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VADE-MECUM AND THE POETICIZATION OF EPISTOLOGRAPHY

Norwid's poems assembled in the *Vade-mecum* collection are well known for their strong focus on the addressee who is never a mere alter ego or fictional adversary but a "real" partner in a conversation aimed at discovering the truth about some phenomenon or life situation. It is not just a matter of refuting false theses or counter-arguments personified by the interlocutor ("Ty powiadasz: 'Śpiewam miłosny rym...'" [You say: 'I am singing a love rhyme...']; "Ty, skarżysz się na ciemność mojej mowy" [You, complain about the obscurity of my speech]¹). Arguments of this kind are only a superficial embodiment of Norwid's dialogicality, whereas the real space of dialogue is the "authorial" perspective, overriding the "I"–"you" relationship at the level of the poem's represented world. It is marked by metatextual statements: the motto, the introduction "to the reader," and especially the dedication:

Tym,
z którymi błogo, poufnie
i często rozmawiałem,
poświęcam i posyłam
C.N.²

¹ C. NORWID, *Vade-mecum*, compiled by J. Fert, Wrocław 1991, p. 27 (*Liryka i druk*), p. 30 (*Ciemność [Darkness]*). All quotations from the *Vade-mecum* are given according to this edition, abbreviated as VM (with the page number following the comma).

² C. NORWID, *Vade-mecum*, p. 3.

[To those
with whom I blissfully, confidentially
and often talked
I dedicate and send it
C.N.]

It is this higher level that makes it possible not only to refute the arguments of the interlocutor-antagonist or to instruct him (the didactic factor, for instance, plays a role in the poetic letters to Teofil Lenartowicz from the first decade of Norwid's stay in Paris³), but it also creates the conditions for highlighting the broader ideological contexts that define individual attitudes from the perspective of a certain whole. From the author's perspective, this whole is never fully realised and points to transcendence (cf. the "definition" of God in the poetic letter *Do Walentego Pomiana Z.* [*To Walenty Pomian Z.*] at the end of the *Vade-mecum*: "Boga? – że znikający nam przez doskonałość – / Nie widziałem, zaprawdę, jak widzi się całość./ Alem był na przedmieściach w jego Jeruzalem [...]") [God? – who disappears before us due to perfection – / I have not seen, verily, as the whole is seen./ But I was in the outskirts of his Jerusalem (...)] VM, 201). The impossibility of holistically knowing the deity is further linked to the excess of human suffering, which is a visible sign of human imperfection that is nevertheless the starting point (implicitly or explicitly) of all attempts to speak about man. Man, as an individual, cannot embrace the incomprehensible tragedy of his "temporal" existence, but has to address it. Thanks to this paradoxical helplessness, the horizon of dialogue in Norwid's poetry never closes. Its condition is man's entanglement in temporality, which seems hopelessly dark, with the simultaneous hope that the night is passing (it is no coincidence that the "epilogue" – another metatextual statement in *Vade-mecum* – is also a self-commentary on *Quidam*, the story of the twilight of antiquity, which was an unrealised dialogue in the face of the absolutisation of its own rich and varied, though gradually dying, tradition).

The last word, then, does not belong to the "poet" (the "cyclic" subject) or to his interlocutors, but the truth – insofar as it is available to "us" (humans, "mortals") – is realised (implicitly or explicitly) at the level of "conversation". In the just quoted "definition" of God from the poetic letter *Do Walentego Pomiana Z.* [*To Walenty Pomian Z.*], the surprising fact is that the poet can no longer address God directly (if only in the likeness of apophatic theology). It is in this respect that *Vade-mecum* differs significantly from Norwid's earlier, still Romantic treatment of religious themes in his poetry (e.g. in the poem *Psalm Wigilii* [*Christmas Eve Psalm*], and especially in *Modlitwa* [*Prayer*]). In his mature poetry, God is "talked

³ See PWsz I, 232 (*Teofilowi* [*To Teofil*]).

about,” and, moreover, such a conversation takes place in the perspective of human imperfection and mortality (“trumny zatrząsk nowój” [a new coffin latch]; VM, 201). It seems, however, that the word “rozmowa” [conversation], which appears in various contexts and guises in the *Vade-mecum* collection, has a very specific meaning in Norwid’s work, characterised by the changing communicative situation in the modern age. I will try to specify this meaning. Such a conversation always presupposes humility towards “chrześcijańska prawda objawiona” [Christian revealed truth] (VM, 197), though not in the sense of codified “knowledge” but as a concrete model of ethical attitudes to life. It is primarily a matter of the embodiment of this ethic – (self-)knowledge is of course also important, but it is not the decisive factor. The lack of self-knowledge does not mean that a person cannot act ethically, although often – as in the case of the son of Alexander of Epirus in *Quidam* – one pays the highest price for it. It happens (even quite often) that the poet is opposed to the “spirit” of the age, but the unmasking of its idols does not serve to affirm his own subjectivity (as in the Romantic works construed around the opposition “poet”–“crowd”) but rather aims to recreate a space of mutual understanding that has become barren (petrified⁴) under the influence of the conventions “zaklętych w umarłe formuły” [enchanted into dead formulas] (PWsz II, 16). The possibility that a community of understanding might not be recreated (“Syn – minie pismo, lecz ty spomnisz, wnuku” [Son – the writing will pass, but you will remember, grandson], PWsz II, 17) is, in this way, a function of this basic attitude towards conversation with some “you”.

This kind of dialogicality is realised through a modification of the form of the poetic cycle that makes it possible to present the dispute between the various rationales at the level of literary space (i.e. the “represented world”, as well as the metatextual elements governing the relations between the individual links of the cycle). Norwid’s poems are thus not “Zeitgedichte” (poems of the epoch) in the usual sense of the word, directly (and usually critically) referring to a contemporary event (such poems were written, for instance, by representatives of the German literary movement *Das junge Deutschland*), but they contextualise the tensions of the epoch at the literary level. Understanding an individual work is not limited to explaining the circumstances of its composition (in which case we would be dealing with “journalism” which uses rhymes) but presupposes above all its reading in the context of other Norwid’s works featuring similar themes or “key words” (even though, at first sight, the content appears to be completely different). The semantics of *Vade-mecum* as a poetic cycle is also a matter of poetic language in the strict sense, creating a network of equivalent images and sounds.

⁴ Cf. C. NORWID, *Vade-mecum*, compiled by J. Fert, p. LXXXVI.

With this strategy of making the “work” (we will see below that this word has a special meaning in Norwid’s oeuvre) coherent, not only through certain thematic ensembles, but also through the ambiguity of key words, the poet opposed the “journalistic” (columnist!) tendency to unify complex phenomena. This peculiar “literary autonomy” of Norwid’s oeuvre, which precisely as an artistic whole refers to the realities of the epoch, is in fact not limited to the poetic cycle. It is also present (though implicitly) in other genres and is closely linked to Norwid’s concept of incompleteness.

Let us, however, return to the *Vade-mecum* collection. The essential space of “ideological” confrontation is thus not an individual poem, but the whole poetic collection, or – in other words – the position of its “author” (the “cyclic” subject), who – from poem to poem – undergoes development and enrichment in confrontation with the “spirit” of the epoch, or – in other words – in the discussion of its advantages and disadvantages from the point of view of the specifically “Polish” situation of enslavement and exile. The greatest danger, on the other hand, would be the inability to have a (self-) critical attitude to this existence of “shadows”(cf. the motto from the *Odyssey*, the scene in Hades), as well as – among other things, this is what the poem *Fulminant*, written during the January Uprising, is about – “*przyrodzony-gniew we krwi człowieka*” [*the inherent anger in man’s blood*] (DW IV, 200), the poisoned fruit of reflexive hatred towards the invader⁵ (a theme also present in *Vade-mecum*, e.g. in the poem *Język-ojczysty* [*Mother-Tongue*]). This is precisely why it is necessary to read *Vade-mecum* as a whole, or perhaps rather as a “project” of a whole. The unifying perspective of this poetic collection does not lie primarily in the implementation of certain formal or thematic structural principles, but in the poet’s confrontation (through the aforementioned “key words”) with contemporaneity mediated by specific individuals, i.e. his fellow émigrés, as well as by Poles staying in their homeland – often belonging to the landed gentry – who are “tourists” in Paris, and finally by influential French – “Western” – poets, thinkers and artists, with whom Norwid’s contact was generally less direct⁶. These meetings were accompanied by an exchange of letters in

⁵ DW IV, 198 (“– Coś, co jest wielką nienawiścią pierwej,/ Niżli na miłość wyrość mogło w nerwy,/ A jednak *taką* być musi!” [– Something that is great hatred first,/ Rather than for love could grow into nerves,/ And yet *such* it must be!]).

