

Marek K. Siwiec, *Los, zło, tajemnica: ku twórczym źródłom poezji Aleksandra Wata i Czesława Miłosza* [Fate, evil, mystery. Toward the Creative Sources of Aleksander Wat's and Czesław Miłosz's Poetry], Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo Akademii Bydgoskiej im. Kazimierza Wielkiego 2005, 304 pp.

The content of the book is well indicated by its title. As far as the content is concerned it is about approaching a primordial experience of three realities – fate, evil, mystery, all of which, as objects of experiential being (existenziell), determine the deepest meaning of philosophy as well as poetry. Regarding the latter, this experience will be revealed particularly through poetry which can, without a doubt, be named philosophical. Its depth turns out to be the more poignant the more it tries to face the dramatic and quite often tragic experiences of our times. Thus, one is not surprised by the choice made by two great poets, whose works have become particularly significant as evidence of the traumatic adventures of 20th century man.

However, before Marek K. Siwiec moves on to analyse their works, in the first part of his book, *Towards the creative sources and philosophical perspectives – fate, evil, mystery*, he presents his methodological assumptions and makes reference to the philosophical theories which, without doubt, affected both poets. As early as the *Introduction* we find specified the significant notion of ‘new experience’ (this term derives from Miłosz’s poem – ‘we try to name the new experience’), and it is suggested that we distinguish between ‘experiential’ (existenziell) and ‘existential’ (existenzial), as well as between ‘being’ (experiential) and ‘being’ (existenzial). Then in chapters 1 to 3 of Part 1 we find considerations, reaching right back to antiquity, concerning being, astonishment, fate and evil and which end with a presentation of the views of Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Ricoeur. It seems to me that the author of the book follows Heidegger’s language too slavishly. Since he didn’t dare to keep his distance from this terminology, his conceptions are as hermetic as Heidegger’s.

Philosophy and poetry are fields of creativity that touch the mystery of *being*, and being, very deeply. As a matter of fact their basic source is the same. Even if we find in poetry different philosophical influences (which are presented by Wat and Miłosz) such philosophy doesn’t derive from philosophical influences but from autonomous experience. However, converted by the internal, mysterious work of the poet, it obtains a specific transvaluation which cannot be predicted before starting the work. According to Wat: „Every genuine writer has a feeling of the value of his work only when he notices the overriding appearance of something that he did not have in mind before writing, and his anointing is only given to him in the conscious or unconscious feeling of this secret acquisition...” (quoted by Siwiec, p. 113).

However, all the subjects indicated by the title of the book are taken into consideration. The question of evil is highlighted first. In Wat’s poetry the question of evil has various faces. Chapter 5, which is devoted to the question of evil, begins with

pain and fate. „Pain is only the herald, the envoy of fate. Nevertheless fate remains a certain existential possibility which can be realized in many ways. Pain is the most stabbing of these possibilities. But even an exceptionally nasty fate – while a man is still alive – always appears to keep something up its sleeve. Maybe the irony of fate consists in this” (p. 126). We have to bear in mind that Wat’s pain is not only a spiritual experience, but also an extreme physical pain caused by the serious diseases that plagued him. „The arrival of a pain when it is knocking on my bone like on the door. / Like fate. With a bony finger until I give up.” This quotation, derives from the first stanza of *Nocturne 1*, from the cycle *Nocturnes*, and is masterfully analyzed by the author.

The second *Nocturne* is interpreted by the author as an expression of a spiritual rather than a physical pain, a pain which culminates in the sense of rejection. It seems to me that this poem can be understood in another way – as an expression caused by the profanation of values including, most of all, religious ones („the Host’s ashes scattered on the floor / and the muddy peasant’s footsteps on them”), and as expressing the hope of regaining peace in God („where one burns oneself with God in flames”) (p. 128).

In the shocking *Nocturne 3* — whose beginning clearly refers to Nietzsche’s famous poem – the mysterious word *This* appears. Milosz will give his book of poetry and the most brilliant of his poems the title *This* (Milosz, *This*, 2004). However, in Wat’s poetry „This”, despite its metaphorical meaning, has a concrete shape, which is downright tangible: „This / the night screams. / This the night screams / Although its mouth / is plastered”. Siwiec claims, rightly, that „in the poem the term „This” represents primordial depth” (p. 130). But, the interpretation of this depth can evoke certain doubts. On one hand „This” is treated as a source of powerlessness and hopelessness. But the scream of „This” contains also a certain absolute moment. This leads the author to link the „This” with the terms which Plotinus used to refer to the Absolute, unspoken, radically transcendent. Thus, „This” approaches pure negativity. It appears to me that despite this negative indication, which is common to evil and to Plotinus’ *Hen*, one cannot find here a common denominator. If „... the special „This” refers to the primordial depth of the experience of evil, which escapes understanding” (p. 138), it can in no way be identified with Plotinus’s unspoken *This*, nor with *Hen*, the source of all good and beauty. In no way can the night’s scream of suffering be reconciled with the ecstatic experience of the Absolute, of which Plotinus spoke. In other words: Nietzsche’s nothingness is not the same as the NOTHINGNESS of Plotinus or Pseudo-Dionysus.

