TYTUS CZYŻEWSKI

A BURGLAR OF THE BETTER SORT

POEMS, DRAMATIC WORKS, THEORETICAL WRITINGS

TRANSLATED BY
CHARLES S. KRASZEWSKI

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Introduction

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Benedetto Croce is quite right in reminding us that literary periods are of dubious value. To call Tytus Czyżewski a 'futurist' is to risk succumbing to an oversimplified approach to literary history that might begin with a point by point catalogue of *Parole in libertà* and proceed to work up a scorecard of Czyżewski's hits and misses. That's not how poets are formed. There is no handbook or instructions manual, and we should not expect Czyżewski to carefully thumb through the index of a well-worn copy of Marinetti's writings before deciding whether or not he's allowed to fit angels with prosthetic wings and send them buzzing about the skies over Poland in propeller-driven craft. A poet's compositional *ordo* is made up not only of whom they read — and the first major work of the present collection was composed a full two years before the *Manifesto de Futurismo* — but of who they are, where they live, and what they've experienced.

In the case of Czyżewski, even more important than literary movements that he consciously rejected (Romanticism, Symbolism) or aligned himself with (Futurism, Surrealism too — though perhaps less avidly) was the historical background of the nation of his birth.

In 1795, the already twice-partitioned, once mighty Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was completely wiped off the geopolitical map of Europe. More than a hundred years were to pass before its reestablishment at the conclusion of the First World War, and the breakup of the Empires of which it had once been part: Prussia, Russia, and Austro-Hungary. During the period of the Partitions, Poles were subjected to varying amounts of pressure — Russification and Germanisation. It is only logical that the main mission of the Polish artist during such times was the preservation of the Polish tongue, and Polish nationhood, amongst a population that was being encouraged, sometimes temptingly, sometimes harshly, to assimilate the national consciousness of a centralised government in Sankt Petersburg or

Berlin. As a result, Polish literature between the years 1795 and 1918 is patriotically and politically engaged. There is precious little of the autotelic among the writings of the Polish poets of the time in question. Very few Polish authors had the luxury of exclaiming, after Papini:

> In Italy, the Minister of Foreign Affairs is responsible for politics. Social matters are in the hands of the Minister of the Interior. I am concerned with literary affairs, and busy myself with them alone.[1]

Thus, when independence was re-established, it is not surprising to read, in the lines of even the more traditional poets of the first generation of 'free' Poles, such as Antoni Słonimski, sentiments like: 'My fatherland is free, free… / I shrug from my shoulders Konrad's cape'[2] or Jan Lechoń, whose words have become something of a slogan: 'And in the spring — let me see the spring, not Poland'.[3]

Perhaps because Czyżewski — who was nearly thirty when the map of Europe was redrawn by the victorious Entente — was born and raised in the ever more federalising, ever more liberal Austro-Hungarian Empire, where the individual languages and cultures of the ethnicities making it up were not nearly as oppressed as they were in Prussia or Russia, it is difficult to find the sort of xenophobic patriotism that animated the plebiscites set up by Woodrow Wilson and his collaborators at Versailles. It comes as no surprise to hear the parish priest in *The Death of the Faun* describe nineteenth century Poland in such terms:

> […] as for this country,
> It's gained a scar or two in roustabouts — —
> Unnecessary quite — but famous, ho!
> They're written up in histories, in fact.

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1 Giovanni Papini, cited by Jerzy Kwiatkowski, *Dwudziestolecie międzywojenne* (Warsaw: PWN, 2012), p. 9. Unless otherwise noted, all translations into English are my own.

2 From his *Black Spring* [Czarna wiosna]; the reference is to Konrad, the hero of Adam Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve* [Dziady].

3 From the *Magenta Poem* [Karmazynowy poemat]. Both of the citations come from Kwiatkowski, p. 11.

Czyżewski is perhaps being snide when, just previous to these lines, he has his priest apologetically explain to the classical creature:

> O, […] we've a long way to go yet
> Until our nation's culture catches up
> With that of foreign parts

but, despite the offence that other Poles might take at hearing the armed uprisings of the Romantic age described as 'roustabouts,' it's hard not to take the poet at his word when he calls them 'unnecessary quite.' For what, really, did they achieve? At any rate (although he is commenting on Czyżewski the painter, rather than the poet), it is worth underscoring the fact, along with Piotr Piotrowski,[4] that Czyżewski's engagement with contemporary currents in art predates the First World War. He does not merely arrive at 'purer' forms of artistic expression after 1918, when the obligation of 'organic work' no longer animated his pen. Now, I don't mean to say that Czyżewski was ambivalent to Poland or things Polish, but, rather, to point to him as an independent artistic force, who created on his own terms, letting his wider indigenous culture catch up with him at its own pace.

His poetic creations are basically apolitical. Czyżewski casts a sceptical eye on the conspiratorial traditions of the Romantics, whose time had passed away almost a full half-century by the time he was born, in lines like those that bring 'To the Manes of Juliusz Słowacki' to an end:

> In the netherworld, where those grey shades flit,
> Covered beneath the wings of gloomy night,
> Who yet of Lethe's waters have not sipped,
> Whose brows with misty musing still are bright,
> They hear, as they go into the death and dark,
> Echoing sevenfold, though it slowly thins,
> Like to a distant storm (though louder by far)
> Thunderous speech: 'The valorous deed, too, wins.'

The valorous deed wins… what, exactly? A place in national legend? Mention in what Mickiewicz calls the 'long nocturnal conversations

4 See Piotr Piotrowski, 'Od nacjonalizacji do socjalizacji polskiego modernizmu, 1913–1950,' in *Artium quaestiones* 15 (2004): 97-138.

of one's countrymen?' They're still dead, Czyżewski notes, and as these belligerent, heroic shades proceed into the dark, it's not difficult to sense their bewilderment.

Rather than an ethnic, Polish patriotism, there is a very modern, European, feel to Czyżewski's sense of identity, which seems so like the twenty-first century idea of a 'Europe of regions,' but which really has its basis in the late Austro-Hungarian sense of commonwealth. There, loyalty was not focussed on any dangerous racial understanding of ontology, but rather on the person of the Emperor, the house of Habsburg. 'Other nations make war,' as the saying went, 'you, happy Austria, spread through marriage'. It is no surprise at all that in the many Christmas 'pastorals' that Czyżewski wrote, the setting is not a section of the Polish Tatras, but a natural cultural region that embraces both slopes of the mountains: Slovakia as well as Poland. The shepherds from Spiš have just as natural a place at the Child's crèche as their colleagues from the foothills around Zakopane. Not only the bandit Janosik feels at home on both sides of the border, which is nothing if not arbitrary.

TYTUS CZYŻEWSKI AND THE POLYMATH TRADITION

There is a long list of significant, multi-talented artists throughout Polish history. The twentieth century is particularly rich in individuals of great importance in more than one artistic field. Stanisław Wyspiański (1869–1907), one of the greatest Polish dramatists of all time,[5] is also the chief representative of Sezessionstil in Polish painting and decorative art. Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz ('Witkacy,' 1885–1939), made his mark as a writer of experimental novels, plays in 'pure' dramatic form, and an inimitable style of painting in which he made a careful study of the manner whereby self-administered narcotics affected his perception. Bruno Schulz (1892–1942), perhaps the most widely known Polish writer outside of Witold Gombrowicz, was a talented illustrator as well as the author of surrealistic cycles of narratives, which gained him the appellation of the Polish Kafka. Finally, there is Tadeusz Kantor (1915–1990) — avant-garde painter, theatrical revolutionary, who won worldwide recognition despite being shunned by the then-Communist

5 A volume of his plays centred in his native Kraków, *Acropolis: the Wawel Plays*, is available from Glagoslav.

government of his homeland, which looked upon his creativity with a less than benign eye.

