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NORWID'S INSECTS.
THE LAST OF THE FABLES, OR ON THE BEAUTY
OF EXISTENCE

Alem był na przedmieściach w Jego Jeruzalem:
W wodzie obłoków krzyżem pławiąc się czerwonym,
Zwierzokrzewowe psalmy mówiłem z korałem,
Z delfinem – pacierz, z orłem – g l o r i e – uskrzydlonym.

(PWsz II, 155)

But I have been in the suburbs in His Jerusalem:
In the water of clouds bathing in a red cross,
I have spoken animal-bush psalms with the coral,
With the dolphin – a prayer, with the winged eagle – glorias.

1. EXISTENCE AS A COMMON SPACE

In Romanticism, natural history underpins not only education but also the inquiries of the epoch and constitutes its deep current. Zofia Stefanowska, in her study *Świat owadzi w czwartej części "Dziadów"*¹, drew attention to the importance of this aspect of scientific research and initiated its tradition.

Cyprian Norwid's thought on the speech of animals and the importance of their existence (their co-existence with man) was expressed, for example, in the poet's

¹ Z. STEFANOWSKA, "Świat owadzi w czwartej części 'Dziadów,'" in: *Studia romantyczne*, studies edited by Maria Żmigrodzka dedicated to the 7th International Congress of Slavists, Wrocław 1973, pp. 289-312; the study was included in the collection of works by Zofia Stefanowska *Próba zdrowego rozumu. Studia o Mickiewiczu* (Warszawa 1976).

late works belonging to the posthumous works (*opera posthuma*) of Romanticism², including *Ostatnia z bajek* [*The Last of the Fables*] (created in 1882³) and in a study of an essayistic nature entitled *Fabulizm Darwina* [*Darwin's Fabulism*] (created in 1882⁴). His thought grows out of the spirit of the Romantic era as well as the discussions on natural history that continued in both the first and second half of the 19th century.

This relation of the human listener to nature, including all living creatures (even the tiniest ones) and, equally important, the relation of the animal world to man, form an integral whole. Norwid's giving voice to animals – “the lesser brothers” (a term attributed to Saint Francis is not unwarranted here⁵) – conveys the essence of experiences in the natural world; experiences that are not inferior or different in quality from humans, though obviously different – related to the development and place of existence in natural history. In the world of Norwid's works mentioned above, man appears to be someone external to the natural world, someone who has ceased to listen to and hear that voice of other beings, and has thus lost his both natural and supernatural bond with the world, even though from the beginning he was immersed in the natural world – he has ceased to comprehend that world.

The fullness of man's understanding with the natural world was conveyed by Adam Mickiewicz in *Pan Tadeusz*. The poet is an excellent listener and interpreter of the speech of animals, plants and natural phenomena. In this narrative poem, living creatures communicate in a certain way and have the ability to experience feelings. This is an important aspect to complete the meaning of the Romantic category of “beauty” (to which the poet already points in the poem's invocation). Its source is the relationships existing in nature and the reciprocal relations linking man to the very source of existence. In *Ostatnia z bajek*, Norwid addresses the question of how to understand “beauty” (an extremely important theme for the era), as the poet was aware of significant civilisational and cultural changes, and thus of man's distancing himself from the pure source of nature, the severance of ties with it. The fable-like nature of Mickiewicz's poem brought out the wonder of the natural world, the source of which

² On the specificity of work published after the death of poets, see my book *Romantyzm “brulionowy,”* Warszawa 2015.

³ The date should be taken as provisional. Originally printed posthumously in *Chimera*, 1902, Vol. VI, Issue 18. See *Ostatnia z bajek – Uwagi edytorskie*, in DW VII, 366-368.

⁴ The date of *Fabulizm Darwina* [*Darwin's Fabulism*] should be taken as provisional. First edition: *Wszystkie pisma Cypriana Norwida. Wydanie i nakład Z. Przesmyckiego*, Vol. VII: *Pisma filozoficzne, społeczne etc.*, Warszawa 1939. See *Dzieje edytorskie*, in: PWSz VII, 508ff.

⁵ The influence of Franciscan spirituality on Norwid was addressed by, *inter alia*, G. HALKIEWICZ-SOJAK, *Wobec tajemnicy i prawdy. O Norwidowskich obrazach “całości.”* Toruń 1998 (book fragment entitled: *W koncepcji antropologicznej “Ostatniej z bajek”*), p. 212.

was the extraordinary natural world and the relationship that linked man to the other creatures living on the land they shared. In *Ostatnia z bajek*, man can no longer read the signs of nature, he has deprived himself of something extremely important, the life-giving experience of the beauty of existence in all its variety.

Natural history meets literature, and is present in the educational system of the 18th and 19th century (in grammar schools and universities it is an important and basic subject). It suffices to mention the solid course in natural history that Norwid took at the Warsaw grammar school under the tutelage of the scholar Antoni Waga, with whom the poet maintained acquaintance basically until the end of his life.

Ostatnia z bajek is one of the very important works in terms of Norwid's concept of man and the vision of a person as a pilgrim on a continuous journey towards God, fully aware of the significance of salvation and the final goal of his or her journey, which is well established in studies on the poet's works. Norwid's elaborate fable reveals the image of man as a being created by God, but among other created beings, not inferior and not less important than him, because they are also – like man – the works of the Creator. The pilgrim theme is present in studies of the poet's oeuvre. In Norwid's late works (such as *Ostatnia z bajek*), the measure of humanity appears to be not only pilgrimage, redemption "ensured" through the person of Christ, which has been and is being accomplished in history, constant work, the effort to build up the highest values within oneself (so much has already been established on this subject), but also man's attitude towards other living beings, just like him called to life in the process of *genesis*, which is part of the toil of existence. The measure of humanity in the aforementioned work by Norwid is co-existence, that is, man's relationship not only with another person but more broadly with other existence. The possession of life is a common space shared by all living beings on earth.

