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**CARRYING COALS TO NEWCASTLE COULD ONE SAY
IT IN A DIFFERENT MANNER?**

Project of poetry

In the text “Zadania dla krytyka” (“Tasks for a Critic”) Czesław Miłosz wondered if Polish literature was going to survive if writers’ key interests shifted in the direction of universal themes. Miłosz’s question was by no means rhetorical. Miłosz was searching for it in his experience as a translator, which prompted him to state that the poetry of “the Polish school”—universalizing individual historical experience—preserved its attractiveness in translations. Miłosz’s text was published in 1996, and from this perspective his apprehension seems justified, because “there will be no point in the translation of poetry perfectly Westernized, because there is no point in carrying samovars to Tula or coals to Newcastle.”¹ Miłosz’s voice is congruent with the long tradition of Polish literary criticism, which has been asking questions about which type of Polish literature might be of interest to a non-Polish reader. Marek Zaleski—hoping for a change—reconstructed this tradition and remarked: “Literature has always fed on literature, and has been created out of literature, but in Poland we have treated it as fishy rigmarole [...] We have been fixed in the conviction that it should live with what we live, that it will

¹ Czesław Miłosz, *Zadania dla krytyka*, in *Idem O podróżach w czasie*, ed. by Joanna Gromek, Kraków 2010, 130.

always be true to Our Important Causes.”² In this or that way—we have been stuck, or we have been thrown into whirls of progress, which demand victims—“important causes” have turned out to be, from the perspective of foreign readers of Polish poetry, not only ours.

The second part of the title of this article refers to the anthology published in 2011, *Powiedzieć to inaczej. Polska liryka nowoczesna (To Say it Differently. Modern Polish Lyric Poetry)*, edited by Jerzy Borowczyk and Michał Larek. It was greeted with consternation. Czesław Miłosz, Zbigniew Herbert and Wisława Szymborska were not included in it, while Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz and Tadeusz Różewicz refused the invitation to it.³ The title of this anthology comes from the poem by Andrzej Sosnowski entitled “Acte manque”.⁴ The last line reads: „Powiedzieć to inaczej niż tak i niż nie”.⁵ Larek explains it as a formula of new poetry, shaped beyond negations and confirmations of the findings of their predecessors, as a project of poetry, which “should not be a domain of generalizing verdicts, but a space within which experiments on different types of idioms are carried out, inventions of imagination, cultural clichés, predilections of our spirits and bodies.”⁶ It is difficult not to notice the stringent aspect of the phrase “poetry [...] should not”—at least not obvious in the context of the experimental openness to the unknown declared in the same sentence. This is the first signal of doubts if the goal of “saying it differently” has been really accomplished. The same doubts could also be uttered in this way: is not it so that rejected generalizing verdicts are replaced by new ones?

A more crucial problem is a project of poetry as revealed in the commentaries of the authors of this anthology. This project assumes: “non-transparency of language, meta-poetic tilt of poems,

² Marek Zaleski, *Co dalej?*, in *Co dalej, literaturo? Jak zmienia się współczesnie pojęcie i sytuacja literatury*, ed. by Alina Brodzka-Wald, Hanna Gosk and Andrzej Werner, Warszawa 2008, 82.

³ See *ibid.*, 11 – poems of both these poets were planned for publication.

⁴ See *ibid.*, 632.

⁵ “To say it differently than yes and no”.

⁶ See Michał Larek, *Figury niepewności*, in *Powiedzieć to inaczej.... op. cit.*, 935.

crises and breakthroughs in thinking about identity and subjectivity, extinguishing of the myth of a poet as a bard or a sage, predilection for details, offensive of various mass-media".⁷ The list of these elements in the introduction to the anthology is an ascertainment of criteria of the selection. This list disappoints with the lack of "non-similarity"⁸—as Janusz Sławiński would have said after Zbigniew Bieńkowski—of the model of poetry designed in this way. Does this model—in the manner in which it has been defined—have enough uniqueness to justify the declaration embedded in the title of the anthology? For example, does this set of distinctive features of poetry uttered 'differently' justify the lack in this selection of poems by Szymborska, Herbert and Miłosz? An even more important question is: is it a set of critical observations of literary scholars which could justify the project itself?

