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One of the so called “great themes” in literature – or at least the literature of the West – that appears in Białoszewski's work is the theme of love.¹ Scholars never really paid too much attention to this particular fact. Perhaps they were assuming that there is no point in talking about something that is not there, or that there are other, far more significant, themes to be touched upon. Then again, perhaps there was a fear of being misdirected and fooled by the results of reconstructing the remnants of “love discourse” in Miron Białoszewski's work. Misdirection would consequently lead into the dangerous realm of literary “margins” – namely, the homoerotic. The author freely moved among numerous myths of his own culture, oftentimes assuming an outsider position. It was an interesting position to take, since it allowed for recognition of elements of a “common world,” and simultaneously allowed for the extraction of new meanings.

The question of the love theme becomes even more intriguing, since that was the one with which young poet started his writing career. One of earliest known works of Białoszewski is the expressionistic in spirit (resembling in style Kasprowicz's Hymns) poem *Jerozolima* (Jerusalem), about the tragedy of the ghetto, dating back to 1943.² There is also a poem entitled *Sherzo h-moll* from 1945, which was written in a similar style and which talks about musical elations. The remaining three poems are date back to 1946 and are considered works in erotics. In all of three, the addressee is not present physically, but recalled from depths of memory. The word “longing” is often repeated and the atmosphere recalls the aesthetic spirit of Young Poland. We can take the poem entitled *You – Longing*, as an example:

¹ See Rougemont, D., *Les Mythes de l'Amour* (1972).

² Published in the *Poetry* magazine, vol.12 in 1985, 3–4.

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Evening is full of white soil
And black sky
And now I know
 through the trees
extending their rimed fingers
of branches
that you endure in me

Over the dome of bushes
Covered with snow
I raise your face

I begin to understand on this night
starless
that I need to make Your voice
sound above the wind

I lower my head,
To touch a vision of your hands with my hair.
Do you know I'm cold,
That I miss – those hands
And before my lips change them into touch,
Space will remain
The longing³

A lonesome walk in winter weather, inducing a reflective mood and the sensation of lacking, call the “loving” one to recreate the “beloved”: “that I need to make Your voice,” however it is not creation, but rather re-creation, since: “you endure in me,” or, in other words, “I carry you inside me.” Maybe that is why he can “raise your face.” Let us pay attention to the fact that this time, differently from the rest of the poem, the possessive pronoun is written in a lower case. This could suggest that “your face” is the face of a loving one, who “gave himself away” to the “beloved”. A “starless night” could mean a night without predictions, without “guides” – as if future of the relationship was unclear, as if the “loving” one was to be left only with the space filled with “longing.” One could say that time, in a rather cynical way, revised this thought of the twenty four years old poet. In his later works, space is usually completely “different from longing,” even though he did not write about how he “changes lover’s hands with his lips into touch.” Similarly, the natural scenery and motif of a long walks appears in a poem with incipit that exclaims, So what if... :

So what if astral kernels
Will spill at dusk?
Day – or night
It's only brilliance – or the dark
Nothing more

³ Published in the *Poetry* magazine, vol.9 in 1987. <http://rcin.org.pl>

In grey sidewalks
Like in ash's heap
I know Your's step by step
But they are too deep
 For me to uncover

I don't know what to do
My legs are made of stone
And hands are so idle
That waves of hot air
Put me in a motionless vertigo

And if ask the vastness of the skies
Have I?
Green eyes of stars will answer:
 Nobody⁴

The motif of the stars corresponds with the previous poem, where we observed their absence. On the other hand, their presence here seems to be indifferent. This turns out to be a sign of inconsistency on the part of the poet, since in the punch line of the poem “stars rule over his faith,” paraphrasing the famous poem by Tadeusz Miciński, who was most likely read by young Białoszewski himself at the time. These stars, their presence, and green light (why green?) underlines the missing “beloved,” his absence. Most likely, the described walk takes place along the same paths of many walks lovers enjoyed together before. It is like walking over one's own footsteps, hence the sidewalk turning into “ash” – traditionally considered to be “a symbol of the passing of everything that is earthly, of death and decomposing matter.” In the Christian tradition, which was not alien to Białoszewski, but in his later works thoroughly reinterpreted, it is a symbol of humility, penance and penitence.⁵ “Ash” stands for the corpse of the “beloved,” who cannot be “unearthed.” Somewhere in the background there is a fire smoldering, perhaps it is a symbol of love that has burned something, or burned out itself. We observe far more original scenery than in the last poem, dated July of 1946. With an unsteady hand, the poet underlined the word “evening,” next to the date:

This path that used to
But memory of snow, as if a life passed away
Now – under warmth swell
Where dirt and ice, abundance of weeds.

One, but two alien grounds: alive-dead,
Only the same rubble compressed into ash
-into horizon;
westbound the milky way of lanterns
and the red sea observing above them,

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Biedermann, H. *Knaur's Encyclopedia of Symbols*, entry: ash, 1989.

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I walk, eternally, even when – I don't know,
I sense your eyes, even with a different thought.
Come out to meet me by the green ruins,
on the edge of light,
while aurora... later we can miss each other by an inch⁶.

