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Prophet of the Six Senses? On the Sensuality of Czesław Miłosz's Christian Imaginarium¹

Abstract

This article discusses the sensual dimension of Czesław Miłosz's work, the hidden unity of which lies in the Christian character of the poetic imaginarium, encompassing the vision of the world, man and God in their entirety. This imaginarium, based on the concreteness of sensual imagery, remains an important aid for Miłosz in approaching the mysteries of faith, enabling him to transcend the abstractness of rational inquiry. Sensuality is both an expression of Miłosz's writing personality and the rationale for his worldview. For the poet, the sensuality of the world is an expression of both the reality of being and the beauty of creation, and thus a trace of the hand of God. With the passage of time, from an interest in the sensual beauty of the temporal world, treated as a sign of the eternal world, the poet arrives at a concentration of attention on the perception of man, who through divinisation can become a sign of God and an embodied foreshadowing of heaven. Images of a reality that "eye hath not seen nor ear has heard", defined by sensual visions of a "second space", images of light or moments of epiphany, become in the works of Miłosz, this "prophet of the six senses", an expression of another sense, the "sense of faith", enabling humans to experience a "sense of eternity".

Keywords: Czesław Miłosz, Polish literature, Christianity, sensuality senses, imaginarium

The deepest, hidden strand to Czesław Miłosz's body of work, and one which at the same time integrates it as a whole is its religious dimension (Błoński 2001: 7). It was not until the poet's late works that this fact was fully revealed, since it was in these works that fundamental questions about the spiritual foundations of contemporary culture were brought to the fore more strongly than in his earlier texts. It should be noted at this point that Christian themes appear throughout Miłosz's poetic output, especially in such volumes as: *Trzy zimy* [*Three Winters*] 1936, *Ocalenie* [*Survival*] (1945, here especially the poem *Świat*

¹ Translated into English by Aleksandra Oszmiańska-Pagett and Rob Pagett.

[*The World*] of 1943), *Miasto bez imienia* [*City Without a Name*] 1969, *Gdzie wschodzi słońce i kędy zapada* [*Where the Sun Rises and Whence it Sets*] 1974, *Hymn o Perle* [*Hymn of the Pearl*] 1982, *Nieobjęta ziemia* [*Unattainable Earth*] 1984, *To* [*This*] (2000), *Druga przestrzeń* [*The Second Space*] 2002. So is the case in Miłosz's essays published in such volumes as: *Widzenia nad Zatoką San Francisco* [*Visions from San Francisco Bay*] 1969, *Ziemia Ulro* [*The Land of Ulro*] 1977, *Ogród nauk* [*The Garden of Science*] 1979 and *Metafizyczna pauza* [*Metaphysical Pause*] 1989. Nevertheless, the end of the 1960s and 1970s should be pointed out as the moment at which Miłosz's interest in religious issues intensified and as a kind of breakthrough in his work in this respect, marked by the publication of the collection of poems such as *Miasto bez imienia* [*A City without a Name*] 1969 and *Gdzie wschodzi słońce i kędy zapada* [*Where the Sun Rises and Whence it Sets*] 1974, and the essay *Ziemia Ulro* [*The Land of Ulro*] 1977. The culmination of this interest came in his late works, especially the volumes *To* [*This*] 2000 and *Druga przestrzeń* [*Second Space*] 2002. For this reason, it is precisely the works from this period that are the focus of my attention. Moreover, these are the works which make it possible to observe more clearly than in the earlier Miłosz's pieces the positioning of Christian themes in relation to sensual issues. It is worth emphasising that the references to the Christian *universum* in his writings encompassed many problem areas and had the character of multi-level references (Szymik 1996; Jarzyńska 2018; Kaźmierczyk, Wojan: 2020). It should also be added that Miłosz's inspirations are heterodox in nature, for instance, in his references to Manichaeism, gnosis or hermetic reflection. What is crucial for the sensual character of this *universum* is that it not only takes up topics in general terms, but reaches much deeper, far beyond the area of strictly intellectual inquiry, thus encompassing the sphere of imagination, which is fundamental for poetic work and grounded in biographical experiences (Miłosz [1968] 2002; Miłosz [1975] 1983a; Miłosz [1975] 1983b). As Jan Błoński aptly observed, "this is what proved interesting and what distinguished Miłosz among the poets of his time: the fact that this imagination was Christian" (Błoński 2001: 7).

