

# “Not Enough for a Trace”.

## On *Spis z natury* [Register from nature] and Other Early Poems by Krystyna Miłobędzka

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Otwarte drzwi [Open door]. To the text!

A recipe for a poem? Simple:

taking the most humble object, the most everyday action, and trying to consider it afresh, abandoning every habit of perception, and describing it without any verbal mechanism that has been worn by use. (...) Suddenly we discover that existing could be a much more intense, interesting and genuine experience than that absent-minded routine to which our senses have become hardened<sup>1</sup>.

Although this quote by Italo Calvino refers to *The Pleasures of the Door* by Francis Ponge, it could also introduce *Spis z natury* – the debut book of poems by Krystyna Miłobędzka, written in the mid 1960s (although unfinished, and as such unpublished at this time). Reconstructed by the author in cooperation with her publisher, Jarosław Borowiec, it was released in mid-2019 in an eye-catching, richly illustrated<sup>2</sup>, three-volume edition. One cover-jacket contains: *Anaglify* [Anaglyphs], *Małe mity* [Small myths], and an interview with the poet, entitled *Jesteś samo śpiewa* [You are self-sung]<sup>3</sup>. *Anaglify* constitutes the core of the volume; it consists of 40 untitled poems written

<sup>1</sup> Italo Calvino, *Po co czytać klasyków*, trans. Anna Wasilewska (Warszawa: PIW, 2020), 248. English translation by Martin McLaughlin, *Why Read the Classics?* (Boston: Mariner Books, 199), 316.

<sup>2</sup> The thoughtful cover design, which reflects the structure of the volume, is by Marcin Markowski.

<sup>3</sup> Krystyna Miłobędzka, *Spis z natury. Anaglify, Małe mity, Jesteś samo śpiewa*, edited by Jarosław Borowiec, (Lusowo: Wolno, 2019). Because each volume has its own pagination, henceforth I shall use abbreviations: A – *Anaglify*; M – *Małe mity*; JS – *Jesteś samo śpiewa* (with page numbers). Additionally, Z refers to: Krystyna Miłobędzka, *Zbierane 1960-2005* (Wrocław: Biuro Literackie, 2006).

in prose. Because Miłobędzka published 23 of them in *Przed wierszem. Zapisy nowe i dawne* [Before the poem. New and older works] (1994), and then in subsequent editions of her collected poems, the cycle is well-known by her readers and critics, unlike *Małe mity*, which constitutes the second, far shorter volume, and contains only nine, previously unpublished texts, which have not been discussed to date (except for reviews of the whole volume). According to the editor's note, four of them had their first printing in the 1960s (*Ziemia* [Earth], *Mały traktat o wyobraźni* [A small treatise on imagination], *Kołysanka* [Lullaby], *Spis z natury* [Register from nature]), whereas the rest were in Miłobędzka's archive, copied from typescripts and manuscripts: four poems from the cycle *Ptasie obrazki* [Bird pictures] (*Wróble* [Sparrows], *Łabędź* [Swan], *Orzeł* [Eagle], *Flaming* [Flamingo]) and the three-part *Małe mity*, which is also the title of the book of poems<sup>4</sup>. In this essay I would like to investigate those texts and several other early poems by Miłobędzka, which have been published but are not included in the reconstructed volume, in order to uncover the nature of her early-1960's poetics. This is when observation of nature comes to the fore, which is why today we are inclined towards reading it through the prism of ecocriticism: as ecopoetry, which goes beyond the horizon of what is human, takes on a non-anthropocentric perspective. I wonder whether the split of the debut *Spis z natury*, resulting in such a clear division of the volume in half, is a kind of crack, distorting the seeming obviousness of such a picture. What is the source of myths – even "small" ones – in Miłobędzka's poetry, and what function are they supposed to have? Can a mythical order agree with the domain of what is perceptible, which is constitutive for *Anaglify*: the kingdom of individual organisms, elements of inanimate nature and objects "existing unambiguously", observed by the poet not just "from outside", but also "from inside" (A 7)? Maybe *Małe mity* was created according to a different recipe than the quote opening this paper? However, if this is the case, then why do parts of *Anaglify* and *Małe mity* seem almost identical to us? Why is the one-sentence-long part of *Spis z natury* (*Małe mity*), which rhymes perfectly with *The Pleasures of the Door*, not an anaglyph? In order to see that they are similar to each other, we do not need to "hold a door in your arms" and "[seize] one of these tall barriers to a room by the porcelain knob of its belly"<sup>5</sup>:

An open door is a mirror, where unreflected people appear (M 19).

is an open book a mirror, where unreflected poems appear?

*Jeszcze inaczej zgubione* [Lost in yet another way].  
Poems from "Twórczość"

Because Miłobędzka's poems in question were first "reflected" in the press, I would like to start with a few references which allow one to ask about the character of *Spis z natury* in a slightly different way. It would be misleading to suppose that this publication included all her early poems, whether those that meet the requirements of the *Anaglify* cycle in the first volume, or those which do not (and which do not have much in common with one another, apart from the time they were published), or even those in the second volume, under the title *Małe mity*, which was ascribed

<sup>4</sup> The first, much shorter version of "Małe mity" was published on 15 August 1965 in *Siódmy Głos Tygodnia* (No. 33 (1965): 8), a literature extra of *Głos Szczeciński*.

<sup>5</sup> See Francis Ponge, "Rozkosze drzwi", Polish translation by Anna Wasilewska, *Literatura na Świecie*, No. 9-10 (2006): 6. English version translated by C.K. Williams [PZ].

to it years later. It is a different matter, further complicated by the uncertain “textual status” of Miłobędzka’s debut cycle (analyzed by Adam Poprawa), its intentional “fragmentary” character and deviations in subsequent versions of the texts. Due to these reasons, Poprawa claims that “already at the beginning *Anaglify* were meant to be a collection not to be put together”; the book of poems does not constitute “one, consistent whole”<sup>6</sup>. We should add that when working on the 1994 selection, Miłobędzka included the poem *Pióro* [Feather] published in 1966 in the November issue of “*Twórczość*” magazine; it would seem that originally it was not an anaglyph – we learn from the editor’s note from *Spis z natury* that the texts from the cycle “have never had separate titles” (JS 34). Moreover, an analysis of the cycle shows that a first-person subject in the singular does not reveal itself there – which is the case in the text that interests me (“I listen »feather« and look »feather«. I say squeezed”, A 58); in no anaglyph can we find such a long and complex sentence as here (the initial sentence is six-verses long). Its title was replaced by the incipit *Stawia dwa znaki gwałtowne* [Writes two signs violently]; however, the poem concluded the selection proposed by Miłobędzka. As noted by Borowiec, the anaglyph opening with *Dzieciom nie wolno opowiadać* [Children are not allowed to tell stories] (first printing in “*Współczesność*”, 23, 1960) goes in the opposite direction. It was later included in Miłobędzka’s theater script, *Siała baba mak*<sup>7</sup> [An old lady was sowing poppies], and hence not included in *Spis z natury*. I mention this because the idea of *collecting* Miłobędzka’s concise *oeuvre*, and thus reconstructing *Spis z natury* as a whole, seems to be against the idea of *losing* surplus, unnecessary words, and sometimes even whole texts – such as in the case of *Jeszcze inaczej zgubione*, crossed out from subsequent editions of *Pokrewne*<sup>8</sup> [Affined]. In an interview included in *Spis*, the 86-year-old poet emotionally reveals: “For years I have crossed out words from my texts, so that only the necessary ones are left. In the book which I know to be my last, I manage to put myself and my life in six<sup>9</sup> words – »wind, I lived/sand after I am gone«” (JS 7). However, perhaps Miłobędzka is inviting us to look at her entire creative path by defining the 2008 book of poems as her “last book” (let us hope she is wrong!) and agreeing to a reconstruction of her unpublished debut?