2. "IN THE GARDEN OF PLANTS AND ANIMALS"

The angel – the protagonist of *Ostatnia z bajek* [*The Last of the Fables*] sings a praising song over the cradle of a newborn child, calling upon the insect and "zwierzątka" [little animal] (he uses diminutive in reference to them) world to perform a kind of adoration of human life:

Wy! Pokwapię się, lekkie, składne, **jasne motyle**, i wy, **muszki drobne, złote jak iskry**. Wy, **ptaszki wesole**, i wy, zwinne polne i leśne **zwierzątka**... Wszystek ten **drobny świat**, który jakoby **zabawkami dla kogoś doskonalszego** jest nastęczonym, niech się on kwapi dziś, gdyż oto dni temu nieco – najpiękniejsze ze stworzeń, *człowiek* przyszedł na świat! (DW VII, 242, emphasis added by E. Sz.-P.)

You! Hasten, light, prompt, **bright butterflies**, and you, **tiny flies, golden as sparks**. You **jolly birds**, and you nimble field and forest **animals**... All this **small world**, which seems to have been made into **toys for a more perfect one**, let it quiver today, for behold, a little while ago – the most beautiful of creatures, a *man* came into the world!

The child wrapped in nappies and carried to be baptised evokes images of innocence and purity. However, this solemn song of praise of the somewhat enigmatic Angel who at noon “leci ponad siołem” [flies above the village] finds its answer in the natural world. The status of the Guardian Angel is unclear; he appears to be a very distant visitor who has barely had time to arrive on earth because a child has been born and is supposed to care for him. However, he knows little about life “on earth.” It should be noted that he lacks the gravity of the biblical angels. According to tradition, the Guardian Angel came to earth from the heavens at the moment of the child’s birth to look after him.⁶ In *Ostatnia z bajek*, he is more reminiscent of images that were extremely popular and widely circulated in the 19th century, filled with naivety, depicting the Guardian Angel guiding children across a bridge or surrounding them with care, protecting them from dangers while they are playing by the river. Images of this kind (also popular today) were often given as gifts on the occasion of baptism. The most prominent features of this type of devotional painting are the angels, which are large, beautiful and often presented without a halo, sometimes with a bright star above their heads, and the images of the children depicted – usually a boy chasing a butterfly and a girl with flowers in her hands. The picture is perceived as idyllic, because the dangers that await the children will be foreseen by the Guardian Angel and the children will be protected; they will not fall into a stream or into an abyss. Insects and flowers distract children from potential dangers.⁷ The colours of the representations, the “sunny,” lurid figures of “beauti-

⁶ See M. BARANOWSKA, “Anioł”[entry], in: *Słownik literatury polskiej XIX wieku*, eds. J. Bachórz, A. Kowalczykowska, Wrocław 2009, pp. 26-28; *Księga o Aniołach*, ed. H. Oleschko, Kraków 2002; R. OTSASON, “Anioł”[entry], in: *Powszechna Encyklopedia Filozofii*, Lublin 2000, Vol. 1, pp. 234-235; D. SZAGUN, “Anioł i anielskość w romantyzmie na podstawie poezji Kornela Ujejskiego i Cypriana Norwida,” in: *Anioł w literaturze i w kulturze*, eds. J. Łagowska, J. Skawiński, Wrocław 2004, Vol. 1; I. WAKSMUNDZKA, “Anioł u Norwida,” *Colloquia Litteraria*, 2017, Issue 1.

⁷ A confirmation of the extraordinary popularity of Guardian Angel images can also be found in the religious popular literature of the period, e.g. *Pamiętniki Anioła Stróża [Memoirs of the Guardian Angel]* by Father Chardon, Pelplin 1872. To quote a significant passage:

“My little brother was running in the meadow: I was with him and followed his every move.

The insect, having sucked the poison from the plant, began to fly past him. – The child wanted to attract it and catch it... with one breath I drove it away and saved my little brother.

Amidst the greenery crawled a poisoned reptile. – An eye full of fire. Aiming its stinger it

ful” children (a boy and a girl), rather high-born, as evidenced by their clothing, are meant to “gladden the heart.” This religious imagery is supposed to explain in a simple way the presence of an unearthly, even fairytale-like, vigilant Angel. It does not offend anyone that a girl is picking flowers for fun, perhaps throwing them somewhere off to the side in a moment, while a boy is chasing insects, but what happens if he catches them? A tiny human being catches tiny insects – there is an analogy here and proportion prevails. The small world of insects corresponds to the child’s microcosm. In these naïveté-filled images, the production of which piled up in the 19th century (as evidenced by the press), the little boy appears as a small hunter who will be portrayed as a hunter or an officer in a few, several years, while the girl as a beautiful, developing flower, soon to be a woman.

The Romantic poet (Norwid), however, sees more. In this picture (or perhaps it is better to say in this idyllic picture of the world of which the Angel becomes a part), he sees the potential cruel interference of a small boy into a small (per analogy) insect world. Can the world suffer any harm when a butterfly is killed for fun? Even the angel in the 19th-century picture pays no attention to this; with a calm, indulgent, fully accepting smile and a serene countenance he does not hold up the boy’s hand to reveal to him the meaning of the butterfly’s existence, he cares and shields the child from the danger of drowning, of straying off the path, of hurting himself. The life of the little human being comes first. Chased insects and plucked flowers – are of little importance here, they do not absorb the attention of the observer. Perhaps the viewer reads the scene in terms of e.g. understanding the butterfly as a sign of momentary playfulness, carefree joy (like, for instance, the image of Zosia who is trying to chase a lamb and catch a butterfly – in Part II of *Dziady* [*Forefathers’ Eve*] because – according to the words of Guślarz [Volkhv] – the girl “has not touched the ground even once”).

