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## “THE SENSE OF FORM” IN THE POETRY OF WISŁAWA SZYMBORSKA AND CZESŁAW MIŁOSZ

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### “The sense of form”

In the 1970s, Jan Błoński tried to clarify how Polish lyric poetry was understood, by juxtaposing two diametrically different types of literary output, i.e. the aesthetical, characteristic of Julian Przyboś and the ethical, characteristic of Czesław Miłosz (Błoński 1998: 131-146). In the following decade the historic events that influenced the cultural life of Poland diverted attention from avant-garde ideas and confirmed Miłosz’s authority. However, instead of prompting the extreme attitudes, which dynamized the development of 20<sup>th</sup>-century poetry, it seemed more appropriate to focus on certain “necessary personages” (Stala 1996: 105), who contributed to this development and its balanced approach. As well as Zbigniew Herbert, Tadeusz Różewicz and Miron Białoszewski, a special place belongs to Wisława Szymborska, with whom Miłosz repeatedly held poetic discussions that are preserved in numerous literary texts (Grądziel-Wójcik 2012: 99-112; Kaźmierczyk 2004: 107-115).

Their poetic temperament, their vision of literature, their sex, their generation and their creative point of view totally differentiate Miłosz from Szymborska, yet there are certain similarities. They can both be referred to as poets of reality who are grounded in everyday life and historical experience, although they understand reality differently. For Szymborska, a poet who confronts the parallel worlds of art, dreams, imagination and memory, reality has a horizontal meaning, which is accompanied by an ethical imperative. For Miłosz, on the other hand, who is perceived as a poet of sensual enlightenment and religious epiphany, who chooses to think metaphysically, reality has a vertical meaning.

The author of *Unattainable Earth* not only feels a need to write about existence in its entirety, thus demonstrating its timelessness, but also perceives the intensity of human experience as the basis for his worldview. The focal point of his poetry is a sense of completeness intertwined with his own religious worldview and the idea of *apokatastasis*, which refers to the original unity with God, a unity that gave the world the power to continually renew its existence. The poet created his literary dialogue with modernist thinking informing the form, yet at the same time revealing in his output a “sense of nostalgia for the unattainable,” as suggested by Ryszard Nycz, who follows the idea of J.-F. Lyotard (Nycz 2000: 294).

The world in Szymborska’s poetry lacks metaphysical depth and a well organized structure based on certain divine guarantees. According to Miłosz, who failed to accept the condition of “man mutilated” from *The Land of Ulro*, her literary output exemplifies “very bitter poetry” (Miłosz 1996: 34), inspired by a determinist scientific worldview and the expression of an “identity after Copernicus, after Newton, after Darwin” (Miłosz 1996: 32). As a defender of the new metaphysical poetry, Miłosz was unable to concur with a narrowing of the horizon to what one finds “here,” and what is “enough,” as the titles of Szymborska’s volumes of poetry suggest. He continually draws attention to a mysterious “this,” which returns the readers to an “unattainable earth,” to “provinces” and “the other space,” as the titles of Miłosz’s volumes of poetry suggest. Thus, Miłosz is referred to as “the poet of entirety” (Dybciak 1985: 193), while “entirety” in Szymborska’s poetry seems to be continuously questioned, for as she did not aspire to create the Book her literary output questions the transcendent, yet at the same time displays some ironically metaphysical features (Nieukerken 1998: 360-361). Despite this, the reality presented in both poetical examples gives a feeling of multi-shapedness, of an abundance and a nobility concerning the human experience in all its dimensions.

