The Catholic Imagination of Czeslaw Milosz

Artur Sebastian Rosman

A dissertation
submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington
2014

Reading Committee:
Leroy Searle, Chair
Douglas Collins
Eugene Webb
James Wellman

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:
Comparative Literature

University of Washington

Abstract

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Chair of the Supervisory Committee:
Professor Leroy Searle
Comparative Literature

This dissertation will argue, using a unique hermeneutic model, for interpreting the poetic work of Nobelist Czeslaw Milosz as thoroughly permeated by a Catholic imagination. The introduction will outline a general theory of the imagination and how it has swerved from analogy (classically Catholic) into several types of analogy (Protestant, scientific, and literary) because of historical epistemological failures. The body of the

argument consists of three chapters that argue, following arguments made by the poet in his works, for the continuity of a religious poetic voice throughout his career. It does so by demonstrating the continuity of theological interest in the poems of Milosz's early, middle, and late period. Besides being a contribution to Milosz studies, the foregoing argument will also show how much contemporary literary theory is permeated by historically conditioned theological assumptions that are neither clearly acknowledged nor well understood.

The elaboration of an expanded conception of imagination in the introduction hinges on the recognition that "imagination" is not sufficiently apprehended as a psychological power or function nor an epistemological premise, since it is inculcated through many elements and practices to constitute a worldview. Central to this conception is a parallel expansion of the idea of the liturgical, not restricted to elements of commonly identified as religious, but including them as indexical and accessible, playing multiple roles in axiological contexts, circumstances of reflection or judgment, and the inhabitation of a world as communally constituted and continued. The historical dimension is treated, albeit schematically, to illustrate that there is no contradiction in there being *multiple* imaginations, with the primary focus for the subject of concern here the Catholic imagination.

The focus on the example and the work Nobel laureate Czeslaw Milosz is crucial. My central claim is that Milosz, an unmistakably powerful and influential poetic voice in the modern world, is very commonly read and critically commented upon without sufficient attention either to his life-long concern with religious, frequently theological

issues, but to an encompassing Catholic imagination that is a major shaping element throughout his career.

The chapters in this dissertation take on multiple critical purposes, to frame the issues so as to make clear both how a specifically Catholic imagination can be discerned and understood, and to provide critical commentary and analysis of selected major poems, from his earliest to his latest. In the concluding chapter, the subject is Milosz's long poem, late in his career, "A Treatise on Theology", itself possibly unique in recent literature. My concern will be to show that this is *not* as the title appears, a mixing of genres, but an explicit and eloquent address to the union of poetry and religious life, neither doctrinaire nor defensive in embracing the historical community and communion of Catholicism. It exemplifies poetry not as merely craft, but as a profound way of thinking.

Chapter One, "Visibility and the Catholic Imagination," starts with an extended account of the visual culture of the dialectical-Protestant imagination. Such an account helps to flesh out the analogous structures involved in forming both Catholic and Protestant imaginations and proves that the latter has a rich historical imagination. This then leads into an explanation of how and why the Catholic imagination differs from dialectical imaginations (Protestant, scientific, and literary) in the emphasis it puts upon man and the world as immanent analogues of the transcendent. This unique accent upon the visible world as an analogue for God is explored in the following early Milosz poems: "Encounter," "The Sun," "Faith," "Hope," "Love," "The Spirit of History," and "*Esse*."

Chapter 2, "Breakdowns of Analogy and Cafeteria Manicheanism," discusses poems of Milosz's middle period and their interpretation of breakdowns in the analogical imagination caused by developments in the sciences, literature, and theology. It pays special attention to the poet's development of the category of Manicheanism. It argues that Milosz is not a Manichean himself, even though his writing, especially in this period, is colored by Manichean categories. The analysis of the poems "Veni Creator," "To Robinson Jeffers," "To Raja Rao," and "The Accuser" (a section from the poem "From the Rising of the Sun") demonstrates how the poet picks and chooses Manichean categories in order to highlight the areas where analogical thinking is breaking down. His selectively descriptive, rather than prescriptive, use of Manicheanism is the reason why this chapter resorts to calling him a "Cafeteria Manichean." Special attention is paid to Milosz's use of Eucharistic images that counter what he calls "Neo-Manichean" historical trends.

Chapter 3, "Analogy and the Problem of the Good," discusses Milosz's late poems with an emphasis upon the problem of the good. These poems tend to thematize the goodness of the world and man much more frequently than the poems from the poet's early and middle periods. The poems "Bypassing Rue Descartes," "Realism," "Unde Malum," and "Presence" are analyzed from this angle with special emphasis put upon the theological concept of the communion of saints.

The Conclusion, "Yet I Sing With Them," is an analysis of the last two sections of the late poem "Treatise on Theology." This work is singled out because it is Milosz's final poetic treatise. As such, it gathers up all the theological themes we have discussed in poems from his middle, early, and late periods and thereby confirms the poet's thesis that

there is a specifically religious thematic continuity to all of his poetry. The “Treatise on Theology” also advances the importance of participating in a historical religious community and the power of beauty to foster an analogical imagination. These last two themes were only present rarely or implicitly in the earlier poems.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my loving wife Monika for her unfaltering love and saintly strength.

I would also like to dedicate this work my parents, Anna and Adam Rosman, for all the invaluable help they've provided along the way.

Acknowledgements

I would also like acknowledge my mentors and teachers, who have given me the skills and support to accomplish the task of writing this dissertation. Special thanks go to Leroy Searle who made me believe I could finish this dissertation and guided me through every step. I cannot begin to list all the gifts and wisdom his patient presence has bestowed upon me. I would also like to thank Eugene Webb and Douglas Collins for the intellectual armory they provided me with to conceive such an undertaking. And I thank Herbert Blau (memory eternal) for the heart he gave me to face up to my task.

Countless friends have helped me with their encouragement and more. My heartfelt gratitude to all of you. You know who you are. I would like to single out Steve Nantz, Anthony Gromko, Jean-Francois Garneau, and Ben Olsen.

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Introduction:

How Does the Catholic Imagination Supplement Literary Theory?

Anyone who has read more than one book by the Polish Nobel laureate Czeslaw Milosz (1911-2004) is familiar with the following words from another Nobel prize winner, the Russian Joseph Brodsky: "I have no hesitation whatsoever in stating that Czeslaw Milosz is one of the greatest poets of our time, perhaps the greatest." This statement appears on the back cover of just about every volume of Milosz's poems and essays. This praise is a bald assertion, but one might ask, given the absence of context for Brodsky's statement, "How and why is Milosz one of the greatest poets of our time?" This study will argue that Milosz's poetry is a form of thinking—as serious as any philosophy, theology, or literary theory—that carries a heavier intellectual load than competing forms of thought. Milosz was aware of this and said in his *A Treatise on Poetry*,

> Novels and essays serve but will not last.
>
> One clear stanza can take more weight
>
> Than a whole wagon of elaborate prose.[1]

Carrying weight for the sake of carrying weight might be satisfying for aficionados of weightlifting, but it remains to be seen just *what sort of weight* Milosz's poetry carries.

What this study will argue is that the poetry of Czeslaw Milosz attempts to carry the burden of discussing profound changes in the intellectual landscape of the last five hundred years, particularly as they continue to be manifest in the present. It systematically returns to problems caused by the collapse of the thought-world of medieval Catholicism and the

[1] Czeslaw Milosz, *A Treatise on Poetry*, trans. Robert Haas and Czeslaw Milosz (New York: Ecco, 2001) 1.

emergence of the Reformation, the Scientific Revolution, and the development of literary studies. Here is how the Milosz outlines the scope of the problems he diagnoses:

> Instead of leaving to theologians their worries, I have constantly meditated on religion [in my poetry]. Why? Simply because *someone* had to do this… I lived in a time when a huge change in the contents of the human imagination was occurring. In my lifetime Heaven and Hell disappeared, the belief in life after death was considerably weakened [and so on]… After two thousand years in which a huge edifice of creeds and dogmas has been erected, from Origen and Saint Augustine to Thomas Aquinas and Cardinal Newman, when every work of the human mind and of human hands was created within a system of reference, the age of homelessness has dawned. How could I not think of this?[2]

From this it becomes apparent that the story Milosz irrepressibly wants to tell about modernity, roughly the period that emerges with the Protestant Reformation and the Scientific Revolution in the 16th and 17th centuries, will be tied up with the collapse of the Catholic "system of reference," what we will later call a "Catholic religious imagination."[3]

One of the things that Milosz criticism has consistently overlooked is how much Milosz writes from within this system of reference; in other words, his poetry is pervasively marked by a Catholic imagination. Above he said, "I have constantly meditated upon religion," but this makes the relationship between his work and theology sound too extrinsic. The introduction, "A

[2] Czeslaw Milosz, *Roadside Dog*, trans. Robert Hass and Czeslaw Milosz (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998) 105.

[3] We will shortly explore how we are using the concept of the imagination, with citation of sources, especially in note 8, upon which I have drawn, because it differs considerably from the theories of Kant, the German Romantics, and Coleridge, which have received almost exclusive attention in recent academic research.

Footnote, Many Years Later," to his *Selected and Last Poems: 1931-2004* gives us an essential corrective. There he asserts an "internal logic that connects [the] earliest poems [I] wrote [from] the age of twenty with [the] poems of [my] maturity and old age."[4] He explains this internal logic as the outworking of a "Catholic upbringing [that] implanted in [him] a respect for all things, visible, connected by the property of being, or *esse*, that calls for unceasing admiration" (xix). We will explore this in more depth as this introduction unfolds. Early and late, he is working from a Catholic analogical imagination that puts unusually heavy emphasis upon the presence of God in the world in a way that is perhaps unique among world religions—at the very least, unique among Western Christian traditions. These reflections from "A Footnote, Many Year Later" ultimately lead Milosz to characterize his poetic enterprise as theological:

> The history of the twentieth century encouraged many poets to seek images that could convey their moral protest. Yet it is very difficult to bear the knowledge, the weight, of facts and not yield to the temptation of becoming a reporter. A certain astuteness is called for in choosing our means, and a sort of distillation of materials, so as to acquire the perspective that lets us contemplate the things of this world without delusions. I wouldn't be exaggerating if I said that, for me, such contemplation acquired a religious dimension (xix).

The topics and symbols Milosz "distills" from the "weight of facts," are the result of an imagination shaped within a specific tradition and the worldview it inculcates. This aspect of his

[4] Czeslaw Milosz, *Selected and Last Poems: 1931-2004*, trans. Anthony Milosz et al. (New York: Ecco, 2011) 94. NOTA BENE: All subsequent passages from Milosz's poetry will be taken from this volume with the page number cited in parentheses within the body of the text. Poems taken from other collections will receive standard footnoting.

poetic output has not received due attention in either Polish or English criticism. Polish studies of his work often tend to take this fundamental dimension of his poems for granted, while American studies ignore it for the most part.[5] One of the other major aims of this study is to confirm Milosz's theological-continuity-thesis by analyzing poems from three periods of his life: early (1936-1959), middle (1960-1979), and late (1980-2004). Our analysis will seek to confirm that the thematic unity Milosz proposed in this late essay reflects what is found in the poems themselves from beginning to end, rather than being a projection of old age and fear of death. The approach of confirming a theological continuity throughout all the Polish poet's work has not been tried, so far as I know, in any previous study of his poetry.

At this point, the reader might be rightfully tempted to ask the following questions: 'How does such a study belong within the discipline of comparative literature? Can we not stick to the poems themselves and explain their linguistic intricacies and affective power? Perhaps this study ought to be submitted to a theology department, or at least a comparative religion department?' These are all fair questions. Answering them will take us through a description of a long historical arc that will explain how the partial collapse of medieval Catholicism not only led to the Reformation, but also the Scientific Revolution, *and* the 19th century emergence of literary

[5] Lukasz Tischner, Sekrety Manichiejskich Trucizn [Secrets of Manichean Posions] (Krakow: ZNAK, 2001) is typical of Polish studies. He concentrates upon the Manichean leitmotifs in Milosz work and how they relate to the problem of evil. What Tischner's argument ignores is the Catholic background of the poet's work. If the book were to be done from the perspective proposed in this study then it would argue for a "Cafeteria Manicheanism" in Milosz's poems. That is, Milosz picks and chooses Manichean motifs (heavily dialectical) in order to show the places where the Catholic analogical imagination is breaking down. The most representative American study is Leonard Nathan and Arthur Quinn, *The Poet's Work: An Introduction to Czeslaw Milosz* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1991). Like most American studies this one is largely biographical. This study accentuates the poet's unique historical experience and subordinates the poems to the historical experience. It therefore does not foreground the unfamiliar but constant theological component of the poems and the imagination behind them.

criticism as disciplines independent of the older theological tradition.[6] Milosz is clearly aware of this historical arc, because his poems and essays, as we have already glimpsed, are an exploration of its origins and the problems that have emerged from them.

Before we can proceed to explore the historical arc, we first need to flesh out the concept of the "imagination." This concept will be used in this study to describe how Czeslaw Milosz treats the collapse of medieval Catholicism and the subsequent emergence of the Reformation, the Scientific Revolution, literary studies, and finally, the state of contemporary Catholicism. Our working definition for the concept of the "imagination" is as follows: *an imagination is a liturgically inculcated worldview that structures a way of life*. The concept of "liturgy," as it will be used throughout this study, denotes a set of normative beliefs and practices that are inculcated through repetitive *praxis*, within a community.[7] By this definition the imagination is not insulated against doctrine and practice into some fanciful imaginary realm; instead, those two dimensions of existence are integrated into our understanding of what the imagination is. The imagination always includes doctrine, because there is always a dynamic interplay between beliefs, practices, and creativity. They play off of each other.

Our definition of liturgy also swerves from commonplace definitions of liturgy, because it does not limit itself to religious ritual. Although it very much includes religious ritual, it also includes secular liturgies. For example, the curriculum of graduate students in humanities departments is one example of a secular liturgy. The students participate in practices that form

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[6] My analysis owes a great deal to one particular book: Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2012), especially the final chapter where he summarizes his findings, "Conclusion: Against Nostalgia," 365-388.

[7] Later on in this introduction it will become apparent that the beliefs and practices change over time as they adopt to new historical moments, however, for the most part, they maintain some ideational and practical identity with earlier manifestation. Hence, we can speak of a development of imaginations much in the same way as John Henry Newman talked about the development of doctrine. It should become more obvious that the development of doctrine is contained within the notion of imagination as defined for the purposes of this study.

their imaginations into a worldview with definite contours. This is accomplished through students reading, discussing, and writing about an implicit canon of texts (i.e. de Saussure, Adorno, Foucault, Derrida, Kristeva, Said, Butler, and so on) in graduate humanities programs across the United States and elsewhere. The habits of mind acquired by graduate students are then applied to writing conference papers, other publications, and ultimately in the pursuit of tenure. But the whole complex of these practices shapes the imagination which is then applied to life outside the text, for example, in certain types of community organization, coffeehouse culture, political protest, and choices made in family formation, and so on: the list is virtually endless.

The training of a soldier's imagination through a military liturgy is perhaps a more obvious example. It includes specific beliefs and codes of conduct that spill outside the barracks and the battlefield. They modulate the everyday life of a soldier whose mannerisms, ways of comporting him or herself in the civilian world, ways of dressing and grooming, can be readily recognized by those who have never partaken in military training. In summary, the combination of continual liturgical training and practice creates a worldview—any worldview; it is only most apparent, and perhaps most conscious, in religious liturgical formation. The training of an imagination aims at a liturgically inculcated worldview that leads to a "distillation of materials" as Milosz called it. This distillation privileges certain sets of actions and ways of thinking, which constitute a worldview that is potentially recognizable in word, deed, and even bodily comportment of a person who is shaped by a particular imagination. It is more than a set of beliefs, it is a way of life.[8]

[8] The understanding of the imagination as a liturgically shaped worldview owes its inspiration to the work of religious scholars James K.A. Smith, William T. Cavanaugh, and the historian of philosophy Pierre Hadot. See: Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1995)

Finally, there is the training of the scientist. Science involves an inculcated worldview as much as religion, graduate study, and soldiering. Note, however, that calling attention to what is an obvious parallel with "liturgy" can easily become a flashpoint for controversy. In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* Thomas Kuhn explains these underpinnings of scientific practice:

> "Normal science" means research firmly based upon one or more past scientific achievements, achievements that some particular scientific community acknowledges for a time as supplying the foundation for its further practice.[9]

In his "Postscript-1969", Kuhn goes on to remark that adherence to a paradigm includes not only such foundational concrete achievements, but a "disciplinary matrix" as "the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community."[10]

Most of the controversy connected with this book had to do with Kuhn's account of paradigm changes. Kuhn said about this process that "the transfer of allegiance from paradigm to paradigm is a conversion experience that cannot be forced."[11] The word conversion seems to

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and William T. Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011). James K.A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013) 31-32 gives a formulation of the imagination that is in line with the one we will be working with in this study on Milosz, "Much of our action is not the fruit of conscious deliberation; instead, much of what we do grows out of our passional orientation to the world—affected by all the ways we're been primed to perceive the world. In short, our action emerges from how we *imagine* the world. What we do is driven by who we are, by the kind of person we have become. And that shaping of our character is, to a great extent, the effect of stories that have captivated us, that have sunk into our bones—stories that 'picture' what we think life is about, what constitutes the 'good life.' We live *into* the stories we've absorbed; we become characters in the drama that has captivated us. Thus, much of our action is acting out a kind of script that has unconsciously capture out imaginations. And such stories capture our imagination precisely because narrative trains our emotions, and those emotions actually condition our perception of the world."

[9] Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2012) 10.

[10] Ibid, 175.

[11] Ibid., 150.

have been a particular stumbling block for Israel Scheffler who charged that Kuhn's account of the "adoption of a scientific theory an intuitive or mystical affair."[12] The aversion to applying religious categories is typical among those who responded to Kuhn critically. Yet once brought to the foreground, notice how much Kuhn's description of "normal science" *is* analogous to the workings of religious liturgy, that is, how much "achievements that some particular scientific community acknowledges for a time as supplying the foundation for its further practice" are a liturgically inculcated worldview which is changed in a scientific revolution, a point Kuhn explicitly makes.[13]

The liturgies of the scientist, graduate student, and of the solider are analogous in how they function and how they inculcate a world view about the optimal way of proceeding through life by repetitive actions and ways of thinking. In addition, there is no reason why they cannot meet within one person who might a graduate student in the sciences within an ROTC program. Things can get even more complicated when the same person is a religious believer as well. Milosz's poetry demonstrates that due to historical developments, different liturgies either harmonize or compete with each other for the heart and mind of the person they inculcate. For example, in "A Treatise on Poetry" he says,

> Many a man will concede, if he knows himself,
> That he was like one who hears a chorus
> Of voices and doesn't know what they mean.
> Thence, fury. A foot to the accelerator, as if
> Speed could save us from voices and phantoms.
> We trailed everywhere an invisible rope

[12] See: Israel Scheffler, *Science and Subjectivity* (Cambridge, MA: Hackett, 1982) 18.
[13] Kuhn, *Structure,* chapter X: "Revolutions as Changes in World View," 111-135.

And felt its hook deep inside us every moment.[14]

The influence of the "chorus of voices" is like the influence of various liturgies that inescapably influence an individual's way of life and cannot be escaped. This is the case because they bind a person to an invisible rope that goes into the very marrow of their being, into their fleshly existence like a hook attached to an "invisible rope." Liturgies transform our being and therefore cannot be evaded; they are the furniture of our minds. At most, new liturgies can be consciously chosen and cultivated while struggling against the influences of the other liturgies. The challenge of negotiating the demands of competing liturgies, a process that is called discernment in religious practice, is one of the main challenges of our hyper-pluralistic late modern culture. What we have outlined above is a synchronic account of how an imagination works. The model is analogical because it accounts for the fundamental structural similarities in how imaginations are shaped. However, each imagination, or combination of imaginations, will shape an individual uniquely. This means that an individual would be a different person if they were subject to the inculcation of a different liturgy, or sets of liturgies. Ultimately, the differences in the worldviews and practices liturgies inculcate are fundamental for the shaping of personhood.

It is a testament to Milosz's poetry, however, that it is also concerned with the diachronic development of imaginations. His poetry provides a genealogy of the contemporary situation and its roots in medieval Catholicism's partial collapse and the problems these developments pose for a contemporary Catholic imagination. Once again, it might seem strange to the reader to put so much emphasis upon questions of belief in a comparative literature study. However, there is good reason for this emphasis: there is both a theological background to literary criticism and

[14] Czeslaw Milosz, *A Treatise on Poetry*, trans. Czeslaw Milosz and Robert Hass (New York: Ecco, 2001) 59.

there is also an implicitly theological dimension to it. It is, in this respect, already a part of our religious as well as our intellectual and cultural history.

We must take the long diachronic road of establishing a genealogy before we can fully explain from where this theological dimension of literary criticism and our contemporary pluralistic situation originates. Milosz can help here as well. The stanza from "A Treatise on Poetry" we analyzed above for its explanation of the synchronic dimensions of the imagination is preceded by a stanza that gives us a wider diachronic vista,

> There is much with which to reproach us.
> Given the choice, we rejected peaceful silence
> And long meditation on the structure of the world
> Which deserves respect. Neither the eternal moment
> Attracted us as it should, nor purity of style.

