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“A DISCARDED TIRE BY THE ROAD”: MIŁOSZ SETTLES UP WITH GINSBERG

This article discusses Czesław Miłosz’s ambiguous relationship with American beat and confessional poetry as well as with the counterculture of the 1960s. It focuses on one of Miłosz’s late poems dedicated to Allen Ginsberg, published in *Facing the River* in 1994. The poem, though ostensibly about Ginsberg, is in fact one of the most confessional poems the Polish poet has ever written, presenting his own life as a failure, “a discarded tire by the road,” and setting up Ginsberg as an exemplary wiser poet, “who persisting in folly attained wisdom.” On the one hand, it seems difficult not to see Miłosz and Ginsberg as two very different personalities. On the other hand, Miłosz saw Ginsberg as the true heir to Whitman, whom he himself had always admired. The discussion of the poem reveals that Miłosz uses Ginsberg as his own antithesis, a Yeatsian mask or a Jungian shadow, representing everything that the Polish poet, with his admitted contempt for any trace of weakness and mental instability, has never been or valued.

Keywords: Czesław Miłosz, Allen Ginsberg, counterculture, beat poetry, confessional poetry

Some might remember a slim volume of poetry in Polish, *Znajomi z tego świata* (Acquaintances of This World), published in 1993 by the Maszachaba Publishing House in the series Biblioteka NaGłosu (OutLoud Library). The author featured in the volume was Allen Ginsberg. The anthology, which was edited by Piotr Sommer, gained notoriety when it transpired that once the Kraków publisher learned who Ginsberg was – and, as we know, he was a junkie and a fag – he decided to withdraw all the copies from circulation and destroy them. Fortunately, another publisher emerged just in time to buy out every single copy, restamp all the books and dis-

tribute them. Accordingly, 1993 basked in dubious glory as it turned into the year of Ginsberg.

In the spring of 1993, the long-awaited countercultural issue of the *NaGłos* literary journal came out, featuring, among others, John Lennon, Julian Beck, Jack Kerouac, Richard Brautigan as well as the Liverpool poets, and proudly sporting on the cover such words as *LSD*, *hippies*, *rock*, *psychedelia* and *contestation*. No wonder many readers were taken aback by the text opening the issue. The text in question was a poem by Czesław Miłosz, “Do Allena Ginsberga” (“To Allen Ginsberg”), which a year later was included in the Polish edition of Miłosz’s poetry volume *Facing the River* (1995: 36–38).¹

This encounter of fire and ice may be surprising, as it would be difficult to find two artists more distant than Miłosz and Ginsberg. Ginsberg, who died in 1997, was the embodiment of everything that Miłosz never came to accept and that he feared: madness in its clinical and metaphorical manifestations; desperate bravado and the Beat drive towards autodestruction; irrationality and obscure penchant for mysticism; leftist naivety and infantile pursuit of utopia, and finally a style habitually characterized by excess, verbosity and exaltation.

Ginsberg was a former beatnik and one of the leading figures of the 1960s counterculture that admittedly intrigued and fascinated Miłosz, even though he always kept his critical distance. In *Visions from San Francisco Bay* he mocks the immaturity of the countercultural movement, whose manifestations he could observe on the Berkeley campus, and points out its similarities to the *fin de siècle* bohemianism as well as the 19th-century Russian intelligentsia. Still, the Polish poet concludes that the country idolizing the Biblical Golden Calf has undergone a metamorphosis and “is clearly becoming the most poetic and artistic country in the world” (Miłosz 1982: 124), which can hardly be taken for a sign of dislike of the perceived changes. Even so, he remained clearly mistrustful of them. Miłosz’s aversion to the counterculture that he himself associated, not without some modicum of truth, with vulgarized Marxism was something that he shared with Zbigniew Herbert in their correspondence. Both poets looked down on the movement, with a superior knowledge of those who experienced similar madness and knew well its consequences.

¹ All quotations from “To Allen Ginsberg” come from this edition. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of the Polish sources are mine [A.K.-P.].

Miłosz's contacts with Ginsberg must have been accidental at best, but we are kept in the dark here. Andrzej Franaszek does not mention any details in his biography, except for the fact that Miłosz met Ginsberg "on many occasions": it remains a mystery on what ground and in what character (Franaszek 2011: 646). In Franaszek's book, Ginsberg is alluded to only once, in the chapter "Prisoners of Ulro," and the reference is presented together with a passage from "To Allen Ginsberg." What is even more symptomatic, Miłosz is not mentioned in any of the Ginsberg biographies I have examined. The Polish Nobel Prize laureate is absent from Ginsberg's collected sketches or interviews (introduced by Václav Havel).