There is, however, no admonition, no suggestion, no doubt in the “content” of the 19th-century pictures as to whether the boy can catch the butterfly or whether he can play with it. In a sweet land, interpreting an idyll in a naïve way (though often heart-warming), the observer focuses only on the given (depicted) part of the world. The images discussed and popular at the time were certainly well known to Norwid, as evidenced by the poet’s drawings: *Anioł Stróż* [*Guardian Angel*], created in 1873, ink-pen, in the collection of the National Library⁸ in Warsaw, or

wanted to lunge at the child. With the tip of its wing I fatigued a pretty butterfly from the rose’s womb, the child ran after it and escaped from the reptile.

It was not only similar daily incidents that required my help, there were also those that needed visible support” (based on the Polish version, *Pamiętniki Anioła Stróża*, p. 23).

⁸ See E. CHLEBOWSKA, *Cyprian Norwid. Katalog prac plastycznych*, Vol. IV: *Prace luźne 2*,

the watercolour *Dziecko i Anioł* [*Child and Angel*] recognised as lost, known from a reproduction of 1933. The popularity and importance of the divine protector of man is also evidenced by prayer booklets popular in the 19th century, titled e.g. *Anioł Stróż: skarbczyk modlitewny dla młodzieży i dzieci płci obojga* [*Guardian Angel: A Prayer Treasury for Youth and Children of Both Sexes*]⁹. Booklets of this kind contained all kinds of prayers, songs, commandments, including the prayer which young children usually learn first, i.e. *Oratio ad Angelum Custodem*:

Angele Dei, qui custos es mei, me,
tibi commissum pietate superna,
illumina, custodi, rege et gubernā.
Amen.

These prayer booklets for children and young people often contained an illustration of a child and a vigilant Angel walking behind it.

The angel from the first parts of *Ostatnia z bajek* makes up an “idyllic” 19th-century picture by calling the world of insects, birds and small animals into singing a hymn of praise in honour of the newborn child. This world, however, is described with extraordinary delicacy by the poet, and therefore draws the reader’s attention far more than the Angel itself, and makes one ask about the status of this microworld: Norwid’s butterflies are bright and “prompt,” the flies – “golden as sparks,” “jolly birds.” The angel, however, proclaims: “All this **small world**, which **seems to have been made into toys for a more perfect one** [...].” The words even seem crucial: the family of insects, birds, smaller and larger animals, described by the poet with no small amount of loftiness and nobility, are – in the words of the Angel – merely “**toys for a more perfect one**.” Even if we try to assume – very superficially, as a test – that man is “someone more perfect,” Norwid would not accept that any being should become a toy for another, e.g. an animal for man. Norwid – a Romantic poet “in spirit” – could not approve of such a thesis. This is partly reflected in research on *Ostatnia z bajek* and Norwid’s attitude to animals (Janina Abramowska, Grażyna Halkiewicz-Sojak, Piotr Lehr-Sławiński, Magdalena Rudkowska¹⁰). The

Lublin 2019, p. 264. At this point, I would like to thank the author most sincerely for all her help, kindness and for providing me with materials related to this drawing and to the watercolour entitled *Anioł i dziecko* [*Angel and Child*] mentioned later in the article. The drawing *Anioł Stróż* [*Guardian Angel*] can be found in the digital repository of the National Library (Polona).

⁹ See *Anioł Stróż: skarbczyk modlitewny dla młodzieży i dzieci płci obojga*, [Częstochowa] 1933.

¹⁰ See P. LEHR-SŁAWIŃSKI, “Darwin – Narwid – Norwid,” in: *Dziewiętnastowieczność*, ed. E. Czaplejewicz, W. Grajewski, Wrocław-Warszawa 1988; J. ABRAMOWSKA, “Darwin, Ezop i Anioł,” in: *Nie tylko o Norwidzie*, eds. J. Czarnomorska, Z. Przychodniak, K. Trybuś, Poznań

fact that living beings other than humans are the work of the Creator – that is, they are creatures – is for Norwid sufficient reason to show them due respect and admiration. Norwid's view of the status of the existence of animals resonates clearly in both *Ostatnia z bajek* and *Fabulizm Darwina* [*Darwin's Fabulism*], as well as, for instance, in his correspondence, e.g. in those passages where zoos – objects unacceptable to Norwid – are mentioned. This is evidenced, for example, in his correspondence with Seweryna Duchńska (author of columns devoted to the development of natural and popular history at the time of Charles Darwin's theory¹¹). The description of the zoological garden appearing in Norwid's letter (of 1879) to Duchńska as: "Ogrójec roślin i zwierząt" [a garden of plants and animals]:

Podobno, że Łaskawa Pani, będąc w progach tych tu murów, raczyła o mnie zapytywać – otóż właśnie że wyszedłem do Ogrojca roślin i zwierząt [...]. Spółcześni tłumnie biegną do Ogrodu-aklimatyzacji [...] ażeby widzieć ich (wedle Darwina) przodka orangutanga, a nie pojmuję u tych osób podzielających system naturalisty angielskiego, dlaczego one antenata w klatce z małpami osadziły i parasolkami przez kratę do niego bodzą?... Obyczaj, którego żaden ze współwyznawców moich nie dopuściłby się względem portretu dziada swego! – Orangutang też z politowaniem i newralgią na tę z d z i c z a ł a – c y w i l i z a c j a rzeszę poogląda... W tym to jednym pokrewnym mu jestem [...]¹².

1997 (Janina ABRAMOWSKA returned to the subject of *Ostatnia z bajek* in her book: *Pisarze w zwierzyńcu*, Poznań 2010, pp. 40-42); M. RUDKOWSKA, "Ostatnie z bajek. Romantyczna iluzja wspólnoty ludzko-zwierzęcej i jej rozpad," *Wiek XIX. Rocznik Towarzystwa Literackiego im. Adama Mickiewicza*, 2014. Alina Merdas argued with Piotr Lehr-Splawiński's theses by considering the main idea of *Ostatnia z bajek* to be "the truth about man in need of redemption": A. MERDAS RSCJ, *Ocalony wieniec*, Warszawa 1995, p. 209. Among others, the study by Elżbieta FELIKSIĄK, "Darwin Norwida," *Teksty*, 1972, Issue 4 and Grażyna HALKIEWICZ-SOJAK, *Wobec tajemnicy i prawdy. O Norwidowskich obrazach "całości"* (excerpt from the book *W koncepcji antropologicznej "Ostatniej z bajek"*).