He continues by explaining the motivations behind this civilizational choice,

> We wanted, instead, to move as words move,
> Raising the dust of names and of events.
> We didn't care enough that they disappear
> In a thousand sparks and we with them. Even
> The disrepute we have taken on ourselves
> Was not completely far from our designs,
> And so, though unwillingly, we pay the price.[15]

[15] Ibid., 58-59.

This is the poet's rough outline of what the transition from the medieval world to the modern world entailed. It involved a choice against the "long meditation on the structure of the world" and a movement into properly modern historical consciousness "Raising the dust of names and of events." Note how this passage is analogous to the passages in "A Footnote, Many Years Later," where Milosz talks about his "Catholic upbringing [that] implanted in [him] a respect for all things, visible, connected by the property of being, or *esse*, that calls for unceasing admiration" (xix). The respect that calls forth admiration is what "A Treatise on Poetry" calls "meditation upon the structure of the world," which is related to the "eternal moment," that is, epiphanies of the transcendent (God) within the very immanence of this world. This close interplay between the transcendent (God) and the immanent (man, world) is one that calls forth analogies between these realms. These are the hallmarks of what we will call the Catholic imagination.

The Catholic analogical imagination will be our diachronic starting point, simply because it chronologically precedes the Reformation, Scientific Revolution, and literary studies. We will also argue that the emergence of the latter movements came from a long series of dialectical responses to the abuses of analogy. These responses are characterized by a dialectical emphasis upon transcendence (God) over and against the immanent (man, world). The Reformation was a dialectical response to medieval Catholicism, in the sense of emphasizing God's transcendence in order to protest against immanent moral, institutional, and epistemological failures. The success of the Scientific Revolution was in part the result of a dialectical response to the post-Reformation (and Counter-Reformation) Wars of Religion (1524-1648). Finally, the emergence of literary studies was a dialectical response to the Scientific Revolution. We will do our best to fill out the complicated details of these dialectical responses

when we describe each of them. We shall call this intricate process of deploying dialectical responses to perceived moral, institutional, and epistemological failures "the weaves of transcendence." Lastly, our phenomenology of the weaves of transcendence—the successive transitions from the pre-modern to the modern and lastly to the late modern—will use the categories God, man, world to help us characterize how the imaginations that emerged from these weaves function. These three categories despite, but also by virtue of, their broadness will help us build up a picture of each of the four successive imaginations by what they emphasize and also what they deemphasize.

The Catholic imagination closely relates the three categories of God, world, and man through analogies. Analogies should not be confused with complete one-to-one identification of these three categories. A complete identification would result in a pantheistic system. However, unlike the dialectical imagination, which stresses the differences between the transcendent and the immanent, the analogical imagination puts emphasis upon the similarities between God, world, and man. The theological reading of the creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 is what undergirds this imagination. If creation (man and world, the immanent sphere) emerges, is sustained, and continually participates in God, then it is in some way analogous, that is, stamped with his imprint and presence. That is the reason why somebody like Milosz, shaped by a Catholic imagination might say that *esse* (being) is worthy of admiration.

Thomas Aquinas, the most representative figure of the Catholic theological imagination, and a decisive figure in the intellectual development of Czeslaw Milosz,[16] says the following about God and being, "So God is present everywhere in everything… Since existence itself is what God is by nature, he it must be who causes existence in creatures. Now existence is more

[16] This will become apparent in our discussion of the poems in the body of this study.

intimately and profoundly interior to things than anything else; everything else is potential compared to existence."[17] In the late poem "Presence," which we will fully analyze in the last chapter of this study, Milosz combines this insight from Aquinas (via St. Paul) when talking about his experience of the world and the communion of saints as "rising within one enormous unknowable Being" (273). The capitalization of "Being" is a clear sign that he is invoking the most characteristically Thomistic name for God. Along with this, he signals his Catholic imagination by emphasizing God's constant presence to man and the world precisely *through* man and the world.

Since we have mentioned the communion of saints, we should talk about its roots. According to Genesis 1:27 human beings are made in the "image and likeness" of God; therefore they are eminently connected to the divine, through an explicit, though often muted, anthropomorphism present in the Old Testament. This anthropomorphism grows exponentially with the incarnation of God in a man, Jesus, in the New Testament. The anthropomorphism of the Catholic imagination, which grows out of this scriptural tradition, expresses itself in a set of practices and a material culture that give shape and historical density to particular frameworks for imagination. This point is particularly important, since the impact of a Catholic imagination upon poetry, while not itself a direct exercise in theological or ecclesiastical discourse, does allow, and in the specific case of Milosz, insists upon the continuity between poetry and religious issues and observance as the most direct and fully grounded way to link both to the broader analogies by which poetry and religion give communal extent and historical depth to a comprehensive and expandable way of life.

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[17] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation*, trans. Timothy McDermott (Westminster, MA: Christian Classics, 1989) 22.

This Catholic liturgy is most closely associated with the notion of a "communion of saints." The communion of saints is a belief that highlights the lives of certain individuals who are held out as examples for the religious community at large to imitate.[18] Usually, these are people who are singled out after their death in a long process of canonization that confirms the exemplary nature of their witness. Saints function as mediators of grace to those who are still living. In this way, the human community of believers in Catholicism extends beyond the boundaries of earthly time through the mediation of the saints, instead of being an unmediated relationship between the believer and God, as it tends be in most forms of Protestantism. It should be added that there are also extraordinary examples of individuals who unofficially are believed to possess saintly status even while they are alive.[19] Mother Theresa of Calcutta is the most conspicuous recent example of such a person. Here is how Milosz contrasts the Catholic imagination with the Protestant imagination:

> In Protestant Christianity, there is no place for them [the departed, their presence, their examples], and no one turns to the dead with a plea for intervention. Catholicism, however, by introducing the intercession of the saints and multiplying the number of saints and beatified people, presumes that these good spirits are not separated from the living by an impassible boundary. That is why Polish All Souls' Days, although its origins are located far back in the time of

[18] There is, of course, much more elaborate discussion of other ways of considering both the communion and adoration of the saints, still a very lively subject of scholarly discussion. See especially Eamon Duffy's review essay, "The Intense Afterlife of the Saints" in *The New York Review of Books* LXI, no. 11 (June 19, 2014), 59-62.

[19] Czeslaw's uncle Oscar was an example of a living saint. Milosz also put a lot of store in the words of deceased people who were not officially recognized as saints, individuals such as Simone Weil and Fyodor Dostoevsky. There is a third class of saints, ordinary anonymous people whose actions (usually ritual) whose example was upbuilding, to whom Milosz turned in his poems.

> pagan animism, received the blessing of the Church as a great ritual intercession.[20]

Since in this essay Milosz was concerned with describing the Catholic imagination he did not go into the details why Protestant Christianity found "no place" for the communion of saints.

We can fill this lacuna by explaining the first, and most crucial, weave of transcendence: the emergence of a Protestant imagination was a dialectical response to medieval abuses of the communion of saints, the ecclesial institutions connected to it, and the epistemological consequences of their failures. Even though the Reformation occupies a central role in the West's self-understanding, there was nothing inevitable about the emergence of churches that came to identify themselves as Protestant, "No one seems to have anticipated the revolution. And perhaps this is because, whatever it subsequently turned into, and whatever unfolded in its wake, it was not—at least at first—intended as any kind of revolution at all."[21] It was not intended to be a revolution, because even Luther's seemingly radical gesture of nailing his theses to the Wittenberg cathedral door was part of a long medieval tradition of initiating disputes about doctrine and church practice. Many theses had been nailed to cathedral doors long before Luther did so. The whole controversy began over abuses related to the sale of indulgences. In other words, the communion of saints whose deposit of grace was packaged out through indulgences was the bone of contention between various factions within the Catholic Church. The inflexibility of the Vatican led to the hardening of positions and ultimately a break between the

[20] Czeslaw Milosz, *Milosz's ABC's*, trans. Madeleine Levine (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2001) 312.
[21] Jonathan Wright, *Heretics: The Creation of Christianity from the Gnostics to the Modern Church* (New York: Houghton Milton Harcourt, 2011) 161.

Roman Church and a loose unaffiliated collection of groups that came to be called, collectively and polemically, by the Roman Catholics as Protestants.

The earliest phase of the Reformation, the Lutheran, rejected the communion of saints, instead opting for a more direct, unmediated connection to God. There was a corresponding crackdown, but not a total rejection, of images in churches, because most of those were related to the communion of saints. Luther's understanding of the priesthood of all believers also further cut ties with the world and man, instead proposing to individual believers a simplified, less mediated relationship to God. Scripture alone was to be the authority of Christian conduct. Correspondingly, clergy lost most of their mediatory functions, because the laity could address a more transcendent God directly. A wholly other God did not need human institutions to reach believers. He could thereby circumvent what Milosz called "the structure of the world." Luther's concept of God, and even more so Calvin's, stressed God's transcendence dialectically over and against a sinful world and humanity. This opposition between the transcendent (God) and the immanent (man, world) is what we will call the dialectical (or Protestant) imagination. Because the Reformation was a gradual process that developed at different speeds and with specific histories, the remnants of analogy and emphasis upon dialectics still vary from Protestant denomination to denomination. For example, the Anglican Church maintains a surprisingly large amount of the following: veneration of images, devotion to saints, and priestly privileges that are usually associated with Catholic clergy. On the other hand, most of the Christians associated with Calvinist traditions and the Zwinglian Radical Reformation retain almost none of those. Therefore, Milosz is not entirely correct in claiming there is "no place" for the dead and the saints in Protestant traditions. There is in some, even if it is to a lesser degree than in Catholicism.

Our brief and necessarily incomplete description of how this internal reform turned into a revolution should already hint at the processes that have led to the proliferation of Protestant denominations down to our day. They unleashed a complicated set of unexpected processes. As Brad S. Gregory puts it, "The unintended problem created by the Reformation was therefore not simply a perpetuation of the inherited and still-present challenge of how to make human life more genuinely Christian, but also the new and compounding problem of how to know what true Christianity was. 'Scripture alone' was not a solution to this new problem, but its cause."[22] Instead of leading to unity "scripture alone" led to sets of incompatible readings that produced incompatible confessional imaginations and liturgies. This Protestant fissiparousness was further compounded by opposition from Rome, all of which created an extremely volatile political situation that led to the bloody Wars of Religion (1524-1648). The end result of the Wars of Religion was a thoroughgoing skepticism about religious claims among the political and intellectual elites of Europe. This is where another swerve of transcendence occurs. It ironically paves the way to the partial eclipse of God in the Western collective imagination.

Great scientific advances simultaneously complicated and intensified religious turmoil on the Continent, in the gradual emergence of a competing world view, from what we now too simply call 'The Scientific Revolution.' The elegance of universally applicable mathematical formulas for harnessing the power of the world and offering mechanical models of it, starkly contrasted with the messy particularities of religious parties that only weakened the political consensus. In the poem "Bypassing Rue Descartes," ironically named after one of the main theoreticians of 17th century, Milosz captures, and recapitulates in his own biography, some of the power that these advances must have had for those who were first encountering them, "I had

[22] Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*, op. cit., 368.

left the cloudy provinces behind, / I entered the universal, dazzled and desiring" (175). Leaving the "cloudy provinces" behind is in fact a type of transcendence. It is the act of cutting oneself loose from the troublesome particularities of specific societies.

What Milosz describes is actually a double transcendence comparable to the effect of the Scientific Revolution. First, the Scientific Revolution desired to transcend the imponderable questions about God (the ultimate transcendence) by methodically bracketing them out only to eventually completely abandon them—even though, many of the principal figures (including Descartes) presumed that the way ahead would require no such abandonment. Second, to some extent, science also aimed to transcend the world of men (within the immanent sphere according to our model) by positing a universally verifiable method that everyone could agree upon, with the difficult irony that a search for complete generality and therefore the universality of 'scientific' truths preserved the desire for a universality clearly analogous to the desire for knowledge of God, while setting up human reason as if it could take the form of intellectual intuition—and thereby displace the ambiguities of faith The following passage from Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* can remind us how profound an epistemological crisis touched the 17th century, "I will suppose then, that everything I see is spurious. I will believe that what my memory tells me lies, and that none of the things that it reports ever happened. I have no senses. Body, shape, extension, movement and place are chimeras. So what remains true? Perhaps just the one fact that nothing is certain."[23] Here we have a thoroughgoing skepticism that grows out of religious historical trends we have explored above. The combination of scientific examination of regular natural laws through mathematical quantification was proposed as the solution to these problems. It paid dividends in the form of immense technological

[23] Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) 16. Not that philosophy has managed to overcome these doubts in subsequent centuries. The problems have become even more acute.

advances that eventually trickled down and helped to transform and prolong the lives of millions, then billions. But it led more immediately to Descartes' more celebrated pronouncement in his *Discourse on Method,* that the one thing certain was the existence of the cogito as a "thinking substance." The proviso that allowed development, however, was the corresponding 'ontological proof' of the existence of God as an inherently rational creator who would not attempt to deceive us when we sought "clear and distinct" ideas. So in parallel with the benefit of scientific and technological progress came an embedded and fundamentally obscured reiteration of ancient problems, originally theological, that became instead the content of professional philosophy in the development of Transcendental Idealism from Fichte through Schelling to Hegel.

The dialectical solution of bracketing off all knowledge that does not conform to the canons of science in turn led to its own set of problems. This new détente started to collapse toward the latter part of the 19th century. Human power was at first flattered by the ability to devise regular mechanical laws that applied to all of nature only to realize that it did not have a metaphysic to inoculate itself from these mechanical laws. After all, human beings are also part of nature. Given the Post-Reformation philosophical and theological constraints: what resources were there to marshal an account of what is unique about humanity? Milosz's "The Spirit of History" captures the dilemma of how this methodological principle (science's bracketing off of metaphysics) turned in Milosz's view, into a straightjacket for humanity, because humanity was inserted into the mechanistic and rationalist formulas that were initially applied only to nature, while on the Cartesian side, the human mind and human history were somehow inexplicably (almost apophatically, mystically) immune to them:

Where wind carries the smell of the crematorium
And a bell in the village tolls the Angelus,
The Spirit of History is out walking.
He whistles, he likes these countries washed
By a deluge, deprived of shape and now ready.
A worm-fence, a homespun skirt is pleasant to him,
The same in Poland, in India, Arabia.[24]

This scene dramatizes with immediate potency a naturalized historical process in a deluge of identity. It is also a poetic recasting of World War II Warsaw. Here nothing is able to maintain its own uniqueness in the face of a history, abetted by military advancements also made possible by the Scientific Revolution, as it levels all differences into a rubble of identity. And this "Spirit of History" is not the beneficent genius of progress, but instead walks, whistles, like "these countries washed / by a deluge. . ." For what, exactly, are these countries "ready"? The answer is simply, because of the emptying out of metaphysics through naturalism, nothing in particular, meaning, everything levelled down to the same. Milosz lived through the occupation of Warsaw and saw it leveled to the ground. He is not merely reducing the progress of history into intellectual commonplaces. The question is (to play upon Immanuel Kant's famous expression), what to do when we have the starry skies above and *no* moral law within is deadly serious. There is an implicit parochialism in the inability to appreciate differences, which is perhaps why the spirit whistles.

This brings us to the swerve that literary studies attempted in the face of the abuses allowed, or encouraged, by scientific encroachment upon the human realm, presuming that its

[24] Czeslaw Milosz, *A Treatise on Poetry*, op. cit., 30.

methodology was not only certain but sufficient. Literary studies came to treat the literary text as dialectically opposed to cold scientism and an answer to the moral dilemmas caused by the collapse of metaphysics in the wake of interminable Christian squabbling. At its dawn as a separate discipline, literary study was understood as an imagination that would liturgically inculcate a worldview with quasi-salvific aims, in this celebrated remark by Matthew Arnold:

> The whole scope of the essay is to recommend culture as the great help out of our present difficulties; culture being a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world, and, through this knowledge, turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits, which we now follow staunchly but mechanically, vainly imagining that there is a virtue in following them staunchly which makes up for the mischief of following them mechanically.[25]

The literary canon of the best of what has "been thought and said in the world" has always been difficult to determine, but through both T. S. Eliot and I. A. Richards, the view that literary study would by some means answer a crisis of faith and values in the century following Arnold produced first the liturgy of the New Criticism, and after it, Cultural Studies and Literary Theory that show themselves as liturgies in a precisely parallel way. Analogously to religious traditions, rejecting works (or "approaches"') not suited for the canon is still of utmost importance. What is more, this sifting process involves the mediation of a group analogous to the clergy: professors who have gone through a process of training of the imagination as rigorous as a Jesuit or Dominican that involves practices that parallel monastic asceticism. The clergy of culture are in

[25] Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009) 5.

charge of sifting out unsuitable texts that do not meet their stringent ethical criteria. Their work of compilation continues in the sub-disciplines of literature departments such as colonial studies, gender studies, post-colonialism, post-structuralism, and so on. The heated debates in departments and conferences about what belongs (and what does not) show how high the stakes are.[26] In order to be fair, we should remember that it usually takes any new religious tradition anywhere from several hundred years, up to a millennium, to settle its canon. The soteriological tone of Arnold's words, and the traditions that have followed them, also betray a further analogy with religion: the roots of philology in the antecedent discipline of biblical criticism.

There is another dialectical tendency in Arnold's words and how they have played out in the history of literary criticism. In an almost Puritan vein he proposes the pursuit of a "total perfection" against "present difficulties." Seen in this way literary studies become a principled enterprise of overcoming present difficulties. The choice is starkly posed as one between culture and chaos. Literary texts are expected to produce "a stream of fresh and free thought." Now if the collapse of Catholicism destroyed the unity of God, man, and the world; if the Reformation tried to salvage God through dialectically opposing him to man and world, both of which had been compromised by medieval Christianity's inability to live up to its high standards; if the Scientific Revolution dialectically opposed the world to post-Reformation God and man; then literary studies dialectically proposed the liturgy of the human engagement with texts to the exclusion of a scientifically conceived world and the God of religion. Instead, what looms is a derivative ideological vision of politics and society, too often historically truncated and lacking

[26] See especially: John Guillory *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1995). For a summary of current debates see the chapter "Canonical and Noncanonical: The Current Debate" (3-84).

any foundation for communal assent, except the practice of dialectical debate which guarantees only its own continuation, without either end or actual solace.

This schematic genealogy gives some guidance for seeing how the discipline of literary studies is intimately connected to the questions of belief. In many respects, the enterprise of literary theory is grounded on debates over doctrine and contests concerning practice. So too, the issues under debate are often much less about theory (as it might be discussed, for example, in philosophy or science) than about politics and moral issues, such as social justice, freedom of expression, and the impacts of political and economic policy. By following the weaves of transcendence we encounter, not far below the surface, the theological underpinnings of literary studies, which along the lines indicated, take up a strictly analogous array of issues. They are an outgrowth of a long experiment with the dialectical imagination that has its roots in the Protestant Reformation's response to Catholicism. If we are beholden to narratives of progress then it might be easy to forget that Catholicism did not disappear from the face of the earth in the intervening years, and strikingly, did not abandon moral positions on all these and other practical issues. Milosz's significance lies in writing from within this religious imagination with an appreciation of the critiques leveled against it during the four hundred years of dialectical critique. But he does not abandon his own liturgy; instead, he is perhaps one of the best guides for understanding the vicissitudes of contemporary Catholicism. His poetry is also perhaps the best prolegomena for any future Catholic theology, because of his clarity about how much the challenges posed by Protestantism, the Scientific Revolution, and literary studies matter for the Catholic imagination. Just so, his work is exemplary of the kind of analogical thinking that can serve, perhaps, as a prolegomena to further literary studies. His poetry is imbued with these

problems, where the formal strength of poetic traditions is itself also resolutely and essentially *analogical* and not dialectical.

Several recent trends in Protestant theology suggest the possibility that Protestant dialectical theology is not adequate to account for the analogical practice of Protestant poets, or even believers. The Catholic analogical imagination that sees God, man, and world has been proposed on a popular level by the Emergent Christianity movement in the United States in Evangelical circles. Several authors, such as Brian McLaren, Phyllis Tickle, and Shane Claiborne have proposed the recovery of Catholic liturgical practices (in both the ecclesial and the special sense we're using here) in what's become known as the Emergent Church movement. What is emerging from it is a more Catholic analogical imagination among American Evangelicals. On a much more sophisticated intellectual level the members of Radical Orthodoxy such as John Milbank, Graham Ward, Catherine Pickstock, and Michael Hanby have written sophisticated analogical recoveries of modernity while drawing inspiration from pre-Reformation thinkers, especially Aquinas. All the while they have not shied away letting literary texts take center stage in their arguments. The movement is broadly ecumenical. It members are predominantly Anglicans and Catholics, but also includes members of other Protestant traditions.

