METAPHYSICS OF LITERATURE
THE CASE OF ANTONI MATUSZKIEWICZ

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1.

I was supposed to wander around topics, but it turned out that there is basically only one topic: a man towards God, divinity in humans, and against this background – friendship, love and other secret bonds connecting us with each other and space. I was supposed to go from one book by Antoni Matuszkiewicz to another and add some things, but here you can clearly see that there is nothing to add, as the whole has been ready and given since the beginning. This is a poet of his own voice and one topic, a poet of consequence and mystical stubbornness, however weird it sounds. And it sounds weird, old-fashioned, firm, although ethereal and amazingly delicate at the same time. Because this is the voice of a subtle teacher, a sage pointing to the surrounding truth with subtle movements of the word. Each next word is to add something to the sense of the truth, awake it in the reader. Compared to this truth everything else fades and there is a question, what ‘everything else’ is, if it exists. Existence as a primary injury that needs to be healed with words, for which you need to find justification, compensation. And there are
answers to the question of existence, there is search for sense in between words, which sound and look as if they were reflections of a super-word, super-sense.

And it is not about symbolism, discussed by many other kinds of poetics before, Matuszkiewicz, in his approach to words, seems too aware, already modernistic, modern. Writing is a spiritual practice inspired, indeed, with symbolism, yet transcending it, not closing itself in precisely calculated measures. To be beyond the measures (of this or that kind of poetics) because there is something more important than the measures of poetry – this is what this voice is about the most. Therefore, an average reader is so surprised here. The world has not heard about poetic spiritual practices for a long time now. Where did this weirdo come from, why is he so different?

It seems to me, in simple words, that this modernistic, vanguard line of the poem was superimposed by nontrivial spiritual zeal. It is as if a modern artist tried to combine in one record an insightful metaphor with something perennial, something like mystic spiritual formation. With every poem I have an impression of the presence of a man, I see an outline of a person, a man of words measuring out every word very precisely, carving out a new metaphor, but a man of words wearing a habit of a monk. And here the paradox of this character is growing, as the precision of the mind is accompanied by the profligacy of feelings; because numerous times a methodologically forged metaphor hides an underlying emotion so strong that it almost blasts the reasonable order out of that metaphor. As if in each ‘from-to’ of a heuristic situation of a poem there was as slot, openness to co-importance and compassion, and the writing, circulating around a secret anxiety, would point rather to the secret than to the anxiety.

Here are the sources of the surprise of the said reader, who – knowing the last several dozens of years of Polish poetry, has a hunch as to what will come next. Matuszkiewicz, therefore, goes
against the anticipated direction\(^1\) – and again let me emphasize that I am not about the symptoms of the increasingly stronger deviation of poetry from the religious source, about the laicization of the word. He is not weird nor old-fashioned in it, and in the very attitude to the word material that disturbingly sticks to a thing next to it, to something higher, to anticipated, existence crossing, vectors – here the word material is secondary, even servant-like towards the invisible patterns of existence and infinity, towards any heroic attempts of their reciprocal binding. And the dominant strategy of modern poetry is to stay in the word material, on its surface, and to draw far-reaching conclusions from ‘materiality’ and ‘wordness’, namely only from linguistics. Something may happen in a language, but it does not have to (against the infinite) – says Matuszkiewicz. There is always something occurring in a language and it should be sufficient – ‘the others’ say. And they continue: basically there is no other creation, because if ever we will manage to accept that the reality mostly has nothing to do with our descriptions of it and that human ego is created in the process of using a dictionary, not expressed in it, whether accurately or not, then we will understand at last something that was true in the romantic idea, that the truth is being created, not discovered and that the truth is owned by language beings, by sentences\(^2\). The thing, in my opinion, in its nature concerns the basic dispute between those who believe in the substantial vision of the worlds, and therefore – spirituality of literature, and those who got rid of such illusions.

