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"My name is Salahuddin Chamchawala, professional name Saladin Chamcha," (*says one of the heroes of Salman Rushdie's* Satanic Verses, *fallen into the angry hands of the British immigration officers, named Bruno, Stein and Novak*), "I am a member of Actors' Equity, the Automobile Association and the Garrick Club. My car registration number is suchandsuch. Ask the Computer. Please." "Who're you trying to kid?" inquired one of the Liverpool fans [...] "Look at yourself. You're a [...] Packy billy. Sally-who? — What kind of name is that for an Englishman?" Chamcha found a scrap of anger from somewhere. "And what about them?" he demanded, jerking his head at the immigration officers. "They don't sound so Anglo-Saxon to me." For a moment it seemed that they might all fall upon him and tear him limb from limb for such temerity, but at length the skull-faced Officer Novak merely slapped his face a few times while replying, "I'm from Weybridge, you cunt. Get it straight: *Wey*bridge, where the [...] *Beatles* used to live."[1]

In recent decades, historians of Polish literature have been debating a single, seminal question: Is contemporary Polish literature one, or two[2]? This is a question faced by most eastern European literary traditions, where the homegrown product has been augmented by a second crop: that which grew out of the exile experiences of writers forced abroad, either by war, or inimical political régimes. With the fall of Communism in 1989, and the official embracing of exiled writers earlier ignored, or actively persecuted, by the authorities, the general consensus tends toward the unitary. This is perhaps the only correct answer. For the work of the exiled poets differs little from that of their colleagues at home, as both the work of Czesław Miłosz, a good example of the Polish exile, and that of Zbigniew Herbert, his friend and colleague who remained at home, are Poland-centered, Polish to the very core. The only difference between the approach of exiles such as Miłosz and non-exiles,

[1] Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (New York: Viking, 1989), p. 163.
[2] An earlier version of this article was presented at the March, 2010 conference of the Pacific Coast Conference on British Studies, at Pomona College, Pomona, California.

such as Herbert, is that Miłosz, freed form the constraints of censorship, could be more direct, was not forced to be an ideological contortionist, to get his message across. Polish literature, then, whether written in Białystok or Berkeley, is one.

The real binary question, which I wish to address in this paper, is rather between Polish literature in exile, and that which we may call, for lack of a better term, "ethnic" Polish literature. The latter I would define as literature written in Polish, by young Polish authors either born abroad of exiled parents, or relocating abroad at such an early age, that their cultural outlook was shaped more by their adopted nations than the countries from which they originally spring. Such a group of poets is that gathered about the journals *Kontynenty* and *Merkuriusz*, known from the title of the former as the Kontynenty Group. They were either born in Great Britain, or spent their formative years there, arriving with their parents from occupied Poland as young children in the early forties. Coming of age in the fifties, the high-caliber poetry they produced, which is only just now beginning to be appreciated in Poland, is Polish in language only. It voices the concerns, not of Polish exiles or young Poles growing up in their Central European homeland, but of British subjects, formed by British schools and British political realities, reading British works and influenced, as poets, by the anglophone greats, such as Eliot, Whitman and Pound. In short, in considering the Kontynenty poets, we are dealing with British poetry written in Polish. And this might prove an interesting entry-point for a discussion of postwar British culture as being far from monolithic, but made up of voices arising from, and representing, a tapestry of nations that have transformed the Isles into a society and a culture approximating that of established melting-pots, such as the United States and the nations of the Commonwealth.

First, let us establish the context. As an example of "exile" poetry, consider verse 3 from Miłosz's cycle *Dziecię Europy* [*Child of Europe*], dated New York, 1946:3

> Nie może być mowy o triumfie siły
> Bowiem jest to epoka gdy zwycięża sprawiedliwość.
>
> Nie wspominaj o sile, by cię nie posądzono

[3] Although Miłosz was not yet in exile from Poland when this work was written (being at the time Polish cultural attaché to the New York consulate), in tone and subject-matter it provides us with a succinct example of the sort of politically-charged, Poland-centered verse he was to write when he finally "swallowed one goldfish too many" and found continued life under the new régime unbearable.

Że w ukryciu wyznajesz doktryny upadłe.

Kto ma władzę, zawdzięcza ją logice dziejów.
Oddaj logice dziejów cześć jej należną.

Niech nie wiedzą usta wypowiadające hipotezę
O rękach które właśnie fałszują eksperyment.

Niech nie wiedzą twoje ręce fałszujące eksperyment
O ustach, które właśnie wypowiadają hipotezę.

Umiej przewidzieć pożar z dokładnością nieomylną.
Po czym podpalisz dom i spełni się co być miało.

[There can be no mention of the triumph of force / because this is the era in which justice is triumphant. // Don't say a word about force, so that you will not be judged / of confessing to fallen, bankrupt doctrines in secret. // Whoever is in power, owes that to the logic of history. / Honor the logic of history as is only meet. // Let the lips declaring the hypothesis know nothing / of the hands which simultaneously falsify the experiment. // Let your hands, falsifying the experiment, know nothing / of your lips, which are simultaneously declaring the hypothesis. // Know how to foresee the inferno with infallible precision. / After which, you will set fire to the house and that which was to happen, will be fulfilled.]

