

Gautier, and Anna Ciesielska (Warsaw-Paris, Centre de Civilisation Polonaise de l'université Paris-Sorbonne (Paris IV), 2005), pp. 113–23. Published in Polish as “Poezja jako obowiązek” in *Portret z początku wieku*, edited by W. Ligęza (Lublin: Gaudium, 2005).

[31] “Przesłanie Pana Cogito,” in Herbert, *Wiersze Zebrane*, 439.

[32] “Słowo na wieczorne poetyckim w Teatrze Narodowym,” in Herbert, *Węzeł gordyjski i inne pisma rozproszone, 1948–1998*, edited by Paweł Kądziera (Warsaw: Biblioteka Więzi, 2001), 94–100.

[33] Zbigniew Herbert– Czesław Miłosz, *Korespondencja* (Warsaw: Zeszyty Literackie, 2006).

[34] *Wiersze zebrane*, 271.

[35] “Powrót prokonsula,” 269; “Miasto nagie,” 273; “Rozważania o problemie narodu,” 274. English translation by Miłosz and P. D. Scott, “The return of the proconsul,” 184 and “Naked town,” 188. English translation by A. Valles, “Reflections,” 189.

[36] Zbigniew Herbert and Czesław Miłosz, *Korespondencja*, op. cit., 93. Translated into English by B. G.

[37] William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1930).

[38] Herbert, *Wiersze zebrane*, 413.

[39] Herbert, *Collected Poems*, translated by Alissa Valles, 308.

[40] “Substancja,” *Wiersze zebrane*, 160.

[41] “The Substance,” translated by John and Bogdana Carpenter, *Selected Poems* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), 27.

[42] “Ci którzy przegrali,” *Wiersze zebrane*, 400.

[43] “Those Who Lost,” *Mr. Cogito*, translated by John and Bogdana Carpenter (Oxford Univ. Press, 1993), 27.

[44] “Potwór Pana Cogito,” *Wiersze zebrane*, 487.

[45] “The Monster of Mr Cogito,” *Report from the Besieged City and Other Poems*, translated by John and Bogdana Carpenter (Oxford Univ. Press, 1987), 40–41.

[46] Krzysztof Biedrzycki, *Poezja i pamięć - o trzech poematach Czesława Miłosza, Zbigniewa Herberta i Adama Zagajewskiego* (Kraków: Wyd. Uniw. Jagiellońskiego, 2008), p. 201.

[47] “Wróżenie,” *Wiersze zebrane*, 67.

[48] “Fortune-telling,” translated by C. Miłosz and P. Dale Scott, *Collected Poems*, 50.

[49] A. S. Byatt, *On Histories and Stories* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2002), p. 145.

[50] Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* (NY: Viking, 2011).

[51] First in *Zeszyty Literackie*, 2000/2, 92–93, then in *Utwory rozproszone*, edited by Ryszard Krynicki (Kraków: A5, no year given, pp. 290–92).

## A Strange Poet

### A Commentary on Cyprian Norwid's Verse

Agata Brajerska-Mazur

There lived in Paris. . . a Polish writer little known in his own country, an artist known even less, a strange poet, a hieroglyph-stylist, whose every poem has to be read syllable by syllable ten times over. . . His ideas, despite his profound learning and detailed familiarity with the achievements of contemporary knowledge, move in a diametrically opposite direction to that of modern philosophical current. But he was not a dilettante, and certainly not a visionary, a mystic, or a lunatic. . . He knew how to uncover in every thing such a relation of it to other things that it would become so original as to appear almost unrecognizable. He carried his soul around with him as if it were some kind of a numismatic rarity, unknown to anyone, unwanted, useless. . . . He resembled a stone salvaged from some marvelous edifice, which somewhere, sometime had burnt down completely.[1]

Józef Tokarzewicz wrote these words about Cyprian Kamil Norwid in an obituary notice. Tokarzewicz described a strange poet: unknown, obscure, moving in an opposite direction to fashionable trends in art and philosophy. Such a description was appropriate because in the eyes of his contemporaries Norwid was indeed strange, obscure, ill-understood, and rejected.

