

Michał Głuszak\*

## The multi-faceted nature of freedom in the life and works of Czesław Miłosz

### 1.

Let me begin according to Horace's maxim *ab ovo*. Andrzej Franaszek, Miłosz's biographer, indicated<sup>1</sup> that the first act of rebellion and self-awareness in the poet's life was the decision to leave the boy scouts. At that moment, Czesław Miłosz was only fourteen or fifteen. It could seem to be nothing important. A trifle. An insignificant detail. A small sheet of paper torn out of a big book of biography. And yet the situation seems to me very intriguing, having almost a symbolic significance. Miłosz himself returned to it at various stages of his life. In a letter to Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz of 22 April 1932<sup>2</sup>, he wrote that "he was sick to the stomach when submitting to the scout discipline." Then in 1979, in an interview with Aleksander Fiut, he mentioned that at some point scouting began to overwhelm him as he was not able to find any justification in it. Wearing a uniform, singing songs, acquiring new skills, and in the background a pestering question: "why?", "what is this for?" The teenager demanded meaning!

Upon leaving the boy scouts, young Miłosz changed. It was visible in his school file. Mid-way through school, the once calm pupil started to become defiant, and there was a note recorded in his student grade book: "Troublemaker, taking part in brawls in the hallways and in-class."<sup>3</sup> At that time, Miłosz was engaged in a conflict with prefect fr. Leopold Chomski. What an exceptional character that was! A priest treating his vocation extremely seriously: zealous preacher, proponent of the view of the evil nature of humans, fighting all

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<sup>1</sup> A. Franaszek, *Miłosz. Biografia*, Wydawnictwo Znak, Krakow 2011, pp. 69–70.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>3</sup> A. Zawada, *Miłosz*, Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, Wrocław 1996, p. 27.

manifestations of sin. He perfectly matched the turbulent atmosphere of the interwar period. In terms of his fundamental approach, if not fanaticism, the story told in *Native Realm* seems representative to me:

Once, during the break, one of us made a diagram of an electric battery and wiring on the blackboard to explain a problem in physics. Hamster happened to be passing by in the hall and he opened the door unexpectedly, as he liked to do. One glance at the chalked circles and ellipses was enough to bring one of his darkest blushes to his face and send him running to the principal's office, where he reported that the boys had made a drawing on the blackboard of sexual organs.<sup>4</sup>

The conflict with fr. Chomski referred to imponderabilia. The catechist wanted to control the religious and spiritual lives of his pupils. Their religious practices and participation in the sacrament of confession was supposed to be confirmed with a document, which provoked opposition and rebellion in Miłosz, who insolently and ostentatiously disregarded the priest's ideas. He would also often provoke Chomski with his inconvenient questions regarding the dogmas of the Catholic Church. It should be mentioned that despite his dispute with the prefect, Miłosz did not turn away from religion, or avoid metaphysical questions. Discouraged by fr. Chomski's attitude and the policy of the Church at that time, he engaged in his own studies. He passionately read *Confessions* by Augustine of Hippo, and *The Varieties of Religious Experience* by William James. He defined his feelings at that time in *Native Realm*:

Taking part in rituals along with apes humiliated me. Religion was a sacred thing; how could their God be mine at the same time? What right had they to adore him? "But when thou prayest, go into thy room and, closing thy door, pray to thy Father in secret." In the face of clearly inferior creatures, it would be better to proclaim oneself an atheist in order to remove oneself from the circles of the unworthy. Religion, insofar as it was a social convention and constraint, ought to be destroyed. In my battle with Hamster, it is apparent that the best and the worst motives converged. A taste for independence, a loathing for all hypocrisy, a defense of freedom of conscience joined with intellectual arrogance, an obsession with purity, and the conviction that I understood more than anybody else.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, the search for freedom has both a positive and a negative side as it can lead to intellectual independence, to maturity, but also to a sense of supe-

<sup>4</sup> Cz. Miłosz, *Rodzinna Europa*, Czytelnik, Warsaw 1990, pp. 76–77. [English version: Miłosz, Cz. *Native Realm*. London 1981].