Written abroad, it is a commentary on nothing touching upon the poet's new surroundings of freedom in the West, but rather a bitter, Orwellian diatribe against the philosophical violence perpetrated on his native culture, a culture to which he will ever confess adherence, a culture which obsesses him to the point of dis-enabling him to find his bearings in his new adopted land. As I have stated elsewhere,[4] Miłosz was so Polish, to his very marrow, that separation from effective contact with the culture of his homeland forced upon him a sense of isolation no less oppressive than solitary confinement. Almost three decades later, in 1972 Berkeley, he would still be writing, in a poem such as "Władca Albanii" ["The Ruler of Albania"], of his imprisonment in American liberty:

A może już mój dług został spłacony
I zrobiłem co mogłem dla mego języka,
Wiedząc, że w zamian będę miał milczenie?
Zmniejszało się i zmniejszało. Pigmejało i pigmejało.
Zostałem wielkim poetą królestwa Albanii
I uśmiech damy dworu, łaskawość regenta
Byłyby dziś, niestety, spóźnioną nagrodą.

[4] See: Kraszewski Ch., *Irresolute Heresiarch: Catholicism, Gnosticism and Paganism in the Poetry of Czesław Miłosz*, Newcastle-on-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2012.

[But perhaps my debt has already been paid, and I've done what I could for my language, knowing that, in exchange, I would be silenced? It has all grown smaller and smaller. Pygmified and Pygmified. I have become the great poet of the kingdom of Albania. And the smile of the lady of the court, the kindness of the regent, would be today, unfortunately, but a belated reward].

Yet the situation of the poets who remained behind — those like Herbert, who remained in opposition to the régime they lived under — was not to be envied. In "Powrót Prokonsula" ["The Proconsul's Return,"]5 he writes both of the same longing the exile must feel for his homeland, and the excruciating mental acrobatics the honest man must perform in order to survive in a totalitarian system. The poem itself is an acrobatic act, as the realia of twentieth-century Communist Poland can only be spoken of beneath the allegorical cloak of Nero's Rome:

postanowiłem wrócić jutro lub pojutrze
nie mogę żyć wśród winnic wszystko tu nie moje
drzewa są bez korzeni domy bez fundamentów deszcz szkla-
ny
kwiaty pachną woskiem
o puste niebo kołacze suchy obłok
więc wrócę jutro pojutrze w każdym razie wrócę

trzeba będzie na nowo ułożyć się z twarzą
z dolną wargą by umiała powściągnąć pogardę
z oczami aby były idealnie puste
i z nieszczęsnym podbródkiem zającem mej twarzy
który drży gdy wchodzi dowódca gwardii

jednego jestem pewien wina z nim pić nie będę
kiedy zbliży swój kubek spuszczę oczy
i będę udawać że z zębów wyciągam resztki jedzenia
cesarz zresztą lubi odwagę cywilną
do pewnych granic do pewnych rozsądnych granic
to w gruncie rzeczy człowiek tak jak wszyscy
i już bardzo zmęczony sztuczkami z trucizną
nie może pić do syta nieustanne szachy
ten lewy kielich dla Druziusza w prawym umoczyć wargi
potem pić tylko wodę nie spuszczać oka z Tacyta
wyjść do ogrodu i wrócić gdy już wyniosą ciało

Postanowiłem wrócić na dwór cesarza
mam naprawdę nadzieję że jakoś to się ułoży
(6-33)

[5] Published in *Studium przedmiotu* [*Study of the Object*], Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1961.

[I've decided to return tomorrow or the day after / I simply cannot live here among the vineyards nothing here is mine / the trees have no roots houses no foundations the rain is glassy and flowers smell of wax / a dry cloud rattles against an empty sky / so I'll return tomorrow or the day after at any rate I will return // have to come to terms again with the face / the lower lip, so it might bridle contempt / the eyes, that they might be ideally empty / the unfortunate double chin, rabbit of my face / that shivers whenever the Guard captain strides in // I'm sure of one thing I won't drink wine with him / I'll glance down quick when the cup comes round / pretend to be picking my teeth / Caesar after all values civic courage / to a certain extent to a certain rational extent / at bottom he's a man like us all / already bored to death with poison tricks / can't drink his full neverending chessmatches / left cup for Drusius wet lips with the right / then drink nothing but water don't let Tacitus out of sight / go for a stroll in the garden and return when the bodies have been carried out / I've made up my mind to return to Caesar's court / I really hope it can be worked out somehow]

How completely different from both of these poems, and from the mental makeup of the poets who wrote them, is "Wypadek," "The Accident," written about the same time as Herbert's verse, by one of the Kontynenty, Floryan Śmieja:

Jasny był z nami dzień
kiedy samochód wyrzucił koła w niebo
i potrzaskanym grzbietem ciężko zagrodził szosę.

