

WOJCIECH KUDYBA

THE DOOR TO PEACE

A protagonist lives in a state of constant threat to his 'I'—through the flow of time, pressure of the subconsciousness, burden of heritage, surroundings, the whims of memory. Or he looks for identity in the depth of his personality, or projects self-cognitive anxiety onto his environment.¹

This quotation comes from the monograph of Czesław Miłosz's writings and shows a circle of problems connected with questions about identity which were crucial for him. The researcher not only showed their intriguing persistence, but revealed their semantics. He convincingly placed them in the context of experiences of re-constitution covering various aspects of existence: geographical, cultural, social and, last but not least, spiritual.² The more we know about pictures of 'non-identity' and metaphysical disinheritance³ scattered in Miłosz's *oeuvre*, the more late writings of his draw attention together with traces of contrary experiences. The dark

¹ Aleksander Fiut, *Moment wieczny. Poezja Czesława Miłosza*, Kraków 1998, 209.

² Ibid., 244–246. Cf., also Idem, *Pytanie o tożsamość*, Kraków 1995 and Marian Stala, „Szukając tego, co jest Rzeczywiste”, in Idem, *Chwile pewności. 20 szkiców o poezji i krytyce*, Kraków 1991, 51–86. A precious extension of the theme of Miłosz's 'exile' is presented in Przemysław Dakowicz, *Wygnanie jako sytuacja egzystencjalna w poezji Czesława Miłosza*, in P. Dakowicz, *Helikon i okolice. Notatki o poezji współczesnej*, Sopot 2008, 63–79.

³ Łukasz Tischner in his latest book writes about it in an interesting way: *Miłosz w krainie odczarowanej*, Gdańsk 2011.

obverse of figures of separation, of the search for oneself in the late volumes, receives a light reverse in the shape of tropes of peace: reconciliation with oneself and with the world. In order to look at them in detail I have selected one poem: “Późna dojrzałość” (“Late Ripeness”) from the volume *Druga przestrzeń* (*Second Space*)

Not soon, as late as the approach of my ninetieth year,
I felt the door opening in me and I entered
the clarity of early morning

One after another my former lives were departing,
Like ships together with their sorrow.

And the countries, cities, gardens, the bays of seas
assigned to my brush came closer,
ready now to be described better than they were before.

I was not separated from people, grief and pity joined us.
We forget—I kept saying—that we are all children of the King.

For where we come from there is no division
into Yes and No, into is, was, and will be.

We were miserable, we used no more than a hundredth part
of the gift we received for our long journey.

Moments from yesterday and from centuries ago—
a sword blow, the painting of eyelashes before a mirror
of polished metal, a lethal musket shot, a caravel
staving its hull against a reef—they dwell in us,
waiting for fulfilment.

I knew, always, that I would be a worker in the vineyard,
As are all men and women living at the same time,
whether they are aware of it or not.⁴

⁴ Czesław Miłosz, *Second Space: New Poems*, ecco, New York, 2004, 4.

At the beginning of the poem Miłosz uses the metaphor of a road. In many of his poems it becomes a metaphor of longing. It tells of pursuance—about disagreement and the will to search.⁵ The verb “entered”, however, has a perfective aspect. It tells not about going there, but about getting there; not about effort but about achievement; not about desire but about satisfaction. Its shape is drawn by subsequent symbols. Thanks to them we learn that movement takes place in mental space, inside ‘I’, that it means getting to oneself, finding within oneself this personal depth, from which act of cognition and will spring, getting to the very sources of one’s identity. Miłosz’s “door opening in me” is similar to the ‘door to the heart’ known to Christian and non-Christian mystics.⁶ Maybe it is possible to find in this poem an echo of Miłosz’s fascination with Swedenborg. “The Master” wrote about “doors of perception”,⁷ the picture of the renewal of cognitive abilities also appeared in “Late Ripeness”. The landscape of a clear morning is in the poem more a projection of an internal state of a lyric ‘I’ than an ‘objective’ feature of topography. It seems that connotations of light and transparency (which in Miłosz’s idiolect are signs of transcendence⁸) refer to the sphere of spiritual life and internal development (meditation⁹?, illumination¹⁰?) I am not going to define

⁵ Which is the case, among others, in the volume *Trzy zimy*. See Ewa Kołodziejczyk, *Podróż syna marnotrawnego. O motywie romantycznym w „Trzech zimach” Czesława Miłosza*, „Pamiętnik Literacki” 2001, (3), 135–169.

