

MAGDALENA KOWALSKA
ORCID: 0000-0003-4942-5598

WHEN EVERY DEBUT IS A FAREWELL.
MY LAST SONNET BY NORWID
AND ADIEUX À LA POÉSIE BY LOUISE ACKERMANN

LOUISE ACKERMANN, *Adieux à la poésie*

Mes pleurs sont à moi, nul au monde
Ne les a comptés ni reçus;
Pas un œil étranger qui sonde
Les désespoirs que j'ai conçus.

L'être qui souffre est un mystère
Parmi ses frères ici-bas;
Il faut qu'il aille solitaire
S'asseoir aux portes du trépas.

J'irai seule et brisant ma lyre,
Souffrant mes maux sans les chanter,
Car je sentirais à les dire
Plus de douleur qu'à les porter¹.

In the previous reflection on the work of Cyprian Norwid, one can find many examples of studies revealing the affinity of the poet's thought with the concepts of the French authors of the second half of the 19th century. Works by Maciej Żurowski, Magdalena Siwiec, Arent van Nieukerken, Piotr Śniedziewski, Wiesław Rzońca and Anna Krasuska have opened up inspiring research perspectives – Norwid

¹ L. ACKERMANN, *Œuvres: ma vie, premières poésies, poésies philosophiques*, Paris 2005, pp. 3-4.

appears as a partner in the discussion of the principles of art with the poets of French Parnassianism and Symbolism. It is difficult to find equally interesting contexts for the work of the author of *Vade-mecum* in the poetry of early French Romanticism². The two poems, by Norwid and Louise-Victorine Ackermann, née Choquet (1813-1890), which are the subject of interpretation in this article, appear to belong to separate worlds – they differ in terms of the gender and nationality of the authors, the appreciation of their works in past and in contemporary reception, as well as poetic style and mode of expression. On the other hand, the area that would make a comparative attempt possible is the place of these works in the authors' poetic journey – for they are among the first poems to come out of their pen – and the situation of their reception, already indicates in the titles, as the last in their artistic output in general or in a certain formal dimension. Norwid's *Ostatni mój sonet* [*My Last Sonnet*]³ and Ackermann's *Adieux à la poésie* [*Farewells to Poetry*] surprise readers by announcing the end of a phase of their work that has just begun. The tradition of Romantic farewells to "poetry" or to the poet's muse can be found as early as in the 1830s, initiated by Byron and Alphonse de Lamartine, and continued later by other great authors, such as Théophile Gautier⁴. However, such a gesture does not happen as often in the period of a poetic debut. For obvious reasons, Norwid's and Ackermann's poetic utterances, stylized as the "last" lyrical message, lack the themes characteristic of "late poetry," as Anna Legeżyńska understands it, such as existential reckoning, returns to childhood years, consideration of the imperishable beauty of art⁵. The announcements of making a poetic statement for the last time and the last use of certain poetic forms in the first lyrical works are not the only aspects of the two poems analysed that require reflection. The content of the works provokes many questions. Ackermann does not use the word "poetry" in her work, just as the word "sonnet" does not appear in the body of Norwid's poem (nor is the aforementioned work by Byron a sonnet). Two of the three stanzas of her piece elapse before Ackermann introduces herself as a poetess. The problem of

² Cf. M. KOWALSKA, "Xavier Forneret odczytany przez surrealistów i czytany Norwidem," *Przegląd Humanistyczny*, 2017, Issue 4, pp. 173-184.

³ It is a sonnet of uncertain authorship. The editors of the most recent, first critical edition of Norwid's poems as part of *Dziela wszystkie* [*Complete Works*], published by the Learned Society of the Catholic University of Lublin, included this work in the edition. Quotes from the sonnet are based on the version prepared for publication by Professor Grażyna Halkiewicz-Sojak, whom I thank for making the result of her work available.

⁴ M. SIWIEC, *Romantyczne koncepcje poezji. Poeta i Muza – relacja w stanie kryzysu (Alfred de Musset i Juliusz Słowacki)*, Kraków 2012.

⁵ A. LEGEŻYŃSKA, *Gest pożegnania: szkice o poetyckiej świadomości elegijno-ironicznej*, Poznań 1999.

bidding farewell to a certain type of work presents itself in a slightly different way in a sonnet – Norwid wrote the words about “mych pożegnań chwili” [the moment of my farewells] already in the third verse, while Ackermann invariably raises the subject only in the third stanza. A reading of the poems thus reveals the perversity of the intention signalled by the authors in their titles. The lyrical “I” of both works reveals an intention to fall silent, but in Norwid’s sonnet words are spoken – they are precisely words of farewell, and Ackermann makes this Romantic gesture only at the end of the work. The information about the real object of the farewell – the real subject of the work – has been veiled by the poets; perhaps the poems, by their structure and style, actually say more about it than in the representational layer.

