

Marta Skwara
Uniwersytet Szczeciński

“Two Poets” in Czesław Miłosz’s Unknown Letters and Other Writings

1. Introduction

Ever since European civilization upgraded the unknown Polish poet Czesław Miłosz to the top rank of the world’s men of letters by awarding him the Nobel Prize in 1980 and “some different civilization,” as Miłosz used to think about his second home—America, acknowledged the fact and upgraded the translator to the rank of a Poet, every newly found piece written by him has attracted special attention. Such attention is far from being unproblematic though, particularly when the poet’s private correspondence is considered. Since the four letters written by Czesław Miłosz to Paul Engle, the director of the Iowa Writing Program at the University of Iowa, reveal unknown aspects of Miłosz’s sojourn in the US at the turn of the 1960s, taking interest in these letters seems to be justified, particularly because Paul Engle is not even mentioned by Miłosz’s biographers. There is not a word on him either in the old biographies (by Andrzej Zawada, by Jan Błoński or by Aleksander Fiut) or in the new one (by Andrzej Franaszek, 2011). Only Marek Skwarnicki, in his memoirs *Mój Miłosz* (*My Miłosz*) evokes Paul Engle’s name several times but mostly in the context of his own experiences as a grantee of the program. Skwarnicki even makes the assumption that Miłosz might have backed up his application (Skwarnicki 121), which does not seem to be the case in the light

of the letters found in the IWP Archive.¹ Miłosz himself recalls Paul Engle in one of his public talks. Yet he does so in the context of wars, the American Civil War in particular, and human experience in general, rather than in the context of the program (Miłosz, 2006: 131).

What is much more important, the four letters in question also reveal some intriguing aspects of Miłosz's literary opinions. The fact that Miłosz is a "civilized" rather than a "barbarian" poet is easy to agree upon, whether we understand these vague metaphoric epithets as denoting high/low artistic standards, or high/low morals. (One should also remember that, with time, Miłosz became the canonized poet, the Poet of the Country). The fact that Miłosz preferred some poets to others, usually "civilized" over "barbarian," is also a well-known and perhaps quite a natural phenomenon, yet that Miłosz clearly supported poets whom he found more "civilized" than others may be a problematic piece of news. Particularly since it is Artur Międzyrzecki who appears in these four letters to be the essence of civilization (due to his literary knowledge, literary achievements, and personal qualities) while Tadeusz Różewicz seems to be portrayed not only as a less "civilized" person (due to his disposition, such as Miłosz perceived it) but also as a worse equipped man of letters. In consequence, it was Międzyrzecki who received Miłosz's support for a prestigious international literary program. Giving Międzyrzecki priority over Różewicz sounds almost ridiculous in 2013, when the former writer is still recognized primarily as a translator and only secondarily as a poet, and the latter—as one of the major post-war Polish poets and playwrights. One could say that it might not have been that obvious at the turn of 1969/1970, yet especially at that time, contrary to what Miłosz wrote to Engle, Międzyrzecki was more a translator, an author of literary essays, and a co-author of books for children than an acknowledged poet.

There is also one more important hero of the mentioned letters and of the story behind them: Ernest Bryll, a problematic follower of Miłosz, criticized by him severely, and denied support both on the basis of his dubious poetical achievements and his undoubted political skills. Thus the letters provoke at least two questions: who is "civilized" enough to obtain Miłosz's support

¹ The letters were found in November 2011 by the PhD student Agnieszka Moroz during her research in the IWP archives on the Polish grantees of the program.

for the participation in the worthwhile international literary program? And, more seriously: what ideal of poetry writing and poets' behavior is presented in the letters? The reflections which the letters evoke must be discussed against the broader background of Miłosz's literary, political and ethical opinions if they are to shed light on what poetry means to Miłosz, and what poetry and poets should be like according to the author of *The Captive Mind*.

Despite the fact that Miłosz calls himself a "young barbarian" in the poem on his first trip to Paris ("Rue Descartes"), it is not the lack of European cultural experience that makes any poet a real barbarian in the face of civilization. It is something else which Miłosz often describes as being "inhuman," or "nihilistic." I will try to demonstrate how this characteristic is represented both in the letters and other writings by Miłosz. The utter negation of any human being's goodness and the harsh denial of the value of life that human beings create always prompted the poet to react, both in his public and private writings.

I would like to begin with a short analysis of the content of the letters in question, then I shall proceed to the issues evoked by the opinions about Tadeusz Różewicz expressed both in the letters and Miłosz's other works and finally elaborate on the topic of the "inhuman" poetry with regard to yet another of Miłosz's letters (recently published by Andrzej Fraszek in his biography). To my mind one passage of the said letter creates an interesting comparative perspective since there the Polish poet (Różewicz) is juxtaposed with an American poet (Jeffers) as examples of "atheist despair."

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BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA 94720

November 11, 1969

Professor Paul Engle
Director
The Program in Creative Writing
Department of English
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa 53240

Dear Professor Engle:

The time I was in Iowa City seems to be centuries ago. I see you have been very energetic and the list of writers you have brought to this country grows imposingly. I know you now have Strykowski from Poland, a very good choice.

I am writing to you on the subject of a man whom I should very much like to see in America and who needs such a trip badly, who is stifling in the suffocating atmosphere of present-day Poland. He is a gifted poet and translator of poetry, Artur Międzyrzeczki. His specialty is modern French poetry (he lived several years in France after the end of World War II), and he could bring into discussions his knowledge of two literary workshops - Polish and French. I like also his literary essays and his autobiographical book on soldiering in Italy. His wife, Julia Hartwig, is a gifted writer too, author of poetry translations and of imposing studies in French literature. Her book on Guillaume Appollinaire won her renown in France and has been published in French. Such a couple would be able to bring quite a contribution to your Center. Międzyrzeczki speaks good English. He has spent one summer in the United States as a member of the International Seminar at Harvard.

Let me state briefly my reasons for backing Międzyrzeczki. I know him personally, and it is difficult to find a man so warm, so open to other people, so affectionate - particularly among writers. We see each other every few years, for instance at Knokke-le Zoute, or, the last time, at the poets' gathering in Paris attended also by Professor Will.