Uszedł z motoru duch
razem z benzyną
i stanął czas w zapachu ziemi i krwi.

Nieco dalej w dolinie
w podrastającym zbożu
bażancią głowę wychylała śmierć
z krzykiem rozczarowania.

Żartem odczynisz strach.
Płosząc bolące myśli
wraca zmącona na chwilę
ważność codziennych spraw.

Jeszcze kilka pomiarów, zeznań i fotografii
zaraz uprzątną wrak
i statystycznie określą
fatum na prostej drodze.

Zajechał zdrowy wóz i ruszyliśmy z miejsca
a metalowe serce waliła zdrowym rytmem.
Biegnące pobok drzewa

hojnie rzucały kwiecie
pod śpiewające opony.

[The bright day was with us / when the car tossed its wheels at the sky / and blocked the road with its broken back. // The spirit departed the motor / along with the gas / and time stood still in an odor of earth and blood. // A little further on down the valley / in the growing corn / death poked out its pheasant's head / with a cry of disappointment. // You banish terror with a joke / spooking painful thoughts / the importance of everyday things / returns, ruffled momentarily. // Just a few more measurements, statements and photos / and soon they'll clear away the wreck / describing statistically / fate, on a straight road. // Then the fresh car arrived and we left that place / the metal heart before us beating a healthy pulse. / The trees disappearing on both sides of the road / tossed their largess of blossoms / beneath the singing tires.]

We are far from Polish realia in this poem. What to a British reader in 1964 is a commonplace: an afternoon drive in one's own car on a sunny day, accident or no accident, has something of an exotic flavor for the Pole in his homeland, still rebuilding, twenty years on, after the catastrophe of World War II. Now, private property was never as constricted in the Soviet satellites as some in the West imagine it to have been; some people owned their own cars; vacations, and even motoring holidays such as that described in Śmieja's poem were not unknown. Still, for most people, living in pre-fab apartment blocks, working six days a week, and depending on trains for most travel, the situation in which Śmieja's poem plays out indicates privilege and luxury.

What is even more luxurious, to the mid-sixties Polish reader of this poem, is the accident's aftermath. It is all taken care of with such marvelous ease. Moments after the shock, the perturbed pair are already skimming away from the rumpled metal in a new car. Whether it be one provided by their insurer, or just a courtesy shuttle of some sorts, the unthinking efficiency of the clean-up stands in stark contrast to what the denizens of the so-called People's Democracies were used to: miles of bureaucratic red tape that led the unfortunates through the winding queues of a society that, at times like this, seemed a theme park of Murphy's Law.

And the official aftermath? Instead of a Kafkaesque militia investigation, we have a proper British setting of chaos in order: the calm geometry of investigative physics that tidy up the Dorset countryside, mangled but a moment before, smoothed out again by the sure hand of the polite constable.

In the case of Śmieja, the font of images and everyday accidentia, from which all poets derive the stuff of their art, is naturally and particularly British. In many of his verses, and those of his colleagues, the only

thing that is particularly Polish is the language in which they are written. Consider the following poem:

W CYTRYNOWYM GAJU

W cytrynowym gaju
Chodzi szary kot
I macha szarym ogonem.

Ogon ma długi, puszysty
I zamiata nim liście
Cytryn.

W cytrynowym gaju
Cytrynowy kot
Wciąż pilnuje cytryn.

A cytryny, jak cytryny,
Duże, żółte i lśniące —
Na pewno farbowane.

A ogon kota,
Długi, szary ogon,
Pewno jest zrobiony
Z nylonu.

I pewno nie ma tego gaju,
Ani kota,
Ani cytryn.

Bo wszystkie bajki są na niby
I życie jest jak bajka.
— Pogładziłam kota ręką
I dopiero wtedy zobaczyłam

Że nie było ani kota
Ani ręki.

Bajka jak życie
Życie jak bajka
Nie naprawdę i nie na niby.

W cytrynowym gaju
Ciągle szukam kota i cytryn.
Może znajdę cytrynę
Może znajdę kota
Może tylko znajdę
Ogon.

[IN A LEMON GROVE // A gray cat walks about / in a lemon grove / wagging his gray tail. // It's a long tail, bushy / with which he sweeps the leaves / of the lemon trees. // The lemon cat / in the lemon grove / constantly guards the lemons. // And the lemons, like lemons / large, yellow and shiny— / are probably artificially colored. // And the cat's tail, / that long, gray tail, / is probably made / of nylon. // Most likely that grove does not exist / nor does the cat / nor do the lemons. // Because all fairy tales are pretend / and life itself is like a fairy tale. / — I stroked the cat with my hand / and only then did I see // that there was neither a cat / nor a hand. // A fairy tale like life / life like a fairy tale / not for real and not just pretend. // In the lemon grove / I constantly search for the cat and the lemons. / Maybe I'll find a lemon / maybe I'll find a cat / maybe I'll only find a tail.][6]

