

Most poems are short and written in free verse, showing economy of language. The author often constructs his imagery using musical and visual elements to create mood. He frequently refers to different arts and music in the titles of his poems, for example “Malarstwo holenderskie” (Dutch Painting), “Akwarela” (Watercolor), “Piosenka wesołego staruszka” (Song of Happy Oldster), “Etiuda” (Etude), and “Scherzo.” Many poems have intertextual references to painting and literature, for example “Portret damy z kotem” (Portrait of a Lady with a Cat) brings to mind Leonardo da Vinci’s Lady with an Ermine or T. S. Eliot’s “Portrait of a Lady.” However, in Ihnatowicz’s poem the animal, against its hopes and expectations, is not caressed by the lady but jumps from her lap, frightened by the lady’s sudden tragic gesture. The poems refer to literary works, characters, and authors: “Dante u brzegu Styksu” (Dante at the banks of Styx), “Beatrice i Satyr” (Beatrice and Satyr), “Proroctwo Wernyhory” (Wernyhora’s Prophecy), “Romeo i Julia o poranku” (Romeo and Juliet at Dawn) and “Biedna Ofelia” (Poor Ophelia). “Portret autora jako chłopca małego” (A Portrait of the Author as a Petty Farmer) brings to mind Joyce’s title *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, while “Love Song of W. H. Possum,” echoes T. S. Eliot’s “Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.”

Many of Ihnatowicz’s poems resemble scenes from a film, images following images. Here belong “Pejzaż z postaciami” (Landscape with Human Figures), “Dzieci w oknie” (Children at the Window), “W autobusie imagistów (szkice z podróży)” (In the Imagists’ Bus [Sketches from a Journey]). The author refers here to Anglo-American imagism; he juxtaposes bucolic scenes with images of war. White chickens are “white military tanks” and a blooming apple tree suddenly bursts into fire. Images of war recur in many of the poems. At the end of the bus ride an image of solitude awaits: a dark window, the “blind” window of the room where the passenger lives alone. It evokes the personal loneliness of the émigré poet but also, in a more universal sense, human solitude and homelessness. The influence of imagism can also be seen in the way the poet creates his

imagery. He often refers to imagist poets and dedicates his own poems to them (“Il fabro – in memory of Ezra”), or includes epigraphs from T. S. Eliot’s verse (“O mors amabilis amor amarus”).

Many poems create images of solitude, sadness, and death: “Samobójstwo w Paryżu” (Suicide in Paris), “Pieśń samotnego człowieka” (Song of a Lonely Man), “Epitafium bezimiennego” (Epitaph of a Nameless Man), “Melancholia” (Melancholy). From *Pejzaż z postaciami* (1972) to the most recent poems the theme of escaping time also recurs, the time that inescapably slips away every moment, hour, and day. In these poems one observes a search for the essence of time and for its secret meaning. Fr. Ihnatowicz’s poetry is a constant reminder of our transience. Even in his *Ars poetica* he asks, “Where is Horace now?” and cries, “Nothing lasts.” Virtually all themes in this poetry are subordinated to the problem of time determining human existence. The only thing that seems to resist the annihilating power of time is nature.

Finally, Fr. Ihnatowicz’s poems often refer to the Bible either in their titles or allusions, or through direct quotations. The Scripture’s authority is present in the way the poet comments on human existence. These references are often covert, and are occasionally not devoid of irony or even sarcasm.

*Poezje zebrane* is a beautiful volume of poetry and its readers will certainly appreciate the powerful allusive discipline and terse verse of Janusz Ihnatowicz. Δ

## Irresolute Heresiarch Catholicism, Gnosticism and Paganism in the Poetry of Czesław Miłosz

By Charles S. Kraszewski. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012. Endnotes, bibliography. vi + 276 pages. ISBN 978-1-4438-3761-3. Cloth. \$59.99.

