

Artur Płaczekiewicz

# Miron Białoszewski: Radical Quest Beyond Dualisms

## Polish Studies - Transdisciplinary Perspectives

Edited by Krzysztof Zajas / Jarosław Fazan



PETER LANG

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Radical Quest Beyond Dualisms



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## Preface

*Miron Białoszewski's Radical Quest beyond Dualisms* is an innovative and challenging work of literary scholarship that examines Białoszewski's artistic praxis as a certain philosophical proposition. It differs from the earlier critical approaches to the writings of this extremely important and original Polish poet, prose writer and dramatist in as much as it attempts for the first time to examine his mature poetry (1975-83) from a non-dualistic perspective. Specifically, the writer's radicalism is approached in terms of the radicalization of the postmodern worldview (i.e., a holistic, nonjudgemental and antihierarchical approach to reality), and his originality is explained by the fact that he is successful in his art in providing a positive (not merely deconstructive) proposition within the new postmodern paradigm and consciousness. Drawing upon such theoreticians as Gilles Deleuze, Richard Rorty and Todd May, and literary critics such as Anna Sobolewska and Stanisław Barańczak, I examine Białoszewski's attitude toward language in order to explore and better understand the poet's idiosyncratic artistic experiments and his "unorthodox" worldview. The poet, I argue, disregards binary oppositions. He approaches life and reality without any universal method, and his attitude is holist and antiessentialist.

This is a 200-page book that challenges a number of boundaries and scholarly stereotypes (especially in the areas of Białoszewski studies, Slavic Studies, Polish poetry, comparative literature and cultural studies) by showing that Białoszewski's artistic and life attitude was (neo-)pragmatist and anti-essentialist, and his impact upon Polish literature was truly unique and original. The study is solidly grounded in Białoszewski's texts and it also fills a major gap in existing scholarship: despite the fact that it is commonly acknowledged that Białoszewski's place in Polish literature was unique, and there have been several monographs on the subject of his writings written in Polish (e.g.: Stanisław Barańczak, "*Język poetycki Mirona Białoszewskiego*" 1974; Anna Sobolewska, "*Maksymalnie udana egzystencja. Szkice o życiu i twórczości Mirona Białoszewskiego*" 1997), he remains a largely undiscovered writer (and practically unknown to the Western world), and the puzzling qualities of his texts seem to escape critical grasp; hence interpretations of his attitudes as expressed in his writings often appear insufficient and seem to miss important aspects. In my study, I propose a new way of looking at his texts, a new interpretation and methodology which is helpful in explaining the philosophy behind the originality of his writings.

The study demonstrates in detail, for instance, how Białoszewski's radical approach to poetry evolves into a consistent life-writing and life-philosophy (life-writing-philosophy). In the poet's mature poetry, the context is identified as life and not as reality (contrary to many of his critics, who examine his works



as an expression of the relationship between the poet and the world). This questions the validity of one of the main oppositions used by critics to describe Białoszewski's project, namely maximalist-minimalist dualism. Finally, Białoszewski's writing is described as his life project; a project which is neither primarily aesthetic nor primarily social, and which is primarily not a search but a research, since it has no pre-established goal to reach except for being continued.

*Białoszewski's Radical Quest beyond Dualisms* makes a long overdue contribution to present Białoszewski, one of the most original and important among postwar Polish poets, to English-speaking readers. It also suggests new avenues of investigation for scholars working at the intersection of philosophy, semiotics, cultural and literary studies and, as such, will be of interest to a wide range of specialists in a number of disciplines, including literary criticism, Polish literary studies, comparative literary studies, and cultural studies. Specifically, it shows how the framework and theories developed by Western thinkers and philosophers associated with the postmodern discourse (e.g., Deleuze, Rorty) can be successfully applied to the artistic praxis of an Eastern-European poet, thus illustrating their validity and certain applicability, not to say universality. While *Białoszewski's Radical Quest beyond Dualisms* is rigorous in its scholarship, it is written in a clear and engaging manner and will be of interest to a more general intellectual readership. Essentially, it is a philosophical story about a development of a very interesting and original worldview of a major Polish writer, who approaches the world through his conjunctures, incorporates unpredictability and chance into his method, and whose writing is first of all about making connections. On a more universal level, it is a study of the interaction and mutual influences between text and reality, between text and life; a complex unity composed of many forces and relations that can be described but not represented.

