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VADE-MECUM IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF TIME TOPIC OUTLINE

Ex audivi vocem Domini dicentis: “Quem mittam; Et quis ibit nobis?”.
Et dixi: “Ecce ego, mitte me”. Et dixit: “Vade, et dices populo...” (Is 6:8)¹

1

The problems indicated in the title of my article are not new. Time, and especially its emanations in the turbulent history of the 19th century, almost “naturally” accompanied the Norwid phenomenon, which at a certain point in the history of Polish literature became one of the factors organising the “national imagination”. The author of *Promethidion* gained this position owing to the publishing and commentary work of Zenon Przesmycki.

Over the course of a century of revindication of Norwid’s legacy, initiated by Miriam and happily continued by a “legion” of fellow explorers, an impressive interpretative and literary-historical literature has accumulated around the happily exposed wholes and fragments of this work. Of course, in this article I am not able to address it fully, although I am aware that I am swimming in the waters

¹ “Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’ He said, ‘Go and tell this people...’”(Is 6:8) – *Biblia w przekładzie księdza Jakuba Wujka z 1599* – type B transcription of the original 16th-century text and introduction by Rev. J. Frankowski, Warszawa 1993, p.1477 [English version according to the New International Version Bible]; cf. L. SZESTOV, “Synowie i pasierbowie czasu. (Historyczne przeznaczenie Spinozy),” in: L. SZESTOV, *Na szlakach Hioba. Duchowe wędrówki*, transl. J. Chmielewski, Warszawa 2003, pp. 289; 316.

that many before me have already traversed and described. However, I would like to mention at least a few works that, on the one hand, have pushed me towards a reflection on the category of time in Norwid's most important book of poetry, i.e. *Vade-mecum*, and, on the other hand, contributed a great deal to my reflection on this poetry in general, growing out of the Romantic spirit and frequently going beyond it, especially at its heights – precisely in *Vade-mecum* and, significantly and originally, in poetic management of the topic of time.

Let me begin with the work that directly guided me towards the reflection on this category in Norwid's writings, i.e. Jaromir Brejda's book on the historiosophic thought of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) entitled *Ewangelia Zaratrusty*. This publication from a few years ago², in which I did not find direct references not only to *Vade-mecum* but also to Norwid in general, relentlessly pushed me towards our poet as one who, living basically in the same era as the author of *Zarathustra* and struggling with analogous intellectual problems and aporias, especially those founded by the historiosophic thought of Hegel and his successors, solved the same or similar dilemmas quite differently. Reflections on Nietzsche's thought mobilised me to re-read a book by Ewa Bieńkowska, who many years ago made this surprising analogy between our poet and the great inspirer of modern European philosophical thought – Friedrich Nietzsche; Brejda could even have taken one of the sentences of Bieńkowska's sensational study as the motto of his work: "*Zarathustra* was conceived as a new gospel, a cry addressed to unknown disciples"³. Parallel – in a sense – to Bieńkowska's work was a collection of literary studies by Alicja Lisiecka, *Norwid poeta historii*, which, although written in 1966-68, did not see the light of day until 1973 and was published only abroad⁴. Both books undoubtedly addressed and developed Waław Borowy's accurate observations, uttered in the middle of the last century in the key dissertation *Główne motywy poezji Norwida*. Just to cite one sentence from the reflection of the great Norwid expert and lover, which is still inspiring today: "One could say that one feels a kind of whirlwind of history throughout Norwid's poetry. The very words 'historia,' 'dzieje' [history] and their derivatives are – next to the word 'prawda' [truth] – among those that recur most often in his work, and at the same time are the most poetically charged"⁵. Obviously, the tradition of reflection on "temporal

² J. BREJDA, *Ewangelia Zaratrusty*, drawings and poetic texts by T. Babińska, Warszawa 2014.

³ E. BIEŃKOWSKA, *Dwie twarze losu. Nietzsche – Norwid*. Warszawa 1975, p. 68.

⁴ A. LISIECKA, *Norwid poeta historii*, Londyn 1973.

⁵ W. BOROWY, "Główne motywy poezji Norwida," in: W. BOROWY, *O Norwidzie. Rozprawy i notatki*, ed. Z. Stefanowska, Warszawa 1960, p. 25. First print: *Zeszyty Wrocławskie* 1949, Issue 1-2, pp. 26-50.

historicity” in Norwid’s works have even older “traces”; I refer here primarily to Kazimierz Berezynski’s essay *Filozofia Cypriana Norwida*, written at the beginning of the 20th century, which contains particularly strong remarks on Norwid’s proposal to harmonise the dualism of the categories of “divinity” and “humanity,” which so intensely occupied the philosophical thought of the 19th century⁶.

Linking time synonymically with the notion of history is not the only perspective on this category found in the poetry of the author of *Vade-mecum*, although it undoubtedly deserves priority as, using the words of Waclaw Borowy, a particularly important and “poetically charged” component of his writing reflection on history. Preceding any further discussion on the subject, I would like to remind of the great importance of “historical thinking” in the Romantic era, especially due to the speculative reflection of Georg W. F. Hegel (1770-1831), in which the science of being (classical ontology) acquired an original, albeit controversial, historical-dialectical approach. Figuratively speaking, being was “pushed” from its dignified, logical metaphysical “motionlessness” towards real, historical dynamics – towards historicity, i.e. happening, becoming itself in the inexorable “progression” of time. According to Hegel, the driving force “of the dialectical process is [...] the notion of contradiction [...] which is the fundamental law of reality⁷”. Furthermore, the apprehension of reality as a “history of the Spirit” coupled 19th-century historical thinking with essentially ancient ideas of “universals”, and it left its mark on philosophy and politics, as well as on European literature. As Lev Shestov notes in his study *Children and Stepchildren of Time*: “When Hegel says that the individual belongs to the General Spirit [...], he is merely repeating Anaximander’s thought. And let me add for the sake of completeness: the legend of Anaximander was not invented by him, and not even by the Greeks. It was brought to the Hellenistic world from the East, the homeland of all the legends and myths that it has lived by, but which the West does not want to acknowledge⁸”. And it was precisely this time, this epoch that was marked once and for all by the extraordinary genius of Hegel, this man in the face of whom all thought in the fields of philosophy, the

⁶ K. BEREŻYŃSKI, *Filozofia Cypriana Norwida*, Warszawa 1911, re-print: *Sfinks* 1911.

⁷ M. A. KRAPIEC, “Hegla rozumienie bytu,” in: *Powszechna Encyklopedia Filozofii*, eds. A. Maryniarczyk et al., Vol. 4, Lublin 2003, p. 286.

⁸ L. SHESTOV, *Synowie i pasierbowie czasu*, p. 297. The myth to which Shestov refers concerns the origins of all individual things and persons, including human beings: according to Anaximander, “It was not by a voluntary act of God, as the Bible recounts, that human beings have been created, and having created them, God blessed them; it was not with God’s blessing, but precisely against His will that human beings spontaneously and transgressively have sprang into being to which they had no right” (L. SZESTOV, p. 296).

concept of law, the state, art or religion had to refer to him – the last in the line of the great German idealists⁹ – affirmatively and/or “contradictorily”¹⁰...

Norwid brought to this problematic his own original solutions, yet rooted in the eternal tradition stemming from the Christian vision of history as the history of salvation unfolding in time. This aspect of Norwid’s “temporality” was insightfully described by Ewa Bieńkowska in the aforementioned essay on Norwid and Nietzsche¹¹.

Norwid’s concept of looking at time through the stained-glass windows of history – in connection with Polish Romantic thought – obviously must refer to the history of the nation, to the here-and-now dimension and the future fate of a Poland torn apart by both the partitioners and internal disputes at home and in exile.

I would then like to look at Norwid’s treatment of the question of time as a fundamental vector of poetic form, omnipresent in the *Vade-mecum* collection. In anticipation of detailed observations it can be said that time constitutes the essential compositional frame of this collection.

And one more aspect of time, quite important in the perspective of Norwid’s drama as a poet who took his vocation extremely seriously, and at the same time was almost completely disregarded by his contemporaries, not just by Sunday readers who take a book in their hands only when they go to take a nap in the garden¹², but by the most eminent actors of Polish culture of the time, including Adam Mickiewicz¹³, Zygmunt Krasiński, Józef I. Kraszewski or the Poznań facilitators of intel-

⁹ Cf. “Hegel,” in: W. TATARKIEWICZ, *Historia filozofii*, Vol. II: *Filozofia nowożytna do roku 1830*, 9th ed., Warszawa 1981, pp. 211-219.

¹⁰ Cf. the references of Hegel’s thought to his great predecessors: Anaximander – Descartes – Spinoza in Lev SHESTOV’s study cited here: *Synowie i pasierbowie czasu*, pp. 289-316.

¹¹ See chapter: “Historia jako dzieje Wcielenia,” in: *Dwie twarze losu*, pp. 154-168.

