

mgr Maria Wójcik

Summary of doctoral dissertation on  
***“Poles of sense”. Contrast as a method of building the world  
presented in Cyprian Norwid’s poetry***

The doctoral dissertation addresses the issue of the contrasting way of shaping the world presented in Cyprian Norwid’s lyrical works. It is an attempt to answer a number of questions about how the presented world and the ideological meaning of individual works are organized around specific oppositions, what pairs of concepts create them, on which levels of the work they are realized, and finally, what place the poetics of contrasts occupies among other conventions used by the poet. The most important terms used in the dissertation, such as contrast, dualism, polarity, opposite, opposition, antinomy or splitting, appear in the course of analysis interchangeably and are treated as related in meaning.

The research material includes selected lyrical works by the artist, contained in volumes 1 and 2 of *Pisma wszystkie*, edited by Juliusz Wiktor Gomulicki (Warszawa 1971). In the common consciousness the poems are probably the most important part of the work of the author of *Vade-mecum*. Moreover, in their essential form, they contain a number of artistic techniques characteristic of Norwid’s entire oeuvre.

The doctoral dissertation consists of four chapters, the first theoretical and three analytical. The first chapter, entitled *Whole, parts and contrasts: interpretations of Cyprian Norwid’s works*, contains a description of the most important research concepts, according to which the category of contrasts and oppositions plays an important role in the work of the author of *Vade-mecum*. This part of the dissertation also contains a discussion on selected philosophical concepts affecting Cyprian Norwid’s thought (the views of the ancient philosophers, the influence of the Bible and Christianity, and the importance of 19th-century Hegelianism). Thus, in the first chapter, the author distinguished, among others, Norwid’s “dualistic concept of the word” characterized by Włodzimierz Toruń (where the dualism of “word” and “letter” is present), as well as Norwid’s understanding of the contrasting categories of “brightness” and “darkness” analyzed by Grażyna Halkiewicz-Sojak. She also emphasized the fact that the two basic divisions in the poet’s thinking are connected – the duality of man and the dualism of the word, as well as the distinction between the external and the internal in poetic expression. The author of the dissertation also pointed out that in the views of a significant part of researchers, the concept of the whole has come to the fore many

times, according to which Norwid sought in his works to show the recipient a certain generality of phenomena, to create their synthesis. This theory, however, despite the main function unifying the poet's message, leaves room for the presence of contrasts. The author proves that the dichotomous way of thinking of the poet could also be influenced by the achievements of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, as well as Christian philosophy and (to a lesser extent) the philosophy of Hegel – everywhere there the oppositions of concepts or values are clearly realized.

The second chapter, entitled *Conceptual oppositions*, deals with the presence in the world depicted in Cyprian Norwid's poems of broadly understood juxtapositions of concepts, both those rooted in culture and those chosen by the poet entirely in his own way, for the needs of specific lyrical situations. Socially grounded oppositions are divisions such as "good" and "evil", "body" and "spirit", "sacred" and "profane", "truth" and "falsehood", "freedom" and "bondage" or "speech" and "silence". Despite the meanings assigned to them by culture, the poet often treats these dichotomies individually, changing or enriching their message, for example, silence is often "eloquent" by Norwid, and speech is an ineffective way of expressing one's own thoughts. Oppositions from this circle most often present man as a material and spiritual being, whose existence is constantly "torn" between two spheres or values.

Other opposing motifs in Norwid's poetry – that have more individual character – have been assigned to three groups of works, classified according to the forms in which the contrasts are manifested. These are: the poetics of dialogue, the poetics of paradox and the poetics of description. Each of the above-mentioned groups represents Norwid's characteristic yet each time a slightly different way of shaping the thought or creation of the depicted world, within which unconventional juxtapositions of concepts or motifs come to the fore. Within the poetics of dialogue, contrasts are realized not only on the formal level of the work, divided into two utterances. Using this form of expression, Norwid creates original pairs of oppositions, most often being allegories, personifications of concepts or juxtaposed figures of animals or equipment. The poet chooses seemingly non-contradictory terms, such as "Morality" and "Philosophy" or "statue" and "shoes", which he polarizes within the world presented in the poem. The lyrical speaker does not choose one of the two possibilities, nor does he give a different solution, and turns his thoughts in a completely different direction, leaving the described scene, as it were. He does not negate the previously revealed oppositions, nor does he integrate them by synthesis. The poet uses the poetics of paradox mainly in situations where he wants to draw attention to surprising dependencies that manifest

themselves both in social life and in the life of an individual. Throughout history, Norwid notices dramatic changes in the society's approach to outstanding individuals. He illustrates this in the work with a paradoxical juxtaposition of their merits and posthumous fates (rejected and underestimated during their lifetime, and recognized only after death). The poet notices similar behavior in his contemporary society and in the dimension of his personal life. Both the followers of salon customs (who present awkward or even unpleasant situations as a good omen) and the Polish emigration, whose behavior the poet portrayed quite critically, are representatives of paradoxical social behavior. Paradoxes also concern the inner sphere of a man who, for example, at the moment of repeated betrayal, becomes indifferent and no longer feels strong bitterness. Paradoxes also define the nature of God, who, while remaining a being transcendental to the world, at the same time became a man. In the poetics of description within a single utterance, which most often resembles the convention of a parable or a story, as in the poetics of dialogue, selected concepts are juxtaposed in a way that is specific only to Norwid (these are, for example, "success" and "victory", "books" and "deeds" or "tears" and "stones"). As part of this poetic technique, Norwid also repeatedly uses a single, specific concept in order to subject it to a multi-perspective view in the course of the narrative and detail the contrasts perceived within it (e.g. different faces of tenderness or miscellaneous dimensions of human morality). The poet, by using such contrasting motifs, emphasizes the complexity of the world even where it would seem that it does not exist.