¹¹ See S. DUCHŃSKA, "Kronika Paryzka," *Biblioteka Warszawska*, 1864, Vol. 3. Duchńska's columns were not highly regarded in her lifetime, but they were considered important. B. Rejchman wrote on the subject: "The author of the light-hearted columns entitled 'The Paris Chronicle' in 'Warsaw Library' was the first herald of a new era in science, publishing in September 1864 information on d'Archiac's views, in a freshly published volume of the Course of Palaeontology and Flourens in 'examem du livre de M. Darwin' – on the new theory of evolution." He adds, however, that Duchńska "did not understand well what she was writing about." B. REJCHMAN, *Teoria Darwina w stosunku do nauki życia*, Warszawa 1882, p. 11, quoted in R. KOZIOLEK, "Kompleks Darwina," *Teksty Drugie*, 2011, Issue 3, p. 16 (footnote 16).

¹² C. NORWID, Letter to Seweryna Duchńska, PW X, 130, 131. Many scholars stress the importance of this letter for the composition of *Ostatnia z bajek*. See J. W. GOMULICKI, *Metryki i objaśnienia: "Ostatnia z bajek,"* PWSz VII, Part II; P. LEHR-SPLAWIŃSKI, *Darwin – Narwid – Norwid*; G. HALKIEWICZ-SOJAK, *Wobec tajemnicy i prawdy*.

Apparently, the Gracious Lady, being at the threshold of these walls here, deigned to inquire about me – well, I had just gone out to the Garden of plants and animals [...]. The contemporary people are flocking to the Garden of acclimatisation [...] to see their ancestor (according to Darwin), the orang-utang, and I do not understand why these people, who accept the system of the English naturalist, put their ancestor in a cage with monkeys and use umbrellas to poke him through the bars?... A custom that none of my co-believers would commit against the portrait of their grandfather! – The orang-utang also looks with pity and neuralgia at this feral – civilizational crowd... In this one thing I am related to him [...].

This is an important quotation. Even if Norwid did not accept Darwin's theory, he regarded zoological gardens ("ogrojce") as a perversion of civilisation and human behaviour towards animals as scandalous. We should add that the poet exposed a situation of two-way observation, showing it not only from a human perspective, but also from an animal perspective (as in *Ostatnia z bajek*). In the quoted excerpt from the letter to Duchińska – the orang-utan looks "with pity and neuralgia" at humans and "feral civilisation." Therefore, animals ceased to be feral. The writer's thoughts expressed in the letter allow us to understand *Ostatnia z bajek*. Incidentally, it should be added that in 19th-century zoos (e.g. in Amsterdam), people from, for instance, Congolese tribes were locked up, which clearly testifies to this "civilisational ferity."¹³

3. ON THE IDYLL, OR THE ILLUSION OF BEAUTY

In Norwid's work, as in fairy tales, animals have been given a voice: insects respond to the Angel (when called upon to sing a hymn of praise), but this is preceded with a prelude of silence and description revealing the **beauty** of the small creatures:

Tak gdy swoją pieśń skończył Anioł, nastąpiła na bardzo mało chwila głębokiego uciszenia, po czym jak jednej struny złotej wygłos zabrzmiały **słowa drobnych złotych muszek** i owadów tęczowych, i motyli w pyły świetne owianych. (DW VII, 243)

Thus, when the Angel had finished his song, there followed for a very short time a moment of profound silence, after which, like a single golden string, the **words of tiny golden flies** and rainbow insects, and butterflies shrouded in splendid dust, resounded.

¹³ See, among others: M. KLUSZCZYŃSKA, *Ogród zoologiczny jako miejsce konstruowania Zwierzęcia*, in: *Ludzie i zwierzęta*, Vol. VI; *Pongo*, ed. R. Chymkowski, A. Jaroszuk, Warszawa 2014; K. ŁUKASZEWICZ, *Ogrody zoologiczne: wczoraj, dziś, jutro*, Warszawa 1975; J. WARSZA, "Ludzkie zoo," *Krytyka Polityczna*, 2010, Issue 24-25; A. WIECZORKIEWICZ, "Ludzki okaz na czterech scenach," *Czas Kultury*, 2007, Issue 6.

The descriptions of the animal world in *Ostatnia z bajek* are ennobling, even laudatory. A kind of lyrical hymn in praise of insects uttered by the poet is more perfect than an angelic hymn delivered in praise of human beings. “Golden flies,” “rainbow insects,” elsewhere in the text called “rainbow worms”¹⁴, butterflies – “shrouded in splendid dust”¹⁵ are part of a reality that is rather poorly recognised by man, veiled – from Norwid’s perspective – with some extraordinary beauty and mystery of life.

In the aforementioned Guardian Angel pictures mass-produced in the 19th century, insects are insignificant, their status of existence is low, subordinated to man, for whom they are merely a plaything and a toy. On the other hand, in *Ostatnia z bajek* insects express themselves, but in a different way to that found in fairy tales, their speech transcends fairy-tale conventions, for Norwid has shifted the centre of gravity, the insects here do not embody human characteristics (as in traditional, epigrammatic or narrative fables by e.g. Ignacy Krasicki), but above all they reveal their unique status of existence. They are independent, species-integral (analogous to human beings) entities. Norwid presents reality in a very interesting literary way, not so much from his own (i.e. authorial) position, but from the perspective of insects and other animals. On the surface, this seems to be a world different from the human one in terms of, among others, “quality,” but in *Ostatnia z bajek* it has an analogous status, each organism being considered valuable and unusual in its own way. Norwid’s animals “possess” their own existence, with which they are no less fascinated than humans. Also, the perspective on the human person changes, we get to know and observe it from the point of view of a creature measuring a few millimetres or a few centimetres. This is an original way of observation, bringing **lyricism** into the represented world in the work that is the quintessence of the author’s subjective stance and his recognition of the mystery of existence as a value and truth of a supernatural nature.