¹² Cf. the so-called *Pamiętnik podróżny* [*Travel Diary*]. PWSz VI, 211.

¹³ In Mickiewicz’s case, this may have been an involuntary revenge for the young poet’s ostentatious public opposition to the bard during the tumultuous pre-Spring period in Rome in 1848, and certainly a by-product of Mickiewicz’s deep distancing from poetry in general and “young literacy” in particular, as evidenced by Norwid’s “instruction” given to Lenartowicz before the poets’ first meeting in early August 1852: “P. Adamowi dawaj wyobrażenie o tym, czego wiedzieć literalnie nie może, a potrzebne jest. Świadczy o rzeczach, które się robiły od [18]30 roku – co poczynaliśmy, jakie było usługiwanie nasze w społeczeństwie litery, i co do ludu etc. Jak się duchy usługujące porządkowały w następstwach sprawy, pojęć i osób etc. O tym wszystkim nigdy dość mówić nie można, bo to drabina z zaświata do rzeczywistości – czynu kłamra” [Give Mr Adam an idea of what he cannot know literally, but needs to know. Give witness to the things that have been going on since [18]30 – what we have been up to, what our service in the literary society has been like, and as to the people etc.; how the ministering spirits order themselves in the succession of matters, concepts and persons etc. One can never talk about all this enough, because it is a ladder from the hereafter to reality – a brace of deeds] (DW X, 420); there is even

lectual life such as Marcei Motty, Władysław Nehring, Jan Koźmian or Władysław Bentkowski... Here I also need to mention the particularly venomous effect of the “teeth of time”, which crushed Norwid’s most valuable poetic collection, leaving us with the fragmented remnants of what we will probably never see again in the form of a “completed work”; which in a way fulfilled the author’s own self-ironic prophecy encapsulated in the title poem of the collection *I. Vade-mecum*:

Piszę – ot! czasem... piszę NA BABYLON
DO JERUZALEM! – i dochodzą listy –
To zaś mi mniejsza, czy bywam omylon
Albo nie?... piszę pamiętnik artysty –
Ogryzmołony i w siebie pochylon –
Obłądny!... ależ – wielce rzeczywiście!¹⁴

I write – eh! sometimes ... BY WAY Of BABYLON
Or TO JERUSALEM! – my letters arrive –
I care little whether I blunder
Or not?... I write an artist’s account,
Ink-besmeared and inwardly hunched –
Errant! ... but of course – utterly true!¹⁵

2

Literally “time” and its closer and further synonyms, such as “history,” “century,” “eternity,” “epoch,” “times,” “persistence,” “today,” “contemporaneity,” “yesterday,” “tomorrow,” “hour,” “moment” etc., but also Norwid’s unique metaphorical expressions, such as “przesytu-Niedziela” [Sunday of excess]¹⁶ (*I. Vade-mecum*, l. 39), or the special use of verb forms, which generally trigger the narrative perspective of

a striking linguistic stylisation here, perhaps imitating the Towianist style...

¹⁴ C. NORWID, *I. Vade-mecum*, in: C. NORWID, *Vade-mecum*, ed. J. Fert, 2nd revised and supplemented edition, Wrocław 2003, pp. 18-19. Ossolineum, De Agostini Polska Sp. z o.o. Further citations from this source are abbreviated as VM, page; authorial emphasis (underlining, capitals etc.) are given according to the source cited.

¹⁵ English translation by D. BORCHARDT, in collaboration with A. BRAJERSKA-MAZUR, C. NORWID, *Poems*, New York 2011, p. 17.

¹⁶ Similarly, in the beautiful poem *Trzy strofki* [*Three stanzas*], there is an ironic term for people detached from the realities of life: “Świątecznych-uczuć świąteczni-c z c i c i e l e” [Festive-worshippers of festive-feelings,” accompanied by the footnote “Sonntags-Dichter”, which could be translated as “a holiday poet” (PWsz I, p. 222). This evaluative metonymy also appeared in VM in poem *XXV. Wakacje* [*Holidays*], which refers to “wodzowie” [chiefs] – “na dni robocze/I – na niedziele!” [for working days / And –for Sundays!] (VM 55).

works, especially the more extensive ones, occupies a special, even “privileged” place in VM, e.g. *I. Vade-mecum*, XXXI. “*Ruszaj z Bogiem*” [“*Go with God*”], XXXVI. *Powieść* [Novel], LXXI. *Czas i prawda* [Time and Truth], LXXIII. *Grzeczność* [Politeness], LXXXIII. *Sens-świata* [Sens-of-the-World], LXXXIV. *Czemu* [Why], XCIII. *Źródło* [The Source], XCV. *Nerwy* [Nerves], XCVIII. *Krytyka (wyjęta z czasopismu)* [Criticism (Extracted from a Journal)], XCIX. *Fortepian Szopena* [Chopin’s Grand Piano], although smaller works do not shy away from the structural use of time either, such as *XV. Sfinks* [Sphinx], XXX. *Fatum* [Fate] or *LX. Język-ojczysty* [Mother-Tongue]. Among the poems that particularly highlight time, even making it the main protagonist or at least a poetic counterpoint, we find the famous words from the poem *Przeszłość* [The Past]: “*P r z e s ł o ś ć – jest i dziś, i te dziś dalej...*” [The past is here today, and today is even further...] (VM 20), or in *XLII. Idee i prawda* [Ideas and Truth]: “*Prawda się razem dochodzi i czeka!*” [Truth, one reaches it and waits!] (VM 87). Among the most important evocations of this issue we can mention: the opening poem of the collection *Za wstęp. Ogólniki* [As Introduction. Generalities], *IV. Posąg i obuwie* [Statue and Footwear], *XXV. Wakacje* [Holiday], *LXXI. Czas i prawda* [Time and Truth], *LXXIV. Bohater* [Hero], *LXXXII. Śmierć* [Death], *LXXXIX. Gadki* [Gabs], *XCIV. Historyk* [Historian].

One might get the impression that VM is burdened with the search for lyrical expression in material that is fundamentally epic, because it takes place in time... The experiences of Zbigniew Herbert come to mind here. In assessing his drama *Rekonstrukcja poety* [The Poet’s Reconstruction], Herbert wrote to one of his many correspondents:

[...] The idea was the following: Homer (not the historical one, but the shortcut, simply the poet) was to be the figure in which the transformation of (loud, descriptive) epic into lyric poetry takes place. The transformation of the drum into the flute, musically speaking [...] – I wanted to encapsulate the whole drama in the intensity of the voice from heroic tenor to song (lyric)¹⁷.

The reference to Herbert is not just a stylistic embellishment; it is well known that the author of *Barbarzyńca w ogrodzie* [Barbarian in the Garden] was sincerely interested in Norwid’s work, and it was in his times that there was an increased interest in Norwid in many fields of culture. Traces of this interest can be found in Herbert’s correspondence – for instance, with Jerzy Turowicz (“I walk with Norwid...¹⁸”) or in his paraphrase of the poem *Pióro*¹⁹ [My Quill Pen], with

¹⁷ “*Bardzo potrzebna mi jest przyjaźń Pana*” – Z. HERBERT, H. KUNSTMAN, *Listy 1958-1970*, introduction and ed. M. Zyburka, Kraków 2018, pp. 18-19.

¹⁸ Letter of 5 June 1953: Z. HERBERT, J. TUROWICZ, *Korespondencja*, ed. T. Fiałkowski, Kraków 2005, p. 55.

¹⁹ Letter of November 1953, p. 61.

Henryk Elzenberg²⁰, Józef and Maria Czapski (e.g. “Yesterday we read aloud Norwid....²¹”), but also in various writings by the author of *Pan Cogito* [*Mr Cogito*], testifying not only to their acquaintance, but also to a deep affinity in thought, as in *Rozmowa o pisaniu wierszy* [*A Conversation About Writing Poetry*] (“[...] the dream of poets is to reach the pristine sense of words, to give appropriate words to things, as Norwid said²²”) or in *Jesienny salon nowoczesny* [*Autumn Modern Salon*]²³. However, there is also no lack of scandalous grotesquerie in Norwid’s portrait, as in *Słowo na wieczorze poetyckim w Teatrze Narodowym 25 maja 1998 roku* [*Speech at a Poetry Evening at the National Theatre on 25 May 1998*], in which one might discern a self-portrait of Herbert himself from his Parisian period rather than that of Norwid at the end of his life at St. Casimir’s Home: “He always returns late at night, drunk on cheap calvados, humming:

C’est une chanson
 Qui nous ressemble
 Toi, tum’amais
 Moi, je t’amais [...].²⁴

When we relate this predilection of Norwid for the category of time or its synonyms and associations with the entirety of his writing, and especially with

²⁰ Z. HERBERT, H. ELZENBERG, *Korespondencja*, ed. B. Toruńczyk, Warszawa 2002, p. 46; in the footnotes we find an interesting reminiscence of the poet from an author’s soirée at the Catholic University of Lublin on 19 February 1955, organised by the Polonists’ Circle: “[...] Meeting people who speak normal language, who are not afraid of the truth, was a great experience in those days [...] I met young people who are interested in literature not from the position of an investigating judge or a sociologist with a poor conceptual apparatus but those who are writing papers on Norwid’s poetics [...] In the evening I was invited with very hospitable and kind Polish Studies colleagues to Professor Sławińska for coffee and unforgettable doughnuts” – the quotation from Herbert’s note kept in the Zbigniew Herbert Archive is given after the editor and commentator of the correspondence between Herbert and Elzenberg (p. 201).