## **Introduction:**

### **Miron Białoszewski's Life Writing Philosophy.**

Who is Miron Białoszewski? Why is he important? What is so unique and original about him and his writings? The introduction lays out the framework and the context for the exploration of this writer's life writing philosophy. First, it presents the background against which the poet's development took place. It presents his biography focusing on some radical decisions he had made in his life. It also presents his poetry within the context of his contemporaries (e.g.: Czesław Miłosz, Wisława Szymborska, Tadeusz Różewicz, Zbigniew Herbert), stressing his unique approach to art. Then, it presents Białoszewski's poetry within the context of its own internal dynamic development, and in the context of critical reactions to his art. Finally, Białoszewski's writing is described as his life project; a project which is not a search but rather a research, since it has no expectations about its results and remains open to new possibilities.

## **Part One.**

### **Beyond Representation or Traversing the Platonic Split: Antilogocentric Białoszewski.**

In Part 1, I examine Białoszewski's antilogocentric approach and the impossibility of representation. The artist's language is defined as being contingent in which case the meaning is formed only after the production of sentences. According to this view, metaphors do not reveal the hidden order of reality but force the subject to recontextualize his positions and grow from the experience. I claim that according to Białoszewski there is more than one way of representing reality, and there is no universal language to express reality's essence. Consequently, I define one of the main aspects of Białoszewski's literary practice in terms of his rejection of representation as a stable and essential relation. This is exemplified in his texts through his traversing of the made-found and subject-object splits among others. I argue that it is so because he is an antiessentialist and he is not interested in the stable relations of representation, but instead remains within the network of accidental and causal interactions. This is highly significant for his literary practice because his approach to language forces him into antimetaphysical positions.

## **Part Two.**

### **Beyond Visual Reality or Traversing the Cartesian Split: Białoszewski – the Participating Observer.**

In Part 2, I argue that the poet's antilogocentric attitude and his acknowledgement of the continuity between the subject, language and reality enable him to view himself as a part of reality, and not as separate from it. Moreover, the poet does not conclude that there are no relations between language and reality from the fact that language is unable to faithfully represent it. For the writer's subject, the lack of representation only means that there is no translation between the verbal and the non-verbal, but there are still mutual influences between language and the non-linguistic world. In other words, the subject sees himself in the position of participating observer, not merely an objective one. His participatory attitude is manifested in his poems where he traverses the dualisms between the part and the whole, form and content, spoken and written, etc. In traversing these oppositions the poet attests to the non-finality of the epistemological search as well as to the contingent nature of reality. In the subject's view there is no pre-established order governing reality and reality must remain permanently unstable.

## **Part Three.**

### **Beyond Metaphysics or Traversing the Kantian Split: Impossibility of Metaphysics.**

In Part 3, I argue that Białoszewski's sensibility should not be regarded as 'metaphysical' only on the basis that it is maximalist in the sense of being non-re-

ductive and non-exclusive. In the case of this poet, it is rather a matter of “conjunctures,” of “fuzziness,” of “unobviousness,” of “weak thought.” And Calinescu defines “weak thought” as “a typically postmodern mode of reflection that is in direct opposition to ‘metaphysics’ or ‘strong thought’ (a thought that is domineering, imposing, universalistic, atemporal, aggressively self-centered, intolerant in regard to whatever appears to contradict it, etc.)” In my view “conjunctures” and “unobviousness” are in direct opposition to “strong thought” and “metaphysics.” The poet is not “intolerant in regard to whatever appears to contradict” his thoughts, and remains open towards the Other all the time. I believe that this way of approaching life enables him to become “a guard of reality,” instead of becoming its “master” or its “servant.” Thus, in this part I claim that Białoszewski views the Self not less causally, accidentally and mechanistically than reality itself. Hence, he sees metaphysics as an unwanted sentiment. My approach in this part is twofold. On one hand, I continue to describe the consequences of Białoszewski’s attitude towards language and reality on his literary praxis, claiming that such an attitude must exclude metaphysics. On the other hand, I attempt to explain ‘metaphysical aspects’ of Białoszewski’s texts (as identified, for example, by Stala or Sobolewska) within the non-metaphysical framework I develop in Parts 1 and 2.