The thing is that Janusz Sławiński, in a text from 1964, discovered this 'non-similarity' which the authors of the anthology consider to be their discovery. In the text entitled "Próba porządkowania doświadczeń" ("An Attempt to Order Experiences") he diagnosed the state of poetry in this period, pointing to the poetry of Różewicz as an influential model of 'non-similarity', drawing attention to issues in which Borowczyk and Lorek find characteristic for 'otherness'. I mostly have in mind the situation of man, observed by Sławiński, "who is not able to express his experiences (psychological, social, ideological) as a co-ordinated and meaningful whole".⁹ This poetic impotence is negatively specified through a comparison with Przyboś, whose lyric 'I'—argued Sławiński—is a stream of activities directed at

⁷ Jerzy Borowczyk, Michał Larek, *Kilka wstępnych wyjaśnień*, in *Powiedzieć to inaczej...* op. cit., 6.

⁸ See Janusz Sławiński, *Próba porządkowania doświadczeń*, in Idem, *Prace wybrane*, ed. by Włodzimierz Bolecki, vol. V: *Przypadki poezji*, Kraków 2001, . 289. "Non-similarity" here means "the centre of some situation, which makes it recognizable and defines its meaning".

⁹ Ibid.,292.

the surrounding world.¹⁰ The style of Różewicz, defined as the rhetoric of helplessness, expressed determination and obedience to chaos.¹¹

For Lorek and Borowczyk the main component of ‘non-similarity’ are “figures of progressive uncertainty”.¹² They declare: “We have avoided poets who treat poems as instruments to communicate peremptory figures of knowledge or dogmas.”¹³ In this approach it is Miłosz and Herbert who would turn out to be “peremptory dogmatists”. In their assessment of Miłosz and Herbert, Lorek and Borowczyk followed in the footsteps of many critical opinions recently voiced—Miłosz’s and Herbert’s greatness is apparently a burden to the development of Polish poetry. Herbert is accused of false heroism and indifference to the problems of ordinary people.¹⁴ It is fashionable to dislike Miłosz for being stilted and monumental.¹⁵ I will not be entering into a debate with judgements, although it is worth noticing that in both these cases negative choices turned out to be predictable in their compliance with fashions and trends. So, as we see, “different” in the starting point really means “the same as others”. The intuition of Tadeusz Pióro, one of the ‘heroes’ of the anthology, about “modern subjectivity and style”,¹⁶ turned out to be right: “everything is common in such a style”.¹⁷ Modernity as well—which is usually looking for new forms of expression—was tempted this time to ascertain for itself safe acceptance.

¹⁰ See *ibid.*, 293.

¹¹ See *ibidem*.

¹² Jerzy Borowczyk, Michał Łarek, *Kilka wstępnych wyjaśnień*, op. cit., 7.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ See, e.g., *the voice of Stefan Chwin in the discussion: «Złote runo nicości». O «Przesłaniu Pana Cogito» i poezji Zbigniewa Herberta dyskutują Stefan Chwin, Tadeusz Dąbrowski, Andrzej Franaszek, Ryszard Krynicki, Marian Stala i Piotr Śliwiński*, „Tygodnik Powszechny”, 4.11.2008, 5, special issue “Herbert”.

¹⁵ See, e.g., *Wał*, in *Rodzinna Europa. Pięć minut później*, ed. by Anna Kałuża, Grzegorz Jankowicz, Kraków 2011, 25–30.

¹⁶ Tadeusz Pióro, *Chlebek i winko*, in *Idem Powązki*, Wrocław 2015, 8

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

I would pay a lot of money to anyone who could convincingly differentiate—I am putting together phrases of the duet Larek-Borowczyk and Sławiński—"figures of progressive uncertainty" from "rhetoric of helplessness", impossibility of the formulation of generalizing verdicts from being subjected to chaos, observing of the commandment "seek otherness" from the impossibility of expressing experience as a whole.

