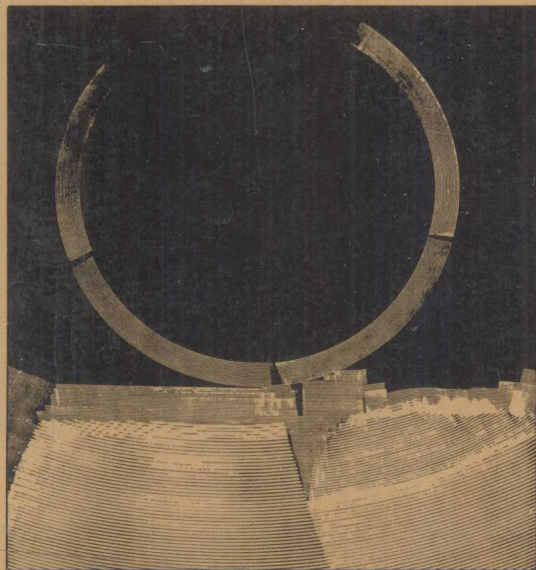


An Anthology
Selected and Edited by

CZESLAW MILOSZ



POSTWAR
POLISH POETRY

NEW, EXPANDED EDITION

1712.2 / M 661

POSTWAR POLISH POETRY

An Anthology
Selected and Edited by

CZESŁAW MIŁOSZ

Third, Expanded Edition

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
Berkeley Los Angeles London

University of California Press
Berkeley and Los Angeles, California
University of California Press, Ltd.
London, England

First edition 1965 by Doubleday
Second edition 1970 by Penguin Books
Third edition 1983 by University of California Press
Published by arrangement with Doubleday & Company, Inc.
© Czesław Miłosz, 1965, 1983

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Main entry under title:
Postwar Polish poetry.

1. Polish poetry—20th century—Translations into English. 2. English poetry—Translations from Polish.

I. Miłosz, Czesław.

PG7445.E3P67 1983 891.8'517'08 82-16084

ISBN 0-520-04475-4

ISBN 0-520-04476-2 (pbk.)

2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

The following poems are reproduced here with the kind permission of *Encounter*, London:

"And Even, Even If They Take Away the Stove," "A Ballad of Going Down to the Store," "Self-Portrait as Felt," "Garwolin—a Town for Ever," and "My Jacobean Fatigues," all by Miron Białoszewski and first published in *Encounter*, February 1958. © 1958 by Encounter Ltd.

"Elegy of Fortinbras," by Zbigniew Herbert and first published in *Encounter*, August 1961. © 1961 by Encounter Ltd.

"Throughout Our Lands," by Czesław Miłosz and first published in *Encounter*, February 1964. © 1964 by Encounter Ltd.

The following poems are reproduced here with the kind permission of the *Observer*, London:

"The Return of the Proconsul," "The Tongue," "The Stone," "Mythology," and "The Fathers of a Star," all by Zbigniew Herbert and first published in the *Observer*, September 2, 1962. © 1962 by the *Observer*, Limited.

All the poems by Witold Gombrowicz, Anna Świrszczyńska, Stanisław Barańczak, and Adam Zagajewski are new to this third edition. The poems "From Songs of a Wanderer," by Aleksander Wat; "A Great Number," "The Joy of Writing," "Utopia," "Autotomy," "Letters of the Dead," "Every Case," and "Laughter" by Wisława Szymborska; and "The Envoy of Mr. Cogito" by Zbigniew Herbert are also new to this edition.

The two monologues from *The Marriage* are from Louis Iribarne's translation of the play, originally published by Grove Press, Inc. (1969) and Calder & Boyars Ltd. (1971); they have been revised by the translator for the present anthology. © 1969 by Grove Press, Inc., © 1971 by Calder & Boyars Ltd., © 1982 by Louis Iribarne.

The translations of the poems from *Building the Barricade*, and the note, "From the Author," were first published in the bilingual edition of *Building the Barricade*, poems of Anna Świrszczyńska translated by Magnus Jan Krynski and Robert A. Maguire (Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1979). Translations © 1979 by Magnus Jan Krynski and Robert A. Maguire.

The translation of "The Envoy of Mr. Cogito," by Zbigniew Herbert, was first published in *Selected Poems of Zbigniew Herbert*, translated by Bogdana and John Carpenter (Oxford University Press, 1977). © 1977 by Bogdana and John Carpenter.

The translations of "If You Have to Scream, Please Do It Quietly" and "If Porcelain, Then Only the Kind," by Stanisław Barańczak, were first published in *Under My Own Roof*, poems of Stanisław Barańczak translated by Frank Kujawinski (Mr. Cogito Press, 1980). © 1980 by Mr. Cogito Press.