Międzyrzeczki is a man of integrity and for that reason he is now in trouble. Writers in Warsaw either observe a certain unwritten code of behavior as he does or else become lackeys. He pays for his integrity by losing opportunities to earn money and deserves respect and sympathy.

To be frank, I have been cool toward one of your guests, Bieńkowski, just because of his pusillanimity and manoeuvring. I believe, after all, in a community of writers as a sort of brotherhood. Recent events in Russia or in Poland show to what extent such a feeling of brotherhood is necessary when writers have to oppose the pressures of the authorities.

I see no better candidates for your Center than Międzyrzecki and his wife. If you see any possibility, please write to him directly - he is at the present moment in Paris and his address is

c/o Professor Piotr Słonimski
Résidence du C.N.R.S.
Gif sur Yvette (91)
France

With friendship,


Czesław Miłosz

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December 2, 1969

Professor Paul Engle
Director
International Writing Program
School of Letters
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa 52240

Dear Professor Engle,

Thank you for your letter of November 18. Perhaps there is a misunderstanding as to Artur Międzyrzecki. He is a poet and a good poet. He is also a poetry translator and essayist, but I recommended him to you knowing you are interested primarily in poets.

Międzyrzecki, as far as I know, has no plans to leave Poland for good. For a poet this is usually an extremely painful decision as deprived of his language he is mute. The Polish authorities would like to get rid of some disobedient writers and this is an additional argument for some of them against choosing exile. His plans may change in the future, but his is not the case of an immigrant. He is simply looking for some breathing space. A few days ago I received a letter from him from Paris, written on the eve of his return to Warsaw. He asks that correspondence to him be directed to his friend's French address (c/o Professor Piotr Słonimski, Residence du C.N.R.S., Gif sur Yvette (91), France), and it will be transmitted to him in Warsaw through private channels.

Ernest Bryll. I am in an awkward position as Bryll considers himself a sort of disciple of mine, at least in his verse technique. Yet I would not recommend him. The man has decided he must make a career, adapting himself to the anti-intellectual climate created by the government. Attacking liberals, practicing mental acrobatics in his ambiguous poetry full of political innuendoes, he might have fallen into his own trap. That is my guess, as I do not know why he has been refused a passport. He is gifted, but lacks the kind of integrity which I consider a necessary quality for a writer.

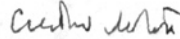
Michał Chmielowiec. I have much respect for him. Intelligent, open-minded, a perspicacious literary critic, he proved of late to be an excellent editor of *Wiadomości*, a literary weekly founded in 1924 in Warsaw and published since the beginning of World War II in London. Thus, a periodical with a forty-five-year record. Of course, the fact that Mr. Chmielowiec both knows

Polish contemporary literature well and can express himself perfectly in English would make him an interesting participant in your group. As the center of Polish literature moves to exile in consequence of a wave of new migrations after 1968, it would be profitable to both sides to have at your Center an editor of a serious émigré periodical.

First of all, however, I am anxious to help Międzyrzecki in view of his dramatic situation in Warsaw - dramatic primarily in a psychological sense. He has been one of the most active members of that liberal community of writers who have been silenced by censorship. He is backed unreservedly by Leszek Kołakowski, a philosopher widely known abroad because of his books on Marxism. Kołakowski, deprived of his university chair in Warsaw, is at the present moment a Visiting Professor in the Department of Philosophy at Berkeley. I hope you will be able to do something.

I shall always be pleased to provide you with any information at my disposal.

Very sincerely,



Czesław Miłosz
Professor of Slavic Languages
and Literatures

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Czesław Miłosz

Apr. 3, 1970

Dear Professor Engle,

Thank you for the news
and materials.

As to Boyle, I would not
hesitate. Since he was not
able to come on time, it
is obvious you had
to make arrangements for
somebody else. I feel his

Country may be safely postponed.
I am applying humane-pragmatic
criteria. Bryll is a skilful
operator in that mess over
there, while Miodzyrecki
is deprived of means of
subsistence because of his
liberal stand.

Best wishes

Czesław Miłosz

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August 14, 1970

Dear Paul Engle,

Thank you for your letter of August 5. I had called you as I was anxious to learn something about the perspectives of Międzyrzecki's coming to Iowa. In your letter you give the data on Bryll's and Różewicz's arrival. What about Międzyrzecki whom you mention in your letter to Jelenaki? As to the quality of mind, literary knowledge, openness to others and moral integrity he is far superior to the two others.

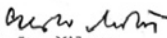
The case of Bryll is not exactly what you seem to believe it to be. Convinced Marxists, true believers, belong in Poland to the past. Bryll belongs to a generation which has no firm convictions whatsoever. People of his kind are interested in success and money only and for that reason join the Communist Party. Their cynicism, as they do not hide their motives, may even be disarming. They are as far from Marxism as is President Nixon.

I am not against bringing Bryll to this country. What I am worried about is a certain lack of equilibrium in a cultural exchange. As a rule, those who are pliable enough to curry favor of the Warsaw government are invited here. Others, often more gifted, are rarely able to travel - either nobody invites them or they do not get passports.

Różewicz is a poet of talent and I rather like him personally, though I do not know whether many people will find his company stimulating, as he is taciturn, bitter and aloof.

Thank you for the invitation. My wife and I will be coming back from Europe and the East Coast in the second half of October, but I am not sure whether October would suit you. As to meeting Bryll, well, it is true that he has been strongly influenced by my poetry, so that he is considered my pupil. Yet he puts a technique which he learned well to a doubtful and ambiguous use, so I am not too eager to talk to him. I have belabored cruelly his poetry in one of my recent essays on the Polish literature of today. If Międzyrzecki is in Iowa - that would be something else.

Many best wishes,


Czesław Miłosz

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2. Poets in the letters to Paul Engle

The first letter written to Paul Engle, dated 11 November 1969, clearly indicates that Miłosz had already visited Iowa City and met Engle personally. The letter begins by congratulating Engle on “energetically” bringing writers to the US—Miłosz mentions Strykowski (Julian, a Polish prose writer), calling his participation in the program a “very good choice”—then Miłosz goes on to promote Artur Międzyrzecki’s candidature for the IWP. From the very beginning an approval of his professional qualifications goes together with an appreciation of his personal virtues. Międzyrzecki is presented as both a “gifted poet and translator of poetry,” married to Julia Hartwig, herself a “gifted writer too,” and an author of literary essays, knowledgeable on French culture and literature, who also speaks good English and has respectable international experience, both in Europe (France) and in the US (Harvard). In personal contacts Międzyrzecki is “so warm, so open to other people, and so affectionate,” a phenomenon rare among writers, that it is difficult for Miłosz to find another person like him.

