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COMMUNITY AND HISTORY, OR MONEY AND BLOOD  
ECONOMY IN NORWID'S VADE-MECUM

Są to rzeczy gorzkie, może głębokie, może dziwne – – niezawodnie potrzebne!  
[These are bitter things, perhaps profound, perhaps strange – – infallibly necessary!]  
C. Norwid, Letter to H. Merzbach, PW IX, 228.

Mówią, że Postęp nas bogaci co wiek;  
– Bardzo mi to jest miło i przyjemnie –  
Niestety! co dnia mniej cieszę się ze mnie,  
Śmiertelny człowiek!  
[They say, the Progress make us richer every century;  
– I am very pleased and delighted –  
Alas! every day I am less happy with myself,  
Mortal man!]  
(*Sieroctwo* [Orphanhood ] PW II, 42-43)

Literature allows us to discover more than just one sense of money<sup>1</sup>.

Already the Enlightenment critics described the Romantic person as *homo metaphisicus*. This is also how we tend to perceive Romanticism today – as an epoch that sees the goal of human endeavours (including intellectual ones) in the extra-mortal, immaterial dimension of existence. The problem is that, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, economics was (or at least tried to be) promoted to the rank of a new metaphysics, which, from an idealist (and other) point of view, was an insult to “first philosophy”. However, the economic and social conditions of the century meant that, contrary to anti-materialist declarations, money strongly attracted the

<sup>1</sup> J. HÖRISCH, *Orzeł czy reszka. Poezja pieniądza*, transl. J. Kita-Huber, S. Huber, Kraków 2010, p. 52.

attention of the Romantics, and the critique of capitalism even took on the character of a “Romantic pose”<sup>2</sup>. Philosophers and political scientists have repeatedly shared with literary scholars their surprising observation that

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<sup>2</sup> See M. A. CICHOCKI, „Wieczna gra możliwości – rzecz o politycznym romantyzmie niemieckim,” *Nowa Res Publica* 1998, Issue 7-8 (118-119), July-August, pp. 42-44.

The author of the publication writes about the German Romantics, describing them as “intransigent opponents of free trade, the capitalist economy and the economic supremacy of the bourgeoisie”: “in their conceptions of the state, the theories of class society, the community of property and the control of power over people’s economic activity constantly recur” (ibid., p. 43). Although the critique of capitalism and industrialisation reached different degrees in different German thinkers, and the prescriptions they gave were quite different, the traumatisation of the image of the economic reality of the time became a common feature of their statements and works. A similar regularity can be observed on the Polish ground. See Z. STEFANOWSKA, „Romantyczny stosunek do finansów publicznych” and E. NAWROCKA, „Buchalteria i duchowość (Słowacki i pieniądze),” in: *Pieniądz w literaturze i teatrze, Materiały z sympozjum “Temat pieniądza w literaturze i teatrze”*. Uniwersytet Gdański, Gdańsk 17-18 stycznia 2000, ed. J. Bachórz, Sopot 2000, pp. 68-73 and 74-88; K. CZECZOT, *Romantyczny antykapitalizm*, ed. M. Pospiszyl, Warszawa 2018.

On the Polish literary scene, already at the dawn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, money became an object of interest for Maurycy Mochnacki, who was passionate about mineralogy and geognosy. He saw gold as a kind of underground, fascinating and at the same time diabolically dangerous *primum mobile*:

“How many times have we cursed and blessed these powers, these telluric potentials? – Precious metal from the abyss, beaten and marked with an inscription, is it not the *primum mobile* and at the same time the brake of everything in the world? Has it not moved the earth’s property and does it not move it from hand to hand in a rapid succession? Does it not change all relations between people and nations? Has it not set in motion things that would never have moved from their place? This metal, swift as a vision, has bribed the ship [i.e. disturbed peace – R.G.-S.], shaken virtue, inflamed all desires, cleared away all obstacles, compared everything to the soil, to the mud from which it had been taken and purified; it has disappointed all temptations, shattered the charm of all allure; cooled down the ardour, which no clink of silver or gold can replenish! It has conquered the reason of wise and elder men and submitted them into its obedience – from heaven far into the abyss, into the earth it has cast them. It has sharpened the wit, perfected accounting, but it has conquered the power of the spirit”. M. MOCHNACKI, „O literaturze polskiej w wieku XIX wieku,” in: M. MOCHNACKI, *Rozprawy literackie*, ed. M. Strzyżewski, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków 2000, pp. 190-191.

Believing in “subterranean astrology”, i.e. in “sorcerous, moral and chemical relationships, in the affinity, unbreakable by any power, of the inorganic nature with the organic nature, in the relationships and affinities of stones, metals with thinking, and even more, contemplating beings,” Mochnacki introduced money (gold) into Romantic anthropology (this was justified by, inter alia, the theory of universal affinities). This early Romantic “anthropology of money” is worthy of attention. Many of the Polish critic’s remarks anticipate the observations (e.g. on the mobility of money and the acceleration of the pace of life caused by it) made in Georg Simmel’s book *Philosophy of Money* (1900), which was almost a century younger, as well as Freud’s

In their anti-capitalist rhetoric, the political Romantics closely resemble Karl Marx. As Ernst Hanisch ironically pointed out, the difference between Adam Müller and Marx is that the former did not yet know the concept of added value<sup>3</sup>. Apart from that, there are only similarities: the alienation of the individual and his work, the objectification of human relations, the mechanisation of life, the despotism of money, the egoism of profit, the reduction of everything – including human life – to economic value alone<sup>4</sup>.

The drama of the direct dependence of human life on money, already in its elementary, biological dimension, right up to the prospects of development and fulfilment, also became one of the first discoveries of the orphaned Norwid upon his entry to life<sup>5</sup>. This problem is clearly present in the poet's early works, for example in the lyric *Sieroty* [*Orphans*]:

Ja widziałem młodzieńca, co w okropnej nędzy  
 Dniem i nocą pracował, by dostać pieniędzy,  
 Pieniądzy! które swoim przeważnym ciężeniem  
 Przytrzymały jego matkę na tym świecie.  
 (*Sieroty* [*Orphans*]; PWSz I, 5).

[I saw a young man who, in abject poverty,  
 Worked day and night to obtain money,  
 Money! which, by its prevalent gravity,  
 Kept his mother in this world.]

Norwid also linked money with orphans' plight and tears in the satirical juvenile short story *Łaskawy opiekun* [*The Kindly Guardian*], whose title character, Mr

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symbolic associations (linking money to faeces and mud). Mochnacki's text is simultaneously a *signum temporis* of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; in Dante's work, the thing that "moves the sun and the stars" was God's omni-love – the man of the "mercantile and industrial age" discovers that money is the source of the world's movement. This theme would recur many times in the works and letters of the Polish Romantics.

For a discussion of Mochnacki's critique of economics, see L. BIERNACKI, "Zabić ministra skarbu," in: *Pieniądz w literaturze i teatrze*, pp. 89-105.

<sup>3</sup> Added value, in Marx's concept, refers to the increase in the value of goods in the process of production or provision of services. The source of added value is human labour.

<sup>4</sup> M. A. CICHOCKI, p. 43.

<sup>5</sup> The young Cyprian's interest in the subject of money may also have been aroused to some extent by the fact that his father, Jan, was involved in various activities related to the management of landed estates and finances, among others, he served as a plenipotentiary of the Radziwiłł Land Trust, and later working for the Bank Receipts Commission and the Government Revenue and Treasury Commission.

Drażkowski, the dishonest and cunning “guardian” of Bartłomiej Socha, seizes the orphaned ward’s funds (the son of his deceased treasurer) and then, with the help of a cynical ploy, gets rid of the boy from his home:

– Przyjaźń przyjaźnią, a interes interesem – wyrzekł po chwili pan Drażkowski [...] – [...] Wychowańcze mój, wiesz o tym dobrze, że dałem ci naukę i wszelakie ciała wygody, chociaż szczupła suma od twych rodziców przeznaczona zupełnie na to nie wystarczyła...

Tu Bartłomiej uczuł się w przykrym położeniu, pułkownik zaś odkasznął i zamykając biurko tak dalej zaczął mówić:

– Pieniądze są niczym!... miedź, srebro, złoto, nawet listy zastawne nabyć można z łatwością, ale piękne imię i szlachectwo to są dopiero klejnoty! Synu mój – rzekł opiekun zapalając się niespodzianie – synu mój! ja wyszukałem w papierach twojego ojca, że cała rodzina Sochy szlachtą była od dawna!! (*Łaskawy opiekun* [*The Kindly Guardian*]; DW VII, 29-30).

[– Friendship is friendship and business is business – Mr Drażkowski asserted after a while [...].

– [...] My ward, you know well that I have given you education and secured all bodily comforts, though the meagre sum allocated by your parents was not at all sufficient for this...

Here, Bartłomiej found himself in an unpleasant position, while the colonel coughed and, closing his desk, began to speak:

– Money is nothing!... copper, silver, gold, even bills of exchange can be acquired easily, but a beautiful name and nobility are just jewels! My son – said the guardian, unexpectedly with fervour – my son! I have found in your father’s papers that the whole Socha family have been nobles for a long time!]

*Łaskawy opiekun* is a great, penetrating satire on avarice, hypocrisy and materialism, going hand in hand with parochialism and a crippled mind and heart. Drażkowski’s portrait, blending the features of both of Norwid’s own “kindly guardians”: Ksawery Dybowski (eloquently referred to as “the Rich Man”), known for his financial prudence, and Colonel Michał Sobieski. It is a study of greed that is almost Molièrean in its accuracy:

Powierzchność pana Drażkowskiego, zwłaszcza kiedy tenże kontrakt jaki zawiera, nie jest bardzo obiecująca, przy otwieraniu jednakże szkatuły dają się spostrzeżeć na jego licach skryte jakieś pomysły i pewien rodzaj powolności, która nigdy biegłych strategików nie odstępkuje. (DW VII, 16)

[The superficiality of Mr Drażkowski, especially when he concludes a contract is not very promising, however, when opening the money chest one can see on his face some concealed ideas and a kind of slowness which never abandons skilful strategists.]

[...] zaczął myśleć z zapałem o poprawie losu swego Bartłomiejka, do czego jeszcze prócz kobiet zniewalało go także i owe grosiwo, które nieboszczyk Socha wraz z swoim synalem oddał mu w opiekę. (DW VII, 14)

[...] he began to think with eagerness about improving the fate of his Bartłomiej, to which, in addition to women, he was also compelled by that penny which the deceased Socha, together with his son, had given him in his care.]

[...] pułkownik tymczasem nie przestał myśleć o jego przyszłości, a ilekroć razy zajrzał do szkatuły i dostrzegł depozyt nieboszczyka Sochy, tym większym jeszcze ogniem podniecał swój zamiar i tym bardziej pragnął wyświadczyć przysługę wychowankowi (DW VII, 26)<sup>6</sup>.

[...] the colonel, meanwhile, did not cease to think about his future, and whenever he looked into the chest and saw the deposit of the dead Socha, he was excited even more fervently in his intention, and was all the more anxious to do his ward a favour.]

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<sup>6</sup> The Drążkowskis' table talks revolve solely around "business" and "capital," with the house's regular guest and companion being a merchant who used to fall asleep holding a bag of money under his pillow:

Po chwili pan Drążkowski położył książkę na stole, ziewnął, uściskał Edwarda i zadał mu pytanie: „Wiele kosztuje edukacja syna, kiedy dobry ojciec przez lat cztery po sto dukatów corocznie na nią wydaje ?”

[...] – Prawda jest, słuszną prawdą, przy pracy i uwadze wszystko z siebie uczynić można... Wieluż to ja znam takich, mości dobrodzieju, co w młodości swojej zupełnie nic nie mieli i tylko z łaski żyli, a teraz co za domy! co za kapitały! co za spekulacje!... (*Łaskawy opiekun* [*Gracious Guardian*], DW VII, 19).

[After a while, Mr. Drążkowski put the book on the table, yawned, hugged Edward, and asked him the question, 'How much does it cost to educate a son when a good father spends a hundred ducats each year for four years on it?'

(...) – True, it is true that with work and attention one can make everything of oneself... I know many such people, your grace, who in their youth had absolutely nothing and lived only by grace, and now: what houses! what capitals! what speculations!...]

The theme of the seizure of orphan funds would return in Norwid's works (a Knight of Malta!) even years later. In 1865, in a letter to Konstancja Górską, the poet compares Warszawa to such an orphan robbed of his property:

Jest to wychowanka, sierota z wielkiego rodu, zmieniona na popychadło domowe przez opiekunów raz wraz się przemieniających i doprowadzających dziecię do obłąkania, aby potem w szpitalu wariatów zamknąć, za idiotę ogłosić i nakazać na intencję jej wyzdrowienia oficjalne pacierze, a tymczasem fortuną sieroty podzielić się (Letter to K. Górską, DW XII, 385).

[This is an orphan girl from a great family, turned into a domestic pushover by her guardians, who constantly change and make the child insane, in order to lock her up in a lunatic asylum, declare her an idiot and order official prayers for her recovery, while in the meantime share the orphan's fortune.]

The young Norwid also realised very quickly that the artist is entangled in the snares of the mechanisms of supply and demand. A testimony to the moral dilemmas and struggles of the Romantic soul with the temptations of a venal world is his youthful fantasy entitled *Chwila myśli* [*A Moment of Thought*]<sup>7</sup>. In this fragment of Romantic biography (alluding by its title to Słowacki's *Godziny myśli* [*Hours of Thought*] and Mickiewicz's *Dziady* [*Forefathers' Eve*] Part IV, a record of a painful and shocking initiatory experience comes to the fore – the unmasking of the hidden, financial mechanisms of reality and the rebellion against such a world<sup>8</sup>:

## MŁODZIENIEC

*po chwili*

Takie to widziadła  
 Ułomność ludzka przed oczyma kreśli –  
 Pieniądz króluje – bogdajby przepadła  
 Jego wszechmocność! a jednakże trzeba,  
 Rozéwiertowawszy godne człeka życie,  
 Sprzedać je na wpół. [...]

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<sup>7</sup> Also of note is the metaphorical use of “accounting” in the excerpt of *Dobrzy ludzie* [*Good People*], written almost simultaneously with *Chwila myśli* [*A Moment of Thought*]:

Często z rozpaczą słucham, jak obecność taje,  
 Kroplami chwil upada w odmęt zapomnienia,  
 A człowiek Bóg wie komu życie zaprzędaje,  
 [...]  
 I szydzi z rozrzutników, co marnują grosze,  
 A nie wie, że na groszach, tych liczmanach życia,  
 Nie kruszec, ale troski ważyć, i rozkosze,  
 I uprawiać się powinien w rachunkowość życia.

[Often with despair I listen to the presence thawing,  
 Drops of moments falling into the abyss of oblivion,  
 And man God knows to whom sells his life,  
 [...]

And he scoffs at spendthrifts who waste pennies,  
 And he does not know that with pennies, those chips of life,  
 Not metal, but concerns and pleasures should be weighed,  
 And he should practise the accounting of life.]

(*Dobrzy ludzie* [*Good People*], DW V, 21).