Americans

The anti avant-garde tendencies perceived by Sławiński in the inability of Różewicz's protagonist to "overcome their internal and external determination", inability to "purposeful actions"¹⁸ could be seen in the project of "other poetry" because of its American patronage.¹⁹ Alan Ginsberg—one of the Beatnik poets who were searching for a new poetic path—wrote in a letter to John Hallander, a poet and critic, in 1958:

The beauty of writing is [...] the invention, the discovery of new appropriate forms, the discovery of something you DON'T know, rather than synthesis repetition of things you do already know. It's a jump up forward into life, unknown future life [...] But expanding the area that you can deal with directly, especially to include all the irrational of subjective mystical experience and queerness and pants—in other words individuality—means again (as it did for Whitman) the possibility in a totally brainwashed age where all communication is subject to mass control—means again at last the possibility of Prophetic poetry—it's no miracle—all you have to know is what actually think and feel and every sentence will be

¹⁸ See Janusz Sławiński, *Próba porządkowania doświadczeń*, in Idem, *Prace wybrane*, v. V, op. cit., 293.

¹⁹ The anthology includes works of 29 poets. This American patronage would cover, first of all, Bohdan Zadura and 11 young poets, still writing today. It seems that the anthology was made because of them. The list would include Piotr Sommer, Jerzy Jarniewicz, Andrzej Sosnowski, Tadeusz Pióro, Marcin Świetlicki, Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki, Andrzej Niewiadomski, Adam Wiedemann, Mariusz Grzebalski, Dariusz Sońnicki, Edward Pasewicz.

a revelation—everybody else is so afraid to talk even if they have any feelings left [...] nothing but a lot of Trillinguesque evasions with communist doubletalk about moral imagination, a cheap trick to suppress their own irrational Life and Poetry and reduce everything to the intellectual standard of a *Time* magazine report on the present happiness and proper role of an American Egghead who's getting paid now and has a nice job and fits in with the whole silly system [...].²⁰

It is not difficult to find in the words of the famous Beatnik things which are important, and the most important for the editors of the anthology and for the poets whose poems are included in it, at least for the youngest dozen of them. Extension of the field of poetic exploration by adding to it what is unknown, but justified in a poem from an individual perspective, to explore themes and qualities reluctantly perceived in the poetry understood in the traditional way—these are the most important things. While the matters of every day, with common, not poetical, details are the important things.

It is characteristic that Piotr Sommer, in the text “Ten staroświecki Allen Ginsberg” (“This Old Fashioned Allen Ginsberg”), confesses that he cannot admire Ginsberg, “who has called himself a messenger of all less and more public hired jobs, and the whole plethora of less and more colourful slogans, which he wished to identify himself with [...] [from] opinions in favour of some fiendishly Important Cause, of which he used to call himself a messenger.”²¹ Ginsberg the interlocutor and Ginsberg the retailer, is the only Ginsberg—according to Sommer—worthy of literary and translational labour.²²

It might be supposed that the term ‘prophetic poetry’ would raise many doubts in Sommer. His clear hostility to the prophetic poetry of ethos or of wisdom goes along well with the declaration of Lorek and Borowczyk that they are looking for poetry the subject of which

²⁰ Allen Ginsberg, *The Letters of Allen Ginsberg*, ed. by Mill Morgan, Da Capo Press, 2008, 214-215

²¹ Piotr Sommer, *Ten staroświecki Allen Ginsberg. Widok od strony podwórka*, in *Idem, Po stykach*, Gdańsk 2005, 273.

²² See *ibidem*.

is characterized by "non-certainty, fuzziness, things collateral, incidental."²³ Anyway, the direction of action is, at least to a certain extent, obvious. Sommer—as a poet and a longstanding editor in chief of *Literatura na Świecie* (*Literature of the World*)—is shaping literary taste.

