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The Theme of the Fountain-Wound in a Baroque Manuscript Meditation: The Impact of Iconography on Poetry

I found the rhymed meditation *Wounds of My Jesus*¹ in the manuscript number 45 belonging to the Discalced Carmelite Nuns Library in Kraków. The manuscript is dated to the beginning of the eighteenth century, but the text stored there seems to be older.

The poem resembles a prayer in honour of five wounds of Christ, the likes of which were made popular in medieval Europe by the Bernardine Order (Kopeć, 1981, pp. 49–57).

The author of the canticle *Wounds of My Jesus* probably had his or her imagination formed on the conventional basis of the wounds' theme as adapted to the Baroque poetics of wonder. However, he or she changed the well-known ways of conceiving the theme, giving it a new, unusual, even unique character.

The line syntaxes are similar, as they begin with surprising anaphors, defining the wounds of Christ. This treatment is closely connected with the

¹ *Cantilena de Nativitate Domini Nostri Iesu Christi ad cunas Bethleemicas de cantande cantu Latino et Polonico Anno Salutis 1736 conscripta de 21 augusti*, Manuscript, Discalced Carmelite Nuns Library, Kraków, Wesoła, no. 45 (ABMK 2681) (*Cantilena de Nativitate Domini Nostri Iesu Christi*, 1736, pp. 72–73).

circle of artistic tasks set before themselves by Baroque poets, who wanted to impress the audience with unconventional associations:

Wounds of my Jesus, fountain of love,
[...]
Wounds of my Jesus, sources like crystals,
[...].
Wounds of my Jesus, delightful nectars,
[...]
Wounds of my Jesus, splendid palaces,
[...].
Wounds of my Jesus, unsurpassed sea,
[...].

The verbal layer causes consternation by juxtaposing the situation of the Passion of Jesus with the luxury of Baroque architecture and the beauty of nature. Thus, the wounds of Jesus are sequentially: fountains, crystals, palaces, nectar and sea. The sophisticated literary ideas were in communication with sumptuous architectural forms, and one may even say more – they tried to match them. No doubt the phrases quoted above had to be seen as a specific type of devotion to the suffering God.

Yet while the theme was developed in a surprising way, such an original approach to the theme of wound is not at odds with the poetics of the Baroque – one only needs to mention Antonina Niemiryczowa, who wrote about wounds of Jesus as a mirror that the soul uses to look at itself (Prejs, 1989, pp. 210–211).

The poem *The Wounds of My Jesus* bears similarities to certain works of the visual arts. It seems to directly refer to the graphic no. 26 in the work *Amoris divini et humani effectus varii, e variis Sacrae Scripturae sanctorumq PP. sententias ac Gallicis versibus illustrati*, from 1626, published in Antwerp, and the very similar graphic no. 54, appearing in the 1629 print *Amoris divini et humani antipathia. Sive effectus variis Sacrae Scripturae locis deprompti emblematis suis expressi SS. PP. authoritatibus, nec non Gallicis, Hispanicis et Flandricis versibus illustrati*, which was also published in Antwerp, and was an expanded version of the former release (quoted after: Pelc & Pelc, 2000, pp. 4–7).

The man standing on the platform is the central theme in images 26 and 54. We can easily identify him as Jesus Christ crucified, resembling a garden statue² (Lacki, 1997, p. 161; Kwiatkowska-Frejlich, 2009, pp. 191–202). The

² Cf. *Pia desideria* (Hugo, 1624a): a human figure (angel) forming a fountain appears in the background of copperplate number 41. A deer walks towards him as to the “source of living waters,” carrying on its back a girl (cf. Hugo, 1624b). In Lublin, in the church of the Assumption of Our Lady of Victory on the sides of benches there are copies of *Pia desideria*.

artist did not reflect in the image of the Saviour the anxiety, drama and sudden movement characteristic of Baroque art. In both works, the Antigue and Renaissance rules of proportion are kept, which are: moderation, harmony and serenity. In this way, the suffering Christ accepts his fate with peace. The Saviour is close to man and seems to protect him. He does not give any reason to feel fragility and helplessness.

The graphics represent supernatural phenomena – the open wounds of Jesus with blood flowing abundantly – but despite this, they are life-like and they appeal to the viewer. After all, the recipient recognizes here the transformed worlds known from the teachings of preachers, as well as Bible-based prayers. In this way, we can speak of an empowered content of the theological expression relating to the passion and death of Christ, one that influences the imagination and feelings of the viewer by means of its unconventional form.

In the first of the lithographs (of 1626), the author does not include any background details, while in the second one, a garden is depicted in the background in order to complete the structure located in front of it. That is why in this lithograph, the statue of Jesus with wounds is the “palace” behind which – as it used to be done in architecture – a garden extends in so-called geometric and closed composition.

The forms of plants are strict and static, expressing the classic figure of order. The purpose of such compositions was to preach the principles of sustainability and triumph of royal power. Undeniably, we can read here the mark of French classicism, which Christian philosophy adapted to its needs to proclaim the triumph of the crucified Saviour. The idea of this composition was probably read following the principles of this inscription:

Lava a malitia cor tuum, ut salva fias; Dealba me Domine, et munda cor meum, ut, dealbatus in sanguine Agni gaudiis perfruar sempiternis³ (Pelc & Pelc, 2000, p. 80).