⁶ Rolf FIEGUTH wrote about the possible links between *Vade-mecum* and French poetry (epitomised by the most important French poet of the 19th-century, Victor Hugo) in his sketch “‘Vade-mecum’ Cypriana Norwida w kontekście Wiktora Hugo i Charles’a Baudelaire’a” (in: R. FIEGUTH, *Gombrowicz z niemiecką gębą i inne studia komparatystyczne*, Poznań, 2011, pp. 241-264). In *Vade-mecum*, the essence of art is discussed against the back drop of the work of Alfred de Musset (see the poem *Różność-zdań* [*Difference-of-Viewpoints*], VM, 128).

which requests and anecdotes are interspersed with discussions of the most important issues of the age (it often happens that the “anecdotal” plane, through some keyword, is closely linked to broader ideological themes)⁷.

The other side of this “personal” communicative model underlying Norwid’s poetics in the *Vade-mecum* period is that the topics of his conversation were largely influenced by “journalism”, whose importance was growing in the second half of the 19th century, not only in Western Europe but also in Russia and Congress Poland (although censorship there restricted the working conditions of both “reporters” and “columnists”). Therefore, when in the introduction to *Vade-mecum* (*Do czytelnika* [*To the Reader*]), Norwid writes that “rozwiniecie dziennikarstwa odejmie wiele z rzeczy i ciężarów, które ponosiły dotąd skrzydła poezji” [the development of journalism will take away many of the things and burdens that have hitherto been borne by the wings of poetry] (VM, 9), he is not being entirely strict. For it also becomes the task of poetry to express the modern mediation of the world by the “press,” which has ushered in an era of “massmedia” throughout Europe (authors such as Bolesław Prus and Henryk Sienkiewicz earned their bread as journalists for a time), with its impli-

⁷ An example – one of many – of how, in Norwid’s letters, a particular “life” issue becomes a pretext for more general considerations, which return in his poetry (not only in *Vade-mecum*), is, for example, his implicitly negative assessment of the poetry by Mieczysław Romanowski, who actively participated in the January Uprising and was killed on 24 April 1863 in the battle of Józefów. In a letter to Mieczysław Pawlikowski (which probably never reached the addressee), than king him for handing over a booklet of poems by the late Romanowski, Norwid complained – without mention in gnames – about the lack of “obywatelskiej twórczej trzeźwości” [civic creatives obriety]: “Do lat wiosny odpowiada człowiek za to, co umarzył, ukochał, upragnął – potem odpowiada człowiek za to, co do-konał, dopełnił, uskutečnił – choćby to był łepiek u szpilki, choćby to był okrągły, cały atom! – Znajomości tych obowiązków, niestety, nie spotkałem dotąd dość rozwiniętych i świadczonych przez ludzi, których z ojczyzny widuję. Owszem, w tym, co widziałem, nie widziałem nigdy więcej nad miarę tradycyjnych-herosów i bezwiednych-magnetyzerów! [...] Widzę – rozbijanie i poczucie energii, nie widzę sił” [Until the spring years a man is responsible for what he has dreamed, loved, desired – then a man is responsible for what he has done, completed, made effective – be it a pin-head, be it a round, whole atom! – Unfortunately, I have not yet encountered the knowledge of these duties that would besufficiently developed and provided by the people I see from my homeland. Yes, in what I have seen, I have never seen more than a measure of traditional-heroes and faithless-magnetisers! (...) I can see – exuberance and a sense of energy, I cannot see strength]. From Norwid’s point of view, the shortcomings of Romanowski’s poetry indirectly expose the determinants of Norwid’s poetics. More concretely, the issue of energy devoid of real strength is present in the poem *Język-ojczysty* [*Mother-Togue*] (“Góra czyny! ... a słowa? a myśli?... potem!.../ Energumen tak krzyczał do Lirnika” [Deeds above all! ... and words? and thoughts?... after them!.../ The Energumen shouted thus to the Lirnyk] (VM, 112); the word “energumen” is a borrowing from French).

cations for “art,” i.e. “poetry”. An example of the accomplishment of this task is the already mentioned short poem on the work of Alfred de Musset, who according to some critics was a completely original poet, “Nowe wniósłszy sztuki prawidło” [Having created new principles of art], while others (and among them Norwid himself) believed that he merely borrowed a certain mannerism akin to the 17th-century Dutch artists painting Italian landscapes. The poetic language here helps to ironically (via rhymes) highlight the unintended – in Norwid’s view – contrast between the realism of some details (animals) of this work and the classical aura of Italy:

Jedni twierdzą, że Musset mistrza nie ma,
Nowe wniósłszy sztuki prawidło;
Drudzy – że naśladowcą jest Berghema
(Który malował ślicznie... bydło!...).

(VM, 128)

[Some say that Musset has no master,
Having created new principles of art;
Others – that he imitates Berghem
(Who painted beautifully... cattle!...)]

The relationship between “journalism” and “Literature” (capitalized) was one of the most important issues of the time, although the “literati” themselves often took it as something undeserving of deeper reflection from the point of view of the literary form. In Norwid’s case, however, things were different; some poems in *Vade-mecum* are explicitly (and critically) devoted to “journalism”. In doing so, they adopt (though not without irony) the perspective of the literary critic and, more generally, of the “editor” (cf. also the editor’s statement in the later novella “*Ad leones!*”: “redakcja to redukcja” [redaction is reduction], an example of “ironia zdrady na samym sobie” [irony of betraying oneself]). Norwid was, of course, primarily interested in the “Polish” (domestic and émigré) mediatisation of reality by the press, as evidenced by the poem immediately preceding *Fortepian Szopena* [*Chopin’s Grand Piano*] entitled *Krytyka* [*Criticism*] (subtitle: “wyjęta z czasopisma” [Extracted from a Magazine], VM, 173-176), although extensive passages criticising the state of the press (the so-called “print”) in the poem *Rzecz o wolności słowa* [*On the Freedom of Speech*] (written and published a few years after the completion of *Vade-mecum*) show that also the issue of the mediatisation of reality in a broader, “metaphysical” sense (cf. the relationship between “author” and “vulgarizer” to “sanctity”) was not foreign to Norwid:

“Świętość-słowa?!” – zapyta Akademii członek,
 Dziennikarz, opowieściarz lub nadzorca czcionek,
 Słowem, *cala Minerva*... o tym przymiotniku
 Słowa nie wyczytawszy w społecznym dzienniku!
 (DW IV, 251)

[“*Sanctity of the word?!*” – asks an Academy member,
 Journalist, storyteller or font supervisor,
 In a word, *all Minerva* ... without having read a word
 About this adjective in a contemporary journal!]

Polish dilemmas in relation to a gradually maturing modernity (including the mediatisation of reality) were also manifested in the attitudes of domestic and émigré addressees of Norwid’s letters⁸. The point is that, unlike in the works of many of Norwid’s contemporaries (for whom the very concept of “lyrical” poetry excluded any relation – even a critical one – to “journalism” and other forms of mediatisation of the world⁹), their and Norwid’s own attitudes towards modernity become the subject of reflection as well as poetic self-reflection in *Vade-mecum*, whereby the transfer of “journalistic” elements from Norwid’s epistolography to his poems further complicates (thickens) their poetic form. There is thus a close relationship between Norwid’s letters and his poetic work, especially in the case of the *Vade-mecum* cycle, but an important – and innovative – factor in this relationship is its mediation by “journalism” not only as the “subject” of the poem but also in the sense of a communicative model that negatively (in the case of concealment) or positively (as an element of contextualisation – often polemical) shapes the poetic form.