If yes, then we should remember those texts which were not included in *Spis z natury*, although they could have been due to the time they were written. Not counting early poems published in local periodicals of limited range and availability<sup>10</sup>, in the 1960s Miłobędzka published at least four important poetic texts, which have not appeared in any of her later books and have ultimately been forgotten. If *Spis* had a register of her early works, those poems – similarly to the already mentioned

<sup>6</sup> Adam Poprawa, “Na początku było inne. *Anaglify*” [In the beginning there was other], in *Miłobędzka wielokrotnie* [Miłobędzka many times], edited by Piotr Śliwiński (Poznań: WBPiCAK, 2008), 96, 99.

<sup>7</sup> See Krystyna Miłobędzka, *Siała baba mak. Gry słowne dla teatru* [An old lady was sowing poppies. Word games for theater] (Wrocław: A, 1995), 30-31.

<sup>8</sup> The poem was first printed in *Poezja* (No 8, 1968, 38), and in the book of poems *Pokrewne* it was placed before *W gospodarstwie* [At a farm] and it clearly referred to it; it ended with “Such a shame, to put NOTHING in your mouth”, to which the last verse of *W gospodarstwie* answers: “My task: to prepare NOTHING for every living creature that would eat such a poor shell” (Krystyna Miłobędzka, *Pokrewne* (Warszawa: Czytelnik 1970), 41-42). The word NOTHING is the only one written in majuscule in the whole book of poetry.

<sup>9</sup> Polish: “Wiatr, którym żyłam/ piasek po odejściu” [PZ].

<sup>10</sup> Among others, two urban poems published in *Rocznik Nadnotecki* (t. I 1966: 212): “Piła” and “Widok z hotelu” [Hotel view] display a close affinity with Przyboś’s poetics, and may constitute an illustration for Joanna Orska’s considerations, situating Miłobędzka’s poetry in constructivist poetics. See Joanna Orska, *Performatywy. Składnia/ retoryka, gatunki i programy poetyckiego konstrukttywizmu* [Performatives. Syntax/ rhetorics, genres and programs of poetic constructivism] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2019).

*Dziociom nie wolno* and *Jeszcze inaczej zgubione* – should have been mentioned. The poet's disdain for reprinting her early poems may be justified in the case of those written when she was young; however, the four poems in question were appreciated in the literary monthly "Twórczość", important at the time. As Miłobędzka recalls in an interview with Borowiec: "Being published in «Twórczość» was an elevation for me; at the time I knew I was in one of the best possible places. I owe it greatly to Ziemowit Feddecki, editor of poetry in the magazine, who believed in those texts [*Anaglify* –P.B.] from the very beginning" (JS 15). A two-part poem *Klee* was published in "Twórczość" in December 1962, poems *Małże* [Clams] and *Widziane w ogniu* [Seen in fire] – in February 1965, and *Patrzące chwytlive* [Looking in a catchy way] – in November 1966. Miłobędzka's decision not to include those texts in the reconstructed book of poems seems to be of a structural character: those texts are neither *Anaglify*, nor *Mate mity*, for their poetics would be different – they would not meet the requirements of either of the two poetic cycles. However, perhaps an analysis of those excluded poems would allow one to retrospectively identify the determiners of *Anaglify* and *Mate mity*.

Similarly to *Pióro*, the poems listed here are located between Miłobędzka's debut cycle, the "plant" (*Roślinne* [Plant], *Chlorofil* [Chlorophyll], *Ogród* [Garden]) and "animal" groups (*Jaskółki* [Swallows], *Kogut* [Rooster], *Wilk* [Wolf], *Dzięcioł* [Woodpecker]), and prose poems from *Pokrewne* (1970). Although they are based on the same concept and similar poetic sensitivity as *Anaglify*, and Calvin's formula ("consider it afresh, abandoning every habit of perception, and describing it without any verbal mechanism that has been worn by use") seems to match them as well as Ponge's poem (to which it originally refers), some minor stylistic shifts can be observed, which make those texts unusual to a far greater extent than *Anaglify*, written in a purposefully simplified language. Declarative statements dominate the narrow repertoire of syntax structures of *Anaglify*, as opposed to the questions that dominate *Małże*:

Motionless, wingless, eyeless, featherless – perhaps they will fly? Limey birds on limestone. Slipped between land and water (in a hard rind), paused and frozen, multiplied by rind in rinds. Seeds too hard. From how many flickers of water will they come true, how many flickers of water will they absorb, how much humble sand do they destroy? Entangled into how many flickers of the sea? Into loose sand? The borderline of land and water: a shape ready to fly<sup>11</sup>.

In turn, in *Widziane w ogniu*, unlike in *Anaglify*, there are numerous intrusions, signaled mostly by double hyphens, which were single in the debut cycle, serving only prosodic functions:

Red, they break in the air, dropped by the flame – red buds, leaves, branches – soft forest wall, lifted by the heat. Those animals ran there again – found only in smell – waiting, black, frozen, patient – to come out of the night of coal, for skin again, teeth again, for oneself wolf, oneself doe. In one scent does float through wolves, frozen in rush, connected with slow motion, touching bodies, sleepily coasting the taste of salt and grass. This animal is familiar, the only one<sup>12</sup>.

*Patrzące chwytlive* also contains elements absent from *Anaglify*: a clear first-person perspective (with the already mentioned exception of *Pióro*), ellipses and neologisms ("sharpfully", "alweverywhere").

<sup>11</sup>Krystyna Miłobędzka, "Małże", *Twórczość*, No. 2 (1965): 30.

<sup>12</sup>Krystyna Miłobędzka, "Widziane w ogniu", *Twórczość*, No. 2 (1965): 30.

Hard phloem, growing densely, sharply, alverywhere. How to recognize its sudden lives, which beyond twilights, when a blade has enough drawing for its own grass; which beyond the night, when morning washes away color in a biting well of flowers?

I am pulling off shells, piercing through tissue, drilling white flesh: they are falling down, whirring on the brass of leaves into hands darkened into a trunk<sup>13</sup>.