¹⁴ It should be clarified that as late as the 19th century (in natural history literature) insects were mistakenly classified as worms. Grzegorz Igliński discusses this issue in detail and refers to the findings of historical and modern zoology: “The scientific name *Vermes* (on the level of cluster) was first used by the Swedish scientist Carl von Linné (Charles Linnaeus) in his work *Systema naturae*, which was expanded from edition to edition... (first edition – 1735; tenth ed., considered the beginning of zoological nomenclature: Vols. 1-2, 1758-1759). On the other hand, the French researcher Jean-Baptiste de Lamarck, in his work *Histoire naturelle des animaux sans vertèbres* (first ed. Vols. 1-7, 1815-1822, introduced the category of invertebrates, and within it he placed worms (*Vermes*) and insects (*Insecta*).” – G. IGLIŃSKI, “Z Mickiewiczowskiego bestiariusza. Owady i robaki w ‘Dziadach,’” *Wiek XIX. Rocznik Towarzystwa Literackiego im. Adama Mickiewicza*, IX (LI): 2016, p. 8 (sources cited in a footnote).

¹⁵ The butterflies’ wings are built of lamellae covered with coloured dust.

In Aesop's fables, for example, animals were ennobled or ridiculed for certain character traits and values that are important in the human world, e.g. honesty, love, goodness, cunning etc. The situation is different in fictional tales – insects or small birds act as donors¹⁶. The tiniest animals reveal the coherence and interpenetration of the natural and supernatural worlds, they help man in his fight against evil, in his life choices, they make it possible to get to another, better, more perfect world. If man is good to animals, he receives help from them, they often save his life, enable him to achieve his goal (e.g. love “in the form” of a proper princess or a magical attribute of healing: living water or other treasure). The good protagonist is protected by the natural world, he not only does not kill insects but helps them with empathy and understanding, almost tenderness. Animals have their own character and feelings. It should be emphasised at this point that these aspects of animal life were discovered by natural history (the work of Charles Darwin and his predecessors cannot be overestimated in this regard) in Norwid's lifetime (and earlier).

In fables, animals have their own consciousness, they have an external view on humans and thus they see more. They have access to knowledge that humans cannot reach. This is also the case in *Ostatnia z bajek*, hence the insects' response to the Angel's invitation to perform a sublime tirade in honour of the newborn child. However, there is no hymn of praise extolling the greatness and beauty of man, no naïve admiration (as in the aforementioned images of children with the Guardian Angel), even though the insects' statement alludes to these representations:

Piękny – piękny – piękny! jest człowiek-dziecię, i niebawem podziwiać go będziemy hasającego po łąkach – rumianego jak zorza – po pas w kwiatach, z rozwianymi złotymi włosy. Gdzie on ręką skinie, w której nieść będzie zdrafną mgłę gazy, podchwyci motyle zbyt ufnie ssące kwiatki, podchwyci muszki złote, szklannoskrzydłe i tęczowe owadki... A potem, z uśmiechem powodzenia, **poprzewierca im szpilkami karki i tak cały kapelusz i pudelka swoje przebitymi i przybitymi ustroi. One odkręcać się będą na kruszcowych palach i wspinać na wyprężane nogi z jękiem, którego nie dosłyszysz tłuste ucho człowieka, gdy on wtedy po lowach, rzuciwszy się, jak był, na posłanie, głęboko będzie spał, w pięknym odniechceni tym nadośniejszy...** (DW VII, 243; emphasis added by E. Sz.-P.)

Beautiful – beautiful – beautiful! is the man-child, and soon we shall admire him frolicking in the meadows – blushing like an aurora – up to his waist in flowers, with his golden hair flowing. Where he waves his hand, in which he will carry a treacherous mist of gauze, he will catch butterflies sucking too trustingly at flowers, he will catch golden flies, glass-winged and rainbow little insects... And then, with a smile of good fortune, **he will pierce their necks with**

¹⁶ See V. PROPP, *Morfologia bajki magicznej*, transl. P. Rojek, Kraków 2011, p. 40; E. WILCZYŃSKA, “Symbolika pszczół i mrówek w polskiej kulturze ludowej,” *Tekstura. Rocznik Filologiczno-Kulturoznawczy*, 2013, Vol. 1.

pins and in this way **he will decorate his hat and his boxes with those punctured and nailed**. They **will turn themselves on metal piles** and climb up on **stretched-out legs** with a groan that **the fat ear of man** will not hear, when he then, **after the hunt, having thrown himself, as he was, on the bed**, will sleep deeply, in a beautiful repose all the more adorable...

The man “frolicking” in the pictures evokes idyllic associations, but the idyll is only an illusion of beauty. Using poetic devices, Norwid conveys the character of observation conducted as if through a magnifying glass, and thus in such a way that no aspect of man’s actions is overlooked. He reveals a picture of suffering insects and the ruthlessness of the human person – the hunter with a fat ear who falls asleep after the havoc he has wrought. With this way of narrating, the poet achieves a remarkable effect of double magnification – of the insects on the one hand, and of man (his work in the insectarium) on the other. He achieves this by giving insects (more broadly – animals) the status of protagonists in the work.

