

JÓZEF FRANCISZEK FERT  
ORCID: 0000-0003-1952-1327

## THE COLLECTIVE-MAN OF RES PUBLICA. NORWID AND THE CIVIL SOCIETY

Więc bądź ty sobie dla tej wielkiej sprawy,  
W zastępy której wszedłeś na planetę,  
Choć po lewicy, a wszelako *prawy* –<sup>1</sup>  
("Człowiek" [A Man], PWsz I, 273)

And thus for this great cause,  
Into the ranks of which you entered the planet,  
Albeit on the left, be nevertheless *right* –

*"słowo, które nic nie czyni, a czyn, co nic nie mówi – równa czczość."*  
(*Listy o emigracji* [*Letters on Emigration*], PWsz VII, 25)

*"a word that does nothing and an action that says nothing – equal idleness."*

What does the expression "civil society" mean? Today it is quite "naturally" widespread in the language of journalists and politicians of various "shades," but in Norwid's time it was hardly used, even though the very "idea" of organising collective life on the basis of "citizenship" is very old.

Already the ancient thinkers were familiar with the idea of a rational arrangement of interpersonal relations, which, at the height of the political development of some states, took the form of republican (civic), political (legal) structures, even though the "privilege of citizenship" initially concerned – as in Athens, Rome or medieval Europe – only a tiny fraction of the total population. However –

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<sup>1</sup> In Gomulicki's editions emphasis is marked with expanded spacing, I render it in italics; (this "technical" change does not affect the message of the author, who used underlining with a continuous line and/or its various variants in his manuscripts).

surprisingly! – it is precisely from the circles of citizens, privileged in various ways, often quite irrationally, that the idea of referring every “human person to the common good”<sup>2</sup> has been emerging more and more boldly throughout history.

Relationality, not relativity! Such a view of social issues, in which priority is given to a human person in relation to other persons – by way of a conscious and responsibly handled freedom – was neither obvious nor universally accepted even in Norwid’s epoch, especially in view of the immense popularity of idealist (mainly Hegelian) principles of the state and law, in which the state (especially the “national” state) and its actual “central authority” (“head of state,” ruler) acquired a “metaphysical” status, differently grounded than in traditional feudal systems, as a “self-contained whole in which people are its dialectical moment, and only authority – as the formal element of society – has the full personality status [...], while all other persons are merely a means that enable the authority to achieve its different goals.”<sup>3</sup>

For quite a long time, and especially since Romanticism, the Polish civic thought has been imbued with a myth of a pre-Christian “universal citizenship,” which supposedly gave rise to the leadership (the nobility), with time enclosed in its privileges and exclusiveness towards the rest of the co-participants of collective life, creating and petrifying a kind of – as Edward Dembowski put it – “aristocratic republic.”<sup>4</sup> The process of state segregation and the “sealing” of the nobility, combined with the establishment of feudal “order” (mainly through the bondage of the vast majority of cohabitants) in Poland lasted for a very long time and was not in principle absolutely strict, as can be inferred, for example, from “katalog chamów” [the cata-

<sup>2</sup> Cf. M.A. KRĄPIEC, “Społeczeństwo,” in: *Powszechna Encyklopedia Filozofii*, scientific committee led by M.A. Krąpiec et al., Vol. 9, Lublin 2008, pp. 137-143.

<sup>3</sup> M.A. KRĄPIEC, “Społeczeństwo,” p. 142. However, the reception of Hegel’s works gave rise to extraordinary consequences of the application of “logic” to historiosophy; the so-called “left wing” found a solution in revolutionary and atheistic communism, the “right wing” in the ultimate “transformation of humanity into angelism.” Cf. Z. KRASIŃSKI, *Listy do Jerzego Lubomirskiego*, ed. and introduction by Z. Sudolski, Warszawa 1965, p. 47. In a letter of 21 November 1839, Krasinski refers his friend to a work by August Cieszkowski: *Prolegomena zur Historiosophie*, Berlin 1838. Cieszkowski’s historiosophic vision assumed a significant transcendence of Hegelianism, it saw the lever for the evolution of history in the human “deed” and the messianic mission of “nations” (especially the Polish nation!). The “left wing,” in its next iteration, i.e. as Marxism, developed the perspective of proletarian revolution as an irreversible path towards “a new humanity.” Krasinski was surprisingly critical of these ideas, calling – with ironic detachment – Cieszkowski’s ideas “the logic of an angel” (in a letter to Lubomirski of 6 January 1840, p. 55). Cf. T. KLUSEK, *Dwie koncepcje konserwatyzmu romantycznego: Krasinski i Rzewuski*, Lublin 2020 (especially the chapter: *Stosunek do Hegla*).

<sup>4</sup> E. DEMBOWSKI, *O dążeniach dzisiejszego czasu, “Rok 1845”*, Vol. VII, pp. 44-54.

logue of boors (plebeians)] containing several thousand personal entries in Walerian Nekanda Trepka's *Liber generationis plebeanorum* (from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century), known under the later modified quasi-title *Liber chamorum* (experts in Old Polish have established that Trepka did not use here the stigmatising meaning of the word "cham" [boor], which emerged in Polish only at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century). One may wonder why this Old Polish plebeian encyclopaedia, circulating in handwritten copies for generations, was published in print as late as in 1963.<sup>5</sup> Without discussing the degree of reliability of this historical source, what is worth noting is not so much the surprisingly large number of these "łże-szlachcice" [lying/false nobles] but, above all, Nekanda's undisguised resentment towards the plebians ("sons" of peasants, the bourgeoisie or bastards of any class) who *per fas et nefas* were trying to join the "better" stratum of society, even though the acrimonious tracker of "crest mystifications" failed to grasp that, owing to this constant "inflow of fresh blood," the Polish nobility had for centuries remained vital, which ultimately made it the main pillar of Polishness almost until our epoch. The last huge wave of "incomers" filled the nobility during the reign of August III Sas, as a consequence of the conversion of a large group of Jewish families to Catholicism, which resulted, *inter alia*, in their ennoblement and adoption into the coats of arms and surnames of old Sarmatian families, more precisely into the families of "godparents" of newly baptised neophytes, such as the Brzeziński, Czyński, Grabowski, Lanckoroński, Orłowski, Piasecki, Szymanowski, Tatarkiewicz, Wołowski, Zalewski and other families. This process, important for Polish culture, is linked to the so-called "Frankist movement," i.e. the phenomenon of the Polonisation and Christianisation of a significant group of Polish Jews caused by centuries of coexistence with the society of Rzeczpospolita (*Res Publica* – the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth at the time), and the "maturing" of both sides to a fuller integration within a single political organism. The fundamental catalyst for this unusual and yet "elitist" process (the large part of the Jewish diaspora regarded Frankism as a "heretical" movement, by the way – both Jewish and Christian communities have showed a similar attitude to this phenomenon – characterised by reproach and even disgust) became the teachings of Jacob Frank (1726-1791) or Jacob Joseph Frank-Dobrucki, a mystic and religious reformer, and in part also an extraordinary adventurer. An excellent literary picture of this important phenomenon in the history of Poland was created by Olga Tokarczuk (2018 Nobel Prize in Literature).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> W.N. TREPKA, *Liber generationis plebeanorum*. ("*Liber chamorum*"), published by W. Dworzaczek, J. Bartyś and Z. Kuchowicz, ed. W. Dworzaczek, Wrocław 1963.

<sup>6</sup> O. TOKARCZUK, *Księgi Jakubowe albo Wielka podróż...*, Kraków 2014.

A historiosophic discourse has unfolded (still very much alive today) on the relation of the individual to the society as a whole, the citizen to the state as the proper sovereign. The concept of the “Volksgeist” (“national spirit”), abstracted from the age-old search for some universals, supposedly indispensable in describing social life,<sup>7</sup> added fuel to this fundamental dispute. Such a “relation,” or rather instrumentalization of the individual in relation to society provided the doctrinal basis for a society simply enslaved in various ways, which still happens to be practised today.

Of course, the doctrinaires of enslaved societies can even invoke the authority of Aristotle, who recognised “slavery as a natural state and justified it,”<sup>8</sup> as well as Cicero or Machiavelli,<sup>9</sup> but the mainstream idea of a “civil society” has, for centuries, pervaded the corrupt hierarchical structure, to finally awaken the powerful forces of civilisation and their rights, emphatically articulated in the French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, which was passed by the National Assembly as the Representative of the French People on 26 August 1789. Over the last two hundred years this revolutionary act has inspired fundamental rulings and legal arrangements on human freedom and dignity, on which basis societies can be erected and perfected as a union of sovereign citizens within the framework of the various forms of the “civic republic” commonly referred to as the “rule of law,” and/or various supra-state creations, constituting more or less crystallised archipelagos of supra-state structures, such as the European Union or other international associations of various political, military, scientific and even religious entities.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was the scene of heated disputes, often turning into bloody wars and revolutions. The main axis of this phenomenon was the “uncertainty of the European future and whether kings or peoples will ultimately prevail,” as Adam Mickiewicz succinctly and insightfully put it in one of his polemical writings, pub-

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. M. ŚLIWIŃSKI, “Teoria narodu w ‘Przedwiośniu’ Zygmunta Krasińskiego,” in: *Zygmunt Krasiński – nowe spojrzenie*, eds. G. Halkiewicz-Sojak and B. Burdziej, Toruń 2001, pp. 145-152. In Śliwiński’s essay, the category “Volksgeist” refers to the idea of linking the history of humanity with the coming to the fore of the concept of self-realisation of individuals in the national community since “humanity consists not so much of individuals, but primarily of nations” (p. 146). As the scholar reminds us, this is linked to the dominant modern thinking about the world as the subject of “philosophy of history,” hence modern pan-nationalism, opposed to traditional universalism, assumes that the “subject of history” is the nation (p. 147). This should be supplemented with the overwhelming tendency to personalise such concepts as “nation” or “humanity” and associating them with not only the properties of “organisms,” but rather personal properties conceived in real terms, not only as analogy or metaphor.

<sup>8</sup> M.A. KRĄPIEC, “Społeczeństwo,” p. 142.

<sup>9</sup> See D. PIETRZYK-REEVES, *Idea społeczeństwa obywatelskiego. Współczesna debata i jej źródła*, Toruń 2012.

lished anonymously in 1833.<sup>10</sup> In the same speech, he argued that a man aware of his social duties could not run away from participating “in social disputes [i.e. concerning social issues – note by J. F.], spread today all over Europe, indeed, in all the countries on the globe.” This text is also interesting because the author repeatedly points out the fundamental disagreement of Polish opinion on whether to take part in disputes about the shape of the political system of a future, independent Poland. In these reflections, the poet used a very interesting expression – “umysł obywatelski” [civic mind] and “myśl obywatelska” [civic thought], which is concerned about the national well-being. Mickiewicz used a telling description of this social bond which determines the permanence of collective existence; according to him:

[...] there can never be a community without shared feelings and ideas that are appropriate to its purpose; the individuality of nations does not consist merely in their inhabitation of a single land, in a common language, but mainly in a certain general thought which inspires their compatriots, in a certain property of their social union, that is to say – which is one and the same thing – in certain political sentiments and ideas proper to each nation, expressed in its internal arrangement and external relations [...] Striving for a unity in a nation by abandoning what social life is based on, is indeed tantamount to advising it to commit social suicide.<sup>11</sup>

In the end, the poet suggests not so much escaping from any disputes concerning the organisation of social relations, but rather transferring them to “Polish politics,” as one might suppose, i.e. drawing on the best models of Polish republican thought, and even demands that his compatriots give this Polish political thought a voice in the form of a “*Polish national party*,”<sup>12</sup> which would in a sense become a platform for integrating the whole of the nation’s political life. Yet this seemingly purely republican spirit of the Polish national bard seems to have become entangled in irreconcilable contradictions, i.e. in “political mysticism,” opposed to the spirit of universal liberty, based on “mission,” and the idea of “being chosen,” profoundly contradictory to modern concepts of democracy.

A poignant picture of the unresolvable disputes of the time can be found in the descriptions of the dramatic Roman meetings between Zygmunt Krasiński and Adam Mickiewicz, who, incensed by far-reaching mission, rapidly and insight-

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<sup>10</sup> A. MICKIEWICZ [author ship attributed by literary historians], “O obojętności politycznej ze względu na obecne położenie sytuacji sprawy ojczystej i o naszych stronnictwach politycznych,” in: idem, *Pisma filomackie. Pisma polityczne z lat 1832-1834*, in: *Dziela*. Anniversary Edition 1798-1998, Vol. VI, Warszawa 2000, p. 253.