One particular virtue of Międzyrzecki is emphasized in the letter, namely, his allegedly being a “man of integrity,” what will become a recurring motif in the subsequent letters. In the first of them the integrity is presented as a reason for Międzyrzecki’s inability to function in the Communist Poland, a flaw that should win him even more “respect and sympathy,” according to Miłosz and contrary to those men of letters who know how to “maneuver pusillanimously.” Bieńkowski (Zbigniew), Polish poet and essayist, the IWP grantee in the years 1967, 1968 and 1969 is a negative example in the letter. (According to Międzyrzecki, Bieńkowski was “pathologically prudent,” Międzyrzecki, 1999: 75.) In the subsequent letters more critical remarks on immoral attitudes of Polish writers can be found.

In the letter dated 2 December 1969—we do not know if it is the letter which immediately follows the one mentioned above; it very well might be—which is the answer to Engle’s letter of 18 November, Miłosz emphasizes, perhaps due to some objections on Engle’s part, Międzyrzecki’s qualities as a poet (“He is a poet and a good poet. He is also a poetry translator and essayist . . .”), and explains in depth his situation in Poland. According to Miłosz, Międzyrzecki’s

wish is rather to find “some breathing space” than to leave the country for good since this latter move makes poets “mute” (Miłosz’s experiences of being in exile seem to be reflected in this conclusion). In the last passage of the letter, Miłosz expresses his anxiety “to help Międzyrzecki in view of his dramatic situation in Warsaw,” dramatic in a “psychological sense” he adds. As an “active member of liberal community of writers” Międzyrzecki is said to have been “silenced by censorship,” which, according to the historical facts and Międzyrzecki’s own diaries comes across as only partly true. Having resigned from his post as a vice-president of the Polish PEN-Club in 1968 (the year of serious political turbulences in Communist Poland), Międzyrzecki was removed from several editorial boards and he was not allowed to publish his essays in the weekly *Świat*, but his translations and novels (*Wielki pościg* written with Julia Hartwig, and *Złota papuga*) were published in 1969-1970 (Międzyrzecki, 1999: 71-72). His professional and material situation at the time was very difficult of course, which his recently published letters to Miłosz vividly demonstrate (Hartwig, Międzyrzecki, Miłosz, 2012). Thus a scholarship abroad could have been of a real help to him and it seems Miłosz was ready to help Międzyrzecki in every possible way. He ends his letter to Engel with calling upon the authority of Leszek Kołakowski, a “philosopher widely known abroad,” to back up his candidature.

Between the passages emotionally devoted to the poet of integrity, a rather harsh passage on the poet who lacks this feature is inserted. The hero, or rather the villain of the passage, is Ernest Bryll. Despite his being considered a disciple of Miłosz, “at least in his verse technique,” the Master does not have any wish to recommend his problematic pupil. This is mostly because of his moral qualities: being a careerist, Bryll “adapted himself to the anti-intellectual climate created by the government.” His “practicing mental acrobacies (sic!) in ambiguous poetry full of political innuendoes” might make him—Miłosz makes a guess—fall in his own trap. Thus the reason why (or if) Bryll was refused a passport is unclear to Miłosz. In the conclusion of the passage he admits that Bryll is a gifted poet, however he “lacks this kind of integrity” that Miłosz considers a necessary quality for a writer. In the letter dated 3 April 1970 Miłosz expresses something of a relief that Bryll was unable to come to Iowa as well as a strong support for Engel’s endeavors to make arrangements for somebody else’s arrival. In Miłosz’s

eyes, Bryll's coming to America may be "safely postponed," according to some unspecified "human-pragmatic criteria." Then, jotted down hastily, in the only letter which was handwritten, the strongest argument against Bryll is presented. He is said to be a "skilful operator in that mess over there," a formulation which might be read as an allusion to co-operation with the Communist Poland authorities (or services). Międzyrzecki, on the other hand, is said to "be deprived of means of subsistence because of his liberal stand."

Miłosz's last letter, dated 14 August 1970, is a clear expression of anxiety and annoyance at the fact that Engle writes about the data of Bryll's and Różewicz's coming to Iowa, while Międzyrzecki is not even mentioned by the director of the IWP. This fact perhaps made Miłosz express the ultimate comparative opinion on the three poets. Astonishingly, it is Międzyrzecki who, "As to the quality of mind, literary knowledge, openness to others and moral integrity . . . is far superior to the two others." To understand the level of Miłosz's exaggeration when formulating such a statement, especially with regard to Różewicz, it suffices to recollect Miłosz's 1948 poem "To Tadeusz Różewicz a Poet" in which he greets a new genuine talent in the realm of Polish poetry. Two lines of the poem are still quoted in all sorts of handbooks, essays or anthologies on the Polish postwar poetry. They were also meaningfully cited by a president of Polish PEN Club Adam Pomorski in 2011, the year of Różewicz's 90th birthday:

Szczęśliwy naród który ma poetę
I w trudach swoich nie kroczy w milczeniu.
(Miłosz, 2011: 284)

Happy is the nation who has got a poet
And who does not suffer its hardship in silence²

Moreover, in Miłosz's first anthology of Polish poetry published in the US in 1965, eleven poems by Różewicz were translated by Miłosz along with the three poems by Bryll of which Miłosz translated too. No poem by Międzyrzecki was translated, although he was Różewicz's junior by only one year and thirteen

² If not specified otherwise, translations are mine.

years older than Bryll and was a poet who had published several collections of poetry³ by the time the anthology was prepared.

