

KRZYSZTOF TRYBUŚ  
ORCID: 0000-0002-4285-4595

## NORWID IN THE STUDIES BY ROLF FIEGUTH

### VADE-MECUM – “POETRY IN ACRITICAL PHASE” IN THE COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE OF “INTERCULTURAL CONFRONTATION”

Probably all scholars within Norwid Studies have read Rolf Fieguth’s work on “poetry in a critical phase,” which discussed Norwid’s *Vade-mecum* cycle. We are all familiar with it; years ago, it was published in one of the first issues of the journal *Studia Norwidiana* (Vol 3-4: 1985-1986),<sup>1</sup> it later lent the title to a collection of studies on Polish literature by the eminent German Slavist.<sup>2</sup> The author of the above-mentioned study made a spectacular entrance to the Polish circle of researchers of Norwid’s output. The 1985-1986 issue of *Studia Norwidiana* opens with a foreword by Hans Robert Jauss to the first German edition of *Vade-mecum*, translated into Polish by Fieguth (Munich, 1981).<sup>3</sup> A review of this translation by Andrzej Vincenz was published in an earlier issue of *Studia Norwidiana* (Vol. 2: 1984).<sup>4</sup> Vincenz drew attention to the importance of Jauss’s foreword, especially

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<sup>1</sup> R. FIEGUTH, “Poezja w fazie krytycznej. Cykl wierszy Cypriana Norwida ‘Vade-mecum,’” *Studia Norwidiana*, Vol. 3-4, 1985-1986, pp. 13-55.

<sup>2</sup> R. FIEGUTH, *Poezja w fazie krytycznej i inne studia z literatury polskiej*, Izabelin 2000, 327 pp.

<sup>3</sup> H. R. JAUSS, *Przedmowa do pierwszego niemieckiego wydania “Vade-mecum” Cypriana Norwida*, pp. 3-11. In fact, this first German edition of *Vade-mecum* was bilingual, Polish-German: C. Norwid, *Vade-mecum. Gedichtzyklus (1866). Polnisch und deutsch*, Mit einer Einführung von H.R. Jauss, Eingeleitet und übersetzt von R. Fieguth, München 1981.

<sup>4</sup> A. VINCENZ, “Norwid po niemiecku,” *Studia Norwidiana*, Vol. 2, 1984, pp. 84-90.

to the right granted in it to Norwid's poetic cycle to take its rightful place in the canon of works of world literature.

A similar intention to find Norwid's place in the broad panorama of currents and trends in poetry accompanies Fieguth, who in his studies of Norwid adopted a strategy quite the opposite to his parallel studies on Mickiewicz. His Mickiewicz is a representative of world literature, but the German Slavist seeks the secret of the greatness of the author of *Ballady i romanse* [*Ballads and Romances*] in the Polish poet's approach to his native literary tradition, pointing to a sequence of references to the poetry of the masters of the Renaissance, Baroque and Enlightenment.<sup>5</sup> In the case of his research on Norwid, on the other hand, he consistently encouraged a departure from Polish particularism. To this end, he introduced new assumptions for reading the *Vade-mecum* cycle, which situated Norwid's poems in the "critical phase" of the history of European poetry. This did not at all mean turning away from the contexts of Polish literature, especially in view of its future history, for which Norwid's work played an anticipatory role.

Fieguth's study constantly emphasises the polyphonic discourse of Norwid's poetry with the European and Polish poetry. The most important premise of reading *Vade-mecum* is to recognise in this poetic cycle an early manifestation of an understanding of contemporaneity. From there, it is only a step to concluding that the 20<sup>th</sup> century modernity grows out of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by way of normal historical continuity. The scholar points to the progressive blurring of the boundary between "tradition and novelty," which has started in the 1960s, and the growing sense of an almost unbroken link with the 19<sup>th</sup> century past. In Juliusz Wiktor Gomulicki's thesis on the analogy between *Vade-mecum* and *Les Fleurs du mal*, the German Slavist found an argument for placing Norwid at the forefront of the birth of modern Polish and European lyricism. This juxtaposition of these two collections of poetry also leads to an appreciation of their cyclical structure; Rolf Fieguth is a true master in their analysis. Other studies of cyclicity in Książnin's<sup>6</sup> or Mickiewicz's poetry<sup>7</sup> also testify to the fact that the author of the study on "poetry in a critical phase" has his own concept of the study of poetic cycles,

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<sup>5</sup> The thesis that "one of the secrets of Mickiewicz's success from his very early years was the revival of Polish literary traditions" was consistently proved in the book *Rozpierzchłe gałązki. Cykliczne i skojarzeniowe formy w twórczości Adama Mickiewicza*, transl. M. Zieliński, Warszawa 2002. The first German-language edition: *Verzweigungen. Zyklische und assoziative Kompositionsformen bei Adam Mickiewicz*, Freiburg Schweiz 1998.

<sup>6</sup> R. FIEGUTH, "Sobie wielki." *O pięciu zbiorach lirycznych Franciszka Dionizego Książnina*, Warszawa 2018 (esp. the chapter entitled *O cyklu "Erotyki"*, pp. 59-123).

<sup>7</sup> *Rozpierzchłe gałązki*.

which in his proposed reading of *Vade-mecum* highlights the genological sense of cyclicality of this collection of poems.