The polyphony of Miłosz’s poetry corresponds to the polyphony of Szymborska’s poems. As the author of “Ars Poetica?” notes “I have always aspired to a more spacious form” (Miłosz 2005: 240), whereas Szymborska in her poems repeatedly “works the world out” and declares her “eagerness to see things from all six sides” (“Into the Ark”) (Szymborska 1997: 303). Just like Miłosz, however, she multiplies the embodiments of the subjects of her poems, creating lyrical personae, trying to capture the world by viewing it from different perspectives – as Lot’s wife, a terrorist, a grain of sand, a cat, or a tarsier. For her, the entirety does not mean being a part of the whole, but instead a tendency to add never-ending perspectives, new possibilities and continuations to characters, events and situations. This poetry is the poetry of a difficult affirmation of the world, but it is not an epiphany; the poetry of visibility and matter-of-factness, but it is distrustful of any unifying glance emanating from the outside. This is why

the author constructs possible, parallel and potential worlds which confront and complete each other, revealing both their deficiencies and advantages. “The entirety of ontological plausibilities” (Balbus 1996: 167) is possible only within the imagination, dreams, memory and art, where one can realize the impossible, attain the unattainable, and touch the non-existent.

These metaphysical discussions are also transferred onto the metrical decisions. The form of the poems of the aforementioned authors becomes a test for the infinite, remaining outside reality, but the text itself reveals, via its metrical shape, the poets’ worldview and their understanding of reality, the idea of a “more spacious form” and “the ex-centricity of the glance” (Borkowska 1991: 53).

The poems of Miłosz and Szymborska are characterized by their dissimilarity, yet they both possess individual tones, recognizable to the reader despite the number of diverse realizations. Although the authors do not comment on it, the form of the poem is never selfless, but always inexplicably linked with the semantics. Miłosz is sure that every form of life has its own tone that the poem needs to find and he searches for the best way of “adjusting the voice” to “the sense of form” (*The Unattainable Earth*), thus utilizing a rhyming piece of work to its fullest, a skill not all poets possess. The poet would like:

[t]o find my home in one sentence, concise, as if hammered in metal. Not to enchant anybody. Not to earn a lasting name in posterity. An unnamed need for order, for rhythm, for form, which three words are opposed to chaos and nothingness (Miłosz 2005: 452).

In this sense, poetry becomes a way of learning and thinking about the world, with aesthetical, and philosophical attitudes, as well as the worldview of the poet, hidden behind the poem. For both of the authors “the order, rhythm, form” fulfill the poetical perquisites and these protect it from the chaos and nothingness of the Land of Urlo, as “some matters nowadays are unthinkable in prose” (Balbus 1985: 463). However, unlike Szymborska, Miłosz “thinks in verse,” creating ephemeral metrical systems – systems specific to a particular poem and applicable only once (Balbus 1985: 462).

Within the extensive literary output of Miłosz, one can find examples of realizations of all the Polish versification systems, from metrical to free verse poems. These references are conscious choices, overt imitations of earlier styles or hidden allusions, and are part of a game with the centuries-old tradition of Polish poems. Stanisław Balbus described the diversity and functionalization of these forms, noting their changing frequencies and the evolution of Miłosz’s literary output, from its beginnings to the early eighties. They constitute certain necessary points of reference that the poet tries to modify and overcome, for in “fighting a battle with a poem,” simultaneously he is “fighting for the poem

and the new harmony that would not be an automatic, inert or ‘magical’, even unconscious, effect of the musical aspect of speech” (Balbus 1985: 470). The researcher notes a paradox typical of Miłosz, i.e. the paradox between the poetry of incantation prone to a musical and regular rhythm, and the “atonal harmony” of poetic speech (Balbus 1985: 482). Both codes, the rhythmical and the a-rhythmical, cooperate and compete with each other, and as a result they increase the dynamics and the polyphony of the poem. The swinging rhythm refers to the metaphysical Entirety, whereas a resignation from regular rhythmicity leads to a search for a new harmony that is adjusted to the new conditions in which the civilization in the Land of Urlo find themselves. As a result, a polyphonic entirety appears, i.e. a “more spacious form” that encompasses the author’s combination of syllabic, accentual-syllabic and accentual verse, and their irregular versions, as well as types of free verse or forms in prose: “As a result, a versification symphony is created [...]” (Balbus 1985: 495).

