-examination in its retention and commemoration of fading thought? Writing about the light discovered by Newman underneath a layer of darkness (and his phrase "*I know, I know*"), did he remember the motto from *Promethidion* memorializing through the promise of a future encounter "on the route of white suns"⁵⁵ the death of the poet's friend? Brzozowski noticed that the light coming out of the bottom of our soul "pozostaje w łączności ze słońcem niegasnącym" (remains in communion with the undying sun). And the last words, linked with this fragment in *Pamiętnik*, refer to memory, "nie zapomnieć, nie utracić z oczu tego *I know, I know*"⁵⁶ (One must not forget, not lose from sight this *I know, I know*).

54 On the distinction of biographical and foundational memory, see: Jan Assmann, *Pamięć kulturowa. Pismo, zapamiętywanie i polityczna tożsamość w cywilizacjach starożytnych* [Cultural memory: scripture, commemoration, and political identity in early high cultures], trans. Anna Kryczyńska-Pham, ed. Robert Traba (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2008), 67. Assmann's reflections on the "culture of memory" (Erinnerungskultur), have inspired my reading of Norwid, in: Krzysztof Trybuś, *Pamięć romantyzmu. Studia nie tylko z przeszłości* [Romantic memory. Studies not only on the past] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2011), 178–221.

55 Cypryan Norwid, *Promethidion*, in *Pisma wszystkie*, ed. Juliusz W. Gomulicki, vol. 3, 425.

56 Brzozowski, *Pamiętnik*, 190.

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