<sup>11</sup> A. MICKIEWICZ, “O obojętności politycznej,” pp. 254-255.

<sup>12</sup> Idem, p. 256; emphasis in that edition used expanded spacing.

fully recognised by Krasieński,<sup>13</sup> devoted many hours to “sway” the author of *Nie-Boska komedia* to “the divine cause.” Mickiewicz evidently expected to convince Krasieński of his (or rather Towiański’s) despotic designs, hence the stormy discussions between them, in which Krasieński gallantly stood as an equal with the émigré prophet, possessed by a vision of the expected fruits of the “Moscow method,” as Krasieński put it. And this is how Krasieński recounted this unusual experience in one of his letters to Delfina Potocka:

[...] Even if Towianism held some eternal truth, I would still say that it possessed him. Because wanting not to pour out the truth as light is poured out, but pressing it in as one puts on chains, is to be possessed, not enlightened by the truth! [...] He has surrendered himself to Towiański as a reliable tool. Only a slave can be such a despot; and I believe in his quite good faith, I believe that he is guided by Towiański, I believe that he fears him, that he adores him, but in the end, everything is for Poland, it derives from a holy and titanic love for Poland, from an infinite desire to bring it to the light of life.<sup>14</sup>

These “monopolistic” charms are not some kind of Polish speciality of that time (they are also visible in subsequent eras). From a historical perspective, one can observe a clear drift of European (and consequently global) political thought towards

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<sup>13</sup> During his personal meetings with Mickiewicz in Rome in February 1848, Krasieński was struck by the irrationality of the programme of the elder poet he held in such high esteem – to the point of adoration. He tried to deal with this paradox, as we read in one of his letters to Delfina: “So I saw Mr Ad[am] for the second time yesterday. You remember, in Blank’s 2<sup>nd</sup> volume, the chapter on illuminism. Well, consider that – illuminism, Saint-Martinism or whatever the name, did not come to us straight from France or Germany, we were reached directly by the ideas that were clear, obvious, the ideas proclaimed in 89 [referring to the revolutionary *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, proclaimed by the French National Assembly on 26 August 1789 – note by J. F.]. But it turned back and took a longer route – via Riga and Petersb[urg], and Moscow. It was only after it gained some Moscow features that it arrived in Vilnius [...] there [...] Mr Ad[am] met their mysterious current. It seems that the same tradition later also struck his master, hence the Mongolian tone is so highly valued, hence the hierarchical oppression, the furious despotism, reminiscent of Weisshaupt’s devices [German illuminist and member of the secret freemasonry association – note J. F.] and Peter the Great’s devices [...] and all this serving to establish *power* as the supreme goal. By sanctity you are so able to act upon that which is called spirit, so that it becomes like a thunderbolt to be used. And this is true, but the error lies in the fact that one then deals with the spirits like a colonel with his soldiers – he drills them with a moral whip until they learn the strategy called holiness, with the help of which one can fight a battle. True Polish thought, on the other hand, respects the spirit and regards it as a sacred freedom [...] Thus, it does not use the spirit, but guides it towards its own, eternal goal! [...] Mr Ad[am] announced to me yesterday that my position is not here nor there, but in Petersburg!!!” Letter of 13 February 1848: Z. KRASIEŃSKI, *Listy do Delfiny Potockiej*, ed. Z. Sudolski, Warszawa 1975, Vol. III, pp. 656–657.

<sup>14</sup> Letter of 9–10 February 1848: Z. KRASIEŃSKI, *Listy do Delfiny Potockiej*, Vol. III, pp. 649, 650.

“total” concepts which, at certain historical moments in the last 200 years, excluded not only the prospect of dialogue or a plurality of solutions, which demanded a voice in the process of “settling” optimal social issues, but even the voluntarist and often criminal imposition of a political doctrine, usually adorned with democratic ornaments, as can be seen in the victories of fascism (Nazism) or Bolshevism, as well as Asian totalitarian systems in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The great intellectual and political storms that accompanied the crystallisation of the guiding idea of citizenship in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries can be seen not only in Europe, especially in Western Europe, but also in North and Central America, and, in time, on the entire American continent, and further, across the globe. The intense search for the “ideal of citizenship” can be seen above all in the societies of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (*Rzeczpospolita*), whose final collapse at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the successive phases of the increasingly profound destruction of this common, centuries-old heritage not only did not mean the disappearance of the republican tradition, but actually intensified the authentic, multi-lateral and multigenerational dispute over the Polish way to a modern arrangement of social relations in an independent state perceived as a “historical necessity.” At the forefront of this fundamental dialogue were the voices of representatives of the landed gentry and intelligentsia, a new class that emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a new social formation with virtually no adequate analogue in other countries. With time, this dialogue about a future Poland was also joined by a few representatives of other classes – above all peasants<sup>15</sup> or their “spokespersons” within the intelligentsia,<sup>16</sup> and

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<sup>15</sup> Particularly important for the awakening of civic consciousness among the peasantry in the Russian partition was the activity of Fr Piotr Ściegienny (1801-1890) from Bilcza near Kielce, whose pastoral ministry and later revolutionary activity was associated with Opole Lubelskie (his studies), Wilkołaz (as a vicar) and Chodel (as a parish priest). As a result of a betrayal in the ranks of the secret organisation he formed with his brother at the beginning of 1846, Fr Ściegienny, together with 24 of his companions, was court-martialled and, as the leader, sentenced to death by hanging, which was changed (“under the gallows,” as was sometimes the practice under Tsarist law and mercy) to indefinite hard labour in Siberia; moreover, as a result of pressure from the Tsarist authorities on the Church authorities, he was excluded from the clergy. After 25 years, as part of an amnesty of February 1871, he returned from the penal servitude and lived with his family in Tamawa in the Krasnystaw district, then in Wilkołaz, and after the former exile, Bishop Kazimierz Wnorowski, took over the Lublin diocese, he was reinstated into clerical status on 31 December 1883 and appointed chaplain at the St John of God Hospital in Lublin. He died on 6 November 1890 and was buried in the Lublin cemetery on Lipowa Street, sector 14 (Bishop Wnorowski’s tomb). Cf. Cz. WYCECH, *Ks. Piotr Ściegienny. Zarys programu społecznego i wybór pism*, Warszawa 1953.

<sup>16</sup> Here we can point to a very numerous group of democratic activists and writers, coming from the landed gentry, and deeply involved in the struggle to involve the people in the work of regaining independence and rebuilding social relations. A particularly interesting, but dramatically

in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century also by representatives of the Polish proletariat. In the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century we can see a clear striving for a profound description of social forces in class categories, which led not only to clearer terminological distinctions, often used in a misleading way, such as the concept of “the people,” which was often used interchangeably with the concept of “the nation,” which in turn was identified with the only stratum (class) fully participating in the rights and duties of the state, i.e. in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – still the nobility. At the same time (especially in left-wing movements), we can see striving for the formulation of the revolutionary idea of the “class struggle” as “a lever of progress” designed to restore the proper place of the “proletariat class,” called upon to “push the stagnant lump of the world” onto new paths, the proletariat conceived as the “most progressive” part of humanity, predestined to fundamentally transform (revolutionise) the organisation of social life at all levels. It is ironic that the most important beneficiaries of these progressive ideas turned out to be Bolshevism, which grew out of Marxism, and – indirectly – the various totalitarianisms of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including fascism and Nazism<sup>17</sup>.

The dramatic experience of the Polish independence uprisings – lost without exception – the conspiracy work, the great sacrifices and persecutions, and at the same time the unresolved problem of the people’s participation in the national cause,<sup>18</sup>

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interrupted action was carried out in this field by Edward Dembowski (1822-1846), who died, seeking to the end to reverse the tragically launched avalanche of “popular anger,” known as the “Galician Slaughter,” “Rabacja” or “Jakub Szela’s Uprising.” On 26 February 1846, “When the Austrian army was approaching Kraków, Dembowski, dressed in a sukmana, with a pistol behind his belt and with a cross in his hand, walked at the head of a procession that was supposed to win the peasants to the cause of the uprising, and was killed by Austrian soldiers” (E. DEMBOWSKI, *Pisma*, eds. by A. Śladkowska, M. Żmigrodzka, Vol. V: *Posłowie, przypisy, skorowidz*, Warszawa 1955, p. 9. Further quotations from this edition are indicated by the abbreviation: Dembowski, volume, page).

<sup>17</sup> How this “epoch-making manipulation” was achieved can be deduced, *inter alia*, from the (unavailable for years) diary of one of Nazism’s ideologues Alfred ROSENBERG: *Dzienniki 1934-1944*, translated from German by M. Antkowiak, Warszawa 2016. For an insightful discussion of this document, see D. KINNEY, R. K. WITTMAN, *Dziennik diabła. Alfred Rosenberg. Człowiek, który stworzył Hitlera*, transl. G. Siwek, Kraków 2018. Cf. J. F. FERT, *Brunatni doradcy diabła*, in: idem, *Inne Kresy... inny Wołyń*, Kielce 2019, pp. 9-38.

<sup>18</sup> With disbelief and a certain amount of disgust, one can stumble upon traces of feudalism – or rather slavery – not in some “podstarościęgo z zacnych czasów pańszczyźnianych” [understarost from the noble serfdom days] (as Norwid ironically put it in his poem *Spółcześni* [*Contemporaries*]), but, for example, in Zygmunt Krasiński, in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century: “...if it came to selling, you would sell to every other for a better price, more favourably for yourself – not for 70 ducats a soul, but for 90” (the remark about the price of a “soul,” i.e. a single serf, this appeared in connection with Prince Jerzy Lubomirski’s efforts to sell the Szarogród estate in the Podolia Governorate): Z. KRASIŃSKI, *Listy do Jerzego Lubomirskiego*, ed. Z. Sudolski, Warszawa 1965, pp. 552-553; the



which was tragically exacerbated by the events of the so-called “Galician Slaughter” and the Kraków Uprising of early 1846, were constantly pushing “national thought” in the direction of several not always convergent projects, which in the furthest horizon, however, assumed an almost simultaneous solution, i.e. the emergence of some kind of “unification” of the whole nation. However, a significant part of Polish journalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century pointed to the need to recognise the leading role of the nobility, which in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was replaced by the idea of the leading role of the intelligentsia, and finally, at the end of the century, this led to the idea of a general Solidarity movement which – despite its deep decline in 1982-1989 – finally brought about recognition of the importance of the participation of “civil society” in building a governable and independent state on the basis of social agreement and legal principles stemming from the separation of powers (legislative, executive, judicial).

Over time, the Catholic Church became involved in this work of history. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Church was seen rather as a refuge of the conservative social order, a “besieged fortress” of decaying feudalism, stormed time and again by various anti-Church forces, until the cataclysm of the 1848-49 revolution with its further consequences, particularly in Italy. This peculiar paradox was accurately captured by Norwid in his epistolary treatise *Poznańskie 1846-1848*: “Wszystkie wyższe umysły w Europie szły naprzód po powaśnieniu się z Kościołem, bo to dawało siłę wobec mas; *talent*, który pobлуźnił się z Kościołem, miał przez to samo patent na *Geniusz* – Geniusz awansował jeszcze wyżej: bywał bogiem” [All the higher minds in Europe went forward after their squabble with the Church, because it gave strength to the masses; the *talent* that got involved in a quarrel with the Church had by the same token a patent for *Genius* – Genius was promoted even higher: it was god]<sup>19</sup>. The image of the Church at that time, the Church “on the defensive,” began to change intensively, especially from the pontificate of Leo XIII, with his groundbreaking encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (15 May 1891), constituting the foundation of the Church’s modern social doctrine, and it reached its positive apogee after the adoption of the reformist declarations of the Second Vatican Council, in which

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term “ducat” (equivalent to a florin, thaler, guilder or Napoleon) was commonly used in Europe to denote a gold coin, minted in various countries from the late Middle Ages onwards, weighing on average 3.4 grams. In a letter to Cieszkowski of 10 December 1848, we find the conversion rate used at the time: “160 talars, or 600 francs, or 1000 zlotys I send to you back” – Z. KRASIŃSKI, *Listy do Augusta Cieszkowskiego i in.*, ed. Z. Sudolski, Warszawa 1988, Vol. I, p. 418.

