

# Janusz Sławiński

---

## New Trends in Polish Poetry (1945-1965)

---

Literary Studies in Poland 7, 47-62

---

1981

Artykuł został zdigitalizowany i opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej [bazhum.muzhp.pl](http://bazhum.muzhp.pl), gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Janusz Sławiński

## New Trends in Polish Poetry (1945–1965)

“Unlikeness. Unlikeness is the only thing that counts in the development of poetry. Outlining contemporary poetry (at any point of time) means showing the connexions and the interdependences between the dissimilarities.”

Zbigniew Bieńkowski has thus formulated a suggestive and thought-provoking idea. We may suppose that this view concerns the way the investigations of critics should be orientated rather than attainable results. We ought to try and identify these “dissimilarities” for only they really count in poetry. But in order to understand and explain their meaning—and a critic is obliged to do so—they should be perceived as part of a system which includes more than just these “dissimilarities.” One “dissimilarity” cannot be judged with reference to another, since they are *ex definitione* incomparable. For any unique attainment a certain recurrence constitutes the explanatory context, for individual innovations—tradition, for a particular kind of poetic diction—stylistic convention.

Each “dissimilarity” is the central point of some situation, which permits it to be easily recognizable and defines its meaning. The development of modern poetry (and that includes Polish poetry) is not only the acquisition of new values which cannot be reduced to any of the existing modes of poetic diction, but also the formation of such situations as may be said to permit the assimilation of the “dissimilarities” and bring them into socio-cultural circulation. Around these “dissimilarities” schools of poetry are formed, new poetics and trends spring up which create an intermediate zone between the various “dissimilarities.” Single “dissimilarities” coexist insofar as they exclude one another. They go to make up the alternative: either—or, whereas poetics, poetic schools or conventions are mutually penetrable,

they can intermingle and overlap, and within a given period they can form what we might call "sums," "products," and "resultants." It is on this level that connexions and contrasts between various types of experiments are established, that they become related or separated, and this the critic has to see if he is to understand any single event in poetry.

It seems to me that he cannot hope to reach what is individual and unique if he does not start by determining the wider scope within which it appears. The only way to find a name for the central value is to define it in terms of its context.

In this way I should like to motivate and justify my own undertaking in the light of the opening quotation. Its aim is to describe certain general trends, which may be seen in present-day Polish poetry. In my opinion these trends go to make up the context for the most significant "dissimilarities" of our poetry. These are not fixed divisions, but trends which may exist side by side within the cadre of the work of one poet, in one collection of poems and even in a single poem. However, each one leads to a different model of poetry. Let us not delay quoting their names: moralistic poetry, linguistic poetry, the poetry of the "liberated imagination," the evocation of tradition.

\*  
\*       \*  
\*

Each of these trends had of course already made its appearance more or less distinctly at an earlier time. Each had its own history during the twenty years following the war, and it would be possible to retell it from the beginning. But it was only after 1956 that they appeared in the shape they are in now. This is then the period that we shall be dealing with. The common denominator for all these different trends is their reference in literary history. This common point of reference is the avant-garde poetic model, and in particular the version shaped by the poetry of Przyboś. This model is the key tradition for all the innovations in present-day poetry. Key tradition—this does not mean one that is fully accepted and followed, but one that is simply unavoidable, that imposes itself as a question to be settled, a problem that must be overcome. All of

the trends of our poetry in recent years came into being by conducting a dialogue with that tradition, by stating their attitude towards it.