### **Białoszewski’s Radical Quest beyond Dualisms: Concluding Remarks.**

In the concluding chapter, I summarize basic characteristics of Białoszewski’s radical approach that evolves into a consistent life writing philosophy, and place the poet in the larger context of Western philosophy and art. In his writings there is always present an irreducible multiplicity of relations, an irreducible singularity of arrangements, and the scope of connections and influences is unpredictable. In short, in the poet’s writings the context is identified as life and not as reality, a realm that is much larger than previously assumed, and almost entirely unknown and undiscovered, since it remains outside of language for most of the time. My book analyzes Białoszewski’s writing as his life project of blurring the boundaries between his life and art, and transgressing any encountered opposition or dualism; a project which is primarily about life in language which is the only reality known to the subject.

\* \* \*

Editorial notes:

Page numbers following Białoszewski’s texts refer to his *Utwory zebrane*. [Collected Works]  
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All translations are mine unless stated otherwise.

## **Introduction: Miron Białoszewski's Life Writing Philosophy.**

“But I meant something much more different [Mnie jednak chodziło o większe co innego]” (Białoszewski 1991:90).

“For perhaps that is the secret – to practice aesthetics as affirmative play of conceptual experimentation and novelty, and not as tribunal and judgment” (Rajchman 2000:119).

### **1. Miron Białoszewski's Radical Singularity.**

Miron Białoszewski occupies a very distinct, separate, and unique place on the map of postwar Polish literature. His writings have been approached from many perspectives, and the perception of his works seems to be changing constantly. A striking fact among the critical evaluations is their unusual range of interpretations, namely the poet is considered to be a minimalist by some critics (Sandauer, Zieniewicz, Tchórzewski), and a maximalist by others (Sobolewska, Chojak, Stala). Some critics argue that Białoszewski's texts are written under full “dictation” of reality and the subject displays total submission towards it (Barańczak); others propose “inner vision” or “pure seeing” as the main method of the subject's interactions with reality (Sobolewska) claiming that the artist describes his inner world of perception. Some believe that Białoszewski is fully engaged in reality (Zaworska), while others claim that he escapes it (Werner).

The disagreements between critics very often revolve around the poet's approach to reality and identify his originality with his unorthodox relation toward the concept of subject/object duality. Thus, they assume that Białoszewski acknowledges the split between the subject and the object as essential, and they base their interpretations on various theories about the subject (existential, materialist, phenomenological, metaphysical, mystical, etc.). There are only a few critics who identify the writer's separateness not with his exceptional attitude towards the subject/object dualism but rather with the “overcoming of the distance between the narrator and the narrated [przewyciężenie dystansu między opowiadającym a opowiadanym]” (Głowiński 1993:146).

My claim is that the poet is successful in his attempt to traverse essential dualisms (between art and life, art and philosophy, art and science) because, in a Wittgensteinian way, he roots his language in his life and not in reality per se. It means that the writer does not view the relations between his subject and reality as stable and unidirectional, but he approaches them as dynamic and bidirectional interactions. This attitude enables him to escape dualistic modes of thinking and to concentrate on new relations and connections. His experimentalism is not a goal in itself, neither is the disregard for the subject/object split.

They are only the starting points to affirm life in its diversity, and to take part in constantly evolving interactions. The poet can be viewed as a maximalist because there is irreducible multiplicity in his texts. Still, he can be approached as a minimalist because he never steps outside the context he is immersed in.