<sup>19</sup> This was probably written in connection with the swelling uprising in the Kingdom of Poland in 1861, as part of some dispute with Józef Bohdan Zaleski; the autograph has been preserved in Zaleski’s papers: Jagiellonian Library, MS 9260 III, pp. 38-39; see PWSz VII 57 (text); PWSz VII 645-646 (commentary).

the inalienable dignity of the human person occupied one of the key positions, expressed above all in the recognition of man as the real “way of the Church” in the fulfilment of its historic mission.

Let us return to the question of the crystallisation of the idea of civil society in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in particular its first six-seven decades. There was no lack of Polish participation in the great European (and American) dispute on the future of civilisation, and one can even note an unusually distinctive Polish accent, coming to the forefront of popular attention not only because of the catastrophe of Rzeczpospolita, not only due to the daring participation of Poles in the revolutionary and war campaigns, and not only as a consequence of the hopeless upsurge of independence movements, but also (and perhaps above all) in the public manifestation of a number of distinctive social concepts which were voiced time and again on the most important stages of the intellectual life of Europe at the time – in Rome, Paris and Berlin. It would be difficult to point to any central figure of the Polish discourse in this respect; obvious was the primacy of absolute idealism in the version of Georg Friedrich Hegel and his “school,” especially the so-called “Hegelian left” with Ludwig Feuerbach and then the Marxist movement – which we symbolically associate with Berlin (and London, where Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels worked for years); also the revolutionary Paris headed by Louis Saint-Simon, as well as papal Rome, which at one point became the “laboratory” of the European revolution, have no counterparts in Polish circles, and yet we can also find great minds who worked on “Polish social philosophy” (at home and in exile). These included professional philosophers such as Józef Maria Hoene-Wroński, Bronisław Trentowski or August Cieszkowski, as well as “philosophising poets,” above all Adam Mickiewicz, Zygmunt Krasiński or Cyprian Norwid, who is our main point of interest here. We could add here a wide range of publicists addressing philosophical issues, such as Edward Dembowski, whose idea of the “creative act” was to become an alternative to the dominant (or rather – “fashionable”) Hegelianism and the Polish variety of messianism particularly condemned by the young ideologue. Dembowski did not hesitate to demonstrate the falsity of this idea to Adam Mickiewicz himself: “Polish philosophy is a teaching of love, of brotherhood, whereas messianism is an idolatry of ability, which Saint-Simonianism started to be [...] it sanctifies the self-will of ability. Polish philosophy believes in the people, while messianism believes in individuals. Polish philosophy must have as its first social consequence the self-reliance of the people, messianism – the slavish worship of some genius.”<sup>20</sup> It is not known

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<sup>20</sup> This passionate attack on messianism appeared as part of an anonymous article, extremely important for Dembowski’s thought: *Mysli o przyszłości filozofii*. “Rok 1845”, Vol. IV, pp. 1-15 (see Dembowski IV 373).

whether the young revolutionary was acquainted with Krasiński's poem *Przedświt* [*Before the Dawn*], which was crucial to the messianic idea, published anonymously in Paris in 1843, and then under cover as a work of Konstanty Gaszyński also in Paris in 1845, but he would find there an irrefutable argument for his criticism of the messianic idea, which in Krasiński's work "shows the mission of the Polish nation as the Christ of history, the Copernicus in the moral world."<sup>21</sup> In all fairness, however, it is worth noting that Krasiński more than once gave expression to his deeply pessimistic conviction that modern civilisation is inevitably heading towards disaster: "Everything, everything is heading towards the end, and it will be violent, because it will follow the infinite meanness and bottomless stupidity of tyrants."<sup>22</sup> This catastrophe, according to Krasiński, will reach in the first instance – as in the brilliant vision of *Nie-Boska komedia* [*The Un-Divine Comedy*] – the privileged strata on which the whole previous civilisational order was based: "...the days of abomination and desolation will begin in these days, and thence begun, will shake the whole of Europe."<sup>23</sup> And yet, in the fires of the revolution of 1848, Krasiński did not glorify his social class, which in his hypersensitive, pained consciousness appeared to be inevitably doomed to oblivion, infested with all manner of diseases, led by ubiquitous hypocrisy and cowardly defence of the "Trenches of the Holy

<sup>21</sup> M. ŚLIWIŃSKI, *Teoria narodu*, p. 132. It should be added here that in his messianic ideas, Krasiński more than once distanced himself from the revelations of Andrzej Towiański and his followers, led by Adam Mickiewicz, despite his great admiration for the poetic talent and literary achievements of the author of *Księgi narodu polskiego i pielgrzymstwa polskiego* [*The Books of the Polish People and of the Polish Pilgrimage*]; amid the reports of the approaching revolution, he wrote from Rome to his beloved: "I am more and more surprised that the people here have been shouting so much at Tow[iański] and his followers, because here and there these are completely the same miracles, sorcery, apparitions, prophecies, magnetic phenomena, entirely similar, only there they are messianic, while here official and arch-orthodox [...] Where is the boundary between essential mystery in creation and frenzy or human trickery and pretence? between the breath of God blowing and the fossilization of lies or personal fantasies?". Letter of 5-6 January 1848: *Listy do Delfiny Potockiej*, Vol. III, p. 562.

<sup>22</sup> Krasiński's remark in a letter to Delfina Potocka of 3-4 January 1848. *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 558.

<sup>23</sup> Krasiński's letter to Delfina Potocka of 10-11 January 1848. *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 578. This absolutely pessimistic vision of the future was determined not only by his direct Roman experiences, but also by the relentless memory of the "domestic events" of early 1846 (the Galician Slaughter), a powerful expression of which can be found in *Psalmy przyszłości* [*Psalms of the Future*], which (especially the third psalm) provoked a fierce polemic by Słowacki; this lengthy poem was published in Leipzig in 1848: *Do Autora trzech "Psalmy"...*, inspiring Krasiński to respond emphatically: "Murderers are not my brethren – / I love the sabre – I am ashamed of the knife!" in the following two psalms, preceded by a significant introduction; Krasiński's works came out under the pseudonym: Spirydion Prawdzicki.

Trinity,” which was facilitated by the secret deals between oppressive absolutist regimes, an offshoot of the Congress of Vienna, which seemed to have established the European political scene once and for all. In one of his valuable testimonies to the Italian Spring of Nations, he commented on the inevitable “spring” approaching Rome from Sicily via Naples from the end of 1847:

The whole Lazon’s sluggish and treacherous game has also been revealed for two days [...] Imagine, already in October of 1846 he had concluded a treaty with three of our partitioners, sacredly obliging himself before them never to give a constitution to his states. So now these three protested against the given one [King Ferdinand II of the Two Sicilies, gave his state a constitution forced by the “people-driven” uprising in early 1848, which was basically the beginning of an avalanche of ensuing events – note by J. F.].<sup>24</sup>

The 19<sup>th</sup> century, with its romantic glorification of the value of the “nation,” clashed, as we can see, in a profound, multigenerational and multifaceted discussion, primarily with the concept of “humanity” developed on the basis of the French Revolution and its essential political formation, i.e. “societies” as a structure called upon to implement the due civil rights of individuals and social groups, as expressed emphatically in the 1789 *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*. This idea matured in the fire of not only intellectual and political polemics, but also in revolutionary speeches and upheavals, such as the seminal Spring of Nations, which, starting “traditionally” in the south of Europe (Sicily, the outbreak of the Palermo Uprising on 12 January 1848), basically engulfed almost the entire continent, and in its centres at the time – Naples, Rome, Paris, Berlin, Vienna – initiated and/or triggered radical political changes, with the fairly widespread establishment of the constitutional order as the guiding political principle. How these “forced constitutional concessions” were subsequently treated by the “rulers” is another matter – but the peoples of Europe made the fundamental step towards establishing civil societies.

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<sup>24</sup> Krasiński’s letter to Delfina Potocka of 5 February 1848, p. 638. The encryption of messages and comments, sometimes understood only by the two lovers, is one of the sources of misunderstandings surrounding the author of *Nie-Boska komedia*; a good example is the textological “adventure” related to the poem “Na pokładzie ‘Marii-Stelli’” [On Board of ‘Maria-Stella’], which was attributed to Norwid, inter alia, on the basis of the characteristic term “wiadomych trzech” [the known three], i.e. the invaders/partitioners, who can be identified without ambiguity from the above-quoted letter to Delfina Potocka. For a more detailed argumentation questioning Norwid’s authorship of the poem “Na pokładzie ‘Marii-Stellii’”, see my article: “Problem autorstwa wiersza ‘Na pokładzie «Marii-Stelli»”, *Ruch Literacki* 1988, Issue 4-5, pp. 359-363.

One of the “crown witnesses” of these events and a committed commentator was Cypryan Norwid. After his release from Prussian imprisonment in mid-1846, following a “rehabilitation” stay of several months in Belgium (Brussels, Ostend<sup>25</sup>), in February 1847 he settled for an extended period (until the end of 1848) in papal Rome, where a revolutionary turmoil had been brewing for some time, fuelled by various, often contradictory political forces. The most pronounced among those was the aspiration within the Young Italy movement to accelerate the process of unification of the fragmented Italy and at the same time – as a consequence of this process – a clash with Austria and the papacy,<sup>26</sup> which ultimately led to the siege of the Eternal City and the liquidation within a dozen years (by 1870) of the more than a thousand-year-old *Patrimonium Sancti Petri*, the Ecclesiastical State (its symbolic remnant is today’s Vatican), founded by Charlemagne. In the years 1847-1848, the poet became intensively involved in the intellectual life of the strong Polish community there, visiting significant figures living permanently or temporarily in the Eternal City, where, *inter alia*, he befriended Zygmunt Krasiński, which to a considerable extent influenced his entire future and left its mark on his ideological choices.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> “...byłem [...] bardzo słaby, skutkiem czego do Ostendy kazano mi się udać, i pławię się tu we wietrze, gdyż kąpieli nie mogłem wytrzymać” [...I was (...) very weak, and as a result, I was ordered to go to Ostend, and I am wallowing here in the wind, as I could not stand the bath] (letter to Cezary Plater, 1 September 1846: DW X, 99).

<sup>26</sup> From the Spring of Nations (1848) onwards, the gradual unification of Italy under the sceptre of the Savoy dynasty continued through political deals, revolts and battles, especially through attacks on the Ecclesiastical State, which was repeatedly attacked “from within” and from outside. The international revolutionary Giuseppe Garibaldi played a significant role here; one of his actions (in the autumn of 1867) was mentioned by Norwid in a letter to Karol Ruprecht after 3 November: “gwardie pontyfikalne pobiły opryszków bez-historycznych” [the pontifical guards beat up the history-less thugs] (PWsz IX, 322). Incidentally, the poet probably intended to take part in the pope’s defence as a volunteer, as can be judged from a letter to Bronisław Zaleski of ca. 13 November 1867: PWsz IX, 326f. France of Louis Napoleon III took the side of papal Rome, intervening militarily in defence of Pius IX and maintaining a considerable military force in the Eternal City until the war disaster of 1870. In Zygmunt Krasiński’s view, Pius IX made the fatal mistake of calling upon “European countries” to defend him; as a result, in the early summer of 1849, Austria attacked Northern Italy (Bologna and Ancona), Spain attacked Central Italy (Terracina), and France sent a military expedition to Rome; in a letter to August Cieszkowski of 10 March 1849, Krasiński’s assessment was unequivocal: “Everything goes awry and right into the devil’s clutches. The papacy also signed its spiritual death warrant for a very long time by calling Austria to its aid” – Z. KRASIŃSKI, *Listy do Augusta Cieszkowskiego i in.*, Vol. I, p. 463.