⁶ Cf., Dorothea Forstner, *Świat symboliki chrześcijańskiej*, ed. and transl. by Wanda Zakrzewska, Paweł Paciarek, Ryszard Turzyński, Tamara Łozińska, Warszawa 1990, 384.

⁷ Cf., Signe Toksvig, *Emanuel Swedenborg. Uczony i mistyk*, transl. by Ireneusz Kania, Kraków 2002, 187.

⁸ One researcher who have dealt with this issue is: Krzysztof Dybciak in the essay *Poezja pełni istnienia*, in *Idem, Trudne spotkanie. Literatura polska XX wieku wobec religii*, Kraków 2005, 115.

⁹ On the meditational aspect of Miłosz’s text I wrote extensively in *Żywioł medytacyjny w liryce Czesława Miłosza*, „Topos” 2002, no. 4–5 (65–66), 7–15.

¹⁰ Cf., Zofia Zarębianka, *Iluminacje Czesława Miłosza zapisane w jego wierszach*, in *Poetyka i semantyka doświadczeń religijnych w literaturze*, ed. by Agnieszka Bielak, Piotr Nowaczyński, Lublin 2011, 351–360.

this phenomenon in precise categories (is it really necessary?). Let us state that the lyric 'I'—removing himself from everything which is external, going deep into himself—discovers something which is non-reducible and unchangeable (one would like to use the term 'spiritual' here); leaving behind what is superficial, he learns about his deepest essence, what is the true, primary, and at the same time ultimate 'I'—feeling and cognitive.

1. Re-newal

The way in which the protagonist experiences time is intriguing. The terms "not soon, as late" suggest that the past is experienced by him as time not full, a peculiar long break, filled with the "emptiness" of waiting. The full time becomes in the moment of awakening, of opening an inner door a bit. From this moment on it acquires a proper dynamics; from this moment it is experienced as temporariness filled with crucial, meaningful events. Experts of the phenomena of religious experiences would probably say that all people experience spiritual breakthroughs in this manner.¹¹ As has been mentioned before, opening the door to the heart, the discovery of one's own spirituality, should be understood in this poem as a radical change of being-in-the-world, removing or even annulling everything which has happened so far. An important component of the change is in this poem an experience of peace, relief, liberation—known to psychologists of religion researching the phenomenon of spiritual 'awakening'.¹² The aquatic metaphor of the picture Miłosz drew brings connotations of cleansing. The lyric 'I' not only discovers the 'exterior' aspect of what he has so far regarded as his own, but he also experiences an uncanny gift of liberation from these layers of his

¹¹ William James argues on this in his recently re-published: *Odmiany doświadczenia religijnego. Studium natury ludzkiej* (Warszawa 2011). This book was once ground breaking and it remains crucial in research of the phenomenon of religious experiences

¹² Cf., e.g., Antoni J. Nowak, *Homo religiosus et homo novus*, in *Homo novus*, ed. by A.J. Nowak, Teresa Paszkowska, Lublin 2002, 11–29.

'self' which—connected with the old ways of living and thinking—have unexpectedly revealed their 'superficial' character (important but not decisive of 'I's' identity).