This dialogue is furthermore not one with a closed system of principles. The development of Przyboś's poetry—from his war-time poems up to his latest works (*Więcej o manifest*)—continues to add new elements to that dialogue, and as Bienkowski once remarked, it necessitates new oppositions and new acts of self-determination. The impact of his concept of poetry—I mean not only Przyboś's poems but also his theory of poetry—is one of the most arresting facts of postwar literature. His poetic methodology makes imitation impossible. Only someone who imitates his own work, and who treats each problem in the same way, can have imitators; such is the case of Różewicz. Przyboś, who aims at unique solutions, who in every poem reinterprets all his former poems, moving on from one invention to another, cannot be a style-setter. His style is unique, its lasting quality is unmistakably discernible in its changeability, and it cannot be extended so as to become convention. Yet it was Przyboś more than anyone else who determined the shape of the innovations of today's poetry. His influence consists in mobilizing, through his concept of poetical language, all those who follow a programme of opposing this concept, and in forcing disagreement with his own theories to become crystallized (or to be brought out of the state of namelessness, as in the case of "turpism"). In recent years Przyboś has had many opponents. Not all of the anti-Przyboś reactions had a follow-up, and the only ones that count are those which went beyond the first stage of disagreeing, and were transformed into positive propositions, into systems of poetics able to justify their own existence. A relationship based on mere negation in the long run makes for just as great a dependence as a relationship based on imitation. It is still incapable of producing a "dissimilarity."

### Moralistic Poetry

This is the name given to the poetic school which was formed under the influence of the poetry of Różewicz. This school had very clear-cut views in the years 1955–1958, then its distinct character became blurred by other poetic trends. It would be hard to point to a single poet who made his début in those years, which marked

a turning-point in postwar poetry, who was not influenced by this school. Today its limits are not as clearly visible, a great deal of its distinctive features of style have become "common property" and have lost their ties with the poetical system which determined them before. But the main features are still discernible. The name "moralistic poetry" would be devoid of meaning if we understood it as the name of poetry which deals with moral situations. Every kind of poetry, even the most aesthetical, deals with moral situations. But we are concerned with a specific type of poetic diction, with a well-defined method of transposing definite moral issues into the language of poetry. In Różewicz's poetry—from *Niepokój (Anxiety)* right up to *Nic w płaszczu Prospera (Nothing in Prospero's Coat)*—the same situation keeps on recurring, in various forms. He is always concerned with the man who is unable to give his experiences (psychological, social, and philosophical) the form of a coherent and meaningful whole.

In Różewicz's earliest works the biography of the first person singular was well located in space and time. Its non-crystallization was an expression of the impossibility to explain to oneself and to others the horror of the Nazi occupation and one's own survival. At the same time it was an act of protest against these experiences. The possibility of incorporating them in a person's coherent personality would mean that they made sense and could become part of a whole, and were therefore acceptable. For Różewicz they were strictly heterogeneous elements vis-à-vis all that man might experience, and since they could not be assimilated or harmonized, they were doomed to extraneousness and chaos.

However, this was only one aspect of the first person, and though it was dominant it was not the only one. Its other, hidden side was marked by a longing for a clear-cut moral order and the assumption that such an order was possible and attainable. It has been said that the world of Różewicz's poetry extends between the poles of apocalypse and idyll. On the one hand—the horror of the incomprehensible catastrophe, whose consequences (only they are palpable) still remain in the mutilated bodies and deformed souls, and on the other hand—the presentiment of order, and the expectation of a form which will reintegrate the world and redefine it. This is why the first person oscillates between the consciousness of destruction and the "desire for form."

Beginning with *Poemat otwarty* (*Open Poem*)—which followed his works written in 1949–1954—there appeared a new version of this elementary situation. It was ultimately determined in *Formy* (*Forms*) and was from then on always present in Różewicz's poetry (and also in his prose works and plays). For the author of *Niepokój* the shattering of forms and values brought about by the upheaval of the war and the Nazi occupation disturbed the natural, existing order, and demanded negation and protest in the name of some presumed order. But for the author of *Formy* and other later works the world which crumbled into pieces was the only, indisputable, absolute world. To negate it would be a void gesture, and in any case who could make such a demonstration and in the name of what form, since the first person became fragmented in the chaos of the circumstances which determined it? He consists of elements which have become separated from the main structure, of splinters and fragments which exist on their own account, outwit any perceivable whole, and which fall into accidental files and momentary arrangements. Różewicz's lyrical monologue is the voice of someone who cannot shape his personality, who is unable to point to his own limits and who has no identity.