The sphere of political resistance is the third sphere where Milosz's engagement with the analogical imagination might prove to be a valuable resource for bridging gaps between communities that are not usually thought of as belonging together. This is suggested by the last page of a much circulated book by Hardt and Negri:

> There is an ancient legend that might serve to illuminate further the future life of communist militancy: that of St. Francis of Assisi. Consider his work. To

> denounce the poverty of the multitude he adopted that common condition and discovered there the ontological power of a new society. The communist militant does the same, identifying in the common condition of the multitude its enormous wealth. Francis in opposition to nascent capitalism refused every instrumental discipline, and in opposition to the mortification of the flesh (in poverty and in the constituted order) he posed a joyous life, including all of being and nature, the animals, sister moon, brother sun, the birds of the field, the poor and exploited humans, together against the will of power and corruption. Once again in postmodernity we find ourselves in Francis's situation, posing against the misery of power the joy of being.[27]

First of all, note how this passage, which is the final rhetorical gesture in *Empire*, uses an analogical imagination to account for how man, world, and possibly God are intimately tied. Second, speaking of St. Francis as an "ancient legend" that still might "illuminate further the future life of Communist militancy" makes it seem as if these "legends" are not still operative within a world-wide community of over one billion whose leader is also named Francis. Why should political theorists build everything from the ground up if St. Francis, and other radical members of the communion of saints like Dorothy Day, are already mobilized in a worldwide religious imagination that embodies the values Hardt and Negri propose for the Communist international to come? This is another area of life where Milosz's poetic practice, and even his own political leanings, points to where bridges can be built between dialectically segregated areas of practice and theory by looking for and engaging analogies.

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[27] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000) 413.

This picture of the Catholic imagination would be too optimistic if our contemporary account of it ended with these three areas of rapprochement. Milosz is too much of a hard-headed Augustinian realist to permit his readers to rest on their analogical laurels:

> I apologize, most reverend theologians, for a tone not befitting
> the purple of your robes.
>
> I thrash in the bed of my style, searching for a comfortable position,
> not too sanctimonious, not too mundane.
>
> There must be a middle place between abstraction and childishness
> where one can talk seriously about serious things.[28]

This disconnect is something toward which we already gestured in the fragment from *Roadside Dog* on the first page of this introduction. It is the reason why Milosz strives to locate his poetry in the "middle place" mediating between the positions of contemporary theology ("abstraction" and "sanctimonious") and unthinking religious practice ("childishness" and "mundane"). The opposition between these two sets of labels indicates a dialectical space that is problematic for an analogical imagination. He is more than willing to point out these spaces of incongruity not only here, but in many other poems.

Czeslaw Milosz frequently uses the label "Manichean" to describe those places where analogy, "the middle place," is failing.[29] Manicheanism was a diverse set of ancient religious traditions that were at various points at odds with Christian orthodoxy and suffered for it by

[28] Czeslaw Milosz, *Second Space*, trans. Czeslaw Milosz and Robert Haas (New York: Ecco, 2004) 49.
[29] He also uses the label very ambivalently to characterize his own intellectual tendencies.

being actively persecuted by the Church. Manicheanism is so diverse that recent research has convincingly argued that it is not fair to lump all these groups together. However, the various schools of Manicheanism did share one quality: they all posited a radical dialectical break between a Wholly Other God and immanent reality (man and world). The Manichean God is so pure that he does not soil himself by participating in the creation of the world. The job of creation falls to a semi-demonic demiurge. Therefore, the general hallmark of Manicheanism is an extreme dualism between body and spirit. It is so much so that it sees the whole material universe, especially the body, as fallen and ultimately unredeemable (only the pure spirits of a small band of elect survives). Note how this imagination is partially replicated in the Cartesian dualism between extension (including one's body) and the mind. It is also notable that Protestant Reformation polemics against Rome sometimes identified medieval Manichean movements as being proto-Protestant, because of their opposition to the corruption of the Church. Milosz uses the "Manichean" label interchangeably with the label "Gnostic."[30] These concepts are deployed in several ways that we will track throughout our analyses of individual poems.

Such complex use of concepts, images, and historical examples is not unique in Milosz's work. The intensity of intellectual condensation can be best suggested and explained with the following lines from "A Treatise on Poetry,"

> You often ask yourself why you feel shame
> Whenever you look through a book of poetry.
> As if the author, for reasons unclear to you,
> Addressed the worse side of your nature,

[30] Manicheanism and Gnosticism mostly overlap in their meanings for modern commentators who use these categories. They are always used in the abstract, because there are almost no substantial religious groups in the world that might historically be identified with those ancient heresies (by Christian lights).

Pushing aside thought, cheating thought.

Seasoned with jokes, clowning, satire,
Poetry still knows how to please.
Then its excellence is much admired.
But the grave combats where life is at stake
Are fought in prose. It was not always so.

And our regret has remained unconfessed.
Novels and essays serve but will not last.
One clear stanza can take more weight
Than a whole wagon of elaborate prose.[31]

His poetry does not push aside the complexities of thought. Even though Milosz's poetry can be comical at times, it has no time for cravenly pleasing the reader with "jokes, clowning, satire."

The poems instead dare to enter into the fray of "grave combats where life is at stake." They do so by stanzas taking on "more weight" than is usually associated with contemporary poetry. For this reason it is well-nigh impossible to neatly break these poems up into the categories we have proposed in this introduction. Many of them are simultaneously deployed analogically on the level of the poem, or even stanza. Therefore we will proceed with a poem by poem analysis. Proceeding chronologically has the practical advantage of helping us to confirm Milosz's thesis that all these theological quandaries of his Catholic imagination were with him

[31] Czeslaw Milosz, *A Treatise on Poetry*, op. cit., 1.

from the first poems he published. The deployment of the analogical imagination (between God, man, world) is the sole thing in Milosz's poetic practice that is always unequivocally affirmed.

Chapter 1: Visibility and the Catholic Imagination

The argument of the introduction boils down to three main components. First, it proposes the imagination as a fruitful way of going forward in analyzing not only poetry, but also theology, and literary studies within the context of significant historical developments. Second, the imagination is an essential tool for testing Milosz's claim that his own work is consistently motivated, from beginning to end, by the same religious Catholic worldview. Third, the imagination model also gives us analogues for describing the complex interactions of the Catholic imagination with the imaginations (Protestant, scientific, and literary) that have historically emerged after the collapse of medieval Catholicism.

The reflections in this chapter will proceed by adopting a method that Milosz himself used in his poems: a melding of autobiography with theory that gives existential credence to what is being discussed. I will begin with an experience of my own that will organically build up a new angle on the discussion of the theory of the imagination we proposed in the introduction. Imaginations do not work in the abstract; they shape concrete subjects who then reflect upon God, man, and the world from their own liturgically-shaped worldview. In such accounts subjectivity is not excess baggage, because the shaping of subjectivity is the point of the formation process we have called the imagination.

One of my own earliest experiences in comparative religion occurred when I was about twenty years old. I was brought up in Communist Poland. Its borders had been so redrawn and ethnically cleansed by the Germans and Soviets after the War that, for the first time in its history, Poland was a religiously homogeneous country. The various methodologies used to track

religious belonging generally measure Roman Catholics as constituting around of 80% of the population. My first direct experience of Protestantism came in the United States when I was twenty years old. It occurred on a day when I walked into a Baptist church that was located right behind our house. It had never caught my attention before. Now I was inside the church, for a Ukrainian-Orthodox wedding. The contrast of religious cultures was surprising to me, as I wondered, "Where is all the stuff inside the church?" On the other hand, the extravagant vestments, long beards, icons, and copious amounts of candles of the Orthodox liturgy presented me with immediate analogies to my own experience, even if they were still a little unfamiliar. I note particularly that this small episode is characteristic in that one may not, ordinarily, even be aware that one *has* a "Catholic imagination," but it comes to the fore at such times with a sharp shock of recognition. Years went by and this lasting impression remained in the back of my mind, lacking a frame, and collecting dust. Yet it was one of the motivating factors behind my decision to pursue an undergraduate degree in comparative religion.

The whole event was a prime example of the differences between dialectical (Baptist) and analogical (Orthodox) imaginations. It would take me nearly a decade to discover the work of David Tracy on the differences between those imaginations. It took me another five years to discover the work of James K. A. Smith, a Protestant scholar who was educated in Catholic universities, to find a thinker who develops a credible account of how and why those religious imaginations develop differently through their unique liturgical practices and histories. Discovering William Dyrness' *Reformed Theology and Visual Culture: The Protestant Imagination from Calvin to Edwards* was a partial culmination to this an on-going process. This book is the most sustained effort to date of describing the Protestant imagination from within that imagination. To be more precise, it is an effort to describe the Calvinist variety of that

imagination. Dyrness briefly engages several theoreticians of the Catholic imagination. He takes exception to them, because he misreads them as saying that Protestants do not have an imagination. Thus he launches into his own argument with the following, "Clearly the common assumption that Protestants lack imagination begs the question this book seeks to address. Is it the case the Protestant tradition has not encouraged a creative imagination, or has it encouraged a different and equally creative way of shaping the world?"[32] He is correct in point out that the issue is not whether Protestants have an imagination, because every worldview produces an imagination from within its specific liturgical inculcation,[33] but how and why it differs from a Catholic one.

Dyrness' understanding of the Protestant imagination is in line with what we have laid out so far in the introduction. Before we launch into his phenomenology of the Calvinist imagination, it might be helpful to cite some passages from *Reformed Theology and Visual Culture* just to remind ourselves how and why a religious imagination is not imaginary, in the sense of a flight of fancy that is disconnected from the world and humans and God. What is more, the imagination is intimately connected the most mundane everyday dealings with the world, because it provides the frame for navigating them. One gets a sense of the omnipresence of the imagination from the following passage: "We will use *imagination* then in the general sense of the way people give shape to their world, in particular through the images and practices that express this shape." He continues,

> In the present work of historical and practical theology we will seek to demonstrate how Reformed Protestants, in ways analogous to other religious

[32] William Dyrness, *Reformed Theology and Visual Culture: The Protestant Imagination from Calvin to Edwards* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) 2.
[33] Because of this fundamental structure all liturgies are analogous.

> traditions, developed an 'imagination' that is a characteristic way of laying hold of the world and of God that comes to expression in their material (and especially their visual) culture.[34]

What are the main manifestations of this imagination and what is its driving force? A dialectical movement that sets God's majesty against the sinfulness of the world and man.

The Catholic abuses of the 16th and 15th centuries meant that this dialectical movement was met with understandable enthusiasm among many local populations. Dyrness claims that by emphasizing a dialectical relationship between the transcendent and the immanent the Calvinist movement tapped into an ancient tradition,

> The Protestant suspicion toward images and the external mediation of grace connects with the ancient apophatic tradition in the Church. Since God is separate from the world, and those created in the divine image have their eyesight so severely damaged, one must treat all human constructions of God with suspicion.[35]

Notice how sharply God is "separated" out from the world and how the image and likeness we discussed in connection with Aquinas is said to be "severely damaged." The different emphases of this liturgical formation ought to produce different subjects than ones formed by a more analogical tradition.

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[34] Ibid., 6.

[35] Ibid., 302. The problem with this historical account is that in the most ancient Christian traditions apophatic discourses (ones that say what God is not) are always combined with a cataphatic discourses (ones that affirm what God is). Analogy is the mutual interaction between these two theological discourses about God.

According to Dyrness, Protestantism, despite the common prejudices, did not dispense with visual culture at all. The written word, certain landscape painting, and portraiture, became the expressions of one recognizably Protestant culture of modesty that was suspicious of decadent Roman Catholic visual extravagance. Note how these, especially portraiture, could be read as being analogous to practices associated with the communion of saints. That is the case even if these Calvinist analogues lost their directly religious status, because of the urgency of responding to abuses of the communion of saints. In fact reading, hearing, and preaching of the word were the main foci of the Calvinist ecclesial imagination.[36] Correspondingly, traditional sacramental visual culture, as a worldly mediation of God to man, nearly disappeared altogether and was replaced by paintings of everyday objects and portraits of people associated with an industrious piety.[37] This turn toward the world in the arts simultaneously severed the world's analogical relation to God. It was the dialectical consequence of emphasizing the transcendence of God in response to historical abuses.[38]

Before we move onto Milosz's reaction to one form of this dialectical form of religious imagination, we should take a look at one last passage from *Reformed Theology and Visual Culture.* The following passage is a reminder that the one-to-one identification of the dialectical imagination with Protestantism, and identifying the analogical imagination with Catholicism, is problematic because the Reformation's rejection of analogy ran at different speeds. Simply put, a

[36] See especially: the chapter "England and the Visual Culture of the Reformation" (90-141).
[37] The Wheaton art historian Matthew Milliner has written on Protestant visual culture in many scattered essays. He has also made the interesting argument (in a handful of unpublished lectures) that Calvinist Protestantism displays signs of analogy, but in ways that are drastically different (portraiture, landscape painting, and still life) from traditions such as Catholicism and Orthodoxy that are usually taken as the standard of what constitutes analogy. It would seem to me he is actually arguing that in some cases dialectics can be a form of analogical thinking.
[38] The Protestant theological aversion to analogy is best demonstrated by an early 20th century debate between Protestant theologian Emil Brunner and Karl Barth. Brunner proposed a qualified Protestant return to analogy. Barth's response to Brunner was a manifesto entitled "Nein!"

complete turn to dialectical thinking did not occur in all the Protestant traditions. Continuing the thread he began about the "Protestant suspicion of images" that grows out of its stress of the transcendence of God and its correlate of human and worldly fallenness, Dyrness says,

> If one accepts this [dialectical] view of things, Calvin's scruples would have been more realistic than Luther's tolerance. For Calvin understood that in a sinful world patterns and practices often coalesce into particular images, and if health is to be restored, these images must not only be denounced but they must also be destroyed. For the reformers knew that much more was at stake than cultural products alone.[39]

What is sought is a health that will lead to religious salvation. What is implied is that a world-affirming analogical imagination is a sign of disease and a distraction from this ultimate religious liturgical goal. On the margins Dyrness also suggests there is a dialectical diversity across Protestant denominations, reflecting a wide range of commitment to dialectic, sometimes allowing some leeway for the analogical imagination, as in Lutheranism, and a lot, I might add, within the High Anglican tradition. The praise Dyrness has for iconoclasm might sound somewhat shocking to those who are outside religious liturgies. Yet, one can appreciate the consistent inner logic of his liturgical (in the sense outline in the introduction) position. It makes sense. But, the analogy he does point out is that Calvinists shared the Catholic belief in the power of certain cultural productions to shape one's imagination into a particular way of inhabiting and viewing the world. The difference is that Calvinism saw the world as a potentially dangerous impediment to God, whereas the Catholic tradition tended to see the world as frequently (not always) leading man to God.

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[39] William Dyrness, *Reformed Theology and Visual Culture*, op. cit., 302.

Milosz connects with these insights in a fragment from a poem written during his middle period entitled, "I Sleep a Lot." [40] The poem begins mischievously with:

> I sleep a lot and read St. Thomas Aquinas
>
> or *The Death of God*[41] (that's a Protestant book) (73).

But why would he say that the death-of-God theology is a Protestant book? For starters, because the "death of God theology" is one of the most significant original theological movements to emerge among Protestants in America. It grows from the same dialectical Reformation tradition Dyrness describes. This is how Thomas J. J. Altizer summarizes the aims of the death-of-God movement in a programmatic statement:

> By transforming its original faith [during the Catholic Middle Ages], Christianity has become a "world-affirming" religion. Since that time, Christian theology—at least in its orthodox and dominant forms—has been non-dialectical.[42]

This dialectical theological imagination severely criticizes the tendencies of an analogical tradition. The word "transforming" is used in the sense of "distorting." The world is the point of critique, because, like in Dyrness, and the early Reformers, it is unhealthy to concentrate upon the world in its present state, any analogies would only be misleading, perhaps idolatrous. Altizer then continues somewhat unexpectedly:

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[40] Nota Bene: Throughout this study the numbers given in parentheses correspond to page numbers in Milosz's *Selected and Last Poems*.

[41] A tome written by Gabriel Vahanian [*The Death of God: The Culture of our Post-Christian Era* (New York: George Braziller, 1957)]. Vahanian's book is slightly more descriptive than the prescriptive passage we will cite shortly from Altizer. Ultimately, Vahanian seems to have embraced the more prescriptive impulses of Altizer and what became the "death of God" movement.

[42] Thomas J. J. Altizer, *Radical Theology and the Death of God* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966) 102.

> Yet now the Christian God is dead! The transcendence of Being has been transformed into the radical immanence of the Eternal Recurrence: to exist in our time is to exist in a chaos freed of every semblance of cosmological meaning or order.[43]

Note how this dialectical move first cuts God off from the world by stressing his transcendence, but in this instance it did not lead to orderly cosmos still tenuously tethered to God; instead, it led to an affirmation of the primeval chaos, the tohu-bohu of Genesis 1:2. The ironic (theological) danger when God becomes too transcendent and not "world-affirming" enough is that the dialectical imagination is left behind with affirming the world in its uncanny independence from God. These then are among the reasons why Milosz identifies the death-of-God movement with Protestantism.

One of the patterns that emerges from the analyses of Milosz's earliest poems that follow this discussion is how much they cut against these descriptions of the dialectical imagination. For the most part we find Milosz affirming the world in its connection to God. He sees it as a creation that is a largely reliable analogue for God and therefore in "The Sun" he calls the Earth a poem. He delights in beings being a mirror of Being, even though his poems were mostly written during World War II and its ghastly aftermath. Moreover, nearly all these poems greatly emphasize vision and the experience of seeing. Visual perception, the very element of experience Dyrness says the Calvinist revolution distrusted and sought to regulate, becomes, one might say in a Catholic analogical fashion, the primary metaphor for the theological virtues in Milosz's poems, especially in "The World." On the other hand, Milosz is usually distraught whenever he senses the "world-affirming" vision failing. He struggles against its breakdown.

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[43] Ibid., 102.

1.1 I Ask Not Out of Sorrow

ENCOUNTER

We were riding through frozen fields in a wagon at dawn.

A red wing rose in the darkness.

And suddenly a hare ran across the road.

One of us pointed to it with his hand.

That was long ago. Today neither of them is alive,

Not the hare, nor the man who made the gesture.

O my love, where are they, where are they going

The flash of a hand, streak of movement, rustle of pebbles.

I ask not out of sorrow, but in wonder (12).

Vilnius, 1936

Milosz nearly always gives the place of composition and completion date at the bottom of his poems. "Encounter" was written in Vilnius in 1936. The date is significant on a personal level, because it comes after his second visit to Paris in 1935 when he studied French at the Alliance Française.[44] More importantly for our purposes, Andrzej Franaszek notes Milosz also attended Fr. Daniel Lallement's lectures on Thomism at the Institut Catholique de Paris.[45] As we

[44] The Alliance is located near Rue Raspail. This fact will take on a greater significance when we analyze the eminently Thomistic poem, "Esse" (51). The poem is situated in the Rue Raspail metro station.

[45] Andrzej Franaszek in the definitive *Milosz: Biografia* [Milosz: A Biography] (Krakow: ZNAK, 2011) 212 notes, „Z sakralną wizją świata, jaką mógł odczuć na płótnach niektórych przynajmniej dawnych mistrzów, doskonale łączyła się myśl świętego Tomasza, zgłębiana podczas porannych zajęć w Institut Catholique przy rue d'Assas,

shall see, this poem displays an analogical imagination that is consistent with such Thomistic interests.

We will now directly explore why and how "Encounter" is ultimately a poem of analogical relation. It moves from a description of a panorama to a consideration of details human, animal, and vegetative. These lead the narrator to metaphysically reposition his own place in the world with a play on Greek philosophical (and New Testament) vocabulary. Such an itinerary is somewhat reminiscent of the *exitus-reditus* scheme Church Fathers both East (Gregory of Nyssa) and West (Augustine, especially in the *Confessions*) adopted from the *Enneads* of Plotnius.