Although the nature of the relationship between Miłosz and Ginsberg is yet to be ascertained, we know that Miłosz's poem "To Allen Ginsberg" is not his first comment on the American poet. Ginsberg's name appears in several sketches, interviews and letters by Miłosz. As we know, Miłosz treated contemporary American poetry *en bloc* with undisguised sarcasm, but Ginsberg belonged to the group of poets that he respected. His most unequivocally approving opinion on Ginsberg comes from 1967 and can be found in Miłosz's letter to Herbert. Both poets ridicule the naivety and irresponsibility of American artists. Miłosz, for example, proudly confesses:

I yelled at Robert Lowell and Creeley, the poet, screaming in public that I screwed them and that they were provincial oafs, that I didn't run away from the Polish province to get dragged into their fucking arguments (Herbert, Miłosz 2006: 87).

Herbert maintains the same tone and manifestly sneers at Americans, stating that he does not consider Ginsberg a poet at all, and adds condescendingly: "he is a nice lad anyway, but a right cabbage head. He's been trying to talk me into hash and orgies, but I'm a barbarian satisfied with WVC (whores, vodka, cigarettes)" (Franaszek 2011: 645). What comes next? Miłosz at once reacts to the words of his then-friend, responding: "I'm really sorry, but I think that despite all his hysteria, it is Ginsberg that is right, not you, and that his 'Howl' is an important poem. Yes, I agree, I prefer Whitman to Baudelaire, but if you side with Whitman, it is binding" (Herbert, Miłosz 2006: 95). We do not know what is supposed to be binding (or, perhaps, what are we bound to do?), as the letter is elliptical, but it nonetheless signals what, in my view, seemed to be of great importance to the Polish Nobel laureate, namely Ginsberg's relationship with the tradition of Whitman, whom Miłosz soon discusses in more detail and less cryptically.

In *Inne abecadlo* (*Miłosz's ABC's*) we find the following confession: "I first encountered Whitman in Polish translation (...) Immediate revelation: to be able to write as he did! I understood that it was not a matter of form, but of an act of inner freedom" (2002: 300). The passage on Whitman ends with Ginsberg mentioned as "the most Whitmanesque among American poets."

Almost half a century after the letter exchange with Herbert and the epistolary defence of Ginsberg, Miłosz publicly acknowledged his attitude towards the American poet: the poem "To Allen Ginsberg." We should say it openly: nowhere else did he lay bare his weaknesses and anxieties more clearly than in this text, thanks to the very person of the poem's addressee, the creator of the poetry called "raw" by some and, perhaps more accurately, "naked" by others. Already at first glance the text addressed to Ginsberg is more of a poem about Miłosz than a text about the American beatnik and hippie. Only four out of twenty-five sentence-long paragraphs refer to Ginsberg, defining his work or personality, while the rest concerns Miłosz or the speaker, the "I," who may be identified with the poet. We can therefore claim somewhat perversely that it is one of Miłosz's most confessional poems and, at least on the surface, most self-disclosing, as if Miłosz wished to repay Ginsberg in equal measure with his own confession and exhibitionism. As we know, Miłosz mocked Lowell for the public exposure of his weaknesses. And yet, what else can we observe in "To Allen Ginsberg"? It is in this poem that Miłosz could rival Lowell in revealing the more embarrassing truth about oneself. Lowell wrote about madness, while Miłosz agonized over his own cowardice; Lowell deliberated on alcoholism, Miłosz on conformity into which he was sinking; Lowell pondered his divorces, while Miłosz dwelled upon hypocrisy that became his predicament.

Let us try to recreate the image of Ginsberg that emerges from Miłosz's poem. Ginsberg is called *good man, great poet of the murderous century*, who was led to wisdom by his folly and madness. We learn that he rebelled against the conventional lifestyle *in the name of poetry and of an omnipresent God* (mind you, in this particular order). His life and work provided a challenge that Miłosz proclaims as *absolute*. He used *inflamed* words and uttered *ferce maledictions* like a prophet. He cursed and fumed in the neon wilderness, the world of the contemporary Moloch. It is true that he blabbered *journalistic clichés* and took on an absurd appearance: beads and a beard and a rebel's clothes, but that eccentricity could be easily forgiven. And that was it.