This poem, by Danuta Irena Bieńkowska, one of the most talented of the Kontynenty group, is a perfect example of the peculiarly natural British well of images that we refer to above. The cynical reader might call this poem far from Polish realia, since, at the time it was written, lemons were a rarity in Poland, and holiday shiploads of citrus fruit from the friendly island of Cuba were updated on the nightly news in a way similar to the "tracking of Santa's flight from the North Pole" that many Americans remember from Christmas Eve weather broadcasts. But that would really be too cynical; after all, there is really neither "cat" nor "lemon" in the poem, Bieńkowska suggests, and Poles reading this poem could certainly imagine a lemon grove, even if the desired fruit was no easy thing to come by. And here we have the very British, or at least Western, core of the poem: it is painfully simple to translate, into any language, because the images employed are general, human, non-Poland-specific. It may be difficult for the reader unfamiliar with the Polish tradition in letters to understand just how uncharacteristic this is for the Polish literary tradition. Since at least 1795, and indeed even before that fateful year,[7] Polish poetry has generally been "engaged," patriotic, obsessed with the political situation of the homeland. The patriotic and political tendencies of much Polish poetry makes for some stirring writing, for Poles, but also makes gems of Polish literature, from Norwid's "Chopin's Grand Piano" through Barańczak's *Artificial Respiration*,

[6] I am tempted to suggest that this poem gives circumstantial evidence, not just of the British context of Bieńkowska's poetry, but of the possibility of her actually *thinking* in English. Cf. the pun *tail* / *tale*, which comes out clearly in an English translation of the poem, but which is impossible in Polish. Perhaps it is why the poem makes more sense when translated into English, whereas in Polish, it remains a pleasant, yet enigmatic, excusion into absurdity.

[7] The year of the Third Partition of Poland, after which the country disappeared from the political map of Europe, not to return until 1918.

difficult for the non-Pole to appreciate in full. Bieńkowska, like many of the Continents group divorced from the political turmoil and challenges of censorship of the home country, is free to appeal to a wider audience, speaking to more personal, generally ontological concerns, via a poetic apparatus approachable by all human beings, plain and simple. It is this approachability of the Kontynenty poets that makes them ideologically more similar to Dylan Thomas and W.H. Auden, for example, than to Zbigniew Herbert and even Witold Wirpsza.[8]

Perhaps none of the Kontynenty poets expresses his British nature better than Janusz Artur Ihnatowicz. In one of his prose writings, which has the character of a poetic manifesto, he notes:

Gdy nagle zjawiliśmy się na zachodzie, dopiero wtedy mogliśmy się napełnić jabłkami greko-romańskich piękności i cnót; i nie z sadów polskich większość tych jabłek pochodziła. Można to wyrazić inaczej: my widzimy kulturę polską przez oczy kultury zachodnioeuropejskiej, w przeciwieństwie do starszego pokolenia, które widziało kulturę zachodnią przez oczy kultury polskiej. My Słowackiego czytamy na tle topoli Sekwany, na tle ścian Stratfordu (27).

[When we suddenly appeared in the West, only then were we able to eat our fill of the apples of Greco-Roman beauty and virtue, and it was not from Polish orchards that the majority of these apples came. This can also be expressed in another way: We see Polish culture through the eyes of Western European culture, in contradistinction to the older generation, which saw Western culture through the eyes of Polish culture. We read Słowacki amidst the poplars of the Seine, among the walls of Stratford].

While a sense of space, of belonging, is crucial to most people, it is arguably more so to the Poles who, following their century of lost independence, when poets truly were their acknowledged legislators (to paraphrase Shelley), a devotion to Polishness, and the Polish soil, is a frequent theme in the poetry. It is striking, then, to Polish ears, to hear Ihnatowicz distance himself so from his ethnic homeland in favor of Britain. This tendency is also found in the verse of Jerzy S. Sito, Ihnatowicz's younger colleague, who addresses "his city London" in the dialogue verse "Londyn" in tropes that are strongly reminiscent of the lovers' dialogue in the Biblical Song of Songs. Whereas Ihnatowicz expresses a certain liminality in poems such as "Alegoria groty," in which he "takes up residence" in a remarkable borderland:

[8] This is not to say that poets in Poland proper did not write generally approachable poems. As evidence of this, we may point to the under-appreciated Jerzy Harasymowicz, who almost programmatically turns his back on "engaged" and politically-charged writing. But such poets are rather few and far between.

zamieszkałem w witrażu
i świat na tęczę
smutnym więźniom
łamię
(30-33)

[I made my home in a stained-glass window / refracting / the world into a rainbow / for the sad prisoners]

Sito so identifies himself with his home on Ormeley St., that it becomes for him an omphalos, the strait gate to Paradise:

Do godziny trzeciej,
czasem czwartej nad ranem
z wierzchołka ulicy Ormeley
hukam na koty i prostytutki,
skłócony z deszczem,
skłócony z sobą,
mijający ulicą Ormeley.

