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 Michał K u z i a k – TOWARDS NORWID'S HERMENEUTICS<sup>1</sup>
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Norwid the hermeneut – one more name for the poet which, on reading the book by Paulina Abriszewska, can be added to the inventory of such epithets once prepared by Krzysztof Trybuś, epithets which appear in Norwid studies and durably mark the thoughts on the author of *Vade-mecum* (although at the same time it ought to be remembered that the Author of the book declares her reluctance to introduce such labels)<sup>2</sup>. The matter seems obvious. Norwid lived in the times of hermeneutics, both the Romantic one and the one from the period of the antipositivist turn. He lived in times when culture was evolving ever more clearly into a Babel tower of many languages and cultural traditions of a world which modernised ever faster. That must have been a clear challenge to a hermeneut. He found interest in history and culture. He was a thinker, asking questions about understanding and not-understanding (which, I shall add, were for him not a merely cognitive matter, but were related to the manner of human existence), thus he was a philosophical hermeneut. Last but not least, he was a linguistic hermeneut, who considered the issues of reading and interpretation.

The Author of the reviewed book, while proving the existence of Norwid's hermeneutics, indicates more detailed issues: the semiotic vision of world one can find in his work, the concept of language as the source of cognition, the concept of reading as a turn towards the deep sense of a text, dialogicity and interest in allegoric and symbolic genres. The issues intertwine with the poet's thoughts on languages and literature, history and culture, the sacred, and individual and social life. That twine alone is enough to show the significance of the problem undertaken by Abriszewska to the works of the author of *Milczenie*.

As has been mentioned before, the above seem to be obvious at the first look, but one should not forget that Abriszewska is the author of the first and so far only book on Norwid's hermeneutics, although it should be noted that many related issues appeared e.g. in books about the poet written by such authors as Antoni Dunajski, Grażyna Halkiewicz-Sojak, Arent van Nieuwerkerken (here I must note that I feel a deficiency of references to that researcher's analyses in Abriszewska's book – after all, his formula of perspectivity and the use of Heidegger inspirations in his interpretations seem to be a significant

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<sup>1</sup> P. ABRISZEWSKA, *Literacka hermeneutyka Cypriana Norwida*, Lublin 2011. Quotations from the reviewed book are given in the text with page numbers.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. K. TRYBUŚ, *Stary poeta. Studia o Norwidzie*, Poznań 2000, p. 35.

approach to the problem with which the Author is concerned<sup>3</sup>), Piotr Chlebowski, Wojciech Kudyba or Włodzimierz Toruń. I should add that the above (incomplete) list is not meant to depreciate the efforts of the book's Author. Quite the contrary: many researchers have touched upon the issue, but no one has formulated it as a separate problem. Moreover, the reviewed book is not limited to being a collection of already existing knowledge about Norwid as a hermeneut. Abriszewska provides her own conceptualisation of the issue and that conceptualisation allows her to propose interesting and original assertions. The first question is how the Author defined her research field on Norwid the hermeneut. With that, I mean both the topical and the methodological area. Abriszewska proceeds with caution which at times borders on exaggeration (the topic is not as exotic as the Author wishes to see it, and needs not as many explanations as to why it was undertaken as are offered...). For instance, she prefers to speak of the poet's hermeneuticality (even in inverted commas), and not hermeneutics. That caution leads to a build-up of a network of metacommentaries to the analysis contained in the book – with extended, sometimes repeated, explanations and provisions.

Abriszewska does not reconstruct the historical dimension of hermeneutics from Norwid's time (fortunately, neither does she present the whole history of hermeneutics), confining herself to some general remarks on the topic. She adds at that point that she is not interested in the issue of the hermeneut's impact on the poet – although the matter of the impact arises when discussing the Christian sources of the poet's hermeneutics. I should add that such a reconstruction does not have to serve a genetic approach; it may simply allow to better define the specifics in Norwid's work, which I shall return to later. Similarly, the Author is not interested in presenting the poet as a precursor. The Author does not confine herself to one model of 20<sup>th</sup>-century hermeneutics as the basis for her own conceptualisation, either. She observes traces of Romanticism there, which is true at that level of generalisation, although with a more detailed approach it may turn out to be deceptive, to recall just Ricoeur's polemic with Romantic hermeneutics<sup>4</sup>. Yet in various references to Norwid, Gadamer appears most often, unnecessarily as second-hand references at times, and the basis of the adopted conceptualisation is usually Ricoeur (e.g. in connection with his definition of "hermeneutics of trust",

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<sup>3</sup> With that I mean *Perspektywiczność sacrum. Szkice o Norwidowskim romantyzmie*, Warszawa 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. P. RICOEUR, *Wyjaśnianie i rozumienie*, transl. by K. Rosner, [in:] *Język, tekst, interpretacja. Wybór pism*, selection and introduction by K. Rosner, Warszawa 1989, pp. 156ff.

open to the sense, or negative hermeneutics which transforms the hermeneut). While doing thus, Abriszewska declares adopting the perspective of the history of ideas.

