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SO THAT
FINALLY IT
IS ALL ABOUT
LIFE IN POETRY.
LYRICS BY
BOGUSŁAW
KIERC

1.

An incredible thing: all what is revealed in poems and prose notes by Bogusław Kierc. I am intimidated and dazzled with abundance of the poet's, actor's, man's experiences. So one must reach out for and dust off the word 'spirituality' and turn it till you lose your breath, turn it around to all sides. Without falling into devotion or another mystic cheapness. Anyway, it is not possible in the face of so dynamically fluent writing about oneself with the entire oneself. Narcism? If yes, what kind? First of all, justified with a conscious choice of poetic (and wider – spiritual) tradition.

And, indeed, Kierc's thinking about deeper layers of the poetry by Julian Przyboś started from the Narcissus, from attempts at their interpretation. However, before they occurred, there had first been poetic struggles, stimulated with a cordial letter from the mentor. A seventeen-year-old student of the State Secondary School of Artistic Techniques in Bielsko-Biała almost got crazy: *I entered a new period of ecstatic sensualism, this time boiling with my internal hell of gender, although the times were heavenly. Then, as never before, I looked at a rose and saw not only a symbol, but also an object, and an erotic object, I wanted to penetrate flowers, wedge myself into the light; Greek myths to me were no longer only a collection of beautiful stories*¹. Maybe it was the 'ecstatic sensualism' that was the bridge between one's own human and lyrical personality and what he discovered in the poems by Przyboś? Let us emphasize here the special role of *Kwiat*

nieznany [Unknown flower], a volume which for the young follower was a special emanation of refreshed or changed spirit of the poetry of the master, a collection with *lyrical cruelty penetrating dark reasons for the dazzling 'I don't know'*².

The process of gradual integration into the 'leading character', into his gesture, word and writing was triple-track. Firstly: the youngster wrote poems, as he thought, in the master's style. Secondly: he started to think about what poetry was doing with him, changing into an essayist and literary critic. Thirdly: he started to say it out loud, stage its tone (and other) nuances in a form of original recitation appreciated and awarded in recitation contests. Let us not underestimate the latter fact. Arguing with Artur Sandauer, Kierc says that the critic does not hear this and that, and his main mistake is that he reads poetry as if he was reading prose. The act of understanding Przyboś's poetry – according to Kierc – should start from hearing the phrases said out loud. In the beginning there is the sound, the music of the words – the sound of a modulating, somehow already interpreting, voice. This is the starting point to the next interpretation, a change from a reciter or an actor to a hermeneutist, describing his feeling of somebody else's poem 'felt' in the happening spectacle. This is how this amazing game of reflections starts, a parade of mirror sequences. As you can see, it is based on particular sensitivity, maybe even oversensitivity, feeling the word in its colour and materiality, in the 'ecstatic sensuality' indeed.

And that is how Kierc (as an interpreting performer) stands in front of the work by Przyboś *Kwiat lauru*, seeing in it the phenomenon of narcissism *probably the most secret, but the most deceitfully realized*³. A reflection on the text did not exclude returning to other poems of the mentor. The entirety created by Kierc for the purpose of his own sensitivity and imagination, seems to fit into the recognition of the erotic act (or self-erotic), creating a subcutaneous, barely felt layer in some poems by Przyboś (let me remind the words of Przyboś – *who*

knows better what is happening under my skin). These first intuitions of a young critic converge with later discoveries, revealed for example in connection with young Przyboś's reading lists⁴. They are described in the essay titled *Łóżysko* in the book *Przyboś i*. In Kierc's opinion, those early letters already contain something which will define the essence of the mature lyrics by the author of *Śruby*.

Tenderness was an extremely important ingredient of this sensitivity: *Tenderness not only to another person, but also to the world appearing to young Przyboś in convulsive alternation, in ecstatic swelling...⁵*. And that tenderness in parts of some letters melted into one erotic vitalism: *What will happen if we use the word 'gender' as a superlative? And Przyboś's writing is like that. And although you cannot use it superlatively towards juveniles, as they are vividly gender. From peaty desire, covered with religious ecstasies for so long, with angel wings, there erupt blasphemous poems, not inhibited anymore by any shame after the rejection of God. Throwing up, cursing with the same vital strength which, put in the rigour of not substitutive imagination anymore, will later produce such lyrics like, for example, Próba Całości⁶*.