<sup>8</sup> The attitude of the deeply believing Norwid to financial matters was shaped from the very beginning (right until the end) by “biblical economy”.

Dopóty pisać, aż brzęknie pod piórem  
Sprzedany wyraz – aż zabrząkną chórem  
Wszystkie stronice – i głowa, jak mina  
Ciężarna złotem, wesprze się na ręce.

[...]

Pisać więc, pisać i frymarzyć mową,  
Myśli jak bydło przedać całym stadem,  
[...] zapomnieć nieba

Dła worka groszy. [...]

Potrzeba jeszcze, póki serce żyje,  
Sprzedać je światu za kilka srebrników!

(*Chwila myśli [A Moment of Thought]*, DW V, 13-14)<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Norwid's somewhat later *Wigilia [Christmas Eve]* (1848) recalls the scene of temptation in the desert described by St. Matthew (Matt 4:1-11), in which an evil spirit urges the fasting Jesus to transform stone into bread. Here, these satanic temptations concerning hunger and possession of goods gain Satan a new, modernised name: Profit.

Za odległe gdzieś rzeczy –  
*Dziś* włosienie kaleczy,  
A już zorze jedwabią się z dała –  
Szatan przybiegł i prawi:  
“Oto ogon mam pawi,  
Cały z ognia, co słońce zapala.  
Przeto – nie pość już więcój,  
Pokarm stracisz zwierzęcy,  
Młode Jutro zamorzysz uściskiem...”

.....

– Idź precz, diable, co kamień  
Panu dałeś – i „zamień  
W chleb” wołałeś – nazowiesz się *Zyskiem*.

(*Wigilia [Christmas Eve]*, DW IV, 336).

[For distant things somewhere –  
*Today* hurts with hair-shirts,  
And already the auroras are glowing like silk from far away –  
Satan has come and preaches:

“Behold, I have a peacock's tail,  
All made of fire that kindles the sun.  
Therefore – do not fast anymore,  
You will lose your animal food,  
You will stifle young Morrow with a grip...”

.....

– Go away, devil, who gave stone  
To the Lord – and cried out “turn it

## YOUNG MAN

*after a while*

These are the sights  
The human frailty draws before the eyes –  
Money reigns supreme – may be gone  
Its omnipotence! and yet one must,  
Having quartered a dignified human life,  
Sell it in half. [...]

Keep writing until the sold word  
Clinks under your pen – until all the pages  
Clink in a choir – and the head, like a mine  
Pregnant with gold, supports itself on an arm.  
[...]  
So write, write and barter with speech,  
Sell thought like cattle with the whole herd,  
[...] forget the sky  
For a bag of pennies. [...]  
What is needed yet, while the heart still lives,  
Is to sell it to the world for a few pieces of silver!

In the late 1840s, it is no longer only his own experiences as an orphan and poverty that drive Norwid's reflections on money. The global crisis at the dawn of the Spring of Nations becomes a collective experience. This was probably also the time of Norwid's reading of Proudhon's writings, his essay *Qu'est-ce que la propriété?*<sup>10</sup>

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Into the bread"– you will be called *Profit*.]

Thus, already Norwid's juvenilia and works from the late 1840s reveal the diabolic nature of money, its destructive influence on human life (misery, depriving man of spiritual autonomy, detachment from concern for spiritual goods and salvation). With astonishing perceptiveness, the young artist notices that money replaces and sterilises other symbols, even God himself, imitates the religious experience of the Absolute, placing itself at the centre. "Profit" becomes an earthly god, a synonym for a satanic name.

Disagreeing with such an order of the world, the young Norwid charted a path of spiritual independence for himself. In the poem *Pióro* [*My Quill Pen*] (PWsz I, 49), he formulated a manifesto of creativity free from any material and financial entanglements, and remained faithful to it until his death in an asylum. He never chained himself to any "hat" with a golden buckle.

<sup>10</sup> It included the famous phrase: "Property is theft". In Proudhon's view, all property was legitimised solely by labour.



and the famous *Philosophy of Poverty*<sup>11</sup> published in 1846, which the young poet must have known, if only through Edmund Chojecki, his close friend and, at the same time, collaborator and ardent follower of this French socialist-anarchist. Proudhon advocated an economic revolution based on the idea of free credit and a system of mutual aid<sup>12</sup>. However, the revolutionary nature of his *Philosophy of Poverty* lay not only in the boldness of his financial ideas; above all, the book radically repositioned the economic sciences, giving them the place of the old metaphysics – the “first philosophy,” sometimes also called “theology,” capturing existence through the prism of its first, divine principles and causes:

[...] the science of economics, the purest, the most [...] intelligible of all sciences, [...] has a *progressive* character: this is the new thesis that makes this science a logic or metaphysics *in concreto* and radically changes the basis of the old philosophy. In other words, I regard the science of economics as the objective form of the realisation of metaphysics; it is metaphysics in action, metaphysics in retrospect; and whoever deals with the laws of labour and exchange – is really a metaphysician. [...]

The work of man is a further continuation of the work of God who, in creating all beings, acts outside the realm of the eternal laws of reason. The science of economics is thus, by force of necessity, simultaneously a theory of ideas, a natural theology and psychology<sup>13</sup>.

The explosion of publications on money in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century was a consequence of the social reality of the time. During Norwid’s lifetime, there were as many as seven major crises in the global market, of which the following were particularly acute: the crisis at the beginning of the Spring of Nations (1847), the first global crisis (1857), the crisis after the American Civil War (1866), the most serious and longest crisis of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in 1873 (i.e. after the *Vademecum* cycle had already been written) and the crisis of 1882 which started in

<sup>11</sup> P. J. PROUDHON, „System sprzeczności ekonomicznych, czyli filozofia nędzy,” in: P. J. PROUDHON, *Wybór pism*, Vol. I, introduction by J. Garewicz, Warszawa 1974.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, N. FERREIRA, “Crédit et monnaie sociale chez P. J. Proudhon (1809-1865),” *Revue de philosophie économique* 2011, Issue 1 (Vol. 12), pp. 91-116.

Faced with repeated crises caused by shortages of gold stocks, Proudhon proposed a monetary reform combined with the contractual organisation of bank credit and workers’ associations to achieve a new organisation of society. In 1849, he founded the “bank of exchange”, which then became the “bank of the people” – a privileged instrument that could reverse the relationship between capital and labour through reciprocal and gratuitous credit, the abolition of currency (and interest in money and its replacement by “vouchers” or “revolving coupons”) and the generalisation of the bill of exchange.

<sup>13</sup> P. J. PROUDHON, „System sprzeczności ekonomicznych, czyli filozofia nędzy,” pp. 193-194.

France<sup>14</sup>. The crises thus recurred periodically, approximately every 10 years<sup>15</sup>, becoming a noticeable and painfully experienced phenomenon in the reality of that century.

The economic problem was particularly acute in the formative years of Norwid's *Vade-mecum*, when the author of this poetic cycle himself was also in dire financial straits (the inability to publish the elaborately prepared collection compounded his material anguish). In 1866, after the Civil War<sup>16</sup>, a wave of massive recession swept across America and Europe, considered the beginning of the end of the Second French Empire<sup>17</sup>. It was its dramatic effects that Marx showed in the first volume of his *Capital*<sup>18</sup> (Volume 2 of this work was published after the subsequent crisis of the 1870s). The title character of this seminal work became money. In a world marked by the wealth of the capitalists and the misery of the uncounted multitudes of people, money was promoted to the role of the protagonist of economic concepts as well as political and social theories. The question of the just distribution of profit has become one of the most relevant and pressing issues.

*Capital* constitutes an important, though obviously very distant, even polar distant (in the ideological sense) and thus in no way related, historical context for Norwid's *Vade-mecum*. What is striking, however, is the temporal coincidence of the two works: in the case of *Vade-mecum* – theyears 1865-66, while the first edition of Volume 1 of Marx's *Capital* was published in 1867. For this reason

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<sup>14</sup> See W. MORAWSKI, *Kronika kryzysów gospodarczych*, Warszawa 2003, pp. 55-82.

The crisis of 1873 made a particularly strong impression on his contemporaries. Karl Marx deliberately delayed work on the second volume of *Capital* in order to incorporate the insights from this economic catastrophe.

<sup>15</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, along with industrialisation, the mechanism of a regular 10-12 year business cycle took shape, involving not only finance, but also individual branches of production. This basic cycle was first described in 1862 by the French economist Clement Juglar and bears his name. See W. MORAWSKI, p. 10.

<sup>16</sup> See W. MORAWSKI, pp. 65-69.

<sup>17</sup> However, the trigger of the economic collapse, according to experts, was not so much the Civil War as the end of several armed conflicts in Europe. In France, the problems associated with the crisis were further exacerbated by the crop failure of 1867. The French had expected the Paris World Exposition, which opened the same year, to improve the economic situation, but its impact on the economy proved superficial. The real blow to the Second Empire and the beginning of its end came with the collapse of the Credit Mobilier investment bank. One of the socio-political effects of this European crisis was the strengthening of the position of the First International (founded in 1864). See *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> See K. MARX, *Das Kapital. Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, Hamburg 1867.

alone, it is impossible not to mention the German economist when reading Norwid's *magnum opus*.

The first part of *Capital* (referred to by the author as “economic abomination”<sup>19</sup>) was devoted to a meticulous analysis of the process of production and circulation of commodities and their exchange into a “concrete and clinking being”<sup>20</sup>. It showed the development of the “monetary form” and its “adherence” to the articles of exchange (in other words, how the “commodity-money” acquires a usevalue, how the coin becomes a “sign of value”), and then the various stages of circulation, the intertwined metamorphoses of commodities into money (and vice versa) and the *dramatis personae* involved in this spectacle (the seller, the money and the buyer). Marx noted that the fundamental feature of money is constant movement:

In the first half of its circulation, the commodity exchanges places with money. Thus, its utilitarian form passes from the sphere of circulation to that of consumption. Its place is taken by the form of its value, i.e. its monetary mask. The second half of the circulation is not carried out by the commodity in its own skin, but in its golden skin<sup>21</sup>;  
[...] circulation continues to extract money<sup>22</sup>.

In the following chapters, the author's attention was drawn to the mass of circulating money and commodities, the interdependence of the movement of prices, the mass of commodities and the speed of the circulation of money (i.e. the laws of trade), and the process of “solidifying” money into treasure. These analyses, supported by mathematical calculations, were accompanied by accurate observations on the influence of money on social life, on its ability to invade even the spiritual sphere and to blur (erase) the boundaries between the *sacred* and the *profane*:

Circulation becomes a giant social crucible into which everything falls, only to emerge from it as a monetary crystal. Not even the relics of saints can resist this alchemy, much less the more subtle *res sacrosanctae, extra commercium hominum* [sacred things that are not subject to trade]. Just as all qualitative differences between commodities are obliterated in money, so money, for its part, like a radical leveller, obliterates all differences<sup>23</sup>;

<sup>19</sup> F. WHEEN, *Marks. Kapital. Biografia*, transl. P. Laskowski, Warszawa 2007, p. 31.

<sup>20</sup> K. MARKS, *Kapitał. Krytyka ekonomii politycznej*, Vol. I: *Proces wytwarzania kapitału*, transl. from German [no name of the translator – R.G.-S.], 3<sup>rd</sup>ed., Warszawa 1950, p. 117. The first Polish edition of *Capital* was published in Leipzig in 1884.

<sup>21</sup> K. MARKS, p. 121.

<sup>22</sup> K. MARKS, p. 119.

<sup>23</sup> K. MARKS, p. 139.

[...] money knows no bounds [...]”<sup>24</sup>.

What interested Marx most was the way in which money was transformed into capital, the creation of profit and the process of materialisation of human labour in commodities (exchangeable for money). In the German economist’s view, money became the materialisation of human labour *in abstracto*<sup>25</sup>; the mere ability to work without being able to sell it, to monetise it, on the other hand, lost all value<sup>26</sup>. Finally, the author exposed the carefully hidden secret of the formation of profit – he reduced its mechanism to the “innumerable thefts of worker’s time”<sup>27</sup>. Suggestively, yet at the same time extremely factual, he also showed the process of dehumanisation in the system of wage labour. Complementing the theory were horrific images of exploitation and misery, of physical and spiritual degeneration. To its contemporaries *Capital* explicitly showed the torment of overwork and unemployment, premature death, the brutal lawlessness of the capitalists, the calculating nature of the rentiers and usurers, the cunning of the “stock market wolves”<sup>28</sup>. The book mercilessly exposed the mechanisms of the formation of the “modern bankocracy” (banking financiers), unscrupulously driving successive states into public debt in order to then exert influence over economic policy and even shape the political system with this tool. Examples of financial predation and savagery prompted Marx to even formulate the ironic, parodic commandment of greed: “Accumulate, accumulate! Thus preaches Moses and the prophets!”<sup>29</sup>.

Marx exposed the primacy of economic-structural solutions in modern society, and showed that capitalism degrades not only things but also people, reducing them to the status of commodities (buying the worker’s time), destroying their dignity and opportunities for self-fulfilment. He called commodities “fetishes”, poverty – the “violation of the human spirit”, the multiplication of capital – the “dispossession” of human beings, and capitalism – the “religion of sensual lusts”.

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<sup>24</sup> K. MARKS, p. 140.

<sup>25</sup> K. MARKS, p. 150.

<sup>26</sup> Marx quoted Sismondi: “The capability to work is nothing if it is not sold”. K. MARKS, p. 184.

<sup>27</sup> “Profit” was the “surplus” from extending the working hours of employees beyond 6 hours. In this way, the worker became a force producing other people’s wealth, a machine for producing “added value.” “The labour of the poor man is a rich man’s mine,” wrote Marx.

<sup>28</sup> K. MARKS, p. 306.

<sup>29</sup> K. MARKS, p. 641.

The “original sin” of humanity for Marx was the primitive accumulation, i.e. the first accumulation of wealth by selected social groups, which entailed the perpetual misery of some and the skyrocketing, even obscene, wealth of others.

One of the most important observations, however, was that in the system of the capitalist economy, man begins to be ruled by “the creation of his own hands”<sup>30</sup> – money. Of course, *Capital* was not just an economic study; it also formulated a new social philosophy.

The concentration of the collective attention of the societies and thinkers of the time on money must have influenced the character of *Vade-mecum*. The global problems of the age and Norwid’s personal economic drama are reflected, as if in a mirror, in the poet’s letters from the 1860s, in which the subject of money, mainly his own, is extensively discussed:

Tu już zachodzi zwykle kwestia *zdrowia – lub kapitału*, czyli rzeczy, która dziś, tyle razy ze zdrowiem na niekorzyść, nie zaś na korzyść onego zdrowia – jedno znaczy. A kiedy się to tam odmieni? kiedy?... (Letter to A. Cieszkowski, DW XII, 61).

[And this already refers to the question of *health – or capital*, that is, the thing which today, so many times means something detrimental to health and not beneficial to it. And when will it change? when?...]

Dla nas [...] trzeba, aby człowiek miał zarazem geniusz Horacego, mądrość Solona, talent Salvatora-Rosy, obywatelstwo Cyclerona, zdrowie centaury, piękność dyskobola greckiego, anegdoty i pogadanki Radziwiłła Panie Kochanku – i pieniądze, pieniądze bankierskie!! – (List do A. Cieszkowskiego PWsz IX, 164).