Following the path of William Blake, a figure of importance for Miłosz, this imagination is perceived by the poet as animated and guided by love (Eros), and expressing a sensual image in concrete terms. On the one hand, its Christian character is not limited to the sphere of explicitly religious issues, but rather encompasses the entirety of the vision of the world, man and God; on the other hand, it is an imagination that provides important help to the poet in approaching the mysteries of faith, making it possible to transcend the abstractness of rational inquiries. The sensuality of Miłosz's poetic imaginarium is both an expression of his writing personality and his worldview. For him, the sensuality of the world is one of the ways in which the beauty of creation manifests itself, and as such bears the traces of the hand of God. This sensual beauty, fragile and subject to the power of time, remains a sign of the indisputable reality of being, the reality constantly affirmed by the poetry of this author of *The Second Space* (Dybcia 1985: 415–420; Stala 1992: 89–97). Art is thus treated here as a hymn in praise of what is, and as a creative, albeit sometimes helpless, reflection of the Creator's creative power. Miłosz's significantly titled short prose poem *Esse* pulsates with a desire to put an epiphanic experience of being in words (Błoński 1985: 205–228; Fiut ([1987] 1990: 21–28; Nycz 2001: 167–171; August-Zarębska: 2006), with Miłosz treating epiphany, among other things, as "the opening of the senses to reality" (Miłosz [1990] 2001a: 384). At the same time, it should be added that this attempt ends by stating how fulfilment is unattainable:

[...] but why isn't the power of sight absolute? – And so it befell me that after so many attempts at naming the world, I am able only to repeat, harping on one string, the highest, the unique avowal beyond which no power can attain: *I am, she is*.

(*Esse*, Miłosz [2001] 2005: 249)

Art that celebrates the beauty of being remains for Miłosz a voice of protest against “the stony order of the world”, as well as against the reduction of humans to the exclusively temporal and biological order of Nature, whose extreme expression is Darwin’s theory of natural selection, a theory which proclaims – as Miłosz wrote in his poem *In vain*:

[...] By proclaiming the triumph of the strong and the defeat of the weak which is and has always been the devil’s program which is why he is called the Prince of This World.

Everything that creeps, runs, flies, and dies is an argument against the divinity of man.

I turned to anti-nature, *i.e.*, to art, in order to build our home, along with others, out of the sounds of music and paint on canvas and the rhythms of speech.

(*In vain*; Miłosz 2005: 51)

From the perspective presented here, art turns out to be a position in the dispute, a counterargument advocating the divinity of man, who, imitating the Creator, is capable of creative activity and who, thus belonging to the order of nature, at the same time transcends it. It is important to note that the discussion does not cover the area of purely intellectual dispute, but touches upon the existential concreteness of selecting a life’s vocation. Significantly, art is viewed here as a sensual cultural universe, whose sensual character has a dual dimension: on the one hand, it is to be a reflection of the sensuality of the subject it depicts; on the other, it remains the nature of the means of expression. It is worth emphasising that the order prevailing in this “anti-nature” world not only has an aesthetic for Miłosz but also a theological dimension.

As the poet of the celebrated “*esse*”, Miłosz wishes to express and consolidate what turns out to be of primary importance, in all its complexity, in the midst of which the sensual character of being, and linked to its physical dimension. By no means does this imply reducing being to the purely material sphere, but merely proposes reaching the spiritual through the physical – without cutting oneself off from one’s own sensuality:

To renounce, to close, to mortify sight, hearing, and touch, to break free that way and not have to face anymore that something will be taken away from us – no, I did not know how to do that.

(Miłosz [2011] 2017: 438)

The antithesis of an ascetic renunciation of utilising the sensual pleasures of temporality is one of Miłosz’s poetic confessions, containing a personal affirmation of the sweetness and fragrances of the world:

A Confession

My Lord, I loved strawberry jam

And the dark sweetness of a woman’s body.

Also well-chilled vodka, herring in olive oil,

Scents, of cinnamon, of cloves.

So what kind of prophet am I? Why should the spirit

Have visited such a man?

[...]

(*A Confession*; Miłosz [2001] 2005: 461)

In this poem, with the telling title *A Confession*, Miłosz ironically distances himself both from the prophetic nature of his 1930s work and from reader expectations conditioned by the Polish Romantic tradition.