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

riority or hatred of Others. Freedom carrying goodness, beauty, and truth, and freedom spreading alienation, nihilism, and hatred. Miłosz realised that rather quickly.

An antithesis of Hamster was the Latin teacher Adolf Rózek, a leftist intelligent, rationalist, and a socialist, who propagated the apotheosis of mind and classic temperance. Thus the pupils of the Vilnius-based King Sigismund II Augustus Secondary School were witnesses to the basic philosophical and political discourse of those times. Many years later, Miłosz compared the conflict between the teachers to the endless debate between Naphta and Settembrini, the characters of *The Magic Mountain* by Thomas Mann. He became Hans Castrop, who under the influence of both debaters, chose his own intellectual path. Once again *Native Realm* should be quoted:

The mere presence of such a Naphta and such a Settembrini gave us an option. My rebellion against the priest weighted the scale in favor of the Latinist. But my religious crisis was not a final thing; it did not end in a clear “yes” or “no”, so that when I entered the university it was not at all something I had behind me. Which does not mean it was any less acute. I was striving to build intellectual bridges between two dissociated entities. such an endeavor was, in general, alien to my schoolmates, who considered religion a separate sphere, subject to the rules of convention. My intensity won me the position among them of a Jew among *goyim*.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, Miłosz avoided any extremes, or simple answers, he did not wish to be labelled in any way, or assigned to some specific world-view group. That remained characteristic of him, though with varying consistency and intensity, for the rest of his life. So far, I have written about the momentous decision of the teenage Miłosz when he terminated his affair with the boy scouts. And on the significance of the questions posed then: “why?”, “what is this for?” Now, the thesis must be supplemented. I believe it was a breakthrough moment in his biography because as those questions are asked, one discovers personal freedom, understood somewhat along with Kant, as compliance of that which one thinks with that which one does. Thus a person’s own “I” is being constituted. There still lay a long way in front of the youngster, yet the kernel had already been sown. In fact, only then true adventures of the mind began. From the very first act of rebellion against the scouting discipline, to Chomski’s and Rózek’s lessons. That shaped Miłosz. Without that Vilnius, without the special originality of that environment, without the specificity of those times, there would not be Czesław Miłosz as we know him, and his views on freedom. Without that foundation, one cannot understand the path the poet chose in Warsaw, Paris, California, and Krakow. A trifle.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

An insignificant detail. A small sheet of paper torn out of a big book of biography. Or maybe it is the case that human life consists of trifles, details, and small pieces of paper.

## 2.

The 1960s was an intoxicating period in the history of the United States. The emancipation of various minorities, the creation of the hippie movement, and the student rebellions. Czesław Miłosz, who was, in fact, a political animal full of polemical passion, could not remain indifferent to what was happening. Particularly since he found himself right in the eye of the storm. Already in 1964 in Berkeley, there was held a portentous protest against the discrimination of the black population.<sup>7</sup> What was Miłosz's view on all that? The Berkeley events were often discussed in his correspondence with Jerzy Giedroyc. In a letter of 14 December 1964<sup>8</sup>, the editor of the Paris-based *Kultura* thus wrote to Miłosz:

Dear Czesław,

Zygmunt showed me your letter with the description of the events at your university. Quite terrifying. I don't know what I should admire more: the stupidity of your editor, the perfect communist work, or your, i.e. professors', helplessness. Putting aside the danger of communist penetration, which can constitute a very dangerous subversion (...)

Giedroyc is certain: the rebellion of the long-haired students is something very dangerous, and it has been certainly incited by the East. Miłosz's answer is surprising:

To talk about communist influence is, actually, to walk past the matter, the rebellion is, in essence, anarchistic, aimed against technocracy, an impersonal machine, exactly like Situationistes in Paris, with whose writings I would suggest you familiarise yourself. 99 per cent of the student mass is driven by ethical reactions, that is the special American form, in support of justice, they do not care about communists at all, Marxism is not getting a foothold (...) Though there sometimes appear some similarities regardless of the differences. Wat was terrified when seeing, in his words,

<sup>7</sup> A. Franaszek, op. cit., p. 606..