²¹ Letter of 23 November 1968: J. and M. CZAPSKI. K. and Z. HERBERT, *Korespondencja*, read and annotated by J. Strzałka, [Warszawa 2018], p. 42; strong traces of his take on Norwid’s critical thought can be found in numerous places in this correspondence, such as in the letter of 16 April 1986: “In Poland I encounter on a daily basis [...] the phenomenon of a childish Poland, a childish Catholicism [...] I call it the narcissism of the suffering ones” (p. 93).

²² Z. HERBERT: *Węzeł gordyjski oraz inne pisma rozproszone 1948-1998*, collected and compiled by P. Kądziała, Warszawa 2001, pp. 52-53.

²³ Z. HERBERT, p. 227 (here a reference to the poem *Laur dojrzały* [*Mature Laurel*]).

²⁴ I omit Herbert’s more drastic ideas contained in this speech; incidentally, as explained by Paweł Kądziała, the publisher of *Węzeł gordyjski*, the gravely ill poet did not attend this meeting and his words were read out by Piotr Kłoczowski; Z. HERBERT, *Węzeł gordyjski*. pp. 96-97; 734.

his poems, treatises and letters, it becomes apparent that VM is indeed particularly sensitive to “time”. However, it is an issue that is omnipresent in the poet’s entire oeuvre, particularly artistically prolific in his narrative poems such as *Szczęсна, Quidam*, “*A Dorio ad Phrygium*” or *Rzecz o wolności słowa* [*On the Freedom of Speech*], a poem charting the “epic” of the Word in history²⁵. Here, special treatment would be required for *Quidam*, in which the vision of time unfolds “pomiędzy świtem a nocy zniknięciem...” [Between dawn and dispersion of night...] (Book V, l. 1)²⁶, and the whole thing unfolds “w wilię chrześcijańskiej prawdy objawienia / Między zachodem greckiej i żydowskiej wiedzy...” [on the eve of the revelation of the Christian truth / Between the sunset of Greek and Jewish knowledge...] (VM 193) – as Norwid evocatively explains his intention in the poetic letter *Do Walentego Pomiana Z.* [*To Walenty Pomian Z.*], which closes VM and was originally intended most probably for a volume of Norwid’s works prepared by Zakrzewski, which was finally published by Brockhaus in Leipzig in 1863 [recte: 1862]²⁷.

²⁵ P. CHLEBOWSKI, *Cypriana Norwida “Rzecz o wolności słowa”. Ku epopei chrześcijańskiej*, Lublin 2000 (here especially noteworthy is Chapter IV, entitled “*W dziejów toku*”, pp. 219-278).

²⁶ See Ewa BIENKOWSKA’s essay: „W poszukiwaniu wielkiej ojczyzny (o poemacie *Quidam* Cypriana Norwida)”, in: E. BIENKOWSKA, *Dwie twarze losu. Nietzsche – Norwid*, pp. 89-112.

²⁷ According to PRZESMYCKI (footnote in the edition: C. Norwid, *Poezje wybrane z całej odszukanej po dziś puścizny poety*, compiled and with footnotes by Miriam, Warszawa 1933 [recte: 1932], pp. 563-564), the poem was to open the poem *Quidam*; as a result of Zakrzewski’s death, who collected and was preparing Norwid’s works, including *Quidam* and the above-mentioned poetic letter, the poem’s introduction included a letter or quasi-letter *Do Z. K. Wyjątek z listu* [*To Z. K. Excerpt from the Letter*], which explained the main message and artistic idea of the work (by the way, called a “parable”). Incidentally, in the “letter to Krasieński” there appears that essential interpretative component of the work, which we also find in the poetic letter *Do Walentego Pomiana Z.* [*To Walenty Pomian Z.*]: “Cywilizacja składa się z nabytków wiedzy izraelskiej-greckiej-rzymskiej, a łono jej – chrześcijańskie – czy myślisz, że w świadomej sobie rzeczywistości już tryumfalnie rozbiły?” [The civilisation consists of the acquisitions of *Israelite-Greek-Roman* knowledge, and its womb – the Christian one – do you think it has already shone triumphantly in its self-conscious reality?] (DW III, 12); in the study of *Quidam* prepared by Adam CEDRO there is a note: “The most extensive of Norwid’s narrative poems was supposed to be preceded by the poem *Do Walentego Pomiana Z.*” (DW III, 461).

Panta rhei – the ancients used to say. This also applies to Norwid, yet still differently. The ancient sense of the passage of time speaks in essence of the inconstancy of anything under the sun and, despite the seemingly competing saying: *Nihil novi sub sole*, it conveys the same dramatic sense of the uncertainty of the human (and any other) condition since even the gods are also subject to it... As a “consolation” in the “doomed” sense of being uniquely “subjected to fate” and its symbol, i.e. the inexorable Moira²⁸ or the later triad of the Parcae: Lachesis – distributing the yarn among mortals at their birth, Clotho – “spinning” or in fact “weaving” the thread of human lives, and Atropos (the Irreversible) – the one who “in due time” cuts the yarn of life; the ancients, e.g. Hindu culture, discovered the myth of the “eternal return,” which, closer to our time, fascinated Friedrich Nietzsche, *inter alia*, as a liberating response to Hegel’s ruthlessly deterministic and finalist historiosophy²⁹, which he called “historical necessity”³⁰. Yet another response to Hegel’s “problem of time” was found by Polish messianists and millenarists, led by August Cieszkowski who attempted to interpret his deterministic triptych within the framework of the Christian triad of epochs: God the Father, Jesus – the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit, incidentally falling into chiliastic or illuministic heterodoxy, and proclaiming that time is now entering the final phase of history, i.e. the epoch of the Holy Spirit. Yet another myth, shrouded in Gnostic-Cabbalistic implications and poeticised Hegelianism, was born in the brilliant, though generally also heterodox visions of philosophical poets led by Adam Mickiewicz as the founder of the poignant allegory of Crucified Poland (Poland as Christ of Nations) and by analogy – Resurrected Poland, which consequently

²⁸ Homer mentions by name one goddess of fate, Moira; Hesiod distinguishes between three goddesses of fate (Moirai).

²⁹ “In addition, it [time – J. F.] is not in historical being, but in the concrete and individual will of man. The time of eternal return and the will of power seem to be identical in a flash. What returns – is the attitude of the will, its mode of action. The will chooses itself in its apotheosis of life”. (J. BREJDAK, “Wieczny powrót,” in: *Ewangelia Zaratustry*, p. 69).

³⁰ Ewa BIENKOWSKA puts it this way: “[...] Hegel conveyed [...] the conviction that there is a spontaneous mechanism at work in history by virtue of which events mature in the womb of time and reveal themselves at the opportune moment” (p. 120); this historiosophic intuition was followed by the classics of Marxism, who warned, *inter alia*, against the artificial “acceleration” of the worldwide proletarian revolution, which, through an “untimely” outbreak, could bring downright counterproductive and tragic consequences, also for the proletarian “cause”.

caused his pen to produce something so improbable: a blasphemous (*blasphemia in directa*) prayer for “universal War for the Freedom of the peoples!”³¹.

To the finalist vision of time circulating then, Norwid responded under the impression of the breakthrough spring of 1848 and he repeated these “responses” nearly twenty years later in a poem bearing three different titles, though differing little in its essential message: *Czasy [Times]/ Socjalizm. 1848 [Socialism. 1848]/ Socjalizm [Socialism]* (the last version, used in VM). The poem was originally printed in Bojanowski’s *Pokłosie* in 1856, but it is not unreasonable to assume that it acquired its original shape in the glow of the dying fires of the Spring of Nations. Referring to its affinity in thought with *Listy o emigracji [Letters on Emigration]*, Przesmycki noted in his commentary that one can accept “without any doubt” the year 1849 as the date of its composition³². In *Listy o emigracji*, Norwid responded to the voice spreading across Europe that the time is fulfilled and mankind is entering a “new Era” with a telling and fundamentally polemical stipulation of the problem:

[...] Pojęcie zatem nowej Ery i Ludzkości do ruchu wołającej, iżże są czasy wypełnione, iżże władzy Epoka przeminęła (dlatego iż Epoka bez-władności, albo raczej moment, nie Epoka naszedł) – są to właśnie pojęcia chaotyczne, nieporządnie zaczone i niewczesne, przeciwko którym *Listy* mówią. (PWsz VII, 31)³³

[...] Therefore, the notion of a new Era and of Humanity crying out to move, and that the time is fulfilled, and that the Epoch of power has passed (because the Epoch of inertia, or rather the moment, not the Epoch, has arrived) – these are precisely the chaotic notions, messily conceived and ill-timed, against which the *Letters* speak.