In my book, I analyse Białoszewski's late poems as a particular "life writing philosophy." I focus on his late poems, where his worldview becomes fully developed and reaches its mature stage. His later phase of development provides better understanding of his earlier poems and of the choices he makes during his artistic growth. My claim is that one of the main goals of this life writing philosophy is to escape the dualistic models of thinking and to get other than representational relations involved. The artist does not agree that the Platonic division between the relative and the absolute, or the Cartesian split between the mind and the body, or the Kantian opposition between concepts and intuitions can be rigorously sustained. I argue that the poet's uniqueness is closely related to this extreme radicalization previously unmatched on the Polish literary scene. Thus, I propose a new reading of Białoszewski's poetic works, a reading from a neo-pragmatist, antirepresentationalist and antiessentialist position.

## **2. Miron Białoszewski's Life.**

Born in 1922 in Warsaw, Miron Białoszewski belongs to the war generation, a generation which mostly perished during WW2. When he is seventeen, the war breaks out, and he remains in Warsaw during the German occupation. He is still in the city during the Warsaw Uprising struggling to survive with thousands of other civilians. He does not take an active part in the fighting. During the war years, the poet manages to finish an underground high school, and enrolls into the Polish philology program at an underground university. Because of his very difficult financial situation, he has to stop studying after the war, and starts working first as a postal clerk, then as a journalist for various newspapers and magazines. In 1951 Białoszewski loses his job because he is unable to comply with the restrictions which Socialist Realism imposed on any act of creativity, including children's magazines, for which he works at the time. This radical act of nonconformism leaves him in extremely poor living conditions – he is mostly lying in bed, living on strong tea and psychedrine (a drug reducing hunger), and writing "for the drawer [do szuflady]" virtually without any chances to be published.

After Stalin's death, situation in Poland began to change, leading to the 1956 "October Thaw." Białoszewski, who until now has managed to print only a few poems in newspapers, is able to publish his first book of poetry. Even though he is not affiliated with any trend, movement or literary circle, he becomes an established poet right away. Although his poetry is considered to be radical and controversial, Białoszewski publishes three more books of poetry



(in 1959, 1961, and 1965) each time leaving his critics puzzled and uncertain as to how to approach his writings. After 1965 Białoszewski falls silent as a poet, writing mostly prose for over ten years. During this time, he publishes one book with his theatrical writings (these writings are from the period of 1955-1963), and three books of prose, including *The Memoir from the Warsaw Uprising* (where he documents his war experiences) and *The Heart Attack* (where he describes his stay in a sanatorium after his heart attack in 1973). These two events and his moving from the left-side of Vistula River (Downtown in Warsaw) to its right-side (new high-rise buildings) in 1974 prove to be the most influential events of his life, as he acknowledges himself.

Białoszewski lives a very modest if not minimalist life. In the late seventies he still does not have a job but his financial situation improves when he begins to receive a disability pension and earns some money for his publications. Nevertheless, he does not modify his habits. He still eats mostly cheese and grapes, and occasionally gets a hot dinner provided by his friends. He sleeps during the day and writes, reads, and takes walks or visits his friends during the night. With the little money he has got, he buys gifts for his friends and even travels abroad: around Europe, to Egypt, to the United States. These escapades do not influence his style of writing in any significant way. In fact, they prove that for Białoszewski there are no qualitative differences between his experiences, and a trip on a cruise ship is as interesting as taking a bus to his friends.

### **3. Miron Białoszewski's Writing in the Context of His Contemporaries.**

There is a natural caesura in Białoszewski's poetic writing. After his debut in 1956, he publishes three more volumes of poetry and turns to publishing his prose exclusively. He starts to publish his poetry again after thirteen years and writes poems (and prose) continually until his death in 1983. During the first period of poetry writing he is also involved (together with his friends) in an experimental theatre located in the friend's apartment and later in his own place (1955-1963).

It is interesting to look at the poet's generational context (more relevant in his first poetic phase) when he still experiments with form and simultaneously develops his worldview (see Brzozowski 1993), which will be documented in full in his second phase. The artist's extreme sensitivity to his context is well known, and as I argue, it is also one of the main sources of his originality (his theatrical experience in this regard is not without influence). Therefore, it is worthwhile to look at and identify some of the differences specific to his art. It is worth showing where and how he differs from other poets of his generation and from some of their influential and still active predecessors.