To a certain extent, because of Sommer it is not Ginsberg but John Ashbery who is the most important point of reference for poets exploring unknown spaces. Ashbery, a poet reaching to the borders of language, to silence. Andrzej Sosnowski spoke about Ashbery's *Flow Chart* in a maximal way: "It is very unlikely that Ashbery will again create something equally radically 'infinite' and tireless in an effort to reveal language, layer after layer, to show its ways, ebbs and tides and touch the silence at the bottom."²⁴ In Sosnowski's interpretation Ginsberg's jump into unknown future life when taken up by Ashbery meant reaching the end of artistic and, more generally cognitive, possibilities. If in the case of Ginsberg it is sensible to suppose that while setting into the unknown he expected that ultimately he would learn the name of the unknown, in the case of Ashbery this name gets diluted in the multiplicity of possible variants and meanings of the language in which the process of poetic cognition takes place. What is more, if Beatniks had asked for elements of reality not present in art, such as the internal world of an outsider and a homosexual, Ashbery is much closer to the conviction: "Avoiding reality means protecting the idea of art's autonomy."²⁵

The context of Ginsberg allows us to reconstruct the revision introduced by the disciple to a lesson received from masters. This revision in relation to Ginsberg is the giving up—at least in declarations—a prophetic dimension. However, does it mean

²³ Jerzy Borowczyk, Michał Larek, *Kilka wstępnych wyjaśnień*, in *Powiedzieć to inaczej...*, op. cit., 6.

²⁴ Andrzej Sosnowski, *O poezji «flow» i «chart»*, in *Idem, Najrzytykowniej*, Wrocław 2007, 67.

²⁵ Piotr Sommer, *Amerikanin w Warszawie. Rozmowa z Johnem Ashberym*, in *Idem, Po stykach*, op. cit., 206.

that the poetic ideal—or rather, anti-ideal—“flow and chart” has become the ultimate choice of Polish poets? Could they really devote themselves totally to explorations of language, finding its layers, arriving at thresholds of silence, not being interested in the noisy reality around?

Without going to the very nature of poetic material, it could be suggested that such an option is very unlikely. Because, as a matter of fact, the poetry which was honoured by this anthology with a laurel of noble otherness—against the declaration of its independence from social needs—is modelled by the conviction that we all need Polish poetry which would testify to the modern moral imagination.

The stringency and quasi-demolishing predilections discussed earlier are only external signs of the moralistic aspect of the project of the ‘other’ poetry. A new moral imagination makes the poet—to use the case of the above-mentioned Ginsberg—abhor things other than gaydom and trousers, that is abhor being prophetically passionate with issues which matter. This is moral imagination, because it is to change the world built on traditional logocentric—prophesies. The political aspect of the mechanism of this poetry craving for full autonomy is described by Ashbery:

A poem being in fact moralistic, telling people how to behave properly, is a kind of insult to readers, preaching to the converted. [...] I have participated many times in anti-war poetical meetings, have come to them without doubts, because I have been convinced that poetry does not have an influence on reality; anyway, it was a situation in which my thinking has been along such lines: surely, it is an illusion, but who knows, maybe thanks to the non political nature of poems, people, as individuals will become more humane, and that is why I will take part in it, because this is useful and constructive not only in the political sense, but maybe they will be more eager to realize what their lives and the lives of people around really mean, and this will influence their activities on many levels, not only on this one.²⁶

²⁶ Ibid., 206, 207.

There is no doubt that Ashbery agrees that non-political poetry should serve, from time to time, a good cause. Poetic words, with the power of their multiplicity of meanings, diluting all truths, makes man ready to accept new rules. However, as it turns out, there are always some 'fiendishly important issues', and it is very difficult to resist the temptation to talk about them using the old spells of humanity. It is difficult to keep poetic words within the full autonomy of art, especially when so many issues around cry for poet's justice. Maybe one day, somewhere, but in Poland in 2015 how can the meaning of the word 'soul' be rocked without insulting with moralizing? Sosnowski, in his volume *Dom ran (A House of Wounds)*, tried to do it in this way "Wciąż ani słowa.—Chyba głupia p**** nie umarła?"²⁷. But can it be a good solution in the language in which there functions religious and evangelizing (in the intention of its author—Ada Karczmarczyk's) song "Czysta pipa"²⁸ ("A Clean Pussy")—without asterisks? Therefore Sosnowski's move from asterisks to ... Leśmian, or even to Zimorowic, is not surprising: "Wtedy ona wybucha i krzyczy, jakże niedorzecznie: – Tam... chmur-/nicą... gdzie wieczorne zorze prawie gasną... tam... tam... obłoczną.../planetnicą obłoczną.../planetnicą... płaczącą...!"²⁹ Language with such a rich tradition as the Polish language is a chance but also a threat to a poet searching for rescue from the oppression of prophetic obligations.