Significantly, the light-hearted argument undermining the prophetic solemnity would be precisely the poet's "sensual nature" (Miłosz [2011] 2018: 865). The very appearance of a field of reference delineated by the image of a "spiritual visitation" should be considered significant. The substantial tension in this work stems precisely from the opposition between the spiritual, the eternal and the corporeal, that is, the sensual and the transient. And yet in spite of the reservations expressed, and in line with the shimmering irony of the work, Miłosz might be regarded as a "prophet of the six senses" (six senses, not five, taking into account the sense of movement, which also takes on an extremely important function in his how he perceives the world and thinks about poetry). From this perspective, the poet would be a seer who proclaims the sign-like character of the created world, consigning it to another dimension – as he wrote *expressis verbis* in his poem *Meaning* (Miłosz [2001] 2005: 569) – and the unique, irreplicable value of each individual being.

In contrast to both the suggestion expressed in *A Confession* and the Manichaeic inclinations present in his work (Tischner 2001), the two dimensions of being – the corporeal/sensual and the spiritual – were frequently (though not always) understood by Miłosz as not only antagonistic but also as complementary (Przymuszała 2006: 217–228; Bill 2021: 73–107). He associated the hope of finding a form capable of expressing this duality with a poetry of the future where "The rhythm of the body will be in it [...] together with the sublime needs of the spirit and our duality will find its form in it without renouncing one zone or the other" (Miłosz [2011] 2018: 816). Miłosz saw the direction of his path, as poetic as it was spiritual, as running from and through the sensual, the ephemeral, towards the eternal.

It is hardly surprising, then, that this was also the perspective in which this author of *Unattainable Earth* viewed his poetic vocation. As he wrote in *Wherever*:

Wherever I am, at whatever place on earth, I hide from people the conviction that I am not from here. It's as if I'd been sent, to extract as many colors, tastes, smells, to experience everything that is a man's share, to transpose what is felt into a magical register and carry it there, from whence I came.

(*Wherever*; Miłosz ([2001] 2005: 687)

Having jokingly denied a prophetic function in *Confession*, here Miłosz defines himself in the most serious tone as "called", and considers it his mission to be experience the fullness of being in all its rich sensual diversity, and to transfer this experience – through artistic transposition – into the "space of eternal works" (Kubiak 1993). The "other dimension", captured in this work as the "space" of origin and return ("carry there from whence I came"), is also defined in the poem *Dante* by the formula of returning to "home", but the perspective of desire and aspiration resonates even more strongly:

And only, as once for you, this remains real: [...]

The inborn and the perpetual desire

Del deiformo regno — for a God-like domain,

A realm or a kingdom. There is my home.

(*Dante*; Miłosz [2001] 2005: 567–568)

In one of his late autobiographical poems, *Capri*, Miłosz, as the poet of "esse, a pilgrim towards the "God-like domain", defines his poetic vocation, previously encapsulated in the formula of "chasing Reality", as follows:

If I accomplished anything, it was only when I, a pious boy, chased after the disguises of the lost Reality.

After the real presence of divinity in our flesh and blood which are at the same time bread and wine.

(*Capri*, Miłosz [2001] 2005: 588)

From the perspective presented here, the source, the horizon and, above all, the basis of the poet's creative activity turns out to be "Reality", the "Real Presence of the Deity", "lost" and "chased" all his life, and by recalling the first Holy Communion mentioned in the poem, seen as the reality of the transubstantiation of bread and wine, which, without losing their material, sensual character, are transformed into the Body and Blood of the Lord, leading man towards Deification.

In contrast to the poet's description of himself in the poem *Father Ch., Many Years Later*: "I was not a spiritual man but flesh-enraptured" (*Father Ch., Many Years Later*; Miłosz [2001] 2005: 437), in Miłosz's poetry one can also discern a strong tendency to affirm the integration of the spiritual and the corporeal, for which the deepest basis is the mystery of the incarnation (Bill 2021:75, 83–86, 102–106), conjugated into one with the mystery of Man's creation in the image and likeness of the Creator. In the poem *To Mrs. Professor in Defense of My Cat's Honor and Not Only*, Miłosz included an image of Christ as a "human God":

Who cannot but feel and think,
Who is kindred to us by his warmth and movement,
For we are, as he told us, similar to Him.