This complicated symphony cannot be found in Szymborska’s poems, whose poetic oeuvre in comparison with Miłosz’s seems to be much more limited. Szymborska rarely uses regular systems and then only for specific reasons, as in a quotation or rhythmical allusion. Yet great diversity in terms of versification is found in the texts from a post-war unpublished volume and in the first two socialist realist volumes (Zarzycka 2010: 158). The author uses metrical irregularities, combining lines of different length, which are sometimes accentual-syllabic, to express the emotional shifts of the lyrical I or to create the mood. In subsequent volumes, the poet scarcely uses metrical order, devising her own mode of expression, which researchers consider an example of syntactical free verse, organized through different types of parallelisms, enumerations and assonances (Legeżyńska 1996: 102; Urbańska 1995: 76). The syntax, as a rule for delimitations, together with equivalent repetitions on diverse levels of language, favours a non-fixed rhythm, which allows the poetry to imitate natural colloquial speech. Szymborska improves her a-systemic, free trochee interwoven with amphibrach – the most colloquial of the Polish versification systems, simulating the natural manner and pace of speech. Yet, in comparison with such rarely used rhythmicity, there are additionally certain attempts to organize the poems, each time more convoluted and complicated, as in the “Birthday,” “Nothing Twice,” “Allegro Ma Non Troppo” poems.

Despite some fundamental differences as far as versification is concerned, both poets show extreme “tenderness” towards the poem’s form. The text itself via its verse construction, or the so-called “sense of form”, tries to express not only the authors’ perception and their individual approach, but also their attitude towards reality, and as such it becomes an instrument for learning about and feeling reality. In his “Treatise on Poetry,” Miłosz wrote:

I want not poetry, but a new diction,  
Because only it might allow us to express  
A new tenderness and save us from a law  
That is not our law, from necessity  
Which is not ours, even if we take its name.  
(Miłosz 2005: 144)

The poem constitutes what could be referred to as a “state of form concentration,” which increases the reader’s attentiveness. If the poetry is considered as a story of the “spiritual adventures” of their authors, as Miłosz described it in *The Land of Urlo*, in the deepest recesses of the versification one can find what is missing from a direct articulation of the senses, which are ironically inflamed or modified. The author of “A Treatise on Poetry” perceives poetry as a way of knowing as well as partaking in the workings and creation of the world. His attempts to approach the Entirety acquire the form of a syllabic poem in order to assist the process. Metrical “tenderness” comes to the rescue, saves from the necessity and law, which possess the objective certainties; in Szymborska’s world, in which certainty is unknown, and there is only “our law” and “our necessity.” Thus, whenever rhythm appears in her poetry, it appears as a conceit. In Miłosz’s poetry, on the other hand, there is a glimpse of the past, especially the eternal rhythmical rules which reveal the mystery. Miłosz not only retains his metrical memory of the past and hints at a longing for the possibility of enchanting the world again through eliminating the borders between the systems, but he also enlarges the capacity of the poem, thanks to crossing the boundaries between prose and poetry. Yet, the systems themselves remain intact, and the author moves smoothly between them. The poem becomes a mediator of the entirety and eternity, a promise of rhyme and rhythm, its epiphany-like event, as in the lyric “This only,” where:

Everything was the rhythm  
Of shifting trees, of a bird in flight  
(Miłosz 2005: 460)

Despite the fact that in Szymborska’s poetry too there is a particular “struggle with a poem,” it is somewhat different.

### “The struggle with a poem”

“I’m working on the world” from the 1957 *Calling out to Yeti* volume (Szymborska 2000: 3-4) is perceived as the second, indeed the real debut of the poet and is often interpreted as a statement against the historical background to the political changes that took place in Poland in October 1956.

It is an example of poetry that summarizes and yet comes to terms with the utopian ideas of ideological happiness that was supposed to be achieved through the propaganda literature, which itself was subservient to the socialist realist doctrine (Ligeża 2001: 79). This particular text is one of Szymborska's most important poems and constitutes her artistic manifesto that deals with the freedom of speech; it is her authorial credo and as such it was not placed accidentally at the very beginning of *The Selection of Poems*, published in 1979. In "Working on" a better world, its "second, improved edition" refers to both the real world and a subjective projection of it. In the poem, the surrounding empirical knowledge, filled with pain, death and fear, is contrasted with an artistically improved version, without pain or fear and with a peaceful death. Both these worlds define and yet at the same time explain one another, demonstrating their possibilities and limitations.