The author draws the title of his study on “poetry in a critical phase” from a memorable phrase in the introduction “Do czytelnika” [To the Reader], which opens the *Vade-mecum* cycle: “Polish poetry [...] is in a critical moment” and to which Fieguth refers, stating: “the cycle itself was conceived here as an expression of an awareness of the crisis of poetry and as a critical reckoning with poetry and the epoch – precisely as ‘poetry in a critical phase.’”<sup>8</sup>

According to Fieguth, this critical reckoning with poetry and the epoch determines Norwid’s concept of poetic language, defines not only the programme of his poetry, but determines the manner of composing his poetry, determines the structure of individual poems and the organisation of the entire cycle – perhaps it is the most important premise of the reading. The German Slavist states:

Both the semantic organisation of his individual works and – in the case of *Vade-mecum* – the method of linking them into acyclic whole, are marked by irony, contradictions, incoherences, ambiguities, concealments, semantic density, polysemy and stylistic heterogeneity. The function of these structural features of the cycle becomes comprehensible only when viewed through the prism of the numerous (often critical) references to other, earlier and contemporary artistic and poetic programmes, as well as in the light of the passionate reckoning with the epoch and moralistic pathos that permeates this work. Seen from this perspective, they are an expression of such concepts of poetry, which appears not as a closed system, but as a transitional phase, a link in a never-ending historico-poetic developmental process, entangled in political and social history, reaching into the deep past at one pole [...], and looking forward at the other [...].<sup>9</sup>

The author of these words emphasises above all the importance of diffusive forces in the ordering (or rather disordering) of the cycle’s poems, leading to compositional incoherence not only within the whole cycle, but also within individual works. He points to the processes unfolding in the very matter of the poem *in statu nascendi*, which put the language of poetry in a state of disruption – the effect strengthened by the use of neologisms, clumsy grammatical constructions, extravagant punctuation, “subversive” blend of styles, or mixing monologues and dialogues. These distortions are not counterbalanced, i.e. they are not emended, by the palpable presence of, as Fieguth puts it, “the ironic or penetrating intention of the personality behind the whole work.”<sup>10</sup> It stands in opposition to the stereotype

<sup>8</sup> R. FIEGUTH, *Poezja w fazie krytycznej*, p. 15, footnote 8.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

of the inspired poet, it expresses the creator's self-doubt, as in the poem "Bliscy" [The Close Ones]:

Więc gdy na chustki ostatniej już brzegu  
 Łzy ślad spełznie swym ostatkiem;  
 Więc gdy ostatni z przyjaciół szeregu  
 Wspomni Cię j u ż, j u ż przypadkiem – –

Wtedy o! Wtedy – myśl i życia wątek,  
 I ślad dramatyczny bytu  
 Twego, w swej wtóry wnikłszy od-początek,  
 Zbudzi się Tobą do sytu.

Bo teraz wszędzie jeszcze Twoje nie ja  
 Obejmać musisz sumieniem;  
 I nie Twój jesteś rozum i nadzieja,  
 I jesteś Twoim zwątpieniem!

(PWsz II, 75-76)

And thus when on the last handkerchief edge  
 A trail of tears meets its end;  
 And when the last of your friends  
 Mentions you, only just by chance – –

Then! It is then that the thread of thought and life,  
 And a dramatic trace of your being,  
 Having penetrated again to its re-beginning,  
 Will be awaken You, satiated.

Because now, everywhere, You must embrace  
 Your not-self with conscience;  
 Reason and hope are not You,  
 And You are Your doubt!

In his analysis of the language and construction of the lyrical subject in *Vademecum*, Fieguth is extremely meticulous and insightful. His thesis of deliberate distortions in conveying the meaning of individual poems is the direct result of his analyses, of going deep into the structure of poetic utterances, especially in the case of excerpts from the following works: "Do Walentego Pomiana Z." [To Walenty Pomian Z.], "Wieś" [Village], "Obojętność" [Indifference], "Cenzor-krytyk" [Censor-Critic], "Królestwo" [Kingdom], "Idee i prawda" [Ideas and

Truth], “Kolebka pieśni” [The Cradle of Songs], “Dwa guziki (z tyłu)” [Two Buttons (at the Back)], “Cacka [Pretty Things], Klaskaniem mając obrzękłe prawice” [Their Hands Swollen from Clapping], “Przeszłość” [The Past], “Coś” [Something], “Jak” [Just As], “Ironia” [Irony], “Socjalizm” [Socialism], “Sieroctwo” [Orphanhood], “Krytyka” [Criticism], but also in the quoted excerpt from the poem “Bliscy”.

Fieguth points to a parallel for his analyses in Roman Jakobson’s work on “the poetry of grammar,” especially in his well-known essay on the poem “Czułość” [Tenderness]<sup>11</sup>. One could extend this parallel to the structuralist approach to Norwid’s poetry in the studies by Michał Głowiński, who, in his now classic article *Norwida wiersze-przypowieści* [*Norwid’s poems-parables*],<sup>12</sup> pointed to archaic poetics employed by the author of *Vade-mecum*, which caused problems in the reception of his poetry by the 19<sup>th</sup>-century reader, separated in time from the culture of earlier epochs in literature that promoted allegorical genres. Close to Fieguth’s insights related to the poetry of disruption in the *Vade-mecum* cycle would be Głowiński, especially in his interpretation of the poem “Purytanizm” [Puritanism], in which, while addressing the importance of the “virtuoso play with language,” he links Norwid with 20<sup>th</sup> century linguistic poetry. According to the interpreter, the element that makes this kind of play with language possible is the convention of the digressive poem. The main thesis of Głowiński’s essay is the conviction that:

Norwid’s connections with the poetics of the digressive poem are evident not only in several of his larger works, but also, and perhaps above all, in a number of his poems, including those from the *Vade-mecum* cycle, works to which the entire narrative machinery inherent in Romantic poems of this type could not be transferred, but which could be taken over – and given new meanings through new approaches.<sup>13</sup>

In their analyses and interpretations, both scholars reveal the aesthetics of fragmentation in Norwid’s poetry, as well as the element of irony which expresses the poet’s attitude to a world in which chaos has taken hold. The difference between their diagnoses concerns the competence of the lyrical subject. According to

<sup>11</sup> R. JAKOBSON, “‘Czułość’ Cypriana Norwida,” in: *For Wiktor Weintraub. Essays in Polish Literature, Language and History. Presented on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, The Hague 1975, pp. 227-237.

<sup>12</sup> M. GŁOWIŃSKI, “Norwida wiersze-przypowieści,” in: *Cyprian Norwid. W 150-lecie urodzin poety. Materiały z konferencji naukowej. 23-24 września 1971*, ed. M. Żmigrodzka, Warszawa 1973.

<sup>13</sup> M. GŁOWIŃSKI, “Gorzkie kalambury. O ‘Purytanizmie’ Cypriana Norwida,” *Studia Norwidiana*, Vol. 2, 1984, p. 73.

