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Poet on poets

Jacek Łukasiewicz

Przeł. Anna Warso

Jacek ŁUKASIEWICZ

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In his creative work Miłosz frequently surrenders his role as a poet, or rather, he incorporates it into his other roles: that of a literary historian, lecturer, publicist, journalist, reviewer. Although he discusses poetry and comments on other poets in several genres of his discursive prose, my essay will focus only on Miłosz's poetic work and on what he says in it about poets – about other *Polish* poets to be precise. And he says a lot, in several ways and from several perspectives.

They are addressed directly in dedications and poem titles as recipients of letters, odes, or witty verses. They are written about in the third person as well: from a brief mention or a short commentary to a long ballad or a quasi-essay. Miłosz summons them in their various non-literary roles but sometimes also strictly in their poetic function, as speakers of their poetic work. Others yet make their appearance through quotations, allusions, stylistic mimicry and similar techniques that are too plentiful in Miłosz's work to be thoroughly discussed in this paper. I will thus concentrate only on those instances which mention clearly and beyond the realm of doubt other poets by their name, surname, pseudonym or periphrasis.

That poetry as a space strives to be fully autonomous, isolated from other textual orders, is something Miłosz is well aware of and fears. He uses several methods to break the boundaries of poetry and to open up poetic diction: assuming the role of a biographer, chronicler, and literary historian in his poems, he broadens also the meaning of those roles and enriches with them the space of his own poetry.

Miłosz's poetic work evolved with time: in the prewar period (which for convenience I will treat here as a whole) one will find recipients of his dedications in the poems written in the third person. "O młodszemu bracie" (To a Brother) is dedicated to Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, "Kołysanka" (Lullaby) to Józef Czechowicz and "List 1/1/1935" (Letter from 1/1/1935) not is not as much dedicated to as directed specifi-

cally at Jerzy Zagórski, addressed already in the opening apostrophe: “Jerzy, Jerzy, you bad son, you timid poet and a friend wronged.”¹ Other poets are mentioned by name, for instance Jesienin (in “Na śmierć młodego mężczyzny” (On the Death of a Young Man): “With what love for life and condemnation for God/ placed the muzzle to his mouth Sergiusz Jesienin, poet.”) In “O książce” (To a Book) Miłosz lists several major authors of the past centuries whose work the new catastrophic visionaries cannot carry on.

No more will from your pages shine onto us foggy
evening over still waters, as in Conrad's prose,
no more will the skies speak in Faustian choir,
no more will Hafez's long forgotten poem
coolly touch our brows, and soothe our heads
Norwid will no more reveal to us the harsh laws
of the century covered with red dust
Restless, blind and true to our time,
we walk somewhere far

The plural form in this poem is not ironic. But this changed dramatically during the war. In *Rescue*, Conrad, Goethe, Hafiz and Norwid are no longer viewed as belonging to the realm of the past somewhere on the other side of the abyss. On the contrary, Miłosz takes a leap in their direction. From there, looking upon what is now the other side, he sees those who continue – foolishly, he believes – the poetic of catastrophic symbolism, the “twenty-year old poets of Warsaw.”

His writing from the war period does not speak about other poets directly, with the exception of the (already post-war) “Przedmowa” (Introduction) from *Rescue*. In it, Miłosz addresses the poets of the war generation: Baczyński, Gajcy, Trzebiński, declaring that there is “no wizardry of words” in him. He lays his prophetic-didactic volume on their graves, so that the ghost “should visit us no more.” But pushing away from the old shore with spells, he knows very that these cannot work. His post-uprising poems included in *Rescue* make use of numerous talisman-words, such as “seconds,” “pearls,” or “star” (in “Rozmowa płocha”) and of exquisite baroque stanzas – in “Los” (Fate).

It was after the war that Miłosz's poetic space opened up widely and filled with other writers. His poetic invocations addressed those long gone (he asks Jonathan Swift for support in writing poetry that is critical, satirical and mocking but at the same time not devoid of poetic essence) and those still alive. At Tadeusz Różewicz he directs his emphatic praise for the redemptive element of poetry (“And all around thunders laughter of the poet/ and his life, eternal”), contrasting Różewicz with rhetors who preach “official lies.”