The utterance of the lyric 'I' induces questions about reasons for past sufferings. The pictures constructed in the poem let us see a silhouette of an answer. It is not surprising for readers of Miłosz's poetry. It turns out that the source of suffering is a peculiar shutdown to the world and its calls, to people and fate, to gifts we have been given. Miłosz wrote many times about the predilections of *ego* to be like a monad, to place oneself above the claims of the world, and calls of people, beyond good and evil.¹³ Philosophers of personalism, so close to Miłosz, strongly indicate the dynamic way of man's existence. 'I' may function solely on the level of a lonely individual, but it may develop, may become a person, that is make commitments towards the world and other people.¹⁴ It seems that Miłosz used the notion of ripeness in this sense. The experience described in "Late Ripeness" is close to the one which philosophers of personalism called recognition of oneself as a person, discovering a personal dimension of one's existence.¹⁵ The gift about which people have forgotten, which the lyric 'I' discusses, is maybe this 'equipment' of man as a person: consciousness directed at truth and freedom, directed at others. While entering into himself, the lyric 'I' discovers a relational character of his identity, he discovers himself-in-the-world, himself-among-others, himself-against-values. The deep experience of 'I' finally leads in this poem beyond *ego*—in the direction of claims of the world inhabited by

¹³ Miłosz's questions on evil have been dealt in a valuable book by Łukasz Tischner *Sekrety manichejskich trucizn. Miłosz wobec zła*, Kraków 2001.

¹⁴ This type of reflection on oneself (after Max Scheler) was developed in a special way by Jacques Maritain. Cf., Stanisław Kowalczyk, *Wprowadzenie do filozofii J. Maritaina*, Lublin 1992.

¹⁵ Panorama of 'personalistic' approaches is presented, among others, Wincenty Granat. *Osoba ludzka. Próba definicji*, wyd. II popr. i rozszerz., Lublin 2006. The problem of self-cognition was dealt in the sub-chapter *Poznawalność podmiotowego „ja”*, 178–181.

people. “In order to preserve one’s interiority one needs to go beyond it”—argued Emmanuel Mounier.¹⁶

Therefore, what is surprising in Miłosz’s poem is not connected with the diagnosis of real sources of evil, but with the experience of liberation from its effects, which is also very real. The quiet, ‘psalm-like’ phrases of this poem hide the certainty of the lyric ‘I’ that what he is experiencing is not an illusion, but reality, as if he was saying to himself and to us: “This, what I feel, is real”. Joy is a natural component of such a state. It happens (psychologists write about it) that it has a ‘noisy’ character.¹⁷ Not in the case of Miłosz. It is not the expression of joy which is striking here, but its range. It has the features of a touch of the ultimate horizon of being, of a touch of *apokatastasis*. The lyric ‘I’ of “Late Ripeness” becomes a witness of the cosmic ‘undoing’-reversal of the beginning of the world, of pre-historic reality, which was not yet touched by the tragedy of discord and evanescence.¹⁸ “The Grand Return” at first reveals its moral dimension—again a landscape appears, so that it could be described in a better way than before. Again people appear, so that ‘com-passion’ with them could be better than before.

¹⁶ Emmanuel Mounier, *Wprowadzenie do egzystencjalizmów oraz wybór innych prac*, transl. by Ewa Krasnowolska, Kraków 1964, 57.

¹⁷ Cf., Borys Jacek Soinski, *Nawrócenie religijne*, in: *Podstawowe zagadnienia psychologii religii*, ed. by Stanisław Głaz Kraków 2006, 405.

¹⁸ The Greek term *apokatastasis* literally means “re-constitution” in theology is used to refer to reinstate reality from before the Original Sin. Jerzy Szymik wrote extensively on *apokatastasis* in the poetic works of Miłosz in *Problem teologicznego wymiaru dzieła literackiego Czesława Miłosza*, Katowice 1996, s 371–376. The closest context to the sentence about reality, in which still there was no division into Yea and No is the fragment from *Traktat Teologiczny*. In the ninth part we read: “Why such an order of creation? They all tried to find an answer, heretics, kabbalists, alchemists, the Knights of the Rose Cross). Czeslaw Milosz, *Second Space; New Poems*, transl. by Czeslaw Milosz and Robert Hass, ecco, New York, 2004, 53. Let us not go into details of Miłosz’s interpretation of the phenomenon of evil and fall (it is dealt with by J. Szymik, op. cit., 268–278), let us state that the reality from before “Yes and No” is the primordial harmony of everything in everything, the reality with no evil.