Miłosz's last letter to Engle also brings additional negative opinions on Bryll's position in the Communist Poland. He is said to "belong to a generation which has no firm convictions whatsoever," and which is interested mostly in money. In Miłosz's view, Bryll is mostly a cynical person, and certainly he is not a convinced Marxist, contrary to what Engle might have thought. In order to make things clear, Miłosz uses a suggestive comparison to define a group of people among whom he counts Bryll: "They are as far from Marxism as is President Nixon." In the last passage, Miłosz denies any wish to meet Bryll, "strongly influenced by his poetry", in Iowa City since Bryll simply "puts a technique which he learned well to a doubtful and ambiguous use." In addition, Miłosz mentions that he himself "belabored cruelly his [Bryll's] poetry in one of his recent essays on the Polish literature of today" (this is probably an allusion to one of Miłosz's essays later published in Paris in 1972 in the collection entitled *Prywatne obowiązki*; see Miłosz, 2001: 108-109, 116-119, 125-127). The last sentence of the last letter sounds almost like emotional blackmail: Miłosz does not wish to meet Bryll in Iowa City but: "If Międzyrzecki is in Iowa—that would be something else." After this only best wishes for Paul Engle follow.

Yet, there is also one more interesting short passage in the letter, inserted between Miłosz's sharp criticism of Bryll, and this passage is wholly devoted to Różewicz, a "poet of talent" whom Miłosz "rather likes personally" (a similar opinion was voiced by Miłosz in the early 1950s, cf. Fraszek 643) but whose company people might not find stimulating since he is "taciturn, bitter and aloof." Not a word on integrity is jotted down this time but it is obvious that the feature most appreciated by Miłosz is not among Różewicz's characteristics.

It must be speculation if and how the letters influenced Paul Engle (and what role the State Department, the US Embassy in Warsaw and the Polish authorities would play), yet the fact is that Bryll finally took part in the IWP while Różewicz did not. Artur Międzyrzecki and his wife Julia Hartwig attended the seminar twice: in 1970 and in 1986. Both Międzyrzecki and Miłosz gradually became good friends with Paul Engle, whom they considered a fine

³ In 1957 a prestigious publishing house in People's Poland, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, issued Międzyrzecki's *Wiersze wybrane* (*Selected poems*).

and honest but ill-informed person, and kept suggesting Polish candidates for the Program (cf. Hartwig, Międzyrzecki, Miłosz 2012: 65-66, 77-83). Julia Hartwig has kept Paul Engle and his wife Hualing in her grateful memory (Hartwig 46-48, 54-55, 430).

How are we supposed to read these four letters? Should we assume that Miłosz had his own "hierarchy" of poets and poetry, or rather that sometimes he was highly subjective when trying to put his opinions through and support his friends? Perhaps the letters might also convince us that Miłosz would easily get annoyed by the naïve Americans who could not make a difference between poets and Poets, light-heartedly causing a "certain lack of equilibrium in a cultural exchange." To quote his own words from the last letter: "As a rule, those who are pliable enough to curry favor of the Warsaw government are invited here. Others, often more gifted, are rarely able to travel—either nobody invites them or they do not get passports." However, in 1970 it was not Międzyrzecki who became a victim of such an unfair treatment but Różewicz,⁴ a "more gifted poet" indeed, one who is considered to be a true innovator of Polish verse. Maria Dłuska, the highly respectable author of a theory of Polish lyrics, emphasizes that he found his own unusual verse technique (Dłuska 282); the same opinion is given by another leading authority on the matter, Lucylla Pszczołowska (Pszczółowska 355-356). Moreover, this quality of Różewicz poetry was recognized also by Miłosz. In the anthology mentioned above Miłosz wrote: "he invented his own type of antipoem, stripped of "devices" such as meter, rhyme, and even, most often, of metaphors, and limited to the simplest words" (Miłosz, 1965: 61). It would not be an exaggeration to say

⁴ According to Międzyrzecki, it was Różewicz himself who decided not to come to the US (Hartwig, Międzyrzecki, Miłosz, 2012: 198, 271), yet it does not seem to have been that simple. One should remember that most writers in Communist Poland were manipulated by being offered or denied passports, honors or prestigious awards, sometimes just in order to disunite the members of the literary circles. In the light of his letters to Miłosz, it is clear that Międzyrzecki thought of Różewicz as of a privileged writer (16, 52, 83) who all too easily criticizes the West. Paradoxically, this feature could make him interesting to Paul Engle. Różewicz appears ambivalently in Międzyrzecki's letters—sometimes as a favorite candidate of Engle's (62) and sometimes just as the "Warsaw Embassy" candidate (which should be read as a more or less officially endorsed candidate, 73). Characteristically, there is an ironic note in everything that Międzyrzecki writes about Różewicz, also when he is writing about Różewicz's literary work (444, 568).

that Tadeusz Różewicz has been regarded as one of the Polish major modern poets ever since late 1950s.

On the other hand, Ernest Bryll, so harshly criticized by Miłosz⁵ for murky political connections (something of which, we should remember, Miłosz himself was accused because of having left his diplomatic service for People's Poland only in 1951) with time became one of the leading persons behind the opposition weekly *Tygodnik Solidarność* in the 1980s. Bryll's work for this trade union magazine was awarded a high rank medal (*Krzyż Komandorski Orderu Odrodzenia Polski*) granted by President Lech Kaczyński in 2006. His poems have also developed interestingly over time, and, judging by the anthologies of Polish poetry, been considered to be valuable and representative of Polish verse. Since any hierarchy of poets is disputable, I would like to cite some examples of how these poets have been anthologized. In the three-volume anthology of Polish poetry published in 2002 and edited by poet and critic Aleksander Nawrocki one can find nine poems by Artur Międzyrzecki and ten by Ernest Bryll, while Tadeusz Różewicz is distinguished with a separate essay illustrated with his poems. In the anthology prepared (and published in Poland in 2001) by Karl Dedecius, a German lover and translator of Polish poetry, Różewicz is represented by 22 poems, Międzyrzecki by 12, Bryll by 11. In the anthology compiled by Piotr Matywiecki, a poet, literary critic and essayist, one can find 28 poems by Różewicz and 8 by Międzyrzecki, but none by Bryll. In the *Golden Book of Polish Lyrics* edited in 2007 by Jacek Łukasiewicz, a poet, literary critic and professor of Polish literature, five poems by Różewicz were included, and none by either Międzyrzecki or Bryll. Unsurprisingly, in all the anthologies mentioned it is Miłosz who occupies the unquestionably leading position. In his own handbook of Polish literature Miłosz devotes a long essay to Różewicz presented as a "writer in the process of evolving" whose "boldness