Kiedy już dobrze przemarznę,
wyfruwam z konarów,
z parasolem w zębach,
nocny ptak na spotkanie świtu.

Kochanie,
wszystkie drogi prowadzą do boga.

Więc jeśli runę,
odmierz różnicę czasu pomiędzy mną i Ikarem,
zbierz mnie i odnieś pod jodłę
opodal mojego domu,
abym w dzień zmartwychwstania
znalazł drogę do nieba.
("Deszcz na ulicy Ormeley," 55-73)

[Up until three o'clock / and sometimes four, in the morning / from a treetop on Ormeley St. / I hoot at cats and prostitutes / quarreling with the rain, / quarreling with myself / walking down Ormeley St. // And when I'm good and cold / I flutter down from the branches / with a parasol in my teeth, / a nocturnal bird out to greet the dawn. // My darling, / all paths lead to god. // So if I crash, / calculate the time difference between me and Icarus, / gather me up and bear me beneath the fir tree / next to my house, / so that on the day of resurrection, / I might find my way to heaven.]

He, and his fellow exiles, appeared in the West at a very propitious time: that of impressionable childhood, or youth. They look upon Polish culture as something almost foreign, and that because they have

been shaped by British culture. The imprint of the culture of the Isles is especially strongly felt in artistic natures, which like soft clay accept it, and then harden so that it can only be effaced when the fired clay vessel is itself destroyed. "Salony emigracyjne" ["The Salons of Emigrés"] is one of the most British of Ihnatowicz's early poems. Its somewhat Prufrockian atmosphere can be seen in the third stanza:

> Siedziałem na otomanie, a on mi czytał półszeptem
> (by rywale w wierszach i miłości nie dosłyszeli natchnienia)
> piąty — ten najtragiczniejszy — akt swej najnowszej tragedii.
> A potem rozmowa zeszła na Sofoklesa i do późna
> w salonie zabawialiśmy się grami towarzyskimi,
> Canastę wolę od bridge'a …
> Miłości ma, miłości, usta twe zimne dzisiaj są
> jak widokówki z nieodbytej podróży,
> posypałam łóżko płatkami róży i nakreśliłam
> znak ai u wezgłowia, ale słońce nad sadem
> wzniosło się różowe i samotna wciąż byłam.

[I was sitting on the ottoman, and he read to me in whispers / (so that his rivals in versification and love could not catch his inspiration) / the fifth — and most tragic — act of his newest tragedy. / And then the conversation turned to Sophocles, and we sat till late / in the salon playing games, / I prefer canasta to bridge… / O my love, my love, your lips are cold today / like postcards from a journey never taken. / I spread the bed with rose-petals and drew an *ai* on the bedstead, but the sun over the orchard / rose pinkishly, and still I remained alone.]

Prufrockian in its setting, the poem evokes *The Waste Land* much more in its freely-associating collage technique of arranging images, in the voices which freely flow into and from one another, and the layering of several narrators, several points of view, both male and female — something that is hard to bring over in the translation, but is very apparent in the Polish text thanks to the gender-marked endings of the verbs (e.g. *siedziałem* signifies a man, *posypałam* a woman). Nor has the waste land bloomed after four decades: in the poem we find the same hopeless clinging to disappeared forms of the past, and a fevered search for significance that leads to cheap sin on the one hand, and hysterical screaming on the other:

> Potem wniesiono kawę — służby dziś niestety nie mamy —
> bo to nie jak w Odessie (męża mojego majątek na
> Ukrainie, z dziada pradziada Pan — Rodziewiczówna
> świadkiem)
> […]
> Jest przecież tajemnicą poliszynela

że on mnie zdradza z tą aktorką…
i cóż zrobię? cóż zrobię? śmiać się będę
głośno w Hyde Parku aż się drzewa od Serpentyny odwrócą

[And then coffee was brought in — today, unfortunately, we have no service — / because it's not like it was in Odessa (my husband had an estate in / the Ukraine, a noble from time immemorial — Miss Rodziewicz can testify / to that) […] After all, it's a well-known secret / that he's cheating on me with that actress… / and what shall I do? what shall I do? I shall laugh / out loud in Hyde Park until the very trees turn around from the Serpentine]

In the same manifesto cited above, Ihnatowicz openly confesses to Eliot as his muse:

Nigdy nie zgodzę się, że Eliot może komuś być niepotrzebny. Niektórzy twierdzą, że stał się on nieszczęściem dla młodych poetów, bo „raz Eliotyda, na zawsze Eliotyda" (jak trudno się z imitowania go wyrwać, sam to wiem najlepiej). Zaczyna się od świadomego naśladownictwa jego maniery, a łatwo skończyć posiadaniem jego sposobu patrzenia na świat, jego wiary. Bo eliotyzm to nie tylko maniera poetycka, to prawie religia, w każdym razie pewien rodzaj mitologii poetyckiej (39).