Of course we may see in this a literary equivalent of certain socio-psychological situations typical of modern life. But this concept of the first person in poetry may also be interpreted as a polemic with the avant-garde personality model. Różewicz is against the type of first person who, as in Przyboś's poems, is a stream of activity aimed at the outside world. His philosophy of life expressed in his poetry excludes the lyric personality which emerges as a result of overcoming one's outer and inner determinations, and which organizes itself through purposeful action. Różewicz's lyric hero is anti-avant-garde in that he is totally determined from the outside and submits himself to chaos. His situation is discernible in the style, which I am tempted to call "the rhetoric of helplessness." Rhetoric tension is usually characteristic of diction that puts order into experiences and feelings, and controls them in an organized way. It is an expression of a certain unity of the first person, be it only artificially obtained. In the case of Różewicz's work, it is the other way round: the long enumerations, the repetitions, and the persistent parallelisms which appear in the narrative are ways of preserving the state of incoherence of the subject and they are a witness to his inability

to coalesce; not only do they not negate this state but they also make it wholly incontestable. They are superimposed on the language which itself is a product of that disintegration, on shreds of clumsy statements, where everything is on the same level, without choice or gradation. Różewicz's syntax is devoid of the distinction between principal and subordinate elements. It can only sum them up. The same can be said of his verse, which in the cadre of modern free verse is opposed to Przyboś's versification. The latter's verse-forming operations lead to semantic crystallizations; they release, contrast and grade the meanings of each word sequence. Różewicz's versification, which is suited to the technique of enumeration, places every element on the same level, and at the same time makes them autonomous; they are placed side by side without being integrated.

Moralistic poetry as a type of poetic diction originated in a total rejection of the concept of poetical language of the Cracow avant-garde. The most important fact is that it negates the need to draw a line between poetry and other forms of discourse. The meaning of the opposition: poetry—prose in Peiper's and Przyboś's theories is well known. For Różewicz, poetic diction is not part of an alternative. Just like the lyric hero, who is submerged in the sea of anonymity, in the same way for the author of *Głos anonima* (*The Voice of the Unnamed*) the language of poetry does not have a character of its own and is open to the disorder of any kind of "prose." It is easy to see that Różewicz, who appears to be speaking with three different voices—that of poetry, drama, and narrative prose—  
—in fact uses the same style in each of these genres, a style which we have called "the rhetoric of helplessness." This style is certainly one of the most important discoveries in postwar poetry, but—and this has to be stressed—it is also most exposed to the danger of becoming a convention in a short space of time.

### Linguistic Poetry

Zbigniew Bieńkowski, Miron Białoszewski, Tymoteusz Karpowicz—these are the names that represent its three basic forms. The conviction that the relation: poetry—language is of a dialectical character seems to be common to all of these poets. They consider language to be the main reference system for poetry, and conversely,

that poetry is a testing ground for language. Przyboś's opinion that "poetry is the permanent revisionism of language" and that of Eliot, who believes it to be a reminder of that which is untranslatable in a given language, may be considered as representing the main field of exploration of the above poets. In contemporary Polish poetry, it was they who drew the most far-reaching conclusions from the avant-garde break-through in understanding the role and the obligations of poetry. Far-reaching to such an extent that instead of referring to that model, they stood in opposition to it.

These tendencies which we are now discussing cannot be understood if we naïvely consider language to be the "instrument" of poetry. For the above poets, language is not an instrument which they might want to use to work on an outside reality, but itself a reality, the basic state in which the world exists, which poetry has to analyze, watch with suspicion, denounce or sublimate. This was a complete break from the Romantic (and still existing) concept of language as a form of expressing the self. The question to what extent the poet can or cannot "express himself" in words no longer matters. Language does not represent the interests of the self vis-à-vis the world, but the other way round—it represents the world vis-à-vis the self. It is an outer, objective order, where the self must find a fitting place.

We delude ourselves into believing that we "use" language to attain the goals which we have set for ourselves, when in fact the choice of aims is to a great extent predetermined by the hierarchy of norms and values crystallized in language. We entertain the naïve conviction that our language "serves us," that it obeys our purposes, when all the time we in fact submit ourselves to its rules, which imply specific philosophical attitudes, principles of behaviour, myths and beliefs. Modern poetry considers the struggle to overcome this delusion to be one of its main tasks. It tries to stress the extraneous and alien character of language in relation to the person using it, and it resorts to even the most drastic measures. What is more, it means to control the conventions of language, it wants to become a language which would constantly reinterpret the possibilities of expression.