The opening line has a communal tinge as it describes a group of people, a "We" who are riding a wagon at dawn, noting a bird, the red wing, which is a species of thrush. *Turdus iliacus* is a common bird, a thrush, without any overt mythological, Polish national, or literary significance, other than being the national bird of Turkey (12). The peaceful and ordinary scene of travel is interrupted in the next stanza by a hare running across the road. This leads to a cinematic zoom-in on the scene, from the general landscape, to a single animal within a confined space, and finally to a human gesture, "One of us pointed to it with his hand" (12). The readers are then distanced from the scene when the author averts them to the passage of time in the next

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prowadzonych przez ksiądza Lallemanta**,** kreślącego na tablicy koncentryczne koła, hierarchię bytów. Wkrótce właśnie kategorii zaczerpniętych z tomizmu Miłosz zacznie używać w esejach o sztuce, chodziło tu jednakże o coś bardziej osobistego niż wartościowanie twórczości: o antidotum na pustkę." [The sacral vision of the world that Milosz could sense on the canvasses of some of the Old Masters connected very well with the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas, which he explored during morning classes on Thomism taught by Fr. Lallement at the Institute Catholique near Rue d'Assas. The priest would draw concentric circles on the board, hierarchies of being. Shortly after this Milosz started to use categories derived from Thomism in his essays on art. By doing this he was concerned with something more personal than evaluating art: it was about finding an antidote to emptiness.] Gabriel Flynn notes that Lallement was a strict Thomist, although he supported the more modern personalist Neo-Thomism of Jacques Maritain in *Yves Congar's Vision of the Church in a World of Disbelief* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2004) 4.

stanza, "That was long ago," which is then compounded by a lament of sorts, a kind of *memento mori*: "Today neither of them is alive, / Not the hare, nor the man who made the gesture" (12). The catholicity of the sorrow is important: it is directed analogically at both human and animal protagonists without an exaggerated Cartesian or extreme Calvinist (not all currents of Calvinism are so extreme) dualism separating them. The concern, that is to say, is not singularly restricted to man, or any doctrinal conception of the soul, but to the immediately present and enduring analogy itself.[46]

The final stanza concludes with what looks like a lament, because of the phrase "O my love." However, the phrasing is not typical of the *Lamentations of Jeremiah*, as one would expect in a poem that seems to be creeping toward the *memento mori* register. The phrasing instead seems to be lifted straight out of the *Song of Songs*, where the narrator says "I have compared thee, O my love, to a mare of the chariots of Pharaoh." (Song 1:9, KJV). The same phrasing recurs elsewhere in the *Song of Songs*. For example, "Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners".[47] The equine characteristic of the first biblical use of the "O my love" phrase has a curious echo with "Encounter's" initial horse and carriage setting, plus it is an analogical blurring of the distinctions between the human and the animal—again the Catholic imagination's world is peopled with analogies.[48] Furthermore, the erotic setting of the prototype, the *Song of Songs*, makes sense within a

[46] The extended poem "From the Rising of the Sun," especially §II, "Diary of a Naturalist" (111-120) is another notable place were the boundary between the human and animal is slightly erased. The problem of animal pain and how it is analogous to human pain is a constant theme running through Milosz's poems and essays. This is a concern he shares with Witold Gombrowicz, most notably in his *Diary*, trans. Lillian Vallee (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2012).

[47] *Song of Songs* 6:4.

[48] The same phrasing recurs across any number of Bible translations. I will mostly resort to quoting the KJV because of its continuing influence upon English poetry, and therefore, I assume, also upon the minds of Milosz's co-translators.

Catholic imagination that does not see the world human desire and the body, as being wholly unhealthy. Andrew Greely describes this non-dialectical understanding of the body, the world, and human closeness to not only the animal, but also the inanimate, all factors present in Milosz's "Encounter," in his classic study entitled *The Catholic Imagination*:

> Grace, then, lurks everywhere — in brickyards and back alleys, in the snow and the wind, in the sun and the stars, in the waters and the fire, in the tiny flower, and in the volcano. It is in the branches of trees, in weeds, in the chirping of birds, as well as in the roar of an elevated train, and in the desirable body of another. The environment is a sacrament, and to ruthlessly exploit it is a sacrilege. The world is a chalice of grace, and to treat it with disrespect is blasphemy. The world is grace, and not to appreciate it is ingratitude.[49]

Sure enough there are dangers in what Greely says. Identifying the world with grace is borders upon a form of pantheism that abolishes analogy with identity. The Reformers also thought that the medieval Church overstepped this boundary, which is why the reacted with a dialectical theology. Milosz, as we shall see shortly while analyzing "The World," is much more careful in his poetic practice about respecting this distinction between pantheism and analogy.

Finally, in the poem "Encounter" the erotic-hidden-in-a-lament prepares the reader for the last lines of the poem. There the following questions fall, although without a question mark:

> where are they, where are they going—
>
> The flash of a hand, streak of movement, rustle of pebbles (12).

[49] Andrew Greeley, *The Great Mysteries: Experiencing Catholic Faith from the Inside Out* (London: Sheed & Ward, 2007) 109.

The dash seems to take the place of a question mark and extends into an explanation of what is being asked about. What is in fact being asked about is the fate of the humans and animal together and concentrated into the most basic motions and gestures ("flash of hand" and "streak of movement") from the opening scene of the poem. What has happened is that Milosz has managed to cinematically zoom in from a landscape into a synecdoche that verges upon the archetypal within the short span of four skinny stanzas. The endpoint of this maneuver is the symbolization (or perhaps we should say "sacramentalization") of an ordinary scene into almost mythical dimensions, because that is what analogy allows.

The concluding line completes the confounding of the reader's expectations for lament by going through the erotic, understood as the desire for the world and knowledge (not only sexually), directly into metaphysics. Even though the setup leads one to expect sorrow or even despair, the narrator says, "I ask not out of sorrow." No, not in sorrow, "but in wonder" (12). Here we are recalled back to the foundations of Greek philosophy when Plato says in *Theaetetus* (155d), ". . . a sense of wonder--is perfectly proper to a philosopher: philosophy has no other foundation, in fact."[50] Aristotle concurs with him when he says in the *Metaphysics* (982b), "For it was because of wonder that men both now and originally began to philosophize."[51] The Catholic imagination of Milosz claims the Greek tradition in its own peculiar way. Whereas a dialectical imagination might concentrate upon Platonic dualism, the emphasis throughout this poem has been upon participation and analogy. Both emphases are legitimate in their own ways.

Here is how Adriaan Peperzak attempts to pin down the meaning of the all-important word "wonder" in Greek beyond what is familiar to most readers:

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[50] Plato, *Theatetus*, trans. Robin H. Waterfield (New York: Penguin, 1987) 37.
[51] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (New York: Penguin, 1999) 9.

> *Thaumazein* means to wonder or to marvel, to be amazed or astonished, and sometimes to admire or to honor. Although the verb is not used very often in the texts of Plato and Aristotle, both authors state the primordial importance of wonder for *philosophia*.

This is general knowledge, but Peperzak then continues by mentioning surprising correlate uses elsewhere:

> The use of the word *thaumazein* in the New Testament points in another direction. Amazement here does not introduce us to philosophy in the Greek sense of the word; rather it confronts us with a very different, twofold possibility: faith (*pistis*) or disbelief (*apistia*).[52]

The term occurs in crucial passages in St. Mark's Gospel (5:20; 6:6; 15:5, 44) and throughout St. Luke's Gospel. These two traditions (wonder in Greek and the Gospel) are not mutually exclusive. They are analogical in the sense that there are several ways of reconciling them, as we shall see in other Milosz poems.

After this excursion into the history of language and philosophy a parenthetical note about Milosz's background is fitting. After all, skepticism might arise if one steps back and remembers that "Encounter" was written by a twenty-five year old man. But this need not be the case if we carefully consider the biographical details of Milosz's robust Catholic education as he recalls it in *Native Realm*.[53] High school gave him a thorough background in theology, Church

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[52] Adriaan T. Peperzak, *Philosophy Between Faith and Theology: Addresses to Catholic Intellectuals* (South Bend, IN: Notre Dame UP, 2005) 106.

[53] See: Czeslaw Milosz, *Native Realm: A Search for Self-Definition*, trans. Catherine S. Leach (Berkeley: California UP, 1981), especially the chapter "Catholic Education" (69-90).

doctrine, philosophy, literature, and ancient languages. Milosz said the following about his education in his interviews with Czarnecka:

> [During the interwar period] Poland created a system of primary schools and high schools throughout the country that ran extremely well and were on a high level—an enormous achievement. I consider my high school, a very good school. And if I was later to succeed as a university professor, more thanks are due to my high school than to my university.[54]

This background, buried within the margins of this poem, helps us to lay the groundwork for the continuity of theological interest we argued for in the introduction. We shall do so by exploring the explicitly theological sections of an early poem cycle whose title, "The World," falls under Altizer's dialogical critique of "world-affirming," because of its Thomstic understanding of the analogies between the world and religion.

[54] Ewa Czarnecka and Aleksander Fiut, *Conversations with Czeslaw Milosz* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Jovanovich, 1987) 20.

1.2: Look at Light Reflected

THE SUN

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 above represents the artist.

Whoever wants to paint the variegated world
Let him never looks straight up at the sun
Or he will lose the memory of things he has seen.
Only burning tears will stay in his eyes.

Let him kneel down, lower his face to the grass,
And look at light reflected by the ground.
There he will find everything we have lost:
The stars and the roses, the dusks and the dawns.
Warsaw, 1943

We now to turn to selections from Milosz's "The World: A Naïve Poem" (22-32). We will limit ourselves to four of the poems in this twenty poem cycle, concentrating upon the poems "Faith" (28-29), "Hope" (29), "Love" (29-30), and "The Sun" (32). For reasons that will soon become apparent we shall proceed in reverse chronological order, starting with "The Sun."

On a purely narrative level the cycle consists of children coming home from school, roaming through the house, getting lost in a forest, and, after a period of fearing being lost, returning home. Most of these events occur under the benevolent gaze of their father. The poem cycle as a whole dramatizes the Plotinian schema of going out and returning to God that was quickly Christianized by the Church Fathers. The posing of a choice between the theological virtues and fear under duress[55] (wonder in the New Testament sense outline by Peperzak) are the constituents of the drama in the four poems between the ones on the theological virtues (28-30) and "The Sun" (32). The names of the "in between" poems suggests the danger and fear that are their topic and contrast greatly with the safe scenes at home and its surrounding humanized nature that occupy the earlier poems in the cycle.[56] These "in between" poems are the only ones where the benevolent father of the children, like a God the Father who has abandoned the world in Altizer, recedes into the background as they make their way through the forest—only to return in the poem "Recovery," which precedes "The Sun."

The didactic character of "The Sun"—as it paternally unwinds the meanings of its metaphors—also justifies its place as the first poem analyzed here even though it appears last in the cycle. It is a Rosetta Stone for the rest of the cycle, especially if we keep in mind the following counterintuitive injunction: "But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first" (Matthew 19:30). Nietzsche was probably correct in noting that Christianity transvalued

[55] It is difficult to tell whether the threat is real or imagined, but that does not take anything from the drama. It is important to keep in mind this is a "naïve poem." Children react as drastically to real as they do to imagined threats.

[56] The names of the fear-themed poems are suggestive: "Excursion into the Forest" (30) "The Bird Kingdom" (30-31), "Fear" (31), and "Recovery" (31-32) which begins with the benevolent father of the children saying, "Here I am—why this senseless fear?"

many of the traditional values of ancient Greece.[57] Such biblical passages suggest the final things will run counter to conventional opinions (para-doxa) about valuing and ordering.[58] The last poem in "The World" cycle also transvalues the earlier poems by claiming that the world itself is a "poem" whose most minute details should be read with utmost care just like a poem (32). If the reader is willing to make the effort of carefully reading through the cycle again after reading the final poem, almost each and every one of these earlier poems contains a legion of liturgical, biblical, theological, Polish, pagan, Lithuanian, and mythological references. As many readers will notice, these correlates of religious elements are didactic but not assertive, not in any exclusive way *doctrinal*, and that is a major point in Milosz's consistent poetic practice: they fit, they provide a generous yet precise mode of thinking and writing that can connect the reader to the world and to a fully elaborated religious world view, without coercion, using analogy as a pathway of assent.

George Ferguson's benchmark guide to Christian symbols in art says the following about the sun as Christian metaphor:

> The sun is symbolic of Christ[59], this interpretation being based on the prophecy of Malachi 4:2: 'But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings.' The sun and moon are used as attributes of the Virgin Mary, referring to the 'woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet' (Revelation 12:1). The sun and moon are often represented in scenes of the

[57] See: Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Twilight of the Idols and the Anti-Christ*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin, 1990) 130-132.

[58] By this logic Eve is the pinnacle of creation since she was created last in both Genesis narratives.

[59] As in the *Sol Invictus* tradition that reaches back to the Roman tradition of worshiping the Emperor as a sun-god. that Gerhart B. Ladner in *God, Cosmos, and Humankind: The World of Early Christian Symbolism* (Berkeley: California U, 1995) 26, describes as: "In and early-fourth-century mosaic from the Vatican necropolis under Saint Peter's, a Christlike figure with a nimbus of rays rises up to Heaven in a chariot drawn by two horses—like a new Helios, but also a new Elijah."

Crucifixion to indicate the sorrow of all creation at the death of Christ. St. Thomas Aquinas is sometimes depicted with a sun on his breast.[60]

The last sentence of the above passage is a surprising coincidence, given how much emphasis we have put on the significance of Aquinas for Milosz's analogical imagination already.

But instead of letting all these other details blind us at the start of this analysis we should take a closer look at "The Sun." At first blush, Milosz's use of the sun analogy seems to run counter to these iconographic conventions. After all, "The Sun" parcels out the following advice,

> Whoever wants to paint the variegated world
>
> Let him never looks straight up at the sun.
>
> Or he will lose the memory of things he has seen.
>
> Only burning tears will stay in his eyes. (32)

This seems like fairly good ophthalmological advice. But is this poem also suggesting one should ignore God (Christ as *sol invictus*) in one's poetic endeavors? The theological implications of Milosz's use of the sun analogy are more complex than this.

This is because the next few lines offer a curious theological redirection. They continue in a prescriptive, didactic, and paternal tone. In some ways it seems as if the narrator has taken on the role of the father in the poem cycle. If we follow this staging then the readers are asked to take on the role of children the poet is leading through a temporarily confusing world. The narrator dispenses the following advice:

> Let him kneel down, lower his face to the grass,

[60] George Ferguson, *Signs & Symbols in Christian Art* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1961) 45.

> And look at light reflected by the ground.
>
> There he will find everything we have lost:
>
> The stars and the roses, the dusks and the dawns. (32)

Kneeling down and lowering one's face is easily recognizable as a gesture of prayer to the practitioner of just about any religion. In fact, the bowing of the head in prayer is a sign of faith that the one requesting such a gesture of obedience will not abuse his power. Such submission will lead to salvation, in the sense of "find[ing] everything we have lost." What we have lost is the world itself, "The stars and the roses, the dusks and the dawns." The instructions do not welcome liberating oneself from the world, instead, they anticipate a salvific recovery of it.

The human vulnerability is also duplicated by divine vulnerability in the next line. The praying gesture will lead to seeing "light reflected by the ground." There are two New Testament echoes here. The first has to do with light, "Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12, KJV). "The light of life" is not entirely an end in itself; it sheds light upon the darkness that is present in the world, helping to make sense of it, rather than abandoning it. Darkness is not absolute. Second, the effects of the light as it hits the ground reflects a major trend in 20th century Catholic, Orthodox, and Lutheran theology—to various degrees these are all analogical theological traditions—their focus upon the *kenosis,* self-emptying of God into creation through entering it as a servant:

> Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no

> reputation [or in most modern translations "nothing", kenóō], and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men (Phil. 2:7).

The conception of God whose suffering servanthood and nothingness are analogues to the human experience of suffering is something that Milosz will address more directly in his "To Raja Rao" (See: Chapter 2). The implications of this theological assertion for the Catholic imagination can be summed up with the following passage by the American poet Dana Gioia:

> The Catholic worldview does not require a sacred subject to express its sense of divine immanence. The greatest misunderstanding of Catholic literature is to classify it solely by its subject matter. Such literalism is not only reductive; it also ignores precisely those spiritual elements that give the best writing its special value. The religious insights usually emerge naturally out of depictions of worldly existence rather than appear to have been imposed intellectually upon the work.[61]

The palpable sense of "divine immanence" in Milosz's poems, his appreciation for the potential sacredness of both the human being and nature, is the reason why he still does theological reflection then even though he does not frequently directly name the persons of the Trinity. The paradox of an analogical imagination is that the immanent presence of God is potentially so thoroughgoing that there is no immediate need to use proper names, especially when so many analogies are at hand; the presence manifests itself as a pregnant absence. But these absences will not speak unless they are read as carefully as one reads a poem.

The passage below from a major 20th century Catholic theologians—approvingly describing how *kenosis* functions in the work of Origen—suggests this paradox might also be at

[61] Dana Gioia, "The Catholic Writer Today," *First Things* 238 (December, 2013): 35.

work in the passages we are analyzing from Milosz. Hans Urs von Balthasar says the kenotic movement of the incarnation is like "a wave of the sea which, rushing up on the flat beach, runs out, even thinner and more transparent, and does not return to its source but sinks into the sand and disappears."[62] The disappearance itself is predicated upon a presence that empties itself out into the world. This is different from a dialectical cutting of ties with immanence; which is not to judge whether it is more theologically adequate, even if Milosz thinks so.

The blurring of boundaries through the emphasis upon immanence seems to have yet another analogy in Milosz's own biography. There is a striking passage in his autobiographical *Native Realm: A Search for Self-Definition* whose images almost verbatim repeat the contents of "The Sun":

> I could reduce all that happened to me then to a few things. Lying in the field near a highway bombarded by airplanes, I riveted my eyes on a stone and two blades of grass in front of me. Listening to the whistle of a bomb, I suddenly understood the value of matter: that stone and those two blades of grass formed a whole kingdom, an infinity of forms, shades, textures, lights. They were the universe. I had always refused to accept the division into macro- and micro-cosmos; I preferred to contemplate a piece of bark or a bird's wing rather than sunsets or sunrises. But now I saw into the depths of matter with exceptional intensity.[63]

Here we find Milosz in 1939 caught between borders, political alliances, and being bombed. We have the grass, the micro- and macrocosms interrelating, and the aversion to direct sunlight just as in the poem. There are echoes of this biographical experience in "The Bird Kingdom" poem,

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[62] Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Introduction," *Origen: Spirit and Fire: A Thematic Anthology of His Writings*, trans. Robert J. Daly, SJ (Washington, DC: Catholic UP, 1984) 18.
[63] Czeslaw Milosz, *Native Realm*, op. cit., 204.

one of the "in between" poems, mentioned earlier, from this cycle. The birds in "The Bird Kingdom" take on an aggressive, almost military demeanor. When juxtaposing them with the autobiographical passages, it is difficult not to see them as thinly veiled allegories for this war experience. For example, "Flying high," very much like a bomber, "the heavy wood grouse / slash the forest sky with their wings" (30). Even more direct is the following, "And a raven gleams with airplane steel." "The World" cycle was written four years after the experience recounted in *Native Realm*. The autobiography was published much later, only in 1959. And if "the whole earth is a poem" then why should Milosz's biography (of his theological concerns) be out of bounds for poetry? For this reason it is difficult to assume, following literary theory conventions, that these poems are "texts" whose "narrator" cannot be identified with the voice of the poems. Milosz's voice is recognizably consistent in what it says. Whenever he uses other voices, as he sometimes does, they are recognizable as not his.

1.3: Whenever You Look

FAITH

Faith is in you whenever you look
At a dewdrop or a floating leaf
And know that they are because they have to be.
Even if you close your eyes and dream up things
The world will remain as it has always been
And the leaf will be carried by the waters of the river.

You have faith also when you hurt your foot
Against a sharp rock and you know
That rocks are there to hurt our feet.
See the long shadow that is cast by the tree?
We and trees throw shadows on the earth.
What has no shadow has no strength to live (28-29).
Warsaw, 1943

The foregoing discussion brings us to the poems on the theological virtues that precede "The Sun" in "The World: A Naïve Poem," specifically here, "Faith." They set up the Thomistic materialism of that poem by having faith in the trustworthiness of the senses, especially sight. The privileging of vision in the theological virtue poems might seem a little off key when there are plenty of passages in Paul, if not a preponderance of them, about faith, hope and love that

tend toward dialectical readings and ultimately toward transcendent invisibility.[64] Be that as it may, Robert Louis Wilken points out that the Church Fathers definitely gravitated toward sight, "[W]hen speaking of how God is known early Christian thinkers favored the metaphor of seeing, not hearing," adding that, "Beauty is the corollary of seeing."[65] Beauty will become an especially important topic in Milosz's late poetic explorations, especially in poems of the middle period. The emphasis upon sight and its trustworthiness is prevalent throughout his oeuvre.

All the theological-virtue poems begin with statements that either sound like a Credo (I believe in one God…) or the catechism. This is because they address the reader with simple propositional second-person statements, "Faith is in you whenever you look…" (28), "Hope is in you when you believe…" (29), "Love means to look at yourself…" (Ibid.). In light of not only "The Sun," but most of the rest of the poems in this cycle, the benevolently paternal credos, explaining complex ideas in a simple pictorial manner, forms a continuity that is briefly broken in the "in between poems" only to be restored, saved. In fact, "Faith," "Love," and "Hope" are a fortification for the journey into the forest, which is classically seen in European literature and Christian iconography as the antithesis of ordered human culture. Yet, the forest is not excluded from analogy. It is enfolded within it, because these poems are a guide through its challenges, which can be navigated only if read correctly, again, "like a poem."

The poem "Faith" sets up the discussion of its namesake theological virtue through an analogy of looking at the ordinary things such as a "dewdrop or a leaf." The poem proposes seeing the necessity in the existence of these classic symbols for the ephemeral as an act of faith.

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[64] Most representatively in Hebrews 11:1, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

[65] Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2003) 20.

Faith is a belief in their reality that is not disturbed, is resistant to, the bracketing off conducted when one closes one's eyes. All in all, the world "will remain as it has been" because it has ontological weight (28). The following image caps off the stanza, "And the leaf will be carried by the waters of the river." What the reader sees here is the addition of another image of the ephemerality of life, a river, carrying away the leaf. However, within the context of the stanza, the impermanence that could be symbolized by the river (a symbol of time) moving on and carrying away a leaf is given permanence because the river is permanent within its constant mutation and flowing.

