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Creator or author. Norwid's concept of beauty, art and artist or the arts creating process

The Christian concept of beauty, art, an artist formulated by C.K. Norwid and presented in his *Promethidion*, clearly refers to the experience of fine arts. The reference to the arts-creating process makes and blends together Norwid's concept.

In order to formulate the definition of beauty, Norwid uses three terms: shape, profile and form. In fine arts these terms have specific meanings, they relate to one another, defining particular stages of a process of creation. Understanding the form as a matrix seems to be significant in Norwid's concept. It allows seeing the man's work as an image of God's act of creation. Humans, created in the image and likeness of God, are capable of creating. We were invited to create beauty and good and thanks to them we discover God as the source of transcendent values and we get close to Him.

Key words: beauty, good, truth, love, art, Creator, author, artist, conjurer, creating process, shape, profile, form, matrix, repetition, reflection, cognition, resurrection, the secret of creation, the secret of incarnation, likeness of God.

Cyprian Kamil Norwid (1821-1883) an artist, poet, thinker, as John Paul II wrote, left a work which emanates light, which allows us to go deeper into the truth of our being humans, Christians, Europeans, Polish people¹. His mastery of the word, the beauty of his language, creative use of and building semantic or sound nuances make Norwid's

¹ Jan Paweł II, *Z poezji Norwida emanuje światło*, [Norwid's poetry emanates light], a speech given to representatives of National Heritage Board of Poland on C.K. Norwid's 180th birth anniversary, [http://www.opoka.org.pl/zycie_kosciola/l'osservatore_romano/9\(236\)2001/kosciol_w_polsce](http://www.opoka.org.pl/zycie_kosciola/l'osservatore_romano/9(236)2001/kosciol_w_polsce). Html (10 Feb 2017)

work seemingly hermetic and rather difficult to translate. And yet, his ideas concerning esthetics, social or theological issues are characterised by universalism which reaches far beyond nationality. John Paul II referred to Norwid as one of the greatest poets and thinkers of Christian Europe². His work involves numerous areas of activity, inspires to carry out various studies and amazes with its timeless message.

A question could be asked: why does an architect, an interior designer, want to read a poem instead of talking about architecture and the space of sacredness, which they deal with daily?

Certainly, a personal relation to Norwid's poetry, dating back to my youth thanks to my Parents, plays a significant role here. However, it is the work of Cyprian Kamil Norwid, an artist, and as we would say today, a fine artist educated at various Academies of Fine Arts, who lived off art, that invites to do this non-philological research.

In the poet's work, where he "wrote with one hand and drew and painted with the other"³ a romantic idea of arts coexistence materialized, as "thinking, a man paints and sings at the same time"⁴. Although time has shown that, as Horace said, the word is more durable than sculptures of bronze or oil paintings, undoubtedly, for understanding art, an artist's role and work and to create a theoretical aesthetical concept, Norwid's own artistic experience had a vital meaning. That experience gave a wider perspective and allowed understanding nuances resulting from a different methodology of work, technique or sensitivity.

Following that trail, one could presume that to read and grasp Norwid's concept presented in his *Promethidion*, one's own artistic experience as well as knowledge about the artistic creative process may appear helpful.

This text is an attempt to emphasize those motifs which point at a connection between Norwid's theory and experience of fine arts.

Kształtem miłości piękno	
	jest – i tyle, [Beauty is a form of love
Ile ją człowiek oglądał na świecie,	As much a man has seen it in the world,
W ogromnym Bogu albo w sobie-pyle,	In the great God or himself – the dust,

² Ibidem.

³ Norwid, C. K. *List do Teofila Lenartowicza z 16 X 1868, Pisma wszystkie, [A Letter to Teofil Lenartowicz] worked out by J.W. Gomulicki, 1971-1976, IX pp. 371-37. (All quotations translated by A.J.)*

⁴ Ibidem, *Rzecz o wolności słowa, [About Freedom of Speech] III p. 582.*

in reference to the Book of Genesis: "I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth." (Gen 9,13). Grażyna Halkiewicz – Sojak points out that in Norwid's poem the rainbow is also a metaphore of art and the covenant between God and the world. She writes that such permeation of semantic fields implies that the art-rainbow intermediates between the human and divine dimentions of existence and is the work of an artist who can read God's signs¹⁷.