In the quoted poems from *Spis z natury* we can also find a clear radicalization of non-anthropocentric investigations of Miłobędzka's poetry. Those were only initiated in *Anaglify*, conducted within an epistemological (subject-object) frame of a cycle. So far, they have been highlighted in the reception of *Spis z natury*, realizing a scenario pointed out by Krzysztof Hoffman in his discussion of the book: "Those poems could become a tasty morsel for fans of novelties in humanities – such as posthumanism, turn towards things, or ecocriticism. And it is not that those theories have nothing important to say, but that Miłobędzka had walked those paths at least half a century before they became fashionable"<sup>14</sup>. Indeed, in order to capture Miłobędzka's precursory role in Polish ecopoetry in a satisfactory way (as argued by Jakub Skurtys<sup>15</sup>), we should trace the evolution of themes related with nature, plants, and animals in her 1960's texts – taking into consideration the forgotten poems quoted above. Resigning from the first-person perspective, characteristic for the lyrical confession style, and leaning towards impersonal forms that pretend to be clichés (especially with *one*), allow one to describe objects, creatures or phenomena isolated from the world ("If one really likes cacti or has doubts whether they are happy in their pot, one should tear off their spikes", A 11; "One puts dry jasmine in hot water", A 15; "First thing: if one has a giant emerald at home, one should peel it piece by piece", A 17; "One collects rescued roses in aluminum bubbles. One puts a label on the top", A 21, etc.) which is all among the constitutive characteristics of *Anaglify*. On the other hand, in the quoted poems from "Twórczość", elements of the represented world clearly connect with one another: entities lose their individuality, they seem to permeate and combine with one another, presenting themselves no longer as isolated, but as connected and affiliated, constituting parts of a bigger whole on a deeper level. *Małże*, "entangled in flickers of the sea", displays similarities not only to "seed" and "sand", but also to birds (they turn out to be "limey birds on limestone").

<sup>13</sup>Krystyna Miłobędzka, "Patrzące chwytliwe", *Twórczość*, No. 11 (1966): 63-64.

<sup>14</sup>Krzysztof Hoffman, "Mistrzynie Krystyna Miłobędzka. Alchemiczka poezji z nową publikacją *Spis z natury*" [Krystyna Miłobędzka, the Champion. Poetry alchemist with a new publication of *Spis z natury*], *Gazeta Wyborcza. Poznań*, 6.08.2019, <https://poznan.wyborcza.pl/poznan/7,36000,25063141,mistrzynie-milobedzka-alchemiczka.html>. Similar argumentation can be found in Anita Jarzyna's review. She reads *Spis z natury* as an "interestingly up-to-date in the face of Anthropocene-related considerations" and shows "how we abuse nature" (Anita Jarzyna, "Na nowo. Wokół *Spisu z natury* Krystyny Miłobędzkiej" [Anew. On *Spis z natury* by Krystyna Miłobędzka], *Zamek Czyta*, 16.10.2020, <http://www.zamekczyta.pl/na-nowo-wokol-spisu-z-natury-krystyny-milobedzkiej/>). Karolina Górniak-Prasnal interprets Miłobędzka's debut cycle in terms of the turn towards things; according to her, "*Anaglify* should be considered in the context of those trends in the latest culture studies which take non-anthropocentric perspective" ("*Rzeczy, które się do nas zbliżają – Anaglify* Krystyny Miłobędzkiej" [Things that approach us – *Anaglify* by Krystyna Miłobędzka], *Wielogłos*, No. 2 (2017): 64). Even earlier, Anna Kałużna pointed to "a non-anthropocentric, ahumanistic attitude", which can be connected with "new ecology" in her book *Wielkie wygrane. Wspólne sprawy poezji, krytyki i estetyki* [Great victories. Common issues of poetry, criticism, and aesthetics] (Mikołów: Instytut Mikołowski, 2011), 150.

<sup>15</sup>See Jakub Skurtys, "Zamiast Szymborskiej? Krystyna Miłobędzka i źródła współczesnej ekopoezji w Polsce" [Instead of Szymborska? Krystyna Miłobędzka and sources of contemporary ecopoetry in Poland], *Przestrzenie Teorii* 28 (2017). In his review of *Spis z teorii*, he also asked about its significance for "increasingly more popular" ecopoetry; rightfully noting Miłobędzka's early skepticism regarding the possible "dialogue with non-human actors", he added: "this does not mean that her poetry does not belong to categories related to the ecological turn, to sensitizing to nature, paying equal attention to all living creatures (the *akin*, as stated by the title) and destroying the hierarchical chain of being, up until changing the functioning of the poem itself" (Jakub Skurtys, "Cały inwentarz pojęć" [A whole inventory of notions], *Odra*, No. 10 (2019): 104).

In *Widziane w ogniu* "buds, leaves, branches" are a "soft forest wall". Animals running away connect with each other in an even clearer way: "In one scent does float through wolves, frozen in rush, connected with slow motion, touching bodies, sleepily coasting the taste of salt and grass. This animal is familiar, the only one"<sup>16</sup>. The subject of *Patrząc chwytliwie* who uncovers this deep unity can no longer calmly "watch and describe" from a safe distance – it is embodied by a dramatic question: "How to recognize?". In answer, he allows the "sudden lives" of a wooden "phloem" to make the language bizarre, to require new words, syntax, categorizations and a new title from it, which goes beyond what readers are used to: what looks at who, what catches (us?)?

### *Oczy nie widzą głęboko. Sponge and clover*

The difference between *Anaglify* and the poems discussed above would be similar to that between Ponge's short, model "centripetal" texts from *The Voice of Things* and his "centrifugal", fragmentary, open texts in motion, in accordance with the directive of *Expressing Fury* which "take on a challenge accepted by language"<sup>17</sup>. Although the main idea would remain the same – as Ponge himself explains, to "imagine a sort of writing (new) which, situating itself more or less between the two genres (definition and description), would take from the first its infallibility, its indubitability, its brevity also, from the second its respect for the sensory aspect of things ..."<sup>18</sup> – with its subsequent explorations the attitude towards writing would change, which, taking the side of things, more and more clearly transforms, diversifies, changes something in the language<sup>19</sup>. Ponge concludes that as a result being on the side of things equals considering words<sup>20</sup>.

I keep returning to Ponge, because I cannot resist the impression that Miłobędzka as a novice poet – a graduate of Polish philology, in a relationship with Andrzej Falkiewicz, who at the time wrote almost exclusively about French drama – might have known Ponge's works, and thus she may have engaged in a creative dialogue with him in her prose poems (apart from Polish poets representing the genre, such as Herbert or Różewicz). We do not appreciate poetic "influencology" too much today, and indeed, its findings sound all too often like a "tinkling cymbal" in literary histories; however, in this case it would be about love. The interview with Miłobędzka reveals that *Anaglify* was motivated by love; she sent them by post to her future husband, which she recalls today as "a sudden literary opening, which gives love" (JS 10). As Anita Jarzyna concludes, "in fact, by finding a language for two people, Miłobędzka found her own (first) poetic

<sup>16</sup>Although according to Jarzyna, Miłobędzka combined "birds and trees, or people and mushrooms" in order to show the "planet as a hyperorganism (...) engulfed in endless connections" already in *Anaglify*, neither the texts to which Jarzyna refers (see A 40, incipit "In winter birds whether trees died" and A 51 "mushrooms are forest statues of people"), nor in any other *Anaglif* do we deal with such clear "connections" as in the poems discussed here, which were not included in the debut cycle; neither birds and trees, nor people and mushrooms are by any means "connected" – "one".

<sup>17</sup>Francis Ponge, "Expressing fury", translated into Polish by Krystyna Szezyńska-Mackowiak, *Literatura na Świecie*, No 9-10 (2006): 65. Writing about "centripetal" and "centrifugal" texts, I am referring to an inspiring essay by Edward Stankiewicz from 1982, "Centripetal and centrifugal structures in poetry", translated into Polish by Paweł Wawrzyszko, in *Poetyka i sztuka słowa* [Poetics and the art of word] (Kraków: Universitas, 1996), 103-134).