The interpretative hypothesis in my analysis is William Marx’s statement from his work *A Farewell to Literature*. He noted that “bidding farewell to literature” is a convenient, useful gesture – more often than not, its real intention is to bid farewell to a certain stage at which the authors’ contemporary literature has reached, and which they consider to be literature *par excellence*⁶. It is also worth recalling a remark in a similar vein made by Patrick Besnier and Claude Millet about Lamartine, in whose work, as they acknowledge, the gesture of farewell to poetry appears so frequently that it may bring to mind manic behaviour: “The desire to celebrate one’s farewells to poetry – to end one’s adventure with it – is at the root of Lamartine’s concomitant desire to be a poet: the desire to mark completion in the same way as to move on to other things, responding to social and political needs.”⁷ Perhaps, then, the works analysed, not typically distinguished by their debut character or bearing the marks of late poetry to the greatest extent, in fact represent a transition to the next stage of creativity, being liberated from the framework imposed by poetic consciousness.

“LONER”

Louise Ackermann dates the poem *Adieux à la poésie* to 1835, but it appeared in print in the volume *Contes et Poésies* in the section *Premières Poésies* in 1863,

⁶ W. MARX, *L’Adieu à la littérature, Histoire d’une dévalorisation XVIIIe-XXe siècle*, Paris 2005, pp. 15: “Ainsi, quand il est ici question de l’adieu à la littérature, c’est par commodité d’expression: il s’agit en fait de l’adieu à un certain état de la littérature que les écrivains concernés considèrent à tort comme la littérature *par excellence*.”

⁷ P. BESNIER, C. MILLET, “L’éclatementpoétique,” in: *Histoire de la France littéraire: Modernités*, Paris 2006, pp. 246: “Le désir de célébrer ses adieux à la poésie – d’en finir avec elle – est au fond chez Lamartine presque consubstantiel au désir d’être poète: désir de marquer un accomplissement autant que de passer à autre chose, répondant à une demande sociale et politique.”

whereas Norwid's sonnet was written in the last quarter of 1839 and appeared in Hipolit Skimborowicz's "Piśmiennictwo krajowe," a literary supplement to "Gazeta Poranna" (February 1840, Section II, Issue 8). The longer time between the creation and publication of Ackermann's poem is due to her fate. The poem was written in Paris – the city where Ackermann was born, but at an early age her family moved out of the capital to lead a quiet rural life in Picardy. The poetess wrote the work on her return to Paris, while she was receiving her education at a boarding school. The author spent the next years of her life in Berlin, where she married the linguist Paul Ackermann. After several years of marriage, which ended with the unexpected death of her husband at a young age, she settled in Nice, where her sister was staying, and spent the rest of her life there⁸. Her *Contes en vers* were published in 1855 and 1862, but it was not until the publication of a volume of poems (including both her first works and philosophical poetry) in 1874 that she achieved recognition as a poetess. It should be noted that the reviews of her work come during a period when French literary criticism has had the experience of commenting on, *inter alia*, Charles Baudelaire's *Flowers of Evil* and discussed the ideas of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Auguste Comte. The reviewer most enthusiastic about her work, Elme-Marie Caro, pointed out that "what we discover in this book is part of the modern soul, its spiritual stirrings, its outbursts and, at the same time, its discouragement"⁹ – these words could be a direct commentary on the analysed *Adieux à la poésie*. It is also worth noting that also in the Polish reception, the generation that discovers Ackermann's work will first be female authors born in the 1840s – individual works are translated by Maria Konopnicka¹⁰ and Eliza Orzeszkowa¹¹ – and then in the 1860s we find mentions

⁸ The facts of the author's life are taken from her autobiography *Ma vie* (L. ACKERMANN, *Œuvres*, pp. III-XXIII). The Polish translation by Julia Dickstein-Wieleżyńska can be found in: L. ACKERMANN, *Poezje*, pp. 53-70. In addition, it is worth mentioning Ludwik BRUNER's translation of an essay about the poetess by Anatole France: *Pani Ackermann*, in: idem, *Pisma krytyczne*, Lwów 1904, pp. 177-187. This text also contains a short biography of the poetess and a description of the French writer's meeting with her and their conversation about poetry.

⁹ E. CARO, "La Poésie philosophique dans les nouvelles écoles. Un poète positiviste," *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1874, Vol. 3, p. 249: "c'est une partie de l'âme moderne que nous voyons à découvert dans ce livre, ce sont ses agitations morales, ses emportements et tout à côté ses découragements."

¹⁰ M. KONOPNICKA, "Wojna. Z poezyj Ludwiki Ackerman," in: L. ACKERMANN, *Poezje*, pp. 135-140.