¹ Wherever possible I refer to the printed translations of Miłosz's work published in *New and Collected Poems: 1931 - 2001* (Ecco, 2003)) referenced further as [page number, CP]. Where translations were unavailable, I provide a working translation of the quoted passage. [(A.W)]

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And where they sat not a single
blade of grass will grow

In the satirical and didactic *A Moral Treatise* he lists several patrons: Witkiewicz, Sartre, Rabelais, and Conrad, the author of *Heart of Darkness*. But these were not poets.

A Treatise on Poetry (1956) is the main work in which Miłosz gathers other poets. No other poem among his work presents a landscape inhabited by poets as broad, as rich and as complete as that unveiled in *A Treatise* whose composite timeless space gathers together those already dead and those still alive disregarding the boundaries of history, literary history, and autobiography. All those constituent types of space coexist in *A Treatise* but at the same time they do not overlap fully, like slides that have been moved minimally so that the resulting image is ambiguous.

In *A Treatise* Miłosz formulates poetic – and metaphorical, as they are a part of the poetic image – definitions of artistic creation and of the described poets. Behind the metaphors, behind every image there is a lyrical “I” that produced the defining metaphor. He has done that before: “No more will from your pages” – he addressed the book – “shine onto us foggy/ evening over still waters, as in Conrad’s prose” following his comparison-based definition with another, built on anthropomorphizing metaphors: “no more will the skies speak in Faustian choir” and “no more will Hafez’s long forgotten poem/ coolly touch our brows.” Finally, he defines by means of metonymy: “Norwid will no more reveal to us the harsh laws/ of the century covered with red dust.” There is strong poetic imagery in the quoted fragment but it is accompanied by a strong rhetorical and notional element. Immaterial nouns, such as “evening”, “skies,” or “poem” are anthropomorphized turning into images but names of the poets, remaining in the shadow of the images, are inscribed in their structure. At the same time, we know that it is the names that are most crucial: genetically primal here.

A Treatise on Poetry formulates its “definitions” using different method. Those identified by their names are actual subjects of sentences. Descriptions refer to them and not to impressions and moods of the reader, speaking voice of the poem. *A Treatise* resembles (or imitates) a textbook by a literary historian, or a piece of literary criticism, rather than an impressionist lyric: the “I” or “we” – readers – are pushed to the background, we are not as much reading subjects as objects shaped by the “defined” poets. This is what happens in the passages on Conrad and Wyspiański. They are presented as protagonists on the historical (not only literary historical) scene. But even they are not portrayed directly. Instead of Conrad himself, the decisive passage of his tale uses a metonym mentioning a character in *Heart of Darkness*: “One of the civilizers, a madman named Kurtz” who “Scribbled in the margin of his report/ On the Light of Culture: ‘The horror.’ And climbed/ Into the twentieth century” (114).² Wyspiański is spoken of as being defeated by the “contradiction” between solemnity,

² After *New and Collected Poems*. Polish version of Miłosz’s line about Kurtz, also quoted in the original version of this essay, reads “Na memoriale o światłach kultury/ Pisał ‘ohyda’ a więc już wstępował/ W dwudziesty wiek.” Miłosz seems to be referring to Kurtz’s report, and the translation – to Kurtz’s last words. (AW)

the desire to become part of history and to struggle against its fatalism on the one hand, and a style not mature enough for such solemnity and desire.

Other poets of Young Poland are characterized as participants of the literary historical process: either failing to understand its essence; their own dependence on the ethnic language and style of the period (e.g., – Kasprowicz who “roared, tore at the silken tethers/ Yet could not break them: they were invisible. And not tethers, they were more like bats/ Sucking the blood out of speech on the fly” (113)); or passively surrendering to them (as Staff or Leśmian, even though the latter “drew his own conclusions:/ If it’s all a dream, let’s dream it to the bottom” (113)).