<sup>18</sup>Francis Ponge, "My Creative Method", translated into Polish by Jan Maria Kłoczowski, *Literatura na Świecie*, No 9-10 (2006): 109.

<sup>19</sup>Ponge, "My Creative Method": 110.

<sup>20</sup>Ponge, "My Creative Method": 115.

language”<sup>21</sup>. It is possible to imagine that there was a third language – Ponge’s. A selection of his poems translated into Polish by Zbigniew Bienkowski was published in the fourth issue of “*Twórczość*” in 1957, and three years later those poems were included and discussed in a separate chapter of *Piekła i Orfeusze* [Infernos and Orpheuses]<sup>22</sup>. It is possible to trace relationships between various works of Miłobędzka and Ponge: between *Piekła i Orfeusze* and *Anaglify*; between Ponge’s water Poems (such as *Banks of Loire*) and Miłobędzka’s observations from her stay in Rewa (incipits: *Na piasku nad morzem* [On the sand by the sea], *Meduzy drażnią dłonie* [Jellyfish irritate hands], *Mina morska jest krepa* [A naval mine is stocky]), and the already mentioned *Małże*; between Ponge’s *Oranges* and Miłobędzka’s “an orange juice bottle” (A 8); between Ponge’s observations regarding a bird skeleton in *Notes on a sketch of a bird* and the “white skeleton” from Miłobędzka’s *Kolibry* [Hummingbirds] (A 20); between his *Sea coast* and her “borderland of sea and water” from *Małże*; between Ponge’s *Butterfly* (“A flying burning match, which doesn’t spread any fire (...) a tiny sail mistreated by the wind”<sup>23</sup>) and Miłobędzka’s *Butterfly* (“It opens its wings, ready to fly. How lightly are they carrying it? God’s faces, fear of eyes, unsupported colors”, A 43). Even if we are not dealing with an influence (and fear of influence) and Ponge was not the one responsible for inspiring Miłobędzka’s poetic imagination, a comparative analysis of the poems listed above is nonetheless an interesting topic. Apart from some clear differences, I believe it would also reveal not only genological and linguistic similarities, but also a deep convergence in terms of their ideas regarding poetry’s tasks, its attitude towards reality, and the character of language-world relations. It can be supposed that Miłobędzka could endorse excerpts of *My Creative Method* quoted above, whereas things in her poems can be discussed in a similar way as Derrida writes about Ponge: that a thing is not something that adapts to rights, needs to be discussed in an objective (adequate) way or vice versa – subjective (anthropomorphic). According to Derrida, first and foremost, a thing is something else completely. Without words, not saying anything about oneself, it turns towards oneself and oneself only, in all one’s irreplaceable individuality and loneliness. We owe a thing our unconditional respect, which is not mediated by any general law; individuality and difference are also the rights of a thing<sup>24</sup>.

If this is correct, then apart from the dialectics of the whole and the fragmentary characteristic for *Anaglify*, a different dialectics would be constitutive for Miłobędzka’s 1960’s poetic investigations: one of difference and repetition, idiom and institution, novelty and tradition. From this perspective her early poetry would be *par excellence* neo-avant-garde, situating itself in a consciously selected line of artistic investigations<sup>25</sup>, whereas its subsequent, constantly repeated “attitude towards things” would constitute differentiating repetitions of earlier attempts. The resulting, increasingly more open text would become a text in motion, successively losing simplicity and co-

<sup>21</sup>Jarzyna.

<sup>22</sup>See Zbigniew Bienkowski, “Parti pris poezja Ponge’a” [Parti pris Ponge’s poetry]; in *Piekła i Orfeusze. Szkice z literatury zachodniej* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1960), 443-454.

<sup>23</sup>Francis Ponge, “Butterfly”, translated into English by Vadim Bystritski [PZ].

<sup>24</sup>Jacques Derrida, “Sygnowane Ponge” [Signsponge], translated into Polish by Stanisław Cichowicz, *Literatura na Świecie*, No. 8-9 (1988): 308. Paraphrase in English based on the Polish translation [PZ].

<sup>25</sup>Regardless of the myth of a “separate poet” present in later reception of Miłobędzka’s works, it seems that in her early works she felt a clear connection with the avant-garde tendencies of the post-war poetry; it is meaningful that in 1963 in her first program statement regarding – as she put it – Tuwim’s and Gałczyński’s poems “written across”, she reached for the collective subject: “Today we, drilling into each poetic emotion, do not understand the meaning of such works, we read it as making music with proper names, names of emotions and things” (Krystyna Miłobędzka, “W dziesiątą rocznicę [On the tenth anniversary]. Gałczyński – Tuwim”, *Twórczość*, No. 12 (1963): 26).



herence, and going beyond divisions increasingly more successfully: between entities and things, which they discuss, between subject and object, between each text (resembling a limitless poem more and more), between genre models, verses, sentences, syntax groups, parts of speech, and ultimately – lexemes<sup>26</sup>. It would no longer be a work of looking– poetry of the eye, to which the title of the volume refers, and which would stem from phenomenological reading<sup>27</sup> – and would become a poetry of words. After all, the title – *Spis z natury* – leads us to words (and later – an inventory, register, or encyclopedia), similarly to the word “zapisy” [entries] used by Miłobędzka to refer to her poems. Not finding her own way in the existing ways of speaking, and thus recognizing the “internal development of own art” as “the need to speak new” (Z 121), Miłobędzka chooses to write – an action in which, as she confesses, she “can twist words, break down used clusters, combine opposites” (JS 6). It is writing that “drills into” observations – and it is only in writing that a connection becomes possible: “I am organically connected with my writing. I write almost with my whole body – it is my body that has this text, this picture. This is not a matter of head alone; it is the matter of tenderly connecting with the other” (JS 7). Thus, what is impossible to talk about should be written down. In such a conceptualization there would be no contradiction between *Anaglify*, which tries to stand on the side of things, and the poems from *Pokrewne, Dom, pokarmy* [Home, foods] and *Wykaz treści* [List of contents], which are “dramatically agrammatical” and make “an impression of untamed mediocrity”<sup>28</sup>; there is no contradiction between the non-anthropocentric perspective of their reception proposed today, and the motherlike-childlike convention that is dominant in the listed books of poetry, between the turn towards things and the avant-garde, between new ecopoetry and good old linguism. No sponge can erase this connection.

Thus, instead of a sponge, I reach for a clover (four-leaf?) – and with it for Miłobędzka’s other, this time clearly stated inspiration. The text is entitled *Klee*:

1

Will thinking have enough eyes for flooding the world?

Eyes cannot see deep, they see what is near or far, which is why so many coastlines, so many crushed seas.

Too many times met by itself to take root. Shifted through seasons of the year. It approached itself incessantly, too light, until it changed into wind. How much air did it have to go through so that it has become impossible to find a name for it?

2

Fire has been lit – brass masks are fuming. A piece of ice has been placed in the fire – a face is becoming livid. Fear is dividing into separate parts. Fear is looking deep<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>26</sup>Orska writes about poems from *Dom, pokarmy* (1975) which were created in this way: “Miłobędzka leaves us with an impression that we are dealing with a sentence «under construction» – started many times, developed in different directions, corrected in multiple ways” (Orska, 114).