Against such an image of Ginsberg, Miłosz seems its antithesis, already when it comes to the appearance. He has no beard; he is clean-shaven, his hair is cropped. He does not wear beads, but neckties. He does not use drugs, but drinks bourbon, the symbol of the older generation and their customs; he spends his evenings watching TV. This is an openly schematic stylization as a member of the urban middle class, a square, that personifies the world Ginsberg challenged both in his beatnik and hippie incarnations. The orderly philistine life led by Miłosz found its equivalent in his literary style: *sentences with commas and periods*.

However, Miłosz goes one step further. He declares he has a sense of a life wasted, a life spent voluntarily shackled by conventions and prohibitions. He has paid homage to the normal, even though he realizes it is absurd – as if he were afraid of freedom. He is not only scared of the perspective of social exclusion, understandable in the case of the émigré, but, more importantly, he fears the dark forces in himself, the unforeseeable and uncontrollable urges tied to irrationality and madness that could prove his weakness or make him a fool.

Although it seems a surprising confession from Miłosz, the eulogist of sensuality, eroticism was also one of the forces he disregarded, calling its impulses the *diabolic dwarfs of temptations*. This expression is significant, as its reference to the devil suggests the sinful genealogy of sexuality, while the image of dwarfs – its biological, that is, contaminated and malformed background, related to the Manichean notion of putrid matter.

Such an open confrontation of the images of both poets forces the text towards the well-known motif of “the road not taken,” to cite the title of the famous poem by Robert Frost. Miłosz, or the voice impersonating him, declares that, nearing the end of his life, he has realized one thing: his life-choices are wrong, they have impoverished and limited him; in short, his choices are cowardly. To put it differently, Ginsberg’s choice – the other road, the road not taken – has its own unquestionable value and intrinsic charm that appealed to Miłosz with double force towards the end of his life. These were his repressed needs and silenced anxieties.

We need to be aware that Miłosz draws very sharp distinctions, fashioning them into a categorical and uncompromising either-or. He does not consider Ginsberg’s way a possible enhancement or a variation to be introduced into his chosen lifestyle: this is the other road, the road that is opposite to mine. His judgement is unequivocal: I have lost my battle because I have chosen a road different from Ginsberg’s, thus my life, the conse-

quence of my choice, has turned out to be an absolute failure: *a discarded tire by the road*. It is an emphatic image of defeat that leaves no doubt, an evocation of barrenness and rejection. This exhibitionist confession is all the more painful because behind the defeat there hides no error in understanding, nor whim of fate, nor blindness, but the basest of feelings and the most pathetic of motivations: conformity and cowardice.

Moreover, a lack of understanding for human weakness. Miłosz's words sound somewhat surprising: *It is forbidden to indulge yourself, to allow yourself idleness, it is forbidden to think of your past, to look for the help of a psychiatrist or a clinic*. This stance is in complete opposition to the approach of Ginsberg, who not only did spend months in a psychiatric hospital, just like his mother had, but also wrote in his poems about his pain and madness. In the passage, Miłosz reveals his contempt for those who are not able to cope; his almost Puritan cult of work, initiative-taking and self-reliance. This contempt for weakness, already recognized, named and defeated in the poem, took its most astounding and vulgar form in Miłosz's commentary on Lowell, not as a poet, but as a man who had to struggle with his ghosts:

Whenever Robert Lowell landed in a clinic I couldn't help thinking that if someone had only given him fifteen lashes with a belt on his bare behind, he would have recovered immediately. I admit, it was envy speaking through me. If I cannot indulge myself, why should he be free to indulge himself? (Miłosz 1994: 16–17).

Importantly, Lowell should be thrashed not for giving in to self-pity in his poetry, thus prostituting his literary talents, but rather because he has psychological problems and needs help. Strangely enough, with the growing awareness of the nature of mental illness, at the time of R.D. Laing and antipsychiatry pointing out the social sources of psychological disorders, Miłosz thought that problems of this kind could be cured by a simple medicine: the use of a belt, because they were a mere whim, a fad of those privileged by their fate.

Although Lowell irritated Miłosz, Ginsberg, who also ended up in psychiatric wards, commanded his respect. Why the difference? The reason seems to be Ginsberg's Blakean-Whitmanesque heritage, as well as the fact that he was so different that Miłosz did not feel threatened. Lowell was too close; he resembled the Polish poet to such an extent that whatever was different was more dangerous and difficult to stomach. Lowell's eccentricities

were real threat to Miłosz, whereas Ginsberg's madness did not pose such a danger – it was too unfamiliar and too distant.