The self-reflection in this poem does not only concern the concepts or objectives of the art of words, but it also includes the poetic issues in Szymborska's literary output. The reference to the myth of the Book and a text that alludes to it can be regarded as a micro-model for this poetry, which centers around the most important topics, e.g. (not only interpersonal) communication, nature, passing away, love, pain, dreams, utopia, death. "I'm working on the world" also demonstrates Szymborska's ability to use ambiguous irony and play with idiomatic expressions and enumerations. Additionally, it shows that the poet refrains from overusing metaphors and consistently resorts to using a variety of possible metrical forms.

In spite of its appearance, a text written in free verse is not rhythmically neutral or free from metrical rules – there are some iambic, trochaic and amphibrachic elements. The rhythm is already observed in the two opening lines, and a repetition of the hypercatalectic iambic tetrameter motifs reappear throughout the poem in different transformations:

u / u / u / u / u  
 Obmyślam świat, wydanie drugie,  
 u / u / u / u / u  
 wydanie drugie poprawione,<sup>1</sup>

However, in the third line of the same section, which suggests the creation of a better reality, the iamb is ironically undermined. The destruction of the rhythm is visible in the lines which paraphrase the full title of Benedykt Chmielowski's *The New Athens*, the first Polish universal encyclopaedia from the 18<sup>th</sup> century,

<sup>1</sup> I'm working on the world,  
a revised, improved edition, (Szymborska 2000: 3-4)

highlighting at the same time the uselessness and ludicrousness of a project to repair the world:

u / u u /  
idiotom na śmiech,  
u u u / u u /  
melancholikom na płacz,  
/ u u / u  
łysym na grzebień,  
/ u / u  
psom na buty.<sup>2</sup>

In the second section, the trochaic rhythm, so typical of the Polish language, dominates the amphibrachs from the word final position in the verses, with two exceptions: the stress is shifted in the words “słownik” (“dictionary”) and “życie” (“life”):

/ u / u  
Oto rozdział:  
/ u / u u / u  
Mowa Zwierząt i Roślin,  
/ u / u u / u  
gdzie przy każdym gatunku  
/ / u u / u  
masz **słownik** odnośny.  
/ u / u u / u  
Nawet proste dzień dobry  
/ u / u / u  
wymienione z rybą  
/ u / u u / u  
ciebie, rybę i wszystkich  
u / u u / u  
przy **życiu** umocni.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> featuring fun for fools,  
blues for brooders,  
combs for bald pates,  
tricks for old dogs. (Szymborska 2000: 3-4)

<sup>3</sup> Here’s one chapter: The Speech  
of Animals and Plants.  
Each species comes, of course,  
with its own dictionary.  
Even a simple “Hi there,”  
when traded with a fish,  
make both the fish and you  
feel quite extraordinary. (Szymborska 2000: 3-4)

In the third section, the emotions of the lyrical I increase and the poem seems to accelerate rhythmically. If we combine the following two lines and take into consideration the secondary stress in longer words, a regular iambic rhythm, namely a hexameter with a caesura after the seventh syllable, is achieved, although it appears only in every second verse:

⊘ / ⊘ / ⊘ /⊘	/⊘ / ⊘ /
Ta, dawno przeczuwana,	nagle w jawie słów
⊘ / ⊘ / ⊘ /⊘	/⊘ / ⊘ /
improwizacja lasu!	Ta epika sów!
⊘ /⊘ / ⊘ /⊘	/⊘ / ⊘ /
Te aforyzmy jeża	układane, gdy
⊘ / ⊘ /⊘ /⊘	⊘ / /⊘ /
jesteśmy przekonani,	że <b>nic</b> , tylko śpi! <sup>4</sup>