²⁷ Andrzej Sosnowski, *Outro*, in Idem, *Dom ran*, Wrocław 2015, 7. "Still not a word—Perhaps this stupid c*** has not died".

²⁸ Performative play by Ada Karczmarczyk—available in different places in the internet—it has been presented in renowned galleries, lately in New York's *Postmasters*, „Pressje” (Teka 39) has devoted a block of texts to it.

²⁹ Andrzej Sosnowski, *Outro. Translator's note: Bolesław Leśmian (1877-1937) a Polish poet renowned for his neologisms*, "these neologisms are usually the product of the versatile "prefix+verb/noun(+suffix)" formula natural to most Slavic languages but peculiar to many other languages, rendering Leśmian's poetry "almost untranslatable" into English." *Mikołaj Gliński (21 January 2017)*. "The Greatest Poet You'll Never Read". *culture.pl*. Retrieved 23 August 2018. In the quoted fragment Andrzej Sosnowski uses Leśmian's technique with such words as "chmura" (cloud), "obłok" (pall), "planeta" (planete), "płacz" (weeping).

All that is solid melts into air

“All that is solid melts into air”—this Marxist aphorism is not only an innocent speculation or a melancholic diagnosis, but also a desideratum. The ending of the poem “Acte Manque” „Powiedzieć to inaczej niż tak i niż nie” (“To say it differently than yes and no”)—is congruent with it, moving thoughts into regions independent from set norms and rules. In Sosnowski’s volume *A House of Wounds* there appear two clear references to this Marxist formula of Shakespearian origin.³⁰

Sosnowski, in the poetic text “Chrono i perio (2)” (“Chrono and Perio (2)”), wrote about Romantic poets that „zamierzali «ustanawiać» coś, co / mogłoby «trwać», gdy stałostki rozwiewały się w powietrzu”.³¹ What is characteristic, the words “ustanawiać” (“establish”) and “trwać” (“last”) are written in inverted commas—in the atmosphere of constant change they cannot be treated literally. In the allegorical text “Maelstrom”³² a conversation of two lovers sailing in a ship in sub-Arctic waters ends with the following words: “Jakbyśmy obejmowali oba bieguny piekła... jakbyśmy nareszcie / żyli, najdroższa”.³³ These words are spoken in the dialogue of lovers, who, sailing in extreme conditions decide “Ostatkiem sił na dobitkę podpalmy ten okręt, maleńka”.³⁴

³⁰ Sosnowski admits that he was referring only to Shakespear, see, *O książce «Dom ran» Dawid Bujno rozmawia z Andrzejem Sosnowskim*, <http://portlitteracki.pl/przystan/teksty/pamietne-slowa-czemu-nie>, retrieved 17.07.2015. However, it seems that the case here is the reference directly to *The Communist Manifesto*, and only indirectly to *The Tempest* by Shakespeare. Anyway, in the Polish translation of *The Communist Manifesto* there is no sentence “All that is solid melts into air”. This statement, which became so popular according to Marshall Berman’s book. See an interesting analysis of this <http://dyneslines.blogspot.com/2011/05/origins-of-famous-phrase.html>, retrieved : 17.07.2015.

³¹ Andrzej Sosnowski, *Chrono i perio (2)*, in Idem, *Dom ran*, op. cit., 26. “They intended to ‘establish’ something which/could ‘last’ when solid little things melted into air”.

³² Ibid., 27.

³³ “As if we were embracing both poles of hell at the same time...as if we at last/lived, my dear”

³⁴ “Let’s use the remnants of our strength and to top it let’s set afire this ship, my lovely”

The Marxist symbol of change—Maelstrom, one of the strongest sea currents in the world—allows the lovers to discover that you really live only when you decide to set fire to a ship you are sailing.