Tytus Czyżewski, poet and painter, not only fits perfectly into this group, he is organically part of it. Witkiewicz and he trod the same paths as pioneers of Formism, before the latter set off on his own toward 'pure form;' Wyspiański was a professor at the Kraków Academy of Fine Arts at the time that Czyżewski studied there. Kantor, famous for declaring that '[for me it's] Wyspiański — in theatre, [Jacek] Malczewski in painting, and in literature — Bruno Schulz,'[6] whose first great theatrical triumphs came from idiosyncratic productions of Witkacy's plays, might well have added Czyżewski to that list. For he attended Czyżewski's lectures on art in Kraków,[7] resurrected, after the war, the Cricot theatre of which Czyżewski was part, with the aid of those who collaborated with Czyżewski in its original iteration — and perhaps even derived his penchant for mannequins and mechanised, almost ritualistic histrionics from the earlier poet's work in plays such as *A Burglar of the Better Sort.*

CZYŻEWSKI THE PAINTER

Czyżewski was born in the small southern town of Przyszowa, in the Tatra region, near the border with Slovakia. Between 1902 and 1907 he studied at the Kraków Academy of Fine Art. While there, he not only crossed paths with Wyspiański, who was on the faculty as professor of decorative arts, but sought him out:

> Wyspiański did not accept every student of the Academy to his atelier for the course on decorative painting. In order to be admitted, one had to prove to the master that one had a certain amount of talent, and knew quite a lot about painting in general. [… His fame was such that it] could only excite in my young mind the burning desire to belong to that unique school of his.[8]

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6 Cited in Janusz Wałek, *Świat Wyspiańskiego* (Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza "Nasza", 1994), p. 297.

7 Vide Krzysztof Pleśniarowicz, *Kantor* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 1997), p. 31. The lectures took place in the Union of Plastic Artists [Związek plastyków] on the Plac Świętego Ducha in Kraków.

8 Tytus Czyżewski, 'Przy ul. Krowoderskiej' and 'Mistrz z ulicy Krowoderskiej,' first published in *ABC,* 27 November 1932, nr 345 pp. 110-113, and *Kurier polski* 1928,

Consequently, Czyżewski studied under Wyspiański from 1902–1903,[9] though he spent the lion's share of his time at the academy under the tutelage of two no less noteworthy Polish artists: Józef Mehoffer and Leon Wyczółkowski.[10] It is a testimony to Czyżewski's artistic genius that — like Wyspiański apprenticed to Jan Matejko — he was able to study under such strong artistic personalities, yet not fall into the trap of mannerism. Whether it was his five years in Paris (1907–1912), where he came to know the work of Cézanne and the Cubists, or his own irrepressible talent, he neither continued with the Art Nouveau of Wyspiański and Mehoffer, nor adopted the Symbolism, shading into an almost Bouguereau-like academicism, of Wyczółkowski, but pushed on to a very modern style of 'multiplane' compositions, 'uniting the the idea of the physical cube — the block — with simultaneity and fragmentary form'.[11]

Czyżewski's talent as a painter is such that, had he never written a line of poetry or drama, he would still be a noted figure in the European artistic firmament of the twentieth century. His fearless dedication to the creation of a new, contemporary art, especially his experiments in mixed media, point unerringly to the post-war work of Tadeusz Kantor. As fascinating as his work as a graphic artist is, however, we cannot allow ourselves the luxury of too wide an anabasis. Yet before we return to a consideration of his literary output, one more of his pronouncements on art is worth underlining. In the fourth issue of his journal *Formiści,* he wrote:

> The Polish nation must no longer subsist on the rotten remains of kings and forbears. The Polish nation must not become doped with the morphia of the nightmare of [Wyspiański's]

nr 13; cited here from Leon Płoszewski, ed, *Wyspiański w oczach współczesnych* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1971), pp. 423, 420.

9 Płoszewski, p. 597.

10 Izabela Kunińska, ed. *Sztuka świata. Leksykon A-K.* (Warsaw: Arkady, 1998), p. 173.

11 Tadeusz Dobrowolski, *Malarstwo polskie ostatnich dwustu lat* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1989), p. 284.

> *Wedding* [*Feast*], but it must feel in itself the art and poetry of the contemporary Renaissance.[12]

It is a splendid statement, in that it expresses his above-noted liberation, not only from the burden of national and patriotic engagement, but also from the slavish imitation of an artist whom, by his own admission, he practically worshipped. How similar this energetic slogan to Ezra Pound's nearly contemporaneous device, 'Make it new!' or, closer to home for Czyżewski, the concluding line of Apollinaire's 'La Victoire': *que tout ait un nom nouveau.*

INSPIRATION, AND THE POET AS PHOTOGRAPHIC PLATE

In the context of the Polish polymath tradition, how characteristic is the above quote of Czyżewski's, in which no distinction is made between painting and poetry as two modes of the same artistic expression that wells out of the artist, naturally. Of course, in considering the poetry of Czyżewski, the one formist element that leaps off the page is the manner in which he links the spoken word with the graphic image. For two brief examples of this, we may point to 'Hamlet in the Cellar,' a composite poem/graphic project from the volume *A Lajkonik in the Clouds* and, of course, the play *The Snake, Orpheus and Eurydice.* What are those figures interspersed between the lines of the former poem, that seem like the hieroglyphics etched onto golden plates and sent into the cosmos by the space agency, in an effort to provide sentient life with something to ponder when seeking to decipher anything of the civilisation that produced them? What, indeed, are the 'dynamopsychic stadia' that run down the right-hand margins of the latter play? It would be facile to call them mere illustrations. It is almost as if we — as non-artists — are some strange alien tribe to whom Czyżewski would dearly like to communicate something, some important message, but he doesn't quite know how. The keenest and most developed discussion of these images is given by Alicja Baluch in her article 'The Visual Nature of Tytus Czyżewski's Poetry,' of which we quote one brief passage:

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12 Cited by Agnieszka Morawińska, *Polish Painting, 15th to 20th Century* (Warszawa: Auriga, 1984), p. 46. Translation by Bogna Piotrowska.