It is the scenery of a devastated city, its ruins and rubble. They are not important, however, since they have been subdued to the image of a “ruined” relationship. In ways similar to the previous poem, we are witnessing the death of the “beloved” – “as if a life passed away” – and we take part in a walk on a path that was traversed (possibly together) in the past. The second verse seems to be an allegorical statement about the reasons for separation. It is hyperbolic in character, because in order to express its judgement about the differences between the two lovers it utilizes the cosmology of two planets, the Milky Way and the “red sea.” However, it is probably the first time his readers actually encounter these types of hyperbolic-cultural metaphors, which often appear in *Revolutions of Things*; metaphors which include: “Leonards of faces,” “harmonicas of Noah,” “Don Quixote of lampshades,” “Homers of golden fleeces,” etc. The reality observed by Białoszewski starts to demand sublimation – in this case in the form of a line of lanterns and their glow – but since the entire poem displays a sublime character, there is no surprise effect, no hyperbolizing of reality that might be known from a debut volume. Comparing early poems with his later works, one can observe that the need to sublimate, sanctify, evolve, or even mythologize reality remains, but the object, mood and, consequently, style changes. Young Poland is replaced by the “avant-garde,” and whatever was sentimental is no longer valued.

Let us remember that the debut volume of Białoszewski's poems was edited and composed by Artur Sandauer, who, counting backwards from the date of the release, knew him for over two years and had a profound and “living” influence on his development. They met at the right time. Białoszewski himself recalled that in 1952 he finally rejected his former style and started writing “like he really wanted.” His first truly satisfying poems were *The Gray Eminence of Wonder* (Szara eminencja zachwytu) and *Green: And So It Is* (Zielony: więc jest) marking two trends present in the *Revolutions*: the sublimation of objects and a certain philosophical current. The poetry of sublimation was headed in this particular direction. In his first poems, sublimation was practically equal with emphasis, and the later sanctification of dusted places saved from the war, somewhere in the countryside, began to be followed only by shifting this gaze – often in the form of a litany – to objects. However, or “by the way,” something happens: this YOU, a close human being, disappears “in the meantime.” If we have a man in *Revolutions of Things*, it is a man observed from a distance and usually with a large dose of irony. It is a Madonna on a merry-go-round, a lady and peasant laying down in the bushes, drunk “shepherds” in a pub-shed. These are images, little vignettes. One possible explanation could be found in Sandauer's (collaborating with Przyboś) willingness to revive the avant-garde as an antidote to socialist realism. He wanted Białoszewski to be “reistic, anti-sentimental”

⁶ “Poetry”, vol.9, 1987.

and “dehumanized” as much as possible, following the concept of Ortega y Gasset.⁷ But a biographical explanation is also possible. Until 1951, Białoszewski was employed by “Youth’s World” magazine, from which he was subsequently fired by order of the Department of Security (Pol. UB – Urząd Bezpieczeństwa) and imprisoned. Krystyna Garwolińska-Błaszczkowska, the poet’s friend at the time, recalled:

he was fired from “Youth’s World” by the order of the Department of Security. [...] For a short period of time he was also imprisoned. Supposedly, an additional reason for firing him were homosexual tendencies of a boy scout’s magazine employee. The entire scene was set in motion by the visit of a young man in the editorial office, who mysteriously called him out for “a coffee.”⁸

Other friends suggested that the denunciation was filed by false friends of the poet. After that unfortunate experience, he could not find employment and it seems that he suffered from depression. He spent most of his time at home and since he was starving, he would lay in bed for hours and smoke in order to endure the hunger. It is very likely that his imagination retracted from people and became directed at objects. They start to look different when you lie down for hours and contemplate the aesthetic value of objects, instead of their utilitarian function. When lying down and in darkness – Białoszewski usually slept during the day and stayed awake during the night – one’s perspective shifts and objects, for example, may seem larger than they really are. It is a hypothesis that proves, or is proven by, the phenomenal concept of Jerzy Kwiatkowski on the transformation of aboulia into liturgy.⁹ Human kind, humanity – because it is humanity and not a “man,” that appears in the *Revolutions of Things* – is located below the poet in his apartment. Its world is strange and alien and fascinating.¹⁰

Similar in this regard is *A Ballad of Going Down to the Store* (Ballad o zejściu do sklepu – trans. Czesław Miłosz), where going out to the city evokes incredible astonishment in the poet, particularly when meeting people who walk, pass each other, make

⁷ Gasset, J. Ortega y, *The Dehumanization of art and Ideas about the Novel*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968.

⁸ *Miron. Memories of a Poet (Miron. Wspomnienia o poecie)*, edited by H. Kirchner, Warsaw: Tenten, 1996. 122. About his experience of being imprisoned Białoszewski never spoke directly. However, I believe that he addresses it in the following passage from *Rozkurz*: “Whenever I am down and under and I battle my conscious self to remain a straight face, my subconscious begins its merciless reign in the realm of my dreams. It synthesizes all into tortures, blackmail and, finally, into the uprising. The uprising always awaits me.” (Białoszewski, M. *Collected Works (Utwory zebrane)* (from now on in footnotes as UZ), vol. 8: *Rozkurz*, Warsaw: 1998. 130) He performs a peculiar “archeology of dreams,” going deeper – and into more traumatic – experiences in an order of reversed chronology.

⁹ Kwiatkowski, J. “Aboulia and Liturgy” (Abulia i Liturgia), in his *Keys to Imagination (Klucze do wyobraźni)* Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1973. 158–205.