In *Beautiful Times* (part one of *A Treatise*) those poets – name-bearers, appear only as speaking subjects of their work. Trapped in their poetic worlds and unwilling to rebel they lose their status as persons. This changes in the part devoted to inter-war authors – they may be wrong about things (and they often are), but they are also subjects of life, and not only of literary texts. They are active in both spheres. One is tempted to posit that this is perhaps partly caused by the fact that Miłosz knew them not only from their books, but also by the fact that they shared historical time. Their work and their biographies explain each other, such as the most famous, most poignant and most dramatic passages on Julian Tuwim. Tuwim – who “shouted ‘Ca ira!’ in Grodno or Tykocin,” (118) and who, after the war, would meet the participants of his pre-war readings “at the ball for the Security Police” – is not a function of style, like Kasprowicz or Staff, but a literary personage. His failures were not failures of language he could not overcome, they were caused by his own conflicts and weaknesses.

Tuwim lived in awe, twisted his fingers,
His face broke out in reddish, hectic spots
One could say that he fooled the officials
Just as he later cheated earnest Communists
It choked him. Inside his scream was another:
That human life was chaos and marvel
That we walk, eat, talk, and at the same time
The light of eternity shines on our souls

There are those who see a pretty, smiling girl
And imagine a skeleton with rings on the bones.
Such was Tuwim. He aspired to long poems.
But his thought was conventional, used
As easily as he used assonance and rhyme
To cover his visions of which he grew ashamed (119-120)

This “thought” needs to be emphasized, given back its fundamental meaning – the thought precisely, and not an element of poeticity. In the passage above, the eschatological dimension of Tuwim’s poetry, one he could not express directly, is revealed as crucial. Eschatological – that is transcending the boundaries of the present, portraying it *sub speciei aeternitatis*, because poetry itself was degraded by Tuwim (or perhaps by his poetic? or by the poet-subject) to opulent poeticity. Tuwim’s poetic

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portrait in *A Treatise* seems to be particularly accurate, as is the diagnosis; at the same time this short passage is also an epitaph, as Tuwim was already dead when Miłosz worked on *A Treatise*.

The passage on Przyboś is another famous literary portrait and this time it's a comic, not a tragic one:

In the swarm of the Kraków avant-garde
Only Przyboś merits our surprise
Nations and countries crumbled to dust
To ashes, and Przyboś remained Przyboś
No madness ate at his heart, which is human,
And thus intelligible. What was his secret?
In Shakespeare's time they called it euphuism.
A style composed of metaphor entirely.
Przyboś was a rationalist deep down.
He felt what a reasonable social person
Was supposed to feel, thought what they thought.

He wanted to put motion into static images. (121) Miłosz's satirical picture portrays Przyboś as either a hypocrite or someone lacking in the breadth of view: a hypocrite who uses metaphors to feign ambiguity of the poetic world that hides rationalism and its common-sense discourse; lacking breadth of view as he fails to see the contradiction between that pliable conformity of rationalism and the cult of metaphor. Przyboś's avant-garde poetry is unjustly reduced to a technical exercise, performed despite historical cataclysms: "He wanted to put motion into static images."

Just as in the earlier part of *A Treatise* he oversimplifies the Young Poland, Miłosz simplifies the avant-garde in the following passages. He views its language as poeticity, different from the one of the Young Poland but stemming from the same root; as a false "pitching of voice," a yielding to the ease and emotionality of the Polish language (except on a different, ideological level) to the infantile idea of "people's power."

Tuwim's portrait suggestively recalls the imagery of his poetry and it is a sphere in which Miłosz establishes a relationship with Tuwim. In his portrayal of Przyboś there is not a slightest formal allusion to the poetry of the latter, it is not brought into view for even a second, having been pre-judged and rejected.

Tuwim and Przyboś's literary portraits are strongly embedded in the (Polish) literary consciousness, probably stronger than any other critical treatment they have been subjected to. Part III of *A Treatise*, *The Spirit of History* (with the exception of the passage on "twenty-year old poets of Warsaw") is dominated by quotation. Tradition is built differently here – Miłosz does not begin with people but with texts (though people are present too, as Mickiewicz is inseparable from Mickiewicz's quotations). The diachrony of literary history mixing with a much faster pace of literary life (that the speaker-author of *A Treatise* is a part of) gives place to the synchrony of poetic time – of the present perceived in an Eliotic manner as coexistence with the past.