(*To Mrs. Professor in Defense of My Cat's Honor and Not Only*; Miłosz [2001] 2005: 632)

A merciful "God with us", what he shares with humans (with the exception of sin) is his fragile, wounded condition, whose physical limitations are determined largely to a great extent by the weaknesses of a body prone to pain and subject to death. And it is precisely the agony of the crucified body together with the blood of the wounds that remain a sign of the reality of the accomplished work of redemption, as in the poem *Caravels* (Miłosz 2005: 39–40). It is a vision as distant as possible from the abstract and distant "God of the philosophers", an image of a flesh-and-blood Person possessing the "breath of life" (of which breath is a sign), a Person whose presence can be experienced almost tangibly, through the sensation of His breath, as happened to the protagonist of one of Miłosz's late poems: "On my neck and back I felt Your warm breath" (*Presence*; Miłosz 2005: 40). The communion of experience through the bodily senses, between humans and the 'human God', marked by sensuality, can also be perceived through the detail of the sensation of warm breath on the nape of my neck and back recalled here. In the poem *Presence*, this is sensually experienced by the human being, a soothing indication of God's presence. In the poem *Dread*, on the other hand, by means of reversal, Christ's sensation of "the cold sweat of dread" (*Dread*; Miłosz 2005: 42) is a sensual marker, whether it be imagined or perceived by him in a prophetic vision, of the presence in the church of the people-to-be – semi-believers who remain spiritually absent during the Eucharistic sacrifice:

To tell the truth, they believe and disbelieve.
They go to church lest someone think they are godless.
During the sermon they think of Julia's tits, of an elephant,

Of the price of butter, and of New Guinea.
 He dared to think they might be like that
 That night when He knelt in the Garden of Olives
 And felt on His back the cold sweat of dread.

(*Dread*; Miłosz 2005: 42)

God's thinking, which is shown in the example above as forward-looking but *de facto* encompassing all time, is often represented through the metaphor of sight. God, as the one who looks at the world, seeing all persons and creatures and events of all ages, and preserving them in an all-encompassing memory, is for Miłosz the guarantor of objective truth, the basis of being (Kris Van Heuckelom 2004: 168–179), and thus also the foundation of hoping for apokatastasis. Moreover, the human gaze, flawed, limited and yet preserving vision in memories, directs the poet to the gaze of God, treating the redeeming power of the human gaze from annihilation as a sign of the all-surpassing "gaze of God" (Miłosz 2018: 746).

God's sight, "new eyesight, able to look into the Sun", can be granted to people "turning their faces to Him", the "blind, lame, paralytic, twisted", who then experience an inner renewal and an epiphany of the "eternal moment", as in the poem on incipit [*Turning our faces to Him*] (Miłosz ([2006] 2014): 322). This is one of the most recent (*i.e.* the penultimate) of Miłosz's poems. The leaning towards the "second space" is poignantly present in it; nevertheless, it is not new in this poetry; on the contrary, it has been evident in Miłosz's work since the very beginning, and has been present in a profound way at least since the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Miłosz's imaginings of the "second space" find their poetic expression in images of heaven, hell and purgatory, as well as in theologically indeterminate spheres. Interestingly, sensuality remains an important reference for this space even when it manifests itself through negation, as in the poem *Border*, where the characteristic feature of the world "on the other side", viewed in a dream, should be its asensual character:

On the other side nothing.
 Nothing to be touched, seen, heard, tasted.

(*Border*; Miłosz 2005: 62)

Such a shaping of "the other side", however, remains an exception in Miłosz's work.

Among the images of the "second space", the most numerous and, above all, the most meaningful and sensual are images of the sky. More often than not, images of the "God-like domain" are characterised by a strong saturation of sensuality. In the poem *How It Should Be in Heaven*, the titular sky is described through the topos of a garden, "aboveground" and yet, paradoxically, familiar from the autopsy:

How it should be in Heaven I know, for I was there.
 By its river. Listening to its birds.
 In its season: in summer, shortly after sunrise.