However, in Miłosz's writings ethics always goes alongside ontology.¹⁹ The possibility of moral rehabilitation he presents is performed within a cosmic 'return of the Father' and recapitulation of the perception of the world as the family home. An intriguing sentence about the children of the king reveals its sense not only in the context of the Biblical topos, but also in reference to other Miłosz's texts. The motto in "Elegy for Y.Z." was taken from Martin Buber's text, which runs: "Never forget that you are a son of the King".²⁰ It returns in the following phrases, and could be traced in apostrophes to the addressee: "if you were the king's daughter, you didn't know it" (l. 9), and is particularly strong in the "Post Scriptum" of this elegy:

P.S. Really I am more concerned than words would indicate.
I perform a pitiful rite for all of us.
I would like everyone to know they are the king's children
And to be sure of their immortal souls,
I.e., to believe that what is most their own is imperishable
And persists like the things they touch,
Now seen by me beyond time's border:
Her comb, her tube of cream, and her lipstick
On an extramundane table.

(l. 32–39)²¹

It seems that something which might be called an 'epiphany of the Other's Face', which is a discovery of obligations towards others, the beginning of empathy, gets its energy from the recognition of a personal value of himself and of the Other, from the revelation of his own and the Other; dignity of the "King's child" – therefore, such a feature of a person which has its source not in axiology but in ontology. The beginning of authentic interpersonal relations (Buber

¹⁹ Łukasz Tischner's book *Sekrety manichejskich trucizn*, op. cit., provides good arguments of it.

²⁰ Czesław Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems*, Harper Collins, New York, 2003, 442–443.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 443.

would say – the beginning of a meeting) in Miłosz’s poetic world is both ‘becoming a person’ and a firm grounding of persons in the Absolute Being, the awareness “that something which is one’s own to the highest degree, is indestructible”. The spiritual breakthrough which the lyric ‘I’ of “Late Ripeness” experiences allows him to discover the ontological foundations of premonitions about the uniqueness and indestructibility of persons. The ground for such expectations is given to him through the recognized mediation of human identity in the identity of the Absolute, the experience of ‘I’ as heritage and similarity to the royal ‘I’, who knows no time and does not experience a crack between potentiality and reality. The authenticity and intensity of the feeling of deep unity with the world which is described in this poem, an unusual mollification and cheerful affirmation of what is, has its source in the same hope, which is convinced about the deep tie of unnecessary beings with the Being which exists necessarily. The horizon of hope to save what is, has been shown in Miłosz’s world through a religious experience.

2. What has really changed?

Does it mean that in “Late Ripeness” we are confronted by a vision of the ultimate Fullness of the World, a description of Parousia? It seems that this is not the case. The end of history is not yet, the paradigm of the human lot is not changing. As Miłosz writes, “lethal shots” will keep returning, old and quite new scenarios of violence will have to be fulfilled—as well as many other events inscribed within the universal paradigm of the human lot. This is a bitter picture, which forces a restless question: what has changed? The poet’s answer is quite clear, in fact it has already been discussed here: a spiritual breakthrough does not solve the problems of the world, but it introduces a new perspective of understanding them. Miłosz does not undercut the sharpness of existential inadequacies, but he allows us—thanks to a deep experience of hope—to anticipate future harmony and clarity of reality. An internal door allows the lyric ‘I’ to see something which will be fulfilled at the end of time, yet it exists now in the shape hidden in the structure of the world.

Therefore, we observe a fundamental change in the role of the lyric 'I'. While in the opening lines he appears as a guest at the door, later he becomes more like a participant in the renewal. He is no longer the one who asks, but now he becomes a witness. The repetition of the word "because" makes his utterance explanatory. This is what has changed: a newcomer has become a witness of hope. Being aware of the possibility of forgetting its sources, he is even more eager to talk about his experience: "oneness of everything in God is possible, I have just experienced it."