Miron Białoszewski is fascinated by the peripheries of language usage, such as speech which is on the verge of jabbering, automatic

talking, crippled forms, syntactically uncoordinated series of words, hackneyed phrases which have lost all meaning through constant repetition. His linguistic imagination is attracted above all by that which is inefficient, which is a hindrance in the process of communication, by "noises" which drown the meaning. Ważyk was right in saying that Białoszewski's works show the poetical desire and the grotesque inability to communicate. Putting it more precisely, it is the inability to compose a message according to certain rules of segmentation. The word, the elementary segment of an utterance, is constantly threatened. Sometimes it is broken down into its constituent parts, each of which claims one or several meanings depending on its alleged etymology, sometimes it is absorbed by other words, and its boundaries become more and more obscure, until it dissolves in undividable gibberish. Also the sentence in Białoszewski's poetry is not up to its proper level, it cannot attain a decent standard. Its projected contour disappears in the discontinuity of the anacoluthic syntax, and becomes obliterated even before it has been clearly drawn.

The closest point of reference for these methods is everyday speech in its border-line manifestations: the monotonous rigmarole of patients in a hospital waiting-room, drunken muttering outside a pub, a dispute in a police court, long narratives at the launderette, the peculiar "bilingual," half-formal, half-childish flow of words of low-ranking officials. In Białoszewski's works these not only serve as stylistic models but also provide the situations which, through their anecdotal elements and suggestions of plots and themes, are a reference and a motivation for ways of speaking.

However, Białoszewski's poetry is far from treating language in a naturalistic way. It does not reproduce the shapelessness of speech, but reshapes it. It does not take down the natural incoherence of words and sentences, but an incoherence which is consciously fashioned by the poet, fashioned into a parody. However, Białoszewski does not want to make a parody of different ways of speaking, but of the language system as a whole. A system which is consequently interpreted from the angle of those of its potential realizations which go against the system, of shamefully concealed border-line cases. Białoszewski opposes the word which denominates, expresses something, communicates a meaning, and fits into the categories of grammar

and semantics, to the word which is incapable of fulfilling these functions, which is immature and defective. This opposition is best seen in the poems from *Mylne wzruszenia* (*Illusory Emotions*), in their epigrammatic formulae similar in form to the aphorism, the maxim, and the proverb. The association of the grotesque inefficiency and incoherence of speech with this particular form which is a kind of definition suited for pronouncing moral, psychological or philosophical truths, uncovers the hidden defectiveness of the ways of speaking considered as fine examples of linguistic competence, and discredits the alleged discipline of these model verbal messages.

Tymoteusz Karpowicz is attracted by the paradoxes of the economy of language. His poetry develops to the extreme—and goes as far as to negate—that element of avant-garde poetry which originated from the postulate of “an economical outlay of words.” This postulate was formulated by Peiper, but Przyboś used it to work out a method of dealing with language. It was Przyboś who drew Karpowicz’s attention to the words’ hidden readiness for ambiguity, to their potential ability to take part in several streams of information inscribed in one syntactical sequence. But for Przyboś—or more generally speaking, for the avant-garde—the “economy of word outlay” was a quality that poetry sought to acquire by working against the “natural” non-economy of language. In Karpowicz’s concept, however—and this is a very important point of difference—economy is a state enforced upon poetry by language. His words show that it is impossible to formulate a statement which would point to only one experience or event. He proves that when speaking of one thing we cannot help evoking other things; a word which has been used for a given purpose begins to strive towards other unexpected ends; whether we want it or not, its different meanings crowd in, become entangled and penetrate one another, calling up various ideas at the one time. We are led astray, we lose our ability to distinguish the main meaning from additional ones. Language signs are unswerving in their economy, they always give more than expected, and are obtrusive with their all-round usefulness. When employed once, they behave as if they were used several times over.