A Treatise received a lot of commentary, also in the form of the author's own notes. Much has been written about it, as the form of a "treatise" implied the complexity of the speaking subject performing several roles, all of which are subordinate to the basic poetic role: that of a lyrical poet. Miłosz never reached for this form again (*From the Rising of the Sun* is something yet different), he summons and meets with fellow poets in other poetic genres. They are summoned and met with tenderness but also patronized – this is how Miłosz treats those who made the wrong choices: Gajcy in "Ballada" (A Ballad) (dedicated to Jerzy Andrzejewski) or Słowacki in *From the Chronicles of the Town of Poronic*.

Gajcy is inscribed in the topos of Pietà in which the mother's accentual-syllabic verse (in Polish – AW), echoing a lament, is stylized into a folk ballad. Was the decision about uprising the right one? "Gajcy lies in his grave, never will he learn/ that the Warsaw battle amounted to nothing." Now the city has risen from the ashes, past the cemetery two youths are chasing a streetcar.

And I don't know, and may the Lord be judge
If I cannot talk to you anymore
And your flowers all crumbled turning into dust
It's because of the drought, forgive me beloved
There is never time, and when I come visit
I have to carry water from so far away

The poem's styling is a sign of helplessness, not as much intellectual, as emotional, regarding the topic, almost as if it was only by paying the price of irony, of balladic naivety of the narrator, that the poet was the able to discuss it at all. (*The World* is an example of similarly naive stylization, one necessary to be able to speak of the order of existence during the apogee of WWII).

In "Słowacki" Miłosz uses a conjurer rite similar to the one employed in "Dedication" from *Rescue* where he addressed the dead young poets of Warsaw. Słowacki, too, was deluded in his poetry and about his poetry; he did not accept reality in its order, nor nature in its cruelty. Metempsychosis was an illusion, it blurred the boundaries of life and death.

Oh sad one, loved one
Sorely deceived one
It is not the eternal spirit, rebel, Lucifer
That writhes in the eel pierced with a toothed bone
It is not him who is so full of vigor that his head
Against stone needs to be flung, till he is mum
...
You were not brother to the serpent looking at the sun
The consciousness and the unconscious are forever divided.
Why did you talk so much? We all tremble, like you,
Because life is final because death is final.
But here, to you this cognac tumbler.

It is the same ambivalence of summoning and rejection. The conjurer's ritual gesture, alluding to the second part of *Dziady*, overlaps onto the present situation: "consumption of alcohol." One could thus hypothesize (on a different level) that Stowacki did appear because of a "cognac tumbler" (drinking cognac in a tumbler is particularly intense), and that he is at the same time, repelled by the same artefact. The last line, "But here, to you this cognac tumbler," can describe two gestures: I am drinking from the glass, or spilling the offering so that the summoned ghost can leave in peace. Alternatively, I am giving it to you, drink it. You are so frail, your lungs are weak.

One must stress again that the styling of those poems shapes and highlights the common character of the poetic plane, of the space where meetings of poets take place. At the same time, which is typical of stylizations, it creates distance: and so we meet – two poets, the summoned one and the one that summons – on an unfamiliar ground (unfamiliar to the one that was called forth but often also unfamiliar to the one who issues the call), we both meet in someone else's poetic form. This unfamiliar ground is the reason why the authenticity of both speakers must be enclosed in quotation marks.

This evolves in Miłosz's later work. Sometimes making present of the summoned is desired, even necessary, but for some reason particularly difficult on an unfamiliar formal ground. The only solution is to give voice to the summoned poet, not in a short citation, but by quoting an entire poem, as in *From the Rising of the Sun*, where Miłosz repeats a rather long verse by Teodor Bujnicki – "the last poor bard of the Grand Duchee." It is in Miłosz's view the only surviving work by Bujnicki that is worth keeping and hence it is placed among several texts about Lithuania and his place of birth from several historical periods, put together in the poem to imitate the culture-text of the Grand Duchee. Bujnicki's lyrical poem is introduced with epic tonality.