⁸ Józef Fert (C. Norwid, *Vade-mecum*, compiled by J. Fert, p. 138) draws attention to the relationship between the poem *Różność-zdań* [*Difference-of-View points*] and Norwid’s brief remark about Alfred de Musset in a letter to Maria Trębicka sent from New York, dated 21[-23] February 1854. Indeed, it can be said that the epigram from *Vade-mecum* poetically (i.e. through a thickening of stylistic devices) develops the epistolographic observation that “od żadnego dziś poety nie wymagam skończoności spokojnej i zupełnej [...]” [from no poet today do I require a calm and complete finitude (...)] (DW X, 486).

⁹ According to the author of *Vade-mecum*, it was precisely this kind of “lyricism” that was acceptable for “journalism” – cf. the above-mentioned poem *Krytyka* [*Criticism*]: “Wiersz – kwitnie u nas – kwitną rymy śpiewne/ Woni rodzimej, jak zielona fletnia;/ I czują u nas z dala wiew trucizny./ – Satyra wtedy Muzę uszlachetnia./ Skoro się głównie rzuca na obczyzny/ Naleciałości chore z krajów owych,/ Gdzie naszych wiosen brak konwalijowych!” [The poem – blossoms here – singing rhymes blossom/ With the native scent, like a green flute;/ And they sense from afara whiff of poison./ – Satire then ennobles the Muse,/ Since it casts itself mainly on foreign lands/ The sickly afflictions from those countries,/ Which lack our lily springs!] (VM, 174-175).

Let us now try to define this triangle, consisting of poetic form, epistolographic style and “journalism,” from the point of view of “literary geopolitics”. It is this perspective that constitutes Norwid’s originality, both among representatives of Polish literature in exile and at home. Poles, both in exile and at home, had an internally polarised attitude to “Western” reality, which was expressed, on the one hand, in an exaggerated affirmation of the “West” (in juxtaposition to “Moscow” and with regard to “conciliatory” attitudes among Poles themselves), and, on the other hand, in spontaneous gestures of rejecting it (as devoid of “spirit”— cf. Mickiewicz’s *Księgi narodu polskiego i księgi pielgrzymstwa polskiego* [*The Books of the Polish Nation and of the Polish Pilgrimage*], which began a long line of texts written in a similar vein). Such an internally polarised attitude was also not foreign to the author of *Vade-mecum* (especially during the period of the Spring of Nations), except for that in his mature poetry (from the mid-1850s onwards), both extremes are constantly questioned – and thus their awareness raised – in the context of dialogue/conversation with letter correspondents. They then become the content of Norwid’s poems, especially during the turbulent period of the January Uprising, while the main paradox (from the point of view of both Romantic and early modern poetic principles) seems to be the fact that the epistolographic pedigree of these works does not prevent the poetic impersonality of the artistic realisations of the themes, especially in *Vade-mecum*. One might even get the impression that the impersonality of the poem was the compositional criterion of this “cycle,” “złożonego z stu perełek nawlekłych/ Logicznie w siebie – jak we lżę lża wciekłych” [Composed of a hundred pearls and threaded, /Logically as tear flows into tear one into another] (*Finis*, VM, 172), although from the point of view of later modernist reception this epistolographic context was rather a misunderstanding or even a flaw (the focus at the time was on impersonality as an artistic procedure, i.e. in an “autotelic” sense – a work as an artefact).

In the case of Norwid’s poetic impersonality, the “ideological” content of a particular epistolary conversation is admittedly, when it becomes the subject of a poem, “purged” of elements that are too personal (“private”), limiting its overall meaning, but this does not mean accepting the communicative situation typical of modernist autotelicity (which had already begun to be employed by Norwid’s Parnassian contemporaries and was perfected in Mallarmé’s poetry). The poet never “disappears from the text,” as the leader of French Symbolism postulated¹⁰.

¹⁰ See P. ŚNIEDZIEWSKI, *Mallarmé – Norwid. Milczenie i poetycki modernizm we Francji i w Polsce*, Poznań 2008, pp. 111-130. The researcher is obviously aware that Norwid’s practice differs from French modernism. The common denominator is a retreat from the Romantic concept of lyricism.

Indeed, this lyric is dominated by a particular variety of “impressive” function. It involves not only direct persuasion or arousing feelings, but creating a communicative situation in which the concretisation of “ideological” content presents itself as a joint task (of the poet and his interlocutors), without the “poet” himself knowing all the answers in advance. The poem is thus a kind of call (though quite often futile) to the addressee (explicitly designed in the communicative situation) to cooperate in the pursuit of truth. In this respect, the relationship between poetic creation and epistolography presents itself differently in Norwid’s work than in that of many “older” Romantic poets, whose letters often contain elements of emotionality usually reserved for personal lyricism.

This kind of lyricism is generally absent from Norwid’s letters. The context of this specific dialogical situation seems to be an image of reality created largely by “journalism,” which suggests topics for discussion and contestation to Norwid and his correspondents, although such attempts often end in a failure, as e.g. in the poem *Ostatni-despotyzm* [*The Last Despotism*]. Norwid’s poetry depicts (especially in *Vade-mecum*) human communication as a process that is significantly mediated (though often falsified) by what might be termed the “mediasphere”. It is this layer, which “alienates” modern man from the immediacy of life in a manner quite different from that of earlier eras, which creates a common space that allows the situations underlying Norwid’s discussions and contestations to be isolated from their epistolographic context, though this does not mean that they become generalised. Rather, it is that their dialogicity is raised to a “higher” power. That which is general and that which is individual then ceases to manifest itself in the form of simple oppositions. The poetic form, and especially the “shaky” self-irony-lined status of the lyrical subject, contributes to this.

Norwid’s poems in *Vade-mecum*, both shorter and longer, are thus meeting points where criticism and self-criticism go hand in hand, since the presence of the second person singular (“you”) is generally ambiguous. By addressing the addressee (sometimes the poet is his own addressee), bringing out superstitions (e.g. the impression that something is “absurd”), the author of *Vade-mecum* (at the level of the “subject of creative activity”) evokes the generally accepted conventions (both literary and ideological in the broader sense, mediated by the “mediasphere”) of the community to which he belongs, while this community is not “abstract,” but – owing to the epistolographic provenance of many of the motifs – “embodied” in concrete persons, the poet’s “acquaintances” and friends (I have already drawn attention to their presence in the metatextual statements, cf. dedication of the volume). The poetic impersonality (considerably different from its “Parnassian” variety), which makes it possible to concretise themes and motifs

in contexts not directly related to the “epistolographic” origin of the work, is not at odds with this focus on the concrete addressee as a partner in a “blissful” and “confidential” conversation. The communicative situation in *Vade-mecum* thus reflects the structure of a “confidential” epistolary conversation; nevertheless, it has been “purged” of “biographical” information in the strict sense. However, the epistolographic context of the collection comes to light (in the sense of the “formalist” notion of “exposing the grip”) in the epilogue, in which the strategy of poetic impersonality is “secondarily” embodied through the choice of the ancient (“classicist”) genre of the poetic letter. The determinants of this genre, however, are significantly modified. In the following we will take a closer look at this work.

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In the envisaged collection of his works, Norwid intended to place the poetic letter *Do Walentego Pomiana Z.* [*To Walenty Pomian Z.*] immediately before the poem about ancient Rome in Hadrian’s time, *Quidam*¹¹ [the poem was preceded by an excerpt from Norwid’s letter to Zygmunt Krasiński (Z.K.)]. However, this detail is irrelevant to the function of this rhymed letter in the *Vade-mecum* collection. The discussion of the content of the “parable” (*Quidam*) is a different issue. In the “epilogue” of *Vade-mecum*, this self-commentary encompasses more than 40 lines and presents the fate of the “son of Alexander of Epirus” as a “generational” experience (“Miałże to być przeto obraz pokolenia [...]” [It was therefore to be a picture of a generation(...)]; VM, 197). This self-commentary thus gives the situation of conversation typical of a poetic letter the characteristics of an intra-generational dialogue, without losing its “confidential” character. It is precisely as a “confidential generational” conversation that the poetic letter *Do Walentego Pomiana Z.* provides the context for the themes, motifs and evaluations presented in the previous links of the poetic “cycle”. This “epilogue” is closely linked to the first “link” of *Vade-mecum* – *Klaskaniem mając obrzękłe prawice* [*Their Hands Swollen from Clapping*]. Firstly, both poems contain an intuition that, in an age of “progress”, the authentic “work” will not be immediately understood by its audience (cf. “Zwij więc jak chcesz? – Współczesność minie niestateczna,/ Lecz nieominie przyszłość: Korektorka-wieczna!...; Syn – minie pismo, lecz ty spomnisz, wnuku” [Call it as you will? – Contemporaneity will pass unsteady,/ But the future will not be missed: the everlasting Corrector!...; Son – the writing will pass, but you will remember it, grandson]; VM, 191), and

¹¹ C. NORWID, *Dziela zebrane* [*Collected Works*], compiled by J. W. Gomulicki, Vol. II: *Wiersze. Dodatek krytyczny* [*Poems. A Critical Supplement*], Warszawa 1966, p. 858.

the reason for this lack of understanding is linked to his orientation towards the future. This “artist’s diary” is a collection of peculiar letters about “Babylon” (about Norwid’s contemporary civilisation that forgets the sacred, presenting reality as a self-sufficient entity governed by “immanent” laws in its development) addressed to “Jerusalem”.