4. FACING THE CREATURES. THE INSECTARIUM

Beauty (in Norwid’s thought) cannot be enclosed in idyllic images; it manifests itself in relations, and though not only to another human being (although Norwid does not present the human-human relationship as perfect) but also in man’s relation to all living beings and to each existence-creation individually, to existence as such. Man’s relation to another person and another existence-creation is mentioned first, because in Norwid’s world of values this is the measure of man’s possible relation to God. The poetic image of insects impaled, pierced in an entomological dissecting room (because the space of a meadow is transformed into something like this) in order to make decorative boxes or showcases and pseudo-scientific exhibits, which the professor praises, has a strong emotional undertone, especially in view of the 19th-century fashion for preparing butterflies and other insects. In *Ostatnia z bajek*, we read that after such a hunt, a man will sleep soundly:

I przyjdzie matka, pojrzy, zachwyci się – miękkim palcem odgarnie jemu włosy z powiek – chustą wonną oetrze mu czoło. Profesor przebudzonego wychwalać będzie, iż wdzięcznych tyle trudów poniósł – – ale on się nic z tego ani się nikt z tego nic nie nauczy!... (DW VII, 243)

And his mother will come, she will look at him and will be delighted – with a soft finger she will pull the hair from his eyelids – with a fragrant scarf she will wipe his forehead. The professor will praise the awakened one that he has endured so many graceful hardships – – but he will learn nothing from it, nor will anyone learn anything from it!...

The general acceptance of man's attitude towards creatures gives food for thought. The Guardian Angel from the collective imagination immortalised in colourful images, the image of the mother and the professor (presumably of natural history) – give consent to this pogrom in the natural world. There are important, authorial words in the piece forewarning that no one will learn anything from these prepared, nailed-on insects placed in boxes or display cabinets or on fanciful hats, hence the warning to the animal world: “**Wystrzegajcie się jego**, jakkolwiek jest piękny i wzniosły!” [**Beware of him** [man], however beautiful and sublime he may be!”].

It is not in the words of the Angel, but in those of the insects, that the author's voice sounds in opposition not so much to man *per se* – such a thesis would not be in line with Norwid's entire *opus magnum* (after all, man is a creature, a living being descended from God), but to the bonds he has severed with other creatures who are by no means inferior or less perfect than man (everything God made was good and beautiful, and pleased God – insects and other living beings pleased him no less than man). The subsequent parts of *Ostatnia z bajek* develop images of man's thoughtless and wanton cruelty: cutting off bird wings for decorative feathers for their hats, taking the food squirrels have gathered for the winter, fishing with worm bait – piercing a worm with a hook, skinning an ox, killing for industrial purposes¹⁷:

On rozwiesi w jatkach białe i tuczne trupy i bawić się będzie wyrzezywaniem we wzory skóry i mięsa, i umai je liśćmi zielonymi. Tamtędy potem pędzić będzie na rzeź sprzedane i z obłędem patrzące bydło.

Albowiem jego całą rzeczą jest i było, po wszystkie czasy, od rana do nocy, tym się zaprzętać jednym, ażeby wszystko podstępem ująć, zamordować, złupić, i zjeść, i zjeść... i co tylko można, na siebie wdziać, a wszystko sobie przysądzić. (DW VII, 245)

He [man] will hang the white and fat corpses in the slaughterhouses and will amuse himself by carving skin and flesh in patterns, and will decorate them with green leaves. Then he will drive the terrified cattle sold for slaughter.

For his whole business has been, for eternity, from morning till night, to be occupied with one thing, that is to cunningly seize, murder, plunder, and *eat*, and *eat*... and to put on himself whatever he can, and to avail himself of everything.

This poetic prose powerfully captures the martyrdom of animals. This theme was adopted in the research by Magdalena Rudkowska, who wrote:

¹⁷ This aspect was pointed out by Magdalena RUDKOWSKA (“Ostatnie z bajek. Romantyczna iluzja”), earlier by Janina ABRAMOWSKA (*Pisarze w zwierzyńcu*) who wrote: “the intention of the author of *Ostatnia z bajek* is to show human egoism and the harm inflicted on animals” (p. 41).

Ostatnia z bajek is a demonstration of the injustice, the crime for which man is responsible towards animals, and at the same time the deep wound he has inflicted on himself by detaching himself from the primordial harmony and mystery of living alongside them¹⁸.

Norwid is not so much attacking the human person as expressing his lost sensitivity, his lack of self-awareness, i.e. the truth about himself as a living being, created among other beings (like him) created and therefore co-existing with him. Norwid's formulation of "**twardość serca człowieka**" [**the hardness of man's heart**] expresses this thought emphatically.

"Rozwijanie piękności własnej" [developing one's own beauty] – these words of the poet – would be a great opportunity for man and the community of living beings on which his life in fact depends. This is the remedy written by the poet for the hardness of man's heart. It is not the tirade shouted by the Angel (who has just appeared on earth) that man is beautiful – it makes sense in the light of the work, for it sounds like a slogan, a worn-out formula, not the kind of beauty sought after as that seen in the pictures depicting children with a Guardian Angel, or a child being carried to baptism or sleeping in a cradle. "Developing one's own beauty" is related to work, toil, the effort to understand, self-awareness, a careful reading of the book of life, tenderness and respect towards every existence. The feathers from clipped bird wings attached to a hat are only evidence of "stripping off others' beauty and taking it upon oneself," not of "developing one's own beauty." The terms "others' beauty" – is a sign that birds are also endowed with beauty, which man takes away, but this beauty taken away does not make him beautiful, it only reveals his "hard heart" in all the depth of the Gospel (more broadly biblical) meanings¹⁹.

5. CYPRIAN NORWID – ZYGMUNT KRASIŃSKI – POETS' INSECTS, OR TOWARDS THE CONCEPT OF BEAUTY

Where did Norwid get such an unusual and original image of insects and man? One source is certainly Zygmunt Krasiński's *Nie-Boska Komedia* [*The Un-Divine Comedy*]. There is an analogous image of insects in the description of Orcio, which must have influenced Norwid's imagination; it is not a question of identity

¹⁸ M. RUDKOWSKA, "Ostatnie z bajek. Romantyczna iluzja," p. 369.