There Theodore took three bullets in the stomach
At close range, because of which he was spared the need
To cross so many borders (301)

The quoted poem of the killed poet is a part of the (broadly understood) authentic linguistic tradition of old Lithuania, integrally tied to the rhythm, the physiology of the native land (to the same extent to which we tie a poem with the rhythm of its author's organism – Miłosz writes about it for instance in *Unattainable Earth*).

Theodore will be remembered because of one poem
Dictated – because it is not the skill of the hand
That writes poetry, but water, trees
And the sky which is dear to us even though it's dark,
And to parens and parents of those parents since time (303)

Miłosz's poem is not a collage; it's an integral poetic space whose components are nonetheless heterogeneous: court records and testaments are viewed as equal to lyrical poetry. Even if Bujnicki is somehow present in his own poem, his presence is

fuller and more real in Miłosz's text imitating the cultural text of the Grand Duchee – that is, in someone else's secondary poetic space.

Some of the poets are mentioned very briefly and occasionally, like Adam Ważyk in “1944.”³

– You! the last Polish Poet! – drunk, he embraced me,
My friend from the Avant-Garde, in a long military coat,
Who had lived through the war in Russia and, there, understood. (490)

In *Provinces*, Anna Kamińska is introduced in a different manner, although she, too, is mentioned in a mode both memoiristic and necrologic (as Miłosz's life goes by these two modes overlap more and more often). Part 11 of Miłosz's long poem consists of what could be seen as the main text and a footnote, added in parentheses.

The main text is solemn:

11. “I walk in the disguise of an old, fat woman,”
Wrote Anna Kamińska shortly before her death. Yes, I know. We are a lofty flame.
Not identical with a clay jar. So let us write with her hand:
“Slowly I am withdrawing from my body.” (529-30)

The following footnote (a memory) significantly lowers the tone.

(Two poets appear, girls seventeen years old,
One of them is she They are still in high school.
They came from Lublin to see a master. That is, me.
We sit in a Warsaw apartment with a view onto fields.
Janka serves tea. Politely, we crunch cookies.
I don't talk about the graves in an empty lot close by.) (530)

The memory is imprecise. Information about those shot in the empty lot seems to point to the war period but Kamińska, who was born in 1920, was already at least twenty at that time. The following poem is entitled “Reading the Notebook of Anna Kamińska.”

Reading her, I realized how rich she was and myself, how poor.
Rich in love and suffering, in crying and dream and prayer.
She lived among her own people who were not very happy but supported each other,
And were bound by a pact between the dead and the living renewed at the graves.
She was gladdened by herbs, wild roses, pines, potato fields.
And the scents of the soil, familiar since childhood.
She was not an eminent poet. But that was just: A good person will not learn the wiles of art.

(531)

³ Discussing characters that continue to revisit his imagination Miłosz comments on his meeting with Ważyk: “Some of them want to be recalled, while others don't. Adam Ważyk, avant-garde poet called a ‘theorrist’ in the Stalinist era, was among those who wanted to be recalled. He was the one who approached me, drunk, in 1945: “You! The last Polish Poet!” (*Wiersze*, Kraków 1993-Vol.3 p.272).

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The texts are split into two differently valued layers: one of wisdom and one of poetry. A sapiential text is noble, poetry ought not to be “noble” (Miłosz repeats this often and regarding poetry he distinguishes two meanings of “noble”: 1) that of a positive social cliché – irrelevant here; 2) free from the Manichean flaw, devoid of “Melody, daydream”).

The portrayal of Świrszczyńska is a direct opposite of Miłosz’s portrayal of Kamińska. Split into the high and the low, the spirit and the body, Świrszczyńska wants to rise above such contradictions “praising being:/ The delight of touch in lovemaking, the delight of running on a beach,/ of wandering in the mountains, even of raking hay,/You were disappearing, in order to be, unpersonally.” Świrszczyńska attempted to solve the riddles that Miłosz is was trying to solve for in his poems.

And the body is most mysterious,
For, so mortal, it wants to be pure,
Liberated from the soul which screams: "I!"