The next stanza takes on the vexing topic of human pain, another phenomenon associated with worldly impermanence. There is a kind of necessity, order, maybe even providence here, because we are told "rocks are there to hurt our feet" (28-29). One wonders here whether the poem is in dialogue with the extreme idealism of Bishop Berkeley, because this line bears a great deal of resemblance to Samuel Johnson's response to Berkeley's world less idealist epistemology with a kick to a rock and the words, "I refute it [Berkeley's idealism] thus."[66] The reliable solidity of the world, as an analogue of faith, is further reinforced in the remainder of the stanza by a line resembling a call to direct confirmation through sensory experience, as if the reader were actually standing next to the narrator, "See the long shadow cast by the tree?" (29). What follows appears to be yet another play on a fundamental Platonic metaphor: shadows. Shadows throughout Plato's work signal unreality, mere copies of the ideal world, or copies of copies in the case of poets. The aim is to get beyond the shadows in the

[66] See: Benjamin Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (New York: Penguin, 1979) 122: "After we came out of the church, we stood talking for some time together of Bishop Berkeley's ingenious sophistry to prove the nonexistence of matter, and that every thing in the universe is merely ideal. I observed, that though we are satisfied his doctrine is not true, it is impossible to refute it. I never shall forget the alacrity with which Johnson answered, striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone, till he rebounded from it -- 'I refute it thus.'"

noumenal realm that they inchoately symbolize. Milosz's poem is inundated with shadows, besides the tree "We and the flowers throw shadows on the earth" (29). However the takeaway from this visual metaphor is not a depreciation of the everyday world, rather, it is an appreciation of its visible ontological weight and vigor, "Whatever has no shadow has no strength to live" (29). Meaning, that visual experience of even such ephemera is significant because it is a cipher of the "light reflected by the ground" of the Earth-poem, and ultimately its "artist" (32).

1.4: The Earth is Not a Dream

HOPE

Hope is with you when you believe
The earth is not a dream but living flesh,
that sight, touch, and hearing do not lie,
That all things you have ever seen here
Are like a garden looked at from a gate.

You cannot enter. But you're sure it's there.
Could we but look more clearly and wisely
We might discover somewhere in the garden (29)
A strange new flower and an unnamed star.

Some people say that we should not trust our eyes,
That there is nothing, just a seeming,
These are the ones who have no hope.
They think the moment we turn away,
The world, behind our backs, ceases to exist,
As if snatched up by the hand of thieves.

Warsaw, 1943

Next, Milosz's tackling of the theological virtue of hope builds upon and includes the insights covered in "Faith." Hope is present when "you believe / the earth is not a dream but living flesh" (29). Again, despite the apparent simplicity of the diction the poem "Hope" is yet

another engagement with debates that have vexed modern philosophy and science since their foundation. This time we seem to have a less opaque reference to a key philosopher and his favorite metaphor: Descartes' nightmare thought experiment at the end of the first meditation suggesting the possibility that the world is just an illusion, because it is a deceptive dream placed in our minds by a malicious demon.[67] The "brains in the vat" scenario is the most contemporary reincarnation of this fundamental puzzle of modern philosophy. Its persistence in neuroscience demonstrates how much the dialectics of radical skepticism and idealism still haunt our minds with their frightening possibilities. What the Milosz poem proclaims instead is the stubborn reality of the flesh. There are more than a few Eucharistic overtones in such an assertion, which is called the "flesh and blood" of Christ. The sheer number of connections here is another demonstration of how poetry, as an analogical practice *par excellence*, is able to carry more weight than "novels and essays."[68] It creates a wide network of connections that force the reader to think through either several problems at once, or to actually see them as related problems. This is a far cry from the clear and distinct ideas that Descartes proposed.

"Sight, touch, and hearing," the very sensual incarnate fleshiness whose deceptions made Descartes and other fathers of modern philosophy and science bracketed off in their unreliability, according to Milosz, "do not lie" (29). Not that he denies the very possibility, or even necessity of some sort of cognitive dissonance. The last line of the first stanza posits that all things we see "Are like a garden looked at from a gate" (29). The space between stanzas visualizes the distance between those standing in front of the gate and the distance that separates them from the garden that is behind the gate. This is no flaming sword of the cherubim in Genesis 3:24, but there still is a strong analogy with the expulsion from Eden.

[67] Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) 15.
[68] See our discussion of "A Treatise on Poetry" in the Introduction.

The next lines continue this suggestive connection by positing a human cognitive dissonance, although not total depravity as in the most extreme dialectical theologies. Milosz follows Augustine's legitimately Pauline approach toward human fallenness that can be best summarized with the following ocular and almost shadowy metaphor from 1 Cor 13:12, "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." Thus, in the stanza following the break we are abruptly told in a short sentence, as if by the forbidding cherubim with a flaming sword, "You cannot enter." However, in the same line we are reassured by yet another deliberately definitive short sentence, "But you're sure it's there" (29). The depravity is there, but it is not total, it is reflected in the intellect's ability to see shadowy copies of reality clearly.

The following lines hinge upon a conversion of sight, a new imagination, the discovery of a world that was there, but not clearly seen at first, "Could we but look more clearly and wisely / We might discover in the garden a strange new flower or an unnamed star" (29). Thus, the possibility of seeing less darkly is held out to the reader. The possibility of seeing more than is apparent at first, the possibility of discovery, is also left tantalizingly within reach. Alternatively, if we assume that "Could we but look" means that we initially either cannot (or do not) look in such a way, then the reality of the contingently invisible things is still dangled before us by the poem.

The last stanza of "Hope" reads like a direct attack on Cartesianism and other forms of (crudely interpreted) Platonism, rationalism, and idealism. It starts out by outlining its opponents, "Some people say we should not trust our eyes / That there is nothing, just a seeming." It follows this up with an *ad hoc* attack against these detractors of visibility and the world as "living flesh"

by claiming “These are the ones who have no hope.” The final three lines lampoon them roundly with,

> They think that the moment we turn away,
>
> The world, behind our backs, ceases, to exist,
>
> As if snatched up by the hands of thieves. (29)

The thief motif might be an ironic conflation of Berkeley and Descartes with several New Testament passages that compare the Second Coming and the coming of the Kingdom (which amounts to much the same thing) to a thief, “For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night” (1 Thess 5:2). Yet, these early Christian expectations did not come to fruition and later generations of Christians came to terms with the incarnational and analogical solidity of the passing world.

1.5 The Way One Looks at Distant Things

LOVE

Love means to learn to look at yourself
The way one looks at distant things
For you are only one thing among many.
And whoever sees that way heals his heart,
Without knowing it, from various ills—
A bird and a tree say to him: Friend.

Then he wants to use himself and things
So that they stand in the glow of ripeness.
It doesn't matter whether he knows what he serves:
Who serves best doesn't always understand.
Warsaw, 1943

Milosz honors the Pauline ordering of 1 Cor. 13 by concluding his theological virtues cycle in "The World" with "Love" (29-30). Paul considers love to be "the greatest of these" (1 Cor 13:13) and therefore it is listed last, reflecting the Gospel adage that the last shall be first. "Love" internalizes the trope of looking at objects as the practice of the theological virtues in an unusual way. A turn inwards is signaled by the first line, "Love is to learn to look at oneself" (29), which sounds a lot like the Cartesian introspection that followed upon Post-Reformation skepticism. Sight is once again privileged, and even though the poem instructs the reader to look at themselves, they are asked to look at themselves analogically, to look "The way one looks at distant things" (29). This mode of looking gives one the necessary distance to see themselves as

a part, or line, of a greater Earth-poem,[69] "For you are only one thing among many" (Ibid.). This operation, we are told, leads to something like a conversion, because "whoever sees that way heals his heart."[70] The heart is a ubiquitous metaphor throughout the Bible and the change of heart (μετάνοια), or a healing of it, is one of the most basic metaphors for conversion.

"Love" then takes another unexpected turn by highlighting the lack of knowledge in such a maneuver. The healing can come "without knowing it" and leads to "A bird and a tree say[ing] to him: Friend." This mysterious change leads to a new, or renewed, imagination where the one undergoing it "wants to use himself and things / so that they stand in the glow of ripeness" (30). In other words, this sort of approach is supposed to lead to a way of seeing that will allow oneself and the things of this world reach ripeness, the fullness of being. Note how man and the world are interwoven here in lines that suggest the transcendent that both transcends yet enfolds them, promising a glow of ripeness. Finally, comes the surprising finale, "It doesn't matter whether he knows what he serves: / Who serves best doesn't always understand" (29). The lack of clarity can probably be attributed to the exile from the garden and its attendant cognitive dissonance as described in the poem on "Hope" that preceded "Love" (29). Furthermore, the lack of understanding is not total blindness, because "doesn't always understand" implies that one *does* sometimes understand. Perfect clarity would be inconsistent with the rather complicated picture of human understanding painted in these poems on the three theological virtues. It would

[69] See: The discussion of "The Sun" above.

[70] This poem curiously has some interesting overlaps with the work of Simone Weil whom Milosz encountered and translated only after the war. One of her most famous sayings is that "Distance is the soul of the beautiful," which she unpacks [*Gravity and Grace*, trans. Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr (New York: Routledge, 2002) 149-150] with an ocular metaphor that nonetheless reads dialectically, "The attitude of looking and waiting is the attitude which corresponds with the beautiful. As long as one can go on conceiving, wishing, longing, the beautiful does not appear. That is why in all beauty we find contradiction, bitterness and absence which are irreducible." Milosz's own vision most frequently (but not always) much more analogical than Weil here.

also not fit into the highly mediated analogical picture of the world painted in “The Sun” (32). After all, “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” (1 Cor 13:12).

1.6: What Heaven Will See Us Reunited?

From THE SPIRIT OF HISTORY

Under a linden tree, as before, daylight
Quivered on a goose quill dipped in ink.
Books were still governed by the old rule,
Born of a belief that visible beauty
Is a little mirror for the beauty of being.
The survivors ran through fields, escaping
From themselves, knowing they wouldn't return
For a hundred years. Before them were spread
Those quicksands where a tree changes into nothing,
Into an anti-tree, where no borderline
Separates a shape from a shape, and where,
Amid thunder, the golden house of *is*
Collapses, and the word *becoming* ascends.

Till the end of their days all of them
Carried the memory of their cowardice,
For they didn't want to die without a reason.
Now He, expected, for a long time awaited,
Raised up the smoke of a thousand censers.
They crawled on slippery paths to his feet.

—"King of the centuries, ungraspable Movement,
You who fill the grottoes of the ocean
With a rolling silence, who dwell in the blood
Of the gored shark devoured by other sharks,
In the whistle of a half-bird, half-fish,
In the thundering sea, in the iron gurgling
Of the rocks when archipelagoes surge up.

"The churning of your surf casts up bracelets,
Pearls not eyes, bones from which the salt
Has eaten crowns and dresses of brocade.
You without beginning, you always between
A form and a form, O stream, bright spark,
Antithesis that ripens toward a thesis,
Now we have become equal to the gods,
Knowing, in you, that we do not exist.

“You, in whom cause is married to effect,
Drew us from the depth as you draw a wave,
For one instant, limitless, of transformation.
You have shown us the agony of this age

So that we could ascend to those heights

Where your hand commands the instruments.

Spare us, do not punish us. Our offense

Was grave: we forgot the power of your law.

Save us from ignorance. Accept now our devotion."

So they forswore. But every one of them

Kept hidden a hope that the possessions of time

Were assigned a limit. That they would one day

Be able to look at a cherry tree in blossom,

For a moment, unique among the moments,

Put the ocean to sleep, close the hourglass,

And listen to how the clocks stop ticking.

When they put a rope around my neck,

When they choke off my breath with a rope,

I'll turn around once, and what will I be?

When they give me an injection of phenol,

When I walk half a step with phenol in my veins,

What wisdom of the prophets will enlighten me?

When they tear us from this one embrace,

When they destroy forever the shaft of tender light,

What Heaven will see us reunited? (38-39)

Brie-Comte-Robert, 1956[71]

Milosz's *A Treatise on Poetry* is one of three major poetic treatises he wrote during his lifetime. The ambition that the poet envisioned for his poetry can be gleaned from their titles: "Treatise on Morals" (1947), "A Treatise on Poetry" (1956), and "Treatise on Theology" (2002).[72] These poetic presentations of serious philosophical topics are meant to bring poetry out of its intellectual cul-de-sac. The following is from the introduction of "A Treatise on Poetry"

[71] The tome *Selected and Last Poems* [op. cit., 39] incorrectly lists the date of composition for "The Spirit of History" as 1939-1945 in Brie-Comte-Robert. This is impossible because Milosz was in Warsaw between 1939 and 1945. Only the action of the section "The Spirit of History" from the larger poem "A Treatise on Poetry" takes place in 1939-1945, but in Warsaw. The *New and Collected Poems: 1931-2001* [op. cit., 151] lists the date of composition as 1956. This is the date we shall follow.

[72] The first treatise was not translated into English during Milosz's lifetime. I know of no attempts to translate it by any of his surviving translation collaborators. *A Treatise on Morals* deals with the difficulties of trying to act morally within a chaotic postwar world. This was a time when Milosz collaborated with the Communist government of Poland, working within its diplomatic corps as a cultural attache. Some readings would have the reader believe that *A Treatise on Morals* is a self-justification on the part of the poet. It is written in a highly ironic tone that defies any simple interpretation. It also employs rhyme schemes and Polish idioms that make it difficult to pin down a determinate meaning for the poem. They also make translation extremely difficult.

The last several lines of the poem can give you a sense of its convoluted, despairing, but perhaps also darkly incarnational tones:

Na dziś nie daję ci nadziei,
Nie czekaj darmo treuga Dei,
Bo z życia które tobie dano,
Magiczną nie uciekniesz bramą.
Idźmy w pokoju, ludzie prości.
Przed nami jest
– 'Jądro ciemności'.

[Hope I cannot give you today,
Don't wait vainly for the treuga Dei
Because from the life given to you,
there is no magic gate with which to escape through.

You often ask yourself why you feel shame
Whenever you look through a book of poems.
As if the author, for reasons unclear to you,
Addressed the worst side of your nature,
Pushing thought aside, cheating thought.[73]

Milosz ventures these extended poems, because he believes poetry can make an important contribution to serious intellectual debates, as already noted: "Novels and essays serve but will not last. / Once clear stanza can take more weight / Than a whole wagon of elaborate prose" (Ibid.). Thanks to its compression, and extensive use of analogy, poetry can yoke the heavy burden of reality as if it were light.[74] On this account, prose lacks the ability to carry weight, because it lacks the analogical compression of poetry.

Even though "A Treatise on Poetry" is a long poem, at sixty-two pages, it is a study in compression. It is composed of four main sections that summarize about fifty years of Polish, Western European, and American history and literature. The four sections—along with their geographical and historical locations—are as follows: "Beautiful Times" (Krakow, 1900-1914),

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Simple people let us go in peace
Before us is
The Heart of Darkness. (my translation)]

Czeslaw Milosz, *Traktat Moralny, Traktat Poetycki* [Treatise on Morals and A Treatise on Poetry] (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1998) 50.

Its writing coincides with Milosz's study of Hegel under a Marxist philosopher to whom Milosz gave the pseudonym "Tiger." Tiger's influence is documented in the last two chapters of *Native Realm* "Tiger 1" and "Tiger 2" (258-300). Tiger advocated a stance of irony that served to dissimulate any clear formulation of political and philosophical ties with frequently shifting power blocs. His high estimates of philosophers as the ultimate interpreters and levers of history who work behind the scenes has some similarities with stances advocated by Leo Strauss.

[73] Czeslaw Milosz, *A Treatise on Poetry*, trans. Robert Haas and Czeslaw Milosz (New York: Ecco, 2001) 1.

[74] The echo of Matthew 11:30 is a very distant possibility, but not an impossibility, given Milosz's immersion in biblical and liturgical idioms.

"The Capital" (Warsaw 1918-1939), "The Spirit of History" (Warsaw again, 1939-1945), "Natura" (Pennsylvania, 1948-1949). When taken together they give the reader an idea of how much trouble literature, both in Poland and in the rest of Europe, despite the hopes that literary theory put in it, had catching up with rapidly changing historical events: military, political, social, and technological revolutions. Milosz accomplishes this task by taking over, incarnating if you will, the styles and voices of the poets he critiques. Milosz's parodies expose the inadequacy of early 20th century literary resources to the gravity of the historical situation. It is a survey of how the poetry of his time has "cheated thought."

The poem's critical approach to the practice of poetry means that it attempts to carry the full load of reality on its shoulders. Milosz does not limit himself to only the negative work of criticism. There are sections of the poem where he lets his own voice speak in collision with historical events. The section we will consider here, a selection from "The Spirit of History," is one such example. Milosz thought it important enough that he excerpts a two page selection of that poem in his *Selected and Last Poems* (38-39). On a philosophical level, or what we've called the level of the imagination, this selection is also an excellent example of various cultural liturgies colliding with each other.

At first there seems to be no doubt that the *Zeitgeist* in the poem's title is Hegel's spirit of history. But we would only be scratching the surface if we remained there. Milosz puts Hegel in an intense dialogue with Goethe's "Earth-Spirit," makes an analogy with Darwin's evolutionary findings, then finally presents this concoction as a mock religious liturgy (in the ecclesial sense).

It might be useful to cite Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) since it was published before *Faust I* (1808) and *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and frames the others in Milosz's poem and in its historical influence, especially in Eastern Europe:

> Since the Substance of the individual, the World-Spirit itself, has had the patience to pass through these shapes over the long passage of time, and to take upon itself the enormous labour of world-history, in which it embodied in each shape as much of its entire content as that shape was capable of holding, and since it could not have attained consciousness of itself by any lesser effort, the individual certainly cannot by the nature of the case his own substance more easily.[75]

These are the bare bones of Hegel's evolutionary scheme of human history. The World-Spirit incarnates itself progressively in different human forms (individuals and social institutions) and advances through history. This collective process is through moments mysteriously the substance of the individual. What could be offensive about such an account of historical progress?

Milosz starts out his critique of what could, and did, go wrong with such a philosophy of history with a *Faust*-like summoning and questioning of the spirit of the times in the section just before the one excerpted in the *Selected and Last Poems* we will be discussing shortly (we need this setup in order to understand what goes on later), "Who are you, Powerful One? The nights are long. / Do we know you as the Spirit of the Earth?"[76] These words are an almost verbatim recapitulation of Faust questioning the Earth-Spirit in the "Night" section of *Faust I* (lines 460-

[75] G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1977), 17.
[76] Czeslaw Milosz, *A Treatise on Poetry*, op. cit., 31.

515).[77] Milosz explains the complexity of his borrowing in the extensive notes provided at the end of the English language edition of this treatise.

In the notes the poet draws out Hegelian and Darwinian implications of *Faust I* that Goethe probably would not, even could not, have made: "In Goethe's *Faust* the Spirit of the Earth was Nature." That is in line with Goethe, however, the German pre-Romantic poet would definitely not have made the following inference from it: "which [nature is] governed with the law of universal necessity." Milosz then makes another analogic jump by tying both these in his notes (and in the poem) with Hegel's spirit of history as it embodies itself in various shapes: "If the Spirit of History is just another name for the Earth Spirit, then the law of necessity, of strict determinism, applies to history as well." [78] Back in the poem he then further naturalizes the Hegelian dialectic of history by combining it with a pessimistic reading of Darwinian evolution spiked with a healthy dose of entropy:

> …It will cool,
> our blood, and we, touched by rust, dressed
> In our cloaks of fading purple, will fall
> Down into the dust of a million years, mingled
> at last with our cousin pithecanthropus
> Who's been waiting. And you, is it just that you,
> in a reasonable frock like Hegel's,
> Have chosen for yourself a different name?[79]

[77] Goethe, *Faust: A Tragedy*, trans. Walter Arndt (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998) 14-16.
[78] Czeslaw Milosz, *A Treatise on Poetry*, op. cit., 102.
[79] Ibid., 32.

It is crucial to remember that the decomposing of form in this section of *A Treatise on Poetry* takes place in Warsaw 1939-1945, meaning, the most severe occupation of World War II. The occupation of Warsaw might be the place where the process of history naturalized itself into a battle of all against all, or more accurately, of some against all, where the powerful destroyed the weak with impunity, thereby reversing the evolutionary process by reducing everything "into the dust of a million years." Warsaw's downtown was literally reduced to rubble, dust. This can also be read as a reversal of the creation account in Genesis 2:7 where man is created out of dust. Furthermore, Genesis 3:19, situated just after the Fall, pronounces that to dust we shall return. Therefore there is an element of aping divine judgment in saying that we will, notice the verb, "fall into the dust of centuries." Moreover, the purple of the "fading cloaks" is a reference to the liturgical color of purple that signifies suffering and is usually worn during Lent. The fading of the color means that suffering, once taken up into a naturalistic system, will no longer be humanly significant. When suffering is taken to be natural, then there is nothing to protest; it just is. Because of all these connections with dust there is heavy sarcasm in saying that the history of World War II could be an expression of the Spirit of History that is cloaked "in a reasonable frock like Hegel's." What could be more unreasonable than accepting such carnage as the working out of the human spirit in history? The situation calls for protest not acceptance.