It is worth mentioning that "To Allen Ginsberg," read along with the other countercultural texts in *NaGłos*, had much more direct impact than in *Facing the River*, where the preceding poems serve as buffers, weakening the effect of the Nobelist's confession about his life as a discarded tire by the road. Just before the Ginsberg poem we can read "Translating Anna Swir on an Island of the Carribean" (Miłosz 1995a: 22–23).² That Miłosz chose to place these two writers next to each other is no mere coincidence, as both of them represent the qualities he did not possess or the qualities alien to him. Moreover, Miłosz could easily say of Ginsberg what he wrote about Świrszczyńska in his biography of this Polish poet entitled *Jakiegoś to gościa mieliśmy (What a Guest We Had)*: "her poetry offers itself as a fulfilled life, fulfilled not through artistic mastery, with her biography somewhere in the background, but rather as a unity of the poems and the person (1996: 5).

The poem on Świrszczyńska is preceded by a short poem, "One More Contradiction" (Miłosz 1995: 31). Its title evokes Whitmanesque contradictoriness, and prepares the reader for the two texts that follow and may initially seem to oppose Miłosz's own views. It highlights the themes present in "To Allen Ginsberg": alternative life choices, search for wisdom, pretending to be just like others. This poem, in a general and sketchy way, foretells the most significant points of Miłosz's conversation with Ginsberg and situates them alongside the more established paradoxes and ambivalences characteristic of Miłosz's work.

While discussing the context of "To Allen Ginsberg," it is worth pointing out that the poems in the English edition are arranged differently from the Polish original (according to Joanna Zach, the change was suggested by Robert Hass, who co-authored the translations). The "Ginsberg" poem is preceded by another text, "Sarajevo," and this placement constructs an entirely different frame of reference. "Sarajevo," which Miłosz prefaced with a surprising, almost autoparodic commentary: "Perhaps this is not a poem but at least I say what I feel," is not so much about the Yugoslav war as about settling the account with the 1960s generation, its pacifism and utopianism. This poem is probably the most critical of Miłosz's opinions on

² In *Facing the River* both poems are placed in the middle of the volume, with "Translating Anna Swir" somewhat more towards the beginning and "To Allen Ginsberg" more towards the end (A.K-P).

counterculture, as he makes it responsible for contemporary atrocities: “The rebellion of the young who called for a new earth was/ a sham, and that generation has written the verdict on itself;” “Now that a revolution really is needed, those who once were fervent/ are quite cool” (1995a: 34). We should remember that Ginsberg was not only one of the representatives of that generation, but first and foremost its spiritual leader and co-author of the countercultural revolt. Thus, “Sarajevo” prepares the English-speaking reader for the encounter with “To Allen Ginsberg” in the light of the critique expressed in the earlier text; it offers a polemical supplement to the image of the poet.

Both in the Polish and English editions, the poems that accompany “To Allen Ginsberg” are carefully selected: they function as a protective screen, problematize its interpretation, provide alternative perspectives and relativise the confession of the failure expressed in absolute terms. All this renders direct reading impossible, entangling any interpretation in ambiguous contexts. I would argue that such a problematic arrangement stemmed from Miłosz’s difficulties with the process of composing the poem. They were revealed most conspicuously in his own comments on the text, which will be discussed further on.

In “To Allen Ginsberg” Miłosz speaks of the American poet as a *good man*, before he calls him a poet. Ginsberg is “good” then, as if a living embodiment of the saying by Adam Mickiewicz that it is easier to write a book than to live a day in a good way. One can obviously assume that the phrase *Allen, you good man* is solely a conventional address, a condescending gesture: a pat on the colleague’s back. In my opinion, however, what manifests itself in this phrase is Miłosz’s axiology. *Good man, great poet* – this is a telling ordering of the epithets revealing the superiority of ethics over aesthetics that paradoxically explains also Miłosz’s interest in another Polish poet, Tadeusz Różewicz, even though they had a different understanding of both ethics and aesthetics. In his commentaries on contemporary poetry, including American poetry, Miłosz often focused on the sphere of ideas and on the function that poetry fulfills in creating world-views and attitudes. What was of crucial importance to him was the aim of poetry and the tasks it fulfills in our chaotic world.