Therefore for Karpowicz the economy of language is not an aim, but rather the object of continual suspicion. He doubts the sincerity of words which pretend to be designations. He forces

them to tell the whole truth. He exposes their ambiguity which results from their use in colloquial, literary and proverbial expressions, he traces the resemblance of sounds that go to make up different words, he discloses the unexpected possibilities of making puns on what appear to be the most innocent groups of words, he unmasks the polysemy disguised as an unequivocal textbook definition. Karpowicz's works—and in particular *W imię znaczenia* (*In the Name of Meaning*)—are inquiries into the doings of words and their phraseological groups. However, in these inquiries there is no dividing line between persuasion and coercive measures. The constraining force of the syntax helps to achieve all that is necessary. Especially since in Karpowicz's creative work the pressure is exerted with the help of an instrument with which the words have not yet become familiar. His syntax invents special motivations, constantly playing with the norm, unceremoniously picking and choosing among the rules. Almost every sentence is an amphibology, a construction in which "parts of the sentence" lawlessly exchange syntactic roles, where over and above the ambiguity of words there is ambiguity in the structure of the syntax. The poem resembles a palimpsest where the various semantic layers do not obscure one another but all try to rise to the surface of the text, penetrating, blurring, and drowning one another. And so we have the paradox of the economy of language: the more a message is crammed with meanings, the greater its vagueness. That which for the avant-garde was of unquestionable value now becomes highly equivocal. Peiper and his friends identified economy with definiteness and precision. Where they saw exact likeness, Karpowicz seems to discern a dramatic and insurmountable contradiction. His poetry is based on this contradiction.

Zbigniew Bieńkowski's case is clearly opposed to the previous two. Unlike Białoszewski who is concerned with the defectiveness of language, Bieńkowski is amazed at its excessive efficiency. Unlike Karpowicz who puts the economy of language to the test, Bieńkowski notices above all its lavishness, that "sea of possibilities," as he puts it, which overwhelms the person who is speaking. His poetry tries to cope with this lavishness, it aims at being at the same time its theory and its equivalent, its description and its application. *Wstęp do poetyki* (*Introduction to Poetics*), one of the most amazing

texts to appear in contemporary Polish, is both a linguistic treatise, an exposition of a philosophy of language, and it uses language according to the principles of this philosophy. Not only does it use but it abuses language, and Bieńkowski's linguistic theory justifies this abuse.

According to Bieńkowski, language is not a reality parallel to the world of objects and events. The fundamental and seemingly trivial function of words, that of designating objects, is to him a permanent impossibility. There would be no problem if words had no other functions, if each word reposed on something hard and incontestable. But the snag is that every word evokes other words, that it is a sign of its belonging to the language system, and that when it is placed in a context it actualizes at once its manifold entanglements in the system. It is enough to move it and immediately it calls up not only the possibilities of its various uses, its semantic fields where it can remain, but also all kinds of lexical units which are related to it (from the point of view of etymology, meaning or sound), since every word is the point of intersection of whole rows of other words. The word is so entangled that its reference to reality becomes obscure and is lost. The more precisely we want to define something, the further we move away from it, for as the number of terms increases the autonomous world of relations between words and meanings becomes more complicated and expands, and the original word turns out to be only a "fore-word."

In Bieńkowski's poems this process of language moving away from the object becomes a lyrical plot, the only one of its kind, the events being the relations between words, their connexions and conflicts, alliances and tensions. The words support and motivate one another. One word designates another word, and that word in turn designates other words, etc. Each usage is interpreted by other usages (this leading to abuse), one idiom evokes a second idiom, one expression is verified by other expressions, one meaning is reflected in another, the shape of each word suggests many other shapes thought to be quite similar as well as hidden meanings. It is the manifestation of a staggering lavishness which opposes language to the outside world. It is also a manifestation of speaking competence, so well developed that in the end it is only capable of articulating itself. Therefore this lavishness and this competence are

not very trustworthy. In fact they are an object of constant lack of confidence, since they are an obstacle to communication and do not allow the individual to verbalize his real position among people and things, in social and physical space.

Białoszewski, Karpowicz, Bieńkowski—three different ways of writing poetry. Yet all three of them try to define the same situation of the language, only from different angles. Language under suspicion. They believe this to be a new opportunity for poetry. A chance for poetry as such and for its social “involvement.”