This exceptional Romantic poet, novelist, playwright, sculptor, painter, engraver, and draughtsman was born in 1821. As an orphan he was raised by his grandmother Hilaria Zdziechowska, née Sobieska.[2] Norwid spent his youth studying painting but in 1840 he made his debut as a poet on the pages of a Warsaw newspaper. As a result, he enjoyed a brief spell of fame and recognition. It soon ended in rejection and bitterness because it became clear that his works had little to do with the poetry of the second generation of the Polish Romantics, and his views did not fit the programs of emigration political parties,[3] nor did they have much in common with the manifestoes of Polish Positivism. They were too difficult, too precursory to be understood by the readers of that time. As one of the poet's critics stated, he was a “genius not appreciated enough. . . born one hundred years too soon.”[4] Norwid died in oblivion in France, in the St. Casimir Shelter for impoverished Polish war veterans and orphans run by Polish nuns. He was first buried at Ivry, then moved into a mass grave at the Polish cemetery in Montmorency. The fluctuation of critics' attitudes toward Norwid's poetry can be best exemplified by a

selection of their comments, given in chronological order:[5]

“Prose-writer, critic, poet, sculptor, painter, he daily demonstrates immense fruitfulness and creativity” (*Przegląd Poznański*, 1848).

“A mannered obscurity of thought, imagery and language” (*Gazeta Polska*, 1849).

“It is very difficult to grasp these poems, logically tie the author’s thoughts and say what he is after” (*Czas*, 1851).

“Examples of studied nothingness, in which quirks of thought are matched by quirks of language and unbelievable arrogance competes with glaring ignorance” (*Wiadomości Polskie*, 1857).

“Wagner’s *Tannhäuser*. . . has been called the music of the future, just as our people call Norwid the poet of the future, and indeed it is a Norvidian work: Hegelian philosophy in music” (Andrzej Koźmian, 1861).

“Extremely individualistic and precisely because of this individualism there is no way he can be well understood by the masses” (*Echo*, 1876).

“Cyprian Norwid is dead. So? . . . Cyprian’s truly beautiful poems could make up a volume that would prove its weight even alongside the best European talents, but will there be anyone to offer him this posthumous favor? ” (Teofil Lenartowicz, 1883)

“Norwid’s works demand not just to be read, but to be closely read” (Wiktor Gomulicki, 1902).

“Today, even after publication of just a handful of unknown works, his name sounds. . . just as fully. . . as the names of our three great Romantics” (Zenon Przesmycki, 1904).

Rejected during his lifetime, absent from Polish culture of the nineteenth century, Norwid was discovered at the beginning of the twentieth century by Zenon Przesmycki (aka Miriam), who saved the poet’s manuscripts from oblivion and systematically published Norwid’s texts in his periodical *Chimera* (1901–1907). Przesmycki also put together collected editions of the writer’s works. His efforts were continued by Professors Stanisław Pigoń and Wacław Borowy, and after the Second World War by Juliusz Wiktor Gomulicki, Józef Fert, and Stefan Sawicki.

Today Norwid’s output remains the focus of research of many exceptional literary theorists[6] and academic institutions.[7] A scholarly journal is dedicated to Norwid’s opus.[8] Because of his originality he is one of the most difficult poets to translate, yet some of his works have been translated into many languages, especially into English.[9] The difficulty of anglicizing his poetry was best grasped by one of Norwid’s most prominent translators, Adam Czerniawski, who wrote the following:

How can a translator verify Norwid’s genius? Norwid is a nineteenth-century poet as well as a precursory author. How

then can one introduce the work of a poet who is simultaneously grounded in nineteenth-century traditions and who at the same time shatters them? . . . One should reveal Norwid’s *originality*. But how to demonstrate it without seeming ridiculous and eccentric? . . . The answer . . . must be that he cannot appear as a second rate Hopkins, Browning, Clough; or as an imitation of Emily Dickinson, nor as just another average craftsman of the Victorian era. What a challenge! Who will cope with it?[10]

Norwid has been compared to Pre-Raphaelites, to T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and the French Symbolists. G. M. Hyde has written of him as follows:

For the English reader, he is like the French Symbolists, and shares Baudelaire’s fascination with paradox and the dialectic. . . . His almost paranoid view of language as a dense system of “correspondences” from which we are necessarily excluded (but by which we are judged) again echoes Baudelaire and Mallarmé. . . . He is simultaneously a political poet steeped in the history of a specific moment, and one of those powerful practitioners of the genre of “silence” (or a hermeticism bordering on silence) that the “new” Poland . . . will have to reassess.[11]

In fact, apart from similarities to the mentioned writers, Norwid is so unique and so idiosyncratic that he should remain himself in translations: obscure, eccentric, a bit of a visionary but at the same time very down to earth; on the one hand deeply rooted in tradition but on the other establishing new trends in poetry. The challenge is enormous, and yet there have been a few risk takers who tried to rise to it.[12]

Danuta Borchardt and Patrick Corness recently have joined the rare group of Norwid’s translators.[13] I cannot objectively estimate their work since I have collaborated with both of them. For Danuta Borchardt I provided “Ten Commandments for the Translation of the Works of Cyprian Norwid”[14] devised to maintain the highest possible fidelity toward his poems. These commandments were based on my knowledge of previous translators’ pitfalls and difficulties encountered while translating Norwid’s texts.[15] Patrick Corness tried to preserve the distinctive features of two of Norwid’s poems: *Fatum* (“Fate”) and *W Weronie* (“In Verona”) which I discuss in *On English Translations of Norwid’s Works*. [16] These features were named in order to help critics evaluate whether existing translations corresponded to the identity of the original texts. Often the features were presented in the form of points created with the *katena* method.[17] *Katena*, meaning “pure” in Greek, compiles and compares the most important interpretations of a source text in order to determine its most significant features that should be preserved in translation. It seems to be

the most suitable method so far as the search for distinctive features of the original are concerned. It sums up the general knowledge of all interpreters of the text, giving the critic broad insights into the analyzed poem and safeguarding him from subjectivism. Its usefulness has been demonstrated by Patrick Corness, a translator who used the points created with the help of *katena* in order to actually produce a translation and not just assess existing translations. While working on his translation of *Fatum* he tried to comply with the following significant points identified on the basis of the compiled and compared interpretations of the original:

1. The “multi-interpretativeness” of the lyric, or the effect of numerous associations and references to diverse literary and philosophical currents, such as in “gaining from one’s foe” or “benefiting from one’s misery.”
2. The terseness of the lyric that describes only one dramatic event: the fight between the man and his fate.
3. The situation of an “eye fight,” shown by means of a proper word selection, which leads to the conclusion that misery disappears when it is confronted by and used by its victim.
4. Semantic, phonetic and syntactic contrast between two parts of the lyric, perceivable through the presence of fricative and affricate consonants, inversion, and “wild” designations in the first stanza, and the lack of them in the second.
5. Duality of time that simultaneously expresses the concrete and the universal situation.
6. Typography of the poem that introduces the full range of emotions inherent in its plot: astonishment, tension, anticipation, reflection, fear and relief; stressing the significance of words marked in the text by spaced-out print.

I believe that Patrick Corness’s translation is not only faithful to the original, but also identifies itself as an artistic entity. He conveys in depth all of the six features that comprise the specificity of Norwid’s *Fatum*. However, there are some minor deficiencies that could be eliminated in order to make his translation even more faithful.

In the original Polish “*Jak*” begins a comparison because it compares “Nieszczęście” (Anguish) to a wild beast, so its best equivalent in English would be “like,” not “such.” In the second stanza Norwid again uses a comparison, this time comparing “a man” to “an artist.” It may be worth maintaining the pattern of

repeating comparisons that contrast two opposing protagonists in the poem.