Głowiński, this subject appears as a virtuoso, manifesting his unconditional mastery over poetic language. According to Fieguth, by contrast, the subject manifests limitations of the linguistic competence by often using a “bland style” in the analysed poems of *Vade-mecum*, enabling a programmatic departure from the ideal of artistic linguistic perfection.

It seems that in his observations concerning conscious disharmony in Norwid’s poetry, Fieguth was closest to the findings of Zdzisław Łapiński; in particular, I am referring here to the following passage from the latter’s reflections:

By shuffling and separately dosing certain genological traditions, Norwid evoked a sense of incongruence in established artistic sensibilities. And while most of his predecessors had been tempted to create a new unifying principle, Norwid manifested this incongruence. For it was a means of discharging, rather than erecting anew – a monolithic vision. Owing to this, the feelings expressed in the work gained dramatic value, while the thoughts conveyed in it became multifaceted.<sup>14</sup>

Fieguth, like other scholars of Norwid’s poetic language, draws attention to the crucial importance of the poet’s conviction that perfect lyric poetry must retain some flaws which the poet must not smoothen. The author of the dissertation on “poetry in a critical phase” links these flaws to the character of the epoch in which the *Vade-mecum* cycle was written and finds justification for the features of this collection of poetry in the shape and varieties of time, which in individual poems takes the form of distorted, interrupted, sometimes ruined time. It seems that the topos of ruined time is a derivative of the represented reality, its ontic feature (“Ironia jest bytu cieniem” [Irony is the shadow of being]).

The scholar situates the epoch of “poetry in a critical phase” both historically and biographically, referring to the poet’s places of residence, which he explicitly expresses in the statement:

His poetry is of interest to us as a kind of response to the problems of the age, to the process of the formation of an industrial mass society, the effects of which Norwid experienced in New York, London and especially in Paris during the Second French Empire.<sup>15</sup>

Undoubtedly, this point of view is reminiscent of the well-known thesis by Zofia Stefanowska, expressed in the title of a seminal article within Norwid

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<sup>14</sup> Z. ŁAPIŃSKI, *Norwid*, Kraków 1984, p. 35. Łapiński aptly notes that the principle of combining contradictory elements in Norwid’s poetry has a long history of research, and indicates the opinion of Waclaw Borowy (ibid., *O Norwidzie*, Warszawa 1960, pp. 7-24).

<sup>15</sup> R. FIEGUTH, *Poezja w fazie krytycznej*, p. 15.

Studies: *Norwid – pisarz wieku kupieckiego i przemysłowego* [*Norwid – a writer of the merchant and industrial age*].<sup>16</sup> Stefanowska wrote in the article:

After the failure of the Spring of Nations, the walls of the Polish ghetto in Paris had to crumble and the absolutisation of the national cause inevitably lost its basis. Being a representative of the second émigré generation, Norwid began to live as a citizen of a metropolis of two million people, as a participant in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century civilisational processes. His Romanticism was the result of a clash between those ideas which were imposed on Polish consciousness by Mickiewicz's generation and those ideas which were shaped by the long years of Parisian life.<sup>17</sup>

One could say that Fieguth asks about the consequences of Norwid's positioning in time, about the consequences for his artistic output shaped in the industrial society. The answers he gives concern many aspects of the poet's life and work. Above all, he expands the field of generational relationships – he presents Norwid as a peer of Gustav Flaubert (1821-1880) and Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), but also of Gottfried Keller (1819-1830), Conrad Ferdinand Meyer (1825-1898), as well as Nikolai Nekrasov (1821-1878) and Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881). This is a very different constellation of writers from that proposed by Kazimierz Wyka, who distinguished the second generation of Romantics in Polish literature – authors born in the early 1820s<sup>18</sup>. It is also different from the one related to Norwid's belonging to the so-called Warsaw Bohemia, which was insightfully described by Zofia Trojanowiczowa<sup>19</sup>. Such a widening of the poet's generational circle is justified especially if, as Fieguth writes, we want to replace the author of *Promethidion* with the author of *Vade-mecum*. In this part of his reflections, the German Slavist refers to the attempts made by Polish literary critics, especially by Julian Przyboś, to discover the modernity of Norwid's poetry, leading to a transformation of Norwid's image – “the figure of the precursor lyricist began to emerge replacing the image of the controversial poet-philosopher.”<sup>20</sup>

Crossing the threshold of national poetry in the reading of *Vade-mecum* takes place without invalidating it, however. Fieguth reaches for the Polish poetry of the future, in a way (as he claims) heralded by Norwid – the poetry by Tuwim,

<sup>16</sup> Z. STEFANOWSKA, “Norwid – pisarz wieku kupieckiego i przemysłowego,” in: *Literatura, komparatystyka, folklor. Księga pamiątkowa poświęcona Julianowi Krzyżanowskiemu*, eds. M. Bokszczański, S. Frybes and E. Jankowski, Warszawa 1968, pp. 423-460.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 456.

<sup>18</sup> K. WYKA, *Pokolenia literackie*, with a foreword by H. Markiewicz, Kraków 1977, pp. 249-306.

<sup>19</sup> Z. TROJANOWICZ, *Rzecz o młodości Norwida*, Poznań 1968, pp. 9-116.

<sup>20</sup> R. FIEGUTH, p. 23.