A metaphysical poet, Anna Świrszczyńska
best felt when she was standing on her head

(“Translating Anna Świrszczyńska on an Island of the Carribbean,” 598-99)

Świrszczyńska is treated with trust, Kamińska as a poet – with distrust but both found their way into Miłosz’s poetic space for important reasons.

They are recalled in Miłosz’s poems by his autobiographical and real “I,” he simply reminiscences about them. There are no special rituals used to summon them, no literary historical categories. The poet does not have to and does not take on the role of a conjurer or a literary historian.

In the poem about Czechowicz from *The Separate Notebook* cycle, the subject acts in a yet different, more ritual manner. Is there a way to communicate with the dead across the boundary of death? There is, but an insufficient one – answers the poem in several verses of different tonality. The colloquialism of some of them aims to eliminate or reduce the distance between the living and the dead (“Yet I presume you have some trace of interest, at least as to your own continued stay among the living.” (382)). The high tone of others clearly emphasizes the poetic character of the situation: “you appear now on this other continent, in the sudden lightning of your afterlife”). Czechowicz is presented in the uniform of a soldier from the year 1920.

From shit-houses in the yard, tomatoes on the windowsill, vapor over washtubs, greasy checkered notebooks – How could that modest music for young voices soar, transforming the dark fields below?...Set apart by a flaw in your blood, you knew about Fate; but only the chant endures, nobody knows about your sorrow (383)

Czechowicz’s poetry directs the reader (or the listener) not to its maker but to a different reality that he created or revealed. Not a biographical, historical, social, but a metahistorical, metaphysical one:

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Where are you behind your words, and all who are silent, and a State now silent though it once existed (383).

For a very long time, actually from the very beginning, Miłosz paid special attention to figures of authority and constructed perspectives to properly receive them. Depending on the perspective, the same person was admired or criticized, for example Mickiewicz (as discussed thoroughly by Elżbieta Kiślak in the second part of *Walka Jakuba z aniołem (Jacob's Battle with the Angel)*) As the perspectives shift, new approaches are adapted, including the attitude of the worshipper, or – more frequently in Miłosz's work – the attitude of the student.

The third part of *This* is devoted to poets and other authors. Poets should not be singled out, despite the fact that matters of poetry are also discussed here. Miłosz talks about what he owes to others and, once again, recapitulates the points he disagrees with them about. It is his second most important dialogue with other writers after *A Treatise* but one very different from the latter. Its basic diction, natural and “practical,” is modified here in several ways, from the pathos of an ode to the sarcasm of a pamphlet.

Mickiewicz is the first to make appearance. He was the one taught by the fate that it's enough to:

Put two words together, and here they come running,
Grab you to take you to the tribal rite.
Let us write for ourselves, for a handful of friends,
Just to while away a Sunday picnic:
This is how it starts. And before you know it there are flags,
Screams, prophesies, defending barricades

How diabolical must be the nature of language
If one can only become its servant!

(„Ze szkodą” (To the Detriment))

I learned, says Miłosz, not only from Mickiewicz's great and right accomplishments but also from his mistakes. But he always remains “my great patron,” the first one to summon. In him is the lesson and the warning.

I, too, did harm, perhaps less than others.
In disguise, wearing masks, unrecognizable,
Ambiguous. Even this is protection
Against recitation at the yearly fete.

Iwazskiewicz is invoked as the second. “Selecting Iwazskiewicz's Poems for an Evening of His Poetry at the National Theater in Warsaw” (708) is polemical about the previous poem („Ze szkodą”) and opens with a (hidden) allusion to the text Iwazskiewicz published in *Twórczość* after Karol Wojtyła was elected Pope. Iwazskiewicz wondered how Mickiewicz and Słowacki would have reacted to the news of the election of a Pole who knew their work by heart and who once played Samuel Zborowski on stage. While repairing the evening of Iwazskiewicz's poetry,

Miłosz was aware that Iwaszkiewicz was a poet prone to succumb “to the temptation, deeply sweet, of relief through nonexistence.” And Miłosz says without irony: “I too felt the seriousness of my duty.” He wants to bring out Iwaszkiewicz’s tone, “Despite your doubts, that tone of depths,” which – as every tone of depth in poetry – is *eo ipso* an affirmation of existence. He wants to extract from Iwaszkiewicz’s work “speech of generation, a home and fortress...the colors and scents of the steppe in bloom.”