The first, “autobiographical” link of *Vade-mecum* suggests that the dialogical essence of the collection is (despite the fact that “listy dochodzą” [the letters do arrive]) inaccessible to some recipients of this “work”. For the addressee inscribed in the structure of the cycle is internally polarised and has two faces – that of the “confidential” interlocutor and that of the man completely subordinated to the prejudices of the age (“journalist” or “critic”), the former appearing as a potential – and “accidental” – victim of times devoid of compassion towards those who lost (the motif of the suicide of Polish emigrants, victims of historical “coincidences,” plays a role in the “epilogue”; I will return to this thread later). The future as an open horizon has closed. The idea of “progress” does not involve the possibility of transforming humanity through the sacred, but turns out to be the realisation of a preconceived idea that impoverishes humanity. In such a situation, the “critic” or “journalist” overlooks the internal coherence of the cycle as a “confidential” and self-critical conversation of potential victims of the age about the present. The only coherence available to them is of a “formal” nature. The poet (the “cyclical” subject) is well aware of this and consciously – albeit through irony – thematises various misunderstandings. From such a constricting point of view, the cycle could indeed present itself as an artefact composed “ze stu perełek nawlekłych/ Logicznie w siebie – jak we łzę łza – wciekłych” [of a hundred pearls threaded/ Logically as tear flows into tear one into another] (VM, 172). Such a “formalist” (in the colloquial sense of the word) logic should be distrusted in this case (cf. “Pod sobą samym wykopawszy zdradę,/ Coś z życia kończę, kończąc *mecum-vade*” [Digging out treason beneath me,/ Something of life I end, by ending *mecum-vade*]; VM, 172). If we were to treat this formula as bona fide, *Vade-mecum* would be no more than a collection of pretty – though often “omylon” [mistaken] and self-sufficient – artefacts, “impersonal” in the sense of being completely detached from historical reality (this is precisely the reaction the poet expected from literary “criticism,” which becomes the subject of the next poem: “VM – złożone ze stu rzeczy drobnych –/ Wyszło – – Kolega nasz (niespracowany/ Krytyk) źle wróży z utworów podobnych” [VM – composed of a hundred small things – /Came out – – Our colleague (the indefatigable/ Critic) augurs badly from works of this sort]; VM, 173-174), although we have seen that poetic impersonality means here rather a refusal to reduce these motifs, overtly or covertly evoking Norwid’s epistolography, to the circumstances of their origin. On the other hand, *Finis* shows that

poetic impersonality was – in the sense of a “Parnassian” temptation –not foreign to the poet himself. For the role of “flory-badacz” [the researcher of flora], the botanist content with dried plants collected in a “herbarium,” is ambiguous. Accepting such a “Parnassian” stance would not immortalise these artefacts, nor their author. At most, the viewers would forget the essence of these “creations,” i.e. their mortality and, at the same time, the fact that the poet himself is mortal. The critical attitude to “criticism” in the next piece is perhaps an exaggeration (and leading *ad absurdum*) of the poet’s own dilemmas about the meaning of poetry.

*

It is worth devoting some attention to the “biographical” context of the poetic letter *Do Walentego Pomiana Z.* This letter has been characterised by Zenon Przesmycki as a work of “Juvenalian anger” at the extinction of the sphere of the spirit, contemporary with the poet¹². It is the “spirit” here that is the factor through which the forms inherited from the ancestors could transform themselves into living beings again. For the spirit sets in motion what had become a dead convention. For Norwid, stillness was the most disastrous aspect of an age that boasted “real” progress in many areas of science and material life, but this one-sidedness stifled what he thought was most human – the person. The addressee of the poetic letter, Walenty Pomian Zakrzewski, himself fell victim to this spiritual “immobility”. He committed suicide on 17 January 1862. The inclusion in *Vade-mecum* of a poetic letter to a victim of the era could be interpreted as a commentary on the ideological conditions that prevented Norwid’s talented and sensitive friend (he was, *inter alia*, the translator of Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*) from developing his talents to the benefit of the nation and society. However, this theme is realised at the level of a “lyrical” or perhaps rather “epistolographic” situation (this poetic letter is also a meta textual statement). The lyrical subject mentions suicides reported in the press (thus the mediation of the world by the mass media returns here):

Dziennik donosi: ten się struł, zabił się owy –
Pracował w Ossolińskich księgozbiorze sporo,
Zbyt czuwał – konstytucję nie dość krzepił chorą...
(VM, 201-202)

[The daily paper reports: this one poisoned, that one killed himself–
He worked quite a lot in the Ossolińskipublishing house,
He was too vigilant – he did not sufficiently solidify the illconstitution...]

¹² C. NORWID, p. 858.

These lines do not refer to Walenty Pomian Z. himself', but to Felicjan Łobeski. What is significant, however, is that the poet ["C.N."], noting that the letter was originally intended as an introduction "do przypowieści *Quidam*" [to the parable of *Quidam*] (VM, 202), links the fate of contemporary victims of the epoch with the accidental death of an ancient hero who "za pole bitw cóż znalazł?... jatki!" [what did he find for a battlefield?...meat market!] (VM, 197). Thus the poetic impersonality that allows the dilemmas and sickness of the epoch to be concretised from the more general perspective of not only the Polish fate (although the Polish perspective remains paramount), but also the idea of "martyrdom" (although the accidental death of the son of Alexander of Epirus was "przed-męczeńska" pre-martyrdom); VM, 197), returns (less so for the "biographical" circumstances delaying the publication of this poetic letter) – albeit in a paradoxical way since the addressee of the poem is known by name. "Despair" turns out to be a "modern" (and at the same time specifically Polish) variety of unconscious martyrdom.

*

This poetic letter is as much a dialogue with a man who has not found a PLACE for himself (perhaps because he has not been able to create a "work" in Norwid's sense), as it is a judgement on the epoch, a judgement that is very concrete, because it is personified by the tragic fate of a friend, but also touches upon many other "individual" fates. Moreover, Norwid's specific interpretation of the genre of the poetic letter thematises yet another issue important for (post-) Romantic poetry, namely the relationship between literature (poetry, "artefact") and the author's life (in a broader sense – it is not a question of "lyricism" as an – apparently – direct expression of emotion, but of the nature of the author's relationship with the epoch, i.e. whether the author adopts existing poetic conventions, combining them according to generally accepted rules, or whether he goes beyond what is "given," which creates an impression of clashes, fractures and incompatibility). Is it possible to find elements here that give this poetic work the mark of "authenticity" (only such texts are "works" according to Norwid)? Such an approach to the matter (authenticity as a criterion of poeticity) precludes a dispassionate and generalising interpretation of the rules of literary creativity in the traditional formula of *Ars poetica*. Rather, it would be necessary to reconstruct the artistic image of poets and other creators vis-à-vis the epoch and to determine what their contribution to "development" is. It is precisely in this respect that there is – in the opinion of Norwid, the author and "sender" of a poetic letter to a specific addressee – an important difference between "writings" and "works,"

with the position of a work in the hierarchy of the author's contemporary genre system often proving to be a secondary matter:

Zaledwo się myśl tego wydawnictwa wszczęła,
Pytasz mię, jak? Je nazwać – Pisma albo Dzieła?
Jakbyś do obu nazwisk tajemne miał wstręty –
Pojmuję to, i wraz Ci odpowiem, Walenty!
(VM, 188)

[The thought of this publication has only just begun,
You ask me, what? To call them – Writings or Works?
As if you had a secret revulsion to both names –
I understand that, and I will answer you accordingly, Walenty!]