¹⁰ See: *Szare pytanie w poinie: “Jakiż blask / zaćmił mi okno? // Co tam słyhać / dziś / w dole miasta?// Który to dzień stworzenia świata / i jakich ludzi?”* (Utwory Zebrane, volume 1: *Obroty rzeczy. Rachunek zaściankowy. Mylne wzruszenia. Było i było*, PIW, Warszawa 1987. 108.

noises with their bags and talk. This kind of astonishment can appear only in somebody who hasn't observed such things for a long time. He addresses people with a different experience than his own: "Regret! / That you did not see / how people walk, / regret!"¹¹ Why should anyone, this unspoken You, regret? Because this addressee does not walk the streets at all? Not really. The unspoken "You" is organized as a network of "friends of friends," and in this case the subject does not have any "friends," which allows him to see people as representatives of a different species, as well as because going down the stairs ("ah, imagine only, / by the stairs") did not become for them an act of magic, a ritual of passage – it was devoid of all transgressive character. It is an ironic reference to the myth of descending into hell. That is why, in the punch line, the opportunity to come back turns out to be a miracle: "And indeed, / indeed / I returned." There is a metaphorical shift of perspective here. The floor of the apartment becomes a ground floor (even though it is elevated). Anything that is below is considered to be hell. This poem is one of the last in the volume and could possibly be announcing coming back and going out to people, which we witness in *Examination of Whims* (Rachunek zachciankowy).¹²

There are passages in the *Revolutions of Things* that stand out compared to more general tendencies. However, one needs to remember that the "otherness" was "neutralized" in various instances of the reception of Białoszewski's work. The poem *Autobiography* (Autobiografia) opens the entire series entitled *Self-portraits* (Autoportrety). What we are witnessing is a description of an anxiety attack triggered by the thought of leaving the apartment. Let us look closer at the first line: "Who is so sadly shuddering on my eyelids?"¹³ It starts with a recollection of some "You", as longing as it was in very first poems (*Autobiography* was written in 1952). The tone and the stylistics of the poem are similar, and even some words are repeated: "and it is wise to throw away this pot full of ashes." At the very beginning, there is a confession and doubt is expressed: "Why should I croak / with lamentations / hung on a string / of what I'd wish / but can't?... / Why tussle / in my heart's thick bushes?"¹⁴ Sighs, ashes, and tears – all of this is connected with the heart and impossibility. This is the opening of the poem. We should also pay attention to the fact that in the image of "heart's thick bush" there is an allusion to *The Silver Dream of Salomea*, and thereby to the poetics of Romanticism. When writing about this poem, Kwiatkowski talks about intellectual courage in expressing these feelings, which have been absent since the period of Young Poland. However, courage does not lie in Białoszewski's return and reference to the practices of Young Poland, because in Kwiatkowski's mind Young Poland approached this state

¹¹ Ibid. 120.

¹² This is part of a conversation with Zbigniew Taranienko: "ZT: The theme of first volumes were objects, experiences and language. / MB: And immediately people in the second one." (Interview "Respect for Every Detail" ("Szacunek dla każdego drobiazgu") in Taranienko, Z. *Conversations with Writers (Rozmowy z pisarzami)*, Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna, 1986. 401.

¹³ UZ, vol. 1, 97.

¹⁴ Ibid.

pompously, while in Białoszewski's work we find ridicule and grotesque.¹⁵ But is that right? I happen to disagree. I believe that Białoszewski not only doubts the sense of thinking about the hurtful string "of what I'd wish / but can't..." but also points to his willingness to say more about something else, but he simply can't. This is so because of the content, as with the form. "Croaking" does not stand for entering the space of the grotesque and distance, but rather resignation. Kwiatkowski attempts to defend the poet against accusations of sentimentalism. Until this moment, this accusation is not in the center of the discourse where restraint, or even "shame for feelings" are considered to be more artistic than their expression. Kwiatkowski's reading of *Wojaczek* could be further proof for this thesis. In *Autobiography*, early, sentimental and erotic poetics collide and, with the reader as a witness, transform into the "mature" *Revolutions of Things*, which brings about solitude, amongst other things. It is a vision-like "walk around the city," but without any recollections of love. What else is Kwiatkowski, and other commentators following him, seeing in this particular poem? He observes a dynamic vision of the city that brings to mind futurism and surrealism in painting, elements of expressionistic imagery and catastrophic associations. In short, these were elements drawn from different avant-garde movements. Perhaps that was the reason why Sandauer chose this poem. One can see elements of emotionality in the poem *We, the Starfish (My rozgwiadzy)* that remains practically without comment. There is longing, which was central – along with awe – the feeling of Białoszewski's early poetry, although it may appear to be masked. But the method of expressing it is already different and closer to the technique in Polish that is called "ekwiwalentyzacja," which means presenting an image, which is equivalent to an emotion. In non-sentimental poetics, "You" appears also in *Lyrics of the Sleeping (Liryka śpiącego)*¹⁶. Yet again, as I have written in a different place,¹⁷ this particular poem was easy to disregard as an erotic through the conviction that this "You," in reality, was an "I" that cracks in half and splits into two aspects – one that lies on the bed and the other that hovers above it. There is also an alternative: one could claim that "mine, laying on the bottom" means *le moi profond*, that the power of being, "everything-but-you," is actually an inability to be oneself, especially while dreaming, as it is the time when one cannot control oneself. Finally, it could mean that words "overt" and "conscious" address the state in which "I" is only "I" and their contradictions – "covert" and "unconscious" – address the state in which "You" starts to leak from "I." Why, however, could this not be an "erotic You"? Only because it is openly male?¹⁸ Blurring of the distinction between

¹⁵ Kwiatkowski, J. *Aboulia and Liturgy*.