<sup>8</sup> J. Giedroyc, Cz. Miłosz, *Listy 1964–1972*, Czytelnik, Warsaw 2011, pp. 66–68. [English version translated from Polish].

the hysterical Żydowice, the figures, which we knew from our memory-those, as he said-which later occupied positions in the UB [Security Office – J.W.]. But maybe you will understand using this example why I'm increasingly immersing myself in the local topics, and I'm less and less occupied by Eastern Europe, because the processes important for the human kind occur here (...) These youths are sarcastic, yet astonishingly idealistic, craving for warmth, which is absent in the life of a social machine, and producing that warmth, having their own rituals resembling the Bohemian community of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. (...)<sup>9</sup>

The letter indicates that the author of *The Captive Mind* seemed, to some extent, to sympathise with student movements, and certainly tried to understand their origins. He considered them to be driven by ethical norms, not opportunism, which was praiseworthy. He absolutely rejected the thesis of a communist incitement of the rebellion. He saw that the protesters were the children of the wonderful American dream, raised in a free market country, which had been the dream of many. Unfortunately, the generation of the young rebels was disappointed in their homeland. They were estranged within the background of a technocratic society focussed on accruing more and more wealth. Yet some danger existed. Miłosz referred to Wat, who remembered the ideological communist activists, often of Jewish descent. Those subtle intellectuals, tender lovers, usually terribly wounded by fate, often haunted by various demons from history, later put on UB uniforms, and became degenerates possessed by mad ideologies. So every rebel, every revolutionary, is a potential candidate for a totalitarian – concluded Miłosz. An old truth, yet one which is often omitted. In that sense, the students on strike could also be a danger. Miłosz was surely aware of the fact that he was witnessing something extremely important, something which could have had widespread spiritual consequences and changed the civilisation. He was rather inclined to think for the better, yet he did allow the chance that for the worse.

The year 1966 brought about new protests, that time against the war in Vietnam. Miłosz decided to support the protesters. He was the only member of the faculty to support the strike. He cancelled his classes, and he defended the students, which with some pride he reported to Aleksander Wat in a letter of 5 December 1966.

Three years later the situation changed considerably. With consecutive rebellions, there appeared flower children and the dream of "Free Love". The university campus was also filled with students fascinated with Castro, Stalin, and Mao. Riots, interrupting classes, removing professors from university buildings, and fires became part of everyday reality. There were also fires in libraries, which

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

inevitably brings to mind Germany in the 1930s. Law enforcement forces intervened on a regular basis. In a letter to Giedroyc of 20 January 1969<sup>10</sup>, Miłosz wrote:

From the point of view of Czechoslovakia or Poland, or Russia, the youth here are simply shameless, because they do not know what pressure and terror are. Actually they are the spoiled children of bourgeoisie. But the reasons are serious – they stem from basic nihilism, into which the so-called West has been sinking since the war – that could not have passed without bearing any fruit. E.g. universities are completely defenceless against the model of calculated provocations with the goal of utterly paralysing them, as police actions draw students to the side of the rebels – while universities are extremely important centres of that nervous system (...) It seems that for those people hindsight will be 20/20 in 20 years' time, but what are young Czechs or Russians for whom hindsight is already 20/20 to say about that (...)

The old understanding had disappeared. Protesting students, for some time already had seemed not as those who are driven by an “ethical reaction”, but as dangerous devils, “spoiled children of bourgeoisie.” The writer with his private commitments, and his political-analytic intuition, had to face the problem, and a series of other maladies affecting America. Those struggles resulted in a book-essay entitled *Visions from San Francisco Bay*<sup>11</sup>, which was written during the period of the most heated strikes. On 11 March 1969, Miłosz sent Giedroyc the typescript.