The translations of "The Humane Conditions," "Never Really," and "Those Men, So Powerful," by Stanisław Barańczak, were first published in *The New York Arts Journal*, no. 23 (1981). © 1981 by Magnus Jan Krynski and Robert A. Maguire.

The translations of "Freedom," "I Talked to a Frenchman," and "Verses About Poland," by Adam Zagajewski, were first published in *Witness out of Silence: Polish Poets Fighting for Freedom*, translated by Antony Graham (Poets' and Painters' Press, 1980). © 1980 by Poets' and Painters' Press.

Czesław Miłosz was born in Lithuania in 1911. A few years later, his father, an engineer, moved the family to Russia, but after World War I he elected to live in Poland, and Miłosz grew up in Wilno, attending Catholic schools there. At college, like many young Poles of his generation, he joined literary-political groups that were influenced by Marxism. He began to write poetry seriously while he was living in Paris, where he came to know his cousin, a French poet, Oscar de L. Milosz. During World War II he worked in Warsaw as writer and editor for the Resistance movement publications. In the first postwar years he was secretary at the Polish Embassy in Washington. In 1951 he left Poland and after ten years in Paris came to the United States where he is now Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures, Emeritus, at the University of California, Berkeley. In 1980 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Other books by Czesław Miłosz available from the University of California Press are *The History of Polish Literature*, *Emperor of The Earth* (essays), and *Native Realm* (memoirs).

PREFACE
TO THE THIRD EDITION

THE first edition of this anthology appeared in 1965. It was soon sold out and followed by a second edition, published in England. Subsequently, I was to learn from friends of mine, American poets who in the sixties had been at the outset of their literary careers, that the book had an impact on their work then. It was well received by teachers and students of literature. All this suggests that its reissue, at the initiative of the University of California Press, is justified.

This is an expanded edition. I have added some poems by authors who were already represented and a few by new names. As I said in my first preface, the anthology is not meant to rank the relative merit of authors by allotting them more or less space. Translatability and the editor's whim were more decisive. That whimsical character of the whole is even more pronounced in this edition, and I readily accept the reproach of arbitrariness.

Postwar Polish poetry has gone through several phases marked by changes in the amount of political control. Censorship was relatively tolerant in the years 1945-1949, sterilizing and debasing between 1949 and 1956, then again relaxed but growing unpredictable through the sixties and seventies. The victory of Solidarity in August 1980 opened, for a short time, completely new vistas. The coup of December 1981 closed that chapter; it is too early to predict the future of poetry, which by its nature is a rebellious force.

In expanding the anthology, I translated several

PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

poems especially for the occasion, and I wish to thank my colleague, poet and professor Leonard Nathan, for his assistance in reading and correcting the new material. I decided also to include some English versions done by others and published in separate collections. Thus, all translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

Berkeley, 1982

PREFACE

I WISH to explain in a few words why and how I made this anthology. The underlying motive, as I see it, was my distrust of a poetry which indulges in negation and in a sterile anger at the world. Man confronted with mechanisms beyond his control is a loser until he learns that what seemed to crush him was, in fact, a necessary trial to open a new dimension and to prepare his mind to cope with unheard-of circumstances. This, in my opinion, is what has happened in contemporary Polish poetry. A historical steam-roller has gone several times through a country whose geographical location, between Germany and Russia, is not particularly enviable. Yet the poet emerges perhaps more energetic, better prepared to assume tasks assigned to him by the human condition, than is his Western colleague. One can blame the Polish poet for his irony, sometimes verging on cynicism. Irony, however, for better or worse, is an ingredient of modern poetry everywhere and cannot be separated from the purpose it serves. As for this purpose, elegant scepticism and the will to defend the basic values of man's existence are not one and the same thing.

The anthology is not conceived as an 'image' of contemporary Polish poetry. To make such a claim one would have to allot space to every single poet of talent, a task I found impossible. Some, fine craftsmen, are completely untranslatable, whereas others can be translated without betraying the original. I doubt whether Polish syllabo-tonic verse ('feet' within a line of counted syllables) can be rendered in English. Consequently,

PREFACE

there is in my book a distortion of perspective, as poets who use the traditional metre could hardly be included. It is true, however, that in the last decades they have been less and less numerous; the younger generation tends to practise a kind of asceticism or 'anti-poetry'; thus the fluidity of rocking rhythms and rhymes is usually abandoned. Generally speaking, adaptability to English determined to a large extent the number of poems each writer has been allotted.

I limited the scope of the anthology to poets who are living, with one exception. The stress is laid upon poems published since 1956, a date when the lifting of censorship and the breakdown of absurd doctrines provoked a real explosion of new schools and talents. Here, of course, I make several exceptions, going back sometimes as far as the years of World War II or the years preceding it. Poems were judged on merit alone and I did not apply any discrimination as to the views of their authors or their political status. Neither did I examine their passports; no clear-cut division between the poets living abroad and those at home is apparent in Polish literature, in contrast to what occurred in Russian literature. Since Polish poets have been influencing each other across the borders, their present residence is not a decisive factor.