¹⁶ UZ, vol.1, 91.

¹⁷ In the essay entitled "Dream of Miron Białoszewski," which I presented during a conference dedicated to oneiricism and fables in Łódź, 2003 (in print), my remarks were about the rarely discussed and rarely re-printed poem entitled *Dream (Sen)* – an openly homoerotic confession addressed to a tragically deceased lover.

¹⁸ On a similar, two-tracked basis one could also read the poem *To NN*** (Do NN***)* as an epistemological treatise.

lovers of the same sex, especially during sleep, as well as sensation of “close separation,” all belongs to homoerotic mythology. Obviously, readers in 1956 would never assume anything of that sort. Even if a hint of “suspicion” might emerge, it would most likely be rationalized by the inherent “censorship of conventions”: “no, that would never be published” – and that is precisely the kind of mentality that got the poem published.

It was apparently explained to Białoszewski – or he understood on his own – that for aesthetic reasons he could not write about love in sentimental tones, while because of the “public sense of decency” he could not, as Luis Cernuda, the Spanish poet, once wrote, “reveal the truth about his true love.” But already in 1931, Cernuda broke his own rule.¹⁹ However, this only represents one possible way. Federico García Lorca never spoke directly in his *Sonnets of Dark Love*. This “dark love” can be exclaimed only through a clasped throat (with the metaphor of a “shadow in the throat”). Cocteau, in his published poems, used feminine gender forms, which was a popular tendency. Białoszewski made an original move, but not until his *Mistaken Affections* (*Mylne wzruszenie*). He did not go in the direction of modernistic spiritualization and coding. On the contrary, he decided to see how it would be possible to speak openly and directly. His effort was to not speak about the act of loving itself, or who you love, or how much, etc., but to present the love in question as naturally as possible – as the everyday existence of two men. In *Minder?* So many years, and that he/she is! and that you could see him/her! (*Opiekunka? Tyle lat że ktoś taki, taka jest! i że się go, ją zobaczyło!*) from the volume *Was and Was* (*Było i było*) we observe a walk “on Nowy Świat / with Adaś,” during which there is an emotional moment triggered by the lady tending flowers. It may sound a little “gay,” but when reading the poem it is easy to miss that bit entirely. Especially since – as it is with Białoszewski – “emotional moments” are always already “mistaken,” or ironic. Białoszewski discovered that one can write about something in full seriousness and make it clear for a circle of “insiders,” but keep it vague and obscure for people limited by social conventions. And so, the walk is just a walk of two men, a walk of two “friends without subtexts.” But there is also a more profound thought hidden behind all of this: Białoszewski turns around the literary tradition in which love was usually sublimated within the literary work, hyperbolized, mystified and mystical. Very rarely would one present it as a “mutual co-habitation.” As we have seen, in the beginning, Białoszewski was faithful to the convention of sublimation. If I am right in assuming that at one point he realized that he cannot write in this fashion anymore, being an ironist he decided to assume a point of view “from aside,” creating a niche for himself. But apart from all the seriousness, despite sentimental elements, there is a hint of irony – and I do not know how intentional it is. We can observe it in the poem *From the journal of an admirer* (*Z dziennika – miłośnika*):

¹⁹ Cernuda, L. *Un río, un Amor. Los Placeres Prohibidos*, edited by D. Harris, Madrid: 1999. 95. In the translation of my authorship it will appear in the magazine “Fraza,” along with an essay *Reality and Desire of Luis Cernuda* (*Rzeczywistość i pożądanie Luisa Cernudy*).

After going out for a walk in,
way back, Buraków,
way now, Zatrąsienie (-what a name! – she says
...the One, when I told her – the name -
when she was still alive
-zade? – I ask – comes?
to mind?...
 of course! – and she was
very decent)
so I go back
longing
after the apartment
you
I say:
let me change water in the ashtray -
I change, too long, you drop,
you spill
 enough now enough! -
I apologize:
I didn't know
got inspired again in the bathroom,
water, radio, you call:
 come! Koterbska...
I go, she signs, we don't listen,
you say:
I wasn't going to be angry
yes?? good, I was worried...²⁰

A “vignette of a married life” is what one could call this scene. There is an argument in the background and one of the partners leaves the house. He then comes back and tries to make amends. Finally, there is reconciliation. Personally, I always sense compassion in this poem, but there is something ironic in there as well: a certain “banality of love” and the reconciliation accompanied by Koterbska’s song (interestingly, this is probably the only time Białoszewski mentions music other than classical!) – but the tension seems purposeful. Maybe it is designed to draw attention to the fact that a record of the “regular” being together, those “love scenes,” seem ridiculous from the outside, even though to the interested parties they are completely serious. It is a testing ground for Białoszewski’s “talking straight” and it turns out that, in accord with his assumption, not many people realized what he was really saying. At least the reception of his poems seems to confirm this story. Scholars working with *Was and Was* mainly wondered about narrational and speech elements. They suspected that the poet is eavesdropping, overhearing maimed speech, hence subject matter is secondary to the form, or even fully irrelevant.²¹ What

²⁰ UZ, vol.1, 380.