### 3.

One of the best known slogans of the sexual revolution was “Free Love”. One must reject the oppressive tradition, and liberate oneself from the thrall of all responsibilities and control. According to the prophets of the new faith, nothing should limit a truly free person. On the pages of *Visions from San Francisco Bay* Miłosz noted that “Free Love” was, in fact, a form of captivity:

The anti-utopias of our century (Zamyatin, Huxley, Orwell) depicted societies under total control where the absence of freedom is called freedom. In such societies, the rulers make sure to deliver the ruled decent entertainment preventing intellectual anxiety. Sexual games serve that function best. It brings glory to the authors of those books that Eros operates in them as a subversive force, which by the rulers is understood perfectly: sex is anti-erotic, and not only benign, but it successfully prevents

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 204–206.

<sup>11</sup> Cz. Miłosz, *Widzenia nad Zatoką San Francisco*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow 1989.

the appearance of passion bringing together not bodies, people and engaging both carnality and spirituality. The protagonist enters a dangerous path when he is awoken by love. Only then captivity which had been concealed, and accepted by everyone, is revealed to him as captivity.<sup>12</sup>

Miłosz understood love as a force operating on two levels: physical and spiritual. One which offers much, but which also requires much. Only such love gives people dignity, encourages them to brave deeds, and to fight for freedom against totalitarian systems. People who subordinate their lives only and exclusively to pleasure are, essentially, prisoners, and potential casualties of various political systems. The latter are ready to use even sexuality, i.e. one of the most intimate sides of life given to people. Sex as commodity, and the source of objectification of people! It is outstanding that Miłosz wrote this in a country considered the model democracy! Therefore, the cynical and cunning captivity of an individual is not the domain of feudal, Nazist or communism states, but also of a capitalist one. Captivity in capitalism can even be more dangerous as it is more difficult to notice. In fact, there are no, at least nowhere in sight, censorship, or agents of special forces. But there is advertising (which was also often the focus of the deliberations of the author of *Visions*), and there is the rat race. In 1968, Miłosz wrote a poem entitled *Higher Arguments in Favour of Discipline Derived from the Speech Before the Council of the Universal State in 2068*<sup>13</sup>. One fragment is particularly worth quoting:

We call for discipline not expecting applause.  
 Because we do not need their cheers.  
 Loyal citizens can enjoy our protection  
 And we demand nothing in exchange, except obedience.  
 Nevertheless, much evidence inclines us  
 To express the hope that people correctly assess  
 How much the rightness of the line we take  
 Differs from their irrational suppositions and desires.  
 We can say boldly that we, and no one else,  
 Rescued them from a waste of contradictory opinions,  
 Where what is true does not have full weight  
 For equal weight is given to untruth.  
 We led them from that place, from that wasteland  
 Where each of them, alone in his own ignorance,  
 Meditated on the sense and nonsense of the world.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>13</sup> Cz. Miłosz, *Wiersze wszystkie*, Wydawnictwo Znak, Krakow 2011, pp. 590–591. [English version: Miłosz Cz. *The Collected Poems*. New York 1988].

Freedom for them meant nakedness of women,  
 And their bread had no taste: the bakeries were full of it.  
 Under the name of Art they favored the antics of their boredom  
 And a daily terror of passing time.  
 We, and on one else, discovered the Law of Blackout,  
 Being aware that a mind left to itself  
 Reached out for the ultimate, not on its scale. (...)