⁵ Only negative opinions on Bryll and his attitude can be found in the letters sent by Międzyrzecki to Miłosz from Iowa City. Still, in one of his letters to Międzyrzecki Miłosz could not help admiring the poems by Bryll published in 1971, that is, after the change of government in People's Poland. (Hartwig, Międzyrzecki, Miłosz, 2012: 220). It should be noted that the harsh criticism against Bryll and the alleged servility of his poetry was openly shared by others both at the time in question and later. For instance, Stanisław Barańczak, first a dissident writer then a literary émigré, used to scold Bryll using offensively paraphrased quotes from the Polish literature (cf. Barańczak 1977).

compensates for his faults, the chief of which is crudeness" (Miłosz, 1969: 470) whereas Międzyrzecki is given only a short passage. It is worth observing that Międzyrzecki is regarded as an exponent of the "poetry of culture" (Miłosz, 1969: 487) while Różewicz—when compared to a "poet of civilization," Zbigniew Herbert—is called a "rebel decrying the 'nothing in Prospero's cloak'" (Miłosz, 1969: 470). The metaphor of the nothingness of modern humanity is taken from the title of a poem by Różewicz that Miłosz quotes in the same handbook.

What I find really interesting in the letters written to Paul Engle is not so much Miłosz's *ad hoc*, emotional opinions—like every human being he was sometimes mistaken or biased (but sometimes also quite objectively informative, e.g. in the passage on Michał Chmielowiec from the letter written to Engle on the 2 December 1969)—but rather the question of "poets' integrity," of great importance not only for the letters quoted above but, far more importantly, for Miłosz's views on human beings, poets, and poetry as such. It was probably this sense of integrity that stimulated Miłosz's both friendly and consistent lifelong correspondence with Międzyrzecki⁶ and his always rather problematic and inconsistent lifelong literary relationships with Różewicz. In both cases, the question concerned more than just Polish poetry and Polish poets. As he explained in the letters to Engle, Miłosz believed in an international "community of writers as a sort of brotherhood" necessary in order to "oppose the pressures of the authorities" (11 Nov. 1969). For that reason, we should not be surprised by the almost anecdotic tone which Miłosz often adopted when referring to American poets' invented sufferings. For instance, in his letter to Międzyrzecki we find an ironic remark on the "air-conditioned despair" experienced by American poets in their country where, as Theodore Roethke used to say, "it is easier to publish a book on poetry than a book of poems . . ." (Miłosz, 2007: 28). The same annoyance can be seen in Miłosz's impulsive reaction to Robert Lowell's "provincialism", which he describes in a letter

⁶ See for instance a letter dated March 23, 1974 written by Międzyrzecki to Miłosz congratulating him on his newly published *Ogród nauk* which Międzyrzecki found "great, clear, and bracing" (Międzyrzecki, 2007: 38). See also the newly published volume of correspondence (Hartwig, Międzyrzecki, Miłosz, 2012) where Międzyrzecki's numerous praises of Miłosz's achievements can be found. Miłosz, on his part, sometimes praised Międzyrzecki's poems, though often in short formulas, e.g. *beaux mais tragiques* (Hartwig, Międzyrzecki, Miłosz, 2012: 308).

to the Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert (Franaszek 645). Many years later he composed a poetic pardon to the American poet, apologizing for mocking the poet's "long depressions, weeks of terror, / Presumed vacations in the safety of the wards" which "a refugee on this continent / Where so many newcomers vanished without a trace" (Miłosz, 2003: 722) could not allow himself. A different historical training, as Miłosz put it, prevented him from making such a mess of himself. That training should bring him closer to Różewicz, and in some ways it did, yet in some ways—it clearly did not.

3. Miłosz and Różewicz

What obviously attracted Miłosz to Różewicz (contrary to what he wrote in the letters to Engle, it was Różewicz, who was the Poet to Miłosz, the one who became the hero of his own poems and essays) and, at the same time, pushed him away was his anti-aestheticism, grounded on a deep dejection in human civilization in general, and in culture in particular. With his traumatic war experiences (service in the guerilla Home Army) Różewicz, "hated art as an offence to human suffering," as Miłosz expressed it in an introductory sketch placed in his 1965 anthology of Polish poetry. Being a "nihilistic humanitarian," "Różewicz is constantly searching for a way out of his negation which is mitigated only by pity; his tenderness bursts out only when he writes on little things of everyday life," Miłosz thinks. According to him, Różewicz's "tragedy is to deny the values which are affirmed by his revolt" (Miłosz, 1965: 61).⁷

⁷ The rapacity of Różewicz's poetry can be illustrated by one of the poems entitled "To the Heart" that Miłosz selected for the anthology:

I saw
a cook a specialist
he would put his hand
into the mouth
and through the trachea
push it to the inside
of a sheep
and there in the quick
would grasp the heart
tighten his grip
on the heart
rip out the heart
in one jerk

Both the denial and the revolt seem to have attracted Miłosz, the poet who is always "on the side of man," even if sometimes "for a lack of anything better," to quote the title of the famous chapter in *Visions at San Francisco Bay*. Not only Różewicz's merciless and often ironical portrayal of the atrocities of the so-called civilization disturb Miłosz;⁸ his ascribing all the evil to human beings, with the whole culture being merely a helpless cover, disturb Miłosz even more. The two poets' dialogue via poems—Różewicz's poem "Unde malum?" and Miłosz's response to it—should be evoked here. Miłosz begins his poem with a quotation from his predecessor's in order to give his own answer to the classical theological question:

*Skąd się bierze zło?
jak to skąd*

*z człowieka
zawsze z człowieka
i tylko z człowieka*

Where does evil come from?
It comes⁹

from man
always from man
only from man
(Miłosz, 2003: 726)

Not only evil but also goodness come from human beings, Miłosz replies in the last line of his poem, belittling Różewicz's arguments. While Różewicz insists on the necessity of the radical change of human race, Miłosz speaks sarcastically

yes
that was a specialist. (Miłosz, 1965: 72)

⁸ Particularly when they take the shape of "nihilistic jokes" already overrepresented in Western literature (Międzyrzecki, Hartwig, Miłosz, 2012: 508). A more critical remark on Różewicz, the nihilist, was jotted down in the quoted letter to Międzyrzecki yet it was omitted by the editors of the volume whose general policy was "not to publish expressions or phrases which could be offensive to third parties" (632).