<sup>27</sup> The beginnings of this acquaintance, so important to Norwid, were not promising; at the thought of this meeting, Krasiński moaned in one of his letters: “Yesterday, after a night spent in the company of Władysław [Zamoyski – editor’s note], my nerves were exquisitely unsettled [...] He felt sad to death. In the evening, I promised to visit Norwid (as it is my eternal art to visit others

One of Norwid's distinguishing features was his uncompromising intellectual courage – the poet did not hesitate to stand up for the values he considered important, even against the most numerous or famous opponents,<sup>28</sup> not excluding people with whom he was connected by friendship or family relations. This trait of his personality is already visible in his youthful literary attempts, and even brought him a momentary burst of fame, as summarised by a prominent figure of the time, Edward Dembowski, in an enthusiastic article entitled *Młoda piśmienność warszawska* [*Young Warsaw Writers*] in *Tygodnik Literacki* (1843, Issue 31):

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and not to receive anyone at my home. For when visiting them, I govern my stay with them, while when receiving guests I am subject to their will, I yield to the power of boredom exerted by them). Hence, I promised to visit him to get acquainted with him [...] I spent an hour there. Then I returned and, hammered by a migraine like by a peasant's flail, I lay down. Despair was eating me up.” Z. KRASIŃSKI, *Listy do Delfiny Potockiej*, Vol. III, pp. 573-575.

<sup>28</sup> One of the most famous public disputes that significantly influenced the opinion of the poet was Norwid's speech at a meeting of the Polish community related to the creation of the Polish Legion that took place on 27 March 1848 in the Roman flat of Edward Jełowicki, Fr Aleksander's brother, and concerned the issue of choosing the commander of a Polish military formation. According to Fr Jełowicki's account: “[...] Mickiewicz raised the issue of choosing a commander that should embody a new *idea*, and that therefore such a commander could not be anyone representing past, foregone era, e.g. Zamoyski. Hearing this, Cyprian Norwid spoke up, saying that he could by no means belong to such a Polish Legion that would want to break with the national past. Having said this, he erased himself from the list of legionaries drawn up at the previous meeting” – Paweł SMOLIKOWSKI, *Historia Zgromadzenia Zmartwychwstania Pańskiego*, Vol. IV. Kraków 1896, p. 188; quoted in Z. TROJANOWICZOWA, Z. DAMBEK with participation of J. CZARNOMORSKA, *Kalendarz życia i twórczości Cypriana Norwida*, Vol. I: 1821-1860, Poznań 2007, p. 303; Z. TROJANOWICZOWA, E. LIJEWSKA with participation of M. PLUTA: *Kalendarz*, Vol. II: 1861-1883, Poznań 2007; Z. TROJANOWICZOWA, Z. DAMBEK, I. GRZESZCZAK: *Kalendarz*, Vol. III: *Aneksy. Bibliografia. Indeksy*, Poznań 2007; quotations from this source are henceforth indicated with the abbreviation: Kal, volume, page). For the sake of completing this dramatic picture, it is worth recalling Norwid's own recollection of this traumatic event, triggered by a scandalous incident during Mickiewicz's funeral in the Parisian Church of St Magdalene on 21 January 1856: “Któż tak powstał przeciw śp. Adamowi jako ja w Rzymie – ale czy ubliżyłem kiedy godności jego – czy nie uszanowałem tego, co w nas, ludziach, jest *świętym-ciałem*, to jest tego, co trudem swym rozlał Adam wokół jako ogół duchowo-realny? Ceniłem – sądziłem – bo kochałem, chwala Bogu, trzeźwo. Oni kochają strzemiączka od butów na pamiątkę, a niewidzą nawet *ciała*, ani za życia, ani po śmierci” [Who has risen up against the late Adam as I did in Rome – but have I ever insulted his dignity – have I disrespected what is *sacred-body* in us, human beings, that is, what Adam poured out with his toil around as a spiritual-real whole? I have cherished – I have judged – because I have loved, praise God, soberly. They love shoe straps as a souvenir, and they do not even see the *body*, either during life or after death” (to Teofil Lenartowicz of 23 January 1856 – DW XI, 42; cf. Kal I, 304).

Youth, the slogan of all progressive aspirations, that expression tuned like angels singing [...] shone above the literariness of Warsaw. After all, to us (Warsaw residents) our own sun of literature has lit up, after all we have stopped playing with it as if it were a pretty thing, and we have created a huge profession, a priesthood of a whole life out of it. The first awakening of Warsaw literature, the first step in transition from toy to writing, was made by two young men in 1840 [...] In poetry, two young talents have shone: Cyprian Norwid and Roman Zmorski.<sup>29</sup>

It is no exaggeration to note that these were, in a sense, prophetic words – although Dembowski, in the same article, accuses the young artist (Norwid was less than 19 years old at the time of his poetic debut) of “backsliding” as a consequence of his association with the Warsaw salons<sup>30</sup> – although, in fact, the poet remained faithful to the profound seriousness of his vocation for the rest of his difficult life, especially during the years of forced emigration (from 1846 onwards). Even though the circumstances of his nomadic life often made him take advantage of invitations to literary salons as one of the few available “forums” for live contact with the public, it was a gross misuse of the term to call him a “salon poet.” Let us add that Dembowski did not have the opportunity to watch the further stages of the maturing of this talent, which he himself had noticed and promoted, because Norwid soon left the country for the West (in mid-1842). He did not get to know Norwid’s genuinely great but also difficult talent, as he himself was deeply involved in conspiracy work and treated the task of a literary critic more as a “smokescreen” for his important engagements, which were unfortunately interrupted by his tragic death in the first days of the Galician Uprising in the early spring of 1846.

It just happened so that in Norwid’s unusual and difficult life, time after time, intellectual (moral) challenges were arising to which he felt compelled to respond; the drama was aggravated by the gradual spread of a rumour, often taking the form of a treacherous slander, that he was simply a “wasted talent” or even a madman who wrote in hieroglyphics that were incomprehensible to anyone. This opinion did not change even after his frequent successes with “foreigners”<sup>31</sup> or the poet’s public

<sup>29</sup> DEMBOWSKI III, 286-287.

<sup>30</sup> “Norwid has become a salon dweller, nothing can be expected of him anymore” – *ibid.*, p. 292. An astonishing remark, or perhaps the critic of the Young Warsaw Writers (such a name became established over time as the term for an informal group of poets that emerged in Warsaw around 1840) did not notice the extremely sharp, even “anti-salon” poem *Pismo [Writings]*, published in *Przegląd Warszawski* in 1841, Vol. I, Issue 1 (mid-March), which would have prevented him from formulating such an extremely unfair opinion of this undoubtedly most talented poet who remained most faithful to his high calling – “the awakener of consciences.”

<sup>31</sup> These were not some international “successes” on the scale of, say, Mickiewicz, but European critics, especially from France and Germany, recognised the poet’s talent, especially in

appearances for “his own [compatriots]” as a lecturer or reciter,<sup>32</sup> e.g. his public lectures on Juliusz Słowacki in 1860, which undoubtedly became one of the most important steps towards overcoming biased opinions about the author of *Kordian*, situating his work always in the shadow of Mickiewicz; or the fascinating reading in front of an audience of about 300-600 listeners,<sup>33</sup> gathered on 13 May 1869 in the hall of the Grand Orient de France. By the way, both these texts were published soon after their delivery, yet at the time they met not only with complete disregard but, worse, with crushing criticism. This is particularly true of *Rzecz o wolności słowa* [*On the Freedom of Speech*], the publication of which, in a review by Józef I. Kraszewski under the pseudonym Doktor Omega in the first issue of the journal “Tydzień” in early 1870, was treated as proof of the complete derailment of poet’s literary vocation.<sup>34</sup> A similar fate befell his speeches at Parisian literary and artistic salons, more understandably so given the sparse audiences at such gatherings; the texts delivered there (including authentic improvisations written down by some of the audience) rarely made it into print during the poet’s lifetime. He often presented this difficult situation of an author recognised only in a narrow circle of acquaintances as a particular affliction of Polish culture, which can have (and has) not only disastrous consequences, i.e. the disappearance of the universal character of national culture, but also has a “positive” side, as he noted in one of his letters: “– – W innych społecznościach byłoby to już publiczną własnością, u nas jest Kolumbowym odkryciem, że były, są i będą salony, które karty historii zastępowały i w narodu dziejach stanowią – że to właśnie jest jednym z atrybutów chrześcijańskiej Ery w Dziejach” [– – In other societies it would already be a public property, in ours it is a Columbian discovery that there were, are and will be salons that replace the pages of history and constitute the nation’s history – that *this is one of the attributes*

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printmaking and drawing, comparing his work to the art of Dürer, Raphael or Rembrandt; the poet valued these references highly, as can be seen, for example, in his 1872 artistic autobiography (PWsz VI, 556-560) or numerous mentions in his letters.

<sup>32</sup> In a letter to Karol Ruprecht of October 1869, he enumerated his previous public appearances in Paris, citing the reading of the poem *Rzecz o wolności słowa* [*On the Freedom of Speech*] as his seventh “lecture”: “W tych siedmiu aktach publicznych Norwid, jak wiadomo wszystkim, nie oparty jest na żadnym stronnictwie, żadnej partii, żadnym spisku, żadnej sekcie... mais sur ce qu’il y a de plus loyal dans le suffrage universel” [In these seven public acts, Norwid, as everyone knows, is based on no partisanship, no party, no conspiracy, no sect.... but on what he is most entitled to through universal expectation], PWsz IX, 429f.

<sup>33</sup> Norwid gave a figure of 600, press reporters mentioned 300; cf. the commentary in the edition of the poem, ed. P. Chlebowski: DW IV, 347f.

<sup>34</sup> In the section *Nowe Książki*: “Tydzień polityczny, naukowy, literacki i artystyczny,” published by Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, Dresden 1870, Issue 1, p. 11.



of the Christian Era in History] (letter to Bronislaw Zaleski, between 9 and 16 November 1869: PWSz IX 433). But words of genuine appreciation sometimes reached him “from the salons.” He wrote of this in a letter to Eleonora Czapska: “Bilecik Pani życzę sobie zachować jako pamiątkę; słowa, że ‘mało osób poważniej się obchodzi literaturą,’ są drogim uznaniem. Czasem *kilkanaście lat* przebywa się w stolicy dzisiejszego umysłowego ruchu, aż w jednym salonie polskim zasłyszysz się tę prawdę!” [I wish to keep your ticket as a souvenir; the words that ‘few people are more serious about literature’ show great recognition. Sometimes one spends *several years* in the capital of today’s intellectual movement until one hears this truth in a Polish salon!] (letter to Eleonora Czapska of 31 January 1870: PWSz IX, 442f.).

Simplifying the matter a little, we could say that this natural-born polemicist and awakener of intellectual life, searching for social solutions through dialogue, dispute and polemic, was deprived of the basic instrument of action, which at the time was the large-circulation press, hence the not infrequent signs of frustration or even aggression in his letters sent to friends and/or public figures (especially in exile), in journalistic texts, which also most often had to take the epistolary form, as, after the Polish-language press in Greater Poland was temporarily opened to him (1848-1850), the “whispered propaganda” against Norwid deprived him of the opportunity to publish texts about the problems he addressed, which were fundamental to his contemporary times (e.g. the burning problem of young emigration) and the future of an enslaved country that should undoubtedly one day regain its independence. One consequence of this abnormal position of the man particularly attuned to discussion, polemics, wrestling over the truth and moral reasons, was the introduction of journalistic themes directly into his poetry, which made it even more difficult for it to reach the general readership, supposedly or actually having a different idea (a different taste) of “true poetry.” In this way, the powerful voice of his brilliant work *Vade-mecum*, which in the poet’s plans was to make a fundamental “turn” in the developmental paths of Polish poetry, and at the same time carried a radical social (moral!) programme, which often came into conflict with the artistic programme of this collection of poems, written and/or processed over the course of nearly 20 years of Norwid’s creative output (1849-1866), was drowned out, under-completed in scribbled notebooks.

This unparalleled civil courage, even more – bravery, comparable with the knightly ideals of ancient times,<sup>35</sup> is best seen in some of the poet’s speeches “in

<sup>35</sup> The Norwid family – “on the spear side” (i.e. represented by the eldest son) – belonged to the Knights of Malta; moreover, “on the distaff side” (the Zdzieborski – Sobieski families), a tradition of kinship with the Sobieski family (very distant, dating back to the turn of the 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> centuries) was cultivated, from which descended the famous victor at Vienna, King Jan III Sobieski. Cyprian Norwid was well aware of these connections, and often treated them as a compensation for

defence” of the Catholic Church, and particularly its “head” at the time, Pope Pius IX. What is striking, however, is that even though the poet was a declared “papist,” he did not hesitate to utter extremely violent words, provoked by the shortcomings of the “political mission” of the papacy at the time. In a letter to August Cieszkowski from November 1850, we can read something that might surprise even a contemporary “declared defender of the Church”:

[...] gdybym dziś zakonnikiem stał się – *jutro herezję zrobiłbym* – nie mogąc wchodzić do Kościoła kontemplacji, bo w tym trwam i jestem, ale jako *czynnik* i pracownik. A Kościół, który na Anglię nie przez boleść irlandzką – a na Rosję nie przez boleść polską działa – nie obowiązuje mnie w swej akcji. *I o ile jest w akcji*, zginie za niewiele już czasów, bo apostołstwo nie jest dyplomacją i kuglarstwem, i kabalistyką, ale prorocstwem szczerym.