³¹ A. MICKIEWICZ, “Litania pielgrzymka,” in: [ending of] *Księgi narodu polskiego i pielgrzymstwa polskiego*, in: A. MICKIEWICZ, *Dzieła*, eds. Z. J. Nowak et al. Anniversary edition, Vol. V: *Proza artystyczna i pisma krytyczne*, ed. Z. Dokurno, Warszawa 1996, p. 62.

³² Cf. C. NORWID, “Pism wierszem dział pierwszy,” in: C. NORWID: *Pisma zebrane [Collected Writings]*, Vol. A, ed. Z. Przesmycki, Warszawa-Kraków 1911, pp. 864-867.

³³ The so-called *Odpowiedź krytykom “Listów o emigracji” [Reply to the Critics “Letter on Emigration”]* (title given by the publisher). Incidentally, this untitled “reply,” probably written with publication in mind, was not printed and lay in Seweryn Mielżyński’s papers until the time of Miriam, who published it under the title *Rasa, naród, ludzkość – i życie [Race, Nation, Humankind – and Life]* in *Inedita. Rozprawki epistolarne [Inedita. Epistolary Essays]*, collected and published by Z. Przesmycki (Miriam), Warszawa 1933; autograph unknown today. Cf. PWsz VII, 642. The supposition of Przesmycki and Gomulicki that the “reply” was addressed to Seweryn Mielżyński is supported by the authors of Norwid’s Calendar: Z. TROJANOWICZOWA, Z. DAMBEK with the participation of J. CZARNOMORSKA, *Kalendarz życia i twórczości Cypriana Norwida*, Vol. I: 1821-1860, Poznań 2007, p. 374.

Karol Libelt, among others, reacted to Norwid's *Letters* by replying to the poet in the Poznań-based *Dziennik Polski* Issue 129 of 1849:

We reply to him [i.e. Norwid – J. F.] that we would lose all faith in divine and human justice if we did not regard the recent history of our nation as the passion of a nation through which mankind will redeem itself from slavery. Poland gives itself as a sacrifice for the freedom of the peoples, and as such is as a sacrifice of the passion of Christ [...] ³⁴.

And so it was in parallel with the journalistic discourse taking place in the pages of the Poznań press in the autumn of 1849 that this remarkable picture of “socialism” could be created:

Oh! nieskończona jeszcze? Dziejów praca –
 Jak bryły w górę ciągnę cie ramieniem:
 Umknij – a już ci znów na piersi wraca,
 Przysiądź, a głowę zetrze ci brzemieniem...
 – O! nieskończona jeszcze Dziejów praca,
 Nie-prze-palony jeszcze glob – Sumieniem! (VM 22)

Oh! unfinished yet? History's work –
 Like a lump pulled up with an arm:
 Slip away – and it's back on your chest again,
 Squat down and your head will be wiped off with a burden...
 – O! the work of History is yet unfinished,
 The globe is not yet burned – with a Conscience!

Elżbieta Bieńkowska, commenting on this poem (in the version included in Bojanowski's *Zbieranka*) fleshed out its essence contained in the concluding section to emphasise its ethical dimension: “The work of history [...] is above all ethical in character – it is about constantly expanding the area where the principles of conscience rule against the dead weight ³⁵”.

This sense of the “incompleteness of the work of History” on a global scale resonates with the VM's view of the problem in a singular and individualised way, for instance, as in piece *XV. Sfinks* [*Sphinx*]. In this poem, the poet draws on the old mythological image of the Theban monster that accosts people and asks them a challenging riddle, and in the absence of an answer or after giving an inaccurate one, tears the unfortunate ones apart or throws them into an abyss. In Norwid's

³⁴ Z. TROJANOWICZOWA, Z. DAMBEK with the participation of J. CZARNOMORSKA, *Kalendarz życia i twórczości Cypriana Norwida*, Vol. I: 1821-1860, p. 371.

³⁵ E. BIEŃKOWSKA, *Dwie twarze losu*, p. 153.

work, the myth is subjected to an unusual reinterpretation. In the original myth only Oedipus answered the Sphinx's question correctly, which resulted in the liberation of Thebes from the bloodthirsty beast, who, defeated by the correct answer of the future king of Thebes and at the same time the clueless husband of his own mother, committed suicide by throwing itself into the abyss³⁶. But in Norwid's work:

Alić – o dziwy...
 Sfinks się cofnął grzbietem do skały:
 – Przemknąłem żywy!
 (VM, 41)

And– o! wonders abide...
 Sphinx pressed her back to the rock:
 – I slipped by alive!³⁷

Even more interesting is the reason for this unexpected “plot twist”; in the myth, Oedipus correctly answers the beast's question that it is a man; and here an identical answer seems to be given, although it is not a literal repetition of Oedipus' answer; it is altered by the telling – indeed, Norwidian – use of a question mark:

– “Człowiek?... jest to kapłan bez-wiedny
 I nie dojrzały...” –
 Odpowiedziałem mu³⁸.

[– “Man?...he is a high priest unaware
 And unformed...”–
 I answered her.]

It seems that the trembling response of the contemporary wanderer accosted by the Sphinx hides an unarticulated question here: “Who/what is man?”... And

³⁶ “Only Oedipus managed to respond correctly. In despair, the monster jumped from the top of the rock and killed itself” (P. GRIMAL, *Słownik mitologii greckiej i rzymskiej*, scientific ed. J. Łanowski, 2nd ed., Wrocław 1990, p. 320; see R. GRAVES, *Mity greckie*, transl. H. Krzeczkowski, introduction by A. Krawczuk, Warszawa 1969, p. 341.

³⁷ English translation by D. BORCHARDT, p. 33.

³⁸ In the VM autograph, it can be seen that originally the word “Człowiek” [Man] was followed by a comma and an ellipsis, but the author converted the comma to a question mark and the ellipsis was left as two dots.

this was enough to save a life; this particular life, as the Sphinx, after all, merely retreated “with its back to the rock,” giving free passage to this “tested” passer-by; however, there is no doubt that it will continue to lurk there – perhaps until the end of the world – for further victims. Such an understanding of the scene is further suggested by the “biblical” response of the poem’s protagonist, which speaks of man’s “priestly” vocation, as in St. Peter’s first letter: “But you are *a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession* [...]”³⁹. Man is captured in this poetic definition as an “unaware and unformed priest,” and thus as a process, dynamically, “in progress,” on his way towards full, i.e. conscious, priesthood. Thus is revealed the extraordinary novelty of Norwid’s conception of man as a being subject to change in time, which is both a threat to his ideal “priestly” condition and a prognosis of hope that one day he will finally attain the desired maturity in that “royal priesthood”. This is our “temporality,” immersed in the tradition of culture, in its immeasurable past on the one hand, and in an equally indefinite future on the other. A temporality that seeks an individual response to Christ’s call, “Follow me!,” addressed to one in a language only that person can understand.

Now we must return to the beginning of VM, to the remarkable poem *Przeszłość* [*The Past*], which examines the problem of time from another, one might say ontic perspective.

Nie Bóg stworzył p r z e s z ł o ś ć i śmierć, i cierpienia,
Lecz ów, co prawa rwie,
Więc nieznośne mu – dnie;
Więc, czując złe, chciał odepchnąć s p o m n i e n i a!

Acz nie byłże jak dziecko, co wozem leci,
Powiadając: „O! dąb
Ucieka!... w lasu głąb...”
– Gdy dąb stoi, wóz z sobą unosi dzieci.

P r z e s z ł o ś ć jest i d z i ś, i te dziś dalej:
Za kołami to wieś,
Nie – jakieś tam c ó ś, g d z i e ś,
Gdzie nigdy ludzie nie bywali!...
(VM 20)

³⁹ *Biblia Jerozolimska*, first edition, ed. by Rev. K. Sarzała, Poznań 2006, p. 1715; italics consistent with the source – here it is a reference to the extremely rich Old Testament tradition in this regard.

[God did not create the past, nor death nor pain,
 But he who breaks the laws;
 His days are – woes;
 So sensing evil, wards off memory, in vain!

Wasn't he like a child that whirs by in a dray,
 Saying: "O! an oak tree
 Deep into the woods... it fleets!..."
 – The oak stands still, the cart sweeps the children away.

The past is here today, and today is even further...
 Beyond the wheels the village is there,
 Not – something, somewhere,
 Where people never gathered!⁴⁰...]

