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Kazimierz Wyka

## Czyżewski's *Pastorals*

Emotions related to the rites of Christmas consist in Poland not so much for an element of religious but rather patriotic feelings. Not necessarily patriotic in the very sublime sense, as in Wyspiański's *Wyzwolenie (Liberation)*, in which the poet puts an equal mark between the Polish home in general and the crib with the Holy Infant and his Mother. Suffice to say patriotic in terms of customs. In the sense of the home hearth, the grace of the family custom, all this lyrical twilight which every inhabitant of Poland carries in his or her heart from childhood, when it is instilled in them. This accounts for tinting even irony with a shade of indulgence. "And under the burning constellation sign they sit down to eat fish, honey and noodles with poppy-seeds"—as ironically indulgent Norwid recalled.

The links between the family traditions and religious emotions were established very long time ago, as accounted for expressly in the Polish medieval art. Let me recall here the volume of art published by Michał Walicki before the war—*Święta Noc (Holy Night)*. After Callimach, Walicki quotes: "about 1470 the Bernardines of Lvov contributed much to a great scandal in town by placing in their church the creche with the Holy Infant in the crib enticing the folk to rock it sing."

Testimonies from the latest poetry also speak explicitly about the nature of these links. Obviously, much more telling in this regard are works by authors far removed from religiousness, thus proving that they also... In Tadeusz Hołuj's *Wiersze z obozu (Poems from the Camp)*, *Lata powrotu (Years of Return)* by Leon Pasternak we come across lyrical pieces indicating that Bethlehem was Polish not only in Rydel's works. It was Polish in Kuybyshev and in Auschwitz. Even in the ghetto of a Galician township the hero of a short-story

by Artur Sandauer *Sprawa godności* (*The Matter of Dignity*) can hear at night how Jewish militiamen sing carols while on duty. He says with a sigh: "Even God has become popular for two weeks... Hero of religious hit songs."<sup>1</sup>

During the two interwar decades two poetic works appear that in a modern fashion consolidated this convergence of the collective imagination and rituals: *The Pastoral* by Leon Schiller and *Pastorki* (*Pastorals*) by Tytus Czyżewski. There is much more than just the title linking the two *oeuvres*. First of all they are linked by the common source of the folk theatrical imagination, that in the case of these two works can be defined even more closely, provided we bear in mind that Czyżewski was also the author of *Lajkonik w chmurach* (*The Cracow Tartar in Clouds*). There is the folk source and the Cracow source, there is a similar spontaneous theatricalization of the rituals in a mountain village and in the marketplace of Cracow. Schiller beautifully recounts in his autointerpretation of *The Pastoral* as if trying to justify *Lajkonik w chmurach* (later on *Zaczarowana dorożka*—*The Enchanted Horsecab*):

In the years of my childhood Cracow was still a stage on which over the entire year most of these folk spectacles was performed [...] the Cracow theatre came to be Wawel and Wawel turned into theatre. Following the poet-sorcerer (Wyspiański), a circle of familiar yet almost forgotten characters pushed its way through trap-doors, came down steel poles and girdled the stage. We used to meet them in creches, in the marketplace, in churches and local villages, not knowing they were so beautiful and could be of use to the arts. Very soon then in this "live theatre" everything was transformed acquiring a deeper sense: the procession and Lajkonik, peasant wedding parties riding from Bronowice to the St. Mary's church across the middle of the marketplace, strings of flowers and church festivals—but above all, Wawel and creches."

This was the way the wedding party of Lucjan Rydel was riding high through the filled market before it reached the pages of *Wesele* (*The Wedding*).

Schiller's *The Pastoral* is a composition consisting of texts of old

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<sup>1</sup> Also in the film this link was used at times. Let me quote Ford's *Young Chopin*, the carol *Lulajże, Jezuniu*, and Chopin's scherzo, based on this motif, resounding in the winter landscape of Warsaw. In *The Robinson of Warsaw* by Andrzejewski and Zarzycki there is a much more memorable idea—on Christmas Eve in trenches amidst the desert of a razed town we can hear "Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht."

cantos, songs recorded by Kolberg or stored in the ancient manuscripts of the Jagellonian Library. It consists of folk melodies interwoven at times with own texts of the great theatre director. In spite of this, it should be regarded as an original piece of art, equally with, for instance, drawings by Noakowski based on a similar ideal knowledge and transformation of the visual shape of the past. As material for construction Czyżewski's *Pastoralki* could fit into this composition. They are formed of the folk imagination and the primitivizing imagination of the child—as if the artist deciphered them from an old manuscript dotted on the margins with the chirping of birds and shepherds' hollos.