<sup>27</sup>See Jacek Gutorow, “Glif”, in *Wielogłos. Krystyna Miłobędzka w recenzjach, szkicach, rozmowach* Multivoice. Krystyna Miłobędzka in reviews, sketches, conversations], edited by Jarosław Borowiec (Wrocław: Biuro Literackie, 2012), 17-30.

<sup>28</sup>See Stanisław Barańczak, “Dramatyczna agrammatyczność” [Dramatic agrammaticality], in *Wielogłos. Krystyna Miłobędzka...*, 46.

<sup>29</sup>Krystyna Miłobędzka, “Klee”, *Twórczość*, No. 12 (1962): 37.



In her poetry, Miłobędzka, who does not like “making music with proper names”, she uses very few last names (with the exception of Sylvia Plath and “Yoshimoto, master of butoh” – Z 238), and apart from the jocular *Wiersz dla Bashō* [A poem for Bashō], they never appear in titles. For those reasons, the above poem from 1962 would be exceptional – which perhaps is the reason why eight years later, when it was included in *Pokrewne*, it lost both its title and half of its size. Miłobędzka also decided to use inversion, as a result of which the phrase *Eyes cannot look deep* became the incipit (see Z 41); she also erased the sentence “How much air did it have to go through so that it has become impossible to find a name for it?”, which seems especially significant in the context of “losing” Paul Klee’s name, Miłobędzka’s favorite artist. When asked about have an “affinity in visual arts”, she told Borowiec that:

Always Paul Klee. I sometimes forget about him. Now you reminded me about drawings I have not seen in a while. (...) There is this story by Klee about the drawing from *Creative Confession*. There is a field, you can see a cloud... Only lines – this line is this, that line is that. I think it is an encounter between childish drawing and an artist who is aware of his works – unusual in Klee. Why am I telling you about this? Because in his drawings I find what I am sometimes lucky enough to write in my texts<sup>30</sup>.

Miłobędzka also pointed out the childish aspect of Klee’s drawings in 1995 in an interview with Sergiusz Sterna-Wachowiak; referring to his small-format works, such as *Avant la neige*, she said: “There is very little, but a lot is happening, at least for the viewer and inside the painting”<sup>31</sup>. This formula might as well be a self-characterization of Miłobędzka’s works, whose “childishness” is also closely related to the activity of “an artist aware of his own work”. The reference to *Creative Confession* is also meaningful. Although in Poland the essay was published only in 1969 in an edited volume entitled *Artyści o sztuce* [Artists on art] (translated into Polish by Jolanta Maurin-Białostocka), at the very beginning of Miłobędzka’s activity, it was then published as *Credo artystyczne* [Artistic credo] in 1961, translated by Waław Niepokólczycki in “Więzi” (issue No. 4), a year before Miłobędzka’s poem was published – coincidentally? – next to a translation of Ponge’s poems. It may be supposed that the second part of *Klee* would be an ekphrasis, perhaps the only one in Miłobędzka’s poetry, whereas the first part can be read as a poetic answer to Klee’s considerations.

*Creative Credo* opens with a frequently cited formula: “Art does not reproduce the visible but makes visible”<sup>32</sup>. It constitutes both criticism of non-reflective looking (“And what about the beholder: does he finish with a work all at once?” – Klee asks, and then answers: “Often yes, unfortunately.”<sup>33</sup>), and an apology for looking deep: “let us (...) take a little journey to the land of better understanding”, says Klee in the introduction<sup>34</sup>. “Eyes cannot see deep”, Miłobędzka agrees, and having accepted the invitation, she makes “thinking” the subject of her poetic

<sup>30</sup>Jarosław Borowiec, *Szare światło. Rozmowy z Krystyną Miłobędzką i Andrzejem Falkiewiczem* [Grey light. Interviews with Krystyna Miłobędzka and Andrzej Falkiewicz] (Wrocław: Biuro Literackie, 2009), 143.

<sup>31</sup>“Wiersza nie można zapisać, bo trzeba by było zapisać wszechświat. Z Krystyną Miłobędzką rozmowa Sergiusz Sterna-Wachowiak” [A poem cannot be written down, you would have to write cosmos down”, in *Wielogłos. Krystyna Miłobędzka...*, 610.

<sup>32</sup>Paul Klee, “Credo artystyczne”, translated by Waław Niepokólczycki, *Więzi*, No. 4 (1961): 81. English version: Reed Enger, “Creative Credo, Art does not reproduce the visible but makes visible.” in Obelisk Art History, <http://arthistoryproject.com/artists/paul-klee/creative-credo/> [PZ].

<sup>33</sup>Klee: 83.

<sup>34</sup>Klee: 81.

considerations rather than "looking". Klee writes that this is the first "action" which precedes everything else ("first a thought manifests itself", "thought can be considered first"<sup>35</sup>). The opening question – "Will thinking have enough eyes for flooding the world?" – which initiates a number of aquatic metaphors ("so many coastlines, so many crushed seas"), could answer the challenge from the conclusion of the essay: "to let oneself be carried by the refreshing sea, a broad river, or a delightful stream, like this diversified aphoristic art of graphics"<sup>36</sup>. However, where does "flooding the world" come from? Why is she writing about "crushed seas"? And what "changed into wind", travelling the world, unable to "find a name"? The direction of Klee's considerations, connecting an artist's work – creation – with the Biblical story of the creation of the world, seems to provide answers to those questions. Pointing out to the key role of motion, he believes that "The Biblical story of Creation is a good parable for motion", adding that "The work of art, too, is first of all genesis; it is never experienced purely as a result"<sup>37</sup>. Defining a work of art as "a formal cosmos" consisting of such elements as "numbers and letters", he adds that "in the end a formal cosmos is achieved, so much like the Creation that a mere breath suffices to transform religion into act"<sup>38</sup>. In the end he claims that:

The relation of art to creation is symbolic. Art is an example, just as the earthly is an example of the cosmic.

The liberation of the elements, their arrangement in subsidiary groups, simultaneous destruction and construction towards the whole, pictorial polyphony, the creation of rest through the equipoise of motion: all these are lofty aspects of the question of form, crucial to formal wisdom; but they are not yet art in the highest sphere. A final secret stands behind all our shifting views, and the light of intellect gutters and goes out.<sup>39</sup>

### *Małe mity*. From life of the earth

Let us put forward a (small) thesis: Klee's concept of art as playing with final things may have inspired not only the forgotten poem from "Twórczość" analyzed here, but also poems from *Małe mity*; openly engaging in that "game" would constitute the determiner of this cycle, making it different from *Anaglify*. Attempts at reducing the difference between two parts of *Spis z natury* to a set of oppositions –nature-nurture, myth-nature, anthropocentrism-nonanthropocentrism, humanism-posthumanism etc.–would be misguided. In *Małe mity* Miłobędzka starts a journey whose later stages can be understood by analyzing poems from "Twórczość" (*Małże*, *Patrzące chwytliwe*, *Widziane w ogniu*): a journey of "setting free" perceived elements of the world, "grouping" them into more "complex divisions", and ultimately "reconstructing as a whole", which required Miłobędzka to undertake increasingly more complex formal measures and a radical opening for possibilities offered by the neo-avant-garde linguistic poetry

<sup>35</sup>Klee: 83.

<sup>36</sup>Klee: 86.