> The most unconventional, and thus difficult to decipher, are drawings 1–12, which constitute the core of the action. Their various geometrical shapes present directional stresses, as an indication of the attraction and repulsion of masses (which was Witkacy's understanding of painting) — in this way one might interpret Czyżewski's drawings. Considering his own words, one might also acknowledge them to be 'dynamopsychic stadia, which occur at certain moments.' This is the description given in the introduction to the work. It permits one to suppose that there exists some language of the poet's own, hermetic and unapproachable by anyone else, in which he expresses underlying thoughts and emotions. They are the expression of inner experiences, as if they were sensory experiences, and therefore, they constitute the essence of symbolic language, through visual images. Erich Fromm states that we 'speak' this language when we dream, and the language of dream does not differ from the language of myth and religion.[13]

But if poetry is truly the art of speech and hearing, not of sight, how are we to deal with these images? The easy way out would be, along with Baluch, to suggest that the visual and verbal forms of *The Snake, Orpheus and Eurydice* are independent of one another.[14] That is easy, but not entirely satisfying. So, can *The Snake, Orpheus and Eurydice* be performed aloud? Can 'Hamlet in the Cellar?' Certainly. But we remain teased by the nagging suspicion that, without seeing the graphics, or experiencing them somehow otherwise in performance, we are missing out. The same thing can be said, surely, of the pictograms among Apollinaire's *Calligrammes.* Yet how different Czyżewski's interwoven images are from the word-pictures of that otherwise brilliant poet of the sublime *Alcools* — whom Czyżewski revered, and translated. Seen in comparison with these, Apollinaire's horses and cats and cellos made of poetic phrases seem rather exercises assigned by some particularly annoying elementary school teacher striving to awaken an artistic 'expressiveness' in her fidgety pupils. Czyżewski's dynamopsychic

13 Alicja Baluch, 'Wizualność poezji Tytusa Czyżewskiego' in *Rocznik naukowo-dydaktyczny* 101 (1986): 199-137, p. 130.

14 Baluch, pp. 129-130.

drawings, as mysterious and perhaps finally indecipherable as they may be, are yet something completely new in the completely new poetry he was pursuing — in 1922 and again in 1936 — and what is more, something important, authentic. Even if we don't quite know what to do with them in the performance of Czyżewski's poetic works, they are *real.* As Tadeusz Kantor might say, they are autonomous, even in the context of the works they accompany, perhaps, but still: they demand contemplation.[15]

It is somewhat curious that Czyżewski did not employ hieroglyphics (if that is the proper term) or ideograms, more often. The closest he comes to a synaesthetic approach in the purely verbal realm is in the poem 'Clairvoyant-Mechanical Photograph of the poet Bruno Jasieński.' The concept of this poem is astonishing in its simple novelty: it constitutes a comparison of the poem, to which the immediate image is so important, to the taking of a photograph. In its frank enthusiasm for the modern, mechanical form of portraiture which is photography, it makes a simple, yet eloquent statement about the objective, reproductive power of descriptive verse. Who is to say that the following surrealistic description:

> long hands are strolling about the room next door
> the brain is full of snakes and at this moment may be found
> in the kitchen on a frying pan
> grand amethyst eyes are swimming about
> along with the Christmas Eve carp in the bathtub
> long lunatic legs are descending from the sofa
> and creeping up on the commode
> fingers at this moment are playing on a clavichord
> 'god save the King'

is not as faithful a record of the inner reality of the poet-photographer's subject, as the chiaroscuro, mimicking depth and three dimensions, captured by the light-sensitive photographic plate? The creative

15 It is worth remarking here the influence that Czyżewski's art had on the development of Kantor's Independent Theatre [Teatr Niezależny]. See Pleśniarowicz, p. 64.

consciousness of the poet, like the mechanical apparatus of the camera, records what it is built to record.

This is where Czyżewski's spontaneity comes into play. It is not automatic writing that he pursues, like other futurists, but rather the state of being constantly open to impulses, which may jar him to the creation of art:

21 hours says
my watch
passing along the edges of the street
I catch my foot
against the door of a perruquier
a new situation arises
and thus a new direction in poetry
22 hours says
my watch
passing along the edges of the boulevard
I catch my head
against the leaves of a dry acacia
from this nervo-situation
a new direction in painting comes about

If Stendhal's ideal of the artist was a mirror walking down the street, that of Czyżewski is a walking, sensitive photographic plate. His spontaneity is the reception of impulses, which he then works into final shape through his process of poetic creation, which, as we have seen, is devoted to form (and thus not spontaneous). Curiously, Czyżewski seems here quite akin to Wordsworth, in the latter's confession to the creation of poetry as the 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings […] recollected in tranquillity.'

THE SHAMANISTIC IMPULSE

Agnieszka Morawińska states that 'the painter and poet Tytus Czyżewski believed in the instinct of artistic creation, and in the act of creation being similar to birth in nature.'[16] Very true. This outpouring of creative energy, in visual or verbal form, is what he means when he swears his

16 Morawińska, p. 45.

allegiance to 'the instinctual art of the animals' in his programmatic brochure 'From the Machine to Animals:' '***The mechanistic instinct*** == *"let each one write, sculpt and paint* ***as*** *his* ***instinct*** *directs him!"*' Instinct here is to be understood as openness, the willingness to be directed to creativity by nature, the world around one, as if one were a shaman and the world — his (no coincidence!) 'animal master.' Although the creation of art is not to be a spontaneous matter — 'Just please,' he cries in the same text, 'no programmatic primitivities!' — nor is art a modish dalliance for the effete. 'Let us kill the "aestheticism" within us!' he proclaims, immediately following the former statement. It is as if he saw primitivity and aestheticism as antipodean opposites, both of which he rejects. Rather, he wishes to tap into something that he senses as the natural or creative artistic impulse of the universe:

Long live the electrical instinct
the instinctual art of the animals
the instinct electrical
of the cosmos
of minerals plants beasts men
of the inner life of the **medium**.

The artist should respond — naturally and unaffectedly — to this impulse as the plant does, in turning its leaves to the sunlight. If he were looking for a traditional religious trope, Czyżewski might have described this impulse as did his contemporary, the short-lived metaphysical poet Jerzy Liebert, as participation in God's original Creation. His younger contemporary and colleague, the Warsaw futurist poet Aleksander Wat, makes use of the taboo term 'primitive' in relation to Czyżewski's art, but in a way that emphasises his primal nature as an artist, tapping into the creative juices of the cosmos:

> Now Czyżewski was a phenomenon unto himself [*zjawisko bardzo odosobnione*]. The same thing can be said of his paintings — his Madonnas, the first formist Madonnas. I remember the first time I was in the Academy gallery in Venice, how struck I was by the similarity of Czyżewski's somewhat cubist Mother of God to an anonymous icon from the Italian primitives of the XIV century. In both poetry and painting Czyżewski had a lot in common

> with *le Douanier* Rousseau. Now, this wasn't primitivism in the same sense as ours, but it was actually art from the very roots, from those primitives. He was, sort of, not so much a prophet as a shaman. His proximity to futurism and to novelty was caused by his shamanism, insofar as his visions and his words did not fit into logical, normal phrases. He was an authentic poet-shaman of great magnetic power.[17]

And so, as far as Czyżewski is concerned, the relationship of the true artist to the world, from which he naturally derives his artistic expression, is not that of a botanist or zoologist cataloguing the life that surrounds him, but rather that of a shaman who is able to penetrate to the creative depths that cause that life, in its variegated forms, to be. In speaking of shamanism, Joseph Campbell, building on Mircea Eliade, defines the shamanic experience as:

> a normal event for the gifted mind […] when struck by and absorbing the force of what for lack of a better term we may call a hierophantic realisation: the realisation of 'something far more deeply interfused,' inhabiting both the round earth and one's own interior, which gives to the world a sacred character; an intuition of depth, absolutely inaccessible to the 'tough minded' honest hunters (whether it be dollars, guanaco pelts, or working hypotheses they are after), but which may present itself spontaneously to such as William James has named the 'tender minded' of our species. […] The crisis [*of shamanic vision*] cannot be analysed as a rupture with society and the world. It is, on the contrary, an overpowering realisation of their depth.[18]

Czyżewski speaks of the artist's relationship to nature in a strikingly similar manner. He gives the clearest idea of his understanding of the artist and nature in the short programmatic essay 'From the Concept of Nature — to Nature Itself' included in *A Lajkonik in the Clouds*:

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17 Aleksander Wat, *Mój wiek* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1991), vol. I, p. 52.