That was a vision of the world in 100 years' time. The notion of states has probably faded away. Everything has become centralised, there is only one common state governed by some Council. The speaking official discusses in short the perfect citizen: they are to be loyal and far from any reflection, and in turn shall receive help and care. That included deep irony. In fact, the word citizen means a member of the society of a given state having specific rights and obligations reserved by a constitution. A citizen, in principle, must be free. A citizen, in principle, must be aware. Having returned from the United States, Cyprian Kamil Norwid liked to sign documents as Citizen. Especially documents regarding social projects and stipulations.<sup>14</sup> The citizens of the Universal State, then, are completely captive: just is what state authorities propagate, everything else is reduced to the role of a mistake, or an erroneous assumption. Therefore, in the Brave New World, there is no place for a person's own world-view. At the same time, the rulers of the Universal State are convinced that they have ensured the world's salvation. The following words are, in fact, uttered: "We led them from that place, from that wasteland/ Where each of them, alone in his own ignorance,/ Meditated on the sense and nonsense of the world." Well, any totalitarian has in their twisted supposition, the feeling that they are the saviour of humanity... Though this quote requires some more consideration, i.e. what is it actually about? From what moment in history was humanity supposed to be saved? What enabled the members of the Council to seize power? It seems to me that the answer is hidden in the following two lines: "Freedom for them meant nakedness of women,/ And their bread had no taste: the bakeries were full of it." Miłosz depicted the world after the sexual revolution. Excess consumption of food leads to poisoning... Sex became so widely available that both its magic and metaphysics vanished, as physics according to the author of *The Land of Ulro*, may edge on metaphysics. Most of Miłosz's uplifting poems, e.g. *Notatnik: Nad brzegiem Lemanu*, constituted commendations of existence, attempts at tearing the essence of existence from commonness, the reality in those poems is somewhat transcended, while in the utopian world of "Free Love", sex had been stripped of its magic, and metaphysical inclinations overthrown by consumerism, the cult of carnality, and egoism.

<sup>14</sup> Z. Trojanowiczowa, *Romantyzm. Od poetyki do polityki*, Universitas, Krakow 2010, pp. 49–58.



Miłosz seems to be telling us that in such a state, the society could not have endured, and it didn't. It sank in chaos, in a state of absolute vapidness. Then, there came the founders of the Council, and they simply took over the power which lay in the street. The demoralised society was not able to defend against them. Actually, it is possible that it even might not feel a need to do so. It is possible that the representative of the Council was right. In societies immersed in a state of permanent crisis, anyone who tries to introduce some order can become a hero worthy of undying gratitude. Most totalitarianisms started that way.

#### 4.

Almost concurrently with the events at American universities, Czesław Miłosz was working on his science-fiction novel entitled *The Mountains of the Parnassus*.<sup>15</sup> According to Agnieszka Kosińska, he started working on it in 1967. He would then abandon and return to it many times. The peak of his work on it occurred in the years 1970–1971. It seems that Miłosz had high hopes of the novel because he often mentioned it in his correspondence with Jerzy Giedroyc. In a letter of 11 December 1970<sup>16</sup>, he wrote:

Since I cannot “express myself” in an essay, I’m toiling on with this novel, the story of which takes place at the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> c. It is a cutting novel, though maybe closer to the style of Witkacy or Orwell (...)

A few months later, Miłosz eventually gave up on writing *The Mountains of Parnassus*. In May 1972, he sent his typescript to Giedroyc. The editor of *Kultura* did not like the book. Miłosz accepted that with humility, but he made sure the typescript returned to him. The book was eventually published in 2012 by the *Krytyka Polityczna* journal.

It depicts the world at the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> c. It is governed by the Astronauts’ Union, which influences all associations and community organisations, including opposition bodies. It also controls thoughts, and even has a go at genetic experiments. People can travel between planets almost at the speed of light. Religion is gone, reflection is gone, and interpersonal relationships are gone. The notion of art has also lost its value. Efraim, one of the characters, establishes the Parnassus commune, which is to be a place offering rescue, restoring freedom and dignity, everything that is high and good.

<sup>15</sup> Cz. Miłosz, *Góry Parnasu*, Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, Warsaw 2012.

<sup>16</sup> J. Giedroyc, Cz. Miłosz, op. cit., pp. 420–422.