Yet, once again the rhythm is disrupted and as in the final line of this fragment the stress falls on the second syllable: “nic” (“nothing”). The humorous and emotional tone changes in the next stanza, devoted to “Time,” and shows the independence of love in an ideal world from any laws of passing away. The even rhythm of iambs with hypercatalexis, which encompasses the secondary stresses, directs the readers’ attention to the biological rhythm of both the universe and the natural environment, since the lawmaker in this system is “time’s unbounded power that makes a mountain crumble” and “rotates a star”. If the iamb is to prove inviolable, an eternal order of time, something slips away: “time” (“czas”) is reflectively used by the subject, with the “too” (“zbyt”) naked lovers and their “soul” (“dusza”) in the final verse highlighting what is individual and unusual. Additionally, the fifth line disrupts the rhythm in this part (“moves seas”), suggesting the potentially destructive nature of divine power:

/ / ⊘ /⊘
Czas (rozdział drugi)
⊘ / ⊘ / ⊘ /⊘⊘
ma prawo do wtrącania się
⊘ / ⊘ /⊘ / ⊘ /⊘
we wszystko czy to złe, czy dobre.

<sup>4</sup> The long-suspected meanings  
of rustlings, chirps, and growls!  
Soliloquies of forests!  
The epic hoot of owls!  
Those crafty hedgehogs drafting  
aphorisms after dark,  
while we blindly believe  
they are sleeping in the park! (Szyborska 2000: 3-4)

u / | u / | u / | u / u  
 Jednakże – ten, co kruszy góry,  
 uu/u u / uu / u  
 oceany przesuwają i który  
 u / u / u / u / u  
 obecny jest przy gwiazd krążeniu,  
 u / u / u / u / u  
 nie będzie mieć najmniejszej władzy  
 u / u / u u / / u  
 nad kochankami, bo zbyt nadzy,  
 u / u/u / u / u  
 bo zbyt objęci, z nastroszoną  
 / u u / u / u / u  
 duszą jak wróblem na ramieniu.<sup>5</sup>

The next, the fifth, section begins with iambs, but in the second line amphibrachs start to appear. Their swinging rhythm brings a calmness and eases the prospect of old age, pain and death. As before two rhyming lines can be combined, i.e. the first with the second, the fourth with the fifth, to exemplify a versification typical of Polish verse, which consists of thirteen syllables (13(7+6)). The rhyming assonance binds the third and two final verses, each of which are seven syllables in length, and constitute the first hemistich of the former measure. In the line “Ach, więc wszyscy są młodzi” (“you’ll stay young if you’re good”), one can distinguish two amphibrachs preceded by an additional stress (“Ach”), whereas the verse “Śmierć, kiedy chcesz, przychodzi” (“Death? It comes in your sleep, exactly as it should”) would be regularly iambic, were it not for one exception: the word “śmierć” (“death”), which does not conform to the rules of versification and rhythm. In addition, it is also the shortest line in the whole text.

/ u u / u / u  
**Starość** to tylko morał  
 u / u u / u  
 przy życiu zbrodniarza.  
 / u / uu / u  
**Ach**, więc wszyscy są młodzi!

<sup>5</sup> Time (Chapter Two) retains  
 its sacred right to meddle  
 in each earthly affair.  
 Still, time’s unbounded power  
 that makes a mountain crumble,  
 moves seas, rotates a star,  
 won’t be enough to tear  
 lovers apart: they are  
 too naked, too embraced,  
 too much like timid sparrows. (Szymborska 2000: 3-4)

˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘  
 Cierpienie (rozdział trzeci)  
 / ˘ / ˘ / ˘  
 ciała nie znieważa.  
 /  
**Śmierć**,  
 / ˘ / ˘ / ˘  
 kiedy śpisz, przychodzi.<sup>6</sup>