The third chapter *Spatial and temporal oppositions* presents a set of space and time oppositions present in Norwid's poetry. They mainly stem from the poet's special interest in historiosophy and the role of man in history. The poet had a special ability to notice significant transformations both in his own perception of the world and in the collective consciousness. As part of the opposition of space, oppositions in the classical sense intertwine, but their realizations take place in a very diverse way. Space contrasts may refer to culturally accepted universal directions and areas ("top" and "bottom" or "vertical" and "horizontal"), as well as a certain form of their concretization, referring to the human condition and the way a person looks at reality (e.g. "sky" and "ground", "city" and "village"). Spatial oppositions are also revealed within specific dimensions, e.g. horizontal (using terms such as "here" and "there") or vertical ("up" and "down"). The dichotomies within the horizontal gaze are used by the poet to emphasize the contrasts between situations that are simultaneous but spatially distant. Such differences are revealed on the emotional or axiological level. Vertical poles, in turn, become determinants of the dimension of human existence, related to earthly existence, and at the same time having mental, psychological

access to the sphere of transcendence (e.g. as in the poem *Idee i Prawda*). This way of seeing is also related to the spirituality of a believer, a Christian who interprets the areas of heaven and earth as places where God and man reside. Such spirituality also makes it possible to perceive in the intersection of the horizontal and vertical spheres (“vertical” and “horizontal”), the motif of the cross, perceived both physically (as a bridge and a mast) and symbolically (as in the poem *Pielgrzym*).

Time dichotomies such as “past” and “future”, “past” and “present” or “present” and “future” are used by the poet to characterize the existence of a man who is constantly suspended between where he comes from and where he is going. Looking at the present from the perspective of the past, the poet emphasizes that human identity consists of all the experiences and achievements of people of the past, especially outstanding individuals who made breakthroughs in thought (eg St. Paul or Socrates). The classical understanding of the concepts defined by thinkers is lost over time and, according to the poet, does not accompany the contemporary man who follows what is attractive and superficial (as in the poem *Pięknoczasu*). The belief that the authentic value is perceived over time opens the direction of looking at the present from the perspective of the future, which will verify the temporal efforts of man (e.g. the poem *Laur dojrzały*). This means that, according to Norwid, man is a mortal and temporal being, who, however, can remain in the memory of posterity for a long time and “live” in their consciousness long after death.

Within the group of contrasts of space and time are also visible such dualisms that are characteristic only of Norwid’s imagination. Thus, the poet revises the traditional understanding of concrete (Siberia) and abstract concepts (civilization, martyrdom) and assigns them new meanings. This technique of extracting contrasting semantics within a single concept illustrates Norwid’s tendency to constantly confront the meanings of words, showing the multiplicity of perspectives and complexity where it seems there is none.

In the fourth chapter entitled *Optical oppositions* the oppositions existing in the sphere of visual qualities of Norwid’s lyrics were characterized, such as: brightness and darkness, light and shadow or black and white. First, in the lyrical works of the young poet, various light qualities appear in the world presented mainly in the functions of creating the space viewed by the lyrical subject, they also appear as symbols of biblical axiology. In the creative development of Cyprian Norwid, these oppositions gain new meanings and references, e.g. brightness and darkness are associated with sound and silence. The dichotomies of light, specified, for example, in the motifs of night and matins, polarize human attitudes – the night refers to schematic thinking, and matins herald hope for a change in consciousness. The

opposition of light and shadow, on the other hand, is presented by Norwid in the notion of “chiaroscuro” written with a hyphen. It symbolizes the transition between two extreme values, while presenting a whole range of human attitudes and behaviors. Color contrasts, black and white, perform various functions, although the poet uses them less frequently than the light ones. They are most often evoked by the physical features of objects and animals (the whiteness of a quill pen and the blackness of its ink, the motifs of a dove, a raven) or people (the whiteness of hoar hair and blackness of eyes, the whiteness and blackness of the clothes of passers-by). The semantics of these two extreme colors may present both references to meanings fixed in culture (white as purity, life, and evil as chaos, death), as well as refer to the poet’s own imagination, perceiving the vitality of a man in the blackness of his eyes or nobility, but also fragility in the alabaster whiteness of the hand.

The end of the dissertation contains a number of conclusions about Norwid’s poetics of contrasts. In the poetry of the author of *Vade-mecum*, one pair of opposing qualities or motifs is often associated with others, which results in a characteristic concentration, an accumulation of poetic contrasts. In many cases, when the poet seeks to reveal the whole, he also emphasizes its antinomian character. It is also worth noting that the polarization of two categories in principle does not take into account any place in-between, and yet Norwid many times, despite the use of opposing concepts, does not subordinate the entire world presented only to these poles. The poet often either distances himself from the discussed categories, directing the reader’s attention in a different direction, or defines some area of suspension or type of centering, “in between two incompatible worlds”. He also rarely introduces opposing pairs of concepts, phenomena or motifs into the world presented in his own works, only to express their overcoming and “reconciliation” (if he does, it is related to references to God and the non-material reality). It can therefore be seen that contrasts and oppositions are in many cases figures of Norwid’s thinking, by means of which the artist conveys observations crucial for his poetic work.

The entire dissertation is complemented by a bibliography.

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