“Ode for the Eightieth Birthday of John Paul II” is introduced by the two previously discussed poems. The recipient of the ode is an embodied holiness. Holiness has a triple meaning here: denotative (in the title: Holy Father), personal (he is a holy man) and numinous (through him acts God’s Holy Power). If the tradition of prophetic Polish Romanticism contributed to this triple holiness, it fulfilled its great task. Perhaps, then, the weakness or the strength of our romantic tradition depend on the qualities of its followers?

You are with us and will be with us henceforth
When the forces of chaos raise their voice
And the owners of truth lock themselves in churches
And only the doubters remain faithful
Your portrait in our homes every day remind us
How much one man can accomplish an how sainthood works (710)

He next summons Jeanne Hersch. Among the twelve rules, or commandments, of his philosopher friend not a single one is unimportant. “What I Learned from Jeanne Hersch” (711) complements what Miłosz said earlier in “Conversation with Jeanne” from *Provinces*. In “Conversation” he talks about being “dazzled by the emerald essence of the leaves” (543) being more important than philosophy, about the sense of freedom found in the vastness of nature. In “What I Learned,” the commandments, extracted from the writings and conversations with Jeanne Hersch, form a moral code, concluding with the following principle engendering optimism and courage: “

12. That in our lives we should not succumb to despair because of our errors and our sins for the past is never closed down and receives the meaning we give it by our subsequent acts” (712).

“Zdziechowski,” encrusted with quotations from professor Zdziechowski’s writing, opens in the first person and ends with rhythmical verses in the second, addressing the eponymous character. Zdziechowski’s pessimism led him nonetheless towards the redemptive faith in God, despite the omnipresence of evil and chaos, and towards seeking refuge in tradition. A thinker and a poet (in his role of a thinker) has to redeem. “Zdziechowski” is thus a poem that Miłosz’s philippic “Against the Poetry of Philip Larkin” (718). clearly corresponds with: “Suddenly Philip Larkin’s there/ Explaining why all life is hateful./ I don’t see why I should be grateful.”

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My dear Larkin, I understand
That death will not miss anyone.

But this is not a decent theme
For either an elegy or an ode.

(718)

The rhymed ending (of the Polish version) introduces irony to the poem, weakening the deriding tone, also hinting at auto-irony.

This part of the volume includes other poems, “Aleksander Wat’s Tie” and “To Robert Lowell,” as well as poems about two Polish poets: Zbigniew Herbert and Tadeusz Różewicz. I will briefly refer to the last two.

“On Poetry, Upon the Occasion of Many Telephone Calls after Zbigniew Herbert’s Death” returns to the division that keeps tormenting Miłosz, the division between the carnal and the spiritual, the amoral nature and the moral sphere of God and humanity. Even though it seems that poetry should not – it does, for some reason, inhabit that which is earthly, dirty and sinful. Individualized in man, after his death it becomes identical with his individual soul that has left the body.

Liberated from the phantoms of psychosis
from the screams of perishing tissue
from the agony of the impaled one

It wanders through the world
Forever, clear (724)

Poetry is thus important also for the non-earthly future of the poet.

To Różewicz who said that evil comes “from man/ always from man/ only from man” (726), Miłosz replies with his *leitmotif* saying that evil is, unfortunately, immanent in nature: “good nature and wicked man/ are romantic inventions.” He adds to this, however, by adding to the volume the last poem in this part, one that is a portrait and a definition, “Różewicz.”

he does not indulge
in the frivolity of form
in the comic abundance of human beliefs
he wants to know for sure

he digs in black soil
is both the spade and the mole cut in two by the spade (727)

The last two lines are a mystery and each attempt to shed light onto it must falsify it. Let us try to interpret them nonetheless: to “dig in black soul” means to search for something in nature, to farm the land and at the same time to hurt it. Różewicz does both, obeying the external force (the force of poetry), being its tool – the spade and at the same time the injured mole. What does one find digging in the ground? An earthworm or – precisely – a mole. The latter has already made an appearance

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in Miłosz's poetry. In "A Poor Christian Looks at the Ghetto" (63), the mole was a guardian of the dead, a judge and a metaphysical riddle. In his poetry Różewicz injures himself – the mole with his poetry – both in the physical, earthly, and in its moral and metaphysical dimension. It is an extremely astute reading of the poems written by the author of "Bas-Relief" and "Always a Fragment."