²¹ Obviously, apart from Sandauer, readers like Sławiński, or Barańczak must have known very well what the poems were about, but preferred to stay silent. Perhaps they did so because they did not consider it important, to protect the poet, or in the name of the

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were (are?) the conditions that needed to be met, in order for one to become an “insider”? They were fairly simple: one needed to be well versed in Białoszewski’s work and know his linguistic imagination, and know that THIS could be mentioned. Respectively, one needed not to be ashamed of noticing THAT and be able to add some interpretation, saying what was omitted.

Similar stories appear in later books, including a series of poems entitled *Poems for Le. So.* (Wiersze dla Le. So.) – for example, about how they cook rice together. Or different stories from *Denunciations of Reality* (Donosy Rzeczywistości), about the openly feminine redemptorist Albertynek, or about the visit of a priest in a shared apartment of Białoszewski and Leszek Soliński, or finally a hilarious story from *Hums, Mucks, Pullings* (Szumy, zlepy, ciągi) about the arrival of Soliński’s relative, Mara Paluska, from the United States, before whom an effort of masking and hiding and pretending to be only friends is meticulously staged. One will find plenty of similar stories in Białoszewski’s work. I will present a short anthology of quotes taken out from *Denunciations*. One remark we need to make, however, is an acknowledgement that there will be no “return to innocence” and that a phrase “taken out of context” is undoubtedly helpful when revealing “pornographic” meanings. And so, everyone will be forced to reassess whether one found those meanings when reading *Denunciations* before:

”Misio is from nobility. Noble man. Cause he’s got a canal running through his ass.”

Leon about the Dutchmen²²

During those natters about painting, Le. So. would look meaningfully at Jaś. He thought he sensed something. And Jaś gave him a wink. But when Le. told Lu., Lu. said it didn’t mean anything²³.

”They run and knock on the door. Can’t do nothing, but open, serve tea, coffee. All they would do is sit on their trunks and smoke cigarettes. And I need to paint! I need to look after my own ass.”²⁴

”Such huge asses” Le. would say. He said that his own ass had gotten too big, unnecessarily so. Small. Shoes with bootlegs, up to middle of the calf, with some fur. This quasi-leather. He stands in front of the mirror. Turns around and asks me: “Am I pretty?,” “In this sky?,” adding “I still can go out there, right?” [...] He will put on a sweater, or a transparent top – one that

purity of so-called academic discourse. Other critics might have been unaware. It was Sławiński and Barańczak, in reality, who in their analysis of language mechanisms showed for the first time, also to others, how to approach the works. They managed to transform sentences full of mumbling into announcements. They revealed, to put things jokingly, rules of recurrence, when deriving sense from those written recordings. They have, in a sense, made those kinds of reading possible.

²² UZ, vol.4, *Denunciations of Reality*, 54 (prose *Leon*). Comment concerns Henek Proeme, partner of Leszek Soliński and later his legal husband.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid. 93 (prose *Blockade [Blokada]*). Statement by Le.

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highlights, or a moon-glasses, or a lapel-less blazer with a file folder under his arm. Once, he put on a soutane.²⁵

I asked Włodek: "Undress and get in bed." And he responded, all upset: "What's wrong with you? Want to turn me into a doll?" And so I asked him kindly and said: "...or you will regret – crime of passion."²⁶

I believe that in the case of Białoszewski's prose, but also going even further back to his poems like *Was and Was*, we can speak of a fusion of two elements, of which only one has been properly recognized. It was a fusion of recordings of everyday rambling – seemingly random, but in reality closely controlled – in which observations of what is real, what really happened are highly dramatized, given elements of cabaret and, finally, camp.²⁷ But his control, his "subjectival dictate" over "reality," Białoszewski decided to hide carefully, leaving few tracks. In other words, he staged an autobiographical pact, according to which readers were less likely to pay attention to his retracted subjectivity. This opens possibilities with interesting consequences: in the case of "catching" Białoszewski during something "strange", let us say something perceived as vulgar, he would excuse himself by pointing to blurred subjectivity and a dictate of reality. This reality, both powerful and demonic, is created as something resembling nature, particularly as understood by de Sade: all crime, perversion and so on are the natural, because they appear in nature, while "all we say, all we try to order, and decide over is as far from perfection and its prospect and is as inferior to Nature as the rights of the community of blind men are to our rights."²⁸ Based on this perspective, everything could have happened in Białoszewski's prose – but somehow it does not. There emerges a question of why, for example, he never describes sexual intercourse, although it undeniably occurs in reality. Why does he speak in a coded manner about erotics, etc.? If we decide to follow the version of reality that is so eagerly proposed by Białoszewski – of reality's unquestioned reign – it tells us to support a philosophical view called "realism," according to which there exists the possibil-

²⁵ Ibid. 94. On page 100 Miron tells a story of how he got "rid" of Marek, whom he lets inside the house only from time to time: "He's falls for money. And I need."

²⁶ Ibid. 115 (prose *Rusin in an Alcove* [*Rusin we wnęce*]).