Milosz begins the excerpt in the *Selected and Last Poems* we've been setting up by evoking an anthropomorphic nature friendly to humans that is especially familiar to readers of Polish poetry. The reference to Jan Kochanowski's (1530-1584) linden tree is almost automatically recognizable to them, "Under a linden tree, as before, daylight / Quivered on a

goose quill dipped in ink" (38).[80] The next few lines are a commentary on what Kochanowski's still medieval universe represents within the frames of this poem: a stable set of interchangeable transcendentals which include being, beauty, truth and goodness. Milosz chooses to put stress, not surprisingly from what we've seen, upon visible beauty as a reflection (limited but real)[81] of *esse*: "Books were still governed by the old rule, / Born of a belief that visible beauty / Is a little mirror of being" (38). This is consistent with the medieval maxim: *ens et verum et bonum et pulchrum convertuntur* [being, truth, good, and beauty are convertible]. We have explored how and this harmoniously structured universe did not collapse in the 20th century, or Hegel's 19th century, but during the Reformation, because it did not practice the harmony it preached.

Then everything rapidly collapses within the very same stanza. The lack of a structural break within the poem, like the start of a new stanza, might signal the rapidity of the collapse. Within that same stanza the poem pans onto a battle scene where "survivors [run] through the fields." They run for hundreds of years, while the landscape around them, which appears to

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[80] Here is Kochanowski's poem "On His Linden" in full:

Now seat thyself beneath my leaves, O guest,
And rest.
I promise that the sharp-beaming sun
Here shall not run,
But 'neath the trees spread out a heavy shade;
Here always from the fields cool winds have played,
Here sparrows and the nightingale have made
Charming lament.
And all my fragrant flowers their sweets have spent
Upon the bees; my master's board is lent
That honey's gold.
And I with gentle whisperings can fold
Sweet sleep upon thee. Yea, 'tis true I bear
No apples; yet my Lord speaks me as fair
As the most fruitful trees
That graced the gardens of Hesperides.

Jan Kochanowski, *Poems* (Berkeley: California UP, 1928) 117.

[81] See: discussion of the poem "Hope" in section 1.3 of this chapter above.

include the linden tree, starts to rapidly decompose under the influence of some (with apologies to Daniel Dennett) universal acid:

> …where a tree changes into nothing,
> Into an anti-tree, where no borderline
> Separates a shape from a shape.[82] (38)

Here there is no space for the transcendentals to convert themselves, because there are no stable transcendentals to speak of: instead, "Amid thunder, the golden house of *is* / Collapses, and the word *becoming* ascends" (38). This is a whole new universe and it seems to be touched by the disintegration of form as rapid as the destruction of the human form in a crematorium.

What follows upon this salvo is the attempts of the survivors to make peace with Movement (quasi-divinized by the capitalization) by engaging in something that looks a great deal like a liturgy. They are clearly engaged in a groveling propitiation ritual for the godlike monster of history: "They crawled on slippery paths to his feet" (38). Crawling is usually associated with not only obedience, but also the punishment of the serpent in Eden for inciting the first couple to eat the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Not only is the spectacle judged as an evil, a fall to the level of the serpent, but the "thousand censers waving" give it a mock liturgical (ecclesial sense). Amidst the smoke, the aftereffect of reducing everything to dust, the worshippers anticipate an Advent through history as if some new birth of Christ is upon them, "Now He, expected, for a long time awaited / Raised up the smoke of a thousand censers." (38). Milosz further makes a connection with WWII and the faux liturgy of the "thousand censers" in his extensive notes in *A Treatise on Poetry* by equating the scene with

[82] Milosz uses the trope of alarmingly collapsing differences, although as a sign of a Divine judgment, in the poem "Oeconomia Divina."

the human waste of the Holocaust and the failed General Warsaw Uprising.[83] The parallels with Yeats's "Second Coming" are very suggestive. Yeats even uses the notion of a *Spiritus Mundi*, close to the Spirit of History (and the demonic), although one suspects without the Hegelian connotations, and in any case much too soon to have in mind anything like the radical evil of World War II crematoria, or the brutal putting down of the General Warsaw Uprising in 1944, as bad as World War I might have been.[84]

The shape of the excerpted section also has other ecclesial liturgical undertones. Not only is the liturgy to the god of history framed within a threefold, divided into three stanzas, but it is also noteworthy that the doubts expressed by the narrator, who sits outside the whole process and comments upon the faux-liturgy, are also formulated in a three-stanza from. Threefold repetition is a common religious convention used in rituals. More germane to our discussion here, the baptism ceremony involves a threefold exorcism where those attending renounce the Devil in the name of the child.[85]

Further on in the poem the worshippers of the *Zeitgeist* renounce their identity and illusions about stability ritually. Their *mea culpa* runs as follows:

> You without beginning, you always between
> A form and a form, O stream, a bright spark,
> Antithesis that ripens toward a thesis,
> Now we have become equal to the gods,
> Knowing in you, that we do not exist (39).

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[83] Czeslaw Milosz, *A Treatise on Poetry*, op. cit., 107-108.
[84] W.B. Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats* (New York: Scribners, 1996) 187.
[85] See: Joseph Matros, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church* (Liguori, Missouri: Liguori, 2014).

Calling the monstrous historical dialectic as it plays itself in wartime Warsaw "without beginning" means attributing a name to it that is traditionally reserved for God. "O stream" has echoes with Heraclitus, but the language of "thesis" and "antithesis" gives it a decidedly Hegelian spin. Granted, Hegel did not have this sort of historical meat-grinding in mind when he talked about the substance of the individual, the World-Spirit, passing through shapes in the labor of world-history. But Milosz makes one see how the jump into the history of the twentieth century is progressive only in a very ironic sense. The destructiveness of this whole process is portrayed in the conclusion of the faux-prayer that has biblical echoes with the promise of the Serpent in the Garden from Genesis 3:5, "ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." Like in the garden the knowledge gained by the devotees in the poem is beyond good and evil, "Knowing in you that we do not exist," because nature is indifferent to such distinctions. They come to know the pure negativity. The ceaseless and abstract movement of negativity is what the French Hegelian School, the forefathers of much contemporary theory, following Kojeve, argued to be the motor of the Hegelian system. In Milosz's poem the negativity of the historical movement moves from abstraction into actual historical events as Milosz pushes his readers to watch as naturalized history crushes its subjects in its wake. All they can think of to do is to beg, "Accept now our devotion." By putting so much emphasis upon ironically theologizing Hegelian philosophy Milosz gives recent history, and the theory that has been used to interpret it, a theological genealogy for an age that that thinks itself secular. In this way, Milosz's theological readings might be called post-secular, because they see theological categories operating within what we usually call secular history.

Now, as we have already mentioned, this example of a collective bad faith is then interrupted by a threefold commentary. The narrator says “so they foreswore,” however “every one of them / Kept a hidden hope that the possessions of time / were assigned a limit” (39). Milosz suggest that the secret hope of those caught between the armies of World War II was to return to some semblance of a Kochanowski-like stability in a world filled with significance, rather than remain in pure progression. They pined “For a moment, unique among moments” to “Put the ocean to sleep, close the hourglass” when they can “listen to how the clocks stop ticking” (39). But the poet follows history by not permitting these worshippers an apocalyptic respite from the ravages of time. The whole spectacle becomes even more painful as he switches into a series of three questions about death (through hanging, phenol, and through separation from loved ones) formulated in the first person. He asks, what he will be after dying, what prophets will enlighten him, and “What heaven shall see us reunited?” (39). These are eschatological questions without an answer. Even if history has destroyed the theological imagination that preceded it, the questions that drove that older way of seeing things are still germane. They remain so because they are the only ones that can be asked in the face of radical evil. This-worldly answers, the only ones left after the limitations imposed on metaphysics in the wake Post-Reformation squabbling, will not do because they are not radical enough, they do not reach far enough to redeem the wreckage of history. Whether classical theological answers are still adequate to these questions is something Milosz continued to explore throughout his poetic career.

1.7: I Looked at That Face, Dumbfounded

ESSE

I looked at that face, dumbfounded. The lights of métro stations flew by; I didn't notice them. 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 like a hieroglyph simplified from the drawing of an animal or bird? A slightly snub nose, a high brow with sleekly brushed-back hair, the line of the chin - but why isn't the power of sight absolute? - and in a whiteness tinged with pink two sculpted holes, containing a dark, lustrous lava. To absorb that face but to have it simultaneously against the background of all spring boughs, walls, waves, in its weeping, its laughter, moving it back fifteen years, or ahead thirty. To have. It is not even a desire. Like a butterfly, a fish, the stem of a plant, only more mysterious. 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 avowal beyond which no power can attain: I am, she is. Shout, blow the trumpets, make thousands-strong marches, leap, rend your clothing, repeating only: is!

She got out at Raspail. I was left behind with the immensity of existing things. A sponge, suffering because it cannot saturate itself; a river, suffering because reflections of clouds and trees are not clouds and trees. (51)

Brie-Comte-Robert, 1956

If there is a quintessential sight-centered poem in Milosz's oeuvre that Thomistically celebrates the wonder of being, then it would have to be "*Esse*" (51). The use of the Latin and

the italicization in the title doubly adverts to this technical word's significance. "Esse" is perhaps *the* single most important Thomistic category as we've already discussed in the introduction and in our analysis of the poems in this chapter. The very shape and versification of the poem itself reflect its preoccupation with being and with the inadequacy of human perception to it. It alternates between short ejaculations such as the opening sentence, "I looked at that face, dumbfounded," followed by another short sentence, then a whole series of run on sentences, followed by some similar shorter exclamations, only to return to run on sentences. The text itself is shaped into a solid rectangle that takes up about three-quarters of a printed page. Whether intentionally or not, it mirrors the narrator's comparison of human consciousness to a sponge that's oversaturated by the reality around it.

The frenzy of "*Esse*" also has significant parallels with that of the excerpt from "The Spirit of History" we just analyzed. But clearly the anxiety here is not associated with the closing off of a world; instead, it is marked by an overwhelming human openness to the generosity of existence. It also overcomes the dichotomy between the being and becoming. Milosz accomplishes this through a description of the being of an anonymous woman seen in the Paris metro. Being, through the experience of her particular being, is shown to be substantial in its dynamism—the two do not seem to be mutually exclusive here.

After describing the woman's features the poem then goes on to express the manifold forces and desires that are aroused[86] through such an encounter, "To absorb that face but to have it simultaneously against the background of all spring boughs, walls, waves, in its weeping, its laughter, moving it back fifteen years, or ahead thirty" (51). All of this potentiality is pregnant in the encounter with a single human being. Human being is given pride of place here, but without

[86] The sexual description of the scene is entirely appropriate as we shall see shortly.

necessarily denigrating the rest of creation, “Like a butterfly, a fish, the stem of a plant, only more mysterious" (51). There is no dialectical cut between humanity and the animal kingdom, rather they are related through what we might call an analogy of degrees of inexhaustibility. There is also not a concomitant naturalization of the human being here, instead, Nature is given an almost diving richness and mystery.

There is also an unabashedly erotic edge to this poem much in the same way there is to Bernini’s St. Teresa. In turn, the Bernini statue is faithful to the eroticism of St. Teresa’s *Autobiography*:

> In his hands I saw a great golden spear, and at the iron tip there appeared to be a point of fire. This he plunged into my heart several times so that it penetrated to my entrails. When he pulled it out I felt that he took them with it, and left me utterly consumed by the great love of God. The pain was so severe that it made me utter several moans. The sweetness caused by this intense pain is so extreme that one cannot possibly wish it to cease, nor is one's soul content with anything but God. This is not a physical but a spiritual pain, though the body has some share in it—even a considerable share.[87]

The pain is described by Teresa as spiritual, but there is no spirit without the body, which plays a “considerable share” in this exemplary mystical experience. The analogies she uses are frankly sexual, because the analogies have held up from the Song of Songs to St. Bernard and beyond. They reappear in Milosz whose main access to “Esse,” meaning, God in some sense, is through, “A slightly snub nose, a high brow with sleekly brushed-back hair, the line of the chin.” (51).

[87] St. Teresa, *The Life of Teresa of Avila by Herself*, trans. J. M. Cohen (New York: Penguin, 1988) 210.

Less than a decade before the composition of Milosz's poem (in 1954) Fr. Martin D'Arcy intervened in a debate that was started by the Protestant scholars Anders Nygren in his *Agape and Eros* (volume I, 1932 and volume II, 1936) and was continued by Denis de Rougemont's *Love in the Western World* (1939).[88] These two thinkers drew a sharp dialectical boundary between erotic love and Christian *agape*. This line was meant to exclude the earthy messiness of the erotic. Christian love could only be disinterested, pure, individual, thereby avoiding the dangers of union and fusion. But D'Arcy, the celibate Jesuit, in direct polemic with Nygren opted for dialogue and fusion, "The perfection of love… is to be found in personal friendship, whether between a man and a woman, between man and man or between man and God. When God revealed himself as love, the last fear was removed from man's heart." He continues by striking directly at the Eros/Agape dichotomy, "Neither God nor nature, nor other human beings were enemies and a menace. They could all be looked at with interest and love, and in the case of persons love could be mutual. Even Eros, if it knows its own nature, can go with Agape."[89] When the last fear is removed then this encourages the proliferation of analogies. Worldly being is itself so rich that it can produce an infinite hermeneutic that is analogous to the infinity of God.

Milosz's poem suggests worldly existence is not occluded by the transcendent, even as it remains in some "mysterious" way transparent to infinity, "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 avowal beyond which no power can attain: I am, she is. Shout, blow the trumpets, make thousands-strong marches, leap, rend your clothing, repeating only: is!" (51). This sort of

[88] See: Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Phillip S. Watson (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1982) and Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, trans. Montgomery Belgion (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1982).
[89] Martin D'Arcy, *The Mind and Heart of Love* (New York: Meridian, 1957) 30-31.

scenario is reminiscent of Heidegger's wish in *Identity and Difference* to find a god who might be a dance partner:

> Man can neither pray or sacrifice… before the *causa sui*, man can neither fall to his knees in awe nor can he play music and dance before this God… The god-less thinking which must abandon the god of philosophy, god as *causa sui*, is thus perhaps closer to the divine God.[90]

In contrast, we have Milosz who goes berserk precisely for a God who is a *causa sui*, but intimately related to creation, whose fullness of Being sustains, overflows, and is reflected in, creation. The differences between the two thinkers are probably not accidental given their disparate wartime experiences. We have already seen how that experience sent Milosz scurrying to recover some stable sense of being in our discussion of "The Spirit of History" above. Heidegger, on the other hand, because of his wartime collaboration, was forbidden to teach.

Milosz's liturgy ends abruptly once the woman leaves his sight and exits the metro. The prose-poem "*Esse*" reflects this by breaking up into a new paragraph, although not quite forming a conventional standalone new stanza. The narrator says, apparently still dumbfounded, that is, in a state of philosophico-theological wonder: "I was left behind with the immensity of existing things" (51). The narrator then launches into a couple of analogies that celebrate the human cognitive lack, its inadequacy to the richness of experience, by comparing himself to "A sponge, suffering because it cannot saturate itself; a river, suffering because reflections of clouds and trees are not clouds and trees" (Ibid.). The lack here is not absolute. It might not even entirely be a lack, because these lines express the sense of being overwhelmed by the being that is always

[90] Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Staumbach (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2002) 72.

continually gushing forth. It also mirrors, indirectly, a Catholic analogical sense of the dynamism of the divine immanence.

Chapter 2: Breakdowns of Analogy and Cafeteria Manicheanism[91]

Milosz's middle period (1960-1980) finds him leaving Europe and taking up a teaching post at Berkeley. His poetry, as he claimed in the passages we analyzed in the introduction, continues to be at its core consistently religious, Catholic in the analogical and thematic sense. However, his poetic explorations gain a thematic focus: a new emphasis upon the erosion of the analogical imagination. As we shall see in the discussions of the poems from this period, the Polish poet associates this breakdown with certain extreme-Darwinian liturgies, their mainstream acceptance, and their subsequent expression in the poetry of his time. The consequence of these trends is a contemporary erosion of nature as an analogue for God. This is the reason why Milosz takes up Manichean-Gnostic themes,[92] more as a diagnostic device, rather than as a prescriptive or confessional theme.

In addition, Milosz's analyses of Manicheanism are applicable beyond confessional boundaries, because the breakdown of analogy not only affects Catholicism, but also science, philosophy, other religions, and literary theory. All of those liturgies rely upon making analogies between disparate phenomena in order to produce viable worldviews that capture as much of the flow and interaction of reality as possible. The reduction of reality into a worldview that posits nature as a selfish dialectical battle of all against all ignores the possibilities of analogy,

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[91] Nota Bene: Throughout this study the numbers given in parentheses correspond to page numbers in Milosz's *Selected and Last Poems*.

[92] See: Introduction to the present study for a discussion of Manichean/Gnostic liturgies. Manicheanism posits the world as totally beyond redemption and matter as a pure and simple evil in ways that go way above and beyond the fallenness of creation posited by even the most dialectical of Protestant theologies. For a thorough discussion of Manichean and Gnostic worldviews see: Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston MA: Beacon, 2001) 31-96.

cooperation, mutual flourishing, and altruism that are equally justifiable with a Darwinian account. Here is how Hans Jonas outlines such an alternative reading of Darwin:

> Thus evolutionism undid Descartes' work more effectively than any metaphysical critique managed to do. In the hue and cry over the indignity done to man's metaphysical status in the doctrine of his animal descent, it was overlooked that by the same token some dignity had been restored to the realm of life as a whole. If man was the relative of animals, then animals were the relatives of man, and in degrees bearers of that inwardness of which man, the most advanced of their kin, is conscious in himself. Thus after the contradiction brought about Christian transcendentalism and Cartesian dualism, the province of 'soul,' with feeling, striving, suffering, enjoyment, extended again, by the principle of continuous gradation, from man over the kingdom of life.[93]

In talking about animals as evolutionary relatives of man, bearing the same inwardness as man in degrees, Jonas creates an analogy with the notion of a great chain of being. Such an account of Darwin, which Milosz did not seem privy to, would have made the best the sense of the common fate of humans, nature, and animals that Milosz already displayed in poems we looked at in the preceding chapter.

The poetic problematization of these developments shows how the religious thrust of Milosz's poetry is capable of contributing to a wider audience than those who read and write theology. For this reason studies such as Jerzy Szymik's *The Problem of the Theological Dimension of Czeslaw Milosz's Work* are motivated by the wrong goals. Fr. Szymik's work is

[93] Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2001) 57.

much too concerned with lining up the poet's work smoothly with orthodoxy. He says, "Czeslaw Milosz believes—and this study is one justification of this thesis—that poetry has a unique role, which, if it remains in tune with its fundamental kinship with the Word (with the realism of the '*Mysterium Incarnationis!'*) can effectively support theology, because in the contemporary, axiological battle it (poetry) fights 'on the side of being and against nothingness.'"[94] What is missing here is an account of how Milosz also documents all the derailments of the Word, ways in which it has become disincarnated in relation to the historical situation. This is not to say that Milosz is against orthodoxy; rather, his poetry is able to show where theology has shown itself imaginatively inadequate to the tasks that the contemporary situation has meted out to it. It also discusses where the contemporary situation can profit by looking at the unifying aims of an analogical imagination.

The importance of divine immanence for the analogical imagination (in Milosz and beyond) leaves it uniquely exposed to challenges from liturgies (secular and religious) that compete with it on the same immanent plane. This is precisely the conundrum Milosz describes in the extended quotation from *Road-Side Dog* on the first page of the present study. If you will remember, in that statement he describes the imaginative-dogmatic-liturgical-analogical edifice built by Origen, Augustine, Aquinas, and Newman as partially collapsing during the 20th century. Conversely, the dialectical imagination does not have to struggle as much with these developments, because its conception of the world as heavily fallen means the world does not carry the same amount of weight for it—which is not to say it ignores the world. Some forms of

[94] Jerzy Szymik, *Problem Teologicznego Wymiaru...*, op. cit., 392. Translation my own. Original: "Czeslaw Milosz twierdzi—a praca niniejsza jest tej tezy jednym z uzasadnien—ze wyjatkowa rola przypada tutaj poezji, ktora—jesli pozostaje wierna swemu zrodlowemu pokrewienstwu ze Slowem (z realizmem '*Mysterium Incarnationis!*')—moze skutecznie wspierac teologie, poniewaz we wspolczesniej, aksjologicznej batalii walczy ona (poezja) 'po stronie istnienia i przeciw nicosci.'"

extremely dialectical Protestant theologies, as we have seen *in extremis* with Altizer, put so much emphasis on transcendence that they are not only buffered against disenchantment, but they can also consistently embrace, even promote, disenchantment.[95]

How the analogous imagination can react to contemporary mechanistic interpretations of science, which have infiltrated the Western imagination, is a very important issue for understanding Milosz's engagement with Manicheanism. We have already seen him pose the questions starkly, without hinting at answers, in our discussion of "The Spirit of History." In *Milosz's ABC's* the poet mentions an introduction to his writing by Arthur Quinn[96] and Leonard Nathan,[97] where, he says, "My Manicheanism is strongly emphasized [in *The Poet's Work*]."[98] It will become apparent that there are plenty of reasons for agreeing with such an emphasis, because of what Milosz wrote in both his essays and poems. However, what "My Manicheanism" implies is the issue that will occupy us frequently in this chapter.