Therefore, it is not cognition but experience which is the key to the understanding of this poem. The lyric 'I's' knowledge is not *gnosis*, it is not destined for the initiated, it does not pretend to be able to draw borders of the community of the saved ones. On the contrary, it takes the form of the simplest of syllogisms. Although it is an answer to most disquieting questions—about the sources of our miseries, about our place in the world and our human duties—it requires, neither from the lyric 'I' nor from the ones he addresses, exquisite speculations, but just a basic, commonly accessible opening—a childish trust and humility in the face of reality. Also, it has no appropriative predilections of *cogito*. Although the lyric 'I' is far removed from the elimination of the barrier between 'I' and 'not I'—the border between a person and the world—he clearly stresses the connection of his revelations with the attitude of the meditation-like opening to the existence of everything with solidarity to the suffering, with empathy for the unhappy. His testimony does not have elements of the power discourse, it is not the result of the need for power, but of availability,

The changes in the personal form of the verbs in this poem are the grammatical signs of the overcoming of the limitation of *ego* and the placing of 'I' closer to the others. In the eighth line we still have a 'monologic' structure, clearly marked with the speaking *ego*, but from the ninth line 'I' melts in the community, and speaks solely in its name. It could be said that in some sense 'I' gives up its privileged position, overcomes the temptation 'to be above others', in order to locate oneself, in a conscious manner, inside the community as

'one of many'. The first person forms which return in the last stanza not do only not challenge these associations, but they clearly support them. The Biblical topos of "King's children" is changed now in the picture of workers in a vineyard from the New Testament. Both reveal the dialogic character of our life, its entanglement in relations with the one who appears as its giver. In this poem they are both a picture of the community—not only the one between the Creator and the created, but also the one which is possible between people. Each stresses its peculiar aspect. The first is a characteristic epiphany of the Father, and is connected with existential safety, about home, about experiences of trust and care. The second seems to be more connected with human 'ripeness'—with the recognition of duties, sense of mission, and responsibility. The lyric 'I' discovers anew the "always known" truth about his place in the world and his mission. What is more: he sees a social imprint of vocation. The inner door, although it sounds like a paradox, does not separate him from the others, does not lock him from the world. Miłosz argues that something contrary is happening. The doors of the heart lead to the community of "king's children" and "workers in a vineyard"—towards the community founded on the inter-subjective experiences of dignity and indignity, despair of evanescence, and eschatological hope for the salvation of everything which exists. The lyric 'I', confronted with these obligations, finds an imperative to understand both oneself and others. Let us recall once more Mounier's vision of a person: "man's key call is neither the control of nature, or enjoyment of the fullness of life, but a gradual fulfilment of universal reciprocal understanding."²²

"Late Ripeness" is inter-textual in diverse ways, thanks to auto-quotations, paraphrases, allusions. It seems to be synthetic in character: it gathers into a short lyric whole the basic elements of the existential project built in Miłosz's prolific writings. The contemporary disciplines of knowledge use phrases like social, emotional or religious ripeness, or mature and immature personalities. The metaphorical pictures this poem is constructed of do not allow for too specific an interpretation

²² Emanuel Mounier, *Co to jest personalizizm? oraz wybór innych prac*, Kraków 1960, 22.

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of the term from the title of the poem. It seems that its general character places the poem's message in the context of philosophy. I have particularly in mind the philosophy of personalism, which has very consistently used the category of personal ripeness. The vision of a man aware of his spirituality, aware of his dignity and uniqueness, with a coherent picture of reality, which becomes for him a source of hope, a concept of a person transcending himself, to enter into relationships with other people, the world and God, discovering his own place in the world and his own obligations—all these aspects seem to be close to the circles of 'personalistic' reflection about the phenomenon of a person. Miłosz saves it not only for poetry, but also for us—for our culture.