The unusual conception of time as essentially a continuum, independent of the dynamics of change of “the present,” through which human processions, possessed by a devilish vision of life “leading towards death” – naïve children – are “flitting” as if through a magic lantern screen into the inky darkness of the past, in the face of the imminence of the laws of nature rooted in being, laws that are as solid and hard as oak, and the eternal laws of culture, which shape humanity by rooting it paradoxically in the past tuned to the future, because it is “dziś, i te dziś dalej” [today, and today is even further...]. Both here and in the poem *Sfinks* [*Sphinx*] discussed earlier, apart from the logic of poetic argumentation, we find something else, something essentially Norwidian – a reference to the final instance that should tip the judgment to the side chosen by the poet – to biblical inspiration in its entirety, in the Christian parabolic interpretation and in the personal experience of the reader of “księga ksiąg” [the book of books]. In *Sfinks* we can find a subtle reference to the biblical concept of the “royal priesthood,” which is projected onto the Israelite idea of the chosenness of “the people of God” and the Christian vision of “the new people” washed in “the blood of the Lamb”, which in Norwid’s case extends to all humanity, represented here by the pilgrim accosted by the Sphinx “u ciemnej skały” [at the dark rock]. In the poem *Przeszłość* [*The Past*], the biblical reference is concretely rooted in the Book of Wisdom: “Do not invite death by the error of your life, / or bring on destruction by the works of your hands; // because God did not make death, / and he does not delight in the death of the living. // For he created all things so that they might exist; / the generative forces of the world are wholesome, / and there is no destructive poison in them,

⁴⁰ English translation by Danuta Borchardt, *Poems*, p. 21.

/ and the dominion of Hades is not on earth. // For righteousness is immortal” (1:12-15). And even more emphatically elsewhere in this Book: “for God created us for incorruption, / and made us in the image of his own eternity, // but through the devil’s envy death entered the world / and those who belong to his company experience it” (2: 23-24)⁴¹.

Apart from this biblical context, which is so important to Norwid, it is worth pointing out other references. Alfred de Musset, who was well-known to Norwid, put it this way in his famous *Confession of a Child of the Century*: “All that has been is no more; all that will be is not yet”⁴². Given that Musset appears in VM in the venomously ironic poem LXXIX. *Różność zdań (Pod wizerunkiem Alfreda de Musset)* [*Difference-of-Opinions (Under the Image of Alfred de Musset)*] – it is impossible to resist the impression that the piece *Przeszłość [The Past]* is a camouflaged polemic against the French poet, that master of irony, “naturalness” and intellectual disinclination...

There are other traces of this problem in Norwid’s writings; for example, in a letter to Konstancja Górską from early 1857: “[...] Polacy amnestii chwytający się jak zobaczą, iż Rosja daje tylko o b e c n o ś ć, zabraniając p r z e s z ł o ś c i i p r z y s z ł o ś c i, to jest – że nic nie daje, bo każdy moment życia jest ciągłą przeszłością i przyszłością, i każde dziś jest ciągle w c z o r a i j u t r o..., jak tego nie zobaczą, to poniosą charaktery własne na śmiecie, oszukując Rosję, Francję, Polskę i siebie samych” [(...) Poles grasping amnesty as they see that Russia gives only the present, forbidding the past and the future, that is – it gives nothing, because every moment of life is a continuous past and future, and every today is still yesterday and tomorrow..., if they do not see this, they will carry their own characters to rubbish, deceiving Russia, France, Poland and themselves] (PWsz VII, 303)⁴³.

⁴¹ According to exegetes, the Book of Wisdom was written around the first century BC; its Greek title (which was written entirely in Greek and with clear links to that culture): *The Wisdom of Solomon* (this is also the title it bears in the Septuagint) refers to ancient times, but it is simply considered a literary trick. The Hebrew Bible canon does not include this book; it has its place in the Christian Scriptures, but is referred to as a “deuterocanonical book”; however, it was not included in the Protestant *Biblia Gdańska*.

⁴² A. DE MUSSET, *Spowiedź dziecięcia wieku*, transl. T. Boy-Żeleński, Warszawa 1979, p. 44.

⁴³ The letter considers as its main problem the reference to the provocative idea of the Russian invaders to grant amnesty to Polish exiles, obviously on the basis of an appropriate request submitted to the “authorities”. Norwid warns the émigrés against this trap, formulating the poignant thesis that “g r a n i c a m i n a r o d ó w - g r a n i c - p o z b a w i o n y c h s ą c h a r a k t e r y l u d z i...” [the boundaries of nations with no borders are the characters of the people...] (PWsz VII, 303).

What is striking about the conception of time we encounter in the poem *Przeszłość* [*The Past*] is the peculiar relativisation of what takes place (happens) in the course of the poetic “action”. On the one hand, we have the observation, of a “child,” that “an oak tree deep into the woods... it fleets,” and on the other, the corrective remark of the lyrical narrator: “the oak stands still, the cart sweeps the children away”. Who, then, “can see” here really what is and not what appears to be? Norwid does not leave us in the Romantic situation bluntly captured by Mickiewicz in his sonnet *Widok gór ze stepów Kozłowa* [*The View of the Mountains from the Kozlov Steppes*], in which, to the poignant vision of the guide (Mirza), the only response of the Pilgrim is a childish cry: “Aa!!!”. Norwid’s vision of incommensurable experience achieves a radical thesis in the very first words of the poem: “Nie Bóg stworzył p r z e s z ł o ś ć i śmierć i cierpienia, / Lecz ów, co prawa rwie...” [God did not create the past, nor death nor pain, / But he who breaks the laws] – thus the “childish” interpretation of events is anti-truth, i.e. godless and ultimately unworthy of affirmation. The bastion of truth is God’s law, which like the cedar of Lebanon is rooted in the mountain of creation... We see here (but also elsewhere) a faithful adherence to the word given in the first words of the collection, addressed “to the reader,” that in literature “strona o b o w i ą z k ó w, strona m o r a l n a, znaczne zajmowała miejsce...” [the side of duty, the moral side should occupy a considerable place...] (VM 8). This inclination of VM towards a kind of “moralism”, which the poet believed was a significant obstacle to the publication of the collection⁴⁴ and which, in the heyday of French Parnassianism, might indeed have stood in the way of these poems reaching the reader, is observed in the course of the entire composition of the collection, seen as a whole “nicią wewnętrzną zjęta w ogół” [sewn into a whole with an internal thread] (VM 8). Perhaps, the first impression after reading these poems, which do not shy away from clearly formulated theses and unambiguous messages, which might have brought to mind syllogistic constructions, repelled from them by evoking suspicions of didacticism, associated at the time with pushy moralising rather than high poetry. Regardless, VM failed to achieve the author’s planned diversion of “całego wiekowego kierunku poezji” [the whole age-old direction of poetry], giving preference to “the dynamics of thought” rather than “the dynamics of sensation”... as the “practical publisher” from Leipzig withdrew from the contract and sent the manuscript back to the poet, condemning

⁴⁴ This is perfectly evident in the poet’s letters to Kraszewski in mid-1866, from whom he sought support for the publication of VM, or to Henryk Merzbach in June that year, to whom he even wrote: “Są to rzeczy gorzkie, może głębokie, może dziwne – – niezawodnie potrzebne!” [These are bitter things, perhaps profound, perhaps strange – – unfailingly necessary!] (PWsz IX 228).

it to the literary “purgatory” until the early 20th century; in fact, it pushed the work (fragmented and in places illegible) into foreign cultural contexts that prompted one “late grandson” to uncharacteristically describe Norwid as an “anachronistic disciple of biblical authors”⁴⁵.

Years ago, while preparing the first edition of VM for the National Library, I noticed that a beautiful and overly repeated gnome, taken from the poem discussed here: “Przeszłość, jest to d z i ś, tylko cokolwiek dalej...” [The past is today, only anything further...] does have the charm of a “winged word,” but at the same time it does not correspond to the “truth of the text,” as it has been discarded (deleted) by the author and replaced with the phrase: “P r z e s z ł o ś ć – jest i dziś, i te dziś dalej...” [The past is here today, and today is even further...]. There are far more arguments in favour of this reading than the “prettier,” original one, which the poet has undoubtedly abandoned, and yet the power of habituation to what has become established in popular memory is greater than the strongest arguments. Thus, the version rejected by the author but petrified by the publishers continues to be repeated. As one can see, the “cogs of time” have been grinding Norwid’s work, but more about that in another place.

This “movement of thought” on which VM is erected permeates the entire collection and directly examines this very issue of how the “static” and the “dynamic” of thinking, perceiving and experiencing relate to each other. Let us look, for example, at two poems that are based on this idea: *X. Czynownicy* [*Chinovníks*] and *XI. Pielgrzym* [*Pilgrim*]. In *Czynownicy* we deal with two juxtaposed ways of “being in time”. The first is realised by the titular “chinovníks”; the very Russian notion of “chin”, i.e. rank, clerical rank, dependent on unattainable “power,” they signify a barbaric staticity of thought and being, rootedness in convention and slavish attachment to a form fixed “once and for all,” which is bluntly expressed by the ironic remark about the “number of buttons” in the official uniforms. These Baudelaire-like *chats sédentaire*⁴⁶ are contrasted with the perpetually dynamic and all-changing time:

Warownie nikną... i mondury!...
– Oni?... z d é m i s j ą - c z y n o w n i k i
(VM 35)

⁴⁵ J. PRZYBOŚ, “Próba Norwida,” in: idem, *Sens poetycki*, 2nd ed., extended, Vol. I, Kraków 1967, p. 110.

