

Summary

Being and chiaroscuro

On the poetic anthropology of Cyprian Norwid

Being and its shadow – in other words the anthropology and the irony – it is one of the most significant issue in the creations of the *Quidam's* author. To understand their mutual attitude – usually hidden but brought to light by Norwid and also frequently asymmetric – the metaphoric key proposed by the poet is really useful. It refers to the game of light and shade. It is hinted in his two most well-known definitions of the irony as a “light-shadow” (*My song [III]*) and as a “necessary shadow of being” (*Irony*). In both those figurative expressions the irony was connected to two problematic circles: category of the truth (also about the man) and existence which are also inwardly intertwined.

In Norwid's thinking the irony, “the sister of truth”, “mocking” its image as a distorting shadow but also bringing back the illuminated silhouette which represents the frowning reflection and the confirmation of reality, its concealment and perverse disclosure. Hence, it appears to be a dependent, mediated by its original basic source; indispensable whenever the truth, for various reasons, cannot be born or make its way through, and unnecessary there where the truth can speak clearly in its own voice. Then, the irony is an unembodied truth, suppressed, rejected or left unsaid. It is the truth often twisted with pain (also caused by its non-acceptance), reflected “in a distorting mirror”, Norwid's “seriously true”, and yet the power “betraying the lie with a lie of art”. However, its ethos is more than a diagnosis of illusionary opinions and the exposure of their insincerity by changing their meaning or the “echo summoning”, the common but incorrect convictions to subject them to refutation: the first step is to lead the recipient to discover the truth by rousing them to the action, reflection and disbelief, in a nutshell – to a critical thinking and then to life in truth. Eventually, this is what a moral judgment and also a character of a communicative situation, a specific “dialogic nerve”

should be used for. The irony as a research is a method of inquiry into the truth, as well as the way of communication; a game, typical for irony, of approaching and receding reflects the directness and a detail of experience with the distance of a mental overview.

The basis of the ethical passion and the epistemological, existential and spiritual aspect of the irony perceived in such way as well as its roots in reality and humility, is the “conscience in the face of the source” to which the irony should lead the recipient. It is Norwid’s original synthesis of Socratic tradition and Christ’s message interpreted ironically, in the light of which the poetry of the *Vade-mecum* author reveals itself as the continuity of the mission of preaching the truth and serving the word. In this perspective the irony as a lesson of humanity resembles not only the elenctic exposure of illusion and maieutic “truth birth” by Plato’s teacher but it also appears to be one of the varieties of imitating Christ (*imitationem Christi*), even more important as it is one of the knots tying Norwid’s irony and anthropology. This knot comes to life by understating a person.

The truth to which the recipient is to be led by the irony is often the painful, dark truth; it is not a coincidence that the second rhyme echo of irony in Norwid’s miniature is the “pain”. It is described as a “rasp”, “dis-harmony”, penetrating the whole reality of a human to a various extent. Being the sign of an inner essential chink, crank, contradiction existing in a human as well as between the person and the world, it appears to be an immanent characteristic of human existence and co-created world. There is no escape, similarly as there is no escape from oneself or the reality and any escapism is not only illusional but also harmful and comical. The ironic shade of suffering, though being in the “underexposed” space, is not, however, unambiguously the negative reality. In forming a person, it can play positive roles: it appears “necessary” in a human life to snatch the person from one’s “sleep” (mindless) oblivion and lead it to (ironic) awareness of reflection on oneself and subsequently – to maturity. Acting as an ontological reflection catalyst, by its roots in (painfully experienced) reality (actuality) of being, it enables the intertwine of thinking with the existence, opening the door to an authentic life. If the truth is the existence (one experiences the irony if one suffered) than the suffering can also be called a “necessary shadow of being”. However, suffering – as the irony – is not a sphere of a complete darkness; it is suspended between a full brightness and the complete darkness. Therefore, a difficult, sober conscience of “necessity” of the ironic shadow, emerging from the experience of a human “fate”, does not negate the value of a human life but – as a light and shadow – paradoxically affirms its existence. In such approach the irony is per-

ceived as shadowy side of thinking about a man, through their suffering which recalls the view of a person from the perspective marked by the fragility of human condition while the truth of its “illuminated” (and all the same to a big extent eliminating the irony) version recalls the complementary view from the perspective of the human being. All the same, as we can see, the concept of the irony as the “shadow of being” and “chiaroscuro” let us look at the anthropology of Norwid from the perspective – rather – of the light (the considerations on the essence of the human as a person) or – rather – the shadow (considerations on the condition of humans) though it is an issue of intensity and not the exclusivity of one or the other perspective. So, the irony and the anthropology appear to be deeply connected within the sphere of the ontological, existential, epistemological and, finally, aesthetic concepts. Anthropology is revealed as one of the most important “further” “irony backgrounds” while the irony for the anthropology remains the “further background” only potentially. All the same though the irony marks significant areas of Norwid’s thinking and speaking about the human, it does not fully penetrate that reflection of the poet and some areas are free from it and in other cases – those marked by the irony – it is present in a various intensity. Irrespective of the occurrence of serious or comic grimaces of the irony or its lack, the aim of Norwid’s poetry remains always the same: to awaken the man to an authentic life and potentially life-giving death so that one can ask the question about eternity.

The presented work is not a book solely about the irony or anthropology (though more about the anthropology than the irony). Personally, for me, the most important issue was the interference between those two concepts: how they tightly permeate, overlap or do not. In my opinion, both perspectives were assumed in advance, however, to a different extent, with a bigger preference on the side of human philosophy and the way the irony serves in that matter. This injustice of the research attention attribution can be partly explained by the fact that as far as Norwid’s creations very often – however not always – are ironic but always anthropocentric.

Norwid, perceived in that way, is revealed as the poet of XIX century, but above all, as a modern poet and the poet of the Christian culture – and it must be admitted that the latter two perspectives predominate. Therefore, it is a poet perceived as a “separate” poet as well as a creative precursor of many further discoveries, solutions and tendencies and who can be seen as one of the fathers of Polish modern poetry.

Translated by Aleksandra Wójcicka