[For us [...] it is necessary to simultaneously have the genius of Horace, the wisdom of Solon, the talent of Salvator-Rosa, the citizenship of Cicero, the health of a centaur, the beauty of a Greek discobolus, the anecdotes and chatter of Radziwiłł “My Beloved Sir” – and money, banker’s money!!! –]

Already in the early 1860s, Norwid wrote to Joanna Kuczyńska about his “liche interesy finansowe” [meagre financial interests] (DW XII,15), complaining about the lack of any “*realne* stanowisko” [*real* position] (DW XII, 21): “bardzo mam wiele ciężarów na biednych siłach moich” [I have many burdens on my poor shoulders] (DW XII, 113). Indebted to August Cieszkowski for about one and a half thousand francs, he promised to repay this debt in the unspecified future. He made desperate plans to repay this loan, which was beyond his means, from a tiny pension paid to him from the interest on the capital deposited in a Paris bank by his cousin Michał Kleczkowski (PWsz IX, 296). At the same time, he owed 600 francs to Joanna Kuczyńska (“nigdy nie pomnę, abym raptem znalazł się gorzej” [I can never say that I suddenly found myself worse off] Letter to J. Kuczyńska,

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<sup>30</sup> K. MARKS, p. 670.

DW XII, 534). Count Ksawery Branicki rushed to his aid (Letter to K. Górka, DW XII, 499). The poet painted a picture of his desperate situation to his friends and acquaintances, at the same time making a silent plea for mercy and help<sup>31</sup>:

Co do pieniędzy – przy silnych bojach i praca[ch] mam ich ledwo tyle, że pocziwie długi mo-  
j[e] opłacam i czasem na rękawiczki starczy (Letter to J. I. Kraszewski, DW XII, 178);

[As for money – with my strong battles and work I barely have enough to pay off my debts and  
sometimes there is only enough left for gloves;]

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<sup>31</sup> Norwid needed not only the means to live, but also considerable money for the materials necessary to produce the paintings or medals commissioned from him. Lack of money delayed or even thwarted his artistic endeavours: “Robię dziesiątą część tego, co mógłbym, i jeszcze nikt o tym nie wie, jak to trudno” [I am doing a tenth of what I could, and no one even knows how difficult it is] (Letter to A. Cieszkowski of 1867, PWSz IX, 298-299).

During the 1860s, Norwid’s life was a constant financial struggle. The poet tossed between creditors, paying off old arrears with the help of new loans:

“Wczoraj byłem piechotą za Paryżem u jednego małego fabrykanta, u którego miałem dwa moje weksle, i wykupiłem je. Żadnego teraz weksla mojego w obiegu nie ma, ale właśnie dlatego muszę znaleźć kogo, co mi zechce przyjąć nowy weksel na sto pięćdziesiąt franków wypłacalnych po pięćdziesiąt [...]. Za tym biegam i biegam, biegam i biegam, bo od tego zależy nie tylko życie, ale i żywot, z powodu, że roboty czekają, a słoneczne miesiące uchodzą. Oto są grzechy mojego żywota!” (Letter to A. Cieszkowski, PWSz IX, 297-298).

[Yesterday I went by walk outside Paris to a small factory owner who had two of my promissory notes, and I redeemed them. None of my promissory notes are in circulation now, but that is why I must find someone willing to accept a new promissory note for one hundred and fifty francs solvent at fifty [...]. I am chasing after it, as not only my daily living depends on it, but also my life, since work is waiting and the sunny months are running out. These are the sins of my life!].

In a Paris pawnshop, he pawned a gold pin lent to him by his friend Bronisław Zaleski (probably never redeemed later):

“Na końcu tegoż listu znajdziesz słówko, które Ci nadmieni moje finansowe sprawy. Zaszczytą szpilkę zastawiłem za 25 fr.! – skutkiem tego drugiego wekslu mego tą drogą nie wykupię – ale dzięki tej operacji postaram się o znalezienie ku temu środków.

Lecz tym więcej proszę Cię, abyś raczył o zostawionej u Ciebie flaszcze próżnej pamiętać, albowiem to, co mam grosza (dzięki Twojej uczynności), muszę jeszcze na atomy rozdzielać, aby wszystkim i wszystkiemu wystarczyć” (Letter to B. Zaleski, PWSz IX, 307).

[At the end of this letter you will find a word that will give you an idea of my financial affairs. I have pawned the honourable pin for 25 fr.! – As a result of this, I will not be able to redeem my second promissory note by this means – but with this operation I will try to find the means to do so. But I ask you all the more to deign to remember about the empty bottle left with you, for what I have in pennies (thanks to your generosity) I must still divide into atoms, in order for it to suffice for everyone and everything].

Jestem albowiem  
 Z rozdartym sercem,  
 Z rozdartą kieszenią.  
 [...] nie mam gorsza (Letter to M. Sokolowski, DW XII, 285);

[For I am  
 With a torn heart,  
 With a torn pocket.  
 [...] I have no penny;]

Dołącz do tego ruinę zupełną w mych interesach finansowych, teatralnych, księgarskich itd. – bo wszystko zrujnowano – zostaje mi jeden widok, [...]: cudzoziemski szpital (Letter to M. Sokołowski, DW XII, 323);  
 [Add to this the utter ruin in my financial, theatrical, bookshop endeavours, etc. – for everything has been ruined – I am left with only one sight, [...]: a foreign hospital;]

Przezierając [...] list Pani, myślałem o pieniądzach, których często *tak mało i tak usilnie nieraz mi potrzeba* (Letter to J. Kuczyńska, DW XII, 529);

[While looking at [...] your letter, I thought of money, which is *so little and which I often so desperately need*;]

Złota i srebra nie posiadam – (Letter to S. E. Koźmian, DW XII, 418);

[Gold and silver I do not possess;]

[...] jestem goły – klasycznie goły (Letter to B. Zaleski, DW XII, 465)

[[...] I am broke – classically broke.]

The year 1867 was particularly dramatic for Norwid. At that time he lost the only modest financial security he had – due to the death of Kornel Kleczkowski, which “shook” the family’s financial situation, his cousin Michał Kleczkowski withdrew his payment of a tiny pension (of 50 francs)<sup>32</sup>:

<sup>32</sup> This was the amount Norwid charged for one of his watercolours at the time.

Devastated and humiliated, he then turned to his cousin Zofia Radwanowa for support:

“[...] człowiek, który z nich wszystkich razem właśnie że nigdy nic nie miał i był zawsze żaden – – ten, czyto w Hamburgu, czy w Spa, czy w Chinach co się wydarzy fatalnego, jedyny i ten sam rodzaj następstw zbiera” [(...) the man who, of all of them together, has just never had anything and has always been nothing – – the one, if a fatal event occurs in Hamburg, or in Spa, or in China, reaps one and the same kind of consequence] (Letter to Z. Radwanowa, PWsz IX, 312).

The result of this accumulation of dramatic experiences was an unrelenting heartache for



[...] umarł nagle pułkownik Kleczkowski na wyspie Amoy w Chinach i śmierć ta nagle spowodowała położenie czterech osób bez żadnego środka egzystencji... a przeto uczyniła, że małą i jedyną sumkę, jaką miałem sobie zapewnioną u bankiera w Ministerium Spraw Zagranicznych Fr[ancji] utraciłem aż do polepszenia interesów Kleczkowskich, to jest – zapewne na tak długo, że dla mnie na zawsze.

Czyli że utraciłem wszystko a wszystko, co miałem tu (Letter to J. Kuczyńska, PWsz IX, 318).

[[...] Colonel Kleczkowski died suddenly on the island of Amoy in China, and this sudden death left four people without any means of existence... and therefore caused me to lose the small and only sum that I had secured for myself with a banker at the Foreign Ministry in France until the Kleczkowskis' situation improved, that is – probably for so long that for me it means forever.

That is to say, I have lost all and everything I had here.]

These personal sufferings were accompanied in the 1860s by the financial tribulations of the poet's friends and the dramas of the Norwid family. In 1863, Cyprian's brother Xavier was robbed of 3,000 francs (DW XII, 164). In 1865, the death of the poet's sincere friend, the bankrupt Prince Marcei Lubomirski, put his widow and their infant daughter in a desperate situation (DW XII, 404-405). A year later (in 1866), Norwid was deeply shaken by the bankruptcy of the last person who could still support him – his elder brother Ludwik, who within a few months had lost his wife's entire fortune in the gambling saloons of Spa and Homburg<sup>33</sup>:

fourteen days. To Joanna Kuczyńska he confessed:

“[...] nie mam czasu i mam ledwo ślad miejsca, bo mam normalne i wielkie obowiązki, a żadnego a żadnego stanowiska utwierdzonego realnie.

Słowem:

wszystkie ciężary,  
żadnej pomocy [...]” (Letter to J. Kuczyńska, PWsz IX, 323).

[(...) I have no time and I have barely a trace of space left because I have normal and great responsibilities, and no position established realistically.

In a word:

all burdens,  
no assistance (...)].

<sup>33</sup> Financial ruin completely destroyed Ludwik's health: he first suffered a temporary confusion of the senses, and later a stroke and periodic paralysis of his legs (see Letter to B. Zaleski, PWsz IX, 302). He ended his life in the asylum for poor old men and cripples, run by the Warsaw Charity Society. See J. W. GOMULICKI, „Ludwik Norwid,” in: *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, Vol. XXIII, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków-Gdańsk 1978, pp. 201-202; J. W. GOMULICKI, „Zabłąkany pielgrzym. Rzecz o Ludwiku Norwidzie,” *Przegląd Współczesny* 1935, Issue 163-164, pp.



Jedyny brat (jakiego mam jeszcze) miał nieszczęście stradać zupełnie cały majątek, to jest około dwakroć-sto tysięcy franków i willę pod Paryżem – następnie zaś zachorzał i cierpi chwile obłąkania [...] (Letter to J. Kuczyńska, PWSz IX, 278);

[The only brother (that I still have) had the misfortune to lose his entire fortune, that is, about two hundred thousand francs and a villa near Paris – and then he fell ill and suffers moments of insanity [...];]

Miałem wielkie nieszczęście – mój brat, jedyny jaki mi został, stracił cały majątek (Letter to A. Cieszkowski, PWSz IX, 297).

[I had a great misfortune – my brother, the only one I have left, lost all his possessions.]

This drama made Norwid reflect on the tragic fatality of the human predicament – a truth that was soon illustrated in the drama *Aktor* [*Actor*], whose protagonist was a spendthrift deluded by the magic of gambling:

Żyjemy w Epoce podobnej do piątego aktu tragedii przed nami zaczętej; rób co chcesz, rób co chcesz!... nie odmienisz następstw i losów-aktorów, i pędzących sił do naznaczonego im węzła dramatycznego... fatum... (PWSz IX, 280).

[We live in an Epoch similar to the fifth act of a tragedy that began before us; do what you will, do what you will!... you will not change the consequences and the fates-actors, and the forces rushing to the dramatic pointmarked for them... fate...]

Additionally, in 1867 Norwid learned from Konstancja Górska of the high loss of his acquaintance, Count Ksawery Branicki. He reacted with deep sympathy and understanding:

Jeśli prawda, że p. Ksawery Branicki przegrał tyle w Homburgu, to byłbym bardzo szczęśliwym, gdybym sam miał, bo natychmiast posłałbym mu, prosząc pokornie, aby był łaskaw przyjąć, a gdybym nie miał nadziei, że to bajka i że potrafi sobie dać radę, to sam nic

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245-258 and 391-403; K. BORZĘCKA, „Ludwik Norwid w świetle poszukiwania miejsca pochówku,” *Studia Norwidiana* 34: 2016, pp. 155-168; E. JAŁOCHOWSKA, *W cieniu sławy. Zapomniane rodzeństwa wielkich Polaków*, Warszawa 2018.

A decade before this catastrophe, still unaware of the family tragedy awaiting him, Norwid wrote to Kleczkowski: “[...] dziś wiele ofiaruje bursa i różny hazard, bo poprzyśpieszane kombinacje samym przyśpieszeniem komunikacji – ale właśnie może dlatego więcej niż kiedykolwiek trzeba znać się i panować nad sobą” [(...) today much is offered by the stock exchange and various gambling forms, because the combinations themselves are accelerated by the acceleration of communication – but precisely for this reason, it is more necessary than never to know and control oneself] (Letter to M. Kleczkowski, DW XI, 239).

nie mając użyłbym wszystkich moich możliwości moralnych i nie uchyliłbym się od kroków trudnych i upokarzających, aby tylko zgranemu w Homburgu być uczynnym – albowiem brata miałem w tymże położeniu i, choć sam nie gram, żyłem dosyć na świecie, aby umieć czuć prawdziwie fatalne położenia (Letter to K. Górską of 31 August 1867, PWsz VII, 304-305).

[If it is true that Mr. Ksawery Branicki has lost so much in Homburg, I would be very happy if I had so much, for I would immediately send it to him, humbly asking him to be gracious enough to accept it, and if I had no hope that this were a fairy tale and that he could manage, then, having nothing myself, I would use all my moral faculties and would not shirk from taking difficult and humiliating steps, just to be helpful to those in Homburg – for I had a brother in the same situation, and, although I do not play myself, I have lived enough in the world to be able to feel truly dire situations.]

These “dire situations” of those closest to him undoubtedly intensified Norwid’s “economic” reflections in the 1860s, on a par with the great financial slumps reported in the Paris and world press. The poet’s particular interest at that crisis time in the subject of money (and not only his own leaky budget) is evidenced by a small but important reference in a letter to August Cieszkowski of 15 July 1867:

*Secundo*: czy p. L. Wołowski załączył Ci mój skrypt *sur le Crédit et la Circulation*? (PWsz IX, 297).

[*Secundo*: did Mr L. Wołowski enclose to you my script *sur le Crédit et la Circulation*?]

Norwid did not elaborate on this topic, so we do not know more details, but even this single sentence allows us to draw far-reaching conclusions. August Cieszkowski’s popular economic treatise was entitled *Sur le Crédit et la Circulation* [*On the credit and the circulation*], first published on 22 August 1840 in the French “Journal des Débats”<sup>34</sup>. The publication was the fruit of the Polish philosopher’s reflections triggered by the financial crises of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It referred to the revolutionary idea of replacing paper money (“banknote” convertible *a vista* into cash) with an “annuity ticket,” which would combine the advantages of a “clinking coin” made of metal (along with paper money) and a deposit; unissued, retained in the wallet, becoming a source of income for the owner. These tickets were to be issued exclusively by the state<sup>35</sup>,

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<sup>34</sup> It had three French editions, the third of which appeared in 1884, but the Polish translation did not come out until 1911 in Poznań. See A. CIESZKOWSKI, *O kredycie i obiegu*, transl. by the author’s son, Poznań 1911.

<sup>35</sup> The author was strongly opposed to allowing private banks to issue money, as this would

which would secure the payment of interest from public revenues, from mortgages on treasury domains or from land mortgages. The annuity note was envisaged as a new means of circulation without the disadvantages of coins and banknotes, i.e. it would be flexible, have dual use (both as coin – means of circulation, and deposit – static capital) remaining and at the same time very stable, because it would always be covered by the mass of national wealth. It would protect the banks from excessive outflow of reserves (citizens would not dispose of it as readily as ordinary paper money) and would allow natural, self-generated regulation of the market (circulation of values), without ever threatening crisis-inducing extremes.