18 Joseph Campbell, *Primitive Mythology* (London: Penguin, 1985), pp. 252-253.

> Nature is a constant mass (a body) — touched by the hands of a blind man. Touching things, the artist forms his own spatial world, upon which 'CONCEPT' of his depends his very entry into the AREA of nature. That nature has the same effect on him as a lightning storm has on a pagan. Wishing to create for himself (HIS OWN) concept of a storm, he must turn to art. […] Through abstract form — the artist approaches nature — since he must return — in order to discover his own spatial world — in order to be in the midst of that lightning storm — and not just view it, observe it, from the outside.
>
> So, identification with nature? — NO!
>
> To create one's own world from nature — not an abstract world, but ONE'S OWN.
>
> A sculpture, a building, a painting, a poem — this is not an identification with nature, it is NOT THE ABSTRACTION OF SIGHT — it is nature, unconditionally itself. Materially and spatially individual. HARMONICALLY DEPENDENT upon the centre[19] of the lightning storm (nature) in which the human being (the artist) finds himself.
>
> […]
>
> Disinterestedness plays no role — in art — nothing plays any role in art which is not me MYSELF — who creates an IMAGE or a poem, WHICH IS NATURE ITSELF, not identically but in the centre of the lightning storm.

Like the shaman, the artist separates himself from the everyday world and enters into the creative matrix of nature, from which he derives the message he brings — and all art is communication, after all — to the receptors, to us, who have no such ability to contact the very beating heart of things.[20] Again, Mircea Eliade:

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19 *Ośrodek* — centre, hub, environment.

20 Thus I would somewhat differ with Leon Chwistek's defence of Czyżewski's individualism: 'Like every true artist, Czyżewski is completely sincere. He paints a bandit as he imagines him to be, in other words, he paints him as he comes across him in reality. And that's what it's all about, that Czyżewski's reality is something completely different from that, with which average people have to deal. Perhaps it is not beautiful, maybe it's even horrid, but it's different.' Of course, here Chwistek is picking up the gauntlet cast by Czyżewski's critics. While it is

> The lands which the shaman sees and the personages whom he meets in the course of his ecstatic journeys into the beyond are meticulously described by the shaman himself, during or after the trance. The unknown and terrifying world of death takes form: it organises itself in conformity with specific types; it takes final shape as a structure; and, with time, it becomes familiar and acceptable.[21]

Now, just like the words of an ancient oracle, the message he brings carries more within itself than do the merely practical modes of our daily communication. Art is separated from all other forms of human expression by the form in which it is transmitted, and that form is also — perhaps even *primarily* — deeply eloquent and multivalent. Along these lines, the poem 'Return' alludes to some of the gigantic claims of Mickiewicz's shaman-poet Konrad in his Great Improvisation, but in a novel manner. Whereas the romantic bard is *above* nature, ruling it like a god, Czyżewski's narrator draws his strength *from* the springs of nature. He does not lord it over the birds, he needs them to aid his flight; he does not overtop nature, he loves it like a woman, and wishes to *return* to it (hence the title), to learn from 'granddad Gorilla.'

CZYŻEWSKI AND ANARCHICISED POETIC FORM. THE INAPPLICABLE THEORY

Care with form as the main ingredient of art, form as content, form as the medium of expression that distinguishes works of art — especially poetic expression — from all other forms of human communication, is implied in the very name 'Formism.' It is a vital characteristic of Czyżewski's poetry. His verse, his theatrical works, are carefully crafted. They have nothing to do with automatic writing, or the Ginsbergian 'first

important to remember that context, it is equally important to stress that, however individual his expression, the artist is still attempting sincere communication with his receptor. I quote Chwistek from Stefan Konstańczak, 'Od Formizmu do Strefizmu. Ewolucja poglądów estetycznych Leona Chwistka,' in *Słupskie studia filozoficzne,*8 (2009): 13-29, p. 19.

21 Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas. Vol. 3: From Muhammed to the Age of Reforms* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 20. Translation: Alf Hiltebeitel and Diane Apostolos-Cappadona.

thought — best thought' approach to poetry, which was to become ever more popular as the twentieth century drew on. As he writes in 'From Romanticism to Cynicism,'

> Through my constructions of poetic form I wish to rescue poetry from the jaws of death. For poetry, unfortunately, in recent times, and at the hands of people with no vocation thereto, has become piece-work 'more convenable to shoemakers than Apollo.' I endow each word that appears in my poetry with individual significance and autonomy; at the same time, via the anarchisation (not anarchy) of words, I separate them into groups of analogous words, from which I elicit analogous phrases, etc. For this reason, words and phrases, despite a frequently superficial alogicality, as a whole (through the contrast of bonding materials) result in a cohesive entity, which lives like an organism in the natural world.

This is dense prose — and not necessarily enlightening. His description of 'anarchisation' is especially challenging. We will try to define it better below. For now though, it is important to stress the importance of the poetic craft, that is, conscious dedication to poetic form, in Czyżewski's output. In the poem *'For Art and Life'* from *The Green Eye*, he explicitly advises:

> *For the construction of worlds start*
> *With FORM*
> […]
> *From art through STYLE to what abides*
> *The spirit to harmony inclines*
> *Where senseless form will have no part*
> *Where now is birthing the new art.*

The primacy of 'instinct' that he champions isn't reactive or mindless in creation, but rather an instinct to the proper harmonies of art — an instinctive attuning to the creative act. And so it is no coincidence that this poem, so unusual in its surrealistic images, is still expressed in the tight form of more or less regular couplets:

> *The day re-azures as dawn breaks*
> *A wave of spiral tremblings quake*

The atoms' nervous jerky throes
The steep planetary roads
Crackling radioactive currents
Misty fires that sputter and dance

Among the poems collected in this earliest volume of his verse, 'The Sleep of Flowers' and 'Rain,' certainly, and 'Cathedral' for all extents and purposes, are sonnets. 'Music from a Window' is composed in a form as intricate as any sestina or triolet.

Other poetic forms utilised by Czyżewski throughout his career, which saw the publication or production of nine major collections and plays[22] are significantly more inventive and idiosyncratic. Before we proceed to describe them, however, we should now touch upon the key matter of the 'anarchisation' of the word, which supposedly lies at the heart of his poetics. I say 'supposedly,' because whereas his poetry is fabulous, and his theory quite interesting — still never the twain shall meet. It is so difficult to square Czyżewski's theoretical pronouncements with his actual poetry, that it almost seems as if they were written by different authors, one knowing nothing of the other.

In the other programmatic essay included in *A Lajkonik in the Clouds,* 'On the Delogicalising of Poetry,' Czyżewski writes:

> The first, main task of contemporary poetry and prose is the elimination of the word from its enslavement to the logics of phrase and syntax. This has nothing to do with the symbolism of the word, i.e. with the bestowal upon the word of some planted, or artificial, or even tectonically accepted meaning. The word in poetry or in prose possesses a realistic meaning, which is autonomous in relation to other words set next to it, or even eventually linked to it, by the logical interpretation of thought.
>
> […]
>
> According to the old poetical conception, 'horse' is also a synonym for running, war, a noble and sublime elevation — and

22 A volume of poetry called *Antidotum*, which would have been his last collection of verse, was lost during the destruction that followed upon the Warsaw Uprising of 1944. The spiteful act of planned municipal destruction by the Nazis resulted in over half of the city being completely wiped off the map.