2. Becoming a novelty\(^3\) – this phrase rings in one’s memory and regards one of earliest books of the author. I talk about Rebeka, published in Wałbrzych in 1988. It seems that everything is settled – the expressiveness of the person talking to us is based on the original determination of the importance and hierarchy of things – and yet, there is
still so much to discover. In the frame of the adopted, or rather absorbed, spirituality, everything is possible. The power of faith in the effectiveness of the spirit evades dogmas. One cannot sleep calmly with this in mind, one cannot cover oneself with it like with a coat. Rather it is the anxiety of the search that is its content, and everyone sews their own coats. The belief in the existence of a divine factor is to be constantly recreated. It becomes real in a dynamic, never-ending process of staying vigilant, the individual co-creation of its always new references and meanings. That is why monologues in Rebeka (current recordings of reflection⁴) are preceded with a peculiar overture, a short piece of prose exposing what is characterized by the presented type of look, the type of poetic attention: Between the two non-realities I still saw what was not visible. With this kind of looking, to which images refused to be submissive, I was becoming a novelty to myself⁵.

3.
What was said above is perfectly confirmed with a phrase from the next book Spojrzyć najdalej (Świdnica 1991): I am still too young / towards my own love / endless love⁶. The aptness depends on reversing the concepts. It is no longer faith, codified in this way or another, thus particularist, it is something much more – it is love, in which the character melts away, but at the same time focuses like in a lens. If you do not love, if you are not in a constant loving attitude to existence and its symptoms, then, in fact, you do not believe, do not confirm pure intention, you do not reach the final sense of pervasive communion. ‘To look as far as possible’ – to realize its consequences and to live with this idea, spreading the message. Or from another angle, as Marianna Bocian wants and she writes about it in the introduction to this volume: poems are a beautiful invitation for us to meditate over our own existence in the naked world, a poetic reminder that
our responsibility is to improve our thinking [...], watch over the will to do good, disapproval of evil and vulgarity, nurturing our sensitivities and multiplying human spirituality.

So, the love that we find in ourselves (in this way it becomes 'self-love') is as old as time, it is its perennial substance. In this sense we are 'too young', as we will never, if we do not open up to this love, get older, we will not die in it. It (perfectly understood, totally felt) guarantees the freshness of life, a recurrent revival. It is our eternal youth. And Matuszkiewicz's poems talk about it all the time. Or rather: this love in its pure form talks with poems by Matuszkiewicz, it uses him. There is an enormous stream going through the poet, demanding to talk about one topic only, reaching fulfilment in love. It is not an easy 'description of the world' anymore, it is a creation of the world with each next gesture of affection, tenderness, love, a reflex of giving away and taking. Meditate to love. Love to live. If you love, you already believe.

4.

The illustrations by Vaclav Vokolk in the book Spojrzeć najdalej attract attention and make you wonder about the correlation between words and lines. An even more interesting relation between poetry and painting is shown in the book Błękitne przeciwwstawienie (Nowa Ruda 2001). The book was decorated with reproductions of works by Józef Hałas who once said: I was reaching my abstraction through the studies into the artistic problem in nature (cited from memory). I think we may slightly shift the emphasis and we will get a statement that could have been formed by Matuszkiewicz himself. It would be: I was reaching my abstraction through the studies into the metaphysical problem in nature. Both authors have the passion to disassemble the world into parts and assemble it back together, with a piece of themselves.

But let us not exaggerate with this abstraction. If it appears anywhere, it has solid life foundations, empirical roots. Because these
poems are also a special celebration of sensualism, of the concrete. Here is a man who walks across a marketplace and cries. However, Matuszkiewicz never stops at the level of a picture, he flies far and high and in this way the crying man is immediately accompanied by a series of interesting intuitions regarding things that might have happened and whether it could have been different. It is a typical feature of this world that it functions in sudden flashes of thoughts, in acts from light⁸. I can find here reverbs of the poetics by Przyboś seen in the post-vanguard perspective associated with the poetry of Marian Jachimowicz. In the poetry of Matuszkiewicz, conciseness and concreteness of expression gained a gloss of metaphysics. It is a peculiar haiku in rigidly welded chains⁹.