In the poem "Acte Manque" it is humanity understood in terms of traditional duties and privileges, which is solid. Idiomatic expressions are linguistic equivalents of this traditional picture of man. These expressions are slightly modified phonetically and separated semantically: comic space, a shot of bread, handicapped experts. Sense, which would be crucial in 'different' poetic speech—as far as it could be reconstructed from Sosnowski's poem—is unveiled in Freudian slips of tongue, which reveal subconsciousness at work. Thanks to them, a general rule is established: follow errors, not truths, allow yourself to be led by something which is considered faulty, break existing boundaries. However, the traditional 'yes and no' remains as a negative point of reference,—like in Sosnowski's poem—this attachment to the old poetic and axiological paradigm exists together with the longing to set afire a ship tossed by a powerful Maelstrom.

The project of 'other' poetry establishes independent, autonomous art, independent from all obligations, except artistic ones. Andrzej Sosnowski himself has often been treated as an extremely difficult poet, even hermetic;³⁵ a poet who uses particularly refined language. However, it is characteristic that his poetry gradually becomes simpler. This poetry listens carefully to popular culture, and takes its voice into account, even if only as a negative point of reference, a voice which sometimes creates at least a temptation for contempt of its infantility. Another characteristic thing is Sosnowski's fascination with the works, personality and creative intelligence of David Bowie. In the volume *Dom ran (A House of Wounds)* Bowie appears in a text about a Pepsi advertisement in which Bowie's hit "Heroes" was used. The text entitled "Z rzeczy napotkanych" ("From Things Encountered")³⁶ is devoid of traditional poetic valour. It is dated: "Purchase, New

³⁵ See, e.g., *Interpretacyjna improwizacja*, interview of Małgorzat Iwanek with Andrzej Sosnowski, <http://popmoderna.pl/wywiad-andrzej-sosnowski>, retrieved 17.07.2015. See, e.g., the poem *toutoutoujours* from the volume. *Po tęczy* (2007).

³⁶ Andrzej Sosnowski, *Dom ran*, op. cit., 49–50.

York, 2014”—in an ostentatious and provocative way it locates the centre of poetic inspiration in the headquarters of a global food concern. The journalistic account “Pepsi MAX® has presented today a new version of their global campaign [...]”—and includes phrases “spontaneous celebration of a moment”, or “an outburst of courage and passion”. We might have expected Sosnowski to be reluctant to use the convention of a protest song—which, after all, deals with people standing against the wall and hearing bullets whizzing over them—it would be appropriate in an advertising campaign to recall in the context of this record of the reflection of the poet: “This world is so multi-layered and multi-vocal, as so much happens both at the verbal and at the non-verbal level. We are so completely surrounded by various pictures, icons, advertisements, films, video-clips, and there is a lot of music in the air.³⁷ It is also worth noting that advertising slogans about the phenomenon of a given moment correspond with a quotation from Walter Pater: “*Art comes to you* proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass”.³⁸ This commercial and pop-cultural event—creating many doubts in the artist, who has declared reluctance to the consumerist style of life—can also create in Sosnowski some fellow feeling.

Pop-culture is for those looking for possibilities to ‘tell it differently’, an important area of finding confirmation, that one does not address the void. Tadeusz Pióro gave to his whole volume *Powązki (Powązki)* a motto from David Bowie: “You don’t know what I’m talking about. I don’t / blame you. And do you know what? It’s really / not worth understanding anyway”. This quotation clearly presents an idea of freeing poetic meanings from obligations toward traditional criteria of beauty and sense. The pact with pop-culture, however, does not mean a naive fascination with its products. For example, in an untitled fragment there appears the following reflection, which testifies to Sosnowski’s sober judgment of pop-culture: “And soon such time will come that not a single stage artist will be singing ‘you are still

³⁷ See *Interpretacyjna improwizacja*, op. cit.,

³⁸ Andrzej Sosnowski, *Dom ran*, op. cit., 45.

fucking peasants as far as I can see”³⁹. So, while listening to John Lennon, one may succumb to melancholic reflection on culture. It is not that poetry is to adapt to a level of mass viewers and listeners, but in the production designed for them one has to find a voice able to—let us use the phrase from Pater, whom Sosnowski quoted—extend the time interval given to us, so that we should be “getting *as many* pulsations as *possible* into the given time”.⁴⁰ However, how can diamonds be extracted from the ashes of pop-culture? It is difficult to offer one clear rule, but Sosnowski’s clear reluctance to such works as *Star Wars*, *Matrix* or *Harry Potter* because of their infantile character⁴¹ suggests that these artistic visions are turned into ashes which lack courage in breaking stereotypes, relying on traditional models of treating reality, based on clearly drawn moral criteria.