Significantly, Miłosz did not elaborate on language as such: intonation, syntax, lexis, forms or genres. It was Herbert who, in his irrational attack on French poetry, referred to the matters of form, asking rhetorically: “How can you write about whores in alexandrine? It brought an end to them”

(Herbert, Miłosz 2006: 93). In “To Allen Ginsberg” Miłosz describes his American colleague without a single reference to the formal side of his poetry, just as he disregarded it in “The Image of the Beast,” chapter fifteen of *Visions from San Francisco Bay*, where Ginsberg served merely as a prophet foretelling the coming of Moloch. Ginsberg’s greatness, if we were to rely solely on what can be gathered from Miłosz’s poem, consists in the fact that he did not shy from unconventional life; that he challenged the dominant mentality, questioned Western materialism and searched for transcendence.

While defending Ginsberg, Miłosz launches another attack on irony that, in his words, turns out to be a mere museum exhibit, devoid of any value other than testifying to the times of unbelief. He issued a warning against irony, which comes dangerously close to nihilism, already in 1965, in his anthology of Polish post-war poetry: “irony is an ambivalent and sometimes dangerous weapon, often corroding the hand which wields it. From what is a desperate protest masked with a smile to nihilistic acquiescence is but one step” (Miłosz 1965: 13). The Polish version of “To Allen Ginsberg” contrasts irony with the blasphemous scream of the American beatnik – this scream (the Polish *wrzask*) is, as we can deduce, Miłosz’s version of the original *howl*, usually translated into Polish as *skowyt*. That Miłosz had this association in mind shows in the English translation of his own poem, where *wrzask* is rendered as *howl*, even though *howl* usually signifies the sound made by a dog or a wolf, and not a man’s cry.

This scream (or howl), an absolute challenge, a fierce malediction of a prophet, is valorized positively by Miłosz. Contrary to irony, which is the child of intellect, the howl is the voice of passion. Miłosz adopts here the traditional distinction between passion and intellect, discernible also in Yeats’s work. In “Second Coming” Yeats creates an apocalyptic vision of the end of the Western civilization, where one reason for its fall is the lack of passion in those who build this civilization and another is the awakened zeal of those who bring about its destruction: “The best lack all conviction, while the worst/ Are full of passionate intensity” (Yeats 2000: 158). In *Child of Europe* Miłosz employs a similar juxtaposition and follows a Nietzschean trope, stating that “The voice of passion is better than the voice of reason./ The passionless cannot change history” (2001: 86). Ginsberg was one of the very few American poets who could be called men of passion and this quality allowed him to shape the course of history, play a significant social role and lead a major social movement.

Miłosz's poetic address to Ginsberg is not a reflection of a fixed state of things, but rather a record of the forging of the poet's attitude. Miłosz moves from the astounding declaration of his life failure and the juxtaposition of two approaches to life towards the creation of a space for mutual understanding and community. The last lines of the poem emphasize a somewhat different issue: *Accept this tribute from me, who was so different, yet in the same unnamed service*. Miłosz progresses from otherness to identity. What changes here is not only the emphasis but also the diction: only several lines before did Miłosz risk describing Ginsberg's work in the most elevated idiom, by summoning the Old Testament prophet speaking in the name of God. At the end of the poem, when he announces his kinship with Ginsberg, he lowers his diction and uses periphrasis. The *unnamed service* no longer presents itself as a prophecy, priesthood, or even sublime poetry, but as *the practice of composing verses*. Thus Miłosz avoids the word *poetry*, laden with axiological presuppositions and possibly pretentious. Using the Polish word for "a poem," *wiersz*, as a synecdoche for poetry, he renders the art concrete, or *pars pro toto*, endows it with a technical dimension and, linguistically, makes it more common, as *wiersz* is anchored deeper in the Polish language than the word *poezja* (poetry).

Another interesting strategy which insists on the prosaic and prevents pathos can be seen between the penultimate sentence and the last sentence, where we learn that the service of a poet is *nienazwana* (*unnamed*) not because it ventures beyond the capacities of language or because it belongs to the sphere of supravocal spirituality, but rather because language or its users lack better terms. This "unnamedness" is therefore connected not so much with the problem of inexpressibility as with a mere accidental handicap of language: *lack of a better term*.

However, the introduction of threadbare ordinariness at the end of the poem must be read as something more than a cautionary gesture on the part of the poet who has learned the precariousness of pathos and strives to avoid it. It is rather a necessity that rises from the very fact of living in the world, where *the unusual changes into the common* and, furthermore, where composing verses does not secure us a higher status than that achieved by inventing a spinning wheel or a transistor: once extraordinary objects, nowadays mundane, devoid of their original aura of uniqueness.