¹¹ E. ORZESZKOWA, *Listy zebrane*, Vol. 5, Wrocław 1961, pp. 25-26 (translation of the work *L'Amour et la Mort* with the incipit: "O, skruszy się wkrótce ta glina...").

of the French poetess in Zenon Przesmycki's *Profile poetów francuskich*¹² and in Stefan Żeromski's *Ludzie bezdomni*¹³.

LYRICAL SITUATION AND FORM OF WORKS

In Norwid's sonnet, the image of the situation of a man saying goodbye to a woman is suggested already in the first verse, while the apostrophe to the "Lady" appears only in the closing verse of the tetrastich, but a trace of the lyrical "you" also resounds in the verse: "Póki jeszcze Twych spojrzeń jasność dla nas świeci" [While your glances are still shining brightly for us] firmly constituting the "we" relationship. This is a significant difference to the lyrical situation in Ackermann's poem. The loneliness that the poetess depicts in the second and third stanzas, above all through the adjectives "seule" and "solitaire," is also revealed in comparison to Norwid's poem in that the lyrical situation lacks such a clear "you." In the first stanza, the lyrical "I" is accompanied only by some "nobody" and some "foreign eye" – undefined in any way, corresponding to an impersonal world. The second stanza, reminiscent in its character of a maxim, speaks of *homo dolorosus*, showing him first among his brothers, then as a lonely man. The contrast between the collective and the individual becomes even clearer when we consider the expression used, "parmi ses frères," that is: "among his brothers," rather than, for example, "among the people," which would sound more neutral. This is not the only clear opposition in this stanza, as "ici-bas" [here] is juxtaposed with the end, death: "trépas." Meanwhile, the third stanza transposes this universal image onto the axis of the speaker's life in the poem – what was said in the general sentence is now the utterance of the lyrical "I": "Il faut qu'il aille solitaire" – "J'irai seule." In the third stanza, there is no longer any trace of the presence of any other person. It is also worth noting that the above-mentioned epithet "seule" is the only word in the work by which we can identify the speaker of the poem as a woman¹⁴.

¹² Z. PRZESMYCKI, "Profile poetów francuskich," in: *Wybór pism krytycznych*, Vol. 1, Kraków 1967, p. 109: "Completely separately, as if at a distance from everyone, appears the figure of the great pessimist, Mrs Ackermann."

¹³ Excerpt from Joanna Podborska's diary: "I read Louise Ackermann" (S. ŻEROMSKI, *Ludzie bezdomni*, Warszawa 1996, p. 67).

¹⁴ Already in 19th-century literary criticism, the opinion of the female author as an "unfeminine" voice became widespread, cf. J. Barbey D'AUREVILLY, *Les Poètes*, Paris 1889, p. 159: "C'est l'homme, ici, qui a chanté comme aurait pu chanter la femme, et la femme, comme l'homme n'a pas chanté."

The lyrical situation in the poems analysed also influences the scope of the image of the world – in Norwid’s case, in addition to the fact that we have a depiction of the relationship between the lyrical “you” and “I” (pronouns refer to both the first and second person singular, e.g. “mych pożegnań” [my farewells], “Twe usta” [your lips], but also to the first person plural: “dla nas” [for us], “o nas” [about us]), the poet reached for landscape motifs – water in which a flowing object leaves a trace, the sky streaked with black clouds. These exist either as segments of a comparison or as reflections of an internal landscape, but they significantly expand the boundaries of the work’s represented world. Moreover, we have a reference to the past, to the poet’s predecessors – to Byron’s farewell – and we learn about the prospect of the future, about the “divination” of future fates. Compared to Ackermann’s austere style, saturated mainly with first-person singular pronouns: “je,” “moi,” “mes”¹⁵, with the absence of a specific lyrical “you,” with no reference to the setting in which the farewell occurs, Norwid’s sonnet appears as a work saturated with manifestations of the reality surrounding the speaker of the poem and the addressee of the work.

The short length of the sonnet’s form does not correspond to the length of the units that make it up; since they are complex sentences, we deal with interjection of other people’s utterances, quoting them – Byron’s words and the imagined reaction of the beloved to the farewell – and the multiplication of one way of beginning statements, with “póki” [as long as/while] and “może” [maybe]. Once the farewell formula is uttered aloud, it turns out to be longer and more pathetic than the laconic “Bądź zdrowa” [Be well] with which the speaker of the poem sought to contrast his farewell, also ensuring that this moment would be “oniemiała” [bewildering]. We should note that the manner of parting from the first line seems to be reserved for exceptionally ungrateful behaviour or for a farewell while being in conflict. The speaker of the poem rejects this manner, wishing to say goodbye in silence, using only a meaningful look – which presupposes both physical and emotional closeness between the participants in the situation. The final utterance of the words of farewell takes place under special circumstances, in a unique context, as the poet points out in the construction: “teraz [...] póki jeszcze” [now (...) while still]. It is ambiguous and can be translated as: “until the moment of doubt about the constancy of the beloved’s affection comes – especially given the beginning of the piece, but also possibly as: “as long as our unbroken intimacy lasts,” “as long as our love is given to us” – referring to the verses of the second stanza. Another aspect of the contrast between the Byronic farewell and that of