Also, an important plot in this book is the story of returning to Kresy (Borderlands), to the land of childhood, to the poetic worlds of the artists from the borderlands, such as, for example, Leśmian and Wierzyński. Here it is worth mentioning that Matuszkiewicz was born in Lvov and is aware of his roots, longs for them and desires to describe the story of his family and the world left behind there – in the surroundings of Lvov. He is intrigued by the phenomenon of neighbouring cultures and for his own use he creates something like an ecumenic mythology of reconciliation of a Pole, a Ukrainian, a Jew. That mythology of reconciliation and consensus spreads also to Lower Silesia, the Sudety area¹⁰, following the traces of intermeshing between the Silesian cultures in the German, Czech and Polish version. I was the happiest to see in this book elements of the ‘local lyric’, making the base of the poetic demonstration from the poetic reality taken from there¹¹, from this land. Gierałtów, Śnieżnik, Bielice (the last village at the edge of homeland), Kłodzko, Góry Sowie, Nowa Ruda, Ślęża, Broumov, Wambierzyce, Błędne Skaly, Góry Złote, etc. A true reserve of localism open to universality¹², sensuality following mysticallity, sacredness taken directly from the dust of trodden
paths entwining the spiritual centre of this poetry and the surroundings like a network of neurons.

5.
I should also mention an earlier book. Without it the picture would not be full and the truth about Matuszkiewicz would be falsified. Namely, we should necessarily remember about the corporal aspect of earthly love. The Christ sacrificed his body for us, too. In the frame of a large metaphysical contract they tortured first his body, it became a place of a symbolic transfer.

Matuszkiewicz does not give up the body. His poetry is not a set of abstracts or some quasi-devotional cloud cuckoo land. If I think about it as a satisfying entirety, then I have in my mind a happy, sometimes painful, fulfilment of all elements. In the book of 1989 titled Nowy Rok not only a naked woman’s body shows through, it sometimes speaks a full voice. It is the poet who enables it to express itself. A man in love. Next to a man of words and a subtle metaphysician I can see a desiring and desired man, being able to read the gospel of a woman’s body like nobody else. What faith would there be, what love for life, if there was no woman? Like a clanging cymbal.

The book is dedicated to a woman who was his lover at that time and whose name and surname is given. Let us look: everything has a name and a surname from the beginning. It starts with something concrete, from a note in a lyrical diary (recording even minutes and seconds) in order to get to something bigger, to an integrating bracket through a detail, intimacy, corporality, getting lost in split – like hairs – experiences. ‘Theatre of love’, but a theatre which opens to farther views and allows double seeing, and even multiple seeing. It opens up to the news on the ancient substance of existence, on ecstatic sinking in it, on giving and sacrificing. Eschatology that we can access...
Eschatology

Each of us
Shall be taken away
From oneself

And then it will turn out
That it was
Only love

And one more part of Nad rysunkami Blake’a: Now her body / returns to life / from the earth air / meticulously sculpted stones // Multiplied on the sheets of the album // Blessed among women / a woman staring into her secret / saturated with herself / more and more / present14.

And a disturbing view – and here I come back to the Christ whose body glinted in the beginning of this fragment as if it was a start of mystic eroticism – a picture of new life born from woman’s blood, described in the part of the book featuring spring resurrection. It starts with relating the divine love with the ordinary, human love: Choosing each other / we chose You // Your body // Bread / allowing to die // I look at your shroud / with an image / of a humiliated woman // Rusty sheet after the collapse of the Earth16. And developing consistently, love is being identified with a transcendent gift17, a woman with the Christ: You came to me / from heaven / I do not want to remember / your wounds // Not a hand / a finger / rusty trace of sin18. As if a man did not believe in divinity satisfied in a woman and putting hands in her wounds, the slots in her body, tried to ensure himself again and again. (The motto of the poem which refers to the words of the doubting Thomas emphasize the conscious reference). It is a caress, but also a boundless amazement, awe and anguish. We are in a purgatory of mystic-erotic
exaltations and gradually liberating ourselves from its limitations, we remove the huge rock // We see the glow / of assembled sheets.

