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**POETRY IN THE ERA OF OCULARCENTRISM
THE *LUX/LUMEN* OPPOSITION IN THE WORK OF
CZESŁAW MIŁOSZ**

During the past two decades, the poetry of Czesław Miłosz (1911-2004) has received wide critical attention in the English-speaking world.¹ Now that “the poet’s work is done” (to quote William Blake, one of Miłosz’s “spiritual masters”), literary researchers and Polonists alike face the challenging task of opening up new perspectives on the entirety of Miłosz’s poetic oeuvre. The present article aims to contribute to this undertaking by revising Miłosz’s poetry from a visual studies perspective and, more specifically, by applying some concepts and ideas used in the analysis of (anti)visual tendencies in the history of western thought and culture. I will attempt to show that the poetic works of the 1980 Nobel Prize winner link up in a highly original and fundamental way with the rich tradition of western ocularcentrism.

One of the main ideas underlying the emerging domain of visual studies is the notion of a “visual” or “pictorial turn”, i.e. a shift from a literary toward a visual paradigm in cultural relations and hierarchies.² Visual studies is, however, not only concerned with the predominantly visual character of contemporary culture and the growing deployment of visualization at every level of social and cultural life, but also with the evolution of tendencies such as oculophilia and oculophobia throughout the history of western culture. In this respect, researchers have often referred to the traditional appreciation of sight as being “the noblest of the senses”,

¹ The reception of Miłosz’s work in the Anglo-Saxon area has been broadly discussed in Bożena Karwowska, *Miłosz i Brodski. Recepcja krytyczna twórczości w krajach anglojęzycznych* [*Miłosz and Brodsky. The Critical Reception of their Work in the English-Speaking Countries*] (Warszawa: IBL, 2000).

² See W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory. Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) and Marquard Smith & Martin Jay, “That Visual Turn. The Advent of Visual Culture,” *Journal of Visual Culture*, 2002, no. 1, pp. 87-92.

which finds its origins in ancient Greek philosophy.³ Moreover, particular attention has been paid to the development of “Cartesian perspectivalism” in western thought and its considerable influence on the philosophy of modernity.⁴ Some authors, such as Martin Jay⁵, claim that this hegemony of the visual has led to a “denigration” of vision in contemporary, postmodern philosophy, others prefer to use the term “reevaluation”.⁶

An interesting claim that often recurs in the discussion on western ocularcentrism, concerns the strong visual permeation of language. More than any other sense, visual perception is said to have a striking capacity for metaphorization and is repeatedly linked to mental and intellectual activities.⁷ This tendency to understand vision not only in terms of sensual perception, but also in terms of “theoretical” knowledge is already present in the aristotelian and platonic currents of Greek thought.⁸ The most elaborate discussion of this dual character of vision (looking with the physical eye vs. looking with the eye of the soul/the eye of reason) is to be found in Martin Jay’s encyclopedic study *Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*.⁹ First of all, Jay perceives a constitutive link between the persistent dualistic conceptualization of vision on the one hand and the pervasive character of western ocularcentric discourse on the

³ See e.g. Hans Jonas, “The Nobility of Sight: A Study in the Phenomenology of the Senses,” in *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982), pp. 135-156.

⁴ The Cartesian repudiation of embodiment is said to have been at the roots of the visualist paradigm of modernity, being characterized by a monocular, disembodied, objective, and ahistorical vision and a belief in confident, monocular objectivity (e.g. the God’s eye-view in 19th century realistic prose).

⁵ See Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

⁶ Jay’s hypothesis has been criticized among others by Gary Shapiro, *Archaeologies of Vision. Foucault and Nietzsche on Seeing and Saying* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

⁷ As Karen Jacobs states in *The Eye’s Mind. Literary Modernism and Visual Culture* (Ithaca – London: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 7, from the sense of sight “we derive our most powerful cultural metaphors for knowing.”

⁸ Jonas (p. 135) states: “Since the days of Greek philosophy sight has been hailed as the most excellent of the senses. The noblest activity of the mind, *theoria*, is described in metaphors mostly taken from the visual sphere. Plato, and Western philosophy after him, speaks of the “eye of the soul” and of the “light of reason.” Aristotle, in the first lines of the *Metaphysics*, relates the desire for knowledge inherent in the nature of all men to the common delight in perception, most of all in vision.”

⁹ See Jay, pp. 27-33.

other.¹⁰ A second interesting aspect of Jay's approach is his claim that this dualism on the level of vision is very closely linked to a dualistic conceptualization of the phenomenon of light in the history of western thought: *lux* being a natural light experienced by the eyes; *lumen* being a non-sensual, spiritual light, often enriched with strong mystico-religious connotations.¹¹

Obviously, like any other dualism, the juxtaposition of an observational and spectatorial understanding of vision and light faces the risk of simplifying the actual meaning of very distant and different phenomena, but nonetheless, there are – as Jay convincingly shows in his study – a lot of significant examples indicating that this dual

¹⁰ Jay (p. 29) states: "For if vision could be construed as either the allegedly pure sight of perfect and immobile forms with "the eye of the mind" or as the impure but immediately experienced sight of the actual two eyes, when one of these alternatives was under attack, the other could be raised in its place. In either case, something called vision could still be accounted the noblest of the senses."

¹¹ The author of *Downcast Eyes* (Jay, pp. 29-30) comments upon this aspect in the following way: "It was an ambiguity that also had a correlate in the way light itself was conceptualized for a long time in Western thought. Light could be understood according to the model of geometric rays that Greek optics had privileged, those straight lines studied by catoptrics (the science of reflection) or dioptrics (the science of refraction). Here perfect linear form was seen as the essence of illumination, and it existed whether perceived by the human eye or not. Light in this sense became known as *lumen*. An alternative version of light, known as *lux*, emphasized instead the actual experience of human sight. Here color, shadow, and movement was accounted as important as form and outline, if not more so. In the history of painting, as well as optics, these two models of light vied for prominence. This dual concept of light nicely complemented the dual concept of vision, even if they weren't perfectly congruent. What might be called the alternating traditions of speculation with the eye of the mind and observation with the two eyes of the body provided fertile ground for the varieties of ocularcentrism that have so deeply penetrated Western culture. In fact, if we divide them further, we can discern still other opportunities for privileging the visual. Speculation can be construed as the rational perception of clear and distinct forms with the unclouded eye of the mind or as the irrational and ecstatic dazzlement by the blinding light of God, the "vision" of the seer. Here a metaphysics of light could turn into a full-fledged mysticism of light. Observation could be understood as the unmediated assimilation of stimuli from without, the collapse of perception into pure sensation. Or it could be construed as a more complicated interaction of sensations and the shaping or judging capacity of the mind, which provided the Gestalt-like structures that made observation more than a purely passive phenomenon. And within these broad categories, many differentiated variants could proliferate. In all of them, however, something called sight was accorded a fundamental place in our knowledge of the world."

conceptualization is indeed deeply rooted in western thought. The particular way in which visual experience functions in the poetry of Czesław Miłosz can be considered as another argument in support of the existence of such a dualism. As early as WW II, the poles of observation/*lux* and speculation/*lumen* constitute one of the most important oppositions in Miłosz's representation of reality and reflect the ambiguous and dualistic way in which the poet conceives of the *condition humaine*.