The second fundamental issue discussed in Cieszkowski's treatise was the "wizardry of credit", particularly the global disasters caused by its inappropriate, fraudulent, wild and unguaranteed forms of security. The doctor of philosophy drew attention to the underdevelopment and defectiveness of the credit institutions of the time (he argued that they were still in their "infancy") and to the alarming fact that credit was becoming increasingly immaterial and indefinite<sup>36</sup>. The treatise illustrated the disastrous consequences of anticipation theory (and consumer credit) for individual borrowers and the market as a whole, and exposed the shortcomings of the mortgage and insurance system of the time. At the same time, it showed the significance of the state's economic organisation: "Financial values," wrote Cieszkowski, "are the lifeblood of the social body, its nourishing and life-distributing element, the condition of its existence and development"<sup>37</sup>. In Cieszkowski's work, the metaphor for the circulation of money became a vivifying bloodstream, guaranteeing the continuity of biological life. Years later, the author emphasised the affinity of *Sur le Cr dit...* with the theme of his

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open the door to manipulation of state institutions and gigantic abuses.

<sup>36</sup> The author's concern was first and foremost that the loans were granted against the borrower's future income and were completely unsupported by the fund, assets or real estate currently held by the borrower; in other words, they were not based on the present guarantees, but on a promise of uncertain income in the future ("loans mortgaged on castles in the air"). A second cause for concern was that banks were increasingly lending not from their guarantee funds, not from their reserves, but from non-existent capital (they issued "imaginary" notes), which, incidentally, they never paid out to the client (Cieszkowski called this form "discredit"). The author of the treatise also made his readers aware that credit does not create or multiply capital (*Ex nihilo nihil fit!*), but only "reflects" it, and that the abuse of credit leads to the abandonment and neglect of real accumulated resources.

Another essay by Cieszkowski was also devoted to economic topics: *Uwagi nad obecnym stamem finans w angielskich* [*Remarks on the Present State of English Finance*] (1842).

<sup>37</sup> A. CIESZKOWSKI, *O kredycie i obiegu*, p. 113.

greatest work, *Ojciec nasz* [*Our Father*]; after all, the prayerful request: “give us today our daily bread” was closely linked to the satisfaction of natural, material human needs<sup>38</sup>.

From Norwid’s cited letter of 1867, it appears that the poet drafted some now-lost “script” (polemical remarks in the margins, or perhaps even his own, competing draft) on the basis of Cieszkowski’s publication, which he passed on to a friend through a person well known and prominent in the world of Parisian finance, Ludwik Wołowski, a lecturer at the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers<sup>39</sup> and co-founder of the Parisian bank *Crédit Foncier de France*<sup>40</sup> – the first mortgage bank in Europe (modelled on the Land Credit Society set up by Franciszek Ksawery Drucki-Lubecki in the Kingdom of Poland). The epistolary reference quoted above not only indicates Norwid’s keen interest in Cieszkowski’s innovative idea, but perhaps also confirms the poet’s personal involvement in the project. It undoubtedly bears witness to his direct contacts with the most prominent representatives of Parisian banking circles. It is an important trace insofar as it roots Norwid’s “economic” statements and ideas in the writings of Polish thinkers and economists-pragmatists, not exclusively Western ones (whom he also read carefully). On the other hand, if one were to look for literary parallels for the “financial” themes in Norwid’s poetry, one would undoubtedly have to point to the Cassandric, shocking diagnoses for the mercantile 19<sup>th</sup> century (not at all resembling the “world of the spirit” dreamed of by the Romantics) made by Zygmunt Krasiński<sup>41</sup>:

My century is an age of pain – of transition – of misery –  
The last battle between nature and man  
Amidst the rumble of machinery and the clinking of money –  
And my century so far – not the age of the Spirit!  
On its forehead lies the fear of the future –  
And in its breast it feeds – not the heart – but an amphibian  
That today no longer believes in the cross of bygone days  
And pales all over – at the sight of iron!  
And in its hand it holds a bag of silver, a bag of gold

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<sup>38</sup> See A. CIESZKOWSKI, p. XVI.

<sup>39</sup> In 1843 Wołowski became the head of the Department of Industrial Law there, and later also of Political Economics.

<sup>40</sup> The bank was established on 28 February 1852, with Ksawery Branicki as its co-owner.

<sup>41</sup> J. W. GOMULICKI also drew attention to the “infernal” inspirations that seeped from Krasiński’s works (*Niedokończony poemat* [*The Unfinished Poem*]) into Norwid’s oeuvre. See J. W. GOMULICKI, *Norwidowa podróż przez piekło*, p. 8.

And the elbow of the merchants with which the future is measured,  
 Dreaming that the latter, as it itself, will be – of mud!<sup>42</sup>

Statements about the contemptuous and appalling reduction of human ambitions and dreams to “vile desires” (in times “in which all is flesh”) appear not only in the poetry, but also in the epistolography and prose of the author of *Nie-boska komedia* [*The Un-Divine Comedy*]. Even in *Album sycylijski* [*Sicilian Album*], among the images of Italian art and charming southern nature, we come across moving images of the wretched of the great European metropolises (invoked here for the sake of comparison), the same that Norwid must have seen and which find reflection in his poems from the *Vade-mecum* cycle (e.g. *Larwa* [*Larva*]). Krasiński’s *Album sycylijski* also brings an unusually suggestive juxtaposition of two types of civilisations – the primitive, natural, which does not allow for the total exclusion of the individual, and the “mercantile” civilisation of the new age, whose callous, cruel rules (of promotion or elimination) are dictated by cold reason and money. The rule of the former is life, albeit with all its unpredictability, chaos and extremes, while the latter is governed by mathematical order and its concomitant non-idealism, egoism and... death:

Orange and lemon trees everywhere in the gardens, aloe vera and cacti on the walls, the air so pleasant, as if from another world. The people are pale, drab, in rags, with flaming eyes. The beggars abound; the sight of their savage poverty is even more bearable than the impression made by poverty among a civilisation that has reached the highest levels of order and selfishness. Here, beggars run under the blue sky, stretching out their hands, dragging themselves huddled together, throwing themselves furiously at the alms thrown, but not even one of them, as in England, as in London, sits hungry on the ground and writes with his last strength on a stone: *Starvation, come!* I have seen one who read such an inscription and looked at the writer in one of London’s lost streets. That awful, Shakespearean *Starvation, come!* this acceptance of death, this inducement of death from hunger, came to my mind yesterday as I was walking through Messina, surrounded by begging folk, children on stilts, lazzaroni without legs or arms. Although they feel hunger, they at least still believe in life, believe that other people will not let them die. Here, earnings and industry have not yet become the only law of life; in England, to those who cannot work, whether by their own fault or by fate, death has become fair and appears fair.

Such is the difference between nature and mercantile civilisation – in the former there is disorder, chaos, restlessness, but at the same time there is life – in the latter there is order, reason, delineation and description of everything, but at the same time selfishness and death close at hand<sup>43</sup>.

<sup>42</sup> Z. KRASIŃSKI, „Wiek mój jest wiekiem bólu – przejścia – nędzy...,” in: Z. KRASIŃSKI, *Dzieła zebrane*, ed. M. Strzyżewskiego, Vol. 1: *Wiersze*, ed. M. Szargot, Toruń 2017, p. 126.

<sup>43</sup> Z. KRASIŃSKI, „Album sycylijski,” in: Z. KRASIŃSKI, *Dzieła zebrane*, Vol. III: *Proza poetycka*, ed. A. Markuszewska, Toruń 2017, pp. 454-455.

Krasiński's vision of Western European capitalism is uncompromising and dramatic; this poet, so close to Norwid and exerting a strong influence on his work, directly equated the mercantile world of the West with the civilisation of death. The assessments of the "mercantile and industrial age" formulated by the author of *Vade-mecum* are equally devastating:

[...] chorobą wieku panteistyczna ekonomia stawszy się, przyćmiła szlachetniejszy wszelki pogląd (Letter to F. Wężyk of 7 April 1857, DW XI, 157).

[...] pantheistic economics, having become the disease of the age, overshadowed every nobler perspective.]

Cała epoka jest małpa sprzedająca wszystko za pieniądze i nikczemna ze wszech miar (Letter to K. Gorska, July-August 1866, DW XII, 524)<sup>44</sup>.

<sup>44</sup> Norwid sent Konstancja Górską such a gossipy resumé of 19<sup>th</sup>-century reality, reduced to social banalities and stock exchange of the Rothschilds:

"Anetta [pokojuśka Górskiej – R.G.-S.] robi herbatę – Rothschild gra w bursę – pani Franciszkowa Potocka idzie za mąż, pani Kalergi jeździ po bruku warszawskim z kacapem na koźle – pani X. zadrasnęła się w palec szpilką – pan O. zażywa tabakę.

Człowiek jest nicość!" (Letter to K. Gorska, DW XII, 74).

[Anetta [Górska's maid – R.G.-S.] is making tea – Rothschild is playing the stock market – Mrs Franciszkowa Potocka is getting married, Mrs Kalergi is riding on the Warsaw cobblestones in a carriage driven by a Russian coachman – Mrs X. has scratched her finger with a pin – Mr O. is taking snuff. Man is nothingness!]

In a letter to M. Sokołowski, he eloquently juxtaposed the value of the word given by the banker and by the pope:

"Wiele miesięcy temu, kiedy wsiadałem na szczyt omnibusu, uczułem, że mię ktoś za konic poły targa i woła: 'Panie Cyprianie! czy nie pokażesz mi *co*? Papież do Ciebie pisał – poszukaj!!' – '*Nie mam przy sobie*' – odpowiedziałem – i omnibus ruszył po błocie... (ale gdyby to Rotchild albo Rozen pisał!!!!)" [Many months ago, when I was getting on top of the omnibus, I felt someone grabbing the end of my coat-tail and calling out: 'Mr Cyprian! won't you show me *what*? The Pope wrote to you – look for it!!!' – '*I don't have it with me*', I replied, and the omnibus set off across the mud... (but if it had been written by Rotschild or Rosen!!!!)] (Letter to M. Sokołowski, DW XII, 421). The Rothschilds were banking tycoons of Paris and other European capitals, Mathias Rosen (1804-1865) an influential Warsaw banker, one of the richest representatives of the local bourgeoisie, an associate of Leopold Kronenberg in his tobacco and snuff ventures. See A. ŻOR, *Kronenberg. Dzieje fortuny*, Warszawa 2011; S. KONARSKI, „Rosen (Rozen) Mathias,” in: *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, Vol. XXXII, Wrocław 1989-1991, <https://www.ipsb.nina.gov.pl/a/biografia/mathias-rosen-rozen?print> (accessed 15 August 2019).

At times, Norwid wrote about the dominance of money with the seriousness and anxiety of a thinker, at other times – ironically or with humour (for instance, when, in a letter to Kuczyńska, he condemned the appearance of a new type of "komeraż" [malicious rumour]: the modern stock exchange gossip, see DW XII, 44).

[The whole era is a monkey selling everything for money and utterly despicable in every respect.]



C. NORWID, *Kapitalista* [*Capitalist*], pen and ink drawing, Biblioteka Polska Towarzystwo Historyczno-Literackie w Paryżu, source: A. MELBECHOWSKA-LUTY, *Sztukmistrz. Twórczość artystyczna i myśl o sztuce Cypriana Norwida*, Warszawa 2001, p. 473.

Clutching bags of money, the pot-bellied “capitalist” will even find his way into Norwid’s artworks as a caricatured hero of the new times.

In view of the above, it is difficult to agree with Michał Kuźniak’s assertion that Norwid did not react to the economic crises of capitalism<sup>45</sup>. After all, poignant images of man’s entanglement in the machinations of money found their echo in his dramas in the 1860s and 1870s<sup>46</sup>. *Vade-mecum* was also written in the electrified atmosphere of the growing global crisis. This masterly poetic cycle, bearing a Dantean title, can even be regarded as the culmination of Norwid’s reflection

<sup>45</sup> See M. KUZIĄK, p. 69.

<sup>46</sup> See R. GADAMSKA-SERAFIN, „Pieniądz – ‘deus ex machina’ w dramatach Norwida,” in: *Norwidowski świat rzeczy*, eds. G. Halkiewicz-Sojak, P. Abriszewska, I. Dobrzeńska, D. Wojtasińska, Toruń 2018, pp. 349-390.



on the subject of money. The accumulation of poems addressing the “financial” theme (the third poem in the cycle – *Socjalizm* [*Socialism*], the thirteenth – *Larwa* [*Larva*], the nineteenth – *Stolica* [*Capital*], and the thirty-seventh – *Syberie* [*Two Siberia*]) in the first part of the collection testifies to the importance of this issue in Norwid’s mature poetry. Here, the subject of money clashes with the most prominent economic and social theories of the century.

It is greatly relevant to the analysed issue in that, in contrast to his early works (and early Romantic literature in general), *Vade-mecum* is the poetry of the city, of metropolitan agglomerations such as London, Paris with its “za bogactwy goniący we dwa miliony śmiertelnych” [two million mortals chasing riches] or New York<sup>47</sup>. Already at the dawn of the urbanisation process, the city was the primary space for the formation of monetary economy (London was called the “purse of England”), the seat of commerce (and later also of the stock exchange), the place of economic revival and feverish liveliness. As Georg Simmel emphasised, it was in the city that the influence of finance on the state of human psychological life became most visible, it was here that the concentration of monetary transactions took place, and the speed of this circulation noticeably accelerated the pace of life (unlike in agrarian culture, where the circulation of land is prolonged, slow, and does not impose excessive mobility)<sup>48</sup>. This “multiplied movement” and metropolitan pulse can be felt in

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<sup>47</sup> Norwid was called “the poet of the city” by Z. Stefanowska:

“Norwid is the poet of the city. He is one not only in the sense that he often makes the city the subject of his poetic reflection [...]. This refers to something more important than just the subject of his literary works – to the fact that Norwid’s vision of the world in his poetry is urbanised [...]. The city is the natural place of human activity and the situational background of poetic reflection. The countryside is something exotic and external, a recreational fringe of normal life, “w-czasów królowa” [a queen of holiday] beyond the action of history. Norwid dreamt of “jedna chwila spoczynku na trawie polskiej” [a single moment of rest on Polish grass] [letter to Jan Koźmian from October 1852 – M. G.], and this longing is characteristic of a man who is well integrated into a metropolitan environment, a poet in whose poems the cobblestones of so many European cities resound”. Z. STEFANOWSKA, „Norwidowski romantyzm,” in: Z. STEFANOWSKA, *Strona romantyków. Studia o Norwidzie*, Lublin 1993, pp. 79-80.