(*How It Should Be in Heaven*; Miłosz [2001] 2005: 465)

This description is based on the metaphorical concreteness of place (by the river) and time (summer, sunrise), and of what is accessible to the senses: what can be heard (birdsong) and seen (which remains underdetermined. Nevertheless, one can guess that these are riverside landscapes viewed at dawn). It transpires that this garden is "given to the imagination" and associated, as the next lines indicate, with a poetic work described as arranging "rhythmic spells", "striving" or chasing "a name and a form" to

represent its essence. The “superterrestrial” garden, in which one can “be there” already on Earth through creative activity thus proves to be accessible to some extent through the sphere of art, conceived, in the words of Oscar Miłosz, as “a passionate pursuit of the Real” (O. Miłosz, cited by: Miłosz 1983:25). However, it is – as the iterative nature of the verb “to be” attests – a discontinuous state, whose key feature is the experience of movement as a striving “towards”, an effort, as well as a sign of life and love. Art as movement of the imagination thus turns out to be, to a certain extent, one in which it pursues Reality and renders it through “name and form” – an analogue of the eschatological garden. These two partly overlapping images of “gardens” are subtly separated by the position of the speaker, who shifts from obligation-based thinking based on autopsied knowledge (“I know, because I was there”) to a position of obligation-based thinking as imagination (“I think...”):

[...] I think the movement of blood
Should continue there to be a triumphant one,
Of a higher, I would say, degree.

(*How It Should Be in Heaven*; Miłosz [2001] 2005: 465)

This heightened, condensed sensuality is meant to be a sign of the essentiality of another world, of the “fullness of being” prevailing in it, beseeching us to explore it through the movement of the mind, in the manner of the Infinite:

That the smell of gillyflower,
That a nasturtium and a bee and a ladybug
Or their very essence, stronger than here,
Must summon us just the same to a core, to a center
Beyond the labyrinth of things. For how could the mind
Stop its hunt, if from the Infinite
It takes enchantment, avidity, promise?

(*How It Should Be in Heaven*; Miłosz [2001] 2005: 465)

As a commentary on this vision, one can consider the prose passage Miłosz included in *Unattainable Earth*:

Bezustanne dążenie umysłu do objęcia świata w nieskończonej wielości jego form przy pomocy nauki albo sztuki jest tym samym co pogoń za przedmiotem naszych miłosnych pożądań. Eros jest siłą poruszającą zarówno fizyków, jak poetów. Jeżeli, jak chcą Swedenborg i Blake, śmierć nie przerywa tego dążenia i niebo wypełnia bezustanna działalność umysłów odkrywczych, Eros trwa mocniej niż życie i śmierć.

(Miłosz [2011] 2018: 909)

[Transl. by A.O-P&R.P: The mind’s relentless pursuit of encompassing the world in the infinite multiplicity of its forms by means of science or art is quite the same as the pursuit of the object of our amorous desires. Eros is the moving force of physicists and poets alike. If, as Swedenborg and Blake wish, death does not interrupt this quest, and heaven is filled with the ceaseless activity of exploratory minds, Eros endures more strongly than life and death].

Yet this vision of a realm of the essence, of infinite movement and life, shows itself to be free of questions. The image of a world in which “death will be no more” paradoxically reveals the value of mortality as “dear

to us”, defining – through transience – the human condition; eternity also appears to be stripped of the beauty marked by the passing of time:

But where is our, dear to us, mortality?
Where is time that both destroys and saves us?
This is too difficult for me. Peace eternal
Could have no mornings and no evenings,
Such a deficiency speaks against it.
And that’s too hard a nut for a theologian to crack.

(*How It Should Be in Heaven*; Miłosz [2001] 2005: 465)

In this clash between longing – as a sign of closeness and desire, and doubt – as a sign of remoteness – an important interpretative clue can be found in the tone of the utterance. While the middle section of the poem, devoted to essentiality and movement as fundamental features of the world to come, maintains a serious tone, both the beginning of the poem, containing a confession characterised by the subject’s self-confidence, and the end of the poem, marked by uncertainty, are tinged with irony, which introduces distance towards both attitudes.

With the passage of time, Miłosz’s reflections take on an ever more distinct, strictly religious character. The longing, one expression of which was the formula of “pursuing Reality” through art or science, also begins to be shown through the prism of the search for and cry of prayer – as in the poem *On Prayer*:

[...] prayer constructs a velvet bridge
And walking it we are aloft, as on a springboard,
Above landscapes the color of ripe gold
Transformed by a magic stopping of the sun.
That bridge leads to the shore of Reversal.
Where everything is just the opposite and the word “is”
Unveils a meaning we hardly envisioned. [...]

