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PhD dissertation summary

(at) Miłosz' Women. Analytical and interpretative study

In this dissertation I undertook the topic of women who were close to Czesław Miłosz, and whom he immortalised in his works. Referring to both the Nobel laureate's chosen works and his biography written by Andrzej Franaszek and Agnieszka Kosińska, I presented complicated relations between him and his mother Weronika, aunt Gabriela Lipska (née Kunat), whom he would call „cousin Ela”, as well as two wives of the poet: Janina and Carol. In addition, I mentioned, in order to broaden the research field, two very important women for Czesław Miłosz: Jadwiga Waszkiewicz (married name Tomasziewicz) – first adolescent love from the Vilnius times and Jeanne Hersch – Swiss philosopher with Jewish origins, who was the poet's life companion for some time, at the beginning of 1950s.

In my thesis I ask the following research questions:

1. What role did the women, who were close to Czesław Miłosz, play in his life? mythographic perspective.
2. How is the women's presence and Miłosz' attitude to them marked in his works? How helpful is the poet's biography in interpreting this motif?
3. To what extent is the creation of the chosen Czesław Miłosz' works' subject derived from the relations with important women presented by the poet?

The dissertation consists of six chapters preceded by an introduction and followed by conclusions. In the introduction I presented the thesis topic. Chapter first is dedicated to the selected methodology of literary research. In chapter second, I introduce the current reception of the Nobel laureate's work, focusing on the poet's relationships with women.

In my dissertation I used the hermeneutic method, which was complemented with Northrop Frye's mythography assumptions for the purpose of interpretation extension, which enabled the connection of the poet's work with autobiography and biography strands. I included chosen feminist criticism concepts in my considerations as well.

In chapter third I presented the mother of *Issa Valley* author – Weronika Miłoszowa née Kunat. Miłosz had very close relations with his mother, which was particularly reflected in the works he wrote after her death. The Nobelist inherits his mother's life philosophy, he philosophises about human existence – mainly its eschatological dimension - with the thought of her. In the mental connection with her he feels support, security, and understanding. The person of the mother is sacralised, which justifies the juxtaposition with a goddess – mother Earth – Demeter, whose care of the humankind good was of greatest significance.

The fourth chapter of the dissertation is devoted to the mother's first cousin – Gabriela Lipska, née Kunat, whose beauty fascinated Miłosz ever since he was a child. The poet's work and biography facts become the source of knowledge about their long-term complicated relations. Recalling cousin Ela in the works is connected with existential insecurity, reflections related to evanescence, and the saving power of poetry – which was similarly visible in case of the mother. Gabriela was probably his lover – their romance started in Krasnogruda, when Czesław Miłosz was a teenager, and lasted till the period of studies in Vilnius. The poet never officially commented on the relations he shared with the beautiful relative. Study of both mental and emotional connections with the loved ones became the matter of my considerations in that chapter. As I strived to present, basing on the mythography conception taken from Northrop Frye, Gabriela could be compared with Aphrodite, who is a combination of beauty and not entirely happy life.

In the following part of the thesis I focus on the Noble laureate's first wife – Janina Dhuska-Cękańska. The Miłosz' spent fifty years together. Understanding the relations between the two so very different people becomes possible owing to the adduction of biography facts, which form the starting point for the interpretation of the poems devoted to Janina. In the mythographic perspective the poet's first wife is characterised by the features also shared by Hera – Zeus' wife. In that part of the thesis I also draw attention to other women important to Miłosz: Jadwiga Waszkiewicz and Jeanne Hersch.

The last relation I analyse is the *Rescue* author's ten-year happy marriage with Carol Thigpen. Presenting their relationship I prove the poet, at the end of his life, met a person who appeared to be the perfect, forbearing and loving partner to him. After the unexpected death of "Karolina" Miłosz wrote the touching lyric *Orpheus and Eurydice*, where he consciously

related to the mythological strands. The poet recalls the Orphic myth to show that even the greatest artist remains only a human struggling with harsh fortune in the event of a difficult situation. This fact was treated by me as a permission to change the mythographic optics and highlight the poet's exceptional role as a person who is able to express his pain by means of words, and his poetry has a saving power.

Through the analysis of the women present in Miłosz' life and work I came to the following conclusions:

1. It is possible to consider Miłosz' relations with his women through the prism of Greek mythology, which presents the similarities between Miłosz' world and the world of the mythical ruler of Olimp – Zeus.
2. The biography contexts play a vital role in better understanding of the poet's work; they form a significant reference point and allow of a more precise interpretation of works analysed in the dissertation. It should be thereby borne in mind that Czesław Miłosz as an experienced poet plays a peculiar literary game with his readers, and also with himself, searching for the answer to the question who he is as a human and a poet. Undoubtedly, poetry seems to be helpful in search for the answers to these basic questions, in particular the one where the main heroines are the women important to Miłosz: mother, aunt, and his two wives. The loved women, who as literary heroines appear in the Nobel list's works, enable the existential reflections devoted to the modern human condition, the pass of time, eschatological order, the role of a poet and poetry perceived as a saving, but also daimonic, power coming from the dark recesses of the human nature. Through recalling the women characters in his works, the poet wears succeeding masks, becomes an observer, philosophical conversations partner, he is even able to impersonate in a feminine body, being characterised by Proteus psyche complexity. All this makes - within the meaning of radical hermeneutics theses - the unequivocal interpretation of the issues touched in the analysed poems not entirely possible.
3. The persona in Miłosz' poems is characterised by wisdom, whose symptoms are manifested in philosophical reflections and constantly asked questions. The poet, like a demiurge, creates his own literary world, in which he constantly looks at himself as if it were a mirror. In that world, as I strived to present in the present dissertation, women play a vital role. The omni-present literary super-ego in the works of *Unattainable Earth* author constitutes to the fact that Miłosz, like Zeus on literary Olimp, is the main protagonist of the works I analyse, the indisputable, most important

centre, where women, even those dearest to his heart and presented with fondness, and even affection, are de facto treated instrumentally, becoming fodder to his literary passions and ambitions.

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