Conscript poetry

Janusz Sławiński defined Polish poetry written between the middle of the 1960s and August 1980 as being ‘today’s in form’ and ‘the day before yesterday’s in functions’, and it means that this poetry was concerned with the dogma of the independence of poetic language, and at the same time trustworthy cognitively, nobly committed, seriously educational, siding with the handicapped and rebels.⁴² Is it not the other way round with “the different poetry”? Is not this poetry an epigone in relation to Różewicz’s and the American traditions? And, at the same time, is not it today’s in the context of the functions it performs. Because it really adopts the function—it is a different issue if this happens with the agreement and joy of the poets who create it—of “conscript poetry”. “Conscript poetry” is supposed to bring about the required change, to model a “conscript reader”. I am relying here on phrases like “conscript audience”, “conscript readers”. C.S. Lewis used them to comment on the article of J.W.

³⁹ Ibid., 53.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 45.

⁴¹ Ibid., 46.

⁴² Janusz Sławiński, *Rzut oka na ewolucję poezji polskiej w latach 1956-1980*, in *Idem Prace wybrane*, v. V, *op. cit.*, 327.

Saunders, who was considering the issue of whether the modelling of readers by the educational system asserts stability to culture.⁴³ The real—as a phenomenon from the sociology of literature—function of “conscript poetry” is the fact mostly because of the given and accepted literary prizes and promotions in opinion-forming mass media. It is exactly in this place that the political aspect of this poetry is realized in the sense which was clearly reconstructed by John Ashbery in the quoted conversation with Piotr Sommer. The very presence of a poet—who owns the title of an independent artist, not involved in the topical debates of his/her time—in places⁴⁴ where ideas are voiced which present univocal positions in such debates, gains a political sense. In the Polish reality of the recent period it is quite easy to point to issues in regards of which a poet useful for ‘conscript readers’ is silent. It seems that from the most general perspective the political aspect discussed here, in which poetry may have its share, is based on the reconstruction of the model of culture—on such a reconfiguration of accents within such a model that individuality becomes prioritized over communal obligations.

Obviously, it is difficult to be totally consistent in obeying the rule that poetry should not be involved in topical debates. For example, in Sosnowski’s cited volume there is a fragment about Red Bull Action: “What are we going to do with a child conned in the fog, who on

⁴³ J.W. Saunders, *Poetry in the Managerial Age*, „Essays in Criticism”, vol. IV (3), July 1954. C.S. Lewis, *Gnijące lilie*, in Idem *Ostatnia noc świata*, transl. by Magda Sobolewska, Kraków 2014, 57–58. The terms *conscript audience*, *conscript readers* are used as in: C.S. Lewis, *Lilies that Fester*, in Idem, *The World’s Last Night and Other Essays*, New York 1960, 45, 46.

⁴⁴ Ashbery gives an example of an anti-war rally. Declarations—as is it is usually the case—remain in some creative tension with artistic practise. Although Ashbery, after the death of Frank O’Hara in the letter to “The Nation” wrote “Poetry is poetry. Protest is protest. Quoted in: Chris Nealon, *John Ashbery’s Optional Apocalypse*, <http://thoughtmesh.net/publish/printable.php?id=i72>, retrieved 15.12.2015), in *Three Poems* from 1972 with eagerness referred to phenomena from public life “we are not in any danger, or so it seems, of freezing into attitudes of those true spiritual bigots whose faces are turned toward eternity and who therefore can see nothing.” John Ashbery, *Three Poems*, Viking Press, New York, 1972.