Narcissus by Przyboś and Kierc, *not a man, not a boy⁷*, is not a stereotypical figure of self-praise, but rather a symbol of sacrifice, a final dedication to the world in its simultaneous spiritual and material substantiality. In the frame of the androgenicity of this character, the dichotomies and oppositions seen by Kierc lose their meanings – starting with femininity and masculinity, body and spirit, and ending with sin and sanity, gender and intellect. Clear, logical, constructivist Przyboś appears to be totally somebody else, somebody rather secret, allusive, and eventually dark. His relationship with the sun, the earth, nature turns out in this light as almost esoteric or even – here Kierc does not hesitate to experience and describe it – mystic⁸.

An example here may be reading of *Znak przedśworny* and a reference to the part: *He cut a hole in the balk with his penknife [...] he lay on*

his abdomen and he sew himself tapping himself on the hole. The gravest sin to seek and touch little larks⁹. Kierc comments: *This tradition, being a type of transcendently directed self-abuse, reveals its narciss nature in probably the most concentrated way. This act of self-abuse is offering (if we understand ejaculation as 'emission of virtually immortal substance') two ways: as giving away life and wakening new life.*¹⁰ And further: *This fission of ego in self-eroticism is also a special kind of reflection. The object of the act of self-abuse is the desiring and the desired, therefore, the prefiguration of the whole. In that sense (like Narcissus) feminine-masculine [...]. His own body suddenly starts to exist objectively as feeling and felt, and the object of the body understood in this way is changing, or rather interchanging, so, e.g., touching own skin causes once an image of a boy touching a girl's skin, the other time a girl who touches the skin of a boy. And, therefore, the content provoked by the words: 'The gravest sin to seek and touch baby larks' – is closer to the above interpretation and this sentence may also be read as an equivalent of touching your own nudity, which obviously – taking it deeper – does not exclude the relation with the sign of the father, but reveals this relation even more*¹¹.

Here, I make a break to look at sentences written by Kierc forty-seven years later in the book *Karawadźje (inklinacje i konfabulacje)*. The poet, hiding in the book under the character of 'tentamten', writes: *Julian Przyboś was the poet who 'lived' in Tentamten and spread there in such a way that in that spreading of Przyboś he felt his own larger vastness. Taking into account their cordial relation, it was a natural relocation of oneself into someone else*¹². It is a meaningful gesture not only to consistently connect spiritually with the master, but also a permanent renewing of plots associated with the master; so here we read about the Narcissus, an artist, growing to the level of a symbol, not ashamed of any truth about himself, starting the adventure with consciousness from his own body and turning this adventure into art. As, for example, in the part highlighting the initial moment of

'narcistic epiphany', so characteristic for many poems by Kierc, and indirectly taken from *Przyboś's* poetry. *I think that then I felt 'somebodiness' of a naked body that I knew was mine, but I saw it was somebody's. That means that the body with the reflection in the mirror is towards me and sends to me what I feel as my own experience of the body. But such experience of the body was not conditioned by the 'presence' of the mirror. I was – I would put it in such a weird way – naked and happy. Radiant with nudity. And because of that radiance I felt also nudity of others. As if sent to me. By whom? [...] By you. From you. [...] That unfulfilled mutual pronoun [...] was emitted from my feeling of me. Maybe this is what guarantees this feeling to me. This is what I have called 'mność' for some time. What erupts from it is that mutual pronoun which attracts me, calls me, calls my name – nudity, as this is my first visible name*¹³.

2.

*Bogusław Kierc – a phenomenon totally separate in our cultural life – a poet, an essayist, an actor, a director and a teacher, he has not yet received sufficient scholarly reflection over his various artistic achievements which include first of all literary and theatre creation. In-depth reading of reviews that were published after publications of subsequent poetry volumes [...] proves quite large trouble with interpretation and axiology encountered by critics. They constitute a challenge to take a closer look to texts of Kierc and define their proper dimension.*¹⁴.