¹⁵ Marie DELCOURT and Dorothee COSTA point out that the lyrical “I” completely takes over the majority of Ackermann’s works (*Préface*, in: L. ACKERMANN, *Œuvres*, p. ii).

the lyrical “I” is that the former has already become a certain convention, quite widespread, of which the speaker of the poem is aware: “tak [...] tak i niejeden” [this is how (...) this is also how many] [emphasis added – M.K.]. Perhaps, then, what is brought out here is not only the difference between words and silence, but primarily a statement within the social and poetic framework of a farewell, but not a vivid and sincere one, but a petrified, meaningless one, and a gesture by the poet to reveal the true intention.

A greater degree of condensation of the message was achieved by Ackermann, in whose work there are no repetitions and no multiplicity of epithets, so evident in Norwid’s sonnet: “ponury” [gloomy], “niestała” [unsteady], “czarne” [black] etc. Instead, the poet makes use of a repertoire of near-synonymous words referring to sadness, hopelessness – in the poem’s original language they appear in plural, which heightens the feeling of being overwhelmed by these emotions compared to a single “je”: “Mes pleurs,” “Les désespoirs,” “mes maux.” All these states bear clear signs of belonging to one person: the pronouns “mes” and the subordinate phrase: “que j’ai conçus,” which suggests that despair is not simply a universal overtone of the work, but that it primarily emanates from a source – the feelings of the speaker of the poem.

Although the form of the sonnet imposes a rigour in the expression of thought and there can only be a change in stanza length between the first and last stanza, it is noticeable in Norwid’s work that at the beginning of the poem a person speaks in a state of emotional agitation, while in the course of the work there is a shift towards a softer flow of speech. The vehemence of the first stanza is evident in the image of flames (appearing in the context of eyes – thus contrasting with the calm “jasność spojrzeń” [brightness of glances] of the second stanza). The gesture of farewell is multiplied in this stanza – the verb “żegnał” [was saying goodbye] is used in the imperfective aspect, as if the action were still being repeated, and the poet uses the plural of the noun “pożegnanie” [farewell]. “Oniemiała chwila” [bewildering moment] can, of course, mean simply a moment of silence, but it can also be a personification of a moment that was bewildered in the same way as someone frightened or surprised by something. The second verse does not require a predicate, as it is featured in the first verse, however, through the use of anadiplosis: “luby, luba” [beloved_{masc}, beloved_{fem}] and words beginning with *nie-* [not/un-] at the edge of the verse: “niejeden” [not one], “niestała” [unstable] gives the impression of a very closed construction devoid of it. In addition, “zawsze” [always], which ends the first stanza and is repeated several more times later in the poem, contrasts with the gentle image of transience: “jak ślad łodzi pływającej” [like a trace of a floating boat], appearing at the end of the piece. The repetitiveness of “always” gradually loses its force in the course of the piece – it resounds

quite strongly in the farewell words of the lyrical “I,” but then, in the repetition in the female mouth, it takes on the tones of gentle grief, of serene sadness. Norwid’s sonnet thus illustrates a larger scale of emotion than Ackermann’s poem, uniform in its mood of despair. One can illustrate this observation with another aspect of the works. Happiness is an element of one person’s future in Norwid’s sonnet (“losy szczęście Ci wywróżą” [the fates will tell you happiness]), at the opposite extreme we have a vision of a contrasting nature: “zasłona przyszłości czarnych chmur nie wznieci” [the veil of the future will not raise black clouds]. In Ackermann’s work, the names of emotional states: “pleurs” from the first verse of the piece and “douleur” from the last verse turn out to be an internal rhyme, illustrating the constant tonality of the piece. We should note, however, that the quieting down in the middle stanza of a universal character is followed by a gesture that is also very abrupt and at the same time crucial for a piece about the “farewell to poetry.”

SINGING AND BROKEN LYRES

The reader of Ackermann’s poem waits until the beginning of the third stanza, until the words “brisant ma lyre,” to specify the situation of the farewell. This symbolic representation of the end of a poetic creation has been very popular in many epochs and in different national cultures. In the Polish tradition, the motif of abandoning or destroying the instrument, an attribute of the poet, gained its own significance in post-partition poetry. In French culture of the Romantic era, testimonies of the breaking of the lyre are associated with the dying poet, as in Lamartine’s work:

La lyre en se brisant jette un son plus sublime,
La lampe qui s’éteint tout à coup se ranime,
Et d’un éclat plus pur brille avant d’expirer¹⁶.