In 1956 on the wave of the political Thaw, Białoszewski publishes his first volume of poetry *Turns of Things* (*Obroty rzeczy*), but his poetic voice is already fully developed. The generation born in the 1920s, whose artistic debut

should have taken place in the first half of the 1940s, is marked by the traumatic experience of WW2 more acutely than any other. Many young poets from this generation perished during the war (Krzysztof Baczyński (born 1921), Tadeusz Gajcy (born 1922), Andrzej Trzebiński (born 1922)), and those who survived (Tadeusz Różewicz (born 1921), Zbigniew Herbert (born 1924), Miron Białoszewski (born 1922), Wisława Szymborska (born 1923), Tymoteusz Karpowicz (born 1921)) had to re-evaluate their assumptions about the condition of humanity, and their expectations about the progress of civilization. Their generational situation is very different from the situation of poets from older generations. Many of these also died during the war (Józef Czechowicz (born 1903), Tytus Czyżewski (born 1880), Kazimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer (born 1865)), but the survivors (Julian Przyboś (born 1901), Czesław Miłosz (born 1911), Leopold Staff (born 1878), Julian Tuwim (born 1894)) had something to return to, a point of reference from which to start anew.

There are two orientations within Polish poetry after the war. Błoński (2001), in an influential article originally published in 1974, describes them in terms of oscillating between two poles: between Miłosz and Przyboś. The two paths can be approached as a classicist one (more traditional) and an experimental one (antitraditional). The classicist path, besides Miłosz represented also by Herbert and Szymborska, is concerned with traditional philosophical and ethical issues and their universal dimensions. The antitraditional group is smaller and necessarily more varied in the approaches of its members. Besides Przyboś, it includes Różewicz, Karpowicz and Białoszewski, but there are more differences in their poetics than similarities. One of the things they have in common is the experimental nature of their writing. There are many mutual influences between the two groups, and many interrelated issues associated with the concepts that individual poets discuss. The distinction is rather descriptive than essential, as they are all heavily influenced by various interwar avant-garde movements.

Przyboś, the leading poet of the interwar Krakow Avant-garde, as if untouched by his war experiences, remains optimistic and preoccupied with light and energy in his poems, still propagating his ideas and beliefs from before the war. He continues to understand the mission of poetry as a search for beauty, clarity, energy and light (Balcerzan 1999). His aim is to “conquer reality by art, language by a poetic mode, which Przyboś defines through its novelty [podbój rzeczywistości przez sztukę, języka przez mowę poetycką, którą Przyboś określa przez jej nowość]” (Błoński 2001:175).

It seems that the starting point for Karpowicz’s poetic experiments is similar to Przyboś’s, but the former poet lacks the admiration and ecstasy that are inherent in the latter’s poet work. Karpowicz’s poetry is full of fascination for the magical power of the word, and his goal is to name the object precisely and adequately. His experiments with idioms and phraseological structures are directed toward reaching this goal through breaking down the phraseologisms

in order to recombine them together in new arrangements. Thus, he is a logocentric poet, and his poetry remains goal-oriented.

Miłosz's situation is different from Przyboś's, as Błoński remarks: "Przyboś never ceases to adore poetry; [whereas] in Miłosz it often awakens distrust [Przyboś nigdy nie przestawał wielbić poezji; w Miłoszu budziła ona często nieufność]" (2001:177). Being a catastrophist poet before 1939, Miłosz finds himself after the war in a position of someone whose prophecies have been fulfilled. He realizes that poetry lacks the power of salvation, so he becomes interested in moral and historical issues. In Błoński's words, "Miłosz likes to degrade poetry; the position he accords the poet, however, is by no means trivial [...]. His [Miłosz's] poetic diction is not 'more accurate,' as propagated by Przyboś, but rather 'fuller' [Poezję lubi więc Miłosz poniżać; poecie jednak przyznaje miejsce nie byle jakie [...]. Jego [Miłosza] mowa nie jest 'celniejsza', jak chciałby Przyboś, ale raczej 'pełniejsza']" (2001:178-79). The poets born before 1920 still believe in the Romantic paradigm where the mission of poetry is sacred and poets have a special status. Although with time the status of a poet becomes more problematic and less clear, both Przyboś (intellectual avant-garde) and Miłosz (moral authority) believe this dream to be true much more than any younger poet. Both Przyboś and Miłosz remain poet-teachers and poet-seers who often employ pathos in their poetics.