See also: W. RZOŃCA, „Romantyzm i nowoczesność?,” in: *Romantyzm i nowoczesność?*, ed. M. Kuziak, Kraków 2009, p. 12; P. CHLEBOWSKI, „O sytuacji w badaniach nad Norwidem. Preliminaria,” in: *Jak czytać Norwida. Postawy badawcze, metody, weryfikacje*, eds. B. Kuczery-Chachulska, J. Trzcionka, Warszawa 2008, pp. 51-73; S. RZEPczyński, „Norwid a nowoczesność,” in: *Romantyzm i nowoczesność*, pp. 214-215; M. GARŚCIEWICZ, *Piekielna przestrzeń miasta – liryka Cypriana Norwida w perspektywie badań nad nowoczesnością*, <http://biesiada.polon.uw.edu.pl/Piekielna.pdf> (accessed 15 April 2019).

<sup>48</sup> See G. SIMMEL, p. 575.



the stanzas of Norwid's lyric poetry, which heralds, as Marta Gaściewicz notes, modern poetry<sup>49</sup>.

Michał Kuźniak emphasised the thematic and stylistic similarities between the publications by Marx and Norwid<sup>50</sup>:

What unites these authors, in often surprising ways, is their observations and diagnoses of the surrounding reality. Often also the subject of reflection [...] and its style [...]. It combines a focus on action, a synthesis of thought and action, work, also a critique of idealist philosophy, and an interest in history. [...] What they have in common, last but not least, is a vision of a full humanity reconciled with itself and the world, including society<sup>51</sup>.

There are indeed many external parallels. An interesting point of convergence, for instance, is the rooting of both texts in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Norwid's collection, the very title of which already reveals its embedding in the Florentine masterpiece, was designed as a journey through the hell of modern times ("an allegorical journey of the poet-moralist through the hell created on earth by people and for people"<sup>52</sup>— wrote J. W. Gomułicki). A similar idea guided *Capital*,

<sup>49</sup> See M. GAŚCIEWICZ, *Piekielna przestrzeń miasta – liryka Cypriana Norwida w perspektywie badań nad nowoczesnością*.

<sup>50</sup> See M. KUŹNIAK, "Norwid – Marks. Dwie nowoczesności," in: *O Norwidzie komparatystycznie*, ed. M. Siwiec, Kraków 2019, pp. 59-75.

<sup>51</sup> M. KUŹNIAK, pp. 59-60.

This observation confirms, it seems, a broader regularity formulated by Marek Cichocki: that in their "anti-capitalist rhetoric, political Romantics closely resemble Karl Marx". M. A. CICHOCKI, p. 43.

<sup>52</sup> J. W. GOMULICKI, „Uwagi o poezji Cypriana Norwida,” in: C. Norwid, *Pisma wybrane*, Warszawa 1968, p. 31.

Norwid, as is well known, saw the need to complement the Dantean summa taking place in the eschatological realms: Hell, Purgatory and Heaven, with the temporal realm: Earth, as evidenced by his poetic pendant to the *Divine Comedy* – the unfinished poem *Ziemia* [Earth] (DW III, 51-56).

J. W. GOMULICKI wrote about Norwid's "sojourn in hell" and the literary (poetic and epistolary) echo of this experience. See J. W. GOMULICKI, „Norwidowa podróż przez piekło (Ze studiów nad genezą kształtem *Vade-mecum*),” *Miesięcznik Literacki* 1966, Issue 2, pp. 5-14. The scholar regarded *Vade-mecum* as the artistic culmination of Norwid's "myth of hell":

"Wielkiej zaiste odwagi potrzeba, by uwidamiać i uwieczniać współczesne i potoczne momenta" [Great courage is indeed needed to visualise and perpetuate contemporary and colloquial moments], said Norwid in 1860, in one of his lectures on Słowacki.

It was precisely this kind of courage, the courage of the poet-moralist who did not want to put his contemporaries to sleep with assurances that *everything was fine*, but one who wished precisely to *wake them up* by pointing out the evil that surrounded them and the suffering that was

which in an era of proletariat misery, the expansion of spectacular bankruptcies, economic slumps and wild stock market panics was to expose the infernal character of capitalism. A paraphrased quotation from Dante closed the preface to the first edition of Marx's work (who, incidentally, in his youth even had literary ambitions and a keen interest in literature):<sup>53</sup>

[...] wobec przesądów tak zwanej *opinii publicznej*, której nigdy nie czyniłem ustępstw, hasłem moim pozostają nadal słowa wielkiego Florentczyka:  
*Segui il tuocorso, e lasciadir le genti!*<sup>54</sup>.

[...] in the face of the prejudices of the so-called *public opinion*, to which I have never made concessions, my motto remains the words of the great Florentine [Dante – R.G.-S.]:  
*Segui il tuocorso, e lasciadir le genti!* [Follow your path, and let the people talk]

The Dantean reminiscence (also highly visible in Norwid's collection) suggested writer's complete independence from public opinion and, at the same time, introduced the convention, fundamental to the composition of the *Divine Comedy*, of a journey with the author through the ills of the present day (offering the reader a completely new path). This Florentine quotation led later biographers of Marx to see in him a new Dante, and in his *Capital*, which deals with alienation, dialectics and the meaning of money – a kind of modern “summa” on man and the “monetary” civilisation he had created, corresponding to the problems of the time. Francis Wheen wrote:

We are [...] in an earthly hell, a kind of secular version of Dante's *Inferno*. “What difference does it make what is talked about here,” asks Dante of Virgil in the Part 5 of *Purgatory*; – “Follow me, and let the people talk” (“*Vien retro a me, e lasciadir le genti!*”). With no Virgil to guide him, Marx corrects this line in the introduction to the first volume of *Capital* to warn that he will make no concession to others' superstitions [...]. From the outset, therefore, the book is conceived as a descent into hell, and even in the midst of abstruse theoretical and abstract questions Marx does not relinquish the imagery of this place and movement [...].

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its consequence, that allowed him to compose *Vade-mecum*, a realistic yet tragic moral picture of 19<sup>th</sup>-century society, or rather the social Hell of his time, on the gates of which the slogans of Progress were written”. J. W. GOMULICKI, pp. 13-14.

<sup>53</sup> See F. WHEEN, pp. 72-73. Marx referred to the works of Shakespeare, Dickens, Thackeray, Molière, Racine, Montaigne, Bacon, Goethe, Voltaire, Paine, and read in several languages. The first volume of his *Capital* contains quotations from the Bible, Shakespeare, Goethe, Milton, Voltaire, Homer, Balzac, Dante, Schiller, Sophocles, Plato, Thucydides, Xenophon, Defoe, Cervantes, Dryden, Heine, Virgil, Juvenal, Horace, More, Butler and others.

<sup>54</sup> K. MARKS, *Kapitał. Krytyka ekonomii politycznej*, Vol. I: *Proces wytwarzania kapitału*, p. 7.

Making progress along his path, Marx sometimes recalls earlier literary images of such journeys. Describing an English match-making manufactory in which a half of the workers were minors (among them six-year-old children), he states:

A working day of 12, 14 and 15 hours, night work, irregular meal breaks spent mostly in the same phosphorus-infested factory premises. *Dante* would have found that this manufactory surpassed his most horrific fantasies of hell.

Other imagined hells serve to sharpen the picture of empirical reality:

From the multicoloured crowd of workers of all trades, ages and sexes, who surround us more insistently than the shadows of the slain surround Odysseus, and at first glance one can tell that they are overworked, [...] from this crowd we choose two figures, a *milliner* and a *blacksmith*. The striking resemblance between these two characters proves that in the face of capital they are all equal<sup>55</sup>.

Norwid clearly made himself a new Dante (he wrote to Joanna Kuczyńska in 1862: “Ja – byłem w Piekło, mówiłem raz Pani o tym” [I – I was in Hell, I told you about it once], DW XII, 63). Also in his *Vade-mecum*, the “figure” of the new civilisation is “profit”.

*Capital* and *Vade-mecum* have another thing in common: irony plays an extremely important role in both texts (although differing in depth and “technique” in both authors):

To do justice to the mad logic of capitalism, Marx’s text is saturated with irony – irony that, after all, has escaped the attention of most scholars for the past 140 years. One exception is the American critic Edmund Wilson, who wrote in *To the Finland Station: A Study in the Writing and Acting of History* (1940) that the sense of Marxist abstractions – the dance of commodities, the clownish embroidery of values – is primarily ironic, gaining expression through juxtaposition with the grim, well-documented images of misery and filth created in practice by the laws of capitalism.

Wilson saw *Capital* as a parody of classical economics and “when we read it, conventional economic works will no longer look the same: henceforth we will always be able to see behind the arguments and statistics the harsh reality of human relationships that these works more or less

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<sup>55</sup> F. WHEEN, *Marks. Kapital. Biografia*, pp. 70-71.

Marx aptly picked out the monetary metaphor from *The Divine Comedy*. He recalled the scene of a conversation between St. Peter and Dante (in Chapter *Money, or the Circulation of Commodities*), during which the Florentine neatly recited the creed to the Apostle, to which the latter replied:

“*Assai bene è trascorsa,  
D’esta moneta già la lega el peso  
Ma dimmi se tul’hai a tuaborsa*”.

consciously mask”. No one has ever delved more deeply into the infinite capacity of human beings to remain unaware or indifferent to the pain we inflict on others whenever we have the chance to obtain something from them for ourselves. “In dealing with this subject, Karl Marx became one of the great masters of satire. [...] he is certainly the greatest ironist since Swift and has very much in common with him<sup>56</sup>.

The peculiar style of Marx’s work, full of “fanciful metaphors”, “metaphysics” and digressions and philosophical deductions, astonished economists accustomed to dry, logical deductions supported by calculations. As a result, *Capital* was seen as a great metaphor for the modern age:

What, then, does Marx’s ironic discourse have in common with his “metaphysical” account of bourgeois society? [...] If Marx had wanted to write a direct, classical economic text, he could have done so, and indeed he did [referring to the lectures *Labour, Price and Profit*–R.G.-S]. [...] Could it be that Marx suddenly lost his gift of clear speech? [...]

The function of a metaphor is to make us look at a thing in a new way. This is done by transferring the value of that thing to something else, by turning the familiar into the foreign, or vice versa. Ludovico Silva, an American interpreter of Marx, starts from the etymology of the word “metaphor”– transfer – and argues that capitalism is itself a metaphor, an alienating process that transfers life from a subject to an object, from a use-value to an exchange-value, from the human to the monstrous. On such a reading, the literary style that Marx adopted in *Capital* [...] is the only appropriate language to capture the “illusory appearances of things”. An ontological enterprise that cannot be contained within the boundaries and conventions of existing forms – such as political economics, anthropological science or history. In short, *Capital* is entirely *sui generis*<sup>57</sup>.

A brilliant metaphor for the present day, entirely *sui generis* is also the ironic *Vade-mecum* cycle, which in strikingly beautiful, sublimely bitter stanzas highlights all the burning problems of man of the “mercantile and industrial age”. Of course, in that century Marx was an incomparably more influential thinker than (mostly) unpublished Norwid, to whom few of his contemporaries listened.

As noted by Juliusz W. Gomulicki, and later Michał Kuziak<sup>58</sup>, “Marx heard

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[Now this coin is well-examined,  
and now we know its alloy and its weight.  
But tell me if you do have it in your purse].

See K. Marks, *Kapital*, Vol. 1, p. 109.

<sup>56</sup> F. WHEEN, pp. 74-75.

<sup>57</sup> F. WHEEN, pp. 78-79.

<sup>58</sup> See M. KUZIAK, p. 59. Marx must have heard of Norwid in 1875 during a speech by General Walery Wróblewski, in which Norwid’s name was mentioned; the speech was polemical towards the poet’s views.

[...] Norwid's name, mentioned at certain London rallies" (*Metryki i objaśnienia* [*Metrics and Explanations*] PWSz VII, 653). Marx's works, on the other hand, were read by Norwid – this is evidenced by his references to the "immense Social Revolution," which "came to a scientific refinement first in Germany," contained in his treatise *Nihilizm i nihiliści* [*Nihilism and Nihilists*] (PWSz VII, 104) from the late 1870s (probably 1879), revealing a keen interest in the subject of socialism and anarchism and in the programme of the European left "osadzonym na rozwłaszczeniu i ateizmie" [founded on stratification and atheism] (PWSz VII, 103). These statements signal at the same time the Polish poet's radically different outlook on social issues and his unequivocally negative attitude towards the leftist politics of the time: "są fatalną-lewicą" [they are a fatal left], "to ze zbrodnią graniczy" [it borders on crime], "dzieckiem być potrzeba, aby w to wszystko wierzyć!" [one needs to be a child to believe in all this!]. At the same time, however, Norwid was convinced that "Rewolucji tej wielkiej nic nie zatrzyma" [nothing can stop this great Revolution]. Norwid's treatise on nihilism and dozens of other statements, including poetic ones, leave nodoubt that any affinity between *Vade-mecum* and *Capital* ends with the external correspondences indicated above. Indeed, they propose two completely different visions of modernity<sup>59</sup>, different visions of man and different perspectives on the essence of economic problems.

It should be stressed at this point that Norwid never considered the subject of finance to be unimportant or embarrassing, or even worse, unworthy of poetry ("Są, którzy uczą, iż dla poezji trzeba przedmiotów, które nie byłyby suche i niewdzięczne... Poezja ta – co, ażeby była poezją, potrzebuje przedmiotów nie suchych i czeka na wdzięczne – nie należy do mojej kompetencji" [There are those who teach that for poetry one needs objects that are not dry and ungrateful... This poetry – which, in order to be poetry, needs objects that are not dry and waits for grateful ones – is not within my competence] *Rzecz o wolności słowa* [*On the Freedom of Speech*], DW IV, 211). On the contrary, he placed it among the fundamental questions about man and Truth, and considered it a condition of life's "Serio" [seriousness]:<sup>60</sup>

Ani jednego nie ma [pisma polskiego – R.G-S.], które by [...] zapytało przynajmniej – co jest człowiek? co jest życie? co jest czas? co jest praca? co jest pieniądz? co jest wyższość? co jest ład? co jest jawność – – – *zatracają Serio!!* [...]

<sup>59</sup> See M. KUZIĄK, *Norwid – Marks*.

<sup>60</sup> He considered silence regarding the economic conditions of human existence and the financial problems of fellow human beings to be a sign of hypocrisy, pharisaism, and an escape from responsibility for others.

Co prawdą jest – jest nią w obrocie planet na niebiesiach i w ziarnku piasku, i w sercu, i w kieszeni, i wszędzie – inaczej, to żarty! (Letter to M. Sokołowski, DW XII, 193-194).

[There is not a single one [Polish magazine – R.G-S.] that would [...] at least ask – what is man? what is life? what is time? what is work? what is money? what is superiority? what is order? what is openness – – – *they lose Serio!!!* [...]

What is the truth – it is in the rotation of the planets in the heavens, and in a grain of sand, and in the heart, and *in the pocket, and everywhere* – otherwise, it's a joke!]