In this section, the words “starość” (“old age”) and “śmierć” (“death”) do not become part of the rhythmical order. Softly swinging amphibrachs develop in the next stanza, in which the vision of a painless death and a smooth passing is depicted. However, within this fragment “the struggle with a poem” is visible as well. Yet, this time, iambs and trochees gradually give ground to the dominant amphibrachs that finish this section:

˘ / / ˘  
 A **śnić** będziesz,  
 ˘ / ˘ ˘ / ˘ ˘ / ˘  
 że wcale nie trzeba oddychać,  
 ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘  
 że cisza **bez** oddechu  
 ˘ / ˘ ˘ / ˘  
 to niezła muzyka,  
 / ˘ / ˘ ˘ / ˘  
**jesteś mały** jak iskra  
 ˘ / ˘ ˘ / ˘  
 i gaśniesz do taktu.<sup>7</sup>

The words highlighted in the text disrupt the regular amphibrach, indicating the insignificance and the frailty of an imperfect man in relation to the overwhelming power of death. “The struggle” against the rhythmical order is lost and this is exemplified by the penultimate section, the most structured in the

<sup>6</sup> Old age is, in my book,  
 the price that felons pay,  
 so don't whine that it's steep:  
 you'll stay young if you're good.  
 Suffering (Chapter Three)  
 doesn't insult the body.  
 Death? It comes in your sleep,  
 exactly as it should. (Szyborska 2000: 3-4)

<sup>7</sup> When it comes, you'll be dreaming  
 that you don't need to breathe;  
 that breathless silence is  
 the music of the dark  
 and it's part of the rhythm  
 to vanish like a spark. (Szyborska 2000: 3-4)

entire poem, as the iambic tetrameter with its irregularities are only found at the onset of the verses. Moreover, the iamb with hypercatalexis that completes the lines seems to change into a swinging amphibrach:

/ / u / u / u / u  
**Śmierć** tylko taka. Bólu więcej  
 / u u / u / u / u  
 miałeś trzymając różę w ręce  
 u / u / u / u / u  
 i większe czuleś przerażenie  
 / u u / u / u / u  
 widząc, że płatek spadł na ziemię.<sup>8</sup>

However, the attempts to undermine the calming regularity can be seen. The other voice of the poem, which is difficult to control, appears due to placing semantically significant words in important positions in the verse, i.e. "śmierć" ("death") appears at the beginning of the first line, and "ból" ("pain") and "przerażenie" ("terror") appear in subsequent word final positions. The enjambement strengthens this secret dissonance even more. It is as if pain, death and terror scream against the soothing rhythm, and are incapable of fitting into the strict meter.

The final section apparently begins with the usual iambic meter, yet it refrains from using the hypercatalexis in the lines ending with "tak" ("yes") and "Bach." The brief "yes" is very expressive and remains in the word final position of the first line:

/ / u / u / u /  
**Świat** tylko taki. Tylko tak  
 / u u / u / u / u  
**żyć.** I umierać tylko tyle.  
 u / u / u / u /  
 A wszystko inne – jest jak Bach  
 u / u / u  
 chwilowo grany  
 u / u  
 na pile.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Only a death like that. A rose could prick you harder, I suppose; you'd feel more terror at the sound of petals falling to the ground. (Szymborska 2000: 3-4)

<sup>9</sup> Only a world like that. To die just that much. And to live just so. And all the rest is Bach's fugue, played for the time being on a saw. (Szymborska 2000: 3-4)

The two last verses are much shorter as the perfect music fades away, its power finished. These lines can be read either as iambs or amphibrachs, and this indecisiveness again reveals “the struggle with a poem” occurring in the text.

“I’m working on the world” from a semantic perspective unfolds the tempting vision of a better world; an analysis of the versification of the poem, however, displays the rhythmical confusion, the inner struggle with the meter, accompanied at the level of meaning by an ambivalent attitude towards the utopian vision of a perfect reality.