¹⁹ This is a direct reference to the biblical formula that appears in many places in the Bible: "Do not harden your hearts" – Mark 3:1-6.

of meaning, but of a source for poetic imagination. Let me quote a passage from *Nie-Boska Komedia*:

Czemu o dziecię, nie hasasz na kiju, nie bawisz się lalką, **much nie mordujesz, nie wbijasz na pal motyli**, nie tarzasz się po trawnikach, nie kradniesz łakoci, nie oblewasz łzami wszystkich liter od A do Z? – **Królu much i motyli**, przyjacielu poliszynela, czarcie maleńki, **czemuś tak podobny do aniołka?** – Co znaczą twoje błękitne oczy, pochylone, choć żywe, pełne wspomnień, choć ledwo kilka wiosen przeszło ci nad głową? – Skąd czoło opierasz na rączkach białych i zdajesz się marzyć, a jako kwiat obarczony rosą, tak skronia twoje obarczone myślami?²⁰

Why, oh child, don't you swing on a stick, play with a doll, **murder flies, impale butterflies**, roll around on lawns, steal sweets and shed tears over every letter from A to Z? – **King of flies and butterflies**, friend of Pulcinella, little devil, **why do you look so much like an angel?** – What do your blue eyes mean, slanted, though vivid, full of memories, though barely a few springs have passed over your head? – Why do you rest your forehead upon your white hands and seem to dream, and as a flower laden with dew, so are your temples laden with thoughts?

Orcio, the little protagonist of *Nie-Boska Komedia*, and the above-cited excerpt from the poetic prose of the drama must have made a great impression on Norwid. In the fragment quoted above, hunting insects and piercing them with pins is put on par with other activities “characteristic” of a child, such as playing with a doll, stealing sweets, rolling on the lawn or “shedding tears over all the letters.” This image must have been firmly rooted in the morality of the period. Krasiński's sensitivity as a poet allowed him to extract these images from the lives of children, and thus behaviours that were universally accepted, even those in which a man – the “**king of flies and butterflies**” according to 19th-century fashion – catches them in a gauze net and makes animal preparations or specimen-paintings. Krasiński understood this like no one else; forced to hunt, brought up by his father-general, he clashed with adult expectations, with the image cultivated in many families of the boy (the little hunter²¹), and later of the man, with the image of man who can (has the right – by virtue of his social and biological status), with the power he was endowed with, relate to other beings (subordinate to him, after all). We are talking about the natural world, but we must not forget that these were times of serfdom and complex, tense social relations (this is a separate problem, but important from the perspective of the issue analysed here).

²⁰ Z. KRASIŃSKI, *Nie-Boska Komedia*, in the volume: *Dzieła literackie*, selected, annotated and with a commentary by P. Hertz, Warszawa 1973, Vol. I, p. 347.

²¹ See L. S. [L. SIEMIŃSKI], *Przewodnik myśliwca*, Leszno and Gniezno 1848, p. 3. The issue of hunting was discussed, among others, by B. MYTYCH-FORAJTER, *Poetyka i łowy. O idei dawnego polowania w literaturze polskiej XIX wieku*, Katowice 2004. This theme was emphasised by M. RUDKOWSKA, “Ostatnie z bajek. Romantyczna iluzja.”

Kraśiński's and Norwid's insects contribute to a much deeper discussion that takes place in both works, a discussion on the status of man and the essence of "beauty." This is the level at which a kind of "poetic" conversation between Norwid and Kraśiński takes place (this is what the "borrowing" of the image, the allusion to *Nie-Boska Komedia* in *Ostatnia z bajek*, served to achieve).

Kraśiński's idea of beauty is most fully revealed in a phrase from *Nie-Boska Komedia*: "Przez ciebie płynie strumień piękności, ale ty nie jesteś pięknocią" [A stream of beauty flows through you, but you are not beauty]. It does not refer only to Count Henryk or to other characters in the drama but to man as such. Kraśiński's thinking about the relationship man–beauty is permeated by a kind of pessimism. The human person is not "beauty," his element is external to him (coming from God). Experiencing beauty is possible, but this beauty is not essentially inherent in man (he is not beauty).

Norwid's response in *Ostatnia z bajek* would be the duty incumbent on man, which is most fully expressed by the exhortation to "develop one's own beauty." These are two different positions; it is impossible to discuss them here. Norwid's "developing one's own beauty" is a hopeful statement that in life one can strive for beauty, make conscious choices, and thus shape reality and the quality of existence. This is not a catastrophic vision, there is no predestination or any kind of limitation or imprisonment of human possibilities, but at the same time it reveals a necessity arising from the essence of things, from the profound nature of man and from the sense of life – let us add – of every life (being), and thus not only human life. "By developing one's own beauty," man can get rid of the hardness of heart.

In *Ostatnia z bajek*, Norwid is not a poet-observer. Observation has turned into presence, hence the distinctiveness of the subject (the author) who, despite his verisimilitude, is not a narrator but a lyrical personality. It is this presence, growing out of a deep awareness and knowledge, that allows him to reveal the truth about being and man. In Norwid's work, presence becomes at the same time a reflection on the nature of things, the nature of existence as such. Observation makes it possible to take a stance on persons and events – the subject remains, as it were, outside the described reality, while presence becomes possible when the subject penetrates inside and becomes part of reality, takes responsibility for it, and from this perspective experiences an understanding of the essence of things with insight. *Ostatnia z bajek* became an expression of such an engaged presence of the poet.