⁹ Miłosz's translation is not accurate here, Różewicz uses a kind of an ironic question: "then from where, / from man . . ."

of the goodness of the Earth deprived of human beings. Yet, such a conclusion does not really follow from Różewicz's poem in which the Earth will regain its shine and charm "if humans brush themselves out of fauna and flora with their own hands" *jeśli rodzaj ludzki / wyczesze się / własnoręcznie / z fauny i flory* (Różewicz 66). Thus the two poets talk about different issues: Różewicz about a possibly good Earth with better human beings, Miłosz about only seemingly good Earth without human beings who annihilated themselves. It is Miłosz who assumes the tone of moral superiority, once again making Różewicz a nihilistic, somehow naïve ("Alas dear Tadeusz, / good nature and wicked man / are romantic inventions") and barbarian poet ("so let man exterminate / his own species / the innocent sunrise will illuminate / a liberated flora and fauna"), a poet who despises human beings. Miłosz's interpretation of Różewicz's poem, however, is far from being unquestionable.

The core of the two poets' dispute concerned metaphysics, which is best illustrated in Różewicz's poem on his reflections on reading Swedenborg, so important to Miłosz. In the poem Różewicz denies the value of any metaphysics and emphasizes his "poor" need of protecting the reason.¹⁰ Różewicz "atheist" attitude was often criticized by Miłosz, also in his essay entitled "Różewicz in the year 1996" in which the latter poet is accused of giving little support to anybody with his "helpless philosophy" (Miłosz, 1997: 292). One could hardly imagine more crushing an accusation. Still, Różewicz is described by Miłosz as a poet of contradictions who distrusts European culture with its splendor merely covering "violence and murder" but who also constantly uses culture and language which differ us from animals to cry over our similitude to beasts (Miłosz, 1997: 292-293). Here, one of the two poems which Miłosz picked up for his anthology of the "luminous books" could be evoked, even if Różewicz is called a "nihilist" once again in the introductory remarks (in a more serious

¹⁰ Tadeusz Różewicz, "Zaćmienie światła" ("The Eclipse of the Light") [Swedenborg czytany przez Miłosza] *ani mnie ziębi ani grzeje / z trudem brnę przez jego sny / księgę o niebie i piekle / rzucam na ziemię / (...) wystawiam sobie świadectwo ubóstwa / ale nie mogę / gasić światła rozumu / tak obelżywie traktowanego / pod koniec naszego wieku.* (Różewicz 25-26) [Swedenborg read by Miłosz] is all the same to me / I wade through his dreams with difficulty / I throw the book of heaven and hell / Onto the ground / . . . I give myself a certificate of poverty / But I cannot / Turn off the light of mind / Abused so much / At the end of our century. (Trans. Katarzyna Bielawna)

tone in the English version of the anthology than in the Polish one¹¹). In both, however, also Różewicz's compassion for human condition is emphasized. Indeed, Różewicz's "Voice" in Miłosz's own translation says more about his sensitivity than his nihilism which Miłosz cannot have overlooked.¹²

Różewicz's last answer given in the form of a poem written after Miłosz's death is more ironic than nihilistic or despairing. In his "Elegia" dedicated to the Memory of Cz. M. Różewicz presents himself as a mole who cannot even utter the word "heaven" without shame, but who still asks about friendly disputes with the poet who died (and who undoubtedly writes an elegy on the bread and wine "in heaven"). Różewicz's persona declares that he, on his part, will probably turn from Orpheus (in this manner Miłosz portrayed Różewicz in the 1948 poem, according to his own 1996 interpretation) into a . . . spade (Różewicz 381-382), a tool more appropriate for a barbarian poet, or a poet of the barbarian times, his readers might think. Yet, first of all, the spade is an allusion to Miłosz's poem "Różewicz" in which the poet is a "serious mortal / he does not dance . . . he digs in black soil / is both the spade and the mole /

¹¹ The English version reads: "Tadeusz Różewicz was marked in his early youth by the cruelties of war, in which he fought against the Nazis as a soldier of a guerilla unit. That experience influenced his poetry, in which he is a desperate nihilist, but also a compassionate interpreter of the human condition" (Miłosz, 1996: 207). The Polish version says "Certainly a nihilist. But crying, sore, sensitive, as if being skinned . . . whose total despair, also about poetry, seems unnecessary to me." (Miłosz, 2000: 242)

¹² A Voice

They mutilate they torment each other
with silences with words
as if they had another
life to live

they do so
as if they had forgotten
that their bodies
are inclined to death
that the insides of men
easily break down

ruthless with each other
they are weaker
than plants and animals
they can be killed by a word
by a smile by a look (Miłosz, 1965: 67)

cut in two by the spade” (Miłosz, 2003: 727).¹³ Certainly, it is not an image of the poet’s integrity.

4. Miłosz and other poets

In order to see the significance of the Miłosz-Różewicz dispute we have to take a look at Miłosz’s attitude towards other poets and their poetry. If we remain in the circle of the heroes of the quoted correspondence, Międzyrzecki’s poetry—with which, by the way, Miłosz never conducted any dialogue—can be evoked as an example of a more civilized or humane attitude. Międzyrzecki can certainly be regarded as a poet who supports humanity with his poetry (even if, with time, his poetry became more ironic). The message he conveys is often similar to Miłosz’s own views. One could juxtapose Miłosz’s oft-quoted sentence *W chwili dziejowej, gdy nic nie zależy od człowieka, wszystko zależy od człowieka* (“In a historic moment when nothing depends on man, everything depends on man”) with Międzyrzecki’s early poem “Rachunek” (“Account”) so as to see a similar attitude which is so different both in tone and in its message from Różewicz’s perspective. The ending of Międzyrzecki’s “Account” reads: “Who committed wildest crimes and wicked deeds? Man / In whom rescue, hope, a good start? In him, in man.”¹⁴