The difference between “pisma” [writings] and “dzieła” [works] outlined here is, at first glance, only tenuous. After all, these are not synonyms (perhaps Walenty Zakrzewski – who acted as an intermediary with the Brockhaus publishing house, where Norwid's “writings” were to be published – was concerned with determining which title sounded better from the point of view of “commercial” effectiveness). Among the meanings of the word “dzieło” [work] in the so-called Vilnius Dictionary (reflecting the state of the language in Norwid's time), we also find “a literary foetus/output”, “a writing”¹³. But the innocent question asked by a friend immediately sets in motion a mechanism of philosophical-*cum*-existential associations in Norwid's poetic letter that questions the concept of poetry as an “artistic” activity in the common sense of the word. “Work” can, in fact, also mean “an effect of action”, “a creation”, “a foetus”, or even (this is the sixth meaning in the Vilnius Dictionary) “[in logic] a resultant of power (example: “power and work [*potestas et opus*] are the most prominent exponents of cause and consequence”), whereby in painting the artist himself is the “power” and the painting is his “work”. Thus, it turns out that, according to Norwid, “work” is not a realisation – separate from the “author” – of the artistic conventions (or norms) of the age, nor a self-sufficient, “autotelic” piece, but an act that expresses the person and his power. “The person” does not act in a “vacuum” of rules and conventions, but in confrontation with the “spirit” of the epoch embodied by other persons, although it cannot be ruled out that they have forgotten the true nature of artistic creation and identify it with “ready-made” artefacts or – in the “Romantic” fashion – with incarnations of an individual (monologuing) “genius”. It is precisely

¹³ A. ZDANOWICZ et al., *Słownik języka polskiego*, Wilno 1861 (electronic version: <https://eswil.ijp.pan.pl/>), p. 279.

such “foetuses” that have often been referred to as “poetic works” (synonym: “writings”).

The lyrical subject in the poetic letter *Do Walentego Pomiana Z.* actualises precisely this ambiguity and comes to the conclusion that in some cases texts that are not usually categorised as “literary works” still constitute a work (“effect of action”/power) in a fuller sense than “narrative poems” or “dramas”:

[...] rejestra, listy, notatki i kwity,
Którymi Voltaire (lubo pisarz znamienity)
Zaszczepić usiłował swemu powiatowi
Rękodzielnię-zegarków” – o! powiem Ci szczerze,
Iż książkę stąd powstałą, że taką AGENDĘ
Zwałbym DZIEŁEM i więcej: że jest dziełem, wierzę –
Niż mnóstwo innych, których i zwać tu nie będę.
(VM, 189-190)

[...] registers, letters, notes and receipts,
With which Voltaire (a notable writer)
Tried to instil in his district
A manufactory of watches” – oh! let me tell you frankly
That the book originated from here, that such an AGENDA
I would call a WORK and more: that it is a work, I believe –
Instead of a host of others, which I will not name here.]

This thought may not be very original (in Romanticism, “work,” “word” and “deed” were all near-synonymous terms), but what is significant is that the poet does not deliver this truth *ex cathedra*, but develops it in the form of a “conversation” in which the addressee does not simply appear as the poet’s *alter ego*, but retains his existential autonomy. This is where the significance of the choice of poetic letter genre lies, whereby this “you” is not an ideal addressee “tailored” to the expectations of the speaking subject, but someone to be persuaded of one’s reasons (this precisely differentiates it from the often “didactic” poetic letters of the Enlightenment). The motivation for the choice of genre is explicitly indicated here in the text, but it also guides implicitly many other poems from the *Vademecum* collection which have their origin in Norwid’s epistolographic work. From such a point of view, Norwid’s letters were also – in the sense of Norwid’s distinction between “writing” and “work” – no less a work than his poems, dramas and short stories, because it is the letters that best demonstrate the poet’s struggle against the contemporary tendency to call everything – that at first sight seems incomprehensible – “absurd” (*absurdité* – cf. the motto of the poetic letter *Do*

Walentego Pomiana Z.). Recognising something as “absurd” was – due to succumbing to “routine” – a spontaneous reflex of both the émigré community in France and many of the wealthier citizens of the “partitioned” country (often arriving as “tourists” in “Paris”), whereby this routine can be understood as – I have already mentioned that – the often not-quite-aware tendency to slavishly adopt “non-Polish” (“Western”) models or to reflexively reject them in the name of “puritanism”:

Wolę hellenizmy i latynizmy niż purytanizm słowiański, na którym ażeby się ograniczyć, należałoby pierw z filozofią, z fizjologią, z historią, z historiozofią, z chemią, i z astronomią, i z polityką zerwać zupełnie, dlatego iż słów ku temu swojskich nie ma. (DW XII, 190)

[I prefer Hellenisms and Latinisms to Slavic puritanism, which, in order to limit oneself to it, would require one first to *completely abandon* philosophy, physiology, history, historiosophy, chemistry, astronomy, and politics, because there are no native words for them.]

The point, however, is that it was impossible to free oneself from this “routine” way of thinking by one’s own efforts. The dialogue approach is also insufficient here, although, on the other hand, a lively conversation is a prerequisite for realising that reality (social and historical) is much more complex (although not precisely “absurd,” because this complexity can nevertheless be explained) than it appears to man. It is a matter of activating our powers of association, especially in the sense of “situational” irony, i.e. seeing that the common meaning of words and concepts often does not correspond to the realm of “phenomena”. This also applies to the relationship between “writing” and “work,” as, for instance, in the case of Voltaire’s heroic poem *La Henriade*, which, although it fulfilled the classicist rules of genre, was not an “epic” because it did not “penetrate” life – unlike Voltaire’s “registers, letters, notes and receipts”. The same is true of Byron’s “passionate Greek stories,” although these in turn remained somewhat barren because “czas chyży” [the galloping time] denied them “incarnations” (or, put another way: “czas skąpił im gwoździ i drzewa do krzyży” [time skimped on nails and wood for their crosses]; VM, 190). Of course, one could say that Norwid was also denied “incarnations” by the “galloping time,” as the poet mentions in the opening fragment of *Vade-mecum*, in *Klaskaniem mając obrzękle prawice* [*Their Hands Swollen from Clapping*] when “Boży palec zaświtał” [God’s finger dawned] on him, “Było w Ojczyźnie laurowo i ciemno/ I już ni miejsca dawano, ni godzin/ Dla nieczekanych powići narodzin” [There was laurel and dark in the Homeland/ And no more space was given, no more hours/ For the non-awaited conceptions and births]; VM, 16). The fatal force of history, “Nie zdając liczby z rzeczy, które czyni” [Not reporting the number of things it does], thus commanded him to “żyć

w żywota pustyni” [live in a desert of life] (VM, 17). It seems, however, that precisely the realisation of this fate, or in other words, the sense of inevitable confrontation with the “absurdity” of the poet, an émigré from a conquered, “peripheral” country, occupying a “peripheral” position in the Polish émigré community in Paris, was the condition of Norwid’s refreshing of the ossifying conventions of Polish Romanticism, with this refreshing consisting largely in a reversal of the relationship between poetry and epistolography. An important factor in Norwid’s letters (although they are often “literary” from the point of view of the formalistically understood “poetic” function, based on various kinds of disambiguation operations) is the casual tone and the use of incidental (anecdotal, gossipy) moments to show that trivial and at first sight often absurd matters, motifs and formulas contain a deeper meaning, making it possible to understand that the authentic space of poetry is now precisely the “desert of life”. Seemingly without order or composition, the poet discovers that the ordinary life, the mundane, is the place where higher – often sacred – truths (sacred history) are revealed. These moments of more essential awareness, which happen to the poet in the course of a casual letter conversation, become poetic inspiration in the strict sense when the poet spins shorter or longer poems around them. Although the addressee of the letter, who contributed indirectly to the work, is not present by name in these works, their structure reveals an epistolographic genesis that is not merely a context but an integral factor of Norwid’s poetic form.