### Liberated Imagination

The programme of the “liberated imagination” (this is Jan Brzękowski’s term) was formulated a few years ago in a well-known discussion initiated by Jerzy Kwiatkowski’s essay *Wizja przeciw równaniu* (*Vision versus Equation*). This programme stood in opposition to the avant-garde poetic model. To the discipline of expression it opposed freedom of poetic imagination, to the poetic image—the right to a lively lyrical enunciation, to indirectness—directness. The weakest point of this somewhat old-fashioned programme was its exemplification. Jerzy Harasymowicz was declared to be the patron of the anti-avant-garde revolution. There was talk of Polish surrealism, which would at last put an end to Przyboś’s dictatorship. But it all turned out to be an ephemeral experience.

All this of course does not imply that Kwiatkowski was not right in what he said. He identified with a remarkable perspicacity one of the trends of the poetry of the young generation, but at that time it was fortune-telling rather than a factual account. The tendencies which the Cracow critic had in mind did not appear till some time later and they were put into practice in a way which had little in common with his examples. It became evident that it was not idyllic fairy stories, or a sentimental and grotesque world of fantasy that were at stake. The successive volumes of poetry of Czachorowski, who was very popular with the youngest generation, Czycz’s *Berenais*, Ireduński’s poems, the poetic débuts of the last two years (Bordowicz, Gąsiorowski, and others)—these are some of the most outstanding testimonies to the existence of a poetic trend which can with all certainty be said to be carrying out the programme

of the "liberated imagination," which they take *à la lettre*. For the poets of this school the slogan of freedom from any rules which would govern the writing of poetry is not a synonym of some positive postulates which might verbalize accepted limitations. They understand the freedom of expression in quite a straightforward way: as an opportunity for escaping limitations, and therefore as a chance for irresponsibility.

Of paramount importance in this poetic circle is the myth of the imagination conceived not as material which is purposefully fashioned but as the sole predisposition for writing poetry, and this predisposition fully determines the shape of the poetical text. There is no room here for a conflict between the imagination and language. The word is a passive conveyor, it is not recalcitrant and causes no problems. The poets of the "liberated imagination" treat words as isolated units, out of which any sequences may be made up at will. They do not take at all into account the words' entanglement in a system, they try to make the manoeuvres of poetry independent of the linguistic expectations of the reader. Naturally complete independence is unattainable. In a line of words which cannot be referred in its entirety to any system of semantic conventions there emerge and vanish various fortuities of words which the reader identifies as poetic information, but these are only chance orientation points which bring into focus the sphere of indistinguishable pieces of information.

Poetry of this kind demands that the reader should consent to the lack of semantic interdependence of words, that he should recognize its right to an unrestricted incomprehensibility and consider his own inability to understand as an aesthetic experience. This inability to understand on the part of the reader should not be a state of passive indifference. The addressee is called to adopt an attitude of not understanding, that is to enter the categories proposed by the poem. This is how we can explain the particular predilection of the poets of the "liberated imagination" for hymnal and invocative forms. In their poetry—that of the youngest poets in particular— the self continuously strives either to change to "we" or to start up a dialogue with a "you." The will to communicate is also expressed in the use of words which refer to some cultural symbols (for example from the Bible), to myths and stereotypes of the "collective

subconsciousness” which are meant to counterbalance the ignored semantic side of their poetry.

We may sympathize with the tendencies of the “liberated imagination” or not, but we should not see in them only deception and misunderstandings. It seems to me that these tendencies are in many ways parallel to for example tashism in painting and just as well founded in an attempt at utmost indifference towards what were up till then the elementary rigours—of geometry and semantics respectively. But in both cases the difficulty consists in that the boundary between innovation and fraud is a fine one. If taken literally, the programme of the “liberated imagination” opens wide opportunities for an easier life. Just as Różewicz’s moralistic poetry deceived whole legions of poets with the simplicity of its code, which was so easy to imitate, so these tendencies which we have discussed are gaining popularity among young “visionaries,” deluding them with the possibility of a poetry in which there is no need for any code.

### The Evocation of Tradition

The poetic trend which we have called “the evocation of tradition” crystallized as a reaction to avant-garde postulates concerning the relationship of innovation to literary tradition. For Przyboś an innovatory poem is one which cuts itself off completely from past experiments in poetry—it neither approves of them nor does it question them—and therefore for him tradition is a vacuum. This ideal of innovation excludes stylization and parody, it excludes in fact any dialogue with accepted traditions, themes and poetic motifs. A poem should create its own unique guarantees, and disregard past guarantees.