Let’s stop, as this richness cannot be captured in snapshots. Meditation requires meditation. Matuszkiewicz deserves more than I can give to him. This wandering from and to the world, from and to yourself, would be, however, fruitless speculation, if it was not for the truth of feelings, the truth of passion, if it was not for honesty and difficult simplicity, which seems to be the biggest value of this poetry.

1 Włodzimierz Kowalewski reviewing the book titled Eden had similar feelings (Świdnica 1994): A poet writing such poems today must have great courage. As he exposes himself either to an ostentatious lack of interest of a large part of critics, or to mocking indication of his stupidity. Because the poetry of Matuszkiewicz is difficult not because of formal or linguistic terms, but because of mental requirements that it poses and bitter truths about us that it reminds (a note inside the book of poems Błękitne przeciwstawienie, Nowa Ruda 2001, p. 84).


4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.


8 Here I refer to the title of a poem included in the book Droga do Iwonicza (Świdnica 1993, p. 20).

9 It was pointed out by Jacek Łukasiewicz in the internal review of the book Spojrzeć najdalej: On the sources of that indirectness which is, on the one hand, related to experiences of the vanguard (its pseudonymisation of the world and embarrassment of feelings), on the other hand – it seems – it takes directly from other sources, namely symbolist sources or poetry of the East. Mr. Matuszkiewicz is close to the type of poetry the Japanese developed in the form of haiku, as well as the traditions of Buddhism thinking. All of that, however, was transformed, filtered through his own imagination and subject to rigours of construction, applicable in that poetic world (from the typescript made available by the poet).

10 Variously understood ‘ground’ appears in many poems as a form of earthly or nature-related presence. Matuszkiewicz cultivated ‘ecological’ lyric earlier than its awareness officially appeared in literary criticism. Anna Kronenberg, describing this kind of awareness changes, uses the term: ‘ecological turn’: The ecological turn indicates the road to a more delicate, more beautiful inhabitation of the Earth (A. Kronenberg, Geopoetyka. Związki literatury i środowiska, Łódź 2014, p. 35).

11 The author asked about sources of inspiration emphasized the role of the landscape: I started to write under the influence of nature, an impressive response to the landscape, the seized detail (U. Glensk, M. Hamkało, K. Maliszewski,
One recalls a press statement of the poet regarding the poetic and philosophical universality of a place: *A human being agrees to his place – where he gets the revelation of life and where he has a duty to fulfil* (A. Matuszkiewicz, *Prostota*, ‘Wieczór Wrocławia’ 1995, no. 91, p. 9).

This is another author in my little gallery (next to, e.g., A. Zelenay, M. Jachimowicz, Z. Krukowski) enchanted with the landscape, the harmonious combination of topography and history, successfully ‘regaining’ these areas for the lyrical Polish language, making them almost a mystical centre of existence: *Any activity of writers living in that part of the Sudety mountains is integrally rooted in the tissue of nationwide literary life, and at the same time in many of its manifestations it does not allow to forget about the specificity of the soil it has its source in, about the multicultural richness of those new Eastern Borderlands* – A. Matuszkiewicz, *Leśne drogi – śladami literatury w Górach Wałbrzyskich i Kamiennych*, [in:] Mikropolis Sokołowsko, ed. K. Uczkiewicz, M. Belof, P. J. Fereński, Wrocław 2016, p. 36.


Karol Maliszewski  
*Spirituality of Literature. A Case of Antoni Matuszkiewicz*

The author in his sketch describes the early lyrics of Antoni Matuszkiewicz. He emphasizes that what has been modernist in them, the avant-garde shape of the poem, has been marked by a special spiritual fervor, as if Matuszkiewicz tried to reconcile in a single record a revealing metaphor with something eternal, with something what seems like a mystical spiritual formation. Matuszkiewicz, in a dispute over poetry, is on the side of those who believe in a substantial image of the world and, hence, the metaphysical nature of literature.

**KEYWORDS:**  
ANTONI MATUSZKIEWICZ, POETRY, REVEALING METAPHOR, MYSTICAL