The fact that visual experience plays a significant role in Miłosz's work, has already been observed by several scholars. Polish literary critics have tended to call Miłosz *poeta oka* ("a poet of the eye"), although they do not seem to be aware of the numerous underlying meanings of visual experience in his poems.¹² When analyzing the various functions of visual experience in Miłosz's poetry, particular attention should be paid in the first place to the late, highly retrospective poem *Oczy* (*Eyes*), published in Miłosz's last volume of poetry *Druga przestrzeń* (*Second Space*, 2002). The text summarizes in many ways the most important aspects of visual experience in Miłosz's poetry and can be divided into two coherent parts of 10 verses. The text as a whole marks the diminishing role of the observational aspect of visual experience (*lux*) in Miłosz's late poetry and the growing importance of visual speculation (*lumen*).

The first part of *Oczy* expresses the old poet's nostalgia for the cognitive power of his two eyes in the past and his lament over their present miserable condition. Miłosz's solemn invocation of his eyes and their metaphorical description as *sfora królewskich ogarów* ("a pack of royal hounds") indicate the high importance ascribed by the poet to visual perception and can be considered as an obvious allusion to the traditional valorization of the eyes as "the noblest of the senses":

Szanowne moje oczy, nie najlepiej z wami.
Dostaję od was rysunek nieostry,
A jeżeli kolor, to przymglony.
A byliście wy sforą królewskich ogarów,
Z którymi wyruszałem niegdyś o poranku.
Chwytlive moje oczy, dużoście widziały
Krajów i miast, wysp i oceanów.
Razem witaliśmy ogromne wschody słońca,
Kiedy szeroki oddech przyzywał nas do biegu

¹² See Elżbieta Kiślak, *Walka Jakuba z aniołem. Czesław Miłosz wobec romantyczności* [*Jacob Wrestling with the Angel. Czesław Miłosz and Romanticism*] (Warszawa: Prószyński i S-ka, 2000), pp. 286-287, and Marian Stala, *Trzy nieskończoności* [*Three Infinities*] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2001), pp. 159-161.

Po ścieżkach, na których podsychała rosa.¹³

[My most honorable eyes. You are not in the best shape. / I receive from you an image less than sharp, / And if a color, then it's dimmed. / And you were a pack of royal hounds / With whom I would set forth in the early morning. / My wondrously quick eyes, you saw many things, / Countries and cities. Islands and oceans. / Together we greeted immense sunrises, / When the fresh air invited us to run / Along trails just dry from cold night dew.]¹⁴

Applying Jay's terminology to the fragment above, one could say that visual experience in Miłosz's poetry is primarily directed to the perception of *lux* – the sensual world in its predominantly visual dimension. This particular attachment to sensual perception can be closely linked to some of the epistemological and poetical keystones of Miłosz's poetic oeuvre.

Firstly, the poet's attachment to *lux* is inextricably bound up with the concept of "naïve realism" that so often appears in Miłosz's writings, i.e. the belief in the objective existence of the external world.¹⁵ The most significant example of this epistemological concept can be found in the poem *Nadzieja* (*Hope*), a part of the war cycle *Świat* (*Poema naiwne*) (*The World* (*A Naïve Poem*)), in which the poet expresses his belief that *ziemia nie jest snem ale żywym ciałem, / I że wzrok, słuch ani dotyk nie kłamie* ("the earth is not a dream but living flesh, / That sight, touch, and hearing do not lie"). From the belief that reality as it appears to human eyes really exists,

¹³ I am citing Miłosz's poems from the following editions: *Wiersze tom 1* (Kraków: Znak, 2001), *Wiersze tom 2* (Kraków: Znak, 2002), *Wiersze tom 3* (Kraków: Znak, 2003), *Nieobjęta ziemia* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 1996), *Kroniki* (Paryż: Instytut Literacki, 1987), *Dalsze okolice* (Kraków: Znak, 1991), *Na brzegu rzeki* (Kraków: Znak, 1994), *To* (Kraków: Znak, 2000), *Druga przestrzeń* (Kraków: Znak, 2002).

¹⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, the English translations of Miłosz's poems are quoted from two volumes: the poems from Miłosz's last volume of poetry *Druga przestrzeń* are taken from *Second Space. New Poems* (New York: Ecco, 2004); translations of earlier poems come from *New and Collected Poems (1931-2001)* (New York: Ecco, 2001).

¹⁵ In *Witness of Poetry* (Cambridge – London: Harvard University Press, 1983), Miłosz makes clear how this "naïve realism" should be understood: "The whole great quarrel about the existence of the world beyond our perceptions, a quarrel started by Descartes, is, so to speak, treated parenthetically (...). The world exists objectively, despite the shapes in which it appears in the mind and despite the colors, bright or dark, lent it by the happiness or misfortune of a particular man." (p. 73). See also Ewa Czarnicka & Aleksander Fiut, *Conversations with Czesław Miłosz*, transl. Richard Lourie (San Diego – New York – London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987), p. 286.

arises the conviction that the world is worth being carefully explored: *Gdybyśmy lepiej i mądrzej patrzyli, / Jeszcze kwiat nowy i gwiazdę niejedną / W ogrodzie świata byśmy zobaczyli* ("Could we but look more clearly and wisely / We might discover somewhere in the garden / A strange new flower and an unnamed star"). In Miłosz's poetry, the beginning of this passionate exploration is usually situated at daybreak: the appearance of morning light enables the poet to "run" and often leads to a feeling of ecstasy.¹⁶ This does not mean, however, that the poet neglects the other senses: visual perception, being the "noblest of the senses", very often functions in Miłosz's poetry as a metonymy for the whole sphere of sensual experience.

Apart from a cognitive dimension, the poet's orientation toward *lux* also fulfills a crucial poetical function in Miłosz's oeuvre. The poet's task is not only to explore the world of *lux*, but also to describe it in his poetry. The most elaborate account of this concept can be found in Miłosz's Nobel Prize lecture, where the terms *chciwość oczu* ("avidity of the eye") and *chęć opisu* ("the desire to describe") give expression to the poet's maximalistic program of mimesis.¹⁷ One of the earliest and most significant examples of this ambitious strategy of "seeing and describing" can be found in the final poem of Miłosz's war cycle *Świat (Poema naiwne)*. In the first stanza of *Słońce (The Sun)*, Miłosz draws on the traditional concept of "Deus Pictor" (God the Painter) and makes a significant comparison between "the Sun" (symbolizing the creator of the world) and an artist working on a poem: *Barwy ze słońca są. A ono nie ma / Żadnej osobnej barwy, bo ma wszystkie. / I cała ziemia jest niby poemat, / A słońce nad nią przedstawia artystę* ("All colors come from the sun. And it does not have / Any particular color, for it contains them all. / And the whole Earth is like a poem. / While the sun

¹⁶ The most frequently quoted and discussed fragment is the following verse from *Gucio zaczarowany (Bobo's Metamorphosis): Od dzieciństwa do starości ekstaza o wschodzie słońca* ("From childhood till old age ecstasy at sunrise").