(From a letter to A. Cieszkowski, before 13 November 1850, DW X, 272)

[...] if today I were to become a monk – *tomorrow I would make a heresy* – unable to enter the Church of contemplation, for in this I abide and am, but as an *agent* and worker. And the Church, which acts in England not by Irish sorrows – and in Russia not by Polish sorrows – does not oblige me in its action. And insofar *as it is in action*, it will perish soon, for apostleship is not diplomacy and jugglery, and cabalism, but sincere prophecy.

Courage, bravery, a chivalrous attitude – these traits of Norwid’s personality are not only a “graceful courtliness” acquired thanks to his upbringing in a landed family with high family ambitions, but also the fundamental ideological side of the poet, as he even said at some point to one of his close acquaintances: “Mam przekonanie, że nic piękniejszego nie ma nad to, kiedy *jeden człowiek wyzywa cały choćby świat do walki*” [I am convinced that there is nothing more beautiful than when *one man challenges even the whole world to fight*] (letter to J. Kuczyńska, late September (?) 1862, DW XII, 117). In our search for Norwid’s civic thought, we will focus mainly on his discursive statements, mainly on his journalistic texts, but in order to give an example to the thesis stated earlier, in which it is suggested that the poet often filled his lyrical poems (but also other literary genres) with journalistic content (some even accused him of unbearable didacticism), we will take a closer look at the poem “Socjalizm” [Socialism], which is a good example of this extremely frequent poetic practice of his. This poem shows a clear affinity in thought with his *Listy o emigracji* [Letters on Emigration]. According to Zenon Przesmycki, in its original version it was written “without any doubt” at the end of 1849, and its first edition later (in 1856) found its way into Bojanowski’s “Pokłosie,” and from there it entered

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life’s failures. Interestingly, the title of “Knight of Malta” was formally inherited – in accordance with the contemporary “Maltese” tradition – by his older brother Ludwik.

contemporary discourse thanks to the publications of Roman Zrębowski<sup>36</sup> and Zenon Przesmycki.<sup>37</sup> This edition of the poem (i.e. “Czasy” [Times]) was also included in Pini’s edition.<sup>38</sup> The new edition (titled “Socjalizm” [Socialism]), included in the *Vade-mecum* cycle, was probably written during the period of the collection’s composition (1865-1866), and the intermediate version (crossed out by the author), differing slightly from the other two, titled “Socjalizm 1848” [“Socialism 1848”], which is found among the surviving autograph pages of *Vade-mecum*, probably dates from the same time. As in the original version (“Czasy”), also in “Socjalizm” one can see a strong ideological affinity with *Listy o emigracji*, and especially with the so-called *Odpowiedź krytykom “Listów o emigracji”* [*Reply to the Critics of “Letters on Emigration”*] (a title given by Gomulicki), in which Norwid strongly opposed the doctrinaire elevation of “humanity,” which he calls a “sacred abstraction,” above “the nation,” through which the individual can realistically participate in the “work of history”: “*Życie – to jest przytomność, a przytomność – obecność, a obecność jest jawność, z której rośnie sumienie, więc moc, więc krzepkość wielowoli....*” [*Life is consciousness, and consciousness is presence, and presence is openness, from which grows conscience, hence power, hence the robustness of the multi-will....*] (PWsz VII, 39).

In the poetic polemic against the utopia of the final “fulfilment of history,” one can clearly hear echoes of the ideological disputes of the epoch, and especially of those mystical-political visions in which various “prophets” formulated final perspectives for the development of current historical events, whose subject is “humanity,” created in place of the previous “nations” that had just completed their historical “mission.” This is how, *inter alia*, Mickiewicz’s *Skład zasad* [*A Collection of Principles*], a manifesto for the revolutionary transformation of civil rights inherited from the French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, was criticised; in a letter to Józef Bohdan Zaleski of 24 April 1848, Norwid expressed his indignation at most of the theses contained in *Skład zasad*, which in his view undermined traditional values such as “homeland,” “property,” “family,” “nation” and others:

<sup>36</sup> C. NORWID, *Wybór poezyj*, collected and with an afterword by R. Zrębowski, Lviv 1908, p. 89; 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Lviv 1911, p. 160.

<sup>37</sup> A comparison of an older edition titled “Czasy” [Times] in: *Pokłosie. Zbieranka na korzyść sierot*, R. V: 1856, Poznań 1857, p. 175; cf. C. NORWID, *Pisma zebrane*, ed. Z. Przesmycki, Warszawa-Kraków 1911 [recte: 1912], p. 864.

<sup>38</sup> C. NORWID, *Dziela. (Drobne utwory poetyckie – Poematy – Utwory dramatyczne – Legendy, nowele, gawędy – Przekłady – Rozprawy wierszem i prozą)*, edited, explained and with a critical introduction by T. Pini, Warszawa 1933 [recte: 1932], p. 42.

Owóż, takie pojęcia spod znakomitego pióra wyszły dały mi tylko uczuć, o ile jestem opóźnionym w widzeniu onej triumfującej już Ludzkości, która jest jakby Jeruzalem u świętego Jana opisane – a w której wszakże *gwalt* panuje – *radikalizm mistyczny* i *gnostyczna duchowa arystokracja* powołanych. Pojęcia pana Adama przemilczane i życiem otrzymywane doskonałym byłyby zapewne cudnymi owocami [...] ale toż samo pojęte jako prawo, jako ukaz-mistyczno-Fourierowski jest niedorzecznością – i jest fałszem – rad bym, żeby nie-krwawym! (DW X, 144)<sup>39</sup>

Well, such notions coming from an excellent pen have only given me a feeling of how far I am behind in seeing this already triumphant Humanity, which is like Jerusalem described in St John –but in which *rape* reigns – *mystical radicalism* and *gnostic spiritual aristocracy* of the chosen ones.

Mr Adam’s notions passed over in silence and received by perfect life would probably be wonderful fruits [...] but the same thing conceived as a law, as a mystical Fourierian dict, is absurdity – and is a falsehood – I would be glad if it were not bloody!

Thus, in the fire of the revolution of 1848, a new socio-political category was forging itself, namely – as put ironically in “Socjalizm” – the concept of “humanity,” which would make a big career in the next century. Norwid, attached to a hierarchical system of references and interdependent, increasingly general concepts, which logically resulted in an impoverishment of content as the range of concepts widened, as in the schema: individual – family – tribe (race) – people – nation – Church – Humanity; he looked upon the last category as the final goal of history rather than as the real form of social relations and did not hesitate to call “humanity” a “sacred abstraction” ([*Odpowiedź krytykom “Listów o emigracji”*], PWSz VII, 33), which, indeed, may become a reality when the “work of history” comes to an end, when the inhabitants of the globe, i.e. mankind, become a community, not an assembly of “peoples,” who are divided (fatally different) by everything rather than drawn closer together, and conscience becomes their common language. In the meantime, judgements about the end of time and the apocalyptic final judgement (the division into “the wicked” and “the chosen”) are simply a distorting truth, a deceptive utopia, a biblical “confusion of tongues” accompanying the erection of a monument to human pride – the Tower of Babel.

In Norwid’s writings as a whole, there are several moments in which one can clearly discern a particular intensity of reflections on “civic” issues, although this is naturally visible as a certain “constant” of his intellectual engagements from the beginning of his writing path, i.e. from his debut appearances in the press in 1840-

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<sup>39</sup> Here, it would be necessary to introduce the context of Norwid’s intellectual meetings with Krasieński in Rome in the early spring of 1848, from whom he most likely drew his vision of the epoch of “St John,” i.e. the third – and final – phase of the triptych of history in the messianic concepts of the author of *Przedświt* [*Predawn*].

1842 and his participation in the intensely flourishing cultural life in the literary salons of post-uprising Warsaw, as evidenced, for instance, in the poems “Pismo” [Writings] and “Pióro” [My Quill Pen]. These moments, particularly saturated with “civic” issues, usually coincide in the poet’s biography with world-shattering events – both in his life and in European or Polish “turning points.”

The first of these “catalysts” of social issues falls in the years 1846-1849, i.e. from the appearance of the “harbingers of the storm” to the clear subsidence of the revolutionary wave that swept almost the whole of Europe and rose with the chaotic outbreak of the peasant revolution in the Austrian partition (the Galician Slaughter) and the unsuccessful Kraków Uprising, to reach its apogee in the spring and summer of 1848. Several key events in Norwid’s life coincided with this time: his arrest by Prussian police in Berlin in the second half of June 1846, which was evidently an act of revenge of the Russian embassy in Prussia after his rejection of his role as a confidant of Tsarist “intelligence,” presumably to track Polish emigration.<sup>40</sup> After being questioned for several hours – as quoted by Krasieński – Norwid replied courtly to the Russian embassy representative: “I am unworthy of the illustrious career you indicate to me, thus accept my farewell for ever;” to which the exasperated official replied “in Polish: ‘You, Poles, are poets, we Muscovites are not. We’ll see who will go further.’”<sup>41</sup> After a few weeks, the poet, supported by influential representatives

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<sup>40</sup> Norwid recounted the whole incident to Krasieński at one of his Roman meetings, and Krasieński “reported” it to Delfina in a letter of 25-26 January 1848: Z. KRASIEŃSKI, *Listy do Delfiny Potockiej*, pp. 605-605; cf. detailed documentation of this dramatic episode in: Kal II, 215-229. Russian intelligence had been “tracking” Norwid for some time, and after the mysterious affair with the poet’s passport (presumably this was the document he used to leave “for studies” in 1842, by then already expired, according to Norwid’s letter of 25-27 January 1846 to Maria Trębicka: “Jeżeli przed 14 lutego nie odbiorę zaspokajającej wiadomości, będzie to dzień wyjazdu do Warszawy – dotąd tylko mam paszport” [If I do not receive satisfactory news by 14 February, it will be the day of my departure to Warsaw – so far I only have a passport] – DW X, 79), offered to a “fugitive” from the Kingdom, Maksymilian Jatowtt. The document then found its way into the hands of the French police, who informed the Russian embassy in Paris about the case, from where an enquiry about Norwid’s whereabouts probably was made; eventually the embassy in Berlin dealt with him and tried to trick him (*inter alia*, by blackmailing him with the passport story) into secret collaboration with the Russian services. For Norwid, this was not only an experience of “temptation” that he remembered for the rest of his life, but also the cause of serious damage to his health in the Prussian prison at Hausvogteiplatz, and later in the prison clinic from which he was released owing to the efforts of influential people from the Polish community in the Prussian government.

<sup>41</sup> From Krasieński’s letter to Delfina, quoted above (p. 605). By the way, the secretary of the Russian embassy in Berlin, Felix Fonton, was not Greek but French, and his wife was a Polish woman, daughter of Baron Mohrenheim (see footnote 10, *ibid.*, p. 608).

of the Polish community in Berlin,<sup>42</sup> broke out of prison (from the prison clinic),<sup>43</sup> in order to set off as an exile (“with a one-way ticket”) to the West, from where he had no right or desire to return to his homeland for the rest of his life, treating exile as a specifically understood, moral and patriotic duty, which he profoundly expressed in a public speech at a meeting of emigration representatives on 29 November 1846 at the Brussels Town Hall on the 16<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the outbreak of the November Uprising. A report from the meeting and Norwid’s speech, entitled *Głos niedawno do wychodźstwa przybyłego artysty* [*The Voice of a Recently Exiled Artist*], was soon published in print in the émigré periodical *Orzeł Biały* (VII: 1846, Issue 19/20, 20 XII, pp. 75-76). This speech and a number of the poet’s later statements on various occasions, especially in letters, addressed the issue of the importance of emigration for the future of the country.