These words written many years ago may still be the indication of the direction for the reader and the researcher. Kierc as a literary phenomenon remains elusive. Scarce attempts remind of what I try to formulate. The 'object' escapes not only the language of description, but also any reasoning. Indeed, I am able to make several meaningful sentences, however, immediately after reading a live poem, squirming with this life dynamics, these sentences lose their meaning. The hot matter of the so-described ('showing off') spirit, contagious for a sensitive reader,

knocks out the weapon, and all those terms, definitions, pigeonholes (e.g. categorizing to streams, generations) do not seem adequate. I can only replay the impressions, not fully trusting their legitimacy. I, therefore, go back in my memory to one of the volumes, to *Plankton* (2006). I go back to such reading mode.

*It is clear that things are unclear*⁵. Maybe then we will be able to take them out from the shadow or put them in the shadow in a meaningful way? Maybe we will be able to put in the light the hidden and silent, glare them in the flash? The moment of a poem must be transcendent, it has to be an explosion of image and meaning, discussion and emotion, cognitive explosion, total glare. But what about the language? Does a language allow something like that?

Questions swirl like images and phrases in poems by the Wrocław poet, who starts from making us sensitive to the dialectic of darkening-brightening. Mickiewicz's boy and 'gem' in his hand throws a flash on something, the rest stays in the shadow. Some bodies stay in the shadow. What is coming out of the shadow here, what brightens up with 'frivolous flashes'? All in all, they are not as frivolous as they pose to be. These flashes are basically solemn things, anointed, these are deep flashes.

This depth is connected with uniting, with pursuing unity despite contrasts tearing us and the world apart. In the beginning it is dark and bright, later only 'seeing dark and bright', a cognitive hybrid allowing unprejudiced merging insight. In the beginning there is a woman, a man and a child. Later, only one large gender, absorbing the differences, cosmic gender. In the flashes, namely in clear significant seeing, you can only see unity. One may say, after mystics, that you can see One.

So, gender is 'blown off'. What else is blown off? Ontology. The rigour of being-non-being. It is floated, that is, carried with water, softened. Diluted. It allows all this to float like plankton, to wave.

This book is about everything being liquid. Any limits. Limits of the body, gender, limits of being, limits of the language. It is about what few people are about nowadays in the breakup-supporting literature. Kierc's attempt is a reply to the question whether nowadays it is possible to see the world as a whole, a unity closing in itself, in rhizomes of contrasts. This surrounding plankton of opportunities and realizations may be used in a mystic and poetic manner. Every day we swallow it in parts, safe doses, we live in clear divisions. Poetic thinking questions pigeonholing, wants to abolish divisions.

And it starts from the very foundations. What is the result of 'floating gender'? Writing beyond gender, being next to gender. What is the result in the text? A mixture of desires. A mixture of voices and love hungers. In these poems a man professes love to a man (or rather a boy), a woman teases a man, and a man adores a woman like a goddess. Love is pervasive and multi-linguistic, evangelically full, expressed in the spirit of Saint John, not subject to moral qualification and not perverse at all, despite the shocking circumstances.

In the opinion of the poet love is the condition for being, its only big 'clearance', a flash in the dark. In another poem they talk about being 'composed of lights only'. What lights? What happens between the elusive bodies ('sludge bodies') of women and men, has a spiritual dimension, as these lights are not only a reflection of love uniting everything, but also a confirmation of existence of the final instance, the God. What is created in these poems during another attempt to contact the sphere represented by Him may be called modern symbolism. Symbolism with experiences of many avant-gardes, especially the linguistic one. Kierc reactivates symbolism, creating its lonely island in the sea of poetic concretism of the past day. It notes flashes from the other side, traces on sand, signs, including into this network of expectations and hopes – a human being, his 'dark-and-bright seeing', so being torn apart between the physical and spiritual,

the real and the dreamt. It is a kind of symbolism from Freud, mysticism from Heidegger: dark nooks of the body lead to ecstasy helping to get through the curtains of being. This type of exaltation may be called cognitive ecstasy as a one-off shocking insight allows for deeper cognition.