The “economic-capitalist” motifs appear in Norwid’s cycle not only in the four works usually associated with this theme, mentioned at the beginning; they also recur in various other poems. Without the slightest exaggeration, it can be said that money is one of the strongest “*namiętności czasowe*” [temporal passions] (*Addio!*, PWsz II, 23) in the entire collection, embodying an action motivated solely by pure “energy,” bare “action” and “energy,” however, devoid of “thought,” and especially of “Truth” and “conscience”. It is situated on the same side as “Popularity” and “*Rozwzraskliwe czasów przechwałki*” [Raging boasting of times] (PWsz, II, 100), “*strawność dobra*” [good digestibility] and “*byt zdrowy*” [wholesome existence] (PWsz II, 106), and above all the illusory charm of “success” (PWsz II, 122). It effectively fills the contemporary “*próżnia-sensu*” [vacuum of sense], allowing one to be “practically wicked” (PWsz II, 99). Sometimes it appears in completely surprising contexts, such as in the poem *Liryka i druk* [*Poetry and Print*], which discusses the essence of poetry, where the necessity of the co-presence of “lyre” and “content” in poetry is explained parabolically with the help of an example taken from the area of trade that seems radically distant from literature:

Handlarz także odda grosz zwierzony,  
Lecz nie odda wesela –  
Nie uściśnie ręki zawściągnionej;  
Maszże w nim przyjaciela?  
(*Liryka i druk* [*Poetry and Print*], PWsz II, 24-25).

[The trader will also give back the entrusted penny,  
But he will not give back joy –  
He will not shake the unstretched hand;  
Do you have a friend in him?]

The utterance of “content” without the participation of the “lyre” (i.e. talent, inspiration, artistic values, rhythmic and musical order, intangible and non-verbalised spiritual qualities) has been likened to the return of entrusted cash,

a soulless and predictable financial transaction, accompanied by neither “żar słowa” [the zest of the word] nor “sumienia berło” [the scepter of conscience]:

[...] To tylko ciało ciała.  
Cóż z tego? – martwość głucha!!!  
(*Liryka i druk* [*Poetry and Print*], PWSz II, 24).

[[...] It is only flesh to flesh.  
What of it? – deaf deadness!!!]

This evocative image from Norwid’s stanza brings to mind a passage from the *Communist Manifesto* (of 1848) that was frequently quoted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century:

The bourgeoisie [...] has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations [...] and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous “cash payment”. It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm [...] in the icy water of egotistical calculation<sup>61</sup>.

The remedy for this drama of European societies was sought, among others, by utopian socialists. One of them, Robert Owen, located the reason for this state of affairs in coin money, claiming that there was too little of it on the market in relation to the wealth of the population (so some would simply run out of it)<sup>62</sup>. Blaming the evil on money itself and the process of its social distribution, i.e. on an inappropriate and unjust economic mechanism, he proposed that this traditional means of payment should be consigned to the dustbin and replaced by a voucher, certifying the amount of work done and entitling the purchase of goods of equivalent value. The socialists’ aversion to money had both historical (hyperinflation and the bankruptcy of paper money at the time of the French Revolution) and ideological motivation:

Socialism was admired as ideal in primitive societies, with their communist alignment, while money centres around the individual [...]<sup>63</sup>.

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<sup>61</sup> K. Marx, F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, London 1848, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm> (accessed 6 December 2022).

<sup>62</sup> Owen’s idea failed because artificial “labour money” was unable to compete with existing real money.

<sup>63</sup> G. SIMMEL, p. 391.

The noble but naive (even from the economic point of view!) ideas of the socialists<sup>64</sup> echoed in Norwid's poem *Czasy* [*Times*], which, after minor modifications and with a new title: *Socjalizm* [*Socialism*], was included in the *Vade-mecum* cycle. Norwid's lyric undermined the socialist utopia of a moneyless and prosperous "end of history":

Ludzie, choć kształtem r a s napiętnowani,  
Z wykrzywianymi różną m o w ą wargi,  
Głoszą: że oto źli już i w y b r a n i ,  
Że już h o s a n n a tylko, albo skargi...  
– Że Python-stary zrzucen do otchłani:  
Grosz? – że symbolem już; harmonią?... – targi!

Och! nie skończona jeszcze Dziejów praca –  
Jak bryły w górę ciągnięcie ramieniem;  
Umknij – a już ci znów na piersi wraca,  
Przysiądź – a głowę zetrze ci brzemieniem...  
– O! nie skończona jeszcze Dziejów praca,  
Nie-prze-palony jeszcze glob, Sumieniem!  
(PWsz II, 19).

[People, though stigmatized because of *race*,  
Whose lips are twisted by *many tongues*, declare:  
They are *condemned already, or embraced*,  
There are *hosannas* only, or despair...  
– Old Python's cast to his infernal place:  
– Penny? – a Symbol; harmony?... – a Fair!

O, nay! History's work is still not done –  
Like pushing rocks upward: enough to set  
Back just a mite – your breast again they stun,  
Sit down – immediately they crush your head...  
O, nay! History's work is still not done,  
The world not-all-consumed by conscience yet!]<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup> It was not only the socialists who wanted to get rid of money, but also many other thinkers, reformers and economists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The replacement of traditional money with an "annuity bond" was also proposed by the already cited A. Cieszkowski.

<sup>65</sup> English translation by T. KARPOWICZ, „Five Poems from the *Vade-Mecum*,” *The Polish Review* 1983, Vol. XXVIII, No. 2, p. 78.



Antoni Chojnacki outlined the broad historical context of this poem by Norwid:

The year 1848 saw the final judgement (for many), which historians will call the Spring of Nations. In February, the French people overthrow the “bankers’ king” Louis Philippe and proclaim a republic. The socialist Louis Blanc enters government. It would seem that the social revolution is winning, that socialism, for which Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier, Pierre Leroux, Joseph Proudhon and many others have been fighting in France since the beginning of the century, is also winning. In March, a popular uprising broke out, first in Vienna, and soon afterwards in Berlin, Milan, Venice, Piedmont, Rome... The revolution spreads across almost the whole of Europe: from the borders of England in the West to those of Russia in the East.

In the first stanza, Norwid characterises [...] the views of those utopian socialists who, intoxicated by political victory, thought that the epoch of social harmony had arrived, that Europe was past the final judgment, and therefore that the bourgeoisie with the proletariat would now build a new society in harmony<sup>66</sup>.

Norwid knew that there is no immanent ethics of money, that money, in itself, is an axiologically neutral object, like any other tool. There is, however, an ethic of human behaviour. This position grows directly out of Christian thought, in which wealth in itself is not something good or bad<sup>67</sup>. Saint Clement of Alexandria wrote: Therefore, one should not blame that which, in itself being without blemish, is neither bad nor good. Guilt must be attributed only to the one who can use the instrument both badly and well, according to his will. And this capacity is possessed only by human reason, which can freely judge and has full power to use the things lent to man. So it is not possessions that should be destroyed, but rather the passions of the soul that do not allow us to make proper use of what we possess. And in this way, having become a noble man, you will know how to make good use of your possessions<sup>68</sup>.

The mistake of the otherwise noble-minded socialists was, according to Norwid, to attribute ontological evil to an axiologically neutral object, and not to the human will and soul in which this evil takes root. It was not the lack of money or other economic instruments that was the cause of the misery of societies and individuals, Norwid repeatedly asserted, but many other reasons, the common denominator of which was the underdevelopment of human conscience (“Nie-

<sup>66</sup> A. CHOJNACKI, “Socialism,” in: *Cypriana Norwida kształt prawdy i miłości. Analizy i interpretacje*, ed. S. Makowski, Warszawa 1986, p. 75.

<sup>67</sup> See J. ILUK, „Kościół antyczny wobec pieniądza i kapitału. Od Nowego Testamentu do pism Ojców Kościoła,” in: *Pieniądz w literaturze i teatrze*, pp. 8-28; and J. OSSOWSKI, „Niebo dla bogaczy,” in: *Pieniądz w literaturze i teatrze*, pp. 29-39; „Bogactwo,” in: *Słownik teologii biblijnej*, ed. X. Leon-Dufour, transl. K. Romaniuk, Poznań 1994, pp. 86-89.

<sup>68</sup> KLEMENS ALEKSANDRYJSKI, *Który człowiek bogaty może być zbawiony?*, transl. Fr. J. Czuj, introduction and ed. Fr. J. Naumowicz, Kraków 2012, p. 65.

prze-palony jeszcze glob, Sumieniem!” [The world not-all-consumed by conscience yet!]).

Already twenty years earlier, in response to criticism of his *Listy o Emigracji* [*Letters on Emigration*], the poet wrote:

Nie wyobrażaj sobie, proszę, iż pieniędzy brak nędzy jest powodem: pieniędzy nie brak – życia brak.

I zgody nie brak – życia brak! (*Odpowiedź krytykom “Listów o emigracji”* [*Reply to the Critics of “Letters on Emigration”*], PWSz VII, 35).

[Please do not imagine that a lack of money is the reason of poverty: there is no lack of money– but a lack of life.

And there is no lack of agreement – but a lack of life!]

In the 1860s he tried to convince Joanna Kuczyńska:

[...] Szlachetna Pani ma zupełną słuszość po szczególe co do wzajemnej pomocy społeczeństw i ludów. Ale... jednej rzeczy brak (wcałe nie pieniędzy), brak jednej tylko rzeczy – – ludzi! (Letter to J. Kuczyńska, PWSz IX, 300).

[...] The noble lady is absolutely right as to the specificity of mutual help of societies and peoples. But... one thing is missing (and this is not money), there is only one thing missing – – people!.

Observing the sluggishness of all social action and works of charity, Norwid noticed that money most often became an excuse, not the real reason for inaction. The real motive for indifference was not really “financial impossibility,” but greed and laziness of heart. He also saw this during the famine in Algeria:

[...] w tej chwili w Banku Francuskim leży  
Miliard-pięć kroć milionów fr. w gotówce (!)

[...]

Otóż z tym wszystkim, chociaż to bardzo jasne i matematycznie-pewne, jednak jest głód w Algierii, i nawet dlatego właśnie czasem bywa głód, że tyle pieniędzy leży (*contradiction apparente*) (Letter to J. Kuczyńska of 1868, PWSz IX, 338).

[[...] at the moment at the Bank of France there is  
One billion five million fr. in cash (!)

[...]

Well, with all this, although it is very clear and mathematically certain, there is a famine in Algeria, and it is because there is so much money lying around that there is sometimes a famine (*contradiction apparente*.)]

It is impossible to understand the economic theme of *Vade-mecum* without reading the 1864 poem *Praca* [Work], which is an important prelude to it. In spite of all the “real schools”, that is, the organicist theories of the time (presented in the country after the catastrophe of the January Uprising) and proponents of *realpolitik*, various ethical concepts (such as hedonism and egoism), as well as socialist ideas, Norwid did not make money the direct goal of human endeavour, and even scoffed at the illusory nature of economic and historiosophical theories based solely on profit. In Norwid’s view, the starting point of every human effort is spiritual order, intellectual prudence, axiological ordering. The end point is the resurrection. It is the order of the Christian economy of salvation:

Głos brzmi w twej piersi: „Postradałem Eden!”  
 Głos brzmi nad tobą: „Pracuj z potem czoła.”  
 – Ekonomistów zbierz wszystkich i nagle  
 Spytaj ich, co jest pracy abecadłem?  
 [...]

Zaczynj ... by w głowie nie było zawrotu,  
 [...]

Wyrobić musi pierw umysłu stałość,  
 Bez której nie ma siły – – nawet zysku!  
 Więc prac początek, prac pierwsza litera,  
 Nie to, co wasza dziś realna szkoła  
 Uczy – zarówno płytka, jak nieszczerza.  
 „Pracować musisz zawsze z potem CZOŁA.”  
 – Spustoszonemu mów ty narodowi,  
 Niech się wzbogaci jak można najprędzej,  
 A mając posag resztę postanowi,  
 Do-rychtowawszy do onych pieniędzy:  
 Naucz, by jednym krokiem się przerzucał  
 Z historii-jatek krwawych do warsztatów,  
 Naucz, by się tak śmiał, jak zasmucał,  
 Wybawisz naród... lecz automatów! (...)  
 Nie! – pracą pierwszą jest: umysłu-stałość!  
 (PWsz I, 388).

[A voice resounds in your chest: “I have lost Eden!”  
 A voice resounds above you: “Work with the sweat of your brow.”  
 – Get the economists all together and suddenly  
 Ask them: What is the alphabet of work?  
 [...]

Start... so that your head does not spin,  
[...]

Hemust first develop a stable mind,  
Without which there is no power – – even profit!  
So the beginning of work, the first letter of work,  
Is not what today your real school  
Teaches – which is both shallow and insincere.  
“You must always work with the sweat of your BROW.”  
– Say that to the desolate nation,  
It should get rich as soon as possible,  
And having a dowry, it will decide about the rest,  
Apart from that money arming itself with the  
Teaching – to flip with one step  
From bloodbaths of history to workshops,  
Teach it to laugh as much as it grieves,  
You will deliver a nation ... but of automatons! [...]  
No! – the first work is: the stable mind!]

The departure from Romanticism, from idealistically conceived great moral duties, in favour of penny-pinching, leads – according to Norwid’s social poetic treatise – above all to a deformation of humanity (spirituality is replaced by automatism). A careful observation of contemporary democratic societies, “wolne jak pieniądz” [free as money], “zbogacone” [enriched] and “ideałowi niepodległe w niczem” [independent of the ideal in everything], led the poet to the conclusion (not a thesis!) that mere “possession” does not in any way protect from historical catastrophe. It may even become its cause. Let us recall that the poem *Praca* [Work] was written at a time when the United States, built on an economic ethos and symbolising a fast road to financial success, was in the midst of a bloody Civil War (1861-65), stimulated by European bankers interested in profits from supplying both sides of the conflict with weapons and granting loans to repair the damage at usurious interest rates. Song Hongbing, author of the bestselling *Currency Wars*, depicted these events as follows:

[...] the calculations were simple: the massive destruction and expenditure of the war would require enormous financial outlays, and this would force governments to borrow heavily, which would be the tastiest and most plentiful dish on the banker’s table<sup>69</sup>.

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<sup>69</sup> S. HONGBING, „Europejscy bankierzy i wojna secesyjna,” in: S. HONGBING, *Wojna o pieniądze. Prawdziwie źródła kryzysów finansowych*, transl. T. Sierakowski, Vol. 1, Wrocław 2010, p. 50.

In the Civil War, in which some 3 million people (10% of the country's population) were mobilised to fight, nearly 650 000 died. At the time, ca. USD 5 billion worth of property was turned to dust. In this way the "enriched" (Americans) also submitted themselves to the "mercy" of "historii-orzeł" [the eagle of history]:

Jest tam i plemię, co inaczej żyło:  
 Porozdzielanych spuścizną warsztatów,  
 Które się więcej niż kto z bogaciło (!),  
 Najrealniejszych pełne demokratów –  
 Ideałowi niepodległe w niczem –  
 Wolne jak pieniądz, co się toczy krągło;  
 I wiem, że smaga je tatarskim biczem,  
 Los ów, darzący pierwej ciszą ciągłą...  
 – wiem, że już milion blisko w pień wycięto  
 Tych z bogaconych i tych zapłaconych,  
 Doganiających się ofiarą świętą,  
 A kapitałów żądzą wyścignionych:  
 Ci – z Indian śmieją się...  
 (PWsz I, 389-390).