You can always go back to him – “the crucified Lamb” – and rediscover the lost paradise, which Christians had seen as the garden of eternity, present in the iconography of both the Baroque and earlier periods as a form of an enclosed garden (*hortus conclusus*).

The whole picture seems to represent happiness waiting for man. In addition to the mentioned reminiscences, the graphic contains references to the medieval *jardin de curé*, in the middle of which fountains were built as mediators on the way to eternal happiness (Kobielus, 1997, p. 143).

The running water, like the blood of Christ, according to old notions of Christianity, revives the weary and exhausted life. It also washes sinners

³ “Wash your heart of malice so that you can save your life; Purify me, Lord, and cleanse my heart, so that, purified in the blood of the Lamb, I can delight in eternal joy.”

of their faults, thereby helping them reach paradise (Delumeau, 1996, pp. 115–120; Vovelle, 2004, pp. 79, 142). The theme of Christ as the source of life should be combined with the cult of his blood, which appeared around the fifteenth century in France, and then spread to the Rhineland, Burgundy and Flanders (Vovelle, 2004, p. 139).

The mood of both the graphic and the literary work is similar. Everything is done as if it were outside linear time. In addition, the works evoke the same content, which demonstrates a direct relationship. We cannot also deny that the graphic and the poem are the result of a deep responsiveness to the world, so perhaps this is the way the conversion took place: from the horror, danger and torture of the Passion of Crist to surprising architecture.

It will be convenient at this point to attempt to recreate, at least in outline, the process of the inter-influence of the motives. Of essential importance here is the arrival of the first Carmelites from Belgium to Poland at the beginning of the seventeenth century (Wanat, 1979, pp. 622, 627; Gil, 1977, pp. 21–22 [note 33]; Olczakowa, 1969, p. 755). Perhaps, in addition to the ascetic works originating from Spain, in their library there were any of the editions of *Amoris divini* – indeed, this is very likely (Grześkowiak & Niedźwiedź, 2012, p. 51). It should also be remembered that spiritual knowledge of women in the Carmelite Order was developed through the so-called spiritual reading, and, in addition, through their own creativity. The texts of meditations were written by those of the nuns that were talented. They did this during their time of prayer or during their recreations. In this way, they tried to imitate St. Teresa of Ávila and the numerous thoughts and meditations that she produced.

These activities, sometimes of poor artistic quality, were indeed inspired by, and modelled after, the works by St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa of Ávila and other pious books. It is not impossible that visual arts also became a source of inspiration for the nuns' own thoughts (Pelc & Pelc, 1999, p. 7).

The author of the analysed text was focused on outlining the idea of the image after the crucifixion of Christ as beautiful, with a view to surprise the spectator, and not to scare him or her as it was the case with the conventional approach to the theme of the Passion.

To this end, the author used associations of meanings, in a way that makes the reality of the scene after the death of Jesus comparable to architecture, just as the author of the Dutch graphics collection did. The Baroque architects applied in their works a reverse rule – to compare architecture to reality: “A good architect, making projects of fountains, should give them always some true meaning, or build an allusion to a noble thing – imaginary or real. [...] The fountain [...] in the Baroque [...] became something real – it became a part of nature [...]” (Białostocki, 2001, p. 464).

In the poem, on the contrary, a man – Jesus Christ crucified – is like a fountain.

Through sophisticated artistic treatment, the poet aimed at an affirmation of the suffering God. She, or he, also showed her, or his, knowledge of the whole of art of the Counter-Reformation period, creating a new literature, and architecture, based on the principle of atypical things. These particular Baroque artworks brought the faithful closer to God through shocking beauty, visible in the elements of horror and pity. We can count among the examples of this the wounds inflicted on martyrs. In fact, we cannot forget that in the era of the Counter-Reformation, beauty was to be a connecting factor between man and God, and these connections could be identified even in the bloody scene after the crucifixion (Hanusiewicz, 1995, pp. 350–352).

This text is perhaps an attempt at interpretation of a fragment of some longer work that is unknown to us. To prove this argument, we can point to some disparity of grammatical forms and portions which seem to be illogical. Despite those examples, the literary environment presented in *The Wounds of My Jesus* is a testimony to the Baroque perception of the world, aimed at making closer the relationship between the word and the object (Vincenz, 1989, p. 92). The aim of this move is the identification of the architectural structures with the sacred sphere. The artist departs far from traditionally displayed religious symbols and establishes new ones, based on the principle of remote associations. Such ideas were practiced by poets in the work of the European Baroque called *Amoris divini et humani effectus variis...*, published in Antwerp in 1626. In Poland, these trends were extremely rare, but Adam Wasilewski attests their existence when he uses them in *Serce Jezusa, serce ubóstwione* [Heart of Jesus, heart adored]:

Więcej z Twego serca, o Jezu kochany,
Byś nas oczyścił, płyną te fontany [sic] [...]⁴ (Vincenz, 1989, p. 92).