If the naïve and charming *Narodzenie z Ptazkowej* (*Nativity from Ptazkowa*) were signed with the following text by Czyżewski, we would not be surprised. Dadaistic wailing and sensitivity of the late Middle Ages are not far apart:

u by u by  
     poklękały buby  
 tiu li tiu u li  
     uśnিয়ে matuli  
 w słomianej stayence  
 przy świentey Panience

As I tried to prove in an article written shortly after Czyżewski's death,<sup>2</sup> he came ahead of his contemporary innovators and initiated many a thing ascribed commonly to others. He was absolutely superior in terms of poetic solution of the problem of modernized folk themes.

*Pastoralki* is the main evidence to the last line above. They include a carol titled *Pastorals*, a canto *Ptakowie leśni przylecieli* (*Forest Birds Have Come*), three mystery plays, two under the title *Pastorals*, and *U szopy* (*At the Shed*) and *Kolęda w olbrzymim mieście* (*Carol in a Big City*). All of the categorial definitions are from Czyżewski since this was the way he distinguished between them. In this we can perceive a drive toward maintaining, and at the same time possibly full utilization of artistic forms and categories passed on by folk poetry and imagination.

It is particularly evident in the three mystery plays. Three texts

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<sup>2</sup> *Poezja Tytusa Czyżewskiego*. "Odrodzenie." 1945, No. 27.

stylized in a folk theatre manner, the longest one not exceeding one hundred lines. It is in these pieces, with their allusive compactness, and owing to it, that the scale of naïve humour and parallel wistfulness is at its broadest. The shed is visited by countless characters in these little poems. Birds fly in in such numbers that it seems all figurines carved in wood by a famous carver Wowra have come to visit the stable. Pigeons coo, siskins, thrushes and blackbirds whistle away. At the same time young shepherds argue but bring “two cheeses, a few rabbits, and some potatoes.” There is also an old Jew from Sącz, an organist and a blacksmith. Naturally, in every mystery play we have the three sages from the East being led by birds or young shepherds.

And that is why when Leon Schiller, as he puts it himself, subjects “various little canto texts to re-working,” the results provided are almost the same as the mysteries by Czyżewski, similar to what the artist retained from his childhood. Maścibrzuch and Dameta bring identical gifts and present them in the same spirit as his anonymous shepherds from the Beskidy mountains near Sącz did:

Ja bym ci dał ten serek, lecz suchy, nieboże,  
 A ten, kto ząbków nie ma, ugryźć go nie może,  
 Ale ci za to jutro, kiedy nie masz ząbków,  
 Na rosółek przyniosę choć parę gołąbków.

.....  
 Ja zaś ci ofiaruję to małe jagniątko,  
 Iżbyś sobie z nim igrał, miluchne Dzieciątko.  
 Nie żałowałbym nawet tłustego barana...

Ale... go... kwestarz... zabrał... wczorajszego rana...

[I would give this cheese my dear but it's dry / One who has no teeth can't bite it / But instead, tomorrow, since you have no teeth / I shall bring you a few birds for a good broth [...] In my turn I want to give you this little lamb / So that you can play with it, my kindest Child / I would not wait to bring you a fat sheep / But a man from the church took it away this morning.]

From here it is only a short way to the good old Rej. It also happens in Czyżewski's poetry. He has a well-developed sense of humour and with it he tones down the overly wistful or too awkward shape of the folk form taken into his hand. He catches the tune of the highlanders' chatting, remembers about the outstanding Tetmajer's tradition of the Podhale talk and tales. “Baca bacy szepce jacy piękne dziecię wydarzone rączki nóżki utoczone piękne dziecię to” (One

shepherd says to another: a fine baby it is, little hands and feet turned out fine. a nice baby, this).

The cycle by Czyżewski comes also close to volume, which even though filled with many dead pages, is definitely underestimated on account of the overestimated *Księga ubogich* (*The Book of the Poor*). I am talking about Jan Kasprowicz's *Mój świat* (*My World*). The subtitle of this collection of "songs for a fiddle and little pictures on glass" could very well serve the imagination of Czyżewski. In the best lyrical pieces of the cycle (*Święty Jerzy—St. George, W świętą Alleluję—Holy Hallelujah, Kalwaryjskie dziady—Calvary Beggars*) Kasprowicz managed to attain his humour-saturated seeming awkwardness, at which Czyżewski is a master. Let us listen now:

W naszym górskim domu  
 U jodłowej ściany  
 Wisi święty Jerzy  
 Na szkle malowany.  
 Kto nie wierzy – niech nie wierzy:  
 Ale święty Jerzy,  
 Najpierwszy z rycerzy,  
 Na swoim rumaku  
 Pędzi do ataku.  
 .....  
 Bez lęku i strachu,  
 A pelen rozmachu.  
 Był ten majster, ten konował,  
 Co konia zmajstrował:  
 Troska go nie chwyta,  
 Że koniowi w rybce pletwy  
 Rozmazał kopyta.  
 Kto nie wierzy – niech nie wierzy:  
 Ale święty Jerzy,  
 Najpierwszy z rycerzy,  
 Na swoim rumaku  
 Pędzi do ataku.