Milosz's engagement with Manicheanism is much more ambivalent than the qualifier "my" can convey. It merits the label of "Cafeteria Manicheanism," because he picks and chooses thematic elements from the Manichean buffet. For example, Milosz frequently resorts to the generic category of "Manicheanism" to condemn his own age, not to laud it:

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[95] Another example is the following passage from Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1968) 28: "The known plane is God's creation, fallen out of its union with Him, and therefore the world of the flesh needing redemption, the world of men, and of time, and of things — our world. This known plane is intersected by another plane that is unknown — the world of the Father, of the Primal Creation, and of the final Redemption. The relation between us and God, between this world and His world presses for recognition, but the line of intersection is not self-evident." Barth was not a marginal figure, but one of the giants of 20th century Protestant theology who operated within the canons of Calvinist orthodoxy. The tie between the immanent (world, men, flesh) and the transcendent (God) is so tenuous in Barth's formulation that one wonders what keeps it from breaking. The mathematical language seems to have more to do with Descartes than Aquinas.

[96] Former student at Berkeley.

[97] Former colleague at Berkeley.

[98] Czeslaw Milosz, *Milosz's ABC's*, op. cit., 232. Lukasz Tischner, op. cit. also (rightly) strongly emphasizes this aspect of Milosz's without spending enough time on Milosz's analogical imagination.

> Yet, never was the position of those who defend the idea of a hidden harmony [with Nature] more difficult, never was Manichean ferocity more aggressive than when the nineteenth century observed that the suffering of living matter is the mainspring of its Movement and that the individual creature is sacrificed in the name of the splendid and enormous transformation without purpose or goal. When our descendants seek to define our times, they will probably make use of the term 'Neo-Manicheanism' to describe our characteristic resentment of evil Matter to which we desperately oppose value, but value no longer flowing from a divine source and now exclusively human, like a Baron Munchhausen able to pull himself from the swamp by his own hair. Then, too, will all praise of the body and freedom in morality be revealed as shams and masks.[99]

Note how "Neo-Manicheanism" is used as both a term of opprobrium and diagnosis. The diagnosis consists of accusing the age of a dualism between ungrounded human values and a pitiless Darwinian nature that sacrifices the individual in the name of the species à la what we read from Hegel in the last chapter. The opprobrium issues from the fact that we have put ourselves into this cul-de-sac because we did not work out a more analogical system of understanding nature, one that would be friendlier to human aspirations. What is left is an inconsistent glorification of the human body that is blind to its inconsistency with the implications of this dominant reading of Darwinian theory.

This is an especially frustrating situation for an analogical imagination, which, by definition, seeks to emphasize the presence of the transcendent throughout creation. Moreover,

[99] Czeslaw Milosz, *Visions from San Francisco Bay*, op. cit., 23-24.

Milosz astutely notes that there are also political implications, as we have seen in poems previously analyzed in this study,[100] of this divorce between matter and value:

> In Europe, and in Eastern Europe especially, as far back as the era of romanticism, people had been divided into the noble, pure spirits who dreamed of transforming man into an angelic being, and the vulgar herd, often simply referred to as swine. From then on cries of despairing poets and revolutionaries have rung out in protest against a life without a deeper justification. To be a member of the intellectual class clearly cut one off from the 'masses,' which were considered either incurably apathetic or else in need of being roused into action.[101]

This is clearly an attack against another 19th century commonplace: the Romantic poet as a lonely genius. What is hidden behind the commonplace, Milosz says, is a Manichean (and aristocratic) division between the swine of humanity and the pure and unsoiled apotheosized poet. Milosz uses Manichean insinuation to condemn both Romantic and post-Romantic writing in *A Treatise on Poetry*. He characterizes it as: "A pure thing, against the sad affairs of the earth. / Pure, forbidden the use of certain words: / Toilet, telephone, ticket, ass, money."[102] The very purpose of *A Treatise on Poetry* is to stick all those items listed in the last line right back into poetry, because the poet believes poetry ought to be able to carry their burden on its back.

The Manichean diagnosis is not Milosz's only reaction to the problems posed by the intellectual trends of his day. During his middle period he surprisingly also frequently reaches back into two very ancient theological resources as answers to the crisis: the communion of

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[100] Especially "The Spirit of History" section of *A Treatise on Poetry* analyzed in Chapter 1 of this study.
[101] Ibid., 145.
[102] Czeslaw Milosz, *A Treatise on Poetry*, op. cit., 7. There is a more direct passage in one of his essay collections where he takes the side of Rome against Polish Romantics whom he deems too Manichean, therefore heretics. I have not been able to track down this passage.

saints and the Eucharist. We have already discussed the significance of the communion of saints in the introduction to this study; therefore we will turn to the Eucharist here. The Eucharist is at the analogical center of Christian high liturgical traditions such as Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and certain segments of Anglicanism. In them the Eucharist not only symbolizes a past event, but is believed to make the sacrifice of Christ present in the bread and the wine, which are believed to become the body and blood of Christ upon consecration. This makes the most basic foodstuffs available to man analogues for God. This is the point where Christianity manifests itself at its most hylomorphic. Manicheans of all stripes nearly always attacked this admittedly shocking doctrine first, because of their dualistic rejection of matter. Henri de Lubac explains the centrality of the Eucharist thus:

> Now, the Eucharist is the mystical principle, permanently at work at the heart of Christian society, which gives concrete form to this miracle. It is the universal bond, it is the ever-springing source of life. Nourished by the body and blood of the Saviour, his faithful people thus all "drink of the one spirit," who truly makes them into one single body. Literally speaking, therefore, the Eucharist makes the Church. It makes of it an inner reality. By its hidden power, the members of the body come to unite themselves by becoming more fully members of Christ, and their unity with one another is part and parcel of their unity with the one single Head. This unity is the head and of all the rest of the body, with unity of Christ and his Church – He is her head, she is his body – is more than what is normally

> called "the whole body of the Church" or even "the body of Christ in general." It constitutes a real being.[103]

This means that the Eucharist is both an ontological and political reality for analogical Christian traditions. It is political, because it incorporates those who partake in it into the city (*polis*) of God in their "unity with one another." There is also an innate tie with the communion of saints, because the saints are those who were recognized as persevering within this unity. It is ontological, because the "universal bond" is understood to constitute the "body of Christ in general," which "constitutes a real being." It should be obvious that the words "mystical," "inner," and "hidden" do not denote a vague spirituality. What is meant is a concrete reality, a unified body of members who are unified through their active partaking in the Eucharist and how they then carry it out into society at large. This is probably the best example of how the analogical imagination concretely enacts itself on several levels of the world. It cannot permit itself a blanket rejection of the world, material reality, nature, and human culture. Conversely, intellectual crises on any one of those levels will be much more damaging to an analogical religious imagination than to a dialectical imagination. Therefore, these two emphases in Milosz's middle poems, the communion of saints and the spiritual-materialist mystery contained in the Eucharist, make it next to impossible to directly identify Milosz with the Manichean voice not infrequently heard in his poetry.[104]

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[103] Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, trans. Gemma Simmonds CJ (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame UP, 2006) 88.

[104] I only zeroed in on Milosz's devotion to the Eucharist in his poetry after his former secretary, Agnieszka Kosinska, told me how much effort he exerted to always make it to Mass at least once a week in his old age, even though by that time he was for all practical purposes deaf. Relayed to me in a private conversation at the Milosz apartment in Krakow in 2007. Again, Milosz was a practicing Catholic, if only because there are very few Manichean communities left in the world.

2.1: Signs Must Be Human

VENI CREATOR

Come, Holy Spirit,

bending or not bending the grasses,

appearing or not above our heads in a tongue of flame,

at hay harvest or when they plough in the orchards or when snow

covers crippled firs in the Sierra Nevada.

I am only a man: I need visible signs.

I tire easily, building the stairway of abstraction.

Many a time I asked, you know it well, that the statue in church

lifts its hand, only once, just once, for me.

But I understand that signs must be human,

therefore call one man, anywhere on earth,

not me—after all I have some decency—

and allow me, when I look at him, to marvel at you. (61)

Berkeley, 1961

The inspiration for Milosz's "Veni Creator" (67) is "Veni Creator Spiritus," one of the older hymns still in continual use in the Western Church. It is used on festive occasions, on the Feast of Pentecost, when popes are elected, and when priests are ordained. It is thought to have been written by sometime in the ninth century. The hymn, despite, or, because it is about the Holy Spirit, is incarnational and analogical in nature. It is, in effect, an extended prayer asking God's Spirit to come and inhabit the human community with his presence through visible effects

in the members of the community. Once again, here we see the materialism in the spiritualism of Catholicism. The hymn is colloquially known as "Veni Creator," which is probably why Milosz cuts off its full name in the title of his poem (67).

Yet, there is a curious reversal, or twist, on the original in the Milosz poem. Instead of asking for the Spirit to descend upon himself as part of the community, the poem asks the Spirit to descend upon some chosen member of the community (think: communion of saints) who will serve as a sign of presence for the narrator. In a bout of excessive humility or "decency," the poem shifts the focus of the hymn's objectivity away from the concrete believer toward somebody else who will then serve as a witness to marvel at God through him or her—only perhaps then the narrator will be drawn closer into the community.

The opening line of this poem reproduces the original church hymn verbatim with "Come, Holy Spirit" (67). The original continues with "Creator blest." The poem omits this, but it alludes to the notion of a Creator Spirit by listing the immanent effects of the Spirit that are reminiscent of the Spirit moving upon the waters of Genesis 1:2 with "Come… / bending or not bending the grasses" (67). Grass is strewn across the scriptures. It is usually associated with plentitude, although it is sometimes slated to be mowed down or burned. The ambiguity of the symbol is in line with the tone of the poem, which sits on the fence between hope and despair, or is an example of hope in despair. The proximity of the grass with imagery culled from Pentecost, "appearing or not above our heads in a tongue of flame," vaguely suggests the latter, purgatorial use of grass imagery. On the anthropological level, the tongues of flames appearing at Pentecost are an overwhelmingly positive symbol of the possibility of human participation in the Spirit of God.

The biblical and liturgical familiarity of the first three lines of the poem make it seem as if it will be content to remain a florilegium of traditional imagery. But then everything suddenly falls away from the traditional imagery as the poem veers into hay harvests (even more flammable than the grass), or ploughing, or the first snow covering firs in the Sierra Nevadas. The proliferation of the word "or," it appears four times in the first four lines of the poem, adds to the effect of ambivalence. It can either be read as an effect of abundance, or, the repetition can be read as introducing an element of doubt, or, both simultaneously. What it seems to point to is the need for spiritual discernment. Something like this occurs toward the end of the poem as it goes through several inadequate responses to the situation of ambivalence, finally settling on the immanent-incarnational-analogical need for a human example as the criterion for seeing God's dimmed presence in the world.

The remaining portion of the poem continues in a confessional first person vein. The confession begins in the sixth line and continues to the thirteenth line.[105] The weakness of the narrator's unaided mind admits of the need for visual crutches, of analogies, to bolster the intellect, "I am only a man: I need visible signs, / I tire easily building the stairway of abstraction" (67). The narrator of this poem believes only a concrete human being will hint at God's presence, not an abstraction. This is theologically consistent, since in Christianity a concrete human being, Jesus as Christ, is the ultimate visible analogy for a God the Father who is believed to be personal, but invisible.

The narrator then addresses God directly in a frustrated and exhausted tone. Here the poem resorts to a Catholic commonplace, if not Catholic kitsch, by asking God to give a visible

[105] One wonders whether the number 13 is significant here given the tone of the poem. Even though the Polish edition contains 14 lines, which does not exclude the possibility that the translation might have been intentionally limited to 13 lines.

sign through making the hand of a statue move. We are given to understand that a visible sign from the hand of a statue did not come. Given this disappointment the narrator corrects his expectations. The change is something of a conversion where the supernatural is then understood as mediated through another particularly analogical way, "But I understand that signs must be human" (67). Milosz will increasingly turn to this emphasis on anthropomorphism in these middle and then the late poems. In one of his essays Milosz says the following about its importance to Catholicism:

> Catholicism is the most anthropocentric of religions and, in some sense, through its own excess of divine humanity, it resists the exact sciences which annihilate the individual. Thus, paradoxically, it is less susceptible than other religions to the disintegrative influence of science and technology. In Catholicism, even Heaven and Earth, the Descent and the Ascension of God are not like relations between worlds but like those between human forms.[106]

We therefore need to slightly qualify the statement from the preface to this chapter claiming that the Catholic imagination is vulnerable to the erosion of analogy. According to Milosz, its reserve of anthropomorphism makes it less susceptible to reductive understandings of science and technology. Whether anthropomorphism by itself is enough is another question.

Back in the poem the prayer rounds itself out with a small ray of hope. It is reminiscent of Abraham pleading for the salvation of Sodom. In Genesis 18:26-33 Abraham relentlessly bargains down God. He first asks God to save the city if fifty righteous men can be found within its limits. The patriarch is then able to haggle the number down to ten. Milosz references and

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[106] Czeslaw Milosz, *Visions from San Francisco Bay*, trans. Richard Lourie (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1983) 82.

radicalizes this myth by asking God to show him just one righteous person as a "human sign" of God's presence—"after all I have some decency," he says (67). The implication is that this one exception, not fifty, not ten, will be a sign. The efficacy of personal singularity is, of course, built into Christianity as we mentioned earlier. Furthermore, there is perhaps also an allusion to humankind being the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:27) when the poem rounds itself out with the supplication, "and allow me, when I look at him, to marvel at you" (67). Such singular mediation of the transcendent (God the Father) through the immanent (Christ incarnate) is supremely on display in John 12:45 where Christ presents himself as an image, an analogy, of the Father ("Whoever sees me, sees the Father").

We should add that Milosz had a proclivity to gravitate toward spiritual mentors throughout his life. This is consistent with the Catholic stress on the communion of saints and its fundamental role in providing individual examples of possible ways of being. In fact, at the time of the writing of this poem, Milosz was several years into a correspondence with Fr. Thomas Merton whom he viewed as a spiritual father. In a letter dated 28 February 1960 he expressed the need for people like Merton to serve as guides,

> If I cling to such people as you, in spite of my weak faith, it is because I am revolted against that complete craziness one observes today in art and literature and which reflects a more general madness."[107]

Later in this letter to Merton Milosz also puts stress upon the "human signs" in new perspective. Milosz, who not infrequently speaks like a nature mystic himself, chastises Merton for his

[107] Thomas Merton and Czeslaw Milosz, *Striving Towards Being: The Letters of Thomas Merton and Czeslaw Milosz* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1997) 63. It is notable that the notion of people of "weak faith" needing guides reappears decades later in the poem "Ode for the Eightieth Birthday of Pope John Paul II," which we will briefly analyze in the final chapter of this study.

excessively naïve understanding of nature, "Every time you speak of Nature, it appears to you as soothing, rich in symbols, as a veil or curtain. You do not pay much attention to torture or suffering in Nature."[108] He continues by explaining his reservations by once again resorting to the category of Manicheanism:

> We live through a time when Manichaeism is particularly strong and one could enumerate many reasons for it—though we do not grasp as yet all the causes. I do not know to what extent a sort of despair at the sight of ruthless necessity in Nature is justified. Yet it exists while it was not known until quite modern times. The distance between man and the rest of Creation was so great that for Descartes too the animal was a machine.[109]

In this statement Milosz admits to a partial breakdown of analogies between the natural world and God without enumerating the many reasons for it. Louis Dupre might be of help when it comes to shedding at least a little light upon the primary reasons for the crisis:

> As a result of the nominalist separation between language and the nature of the real as well as of the humanist creative excess of language over nature, nature lost much of the symbolic power it had possessed before. The change not only affected the nature of religious symbolization, it also undermined the 'beautiful' quality the objective forms of religion had enjoyed in the past.[110]

Is it any wonder that Milosz is somewhat agnostic about the possibility of nature imaging the divine? Is it any wonder he resorts to human signs? The answer is "No." We already saw an

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[108] Ibid., 64.
[109] Ibid., 64.
[110] Louis Dupre, *Religious Mystery and Rational Reflection* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998) 69.

analysis of these trends in our earlier discussion of “A Treatise on Poetry” with its own genealogy of this symbolic breakdown. After taking this circuitous route we should now also better understand how Milosz’s “Veni Creator” mirrors greater trends in the Western, largely post-Christian, scientific and literary imaginations. These problems, in more direct confrontation with problems dealt with in literary and linguistic theory, will resurface in our discussion of “From the Rising of the Sun” later in this chapter.

2.2: An Inhuman Thing

TO ROBINSON JEFFERS

If you have not read the Slavic poets
so much the better. There's nothing there
for a Scotch-Irish wanderer to seek. They lived in a childhood
prolonged from age to age. For them, the sun
was a farmer's ruddy face, the moon peeped through a cloud
and the Milky Way gladdened them like a birch-lined road.
They longed for the Kingdom which is always near,
always right at hand. Then, under apple trees
angels in homespun linen will come parting the boughs
and at the white kolkhoz tablecloth
cordiality and affection will feast (falling to the ground at times).

And you are from surf-rattled skerries. From the heaths
where burying a warrior they broke his bones
so he could not haunt the living. From the sea night
which your forefathers pulled over themselves, without a word.
Above your head no face, neither the sun's nor the moon's,
only the throbbing of galaxies, the immutable
violence of new beginnings, of new destruction.

All your life listening to the ocean. Black dinosaurs
wade where a purple zone of phosphorescent weeds

rises and falls on the waves as in a dream. And Agamemnon
sails the boiling deep to the steps of the palace
to have his blood gush onto marble. Till mankind passes
and the pure and stony earth is pounded by the ocean.

Thin-lipped, blue-eyed, without grace or hope,
before God the Terrible, body of the world.
Prayers are not heard. Basalt and granite.
Above them, a bird of prey. The only beauty.

What have I to do with you? From footpaths in the orchards,
from an untaught choir and shimmers of a monstrance,
from flower beds of rue, hills by the rivers, books
in which a zealous Lithuanian announced brotherhood, I come.
Oh, consolations of mortals, futile creeds.

And yet you did not know what I know. The earth teaches
More than does the nakedness of elements. No one with impunity
gives to himself the eyes of a god. So brave, in a void,
you offered sacrifices to demons: there were Wotan and Thor,
the screech of Erinyes in the air, the terror of dogs
when Hekate with her retinue of the dead draws near.

Better to carve suns and moons on the joints of crosses

as was done in my district. To birches and firs
give feminine names. To implore protection
against the mute and treacherous might
than to proclaim, as you did, an inhuman thing. (78)
Berkeley, 1963

What is most noteworthy about "To Robinson Jeffers" is the analysis of how scientific theories help to shape poetics. These poetics in turn present a certain imagination of how man, world, and God fit together. Therefore, "To Robinson Jeffers" covers the last two swerves on our list, the scientific and the literary. The simultaneous discussion of these in the poem demonstrates that these two liturgies do not occupy two cordoned off spheres of life. They can cooperate in unexpected ways.

This poem also demonstrates that Milosz's poetry is ambivalent, rather than indifferent or hostile, toward nature. "To Robinson Jeffers" describes folk Catholicism's appropriation of nature as an icon of a benevolent deity. This poem is also a confrontation between two different poetics imaginations shaped by different liturgies and by different types of landscapes. These differences in imaginations ultimately inculcate two antithetical worldviews. Milosz also suggests these two worldviews are actually two different theologies.

The poem begins by acknowledging that "Slavic poets" would probably not be to Jeffers' liking. This is because these poets lived in a "protracted childhood." They saw the sun, moon, the Milky Way and were gladdened by them as they would be by familiar everyday sights such as a "birch-lined road" (78). They also, "longed for the Kingdom which is always near," and their childlike trust rendered that Kingdom, "always right at hand" (78). In other words, theirs is

an imagination filled with analogies, a world that humanizes, anthropomorphizes, the whole of the universe up to the point where the sun is compared to the ruddy face of a farmer and the moon playfully peeks from behind a cloud like a child and these ways of seeing make it possible to believe God is near, at hand. In some ways the poem reads a little like the description of a paradise where Christ's commandment to turn from sin and become as little children (Matt. 18:3) has been fulfilled. Granted, there is an ambivalence to a childhood extended "from age to age," but even that might depend upon the perspective from which one views childhood (78). The ambivalence can be seen as an invitation for Jeffers and his extremely dialectical imagination to step in and condemn childlikeness, but it is simultaneously, and in tension, an analogical affirmation of such dependency.