Iwaszkiewicz, Wierzyński, Miłosz, Baczyński, Różewicz, Herbert. But also, curiously enough, Fieguth reaches for the poetry by Białoszewski, despite his “independent origin” (as described by Wyka, to whom Fieguth refers). Admittedly, this foray into the future with Norwid, into 20<sup>th</sup> century poetry, has been confirmed in further research. Yet, it seems to me that the boldest attempt at formulating the presence of the author of *Vade-mecum* was made by Stanisław Barańczak in his essay entitled “Norwid: obecność nieobecnego” [Norwid: The presence of the absent].<sup>21</sup>

Fieguth attaches more importance to the European contexts of *Vade-mecum*, linking his reflection on this subject to the long-standing thesis in Polish literary criticism about the universalism of Norwid’s poetry. Fieguth argues that

[...] the perspective on the history of poetry present in *Vade-mecum* quite openly embraces the heritage of European literature, art and philosophy. This is evoked by great names: Orpheus, Homer, David, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Aeschylus, Socrates, Plato, Phidias, Cicero, Horace, Virgil, Dante, Tasso, Kochanowski, Shakespeare, Voltaire, Koźmian, Byron, Mickiewicz, Słowacki, Béranger, Musset, Chopin; while some indirect indications seem to point to a number of more references [...].<sup>22</sup>

Are the strings of tradition that Fieguth finds in Norwid’s collection of poems an expression of some kind of full representation of European heritage? He certainly shares the conviction expressed in the past by the first author of a monograph on the *Vade-mecum* cycle, Zdzisław Jastrzębski, that this collection is a *summa poetica*. Fieguth knows all too well that these sequences of traditions are nevertheless based on a choice, an non-systemic choice; he also knows that not all elements of this choice play an equally important role.

He took up this issue again in the essay “‘Vade-mecum’ Cypriana Norwida w kontekście Wiktora Hugo i Charles’a Baudelaire’a” [‘Vade-mecum’ by Cyprian Norwid in the context of Victor Hugo and Charles Baudelaire], published in Polish in a volume entitled *Gombrowicz z niemiecką gębą i inne studia komparatystyczne* [*Gombrowicz with a German Mouth and Other Comparative Studies*].<sup>23</sup> The entire book is guided by a clearly crystallised concept of comparative “intercultural confrontation,” which goes beyond dualistic accounts of literary creation to reveal

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<sup>21</sup> S. BARAŃCZAK, “Norwid: obecność nieobecnego,” in: idem, *Tablica z Macondo. Osiemnaście prób wytłumaczenia, po co i dlaczego się pisze*, London 1990, pp. 89-105.

<sup>22</sup> R. FIEGUTH, p. 17.

<sup>23</sup> R. FIEGUTH, “‘Vade-mecum’ Cypriana Norwida w kontekście Wiktora Hugo i Charles’a Baudelaire’a,” in: *Gombrowicz z niemiecką gębą i inne studia komparatystyczne*, Poznań 2011, pp. 246-261.



an always broad, European context of encounters between poets and their texts, all involved in the process of interpenetration of national cultures. Applied to *Vade-mecum*, this concept proved particularly pertinent; in addition to the epic tradition usually invoked in the discussions of this cycle of poems (*Odyssey* and *Divine Comedy*), it allowed to ask about Norwid's contemporary references. And these go beyond the frequent comparison with Baudelaire's *Flowers of Evil*. Fieguth convincingly argues that *Vade-mecum* and *The Flowers of Evil* stand in a creative opposition to Victor Hugo's poetry, in particular in the sphere of the compositional ordering of the poems into a larger whole. The scholar points out that Norwid's familiarity with Hugo's work is attested, while his familiarity with Baudelaire is not documented. Fieguth's analyses uncover allusions and references in Norwid's work to Hugo as a major representative of French literary culture, a writer who achieved great success. For the Polish poet, afflicted by the tragedy of being an unknown artist, Hugo became the epitome of vainglory. Fieguth states:

Certainly Norwid saw the French poet, among other things, as a representative of the era of "panteizm-druku" [pantheism of print] and "cztanie pędem" [rush reading] ("I. *Vade-mecum*"), as one of the authors who today "są jak Bóg" [are like God], since "dość jest, że tchną, wnet arcydzieło wstawa" [it is enough that they breathe and soon a masterpiece arises] ("LXI. *Bogowie i człowiek*" [Gods and Man]), and as one of the most typical bearers of success who "bożkiem jest dziś" [is an idol today] ("LXXXVII. *Omyłka*" [Mistake]).<sup>24</sup>

But this does not mean that there are no common features between the Polish and the French poet regarding their work. Fieguth enumerates some of them: "a marked journalistic temperament, a sense for history, sensitivity to themes from the area of music and fine arts, a deep historico-literary and religious awareness, and a fascination with Byron."<sup>25</sup> Multiplying the similarities and contrasts between Norwid's and Hugo's concepts of poetical practice, the German scholar primarily points out that they both struggled with the genological legacy of the old poem, the framework of which organised in their works larger sets of poems into a kind of narrative whole, as in the case of *The Legend of the Ages* and *Vade-mecum*. Fieguth rightly emphasises the lack of broader studies on this convergence in the current state of research. Thus, he attempts to fill this gap, and one must admit, with considerable success. Characterising the areas of convergence and divergence of *The Legend of the Ages* as compared with *Vade-mecum*, he breaks this dual analysis by relating both collections of poems to Baudelaire's *Flowers of Evil* and thus uncovers the polemical attitude of *The Flowers of Evil* and *Vade-*

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 250.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 252.

*mecum* towards Hugo's cyclical composition. Unlike Hugo's cycle, Norwid's and Baudelaire's cycles are not guided by a coherent narrative line, and the reader, left to himself, co-creates the meaning of the story in the act of interpretation.

It is noteworthy that in his analyses of the analogies between *Vade-mecum* and *The Flowers of Evil*, Fieguth distances himself from the belief, strongly established in the Polish research tradition, that Baudelaire's cycle of poems would constitute a source of inspiration for Norwid's cycle of poems. He rather convincingly concludes: "from a European point of view, both cycles belong to the same historico-poetic situation. We do not even have to assume here that Norwid, with his *VM*, consciously and deliberately – as Juliusz Wiktor Gomulicki suggests – wanted to enter into a literary polemic with the Frenchman's cycle."<sup>26</sup> Fieguth believes that the two cycles may independently refer to *The Divine Comedy*. He also points to the Polish tradition of "setnik wierszy duchowych" [a collection of ca. a hundred spiritual poems] as a likely source of inspiration for Norwid.

If I were to indicate the consequences of the assumptions adopted in Rolf Fieguth's approach to the *Vade-mecum* cycle, then, recalling here the earlier thesis on "poetry in a critical phase," I would point out that the fragment devoted to "Fortepian Szopena" [Chopin's Grand Piano] corresponds most strongly with it in the discussed essay – it is the link in the cycle that best testifies to the destructive tendency in the composition of the cycle. The scholar hints here at both the formal features of this piece, which as an extended (fragmentarily strange) ode transgresses the composition of the cycle, and the symbol of Chopin's shattered piano, which expresses the act of destroying the perfection of art.