¹⁷ Miłosz states in his Nobel Prize lecture (see *Zaczynając od moich ulic* (Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1985), p. 349): "Jeden z laureatów nagrody Nobla czytany w dzieciństwie, w znacznym stopniu, myślę, wpłynął na moje pojęcia o poezji i rad jestem, że mogę tutaj o tym powiedzieć. Była to Selma Lagerlöf. Jej „Cudowna podróż”, książka, którą uwielbiałem, umieszcza bohatera w podwójnej roli. Jest on tym, który leci nad ziemią i ogarnia ją z góry, a zarazem widzi ją w każdym szczególe, co może być metaforą powołania poety. (...) Tak więc dwa atrybuty poety: chciwość oczu i chęć opisu ("One of the Nobel laureates whom I read in childhood influenced to a large extent, I believe, my notions of poetry. That was Selma Lagerlöf. Her *Wonderful Adventures of Nils*, a book I loved, places the hero in a double role. He is the one who flies above the Earth and looks at it from above but at the same time sees it in every detail. This double vision may be a metaphor of the poet's vocation. (...) Hence, two attributes of the poet: avidity of the eye and the desire to describe that which he sees").

above represents the artist.”). Further on, the narrator gives a metaphorical account of his own poetical strategy. An artist who wants to “paint the variegated world”, should “never look straight up at the sun”. On the contrary:

Niechaj przykłąknie, twarz ku trawie schyli
I patrzy w promień od ziemi odbity.

[Let him kneel down, lower his face to the grass, / And look at light reflected by the ground.]

The poet not only makes clear allusions to the opposition between *lux*/observation and *lumen*/speculation, but also draws on the classical (religiously connotated) vertical opposition between “low” and “high” which is also mentioned in Jay’s discussion of the *lux/lumen* distinction.¹⁸

Particular attention should be paid to the argument that the poet advances for “not looking straight up at the sun”. He does not only fear the physical harm that might be caused by such a mystical vision of *lumen*, but also fears that the artist will lose the memory of “things he has seen”:

Bo pamięć rzeczy, które widział, straci,
Łzy tylko w oczach zostaną piękące,

[Or he will lose the memory of things he has seen. / Only burning tears will stay in his eyes.]

In the last verse of the poem, the narrator mentions some of these things: *Gwiazdy i róże, i zmierzchy, i świty* (“The stars and the roses, the dusks and the dawns”), i.e. the earthly world in its macro- and microcosmic and temporal dimension. In this way, Miłosz’s mimetical strategy of “seeing and describing”, directed toward *lux*, gets an obvious soteriological foundation. The poet’s task is to save the transitory beings that surround him. By “seeing and describing” floating reality and making it “eternal”, poetry is able to

¹⁸ Jay states: “The neo-Platonic strain in medieval thought meant that the contrast between a higher *lumen* and an inferior *lux* was often redescribed in religious terms. Even a critic of ocular desire like Augustine still staunchly defended the higher light of God in which the pious man would ultimately stand bathed. (...) In his thirteenth-century treatise *De Luce*, Robert Grosseteste developed a complicated ocular metaphysics in which a divine primal light was contrasted to a lesser visible light available to human perception.” (p. 37). In Miłosz’s case, the image of the Sun symbolizing a higher *lumen* can be linked to thomist philosophy and the first Canto of Dante’s *The Divine Comedy*. See Kris Van Heuckelom, “Świat według Miłosza. Motywy kluczowe w “poemacie naiwnym”,” *Kresy. Kwartalnik Literacki*, no. 42-43, 2000, pp. 110-127.

protect being against the annihilating power of nature, time and history. Adding two well-known Latin epitheta to Jay's concept of *lux*, one might say that it is Miłosz's ultimate ambition to turn the *brevis lux* ("brief light") of existence into *perpetua lux* ("eternal light").¹⁹

The Catullian motif of *brevis lux* appears in various configurations in Miłosz's poetry. It can, firstly, be linked with Miłosz's early, so called catastrophic poetry of the 1930s, in which the poet presents an extremely pessimistic view on both man and world. Human death is usually perceived in these poems as a return to the darkness of the fertile "black earth", symbolizing the everlasting cycle of nature and absorbing all man's individual features.²⁰ The strategy of "looking at light reflected by the ground", as formulated in Miłosz's *Świat*, can be seen as an act of resistance against the annihilating power of the "black earth", absorbing the "brief light" of existence.

In Miłosz's postwar poems, the transitoriness of existence is not only tied up with the dark forces of nature, but also with the devastating power of time and history. In the well-known poem *Notatnik: Bon nad Lemanem* (*Notebook: Bon by Lake Leman*), the poet draws a sharp contrast between the seemingly static world of nature (the sun shining over Lake Leman and its surroundings, depicted in the first stanza of the poem) and the world of culture and human activity, which is permeated with transitoriness and movement (evoked in the second stanza). In the last verses of the poem, the image of a static world lit by the Sun (the high *lumen*) is opposed to the image of a gleam of light on the current of a black river (the low *lux* in its historical dimension). Apparently, the poet's task is not to live in the illusion of an eternal present, but to live in time and to take "from the movement the eternal moment as a gleam on the current of a black river.":

(...) Godzisz się co jest
Niszczyc i z ruchu podjąć moment wieczny

¹⁹ The formula *perpetua lux*, of course, refers to the sentence *Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine, et lux perpetua luceat eis* ("Grant them eternal rest, o Lord, and may perpetual light shine upon them") traditionally used in Offices for the dead. The formula *brevis lux* comes from a well-known love poem written by the antique poet Catullus, in which he urges his beloved Lesbia to "give thousands of kisses", for time is short: "suns can set and rise again; / For us, once our brief light has set, / There's one unending night for sleeping" (in the original Latin text: "Soles occidere et redire possunt: / Nobis, cum semel occidit brevis lux, / Nox est perpetua una dormienda"). As Michael Ferber indicates in *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), p. 210, the Catullian motif of "brief light", symbolizing the brief existence of every being, has become a commonplace in western literary tradition.

²⁰ Cf. Kris Van Heuckelom, "Między 'czarną ziemią' a 'błyszczącym punktem'. Rzecz o poezji Czesława Miłosza," *Slavica Gandensia*, no. 28, 2001, p. 220.

Jak blask na wodach czarnej rzeki? Tak.