The reception of *The Mountains of Parnassus* was not unequivocal. Agata Bielik-Robson<sup>17</sup> considered the book close to gnosis, reactionary and mistaken. Miłosz did not understand, and he did not want to understand what happened in America in the 1960s. She scathingly noted that some of the passages could have been authored by an extreme-right politician. Eventually, the researcher expressed her outrage at the fact that her community could even have published it. Wojciech Orliński<sup>18</sup> criticised the poorly constructed patchwork story, yet he admitted that some of Miłosz's ideas and insights were extremely interesting because they remained current. The critic was mainly thinking about Miłosz's vision of art's downfall consisting of the demise of the very notion, and the overabundance of creators who consider themselves artists, and the over-production of creations which are considered works of art. I am more inclined to Orliński's position. I read *The Mountains of Parnassus* as a reflection of its author's observations at a certain point in his life, and at some point in the history of the United States, as well as a supplement to *Visions from San Francisco Bay* and the poems *Higher Arguments in Favour of Discipline Derived from the Speech Before the Council of the Universal State in 2068* and *Incantation*. Somewhat with a pinch of salt, solely subjectively, maybe even demagogically, I treat it as a series, and I read them together.

## 5.

Towards the end of his life, Miłosz often said that the biggest problem of contemporary civilisation is the atrophy of religious imagination. He would repeat André Malraux's maxim that "The 21<sup>st</sup> century will be religious or it will not be at all." He was of the opinion that Eastern Europe liberated from the Soviet thrall should choose its own new unique path, not mindlessly imitate everything that comes from the West. His statement of 1993 made during a debate in the *Tygodnik Powszechny*<sup>19</sup> weekly was particularly significant. Miłosz said:

I believed that upon defeating communism, our countries will publish literature and art different from the Western ones. When in 1989 in an interview for *Res Publica* I warned against the wave of filth coming towards us from the West, because having had so many experiences we should possess some hierarchy of matters which are

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/felietony/20130319/mala-gnostycka-pielgrzymka> (accessed on 15.02.2015).

<sup>18</sup> [http://wyborcza.pl/1,75475,13503325,\\_Gory\\_Parnasu\\_\\_\\_Milosz\\_w\\_butach\\_Lema.html](http://wyborcza.pl/1,75475,13503325,_Gory_Parnasu___Milosz_w_butach_Lema.html) (accessed on 15.02.2015).

<sup>19</sup> Cz. Miłosz, *Rozmowy polskie 1979–1998*, Wydawnictwo Znak, Krakow 2011, pp. 358–359.

important and those which are not, I was told the following: “Do you want to turn us into a museum?” But my desire was real, and it surely indicated extensive deposits of Romanticism (...)

## 6.

Before he died, Czesław Miłosz wrote in 2003 a poem entitled *Normalization*<sup>20</sup>:

This happened long ago, before the onset  
of universal genetic correctness.

Boys and girls would stand naked before mirrors  
studying the defects of their structure.

Nose too long, ears like burdocks,  
sunken chin just like a mongoloid.

Breasts too small, too large, lopsided shoulders,  
penis too short, hips too broad or else too narrow.

And just an inch or two taller!

Such was the house they inhabited for life.

Hiding, feigning, concealing defects.

But somehow they still had to find a partner.

Following incomprehensible tastes – airy creatures  
paired with potbellies, skin and bones enamored of salt pork.

They had a saying then: “Even monsters  
have their mates.” So perhaps they learned to tolerate their partners’  
flaws, trusting that theirs would be forgiven in turn.

Now every genetic error meets with such  
disgust that crowds might spit on them and stone them.

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<sup>20</sup> Cz. Miłosz, *Wiersze...*, pp. 1333–1334. [English version: Miłosz, Cz. *Collected Poems 1931–1987*].

As happened in the city of K., where the town council  
voted to exile a girl

so thickset and squat  
that no stylish dress could ever suit her,

But let's not yearn for the days of prenormalization.  
Just think of the torments, the anxieties, the sweat,  
the wiles needed to entice, in spite of all.  
[2003].