Art is certainly an artist's work. Creative work is an attribute of man but, paraphrasing what Jesus said to Pilate, man would have no power to create if it were not given from above. (compare John 19, 11). In his *Sztuka dla Polaków [Art for Polish People]* Norwid wrote:

In ideal beauty-doing there is a feeling of superior order of things, to which rising, if at the top of it one cannot take the truth encountered, it is only because man can take nothing that was not at first given to him.¹⁸

The author of *Promethidion* however, understands the capability of creating or contemplates it not perhaps as a gift of the Creator but as likeness to the Creator. The likeness of the creative process and of the artistic one, their relationship, interpenetration and parallelism.

The concept of creationism perceives the act of creation as a single-time and completed work. In the Polish language the words *creator* and *creature* emphasize and sanction the character of that completedness. The word *twórca*, which in English is also "creator" and therefore in this text is translated as "artist" or "author", and *tworzenie*, which sounds very similar to „stworzenie”, i.e. creature, but actually means "making, composing", on the contrary, have the imperfect aspect and suggest duration, permanence. It could be agreed that, in the view of the previous consideration, art is a form of reading God's signs, a way of unveiling beauty, discovering, coming to know it. On the other hand, as St. Paul said, "we know in part and we prophesy in part (...) now we see only a reflection as in a mirror." (1 Cor 13, 9; 12). Norwid's creative process is such a reflection in a mirror, repeating the process of God's creation. Each artistic act is a reflection of God's act of creation and the function of art is primarily revealing Beauty, Good, Love and Truth.

¹⁷ Halkiewicz-Sojak, Grażyna, : *Norwidowskie metafory i definicje piękna*, [Norwid's Metaphores and Definitions of Beauty] [in:] E. Nowicka i Z. Przychodniak (ed.), *Piękno wieku dziewiętnastego. Studia i szkice z historii literatury i estetyki*, [Beauty in the 19th Century] Poznań 2008, p. 56.

¹⁸ Norwid, C. K.: *O sztuce dla Polaków*, [Of Art for Polish People] Pisma Wybrane. Worked out by J.W. Gomulicki, PIW 1968, IV, p. 369.

Understanding creativity as a process of showing the reflection of perfection has its ancient roots. There is a Platonian idea in the verses of *Promethidion*. The author clearly points to collaterality of divine and human realities but those realities are not independent, they interpenetrate each other. The notions of Beauty, Good, Love and Truth, spelled with capital letters, refer to God's attributes, they are ideas which describe Him, whereas spelled with small letters are human merits, means used to present and come nearer to the divine ideal.

At the same time Norwid points to a reverse reaction on the one hand, an artistic act is an implication of the act of creation and is in a way inspired by the Creator Himself, but on the other hand it should be directed at the Creator by the artist. The artist in Norwid's opinion is first of all an apostle.

How to understand the parallelism of the act of creation and an artistic act?

Norwid built his concept on his experience of an artistic process. In order to recognize the stages of such a process, it is necessary to look at the definitions of beauty phrased by the poet. In *Promethidion* there are three definitions. The most frequently quoted is:

„Cóż wiesz o piéknem?... „ [What do you know about beauty?
... „Kształtem jest Miłości”¹⁹ It is a shape of Love]

This definition is usually cited in order to demonstrate the identical nature of beauty and Love. The word Love, written in a capital letter, undeniably refers to God the Creator, who is Love.

Another *quasi* definition:

Gdy jak o piéknem rzekłem – że jest profil Boży,²⁰
[As when I said about beauty – it's God's prophile]

in a way completes the first one. It clearly emphasises that beauty is a shape, or rather a name or face (depending on how we intepret the word profile) of God.

The third definition, which chronologically appears as the earliest of explanations addressed *Do Czytelnika* [*To the Reader*] at the beginning of the dialogues. Perhaps it should also be viewed in the context of the explanations:

...idzie o formę to jest Piékn o [...it's about the form, i.e. Beauty
o treść, to jest Dobro, i o światłość [about the content, i.e. Good

¹⁹ Norwid, C. K.: *Promethidion, Bogumił*. 109 p. 76.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, 157, p. 78.

obu Prawdę²¹ and the light of them both, Truth]

In this configuration appear three transcendent values, whereas the form, the content and the light are another, parallel conceptual level.²²

The very definition of beauty which emerges from these words:

...forma to jest Piękno. [the form is Beauty.]

underlines the transcendent dimension of beauty with using a capital letter, although deprived of its context seems to be less metaphorical and more literal. It is the simplest of definitions, too, also from the grammatical point of view.

It is possible to make similar grammatical simplifications of the sentences quoted above – in the statement “beauty is the shape of Love”, when we omit the object, what is left is “beauty is the shape...”