#### AN INVITATION TO *QUIDAM*

Rolf Fieguth's initiation into Norwid's poetry followed a reverse order to that associated with its chronological development, it was a transition from *Vade-mecum* to *Quidam*. This created the opportunity to make adjustments to the adopted research approach. The Roman narrative poem encouraged more attention to the Christian theme in the poet's work, as the author's book, entitled *Zaproszenie do "Quidama"* [*An Invitation to "Quidam"*], explicitly states.<sup>27</sup> But this is not the only difference, the most important feature of the studies included in this book is their monographic character, guided by the author's intention to comprehensively

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 244.

<sup>27</sup> R. FIEGUTH, *Zaproszenie do "Quidama."* Portret poematu Cypriana Norwida, Kraków 2014, see foot note 13, p. 21.

cover the research problems of the parable of the fate of Aleksander of Epirus. These studies have been prepared over a period of many years, in the form of papers and publications concluding conference meetings devoted to Norwid. What they all have in common is the intention to overcome the difficulties in the reception of this narrative poem encountered from the very beginning of its reading. One could say that they stemmed from Fieguth's reading enthusiasm, his enchantment with Norwid's work. In addition, at this point Fieguth was already able to interact with Norwid as the previously well-recognised author of *Vade-mecum*.

Fieguth is particularly delighted with all things in *Quidam* that make its reading difficult – its supposedly useless metaphors, comparisons and digressions, the breakdown of arbitrarily jumbled plots, the obscure use of time. This foreshadows the later experiments of “poetry in a critical phase.” But the scholar's enthusiasm is also rooted in the genesis of the narrative poem itself; the German Slavist claims that the work was written “in authorial joy.” And he points out that “the language abounds in ingenuity, wit and humour.”<sup>28</sup> He tries hard to convince those interested in learning about Norwid's work that in the act of its reading, the blissful contact with the text outweighs the ordeal of reading it. For this reason, he focuses his attention on the erotic themes in the work, related to the characters of Elektra-diva and Zofia of Knidos, especially the exposure of the “sexual side of Zofia” – as Fieguth writes – goes against the whole tradition of reading this character. The exposition of erotic themes is also linked in this reading to the assumption explicated in the introduction:

Claudio Abbado, an Italian conductor, once said that a piece of music that he prepares to perform under his baton must first be loved. I would like to apply this principle to this book on Norwid's *Quidam*, not least because the poem, as we know, defies easy admiration.<sup>29</sup>

If I were to point out the most important directions of Rolf Fieguth's developing love for this Roman poem, I would indicate firstly the charms of the outside world, secondly – the mystery of allegoresis and religiosity, and thirdly – the formula of Norwid's Classicism. These are the most important thematic and problematic dominants around which Fieguth composes a “portrait” of *Quidam*, and his borrowing of a part of the title from the art of painting is itself evidence of his great admiration for Norwid's poetic art and a desire to present its timeless qualities.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

The charms of the outside world are discovered in the company of Goethe, with his maxim "Poetry at its highest peak shines with all its externality," which encourages to discover the evident and the concrete. Fieguth thus proposes an order of reading that is the opposite of the established one, i.e. usually following the genological sign of the parable, focusing attention on the philosophical message of the work. Let us recall, for example, one of the more significant testimonies to an earlier reading of *Quidam*, Ewa Bieńkowska's book entitled *Norwid-Nietzsche. Dwie twarze losu [Norwid-Nietzsche. Two Faces of Fate]*.<sup>30</sup> Fieguth invites us to *Quidam* without hesitating to study the direction of sunlight in the poem, as if in opposition to the well-established belief in the research tradition that most of the action takes place in the evening. He also focuses on the gestures, poses and body language of the characters in the work, he is occupied with these more than with inquiring into their mental states. In the scholar's analyses, the gestures of seduction and love of Elektra and Lucius, and the gestures betraying the subtle relationship between Aleksander and Zofia, the gestures of individual and collective body language often replace the word or dialogue, which is not quoted in situations of interpersonal communication. Extended body language, however, often allows him to understand the poet's complex comments on the situations depicted in the narrative poem. It is the analysis of gestures that has brought out the significance of Aleksander's physical strength, as his figure towers over others. The analysis of gestures takes away the confidence from Emperor Hadrian. All the time, Fieguth is delighted with this gestural side of the poem's action, he discovers the beauty of gesture, especially in the case of a collective portrait, as in the characterisation of Magus Jazon likened to the ruins of the Jewish people. Based on this analysis of gestures, he also notices that the poet arranged the behaviour of some of the characters to resemble Christ, and thus he explains the principle of *imitatio Christi* in the case of the blood marking the knees of those who watch Aleksander's death.

The analysis of gestures invites Fieguth into the religious world of the poem, in which the most important centre seems to be Aleksander as the envisaged ideal man. "I will argue," states Fieguth, "that Norwid projects on this figure an ideal man, doomed to worldly failure but foreshadowing a better future in the history of humanity, when 'chrześcijaństwo w zupełności rozbłyśnie' [Christianity shines out fully]."<sup>31</sup> This intention succeeded completely, and those passages of the book that deal with the so-called ideal man are among the most convincing testimonies of the reading. The ideal man strives to think independently and to recognise his place in the world, without ethnic or social determinants. In the case of the ideal

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<sup>30</sup> E. BIEŃKOWSKA, *Norwid-Nietzsche. Dwie twarze losu*, Warszawa 1975.

<sup>31</sup> R. FIEGUTH, *Zaproszenie do "Quidama"*, p. 115.

man, love is also different in character from love inherent in the historical times of Norwid's work; Aleksander's love for Zofia is reminiscent in its authenticity of the modern emotional relationship between a man and a woman, its most important feature being the granting of the beloved person's right to an independent existence.