> this idea reaches as far as symbolism and the symbolic conception of the word 'horse.' Should we add an attribute (an adjective) to this word, for example 'winged' = winged horse, we see how logically, idea-logically, and even symbolically, the word horse has been transformed, somewhat — even strengthened imagistically, conventionally, in a poetic sense.

It seems that Czyżewski is after a purification of the word from its historical and cultural accretions. This is not as hard to do as it seems at first glance. If the reader or critic, used to seeking allusions and working up interpretations from them, is warned *not* to, i.e. 'in this poem, *horse* means simply *horse.* Your interpretation will be invalid if you infuse that word with anything else but its simple meaning, as this was not the poet's intent,' the poet has at least a fighting chance to see an honest, bare-bones critical approach to his poem, which would treat the words as they are found, without delving 'beneath' them in search of allusions which, he insists, are not there. As a matter of fact, such an approach to the poem would refreshingly centre *it*, and not the critic's ingenuity, in the consciousness of the reader. So far, so good. He continues:

> [Marinetti and Apollinaire] began to use the word, I reckon, automatically, unthinkingly even, only for its innate value as such, what I call its 'autonomous' value. […] The word, in and of itself, cleansed of pseudo-values (which after all do not describe its sonoric-linguistic meaning) — automatically possesses value only in itself, and becomes the foundation of a new poetry, a new prose.

These terms echo those of his colleague, Anatol Stern, writing in the *Almanach Nowej Sztuki* [Almanach of the New Art] in 1924:

> The new art does not beautify reality — it transforms it. It has effected the autonomisation of aesthetics as an artistic method of constructing the world. In our thoroughgoing social expansion we based ourselves upon the non-mechanised instincts of human nature.[23]

23 Stern, p. 23.

The transformation of the reality, instinctual art — these are terms very similar to those of Czyżewski, quoted above. But how are we to understand 'autonomisation' — a term frequently on the lips of avant-garde poets of the period, from the Ultraists with their demand of the 'autonomy of the lyrical reality'[24] to Czyżewski's own 'anarchisation' of the poetic phrase?

Here is where the practical problems begin. 'Absolute' music exists side by side with programme music; the great twentieth-century painters and sculptors created 'absolute' varieties of their own arts via the rejection of representational, mimetic painting and sculpting, concentrating solely on the interplay of volume, line, mass and colour, without any reference to any object existing in the natural world. It is no wonder that the avant-garde poets were so well aware of trends in contemporary painting, nor is it a wonder that some of them, like Czyżewski, were painters themselves. But can there be an 'absolute' poetry? The poet can stand at the side of the reader, like a tense schoolmaster, ready to rap his knuckles should he expand the simple word 'horse' into allusive and allegorical meanings. But poems are not made up of one word, and when words are strung together, they cannot be appreciated without the use of logic, and that means, without the concretisation of the text by the reader. And that, inevitably, involves historical accretions of meaning.

Problems with absolute poetry occur when the poet proceeds from the autonomy of the word *eo ipso* to the autonomy of the word even in relation to the other words that surround it in a phrase. This is because human languages work, naturally, in such a way that the given word, no matter how autonomous, simply cannot help having its meanings altered by the context in which it is found. Words act upon one another in communicative phrases; words lose their autonomy, or at least a significant portion of it, when linked with other words in a phrase intended to communicate sensibly. It is one thing to tell a critic or a reader, 'When you come across "winged horse," see *winged horse* and nothing else. Any interpretation that finds in my winged horse an identification with Pegasus, or an allusion to poetry, is invalid.' But it becomes something quite different, inevitably, when the horse, winged or not, is put in close proximity with other words. 'Rust food horse' as a hypothetical poetic phrase might be approached as Czyżewski wants it

24 Stern, p. 19.

to be: rust is rust, food is food, and so on. But if a verb and a preposition are added to the phrase — as they almost invariably are in Czyżewski's own poetic practice, e.g. 'Rust is food for the horse,' the autonomous meanings of each of these nouns has been diminished: rust is modified by its identification with food, and the horse is modified by his eating habits.

I do not mean to suggest that I see something here that Czyżewski does not, any more than I would dare pontificate on the meaning of his dynamopsychic stadia. But it is fair, I think, to stress that Czyżewski's theory outpaces his poetic practice. As such, however interesting his theoretical writings are, as theory, his poetry can be — indeed *must* be — appreciated without applying those theories to it.

When we return to the idea of 'absolute' painting, with which Czyżewski was familiar, it becomes apparent that although such autonomy theory is quite fitting in relation to the visual image, its applicability to literature is negligible. This is because of the nature of the material he must, perforce, use in his verbal creations: pre-existing language. It is this which must be abandoned, if an absolute poetry is to be created, as Isidore Isou comes close to doing in 'Larmes de jeune fille,' a poem that is nothing but form:

> M dngoun, m diahl Qana îou
> hsn îoun înhlianhl M pna iou
> vgaîn set i ouf! saî iaf
> fln plt i clouf! mglaî vaf
> L o là îhî cnn vîi
> snoubidi î pnn mîi
> A gohà îhîhî gnn gî
> klnbidi D blîglîhlî
> H mami chou a sprl
> scami Bgou cla ctrl
> gue! el înhî nî K grîn
> Klhogbidi S vî bîncî crîn
> cncn ff vsch gln iéé́é . . .
> gué rgn ss ouch clen déé́é. . .
> chaîg gna pca hi
> Q snca grd kr di.[25]

25 Collected in George Steiner, *After Babel. Aspects of Language and Translation*

Only in this way can Apollinaire's desire, expressed in the programmatic 'La Victoire,' be achieved:

> Ô bouches l'homme est à la recherche d'un nouveau langage
> Auquel le grammairien d'aucune langue n'aura rien à dire
>
> [O mouths, man is searching for a new language
> Where there will be no place for the grammarian].

Yet here we must stop. That sort of poetry would be the death of poetry. This is not a matter of the destruction of quotidian logic in poetic expression, which allows for Czyżewski's singing bears and speaking wolves, angels whizzing about in aircraft, but of the destruction of *all* logic, which would cut our sight off completely from those marvellous, illogical poetic creations.[26]

For a poem like Isou's truly is a *poème clos,* as its subtitle proclaims. There is no entry into it — except for the title, which seems to suggest something like 'this is what a young girl's tears sound like.' Indeed, even the form here is autonomous. We see couplets, and even internal rhymes. But how can we be sure that we are pronouncing the poem correctly, when there is no referent outside it to aid us to its pronunciation, written, as it is, in no actual language, built up out of symbols that *look like* the Latin alphabet, but needn't be (or even if they are, needn't be pronounced as an Englishman, Pole, or Frenchman might pronounce them), and symbols that *look like* Greek (or Cyrillic) letters, but needn't be… Even

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(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 195-196. Steiner comments, among others: 'No signals, or very few apart from the title, are allowed to emerge and evoke a familiar tonal context. […] The wall is at the same time blank and expressive'.