⁴⁶ From the poem *Cats* (*Les chats*). This image of ossification in form can later be found even more strongly, and in a quasi-Norwidian manner, in Thomas Stearns Eliot’s poem *The Hollow Men*, translated into Polish by Czesław Miłosz as *Próżni ludzie*.

[The strongholds are disappearing.... and uniforms!...
– They?...Czynovníks with dismissal]

The second poem triggers both ways of “being in time” from the very first sentence of the poem, in which two images are juxtaposed:

Nad stanami jest i s t a n ó w- s t a n,
Jako wieża nad płaskie domy
Stércząca w chmury...

[*A state-of-states* stands above all states,
Like a tower above flat roofs
Jutting into clouds...]

Then comes the thesis-polemic:

Wy myślicie, że i ja nie Pan,
Dlatego że dom mój ruchomy,
Z wielbłądziej skóry...

[You think I am not Lord of land
Because my home, forever mobile,
Is made of camel hide...]

To finally resound with a perfectly balanced point:

Przecież i ja ziemi tyle mam,
Ile jej stopa ma pokrywa,
Dopóki idę!...

[Even I – own as much land
As my foot can tread upon,
As long as I walk on!...]

In this poem, just as in those previously discussed, in addition to the existential truth that carries affirmative assent to the pilgrim condition, we have a reference to a supreme instance – a sense of coexistence with divine laws, as illustrated by a beautiful metaphor:

Przecież ja aż w nieba łonie trwam,
 Gdy ono duszę mą porywa
 Jak piramidę!

[Even I – dwell high in heaven’s womb,
 While it captivates my soul,
 As it does a pyramid!⁴⁷]

Here we touch upon an essential ideological and artistic complex that is evident throughout Norwid’s entire artistic output. It is the fundamental concept of time in relation to motion, which has preoccupied philosophers, poets and scholars from antiquity to the present day, bringing along the way, *inter alia*, Alfred Einstein’s brilliant concept, which can be encapsulated in the elegant category of space-time, and at the same time leading on – to the string theory, the theory of multidimensionality and, finally, the theory of noncommutativity⁴⁸. On the poetic side, there is the myth of the “eternal return”, the brilliant tragedies of the ancient Greeks, Shakespeare’s dramatization of human fate through time-mediated inevitable consequences of pacting with evil (as in *Macbeth*), the poignant reinterpretation of the Passion of Jesus in Mickiewicz’s psychomachia, or *Dziady* Part Three, Krasiński’s visionary *Un-Divine Comedy*, and immersion in the extraordinary allegory of the turn of history brought about by Norwid’s *Quidam*, taking place “pomiędzy świtem a nocy zniknięciem...” [between dawn and dispersion of night...]. On the philosophical side, let us mention here once again the name of Hegel, who “ordered” history to close in his brilliant thought as the culmination and finale of historical processes...

In Norwid’s work, images of happening – of movement in time – are usually dramatically anchored in the aftermath of events or as a consequence of inference from evoked premises (“movement of thought”). What is significant here is the prospect not so much of an undefined transformation as the effect of an anonymous process, but rather of arriving at some consequence of “happening,” which in poetic terms often takes the shape of a surprising climax, sometimes as a result of supernatural intervention, as in poem *XIV. Litość* [*Mercy*], in which a sequence

⁴⁷ English translation by D. BORCHARDT, p. 27.

⁴⁸ Cf. the attempted description of the so-called “noncommutative geometry” in the interview of Archbishop Józef Życiński: “if you were to take an exam twice and get a three mark (pass) each time, that is different from taking the exam three times and getting a two mark (fail) each time. That is how noncommutative geometry works” (Archbishop J. ŻYCIŃSKI/ A. KLICH, *Świat musi mieć sens. Ostatnia rozmowa*, Kraków 2018, p. 83).

of apparent or conventional signs of compassion is interrupted by a “bolt out of the blue,” forcing one to genuinely help one’s neighbour:

Gdy płyną ł z y, chustką je ocierają,
 Gdy k r e w płynie, z gąbkami pośpieszają,
 Ale gdy d u c h wycieka pod uciskiem,
 Nie nadbiegną pierwej z ręką szczerą,
 Aż Bóg to otrze sam, piorunów błyskiem –
 – W ten czas, dopięro!...

(VM 39)⁴⁹

[When tears flow, they wipe them with a handkerchief,
 When bloodflows, they hurry with their sponges,
 But when the spirit seeps out under oppression,
 They don’t come running with an open hand,
 ‘Til God, with a flash of lightning, sweeps them himself –
 – Only then!⁵⁰...]

But also the concrete human being, immersed in the deep, “passion”-driven tradition of the Christian understanding of sacrifice and offering, can influence the course of events and change the inevitable consequences of “being in time”. Therefore, in poem *XXX. Fatum [Fate]*, as in the poem *Sfinks* discussed earlier, the man-quidam and the nameless misfortune that “jak zwierż dziki przyszło” [came like a wild animal] meet eye to eye. The wise response of the man-artist, who looked upon it as a model of a potential work of art, removed into oblivion the inevitable fatal consequences of the artist’s ethical “examination”⁵¹. In *Fatum*, we deal with a reversal of the deterministic but also Stoic “amor fati”, highlighted at that time by Nietzsche, and a defiance of the inevitable fatenoted for centuries in ontology and popular thought. The same applies to the next poem, whose rela-

⁴⁹ In the VM autograph, the transcript of the last line reads: “– W ten czas, dopięro!..” [– At that time, only!..] – in various editions the line is usually printed as: “– W ten czas dopiero!...” (PWsz II 32), although the autograph notation defends itself against this definitive orthographic intervention by the emphatic emphasis on the expression “w ten czas” [at that time], which indicates a particular kind of time, denoting the moment of Divine intervention; the form “w ten czas” (then) is, of course, rooted in a well-established expression, but the author of VM did not shy away from linguistic innovations and semantic games that were meant to breathe new energy into ossified linguistic forms, for which, of course, he generally paid with incomprehension and/or ridicule, pointing to his ignorance of “elementary orthography”.

⁵⁰ English translation by D. BORCHARDT, p. 31.

⁵¹ Cf. M. MACIEJEWSKI, “Fatum ukrzyżowane,” *Studia Norwidiana* 1: 1983, pp. 31-47.

tion to the next, namely XXXI. “*Ruszaj z Bogiem*” [“*Go with God*”], Gomulicki calls a “bracket with a follower”⁵², as indeed both poems are “bracketed” by the extraordinary and surprising resolution of the drama: in the first – a courageous and deeply rooted in Christianity “turning away” from misfortune, in the second – a humble Christian prayer for a man who once wronged a hungry neighbour by refusing to help, i.e. “turning away” from one’s own seemingly justified dislike or hatred of the perpetrator.

The ethical culmination of this vision of historical time as a process of “infinite labour of time” is a poem placed exactly “in the middle” of the collection – *LI. Moralność* [*Morality*], which through the evocation and reinterpretation of the history of the revelation of the Decalogue points out the path that humanity must follow if it wants to seriously fulfil its vocation to holiness. The poet refers to the tradition of the famous tablets of the Law, which Moses shattered the first time at the sight of the idolatrous practices that prevailed at the foot of Mount Sinai while he was receiving the “Ten Commandments” from God on the top, and the “second” tablets, which he calls here somewhat deceptively “first,” not in the sense of order of creation but “seniority” in the social sense, as we read:

Z pierwszej?... mamy zarys i siłę mamy
Odniesienia rąk w dzieło zaczęte,
Ale d r u g i e j odłamy
Między Ludów Ludami
Jak menhiry sterczą rozpierzchnięte!

Wobec p i e r w s z e j?... każdy – a każdy – r z e s z ą!
Lecz – by d r u g ą od-calić –
Czoła się nam mojąszą
(VM 102)

[From the first?...we have an outline and strength
To put our hands in the work thus commenced,
But the fragments of the second
Between the Peoples of People
Like menhirs are standing scattered!]

⁵² See the publisher’s comments on VM in the edition: C. NORWID, *Wiersze. Dodatek krytyczny* [*Poems. Critical Appendix*], in: C. NORWID, *Dzieła zebrane* [*Collected Works*], ed. J. W. Gomulicki, vol. II: *Wiersze* [*Poems*], Warszawa 1966, p.787 (other quotations from this edition abbreviated as GomDZ; henceforth, the Roman numeral denotes the volume and the Arabic numeral after the comma denotes the page number).