<sup>37</sup>Klee: 84.

<sup>38</sup>Klee: 85.

<sup>39</sup>Klee: 85-86.

(Białoszewski, Karpowicz). In *Małe mity*, Miłobędzka experiments with rewriting Biblical motifs in such a way; similarly to *Creative Credo*, they dominate the cycle, which on the other hand contains hardly any elements from Greco-Roman mythology. Using a pen of poetic imagination (whose significance is stressed by Miłobędzka in *Mały traktat o wyobraźni*) they were “written down from nature”. “Written down” – not registered or “recreated”, but “made visible”, “created”, made real by writing “From nature”, because they were there before, on earth, here, not elsewhere; earth is the leitmotif of the cycle and the proper cosmos of Miłobędzka’s poetry. The formula which constitutes the title of the volume and the concluding poem is not a coincidence; it expresses the idea behind *Małe mity*, which aims to go beyond the nature-nurture, subject-object, thing-word opposition; the mythical and religious is revealed here as earthly, natural in such a way that one has an impression that two orders closely, almost organically connect with each other. And yet the presence of the mythical is perceptible – and although in trace amounts, hardly outlined, hidden, this presence differentiates *Małe mity* from *Anaglify*.

*Ptasie obrazki* – the closest to the debut cycle poems from *Małe mity* – are written into the Biblical perspective via individual formulations. In the final verse of *Wróble*, whose existence (according to Miłobędzka) is defined by waiting (“One is waiting for a horse to pass, for cherries and grains”), she writes: “During waiting one says very many things. This is how waiting becomes as significant as final things” (M 11). *Łabędź* opens with a periphrasis: “Majestic, feathery boat separated from the coastline on the second day of creation” (M 12), whereas “thanks to flamingos one can believe in pink glasses, and hence also in the existence of the paradise” (*Flaming*, M 14). Also *Ziemia* [Earth] which opens the discussed cycle with the incipit “Where to find the first place of pain?”, in which Earth – “heavy, calm, not understanding the violence of waters” – just like its Creator “not included in anything” and “spread with all lives” (M 5) – “Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind” (Genesis 1,11<sup>40</sup>) refers to the first day of creation. The unsettling *Kotysanka* (M 17) inspires messianic associations: its “light, pellucid” protagonist (the Good Shepherd?) enters a “herd”, walks “between lush and soft animals” (sheep?), “beats light after light”, until they “lie down, relaxing their backs along the road”. However, the one that comes turns out to be “more menacing than the night”, and his actions (“he deprived rivers, worn off with thirsty tongues, of depth”) resemble the Messiah from Ephraim’s house rather than that from David’s<sup>41</sup>. A clearer concept opens the already mentioned poem *Spis z natury*:

Lean legs of a crucified tree are hanging on the wardrobe door. Long, even, dried torso, some knees bent inwards. Hips could in the place of protruding bumps (M 18).

A suggestive juxtaposition of a wooden wardrobe with the crucified Christ inspires Biblical references in later parts of the poem describing subsequent elements of a house; the passion motif seems to be continued with “a deep crack from ears to the nose”, “an open wound”, and “longitudinal bunch of muscle of reed and sawdust” (M 19), whereas “heat circulating the living clay” (M 18) again refers to the story of creation. The poem’s strength stems from the fact that the

<sup>40</sup>English Standard Version (EVS) [PZ].

<sup>41</sup>See e.g. Gershom Scholem, *Basic Concepts of the Kaballah*, translated by Juliusz Zychowicz (Warszawa: Aletheia, 2015), 200-202.

cited phrases refer to (respectively): a "horse head in a frame" hanging on a wall, the "wall, visible due to its deformity", and finally (typical for a fan of Białoszewski!) a consistently personified "furnace" with a "throat" and "a dark chamber, or lighter than heart" (M 18-19). However, the most obvious invitation to playing with final things can be found in the titular *Małe mity*:

I

He then took a lump of clay into his hands, this could also  
be a stone, barbwire, grapevine –  
and he passed on labyrinths pressed on his fingers.  
it happened at the beginning and this is surely why until  
today we do not know who he was. It is supposed:  
leaning, no smile, he may have said something,  
or it may have been just a look.

II

He stopped the boat for a moment, in silence they went into  
the water, they made a huge circle with themselves. They did  
not want to catch that fish at all. They only ambushed it.  
They waited. And when the fish fell down on the sandy  
shore, one of them approached it and outlined it  
precisely. At the same time the fish already had  
an idea of human suffering. With no possibility to  
escape it slowly ossified into white tools  
of crime – nails, spears, cross.  
And they said that a sand fish is not enough for a trace  
of fish and not enough for a trace of man. And they kept catching  
living fish, and eating dead fish. And sand? Sand  
became useful for making glass.

III

Trees were the highest place of life on earth:  
its juices could only reach that place. Birds  
knew that. And those who had the power to cut  
trees, invented higher and higher places.  
Now they are flowing, flowing alone through dead constructions  
(M 8-9).

We can easily identify the Biblical periscopes. The first part of *Małe mity*, similarly to the fragments quoted above, is a return to Bereshit – it tells the story of what was happening at the beginning, placing clay in the hands of the Creator in line with the Bible. The longest, second part, belongs to the New Testament: apart from references to Christ's passion, it also refers to the apostles catching fish – but it also alludes to Christ writing on the ground and to the so-called *Eucharistic speech* from John 6. Finally, in the last part we can recognize Babel – but also the Flood. However, identifying those stories is only the beginning; in order not to flow through the poem like through a "dead construction", it should be seen as an effect of poetic work on myth, which presses itself on its surface, and in

the deep structure. The most obvious opposition organizing the latter manifests itself in the whole cycle: positively valued smallness appears in titles, and in the contents of most poems. Sometimes – like in *Wróble* – smallness is juxtaposed with greatness (“Life of sparrows consists of completely small expectations. They do not make plans for migrations in the fall, which is why they do not experience massive anxiety”, M 11) – and it manifests itself in the form of short poems, or poems divided into short parts. However, there is a more significant opposition to be found in *Małe mity* – of life and death, of the living and the dead – which answers the theme of creation. In fact, Miłobędzka’s biophilic 1960’s and 1970’s poetry may be considered vitalist *par excellence*. The elements of the two oppositions are put together in such a way that life situates itself on the side of the small (*Mały traktat o wyobraźni* concludes with a generalizing paraphrase: “a completely small trap, from which life begins”, M 6), whereas the big seems to connect with death and disease (the “physical greatness of an eagle” can only be admired “in an asylum for mad kings or in educational morgues” *Orzeł*, M 13), as well as with violence (the “majestic” *Łabędź* becomes a protagonist of “legends” about “almost human cruelty” M 12) and ideology (“The way flamingos walk is concerning – in a flock they start to march”, M 14). This juxtaposition (small-living vs. huge-dead) also organizes the order of the analyzed poem: the nameless Creator bends over small things (“a lump of clay”, “a grapevine”, etc.), whereas the “higher and higher” human constructions made in order to surpass trees are in fact dead. If we consider *Małe mity* a triptych (and they refer to this form: the longest part, a New Testament scene, is placed between two from the Old Testament), it should not be surprising that we will find their most important formula in the middle: “And they said that a sand fish is not enough for a trace of fish and not enough for a trace of man. And they kept catching living fish, and eating dead fish”. We can hear echoes of “I am the bread of life” (John 6:48), where the contradiction of food – life-giving and deadly – is used multiple times, not only thanks to Bible-like styling which is more evident than in other parts of the poem<sup>42</sup>. However, this is perverse: the evangelical antithesis makes sense for bread or water, but it does not for fish, which need to be killed before consumption. Additionally, worldly food is juxtaposed to God’s Word, and the outline of a dead fish on “the sandy shore”. Although it is difficult to imagine that the resulting “sand fish” becomes living food, it definitely constitutes – like the neo-avant-garde *land art* interventions – a borderline realization, which Miłobędzka clearly suggests; her sand fish is not enough for a trace of fish (after all, it is man-made), and “not enough for a trace of man” (because man only outlined the animal in the sand). Moreover, fish (ἰχθύς) as an acronym of “Iesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudaeorum” refers to Jesus and is a symbol of Christianity. Following its first – Christological – meaning, it is hard not to think that if Jesus does not appear in the second part of the poem as man, perhaps is in fact the mysterious fish, which inspires a striking reaction from the fishermen: “He stopped the boat for a moment, in silence they went into the water, they made a huge circle with themselves. They did not want to catch that fish at all”. The circle could be a reference to a sacrificial circle, and breaking it – like in Girard – would happen due to Jesus’s salvation mission: “fish already had an idea of human suffering” and it washes ashore. However, it seems that the theological reading would be less interesting than a historicized one: not referring to God Incarnate, but subject to Christianity’s secularizing processes, which – like in Gianni Vattima’s hermeneutics – would agree to its own weakening and dying. In the disenchanting world of “dead constructions”,