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Typical of Norwid’s letters are, for instance, numerous aphorisms. They also appear in his poems, especially in the *Vade-mecum* cycle, and generally conclude his paradoxical reflections on Polish and European contemporaneity. However, these aphoristic formulas perform a different function in his letters and poetry than is usually the case in literary texts. They do not close the discussion (nor do they confirm a certain generally accepted truth), but their surprising enigmatic nature makes it impossible to receive the work or letter passively and encourages the continuation of the ideological argument. A good example of such poetics are the final lines of the famous poem *Przeszłość* [*The Past*] (“Przeszłość jest i dziś, i te dziś dalej:/ za kołami to wieś,/ Nie – jakieś tam... coś, gdzieś,/ Gdzie ludzie nie bywali!...” [The past is here today, and today is even further.../ Beyond the wheels the village is there,/ Not – something, somewhere,/ Where people never gathered...]; VM, 20).

Let us look at the relationship between this poem – and especially its apodictic ending – and Norwid’s letters. The relevant context for this poem is a letter he

wrote (probably in February 1865) to Marian Sokołowski. The poet asks whether the edition of Seneca's "writings" that the friend had mentioned in an earlier letter is in French or German (Norwid obviously prefers the French version as he was less fluent in German):

Kupę języków czytam, lubo czasu nie mam, aby lingwistą być. Coraz więcej widzę, jak jest *ważne, nad czym pracuję*: ale czy *dziś* na to pozwoli? (DW XII, 354)

[I read in a heap of languages, although I don't have the time to be a linguist. More and more I see the *importance of what I'm working on*: but will *today* allow it?]

How should we understand the word "today" here? Letters to Marian Sokołowski address a multitude of topics, but the January Uprising and its aftermath is the most prominent among them (as a general context). An important element in Norwid's reflections on this "national" uprising, which had already come to an end in February 1865, and which the poet – despite his admiration for the heroism of the insurgents – assessed rather critically (this is clear throughout his correspondence with Sokołowski), was the incommensurability between "intelligence" and "energy," with Norwid believing that the leaders of the uprising lacked the former factor. In an earlier letter to Sokołowski, the poet ironized this dismissive attitude towards the intelligentsia:

Kiedy pisałem do szefa sztabu [Władysława Bentkowskiego] Dyktatora [Langiewicza], co robi Inteligencja polska? Odpisał mi, że „jest na koniu”. *Jak kto na koniu, to już nie na swoich nogach!* (DW XII, 267)

[When I wrote to the Chief of Staff [Władysław Bentkowski] of the Dictator [Langiewicz], what is the Polish intelligentsia doing? He wrote me back that "it is on horseback". *If one is on a horseback, one is no longer on one's feet!*]

Thus, it turns out that "today", in the sense of the pressing tasks of the time (for Poles), should not focus at all on (blind) deeds (cf. *Fulminant*: "“Milcz! Jestem czynu-mąż, bo tobie przeczę – ’ / (O! bez-ojczyste pojęcia, *śoldackie!*...)” [‘Silence! I am a *man of deed*, for I contradict you – ’ / (O! homeland-less notions, *soldierly!*...)] (DW IV, 195), insofar as they involve the mindless squandering of "energy" (a motif that recurs frequently – and in different contexts – in Norwid's letters from those years). It is in this context that Norwid's readings, although often referring to the "past," take on a more significant meaning, as they point to a certain one-sidedness of "today's" (1863-65) Polish attitudes, both towards the past and the present. The fruitful relationship between "energy" and "intelligence"

(only then does energy become a true “force” – i.e. “energia zapominająca się w dopełnieniu celów” [energy forgetting itself in the completion of goals]; DW XII, 294¹⁴) presupposes an awareness that the past, the present [“today”] and the future [“goals”] are closely intertwined, and that through “czytania sztuce” [the art of reading], which belongs to the traditional tasks of the “intelligentsia,” Poles could better cope with the situation of enslavement:

Ktoś krzyczał, jak ja, że zginiemy, jeśli nie postawimy *inteligencji w powietrzu swobodniejszym* – dansun milieu plus favorable! (DW XII, 354)¹⁵

[Someone shouted, as I did, that we would die if we did not put the *intelligentsia in freer air* – dans un milieu plus favorable!]

The context for these reflections on the nature of true “power”, as opposed to blind, un-“intelligent” energy, was Norwid’s efforts to secure a position as a paid correspondent for some Polish periodical or newspaper, which was to restore to some extent the huge – in the poet’s view – disproportion between activism and reflection in Poland at the time. The result of this imbalance was, in his view, the failure of the January Rising. By the way, Norwid, who sometimes regarded himself as a symbol of the undervaluing of the intelligentsia by Poles, wanted to improve his own hopeless material situation by writing letters to August Cieszkowski asking for support for his efforts (the tone of these “begging” letters is, in fact, rather upsetting). Importantly, however, Norwid’s personal failures and tragedies always set in motion a mechanism for him to transfer the personal to a higher level of more general reflections on the fate of the nation, which later permeated his poetry, ensuring that it was rooted in “life” (an example of this in a letter to Marian Sokołowski from the same month [January 1865] may be the formula “praca w *pocie czola*” [working in the *sweat of one’s brow*], i.e. precisely intellectual work, in order to prevent from repeating “co kilkanaście lat *rzeź* [sic], *rzeź niewiniąt jednego pokolenia*” [every dozen years the *slaughter* (sic), the slaughter of the innocents of one generation] (DW XII, 324)¹⁶.

¹⁴ Letter to Mieczysław Pawlikowski. Paris, before 15 May? 1864.

¹⁵ Letter to Marian Sokołowski, before 9 March 1865.

¹⁶ The motif of “working in the *sweat of one’s brow*” returns in *Vade-mecum* in the poem *Prac-czolo* [Work in Brow’s Sweat] (preserved only in fragmentary form; another full version of this poem appeared in 1865 in the Kraków *Czas* (VM, 204)), where it takes on a broader, “metaphysical” meaning – in the sense of “sacred history” (“Głos brzmi nad tobą: ‘Postradałeś Eden!’”) [A voice resounds over you: ‘You have lost Eden!’] (VM, 118), although the specifically Polish context does not disappear (“Spustoszałem u powiedz Narodowi” [Tell that to the desolate Nation] (VM, 119)).

In Norwid's view, "the past" was misunderstood in Poland, i.e. conceived of from the point of view of a simplified interpretation of "today", as its opposition. But if this is so, then "intelligence" associated with "history" turns into the same "wyłączność" [exclusivity] (another keyword in Norwid's oeuvre) as "energy", and then the Poles themselves become "efemeryczni i bezhistoryczni" [ephemeral and history-less] (PW 8, p. 167), i.e. they cease to be a "nation" and become a "sect". As early as February 1864 in a letter to General Władysław Zamoyski, the leader of the Hotel Lambert party, the poet drew attention to the dangers of an attitude of "exclusivity", claiming that someone who replaces "*patriotyzm [...] na wyłączność [...]*, jak to Polacy pojmują, a pojmują jedynie przez prześladowania Mikołaja [...] musi koniecznie z *ojczyzny* zrobić *sektę* i skończyć fanatyzmem!! – oto CO SIĘ DZIŚ DZIEJE!" [*patriotism (...) with exclusivity (...)*, as Poles understand it, and understand it only through the persecutions by Nicholas (...) must necessarily make a *sect* out of *the homeland* and end up with fanaticism!!! – this is WHAT IS HAPPENING TODAY!] (DW XII, 275). In addition, the poet defines the exclusivity thus understood as "Puritanism," which evokes various new contexts – on the one hand religious ("heresy"¹⁷), on the other – I have already mentioned it – linguistic ("purism" impoverishing the "national" language¹⁸). In both letters – to the leader of the Czartoryski party and to Marian Sokołowski – the notion of "today" plays an important role and allows us to connect very different areas, whose common denominator seems to be a sense of failure and suffering (both "personal" and "national"). But are Polish attempts to throw off the foreign (Russian) yoke doomed to failure as the result of some higher fate? Such a viewpoint was firmly rejected by Norwid and he attributed Polish adversity to the immaturity of the nation itself and its tendency to idealise its sufferings:

¹⁷ "Ważne i ciekawe dla Polaków pytanie: *czemu purytanizm nawet w religii jest herezją???*" [An important and interesting question for Poles: *why is puritanism a heresy even in religion???*] (DW XII, 275).