[In our mountain cottage / On a wooden wall / There is St. George / Painted on glass. / Believe it or not believe it / But St. George / The first among knights / Sits on his horse / And rides away attacking. [...] He has no fear or fright / His body is full of might / Came the craftsman the farrier / Who works on a horse / He is not worrier but rather merrier / That the horse's hoofs / He made into fish fins. / Believe it or not believe it / But St. George / The first among knights / Sits on his horse / And rides away attacking.]

The next neighbour of *Pastoralki* is dadaism, its infantile free approach, search for accidental poetry, based exclusively on the articulatory value of the word. Dadaism met in Poland with poor resonance but, nevertheless, it did. *Pastoralki* are not as dadaistic as Tuwim's *Słowieńce* (*Wordsongs*), the best Polish example of this category. They are not, although Czyżewski consciously uses sets of sounds of little sense or at times simply childishly onomatopoeic. In one of the mystery plays a town band, including a "klarynet" was playing such sounds. We are familiar with similarly sounding clarinets and fiddles from Jasiński's *Słowo o Jakubie Szeli* (*Tale about Jakub Szela*) at Szela's wedding. Well, as regards an identical artistic trick such polarized phenomena may stand next to each other because, on the other hand, they are close because of their being based on modern folkloristic themes:

mula – ula u la la  
 matulina matula  
 kolebina, koleba  
 telebina, teleba  
 u – la la

Only this unification of elements drawn from deposits of folk poetry, unification with his own humour and innovating echoes of the contemporary poetic trends provides *Pastoralki* with their difficult to present but obvious in experience artistic grace and charm. Provides them with perhaps the most perceptible esthetic quality of the approach characteristic of Czyżewski.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> An interesting and truly correct statement about the essence of the artistic intention of Czyżewski contained in the primitivized and at the same time folk and sophisticated vocabulary I find in a book published later by S. Szuman, *O sztuce i istocie poezji lirycznej* (*On the Art and Essence of Lyrical Poetry*), Łódź 1948: "Almost literally the texts of folk, clumsily constructed carols are imitated here. Then this spelling—archaic, old. And the folk tongue, untamed, almost funny. Besides this there are also strange calls, intonations from strange sounds... And yet it is a masterpiece—a carol in a new dimension, rough hewn, peasant style, with an astounding sensitivity to the flavour that the ear senses in the songs given in old spelling and pronounced in the spirit of a dialect but intertwined with those peculiar notes... A new dimension, a new moment out of this world is born from this artistic disembodiment of the word, from giving back to the word its familiar sounds and not those utilized in the poetic frame, from bringing about the fact that the word becomes tiny, simple but God-loving, like those shepherds at the manger."

Tadeusz Makowski, who added seven woodcuts to *Pastoralki*, excellently picked up their tone. Funny and primitive, graceful and poetic, his woodcuts speak the same condensed and polysemantic language as the text by Czyżewski does. Makowski does not work on details, although there are many of them quite faithfully illustrating the text. The anecdotal and illustrative expressiveness of the narration of poetic details is summed up and visually uniformed by thick and hard cuts. It reduces the problem to a play of strong blotches and dense planes in which the eye meets the illustrator's anecdote only after some time.

The poet's and the painter's expressions are in accord. They are enlivened by a similar naïve fantasy and it permits Makowski to introduce ideas that are his own property, in their tone convergent with the folk borrowings of the poet – Tytus. On top of the Bethlehem thatch the painter locates a stork on a wagon wheel; the painter orders the base player to play on his own belly. This way he accompanies the poet – not only with illustrations.

The last line of my article I wish to leave as a question mark. The point is the relation between Czyżewski's expression in poetry and in painting. Examples of other artists gifted in the two arts are a good evidence that such relations always exist and that they call for very cautious treatment, based on material carefully thought out. As in the case of Siamese twins, it is not known in which spot the two talents are joined.

Where they happen to be joined in Czyżewski's work I could not tell today. There is no monograph on his paintings. There has been no exhibition of his works. It is difficult to find one's way in the material, not to mention conclusions and analogies. The main question is: is the supremacy of the folk theme and imaginative approach, which consists for a mainstay of his poetry, similarly visible in his painting? I am inclined to contradict it. Why? This is the very question mark with which it is due to end this essay.

An exhibition more or less embracing all of Czyżewski's works plus a selection of paintings by Makowski was held not until the summer of 1956 in Sopot. The posed question mark did not disappear in the light of the canvasses by Czyżewski from all periods of his artistic activity as a painter – at least this is how I see it. His



works in painting, as regards the folk motif, hold only a very expressive, shouting out loud ornamental gamut of colours, sometimes put together in such a way that one has an impression of looking at a prewar stand with haberdashery at Sukiennice. I guess so... The matter calls for consideration; the question mark is still there and I wish I could pass it on into the hands of the wise organizer of the exhibition together with a large bunch of Cracow ribbons and bands devoted to it.

Transl. by *B. Lowendowski*