[Do you agree then, / To abolish what is, and take from the
movement / The eternal moment as a gleam / On the current of a
black river? Yes.]²¹

This principle of rescuing the low *lux* in its tangible, sensual dimension (*promień od ziemi odbity, blask na wodach czarnej rzeki*) is consistently realized in Miłosz's postwar poetry and is closely linked to the poet's fascination with the theological concept of *apokatastasis* (*apokatastasis pantoön*, or "universal restoration"). For Miłosz, it means that even the smallest "Minute Particular" will eventually be saved. The most elaborate account of this idea of "universal restoration" is to be found in the last part of Miłosz's magnum opus *Gdzie wschodzi słońce i kędy zapada* (*From the Rising of the Sun*).²²

The continuous character of the poet's attachment to the low *lux* (*promień od ziemi odbity*) finds expression in the recurrence of some of the motifs discussed above in his later, Californian poetry, e.g. in the ninth part of the cycle *Miasto bez imienia* (*City Without a Name*):

Uniwersalne światło a ciągle się zmienia.
Bo kocham także światło, może tylko światło.
Jednak co za jasne i za wysokie to nie dla mnie.
Więc kiedy różowieją obłoki myślę o świetle niskim,
jak w krajach brzozy i sosny obleczonej chrupkim porostem,
późną jesienią, pod szronem, kiedy ostatnie rydze
dogniwają w borkach i psy gonią z echem,

²¹ The English translation is taken from Aleksander Fiut, *The Eternal Moment. The Poetry of Czesław Miłosz* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1990).

²² The function of the concept of *apokatastasis* in Miłosz's poetry has been broadly discussed by Kim Jastremski, *Apokatastasis in the Work of Czesław Miłosz: Poetic Restoration of Wholeness* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2000). Miłosz himself comments upon this concept in one of his interviews with Ewa Czarnecka: "Apokatastasis is a concept that first appeared in the Epistles. It was developed extensively by Origen, who is not considered a totally authoritative Church Father because he held very heretical views, but let's not go into that here. In Greek it means more or less the same as "reinstatement", the restoration of the state before original sin, a repetition of history in a purified form. It's a risky concept, very heretical. I'm not saying I'm a great believer in apokatastasis, since the word can have a variety of meanings. In any case, in this poem apokatastasis tends to mean that no detail is ever lost, no moment vanishes entirely. They are all stored somewhere and it's possible to show that film again, to re-create a reality with all those elements restored." (Ewa Czarnecka & Aleksander Fiut, p. 247).

a kawki krążą nad wieżą bazylińskiego kościoła.

[Light, universal, and yet it keeps changing. / For I love the light too, perhaps the light only. / Yet what is too dazzling and too high is not for me. / So when the clouds turn rosy, I think of light that is level / In the lands of birch and pine coated with crispy lichen, / Late in autumn, under the hoarfrost when the last milk caps / Rot under the firs and the hounds' barking echoes, / And jackdaws wheel over the tower of a Basilian church.]

The opposition described between “high” and “level light” has, first of all, a clear temporal and spatial dimension (America vs. Lithuania, summer vs. autumn), but also evokes religious associations. The formula “high light” can be closely linked to the motif of *alto lume/luce* in Dante's *Divine Comedy* or the same motif in St Augustine's *Confessions*.²³ Once again,

²³ See e.g. the following fragment from the *Paradiso*, canto XXXIII, vs. 49-54 (in which Dante describes his arrival in the Empyrean, the highest heaven, and his experience of *alto luce*):

Bernardo m'accennava, e sorridea,
perch'io guardassi suso; ma io era
già per me stesso tal qual ei volea:
ché la mia vista, venendo sincera,
e più e più intrava per lo raggio
de l'alta luce che da sé è vera.

[(...) Beckoning smiled the sage / That I should look aloft: but, ere he bade, / Already of myself aloft I look'd; / For visual strength, refining more and more / Bare me into the ray authentic / Of sovran light. (...)]
(Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, transl. Francis Cary (London: Bibliophile Books, 1988), p. 462)

In the verses 67-78, the poet speaks about *somma luce*:

O somma luce che tanto ti levi
da' concetti mortali, a la mia mente
ripresta un poco di quel che parevi,
e fa la lingua mia tanto possente,
ch'una favilla sol de la tua gloria
possa lasciare a la futura gente;
ché, per tornare alquanto a mia memoria
e per sonare un poco in questi versi,
più si conceperà di tua vittoria.
Io credo, per l'acume ch'io sofferisi

del vivo raggio, ch'i' sarei smarrito,
se li occhi miei da lui fossero aversi.

[(...) O eternal beam! / (Whose height what reach of mortal thought may
soar?) / Yield me again some little particle / Of what thou then
appearedst; give my tongue / Power, but to leave one sparkle of thy glory,
/ Unto the race to come, that shall not lose / Thy triumph wholly, if thou
waken aught / Of memory in me, and endure to hear / The record sound
in hus unequal strain. / Such keenness from the living ray I met, / That, if
mine eyes had turn'd away, methinks, / I had been lost (...)] (Dante, p.
462)

Further on in the final canto of the *Paradiso* (vs. 115-117), Dante uses the
formula *alto lume*:

Ne la profonda e chiara sussistenza
de l'alto lume parvermi tre giri
di tre colori e d'una contenenza;

[(...) In that abyss / Of radiance, clear and lofty, seem'd, methought, /
Three orbs of triple hue, clipt in one bound:] (p. 463)

The same formula also appears in the *Purgatorio*, canto XIII (vs. 85-87):

Volsimi a loro e 'O gente sicura,
incominciai, 'di veder l'alto lume
che 'l disio vostro solo ha in sua cura,'

[I turned to them, and "O shades!" said I, / "Assured that to your eyes
unveil'd shall shine / The lofty light (...)] (Dante, p. 254)

In St Augustine's *Confessions* (one of Miłosz's favorite readings when he was
young) we find the following fragment: "And being thence admonished to return
to myself, I entered even into my inward self, Thou being my guide: and able I
was, for Thou wert become my Helper. And I entered and beheld with the eye of
my soul, (such as it was,) above the same eye of my soul, above my mind, the
Light Unchangeable. Not this ordinary light, which all flesh may look upon, nor
as it were a greater of the same kind, as though the brightness of this should be
manifold brighter, and with its greatness take up all space. Not such was this
light, but other, yea, far other from all these. Nor was it above my soul, as oil is
above water, nor yet as heaven above earth: but above to my soul, because It
made me; and I below it, because I was made by It. He that knows the Truth,
knows what that Light is; and he that knows It, knows eternity." (*The
Confessions of St Augustine*, transl. E. B. Pusey (London – New York: Dent –
Dutton, 1966), pp. 132-133).

however, the poet rejects a mystical union with a higher *lumen* (such as Dante's and St Augustine's) in favor of an attachment to the concreteness and sensuality of earthly reality, which deserves to be saved in poetry.²⁴