With regard to the first?... each – and every one – a crowd!
But – tore-salvage the second –
We get Moses' brows]

To put it more directly, the commitment taken on by anyone who affirms both records of the Law – according to God's "autograph", scattered throughout history, and to Moses' "autograph", which has been preserved by the generations of the Chosen People and their heirs in the form of Sacred Scripture – backed up by participation in their fulfilment, especially in view of those written down first and, in fact, constituting a constant challenge to Moses' successors to "re-salvage" them, i.e. to come to a full understanding of the Law on the one hand, and to apply it in its entirety on the other hand, recalls vividly the thesis of the poem that serves as an introduction to the moral question in VM – the piece *Socjalizm* [*Socialism*]:

– O! Nie skończona jeszcze Dziejów praca,
Nie-prze-palony jeszcze glob – Sumieniem!
[– O! the work of History is yet unfinished,
The globe is not yet burned – with a Conscience!]

However, it would be wrong to look for an unreservedly optimistic interpretation of personal and collective history in this intellectual thread, deeply present throughout Norwid's oeuvre, indicating the sense and necessity of continuing the work of civilisation. Taking a glance at the poem *LXX. Laur dojrzały* [*Mature Laurel*] we can learn something equally surprising:

Nikt nie zna dróg do potomności,
Jedno po samodzielnych bojach;
Wszakże w Świątyni jej nie gości
W tych, które on wybrał, pokojach.

Ni swoimi wstępuje drzwiami,
Lecz które jemu odemknięto;
A co? W życiu było s k r z y d ł a m i,
Nieraz w dziejach jest ledwo p i ę t ą!...
(VM 120-121)

[No one knows the paths to posterity,
Except – through battles fought alone;
Still, in its Temple, no one is a guest
In chambers he has chosen as his own.

Nor does he enter through his own portal,
 But through one that has been for him opened—
 And what? what were wings in life's deal...
 In history proves often merely a heel!⁵³ ...]

This profound yet bitter poem resonates ironically, from afar, with *LXXXIII. Sens-świata* [*Sense-of-the-world*], one of the poet's favourite poems, repeatedly refined by him and used in various compositions⁵⁴, in which the irony of fate, along with his fellows, mocks the poet. The same applies to the next poem, *LXXXIV. Czemu* [*Why*]. This tone of bitterness, disappointment and melancholy is sustained in *XCVII. Finis*, one of final pieces. And finally, the crowning piece of the VM cycle – the brilliant work *Fortepian Szopena* [*Chopin's Grand Piano*], which, in a sense, accumulates the essence of all the most important ideological currents and artistic experiments of the entire repository of Norwid's "rhymes". This poem-hymn-ode has been discussed so many times that it is impossible even to cursorily refer to those analyses⁵⁵; also in the aspect of time, it is a representative work. Everything in it takes place in time – the real, present time, from which the poetic narrator looks into the depths of his memory, symbolised by the initial line, repeated in variants: "Byłem u Ciebie..." [I visited you...] (VM 172), and finally in the present of the drama of the desecration of the piano and other mementos of the brilliant musician, gathered in the house of the composer's sister, in the capital city where both artists, Chopin and Norwid, were raised, in the image of the desecration of their memory in the present, whose "chinovniks" are Moscow soldiers, like those from under the cross on Golgotha, "who do not know what they are doing"... , to fulfil the consequences of the most important matters, which are reached by the way of the cross, which probably requires that "ideał sięgnął bruku –" [The Ideal – has reached the street –].

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I mentioned earlier another aspect of time in relation to *Vade-mecum* – the strange turn of fate of this collection, which accompanied the poet for many years.

⁵³ English translation by D. BORCHARDT, p. 55.

⁵⁴ The first version, entitled *Obyczaje* [*Customs*], was gifted by the poet to Mieczysław Pawlikowski in October 1858; the latest, from around 1876 is known from the *Kalendarz Gospodarski dla Kobiet na rok 1877*.

⁵⁵ Cf. J. FERT, "Norwid – Chopin. Korespondencja serc i sztuk," in: J. FERT, *Poezja i publicystyka*, Lublin 2010, pp.63-74.

Finally, never published, the collection found its way through his heirs to the populariser of Norwid's work, Zenon Przesmycki. Miriam received the manuscript of *Vade-mecum* in an incomplete or, even worse, draft form, into which the carefully transcribed autograph prepared for print had been transformed. As it happened, long after 1866, when Brockhaus terminated the publishing contract, the author continued to work on his collection and, in an attempt to "sell" it as a whole to other potential publishers and/or his acquaintances, he was quoting an ever lower fee or removing some of its components from the collection, which he reworked on the existing fair copy in order to print them on an ongoing basis in periodicals or to incorporate them in his other works, such as the unfinished "*A Dorio ad Phrygium*" or the so-called *Wspomnienia weneckie* [*Venetian Memoirs*] (title given by the publisher). It is worth remembering that *Vade-mecum* is to a large extent, if not in essence, on the one hand a programmatic work, but on the other hand a genuine authorial selection from his poetic output between 1848 and 1866, subjected to a specific programmatic function, in which the problem of moral obligations comes to the fore as a poetic response to the essential demands of the present moment as an artistic act to serve his time. Hence the great sense of unfulfillment experienced by Norwid as an "nadkompletowy aktor" [extra actor] in this theatre of the age of "trade and industry"⁵⁶.

Przesmycki worked for nearly fifty years with the fragmented manuscript of the landmark work of late Romanticism, which was not destined to make the intended and significant turn in the history of Polish literature. From time to time he published single works selected from this collection, or larger groups of poems, but he never brought his editorial work to fulfilment in the form of an integral, though no longer achievable "whole". What remains of his work are editorial materials that emphatically show how far advanced his achievements were on this extremely difficult road to a complete edition⁵⁷. Miraculously rescued from the ruins of Warsaw in 1944, the manuscript of *Vade-mecum* was published in 1947 in the form of a phototype copy⁵⁸ by Waław Borowy, one of the participants of the Warsaw University rescue team evacuating the surviving remnants of national treasures collected in the capital after the fall of the Warsaw Uprising. This "reproduction" of *Vade-mecum*

⁵⁶ An expression used by Zofia STEFANOWSKA in the title of her important study of the social context of Norwid's work: „Pisarz wieku kupieckiego i przemysłowego”, in: Z. STEFANOWSKA, *Strona romantyków. Studia o Norwidzie*, Lublin 1993, pp. 5–53 (first print in: *Literatura, komparatystyka, folklor. Księga poświęcona Julianowi Krzyżanowskiemu*, eds. M. Bokszczanin, S. Frybes and E. Jankowski, Warszawa 1968, pp. 423–460).

⁵⁷ Materials from the archives of Zenon Przesmycki: manuscript BNar II 6323. Part 1: *Vade-mecum. Materiały do wydania drukiem*.

⁵⁸ C. Norwid, *Vade-mecum. Podobizna autografu*, foreword by W. Borowy, Warszawa 1947.

is, unfortunately, not perfect, as the phototype printing did not take into account the page background of the individual autographs and “distorted” many graphic elements of the authentic manuscript, although at the same time it protected the fragile autograph of the work itself from the inevitable “teeth of time,” which took a particularly severe toll on the manuscript heritage of the 19th century. This copy also became the basis for the first integral edition of *Vade-mecum*, which was published in exile, in England, thanks to Kazimierz Sowiński’s work⁵⁹.

We owe the first national integral edition of *Vade-mecum* to Juliusz Wiktor Gomulicki, who for years made this work the centre of his textological and publishing passions. Among other things, he tried to reconstruct the missing “links” of the collection, most daringly in the first edition of the collection⁶⁰, but with time taking a much more cautious approach to his publishing “intuitions”. Gomulicki’s editorial output includes not only several important editions of *Vade-mecum*, but also the only complete edition of Norwid’s writings (insofar as it was possible) as part of *Pisma wszystkie* [*Complete Writings*] (Vols. I-XI, Warszawa 1971-1976).

Parallel to Przesmycki’s work aimed at revindicating Norwid, various editions of selections from the poet’s writing output appeared; his works were increasingly translated into other languages in Europe and worldwide. In this process of Norwid’s entry into Polish and world literature, domestic editions and translations from the *Vade-mecum* collection occupied a prominent place. At the same time, the poet’s biography and work stimulated reviewers’ activity, in which *Fortepian Szopena* [*Chopin’s Grand Piano*] had a special place. *Vade-mecum*, in the form it had survived to Przesmycki’s time, also became the subject of translation work. As early as the end of the 19th century, translations of Norwid’s works began to appear; his works were translated into many languages⁶¹, including English⁶², Bulgarian, Czech, French⁶³, Lithuanian, Russian, Romanian, Slovak, Ukrainian, Hun-

⁵⁹ C. Norwid, *Vade-mecum*, prepared for publication by K. Sowiński, Tunbridge Wells 1953.

⁶⁰ C. Norwid, *Vade-mecum*, published from the autograph, completed and with an introduction by J. W. Gomulicki, Warszawa 1962.