In addition to these dramatic personal experiences, Norwid at that time confronted the fundamental questions of the choice of paths (profiles) of social life for the future, which were displayed in the flames of the revolution of 1848/49. The poet found himself at the very centre of events – in Rome, i.e. on the stage of a great ideological discussion and, at the same time, in the arena of authentic acts of revolutionary violence. These personal experiences culminated in a number of literary works, such as the cycle *Pieśń Społeczna* [*Social Song*] (from 1848) or *Niewola* [*Enslavement*] (from 1848 or 1849) and, above all, the seminal poetic work *Promethidion* (from 1848-1849, published in Paris in early 1851). From the two fundamental paths into the future, namely revolution and labour, progress and conservatism, bare “action” and intellectual-artistic reflection, grew his original conception of art-work as a response to the challenges of the time.

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<sup>42</sup> “Książę Wilhelm Radziwiłł był łaskaw mówić o mnie Królowi Pruskiemu i tym sposobem ułatwiono mi ujechanie z więzienia – mówię: *ujechanie*, nie: *ucieczkę*, bo nie uciekałem nigdy!” [Prince Wilhelm Radziwiłł was kind enough to speak on my behalf with the King of Prussia, and in this way, it was made easier for me to leave the prison – I say: *leave*, not: *flee*, for I have never fled!] (to Konstancja Górską from early 1880: PWSz X, 142).

<sup>43</sup> See a letter to Cezary Plater of 27 or 28 July 1846, and commentary on the poet’s imprisonment and release: DW X, 96. In a letter to Adam Potocki, he mentioned deafness, the beginnings of which “nagabnęły mię we więzieniu pruskim w 1846, w Haus-fochtag, więzieniu ciężkim, gdzie w gorący dzień w lekkim fraku po mnóstwie agitujących nerwy indagacji byłem zawarty na słomie i we wilgoci...” [caught me in a Prussian prison in 1846, in Haus-fochtag, a heavy prison, where on a hot day in a light tailcoat after numerous nerve-agitating inquiries I was lying on straw and in dampness...] (letter of 16 July 1870: PWSz IX, 459). This chronic incapacity was the cause of many of the poet’s “blunders,” e.g. being accused of spying for Prussia during the siege of Paris in the war of 1870/71 (cf. letter to Władysław Czartoryski of 20 September 1870: PWSz IX, 463-466), and also prevented him from taking part in the defence of Paris as a soldier, as he simply could not hear the content of military commands (see a letter to Karol Ruprecht of 1 September 1870: PWSz IX, 462f.).

I tak ja widzę przyszłą w Polsce sztukę,  
 Jako *chorągiew na prac ludzkich wieży*,  
 Nie jak zabawkę ani jak *naukę*,  
 Lecz jak *najwyższe z rzemiosł apostoła*  
 I jak *najniższą modlitwę aniola*.  
 (*Promethidion*, DW IV, 116)

And this is how I see future art in Poland,  
 As a *flag on the tower of human work*,  
 Not as a toy or as a *science*,  
 But as *the highest of the apostle's crafts*  
 And as *the angel's lowest prayer*.

In Norwid's catalogue of supreme values, work occupies a fundamental place, heralding a radical civilisational transformation in which man's attitude to work will be an important measure for assessing his moral contribution to the common good. In Norwid's life we can see not only his "appreciation" (exaltation) of work, pointing to its necessary connection with beauty as a metaphysical category, but also his genuine struggle for the possibility of staying afloat in life precisely thanks to work, which to many in his circle might have seemed an oddity<sup>44</sup>:

Quand aux *lettres à ces Messieurs d'ici* – c'est la dernière des choses. Si j'ai jamais fait des démarches de ce genre, ce n'est que pour n'avoir rien à me reprocher, mais nullement pour espérer à en déduire quelque chose.

Toute ma vie sa passe entre les travaux et les mécomptes. Avant beaucoup de vos connaissances, et plus qu'eux, je commençai à travailler – et j'ai travaillé – – mais l'époque m'a trahit et je ne suis pas de force à la changer.

(Letter to Michał Kleczkowski of January 1860; DW XI, 386)

As for the *letters to the gentlemen here* – that is the least important matter. If I have ever taken such steps, it is only in order not to have anything to reproach myself with, and by no means in hope to obtain anything.

My whole life is spent between work and disappointment. Earlier than many of your acquaintances, more than they, I began to work – – and I have worked – – but the epoch has betrayed me, and I have no power to change it.

Ten years after the poet's famous speech in Brussels, the émigré community was moved by discussions and disputes about the possibility of returning to the country,

<sup>44</sup> In a letter to his sister-in-law, Zofia née Sobieska, by first marriage Komierowska, by second marriage Ksawerowa Norwidowa, by third marriage Radwanowa, dated 30 August 1868, he wrote that perhaps he would be intelligible "gdyby był *próżniakiem*, *to jest człowiekiem zrozumiałym dla społeczeństwa* i otoczonym pomocą przez rozumiejących" [if he were a *loafer*, *that is a man understood by the society* and surrounded with the help of those who understand] (PWSz IX, 359).

which was suggested by the so-called amnesty announced after the death of Tsar Nicholas I by his successor on 27 May 1856. Norwid explicitly urged them to ignore it.

In a letter from September 1856 to his cousin Michał Kleczkowski, who was in China on a diplomatic mission, he wrote:

[...] *Amnestia* tak nazwana jest formalnym na piśmie ogłoszeniem tego, co było od lat tyłu – kto prosi – ambasada daje lub nie daje – jak chce. Nie jest to polityczne uznanie całości jakiejś, przebacząc całość. Także nikomu własność nie wrócona – przebaczenie więc wyjątkowe, tak jakby zbiegłym niewolnikom jako rzecz należącym do panów. Emigracja że nigdy nic, więc i tu jako *cielo zbiorowe* nie odparła tego ani zdefiniować nawet zdobyła się – tylko tak, jak to u nas wszystko...

Ci też, co wracają, są ci, co nie-serio wyszli, także i ci, którzy, *politycznie tylko* żyjąc, żadnego wyobrażenia o *socialnym* człowieku nie mają, a przeto wyobrazić sobie i zgadnąć naprzód nie są w stanie, co to ofiaruje, a co dotrzymać może.

Niewolnicy wszędzie i zawsze niewolnikami będą – daj im skrzydła u ramion, a zamiatać pójdą ulice skrzydłami. (DW XI, 125)

[...] The *amnesty* thus named is a formal announcement in writing of what has been for so many years – whoever requests it – the embassy grants or does not grant it – as it wishes. It is not a political recognition of the whole of something, forgiving the whole. Also property has not been returned to anyone – it is thus exceptional forgiveness, as if given to fugitive slaves as things belonging to masters. Emigration, passive as always, thus also here as a *collective body* did not repudiate it or even define it, just as with everything...

Those who return are those who have not seriously left, and there are those who, living *only politically*, have no idea of *social* man and are thus unable to imagine and anticipate what it offers and what it can keep.

Slaves will everywhere and always be slaves – give them wings at the shoulders and they will sweep the streets with their wings.

An eloquent summary of this issue is provided in two poems from 1856/1857, written against the background of heated debates over the dilemma outlined in the title of one of them: “Czy podam się o amnestię?” [Shall I Request an Amnesty?], which is emphatically judged by the last stanza:

Schowajcie sobie te niewczesne kwiaty,  
I skarżcie raczej, żem zły – żem się zaciął –  
Że nie chcę współczuć własnej i was straty,  
Bo – jam nie zdradził nawet... *nieprzyjaciół*.  
(PWSz I, 260)<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> The dating of this poem is uncertain; *Kalendarz*, following Gomulicki, adopts the year 1856, but with the suggestion that it may have been written earlier – in 1855, when after the death of Tsar Nicholas I, rumours spread of an expected amnesty (Kal II 647).



Hide the untimely flowers,  
And complain rather that I'm bad – that I'm stuck –  
That I do not want to sympathise with my own loss and yours,  
For – I have not betrayed even... *enemies*.

The next poem exposes, in a manner characteristic of Norwid's poetics – ironically and violently – the absurdity not so much of 'amnesty' itself, but of posing the issue in such a way as if it could actually be an amnesty<sup>46</sup> rather than a propaganda game played by the tsar with Polish society and its most important part, the one most homeless, because condemned to wander as an emigrant:

Do której z tych trzech rzeczy wracać pozwolono? –  
*Do Ojczyzny? do Kraju? czy do Społeczeństwa?*  
Do pierwszej równie trudno którąkolwiek stronę;  
Drugi jest ziemią, i to bez błogosławieństwa.  
Pozostaje Społeczność... ta w trzy karnawały  
Tym prędzej zapomina, im kto więcej stały...  
(PWsz I, 261)<sup>47</sup>

Which of these three things have we been allowed to come back to? –  
*To the Homeland? to the Country? Or to Society?*  
To the first one – it is equally difficult from either side;  
The second is land, the one without blessing.  
The Community remains... this one in three carnivals  
Forgets, the more constant one is...

The second intense "chapter" in Norwid's book of social reflections is linked to the breakdown of his life plans: the dramatic end of his acquaintance (which at one point transitioned into the poet's one-sided crush) with Maria Kalergis,<sup>48</sup> and

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<sup>46</sup> The poet did not take advantage of the opportunity to request an amnesty and return to the country, which was announced for Polish exiles by Nicholas I's successor, Alexander II, on 27 May 1856; the tsar's "mercy" was not unconditional and universal; according to the authors of the *Kalendarz życia i twórczości Norwida*: "From the time of the announcement of amnesty until September 1857, 807 applications were submitted to the Russian embassy in Paris for permission to return to the country, amnesty was granted to 530 people, 105 applications were rejected" (Kal II 625). Among others, Norwid's younger brother Ksawery "was granted" amnesty, but "most emigrants protested against amnesty" (Kal, *ibid.*).

<sup>47</sup> Untitled poem, designated in editions by the incipit [Do której z tych trzech rzeczy...] [Which of these three things...].

<sup>48</sup> This was made more dramatic by a chain of various misunderstandings – Maria was formally bound to her husband – her "double" marriage to the Greek millionaire Jan Kalergis, who

the subsequent attempt – also unsuccessful – to “take refuge” in the Resurrectionist Congregation (a retreat before joining the congregation),<sup>49</sup> the spectre of material poverty, unsuccessful attempts to “break through” to the literary forum of his time, despite the publication of several important works, such as *Promethidion* or *Zwolon*, and despite attempts – following the advice of Adam Mickiewicz himself – to “put the strokes of his pen in order,” i.e. the first project to publish a collection of his writings,<sup>50</sup> resumed later on several more occasions. This time of the poet’s hopeless struggle can be clearly seen in his letters of 1849-1852, in which he makes a radical summary of his unsuccessful “love affair” with the Polish literary and artistic audience<sup>51</sup>. This “review” also finds its unusual artistic expression in a poetic letter of 10 April 1853 to Maria Trębicka, sent from across the Atlantic:

Co do mnie, rzecz jest inna: ja to jestem  
 Na świecie jako w trupie doskonałej  
 Nad-kompletowy aktor – jeśli kiedy  
 Czyje mu zrobi miejsce zaziębiecie,  
 To dobrze – albo kochanek się spóźni,  
 Lub duch nie na czas włos sobie rozwieje,  
 Lub piorun winien uderzyć przechodnia...  
 To – już są moje w dramie specjalności!  
 (PWsz I, 218)<sup>52</sup>

As for me, the thing is different: I am  
 In the world like a super-numerary actor  
 In a perfect troupe – if ever  
 One’s cold makes place for him,

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was a member of the Greek Church, concluded in the Orthodox Church and in the Catholic Church, also required a declaration of nullity by both denominations; in the Orthodox Church a divorce was obtained, but in the Catholic Church only a separation, the violation of which could entail serious consequences for Maria, primarily financial. This was the formal and legal reason for distancing herself from Cyprian Norwid’s serious intentions; the second – probably more important – was her dramatically complicated (albeit mutual) love for Adam Potocki, a relationship that was firmly ruled out by Potocki’s mother (Zofia née Branicka). At some point, the poet realised that in this drama he was destined to play the role of an “super-numerary actor” at best.

<sup>49</sup> See a letter to Piotr Semenenko from the first half of May 1852: DW X, 408f.; cf. the publisher’s commentary on the letter and another letter to Fr Semenenko of ca. 22 June 1852: DW X, 414.

<sup>50</sup> See a letter to Władysław Bentkowski of ca. 20 December 1850: DW X, 299.