Such an approach is, of course, not characteristic of the whole of Miłosz's poetry. The strategy of "looking at light reflected by the ground" is subject to several modifications at various levels. First of all, one could point out objections of an ethical and poetical nature.²⁵ However, in the context of the late poem *Oczy*, particular attention should be paid to Miłosz's reservations on an existential level. Thanks to selfconsciousness, man is not only aware of the transitoriness and defectiveness of the surrounding world, but he is also confronted with the "otherness" of things. This feeling of separation between individual beings is closely linked in Miłosz's poetry with visual experience. It is thematized, for instance, in the well-known prose poem *Esse*, in which the narrator-observer realizes that there is an unbridgeable gap between himself and a woman seen in the Parisian metro. The poet experiences an ecstatic awareness of the woman's being (*esse*), but is simultaneously confronted with her separate existence:

Przyglądałem się tej twarzy w osłupieniu. (...) Co można zrobić, jeżeli wzrok nie ma siły absolutnej, tak, żeby wciągał przedmioty z zachłyśnięciem się szybkości, zostawiając za sobą już tylko pustkę formy idealnej, znak, niby hieroglif, który uproszczono z rysunku zwierzęcia czy ptaka? (...) Na to mi przyszło, że po tylu próbach nazywania świata umiem już tylko powtarzać w kółko najwyższe, jedyne wyznanie, poza które żadna moc nie może sięgnąć: ja *jestem* – ona *jest*.

[I looked at that face, dumbfounded. (...) What can be done, if our sight lacks absolute power to devour objects ecstatically, in an instant, leaving nothing more than the void of an ideal form, a sign

²⁴ Another significant reference to the *lux/lumen* opposition in Miłosz's Californian period is to be found in a prose commentary added to the late poem *Bryczką o zmierzchu* (*In a Buggy at Dusk*): "W młodości nie spodziewałem się, że będę tak zafascynowany ludźmi, ich codziennym istnieniem w czasie, dniem, rokiem, który tutaj nie wróży nic dobrego nadjeźdźcy. Nie, nie można patrzeć prosto w słońce." ("In my youth I did not expect that I would be one day so fascinated by people, by their everyday existence in time, by that day, by that year. (...) No, we cannot look straight at the sun.")

²⁵ Miłosz's reservations on an ethical basis have to do with the question whether earthly reality is actually worth being saved. When discussing this aspect, Miłosz often follows a gnostic point of view and tends to consider earthly reality to be the reign of the Manichean Prince of Darkness (e.g. in *Traktat poetycki*). Miłosz's doubts of a poetical nature have to do with the question whether it is possible to rescue reality in words, given the limitations of human language.

like a hieroglyph simplified from the drawing of an animal or bird?
(...) And so it befell me that after so many attempts at naming the
world, I am able only to repeat, harping on one string, the highest,
the unique avowel beyond which no power can attain: *I am, she is.*]

In a similar way, in the tenth part of the poem cycle *Na trąbach i na cytrze* (*With Trumpets and Zithers*), Miłosz exposes the fundamental barrier that separates the I and the Other in the world of earthly *lux*. The poem contains a description of a dream scene that takes place at night time, in a dark and safe forest, described in Polish as *sam środek gęstwiny* ("the centre itself of the thicket"). This "centre" is perceived as a kind of ideal place, in which there seems to exist a total physical and mental unity between the Self and the Other (man and woman). People behave like animals and do not experience any boundaries between themselves and the surrounding world. Only in the morning, when "crude" daylight appears, is human consciousness reactivated, which brings about a fundamental separation between the Self and the Other:

A potem, w jarym świetle, podzieleni na mnie i ciebie, bosą stopą
próbują kamyków posadzki.

Dwunodzy, jedni na prawo, drudzy na lewo, wkładają pasy,
podwiązki, spodnie i sandały.

I posuwają się na swoich szcudłach tęskniąc do leśnego domu, do
niskich tuneli, do wyznaczonego im powrotu w to.

[Later on, in crude light, separated into you and me, they try with a
bare foot pebbles of the floor. / The two-legged, some to the left,
some to the right, put on their belts, garters, slacks, and sandals. /
And they move on their stilts, longing after a forest home, after low
tunnels, after an assigned return to It.]

A part of Miłosz's poems, hence, is characterized by a negative evaluation of individuality and multitude and, simultaneously, by a striving toward a state of unity (between Self and Other, man and woman, ...). This contradictory position is highlighted, for instance, in the following mysterious verses from the poem *Heraklit* (*Heraclit*):

Poszczególne istnienie odbiera nam światło
(To zdanie da się czytać w obie strony).

[Particular existence keeps us from the light / (That sentence can be
read in reverse as well).]

On the one hand, going up in the unity of a higher light (*lumen*) means losing one's individuality. On the other hand, however, our "particular existence" on earth makes it impossible for us to feel united with the Other.

In Miłosz's late poetry, this feeling of separation and lack of unity, characterizing human life in the world of "level light" (*lux*), goes along with an increasing orientation of the poet toward a higher, unifying *lumen*. This tendency can be seen for instance in poems such as *Dante* and *Sala (A Hall)*. In the last stanza of *Dante*, the poet describes his longing for a unification with the divine in the enlightened world of the Empyrean, the tenth immobile heaven from Dante's *Paradiso*:

I tylko, jak dla ciebie, jedno jest prawdziwe:
La concreata e perpetua sete,
 Nam przyrodzone i stałe pragnienie
Del deiformo regno – bogokształtnej strefy,
 Krainy czy królestwa. Bo tam jest mój dom.
 Nic na to nie poradzę. Modlę się o światło,
 O wnętrze wiecznej perły, *eterna margarita*.

[And only, as once for you, this remains real: / *La concreata e perpetua sete*, / The inborn and the perpetual desire / *Del deiformo regno* – for a God-like domain, / A realm or a kingdom. There is my home. / I cannot help it. I pray for light, / For the inside of the eternal pearl, *l'eterna margarita*.]

Another late poem, *Sala (A Hall)*, evokes the posthumous stay of the poet in a kind of religious space that looks like a temple. Just like in *Dante*, the process of unification is situated in a sphere of light and involves a merging of the masculine (the persona) and the feminine (Notre Dame, women – goddesses):

Droga wiodła mnie prosto do świątyni
 Notre Dame, choć nie było w niej gotyku.
 Odrzwia-bramy zamknięte. Wybrałem tę z boku
 Nie do głównego budynku, do skrzydła na lewo,
 Z miedzi jaskrawozielonej, szczerbatej u dołu.
 Pchnąłem. I wtedy objawiła się
 Sala zdumiewająco olbrzymia, w ciepłym świetle.
 Wielkie posągi siedzących kobiet-bogin

W udrapowanych szatach, znaczyły ją rytmem.
Objął mnie kolor jak wewnątrz liliowobrunatnego kwiatu
Niebywałych rozmiarów. Szedłem uwolniony
Od trosk, wyrzutów sumienia i lęków.
Wiedziałem, że tam jestem, choć dopiero będę.
Obudziłem się spokojny, myśląc, że ten sen
Odpowiada na moje często stawiane pytanie:
Jak to jest z przekroczeniem ostatniego progu?