²⁷ Therefore, I am opposed to Henryk Berezka and his views in the review of *Denunciations*. A story that Białoszewski wrote over the span of so many years was created under the dictate of reality, or life, or live speech that he listened to carefully and used himself. This dictate is opposed by subjectival right of choice, subjectival willingness to record and subjectival way of recording. However, these are subjectivities that are unimportant, if the rules of dictate are accepted and if we cannot step away from it, or if it represents a superior subjectivity that has a right to absolute respect, if only it decides to record (*Związki myślowe* (2), in *Związki naturalne*, LSW, Warszawa 1978, 191. G. Ritz remarked on the possibility of such reading. (*Solidarność a seksualny outsider*, trans. M. Łukasiewicz, in *Nie w labiryncie pożądania. Gender i płęć w literaturze polskiej od romantyzmu do postmodernizmu*, trans. B. Drag, A. Kopacki, M. Łukasiewicz, Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa 2002. 236. (From Polish JP)

²⁸ Sade D.A.F. de, *Powiedzieć wszystko*, B. Banasiak, M. Bratuń, K. Matuszewski, eds. Trans. Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, Łódź 1991, 296. (From Polish translation JP)

ity of an objective record of Reality, and language has no influence over it whatsoever. Many critics followed this view, because their outlook was likewise realistic. It is not my philosophy, and personally I do not believe that it was held by Białoszewski. If indeed it was, why would he experiment with speech? In this sense, it is language that sets the parameters for perceiving reality. The record of reality, seeking maximum convergence with the psychological reality of language, is supposed to be a proposition-confession for the reader discovering reality which is perceived in that way. As a consequence, this manner of speaking about “indecencies” (Białoszewski liked this word), which is not a kind of complete disregard, or full freedom of (self)expression must be understood as a sign of a certain worldview. Not (yet?) “sublimating” and not (already?) “emancipated.” German Ritz writes:

Anything that is private, when operating within literature targeting the public sphere, will assume aesthetic and political function. One of its great masters will be Miron Białoszewski. His work is a perfect example of something private that can work without any form of previous confession. Privacy is merely a “non-discursive” way of looking at the outside world. Nobody else in Poland put so much effort into hiding his or her homosexuality as did Białoszewski. Privacy of this sort – without loquacious intimacy – will become, after 1956, the most important context of Polish literature.²⁹

Apart from that one instance, he does not mention Białoszewski anymore. In order to answer why, one would need to conduct much broader discourse analysis of his book. In short, Ritz displays certain assumptions concerning “homosexual literature,” one claim being that it expresses (or is supposed to express) desire. Although desire does appear here and there in Białoszewski’s work, it features far less prominently than in works of others. Ritz elaborates two main models of homosexual literature – modern and post-modern – one being aestheticizing and disguising and the other emancipating, respectively. Białoszewski does not fit either of the two. Ritz has almost foreseen this in the quoted excerpt, but was unable to read properly. Białoszewski is too much of the “other” among “others” to function as a representative of a certain tendency. He is not vivid enough, hence he disappears. But he found yet another way to talk about “this thing.” Artur Sandauer pointed it out when he wrote: “It is fortunate that in the poems reeking of tasteful indecency, sloppiness of language disguises controversial content.”³⁰ This particular issue was not discussed anyway. Sandauer relied on Sartre’s analysis of Genet’s worldview and it is a far less coincidental reference than one could assume. The scholar, however, understands it quite personally. In his mind, it is Białoszewski, whom he himself created, acting like an outlaw who was let into the artistic salon. He barges in, robs it, plays a trick on his Pygmalion and negates everything of which Sandauer used to approve: “Just like Genet, who performs dirty pranks in response to the world’s coquetry, he [Białoszewski – trans.] declares his “otherness” in response to approaches of

²⁹ G. Ritz *Literatura w labiryncie pożądania. Homoseksualność a literatura polska*, trans. A. Kopacki, in *Niż w labiryncie...*, 61. (From Polish translation JP)

³⁰ Sandauer, A. *Junk Poetry*, 200.

the world of art by writing *Mistaken Affections*.³¹ On top of that, there is a fear of being named, of being labeled “as” (in case of Genet, calling him a thief will only push him to steal more). Personally, I would be inclined to see Sartre’s mechanism from slightly different perspective. Białoszewski seems to be acting like a young, belligerent child: “you will not let me play like I want – I cannot write erotics for boys and express my feelings – well, let me show you then, let’s see if you’ll catch this!” And it is precisely about this willingness on “their” part to shape him, threatening to eliminate him from the game and, at the same time, giving praise for recording the vernacular, or hermetic message that frustrates Białoszewski (like in this very definite statement: “they want something from my writing / and I keep catching them by the words.”)³² He prepares a little “surprise.” Beginning with *Mistaken Affections*, there appear several poems, the content of which is more or less obscene. “If I cannot write about feelings as a homosexual, maybe hard-to-decode obscenities will be better” – he seems to be thinking. It looks like Sandauer had similar reflections apropos the poem entitled *Open the window to responsibility* (Otworzyć okno na odpowiedzialność) from the volume *Mistaken Affections*. This is how I would perceive Genet’s transgression in action, so thoroughly examined by Sartre.³³ *Mistaken Affections* closes with four poems about “mistaken erotic affections.” In *Hepyent* (1) “erotic” means “love”, similar to *Zmwartwieńsiulpet* (even though it speaks about life together as not entirely satisfactory: “although I share with you much / not too much”), but it is all written in language that is completely private, child-like almost. In *Hepyent* (2), which Sandauer talked about, the “erotic” element starts to turn into the direction of the obscene:

stop poking around in the bathroom
lay down on the couch
I’m waiting for your loving
“do we have some paste left?”
“Yes”
“And mbest?”
“psrest”
“and loving? not expected
so much today, unless... you know,
ho ho³⁴

We are witnessing an exchange about ablutions preceding intercourse. One of the partners is in the bathroom where he is “poking.” We need to understand, however, that with Białoszewski this word carries a double meaning. He is “poking around” in his rectum,

³¹ Ibid., 200.