<sup>51</sup> This situation is well illustrated by letters to August Cieszkowski, especially a letter from before 13 November 1850: DW X, 275-280.

<sup>52</sup> Poem designated by the incipit [Pierwszy list, co mnie doszedł z Europy...] [The first letter that reached me from Europe...].

That'll be good – or the lover is late,  
 Or a ghost does not ruffle its hair in time,  
 Or should lightning strike a passer-by...  
 These – are already my specialities in drama!

The radical way out of his hopeless situation seemed to him to be the escape across the ocean – to the United States – and the start of “a new life” there, just at the time when the wave of migration from Europe – plagued by various crises – was rising towards this legendary “promised land”:

[...] Kiedy na świecie całym zabrakło mi miejsca, ażeby wysłuchać się – a w celi zakonnej zabrakło mi celi, przybyłem na tę ziemię bez-historycznej wszechstronności [...]. (DW X, 464)<sup>53</sup>

[...] When the whole world ran out of space for me to listen to myself – and I ran out of a cell in a monastic cell, I came to this land of history-less versatility [...].

But it soon became necessary to return from this “emigration from emigration” – not with millions, admittedly, but with a baggage of uncommon experiences, which will pay off, in a sense, to the end of his creative engagements.<sup>54</sup> The central European event at that time (with much far-reaching consequences in the history of other regions as well) was the Crimean War (1853-1856) and the attempts at “reactivating” the Polish cause on the international forum, allegedly championed by Napoleon III. The poet’s main experience during his nearly two-year stay in the United States was the observation of the great power of well-organised work, for which he made the poetic (and at the same time biblical) motto: “Pracować musisz z potem twego CZOŁA!” [You must work with the sweat of your BROW!].<sup>55</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Letter to Maria Trębicka, letter written from New York on 6 September 1853.

<sup>54</sup> A year after his return from across the Atlantic, he summed up his American experience in a letter to one of his “patrons”: “Z mojej strony nie taję, że acz dobrze płacony, kapitalistą *bynajmniej* nie wróciłem, tyle unosząc w zysku, iż *wielkie podróże*, o ile można było użytecznie, ołówkiem się moim podpierając, dokonałem” [For my part, I make no secret of the fact that, although well paid, *by no means* have I returned a capitalist, having gained so much in profit that I have made *great journeys*, as far as could be usefully done, supporting myself with my pencil] (to Adam Potocki from the second half of 1855: DW XI, 25f.). The poet’s request, addressed to Mieczysław Pawlikowski, to borrow “całego uniform *czarnego*” [an entire *black* uniform], when he was forced to make “jedną z rzadkich wizyt w Świecie” [one of his rare visits in the World] (to Mieczysław Pawlikowski from the first half of June 1856: DW XI, 68), can give some insight into the poet’s financial situation.

<sup>55</sup> Originally printed as “Praca” [Work] in the Kraków periodical *Czas*, 1865, Issue 1. After some changes, the poem was later included in the collection *Vade-mecum* under the title “Prac-czoło” [Work in Brow’s Sweat], but more than half of the text was destroyed. Furthermore, the

This period saw an important publishing initiative – another attempt to collect and publish Norwid’s works scattered in periodicals and/or in copies among his friends. Although the project undertaken by Antoni Zaleski did not come to fruition, it remained in the realm of projects and finally produced an effect of great importance to the writer in the form of the publication of a collection of works in the Leipzig publishing house F. A. Brockhaus, in the popular series “Biblioteka Pisarzy Polskich” [Library of Polish Writers] as its volume XXI: *Poezye Cypriana Norwida* [Cyprian Norwid’s Poesies], first collective edition, Leipzig, 1863 [published in 1862]. The publisher soon commissioned another volume, which – despite being unpublished and for years, deteriorating, waiting to be printed – became a pillar of Norwid’s later position in Polish literature. This refers to the *Vade-mecum* volume, unpublished during the poet’s lifetime.

The third prominent social scene were the years of the approaching January storm of 1863-1865, the first hints of which came from the homeland to emigration as early as February 1861, and were connected with the brutal repressions of the Tsarist regime in Warsaw, which provoked further patriotic demonstrations, the culmination of which was the mass uprising of 8 April 1861, which ended in a terrible massacre on the Castle Square: “between one hundred and two hundred people were killed, including several women. Warsaw Jews took an active part in the demonstration. A young Jewish student, Michał Landy, took in his hands a cross carried by a wounded monk, Karol Nowakowski, ‘but cut with a backsword he also fell.’”<sup>56</sup> This time, which was also turbulent in Europe, brought not only the tragic experience of the utter impotence of an enslaved country in the face of the power of the invader(s), but also great legal acts that can be regarded as the “knell” of the dying feudal (serfdom) system; however, this resisted civilisational change in the Russian partition for an exceptionally long time (the enfranchisement act of the Insurgent Government – 1863; a year later the Tsar’s decree – March 1864). In addition to the uprising in Poland, this turbulent time in Europe witnessed the struggle between Austria and Prussia<sup>57</sup> for dominance in Central Europe, which in

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poet used it at least once more – in a composition entitled “Co słyhać? i co począć?” [What’s New? And What’s to Do?].

<sup>56</sup> Kal II, 20; in the quotation, reference to the study: S. KIENIEWICZ, *Powstanie styczniowe*, Warszawa 1983, p. 149.

<sup>57</sup> The profound changes in alliances and alignments in international relations can best be seen in the history of Prussia, which – as the astute observer of political life at the time, Eliza Krasieńska née Branicka, noted – in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century began to “play the role” of the defender of Catholicism: “Since they are no longer just a Protestant power and have acquired so many Catholic subjects, they feel that they must also look after the interests of the head of the Catholic Church. A strange protector, a strange helper...” – letter to Zofia Potocka of 13 November 1866:

the perspective of its later consequences was a prelude to two great world catastrophes in the following century. The clash between the modern armed Prussian and Austrian armies, which, particularly as a result of the defeat of Austria and its ally, Saxony, at Königgrätz (5 July 1866), accelerated the process of unification of the dispersed German states and duchies under the Prussian banner, and the creation of the so-called Second Reich, pushing for achieving an imperial position in Europe and the world. Across the Atlantic at this time, devastating battles over the ultimate political shape of the United States (the Civil War fought between the South and the North in 1861-1865) were taking place.

In Norwid's life, this was a time of, on the one hand, successes in the émigré reading forums and, on the other, actually a string of publishing "disasters." Despite being published in print several times, his books not only failed to achieve any popularity among readers, but were actually crushed by reviewers in the press of the day and – worse still – in the omnipotent "whispered" opinion, which ultimately closed him the door to further publications<sup>58</sup>. This acute and dramatic fate befell, *inter alia*, the publication of a series of public lectures on Juliusz Słowacki, as well as the narrative poem *Rzecz o wolności słowa* [*On the Freedom of Speech*].

The fourth phase of the increased interest in social issues in Norwid's reflection coincided with the dramatic events of 1870, when, within a few months of the ill-timed Franco-Prussian War, France withdrew from the defence of papal Rome, which, after being captured by the Savoy army, became the capital of a united Italy, with the result that the state sovereignty of the pope shrank to the Vatican<sup>59</sup> (the

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*Świadek epoki. Listy Elizy z Branickich Krasińskiej z lat 1835-1876*, Vol. 4: lipiec 1863-maj 1876, read from the manuscript, selected, with a commentary and an introduction by Z. Sudolski, transl. U. Sudolska, Warszawa 1996, p. 141.

<sup>58</sup> This drama of an unwanted writer particularly affected his most outstanding poetic work, the *Vade-mecum* cycle, the publication of which he unsuccessfully sought for many years; the matter was brutally summed up by Józef I. Kraszewski, who was repeatedly asked by the poet – also through mutual acquaintances – for help in publishing his landmark work. Kraszewski wrote back to Bronisław Zaleski, who intervened with the author of *Stara Baśń* [*An Ancient Tale*] regarding Brockhaus' broken contract with Norwid for the publication of the next volume (*Vade-mecum*): "Apart from [...] the terrible *today*, there is also the fact that Norwid ... Norwid, in his last poems, ruined his fame. No one, it seems, will buy [...] I respect the good-hearted fantasist Norwid, but as a poet I cannot help [...] this name is already a synonym for eccentricity, by no means justified by his equal talent, because eccentricity has far outgrown talent and eaten it up" (letter of 29 May 1866; quoted after Kal II, 252).

<sup>59</sup> The Ecclesiastical State gradually decayed over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The main factors were, on the one hand, the revolutionary movements that burst this ancient political entity "from within" and, on the other hand, the idea of building a unified Italian state pursued by the Savoy dynasty. Neither Austrian, nor French, nor even Russian interventions helped. Neither did the radical moves by Pius IX,

pope declared himself “a prisoner of the Vatican”). France, meanwhile, was crushed by the Prussian armies, Napoleon III was taken prisoner, and, as a result of all the misfortunes that had befallen France, dethroned by the government of national defence. Paris, under siege for many months, became the arena of a revolution, known in historiography as the Paris Commune, and the city’s residents – Norwid among them – were subjected to the terrible conditions of war, plagued by hunger, disease and violence. After signing a humiliating peace treaty, France had to pay a huge contribution to the victors: 5 billion francs in gold (i.e. about 100 billion US dollars today), which forced the country to borrow a gigantic amount abroad and made the French economy dependent for a long time on foreign capital (mainly English), from where a ruined France had to draw credit to repay these obligations. By the way, this “war trophy” became for the German Empire, which was established at that time, one of the important impulses of rapid civilisational development and the premise of further imperial projects.

For Norwid’s fate, the defeat of France ultimately contributed to a complete loss of his already problematic material independence, and finally forced him to accept a solution that was extremely difficult for him – taking refuge at the age of 56 in a shelter for poor émigré veterans, i.e. in the Saint Casimir House near Paris, where he lived for six years – from 9 February 1877 until his death (22/23 May 1883). The experiences of these final years – at times dramatically depressing – did not, however, take the pen or chisel away from the poet’s hand, bringing several literary and artistic achievements of the highest order, such as the cycle of “Italian novellas” or the excellent poetic letter “Do Bronisława Z.” [To Bronisław Z.], written “ze Świętego Kazimierza murów po-zastołecznej kraszy” [from St Casimir’s beautiful out-of-capital walls] (“Do Bronisława Z.,” PWSz II, 237).<sup>60</sup>

The final phase of reflection on the issues discussed here is linked to this final moment in the poet’s life, which allowed him to taste to the end the bitter bread of emigration, poverty and abandonment, including his lonely death and burial in a mass grave, and the dispute, unresolved to this day, as to where his grave is

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who excommunicated on several occasions both the initiators of unification movements acting internally (17 June 1859) and the external “plunderers” of the Ecclesiastical State. After the Austrian defeat at Magenta, Solferino and San Marino in June 1859, the Italian unification processes gained new momentum, and in February 1861 the first meeting of the Italian Parliament took place in Turin, followed by Victor Emmanuel II’s assumption of the title of King of Italy on 17 March of that year. During that decade, the Ecclesiastical State ceased to exist, and in 1870 Rome became the capital of the Kingdom of Italy. See M. ŻYWCZYŃSKI, *Historia powszechna 1789-1870*, Warszawa 1977, pp. 474-482, 578.

<sup>60</sup> “Do Bronisława Z.” is a work from late December 1878 or early January 1879, sent to Bronisław Zaleski and preserved in his papers (today in the Library of the Princes Czartoryski Museum in Kraków: MNK 6919, pp. 579-582; formerly: Ew. XVII-3173).

ultimately located<sup>61</sup>. Eventually, the symbolic urn with ashes from the collective grave of emigrants in the Montmorency cemetery, to which Norwid's ashes were transferred on 28 November 1888 from the cemetery in Ivry near Paris,<sup>62</sup> blessed by Pope John Paul II at the Vatican on 30 June 2001, was ceremonially placed in the national Pantheon, in the royal tombs of Wawel Cathedral on 24 September 2001<sup>63</sup>.