I am not sure whether “human” really means the same as “człowiek” (man) in Norwid’s texts. In translation one cannot pay too much attention to this Polish word, so very important in the poet’s vocabulary,[18] that denotes in the context of his works an ordinary mortal but at the same time someone unusual: a priest, although *bezwiedny* (unaware) and *niedojrzały* (immature).[19] As Stefan Sawicki rightly pointed out, in Norwid’s works man is

widely perceived, deeply understood, portrayed in various dimensions, aspirations, and entanglements. Most concisely. . . is Norwid’s comprehension of *man* put in the formula of the story “Bransoletka” (The Bracelet): he is “earthly every minute, and eternal always”—*doczesny jest co chwila, a wieczny zawsze*. Human time. . . is continuous, it has in fact no fundamental caesura. Man is everlasting, inscribed into eternity since the beginning. . . . Earthliness also means limitation. Man is limited in his actions and thinking, despite victorious achievements and great discoveries. Limited by everything that surrounds him, and then by himself. And at the same time he has a part in God’s eternal intelligence, he is its trace, someone nearly angelically elevated. *Pył marny i rzecz Boża*—“wretched dust and a thing of God”—is again an expression of Norwid’s that indicates the need for balancing the two points of reference, which balance allows him to maintain the humanity characteristic of us: a humble, thus true, awareness of ourselves. “Earthly” also means participation in everything earthly: in the life of a family, society, nation, nature. In the creation of culture. In wisely subduing the earth. In creating today with faithful memory of the past and responsibility for tomorrow. In acting on the basis of one’s own decisions, yet subject to eternity in estimates and judgments, dependent on it in one’s conscience. Norwid’s earthliness in human life is also weakness, proclivity to err and slip into, or immerse in sin “every minute”—*co chwila*. But the committed evil deed, sometimes humiliating or terrifying, can also be a realization of weakness, a beginning of inner transformation. Divine eternity is—in the words of St. Paul, the Poet’s favorite—a source of “new power made perfect in weakness”—*siły, która się w słabości doskonali*, which awakens and nurses awareness.[20]

I am not entirely sure whether “human” carries the same connotations as Norwidian “człowiek,” and whether this English word is equally general and universal as Norwid’s use of the Polish term.

No change of subject in the second stanza is acceptable in translation, although in Norwid’s poem such a change means that the attacked man took the initiative and began to defend himself. In Patrick Corness’s translation “anguish” is always the grammatical agent, and thus the focus”centers mainly



on it. On the other hand, the translator lexically reinforces the contrast between the two stanzas to such a degree that it compensates for the loss of their original phonetical and syntactical differences.

The choice of vocabulary (anguish, fateful, transfix, discern, core) is excellent, as well as the structure of the translation (rhymes and rhythm, laconism) and its graphic layout. The only omission that spoils it is the lack of the question mark, which in Norwid's poetry was placed in unusual positions and was always significant.<sup>[21]</sup> It may be worth trying to put a question mark after "What gain" in English. In Polish the placing of this question mark is also unusual, and it thus provokes reflection on the meaning of the text and reading it more attentively. Apart from these slight doubts concerning Patrick Corness's translation of *Fatum* I have no other reservations. I can only praise his translation for its faithfulness to the original.

The second translation is even closer to the source text. The translator followed the directions which I gave when analyzing Norwid's poem "W Weronie" and its many translations into English by means of the *katena* method, taking into account the following: the equivocal sense of the poem, which might be understood as a Romantic praise of emotions as in Mickiewicz's "Romantyczność"; an attempt to unmask illusions; confrontation of two truths about reality (the reader may choose either of them); and reflection on the mystery of the world and human affairs.

The double-layered structure of the poem is manifested by two opposite perspectives (the houses of Capulets and Montagues seen from two levels; confrontation of two different realities (spiritual and material); the regular and symmetrical rhythmic and rhyming pattern of the poem (four triplets consisting of eleven and eight-syllable verses, rhyming aab aab ccd ccd); pictorial quality (stillness, colors); contrast of motion and stillness, dynamism and inertness; and the motifs of tears, ruins, cypress trees, and stones. These features are preserved in the translation. The only thing that was not rendered by the translator is "*Łagodne oko błękitu*" (gentle eye of the blue), a phrase probably untranslatable into English. The Polish "*błękit*" (azure blue, sky blue) can mean the azure blue color, heaven, and sky at the same time. Used together with "a benign eye," it can indicate the eye of God or just a planet, whether the moon or the sun.<sup>[22]</sup> This ambiguity is usually lost in translation because translators of Norwid's text must decide from the very beginning who or what "*gwiazdę zrzuca ze szczytu*"

(casts a star down from on high) and whether this act takes place at night or in daytime.