¹⁶ A. de LAMARTINE, “Le Poète mourant,” in: *Méditations poétiques*, Œuvres poétiques complètes, éd. M-F. Guyard, Paris 1963, p. 144. The work was translated into Polish by, among others, Franciszek Ksawery Godebski, Franciszek Salezy Dmochowski, Ludwik Kamiński. However, these are, according to the subtitles, “imitations” – in Godebski’s case the arrangement of the stanzas does not correspond to that of the original work. More accurate is Dmochowski’s translation, which renders these lines as follows: “Z miłszym, z szczytniejszym dźwiękiem, lutnia się roztrąca, / Na chwilę się rozjaśnia lampa konająca, / I czystsze nam światła przed zgonem użyczy” [With a kinder, with a nobler sound, the lute shatters, / For a moment the dying lamp brightens, / And it will lend us a purer light before death] (*Pisma wierszem*, Warszawa 1827, p. 118). Lamartine’s work also mentions, *inter alia*, the Aeolian harp as the poet’s instrument, and

The shattered lyre is thus meant to be the messenger of yet another poetically unique sound. Ackermann has also reached for this motif in another work. In the poem *La lyre d'Orphée* [*Orpheus' Lyre*], also included in the *Premières Poésies*, the eponymous object floats on water and is played by gusts of wind and waves of water. Through this music, the personification of spring arrives, and the bare banks of the river are covered in blossom. The poem ends with a reflection on the epoch contemporary to the poetess, flowing from the exclamation:

Ah! que nous sommes loin de ces temps de merveilles!
Les ondes, les rochers, les vents n'ont plus d'oreilles,
Les cœurs mêmes, les cœurs refusent de s'ouvrir,
Et la lyre en passant ne fait plus rien fleurir.

Central to the analysis of the poem *Adieux à la poésie* is here the motif of hearts that refuse to open up. The negative assessment of the human world and the human understanding of unhappiness, as well as of the possibility of spiritual understanding with another, is suggested in the phrases about “œil étranger qui sonde” and in the choice of vocabulary for describing the ways of human cognition – they point to the rational nature of the viewing: “compter,” “recevoir,” “sonder.” There is a slightly different semantic component in the sentence in *Pensées d'une solitaire*: “Le poète a d'abord été un initiateur; aujourd'hui il n'est plus qu'un écho.”¹⁷

The motif of the shattered lyre and the negative evaluation of the actions of others, present in Ackermann's texts mentioned above, in turn brings to mind another text by Norwid, the poem *Quidam*, in which Zofia warns Artemidor just before her death in this way:

Liry mi z sobą nie unieś, bo jęknie –
Podłyszają szpiegi, co się w lirze chowa,
Rozbiją na krzyż, że każda z strun pęknie,
Spadkami pękań tych wyrzekłszy słowa
Wszystkiego – co jest na świecie coś warte –
A ludzie patrzeć będą, jak ta mowa
Odleci w lazur, pierś mając rozdartą.
I jeszcze o drachm *złożą się parę*,
Czy też do Grecji szczątki jej doleca? –
(DW III, 282)

the role of symbolically depicted suffering in this passage is different from that mentioned by Ackermann: “Ma harpe fut souvent de larmes arrosée, / Mais les pleurs sont pour nous la céleste rosée; / Sous un ciel toujours pur le cœur ne mûrit pas.”

¹⁷ L. ACKERMANN, *Pensées d'une solitaire*, Paris 1903, p. 8.

Don't take the lyre with you because it will groan –
The spies will overhear what is hiding there,
They will smash it into a cross so that each string will break,
Each break will have uttered the words of
Everything – which is of value in the world –
And people will watch this speech
Flying off into the azure, with its breast being torn.
And they will still *bet a couple of drachmae*
If its remains will make it to Greece?–

A few lines later, Orpheus, among others, is mentioned in this flight. “Spies” play a similar role to the “foreign eye” in Ackermann’s poem – they are trying to reach it and hear what is hidden in the poetry – but in *Quidam* it is they who smash the lyre to extract this secret, whereas in the French author’s work it is the “poetess” herself who does so in an act of desperation. The people mentioned by Zofia understand nothing of the message coming from the lyre – they only see its external, superficial qualities. The theme of the distance travelled by the remains of the lyre, contemplated by the audience, resonates with the assessment of the weeping in Ackermann’s piece by strangers who are trying to “collect” and “count” the misfortune of the lyrical “I,” but there is no question of understanding. The situation of poetic inspiration and dream-like influence on the audience was represented by an earlier passage in *Quidam*, Zofia’s improvisation, in which the lyre also appears. The last stanza of its poetic work reads:

Bo inna *pojąć wzór* i, cało-dźwięków tworu
W po-za-jawie słuchając, nad światy,
Samemu kwiatem wzrość, ku prawdzie pierwowzoru,
A inna – wieniec wić – lub rwać kwiaty – –

Jak ja” –

For another woman is to *grasp the pattern* and,
listening to the whole-sound
Of creation beyond-day-dream, above the worlds,
To grow into a flower herself, towards the truth of the original,
And another – to weave a wreath – or to pluck flowers – –

Like me” –

Then the poetess puts down the lyre, but it still makes the sound of poetry:

– dodała wieszczka, kładąc lirę,

Głosem, co echa nie miał, lub nieszczerze,
Gdy strun ostatnie dźwięki, coraz letsze,
Strofę tę jeszcze powtarzały w wietrze:

“Bo inna pojąć *wzór* – i, cało-dźwięków tworu
W po-za-jawie słuchając, nad światy,
Samemu kwiatem rość, ku prawdzie pierwowzoru,
A inna – wieniec wić – lub rwać kwiaty” – –

Syn Aleksandra, bardzo zadziwiony
Patrzył, na Zofii postać niepodobną
Do siebie samej, gdy za nią te tony
Rzuconej liry, na ławę osobną,
Odrzękiwały jeszcze w cztery strony.
A postać wieszczki z nich rosnać się zdała,
Jakoby z kręgu fali poruszonej
I szła ku gościom, blednąc — przy tym drżała,
[...]

Drżenie zaś takie, że jest z wysilenia,
By drugim swego udzielić natchnienia
I podnieść masę słuchaczy ku sobie,
Szybko się innym udziela, [...].

(DW III, 209-210)

– added the bard, laying down her lyre,
With a voice that did not echo, or was insincere,
When the strings' last notes, growing ever lighter,
Still repeated the stanza in the wind:

“For another woman is to *grasp the pattern* and,
listening to the whole-sound
Of creation beyond-day-dream, above the worlds,
To grow into a flower herself, towards the truth of the original,
And another – to weave a wreath – or to pluck flowers – –
Like me” –

Aleksander's son, greatly amazed
Looked at Zofia's figure unlike
Herself, when behind her those tones
Of the lyre thrown, on a separate bench,
Were still reverberating in all four directions.
And the figure of the bard seemed to be growing from them,
As if from a circle of a moving wave

And was walking towards the guests, fading – trembling at the same time,
[...]
And such a trembling, as is from exertion,
To give to others its inspiration
And raise the mass of listeners towards itself,
Is quickly lent to others, [...].

The tones of the thrown lyre reverberate in all four directions, just as, in Zofia's previous depiction, the lyre will be broken into a cross. The passage speaks of "lending inspiration to others" and of "lifting the mass of listeners towards itself" – meanwhile, in the dream, people only observe and comment on the external possibilities of the sounds, without arriving at the content of the poetic message, which speaks of the most important values, just as in Ackermann's poem the suffering of one person remains a mystery to others. The instrument from Ackermann's piece *La lyre d'Orphée* in the modern era no longer has the power to make the world blossom. Zofia feels a lack in her poetry, which is similarly described – for her, the truth of the original is the poetry of Orpheus and Homer, she would like to blossom with such a flower, "cało-dźwięki tworzą" [the whole-sounds of creation] listening and maturing into her own poetic greatness.

TOPICS – CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, it must be said that Ackermann more than fulfils the intention announced in the title to bid farewell to poetry – her poem explains the reason for this parting and illustrates the very act of ending her poetic activity. It is worth emphasising what the French author understands by poetry. For her, being a poet means: "chanter, dire mes maux." This is a constant in her poetic consciousness¹⁸ – the only paradox is that, although she reveals in the opening piece of her

¹⁸ In her autobiography, Ackermann quotes a passage from a work written in 1830, refuting accusations that her pessimism is mimetic of the interests of the period, such as the thought of Arthur Schopenhauer.

If one looks for some kind of imitation in Ackermann's poetic work, one should look for its origins in the year 1829, in which she arrived in Paris and which she herself described as the moment of the "full bloom of Romanticism" in the French capital (L. Ackermann, *Ma vie*, p. V: "C'était en 1829, c'est-à-dire en pleine floraison romantique," written in Nice on 20 January 1874). These were at the same time the years of reading Shakespeare, Byron, Goethe and Schiller – in Ackermann's words, these authors opened up "a new poetic world" for her (*ibid.*, p. VI: "un nouveau monde poétique," written in Nice on 20 January 1874).

Premières Poésies that this is a task too difficult to bear, almost all of her mature work deals mainly with the theme of suffering¹⁹.