[I will never agree with the statement that Eliot might be unnecessary for a person. Some people opine that he has become the misfortune of young poets, as "once Eliotian, always Eliotian" (and after all, how difficult it is to tear oneself away from imitating him, I know best). It begins with a conscious imitation of his manner, and can easily end in the adoption of his way of looking at the world, his faith. Because eliotism is not only a poetic mannerism, it's almost a religion — at the very least a certain form of poetic mythology].

He even goes so far in following Eliot as to accept, to an extent, the latter's views of the bastardizing tendencies of immigrants in Britain vis-à-vis the dominant culture. In "Portrait of a Lady," Eliot complains of Greeks murdered at Polish dances; in the lines above, Ihnatowicz castigates the enclaves of the Polish aristocratic ghettos as both divorced from British reality in particular, and reality in general, in their refusal to deal with the present day, preferring instead their vanished estates on the Crimean peninsula:

Niektórzy z nas naturalnie musieli imać się pracy
bo pro patria cierpieć wyłącznie nie można
żyć trzeba
tak to nas zdradzono tak to nas sprzedano
tak to nas nie kochano.

[Naturally, some of us had to take on work / since one cannot just suffer *pro patria*] / one has to live / thus have we been betrayed thus have we been sold / thus have we been unloved.]

And finally, against the subjective, lyric grain so predominant in Polish literature, Ihnatowicz, suffused throughout by the Anglo-American modernist poetics, chooses distance, the objective correlative:

Nie chcę pisać o sobie, lecz o świecie. Nie chcę, by czytelnik patrzył na mnie, lecz byśmy razem patrzyli na świat. [...] Jest to poetyka Ezry Pounda, Audena, imagistów, z Polaków może Czechowicza. Przed czytelnikiem rozgrywa się jakaś rzecz, maluje się pejzaż. Patrząc nań, może on współ-odczuwać z autorem, mieć udział w jego zdziwieniu, i tak się z autorem także spotkać (230)

[I do not want to write about myself, but about the world. I do not want the reader to be contemplating me, but rather that together we should contemplate the world. /.../ These are the poetics of Ezra Pound, Auden, the Imagists, and perhaps of Czechowicz among the Poles. Something is going on in front of the reader. A landscape is painted. Looking at it, he can "feel it together" with the author, participate in the author's amazement, and in this way meet the author as well].

Not all of Ihnatowicz's poems are continental echoes of T.S. Eliot; with time, like all noteworthy poets, he developed a unique poetic voice. Parenthetically speaking, Sito goes Ihnatowicz one better in his British-inspired prosody, imitating the inimitable, i.e. Gerard Manley Hopkins, in the sprung rhythms of his "Siedem sonetów do Persefony" ["Seven Sonnets to Persephone"]. Returning to Ihnatowicz, it is Eliot, primarily, at the foundation of his work, and we would be amiss if we did not end our discussion of his work with his marvelous poem "Changing Trains" (the title of which is in English) — a masterful overlaying of the ancient and the modern, Ihnatowicz's own "Journey of the Magi:"

"I potem ukazał mi się jakiś bóg w krzaku płonącym
przemawiając w nieznanej mowie jakiejś wśród gałęzi
gorejących — jakby na obcej stacji pociąg się zagubił
i podróżni — nie rozumiejąc się nawzajem — rozmawiali"

Tak to opowiadał przyjacielom Mojżesz, przy lampce wina
w gospodzie jakiejś, gdy wielbłądy pomrukiwały pod ścianą,
albo może w hotelu luksusowo ubrzydzonym w marmury
przy stoliku gdzie kelnerzy cicho się kręcą, a za oknem
mgłą — jak duch glasgowskiego dnia — nieporuszona stoi
(1-9)

[And then there appeared to me some sort of god in a burning bush / speaking in an unknown tongue among the branches / brightly burning — as if the train got lost on a

foreign station / and the travelers — unable to understand each other — conversed" // That's how Moses explained it to his friends over a glass of wine / in some tavern or another, while the camels grumbled near the wall, / or perhaps in a luxury hotel made hideous with marbles / at a table where the waiters circle quietly, and outside the window / mist — like the spirit of the Glasgow day — stands immutable]

And like the pagan seer of Eliot's poem, returned to "an alien people clutching alien gods," who will be "glad of another death," so is Ihnatowicz's Moses fundamentally changed by the hierophany. At the poem's conclusion we read:

> "Tak to trwoga we mnie była jak noc
> co ku niebu od piasków leci,
> bo na tej pustyni czas mi się mierzył
> i cisza wielka była, że słyszałem
> jak echo jakieś w nieznanej mowie znów wołało."
> (43-47)

["Thus terror was in me like the night / that flies to the heavens from the sands / for on this desert, time kept on ticking / and the silence was so great, that I heard / an echo calling again, in some unknown tongue."]