The *katenas* designed for translation critics and not for translators themselves have not taken such subtleties into account; they can only measure fidelity to the text. Nor do they assess the artistic value of the translation. As Patric Corness's collaborator, I can only be satisfied that the *katena* method proved useful for translation as far as faithfulness to the original is concerned. Δ

## NOTES

[1] Tokarzewicz (1884), translated by Bogdan Czaykowski in "The Poet as a Christian Socrates: Introduction to C. K. Norwid," *Selected Poems*, translated by Adam Czerniawski (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 2011), p. 7.

[2] Norwid was very proud of his noble origin; despite impoverishment, he often boasted of his close relations to the family of King John III Sobieski.

[3] Because of censorship and the invaders' oppression (Poland was then under colonial partition), many Polish intellectuals, Norwid among them, lived and worked abroad, particularly in France where in the hope of regaining independence they created societies and parties.

[4] This commentary was made by Aleksander Jełowicki in 1853. Citation from *Wybór głosów o twórczości pisarskiej Cypriana Norwida* (Selection of Commentaries about Cyprian Norwid's Writing), selected by J. W. Gomulicki in C. Norwid, *Pisma Wybrane*, vol. 1, Warszawa: PIW, 1968, p. 107. Translation from Polish by A. B-M.

[5] All quotations are taken from A. Czerniawski, *The Burning Forest* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1988), pp. 25–27, where the reader may find many more examples of changeable reception of Norwid's works. All have been compiled and translated by A. Czerniawski.

[6] Jan Błoński, Wacław Borowy, Józef Fert, Michał Głowiński, Juliusz Wiktor Gomulicki, Mieczysław Inglot, Mieczysław Jastrun, Zdzisław Łapiński, Tadeusz Makowiecki, Jadwiga Puzynina, Stefan Sawicki, Irena Sławińska, Zofia Stefanowska, Zofia Szmydtowa, Zofia Trojanowiczowa, Jacek Trznadel, Kazimierz Wyka, Zbigniew Zaniewicki, Maciej Żurowski and others.

[7] Zakład Badań nad Twórczością Cypriana Norwida (Cyprian Norwid Research Institute) at the Catholic University of Lublin; Pracownia Języka Cypriana Norwida (Cyprian Norwid Language Research Workshop) at the University of Warsaw; Pracownia Kalendarza Życia i Twórczości Norwida (Workshop on the Life and Work of Cyprian Norwid) at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań.

[8] The annual *Studia Norwidiana* founded at the Catholic University of Lublin in 1983.

[9] A. Brajerska-Mazur, *Bibliografia przekładów utworów Norwida na język angielski*, *Studia Norwidiana*, 1999–2000, nos. 17–18, 385–393. Supplemented, updated, and with references to websites, the bibliography was republished in nos. 24–25 of *Studia Norwidiana*, 2006–2007, 387–391.