Such a course of action is quite ambivalent in its nature, in my view. It may be considered perplexing due to the vagueness around defining hermeneutics; it is in itself a catch-all concept, and the adopted explanation mode enhances that impression. Yet at the same time, the Author seems to be directed by the wish to keep her formula non-limited (“I understand hermeneutics broadly”, 13), so that it allows to talk of such a non-canon hermeneut as Norwid, to reach the complexity of his work. Such positioning of the perspective makes hermeneutics a weak (and even weaker...) interpretational category, but it allows to follow various motifs and themes in the poet’s work, if they carry but a trace of hermeneutics.

In effect, the Author proposes a formula of the poet’s literary hermeneutics<sup>6</sup> bringing literature and philosophy together, a *quasi*-philosophical hermeneutics which is a specific attitude of thought, imagination and sensitivity, an orientation towards phronesis related to the transformation of the cognisant: “The main thesis of this book is as follows: Norwid’s mental attitude may be termed »hermeneutical« (9, Author’s emphasis)” – the attitude which can be observed in various discourses of the poet.

As has been said before, the frequently quoted Ricoeur is to add cohesion to the various hermeneutic themes discussed in the book, with his orientation towards the search for deep sense hidden underneath the message’s surface, so typical for hermeneutics: “Norwid views the world as a multilayered, complex creation and attempts to reach the hidden, reach what hides both »beyond« and »inside« words; what escapes the memory, what remains unread, unrevealed, un-understood” (22). What allows Abriszewska to gather together the various aspects of Norwid’s hermeneutics (which in my view is rather syncretic than eclectic, as suggested by the Author; although e.g. Ricoeur did proclaim “research eclecticism”) – “*Literacka hermeneutyka Cypriana Norwida* is [...] the search for elements, themes, motifs of hermeneutic thought” (18) – is also the adopted assumption that Christianity is its primary framework of sense: “the poet sees the reality as a book of signs which hides the transcendent sense, God’s Word. Immersed in culture, the writer attempts an effort to take a look

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<sup>6</sup> Abriszewska stresses many times that Norwid was not a philosopher, even though he was interested in philosophy, but it needs to be added that the status of hermeneutics itself is also specific, not speculative but interpretative, so to say.

back at it. Immersed in history, he attempts to answer the question for its hidden sense” (22).

It should be noted that Abriszewska herself declares taking a hermeneutic approach in her reading of Norwid. She wishes to understand his work as a cohesive whole marked with inner sense, subordinated to the thought about the poet as an observer of contemporaneity, seeking its transcendent sense. She states that such an intention is an answer to Norwid’s invitation to converse. The hermeneutic circle proposed by the Author includes various texts by Norwid which are related to the “element of discoursiveness” (a whole catalogue of works discussed in the book could be presented here), as well as various concepts of hermeneutics, as I have mentioned before. It is to be a look at Norwid through the prism of hermeneutics, but also a look at hermeneutics in the context of the poet’s works. Engaged in such workings of the hermeneutic circle are also studies of Norwid’s work, which the Author treats as steadily added hermeneutical layers of sense. Such layering is also present in Abriszewska’s discourse, as she returns many times to the main themes of her reflections, each time in a new perspective. Meanwhile, the Author declares a desire to show Norwid’s distinctness against Romanticism and at the same time broaden the thought on Romanticism, following thus the same approach to the problem as presented by Zofia Stefanowska<sup>7</sup>.