a trolley and on haemodialysis, will not live long on prayers and anaesthetics alone? Hey, the Pope's grace and Pope's miracle. Let's apply, let's supply."⁴⁵ Senses which are created from the possible deciphering of Sosnowski's polemic attitude, probably towards the pro-life campaigners, are veiled here by the vision, presented in the manner of tragedy and farce, of an event conceived in the manner of a stunt filmed for the advertisements of a manufacturer of energy drinks. The second example comes in the form of ironic reflections on the social problem of the so called 'galerianki' ('shopping-mall girls') which are included in the same poetic volume *Notatki do przyszłej opery* (*Notes to a Prospective Opera*). This text in prose recalls the once well known, although already forgotten, case of a real country girl who became a 'galerianka'. In *Notes* Sosnowski introduces an idea, suggested in a conversation with a close friend, of erecting Grób Nieznanej Galerianki (Tomb of the Unknown Shopping-Mall Girl), where one honours these girls by not bringing wreaths but objects bought in shopping-malls. The confession at the end comes as a punch line: "A ja pomyślałem sobie wtedy, że nocna scena przed Grobem Nieznanej Galerianki pięknie zakończy dużą operę historyczną, którąś kiedy z pewnością napiszę; nowoczesną operę, szczęśliwie historyczną—o Zabawczce, o panu Andrzeju, o galeriankach—pod warunkiem, że czas który przyjdzie będzie nowy, niebywale inny i lepszy."⁴⁶ Including this journalistic text in a volume of poetry is a case of the clear and strong commitment of poetry to current social debates. In this case the question of the narrator's distance from the story of a hapless teenage girl arises. Is it really smaller and more humane than an aesthetic memento of Herbert, which has raised many moral doubts and accusations of the lack of compassion "if art for its subject/will have a broken jar/a small broken soul/with a great

⁴⁵ Andrzej Sosnowski, *Dom ran*, op. cit., 8.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 20. "And then I had an idea, that in such a case a beautiful night scene in front of the Tomb of the Unknown Shopping-Mall Girl will end a grand historical opera, which I am certainly going to write: a modern opera, happily historical—about a Toy Girl, about Mister Andrzej, about shopping-mall girls—providing that the time which will come will be new, very different and better."

self-pity//what will remain after us//will be like lovers' weeping/in
a small dirty hotel/when wallpaper dawns".⁴⁷

Wacław Borowy, while replying to the critical voices about his anthology of Polish lyric poetry,⁴⁸ remarked: "The Polish poets express religious and love emotions in the strongest and most exquisite ways. Our Parnassus abounds in prayers, confessions, complaints and lovers' longings. [...] The love for one's country is expressed in not so many masterpieces, but with great strength".⁴⁹ The sense of the inadequacy of this statement in relation to Polish poetry attempting "to say it differently, is the measure of the change which has happened within the area of poetry assigned as "other". The confrontation with the statement of Borowy also clearly shows that this change is mostly within the sphere of themes.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Z. Herbert: *Why the Classics*. transl. by Czesław Miłosz and Peter Dale Scott. In: idem, *The Collected Poems 1956-1998*. Translated and edited by Alissa Valles. With Additional Translations by Czesław Miłosz and Peter Dale Scott. Introduction by Adam Zagajewski. New York, Harpers Collins Publishers 2007, 267

⁴⁸ *Od Kochanowskiego do Staffa. Antologia liryki polskiej*, ed. by Wacław Borowy, Lwów 1930.

⁴⁹ Wacław Borowy, «*Antologia liryki polskiej*», in Idem, *Studia i szkice literackie*, vol. II, wybór i oprac. Zofia Stefanowska i Andrzej Paluchowski, Warszawa 1983, 93; the first edition: „*Wiadomości Literackie*” 1936, no. 5.

⁵⁰ A good example of this change is the anthology of *Biuro Literackie (Literary Bureau)* that at the moment dominates on the market, which includes exclusively such texts which have been either published for the first time or republished in the publications of *Literacki Fort i Port (Literary Fort and Port)* entitled *100 wierszy polskich stosownej długości w wyborze Artura Burszty, (100 of Polish Poems of Appropriate Length Selected by Artur Burszta)*, Wrocław 2015. The auto-thematic poems definitely dominate. The homoerotic themes in rare erotic poems attract attention. "Love of one's country"?—it seems that it is not present in any of these poems, although one of them is entitled "Polska" ("Poland"), and several of them deal with social issues. On the other hand there are quite a few poems on religious themes.