In addition, in one of the copies of the above-mentioned edition from Antwerp, an unknown author added three hand-written verses in Polish, where he used the theme of wounds-fountains⁵ (Pelc & Pelc, 1999, p. 7; 2000, pp. 7–20; Pelc, 2002, pp. 259–274). Zbigniew Morsztyn in *Emblema 10* also demonstrated the knowledge of this theme, when he wrote the words:

Grzesznik płucze serce swoje w fontannie, gdzie krew ran najświętszych Chrystusa Pana płynie⁶ (Morsztyn, 1954, p. 16).

⁴ “So from your heart, Oh beloved Jesus, / So that you cleanse us, these fountains flow. [...].”

⁵ Janusz and Paulina Pelc established that the author was Zbigniew Morsztyn.

⁶ “The sinner washes his heart in the fountain where the blood flows from the sacred wounds of Christ.”

Undeniably, the poem *The Wounds of My Jesus* presents an interesting thematic approach of wounds as a fountain, thus far known in old Polish literature only in its renderings by Zbigniew Morsztyn and Adam Wasilewski.

It is necessary to emphasize here that the emblems of Morsztyn are not fully independent works. The author had largely benefited from the texts of a Capuchin Father, the anonymous compiler of the work *Amoris divini et humani Antipathia...*, who in his turn used pieces included in the collection *Amoris divini et humani effectus varii...* (Pelc & Pelc, 2000, p. 4).

Finalising our considerations, we need to keep in mind the interesting fact that behind the foundation of the monastic meditation about fountains is a concrete devotional graphic from Western Europe. It is the Dutch emblem that is the key to the interpretation of the religious text, which uses words to directly refer to a specific image. These cultural correspondences constitute a curious phenomenon. They present the spirituality as well as the mentality of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European society. This seems to confirm, at the same time, the fact that no artistic activity is ever isolated. Indeed, in the discussed period, we can talk about its pan-European dimension, brought about ever since the seventeenth century by increased communication through widespread travel.⁷

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⁷ Some reflexions presented in this article come also from my doctoral thesis under the direction of Professor Stefan Nieznanowski at Maria Curie Skłodowska University in Lublin.

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Motyw fontanny-rany
w barokowej rękopiśmiennej medytacji:
wpływ ikonografii na poezję

U początków monastycznej medytacji o fontannie stoi konkretna dewocyjna grafika z Zachodu Europy. To holenderski emblemat, będący kluczem do interpretacji tekstu religijnego, posługującego się słowami w celu bezpośredniego odwołania do owego obrazu. Te kulturowe korespondencje stanowią ciekawe zjawisko. Odsłaniają duchowość i mentalność siedemnasto- i osiemnastowiecznego społeczeństwa europejskiego. Równocześnie zdają się potwierdzać fakt, iż żadna aktywność artystyczna nigdy nie jest izolowana.

Note

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Transcription of the text

Rany Jezusa mojego fontanny miłości,
 Z których krew na zmycie płynie światowej sprośności.
 Nie tracę nadzieję, wszak i Murzyn bieleje.
 W krwawej zdroi głębokości topię moje wszystkie złości.
 Rany Jezusa mojego źrzodła jak kryształy,
 Przec mi tym napojem świecie konarach niestały.
 Nie tracę nadzieję, ale jak rybka mdleję.
 Rany Jezusa mojego rozkoszne nektary,
 Gardzę słodyczą, której świat ma w sobie bez miary.
 Nie tracę nadzieję, że nigdy tak boleję.
 Do was jak do słodkich uli mdłą miłość pszczołkę przytuli.
 Rany Jezusa mojego przeświętne pałace,
 Czemuż po lepionkach świata serce me kołace?
 Nie tracę nadzieję, we złzach tułać topnieję.
 Odtąd Jezu rany Twoje mój gabinet nie pokoje.
 Rany Jezusa mojego niezbrodzone morze,
 Kiedyż zaćmionemu sercu łask Twych wzniemie zorze.
 Nie tracę nadzieję, po nocą dzień bieleje
 I mię światłem Twych promieni styr, Jezu, serca odmieni.
 Ja rzucam żagle, maszty, kotwice i łodzi,
 Co mnie w światowej częstokroć nurzały powodzi.
 Nie tracę nadzieję, tą krew co Jezus leje,
 W porcie mię wieczności cale krwi ran piąci
 Stawi fale. Amen.



Image no. 26 in *Amoris divini et humani effectus varii, e variis Sacrae Scripturae sanctorumq; PP. sententiis ac Gallicis versibus illustrate*, published by Michael Snyders, Antwerp 1626.



Image no. 54 in *Amoris divini et humani antipathia. Sive effectus variis Sacrae Scripturae locis deprompti emblematis suis expressi SS. PP. authoritatibus, nec non Gallicis, Hispanicis et Flandricis versibus illustrati*, published by Michael Snyders, Antwerp 1629 (Retrieved 16 September 2016 from http://emblems.let.uu.nl/ad1629_2_012.html).