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For Norwid, for his generation and more broadly – for Poles after the loss of independence at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, one of the important “personal” and at the same time “social” problems became the question of defining the prevailing personal and civic condition in a new and essentially unknown historical situation. Questions about the causes of the fall of Rzeczpospolita could be answered much more easily than those concerning the contemporary and future identity of citizens deprived of their state and/or living in a state without sovereignty. At the same time, the Romantic era discovered and passionately exploited a new historiosophic “quality,” namely “nationality,” as an entity that is not only political or social, but even “personal” quasi-human, which apparently in a real way strived for emancipation and separation from the larger wholes in which European culture had previously operated, such as the Church or the Christian community as a cultural entity. This problem was further complicated, on the one hand, by the consistent action taken by the partitioning powers, particularly Russia and Prussia, aiming unambiguously at the irreversible absorption and denationalisation of the “spoils,” i.e. the vast territories and many millions of the citizens of the former Rzeczpospolita.<sup>64</sup> Norwid's

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<sup>61</sup> Juliusz W. Gomulicki repeatedly cast doubt on the widespread belief in Norwid's final resting place, i.e. the mass grave of the residents of the Saint Casimir House in the Montmorency Cemetery. According to him, after the concession expired in 1903, the poet's ashes were transferred in 1904 from the grave of St Casimir veterans to one of the graves of the “residents” of the Hotel Lambert, which is unknown today (PWsz XI 191-192, 195). And yet, from the documents known to me, stored in the Polish Library in Paris in the archives of the Commission for the Care of Polish Historical Monuments and Graves in France, it appears that a sufficient sum was collected to transfer the poet's ashes from Ivry to Montmorency and place them in the mass grave of St Casimir veterans; Bolesław Rubach in particular took care of this.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. the documentation in the report on the archival search in Paris: J. FERT, “Nieznane norwidiana w Bibliotece Polskiej w Paryżu,” *Studia Norwidiana*, Vol. 11, 1993, pp. 125-150.

<sup>63</sup> See the extensive documentation of the ceremony of depositing Norwid's ashes in the royal tombs at Wawel: *Norwid bezdomny. W 180 rocznicę urodzin poety*, ed. J. Kopciński, Warszawa 2002.

<sup>64</sup> Historians point to the paradoxical demographic situation of the Prussian state, which, as a result of the partitions, became a state with a clear Polish majority. Therefore, compared to the

responses in this extremely complicated situation basically revolve around the moral consequences of the captivity and the threat of losing not only the idea of the state, but also the moral death of the nation, which – inkeeping with the spirit of the times – appeared to the poet as a “real entity,” analogous to the human being, as he succinctly put it in response to critics of his *Listy o emigracji* [*Letters on Emigration*], published successively in the Poznań press throughout 1849: “Narody co innego – te są, te żyją, cierpią, drgają – te, istniejąc prawdziwie, już nie inspirowują jako Ludzkość, ale obowiązują rzeczywiście” [Nations are something else – they are, they live, suffer, pulse – these, existing truly, no longer inspire as Humanity, but in fact apply] (PWsz VII, 31). As for the moral consequences of captivity, the poet points to the enormous increase in the “position” of individual members of the enslaved society – that is, citizens aware of their place in time and space, as he summed it up in a heated emigrant dispute over the problem of “applying” or “not applying” for an amnesty with the Tsarist government after 1856:

Gdyby to tylko szło o sam patriotyzm, kiedy kto dziś z Emigracji do Polski wraca, to byłoby jeszcze dużo wyjątków usprawiedliwionych – ale, niestety albo chwała Bogu, idzie tu po prostu o to, co słusznie się zwać powinno i zwie Człowieczeństwem. Jest to albowiem oszukiwać siebie, Francję, Polskę i Rosję. Jakkolwiek kto zechce to sobie tłumaczyć, zawsze wyjdzie na powyższe zdanie, iż końcem końców oszukał (wracając) polską wiarę, francuską sympatię, rosyjski rząd i własny charakter [...] granicami narodów-granic-pozbawionych są charaktery ludzi [...]. (PWsz VII, 31)

If it were only a matter of patriotism alone, when one returns to Poland from Emigration today, there would still be many justified exceptions – but, alas, or thank God, it is simply a matter of what should rightly be called Humanity. Ultimately, it is about deceiving oneself, France, Poland and Russia. However one wishes to explain it to oneself, it will always occur that, in the end, one has deceived (by returning) the Polish faith, the French sympathies, the Russian government and one’s own character [...] the borders of nations-without-borders are people’s characters [...].

The second and most important (beside person’s character, and to put it more bluntly – beside the virtue of valour, or chivalry, practised by the citizen) condition for the permanence of the principles, values, and moral foundation of “homeland” is the sense of close connection with the past, with the history of the entire human culture – from the oldest civilisations on the Euphrates to the one closest to home – on the Vistula, as in the poem “Moja ojczyzna” [My Country]:

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Russian partition, Prussia probably adopted an overly slow mode of eradicating “Polishness” in the partitioned lands; the process of Germanisation accelerated in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the Bismarckian Kulturkampf programme began to be implemented.



Kto mi powiada, że moja ojczyzna:  
Pola, zieloność, okopy,  
Chaty i kwiaty, i sioła – niech wyzna,  
Że – to jej stopy  
[...]  
Ojczyzna moja *nie stąd* wstawa czołem;  
Ja ciałem zza Eufratu,  
A duchem sponad Chaosu się wziąłem:  
Czynsz płacę światu.

Naród mię żaden nie zbawił ni stworzył;  
Wieczność pamiętam przed wiekiem;  
Klucz Dawidowy usta mi otworzył,  
Rzym nazwał człekiem.  
[...]  
Niechże nie uczą mię, gdzie ma ojczyzna,  
Bo pola, sioła, okopy  
I krew, i ciało, i ta jego blizna  
To ślad – lub – stopy.

(PWsz I, 336-337)

Who tells me that my homeland is:  
Fields, greens, trenches,  
Cottages and flowers, and countryside – let him confess,  
That – these are its feet  
[...]  
My homeland's brow does not rise *from here*;  
My body is from across the Euphrates,  
And my spirit emerges from Chaos:  
I pay my rent to the world.

No nation has saved me or created me;  
I remember eternity before age;  
David's key opened my mouth,  
Rome called me man.  
[...]  
They should not teach me where my homeland is,  
Because fields, villages, trenches  
And blood, and flesh, and that scar  
Are a mark – or – feet.

*Transl. Rafał Augustyn*

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## CZŁOWIEK – ZBIOROWY POSPOLITEJ RZECZY. NORWID A SPOŁECZEŃSTWO OBYWATELSKIE

### Streszczenie

Burze intelektualne i polityczne, jakie towarzyszyły krystalizacji idei obywatelskiej w wieku XIX i XX widoczne są nie tylko w Europie, szczególnie Zachodniej, ale również w Ameryce Północnej i Środkowej, a z czasem – na całym globie. Intensywne poszukiwanie „ideału obywatelstwa” widać przede wszystkim w społecznościach dawnej Rzeczypospolitej, której ostateczny upadek pod koniec wieku XVIII i kolejne fazy coraz głębszej destrukcji nie tylko nie oznaczały zaniku tradycji republikańskiej, ale wręcz wzmogły autentyczną dysputę nad drogami do nowoczesnego społeczeństwa w przyszłym, niepodległym państwie. Przodowały w tym zasadniczym dialogu głosy reprezentantów ziemiaństwa i wyłaniającej się w ciągu XIX w. klasy („stanu”) inteligencji, nowej formacji społecznej, niemającej właściwie adekwatnej analogii w innych krajach. Z czasem do tego dialogu o przyszłej Polsce włączyli się również nieliczni przedstawiciele innych klas.

Jakie znaczenia zawiera wyrażenie „społeczeństwo obywatelskie”? Dziś jest ono dość „naturalnie” obecne w języku publicystów i polityków różnych „odcieni”, ale w czasach Norwida w zasadzie nie było używane, choć sama „idea” zorganizowania życia zbiorowego na fundamencie „obywatelstwa” ma rodowód wręcz odwieczny. Artykuł jest próbą opisu myśli obywatelskiej Norwida głównie poprzez analizę jego wypowiedzi dyskursywnych, głównie publicystycznych. Norwid zdecydowanie przeciwstawił się doktrynerskiemu wynoszeniu „ludzkości”, którą nazywał „świętą abstrakcją”, ponad „naród” i „Kościół”, poprzez które jednostka może realnie uczestniczyć w „pracy dziejów”.

Inne pole walki o Norwida o dopracowanie się jasnych kategorii obywatelskich stanowiły ówczesne, liczne wizje powszechnego szczęścia ludzkości i/lub apokaliptycznego jej schyłku. W tych polemikach z utopiami ostatecznego „wypełnienia się dziejów” słychać wyraźne echa sporów ideologicznych epoki, a szczególnie tych mistyczno-politycznych wizji, w których różnych odmian „prorocy” formułowali finalne perspektywy rozwoju bieżących wypadków dziejowych, których podmiotem jest „ludzkość”, powstała w miejscu dotychczasowych „narodów” kończących właśnie swą „misję” historyczną; tak m.in. dostało się Mickiewiczowskiemu *Składowi zasad* – czyli manifestowi rewolucyjnych przekształceń praw obywatelskich, odziedziczonych po francuskiej Deklaracji Praw Człowieka i Obywatela; w liście do Józefa Bohdana Zaleskiego z 24 kwietnia 1848 r. dał Norwid wyraz swemu oburzeniu na większość tez zawartych w *Składzie*, które według niego podważają tradycyjne wartości, takie jak „ojczyzna”, „własność”, „ród”, „naród” i in.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Cyprian Norwid; Zygmunt Krasiński; Adam Mickiewicz; papieństwo; romantyzm; rewolucja; millenaryzm; towianizm; obywatel; niewola narodowa; niepodległość.

## THE COLLECTIVE-MAN OF RES PUBLICA. NORWID AND THE CIVIL SOCIETY

### Summary

The intellectually and politically tempestuous crystallization of the civic ideal in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century manifested not only in Europe (especially Western Europe), but also in North and Middle America, and later – all over the globe. An intense search for the “civic ideal” is clearly discernible in societies comprising the former Polish Republic, whose demise towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the subsequent phases of its increasing decomposition not only failed to annihilate the republican tradition but in fact intensified authentic debate on possible paths toward modern society in the future independent state. A key role in this important dialogue was played by representatives of the landed gentry and the intelligentsia, the latter emerging in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a new social formation that basically had no exact counterpart in other countries. In time, a few representatives of other classes also joined this dialogue on the shape of the future Polish state.

What is the meaning of the phrase “civil society”? Today, it is used almost naturally by columnists and politicians representing various positions, but it was virtually non-existent during Norwid’s lifetime, although the very idea of organising collective life on the basis of “civic” virtues has an almost immemorial provenance. This article attempts to describe Norwid’s civic thought, mainly by analysing his discursive statements, chiefly in journalism. Norwid

was decidedly opposed to any doctrinaire elevation of “humanity” (which he called “a holy abstraction”) over “nation” and “Church,” through which individuals can actually partake in “the work of history.”

Another area in which Norwid struggled to develop clear civic categories comprises visions of humanity’s universal happiness and/or its apocalyptic fall, many of which were promulgated at the time. In his polemics with utopias of “fulfilled history” it is possible to discern clear echoes of ideological debates held at the time, especially ones between mystical and political visions used by various “prophets” to describe the ultimate perspectives for the development of current events whose subject is “humanity” – a category replacing “nations,” which would be thus seen as ending their historical “mission.” From this angle, Norwid would criticize *Sklad zasad* [*A Collection of Principles*] by Adam Mickiewicz – a manifesto of revolutionary transformations of civic rights, which are part of the legacy of the French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*. In a letter to Józef Bohdan Zaleski, dated 24 April 1848, Norwid expressed his outrage at most theses contained in *Sklad zasad*, which he saw as undermining traditional values such as “homeland,” “property,” “family,” “nation” etc.

**Keywords:** Cyprian Norwid; Zygmunt Krasiński; Adam Mickiewicz; papacy; Romanticism; revolution; millenarianism; the Towiańskiite sect; citizen; national bondage; independence.

JÓZEF FRANCISZEK FERT, born on 7 July 1945; professor; affiliated with the Catholic University of Lublin from 1964 (during his studies and later through his academic work) until his retirement in 2015. He supervised about 200 MA students of Polish philology and about 20 PhDs. He created the Department of Textology and Editing. He reviewed dozens of scientific papers, habilitation and professorial dissertations. He is a member of the editorial board of the journal “*Studia Norwidiana*,” the critical edition of *Dziela wszystkie* by Cyprian Norwid and *Pisma zebrane* by Józef Czechowicz.