And on top of all that considerations on the limits of a language come, on linguistic possibilities to experience that liquidity, on that mystical dialectic which – as the poet says – sometimes does not find the words... and then one should thank Wittgenstein and his formula. Kierc, with each poem, wants to seize and make aware of something 'from outer world', something normally unspoken, something expressible only in poetry – in flashes of sounds, in melodies of association, in the rhythm of inflows and outflows of surprising metaphors. In that sense the language of new poems by Kierc has no limits, is extremely inflated, swinging. It hits some riverbanks but removes these riverbanks at the same time. This crazy ambiguity, this ecstatic dilution of meanings means something: one wants to escape destiny, finiteness, interpretation, one wants to go to the other side.

3.

In the poetry of Bogusław Kierc romantic reminiscences overlap the aesthetic experience of avant-garde. After Przyboś and Karpowicz one cannot speak with clear and indirect emotion, however, one may refer to Słowacki all the time (this Wrocław poet seems to suggest that); and to poems of the saint John of the Cross as well: *His eroticism pushed me that way not less stronger than Książę Niezłomny and Apocalypsis cum figuris – two performances by Grotowski being then for me the potentiality and actuality of the theatre and total fulfilment in acting. But, of course, my works – in their existential and ethical dimension – were decided by experiences of married life, fatherhood, dealing with difficulties in supporting the family in the times of social-political*

difficulties, as well – some kind of physical oversensitivity that I mentioned in relation to my fascination with Przyboś⁶.

A deep immersion in the tradition of Polish poems sensed in these works would indicate also affinity with Baroque. The poet himself, when talking with me, agreed with these observations, mentioning the closeness he felt with the language of Baroque expression, with rhythm and images characteristic for it. *I do not read Sep-Szarzyński or Morsztyn as monuments; I am involved by their invention and outstanding indigenously, consistence in experiencing and expressing their being. Outstanding because the distance of matters to heaven and earth was different. That closeness of heaven and earth or even their identical concreteness – that suits me a lot. And who do I talk with the most in my poetry? Unfortunately, with myself. I mean – my poetry talks with me or that thing that becomes independent from me as poetry – talks with me⁷.*

In the sources outlined in this way (the Middle Ages, Baroque, Romanticism) one searches, in a paradoxical way, for the totally contemporary boldness in the attitude to certain matters. Those belonging to the category of the most important, final, regarding life⁸, death, God and the world, body and love. Kierc finds in these old languages an encouragement to take the risk, to break the taboo. The feeling of the said unacceptability (risk?) hits the hardest while deconstructing the interlacement of religiousness with sexuality. This is the biggest taboo, which Kierc wanted to tame and worked a lot on it, hiding from time to time behind uncertainty and fear against blasphemy. It was determined years ago that due to living sacrum, it is not acceptable to write about sensations of the body. And if somebody attempts it, then for sure these should not be erotic sensations of bisexual, or any, expression. In our culture it is more the spirit that worships its faith, and the body follows behind as the stronghold of sin. Kierc triumphally and gracefully reverses the proportions, watching with focused attention bigger and smaller crimes

of the body. His body (and many other mentioned, described, painted similar bodies) matures to transcendence, to directly support the evolving spiritual relation¹⁹. It may be called 'believing physicality'. The erotic ecstasy neighbours with the religious, one becomes the other, melting one in another, in the perspective of an intense emotion and forming artistic experience.

4.

Let me repeat: I am intimidated and dazzled with spirituality revealed with such unheard of courage. A critic must weigh words not to fall into devotion or other suspicious mysticism. Anyway, that is not possible in the face of so dynamically fluent writing about yourself with the whole you. Maybe that does not sound too skilful but fits into the spirit of the last book by Kierc. Basically, the whole series of books. As this stream resonates and grows from *Bazgroły dla składacza modeli latających*, and through *cię-mność* leads to *Karawadźja* (where in the sub-title it is emphasized that we deal with a part of triptych titled *nniemania*). And if you hold in your hand the newest book by Kierc titled *jatentamten*, then you see that this thing has no end – a clearly directed confession grows and flows through subsequent volumes. 'Tentamten' is a character that guides us through 'secrets of soul'... and body in *Karawadźja*, constantly bringing up on the way the concept of 'cię-mność', which is essential for this confessionalism to finally find illumination in a clear and sonorous tone of the poems shaping the separate series titled *jatentamten*.

