

Lake Baikal. He was first arrested in 1920, but was released and continued to clandestinely serve Roman Catholics in Siberia until his final arrest and execution in 1937.

Letters

Personal remembrances of Czesław Miłosz

I read with interest the poetic recollection of Miłosz by Professor/Fr. Raymond Gawronski (*SR*, April 2011) and would like to contribute some personal memories in that connection. While my younger sister Anna was an undergraduate at the University of California-Berkeley as a Comparative Literature major in the late 1980s, she was considered as a possible candidate for an assistantship to Miłosz. The poet invited her to his place and basically had one question: "How did you acquire your last name?" (*Skąd Pani ma to nazwisko?*) My sister's answer was, "I acquired it at birth" (*Od urodzenia*). Miłosz never got back to her, and she never became his assistant.

The future Nobel Prize winner knew our grandfather, Jan Chodakiewicz, a fellow student at the law faculty of the Stefan Batory University in Wilno. They met through my grandfather's friend from high school, Lech Beynar (aka Paweł Jasienica). Miłosz was also a high school classmate of my grandmother's oldest brother, Janusz Cieszewski, also a law student at USB. The late Jerzy Przyłuski recalled the cordiality between the two many years later. Janusz Cieszewski was a hardcore Endek. While in the United States Miłosz recoiled from anything that had to do with his personal past.

On the other hand, my personal dealings with Miłosz were invariably positive. While I did my volunteer work at Amnesty International at Berkeley and audited classes at UC Berkeley, I was interested in neither the poet nor in his poetry. Since I was barred from dealing with Poland and the USSR, I focused on Afghanistan, Cambodia, Vietnam, and North Korea. However, whenever we needed something done for Polish prisoners of conscience, my boss, Laola Hironaka, a Catholic nun, a JD and a PhD in Japanese literature, would turn to me and say, "Let's hit Miłosz." And he would invariably come through, including intervention on behalf of Fighting Solidarity (*Solidarność Walcząca*), a courageous group in Poland that did not eschew armed self-defense against communism.

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The Past

by

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1.
God does not make the p a s t, nor death, nor grief,
But he who breaks the law,
Whose depths are so raw,
He, knowing evil, seeks a m n e s i a for relief.
2.
However, he's not like a child inside a stroller,
Crying: "Look, there's a tree,
Only I see it flee. . .
Into the woods!"; the tree remains; the child grows older.
3.
The past exists today as well as beyond the green:
A simple hamlet waits
Not this or that odd place. . .
Whose fields no living man has ever walked or seen.

Przeszłość

1.
Nie Bóg stworzył p r z e s z ł o ś ć i śmierć, i
cierpienia,
Lecz ów, co prawa rwie,
Więc nieznośne mu — dnie;
Więc, czując złe, chciał odepchnąć
s p o m n i e n i a!
2.
Acz nie byłże jak dziecko, co wozem leci,
Powiadając: „O! dąb
Ucieka! . . . w lasu głąb. . .”
— Gdy dąb stoi, wóz z sobą unosi dzieci.
3.
Przeszłość jest i dziś, i te dziś dalej:
Za kołami to wieś
Nie — jakieś tam. . . coś, gdzieś,
Gdzie nigdy ludzie nie bywali! . . .