¹⁸ In this respect, the poet believed that Mickiewicz was not a "national" poet, but an "exclusive" one. "Nationality", on the other hand, is capable of "appropriating" anything that can contribute to the development of that which is source in it. In the linguisticsphere, Norwid cites the example of English juxtaposed with Czech: "*Czeski zaś jest bardzo czysty, ale dlatego właśnie umarły, że taki czysty!*" [*The Czech language, on the other hand, is very pure, but that is why it is dead, because it is so pure!*] (DW XII, 275). The examples in this argument are not very successful, although the conclusion seems irrefutable (though perhaps not very original, apart from the intense play on words and concepts): "*Wtedy [za czasów Jadwigi] myśleliśmy, że narodowość zależy na sile apropracji, nie zaś na sile wyłączności purytańskiej*" [At that time (in Jadwiga's time) we thought that nationality *depended on the strength of appropriation*, not on the strength of puritan exclusivity] (DW XII, 276).

Jam jej nigdy nie łudził i wiem, że jest wielkie dziecko z zalanymi łzą oczyma, a przeto widzące jedynie przez łez swoich świętych i przeklętych pryzmat, widzące trojenia i siedmienia się tęcz – nigdy prawdy! (DW XII, 354)

[I have never deluded it, and I know that it is a big child with eyes flooded with tears, and therefore seeing only through the prism of its sacred and accursed tears, seeing the triple and sevenfold rainbows – never the truth!]

Recovering the true sense of history (i.e. its presence “today,” although this requires constant acts of reinterpreting past memories) would in turn be a condition for the healing of the national body. This can only succeed if historians, too, begin to overcome their “exclusivity”:

Zresztą, historia co do *przeszłości* jest dziś na stanowisku osobnym i wyłącznym, i dziwnym – przeszłość nie jest to coś, jakieś, ale jest to *obecność warunkowa*, swoje *zawsze* mająca. (DW XII, 354)

[Besides, history as far as *thepast* is concerned is today in a separate and exclusive and strange position – the past is not something, but it is a *contingent presence*, having its own *always*.]

We have seen how this complex theme (combining the personal with the national, even on different levels) returns in *Vade-mecum* – in the poem *Przeszłość* [*The Past*], and also (the issue of “exclusivity”) in the poem *Purytanizm* [*Puritanism*], but in this new context of the poetic cycle it is universalised. It remains a commentary on the specifically Polish fate and vices of Poles, but it also illustrates the tendency of man (regardless of his “nationality”) to get lost in “today,” understood as something “exclusive,” a self-sufficient “point”. Such an interpretation (usually unreflective, reflexive) of the present causes one to forget about man and humanity as developing beings, while it is precisely man’s susceptibility to internal development that constitutes his historicity. Nations, on the other hand, exist only in “history” (outside history they become “sects”). The task of the author (poet) is to depict this development (which is why Norwid somewhat perversely favoured Krasiński, the poet of historical development, over “exclusive” Mickiewicz):

*Narodowy autor jest ten, w którego utworach naród jego zajmuje ten udział i tę część, jaką tenże naród zajmuje w dziejów-ludzkości rozwoju*¹⁹.

¹⁹ Letter to Marian Sokołowski, 6 February 1864.

[The national author is the one in whose works his nation occupies that share and that part which that nation occupies in the history of human development.]

This is precisely the role of the “intelligentsia” in a healthy collective body, in which “intelligence” and “energy” are not “exclusives”.

An analysis of the relationship between Norwid’s letters and his works (I have reflected a little longer on the contexts of the poems *Przeszłość* and *Puritanizm*, but *Początek broszury politycznej* [*Beginning of a Political Pamphlet*] is also a very important poem) shows the extent to which the keywords are intertwined in them and that Norwid developed them not in isolation but placed them in ever new contexts, each time presenting a whole series of keywords through the prism of one of them. However, they undergo modification (and sometimes even transformation) as a whole (this also applies to the “central” keyword) because of some higher “purpose”. In this respect, it is worth taking another look at the poet’s letters to Mieczysław Pawlikowski and Marian Sokołowski sent in the autumn of 1864, i.e. during the demise of the January Uprising:

Uradowanie się energią jest najostateczniejszym idealnym szczeblem elementarnym ras dzikich, w historię świeżo wchodzących, albowiem one do wyższej Ewangelii dojść nie mogą – cała historia ich zamyka się jednym słowie: *hurra!* – a epopeja cała ich jest ten jeden tylko okrzyk: *hurraa!*

[...]

Energia jest nerek apoteozą, w sobie zakochaną – ale *sila* jest płodnością męską, *cel poza sobą* mającą. (DW XII, 294)²⁰

[The exultation of energy is the ultimate ideal elementary level of the savage races, newly entering into history, for they cannot reach a higher Gospel – their whole history closes with one word: *hurrah!* – and their whole epic is just this one cry: *hurrah!*

[...]

Energy is the apotheosis of kidneys, in love with itself – but *force* is male fertility, having *apurpose beyond itself*.]

Było Ci przykro, iż, kreśląc różnice *energii będącej-sobie-celem-czyli-tatarskiej*, okazywałem, jak dalece jest to raczej *moment* niżli genealogiczna natura rasy jakowej – czemu gwoli przytaczałem i Simona, członka republikańskiego rządu we Francji, ale to uważałeś za ogólniki. (DW XII, 297)²¹

[You were upset that, when outlining the differences of the *energy that has itself as purpose*, i.e. *the Tartar energy*, I was demonstrating how this was the *moment* rather than the genealogi-

²⁰ Letter to Mieczysław Pawlikowski, Paris, before 15 May? 1864.

²¹ Letter to Marian Sokołowski, Paris, after 15 May? 1864.

cal nature of some race – to which I cited Simon, a member of the republican government in France, but you regarded that as generalities.]

Thus, it turns out that the reflection on the contemporaneity of what has passed (“memories”), centred around a deeper interpretation of the word “today,” evokes and modifies other key notions in Norwid’s works, such as “energy,” “intelligence,” “force,” “patriotism,” “nation,” “history,” and even “epic”. The poet attempts to give these entities a fuller meaning, showing that they should not be treated “exclusively,” i.e. as static categories that contradict their dynamic nature. Indeed, such moments of often unconscious negation give rise to other categories, also treated exclusively, as their opposite. It is a process that interprets reality through “pairs” of opposed concepts, which mutually immobilise each other and thus contradict what constitutes the essence of each of them, i.e. the possibility of developing their meaning in ever new contexts, without losing their basic meaning (identity). Norwid’s re-contextualisation of key words thus concerns categories which, in false confrontations, impoverish the developmental potential of meaning. “Exclusivities” of this kind, although from a “higher” perspective (“sacred history”) turn out to be apparent, are, after all, highly detrimental because they falsify reality (e.g. “today” as an opposition to “history”; “intelligence” as an opposition to “force”; “nation” becoming a “sect” under the pressure of the struggle for survival with another nation). Above all, the transcendent anchorage of purpose disappears in such cases. In doing so, it turns out that Norwid’s understanding of such “antitheses” is not “dialectical” in the sense of Hegelian and Marxian dialectics since it lacks the element of mediation.

In Norwid’s case, however, these categories cease to relate to transcendence the moment they become impoverished through the (internal) negation of their susceptibility to development [by (self-)immobilising]. An important factor in this fatal negativity is the often not fully realised “media” background (“journalism”) of the discussions in which these categories appear (hence Norwid’s attempt to create a structure of “confidential conversation” in poetry as well). In such cases, the “nation” (guided by a “puritanical” attitude) would indeed become a “sect,” while “energy” would become a self-destructive force (for Poles do not belong to “races [...] newly entering history,” and by focusing on spontaneous (“Tatar”) energy they would fall victim to regression, disavow their own historicity, cease to participate in the “Msza-wieczna” [eternal Mass] of history²²). *Język-ojczysty*

²² See DW XII, 118 (letter to Joanna Kuczyńska, Paris, late September? 1862). See also the poem *Co robić?* [*What to Do?*]: “Jeżeli przeto ta ojczyzna Twoja/ Jest historyczna... (a nie jest, jak Troja!)/ Niech jak Rzym będzie i Mszy-Dziejów słucha” [If, therefore, this homeland of

[*Mother-Tongue*] (the title of another short poem from the *Vade-mecum* collection) would then be associated with “tętniące konie stepowe” [throbbing steppe horses] (VM, 112). Perhaps, to some extent, it was the January Uprising that contributed to the spiritual impoverishment of the elements that gave shape to Polish social life (Norwid thought so!), but the best defence against this kind of exclusivity remains precisely “intelligence” (although in some situations it too can become a negative, i.e. “exclusive” factor), especially poetic creativity which brings out the ambiguity of language through form, and which by “nature” does not succumb to expediency or one-sidedness (although poetry can deny its purpose – this is what happened in the case of “the late Romanowski”; DW XII, 295)²³. It is precisely this role of poetry that is addressed in the aforementioned poem *Język-ojczysty*:

“Gromem bądźmy pierw – niżli grzmotem;
 Oto tętnią i rżą konie stepowe;
 Górą czyny!... a słowa? a myśli?... potem!...
 Wróg pokalał już i Ojców mowę –”
 Energumen tak krzyczał do Lirnika
 I uderzał w tarcz, aż się wygięła;
 Lirnik na to
 “Nie miecz, nie tarcze bronią Języka,
 Lecz – arcydzieła!”