We are witnesses of a peculiar experiment on oneself and the usual structure of revealing 'oneself', or – as the author would say – 'myself' and 'selfness'. That experiment covers not only a shift of the known borders of baring oneself, but also the blurring of literary rigours, including, for example, genre rigours. One of the questions accompanying the reception may regard reader's orientation in the

space of highly dense senses and forms which pour one into another, rapidly changing their shapes and expressions. It is not significant where the line ends, as it may not end at all, just ready to jump into a prose part loaded with amazing energy. What captures the embarrassment of the reader well is the attempt at mediation written on the book's cover by Piotr Matywiecki, who defines *Karawadźje* as a wonderful, free and masterful weave of genres: next to poems we find here essays, parts of autobiographies, interpretations of author's own works.

However, I have the impression that there is nothing 'alongside', or instead – everything is one explosion of poignant expression, and partitioning the monologue into shreds and attempts at classifying them into genres do not have much sense. There is basically one sense here: you may, brother, identify with the confession and its figures, or, stating that this is some kind of nonsense, paranoia and seduction, leave in peace. In the market there are so many 'colourful' publications which soothe and appreciate you.

Kierc proposes other conditions of reading which, in my opinion, must be very close to believing, if it is to be full or proper. As before, one should first 'love' Przyboś to open their eyes and heart to some 'extravagances and pranks', to a specific kind of Kierc's exaltation, now, what is important, these are other mirrors shown to us for approval: Saint John of the Cross, Empedocles, Cavafy, Rilke, mystic Mickiewicz and similar Słowacki, Angelus Silesius, Shakespeare, Wojacek, etc. We will talk more about painters and sculptors but now I want to once again emphasize the intimate sphere of reception. It is talked about directly in the first words of the book: *Ten decided to move two other syllables away from himself and as Tentamten tidy up his examination of conscience; of course, of impure conscience, but subjected to eager purification, which sometimes gives an impression of vocal exercises, as if it was more about the voice timbre than about what this voice utters to the intimate listener*²⁰.

In this moment the place of the author of that sketch becomes clear, as he tries to be some kind of 'an intimate listener'. Maybe he had similar adventures with his own body and its unclear perception, with the whole insatiable and twisted biology so unpleasant to all orthodox and zero-one moral systems. Because this is a book about discovering 'co-physicality', if I put it this way, about an organic attitude to the other body and all of its agitations. Kierc's soul is first of all physical, sending signals through the body, it smells like human skin, shines like a light in the human eye, and only then looks for words and formulas to describe what is happening. Kierc has the courage to talk openly about nudity, about experiencing it which allows to understand another person. In his opinion, first there is secret and beautiful brotherhood of nudity, being the base for next, maybe more complicated forms of human communication.

In this interpretation the mystic unity is always some kind of 'duality', just impossible without the other (in that context gender of the other has no bigger meaning), and without this unifying 'ciemność' the final bond between 'you in me and me in you' is kind of crippled, incomplete. The beginning of opening up to the external ego and the other body lies in oversensitive perception of one's own body, rifting into the visible substance (e.g., in the mirror) and the felt substance. Let us repeat this important quotation: *Then I think I felt 'somebody'sness' of a naked body that I knew was mine, but I saw it's somebody's.* Here are the sources of experiences beyond the ordinary feeling of physicality. The 'radiation of nudity' triggers the illusion of additional presence which tries to be grasped with an 'unfilled pronoun', then called the 'mutual pronoun'.

Kierc sees in those deep somatic experiences a source of his own mysticism and transposes it to mysticism in general, reading e.g. Saint John of the Cross in this style. *My nudity seeing something which is wider than being a body or a living soul. This is something probably sub-*

ject to disposure of mystic experience. There is also a reply to the recipient's questions regarding the title and the related plots. His notes, kept in a calendar featuring reproductions of Caravaggio's painting, the author called 'carravaglia', dividing them into 'inclinations and confabulations'. The parts similar to poetry, rhymed, are 'confabulations'; those directly surrounding them, as if a contra-point, are called 'inclinations'. They share the same eagerness in elaborating the truth about 'oneself', discovering 'shameful' thoughts, feelings, impulses and associations. The same courage in their revealing and reasoning. They share also the 'background', reproductions of 'sacralised' or problematic nudity. Following this trace, Kierc interprets paintings and sculptures of, e.g., Michelangelo, Caravaggio, Borutta, Gentileschi, Fischel, Hockney, Bellmer. And what is interesting, these kinds of records do not function as footnotes which, when read fast, are skipped for something more important.