The reasons for the dramatic gesture seem to be twofold – not to deepen an ingrained sadness and not to risk being misunderstood by others. It is interesting how close some of Ackermann’s depictions situate themselves to another sonnet by Norwid, *Samotność* [*Loneliness*]. “Gdy dusza duszy pojąć, zrozumieć niezdolna” [When a soul is incapable of grasping, understanding another soul]²⁰ – this verse also summarises the French poetess’s understanding of human bonds. After all, she is describing an inability to understand the suffering of another human being. Norwid, however, points more to the burden of certain social conventions, to the “torments” of participating in life, of which the “feast,” the “song,” the “smile,” the “bustle” are manifestations, while the poetess necessarily experiences her suffering in solitude. The sonnet’s lyrical “I” chooses a state in which it experiences the much-desired silence (created both by the absence of the “outside” – impressions symbolising a social gathering, and the absence of its own voice – “the charm of silence I feel”) and in which it experiences true freedom.

The image of a man sitting at the gate of death, evoking pity with his miserable, helpless condition, contrasts with the rather violent gesture of the speaker in the poem, as if rushing to commit the final act: “I will go,” “smashing.” It is worth recalling at this point one of the poetess’s fragments collected in the volume *Pensées d’une solitaire*: “Quand le poète chante ses propres douleurs il doit avoir la note sobre. Les cris personnels déchirants ne sont pas faits pour la poésie. Comme la Niobé antique, elle doit avoir la grâce de la douleur.”²¹ The figure in the second stanza just resembles a sculptural representation, her image ends up static, staying at the threshold, frozen. The real subject of the work in Ackermann’s case is poetry, which could serve the purpose of expressing feelings, but is somehow

¹⁹ As Francisque Sarcey pointed out, quoting Ackermann’s analysed poem in its entirety in his article, it is in the songs of despair that the poet’s greatest commitment can be seen and this piece sets the tone for the entire volume (“Poètes contemporaines,” *Le XIXe siècle*, 25 August 1874). Contemporary scholar Elena Thuault describes the essence of Ackermann’s poetry as follows: “La souffrance physique ou morale, le gouffre/l’abîme, c’est-à-dire la chute et l’anéantissement hérités du thème de l’ange déchu des romantiques, et enfin la mort, avec la répétition du lexique « cercueils », « tombeaux », « tombe », constituent l’essence de ses thèmes, ainsi basée sur les douleurs et les épreuves qu’affronte l’Homme dans sa vie” (E. THUAULT, “Analyse critique de la poésie de Louise Ackermann,” in: *Les Galets de la mer: d’après l’œuvre de Louise Ackermann*, Paris 2015, p. 86).

²⁰ I am using the version compiled by Grażyna Halkiewicz-Sojak. This is another sonnet whose authorship was attributed to Norwid by Juliusz Gomulicki.

²¹ L. ACKERMANN, *Pensées d’une solitaire*, p. 21.

defective – it causes suffering for the sender, and the recipients it reaches are unable to fathom the mystery of the other person's misfortune.

Forgetfulness is shared by both persons of the lyrical situation in Norwid's sonnet: "pamięć o nas zginie" [the memory of us will perish]. Such a formulation at the end of a poem strongly maintained in the convention of the love lyric, with its topos concerning the description of female beauty, may represent the failure of similar poetic endeavours. Noteworthy is the addendum: "Piątek o 5 z rana" [Friday at 5 in the morning] – depicting in the sonnet the beloved in words about "jasność spojrzeń" [brightness of glances], about "tears," "dreams," and also mentioning heaven's gracious verdict for lovers, it is impossible not to remember the day on which Laura's beautiful eyes chained Petrarca – we have here a clear repetition of derivatives of the numeral "five." Petrarca's poetry was meant to save his beloved and her angelic face from oblivion – in Norwid's work, the foreshadowing of the "last" sonnet seems to correspond with a questioning of such an important role for this type of lyric.

CONCLUSION

Ackermann makes more references to poetry and the act of bidding farewell in her poem than Norwid does to the sonnet explicitly. The work as a whole, however, conveys more about his awareness of the formal conventions of the sonnet and the gestures of saying goodbye to his beloved than Ackermann expressed explicitly in the short piece. The poetess bids farewell to poetry with a single symbolic gesture – Norwid with the style of this entire poetic statement. Only traces of "the dark premonition of the end" connect the authors with late poetry, as understood by Legeżyńska, in the verses: "And the veil of the future will not raise the black clouds" and "And to sit at the thresholds of doom." Indeed, Norwid gives the last evidence of this poetic style in this work, while Ackermann rather transforms reflections on suffering, which does not allow her to be a poetess, into her poetic power.