³² UZ vol.1, 167.

³³ See *Ses désirs sexuels seront comme sa vie elle-mêmes des fantômes. Quel quesitleurobj et, ils sont condamnés d’avance; il lui est originellement d é f e n d u de désirer*” and passim. J. P. Sartre, *Saint Genet. Comédien et martyr*, in: *Ouvres complètes de Jean Genet*, Paris: 1952, 83.

³⁴ UZ, vol. 1, 319.

of course. “Paste,” which he asks about, is probably some lubricant, possibly vaseline. After that, the poem stops communicating. What could possibly “mbest” be? Is this some kind of appliance? Or maybe drastically abbreviated, English, “I’m best”? But why would Białoszewski switch to a foreign language? Does “psrest” mean “pst” (as in “shush!” – be quiet!) and “rest” – is it again an instance of introducing an English word, telling the partner to rest and not be so “stressed”? It would explain why “loving” never takes place, after all. The last lines indicate that there was something that day that obstructed entire process. Yet, “unless” suggests that not everything is lost. A similarly scatological story entitled *Lesiu*, I have seen can be found in *Denunciations*. Let me quote it in its entirety:

“Lesiu, I have seen, I have recognized”

“What have you recognized?”

“Stool big as kalach. That’s how I knew. Found them in the attic. Zdzisio Gania from the seventh grade messed up. He kissed my hand and I said: “Zdzisio, clean after yourself, this one thing you do for me” Like barns, big as barns they were.

“And how are you supposed to know?”

“Read Forell.”

Pstrążyna was on her way to the morning mass:

“What has he done! What has he done!”

“What has he done?”

“There will be a case in court against him.”

“Why? Tell now, for God’s sake, I will learn anyway.”

“They will be trying him.”

“For what?”

“For sexualism.”

Mrs. Jadwiga said one more thing; about her nephew:

Telegram from my sister: “God help us all, do something, help – sexualism with onanism.” I know how to deal with that. To the party! Korczynianka is a hell of a girl!, I say: “Pin a flower to his lapel, take him, make him dance!”

In the morning I go to him at quarter to seven: “wake up, now, gymnastics, cold water!” Forell writes: “no idleness, no sleeping in – it all encourages tendencies. Do not let him go swimming with the boys by the shore.”

“Did it help?”

“They sent him away. He was working in the woods, cutting trees. Died recently. Inheritance came by the mail. This money is not for me, but for my sister.”³⁵

The story has no clearly outlined background, but it seems that it takes place in the countryside. Maybe “Lesiu” is Leszek Soliński, which would place the story somewhere

in Bieszczady, around Żarnowiec (some of the prose pieces from this volume take place in that area). We do not know when, exactly, the story takes place. Firstly, we should ask about the basis of the association between “sexualism” and the act of excreting. One does not need to be a Freudian and talk about “anal fixation of libido,” which according to the Viennese master explains “etiology of homosexuality,” to realize that “sexualism” in this story stands for suspicion of being a homosexual person. (The additional advice is found: “Do not let him go swimming with the boys by the shore.” – God forbid naked – try to meet a girl.) The joke in the story is based around the fact that one of the ladies claims to be able to recognize one’s preferences by the size of the stool (a play with the words “messed up,” excrements as symbol of sin. But does “sexualism with onanism” stand for the so called “fingering” (stimulating of one’s rectum with a finger or other object)? It might be that the heroine of this little episode believes that after such practices the rectum muscle becomes stretched and the stool becomes larger. On top of everything else, there is also the mysterious “Forell,” most likely the author of a book on sexual education of the youth. Maybe he is the one writing about the size of the stool and gives advice on how to treat the symptoms once they manifest themselves? Then again, maybe she means Birger Forell (1893-1958), the Swedish evangelical priest? However funny this little anecdote may seem, it feels like humor was not the only intention of Białoszewski. It is a bitter story about how men’s lives were ruined. In the last sentences we witness a huge leap forward in time and talk about a failed “treatment.” In conclusion, if I am correct, the entire story takes place in the countryside. Although, considering a country like Poland, this level of intellectual ignorance could be easily be encountered in a major city. There is also a motif of excessive trust in the book and its author – and the repeated name of the author seems to be spiteful, not a merely “linguistic mimesis.” At the same time, the absence of Białoszewski – the narrator – is not accidental and stems from something more than a willingness to “hide.” In his poem *Suspicious Case (Me)* (*Sprawa podejrzana (ja)*) from the volume *Was and Was*, he talks about an appointment with the doctor, Palankin, who visited his theater “on the fourth floor” once: “It’s been 5, 6 years. / Need / is a mother. I had somebody / there on the couch. Year, two good. / Four – I need advice... / Then... Mr. Palankin – he runs something. / I know. Will go.”³⁶ Mr. Palankin recognizes Białoszewski and lets him come without waiting in line. This is how the conversation proceeds:

I asked about soma
(I was reading something from
philosophy – India). It was written here, on the bottom.
soma... and something...
“body”
“oh(?)”
“because there are my patients here
sick of body and spirit” – he stared,
while talking, at my shoes,
at first he asked “are you here

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concerned with somebody else?”
I wanted to explain that I know,
that one is cracked.
Only when leaving, I looked:
one was light, one was dark
(brown) (by accident),
But I forgot I wear these,
because I lack -³⁷

If Białoszewski comes seeking “advice” in regards to somebody he had “on the couch” for a few years, then Professor Palankin is most likely a sexologist. This somebody may be too ashamed to come and visit Palankin himself. Finally, we learn that this person is “cracked.” It is a vague word. Staying faithful to Palankin’s statements that he treats illnesses of both spirit and the body one can narrow its meaning to a “psychological crack,” or a bodily one – ripping of the rectum or tearing of a bridle. The doctor seems to treat the subject as a “suspect,” although he knows, most likely, about subject’s tendencies. He notices mismatched shoes, which are supposed to stand for psychological “disorder,” or could even be (in Pierce’s terminology) a kind of “index” pointing to a homosexual as somebody, who is inherently “mismatched.” They are also unable to communicate over the meaning of the word “soma.” In India, the word stands for the god of the Vedic pantheon and, at the same time, a plant and a potion that grants immortality. Squeezing the juices out of this plant is seen as a metaphor for sexual intercourse. In the 8th hymn of Rigveda it is said that drinking “soma” increases one’s sexual potential.³⁸ Maybe Białoszewski tries to initiate conversation about sexually related themes, going slightly around, but poorly estimates doctor Palankin’s erudition, who recognizes only the Latin meaning of the word. I also wonder if the name is real – it feels as if Białoszewski used “Palankin,” because it sounds very similar to “palant (jerk)” in Polish. Another explanation is that Białoszewski makes a reference to the sacral erotics (which is dominant in India, particularly in the cult of Siva), and speaks about sublimated eroticism, while Palankin assesses his eroticism as purely “medical.” The form in which the poet decided to present this part is purposefully sloppy and creates a gap that makes it very hermetic. Knowledge of “Indian soma” does not belong to a pool of common knowledge in Poland, and certainly was not part of it in the sixties. As a result, this gap could be a guideline leading to “hermetic obscenities.” It is a poem about the hardships of communicating, and possibly about the conviction of superiority (“moral” superiority?) of the doctor toward his patients. In earlier works by Białoszewski such depictions of doctors are fairly typical (for example, in *Communal* establishing of doctor’s personality).

In his late works, in *AAAmerica*, he decides to talk openly about “pornography,” at the same time introducing the word in the easiest form to define – as a genre of film or a magazine. “Porn magazines for eight or ten dollars. It seems like it’s not that much for

³⁷ Ibid., 355.

³⁸ See Eliade, M. Eliade *Histoire des croyances et les idées religieuses*, vol.1

stuff like that.”³⁹ This is what he notes after his first walk around New York City. After a while, once he starts recognizing names of the streets, he observes:

I come back to the room at Nuns' place on the seventh floor, I lay down my porn, Chinese cookies, bananas, oranges and I say to myself:

“what a wonderful gifts, wonderful gifts.”

Upon me going out again, I hide the porn magazines beneath the shelf with an extra blanket – who would want to look there, which maid?⁴⁰

“Porn” is treated here as a “capitalist luxury,”⁴¹ just like the exotic (extremely exotic for Białoszewski in those days) fruits. But the introduction of these themes does not perform the function of “informing the Polish reader about elements of life in the United States.” In his obsessive talk about porn, there is no more perverse lightness of the subject, there is no more nodding at the reader, or playing little games with him – or simply the game has changed. There are no more confessions, like “I watch porn and I get excited.” Even description of the movie in the theater is cold:

I went to see a male-female porn. Movies. ... Every once in a while film stops. There's a lady going out on the stage, carrying a couch. She dances, undresses and bends. Men comes out on the stage, takes of his pants and they start screwing on the couch – this and that, all in a little circle of light. They fake orgasm at the end. ... There are cinemas for men alone, too. They have “Male” written on the door. You go in and sit down, too. ... From time to time someone stands up and goes backstage. It turns out it's a relief salon. ... I also went to the “Male” cinema with a revue show. You clap after every performance. And this is how wonderfully I have passed my evening.⁴²

There is no sign of double meaning here: “I go to see a male-female porn,” and after that to the “male” cinema – a gay establishment. Many will say that true freedom is only attained by Białoszewski with his *Journal* (*Dziennik*), that he himself did not allow to be published before the year 2010. I do not agree with this claim, but time will tell.

Translation: Jan Pytalski

³⁹ UZ, vol. 9: *Male i większe prozy opublikowane po 1980 roku*, p. 223.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 230-1

⁴¹ In *Cabaret Kici Koci*, in the sketch entitled *Converters*, one of the protagonists asks about “pornuses,” as if they were a rarity.

⁴² UZ, vol. 9, 232.