The chapter entitled „Existence in the face of death and towards mystery” completes the consideration of Wat’s poetry. This is a very significant chapter. It concerns those matters which are existentially the most important and, additionally, considers them in discussion with the most prominent philosophers: Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Heidegger. The crucial subject is death, which, in the poem *What with, what?*, is in a sense specified as agony but also as opening a perspective onto

mystery and immortality. The martyrdom of Christ constitutes a culmination and, in a sense, a climax. From this perspective the problem of evil and suffering is also explained. Thanks to His suffering, Christ, in a way, anticipated, or foresaw all that might happen in a man's fate. 'He was dying while his most faithful apostles were snoring. The martyrdom of the Cross was only a repetition,, not only in a supernatural but also in a natural dimension. What is in the human soul has been already done in the garden of Gethsemane' (A. Wat, *Diary without vowels*, pp. 67-68, quoted on pp. 186-187).

The third part of the book is devoted to Miłosz. Its first chapter, entitled *Philosophy as Philo-sofia, poetry and the thread ... of its fate*, is devoted, among other things, to an analysis of one of Miłosz's most beautiful (in my opinion) poems, i.e. *Spell*. By the way, we can find out here about Miłosz's attitude to philosophy, which he studied deeply, and also to the sources that philosophy and poetry have in common. The situation seems to be similar to that of Wat. In a talk with prof. Fiut, Miłosz said: „My reading was very extensive, philosophical and so on. However, when expressed in poetry and poems, this was because of pain. Only because of personal experience of these matters. It was not because I wanted to develop some theoretic philosophy. The philosophy simply grew out of pain.” (p. 193). This philosophy consists of Nietzsche's experience of „the death of God” and of reflection on Plato's Eros and on commonly valid ideas, which say how things should be. And lastly, it consists in reflection on how everything passes – time, fate – the last, in relation to Heidegger's thought. However, we can find particular philosophical issues in considerations regarding evil. In this context we should mention the analysis of the poignant poem *This*. A poem of confession which shows the most mysterious sources of poetic experience. But is this just, as Siwiec suggests, the experience of evil? It seems that there is something more hidden here, maybe a sense of the deepest truth about reality: „This is when the son of the king is about to go to town and he can see the world / in truth: misery, illness, aging and death” (*This*, p. 213). Finally, the poet comes across the strong wall which „does not give in to any of our begging” (p. 213). Can the poem *Meaning* (*When am I going to die?*), which is equally remarkable, but is not analyzed in this book, be considered as a counterpoint to *THIS*?

Marian Zdziechowski's views were particularly important for Miłosz in his reflections on evil. Zdziechowski was born in 1861, and died in 1938; he was one of the best known Polish philosophers in Europe; his views on Christianity did not agree with the official doctrine of the Church; he combined an interest in Western philosophy and literature with an interest in Russian literature and religious thought; he was interested especially in the question of evil and grasped it with reference to Gnostic and Manichean thought, as well as Saint Augustine and Schopenhauer; he was also a Professor at Vilnius University, where Miłosz met him; Miłosz devoted a poem to him, entitled *Zdziechowski*, which was analyzed by Siwiec. The author of the book under review has concentrated on these views, showing references to them

in Milosz's poems (for example in the beautiful poem *To Mrs. Professor in defense of the cat's honour and not only*). The philosophy of History has a close relation to theodicy. Here Milosz's masters were Hegel and his Marxist devotee, a friend of Milosz's – Tadeusz Kronski. His influence was already highlighted in *Treatise on Poetry*, particularly in the extensive third part, *World Spirit (Weltgeist)*. In the last chapter of Siwiec's book, the question of evil comes back once again, this time enriched by reflections on the mystery of creative being and on the price paid by a poet for penetrating „the essence of monstrosity” (Milosz, *Search*, p. 265).

This book by Marek Kazimierz Siwiec deserves high recognition. The excellent analyses of Wat's and Milosz's poems allow the reader to penetrate their meaning deeply, to experience (if this is possible at all) the depth of their primordial experience, to ascertain their authentically philosophical character. To elicit this and to show it in a clear way is an impressive accomplishment by the author. The reason for drawing a connection between Wat and Milosz has proved to be obvious: „Both poets, in a sense, have experienced a similar spiritual path, in which the turning moment is *being*, i.e. opening to mystery through the experience of evil” (p. 27).

(transl. Anna Julia Siwiec)

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Piotr Sikora, *Słowa i zbawienie. Dyskurs religijny w perspektywie filozofii Hilarego Putnama* [Words and salvation. Religious discourse in the perspective of Hilary Putnam's philosophy], Kraków: Universitas 2004, 330 pp.

Hilary Putnam's Philosophy in the Battle for the Rationality of Religious Discourse

Does religious discourse make sense? Is it possible to use rational arguments in discussions about God and faith in God? Do notions used in religious thought function in the same way as notions used in other areas of human intellectual activity? Is it necessary to believe in God in order to take part in serious disputes about religious matters? These and similar questions seem to remain open to philosophical debate and they are as interesting as ever for one who would like to keep the conversation going in theology and philosophy of religion. And what is more, they are important, not only from a philosophical point of view, but also from a, so to speak, cultural perspective. Especially nowadays when we ask about the role of religion and its place in the contemporary world.

Sikora's book is an excellent example of philosophical work in which certain arguments and notions coming from philosophical discourse serve as tools for solv-