26 Writing in the introduction to the 1920 edition of *The Green Eye* (and thus, one would imagine, with the poet's approbation), Leon Chwistek further muddies the waters by suggesting that poetry 'is constrained to battle against the habit of the direct apprehension of the phrase with the almost complete neglect of form, and it can do so only through the avoidance of phrases linked to a relatively strictly defined content. This is why the great poets always sought out, more or less consciously, a certain adumbration of the content, so as to allow themselves to cast the brighter light upon the full charms of the language in which they were working (Dante, Słowacki).' Tytus Czyżewski, *Zielone oko. Poezje formistyczne. Elektryczne wizje* (Kraków: Gebethner i spółka, 1920), p.5.

the punctuation marks may not be punctuation marks, but symbols descriptive of sounds. Czyżewski never pushes so far in his anarchisation of speech. And this is why the following statements are so difficult to understand, so difficult to square with his actual poetic practice:

> If we take, for example, a certain number of words and by means of so called **anarchisation** link them together, providing them with autonomous, suggestive meaning, giving them in their gathering (the phrase) a lesser, or greater, logical or imaginative significance, we bring them closer to **the essential meaning of the word, as poetry**.
>
> […]
>
> The complete break with what had been up till now the 'logicality' of poetry, under whatever term it was known: Romanticism or Symbolism, leads to the creation of **suggestive poetry**, the poetry of **true realism**.
>
> The word, as a sound, or as a suggestion, as the essential voice of nature: the song of birds, the voices of animals, the songs of aboriginal peoples — is the foundation of the poetic autonomy of the word, which leads to completely new, broad possibilities in prose and poetry.

How do Czyżewski's 'suggestions' differ from the built-in allusions that words accrete over the years, and against which he struggles? Even *Robespierre*, which he references in this essay as an example of the above, doesn't provide us with the most convincing evidence. Unless it be that in his careful, but not fully developed, distinction between 'anarchisation' and 'anarchy' he means that 'anarchisation' does not negate a sensible flow of ideas, whereas 'anarchy' (as above, exemplified by Isou) would, it is hard to see what he is getting at by insisting upon the forbidding of allegorical reading, the 'complete break with the logicality of poetry.' For as splendidly surrealistic as *Robespierre* is, it still tells a logical (*sic*) story of the French tyrant of liberty faced with his ultimate failure.

In a way, ironically, the failure of Robespierre to establish new norms, norms independent of the moral order of the world established by the God he would arrest and abolish, is coterminous with Czyżewski's own inability to turn established human speech into a new course, independent of its millennia of development.

TYTUS CZYŻEWSKI'S TRIUMPHS OF NON-ANARCHICISED POETIC FORMS

Guillaume Apollinaire was something of a guru, not to say patron saint, for Czyżewski and the Polish futurists. Czyżewski's friend, Anatol Stern, even wrote a quirky, and comprehensive, biography of the great Polish-French poet.[27] Of course, there is nothing surprising in this. Even if Czyżewski hadn't spent some of his most formative years as an artist in Paris, it would be odd if, given his modernist predilections, he had *not* fallen under the strong influence of Apollinaire, who is without a doubt among the most talented, and influential, poets of the twentieth century.

Apollinaire's poetry is marked by inventive, playful and surrealistic (a term he coined) phrases such as *des troupeaux d'autobus mugissants près de toi roulent* [herds of mooing buses roll near you, 'Zone']. It is not difficult to find such striking combinations in Czyżewski's verse, such as that of the 'dog vomiting bullets' from 'Halfsleep' or the forks snoring and the knives drowsing in 'Dozing in the Café.' In 'Summer Evening,' the clouds 'crawl down from mountain tops' as if 'from caves.' And just as Apollinaire's narrator in 'Zone' expresses pious wonder for Christ *qui mont au ciel mieux que les aviateurs / Il déteint le record du monde pour la hauteur* ['who ascends the sky better than any aviator / Smashing the world record for altitude'], so Czyżewski peoples the sky above Kraków with futuristic angels in 'Lajkonik':

The music plays — the people dance
And sing.
See the Lajkonik prance
While, high above the city range
Squadrons of angels in planes
With wings of white,
Leaping and bucking around
The snares of clouds
Sailing towards the sun.

The imagistic imagination — if we may risk misusing the term — is the same. Where Czyżewski differs from Apollinaire, in a formal sense, is his

27 Anatol Stern, *Dom Apollinaire'a* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1973).

training as a visual artist. We wish to take nothing away from Apollinaire as an acute appreciator of the visual arts, but it is one thing to assess a painting insightfully, and another to stand before a blank canvas and create something visually significant. We can see Czyżewski's remarkable sensitivity to visual forms in a verse like 'A Poem of Numbers.' In lines such as 'The family 141 / Going out for a stroll' we can almost see the unexpected allusion occurring to his mind as he looks at the numbers and sees the '4' between the two '1's almost like a child between his parents, swinging between them, suspended from their hands. And in the same poem, in the lines:

The harmony of the waking soul
9 7 9

the harmony he writes of is his instinctual, immediate grasp of the geometric harmony of the numbers as a symmetrical succession of circle (9), incomplete triangle (7), and circle (9). This is something that cannot be taught, or, at least, will not be learned from dealing with words. Rather, it develops through long practice with the creation of visual communication. It is just like what Ezra Pound says of the sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska:

> Gaudier Brzeska, who was accustomed to looking at the real shape of things, could read a certain amount of Chinese writing without ANY STUDY. He said, 'Of course, you can *see* it's a horse' (or a wing or whatever).[28]

Perhaps in verses like this, where he succeeds in 'anarchisising' mathematical symbols into anthropomorphic beings, or discovering to our eyes their deeper geometrical identities, Czyżewski comes closest to his creation of the autonomous poetic phrase. And here, we hasten to stress, the victory achieved is an intuitive one, which only a visual artist might grasp — it has nothing to do with theory *per se*. If it is not, as I suggest above, a case of 'two different authors,' one writing theory, and one composing verse, neither knowing anything of the other, then

28 Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (New York: New Directions, 1960), p. 21

it becomes apparent that the poetry was written by Tytus Czyżewski the poet, and the theoretical manifestos by Tytus Czyżewski the painter.

Now, more in line with those programmatic writings, in which he refers to the use of onomatopoeia in primitive settings, is his frequent employment of sound-symbols stripped of any verbal ballast. For example, the transcription of the amorous alleycat in 'Alleycat Serenade' takes on the function of a rhyming refrain in that poem:

> Here in my room I sit and hear
> Curled near my lamp in the quiet
> His drawn out lubricious meow
>
> **au au o - a - u**

More subtle, and perhaps more poetically satisfying, is the manner in which the repetition of the word *springtime* in 'De Profundis' mimics the joyful pealing of bells:

> And my father following the plough
> spring following the plough
> in the springtime springtime
> And my mother going to the fields
> in the springtime springtime
> And the bells going to the fields
> in the springtime springtime
> And all the birds fly to the fields
> in the springtime springtime

It is sometimes said that, in his copious poetic output, Thomas Hardy never used the same verse-form twice. Considering his indubitable metrical brilliance, this exaggeration is well justified, and contains a good amount of truth. The same, I think, can be said for Czyżewski's inventiveness when it comes to poetic form. He is able to take even *banal speech* — literally — and turn it to striking poetic effect. Consider the following excerpt from 'The Regiment. A Military Romance:'

> the captain was pouring a drink
> the corporal was saluting

the sergeant was saluting
the lieutenant was passing by
the lieutenant's fiancée was weeping
someone fired his Mauser
2 soldiers went to get the coffin
2 soldiers were on guard duty
2 soldiers carried out the colonel
the orderly carried round the orders

Here, the nearly washed-out progression of quotidian phrases masterfully gives back the ordinariness of even the greatest crimes of passion. Like Auden in his 'Musée des Beaux Arts' — but much more immediately, for where Auden describes, Czyżewski *shows* — the poet reveals to our eyes what all the uninterested parties were doing at the moment when the murderer ended the life of the adulterer… and then how, after this little blip in the routine, the world went on in its old, usual grooves. We are lulled asleep by the almost boring succession of banal descriptions until the bold and unexpected report of the gun startles us. And then, even before the echo dies away, we are soothed back into *le train-train quotidien* by the very next line, which pre-empts any deeper treatment of the dramatic, tragic event. Perhaps nowhere else in all of literature is our indifference to all suffering which is not our own, more strongly, more effectively, expressed.