6. TRANSFORMATIONS

In traditional fables, the real hero undergoes a metamorphosis – this constitutes the essence of the plot. In *Ostatnia z bajek*, two such transformations take place. One of these transformations is surprising and only possible in a fairy tale – it is the transformation of the Angel who, having flown from the heavens and listened to the insects' complaints, begins to understand reality and thus the immensity of the suffering of creatures on earth. Evidence of the transformation is seen in the third part of the work. The angel makes his way to Lebanon (the Holy Land) in a tremendous effort, but for what purpose? It is described as “pilny bez-interes” [urgent dis-interest]. He is looking for people who have not harmed other creatures. He finds such people – the fable will have a happy ending. They are hermits praying in a rock-cut cave, in front of an altar. The angel feels that he has reached his destination, he has found what he was looking for:

Radowały się wyraźnie oczy jego widokiem aby dwóch ludzi, na których żywocie, mieniu i obyczaju nie było żadnej skazy naznaczonej gwałtem lub krzywdą jakąkolwiek bliźniego, ludzkości i stworzenia!... **to ku temu więc leciał tak skoro z daleka...** To ku temu więc taką trzeba było zadawać sobie podróż oddaloną i poszukiwanie przedsiębrać tak usilne! (DW VII, 248; emphasis added by E. Sz.-P.)

His eyes clearly rejoiced at the sight of merely two people whose lives, possessions and customs were unblemished by any violence or harm towards their neighbours, humanity and creation!... **it isthusfor this that he has flown from so far away...** It is thus for this that he had to make such a distant journey and undertake such an arduous search!

Thus, the angel – against the “rules” – (he left the child entrusted to him) travelled a long way in search of a source of knowledge and found two hermits who did not harm any of the creatures. They persisted in prayer, abiding in living contact with God. The grotto in which the service takes place is a space of knowledge (initiation) which, thanks to a contemplative attitude, takes place in the depths of their hearts. However, there was no one besides them to participate in this prayer, apart from the two lions (who, we should add, despite their predatory nature, never kill for fun and no creature is a toy for them; in the light of *Ostatnia z bajek*, only man can make a toy out of other creatures). It seems significant for the work's plot that it is not the man-child who undergoes the metamorphosis (which is the basis of the fable), but it is experienced by the Angel who finds goodness and innocence in the world, but not in the little child – for now still innocent – by virtue of its vulnerability. “Beauty,” in fact, is born in man's encounter with God, in the need for God and the understanding of the

essence of life, in prayer and contemplation, which allows man to find the right order in the world and his own place among other beings who, like him, possess life from the same giver.

Ostatnia z bajek is a late work by Norwid – this must be emphasised in order to understand that the work reveals a second transformation (besides the angelic one), which took place, as it were, “outside the plot of the work”; this transformation must also have taken place in the poet as a result of a deep understanding of the essence of the creative act. This can be most fully expressed by writing that insects led Norwid-poet and, at the same time, the main “protagonist” of *Ostatnia z bajek* to the silkworm butterfly from Mickiewicz’s mystical lyric *Snuć miłość* [*Love Spun*]. Norwid’s parable has a profound message. The traditional fable ends well. However, Norwid left no hope – this is important in this poet’s axiology, important for the way he looked at the human being, which is why in *Ostatnia z bajek* he quotes a phrase from the Bible, but not the one that man was so quick to misrepresent and misunderstand (i.e. “Fill the earth and subdue it”), but a passage from the Book of Hosea, in which God speaks of a covenant with every beast of the field and with the birds in the sky, so that they may “**lie down in safety.**” God’s covenant with all creatures that possess life, and therefore the highest value, is most clearly expressed by the place on earth of, among other, insects: flies and butterflies. Therefore, it is not only with man that God has made a covenant. It is only in a supernatural way that Norwid’s transformation can be understood, especially the theory of animal speech as glossolalia, which he wrote about, *inter alia*, in *Fabulizm Darwina* [*Darwin’s Fabulism*].

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OWADY NORWIDA *OSTATNIA Z BAJEK, CZYLI O PIĘKNOŚCI ISTNIENIA*

Streszczenie

Artykuł jest studium interpretacyjnym, w którym Ewa Szczęglacka-Pawłowska omawia *Ostatnią z bajek* jako dzieło późne poety. Punktem wyjścia dla szczegółowych rozpoznań o charakterze interpretacyjnym są pytania o obraz i znaczenie przywołanych w utworze owadów, a także o wymiar liryczny bajkowej przypowieści Norwida. Autorka odwołuje się do wpływu entomologii romantycznej, a także konkretnych fragmentów *Nie-Boskiej Komedii* Zygmunta Krasińskiego na sposób przedstawiania przez Norwida obrazu świata jako współlistnienia człowieka z różnymi stworzeniami i bolesnej utraty więzi z innymi istotami. Liryzm i podmiotowość w *Ostat-*

niej z bajek mają swoje źródło w kontemplatywnym stosunku autora utworu wobec szeroko pojętej rzeczywistości, stąd ważne pytania postawione w artykule – o wymiar „piękności” istnienia, które to pytania określają główny temat bajki lirycznej Norwida.

Słowa kluczowe: Cyprian Norwid; *Ostatnia z bajek*; entomologia romantyczna; owady w literaturze; anioł; rysunki Cypriana Norwida; Norwidowska koncepcja piękna.

NORWID'S INSECTS.

THE LAST OF THE FABLES, OR ON THE BEAUTY OF EXISTENCE

Summary

This article offers an interpretation of one of Norwid's late works: *Ostatnia z bajek* [*The Last of the Fables*]. The starting point for this specific reading is the question regarding the image and meaning of the insects invoked in this work as well as the lyrical dimension of this fairy-tale-like fable. The article reveals the impact of Romantic entomology as well as specific passages from Zygmunt Krasiński's *Nie-Boska Komedia* [*The Un-Divine Comedy*] on the ways in which Norwid develops an image of the world as a place where humans co-exist with other beings and experience the painful loss of the bond with these fellow creatures. Lyricism and subjectivity in *Ostatnia z bajek* are rooted in the author's contemplative attitude towards broadly understood reality. This raises the question posed in the title – one regarding the beauty of existence – which defines the main theme of Norwid's lyrical fable.

Keywords: Cyprian Norwid; *Ostatnia z bajek* [*The Last of the Fables*]; Romantic entomology; insects in literature; angel; Norwid's drawings; Norwid's idea of beauty.

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