### Maja Trochimczyk

Eight years after the death of Czesław Miłosz and one hundred and two years after his birth, the time has perhaps come for critical appraisals

of his life and work, issues that have long been located in the eye of a storm about Miłosz's political and religious affiliations, his patriotism, and his art. This book attempts to do so. Having recently read Miłosz's abundant correspondence (published by Czytelnik in Warsaw in 2008–2011) with Jerzy Giedroyc, the founder and editor of the émigré monthly *Kultura*, fresh in my memory are the insights into the characters and priorities of both writers (as revealed by the letters). As a faithful reader of Miłosz's poetry, I felt intrigued by the subtitle of Kraszewski's book. My own relation to Catholicism (a religion not inculcated in my childhood, but rather consciously chosen in adulthood) and an extensive collection of Christian, Catholic, Gnostic, and mystic writers Kraszewski promised to deal with also piqued my interest. I hoped that Kraszewski found in Miłosz's work what I discovered in the poet's magnificent translations of the Psalms (*Księga Psalmów*, published by KUL in 1982). These are the Psalms worth praying in Polish, they are more inspired than the pedestrian version in the *Biblia Tysiąclecia*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (The Millennium Bible, published by Pallotinum in Poznań in 1984, the translation sanctioned by Polish Catholic bishops for Catholic worship)

Thus I admit bias: I am one of those who, to Kraszewski's dismay, love the "insufferable foolishness" of the "Hymn o Perle" (Hymn of the Pearl) and I am a member of the "People of the Book" who cherish the simpler beauties of Miłosz's craft, his gentle expressions of faith: "What is a man without Your name on his lips? // Your name is like the first breath / and first cry of the newborn" ("Sanctificetur," trans. by Anthony Miłosz, from *Meditations on Divine Names* edited by Maja Trochimczyk, Los Angeles: Moonrise Press, 2012, p.16).

In Miłosz's translations of Biblical poetry and in his own poems I enjoy a confirmation and affirmation of life filled with a faith that has survived against the most insurmountable odds: witnessing the massacres of the Second World War, the Holocaust, and the spiritual disemboweling of Polish survivors struggling to keep their dignity in an inhumane system. I am also quite enamored of Miłosz's portrayals of the peculiar Lithuanian past that exists only in

his memory, just as the Belarusian village of my childhood dwells in my mind.

Kraszewski's goal for this study—both erudite and richly illustrated with poetry translations of his own—becomes clear only on its last pages when the judgment is pronounced: "Whereas we may suggest that the difficult trial of his exile, which cut him off from the Poland he loved, and his ensuing (real or exaggerated) isolation in California, may to some extent explain the violent turning inwards that led to a renewed interest in the inner life of secret knowledge that is the wellspring of Gnosticism, biography is powerless to explain the continuance of the heterodox opinions expressed in the latter volumes of his poetry, published after the re-establishment of freedom in his homeland, and after his return home" (273). Thus, in Kraszewski's eyes, stands the condemned man and poet Miłosz, an "irresolute heresiarch" who refuses to accept a Catholic poet's world view that "centers on the idea of the sense-filled universe" (1). For Kraszewski, Miłosz was not a Catholic poet: "he expresses Manichean thoughts badly, and leaves them at that" (272). The scholar argues against Miłosz's own theory of "inner orthodoxy" that apparently failed to justify the poet's ability to separate his life and presumed "real" beliefs from his art and the "lyrical subject" of his poems. While he engages in various disclaimers, Kraszewski merges Miłosz's life and art, assuming that they are one. As a translator and poet Lillian Vallee remarked to me in 2012, their separation is not an easy task, since Miłosz "does blur that line in much of his work, so that the real Miłosz is the subject and sometimes a split voice in his poetry and prose and the content is often autobiographical." But perhaps such a split should be attempted.