Such a description again seems less metaphorical and in a way becomes similar to the third definition which has been mentioned, where beauty is perceived as a form. If another definition is simplified too, we get the notion of beauty described as a profile.

Thus, we receive three concepts which Norwid uses to describe beauty: *the shape, the profile and the form*.

These notions in colloquial language are used as synonyms. In the PWN dictionary of the Polish language the definitions of the profile and the form include the word „shape”, whereas the shape is not described with words profile or form.²³ Consequently, the concept of shape seems primal to the other two. It is an important observation, because it brings us closer to the area of plastic arts, where these three notions can be used as very similar but not synonymous, and there are relations and dependences between them, as well as chronology.

In the first stage of an artistic act emerges the shape, it is abstracted by the artist with available means and tools. The shape is the original adumbration. The shape is materialization of the idea, its incarnation.

²¹ Ibidem, *Do czytelnika [To the Reader]* 15-16, p. 69.

²² Cyprian Kamil Norwid probably carried out a dialogue or even a polemic with Karol Libelt. In his *Estetyka czyli Umniectwo Piękne* Karol Libelt also considered the concepts of form and content, referring to beauty, good and truth, in a different way presenting their interdependencies. Beauty and truth together make good, according to Norwid, beauty and good join to make truth, or rather they are permeated with *the light of both the Truth*. This approach seems to be more consistent with the spirit of the Gospel – Christ says He is the truth. The truth is the crowning or even a *complement*, if we see it in the context of Norwid's reflections in his *Fortepian Szopena [Chopin's Piano]*. One could also find a reference of the idea of truth as light to the third Divine Person – the Holy Spirit.

²³ *Słownik Języka Polskiego [Polish Language Dictionary]* PWN, Warszawa 1978.

Norwid uses an intriguing word figuration. Shaping may be understood as figuration.

About profile we think mainly as a particular portrait development. One side of a face, drawn as a contour or as a shadow projected on a plane, tells much more about the portrayed person than the *en face* view. The profile, like fingerprints, allows identification, it is an individual, distinctive and unique trace.

Describing a profile requires stating the shape, every detail and element precisely. In architecture, but not only there, the profile may be a significant aspect which distinguishes the style, the epoch, artistic movements and even the author. Thus, the profile means the character, ability to distinguish or qualify. Metaphorically speaking, the profile is the name and identity.

The form in art is first of all a matrix, a pattern, a system of reference. It permits one to replicate, repeat, copy, develop or imitate. The form is an apposition, a finite and fully modelled shape. One might presume that in Norwid's concept the notion of matrix is the key one. In view of earlier philosophical deliberations over the form and its meaning, starting from Aristotle, such an approach could be considered as simplification, however, in the context of fine arts it is natural and justified.

Analysing the Creation in chapter 1 of the Genesis, we can watch the stages of the process of God's activity. Four stages of the process are described by short phrases:

“Let us make”(Gen 1, 26) – stage one – “In the beginning was the Word” (John 1, 1), God's intention, His will.

“And it was so”(Gen 1, 30) – stage two – “The Word became flesh”(John 1, 14). The world emerged from chaos, from non-existence, it received a shape. The idea was materialized, embodied, incarnated.

“God called”(Gen 1, 5) – stage three – It means He gave a name and a name is identity. The shape was in a way perpetuated, intended to last, also the goal and the sense were defined. One might say that the shape was profiled.

“And God saw that it was good.”(Gen 1, 12) – stage four – “And God saw that it was good. God blessed them and said, «Be fruitful and increase in number.»”(Gen 1, 22). All creatures were given autonomy and a creative ability to prolong and continue the process of creation. God in His creative act defined the archetypes, original forms and the mechanism.

The artistic process may be viewed similarly, with all its stages.

Stage one: “In the beginning was the Word” – the artist's idea, impulse, intuition, intelligent project.

In this fragment Norwid shows the sequence of events which make a creative process and here the idea expressed by the poet about the conscience, where any creative thought starts, is confirmed. The idea begins from recognizing Beauty (and beauty is a shape of Truth and Love), from “the sense of beauty” but first of all from admiration of it. St. Augustine’s admiration of *Beauty so old and so new*²⁵ is known to the author of *Promethidion*. The admiration does not allow indifference, it is an imperative of creative activity, a personal response of the artist. If the prophet “with truth, for truth burns like a flame”, then also an artist burns and annihilates themselves with beauty for Beauty.