For the generation of the 1920s, and especially for Białoszewski, this pure and even innocent pathos of the telos of the special mission of poetry is no longer accessible. They question and discuss it in a variety of ways. Herbert and Szymborska do it discursively. They question progress, clarity of moral choices, humanism, Romantic and Avantgardist paradigms, and language, but they do so within the tradition and without any formal experimentation. And most importantly, they remain uncertain about the "right answers." Ultimately they acknowledge that tradition and history have their weak moments, but they also recognize their validity and usefulness in dealing with problems faced by postholocaust man. Thus, they are poets of culture who attempt to reconstruct and rebuild the world from fragments of tradition and philosophical issues that are carefully examined and subject to a permanent verification process. Miłosz, Herbert and Szymborska (the classicists), in their own idiosyncratic ways, focus on philosophical and ethical issues in order to find some order in the destroyed and unpredictable world. In an ironic gesture they simultaneously question any form of fundamentalism, while persistently focusing on ethical consequences and the necessity of making decisions. Paradoxically, their focus on the ethical dimensions of the human condition is driven by their extreme skepticism.

In this regard Szymborska, with her fusion of philosophical and everyday issues, comes closer to Białoszewski than does Herbert in whose poems the mundane is almost nonexistent and who feels most at home in abstract realms (with references to the mundane). Miłosz shares with Białoszewski a very special respect for reality, but their differences are unbridgeable. While Miłosz



adores “the skin of the world” (as a skeptical classicist he does not believe that it is possible to penetrate to the essential), for Białoszewski the world does not have a skin at all but only the “inside” (Nasiłowska 1993:200). And Białoszewski is always inside. While Miłosz continues to examine the complex entanglements of individuals with great historical events, Białoszewski demonstrates that it is in fact a personal history (not objective historical processes) that has its largely unpredictable impact on the (relevant) world. Miłosz’s and Białoszewski’s attachments and attention to reality are equally intense, but they approach reality from opposite directions. For Miłosz, “literature and art are instead [literatura i sztuka są zamiast]” (in Błoński 2001:181) of life; they take place beside it. For Białoszewski, in contrast, his life and art are inseparable, “writing and life go hand in hand. And sometimes they are the same [pisanie i życie idą razem. A chwilami są tym samym]” (in Burkot 1992:143).

Herbert and Białoszewski conduct similar experiments with objects and although their results are in large part alike, they ultimately derive opposite consequences from their testing. For both, the object cannot be known and understood in its entirety. However, for Herbert it means that there is an unbridgeable gap between the observer and the observed, and the object is divided between its outside and inside. For Białoszewski the realization that the object cannot be reached with language only testifies to the impossibility of justifying any divisions within it. As Nasiłowska says, Białoszewski’s objects are “not divided into their ‘skin’ and inside [nie podzielone na ‘skórę’ i wnętrze]” (1993:197). The poet discovers that there is something else happening between language and objects, language and subjects, and this something is beyond any conceptualizations. Thus, for Białoszewski a word never stands alone, it is always ‘a word plus something else’ (Balcerzan 1998). This is why the poet turns toward ‘prosaic’ solutions in his writing, toward context and situation, and at some point toward prose exclusively.

Białoszewski’s subject does not aim to ‘express’ his ideas (vs. Herbert’s subject) but rather to experiment with new relations within constantly changing situations. His “‘I’ exists only in the world [‘ja’ istnieje tylko w świecie]” (Nasiłowska 1993:198). Herbert’s subject is a post-Cartesian Self that is abstract and alienated from the world, for whom the collapse between the subject and the object is extremely problematic. Białoszewski’s Self is concrete and at the same time somewhat out of focus. His subject, in opposition to Herbert’s subject, is so closely attached to the world that it cannot be separated from it. In Białoszewski’s case, this situation is not problematic.