If one concentrates on reading vertically the words that fail to respect the rhythmical regularity, what might be called a “dictionary” is created: life, nothing, time, soul, old age, death, dream, silence, death, world, live, which is an alternative to the unambiguously optimistic project. “Death” is the most important element and it is mentioned twice in the text while a rhythmical self-defence is directed against it. This is an unsuccessful attempt to musicalize the world. Miłosz in “Provinces” wrote:

I search for what is most strongly opposed to *smrt*.  
I think it is music. Of the Baroque.  
(Miłosz 2005: 529)

A maximalist project of Bach’s caliber cannot be successful, since “only this” is created. “The world” does not only mean to “live” or “die,” as “all the rest” that happens to a human being between birth and death becomes of much greater importance. The sound of a saw is just an inept imitation of a brilliant score, yet it is the only possible human realization of such a score. The inner struggle with the rhythm is a manifesto of sorts against any planned top-down orders or despotic restrictions that a system, either metrical, political or metaphysical, might impose.

### The poem as a state of concentration

Death reappears in Szymborska’s later poem “Vermeer” from the *Here* volume. In the poem discussed above, the world was written and played, in *Here* it is to be painted. In both cases, the auto-reflexive frame reveals the act of creation and introduces the distance.

“Vermeer”

Dopóki ta kobieta z Rijksmuseum  
w namalowanej ciszy i skupieniu  
mleko z dzbanka do miski

dzień po dniu przelewa,  
nie zasługuje Świat  
na koniec świata.<sup>10</sup>  
(Szymborska 2012: 72)

Despite its seeming simplicity, a precise versification is retained in the poem. The two first lines are hendecasyllabic, followed by two lines with 7 and 6 syllables respectively. As a result, a thirteen-syllable line is created, so typical of Polish versification, and this is evident especially when one considers the run over: "mleko z dzbanka do miski / dzień po dniu przelewa" ("keeps pouring milk day after day / from the pitcher to the bowl"). The two final lines have 6 and 5 syllables respectively. The suggestion of syllabic order is accompanied by tendencies towards accentual-syllabic rhythmization, i.e. iambs in the first two lines of the section and also in the final two lines. There is, however, a third possibility when reading this text, which is an incomplete, yet very evocative, rhythm of accentual verse: triple rhythmic groups fading in two last lines.

As a result, there are three overlapping possibilities of rhythmical order; each time the meter is promised and not kept. The rhythm, constructed as a result of the versification allusions, is recalled and modified, rejected and confirmed at the same time. One sentence in the text comprises a syntactic split in the final pair of lines, which is enhanced by the homonymous rhyme: "Świat" / "świata" ("World" / "world"). There is a maximization of the system used, yet this maximization is individual and a-systemic. Consequently, "the more spacious form" appears and the poem emanates tranquility and concentration.

In this particular text, one notices the obvious indifference to the power of the rhythmical form. This time, as if at her own request, Szymborska loses "the fight with a poem." The world she is "working on," i.e. the world painted by Vermeer, is deliberately "only this:" it soothes, brings tranquility and lessens the pain and terror, but it also denies death. The poet seems to believe that culture can become an enclave of salvation, and thus she searches for the moral justification for a World where "crime is not all / we're up to down there" and "not every sentence there / means death;" and yet again in "Notes from a Nonexistent Himalayan Expedition" she reminds us that "we play solitaire / and violin," "we've got Shakespeare there" (Szymborska 1997: 11), and Vermeer as well.

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<sup>10</sup> "Vermeer"

So long as that woman from the Rijksmuseum  
in painted quiet and concentration  
keeps pouring milk day after day  
from the pitcher to the bowl  
the World hasn't earned  
the world's end. (Szymborska 2012: 73)

The monotonous pouring of the milk from the pitcher to the bowl by the woman in Vermeer's painting initiates the cultural symbolism of milk, femininity and a cornucopia of delights. The existence of the world is conditioned by the life-giving power of the dispenser, of "that woman" (Bernacki 2010: 104). Certainty and calmness exude from the pitcher described by the poet. The undisturbed silence, "painted quiet" and the soothing rhythm remove death, pain, nothingness and old age. However, this poem, so precisely structured, sets a trap for the recipient: one is forced to focus, to pay attention, to strain the senses and to concentrate on the white stream catching the eye of the beholder. Szymborska omits the technical aspects of the painting, the composition of a realistic scene, the uniqueness of the use of light, the "painter of silence and light" (Herbert 2008: 61). She concentrates on the chosen detail and focuses her attention on the inside, on the intimate moment and the stopping of time. Her reserved interpretation compels us to contemplate what she considers the most important. One receives "a poem – concentration" forcing the recipient to pay attention and to perceive the world with extreme sensitivity. The struggle with mortality and the elapse of time is possible "as long as" the subject looks and "as long as" the reader reads.