However, the conducted comparative analysis did not fully convince of the possibilities of fruitful work on the juxtaposition of Norwid's poetry with the works of early French Romanticism. Ackermann's case is in fact unique – the author's late debut and reviews of her work falling in the years when literary criticism uses the concepts of "poetry" and "suffering" in new ways in comparison to the Romantic era are circumstances that make it possible to speak of her, as one critic did, as a *poète moderne*. There is a striking resemblance between the idea of *Adieux à la poésie* and the message of Charles-Marie Leconte de Lisle's work *Les Montreurs*, from the volume *Poèmes barbares*, published a year earlier than

Ackermann's *Contes et Poésies*, widely regarded as a step away from the concept of poetry as an expression of feelings. The reason for this shift is a reluctance to put on public display the feelings that torment the "I":

Dans mon orgueil muet, dans ma tombe sans gloire,
Dussé-je m'engloutir pour l'éternité noire,
Je ne te vendrai pas mon ivresse ou mon mal,

The poet does not want to "mendier ta pitié grossière" [beg for the common pity] of a casual audience and the future appears to him in similar colours as in the case of Ackermann – as "l'éternité noire" [black eternity]. We have thus returned to a consideration of the convergence of Norwid's thought with the debate about poetry in the second half of the 19th century.

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KIEDY DEBIUT JEST POŻEGNANIEM. *OSTATNI MÓJ SONET* NORWIDA I *ADIEUX À LA POÉSIE* LOUISE ACKERMANN

Streszczenie

W artykule przedstawiono interpretację porównawczą utworów: *Ostatni mój sonet* Cypriana Norwida i *Adieux à la poésie* Louise Ackermann. Autorów dzieli płeć i narodowość, a także styl ar-

tystyczny oraz krajowa i europejska recepcja, ich wiersze powstały w odstępie czterech lat. Te dwa utwory okazują się interesującym materiałem do badania z powodu ich jednoczesnego debiutanckiego i „późnego” charakteru: opisano w nich gesty pożegnania z poezją w ogóle i w pewnym jej wymiarze. Obecność samotniczej egzystencji „ja” lirycznego w wierszu Ackermann oraz jednostajnie smutnego nastroju w tym utworze, a relacji między „ja” i „ty” lirycznym w utworze Norwida oraz większej skali emocji prowadzi do wniosków, że tym, co łączy omawiane dzieła, jest motyw ludzkiej obojętności wobec uczuć innych i niezrozumienia ich poezji przez odbiorców. U Ackermann dominuje lęk przed tym brakiem współodczuwania, Norwid zaś uwypukla problem konwencji, które uniemożliwiają prawdziwą komunikację. Udowodniono zatem hipotezę, że tym, co w istocie żegnają w swoich debiutach twórcy, są tylko pewne właściwości poezji typowe dla liryki im współczesnej (ekspresja uczuć osoby mówiącej w wierszu, konwencje sonetowej liryki miłosnej), a utwory te stanowią przejście do innego etapu ich poetyckiej kreacji.

Słowa kluczowe: Louise Ackermann (1813-1890); parnasizm; debiut; pożeganie; sonet; lira.

WHEN EVERY DEBUT IS A FAREWELL.
MY LAST SONNET BY NORWID AND *ADIEUX À LA POÉSIE*
BY LOUISE ACKERMANN

Summary

This article offers a comparative interpretation of two poems: *Ostatni mój sonet* [*My Last Sonnet*] by Cyprian Norwid and *Adieux à la poésie* by Louise Ackermann. Although these two authors differ in terms of sex, nationality, artistic style as well as the national and European reception of their work, their two poems are only four years apart. Both prove to be interesting material for study due to their simultaneous “debut” and “late” character – they describe gestures of bidding farewell to poetry in some specific aspect and in general. The lonely existence of the lyrical “I” in Ackermann’s poem and its sombre mood can be juxtaposed with the relation between “I” and “you” and the increasing scale of emotions in the lyric by Norwid, leading to the conclusion that both works elaborate on the theme of human indifference to the feelings of others, and on the misunderstanding of both authors’ poems by their readers. What dominates in the case of Ackermann is the fear of lack of empathy, while Norwid emphasises the problem of conventions that hinder real communication. What this proves is that in these “debuts” the two authors bid farewell only to certain properties of poetry characteristic of the period’s lyricism (expression of the feelings of the lyrical subject and the convention of sonnet-like love lyricism), while the two poems themselves open passages to different stages of poetic creation.

Keywords: Louise Ackermann; Parnassianism; debut; farewell; sonnet; lyre.

MAGDALENA KOWALSKA – PhD in literary studies, author of the books: *Prowansja w pismach polskich romantyków* (2015) and *Litanic Verse III: Francia* (2018), employed at the Institute of Literary Studies at the Nicolaus Copernicus University; lena_k@wp.pl.