Herbert’s and Szymborska’s interests in moral and philosophical issues differ from Miłosz’s approach. While Herbert and Szymborska remain uncertain as to the evaluation of particular decisions, and they do not see poetry’s mission as a tribunal and judgement, for Miłosz it is precisely the poet who remembers and will judge history. Such a strong moral voice is present only in Różewicz and at this only sometimes. For Różewicz, however, it is still different – his

poet or man is not only the one who judges but also, or even more often, the one who will be judged. While Miłosz attempts to reconstruct the moral man, even though he is skeptical about it, Różewicz recognizes the total destruction of the old world. After the war he finds himself in a chaotic and fragmented world that cannot be put back together. He is aware that there is no return, the old dreams cannot be realized, and this is precisely his problem. He would prefer the pre-war assumptions about humanity to be verifiable.

In contrast, Białoszewski's ethical concerns are almost never stated overtly. Nevertheless, as Niżyńska argues in her unpublished dissertation *Playing Out Life in the Everyday: Ethical Maximalism in the Works of Miron Białoszewski*, the poet's ethical sensitivity is underlying his entire artistic oeuvre. It is inseparable from his attitude toward reality, his openness, and a certain kind of exposure. This ethical dimension is also closely connected with his views on community, and his understanding of the subject as a not fully independent individual, but rather as a "subject-in-community" (Haber's term), always connected with other subjects via many unpredictable relations.

Różewicz and Białoszewski choose formally more radical paths because for them the impossibility of return to the views about the world from before the war is not a valid option anymore. Their language testifies to their trauma also at its structural level. Różewicz 'speaks directly' in his specifically dry voice with a minimal number of attributes and metaphors. Białoszewski's words and syntax are broken and displaced, and it is not fully clear what the new arrangements mean. They are both poets 'fighting with' metaphors (understood as poetic devices or ornaments), denying them their privileged place in poetry, and redefining their applicability.

For Przyboś, as for any prewar avant-garde poet, formal experimentation is a necessary artistic choice. It has analogical repercussions on the level of consciousness, thus it modifies the worldviews leading to a new world order, and its goal is to reach its state of pure expression with its emotional load. Przyboś's fundamental building blocks to accomplish his goals are complex metaphors with many layers of meaning. This definition of formal experiments does not significantly change for him after his war experiences. But for the poets from the 1920s, as well as for Miłosz, this definition of experimentation is no longer valid. "For Przyboś, metaphor is a privileged poetic device; for Miłosz – the privileged device is an image, or rather an ability to arrange and juxtapose images [Uprzywilejowanym środkiem poetyckiej wypowiedzi jest dla Przybosia przenośnia, dla Miłosza – obraz albo raczej umiejętność szeregowania i zestawiania obrazów (jukstapozycja)]" (Błoński 2001:179). Therefore, Miłosz, Herbert and Szymborska are not interested in formal experiments at all, and they articulate their distrust in a proper style with grammatically correct sentences. They introduce new themes, problems, and arrangements but do not question the poetic style or its structures as such. Hence, for them the status of metaphors is not problematic.

Białoszewski and Różewicz are on the opposite side in this regard. They both modify their language but they do it differently. Różewicz introduces many innovations by reducing traditional poetic devices such as (ornamental) metaphors and adjectives, introducing citations and 'other voices.' Białoszewski goes much further, and breaks the morphological and syntactical structures of language (by creating neologisms and grammatical errors). He moves away from metaphors understood as expressions, which can 'lock' or pinpoint the meaning in a precise way, so he differs from Przyboś in this respect. He also moves away from using images in the way applied by Miłosz, since it signifies the detachment of art/literature from life, so his approach differs from Miłosz's too.