- [10] C. K. Norwid, *Poezje/Poems*, trans. by A. Czerniawski (Kraków: WL, 1986), p. 129.
- [11] G. M. Hyde, *Cyprian Kamil Norwid: 'Yesterday – And – I'*, in A. Czerniawski, *The Mature Laurel* (Cardiff: Seren Books, 1991), p. 91.
- [12] Among others Claire S. Allen, Teresa Bałuk, Keith Bosley, Christine Brooke-Rose, Adam Czerniawski, Lola Gay-Tifft, Gerald T. Kapolka, Tymoteusz Karpowicz, Watson Kirkconnell, Charles S. Kraszewski, Jerzy A. Laskowski, Michael A. Michael, Michael J. Mikoś, Edmund Ordon, Jerzy Peterkiewicz, Ilona Ralf-Sues, Olga Scherer-Virski, Burns Singer, Reuel Wilson.
- [13] C. Norwid, *Poems*, translated from the Polish by D. Borchardt in collaboration with A. Brajerska-Mazur (New York: Archipelago Books, 2011).
- [14] A. Brajerska-Mazur, "Ten Commandments for the Translation of the Works of Cyprian Norwid (and what came from them or, on the translations of Danuta Borchardt)," *Polish Review*, vol. LIII (2008, no. 4), 495–540.
- [15] I discuss their work in detail in *O angielskich tłumaczeniach utworów Norwida* (Lublin: TN KUL, 2002), and in several articles.
- [16] *Ibid.*, pp. 71–144.
- [17] I have written extensively about this method in *O angielskich...*, pp. 9–14; *Katena and Translation of Literary Masterpieces, Babel*, vol. 51 (2005), 16–30; *O przekładzie na język angielski wierszy Norwida "Śmierć," "Do zeszłej..." "Finis," Pamiętnik Literacki*, XCVII (2006), book 4, 229–37; and *Katena a przekład współczesnej poezji polskiej*, in *Translatio i literatura*, edited by A. Kukułka-Wojtasik (Warsaw: UW, 2011), pp. 27–34.
- [18] Cf. I. Gałęzowska, *Norwida myślenie o człowieku*, in *Norwid żywy*, edited by W. Günther (London: Gryf Printers, 1962), pp. 287–309; Z. Łapiński, *Norwid* (Kraków: Znak, 1971), p. 53f.; A. Dunajski, "Człowiek–Boga żywego obraz," *Studia Norwidiana*, no. 1 (1983), 81–88; M. Ingot, "Norwidowski 'człowiek,'" *Pamiętnik Literacki*, 1983, brochure 4; P. Chlebowski, "Cypriana Norwida *Rzecz o Wolności Słowa*," *Ku epopei chrześcijańskiej* (Lublin: TN KUL, 2000); S. Sawicki, "Norwidowy człowiek," in *Czterdzieści i cztery studia ofiarowane profesorowi Marianowi Maciejewskiemu*, edited by D. Seweryn, W. Kaczmarek and A. Seweryn (Lublin: TN KUL, 2008), pp. 291–293; A. Brajerska-Mazur, "Ten Commandments," pp. 511–13.
- [19] This definition of "man" is taken from Norwid's poem "Sfinks." See *O angielskich*, pp. 351–52 and A. Brajerska-Mazur, "Ten Commandments," pp. 504–505.
- [20] See Sawicki, "Norwidowy człowiek," fn. 18.
- [21] Brajerska-Mazur, *O angielskich*, pp. 368–71.
- [22] Norwidologists dispute over this issue. See A. Brajerska-Mazur, "Norwid w tłumaczeniu M.J. Mikosia," *Studia Norwidiana*, no. 22 (2004), 273–84; also "Aspekty malarskie wiersza Norwida 'W Weronie' w przekładzie na język angielski," in *Poeta i sztukmistrz. O twórczości poetyckiej i artystycznej Norwida*, edited by P. Chlebowski (Lublin: TN KUL, 2007), pp. 229–48.

## Cyprian Kamil Norwid

### *Fatum*

I

Jak dziki zwierz przyszło N i e s z c z ę ś c i e do człowieka

I zatopiło weń fatalne oczy. . .

- Czeką - -

Czy, człowiek, zboczy?

II

Lecz on odejrzał mu, jak gdy artysta

Mierzy swojego kształt modelu;

I spostrzegło, że on patrzy – c o? skorzysta

Na swym nieprzyjacielu:

I zachwiało się całą postaci wagą

- - I nie ma go!

### *Fate*

I

Such beastly *Anguish*, human-baiting,

With fateful eyes transfixed its prey. . .

- Waiting - -

Now will he turn away?

II

Instead the stare was fair returned,

As artists size up subjects top to toe;

Aware the human had discerned -

*What gain* he'd draw

from such a foe,

It shuddered to its very core

- - And it's no more!

*Translated by Patrick Corness*

### *W Weronie*

1

Nad Kapuletich i Montekich domem,

Splukane deszczem, poruszone gromem,

Łagodne oko błękitu -

2

Patrzy na gruzy nieprzyjaznych grodów

Na rozwalone bramy do ogrodów,

I gwiazdę zrzuca ze szczytu -

3

Cyprysy mówią, że to dla Julietty,

Że dla Romea ta łąka znad planety

Spada- i groby przecieka:

4

A ludzie mówią, i mówią uczenie,

Że to nie łąka są, ale że kamienie,

I- że nikt na nie nie czeka!