The conviction that the extraordinary loses its charm leads to the surrender of the belief that contemporary art can create works matching medieval cathedrals. Contrary to one's expectations, however, this surrender is

not a sign of resistance to clichés, even though the very mention of Gothic cathedrals may signal anachronism and loss of touch with reality. Rather, it is a pessimistic observation that the new Middle Ages introduced by the counterculture will not give rise to cathedrals as a symbol of human spiritual aspirations, a trace of our incessant strife against gravity and the resistance of matter. Perfection surrenders to something closer to life and reality: incessant striving.

By way of conclusion, let us return for a moment to Miłosz’s own comments on “To Allen Ginsberg.” The Nobel laureate does not repeat what he has stated in the poem in any of his interviews. What is more, he distances himself from it by either changing the subject or using irony. He briefly remarks on the American poet in his conversation with Robert Flagg for *The Paris Review* in 1994. Miłosz describes his poem as “tricky” and moves on to relate a brief encounter with Ginsberg, when the author of *Howl* approached him and said: “Well, I guess you are not as much of a square as you present yourself” (Haven 2006: 158–159). Finally, Miłosz admits:

My attitude towards Ginsberg is contradictory. His “Kaddish” is, in a way, a horrible piece of writing but extremely daring. To speak of one’s mother’s insanity, describing its various phases... that’s incredible. I have always denounced that sort of personal indiscretion. So, I’m shocked and somewhat envious of Ginsberg’s daring, and that is what I expressed in my poem about him (159).

Particularly interesting is the dissimulation on Miłosz’s part: he discusses the poem as if he were ashamed of it, or were brushing it aside as unimportant. Yet a king’s ransom to those who will discover in the poem the slightest trace of shock or impatience with Ginsberg’s attitude, or at least a feeble attempt at denouncing him. If Miłosz indeed had any such feelings, he did not express them in the text. When I asked him about it during a brief interview for the Łódź supplement of *Gazeta Wyborcza* (a daily newspaper), Miłosz answered:

My poems are often very ironic and contain multi-faceted irony. This particular poem, “To Allen Ginsberg,” is ironic: its irony is both self-directed and directed at Ginsberg. With all due sympathy, it sends him back to the specific era, the 1960s; it grants the rebellion considerable merit, but it claims: not me, I didn’t take part in that, I looked at it from the sidelines. While reading my poems

one must remember about this level of irony. For example, my sequence *The World: A Naive Poem* is treated literally, even though it is ironic (1995).

This statement seems symptomatic to me. It is evasive and mystifying, not so much because it underlines the role of irony, but because it stresses its ostensibly regular appearance in the poem. There is also the question of the fundamental difference between the rhetoric of the Ginsberg poem and the stylization of *The World: A Naive Poem*. I would venture a claim that, as Miłosz distanced himself from the poem, he no longer recognized himself in the person who had written it. In other words, while writing down his confession of failure, he was a different person. He had allowed himself to express the truth of the moment, the truth connected with the experience of poem-writing, when the “I” becomes suspended and opens up to the opposite.

Miłosz’s role in “To Allen Ginsberg” can be explained with the help of Yeats’s notion of the Mask. The Mask constituted for Yeats the image of what the self wanted to become, whatever it found admirable. It is an anti-thesis, the opposite of the self, which by struggling to become someone utterly different creates “the dramatic tensions from which art arises” (Unterecker 1977: 16). Illustrating the function of the Mask, Yeats called upon the example of Shakespeare, whom he described as a weak and passionless man, but who through his Mask “created the most passionate art that exists” (Yeats 2008: 72). Is Ginsberg not Miłosz’s Mask, the antithesis of his own self: Ginsberg understood not as a man of flesh and blood but as the persona created by Miłosz in the poem?

Or perhaps one should regard Miłosz’s Ginsberg as the Jungian shadow: the area of the psyche where lurk the suppressed experiences and psychological qualities considered dangerous by the ego, even though they are necessary for the development of the full personality?

The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge, and it therefore, as a rule, meets with considerable resistance (Jung 1991: 8).

Perhaps a poem such as “To Allen Ginsberg” might have been written only by a man nearing the end of his life and thus summing it up: it is then that the present reveals the value of the possible; the superficial uncovers

the hidden; the self can encounter the non-self as its supplement which does not overrule it, but ultimately complements it.

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