

International Conference Słowacki and Norwid Today. Tradition, Heritage, Modernity

Conference organised by the Chair of Slavic Literature at the University of Amsterdam, in cooperation with the Research Unit of Slavonic and East European Studies at the Catholic University of Leuven and the Department of Slavonic and East European Studies at Ghent University

Amsterdam, 27-28 November 2009

<http://www.arts.kuleuven.be/slavic/SlowackiNorwid/>

One and a quarter of a century have past since the Polish poet Cyprian Norwid (1824-1883) died in a rest house for former Polish insurgents at the periphery of Paris. Next year (2009) will be the second centenary of the birth of Juliusz Słowacki (1809-1849), one of the Polish “national bards” (wieszczę). Both romantic poets, after an initial period of oblivion, have left their mark on the development of Polish literature.

The mystical inspirations of the mature Słowacki were of great importance for the first phase of Polish modernism, the so-called school of Młoda Polska, even when the reception of his poetry was often superficial, merely aesthetical, not taking into account the hermetic sources of his worldview and overlooking its metaphysical purpose.

Norwid was rediscovered at the beginning of the twentieth century, but his real poetic achievement was not immediately appreciated by the poets of Młoda Polska (perhaps with the exception of the critic Stanisław Brzozowski). His highly intellectual oeuvre, pervaded by existential irony and attempting to objectify personal experience, became a revelation for poets and writers who combated the excessive (from their point of view) subjectivism of Młoda Polska. Yet, if we take the concept of perspective (already tentatively developed by Norwid, many years before Nietzsche came up with the same notion) seriously, it turns out that also our present point of view could (must?) be a misinterpretation (particularly when we accept that the idea of referential truth has ceased to be relevant).

We are interested in papers that show the differing and changing presences of Słowacki and Norwid in nineteenth and twentieth century Polish (but also “foreign”) literature. Their significance for the literary process could be approached from different (but interconnected) points of view:

Intertextuality

This approach is not limited to the presence of both authors as “persons”, but should pay particular attention to their role as inventors of certain poetical devices and motives [...]. The matter becomes even more complicated when such a misinterpretation (or, in the words of Anglo-Saxon literary criticism: “strong reading”) appears to be the starting point of fresh intertextual games [...], or – on the contrary – when a certain device or point of view that could be discovered in tradition is taken for a new invention, because the image of tradition had previously been reduced or falsified (it is really astonishing that Gombrowicz, whose concept of “form” seems very akin to Norwid’s consciousness that man bears the “stigma” of milieu, hardly mentions him in his “Diary” – and when he does mention him, Norwid is treated as an example of “pure existence”; his poetics and worldview seem to have been irrelevant to Gombrowicz).

Constructing New Lines of Tradition

A second interesting approach would be an investigation in the mechanisms by which literary critics (who, more often than not, were poets in their own right) “discovered” parallel developments and contrasts in other European literatures that, having become part of literary tradition in a more general sense, also caused modifications in the image of Polish literary tradition, affecting the status of Słowacki and/or Norwid.

Archetypal Structures of Being

Lastly, the contrast between the poetics and worldview of these two romantic Polish poets could be an incitement for reflection on certain larger (existential) structures in which man appears to be “embedded”, e.g. “myth”, “exile” or “history”, and that retain their significance for modern literature.

Call for Papers (full version)

Practical Information

Presentations should be in English or Polish. Each paper will be allowed twenty minutes. The deadline for proposals is January 15, 2009. One page abstracts are expected by February 15, 2009. Notifications of the Organizing Committee’s decisions will be sent out by April 2009. Papers accepted for the conference have to be submitted one month in advance in order to allow discussants to prepare their contribution.

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