Abriszewska starts her reading with a question about Norwid the philosopher. She notes that the subject literature offers any and all possible approaches to the issue – both referring to the poet (not) being a philosopher and to the philosophical trends he allegedly represented or which he supposedly preferred and referred to particularly often. The Author adopts the version of a philosophising poet, an inherently anti-academic and anti-system thinker, meta-methodological seeker of truth and goodness, who saw the individuality and complexity of the phenomena of reality and life: “one really ought to simply say that he was a philosophising writer, as he was an artist foremostly by choice, and that choice was of an ideological, philosophical nature. Nonetheless, that approach – clear and often dominating in his work – makes the work not so much an illustration of the theses of the contemporary philosophical thought, as a participant of that thought, an active co-author of the history of ideas” (24). At the same time, Abriszewska indicates the specific character of the poet’s perception of philosophy: multilateral, diversified, often heterogenic – although it is also difficult at times to explicitly specify the sources of the poet’s concept – fragmentary, frequently inconsequent, and transforming the source in a creative manner. The considerations, showing the

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Z. STEFANOWSKA, *Norwidowski romantyzm*, [in:] EADEM, *Strona romantyków. Studia o Norwidzie*, Lublin 1993.

poet as an author who actively converses with the philosophical tradition which forms the hermeneutic basis for his thought, are illustrated with detailed examples of references to philosophers and their views (by this occasion, one can see that the poet was interested in particular in ancient thinkers).

The above would be enough to draw an outline of Norwid the hermeneut, intertwining philosophy and literature, constructing his message as a palimpsest of voices. As the Author notes, the poet tends towards practical philosophy with an anti-Cartesian orientation (which does emphasise the creative contribution and perspective empowerment of the self, yet the self is mainly meant to be an ethical subject), with a nature of fragmentary approximations and orientation towards the whole – both of the subject and of existence.

Another issue appearing in the book is the matter of reading the book of the world: “One of those »hermeneuts reading the world«, viewing the reality like a record, like a book, is also Norwid” (87). Abriszewska starts her considerations with the topos of the book of nature, presenting its history, with a particular focus on its Romantic fragment. Yet the issue seems problematic, as the Author notes herself. The writer was mainly a poet of culture and a cultural poet, which means that his vision of the world (and also of the human) had been culturally and historically mediated. Thus we do not have the idea of the book of nature with the poet – and it is not simply because such an idea itself is of a cultural character. As mentioned before, the Author is aware of the fact, with that awareness visible e.g. in her considerations on tradition with Norwid. Examples of reading that book of nature to be found in his works which are referred to in the book (e.g. related to *Quidam*), are seldom: “One finds the motif of the book of nature with Norwid, but only accidentally” (89).

As the Author notes, Norwid’s reading of the book of the world has a religious orientation. The Word (Logos, Christ) which fills the world is the source, but also the tool and aim of cognition. Hence, Abriszewska states, language and literature play a specific role with the poet, as ways to approach the transcendent truth and to participate in it. That issue leads the Author to consider Norwid’s concept of the word (internal and external) and the relation of the word and the object. The poet views the word as a subject participating both in the ontological structure of the world and in transcendence, as well as in the cultural and social reality; a historical, polymorphous and self-differentiating subject, which still remains homogenous inside. The practice of Norwid the poet – his characteristic operations on the language, the famous darkness of speech – is in the Author’s reading a hermeneutic gesture aimed at bringing the sense out of the word.

After such an introduction, Abriszewska moves to the issue which is fundamental for hermeneutics, i.e. to understanding – viewed both linguistically (inter-

estingly, Norwid thinks in a Romantic manner about the author's understanding, but also of a text's understanding where the text becomes independent as writing...) and more broadly: philosophically. To quote: "Of course, in the works of the Polish Romanticist the 'understanding' does not appear explicitly, yet the sense of »reading« with Norwid in many contexts matches understanding in the hermeneutic sense. 'Reading' expresses how Norwid perceives the world as a structure bearing sense. [...] I would like to stress that understanding arises from Norwid's »semiotic imagination« and from accepting the word as the principle of the world" (141). The Author's area of interest is Norwid's view of reading and interpretation. She believes the poet saw them as the creative activity of the subject. It does not, however, consist in giving sense, but in exploring it, investigating the hidden, the unsaid (and necessary), the multidimensional, the flickering. It is about approaching the mystery, tracking the traces of transcendence. It is finally an ethical challenge and task of dialogic nature, related to the perspective, historic context, in which the self and the understood are anchored.

The Author stresses that Norwid's understanding means not only cognition, but also action. It results from experience, and becomes an embodiment of the uncovered sense, a practice of truth, a change of the human. Moreover, it grows into an exegesis, close to allegoresis and parable, related to the concept of hidden meanings.