Let us take, as an example, Miłosz's religious interpretation of Igor Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, a 1913 modernist ballet that changed the history of music with its revolutionary innovations of form, harmony, and rhythm used to depict a pagan sacrifice of the spring. Its premiere by 1913 by Diaghilev's *Ballet Russe* ended with a scandal, the audiences objecting to the angular movements of sacrificial virgins, the stylized folk costumes, and the "primitive"

dissonant and percussive music. Stravinsky himself was not a pagan, his adherence to the Russian Orthodox Church of his youth is well known; but as a composer he wrote a “primitivist” work about a pagan rite without wishing to reenact such a rite in reality. Miłosz’s interpretation (the poem is entitled “Pierwsze wykonanie [1913]”) takes his readers well beyond the paganism of Stravinsky into his own preoccupation with the place of Christian faith in modern society. He contrasts the momentary victory of Dionysius, “shining olive-gold among the ruins of heaven” with the departing “ever more pale, bodiless, moon-like” Galilean—a victory of the embodied present over a redeemed future that he inserts into his own *Rite of Spring*. By doing so, the poet criticizes the rule of “earthly delight” in twentieth-century neopagan Europe that abandoned its Christian roots.

The scholar recounts this criticism in his exegesis, yet he soon chooses to use this poem and others like it as if they expressed what Miłosz the man really felt and believed about the world, rather than as poetic interpretations of subjects that were not necessarily elements of Miłosz’s own *credo*. At one point, Kraszewski accuses the poet of succumbing to the same “predatory instincts” that reduced him to being “the singer of the mortal and the erotic, and *basta*.” (184). Indeed, Miłosz’s poetic statements of devouring women and steaks with the same zeal are shockingly profane and Kraszewski comments about the “dismemberment of the female body” (185) are insightful; so are his close readings of many other poems scattered throughout the pages of this perplexing book. So my criticism should be taken with a grain of salt.

The book is organized chronologically: Chapter 1 reviews the poet’s “Youth and War, 1933–1945,” Chapter 2 discusses “The Atlantic Miłosz, 1946–1960,” Chapter 3 enters into details of “Miłosz’s California Exile: 1960–1980,” Chapter 4 takes readers through the before-and-after of the poet’s Nobel prize (“Berkeley and Stockholm”), and Chapter 5 skims over the final twenty-plus years (“A Chaplain of Shades: Berkeley, Kraków, Miłosz’s Final Years”). There is much of interest

throughout these pages, though much to disagree with as well. The scholar weaves extensive webs of commentary in which fragments taken from one poem cast an unexpected light on another. He also situates the poems in a rich context of biographical facts, letters, essays, and ideas borrowed from the Church Fathers (St. Augustine, St. Anselm, and St. Thomas Aquinas), Gnostic writers, Polish Romantic classics like Zygmunt Krasiński, and more. The method of linking poems and ideas that seem, to this reader, to have little in common with each other, stretching too far across the realms of time and ideas, sometimes enlightens and at other times infuriates.

I was disappointed by Kraszewski’s final Chapter 6 (“Miłosz’s Inner Orthodoxy in the Context of Modern Catholic Poets”), the remnant of the project that this book evolved from. Initially, it was to be a comparative study of four Catholic poets, juxtaposing Miłosz with the French Canadian Hector de Saint-Denys Garneau, the Czech Jan Zahradniček, and the German Elizabeth Langgässer. Only the former two remain in the concluding analysis, in the noble company of T. S. Eliot, but without a visit to a writer Miłosz spoke favorably of: Jacques Maritain. Also absent are the voices of Eliot’s near-contemporaries, Paul Claudel and Max Jacob; similarly lacking is an in-depth analysis of the poet’s own contemporaries, his correspondent and friend, the mystical monk Thomas Merton (see, for instance, *Striving toward Being: The Letters of Thomas Merton and Czesław Miłosz*, edited by Robert Faggen, New York, Farrar Straus, 1997) or the “populist” poet, Father Jan Twardowski. Once Kraszewski’s initial plan for a four-part comparison was abandoned, the field of “Catholic” poetry in the conclusion of the study should have been redefined as well. To be “Catholic” in literature may assume a variety of forms. For the mystic Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin it was something else than for the Franciscan Father St. Maximilian Kolbe who was imprisoned in Auschwitz by Germans and died a self-sacrificial death.