[The road led straight to the temple. / Notre Dame, though not gothic at all. / The huge doors were closed. I chose one on the side, / Not to the main building – to its left wing, / The one in green copper, worn into gaps below. / I pushed. Then it was revealed: / An astonishingly large hall, in warm light. / Great statues of sitting women – goddesses, / In draped robes, marked it with a rhythm. / Color embraced me like the interior of a purple brown flower / Of unheard-of size. I walked, liberated / From worries, pangs of consciences and fears. / I knew I was there as one day I would be. / I woke up, serene, thinking that this dream / Answers my question, often asked: / How is it when one passes the last threshold.]

The second part of the late poem *Oczy* can be considered as the culmination point of this gradual transition from the level of observation/*lux* to the level of speculation/*lumen* in Miłosz's late poetry. Beginning from the eleventh verse, direct visual perception gives way to introspection. The persona directs himself to what he once saw and kept in his memory:

Teraz coście widziały, schowane jest we mnie
I przemienione w pamięć albo sny.

[Now what you have seen is hidden inside / And changed into memory or dreams.]

The poet's memory is no longer exposed as an important instrument for realizing a poetic *apokatastasis*, but becomes a way of compensating the loss of the cognitive capacities of the eyes in the poet's perception of the world. The impossibility of direct visual perception of reality, caused by the physical degradation of the eyes, goes along with a rejection of the outside world. Whereas the poet once cherished love (Eros) and "avidity of the eye" toward the "garden of the world", he now experiences his departure from the world as a relief:

Oddalam się powoli od jarmarku świata
 I zauważam w sobie jakby niechęć
 Do małpowatych strojów, wrzasków, bicia w bębny.
 Co za ulga. Sam na sam, z moim rozmyślaniem
 O zasadniczym podobieństwie ludzi
 I o drobnym ziarnie ich niepodobieństwa.

[Slowly I move away from the fair of this world / And I notice in myself a distaste / For monkeyish dress, shrieks, and drumbeats. / What a relief. Alone with my meditation / On the basic similarity of humans / And their tiny grain of dissimilarity.]

The poet's introspection is concentrated mostly on the problem of the opposition between individuality and unity. In this context, particular attention should be paid to the keyword *ziarno* ("grain"), symbolizing the particularity of every human existence that deserves to be saved. The motif brings up a lot of associations with earlier poems by Miłosz, in the first place with the prewar poem *Pieśń* (*Song*).²⁶ The female persona speaking in *Pieśń* expresses the hope that she will not entirely be absorbed by the "black earth" and that a "grain" of her personality will be rescued:

O, gdyby we mnie było choć jedno ziarno bez rdzy,
 choć jedno ziarno, które by przetrwało,
 mogłabym spać w kołysce nachylanej
 na przemian w mrok, na przemian w świt.

[Oh, if there were in me one seed without rust, / no more than one grain that could endure / I could sleep in the cradle leaning by turns / now into darkness, now into the break of day.]

Miłosz's longing for the *apokatastasis pantoon* entails the hope that everything, even the smallest "particular being", will eventually be saved. A significant allusion to this concept is to be found in the final part of the cycle *Gdzie wschodzi słońce i kędy zapada*:

Nagle umilknie warsztat demiurga. Nie do wyobrażenia cisza.
 I forma pojedynczego ziarna wróci w chwale.

[The demiurge's workshop will suddenly be stilled. Unimaginable silence. / And the form of every single grain will be restored in glory.]

²⁶ Cf. Kris Van Heuckelom, "Między 'czarną ziemią' a 'błyszczącym punktem' ...," p. 226.

This idea of universal restoration plays a highly significant role in the final part of *Oczy*. The final two verses of the poem contain the culminating point of the subject's internal gaze:

Bez oczu, zapatrzony w jeden jasny punkt,
Który rozszerza się i mnie ogarnia.

[Without eyes, my gaze is fixed on one bright point / That grows large and takes me in.]

The words *zapatrzony* ("gazing") and *jasny* ("bright") indicate that the poet still kept a kind of visuality, but, as the formula *bez oczu* ("without eyes") suggests, it fundamentally differs from the observational dimension of visual experience presented in the first part of the poem. Sensual observation (*lux*) gives way to a mental look, directed to a religiously connotated *lumen*.

The possibility of a multidimensional reading of the last part of the poem ensues from its key motif – "one bright point", a formula that also recurs in some of Miłosz's prose books.²⁷ From an intertextual perspective, the motif brings to mind Dante's *Divine Comedy*. In the last part of the *Divina Commedia*, the *Paradiso*, God is called "a point of light" (*un punto che raggiava lume*).²⁸ As Dante suggests, this mysterious point of light not

²⁷ In the autobiographical book of essays *Rodzinna Europa (Native Realm)*, the poet writes about this *blyszczący punkt*, when describing his youngish religiosity: "Wewnętrznej pewności nie udawało mi się stłumić: że istnieje blyszczący punkt na przecięciu wszystkich linii i że wtedy, kiedy go neguję, tracę zdolność koncentracji, a rzeczy, dążenia, rozpadają się w proszek." ("Nothing could stifle my inner certainty that a shining point exists where all lines intersect. If I negated it I would lose my ability to concentrate, and things as well as aspirations would turn to dust", *Native Realm. A Search for Self-Definition*, transl. Catherine S. Leach (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), p. 87). In *Widzenia nad Zatoką San Francisco (Visions from San Francisco Bay)* the formula *blyszczący punkt* is replaced by *światlny punkt*. In one of the essays from the collection, Miłosz discusses the influence of Newton's concept of an unlimited eternal space on the contemporary world view: "Dziś ta przestrzeń (newtonowska z opóźnieniem) narzuca się wszystkim i utrudnia odwołanie się do Jednego jako miejsca powszechnego odniesienia, nawet gdyby ów Jeden został sprowadzony do światlnego punktu." ("Today that space (a delayed Newtonian space) is being imposed on everyone, making it difficult to use the One as a point of universal reference, even if that One were reduced to a luminous point.", *Visions from San Francisco Bay*, transl. Richard Lourie (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1982), p. 78).

²⁸ In the 28th canto of the *Paradiso*, vs. 16, Dante (who is about to enter the Empyrean) says:

only functions as the point of departure, but also as the point of destination for all beings. In the third part of *The Divine Comedy*, Dante and Beatrice together enter the sphere of light, the *alto lume*, in order to attain the “point of light” in the Empyrean. In a similar way, this mysterious “bright point” is the object of the poet’s metaphysical longing in Miłosz’s *Oczy*. Whereas in the poems discussed earlier *Stońce* and *Miasto bez imienia* the poet still expressed his attachment to *lux*, one can now see a clear concentration on the high *lumen*.