Abriszewska further writes of Norwid as a poet of culture (many cultures)<sup>8</sup>, of his hermeneutic attitude to tradition and history. The Author notes Norwid's subject being anchored in the cultural and historic world, and the resulting nature of interpretational practice: "Norwid's subject is an entity rooted in the world of culture – it forms itself by reading the world, interpreting works of art, history, human fate, and thus is no more *cogito*, but an existing being" (197). A fundamental category of the poet's thoughts on the human and the world is also tradition, and the related phenomenon of memory. It is worth mentioning that e.g. this theme makes the writer's cognitive hermeneutics to ontological hermeneutics. In that part of her reflections, Abriszewska returns to the issue of understanding: in this case, understanding not only of the text or the approach in general, but also understanding of the past or history, showing the poet's aversion to dead antiquarianism, and his intention to read the hidden.

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<sup>8</sup> The Author e.g. poses a thesis of the poet's attempt to go beyond Eurocentrism, of his openness to the other. I see the matter as rather complex, and in my view that openness, as is typical for Romanticists, was accompanied by some closure, and a lack of language allowing successful communication with Otherness.

On such reconstruction of the framework of Norwid's hermeneutics, the Author moves to the poet's literary works, also mentioned earlier, but this time forming a separate question about Norwid the artist and hermeneut. She writes: "Norwid's literary declarations make us see his poetry as the original and most perfect form of expression, cognition and existence assigned to the human" (253), and yet, in the Author's view, they do not exclude the significance of other forms of arts, also practised by Norwid. Abriszewska writes of the issue of writing and print, and the living word with the poet, noting his – modern, I shall add – attempt to transgress that opposition, and various measures relating to the graphic form of the text and its poetic form (in particular genology, but the Author's list includes also: reticence, conciseness and condensation of senses, irony, intertextuality, allegorising and symbolism). Those measures are of a creatively hermeneutic nature and are related to the search for sense, to approaching it. The measures add an epiphanic nature to the poet's works (in the sense which van Nieuwerkerken assigns to the phenomenon in the poet's work<sup>9</sup>). The poet-hermeneut is thus a medium between the reader – who is to enter the path of hermeneutics, as well – and the sense.

The culmination of the hermeneutic construction – both that of Norwid and of Abriszewska – proves to be Christianity. As the Author says, it forms the source of the poet's hermeneutics, its subject (however, the religiousness is also manifested in culture and in history; moreover, as the Author notes, the writer is a non-dogmatic, dialogic thinker, who stresses that truth is revealed gradually, in many and various phenomena, and, as a whole, is unavailable to the human), as well as the bonding factor which marks the horizon of sense and the way of interpreting the signs of transcendence: "The fundamental a priori of Norwid's cognition and thoughts on the world, contained in his poetic reflection, remains faith, the Christian faith" (307, Author's emphasis). In that character, Christianity did appear in Abriszewska's earlier discussion on the poet's attitude towards philosophy, reading of the book of the world, understanding, vision of culture and tradition and Norwid the poet. Christianity allows him to give coherence to the plurality of languages – both of the past and of the forming modernity.

As was mentioned before, the Author does not place Norwid against any specified hermeneutics, neither does she want to examine its sources. Yet at the same time it ought to be stressed that the book is of an erudite nature, both when considering the contexts of 19<sup>th</sup>-century hermeneutics (as well as its Christian sources) cited by Abriszewska and when viewing the subject literature used. Also, the book forms a precise construction, in which one theme presages another, and some re-

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. A. van NIEUWERKEN, *Perspektywiczność sacrum. Szkice o Norwidowskim romantyzmie*, Warszawa 2007, p. 101.

turn to be viewed from a new perspective. The Author concludes that approaching Norwid's thought as a hermeneutic one allows for "cohesion of [...] contradictory perspectives" which have appeared in Norwid studies: "I mean such issues as the philosophical/non-philosophical nature of Norwid's work, further: symbolism/allegorising, Romanticism/non-Romanticism, precursory/archaic nature" (347). The considerations about Norwid the hermeneut allow also to indicate the theme of subjectivity, related to the poet's approach to modernity, which I see as an important one<sup>10</sup>. For hermeneutics provides a dimension for the meeting of the subject (it allows to emphasise its significance in the process of understanding, in a manner typical for modernity) with tradition, which limits the claims of the modern self but still gives it much significance. Thanks to the perspective of hermeneutics, it is easier to understand the paradoxes of Norwid's thought on the subject, related to the entanglement in the processes of modernity, and distance towards them.