In the Polish language the word „beauty” sounds like two other words and may even develop into a third one:

It consists of „pieśń” [a song] and „jęk” [a groan], and makes yet another word „po-jęk-ność” [after-groan-ness], as if triumph over pain.²⁶

The aspect of effort and work, struggle, perhaps even suffering and loneliness of the artist is significant and the poet emphasized it more than once. Understood by Norwid in the light of the Gospel, it ensures us that there is no triumph without pain, that resurrection does not exist without Golgotha. In order to achieve “freedom in God”, as the poet confesses, „one must first open one’s way with a cross and painful struggle”²⁷.

Norwid, presenting an artist’s activity as a parallel of Creator’s act, uses a reference to the artistic act also for two fundamental elements characteristic for the process. The first one is the tangible effect of an artistic work. The other – is the effort, the univocal, measurable effort fought with physical tiredness, which demonstrates the value and sacredness of work as a fruitful way, a way which leads to the goal²⁸.

Bo piękno na to jest by zachwycalo	[Beauty is to delight
Do pracy – praca by się	For work – and work – to make
zmartwychwstało ²⁹ .	one resurrect.]

The sacredness of art in Norwid’s concept has a manifold dimension. Firstly, it comes from the source of Beauty, Good and Truth, from ingraining all creative activity in God the Creator. Secondly, it starts in the essence of an artistic process itself, when the artist fulfills a priestly mission and the process is perceived as a repetition, a reflection of

²⁵ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, vol. X, ch. 27.

²⁶ Norwid, C.K.: *O sztuce (dla Polaków)*, [Of Art (for Polish People)] op. cit. p.373.

²⁷ Cf. Norwid, C. K.: *Promethidion, Do czytelnika*, [To the Reader] 28-29, p. 70.

²⁸ For Norwid it is important to emphasise one’s personal effort, struggle, participation in an act of creation. Without effort and work there is no art or artistry,

God's act of creation, as the artist's participation in the mystery of creation. Finally, on account of the aim of art. The eventual aim of art, as the aim of life is resurrection and therefore achieving the fullness of cognition, not „as in a mirror”, but face to face.

STWÓRCA – TWÓRCA. NORWIDOWSKA KONCEPCJA PIĘKNA, SZTUKI I ARTYSTY, A PLASTYCZNY PROCES TWÓRCZY

Chrześcijańska koncepcja piękna, sztuki, artysty sformułowana przez Cypriana Kamila Norwida i przedstawiona na kartach *Promethidionu* w wyraźny sposób odwołuje się do doświadczenia sztuk pięknych. Odniesienie do plastycznego procesu twórczego w dużej mierze norwidowską koncepcję buduje i scala.

Theology
of beauty

Dla sformułowania definicji piękna Norwid używa trzech określeń: kształt, profil i forma. W sztukach pięknych wspomniane hasła mają swoje specyficzne znaczenia, pozostają we wzajemnych relacjach definiując poszczególne etapy procesu twórczego. W koncepcji Norwida pojmowanie formy jako matrycy wydaje się szczególnie istotne i pozwala spojrzeć na ludzką twórczość jako odzwierciedlenie Boskiego aktu stwórczego. Człowiek stworzony na obraz i podobieństwo Boże stał się zdolny do twórczości. Zaproszony został do czynienia piękna i dobra, dzięki którym odkrywa i przybliża się do Boga, źródła wartości transcendentnych

Słowa kluczowe: piękno, dobro, prawda, miłość, sztuka, Stwórca, twórca, artysta, sztukmistrz, proces twórczy, kształt, profil, forma, matryca, powtórzenie, refleks, poznanie, zmartwychwstanie, tajemnica stworzenia, tajemnica wcielenia, podobieństwo Boże.

I stąd największym prosty lud poeta,	[And thus, the greatest poet is the simplest people
Co nuci z dłońmi ziemią brązowemi,	Who hums and their hands brown with soil, (...)
I stąd najlepszym Cezar historykiem,	And thus, the best historian is Caesar,
Który dyktował z konia – nie przy biurze,	Who dictated from his horse, not desk,
I Michał-Anioł, co kuł sam w marmurze...	And Michaelangelo, who chiseled marble on his own...]

(C.K. Norwid, *Promethidion, Bogumił*, 187-188 i 1193-195, p.80)

The expression „on his own” in the quote above seems to be significant and it may be presumed that the poet did not use it accidentally, as it can be understood either as „with his own hands” or „alone”. Loneliness is associated with pain and self-reliance – with personal effort of work.

²⁹ Norwid, C. K.: *Promethidion, Bogumił*, 185-196, p. 80.

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