Białoszewski and Różewicz are similar in their recognition of the necessity of experimentation but not for the reason that it is able to bring about a better world (Przyboś's motivation). It is rather because they view the war destruction as so overwhelming that it becomes impossible to reconstruct or rebuild the world on the prewar premises concerning humanity. These assumptions (about progress, human nature, the moral imperative) prove to be seen as illusions without any verifiable and justifiable grounds. Everything needs to be verified and tested anew. For Białoszewski and Różewicz these conclusions reach much further than for the classicist poets because they involve the modification of their language as well (Przyboś is not skeptical but optimistic in his experiments). Białoszewski seems to be the most radical of them because his language is being modified anew not only at the level of basic words and meanings but also at the level of basic sounds.

Przyboś, the literary critic, disliked the classicists for obvious reasons – they were simply too traditional for him. He also criticized Różewicz for his pessimism and rejection of a privileged place for metaphors. From the 1956 debuts he enthusiastically welcomed only Białoszewski for his innovative language, fusion of the high and low voices, and affirmation of everyday objects. Soon, however, it turned out that Białoszewski's affirmation was not in full concord with Przyboś's optimism, and he condemned the fusion of poetry and prose, the lack of clarity, and the fuzziness of Białoszewski's *Było i było* [*There Was and There Was*] (1965).

Białoszewski's poetry of his early phase testifies to the war experience he shared with his generation. His subject finds himself in a disintegrated and fragmented world. He remains skeptical about any universal ideals and dissatisfied with the Enlightenment assumptions about the world and humanity. He draws the most extreme consequences from his dissatisfaction with the previous and unfulfilled promises of humanism. Therefore, due to the extremity of his radicalism, he also differs from other poets of his generation in many respects.

While Różewicz, Herbert, and Szymborska overtly address the past and/or memory, and remain discursive and revisionist in their examinations of history, Białoszewski never steps outside his present context. While the classi-

cists and Różewicz attempt to save what has not been totally destroyed, and analyze what has been lost, Białoszewski saves and affirms what remained within his reach (the simplest of items: a stove, a chair, a spoon). Other poets are in some sense concerned with stability (questioning it, showing the impossibility of it); they look for some order in a disintegrated world without any foundations (moral, aesthetic, existential). For Białoszewski the impossibility of return to the previous order is not problematic but opportunistic. He is a poet of instability who searches for new possibilities of expression not through the process of naming but rather through the process of creating new connections and interrelations. While all other poets (including Różewicz) are epistemological pessimists, Białoszewski in the end employs his own new epistemology where the impossibility of total knowledge (the source of epistemological pessimism) is replaced by his search for new connections and possibilities requiring only 'approximate' knowledge, and consisting primarily in a certain kind of awareness with a specifically open attitude. This can be most vividly seen in Białoszewski's attitude toward language. For him words are not separate entities representing concepts, feelings, problems, etc. as they are for all of the above poets (regardless of their positions toward the possibility or the degree of reconciliation between language and reality), but rather words are continuous with their environment. It is always a word plus an object ("words added to things [słowa dodawane do rzeczy]"), "a word plus a human being, a word plus a situation [słowo plus człowiek, słowo plus sytuacja]" (Balcerzan 1998:197). Differently put, while other poets (classicists and Różewicz alike, although from different angles and with varying results) examine consequences and the extent of war destruction on humanity, Białoszewski is more concerned with the new possibilities in the defragmented world.

This difference in attitude and the different direction of his interests as compared to other poets are both well manifested in the poet's various approaches to irony. While all the poets are great ironists, Białoszewski is rather humoristic than ironic. While humour is more direct, irony is characterized by its double meaning: its surface meaning which is usually false, and its underlying meaning which is in direct opposition to the surface meaning. Thus, irony is based on at least two assumptions: a) there is a distance between the subject and the described object, and b) the subject is in a position of the Knower – there is an implicit hierarchy between the two. Since Białoszewski's poetry is not primarily revisionist, it is hard for his subject to distance himself in order to articulate his ironic judgement. When Białoszewski is ironic, he is usually referring to himself; he is self-ironic (in succession to his self-verifications). Other poets have their humorous moments, but they are never affirmative or positive in their humoristic statements; rather it is an 'ironic' humour. For Białoszewski the fact that 'he knows he knows nothing' is not a problem but rather a starting point for something new and unexpected. He does not question, discuss or problematize the hierarchy between the subject and the object, or between art and life, but