One could also juxtapose Miłosz’s famous poem “Który skrzywdził człowieka prostego” (“You Who Wronged [a Simple Man]”)—and its moralistic point addressed to the title figure: “Do not feel safe. The poet remembers. / You can kill one, but another is born. / The words are written down, the deed, the date” in particular—with the poem “Ten który” (“The One Who”) by Ernest Bryll in order to see that not only the nihilistic poets driven by contradictions such as Różewicz doubt eternal values conveyed by poets. This is not necessarily an evidence of their cynicism but, perhaps, of their realism: “The one who wronged a simple person—Bryll says in his poem—will find versifiers who will

¹³ For more on Miłosz’s and Różewicz’s relationships see Fiut, 2011; Hobot-Marcinek, 2012; on the symbolism of Orpheus and a mole employed by both poets see Pytlewska, 2010.

¹⁴ “W kim ratunek, nadzieja, gwiazda pomyślna? / W nim. W człowieku.” (Międzyrzecki, 1957: 142)

erase everything.”¹⁵ I will not go deeper into these two poets' verses, since I believe that some other poet, to whom a meaningful passage in another letter was devoted, offers a deeper insight into the questions which really bothered Miłosz: poets, civilization, and the integrity needed for writing human poetry.

In a letter to the Polish scholar and literary critic Jan Błoński, written only a few years earlier than the letters analyzed above, Miłosz wrote:

Gdybym umiał napisaćbym zasadniczą książkę o poezji współczesnej, głównie polskiej i amerykańskiej, a właściwie nie tyle o poezji, ile o różnych aspektach ateistycznej rozpacz. Z tego punktu widzenia fascynuje mnie zarówno Robinson Jeffers, jak Różewicz – ten to jest dopiero kawałek dla krytyka czy historyka literatury, bo ma taki plebejski zamach i takie wspaniałe błędy logiczne (Czesław Miłosz's letter to Jan Błoński, dated 19 January 1965, qtd. in Franaszek 884)

If I could I would write a fundamental book on modern poetry, mostly Polish and American, actually not a book on the poetry itself but on different aspects of the atheist despair. From this point of view, both Robinson Jeffers, and Różewicz fascinate me—the latter is quite a bit for a critic or historian of literature since he has such a plebeian bravado and so magnificent logical mistakes.

Neither the American nor the Polish example of “atheist despair” became the subject of any book written by Miłosz. However, as we have seen, he wrote much on Różewicz—happily, more on his “magnificent logical mistakes” than on his “plebeian bravado” (one more feature making Różewicz more a “barbarian” than a “civilized” poet?)—and much on Jeffers: an important essay as well as a poem devoted to the author of the “inhuman” poetry some of which was also translated into Polish by Miłosz.

Miłosz's reservations towards Jeffers seem to be similar to his reservations towards Różewicz, they are of “theological nature” as Miłosz put it during the poets' meeting in California.¹⁶ Both poets, the Polish and the American, reject all metaphysics, and they both emphasize the evil created by human beings. Human evil is perhaps more demonized by Jeffers than it is by Różewicz, yet, just like in the case of Różewicz, wars—the First and the Second World War—were

¹⁵ “Ten, który skrzywdził człowieka prostego / Wynajdzie rymopisów, co wszystko wymażą . . .” (Bryll 274)

¹⁶ “Poets Sing the Prices of Robinson Jeffers”, http://articles.latimes.com/1987-01-14/news/vw-3344_1_robinson-jeffers (Access 10.01.2013).

substantial factors in forming the negative attitude towards humanity (Miłosz, 1982: 88). In his *Visions* Miłosz presents Jeffers as the creator of *inhumanism*, who might still have seen himself as one of his “own barbarian ancestors on the cliffs of Scotland or Ireland,” taking refuge from history “by communing with the body of a material God” (Miłosz, 1982: 90) since nature was the only God he could worship. By granting himself the superior position at the summit, in his Carmel tower, Jeffers was, as Miłosz formulated it, a “vulture, and eagle, the witness and judge of mortal men deserving of pity” (Miłosz, 1982: 92). Although Jeffers’ pity was not the same as Różewicz’s, it must have played a role in Miłosz’s involvement with the poet he conducted a dialogue with, almost against himself (Miłosz, 1982: 93). Alan Soldofsky even thinks that “No two poets of this century could have hold more firmly opposed positions concerning each other’s valuations, particularly about nature and divinity” (Soldofsky 179). In the introduction to Jeffers’ “Carmel Point” placed in his *Book of Luminous Things*, Miłosz sees Jeffers as advising:

inhumanization, that is getting rid of human measurements, which deceive us because everything then refers to man, without whom the universe can perfectly exist. According to his philosophy, the human species, that destructive plasm on the surface of the globe, will disappear, and then everything will once again be perfectly beautiful (Miłosz, 1996: 34).

This could not be left unanswered from a poet who admired “Human labyrinth” (Miłosz, 1982: 197), and the response was given via the poem “To Robinson Jeffers.” Miłosz’s poem characteristically begins with establishing a cultural difference:

If you have not read the Slavic poets,
So much the better. There’s nothing there
For a Scotch-Irish wanderer to seek
.....

and ends with the valorizing of the difference

Better to carve suns and moons on the joints of crosses
As was done in my district
.....
To implore protection

Against the mute and treacherous might
Than to proclaim, as you did, an inhuman thing. (Miłosz, 1982: 95-96)

Just like Różewicz's nihilistic poems, Jeffers' inhuman poetry was a challenge to Miłosz, something to mentally and poetically wrestle with despite—once again as in Różewicz's case—the poet's "naiveté and his errors" (Miłosz, 1982, 94).¹⁷ Does nature deserve more love and admiration than culture and civilization which are only worthy of deep distrust and condemnation, as both Różewicz and Jeffers are willing to think and express in their poetry? Or do human beings deserve compassion and love together with all the culture they created, and despite all the faults of their civilization, as Miłosz is willing to think and express in his writings? Some of Miłosz's late poems convince us that in fact he himself was not so distant from the first attitude. In his late poem "Sarajevo" Miłosz writes about Europe which "listens with indifference to the cries of those who perish because they are after all just barbarians killing each other," and he portrays such a Europe as "a deception, for its faith and its foundation is nothingness." Those who comfortably but blindly live there, thinking "We at least are safe" will be struck by what "ripens in themselves." (Miłosz, 2003: 610) Both Jeffers' "morbid plasm," and Różewicz's "nothing in Proseper's cloak" as metaphors of humanity echo in these formulations.