Finally, two issues which I believe should be raised in connection with the reviewed book. The first is related to Norwid's individual dimension of hermeneutics. As has been said, Abriszewska formulates the matter as the object of her research interest. The response found in the book situates the poet among Romanticists. Basically, it is difficult to argue with that approach<sup>11</sup>. It seems, however, that what takes the poet beyond Romanticism is his attitude to material artefacts as the object of understanding (the Author stresses that issue when writing of *Notatki z historii*). Materiality was basically not considered by the Romanticists in that context, and perhaps it was not an object of interest to them at all, or only to a limited extent.

The other issue refers to the assumption silently made by the Author that hermeneutics – in particular that anchored in Christianity – allowed Norwid to reach the sense; that, of course, in a laborious and complex way, and perhaps, as today's hermeneutists stress, the search was never completed. I shall quite contrarily note that while one may see the issue in such an optimistic (if I may put it that way) cognitive perspective, naturally strengthened by religious faith, one may also view it in a different manner, closer to deconstruction. Hermeneutics – as stressed e.g. by Gadamer – works where distance appears and the sense is non-obvious, more of a trace<sup>12</sup>. Norwid wrote in times in which such an experience was particularly acute, and the poet seemed to be experiencing it. Thus perhaps it is worth taking

<sup>10</sup> More on the topic in my article *Norwid – zmagania z podmiotowością (wokół epifanii poetycznych autora „Vade-mecum”)* [in print].

<sup>11</sup> That may be proved by e.g. my reconstruction of Mickiewicz's hermeneutics, also centred around the category of tradition, fundamental for the poet (*Mickiewiczowska hermeneutyka kultury (wokół wykładów lozańskich); Tradycja w myśli Mickiewicza*, [in:] M. KUZIĄK, *Wielka całość. Dyskursy kulturowe Mickiewicza*, Słupsk 2006).

a look at the poet's hermeneutics not only as a way to manage the crisis of contemporaneity that he diagnosed so many times, but also as an element of that diagnosis, which complicated an already complex message of the author of *Vade-mecum*, and indicated that Norwid's desire for wholeness was a desire for the impossible.

Translated by Agnieszka Gernand

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## TOWARDS NORWID'S HERMENEUTICS

### S u m m a r y

This article is a review of the book by P. Abriszewska *Literacka hermeneutyka Cypriana Norwida* [Cyprian Norwid's literary hermeneutics]. The book discusses the previous research of the issue, taken in the context of the Romantic, the 19th-century and the 20th-century hermeneutic thought. The review focuses on the reconstruction of the diversified and multilateral hermeneutic approaches to Norwid's works proposed by the author of the publication. These hermeneutic approaches are linked with culture, literature, history and – to the smallest extent – with nature; all of them being part of the poet's oeuvre.

<sup>12</sup> See H.G. GADAMER, *Semantyka i hermeneutyka*, transl. by K. Michalski, [in:] *Rozum, słowo, dzieje*, selection, compilation and introduction by K. Michalski, Warszawa 2000, p. 128.

**Key words:** hermeneutics; Romanticism; literary criticism and history; conceptions of culture.

**Słowa kluczowe:** hermeneutyka; romantyzm; krytyka i historia literatury; koncepcja kultury.

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Arent v a n N i e u k e r k e n – CYPRIAN NORWID  
– PETER GEHRISCH,  
*ÜBER DIE FREIHEIT DES WORTES*  
(*RZECZ O WOLNOŚCI SŁOWA*)

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One of the most important issues in the study of the works by Cyprian Norwid is his place in the developmental dynamics of literary tradition, both in Poland and Europe. This issue is not only crucial for the history of Polish literature as seen from a diachronic perspective and viewed as if it were isolated from other “national” literatures, but also for the attempts to put the works of the author of *Vade-mecum* in a broader picture of “European” (or even “world”) literature in the sense of a factor co-shaping Polish literature as “synchrony in diachrony” (Yury Tynyanov, Janusz Sławiński) and organizing itself around a “key tradition”. The results of these studies, i.e. arranging a hierarchy of contexts, have a significant impact on the strategies used by translators of Norwid’s poetry. A particularly problematic category turns out to be at the (apparent?) asynchronicity of Norwid’s poetry as compared to the literary tradition at that time. The tendency of both literary critics and translators to construct Norwid’s poetics around a pioneering model overlooks the ambivalence essential to Norwid’s poetry, prose and even epistolography: on the one hand, some of the features of his texts, such as situational irony, epiphanic character, understood both as a compositional procedure and a manner of representing the *sacrum* (in its eventualisation), his tendency to denser use of stylistic treatments – indicate the affinity of Norwid’s poetics to creative explorations of European modernism; on the other hand, the discursivity