A reader could be puzzled, I would imagine, by the character of this poetry and be curious about its literary kinships. Its mixture of macabre and humorous elements, its preoccupation less with the ego than with dramas of history, the relish with which it handles and remodels moral maxims did not appear all of a sudden in our time; several centuries of native verse, baroque perhaps by the very nature of the language, are behind it. Italian and

PREFACE

French influences, to mention the most significant in the past, were modified accordingly. And as every poetic current is embedded in local traditions even if it absorbs a great deal from abroad, the pattern has been repeated up to this day. Rebellious French writers have exerted a strong influence since the end of the nineteenth century when the first translations of Arthur Rimbaud were published. Yet the work of one patron and martyr of modern Polish verse, Cyprian Norwid (1821-83), has been leading poets in a direction opposite to that of the French. Norwid, slighted and rejected in his lifetime, was a poet of anthropological structures; he confronted the industrial era with the Mediterranean civilizations of the past; the ironic wisdom of that downtrodden man, an emigré in Italy, in New York, in Paris, overcame subjectivism. Today Polish poetry is the result of a distillation of themes and forms, conducted by successive vanguards. Great conciseness is often achieved, and very short poems contain intricate meanings. I must admit I am partial to a poetry that sometimes attains the calligraphic quality of an ideogram. To my surprise I discovered it translates better than long poems, as if the reduction of images and metaphors to a bare minimum made it more universal and less inclined to be trapped in a linguistic laboratory.

Poets of each country resemble an eighteenth-century freemasonic lodge, with its rites, rivalries and friendships. Being a member of such a lodge myself, I am glad to act as its representative abroad. The majority of the authors in the anthology are younger than myself and to introduce them is particularly pleasant. I hope my fellow poets will not hold a grudge against me for not giving

PREFACE

some of them a more prominent place. Translations should at least be adequate, and it is better not to attempt what cannot be done.

I am not a native English speaker and I do not trust my ear, so I had to rely upon the help and control of those who have spoken English from childhood; poetry, after all, always draws upon the language of one's childhood. I wish to thank Mac Goodman, Lawrence Davis, Reuel Wilson, and Richard Lourie for the long debates we had over one sentence or, quite often, over one word. Two poems of Slonimski and one of Jastrun ("Remembrance") were given definitive shape by Lawrence Davis. Some poems were translated by Peter Dale Scott with my minor assistance and are marked accordingly.

1965

CONTENTS

<i>Preface to the Third Edition</i>	ix
<i>Preface</i>	xi
 LEOPOLD STAFF	
Foundations	2
The Bridge	2
Three Towns	2
 ANTONI SŁONIMSKI	
Hamletism	6
To the Germans	6
Defence of the Moon	7
 JAROSŁAW IWASZKIEWICZ	
Quentin Matsys	10
 KAZIMIERZ WIERZYŃSKI	
A Word to Orphists	14
 ALEKSANDER WAT	
Before Breughel the Elder	18
To Be a Mouse	19
From Persian Parables	20
A Flamingo's Dream	21
From 'Notes Written in Obory'	21
Arithmetic	22
If the Word 'Exists'	23
Notes to the Books of the Old Testament	23
From 'Songs of a Wanderer'	28
 JULIAN PRZYBÓŚ	
Mother	36
On the Shore	37
 MIECZYŚLAW JASTRUN	
Remembrance	40
Man	41
A Woman Who Suddenly Entered the Room	41
Beyond Time	42
 WITOLD GOMBROWICZ	
Two Monologues from <i>The Marriage</i>	44

CONTENTS

ADAM WAŻYK	
Sketch for a Memoir	52
An Attempt	54
A Search	55
A Pre-Columbian Sculpture	56
ANNA ŚWIRSZCZYŃSKA	
I Knocked My Head Against the Wall	58
I Am Panting	59
Kill Me	59
A Woman Talks to Her Thigh	59
Song of Plenitude	62
She Does Not Remember	63
The Second Madrigal	64
The Old Woman	64
The Same Inside	65
From <i>Building the Barricade</i>	66
Building the Barricade	66
He Steals Furs	67
Two Hunchbacks	67
A Woman Said to Her Neighbor	67
It Smashes Barricades	68
Twenty of My Sons	68
I've Been Waiting These Thirty Years	69
From the Author	70
CZESŁAW MIŁOŚZ	
Dedication	74
A Poor Christian Looks at the Ghetto	75
A Song on the End of the World	76
From 'Throughout Our Lands'	77
Advice	80
From 'Bobo's Metamorphosis'	82
TADEUSZ RÓŻEWICZ	
In the Middle of Life	86
The Apple	88
Playing Horses	89
The Wall	90
A Voice	91
Albumen	91
Transformations	93
Leave Us Alone	94
The Deposition of the Burden	94
To the Heart	95
A Sketch for a Modern Love Poem	96