'Expressionism' has various meanings when applied to the literature and the visual arts of the early twentieth century. As a matter of fact, the painter Czyżewski was associated with the Polish variety of this movement before he solidified the aesthetics of Formism. In literature, Expressionism is perhaps best represented by the haunting verses of his near contemporary and co-Austrian citizen, Georg Trakl. In verses both as peaceful as 'Musik im Mirabell' and as horrifying as 'Vorhölle' and 'Grodek,' the poet eschews the logical development of thought in favour of a collection of strong images, sometimes disparate ones, in an attempt at stirring in the soul of the reader a similar emotion to that which gripped him, the poet, at the composition of the poem in question. In poems like 'Fear,' Czyżewski also builds up a mood from subtle, repeated images, quite like Trakl. However, unlike the German-language poet, who is all about suggestion, Czyżewski explains perhaps too much, as here with the refrain-like 'fear takes possession of my mind:'

In a dark and mealy-rotten wood
Dusk falls on the thick limbs of trees
(Fear takes possession of my mind)
The shadow falls on yellow leaves
The shadow falls on rusty moss
(Through the sky there are birds that fly)
(From the limbs there are leaves that fly)
There is a black pool in the ancient wood
The wind swept through the fields of wheat

The whole point of Expressionism is not to explain things, but to present them. Not to address the reader's mind with a transfer of information, but to appeal to the reader's emotions, allowing him or her, facilitating him or her, to experience on their own skin the phenomenon the poet wishes to convey. Czyżewski is more successful — if Expressionism is what he's aiming at — in a poem such as 'City. Autumn Evening:'

the tram sweeps off down the wide street
cheeks with céruse are powdered white
slippers are on the corpse's feet
I smell the fresh scent of wet clay
they beat the rugs on clothespoles hung
mi fa so la si do re
there's ladders rung after white rung
in nurseries the babes are crying
while clouds float slowly through the air
the purples of the dawn are shining
through the tatters of human despair

or with the conclusion of 'The Assumption (An Idyll),' which is very Traklesque in the capturing of the present moment, the appeal to the senses:

The cottage yards reek of manure…
Roses cense the orchard trees
Someone opens the tavern door
A snatch of song flits on the breeze

Whether or not it's right to do so with as individual an artist as Czyżewski, literary historians, in their mania to classify, associate him with Futurism — as Zofia Ordyńska calls him 'the incontrovertible leader of the futurists.'[29] In poems such as 'Vision II,' Czyżewski adopts the imagery of the machine age as a fresh (then, though admittedly dated nowadays) vehicle for the expression of power, vitality:

The brindled carrotty panther draws near
Two shining arrows his electric eyes
His brain acres-broad like a metro
Black eyes each a pulsing dynamo
Two wheels burning without fires

Oa *Oa* *Oa*
R *R* *R*

Here, futurism is very interestingly paired with the 'primitivism' of sound-poetry. In *The Snake, Orpheus and Eurydice* the anachronistic infixing of modernity, which characterises Czyżewski's brand of Futurism, is a brash confession of faith to the modern world:

ORPHEUS
— throws his lyre upon the ground —
— the lyre — shatters —
— a factory siren is heard in the distance —
— the sun has set — from beyond the lake

Now, it is easy to chuckle at Futurism today, as the naive enthusiasm of early twentieth century man for the surges forward in technology just before, and after, the First World War — just as it is easy for us to deride the naïveté of Wordsworth's 'Steamboats, Viaducts and Railways' of a century earlier. But like the Romantic, who sensed the possible 'marring' of nature by man's 'lawful offspring,' so Czyżewski was no unqualified futuristic dreamer. It is somewhat chilling to read the summation of the first part of his 'self-criticism — selfadvertisement' of *The Green*

29 Zofia Ordyńska, *To już prawie sto lat: pamiętnik aktorki* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1970), p. 172.

Eye, with its prescient hedging of bets, from our twenty-first century perspective, when the unfavourable resolution of the 'either…or' clauses seems just around the corner:

> **'Electric Visions'** — a mechanised narrative poem.
>
> Man inseminated and unleashed the machine, which one day will either kill him, or **exalt** him.
>
> We build machines — we shall travel to the stars so as to observe the sun.
>
> The sun will marvel at where man found so much 'understanding.'
>
> Man will build a mechanical sun.
>
> The old sun — is an honest old machine.
>
> Let us love the sun and not talk about him behind his back.
>
> The man of the future is an electrical machine — sensitive, complicated, and simple in style.

Artists, like all people, are men and women of the times in which it has been given them to live. Czyżewski is no different. Whatever we may think of his 'futurism,' other references to twentieth-century culture are engaging. Such, for example, is his poetic enthusiasm for the cinema, and the faster-paced tempo of urban life, which spawned the hustle, organised crime, and the glorification thereof in *films noirs* and cheap detective novels. The form and diction of poems like 'Betrayal' accurately mirror these inspirations of the tenth muse:

> She went she felt she was with child
> She lay down on a sidewalk bench
> He grabbed his browning and he bit
> You bitch this is betrayal bitch

Likewise, 'She didn't know,' with its story of a girl beloved of two rivals (and its humorously innocuous turn, just when you expect jealous pistol shots to ring out) is a melodrama not much fit for the screen… but for all that, like 'The Regiment,' just the kind of domestic drama that happens time and again in this banal world.

There is a playfulness to much of the surreal in Czyżewski's poetry. It is interesting to set this side by side with the aesthetics of a friend and

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

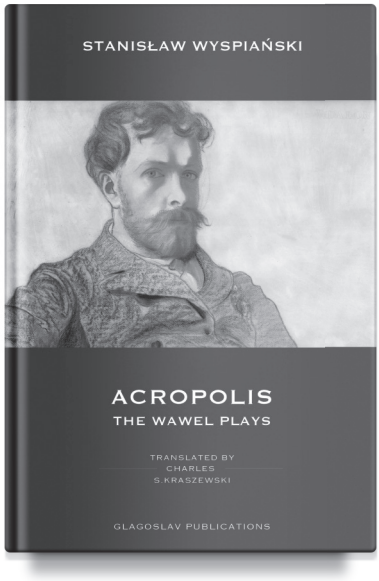
Tytus Czyżewski (1880–1945) was a multifaceted artistic talent, creative in drama, poetry, and painting. His sometimes belligerent critical manifestos — included in this translation — helped establish the foundations of contemporary art in the early decades of the twentieth century. As a painter (he studied for a while under the tutelage of another great Polish polymath, the painter and poet Stanisław Wyspiański), he was associated with Expressionism and Formism (of which he was the main motor, in both painting and poetry). After his studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, he spent some five years in Paris, where he came under the influence Picasso, the Cubists, and Cézanne in painting, and Guillaume Apollinaire in poetry. His poetry and plays, all of which are contained in this volume, are refreshingly disengaged, politically and patriotically, which marks him as fresh voice in the literary tradition of his homeland, and arguably makes his stunningly creative output more accessible to readers beyond Poland's borders. Chiefly concerned with form, he strove towards the 'anarchisation' and autonomy of the word and the poetic phrase, admittedly following in the footsteps of Apollinaire and Marinetti, both of whom he held in high esteem. Both his literary works and his painting are imbued with a radical modernism, which yet acknowledges the folk traditions of southern Poland, where he was born and spent most of his life. In this respect, and others, Czyżewski had a significant impact on the future of Polish art, in particular, that of another giant of contemporary painting and theatre, Tadeusz Kantor.