(*On Prayer* Miłosz 1996: 297; Miłosz [2001] 2005: 435)

Prayer is framed here in terms of movement, action, creation: as the building and, at the same time, crossing of a bridge, one leading towards the space of “esse”. This wandering is accompanied by a vision of a mystical landscape, in which one can discern echoes of the landscapes from Adam Mickiewicz’s *Pan Tadeusz*, landscapes that both poets have in common. In the poem *After Enduring*, Miłosz invokes – as an example of a “possible alliance of religion and science” (and, let us add, art) – the hypothesis of resurrection derived from quantum mechanics and understood as “a return to familiar places and people”, and juxtaposes it with Peter the Apostle’s formula “*Apokatastasis panton*,/ Renewal of all things” (*After Enduring*; Miłosz [2001] 2005: 638). For the poet, however, apokatastasis does not remain merely an abstract idea, part of the “‘equation’”, but is transformed into a poetic image of the resurrection of bodies” (Opacka-Walasek 2005: 176–197):

Yet it is helpful: to be able to imagine
That every person has a code instead of life
In an internal storage room, a supercomputer of the universe.
We disintegrate into rot, dust, microfertilizers,
But that code or essence remains

And waits, till at last it takes flesh.
And also, as the new corporeality
Should be cleansed of evil and afflictions,
The notion of Purgatory enters the equation.

(*After Enduring*; Miłosz [2001] 2005: 638)

In another prose passage (from earlier than the quoted poem) reflecting on the Resurrection, Miłosz puts it in the context of apokatastasis and the restoration of everything in its essential form, with light as an element of the world “out there”:

Resurrection. All tangible, material things, it is said, change into light and their shape is stored there. At the end of our time, in meta-time, they return as concentrated light, though not concentrated to the state of previous matter. By an incomprehensible power, they are then themselves essences. And the essence of every human being without what has accrued on it, without age, illness, lipstick, disguises, pretence.

(Miłosz [2011] 2018: 888)

In Miłosz, depictions of the post-Resurrection world, the senses of sight and touch, as well as of movement, seem crucial, although of course they are thought of as transformed. The importance of touch appears to derive from the tradition of the Gospel accounts of encounters with the risen Christ as the sense which most emphatically affirmed the reality of the living, bodily Person of the Messiah. In the poem *Heavenly*, recalling Blake’s vision, Miłosz recollects the moment when Thomas touched Jesus’ wounds, taking this fact to illustrate the possibility of experiencing a real, material body and, above all, of experiencing just such a transfiguration of the body in a realm “invisible to the eyes of mortals” ([2006] 2014): 317). From the description of the realm as “invisible to the eyes of mortals”, one should infer that it remains accessible to another, suprasensory vision. At the same time, it is a land of movement and creation, whereby what for Blake was an object of joyful certainty, for the voice in Miłosz’s poem remains a desire for faith.

As can be seen, Miłosz’s desire to restore to contemporary culture the Christian imagery of the “second space” is accompanied by existential themes, often of a personal nature. Alongside moments of epiphany, enabling the experience of “feeling eternity” in temporal reality/ “here and now”, Miłosz also evokes imagery at whose roots is the emphasis on the boundary of death, separating the temporal and eternal worlds. The intensification of movement, sight and hearing as an expression of the perfection of the “other world” and its essentiality so captured in the poem *Winter* (Miłosz [2001] 2005: 420–421), for example, is also sometimes shown in opposition to the poet’s senses, which are subject to the power of time, as in the poem *An Honest Description of Myself with a Glass of Whiskey at an Airport, Let Us Say, in Minneapolis*:

If I should accede one day to Heaven, it must be there as it is here,
except that I will be rid of my dull senses and my heavy bones.
Changed into pure seeing, I will absorb, as before, the proportions of human bodies, the color of
irises, a Paris street in June at dawn, all of it incomprehensible, incomprehensible the multitude of
visible things.