⁶¹ See PWSz XI, 316-321.

⁶² Adam Czerniawski, among others as translator of many poems of the VM cycle, deserves particular credit here; see C. K. Norwid, *Selected Poems*, transl. Adam Czerniawski, with an introduction by Bogdan Czaykowski, London 2004, pp. 55-81.

⁶³ E.g. *Choix de poèmes*, traduits sous la direction de C. Jeżewski par Y. Bonnefoy et sl. “Obsidiane” 1983, n° 22. In 1999, a volume of translations into French was published in the Classique Slaves series: C. K. Norwid, *Poèmes*, choisis, présentés et traduits du polonais par Roger Legras, Lausanne 1999 (most works from VM). Much has been done to popularise Norwid in France by Krzysztof Jeżewski, just to mention one album edition: C. Norwid: *Le piano de Chopin*, traduit par Christophe Jeżewski et François-Xavier Jaujard, Paris 1983.

garian, Italian⁶⁴ and even Chuvash (PWsz XI, 318). Particularly notable are the translations into German (first translation as early as 1891), English and French. The entire *Vade-mecum* collection in two language versions came out in Germany: *Vade-mecum. Gedichtzyklus (1866)*. Polnisch-deutsch herausgegeben, eingeleitet und übersetzt von Rolf Fieguth, Vorwort von Hans Robert Jauss. München 1981. Translated by the distinguished Slavist Rolf Fieguth. A quarter of a century later, another translation of this work was published in a bilingual version: C. K. Norwid: *Vade-mecum. Gedichtzyklus*, Aus dem Polnischen von Peter Gehrish, Leipzig 2017. The collection was also published in French by Noir sur Blanc: *Vade-mecum*. Traduit du polonais par Christophe Jeżewski et alii. Préface de Józef Fert. Postface, notes et commentaires de Christophe Jeżewski. Paris 2004. Selections from the *Vade-mecum* have been published twice in English: C. K. Norwid: *Poezje / Poems*. Selection, translation and afterword by A. Czerniawski. Kraków 1986. In the next, related edition: C. K. Norwid: *Selected Poems*. Translated by A. Czerniawski, with an introduction by B. Czaykowski. London 2004: From *Vade-mecum (1865)*, pp. 57-81.

Ultimately, however, we must note the irreversible and devastating effect of time on this highly ambitious work by the 19th-century poet who waited almost a century to play his part in history. But at the same time, elsewhere in his writing, we find the foreshadowing and expression of another true victory:

Statuę grecką weź – zrąb jej ramiona –
 Nos – głowę – nogi opięte w koturny,
 I ledwo torsu grubą zostaw bryłę;
 Jeszcze za żywych stu uduchowniona,
 Jeszcze to nie głąz ślepy – jedną żyłę
 Pozostaw, wskrzesi!... i te zrąb – zostanie
 Materii tyle prawie... co gadanie!...

(*Promethidion. Bogumil*, ll. 325–351; DW IV, 116)

[Take a Greek statue – chop off its arms –
 Nose – head – legs strapped by buskins,
 And leave just a thick lump of the torso;
 Still with a spirit of a hundred living people,
 Not yet a blind boulder –leave
 One vein, it will resurrect!... and chop off this one – what is left is
 Almost as much matter... as talking!...]

⁶⁴ C. Norwid, *Poesie*, traduzione italiana di Silvano de Fanti e Giorgio Origlia, Bologna 1981.

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VADE-MECUM W PERSPEKTYWIE CZASU
ZARYS PROBLEMATYKI

Streszczenie

W artykule dotknięty został istotny kompleks ideowy i artystyczny całościowości autora *Vade-mecum*. To ujęcie czasu w relacji do ruchu, które zaprzęta zresztą filozofów, poetów i uczonych od starożytności do dziś, przynosząc po drodze m.in. genialną koncepcję Alfreda Einsteina, dającą się zamknąć w eleganckiej kategorii czasoprzestrzeni, a równocześnie prowadząc dalej – do teorii strun, teorii wielowymiarowości czy wreszcie teorii nieprzemienności. Po stronie poezji mamy mit „wiecznego powrotu”, genialne tragedie starożytnych Greków, Szekspirowskie udramatyzowanie losów ludzkich poprzez bieg w czasie nieuchronnych następstw paktowania ze złem (jak w *Makbecie*), przejmującą reinterpretację Pasji Jezusa w Mickiewiczowskiej psychomachii, czyli *Dziadów części trzeciej*, apokaliptyczną wizyjność Krasińskiego *Nie-Boskiej komedii* i zanurzenie w problematyce (nierządkiem alegoryzowanej) przełomu dziejów, jaką przynosi Norwidowski *Quidam*, dziejący się „pomiędzy świtem a nocy zniknięciem...”. Po stronie filozofii wspomnijmy Hegla, który „kazał logicznie” zamknąć się dziejom w jego genialnej myśli jako szczyt i finale procesów historycznych...

Obrazy dziania się – ruchu w czasie – mają u Norwida zwykle dramatyczne zakotwiczenie w następstwie zdarzeń lub w konsekwencji wnioskowania z przywołanych przesłanek („ruch myśli”). Znamienne są tu perspektywy nie tyle bliżej nieokreślonej przemiany jako efektu anonimowego procesu, co raczej docieranie do jakichś konsekwencji „dziania się”, która w poetyckim ujęciu przybiera nierządkiem kształt zaskakującej puenty będącej zarazem ukrytą lub jawną „nauką moralną”, niekiedy na skutek nadprzyrodzonej interwencji, jak w wierszu *XIV. Litość*, w którym ciąg pozornych czy konwencjonalnych znaków współczucia przerywa „grom z jasnego nieba”, zmuszając do autentycznej pomocy bliźniemu.

Warto pamiętać, że *Vade-mecum* w znacznym stopniu, jeśli nie w istocie, to z jednej strony dzieło programowe, ale z drugiej – autentyczny wybór autorski z twórczości poetyckiej z lat 1848–1866, poddany określonej funkcji programowej, w której problem zobowiązań moralnych wysuwa się na plan pierwszy jako odpowiedź poetycka na istotne zapotrzebowanie chwili.

li bieżącej jako czyn artystyczny mający służyć swoim czasom. Stąd tak ogromne poczucie niespełnienia, jakiego doświadczał Norwid jako „nadkompletowy aktor” w tym teatrze wieku, mówiąc słowami Zofii Stefanowskiej, „kupieckiego i przemysłowego”.

Słowa kluczowe: Cyprian Norwid; George W.F. Hegel; Fryderyk Nietzsche; czas; historia; dialektyka; romantyzm; *Vade-mecum*.

VADE-MECUM IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF TIME. TOPIC OUTLINE

Abstract

This article addresses a conceptual and artistic issue that is vital for Norwid's entire work, namely the relationship between time and movement. This question has preoccupied philosophers and poets since antiquity, giving birth, for instance, to the ingenious concept of time-space developed by Alfred Einstein, and leading further to string theory, multidimensional physics, or noncommutative geometry. In the field of poetry, this theme has been elaborated in the myth of "eternal recurrence," brilliant ancient Greek tragedies, Shakespeare's dramatization of human fate as the temporal course of the inevitable consequences of compacts with evil (as in *Macbeth*), the piercing reinterpretation of the Passion in Mickiewicz's psychomachia (in the third part of *Dziady* [*Forefathers' Eve*]), the apocalyptic visions in Krasiński's *Nie-Boska komedia* [*The Un-Divine Comedy*], and explorations of the (often allegorised) question of historical turning points in Norwid's *Quidam*, which is set "between dawn and the fading of the night...". Finally, in philosophy, Hegel postulated the logical conclusion of history in his profound theory about the culmination of historical processes.

In Norwid's poetry, images of movement in time are usually anchored in the sequence of events or in the consequences of concluding on the basis of articulated premises (as "movement of thought"). What is notable here is not the perspective of some indefinable transformation considered as the effect of anonymous processes, but rather the establishing of certain consequences of "unfolding," which is often expressed in poetic terms as a surprising point that communicates an explicit or implicit "moral lesson," sometimes as a result of supernatural intervention, as in the poem *XIV. Litość* [*Mercy*], where a sequence of ostensible or conventional signs of compassion are interrupted by a "bolt out of the blue," demanding authentic help for our neighbour.

It is worth remembering that *Vade-mecum* is, to a large extent (if not essentially), a programmatic work on the one hand, while on the other – an authentic selection of poems written in the years 1848-1866 subjected to a specific programmatic function that foregrounds moral obligations as a poetic response to the vital needs of the times – an artistic gesture meant to offer an answer to the problems of this period. Hence the immense sense of a lack of fulfilment experienced by Norwid as an "extra actor" in the theatre of an age that Zofia Stefanowska called "the age of trade and industry".

Keywords: Cyprian Norwid; G.W.F. Hegel; Friedrich Nietzsche; time; history; dialectics; Romanticism; *Vade-mecum*.

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