Highly significant in Miłosz’s formula “jeden jasny punkt” is the count noun *jeden* (“one”). It can be linked, firstly, with the concept of Unity (“the One”) and the important role of light symbolism in the neoplatonic philosophy of Plotinus, who saw the world as the result of an emanation of light, floating out of the One.²⁹ According to Plotinus’ concepts, this emanation of light from one single point was eventually to be reversed: all beings would go back to the Unity, in line with the well-known neoplatonic theory of *exitus* and *reditus* (going forth and returning). In Plotinus’ writings, which had a significant influence on medieval christian mysticism, this return to unity is not only situated on a metaphysical, but also on a mystical level (the so called *unio mystica* or *henoosis*). Obviously, the absorption of

un punto vidi che raggiava lume
acuto sì, che 'l viso ch'elli affoca
chiuder conviensi per lo forte acume

[(...) a point I saw, that darted light / So sharp, no lid, unclosing, may
bear up / Against its keenness.] (Dante, p. 443)

And further (vs. 40-42), giving the word to Beatrice:

La donna mia, che mi vedea in cura
forte sospeso, disse: ‘Da quel punto
depende il cielo e tutta la natura

[(...) The guide beloved /Saw me in anxious thought suspense, and
spake: / “Heaven, and all nature, hangs upon that point.”] (Dante, p.
443)

²⁹ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, “Licht und Erleuchtung. Erwägungen zu Stellung und Entwicklung des Themas in der abendländischen Geistesgeschichte,” *Studium Generale. Zeitschrift für die Einheit der Wissenschaften im Zusammenhang ihrer Begriffsbildungen und Forschungsmethoden*, no. 6, 1960.

the persona in Miłosz's poem by "one bright point" can be regarded as such an experience of – metaphysical or mystical – unification.³⁰

Neoplatonic philosophy and christian mystical tradition are, however, not the only intertextual frames of reference for the last verses of *Oczy*. Its content can also be related to the mystico-philosophical writings of Miłosz's relative and "spiritual master", the French poet Oscar Milosz. One of the key elements in the cosmology of Czesław Miłosz's relative is *le seul Lieu situé* ("the only situated place"). In his metaphysical treatise *Lumen* (translated by Miłosz), Oscar Milosz describes man's return to this "only situated point" in the following way:

Mais le moment éternel du Soleil de la Mémoire lavé dans le Jourdain d'humilité nous va saisir, et cette instantanéité divine nous conduira en la céleste Chanaan, la seule terre située. L'immobile Empyrée de Dante mon père, la sphère pure retombée dans l'unité originelle par la consécration du nombre Dix.³¹

[But the eternal moment of the Sun of Memory, washed in the Jordan of humility, is going to seize us, and this divine instantaneity will lead us into the celestial Canaan, the only situated land, / The immobile Empyrean of my father Dante, the pure sphere restored to its original unity by the consecration of the number Ten.]³²

The absorption by "one bright point" in Czesław Miłosz's poem *Oczy* (DP) can be equated with Oscar Milosz's "eternal moment of the Sun of Memory", taking mankind to Dante's Empyrean, "the sphere of original unity".

What this return to "original unity" actually means in Miłosz's late poetry, is clearly said in a long poem that was written in almost the same period as *Oczy*, viz. *Traktat teologiczny* (*Treatise on Theology*). An important part of the poem consists of cosmological speculations, in which Miłosz implicitly refers to the so called theory of transmutation of his relative Oscar Milosz. This theory draws on the concepts of medieval neoplatonic philosophers, such as Robert Grosseteste, and claims that the material world was created through a transmutation of divine light (*lumen*)

³⁰ Cf. Rudolf Bultmann, "Zur Geschichte der Lichtsymbolik im Altertum," *Philologus*, no. 97, 1948, p. 32.

³¹ See Oscar Milosz, *Ars Magna suivi de Les Origines Ibériques du Peuple Juif; L'Apocalypse de Saint-Jean Déchiffrée; La Clef de l'Apocalypse* (Paris: André Silvaire, 1961), pp. 74-75.

³² The translation is quoted from Oscar Milosz, *The Noble Traveller* (West Stock Bridge: The Lindisfarne Press, 1985), pp. 271-272.

into physical light (*lux*).³³ In the poem *Czeladnik (Apprentice)*, devoted to the memory of Oscar Miłosz, Czesław Miłosz explains this transmutation (*błysk*) in the following way:

Byłem bardzo młody, kiedy przygnębiała mnie wiecznie trwająca
materia
I czas rozciągający się wstecz i w przód nieskończenie,

Co sprzeciwiało się obrazowi Boga Stwórcy,
Bo co by robił w odwiecznym wszechświecie?

List do Storge przeczytałem jak objawienie,
Dowiadując się, że czas i przestrzeń mają swój początek,
Że pojawiły się w jednym błysku, razem z tak zwaną materią,
Dokładnie jak zgadywali średniowieczni szkolarze z Chartres i
Oxfordu,
Przez *transmutatio* boskiego światła w światło fizyczne.

Jakże zmieniło to moje wiersze, oddane kontemplacji czasu,
Zza którego odtąd przebierała wieczność,

[I was very young when I first felt depressed by the idea of eternally existing matter, / And of time stretching backward and forward forever. / It contradicted my image of God the Creator, / For what would he have to do in a universe everlasting? / So I read "The Letter to Storge" like a revelation, / Learning that time and space had a beginning, / That they appeared in a flash together with so-called matter, / Just as medieval scholars from Oxford to Chartres had guessed, / Through a *transmutatio* of divine light into light merely physical. / How much that changed my poems! They were dedicated to the contemplation of time / Behind which, since that moment, eternity transpired.]

In Miłosz's *Traktat teologiczny*, this peculiar view on the creation of the world is closely related to the problem of evil. The defectiveness of the created world is regarded as the result of the disruption of "divine unity" (provoked by the revolt and the fall of Lucifer and his followers):

Tak czy inaczej, anioł wielkiej piękności i siły zwrócił się
przeciwko niepojętej Jedności, ponieważ powiedział „Ja”,

³³ Oscar Miłosz's cosmology is discussed by Philip Sherrard, *Human Image: World Image. The Death and Resurrection of Sacred Cosmology* (Ipswich: Golgonooza Press, 1992), pp. 131-146.

co oznaczało odłączenie.

[Be that as it may, an angel of great beauty and strength turned against the incomprehensible Unity, for he uttered the word “I”, which meant separation.]

As Miłosz suggests further on, the imperfect character of the world is the result of a striving toward separation, “the will toward separate existence”:

Nie ma większej skazy na dziele rąk Boga, który powiedział „Tak”,
niż śmierć, czyli „Nie”, cień rzucony
przez wolę oddzielnego istnienia.