I repeat – everything is important for perceiving the entirety. The spirit of *sylva rerum* melts in something homogeneous and difficult to name. The term that I have on the tip of my tongue (the 'theatrical journal of the artist') does not seem fully relevant either.

- 1 B. Kierc, *Przyboś i*, Wrocław 1976, p. 9.
- 2 Ibid, p. 15.
- 3 Ibid, p. 21.
- 4 *Listy Juliana Przybosia do rodziny 1921–1931*, ed. A. Przyboś, Cracow 1974.
- 5 B. Kierc, *Przyboś...*, p. 81.
- 6 Ibid, p. 83.
- 7 Ibid, p. 22.
- 8 Edward Balcerzan does not hesitate either, he defines various styles of Przyboś' poetry's metaphysical nature in the book *Śmiech pokoleń, płacz pokoleń*, Cracow 1997, pp. 45–58.
- 9 J. Przyboś, *Sytuacje liryczne. Wybór poezji*, Wrocław 1989, p. 240.
- 10 B. Kierc, *Przyboś...*, *op.cit.*, p. 27.
- 11 Ibid, pp. 29–30.
- 12 B. Kierc, *Karawadźje (inklinacje i konfabulacje)*, Szczecin 2016, p. 25.
- 13 Ibid, p. 17.
- 14 R. Cieślak, P. Urbański, *Bogusława Kierca poszukiwanie „międzyludzkiego człowieczeństwa”*, [in:] *Ja, autor. Sytuacja podmiotu w polskiej literaturze współczesnej*, ed. D. Śnieżka, Warsaw 1996, p. 201.
- 15 This and other quotes in this part come from the work by Bogusław Kierc titled *Plankton*, Wrocław 2006.
- 16 *'Pochłanianie bytu i bycia...'. Z Bogusławem Kiercem rozmowa w drodze*, [in:] K. Maliszewski, *Pociąg do literatury. Szkielet literacki z Dolnego Śląska*, Wrocław 2010, p. 158.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 *Rzeczywiście idzie mi o to, żeby szło o życie, żeby wiersz chodził i żeby wierszowi chodziło. O życie. O życiu. Żeby całkiem był do życia* – writes Kierc in his confession *Rzecz dla mnie, jako poety, najważniejsza*. See 'Topos' 2003, no. 6, pp. 186–187.
- 19 *Poem for Bogusław Kierc is a kind of a physical-mental creature, a human-divine reality, which for its author and the reader becomes as if a full human being, given the free will of meanings, always unlimited, unpredictable, both for the author and the reader. And only such physical-mental nature of a poem truly allows to feel what mystical ecstasy is, as freeing from the body, we free ourselves from the power of imagination, mental and physical at the same time* (P. Matywiecki, Bogusław Kierc, <https://culture.pl/pl/tworca/boguslaw-kierc>, accessed on: 25.09.2018).
- 20 This and other quotes in that part come from the book by Bogusław Kierc titled *Karawadźje (inklinacje i konfabulacje)*, Szczecin 2016.

Karol Maliszewski

'So that finally it is all about life in poetry'. Lyrics by Bogusław Kierc

The author of this article analyzes the poetry of Bogusław Kierc, a poet from Wrocław, pointing to the separateness and originality of this artist. Originality is revealed in risky and bold themes and a form that is a combination of something avant-garde with something very traditional. The language used by the poet, concerning ultimate and mystical problems, captivates with harmonious, musical finesse. Pictures in this poetry are seen, heard and experienced. The hero of these poems sees in his somatic and erotic experiences the source of potential mysticism, the possibility of approaching transcendence.

KEY WORDS: **BOGUSŁAW KIERC, JULIAN PRZYBOŚ, NARCISSUS MYTH, SPIRITUALITY, MYSTICISM AND EROTICISM**



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