(*An Honest Description of Myself with a Glass of Whiskey at an Airport, Let Us Say, in Minneapolis*; Miłosz [2001] 2005: 679)

In contrast to the fading of earthly sight, heaven will therefore be the gift of renewed sight, of looking itself, of absorbing the manifold beauty of “visible things”. In the passage quoted above, the fact

of the ageing of the body, the death of the senses, is expressed in ironic diction; in the context of “crossing the threshold”, however, poignant descriptions expressed in a serious tone are not uncommon, as in the poem *Prayer*:

Now You are closing down my five senses, slowly,
And I am an old man lying in darkness.
(*Prayer*; Miłosz [2001] 2005: 742)

Faced with the vision of the impending transition, the sense of sight as being able to perceive light (Van Heuckelom 2004: 186–195) takes on significance, although this is sight “without eyes”:

My most honorable eyes, you are not in the best of shape.
I receive from you an image less than sharp, [...]
Now what you have seen is hidden inside me [...]
Without eyes, my gaze is fixed on one bright point,
That grows large and takes me in.
(*Eyes*; Miłosz 2005: 31)

In Miłosz’s work, it is not difficult to perceive “the light that shines through earthly forms”, which he wrote about as illuminating the day of death in his poem *On Old Women* (Miłosz 2005:12). The imaginative basis for the imagery of “rays of dazzling light” (Miłosz [2001] 2005: 745) as a sign of God’s transforming, renewing power, and thus – for the “other space” as overexposed – is the tradition of symbolically defining God through the imagery of light, present in Miłosz’s work, for example, in the vision of the “King”, “All-Radiant” (from the poet’s translation of *A Hassidic Tale* by Baal Shem-Tov’s (Miłosz [2001] 2005: 488). In one of his final poems (*Heaven*), the titular heaven is defined explicitly as the domain of God in reference to the author’s motto invoking the Lord’s Prayer: “Our Father, Who art in heaven”, with an accompanying commentary, a quotation from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, explaining that:

The expression: “Who art in heaven” does not denote a place, but the majesty of
God and His presence in the hearts of righteous people. Heaven, the Father’s house,
is the true homeland to which we aspire and to which we already belong.
(*Catholic catechism* cited by Miłosz [2006] 2014: 298)

In this poem, heaven – “the Father’s house” – is presented as a celestial homeland, desired by the poet for all time, posthumous and final, although his belief in its existence was not free from doubt. Death, signifying the crossing of a boundary, appears here as a return to the “Father’s house”. This time, the titular heaven is not described as an essential counterpart to the temporal world, whose heightened sensuality is a sign of the “fullness of being”, but, following the theological reflection in the motto, by the “majesty of God and His presence in the hearts of just men”, through freedom and creativity expressing “*our likeness/ To the Unspeakable our Father in heaven*”, and as symbols of this likeness appear later in the poem, visible signs of man’s civilisational achievements in such forms as “aqueducts, waterfalls, and the earthly city”.

In addition to a different take on sensuality, the relationship to time also changes: “the true homeland”, although still seen from the perspective of the future (as the one “to which we are going”), proves to be one in which, paradoxically, it is also possible to live to a certain degree – on the basis of primordality – in temporality (“to which we already belong”). Thus, Miłosz defines the “God-likeness” of this zone not by perceiving it as an essentialised, perfect model of the sensual, created world, but by seeing God himself as a human model for shaping Man, through the very act of creation already created in

the image and likeness of the Creator, and yet at the same time subject to the further formation of a “just heart”. “Heaven, the Father’s house” is thus seen here not as “another space”, filled with the “forms of individual grains” of sensual, earthly, created entities restored by apokatastasis, but a *state* towards which humans “tend” and to which they already “belong”, to the extent that they remain “deified” and thus united with “our Father, who art in heaven”.

In this way, Miłosz, as the prophet of the six senses, thus emerges as a eulogist of reality and of the beauty of the temporal and the eternal world alike. With the passage of time, a change of focus can be observed in his work: from an interest in the reality of forms, manifested in treating the sensual beauty of the temporal world as a harbinger of another world, whose condensed sensuality will be an expression of its essential fullness, the poet’s attention shifts to perceiving the human being, who – as created in the image and likeness of the Creator – through deification can become a sign of God and an incarnate augury of heaven. From this perspective, sensuality recedes into the background, remains outside the field of vision or is expressed through images of illumination as a sign of transfiguration. Thus, images of reality, defined in the biblical tradition by the formula referring to the transcendence of sensual imagery – “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard [...] how great things God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9) – are determined in the poetry of the “prophet of the six senses” by sensual visions of the “other space”, as well as images of light or moments of epiphany. In this way, in Miłosz’s work, they become the expression of a sense of another nature, *i.e.* the “sense of faith”, enabling a human being to experience a “sense of eternity”.

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