It is no coincidence that the speaker here is Moses — that Jew become Egyptian become Jew once again, that leader of the Israelites leading his nation out of one identity and into another. Beyond the religious aspect of the work (Ihnatowicz soon entered the seminary and was ordained a priest), we see an allegory of the exile accepting his new circumstances, not as tragic separation, but as a new, essential challenge, from which there can be no return. "Changing Trains," then, can almost be taken as a programmatic verse of the entire Continents generation. Great Britain may not be a promised land, flowing with milk and honey, but it is the land given them, the land to which they were called by a higher agency, and they would not be poets were they not to express themselves as they are, shaped by the surroundings in which they are submerged, i.e. as British poets, even when writing in Polish.

And finally, a voice even more divorced from things Polish is that of Danuta Irena Bieńkowska, cited above; a young wife and mother who, in the quiet hardness of her agnostic verse, seems akin to the tragic Sylvia Plath. In a verse such as "Powroty" ("Returns"), the sense of separation and isolation are apparent. But this is not the longing of an emigrant, nostalgic or bitter; it is the very western and modern sense of alienation from sense of one who has crept to the edge of the abyss and, looking down, seen nothing:

Jak bardzo jest ciężko odchodzić —
Kto nakarmi ryby
Kto podleje kwiaty
Kto wieczorem zasłoni firanki?
Co pomyślą krzesła,
Gdy je będzie dotykała obca ręka?
Czy cisza umie mówić,
Czy puste miejsce boli,
Czy niewypowiedziane słowa
Brzmią tak samo?
(36-45)

[How very hard it is to go away — Who will feed the fish / Who will water the plants / Who will draw the curtains in the evening? / What will the chairs think, / When they will be touched by an unknown hand? // Does the silence know how to speak, / Can an empty space feel pain / Will unexpressed words / sound the same?]

As in a poem like Florian Śmieja's "Astronautka" ("Astronaut Lady"), in which the death of an old woman is played out against the news reports of a departure for outer space exploration, here too we have the sharp focus on the human individual, the human being, reduced to her essence, of which etiquettes such as Polish or British are simply inessential. It is the individual who is important to Bieńkowska. If there is anything particularly Polish in her verse, it is there apophatically: a constricting veneer that must be stripped away in order for the subject to breathe, authentically. In her poem "Niebo," ("Heaven"), all such accidentia are described, quite meaningfully, as closets that must be opened:

Moje niebo mieści się za szafą,
Jest w niej trochę wspomnień,
Stara lalka, pantofel,
Pamiętnik, parę łeż…
Już nie wiem co w niej jest.

[…]

Tylko za którą szafę?
Tyle było szaf!
Otwierałam je wszystkie
Z kluczem i bez klucza
I szukałam szafy,
Tamtej szafy dzieciństwa,
Za którą było niebo.

[…]

A może nie było szafy,
Skrzypiącego klucza, szuflad?
Może mi się zdawało, że
Że byłam kiedyś dzieckiem?
„Bo to było dawno
I przy tym nieprawda".
A lody wciąż się topią
I kapią na podłogę, jak łzy.

(1-5; 13-19; 39-46)

[My heaven is found behind the closet, / it holds some memories, / an old doll, a slipper, / a diary, a few tears… / I don't know what else. […] But, behind what closet? / There have been so many closets! / I opened them all / with a key and without a key / searching for the closet, / that closet of childhood / behind which was heaven. […] Maybe there was no closet? / no creaking key, no drawers? / Maybe it only seemed to me, that / that I was once a child? / "Because it was a long time ago / and besides that, untrue." / And the ice-cream keeps on melting / and dripping onto the floor, like tears.]

Bieńkowska acknowledges her peripheral belonging to the Polish ghetto in London in the cycle *Seria towarzyska* [*Social Cycle*], where, again significantly, she underscores her position as outsider by expressing herself via narrative personae. In the second poem of the cycle, "Monolog w przerwie między jednym, a drugim kieliszkiem" ("A monologue in the pause between one drink and another"), the persona is male. Bieńkowska attacks the, in her eyes, hypocritical devotion of emigrés separated from their homeland to traditional songs and culture as something forced and expected, not authentic at all. Her narrator Jan confesses:

Więc pochodzę stamtąd
Skąd wszyscy pochodzimy,
Ale od pewnego czasu
To już nie ma znaczenia
I nawet nasze dawne
„Góralu, czy ci nie żal"
Brzmi cokolwiek fałszywie.
Bo, po prawdzie, to mi nie żal
I wcale się tego nie wstydzę,
To znaczy wstydziłem się dawniej,
Ale teraz sobie powiedziałem:
Janie, daj spokój mrzonkom.
I od razu poczułem się lepiej.
[…]
Nie tak łatwo jest zmienić skórę

Chociaż to podobno popłaca.
Nazywam się pan Jan,
Wcale nie jestem góralem
I niczego mi nie jest żal.
(11-23; 41-45)

[So yes, I'm come from there / were we all come from, / but for some time now / that's meaningless to me / and even those old songs of ours, / "Highlander, do you not regret it" / sound falsely to my ear. / Because, truth be told, I regret nothing / and I'm not ashamed to say so. / That is, I used to be ashamed, / but once I told myself: / Jan, stop you're dreaming / I felt better at once. […] It's not easy to change one's skin / although they say it's worth it. / My name is Jan, / I'm not a Highlander / and I have nothing to regret.]