(VM, 112)

[“Let us be rumble first – rather than thunder;
 The steppe horses are throbbing and neighing;
 Deeds above all!... And words? And thoughts?... after them!...
 The enemy has already defiled our Fathers’ speech –”
 The Energumen shouted thus to the Lirnyk
 And hit the shield until it bent;
 The Lirnyk replied.
 “Not the sword, not the shields defend the Tongue,
 But – masterpieces!”]

yours/ Is historical.... (and it is not, like Troy!)/ Let it be like Rome and listen to the Mass of History], PWSz II, 214).

²³ Norwid, however, praises his poem *Sztandary w Kremlu* [*Banners in the Kremlin*]: “ten wierszyk nie jest kreślony pod wpływami elektryczno-magnetycznymi – te zaś wpływy rozwiąże *chemia*, nie *historia*” [this little poem is not written under electric-magnetic influences – and these influences will be resolved by *chemistry*, not *history*] (DW XII, 295) –“electricity” (often associated with “**nerves**”) is another key word used by Norwid, generally associated with negative aspects of social and community life at the time.

*

While in the letters from the January Uprising these keywords occur in a bundle, it is striking that in the *Vade-mecum* collection, Norwid (with the exception of the poetic letter *Do Walentego Pomiana Z.*, which forms the epilogue to the volume) generally constructs poems around only one of them, highlighting the dangers of taking such a keyword “exclusively” (*Język-ojczysty* focuses on the consequences of a unilaterally understood “energy”). Such an entity extracts a feature from itself that is elevated to the status of autonomy, although its autonomy is only apparent. For instance, in *Addio!* the “intelligentsia” is focused on finding an impersonal “truth,” so it cannot indulge in “passions”. By doing so, however, it also loses its energy and its “causal force”. Advocates of “deed” therefore choose to exalt the sphere of the passions to the detriment of reason – the effects of such a split are disastrous. Norwid used a similar strategy (focusing on only one key word, which becomes “exclusive” by contradicting itself) in *Przeszłość* [*The Past*], as well as in the poems *Wieś* [*Village*], *Sieroctwo* [*Orphanhood*], *Królestwo* [*Kingdom*], *Purytanizm* [*Puritanism*] and in the already mentioned *Język-ojczysty* [*Mother-Tongue*]. By leaving out specifically Polish realities, these works can be interpreted in a more “universal” way, although the context of Norwid’s letters obviously helps in understanding (through contextualisation) the antitheses and paradoxes present in them. Moreover, it turns out that the construction of the *Vade-mecum* volume (as a poetic cycle) reproduces – albeit through different means – epistolographic dialogicality (both in terms of the addressees of the letters and in the “internal” sense, i.e. as a confrontation of key words in ever new contexts). The difference lies in the fact that in *Vade-mecum*, the “weave” of the key words is replaced by a model of linear growth of complexity, with the poet beginning (in *Klaskaniem mając obrzękłe prawice* [*Their Hands Swollen from Clapping*] with a sense of personal loneliness (i.e. the alienation of the human being who is an undervalued representative of the “intelligentsia”), then considering the phenomenon of self-contradiction through exclusivity in isolated instances, while these are “universalised” through poetic impersonality. “Harmony,”²⁴ i.e. the reconciliation of contradictions, turns out to be almost unattainable, especially since Norwid – as we have seen – rejected the Hegelian concept of merely intellectual mediation.

²⁴ The word also plays an important role in Norwid’s epistolography, e.g. in a letter to Marian Sokolowski from January 1865, in which the poet returns to the issue of the lack of proportionality between “energy” and “intelligence”: “Im można było gawędzić o *harmonii*, której mi życzysz, kiedy ja obiegłem pół świata pracując, kilkanaście lat służyłem biednej ojczystej literaturze [...]” [They could chatter about the *harmony* you wish for me, while I went round the half-world working, several years serving the poor national literature (...)] (DW XII, 323).

He regarded it as a juggling with empty concepts (as opposed to the idea of the incarnation associated with sacred history realised as a “whole”²⁵):

Trudne z łatwym w przeciwne dwie strony
Rozerwą wprzód człowieka,
Nim harmonii doczeka –
Odepchną wprzód, gdzie zmarłych miliony.
(VM, 23)

[Difficult with easy will first tear a person
In opposite directions
Before he achieves harmony –
They will push him forward, where the dead are in millions.]

Finally, Norwid attempted to show the fateful effects of exclusivity in much broader contexts linking the individual fate of the poet with the fate of the whole nation in a sacred context. The impersonal poetic universality of poems focusing on a single key word is here “incarnated” (rather than “mediated”) in a specifically Norwidian sense, through a “sacred history”, as e.g. in the poems *Bohater* [*Hero*], *Purytanizm* [*Puritanism*] and *Początek broszury politycznej* [*Beginning of a Political Pamphlet*]. It should be noted here, however, that this is only one, though perhaps the most significant, strategies in *Vade-mecum*.

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²⁵ Cf. “To nic! – to tak zawsze ludzkość i Ojczyzny, i społeczeństwo płacą – to *Msza-wieczna*. / Ale – ale – ale – – / Na to trzeba, żeby to było nie ideą, nie atramentem, nie inteligencją – nie widzimisię – nie systematem, *ale człowiekiem całym* – żeby aż Sakrament nie miał okrycia [...]” [It’s nothing! – it’s how humanity and Homelands and society always pay – it’s an *eternal Mass*. / But – but – but – – / For it needs to be not an idea, not an ink, not intelligence – not a vision – not a system – but a *whole man* – so that even the Sacrament has no covering (...)] (DW XII, 118; letter to Joanna Kuczyńska, Paris, late September? 1862).

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VADE-MECUM I UPOETYCZNIENIE DYSKURSU EPISTOLOGRAFICZNEGO

Streszczenie

Artykuł stara się pokazać związki i relacje, jakie łączą wiersze ze zbioru *Vade-mecum* z epistolografią Norwida. Relacje ujawniają się nie tylko poziom genetycznym, ale także tematycznym, stylistycznym, leksykalnym (w tym dotyczącym słów-kluczy) i przede wszystkim w zakresie wykorzystywania struktur komunikacyjnych. W przypadku wierszy zwraca uwagę dialog oraz sięganie po formuły potoczne i epistolograficzne, zaś jeśli chodzi o listy skłonność poety do przesycania przynajmniej niektórych ich fragmentów formułami i zwrotami o wybitnie poetyckim charakterze.

Słowa kluczowe: *Vade-mecum*; dialog; słowa-klucze; list; adresat; wiersz.

VADE-MECUM AND THE POETICIZATION OF EPISTOLOGRAPHY

Summary

This article attempts to highlight links between poems from the *Vade-mecum* collection and Norwid's epistolography. These ties manifest not only on the genetic level, but also in terms of themes as well as stylistic and lexical elements (including key words), primarily with regard to the use of communication structures. What draws attention in these poems is the use of dialogue and the incorporation of colloquial and epistolographic phrases. In his letters, on the other hand, the poet displays a predilection for saturating certain passages with formulas and expressions of distinctly poetic character.

Keywords: *Vade-mecum*; dialogue; key words; letters; addressee; poem.

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