The poem was commented upon by the author himself: "It is part of my operation *sympathy*. People are wretched..."<sup>21</sup> Miłosz sympathised. Empathy, which turns a person into a poet. In that case, it consisted of focussing on people afflicted by nature with ugliness and disability. Appearances deprived them of their chances for happiness and love. Such people, of course, had it tougher, but they had never had it as tough as in contemporary times, stated the poet. In the times after normalisation, no error or defect can be forgiven. The word normalisation was once used in the context of things or rights. Never towards people. Currently, though, humanity has become subject to it as well. Everyone should be young, beautiful, healthy, and all smiles. In the past, "even monsters had their mates." Now, each defect decreases a person's worth. And all that in the times of the greatest freedom and tolerance. Interestingly enough, in that same year in Poland, there was published the well-known and controversial book by the French writer Michel Houellebecq entitled *Atomised*, in which the characters—the children of the sexual revolution—cannot find the meaning of life. It is uncertain whether Miłosz read Houellebecq. Agnieszka Kosińska, his secretary, who recorded all of the poet's readings in *Miłosz w Krakowie*, did not mention it. Miłosz probably did not know the works of the French author, yet he noticed the same problem.

## 7.

But can the emergence of the counter-culture of the 1960s be blamed for all the calamities of the contemporary world? I believe that judgement is too definitive, and formed too fundamentally. In 1992, Miłosz wrote a poem entitled *To*

<sup>21</sup> A. Kosińska, *Miłosz w Krakowie*, Wydawnictwo Znak, Krakow 2015, p. 55.

*Allen Ginsberg*<sup>22</sup>. Ginsberg was an American poet, and the bard of the moral revolution. Yet Miłosz the poet was full of sympathy and fondness:

Allen, you good man, great poet of the murderous century, who  
persisting in folly attained wisdom.

I confess to you, my life was not as I would have liked it to be.

And now, when it has passed, is lying like a discarded tire by the road.

It was no different from the life of millions against which you rebelled  
in the name of poetry and of an omnipresent God.

It was submitted to customs in full awareness that they are absurd, to the  
necessity of getting up in the morning and going to work. (...)

(...) And your journalistic clichés, your beard and beads and your dress of a  
rebel of another epoch are forgiven. (...)

(...) I envy your courage of absolute defiance, words inflamed, the fierce  
maledictions of a prophet. (...)

(...) Accept this tribute from me, who was so different, yet in the same  
unnamed service. (...)

For lack of a better term letting it pass as the practice of composing verses.

In that poem, the author of *The Captive Mind* admitted that despite the various differences regarding their world-views and ways of life, they both served the same unnamed yet known truth. And that is what matters most! As, all in all, any and all discrepancies are secondary. That does not mean that the differences could disappear. Miłosz did not wear a hippie outfit, nor did he submit a comprehensive self-criticism. He persisted with his views and aesthetics, yet what was more important was the already mentioned known truth. What kind of truth was that? Yet Miłosz attempted to name the unknown, which he did in the final line. According to him the truth they served was “the practice of composing verses.” I would call it more broadly: accepting on one’s shoulders a certain duty, as seriously considered poetry and art in general carry with them various

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<sup>22</sup> Cz. Miłosz, *Wiersze...*, p. 1072. [English version: Miłosz, Cz. *New and Collected Poems: 1931–2001*].

duties. Miłosz did treat poetry extremely seriously, probably more than any other matter. Poetry was the reason why the critic of civilisation, with time more and more inclined to religiosity, could make the special tribute to the poet of the moral revolution. Could someone who considered counter-culture as pure evil be able to write such a tribute? I do not believe so; it would be deeply dishonest. The task of constructing an unequivocal opinion is further hindered by a 1970s note included in *Miłosz's ABC's*<sup>23</sup>:

Sierraville became the location of my and Carol's adventure. It takes bad luck for a car to break down right there, and we didn't really know how to handle it. Then, a hippie, clearly, judging by his appearance, we met in a store, was very kind to ask us into his commune a few miles away-if we could slowly reach it despite the fault in the engine. They would fix the car there.