[There is also a tribe that lived differently:  
 Disentangled from the legacy of workshops,  
 Which became richer than anyone (!),  
 Full of the most realistic democrats –  
 Independent of the ideal in everything –  
 Free as coin, which rolls round and round;  
 And I know that it is smitten with a Tartar's whip by  
 The fate, which first gave constant silence...  
 – I know that a million have already been cut to the bone  
 Those enriched and those paid,  
 Catching up with the sacred offering,  
 Outperformed through the lust for capitals:  
 These – are laughing at Indians...]

Norwid's life coincided with the "fabulous years" of America<sup>70</sup>, the time of the Californian "gold rush" (1848-1849), the development of steam navigation and railways, the incredible investment boom, the flourishing of banks and the emergence of the symbol of America: the dollar (the American state mint

<sup>70</sup> See S. BRATKOWSKI, *Nieco inna historia cywilizacji. Dzieje banków, bankierów i obrotu pieniężnego*, 2<sup>nd</sup>ed., Warszawa 2010, pp. 329-336.

began minting it in silver in 1840). By the 1860s, the USA had already come to the forefront of the global development race<sup>71</sup>. The poet had the opportunity to get to know well the society of the “most realistic democrats” in the 1850s<sup>72</sup>. The echoes of this American experience can be found in his work *Praca*. Polemising with organicist concepts in Poland, coinciding with the period of the American Civil War, Norwid points out to his contemporaries that history has just proved (overseas) that by possessing only ideal-less “gold,” one cannot always “decide about the rest,” that this “rest” is in fact the foundation without which one builds a future on sand. Even on the historical plane, the capital argument has proved completely unconvincing and an insufficient rationale for survival.

It is not difficult to see the striking correspondence between Norwid’s conclusions in *Praca* and the observations made by Georg Simmel, author of *The Philosophy of Money* (1900): a feature of the culture of money is growing freedom in the negative sense (“freedom from”) – analogous to the unfettered freedom of money (“Free as a coin, that goes round and round”), but also “monetary” impersonality, blandness, non-idealism<sup>73</sup>.

A continuation of this theme, and at the same time a clear polemic against the views of contemporary “reformers” and utopians on “what the alphabet of work is”, is the *Vade-mecum* link entitled *Prac-czoto* [*Work in Brow’s Sweat*]:

Wyrobić musi pierw: umysłu-stałość,  
Bez której nie ma sił, ciągu ni zysku.  
Więc prac początek, pierwsza prac litera  
Nie tam, gdzie wasza dziś realna-szkoła  
Uczy – zarówno płytką, jak nieszczera:  
Pracować musisz zawsze z potem-CZOŁA!

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<sup>71</sup> See S. BRATKOWSKI, p. 369.

<sup>72</sup> Incidentally, Alexander Jatowt (pseud. Jakub Gordon), an escapee from Tsarist exile, also found himself in America; he was associated with Norwid thanks to a borrowed passport which opened the Berlin prison to the poet). A dozen or so years later than Dickens (the latter visited America twice: in 1842 and 1868), in a completely different tone from the English poet, he described the Western civilisation of money – the incessant preoccupation with business and targeting only the “clinking coin,” envy and gossip, the nouveau riche “pork aristocracy”, but also openness, democratic social relations, freedom and unlimited opportunities for advancement and development. See M. JATOWT, *Przechadzki po Ameryce*, Berlin – Poznań 1866; idem, “Wytłumaczę wam, skąd wzięła się Ameryka,” Warszawa 1979.

<sup>73</sup> See G. SIMMEL, *Filozofia pieniądza*.

Reformatorów zbierz wszystkich i nagle  
 Spytaj ich: co jest pracy abecadłem?  
 Zacząć mam z czego? gdy na skały wpadłem  
 Lub wiatr ustąpił, zerwawszy pierw żagle –  
 Od czego zacząć? czy – od dłoni-potu?  
 Lub ramion-potu?... gdy brak i narzędzi,  
 Gdy wkoło otchłań, a ty – na krawędzi:  
 Zacznij... by w głowie nie było zawrotu –  
 Więc głos ogromny znów jak pierwiej woła:  
 „Musisz pracować z potem twego czoła!”

\*

Spustoszałem powiedz Narodowi:  
 Niech się z bogaci jak może najprędzej,  
 A mając posag, resztę postanowi,  
 Do-rychtowawszy [do onych pieniędzy]

[The rest of the text has not been preserved]  
 (*Prac-czoło [Work in Brow's Sweat]*, PWSz II, 91-92).

[He must first develop a stable mind,  
 Without which there is no power, thrust or profit!  
 So the beginning of work, the first letter of work,  
 Is not where today your real-school  
 Teaches – which is both shallow and insincere.  
 You must always work with the sweat of your BROW!

\*

Get all the reformers together and suddenly  
 Ask them: what is the alphabet of work?  
 What to start with? when I bumped into rocks  
 Or the wind receded, having first broken the sails –  
 Where to start? – with the sweat of the palm?  
 Or the sweat of the arm?... when there is a lack of tools,  
 When there is an abyss all around, and you – on the edge:  
 Start... so that your head does not spin –  
 Thus a huge voice calls out again as before:  
 “You have to work with the sweat of your brow!”

\*

Say that to the desolate Nation:  
 It should get as rich as soon as possible,  
 And having a dowry, it will decide about the rest,  
 [Apart from that money] arming itself with:]

According to Norwid-thinker, work is associated not with capital, but with “heroism” and “creation” (cf. *Bohater* [*Hero*], PWSz II, 107), and, from a teleological perspective, with salvation. The poet restores its biblical senses: the expiatory and soteriological ones, unmeasured by temporal profit, and even remaining with it in a certain eschatological collision.

The protagonist of another lyric in the *Vade-mecum* cycle is “success,” identified with money. The semantics of this word, which enjoyed enormous popularity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was clearly polarised by the poet with the meanings conveyed by the ancient “victory” (*victoria*). Norwid believed that identifying these two terms as synonyms was one of the greatest mistakes of modern times:

S u k c e s   bożkiem jest dziś – on czarnoksiężtwo  
Swe rozwinął, jak globu kartę;  
Ustało mu nawet i Z w y c i ę s t w o  
Starożytne – wiecznie coś warte!

Aż spostrzeże ten tłum u swej mogiły,  
Aż obłądna ta spostrzeże zgraja:  
Że – Z w y c i ę s t w o   w y t r z e ż w i a   l u d z k i e   s i ł y,  
Gdy Sukces – i o w s z e m – r o z p a j a ! . . .  
(*Omyłka* [*Mistake*], PWSz, II, 122).

[ S u c c e s s   is the idol of today – it unfolded  
Its sorcery like a globe chart;  
Even the ancient V i c t o r y – eternally worth something –  
Has yielded to it!

Until this crowd notices at their grave,  
Until this mad mob notices:  
that – V i c t o r y   s o b e r s   h u m a n   s t r e n g t h ,  
While S u c c e s s – i n d e e d – m a k e s   i t   d r u n k ! . . . ]

A particularly evocative vision of industrial Western civilisation “in its everyday concretes”<sup>74</sup> is presented in the poem *Stolica* [*Capital*] (PWSz II, 38-39). The dramatic snapshots of the life of modern industrial metropolises, which are the place where capitalists and the proletariat coexist – images faithfully transposed from the streets of the capital cities known to the poet: London, Paris or New York – are reminiscent of examples from socialist writings. In this poem,

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<sup>74</sup> S. SAWICKI, „Religijność liryki Norwida,” in: *Polska liryka religijna*, eds. S. Sawicki, P. Nowaczyński, Lublin 1983, p. 244.



as in his contemporary or slightly later novellas and positivist novels, there appear the protagonists of the new, capitalist era and contemporary social realities: the factory owners and the workers who are “handed paychecks”; the meagre pay of the latter, barely enough for “a morsel of bread”; the atmosphere of blandness, haste and anxiety shrouding the factory reality:

3

Ruchy dwa i gesty dwa tylko:  
 Fabrykantów, ścigających coś z rozpaczą,  
 I pokwitowanych z prac, przed chwilką,  
 Co – tryumfem się raczą...

4

Konwulsje dwie, i dwa obrazy:  
 Zakupionego z góry nieba,  
 Lub – fabrycznej ekstazy  
 O – kęs chleba.

(PWsz II, 38-39)

3

[Two gestures, two movements – just two:  
 Of producers, chasing something in gloom,  
 And of those with freshly cut pay checks,  
 Delighting in their boom...

4

Two visions, two convulsions:  
 Of heaven purchased ahead,  
 And of factory men’s elation –  
 Over a morsel of bread.]<sup>75</sup>

Before the reader’s eyes thus unfolds a view of a “great city” of a few million “mortals” “chasing riches”. This is

A picture of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century capital, Paris, seen through the eyes not only of a great artist, but also of a man of profound morals, who knows at what hour of history the crowd of black-clad stoics moves along the street of the “capital of the world,” a crowd which, in contrast to their apatheia, in constant motion, in the pursuit of money finds the goal of their life<sup>76</sup>.

<sup>75</sup> English translation by D. BORCHARDT, in collaboration with A. BRAJERSKA-MAZUR, *C. NORWID, Poems*, New York 2011, p. 35.

<sup>76</sup> M. JASTRUN, “Stolica”, in: *Cypriana Norwida kształt prawdy i miłości*, p. 89.

Money is the object of the dreams and desperate efforts of both sides in this inhuman race – both the factory owners and the workers oppressed by them. The owners and the wretched are united by the common notion that the race represents a pass to paradise. The difference lies in the extent to which the desire to possess “heaven,” already here and now, can be satisfied – the capitalists are able to “purchase heaven” for themselves, the wretched experience the only form of “ecstasy” available to them by chewing a piece of bread. It is obvious that Norwid distances himself from the rich, whose insatiable lust pushes them towards ever new acquisitions at the expense of the lives and dignity of others, but unlike the socialists who uncritically affirm the proletariat, he also takes a detached view of the dramatic struggles of the metropolitan poor. He does not succumb to false charity or the delusion of socialist utopias because he is aware that both the poor and the rich inhabitants of the “capital” have reached the extreme stage of mercantilisation of their minds and materialist enslavement, although each group in a different way available to it. The claim that these people are “chasing after something” unambiguously suggests the indeterminacy and blandness of their goal; the pursuit of money is a path in an unknown direction, a perspective devoid of values, essentially nihilistic (this “something” may well turn out to be “nothing”). The spiritual emptiness of nihilism results in despair – even the “triumph” of capitalists is lined with it. The poem’s conclusion thus boils down to the assertion that the materialist idolatry of mammon conceals nihilism and despair.

In Norwid’s masterpiece, “despair and money” will become the quintessence of the entire Western world, and only nominally the Christian world. Ultimately, money will take a place in it, in line with its rank in the social life of the time and on the historical plane:

Rozpacz i pieniądz – dwa słowa –  
 Łyskają bielmem jej źrenic.  
 Skąd idzie?... sobie to chowa.  
 Gdzie idzie?... zapewne, gdzie nic!

Takiej-to podobna jędzy  
 Ludzkość, co płacze dziś i drwi;  
 – Jak historia?... wie tylko: „krwi!...”  
 Jak społeczność?... tylko: „pieniędzy!...”

(*Larwa* [*Larva*], PWSz II, 30)<sup>77</sup>.

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<sup>77</sup> See M. ŻUROWSKI, „*Larwa* na tle porównawczym,” *Przegląd Humanistyczny* VII: 1963, Issue 6 (39), pp. 15-34.

[Despair and money – two words –  
Flash in her web-shrouded eyes.  
Whence comes she?...only she knows.  
Where goes she?... where nothing is

Such is Mankind – a witchlike crud  
That weeps today and finds things funny;  
– Its history?... knows only: “blood!...”  
Its institutions?... only: “money!...”]<sup>78</sup>

Worthy of emphasis is this historiosophical observation by Norwid that the cult of money (on a social level) always translates into “blood” in human history for the simple reason that greed results in a politics of rape. This truth was stated once again by Norwid in his pre-mortem *resumé* of 19<sup>th</sup>-century politics and history:

[...] kilkadziesiąt milionów trupa, łez i opchanych worków fałszywą monetą” (Letter to K. Górka, PWSz X, 155).

[[...] several tens of millions of corpses, tears and stuffed sacks with false coin”.]

Incidentally, Marx came to a similar conclusion at the end of his over 800 pages of economic analyses: If money, in the words of Augier<sup>79</sup>, “comes into the world with a bloody mark on its cheek”, capital is born dripping with blood and dirt from all its pores, from head to toe<sup>80</sup>.

*Vade-mecum* brings another shocking description of the Western, capitalist reality of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: “Syberia pracy i pieniędzy, gdzie wolnym grób” [a Siberia of work and money, where the grave is free]:<sup>81</sup>

<sup>78</sup> English translation by D. BORCHARDT, in collaboration with A. BRAJERSKA-MAZUR, C. NORWID, *Poems*, New York 2011, p. 29.

<sup>79</sup> This refers to the work by Marie AUGIER, *Du credit public*, Paris 1842, p. 265.

<sup>80</sup> K. MARKS, *Kapitał*, Vol. 1, p. 820.

<sup>81</sup> Norwid depicted similarly harrowing moral landscapes of Europe earlier, for example in the poems *Pieśń od ziemi naszej* [*Song of Our Land*] and *Rzeczywistość i marzenia* [*Reality and Dreams*]:

Od wschodu – mądrość-kłamstwa i ciemnota,  
Karności harap lub samotrzask z złota,  
Trąd, jad i brud.  
Na zachód – kłamstwo-wiedzy i błyskotność,  
Formalizm prawdy – wewnętrzna bez-istotność,  
A pycha pych!”  
(*Pieśń od ziemi naszej* [*Song of Our Land*] PWSz I, 123);

Wróćcież kiedy? – i którzy? i jacy? –  
Z śmiertelnych prób,  
W drugą Syberię: pieniędzy i pracy,  
Gdzie wolnym – grób!

Lub pierw, czy? obie takowe Syberie,  
Niewoli dwóch,  
Odepchnie nogą, jak stare liberie,  
Wielki-Pan... Duch!

(PWsz II, 58).

[Will you ever come back? and as who? and what?  
From fatal trials:  
To the second Siberia – of money and work,  
Where the grave awaits the free!

Or else first, if? Both such Siberias  
The two enslavements  
Will be pushed away with a leg, like old liveries,  
By the Great Lord... Spirit!]

The poem *Syberie* [*Two Siberias*] is a shocking testimony to the birth of new forms of oppression that emerged from beyond the horizon of modernity. Evoking martyrological associations, the metaphor “a Siberia of money” had and still has

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[From the East – the wisdom of lie and darkness,  
A whip of punishment or a self-lock of gold,  
Leprosy, venom and filth.  
To the West – the lie of knowledge and brilliance,  
Truth formalism – internal irrelevance,  
And hubris of hubris!"]

– Zresztą, kto ciało ma – ciałem, kto nerwy –  
Nerwami, myśl kto ma, to myśli kwotą  
Musi opłacać czynsz lub kopać złoto...  
– Bogdajby duszy w końcu nie żądano...  
(*Rzeczywistość i marzenia* [*Reality and Dreams*], PWsz I, 227).