The avant-garde postulates were an opportunity for settling accounts with traditionalism, with the overpowering burden of stereotypes, unchanging tastes and habits. They were formulated at a time when traditionalism constituted the main danger for poetry. However, at the present time it is exposed to another, no lesser danger. Passing from one experiment to another, from one novelty to the next, it loses the sense of its historical position, its place in the evolutionary process. By constantly questioning the continuity of this process, it deprives itself of the opportunity to define itself; by not

taking the past into account it runs the risk of not being included in the present. It seems therefore that in the present day apart from encouraging bold innovation, it is important to keep reminding new poetry that it is a link in the historical process, that it does not emerge from a vacuum but from a tradition which is filled with models of poetic diction, and that it has to refer to that tradition if it is to conduct an effective dialogue with the present.

Of those poets who made their appearance around the year 1956, it is Zbigniew Herbert who seems to have understood this situation best. His poetry, which speaks of today's way of understanding history, of the moral sensibility of modern man, of his relationship to the stereotypes of the collective imagination, constantly evokes the signs and symbols of cultural tradition. It is replete with allusions and references to works of art, well-known stories, literary and mythological characters, standardized motifs and styles. The poetic world of Herbert is to a large extent made up of ready-made elements which have a fixed meaning. However, his attitude towards tradition has nothing in common with that of an antiquary who collects relics of the past. His is an active, interpreting attitude. Herbert reconstructs traditional motifs, develops their latent meanings (for example the well-known *Tren Fortynbrasa*—*Fortinbras' Lament*) so that they might take part in the order defined by contemporary socio-cultural experiences. And he double-checks: he looks at tradition through present-day problems, and he interprets these problems in terms of tradition.

Younger poets, such as Jerzy Sito and Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz, who practice the art of poetic stylization and pastiche with great success, approach the evocation of tradition in a more literary, it might even be said a more technical way. In his anthology *Śmierć i miłość* (*Death and Love*) which consists of adaptations—this is a more apt word than translations—of the poems of the English “metaphysical poets,” Sito carried out a most interesting linguistic experiment: in his adaptations he used the language of 16th and 17th century Polish poetry, a language which is a generalized version of the poetic diction of Kochanowski, Sęp Szarzyński, Potocki, and the two Morsztyns. It seems to me that this undertaking is of great value not only because Sito found a good equivalent for the English originals, but above all because he reconstructed for the use of

modern poetry one of the main systems of the Polish poetic tradition.

I used the word "system" though it includes the experiences of different periods of literature—the style of Kochanowski's Renaissance lyrics and of Andrzej Morsztyn's baroque madrigal. But for today's poetic sensibility they are one and the same thing. And what is more, this system contains also the rhetoric of the classical ode alongside the sentimental rococo idyll, pseudo-classicism alongside Norwid. It seems that for today's reader all these elements are on the same level—they are perceived as the homogeneous bloc of non-Romantic tradition. This is then the main dividing line drawn across tradition by contemporary poetical consciousness. In Poland Romanticism was for a long time—for reasons which are all too well known—a monopolistic tradition, which made access to other treasures of the poetic heritage impossible. The Cracow avant-garde's breaking away from that tradition put those treasures within reach. However—once again for well-known reasons—this was of no real interest to the members of the avant-garde. It was only present-day poetry that was able to draw practical conclusions from their antiromantic campaign in that it makes reference to the non-romantic traditions which are claiming their rights more and more pressingly.

\*

\*            \*

The four trends which we have discussed here do not of course give a complete picture of the innovations of present-day Polish poetry. They do not cover all the poets who should be included in an analysis of this kind. However, it seems to me that these fields of exploration are most clearly delimited, and are therefore most suited for being described. But they are not isolated—in fact they penetrate and intersect one another. For example the work of the outstanding poet Stanisław Grochowiak has not even been mentioned here, yet his way of writing poetry can be interpreted as the area of intersection of all the mentioned trends.