With this concept of the main protagonist in *Quidam*, Fieguth has brought a great deal of new insight to the study of the narrative poem, simultaneously countering the often-expressed beliefs in the mediocrity of this character, a kind of anonymity contributed to him by the semantics of the word *quidam*. This, in turn, quite deceptive for readers, was part of a textual trap set by the author for those who read only superficially, one-dimensionally, based on perceptual habits related to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century literary conventions. The German Slavist uses the convention of the traditional *Bildungsroman* (educational novel) to explain this whole process of the protagonist moving towards an ideal state, but also, in accordance with his understanding of "poetry in a critical phase," he does not simplify anything. He complicates the picture of Aleksander when he addresses the autobiographical theme of the work, pointing to the symbolic identification of the author and the protagonist, with the protagonist's death being an important turning point in this parallel, which can be seen as the author's symbolic death.

Certainly, an exhaustive discussion of the thread of the Jewish uprising (132-134 AD) in the poem is also an important extension of the previous findings, highlighting the historical layer of Norwid's work. However, Fieguth does not read it as an archaeologist; by reconstructing the situation of the Jews in the Roman Empire, he rather reflects on the formation of relations between the Jews and the modern European civilisation. He is interested in the confusion of time in the narrative poem; it is not only about literary conventions of time – in the novel, the novella and the epic. It is also about the influence of typological allegoresis in early Christian writing of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD on the allegorical concept of narrative in *Quidam*. Moreover, it is about the interaction of these different elements of time, or rather the lack thereof, a deliberately induced disruption of the narrative structure:

*Quidam's* new narrative structure, composed of a variety of genological elements and corrupted by the compartmentalisation of events, is characterised by a shifting, dynamic hierarchy – a detail can suddenly appear very important and something fundamentally momentous can turn out rather secondary.<sup>32</sup>

Fieguth links the notion of ruin, which is important for Norwid's poetry, with the allegoresis of time; the ruined time of Hadrian's era and Norwid's 19<sup>th</sup> century

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

era reveals sacred time (holes in time), as well as the timelessness of eternity. The scholar's notion of the allegoresis of time, which he uses consistently, allows him to consider issues of Christian interpretation of history in the narrative poem from a literary perspective. Fieguth points to *Quidam's* links with the biblical tradition through references to rhetoric and noematics, and the circle of hermeneutic reflection outlines the horizon of ideological inquiries, free of any doctrinal settlements. In the case of Norwid, an unquestionably religious poet, this kind of methodological independence of the scholar makes it possible to keep a distance from the ideological claims that can be found among Polish scholars studying Norwid's works.

Fieguth's emphasis on the importance of allegory in *Quidam* also facilitates the identification of those fields of reference to ancient literary tradition that enable the poet to proclaim a programme of new classicism. The scholar writes of Norwid's "classical bite," which

marks his imagination, his way of thinking and arguing, and which permeates all the way through his syntax [...], not to mention the universe of his literary forms. This applies to the wealth of his references to Antiquity, but also to modern adaptations of ancient forms and themes, including his native Enlightened Classicism. In the case of Norwid, this phenomenon is deeper and more characteristic than in other outstanding Polish authors of the Post-Classicistic era. For his contemporary functioning as a classicist, this means that Norwid, more than the other great poets of the century, was the bearer of an extensive creative cultural memory.<sup>33</sup>

In my research of Norwid's poetry, I particularly identify myself with this train of thought which assumes a mutual implication between the following features of this poetry: the poet's predilection for allegory, the declaration of a new classicism and the special role of cultural memory. While discussing this mutual implication I wrote that the turn to allegory in the work of the author of *Quidam* contradicts the commonly accepted view of the teleology of 19<sup>th</sup> century literature.<sup>34</sup> One could say, misquoting Hans Gadamer,<sup>35</sup> that in Norwid's poetry we find the rehabilitation of allegory. Furthermore, following this philosopher, we could question the durability of the foundation of 19<sup>th</sup> century aesthetics, which created an unfettered freedom of symbolic activity of the mind. It seems that Rolf Fieguth would come close to such a statement. In his analyses, symbolism, like allegory, co-creates Norwid's Classicism, and the passages of the book devoted to symbolic representations in *Quidam* are combined with reflections on the painterly

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 206-207.

<sup>34</sup> K. TRYBUŚ, *Pamięć romantyzmu. Studia nie tylko z przeszłości*, Poznań 2013, pp. 178-193.

<sup>35</sup> H. G. GADAMER, *Prawda i metoda. Zarys hermeneutyki filozoficznej*, transl. B. Baran, Kraków 1993, p. 104.

ideas and reminiscences of the poem. I find highly original those statements which situate the poet's Classicism as non-competitive vis-à-vis Romantic aesthetics. Notions evoked by Fieguth, such as eclecticism, hybridism and syncretism lead us to believe that the legacy of Norwid's Romantic youth is an essential component of the postulated Classicism.

I also find the premise of reading *Quidam* as a component part of the entire Leipzig volume of Norwid's *Poezje* [*Poetries*] accurate and inspiring, especially in the context of the references to the other works in this collection, as well as their references to antique motifs in the works of Słowacki and Krasiński. The thesis of Classicism as a new poetic programme of this collection, is thus convincingly defended.

If I were to point out what makes the studies on *Quidam* different from the author's earlier publications on *Vade-mecum*, I would draw attention primarily to the fact that these studies grew out of Rolf Fieguth's constant and lasting presence in the Polish circle of Norwid Studies. As a scholar analysing *Vade-mecum*, he came to us from his world of Slavistic methodological concepts and observations made with little, at that point, connection to the Polish scholarly tradition. However, he read *Quidam* already with us, and took part in a memorable conference on this poem, organised in 2007 in Rome, on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the work's creation. In 2008, together with his wife Hilda Fieguth, he co-organised the Poznań conference "Norwid – the artist,"<sup>36</sup> during which he presented the first bunch of his essays on Norwid's symbolism and imagery, which later became part of the monograph on *Quidam*. The thesis on Norwid's Classicism, so important for this monograph, took a long time to take shape and owes much to Fieguth's participation in the wider research project on European Classicism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>37</sup> And all this took place during a period of uninterrupted fascination with other writers of Polish literature – most notably Książnin and Miłosz, to whom Fieguth devoted separate book publications,<sup>38</sup> prepared based on his participation in conferences and seminars over many years. Rolf Fieguth wrote the book

<sup>36</sup> See R. FIEGUTH, "Karykaturalność, erotyzm, idealizacja. Kilka uwag o wybranych szkicach i rysunkach Norwida (w luźnym nawiązaniu do 'Quidama')," in: *Norwid – artysta. W 125. Rocznice śmierci poety*, eds. K. Trybuś, W. Ratajczak, Z. Dambek, Poznań 2008, pp. 11-26. The author also included a modified reprint of his article "Symbolizmy w 'Quidamie,'" published in the book *Symbol w dziele Norwida*, ed. W. Rzońca, Warszawa 20011, pp. 85-100.