Thus I believe that the two attitudes represent the basic duality important for Miłosz's views and, sometimes, even present in his own writings. The metaphorical "two poets" vividly present in the letters, essays and poems by Miłosz cannot be simply called "civilized" and "barbarian," but certainly the attitude to civilization created by so-called human beings in the 20th and 21st centuries is the key factor in Miłosz's literary and human judgments. More examples could be given: Różewicz's and Jeffers' side could be supplemented by the even more horrible Larkin, "reducing human condition to naked bones" (Fraszcek 641), as Miłosz put it in a letter to a Polish poet and translator Stanisław Barańczak (and not only there; see p. 114 above). Międzyrzecki's side could be enriched, *toutes proportions gardées*, by Seamus Heaney, or Josif Brodski. Brodski could even serve as a figure of metamorphosis since he transformed in Miłosz's plain

¹⁷ As Soldofsky puts it, Jeffers' error, according to Miłosz, was his privileging "nature over civilization." (187)

view from an “arrogant barbarian” into a “warm, humane man of culture” (Franaszek 713) as Miłosz reported to Giedroyć, the chief editor of Polish emigrant literary magazine *Kultura*. Joking aside, it is almost self-evident that those who are able to balance goodness and evil, also within themselves, who have enough integrity to support human beings both by their writing and by their personal attitude and virtues are always given priority by Miłosz. In this light it may become clearer why Miłosz once valued Międzyrzecki more than Różewicz. Even though the choice seems to have been so subjective and biased at first, there might have been some deeper conviction behind it.

Różewicz and Jeffers may be called barbarian poets in the sense that they are not civilized enough to come to terms with civilization. If poetry is a “leap of a barbarian who felt God,” as Julian Tuwim famously expressed it, both Różewicz and Jeffers are barbarians who manage to perform their leaps despite God, into fine pure Nature. Such poets enable us to see the other (“material,” “inhuman,” “nihilistic”) side of poetry. It also seems that they enabled Miłosz to see another side of his own poetry, which was never really free from harsh bitterness, profound anger or tricky irony as Two Poems set together by the poet himself demonstrate. In his own introduction to “Conversation with Jeanne” and “A Poem for the End of the Century” Miłosz writes:

I alone know that the assent to the world in the first poem masks much bitterness and that its serenity is perhaps more ironic than it seems. And the disagreement with the world in the second results from anger which is a stronger stimulus than an invitation to a philosophical dispute. But let it be, the two poems taken together testify to contradictions, since the opinions voiced in one and the other are equally mine. (Miłosz, 2003: 542)

The ending of the first poem could belong to Jeffers (“The sea, as today, will breathe from its depths / Growing small, I disappear in the immense, more and more free”); the language that is “not for people” from the second—to Różewicz (see Miłosz, 2003: 543-547).

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Summary

Miłosz's recently discovered letters to Paul Engle, the director of The Iowa Writing Program at the University of Iowa, give an impulse to a more comprehensive discussion on Miłosz's literary tastes and literary opinions expressed both in his private and public writings. Having analyzed the content of the letters, in particular those promoting Artur Międzyrzecki's candidature for the IWP and thus favoring him above other Polish poets, including Tadeusz Różewicz, the authoress discusses Miłosz's literary relationships with Różewicz and his attitude to Robinson Jeffers, mentioned together with Różewicz as examples of "atheist despair" in a recently published letter to Jan Błoński. It seems clear that Miłosz preferred poets of culture to those who were "nihilistic" or "barbarian," even if, as the authoress emphasizes, they were precisely the poets with whom he conducted a lifelong literary dialogue. Although favoring Międzyrzecki seems to have been simply biased, and even if it was most of all motivated by a wish to help a friend

in need, it might have also been generated by strong opinions of what poetry is and what it should be according to the author of *The Captive Mind*.

Key words: Polish and world poetry, Iowa Writing Program, Czesław Miłosz, Artur Międzyrzecki, Ernest Bryll, Tadeusz Różewicz, Robinson Jeffers

„Dwaj poeci” w nieznanach listach i innych dziełach Czesława Miłosza

Streszczenie

Ostatnio odnalezione listy Miłosza do Paula Engle’a, dyrektora Iowa Writing Program przy uniwersytecie w Iowa, są punktem wyjścia szerszej dyskusji na temat gustów literackich Miłosza i jego opinii wyrażonych zarówno w pismach prywatnych, jak i dziełach publicznych. Przeanalizowawszy zawartość listów – szczególnie promowanie kandydatury Artura Międzyrzeckiego do udziału w IWP, co oznaczało faworyzowanie go ponad innych polskich poetów, w tym Tadeusza Różewicza – autorka omawia literackie związki Miłosza i Różewicza oraz postawę Miłosza wobec Robinsona Jeffersa, wymienionego wraz z Różewiczem jako przykład „ateistycznej rozpacz” w ostatnio opublikowanym liście do Jana Błońskiego. Wydaje się oczywiste, że Miłosz cenił poetów kultury bardziej niż tych zwanych „nihilistami” czy „barbarzyńcami”, nawet jeśli, co podkreśla autorka, byli to ci poeci, z którymi toczył trwający całe życie dialog. Chociaż na pierwszy rzut oka faworyzowanie Międzyrzeckiego wydaje się po prostu stronnicze, i nawet jeśli było ono przede wszystkim motywowane chęcią pomocy przyjacielowi w potrzebie, mogło być także spowodowane zdecydowanymi opiniami o tym, czym jest i czym powinna być poezja według autora *Zniewolonego umysłu*.

Słowa kluczowe: Polska i światowa poezja, program pisarski w Iowa, Czesław Miłosz, Artur Międzyrzecki, Ernest Bryll, Tadeusz Różewicz, Robinson Jeffers