[There is no graver flaw in this oeuvre of the hands of the God who said “Yes” than this “No,” this death, a shadow cast by the will toward separate existence.]

Obviously, such a negative evaluation of “separate existence” can be sharply contrasted to the importance ascribed in a lot of Miłosz’s poems to the preservation of “particular beings”.

In *Oczy*, the tension between unity and individuality is, however, not resolved entirely in favor of unity. The fact that the persona has his gaze fixed on *jeden jasny punkt* (“one bright point”) and is gradually absorbed by it, does not mean that the value of individuality is totally neglected. The last verses of the poem suggest that the “tiny grain of dissimilarity” between people should live on, in spite of all their likenesses, in unity with the enlarging “one bright point”. The formula *ziarno niepodobieństwa* (“grain of dissimilarity”) in the third last verse of *Oczy* indicates that the process of unification with “one bright point” is actually understood as some kind of *apokatastasis pantoon*. Highly important in this respect is the fact that Oscar Miłosz’s theory of light transmutation also entails the possibility of an opposite transmutation, taking place at the end of times. In one of his interviews with Ewa Czarnecka, Miłosz refers to this idea of a reversed light transmutation in the following way: “Everything changes into light and in that way is saved. This is a hypothesis used by the cabalists and Oskar Miłosz to answer the question of how the resurrection of the body is possible. If the entire world is a transmutation of divine, nonphysical light, then, maybe when everything changes from physical to divine light, everything can be re-created in full detail.”³⁴ In other words, the orientation

³⁴ Czarnecka & Fiut, p. 275. The same idea is expressed in a prose text on resurrection in the poetry book *Nieobjęta ziemia (Unattainable Earth)*. Cf. Kris Van Heuckelom, “Między ‘czarną ziemią’ a ‘błyszczącym punktem’ ...,” pp. 232-233.

toward *lumen* in Miłosz's late poetry is only accepted under the condition that in this higher unity the *poszczególne istnienia* ("particular existences") will eventually be rescued: the high *lumen* should exist together with *perpetua lux*, the "level light" in its eternalized (or transmuted) form.

Finally, special attention should be paid to the participle *zapatrzony* ("a fixed gaze"). It has a very specific meaning in *Oczy* and should be semantically linked to the motif of "pure seeing" in Miłosz's late poetry. Some late poems by Miłosz such as *To jedno* (*This only*) express the desire for a pure, desubjectivized observation of reality, in order to overcome the gap between object and subject. In his contact with the world, the poet should disconnect his own "I" and fix his gaze entirely on the beings that surround him:

Chce jednej tylko, drogocennej rzeczy:
Być samym czystym patrzeniem bez nazwy,
Bez oczekiwań, lęków i nadziei,
Na granicy gdzie kończy się ja i nie-ja.

[He wants only one, most precious thing: / To see, purely and simply, without name, / Without expectations, fears, or hopes, / At the edge where there is no I or not-I.]

This idea of disconnecting the poet's subjectivity in his observation of the world also has an important extra-literary dimension in Miłosz's late poetry. Such a kind of "pure looking", freed from the own "I", seems to be the kind of perception that characterized man in Paradise before the rupture of primal unity. This motif appears, for instance, in the late poem *Ja (I)*, describing the state of mankind before the Fall:

Nie było Ja. Było zapatrzenie.
Ziemia dopiero co wydobyta z odmętu.
Trawa jaskrawozielona. Brzeg rzeki, tajemniczy.
I niebo, na którym słońce znaczy miłość.

[There was no "I". Only wonder. / The earth just lifted out of chaos. / Grass intensely green, riverbank mysterious. / And a sky in which the sun means love.]

The meaning of this "pure seeing" or "gazing" is also clearly emphasized in another late poem of Miłosz, *Uczciwe opisanie samego siebie nad szklanką whisky na lotnisku, dajmy na to w Minneapolis* (*An Honest Description of Myself with a Glass of Whiskey at an Airport, Let us Say, in Minneapolis*). The speaking subject expects that after his death he will be gifted with the

capacity of disinterested contemplation and will turn into a pure act of seeing:

Jeżeli po śmierci dostanę się do Nieba, musi tam być jak tutaj, tyle że pozbędę się tępych zmysłów i ociężałych kości.

Zmieniony w samo patrzenie, będę dalej pochłaniał proporcje ludzkiego ciała, kolor irysów, paryską ulicę w czerwcu o świcie, całą niepojętą, niepojętą mnogość widzialnych rzeczy.

[If I should accede one day to Heaven, it must be there as it is here, except that I will be rid of my dull senses and my heavy bones. / Changed into pure seeing, I will absorb, as before, the proportions of human bodies, the color of irises, a Paris street in June at dawn, all of it incomprehensible, incomprehensible the multitude of visible things.]

The act of seeing in Heaven would then have the same form as in Paradise, before the Fall. The human "I" (or eye!) still exists, but it is fully directed to the Other and turns into a pure act of seeing. Sight stops being something that divides man from the surrounding world. The formula *zapatrzony* in the final part of *Oczy* can be closely linked to this motif of "pure seeing", in which the I is detached from its subjectivity.

The allusions to Oscar Milosz's theory of light transmutation and the motif of "pure seeing" in the last verses of *Oczy* indicate the ultimate solution of the problem of multitude and unity that was so many times discussed in Miłosz's poetry. "Incomprehensible unity" (as it is called in *Traktat teologiczny*) will eventually be restored, but simultaneously, there will remain an "incomprehensible multitude" (as it is called in *Ucziwe opisanie samego siebie nad szklanką whisky na lotnisku, dajmy na to w Minneapolis*). On the one hand, the light transmutation at the end of times will guarantee the rescue of the multitude of "particular existences" (*perpetua lux*); on the other hand, the strategy of "pure seeing" will destroy the barrier between particular beings and will render a feeling of unity possible.

The considerations above clearly show that the late poem *Oczy* constitutes a very interesting synthesis of different aspects of visual experience in Miłosz's poetry. *Lux* and *lumen*, observation and speculation, "pure seeing" and *apokatastasis pantoon* (understood as a light transmutation) are all in some way at work in the poem. Moreover, an analysis of *Oczy* and some other important poems by Miłosz indicates that his poetry links up in a fundamental way with the tradition of European ocularcentrism. The poet not only seems to accept the traditional primacy of visual experience above the other senses, but he also makes original use of

the main oppositions that constantly return in the tradition of European ocularcentrism (*lux* and *lumen*). The poet's attachment to *lux* expresses his desire to preserve all "Minute Particulars", whereas the orientation toward *lumen* symbolizes the poet's attempt to overcome the limitations of human existence (the separatedness of Self and Other). The late poem *Oczy* suggests the way in which both opposites could eventually be saved in some way, without losing one of them in favor of the other.