CONTENTS

TYMOTEUSZ KARPOWICZ	
The Pencil's Dream	100
A Lesson of Silence	100
Love	101
Turns	102
MIRON BIAŁOSZEWSKI	
And Even, Even If They Take Away the Stove	104
A Ballad of Going Down to the Store	104
Garwolin—a Town for Ever	105
Self-Portrait as Felt	106
My Jacobean Fatigues	107
WISŁAWA SZYMBORSKA	
I Am Too Near	110
A Great Number	111
The Joy of Writing	112
Utopia	113
Autotomy	115
Letters of the Dead	116
Every Case	117
Laughter	118
ZBIGNIEW HERBERT	
At the Gate of the Valley	122
Apollo and Marsyas	124
The Rain	126
Jonah	128
Our Fear	130
The Pebble	131
Revelation	132
Study of the Object	134
A Naked Town	138
The Fathers of a Star	140
Elegy of Fortinbras	141
The Return of the Proconsul	142
A Halt	144
A Wooden Die	144
The Tongue	145
From Mythology	145
The End of a Dynasty	146
The Emperor's Dream	146
The Envoy of Mr. Cogito	147
TADEUSZ NOWAK	
I Leave Myself	152

CONTENTS

BOGDAN CZAYKOWSKI	
A Prayer	154
A Revolt in Verse	155
JERZY HARASYMOWICZ	
A Green Lowland of Pianos	158
The Thistle	159
Leda and the Swan	160
Sister	161
STANISŁAW GROCHOWIAK	
The Village Cinema	166
A Short Fairy Tale	166
To a Lady	167
Clean Men	168
Painting	168
The Breasts of the Queen Are Turned out of Wood	170
When Nothing Remains	171
JAROSŁAW MAREK RYMKIEWICZ	
Spinoza Was a Bee	174
ERNEST BRYLL	
Nike	176
A Ballad of the Bayonet	177
Leviathan	178
URSZULA KOZIOŁ	
Alarum	180
STANISŁAW BARAŃCZAK	
If You Have to Scream, <i>Please</i> Do It Quietly	184
The Humane Conditions	184
Never Really	185
Those Men, So Powerful	186
If Porcelain, Then Only the Kind	187
ADAM ZAGA JEWSKI	
Freedom	190
I Talked to a Frenchman	190
Verses About Poland	191

LEOPOLD STAFF

(1878-1957)

STAFF's name is usually associated with the 'Young Poland' movement which prior to World War I revolutionized Polish poetry. After that time, he accompanied several generations of poets, teaching them craft, but even more learning from them and constantly changing his technique. A man of broad humanist education, he directed before 1914 an excellent series, 'Symposium', for one of the publishing houses, in which, among other authors, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and Cardinal Newman appeared. An amusing detail indicative of the syncretic mood of the period is that he himself simultaneously translated Nietzsche and the *Flowers* of Saint Francis. His translations from Latin, Italian, French and German, both in verse and in prose, are a durable achievement. I used to visit him during the last war in Nazi-occupied Warsaw. A gentle old man with a goatee, he was venerated by much younger poets for his passionate interest in their work, his optimism – very necessary at that time – and the poems he sent to underground publications. After 1945 Staff profited considerably from his friendships with very young poets, then entering the literary scene, and, being open to their judgments, attained his long-sought ideal: complete simplicity of form. The poems which follow belong to his last phase. Though he is no longer living, there is no doubt as to his place among the poets of today.

LEOPOLD STAFF

Foundations

I BUILT on the sand
And it tumbled down,
I built on a rock
And it tumbled down.
Now when I build, I shall begin
With the smoke from the chimney.

The Bridge

I DIDN'T believe,
Standing on the bank of a river
Which was wide and swift,
That I would cross that bridge
Plaited from thin, fragile reeds
Fastened with bast.
I walked delicately as a butterfly
And heavily as an elephant,
I walked surely as a dancer
And wavered like a blind man.
I didn't believe that I would cross that bridge,
And now that I am standing on the other side,
I don't believe I crossed it.

Three Towns

THREE small towns,
So small that all of them
Could be contained in one . . .

THREE TOWNS

They are not on the map.
They were destroyed in the war,
For in them lived people
Who were hard-working, quiet,
Peace-loving.

O tepid, indifferent brothers!
Why does none of you look for those towns?
How poor is the man who
Asks no questions.