In the linear order of Czesław Miłosz's poetry it is the last of his definitions of individual poets.

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The material presented here allows one to draw several different conclusions. It can be interpreted using different keys.

First and foremost, other poets fill the space of poetry seen as a tradition – that is history. They appear in a diachrony, living in their allotted time, composing poems and leaving their texts behind. Among these poets there is also a place for the "I" standing for Czesław Miłosz, poet, born in Szejnie, given a long but also limited moment in the history of Polish and international poetry. "I" am looking at myself from the outside, looking at my place as a place in the history of literature, at myself as a one of the poets fulfilling their functions.

Secondly, they fill the space of poetry defined as my personal tradition. I organize this space arbitrarily to a degree, highlighting selected works of literature. I choose them and shuffle, or they shuffle themselves inside me, co-creating my internal landscape, not necessarily in chronological order although the order of history is present in me to the extent that other poets cannot abandon it entirely. I am the center of the system, not one of them but separate from them. I meet them but on my ground, on the ground of my personality and my poetry. My poetry, however, is not a single space governed by one causal subject. No, my poetry is divided into circles (let us stick for a while to this imprecise but convenient Dantean metaphor).

Those circles are arranged according to the enumeration included in the "Preface" to *A Treatise on Poetry*. In each there is an "I" and in each "others" appear. Mickiewicz, who is especially important for Miłosz, continues to re-emerge. The first circle is a circle of the world's revelation in an image. It is an epiphanic unveiling of the mystery, of being. It is experienced by the "I" directly and in the communion with other poets capable of experiencing it. With Mickiewicz, one of the greatest, perhaps the greatest among the Polish poets, who experienced and immortalized it in the language, or who experienced in through the language. Next, he opens (or rather closes) the circle of "Melody, daydream," equivocal but also necessary, specifically poetic (as the epiphanic circle does not require verse). In the second circle irrational powers are released as the speaker appears as a conjurer in its dual role. The third circle is a circle of thoughts: here Mickiewicz appears ambiguously as a wise man who managed to oppose the bourgeois and scientific *Land of Urlo* with a great force and as a demagogic usurper from *The Books and The Pilgrimage of the*

Polish Nation and *Vision of Priest Peter*. Finally, we enter the circle of satire, where Mickiewicz becomes its unequivocal object. There can be no doubt, however, that the summoned poet retains his personal identity in all those circles.

These are the circles of poetry as space in which “I” – the poet participates, a space that is a metonymy of the cultural space that I am a participant of and the language I write in. At the same time, introducing other poets into my poetry, I introduce them into my personal individual space, into my idiolect. It is where I meet them as master of this space. If history, cultural history and cultural history reflected in the language and shaping the language were the most immediate context elsewhere, here it is my life that becomes the context, and my biography. In this particular space it begins to matter whether I knew personally the poets I am summoning, and whether they are dead or alive. The ones I knew cannot be reduced to their poetry, even if I want to – they appear as real people meeting the real me, not just me as role of a poet or a reader. They appear in the present, because this is the time of lyrical poetry.

Whether it is the poetic space I participate in or poetic space that I own, I am never alone. I am always surrounded by others. And I know that it is very important that those other poets existing in my poetry exist in it differently than outside of it, differently than in essays, differently than in the history of literature or memories.

It seems that Czesław Miłosz had to, and has to, summon other poets, since their participation in his poetic world proves that poetry is not a phantom nor a temptation addressing man’s “worse side” – that it can go beyond the accidental, and that it can last.

Novels and essays serve but will not last
One clear stanza can take more weight
That a whole wagon of elaborate prose. (109)

Translation: Anna Warso