<sup>37</sup> See R. FIEGUTH's publications on the various classicisms of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, collected in the book *Klasycyzm. Estetyka – Doktryna literacka – Antropologia*, ed. K. Meller, Warszawa 2009, pp. 345-374, 563-584.

<sup>38</sup> See R. FIEGUTH, "Sobie wielki." *O pięciu zbiorach lirycznych Franciszka Dionizego Książnina*; R. FIEGUTH, *Rzeki, przestrzenie, rytm. Marginalia o poezji Czesława Miłosza*, Poznań 2020.



*Zaproszenie do Quidama* [*An Invitation to Quidam*] entirely in Polish, brilliantly designing what I believe to be the right elocution for speaking about the time of civilisational crisis narrated by Norwid's work. It is an unusual book, without an excessive use of conceptual apparatus, but written in a style full of allure, thus creating a real incentive to read one of the poet's most difficult works.

#### “GENTLE LAW”

Rolf Fieguth continues his research of Norwid's works. This is often done by additions to his previously published theses, putting a new emphasis, or providing remarks and commentaries on earlier findings. Professor Fieguth's speech on the occasion of being awarded the “Medal for the Dissemination of Knowledge about Cyprian Norwid” delivered at the Catholic University of Lublin on 16 October 2017 includes such commentaries. At that time, he spoke about Christianity in *Quidam*:

Norwid regarded the appearance of Christ on earth as the starting point of a quiet, slow-moving revolution that carries with it a long prehistory in the form of Greek culture and Judaism, the difficult reality of the multicultural Roman civilisation at the time of the Emperor Hadrian, and a distant future reaching (not only) into the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

[...]

In Norwid's vision of the trial brought about by the Christian revolution, and in the narrative of *Quidam*, two aspects coexist: the aspect of the “gentle law” and the aspect of drastic events. Encouraged by Christian Zehnder, I borrow the term “gentle law” (*das sanfte Gesetz*) from Adalbert Stifter.<sup>39</sup>

According to the “gentle law” principle, this process operates discreetly, most often on the far periphery of collective and individual consciousness, beyond any clear awareness of people and humanity, but as unstoppable as a rise in the water table.

[...]

The quiet Christian revolution affects the private reactions and fates of each of the main characters of the poem without their overt knowledge, but in a greatly varied way. All or almost all people described in *Quidam* are to some extent witnesses or even priests of this revolution, mostly “unaware and immature” (see the poem from *Vade-mecum* – XV. *Sfinks* [*The Sphinx*]). Without knowing it, or even denying it – they carry – to varying degrees – with them, on or within themselves, the traces of this quiet revolution.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Adalbert Stifter, a prominent Austrian writer (1805-1868). He outlined the concept of “gentle law,” governing the world independently of human initiatives, in the foreword to a two-volume collection of essays in prose, *Bunte Steine. Ein Festgeschenk* [*Coloured Stones. A Celebratory Gift*], Pest 1853.

<sup>40</sup> R. FIEGUTH, “Chrześcijaństwo dla wszystkich. Parę słów nt. ‘Quidama’ C. Norwida,” *Studia Norwidiana*, Vol. 37, 2019, pp. 281-284.

Is this explicit emphasis placed on the Biedermeier parallel of *Quidam* a re-interpretation of Norwid's concept of Christianity? It seems that Fieguth's argument is not accompanied by an intention to include the Roman poem in an anthology of Biedermeier literature, even though it is Stifter with his "gentle law" who remains the main determinant of the Biedermeier style<sup>41</sup>. I perceive these remarks about *Quidam* as a need to mark the doctrinal ambiguity of the Christian vision of the world in Norwid's work, but, at the same time, as a need to emphasise the open character of the Christianisation process, conceived as an act fulfilling itself in a continuous and endless process.

Similar content can be found in the recently published reflections on the above-mentioned poem "Sfinks II" [The Sphinx II], which seems very important to Fieguth:

I chose this poem because it has given me food for thought for many years, primarily because of its central maxim: 'Człowiek? jest to kapłan bez-wiedny / I niedojrzały...' [Man? He is a priest un-aware/And immature...]. This maxim has accompanied me in my interpretations of Mickiewicz's *Zdania i uwagi* [Sentences and Remarks], Norwid's *Quidam* and Czesław Miłosz's *Druga przestrzeń* [The Second Space].<sup>42</sup>

This is a significant message, which confirms message of the poem "Sfinks II", the message that is already open or, in any case, opening up different ideological spaces of poetic metaphysics. The interpreter adds:

The wanderer's sentence contains a provocation for believers, half-believers and non-believers. Man is indeed supposed to be a priest, that is, a bearer of God's truth. But he knows nothing about it; he is 'bez-wiedny' [un-aware]. In addition, he is 'niedojrzały' [immature] – i.e., he 'does not mature for his priesthood,' but he also basically 'does not notice it,' he is blind to it. In a word, man in such a view, with all the tragedy of his existence, has something distinctly funny about him.<sup>43</sup>

Here, Fieguth touches on a problem that he develops in his commentary on the poem "Ogólniki" [Generalities] from the *Vade-mecum* cycle, during a conference dedicated to him by Polish scholars from Poznań, on the occasion of the conferment of the title of honorary doctorate to this eminent German scholar at the Adam

<sup>41</sup> For more on this subject, see *Spory o biedermeier*. Selection, introduction and editing by J. Kubiak, Poznań 2006 (esp. J. KUBIAK, *Wstęp. Adalbert Stifter i "lagodne prawo"*), pp. 7-63.