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

Charles S. Kraszewski (b. 1962) is a poet and translator. He is the author of three volumes of original verse (*Diet of Nails; Beast; Chanameed*). Several of his translations of Polish and Czech literature have been published by Glagoslav, among which may be found: Adam Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve* (2016) and *Sonnets* (2018), Zygmunt Krasiński's *Dramatic Works* (2018), four plays of Juliusz Słowacki (2018), Stanisław Wyspiański's *Acropolis: the Wawel Plays* (2017) and the mock epics of Ignacy Kasicki (2019). His translations of the poetry of T.S. Eliot, Robinson Jeffers, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti into Polish have appeared in the Wrocław monthly *Odra*. Recently, his English version of Jan Kochanowski's *Dismissal of the Grecian Envoys* was produced at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in London, under the direction of James Wallace. He is a member of the Union of Polish Writers Abroad (London) and of the Association of Polish Writers (SPP, Kraków).

Acropolis – The Wawel Plays

by Stanisław Wyspiański



Stanisław Wyspiański (1869-1907) achieved worldwide fame, both as a painter, and Poland's greatest dramatist of the first half of the twentieth century. *Acropolis: the Wawel Plays*, brings together four of Wyspiański's most important dramatic works in a new English translation by Charles S. Kraszewski. All of the plays centre on Wawel Hill: the legendary seat of royal and ecclesiastical power in the poet's native city, the ancient capital of Poland. In these plays, Wyspiański explores the foundational myths of his nation: that of the self-sacrificial Wanda, and the struggle between King Bolesław the Bold and Bishop Stanisław Szczepanowski. In the eponymous play which brings the cycle to an end, Wyspiański carefully considers the value of myth to a nation without political autonomy, soaring in thought into an apocalyptic vision of the future. Richly illustrated with the poet's artwork, *Acropolis: the Wawel Plays* also contains Wyspiański's architectural proposal for the renovation of Wawel Hill, and a detailed critical introduction by the translator. In its plaited presentation of *Bolesław the Bold* and *Skałka*, the translation offers, for the first time, the two plays in the unified, composite format that the poet intended, but was prevented from carrying out by his untimely death.

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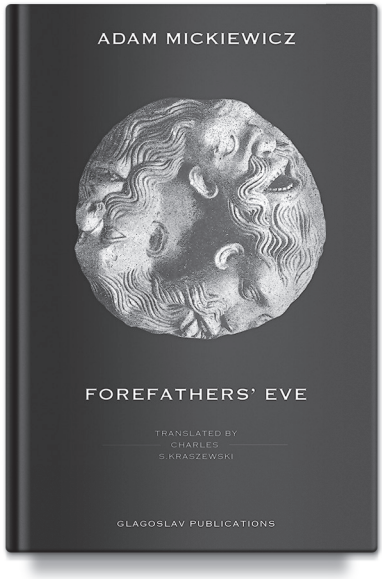
Forefathers' Eve

by Adam Mickiewicz



Forefathers' Eve [*Dziady*] is a four-part dramatic work begun circa 1820 and completed in 1832 – with Part I published only after the poet's death, in 1860. The drama's title refers to *Dziady*, an ancient Slavic and Lithuanian feast commemorating the dead. This is the grand work of Polish literature, and it is one that elevates Mickiewicz to a position among the "great Europeans" such as Dante and Goethe.

With its Christian background of the Communion of the Saints, revenant spirits, and the interpenetration of the worlds of time and eternity, *Forefathers' Eve* speaks to men and women of all times and places. While it is a truly Polish work – Polish actors covet the role of Gustaw/Konrad in the same way that Anglophone actors covet that of Hamlet – it is one of the most universal works of literature written during the nineteenth century. It has been compared to Goethe's Faust – and rightfully so...

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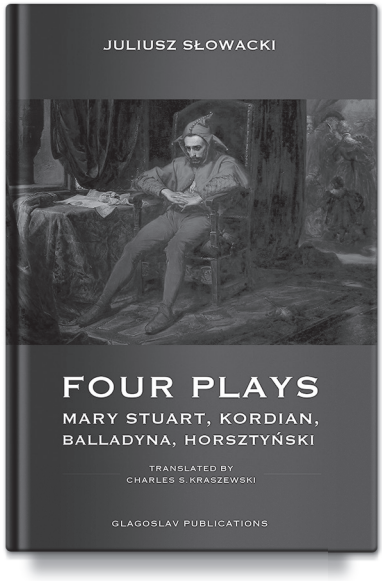
Four Plays:

Mary Stuart, Kordian, Balladyna, Horsztyński



The dramas in Glagoslav's edition of *Four Plays* include some of the poet's greatest dramatic works, all written before age twenty-five: *Mary Stuart, Balladyna* and *Horsztyński* weave carefully crafted motifs from *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in astoundingly original works, and *Kordian* — Słowacki's riposte to Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve*, constitutes the final word in the revolutionary period of Polish Romanticism.

Translated into English by Charles S. Kraszewski, the *Four Plays* of Juliusz Słowacki will be of interest to aficionados of Polish Romanticism, Shakespeare, and theatre in general.

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More coming soon...

The history of Poland, since the eighteenth century, has been marked by an almost unending struggle for survival. From 1795 through 1945, she was partitioned four times by her stronger neighbours, most of whom were intent on suppressing if not eradicating Polish culture. It is not surprising, then, that much of the great literature written in modern Poland has been politically and patriotically engaged. Yet there is a second current as well, that of authors devoted above all to the craft of literary expression, creating 'art for art's sake,' and not as a didactic national service. Such a poet is Tytus Czyżewski, one of the chief, and most interesting, literary figures of the twentieth century. Growing to maturity in the benign Austrian partition of Poland, and creating most of his works in the twenty-year window of authentic Polish independence stretching between the two world wars, Czyżewski is an avant-garde poet, dramatist and painter who popularised the new approach to poetry established in France by Guillaume Apollinaire, and was to exert a marked influence on such multi-faceted artists as Tadeusz Kantor.

A Burglar of the Better Sort offers, in the English translation of Charles S. Kraszewski, the entirety of Czyżewski's surviving literary output, from surrealistic plays like *Donkey and Sun in Metamorphosis* and his inimitable 'formistic poems' through the playful Christmas 'pastorals' — which so delighted Czesław Miłosz — to his theoretical writings, which form the basis for his radically individual, shamanistic approach to literary creation. A truly global talent, Czyżewski belongs to the world, a world which, beyond Poland, finally has the opportunity to get to know him.

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