It is hard to determine whether Kraszewski’s main purpose of writing and publishing this book is mainly *Agon*, or entering the field of

academic competition, or whether his main purpose is to explore the varieties of Catholic and quasi-Catholic experience. Professor Harold Siegel of Columbia University called Kraszewski's book a "deeply probing, erudite and splendidly written exploration" of a very complex subject. Score one for the scholar. Nonetheless, there are many paths through an oeuvre and a life as rich in contexts and meanings as that of Czesław Miłosz. As Cynthia Haven wrote in an essay about the poet and Father Kolbe, "The Doubter and the Saint" (published in *Poetry* on November 20, 2008): "He [Miłosz] embodied several intriguing dualities: an ethnic Pole born and raised in Lithuania, Miłosz was a Polish Catholic who attended mass but decried Poland's fervent and often nationalistic Catholicism, a Gnostic who greedily seized on life's pleasures instead of renouncing them, a sensual Manichean, a doubter who once said 'all my intellectual impulses are religious,' an exile not leftist enough for postwar Paris but too leftist for Cold War America."

The difficulty of pinning Miłosz down to an ideology or world view is confirmed by Lillian Vallee (2012): "To me, Miłosz was a fusion of much older strata of belief coming directly from Lithuanian culture, even if Polonized, and Christian elements (think Kochanowski who did something very similar), which represents the greater, collective fusion of Lithuanian/Polish, pagan/Christian borderland culture." For me, Miłosz is a Catholic poet who expressed an entire culture and large swatches of personally experienced history in his art. While reading Kraszewski's erudite study, I occasionally was losing sight of the man and the poet among the scholar's interpretations, so much so that I had to stop from time to time and return to reading the poet himself.

The copyeditor and proofreader of this volume did a poor job. Misspellings of Polish words and copyediting inconsistencies (the use of underline, italics, and quotation marks) abound. The absence of an index is a grave error. It could be atoned for if an e-book edition becomes available in a searchable format, where Kraszewski's plethora of references and insights entangled in the complex prose and narrative

structure may become a treasure trove for scholars and students alike. Hopefully, Cambridge Scholars Publishing will become more scholarly in the future and will start from the basics: a style sheet and a Polish-speaking proofreader. Δ

## Remembering Katyn

By Alexander Etkind, Rory Finin, Uilleam Blacker, Julie Fedor, Simon Lewis, Maria Malksoo, and Matilda Mroz. Malden, MA: Polity Press ([www.politybooks.com](http://www.politybooks.com)), 2012. xxviii + 185 pages. Bibliography, Index, Timeline. ISBN 978-0-7456-5577-2. Paper.

### Ewa Thompson

In 2010 Russian émigré Alexander Etkind received a grant of one million euros from the EU coffers. He has used it to assemble a team of junior colleagues in order to create and verbalize an interpretation of conflicts in twentieth-century Eastern and Central Europe. The project of which he is leader and principal investigator is titled "Memory at War: Cultural Dynamics in Poland, Russia, and Ukraine." The project seems to follow in the footsteps of such scholars as Aleida Assmann whose value-free (yet German-oriented) project of remembering past traumas gained acceptance in much of the Western world. In Professor Etkind's case, the orientation is Russian rather than German.

The book begins with a narrative about Polish Prime Minister Tusk's visit to Katyn in 2010. Tusk's office coordinated the visit with the visit to Katyn of Russian president Putin, which demonstrated disregard for the Polish president Lech Kaczyński who was maneuvered out of the meeting. It defines Katyn as "one of the first transnational coordinated mass murders of foreign prisoners by a totalitarian state" (2) and proceeds to describe these mass murders, pointing out that Ukraine and Belarus are replete with graves of not only Poles but virtually all other inhabitants of the region. The fact that the decision center in communist Moscow was particularly intent on destroying the culture of the Polish Catholic *pany* is totally bypassed. The