As long as day after day, "in painted quiet and concentration," Wisława Szymborska tells us about the mysterious woman from Vermeer's painting, "the World hasn't earned / the world's end." As long as one follows its rhythm, instead of gazing into the emptiness and darkness inside the pitcher – into a painted nothingness, one focuses on the painted and written stream of milk which binds us to life. As always in Szymborska's poetry, the work of art stimulates a reflection on time and its passing, and such a confrontation with the world of art gives even greater prominence to the problem (Czermińska 2004: 241). The poem, avoiding rhetoric flair and irony, seems to convince us that if one stays within the magical circle of its rhythmical peace, the end of the world will not happen. Similarly, the end of the poem will not happen, despite the fact that it seems "to vanish like a spark." The sentence is still there, as long as it is pronounced and it becomes "the revenge of a mortal hand" as stated in the "Joy of Writing" (Szymborska 1997: 63). The temporary, fragmentary, individual and unstable entirety is possible only in Szymborska's poetic world. Moreover, Miłosz's dream "To find my home in one sentence, concise, as if hammered in metal," revealing "an unnamed need for order, for rhythm, for form, which three words are opposed to chaos and nothingness" is thus fulfilled.

(translated by Paulina Uznańska)

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**“The Sense of Form” in the Poetry of Wisława Szymborska and Czesław Miłosz****Keywords: Czesław Miłosz, Wisława Szymborska, Polish poetry of the 20th century, poem****S u m m a r y**

The article addresses the sources behind the poems of Wisława Szymborska and Czesław Miłosz. The focal point of Miłosz’s poetry is the concept of Entirety, which is intertwined with his religious worldview, whereas the world in Szymborska’s poetry lacks a metaphysical structure based on a number of divine certainties. These fundamental differences are observed in the metrical decisions made as the shape of the poem becomes a test for the infinite, remaining outside reality. For both authors “the order, rhythm, form” seem to be the reasons for the existence of poetry and as such protect it from chaos and nothingness. However, Szymborska “thinks in verse” differently from Miłosz, undertaking her own “struggle with a poem.” This aspect of her work is analyzed in the article with reference to “I’m working on the world” and “Vermeer.”

**„Zmysł formy” w poezji Wisławy Szymborskiej i Czesława Miłosza****Słowa kluczowe: Czesław Miłosz, Wisława Szymborska, poezja polska w XX wieku, utwór poetycki****S t r e s z c z e n i e**

Artykuł poszukuje źródeł wiersza Wisławy Szymborskiej i Czesława Miłosza w światopoglądowych wyborach ich autorów: Miłosz dąży do objęcia w słowie Pełni istnienia, które wiąże się z horyzontem religijnym, świat w poezji Szymborskiej natomiast rezygnuje z metafizycznej struktury opartej na boskich gwarancjach. Te fundamentalne dyskusje przenoszą się na poziom decyzji wersyfikacyjnych – u obojga poetów kształt wiersza staje się sprawdzianem dla nieogarnianej, wciąż wymykającej się rzeczywistości, a założone „ład, rytm, forma” stanowi warunek poezji, mającej bronić przeciw chaosowi i nicości. Szymborska jednak „myśli wierszem” w odmienny niż Miłosz sposób, tocząc swą własną „walkę z wierszem”, która ukazana zostaje w artykule na przykładzie analiz dwóch jej tekstów: *Obmyślam świat* oraz *Vermeer*.