<sup>42</sup>“Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life” (John 6: 27); “Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died (John 6: 49). “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh” (John 6: 51); “This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread[c] the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever” (John 6: 58). The opposition of living and “dead” food appears in the Gospel of John multiple times also in the case of “living water”, e.g. John 6: 10.

where things lost their mythical meanings, and "sand became useful for making glass", the Creator can be talked about only apophatically ("we do not know who he was"), and the "labyrinths pressed on his fingers" show fingerprints rather than Image and Likeness.

The end of the poem seems to leave no doubts that the end of understanding nature as a book and its progressing exploration have negative consequences (or even apocalyptic – the flood). The word "alone" in "Now they are flowing, flowing alone through dead constructions" also points to alienation – without God and faith in Nature the river of time carries us further and further away from 'life on earth'... Does the possibility to undertake the topic of secularization in an affirmative way stem from those pictures? Vattimo perceived secularization as Christianity's proper significance, also relating to art (and thus – literature); art is neither able nor obliged to serve the function of «new mythology», rational religion<sup>43</sup>. *Małe mity* is clearly not meant to be the "new mythology" of our times. Nonetheless, the fact that it ironically distances itself from Christianity's "major narratives" may be treated as an attempt at deconstructing this narrative – a differentiating repetition in which (as befits a neo-avant-garde intervention), criticism goes hand in hand with affirmation, and destruction –and hence with creation. *Małe mity* could be a model text of micrology – a "small literary form" characterized by somewhat perverse "micropoetics", requiring the difficult art of "microreading" from the reader which could reveal Great Things<sup>44</sup> to them. And perhaps even microteology – on the one hand helping us realize the uncertain status of theological discourse, and on the other, thanks to its literary character, being a testimony and tribute to fragile truth and hopeful human existence<sup>45</sup>?

If the answer to those questions is positive, it is because the nature of the poetics of the discussed poems does not allow it. How was *Małe mity* created? It is not based on big myths, and then written into texts about nature, like riddles, in order to invite the reader to give the right answers. The titular formula of "writing from nature" indicates the rather opposite tendency – this "anaglyphic" observation of nature allowed one to see the seeds of myths in it. However, this does not mean that the assumed reading of *Małe mity* would lead to classifying them, i.e., in a register similar to *Systema Naturae* by Linnaeus. Although the poetic language of *Małe mity* – not as connecting and uniting as in *Pokrewne* and *Dom, pokarmy* – is nonetheless close to the language of *Anaglify*. *Małe mity* is different from *Anaglify* in terms of its multiple-level thematic structure, which requires the reader to seek metaphorical meanings not only within each level (perceptible – nature – myth – Christianity – history), but also between them. This implies a complex metaphorical activity, connoting symbolic rather than allegorical qualities, new myths, produced by the poet via differentiating repetitions of the Biblical material rather than the existence of purely religious contents, hidden under pictures observed in nature. Although this construction is made of allegedly "dead", secularized religious-mythical elements by seemingly worn off poetic devices, repeated after the avant-garde, it turns out to be surprisingly alive and fertile in terms of meaning. Affirming the secular lack of certainty which today reopens metaphysics in a new way, Julia Kristeva writes:

<sup>43</sup>Gianni Vattimo, *Poza interpretacją. Znaczenie hermeneutyki dla filozofii* [Beyond Interpretation. The Meaning of Hermeneutics for Philosophy], translated into Polish by Katarzyna Kasia (Kraków: Universitas, 2011), 63-64, 86.

<sup>44</sup>Aleksander Nawarecki, "Mikrologia, genologia, miniatura" [Micrology, genology, miniature], in *Miniatura i mikrologia literacka* [Literary miniature and micrology], vol. I, edited by Aleksander Nawarecki (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2000), 18.

<sup>45</sup>Michał Paweł Markowski, "Teologia, dyskurs, zdarzenie" [Theology. Discourse, meaning], in Maciej Bielawski, *Mikroteologie* (Kraków: Homini, 2008), 226.

The remains of the ontotheological continent, too rapidly decreed sunk, seem less and less like “dead letters” and more and more like laboratories of living cells whose exploration might allow us to clarify present aporias and impasses<sup>46</sup>.

This is what Miłobędzka’s poetry does with the discursive, “dead constructions” of myth, religion, and theology (which indeed to many of us are “dead fish”); by writing them down, it makes them alive, transforms them into a living world full of meaning, and hence creates them anew – yes, small, tiny, but thanks to that also childishly energetic, active, all-pervasive, lively. “Myths have no end!” (JS 17) – Miłobędzka says in an interview with Borowiec, almost like Jesus placing a child in front of us:

There is no end to questions about the beginning of everything. Each thing and universe. What came first, where is this life hidden? Every child surely knows that. I – child – like every child, have my own ideas of life of everything. Adults call it personification. Myths have no end! (JS 17).

Thus, by diminishing the Great Story of Christianity, Miłobędzka does not liquidate it; she makes it weaker by repeating it, thus leading it to its place – on earth. Reminding us about the fundamental connection between nature and myth, *humus* (earth) a *humilitas* (humbleness), her poetry would be consistently humble, and as such, kenotic in its deep structure (incorporating the divine into the earthly, physical, “the first matter of the word”, JS 7), and postsecular in its meaning (functioning on remnants of secularized Christianity, preserving their – blissfully reduced – contents in its small forms). Thus, in fact the discussed cycle would situate itself “at the beginning”. While *Anaglify* would open Miłobędzka’s poetry to nature and the world of things, *Małe mity* would complete her exposition with the theolinguistic theme, resonating (typically *piano*) in all her poetic works, culminating in *Pamiętam. Zapisy stanu wojennego* [I remember. Poems from martial law] and *Dom, pokarmy*; the latter closes with one of the most unusual postsecular forms of Polish poetry: “Do I believe in God? I only cover him, but I do not believe. Which is very good, I can finally look after something huge” (Z 142)<sup>47</sup>. However, it is only the combination of those perspectives in the uniting formula of *Spis z natury*, reading the two parts comprising the reconstructed book of poetry, together with poems which were excluded from it, allows the reader to see the fundamental unity of Miłobędzka’s poetic project, suggested by Paul Klee’s *Creative Credo* with the crucial combination of an artistic act with creation. As Miłobędzka put it in a comment regarding *Małe mity*, presenting it as “first attempts at capturing the whole”, “understanding the unclear whole in which one exists”: “I feel equal to all living creatures. We are all one living organism” (JS 22)<sup>48</sup>.