Unfortunately, Bieńkowska has little more to offer us. As she intimates in the first verse of the cycle, "Papugi" ("Parrots"), life may be little more than the daily round of insignificance:

Prawda, pani Dziuniu
Ja z panią…
Jaka pani…
Może jeszcze sałatki
Lub jajko w majonezie?
W życiu jest też jak w jajku
Z wierzchu biało
W środku żółto
Potem nic.
(26-34)

[It's true, Mrs. Dziunia / I'm with you, Ma'am… / Oh, let's not be so formal… / Perhaps a bit more salad? / or another deviled egg? / Life is like this egg / White on the top / yellow in the middle / and then, nothing at all.]

But is this honest skepticism, this brave pessimism, any better or more satisfying than the tired phrases and songs of her compatriots who might say, so to speak "Next year in Jerusalem," knowing all the while that they'd never really want to board that plane, if they did have the chance? In reading this, and poems such as the Chorus from the "Pieśń o starości" ("Song of Elderly Life") —

Boże, zbaw nas od wieczności,
Pozwól nam się unicestwić,
Aby nas nie nękał ból
I lęk przed wieczystą karą
Lub wieczystą zapłatą
Za nasze wielkie nic.
(Chór, 9-14)

[Lord, save us from eternity, / allow us annihilation, / so that we might be delivered from pain / and the terrors of eternal punishment / or the terrors of eternal reward / for our great nothing.]

— one can't help but hear the voice of the most comical — or irritating — character in Voltaire's *Candide*, le seigneur Pococuranté, who bats aside each and every delight offered by the world with a supercilious phrase of superior, bored disdain. And yet how un-Polish, these lines are. Not everyone in Poland, in the sixties or today, is a practicing Catholic; not every Polish poet writes, for lack of a better world, devotional verse. But both the Manichean Czesław Miłosz, in his bitter anger at the demiurge, and Tadeusz Różewicz, in his militant atheism, ironically affirm the dominant Christian culture of their nation by their direct attacks against its widely-held religious principles; Bieńkowska, on the other hand, in her existential agnosticism *ignores* them — because they are *not* her own; she is, at bottom, like her "Continental" colleagues, not Polish, but British; a writer making use of the Polish tongue to express her naturally British mind.

The Title in English:

British Natures, Polish Poets: the Continents Group as an Example of Ethnic British Literature

Abstract (Summary)

Comparative analysis of the Polish language poetry of several twentieth century Polish poets living in Great Britain. The article covers the poetry of Rev. Janusz A. Ihnatowicz, Jerzy S. Sito, and others. The thesis of the article is as follows: This group of Polish poets, who were to later group themselves informally around the literary magazines Kontynenty and Merkuriusz, are products of a Polish family and national background. However, arriving in Great Britain as war refugees at the beginning of the 1940s, they grew up in a British cultural environment. The literary influences that worked upon them were the same as those working on their ethnically British colleagues. As a result, the poetry of the "Continental" poets reveals them as British poets, composing in Polish. The "Continental" poets are thus an interesting example of "ethnic" literature in the British homeland, which was once homogeneous, but since the Second World War has become ever more a land of many

peoples and tongues. The author of the article used a comparative method (comparing the authors in question among themselves, and to the authors who influenced them, such as T.S. Eliot and G. M. Hopkins) as well as a historical-critical method (setting them in the historical context of Great Britain and Poland). Main results: Since arriving in Great Britain as war refugees at the beginning of the 1940s, the poets in question grew up in a British cultural environment. The literary influences that worked upon them were the same as those working on their ethnically British colleagues. As a result, the poetry of the "Continental" poets reveals them as British poets, composing in Polish. The "Continental" poets are thus an interesting example of "ethnic" literature in the British homeland, which was once homogeneous, but since the Second World War has become ever more a land of many peoples and tongues. The results are limited to close readings of selected poems; therefore, the conclusions obtained by this essay may be broadened and deepened by further scholarly study, concentrating on a greater number of poets, different poets, different verses by the poets included. Practical implications of the article. The results of the analysis can be applied to practical didactics: i.e. the teaching of British literature, Polish literature, or literature in general; they also might lie in the area of supportive texts for psychological / sociological studies dealing with language acquisition and the cultural implications of site and maturing. Social implications of the article: Ancillary evidence to discuss the effect of several cultural influences on the same young people. The novelty of the article (new insights introduced by the article with regards to the current literature). To my knowledge, no work speaking of the Continental Group of poets focuses on them as products of Anglo society.

Key words:

Kontynenty Group; Polish Poetry Abroad, Literary Diaspora, Ihnatowicz Janusz Artur, rev. (1929-), Sito Jerzy S. (1934-2011), Śmieja Florian (1925-), Bieńkowska Danuta Irena (1927-1974),

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