[– Anyway, whoever has a body – with a body, whoever has nerves  
– With nerves, whoever has a thought – with an amount of thought  
Must pay rent or dig gold...  
– As long as the soul is not demanded in the end...]

a tragic meaning for Poles. The semantic field of this geographical term expanded in the Polish language as early as the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when it came to refer not only to the strictly assigned territories of North Asia, but also to all places of the Polish exile in the East (including the Urals and the Caucasus). In Norwid's work, the process of pansemantisation goes even further, to the point of provocation<sup>82</sup>. Siberia is the whole area of man's spiritual and moral enslavement, including that plotted by the new despotism, no longer the political but the economic one. The second Siberia is the Western dominion of money, whose tyranny parallels the tsarist policy of rape and crime. This is one of the gravest accusations ever levelled at the Western, democratic world, which always proudly positioned itself in stark contrast to Asian (including Russian) barbarism.

*Vade-mecum* not only exposes the absurdities of 19<sup>th</sup>-century economic utopias, it also shows the other side of the social coin – the shocking indifference of the elites to the misery of the masses:

2

Cywilizacji dwie widzę ustawnie:  
 Jedna, chce wszystko odkrywać na serio,  
 Druga, chce wszystko pokrywać zabawnie,  
 Świetną liberią!... [...]

4

Zakrywająca?... cieszy znów inaczej -  
 Pokaż jej łez zdroj?... ona odpowiada:  
 „Nie trzeba zważać na to... co? to znaczy!...  
 Może – deszcz pada.”  
 (*Sieroctwo [Orphanhood]*, PWsz II, 42-43).

[2

I can constantly see two civilisations:  
 Onewants to uncover everything in seriousness,  
 The other wants to cover everything playfully,  
 With a great livery!!! [...]

4

The covering one?... pleases again differently –  
 Show it the well of tears?... it replies:

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<sup>82</sup> Waldemar Smaszcz once wrote about the boldness of this move taken by Norwid to redefine the meaning of this sacred word-symbol “Polish Golgotha”: “By using this name in a different sense, the poet seems to have desacralized it, almost defiled it”. W. SMASZCZ, “Syberie,” in: W. Smaszcz, „Trzy analizy,” *Poezja* 1983, Issue 4-5, p. 181.



Entertains with largesse -  
But tell her what?...

...Mirrors will crack,  
Candelabra shudder at the *realism*  
And painted parrots  
From beak to beak cry "*Socialism!*"  
Along the length of the ceiling.]<sup>84</sup>

As Bogdan Owczarek wrote, the contrast of the worlds and social milieus depicted in the poem "is too great for any contact to be possible between them; words about poverty and hunger spoken in the salon are essentially mute since they remain misunderstood or shouted down"<sup>85</sup>.

*Vade-mecum* speaks about money, capital and work, but not always with deadly seriousness. Norwid also happens to strike humorous or ironic tones, a great example of which is the humoresque *Co słychać?* [*What's New?*], written back in 1865 and later included in the cycle. This is a brilliant satire on extreme pragmatism, playfully proposing to give mercantile meanings to even common gestures, such as sneezing or fixing a tie, so that they can become quick, non-verbal information about the situation at the stock market or cotton prices. Despite the appearance of thematic "lightness," the piece conceals the terrifying truth about the caricatured degeneration of human relationships under the influence of money:

– Wkrótce albowiem wszystko Ludzkość z-użyteczni,  
Ludzie będą, dla wprawy w gimnastykę, grzeczni;  
Jak kichnie kto?... będzie to hasłem dla sąsiada,  
Że Bursa stoi słabo i że renta spada –  
Jak poprawi krawatę, prosty z tego wniosek,  
Że wiele jest o cenach bawełny pogłosek.  
„Jak się masz?” – będzie stawką, a „bądź zdrów” – wykrętem,  
Panny będą rachować Fijołki z procentem;  
Arbuzy pójdą w górę; Kapusta czerwona  
Zburczy Różę stolistną, że nie oceniona [...]  
(*Co słychać?* [*What's New?*], PWSz II, 93).

[– Soon Mankind will turn everything useable  
People will, for a gymnastic practice, be polite;  
If one sneezes?... it will be a signal to the neighbour

<sup>84</sup> English translation by A. CZERNIAWSKI, C. NORWID, *Selected Poems*, London 2004, p. 78.

<sup>85</sup> B. OWCZAREK, "Nerwy", in: *Cypriana Norwida kształt prawdy i miłości*, p. 113.

That the Stock Exchange is weak and that the annuity is decreasing –  
If one mends his tie, a simple inference from this,  
There is much rumour about the cotton prices.  
“How are you?” – will be a stake, and “be well” – an excuse,  
Maidens will count Pansies with interest;  
Watermelons will go up; Red cabbage  
Will scold a hundred-leaf Rose that it is unpriced/invaluable [...]]

In the last verse, a wonderful play on words (in relation to the rose) draws attention: “nieoceniona” can mean both: precious, invaluable, unique, and therefore beautiful and special, and (this time in merchant terms) “niewyceniona” [unpriced]: economically unmeasured, unlabelled and unpriced, and therefore “uselessly” beautiful, unable to be quickly monetised.

This review makes it possible to state that *Vade-mecum* is an unprecedented volume of poetry (against the background of earlier Polish Romantic poetry) and an extremely modern one – not only because of the innovativeness of its form, but also because of the boldness with which it addresses in verse the contemporary, ungrateful and “dry” economic subject; the boldness with which it introduces “vulgar” and “unpoetic” words taken from the “everyday prose of life”<sup>86</sup>, such as money, capital, stock exchange, factory worker, price, rate, bank... In addition, Norwid was equally bold in using the word “kał” [faeces], which would be closely associated with money (by Freud) in the not-too-distant future. Today we no longer feel the extravagance of Norwid’s move, but in the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was very striking to audiences. Maciej Żurowski noted:

Metropolitan themes do not have a rich poetic tradition in our country and were still something irritatingly new at the beginning of the interwar period of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>87</sup>.

Within this, perhaps the greatest distaste and aesthetic shock was triggered by the economic topics, which only Positivism legitimised somewhat with its programme of social repair (but this took place in prose, not in poetry!).

Norwid’s diagnosis of the social situation (“Jak społeczność?... tylko: „pieniędzy!...” [How is community?... only: “money!...”]) surprisingly agrees with the statements made by the greatest, most influential thinkers of the century (Proudhon, Owen, Cieszkowski, Marx, Fourier, Leroux, etc.), promoting money

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<sup>86</sup> B. OWCZAREK, p. 26.

<sup>87</sup> M. ŻUROWSKI, p. 15. However, the author draws attention to the fact that metropolitan reality did not attract Norwid (as it was the case with, for instance, Baudelaire), it aroused rather his disgust, he was only its “pathetic witness”. M. ŻUROWSKI, p. 18.



to the very top of the issues defining that mercantile era. It is also owing to his own painful life experience that Norwid unquestioningly recognised the importance of economic issues in the totality of life and society's "Serio". He even employed means of imagery and persuasion similar to those used by the economists and reformers of his day (the infernal Dantean metaphors, irony). However, this poet did not intend to become a practical economist-demagogue. Rather, as Juliusz W. Gomulicki noted, the themes of the *Vade-mecum* cycle revolve around anthropological issues such as: "the immaturity of man," "the tragedy of trivial reality," "the misery of temporality," "the tragedy of moral suffering," "the illusions of progress," etc.<sup>88</sup> Mieczysław Inglot developed this thought as follows: "*Vade-mecum* was one great cry of Christian suffering, i.e. suffering not devoid of hope"<sup>89</sup>. Norwid's poetry never entangles itself in the search of detailed legal and economic solutions (though Norwid was also interested in these, as evidenced by his remarks written on the margins of Cieszkowski's work, or his proposals for the establishment of a bank for émigrés). The poet regards their historical forms to be *ad hoc*, transient and *ex definitione* imperfect, also doomed to evolve almost *ad infinitum* ("Jesteśmy dopier ludźmi XIX wieku!" [We are only people of the 19<sup>th</sup> century!]). The problem of money is resolved in *Vade-mecum* in a completely different way than in the atheistic socialist manifestos, which make a more or less advanced nihilism the starting point of their demands:

Ekonomiści bowiem 19-o wieku zapomnieli prawie, iż kamieniem filozoficznym pieniędzy nie złoto jest, ale *Dekalog*, ale Mojżeszowe „nie kradnij, nie pożądam...” – ale, jednym słowem, Ideał, w myśli Przedwiecznego zapisany i przed-położony człowieczeństwu przez kategorie z-Bożnych, historycznych ciał, ojczyzn [...] (Letter to F. Wężyk, DW XI, 158).

[The economists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century seem to have almost forgotten that the *philosopher's stone* of money is not gold, but the *Decalogue*, the Mosaic "thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not covet...", in a word – the Ideal, encapsulated in the thought of the Eternal One and pre-given to humanity by the categories of opious, historical bodies, homelands [...].]

The idea of a progress geared solely towards accumulation of assets, and only secondarily towards adding dignity and charity "in addition to that money," is not the vision shared by the author of *Vade-mecum*. In Norwid's opinion, the material problems of that century require precisely that we go beyond the

<sup>88</sup> See J. W. GOMULICKI, "Wstęp," in: C. NORWID, *Vade-mecum*, ed. J. W. Gomulicki, Warszawa 1962, pp. 22-23.

<sup>89</sup> M. INGLOT, „Opus magnum Norwidowskiej liryki. Rzecz o *Vade-mecum*,” in: M. INGLOT, *Wyobraźnia poetycka Norwida*, Warszawa 1988, p. 82.

mercantile perspective and return to the world of axiology, because the essence of the problem lies in the human heart, in human frailty (“jednej rzeczy brak (wcale nie pieniędzy), brak jednej tylko rzeczy – – ludzi!” [one thing is missing (and this is not money), there is only one thing missing – – people!]) Letter to J. Kuczyńska PWsz IX, 300) and in the underdevelopment of the human conscience (“Nie-prze-palony jeszcze glob, Sumieniem!” [The world not-all-consumed by Conscience yet!]) *Socjalizm*, PWsz II, 19). In Norwid’s “manifesto of modern intellectual poetry”<sup>90</sup>, which is, as Gomulicki wrote, “the summa of the author’s many years of philosophical and artistic experience”<sup>91</sup>, the poet thus undertakes – as a (post-)Romantic and Christian – an attempt to restore “monetary” material matters to their original spiritual and ideal context.

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<sup>90</sup> J. W. GOMULICKI, „Wstęp,” in: C. NORWID, *Vade-mecum*, p. 18.

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SPOŁECZNOŚĆ I HISTORIA, CZYLI PIENIĄDZ I KREW.  
EKONOMIA W VADE-MECUM NORWIDA

Streszczenie

Temat pieniądza zajmuje w *Vade-mecum* poczesne miejsce, proporcjonalnie do pozycji, jaka przypadła finansom i ekonomii w koncepcjach polityczno-społecznych oraz filozoficznych XIX stulecia. Tematyka „kapitałowa” pojawia się między innymi w takich ogniwach cyklu, jak *Socjalizm*, *Larwa*, *Stolica*, *Prac-czoło*, *Syberie*, [*Co słyhać?*], *Nerwy*. Norwidowskie *opus magnum* kształtowało się w atmosferze wielkiego przesilenia gospodarki kapitalistycznej: kryzysu światowego po wojnie secesyjnej (1866), którego skutki pokazał w pierwszym tomie swego *Kapitału* (1867) Marks. Słynna publikacja niemieckiego ekonomisty stanowi ważny, choć w sensie ideowym – biegunowo odległy, kontekst Norwidowskiego cyklu. Ważną inspiracją były natomiast dla poety czytane w latach 40. dzieła Proudhona i zapewne innych socjalistów utopijnych (może Owena), proponujące rezygnację z dotychczasowych form pieniądza jako antidotum na kryzysy ekonomiczne i nędzę mas. W liście Norwida z 15 lipca 1867 roku (PWsz, IX, 297) pojawia się ponadto ślad lektury rozprawy Augusta Cieszkowskiego pt. *Du Crédit, et de la Circulation* (Paris 1839) oraz dowód kontaktów autora *Vade-mecum* z ekonomistą Ludwikiem Wołowskim, współzałożycielem i dyrektorem paryskiego banku *Crédit Foncier de France* (zał. w r. 1852), którzy przenieśli do Francji Napoleona III genialne pomysły kredytowe księcia Druckiego-Lubeckiego. Norwid podejmuje w *Vade-mecum* polemikę zarówno z utopijnymi pomysłami socjalistycznej gospodarki bezpieniężnej, jak i z polskimi koncepcjami organicystycznymi, osadzonymi na ekonomii zysku i wizji sukcesu gospodarczego. Dostrzega ich oderwanie od Dekalogu, kategorii „sumienia” i chrześcijańskiej soteriologii. *Vade-mecum* staje się próbą (romantyczną i chrześcijańską) przywrócenia spraw pieniężnych do ich pierwotnego kontekstu: idealnego i duchowego.

**Słowa kluczowe:** pieniądz w literaturze XIX wieku; ekonomia; kapitalizm; Cyprian Norwid; *Vade-mecum*.

## SOCIETY AND HISTORY, OR MONEY AND BLOOD. ECONOMY IN NORWID'S *VADE-MECUM*

### Summary

The subject of money occupies a prominent place in *Vade-mecum*, reflecting the significance of finance and economy in socio-political and philosophical theories of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The question of “capital” emerges in many poems from the cycle, e.g. in *Socjalizm* [*Socialism*], *Larwa* [*Larva*], *Stolica* [*Capital*], *Prac-czoło* [*Work in Brow's Sweat*], *Syberie* [*Two Siberias*], *Co słyhać?* [*What's New?*] and *Nerwy* [*Nerves*]. Norwid's *opus magnum* was written in the period of intense transformation of capitalist economy, notably in the wake of the global crisis following the American Civil War (1866), the consequences of which are discussed by Marx in the first volume of *Capital* (1867). The famous publication by the German economist constitutes an important context for Norwid's cycle, although the two are worlds apart in ideological terms. The poet was nevertheless greatly inspired by Proudhon's works, which he read in the 1840s alongside other utopian socialists (possibly Owen), who would propose abandoning money in its traditional form as an antidote to economic crises and mass poverty. Additionally, Norwid's letter of 15 July 1867 (PWsz IX, 297) contains a trace of the poet's reading of August Cieszkowski's treatise *Du Crédit, et de la Circulation* (Paris 1839) and proof of contacts with the economist Ludwik Wołowski, co-founder and director of the Parisian bank *Crédit Foncier de France* (established in 1852). The two men introduced some of the brilliant credit ideas developed by Prince Drucki-Lubecki to the France of Napoleon III. In *Vade-mecum* Norwid po-

lemicises both with utopian concepts of a socialist, moneyless economy and with Polish organicist ideas based on profit economy and visions of economic success. Norwid recognised their departure from the Decalogue, the category of “conscience”, and Christian soteriology. In this sense, *Vade-mecum* becomes a Romantic and Christian attempt to restore the question of money to its original context – that of ideals and spiritual life.

**Keywords:** money in 19<sup>th</sup>-century literature; economy; capitalism; Cyprian Norwid; *Vade-mecum*.

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