<sup>42</sup> R. FIEGUTH, "Pomysły o recytacji wiersza 'Sfinks [II]," in: *Cyprian Norwid. Osobność*, ed. E. Kačka, Kraków 2018, p. 115.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

Mickiewicz University<sup>44</sup>. In his commentary he focuses on the elements of ludic levity, the Socratic parody of other people's speech and thinking, and the poet's irony directed towards himself and his readers. The excerpt from this commentary on the poem "Ogólniki" can serve as Fieguth's *credo* of his research on Norwid:

Schoolchildren read the work politely, trying to imbue it with all the tragic seriousness emanating from the *Vade-mecum* cycle, the fate of the poet and the fate of their homeland. Today, I would like to draw attention to the lighter side of this work.

The poem *Ogólniki* [Generalities] bears this title quite on purpose – there is an element of playfulness and a game with the reader, and none of the three general mottoes ending each of the stanzas pretends to be the absolute truth.<sup>45</sup>

*Transl. Rafał Augustyn*

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<sup>44</sup> The conference was held in Poznań, Poland, on 24-25 December 2017.

<sup>45</sup> R. FIEGUTH, "O 'Ogólnikach' Cypriana Norwida," in: *Wielkie wiersze – nowe lektury*, ed. K. Trybuś, Poznań 2019, p. 20.

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## NORWID W BADANIACH ROLFA FIEGUTHA

### Streszczenie

Autor tego artykułu stara się przedstawić badania Rolfa Fiegutha, poświęcone twórczości Norwida, koncentrując uwagę przede wszystkim na studiach wybitnego niemieckiego sławisty o cyklu poetyckim *Vade-mecum* i poemacie *Quidam*. W pierwszej kolejności rekonstrukcji tu podlegają założenia i ustalenia studium o „poezji w fazie krytycznej” z 1985 roku, a także późniejszy szkic o komparatystycznych kontekstach cyklu wierszy Norwida z 2005 roku (opublikowany po polsku w 2011 r.). Wiele uwagi w tej części artykułu poświęca się dokonanej przez Fiegutha analizie zakłóceń w poezji autora *Vade-mecum* na różnych poziomach organizacji wiersza. Uwagi te dopełnia charakterystyka sformułowanej przez Fiegutha koncepcji komparatystycznej „konfrontacji kulturowej”, która wykracza poza dualne ujęcia twórczości literackiej, odsłaniając zawsze szeroki, europejski kontekst spotkań poetów i ich tekstów uczestniczących w procesie przenikania się kultur narodowych. Druga część artykułu poświęcona jest książce Rolfa Fiegutha *Zaproszenie do „Quidama”*. Portret poematu Cypriana Norwida z 2014 roku. Refleksja o tej publikacji dotyczy nie tylko szczegółowych ustaleń jej autora na temat poematu Norwida, ale także przyjętych przez niego założeń metodologicznych, które pozwoliły odświeżyć dawny gatunek historii literatury, jakim była monografia typu „autor i dzieło”. Szerzej spośród zagadnień przedstawionych w tej książce autor artykułu omawia trudności towarzyszące lekturze *Quidama* i problematykę Norwidowskiego klasycyzmu. W trzeciej części artykułu zwraca się uwagę na pojedyncze glosy Rolfa Fiegutha do jego badań nad Norwidem, pochodzące z lat ostatnich (2017, 2018, 2020). Całość artykułu jest podsumowaniem ponad trzydziestoletnich studiów Rolfa Fiegutha nad najważniejszymi poetyckimi dokonaniem polskiego poety.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Cyprian Norwid; polski romantyzm; poezja europejska; cykl poetycki; komparatystyka.

## NORWID IN THE STUDIES BY ROLF FIEGUTH

## Summary

This article aims to discuss Rolf Fieguth's studies of works by Norwid, focusing primarily on the German Slavist's interpretations of the cycle *Vade-mecum* and the narrative poem *Quidam*. The first work analysed here, along with its assumptions and conclusions, is Fieguth's 1985 study on "poetry in a critical phase," followed by the 2005 essay on the comparative contexts of Norwid's famous cycle (published in Polish in 2011). A lot of space is devoted in this section to Fieguth's analysis of distortions introduced by Norwid at various levels of the poem's organisation. These remarks are complemented with an account of Fieguth's comparative concept of "cultural confrontation," which goes beyond dualistic accounts of literary creativity, revealing the invariably broad, European context of meetings between poets and texts, facilitated by the process of national cultures permeating each other. The second part of the article is devoted to Fieguth's 2014 book *Zaproszenie do "Quidama." Portret poematu Cypriana Norwida [An Invitation to Quidam. A Portrait of Cyprian Norwid's Narrative Poem]*. Reflections on this publication concern not only its detailed findings about Norwid's narrative poem but also the critic's methodological assumptions, which have helped him to update the long-standing genre in literary history, namely the "author and his particular work" type of monograph. Among the issues addressed in the book, the article discusses, in particular, the difficulties accompanying interpretations of *Quidam* and the question of Norwid's Classicism. The third part of the article draws attention to Fieguth's remarks on Norwid made in recent years (2017, 2018, 2020). The article thus summarises Rolf Fieguth's thirty years of research on the most important poetic achievements of the Polish poet.

**Key words:** Cyprian Norwid; Polish Romanticism; European poetry; poetic cycles; comparative studies.

KRZYSZTOF TRYBUŚ – professor, literary historian, his research focuses on the literature of Polish Romanticism, mainly the works by Norwid and Mickiewicz as well as the problems of literary tradition and memory. He authored the books: *Epopcja w twórczości Cypriana Norwida* (Wrocław 1993), *Stary poeta. Studia o Norwidzie* (Poznań 2000), *Pamięć romantyzmu. Studia nie tylko z przeszłości* (Poznań 2011), *Zima romantyków. Szkice o literaturze i pamięć* (Poznań 2017). He is co-editor of numerous volumes of dissertations and essays; member of the editorial board of *Pamiętnik Literacki*.