We found ourselves in a land of tenderness. No one was in a hurry there, no one spoke in a raised voice (...) In their mutual relations, and in how they approached us, you could sense complete tolerance and ease. How it all progressed later on there, one could only guess, but I found admirable the little community, in which neither men nor women tried to impress one another, assuming some attitudes and pulling faces: the absolute opposite of Gombrowicz's theatre.

So for a moment Miłosz found himself in a hippie commune, and that experience was not traumatic. On the contrary, it gave him the basis for writing a witty note. On the one hand, stern criticism at the turn of the 1970s. On the other, a lot of kind words written towards the end of his life. How can one reconcile those? What was Miłosz's attitude towards revolutionary movements? Several answers could certainly be offered. I am inclined to the one stating that there were three stages in the poet's life. During the first one, in the mid-1960s, Miłosz was a cautious optimist. In the second, at the turn of the 1970s, he was terrified by the surrounding world, and he rolled out great weapons against it in the form of several important texts. In the third one, in the final decade of his life, Miłosz mellowed, and became more detached. He remained a consistent critic of civilisation, he continued to seek the third way between socialism and capitalism, yet he started weighing his judgements. Technocracy and dehumanisation possess many Founding Fathers and Continuator Sons. To blame the hippies and "Free Love" for everything would be too easy a path, unworthy of a wise man. Critical words remained to be voiced, of course. In *Sarajewo*<sup>24</sup>, which is an accusation against contemporary politicians, often those originating from the generation of 1968:

<sup>23</sup> Cz. Miłosz, *Abecadło*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Krakow 1997, pp. 222–224. [English version translated from Polish].

<sup>24</sup> Cz. Miłosz, *Wiersze...*, p. 1086. [English version translated from Polish].

It is now that we could use a revolution, but those  
who once were fervent now lie cold.

When the country being killed and raped requested help from Europe,  
in which they believed, they scrambled.

When their statesmen choose villainy, there is

no voice which would name it for what it is.

False was the revolt of the youth attempting

to renew the Earth, and that generation sentenced  
itself to that judgement.

Therefore, Miłosz remained a severe critic of the revolution, yet not a total critic. He noticed its wicked as well as its good side, e.g. the increasing emancipation of women, and a somewhat fresh view on some issues. Therefore, while maintaining his subjective nature, he allowed himself to pay tribute to Ginsberg, and the anonymous hippies from Sierraville, as he appreciated good intentions, and mainly authenticity. The world is not, of course, black and white. Miłosz once said in an interview:

Yes. I am a person full of contradictions – and I'm not denying that. I translated the French philosopher Simone Weil, who zealously defended contradictions, so I am not trying to pretend that my world-view has a coherent and uniform character.<sup>25</sup>

The author of *Visions from San Francisco Bay*, who in his secondary school years carefully observed the conflict between fr. Chomik and the latinist Rózek, declared sympathy towards antinomy. That shows how important a lesson he learnt from his superb and colourful teachers. Yes, every real intellectual experience becomes inscribed in one's memory, and glows giving strength and inspiration for later life. *Ab ovo usque ad mala*.

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<sup>25</sup> Cz. Miłosz, *Rozmowy zagraniczne 1979–2003*, Wydawnictwo Znak, Krakow 2013, p. 177. [English version translated from Polish].

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Michał Głuszak

### **The multi-faceted nature of freedom in the life and works of Czesław Miłosz**

(Summary)

The article discusses the issue of freedom in the work of Czesław Miłosz. This problem is analyzed in relation to prose, poetry, essay writing, journalism, as well as numerous interviews that Miłosz gave throughout his whole life. The author of the article is particularly interested in Miłosz's attitude to the sexual revolution of 1968, which he observed as a professor at Berkley. The poet was not an indifferent witness to this event. He often referred to it, often returned to it, as the author shows, not without ambivalence.

Keywords: Miłosz, freedom, poetry, prose, essay, sexual revolution