<sup>46</sup>Julia Kristeva, *This incredible need to believe*, translated by Beverly Bie Brahic (New York: Columbia University Press 2009), 57.

<sup>47</sup>I have analyzed postsecularism in Miłobędzka’s poetry in: Piotr Bogalecki, *Szczęśliwe winy teolingwizmu. Polska poezja po 1968 roku w perspektywie postsekularnej* [Lucky faults of theolinguism. Polish post-1968 poetry in the postsecular perspective] (Kraków: Universitas, 2016), 181-200; Piotr Bogalecki, „Boga zastąpiam światem. Wiara i świeckość w poezji Krystyny Miłobędzkiej” [I have replaced God with the world. Religion and secularity in Miłobędzka’s poetry], in *Literatura a religia. Wyzwania epoki świeckiej* [Literature and religion. Challenges of the secular age], vol. II: *Literatura polska po 1945 roku – kierunki, idiomy, paradygmaty* [Polish literature after 1945 – directions, idioms, paradigms], edited by Agnieszka Bielak, Łukasz Tischner (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2020), 321-350.

<sup>48</sup>The first, shortest version of the poem “Małe mity” from *Siódmy głos tygodnia* [Seventh voice of the week] can be considered meaningful proof of the unity of Miłobędzka’s early poetry – in place of its first part (inc. “He then took hands”) we can find... an anaglyph about brooches (inc. “Brooches used to live freely”, A 45).



*Porzucone niepotrzebne* [Left behind, not needed]. After hymn

This equalization would remain fragmentary or even illusive in Miłobędzka's poetry, if the notions of nature, whole, or creation functioned within traditional metaphysics, idealizing frames. The kenotic narrative, weakening it, would not include the natural world; the peculiar naturalization of religion would not be accompanied by religionizing nature and the world of things. However, Miłobędzka, striving towards the first days of creation, does not make such a mistake, and the book's titular text, in which passion-related metaphors are applied to a tree, plants, and a horse, as well as a furnace and a wall (M 19), could be the first proof of that. Another one can be provided by the titular poem of *Małe mity*, if we open ourselves to the possibility of an even more radical reading of the suffering, lifeless fish that appears in its central part. What if that fish was Christ rather than his symbol – personified, "fallen" into the depths of creation, and consumed to deliver many? Such a reading – religious, although non-anthropocentric, shifted towards animal theology, accentuating, among others, the motif of the Christ-like suffering of animals<sup>49</sup> – is made possible thanks to the multilevel structure of the poem. Miłobędzka would not be herself if she had not complicated also the linearity of the great disenchantment narrative in a subtle, yet meaningful way. God creating the world takes in his hands not clay or stone, but barbwire (M 8) – which inspires very specific associations – definitely not with paradise. Placing it "at the beginning" – not by surrounding Eden with it, but replacing the human clay with it, highlights one of the leitmotifs of the analyzed poetry, resonating throughout *Małe mity* (it is not a coincidence that they open with a question about "the first place of pain"), and present also in many other poems in *Pokrewne* and in *Klee*, where the ability to look deep is defined as belonging to fear. For Miłobędzka's early poetry would also be poetry of pain, and this pain, together with the accompanying emotions, would connect both cycles of *Spis z natury*. Miłobędzka confesses: "I have known what pain is since the very beginning. Pain of things abandoned, redundant, of crippled beings. It can be seen almost in every *Anaglif*" (JS 21). Doomed to literary nonentity, the final, crossed-out line of *Klee*: "Fear is dividing into separate parts. Fear is looking deep" – would perfectly summarize the evolution of Miłobędzka's early poetry: the fragmentary poetics of *Anaglify*, still based on a series of divisions (out of which the most significant, although camouflaged one, is the presence of the subject-object dichotomy) would be gradually replaced with a vitalist poetics of connectivity, observable in the discussed poems from "Twórczość", *Pokrewne* and *Dom, pokarmy*, whose rule is defined by Miłobędzka in the following way: "Everything connects with one another here, everyone tells themselves the world in a wordless agreement" (JS 24). It is symptomatic that she supported those words with a memory of her infant son crying because of cries of "animal children" on their way to a slaughterhouse. "And this quiet human baby answers with cries. In this life, barely starting, connection with other lives in nature is incredible. Also with their fear and pain" (JS 24).

*Mały traktat o wyobraźni* (M 6) also introduces us to the "sticky" depths of fear and pain. This is the nature of Miłobędzka's poetics: the text does not need to be only about a sundew (which we can deduce from its contents, although the name *Drosera* does not appear in the text), nor an apology of imaginations with clear metaliterary connotations (imagination-poetry), nor even – as Miłobędzka says in an interview with Borowiec (JS 22) – erotic ("Because maybe it is not a sundew? Maybe it is a sexual act between a man and a woman?") JS 22), i.e., a poem about

<sup>49</sup>See e.g. Andrew Linzey, *Animal Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 64-67.

perception (“And maybe only a register of senses which are catching a picture”, JS 22). *Traktat* can also be a kenotic text: about the slow descent of an incarnate God, “pushed lower and lower”, who has to agree to a “cup with earth”, and death “from which life begins”? However, it is only the juxtaposition of the great kenosis story with a small bug sucked in by a flower, with which Miłobędzka starts her game with final things, that she achieves it. And in her comment on *Mały traktat*, before referring us to the much bigger and younger *Życie nigdy się nie kończy* [Life never ends] by Willigis Jäger, she expresses the wisdom of her small biophilic poetry in the most concise way: “Something that is born, is simultaneously something that dies – and it is one” (JS 23).

translated by Paulina Zagórska

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# KEYWORDS

*Małe mity*

ECOPOETRY

**Krystyna Miłobędzka**

**Paul Klee**

**ABSTRACT:**

The paper is an attempt at reconstructing the poetics of early texts by Krystyna Miłobędzka, mostly the book of poems *Spis z natury*, written in 1960s – Miłobędzka’s poetic debut, unpublished at the time. By reading together the two poetic cycles comprising it – *Anaglify* and *Małe mity* – the author stresses the need to extend the non-anthropocentric reading to *Anaglify* with a postsecular interpretation implied by the multilevel structure of *Małe mity*. The paper also discusses four poems by Miłobędzka – *Małże*, *Widziane w ogniu*, *Patrzące chwytliwe* and *Klee* – published in 1960s in “*Twórczość*” magazine, not included in any book of poems. This allowed to identify possible relations between Miłobędzka’s early poetry and works by Francis Ponge and Paula Klee.

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