The next three stanzas contrast the worldview of Robinson Jeffers against the humanized nature and theology of the Slavic poets. Milosz takes the side of the Slavic poets as he simultaneously ventriloquizes the major themes from the poems Jeffers wrote. Jeffers was a proponent of admiring the steely necessities of the post-Darwinian natural world over the weak pieties and mercies of Christianity. Milosz follows Jeffers' own self-understanding by interpreting his poetics as an alternative theology that is a mix of Greek necessity ("without grace"), anti-humanist Darwinism, and a glorification of sublime landscapes,

> Thin lipped, blue eyed, without grace or hope,
> before God the Terrible, body of the world.
> Prayers are not heard. Basalt and granite.
> Above them, a bird of prey. The only beauty. (78)

This is a Wholly Other God so hard and stony that he is deaf to prayers. The only beauty is a predator floating above the whole scene. This imagery is consistent with Jeffers who frequently spoke of the need for a non-human, even inhuman, ethic in his poems.[111]

Milosz then takes Jeffers a step further in presenting the murder of Agamemnon as analogous to the indifference of the almost prehistoric nature of the oceans that Jeffers reverently "listened to," as one might listen to a deity, all his life:

> All your life you listened to the ocean. Black dinosaurs
> Wade where a purple zone of phosphorescent weeds
> Rises and falls on the waves as in a dream. And Agamemnon
> sails the boiling deep to the steps of the palace
> to have his blood gush onto marble. (78)

The connection between a primeval nature and the sacrifice of humans is made through a quick transition between the descriptions of each. Such a vision of humanity being continually sacrificed on a stony altar of the world in waves of nature's indifference until "mankind passes" is diametrically opposed to the one that Milosz presents in the opening stanza that he asks Jeffers directly, "What have I to do with you?" (78). Jeffers is so foreign that he resembles the involuntary worshippers of the Spirit of History analyzed in the previous chapter of this study. What differentiates Jeffers from them is that Jeffers chooses his faith in an inhuman necessity voluntarily, whereas the Poles Milosz describes in "A Treatise on Poetry" did not. Theirs was a

[111] Robinson Jeffers, *Selected Poems* (New York: Vintage, 1965). See: "To Stone Cutters" (3) says, "man will be blotted out"; "The World's Wonders" the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is compared to the killing of "half a million flies"; "The Beauty of Things" (94), praises "unhuman nature its towering reality"; "Carmel Point" (102) claims "we must unhumanize our views a little."

bad faith. On the other hand, Jeffers was an actual believer who unflinchingly praised the stark beauty of necessity and the cruelty of nature as they both ground down the human detritus.

The rest of the poem answers what Milosz has to do with Jeffers. Not much apparently. After exploring the uninviting landscapes Jeffers favored Milosz goes right back to the peasants in the first stanza. They are now in "the orchards" where an "untaught choir" walks with the "shimmers of a monstrance," together with the narrator, participating in a procession. By bringing the Eucharist into view Milosz puts the most anthropomorphic aspect of an anthropomorphic religion on display. The Eucharist is literally *and* symbolically the body of a God who is tragically vulnerable, not hard like the stony elemental world of Jeffers. The word monstrance derives from the Latin *monstrare*, which means "to show." What Milosz shows here he then qualifies in the same stanza with mocking words that seem to mime Jeffers in his dismissiveness of such rituals, "Oh, consolations of mortals, futile creeds" (79).

Jeffers sought to simulate immortality by participating in the eternal hardness of rocks and birds of prey, therefore he had no use for futile creeds that put a human scapegoat front and center. Again, this is not a question of piety versus impiety, but rather of two radically different pieties. And so in the next stanza the narrator chides Jeffers by suggesting his extreme-Darwinian mythology missed an important component of reality by turning away from weakness and dependence, "And yet you did not know what I know" (79). Furthermore, in a demonological reading that borrows a commonplace from the Church Fathers Milosz claims he knows that by worshipping cruelty Jeffers "offered sacrifices to demons" (79). Milosz the Slavic poet then gives these demons their proper names taken from Greek and Norse myth: Wotan, Thor, Erinyes, and Hekate. These are gods of destruction and naked power, but, we are told, "The earth teaches more than does the nakedness of elements" (79). If we follow Milosz's

reading of Jeffers here to its ultimate conclusion, then his worshipping of a post-Darwinian nature, understood as only a deathly battle and nothing more, can be best characterized as demonic worship.

In the end, "To Robinson Jeffers" sees the work of the American poet in terms of an alternative liturgy that proclaims "an inhuman thing" (79). This Milosz poem, however, does not leave the liturgies on equal footing, it makes the following judgment that it is better to, "implore the protection / against the mute and treacherous might" (79). Why? Because Milosz's own theological imagination was formed in an ecclesial liturgy that puts someone who is weak and an outcast in the middle of its rites, in a monstrance, for everyone to see and worship.[112] This, of course, was something monstrously weak for someone like Jeffers who spent a lifetime trying to cut his umbilical cord to even the much more austere and transcendent God of his forebears.

[112] Even if it does not always live up to its own very high standards.

2.3: God Loving Us in Our Weakness

Raja, I wish I knew
the cause of that malady.

For years I could not accept
the place I was in.
I felt I should be somewhere else.

A city, trees, human voices
lacked the quality of presence.
I would live by the hope of moving on.

Somewhere else there was a city of real presence,
of real trees and voices and friendship and love.

Link, if you wish, my peculiar case
(on the border of schizophrenia)
to the messianic hope
of my civilization.

Ill at ease in the tyranny, ill at ease in the republic,
in the one I longed for freedom, in the other for the end of corruption.

Building in my mind a permanent polis
forever deprived of aimless bustle.

I learned at last to say: this is my home,
here, before the glowing coal of ocean sunsets,
on the shore which faces the shores of your Asia,
in a great republic, moderately corrupt.

Raja, this did not cure me
of my guilt and shame.
A shame of failing to be
what I should have been.

The image of myself
grows gigantic on the wall
and against it
my miserable shadow.

That's how I came to believe
in Original Sin
which is nothing but the first
victory of the ego.

Tormented by my ego, deluded by it

I give you, as you see, a ready argument.

I hear you saying that liberation is possible
and that Socratic wisdom
is identical with your guru's.

No, Raja, I must start from what I am.
I am those monsters which visit my dreams
and reveal to me my hidden essence.

If I am sick, there is no proof whatsoever
that man is a healthy creature.

Greece had to lose, her pure consciousness
had to make our agony only more acute.

We needed God loving us in our weakness
and not in the glory of beatitude.

No help, Raja, my part is agony,
struggle, abjection, self-love, and self-hate,
prayer for the Kingdom
and reading Pascal. (105)
Berkeley, 1969

"To Raja Rao" picks up the theme of human weakness from an even more personal angle (104). It is the only poem Milosz wrote in English. The poem emerged from a conversation Milosz had with Rao.[113] It appears from this poetic response that the U.S. based writer of Hindu-themed novels was trying to convert the Polish poet. The fascinating thing is how Milosz reconstructs the conversation in his poem by suggesting that Rao's strategy consisted of tying his own Hindu tradition to Socrates by cloaking the Greek philosopher as a lonely guru of self-actualization. In response to this move the Milosz poem presents original sin as "nothing but the / first victory of the ego" (105).

The desire for authentic community-to-come is once again, as in "To Robinson Jeffers," inscribed within a Eucharistic framework in the fourth stanza, "Somewhere else there was a city of real presence, / of real trees and voices and friendship and love" (104). The "somewhere else" goes beyond an extreme dialectical acceptance of God's permanent withdrawal from a godless world. Instead, this absence speaks of a "the messianic hope" for a sacramental presence ("real presence" is a theological affirmation of the full presence of the second person of the Trinity in the Eucharist) through analogies with the world ("real trees"), and something resembling a communion of saints ("friendship and love"). In other words, the presence of God is seen as obscured, but not totally evacuated from the world (104).

Milosz goes on to proclaim his acceptance of this obscured situation, "I learned to say: this is my home, / here, before the glowing coal of ocean sunsets, / … in a great republic, moderately corrupt…" (104). Yet, this did not cure him of his properly Augustinian "shame," which is repeated twice and compounded once by "guilt" (104). The trap of shame and guilt here is not societal, as it might be for those who advocate self-realization, or those who adhere to a

[113] See: Leonard Nathan and Arthur Quinn, *The Poet's Work*, op. cit., 80-82.

dialectical framework that distrusts the community in favor of the judgments of the individual. The shame consists in the solipsistic isolation of an individual in the cramped confines of the self without community and relationship to fall back on. Such isolation then leads to a distorted self-image that's projected upon a wall like the one Plato's Cave in the *Republic*,

> The image of myself
> grows gigantic on the wall
> and against it
> my miserable shadow. (105)

The next stanza contains a typical analogical move where Plato's metaphor is then taken up as signifying something different than it does in its original context:

> That's how I came to believe
> in Original Sin
> which is nothing but the first
> victory of the ego. (105)

Original sin is not a cognitive mistake that can be remedied by a turn to the light or through efforts of self-actualization proposed by Rao. It is fundamentally a problem of broken relation between humans and the transcendent that can be remedied through a renewed dependence upon the transcendent (and humans).

Milosz realizes that his confession opens him up to Rao's proposals. After all, Milosz's "victories of the ego" can be interpreted in a Hindu liturgy as illusions that can be transcended. The whole Greek heritage can also be redrawn in a similar fashion, "I hear you saying that

liberation is possible / and that Socratic wisdom / is identical with your guru's" (105). This is not a live option for Milosz, because his own liturgy dictates that, "I must start from where I am."[114] The self is not an illusion that can be abandoned in Christianity. The notion that something like that might be possible is the very definition of original sin. Awareness of this insight leads Milosz to the disconsolate, but orthodox, conclusion that, "If I am sick, there is no proof whatsoever / that man is a healthy creature" (105). There is no final karmic escape into cosmic unity in the Christian liturgy also because the individual, with all of his or her foibles, is seen as infinitely valuable.

Milosz ultimately changes the frames of the exchange, because of the traps that permitting Greek thought to take center stage have set for the dialogue with Rao. He says, "Greece had to lose, her pure consciousness / had to make our agony only more acute" (105). This sense of necessity, emphasized by the repetition of the verb "had," makes the downfall of Greece's pure consciousness almost a matter of providence, picking up on the classic theological trope of *praeparatio evangelica*.[115] What is more, the failure of Greek culture is something like a happy fault (*felix culpa* is another name for original sin), because it allows the Gospel to stand out all the more clearly when compared to the lofty standards set up and unmet by classical culture. In this way Greek culture is reintegrated into the conversation on terms that work within Milosz's own liturgy.

And in its concluding stanzas this poem opts for an analogy between human and divine suffering, rather than an escape from illusion into cosmic harmony and identity. The Incarnation

[114] One should also remember that Aquinas affirmed the "I AM," being itself, as the most proper name for God following Genesis 3:14 and John 14:6.

[115] An early Church doctrine that speculated that earlier cultures were not a total throwaway, but instead prepared for the proclamation of the Gospel by partially embodying what would be made fully manifest in the fullness of time (*kairos*).

appeals to Milosz, because it proposes a God whose crucifixion is an analogy of the negative aspects of human experience. This analogy enfolds these sufferings within an even more overtly providential context than the one we looked at above, "We needed God loving us in our weakness / and not in the glory of beatitude" (105). This is why the poem can then conclude with the following affirmation of negativity that refuses a higher synthesis that is too quick: "No help, Raja," because "my part is agony," somewhat as in the crucifixion. This leads Milosz to accept his "struggle, abjection, self-love, self-hate." These experiences are then taken up into the "prayer for the Kingdom," which most likely is the Lord's prayer, whose supplications include "Thy Kingdom come, / Thy will be done" (105). Those words from the Lord's Prayer suggest human fate, with all its rough edges, is to be accepted as a gift and a relation to the transcendent, rather than an escape into a higher non-human synthesis.

Now compare this litany of misery, human and divine, with Pascal's thought that comes after the better known "thinking reed" fragment,

> Man's greatness comes from knowing he is wretched: a tree does not know it is wretched. Thus it is wretched to know that one is wretched, but there is greatness in knowing one is wretched.[116]

Therefore, paradoxically, following Rao's advice and throwing off human wretchedness would also amount to throwing off human greatness. This is the reason why the response to Rao concludes with a "prayer for the Kingdom" and "reading Pascal" (105).

The weakness of God, rather than the power of nature as in Jeffers, or the total transcendence of weakness and suffering in Rao's Socratic version of Hinduism, is affirmed as

[116] Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, trans. A.J. Krailsheimer (New York: Penguin, 1995) 29.

the worldview that it most relatively adequate response to human struggle, abjection, self-love, and self-hate. In the end the hope for a “real presence” does not abandon the exigencies of history, but embodies itself right in the midst of them within an analogical picture of a God who does not shun states of abjection.

2.4: A Taster of Manichean Poisons

From THE ACCUSER[117]

. . . The so-called sights of the earth. But not many.
You started on a journey and are not sated.
Spring dances go on but there is no dancer.

In truth, perhaps you never took part in all that.
A spirit pure and scornfully indifferent.
You wanted to see, to taste, to feel, and nothing more.
For no human purpose. You were a passerby
Who makes use of hands and legs and eyes
As an astrophysicist uses shiny screens,
Aware that what he perceives has long since perished.
"Tender and faithful animals." How is one to live with them
If they run and strive, while those things are no more?

Do you remember your textbook of Church History?
Even the color of the page, the scent of the corridors.
Indeed, quite early you were a gnostic, A Marcionite,
A secret taster of Manichean poisons.
From our bright homeland cast down to the earth,
Prisoners delivered to the ruin of our flesh,
Unto the Archon of Darkness. His is the house and the law.
And this dove, here, over Buffalowa Street
Is his as you yourself are. Descend, fire.
A flash—and the fabric of the world is undone . . . (132)

Berkeley, 1973-1974

[117] Spatial constraints preclude reproducing the six pages of the section "The Accuser" here. The same applies to reproducing the whole of the poem "From the Rising of the Sun" of which "The Accuser" is just one of seven sections.

"From the Rising of the Sun" is undoubtedly one of Milosz's most important poems. It is perhaps his masterpiece. The fact that it is the longest piece of writing (excerpted almost in its entirety) in the *Selected and Last Poems*, attests to the importance the poet attached to the poem (109-141). The limitations of this monograph prevent us from going into all the details of this encyclopedic piece of writing. The strategy will be to deal with the most problematic section of the poem, entitled "The Accuser," after setting up a general framework for understanding how the whole relates to this section (130-133). "The Accuser" is significant, because it has led some researchers to posit a strong Manichean streak in Milosz's poetry. There is for example, Lukasz Tischner's book, currently being translated, which takes its name, *The Secrets of Manichean Poisons*, from a line in "The Accuser." Tischner argues that a Manichean concern with the problem of evil should be treated as the ultimate frame for understanding all of Milosz's work.[118] He goes through all of Milosz's long poems and points out what seems like his Manichean obsession with pain and suffering. The problem of evil is an important concern of the poet, but not the fundamental concern, as we have seen in our explorations so far. The problem of evil is addressed from within a Catholic imagination in Milosz's poems, rather than the other way around. In effect, I propose to argue that Milosz is a taster, rather than an eater, of Manichean poisons, therefore, something of a cafeteria Manichean. What's more, and perhaps more importantly, "From the Rising of the Sun" has a strongly Eucharistic streak. There is nothing more materialistic in the realm of spirituality, and less Manichean, than the Eucharist. We need to explore this context before we can move onto discussion the section of the poem entitled "The Accuser."

[118] Lukasz Tischner, *Sekrety manichiejskich trucizn*, op. cit.

"From the Rising of the Sun"[119] as a whole actually takes its title from Eucharistic Prayer III, "…you never cease to gather a people to yourself, so that, from the rising of the sun to its setting, a pure sacrifice may be offered to your name…"[120] Given our earlier discussion of the Christological significance of the sun (Chapter 1), it makes sense that it is used here during the Mass. In turn, the phrase is an Old Testament borrowing from Psalm 113:3, which reads, "From the rising of the sun to its setting let the name of the LORD be praised." The psalmist goes on to praise God as the highest reality in the universe, but one that is not indifferent like the god of Aristotle, but one ultimately concerned about the travails of the weakest, "He raises the needy from the dust, lifts the poor from the ash heap" (Psalm 113:7). It makes eminent sense to place this passage in the Mass in the part right before God is said to take on the most humble form of bread and wine, where the Son-Sun is ready to be refracted by saint and sinner alike.

The main dilemma in the early parts of this poem is whether words are adequate to describe reality. This dilemma touches upon the last portion of our genealogy of dialectical reactions to the Post-Reformation situation: the realm of contemporary literary theory. Milosz does not shy away from giving credence to the problems of reference that occupy current debates. But he does not see these problems as the *terminus ad quem* of thinking. He sees them as a starting point for recovering an analogical imagination from the rubble of the crisis. "From the Rising of the Sun" demonstrates the seriousness of this crisis by utilizing a whole spectrum of conventions—extended quotations from prose, poetry, history books, and even baptismal records—but only in order to eventually recapture the power of language to forge a correspondence with reality. A truly Manichean, or dialectical, or post-structuralist Milosz

[119] The Polish title of this work does not splice the Eucharistic prayer in half, *Gdzie wschodzi słońce i kędy zapada* [From the Rising of the Sun to Its Setting], therefore it does not seem the shortening in English is all too significant.
[120] Michael S. Driscoll and J. Michael Joncas, *The Order of Mass: A Roman Missal Study Edition and Workbook* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2011) 142.

would have embraced such a situation in his poem as a liberation from all the troublesome exigencies of the body and history. But Milosz does not celebrate the Manichean moment. His description of the situation shows his dread at the prospect of a language that circles upon itself and does nothing more,

> This time I am frightened. Odious rhythmic speech
> Which grooms itself and, of its own accord, moves on.
> Even if I wanted to stop it, weak as I am from fever,
> because of a flu like the last one that brought mournful revelations… (109)

The narrator admits to being frightened of writing the poem we are reading because he is in a weakened state, a state of crisis that expresses itself bodily, and therefore powerless against the wild, animal-like, untethered movement of speech.

The opening section where he voices these worries is entitled "The Unveiling." Unveiling (*aletheia*) is simply another word for apocalypse or revelation. Just as in the biblical apocalypse this portion of "From the Rising of the Sun" describes a period of struggle between forces of good and evil, rather than a description of a final destination, a place of rest. The connection with the final book of the Christian Bible and the frightening anxiety it portrays is further reinforced by the double mention of a "red horse,"

> I attend to matters I have been charged with in the provinces.
> And I begin, though nobody can explain why and wherefore.
> Just as I do now, under a dark-blue cloud with a glint of the red horse. (109)

In the Book of Revelation we find the following, “Another horse came out, a red one. Its rider was given power to take peace away from the earth, so that people would slaughter one another. And he was given a huge sword” (Rev. 6:4). Thus, the Milosz poem’s opening makes an analogy between the crisis of language and the Apocalypse. The biblical analogy is then further extended by connecting the situation with the Babylonian exile: “Never again will I kneel in my small country, by a river, / So that what is stone in me could be dissolved, / So that nothing would remain but my tears, tears” (109). Like the Israelites in Psalm 137 the narrator despairs of returning to his own provincial corner of the world where all his hopes were shaped. The water metaphors might also bespeak an inability to find baptismal renewal, however, they surely are not a celebration of the loss of place and meaning—as one might expect in a Manichean reversal—rather it is a poem of crisis. The narrator finds himself in the same position as the Psalmist who wrote the prayer that gave the poem its name, needing to be raised from the ashes and dust, or rather, in a similar purification process, to have what is stone in him eroded to pure tears of repentance.

The next several sections of the poem proceed enunciating the outlines of the crisis. Here he recapitulates nearly all the swerves of transcendence we mentioned in the introduction. However, he proceeds in reverse order. And so after discussing the crisis of language he moves onto a discussion of the scientific swerve and the problems it generated. Milosz concentrates upon the problematization of nature as a possible icon of God’s presence after Darwin’s discoveries. Darwin himself once said in a rare moment of theological reflection for a former Anglican divinity student, “What a book a Devil's Chaplain might write on the clumsy, wasteful,

blundering low and horridly cruel works of nature."[121] On the other hand, Milosz summarizes his similar reservations with regard to Mother Nature thus,

> …Suckling, munching, digesting,
> Growing and being annihilated. A callous mother.
> If the wax in our ears could melt, a moth on pine needles,
> a Beetle half-eaten by a bird, a wounded lizard
> Would all lie at the center of the expanding circles
> of their vibrating agony.[122] (116)

Much like in previous poems we discussed, human history also does not prove to be all that edifying. Milosz's view of American culture culminates in a Carnival like characterization of what looks like it might be a Fourth of July celebration,

> And there was holiday in Megalopolis.
> Streets were closed to traffic, people walked in procession.
> The statue of a god slowly moved along:
> A phallus four stories high
> Surrounded by a crowd of priests and priestesses
> Who tossed about in a whirling dance. (129)

[121] Charles Darwin in a letter to Joseph Hooker, cited in Conor Cunningham, *Darwin's Pious Idea*, op. cit., 288.
[122] The beetle becomes a strikingly similar symbol of nature in the writings of Milosz's friend and contemporary, Witold Gombrowicz. In his *Diary* [op. cit., 288] Gombrowicz gives the following example of nature as a callous mother: "And by this time I was so wrapped up in their suffering, I was so absorbed by it, that, seeing new beetles all along the plains, ravines and canyons, an endless rash of tortured dots, I began to walk the sands as if I were demented, rescuing, rescuing, rescuing! But I knew this could not last forever - for it was not just this beach, but the entire coast, as far as the eye could see; it was sown with them so there had to come a moment when I would say 'Enough!' The first unrescued beetle would have to happen too. Which one should it be? Which one? Which one? Each time I said 'this one' - I saved it, unable to bear the awful, almost vile arbitrariness - because why this one, why this one? Until I finally broke down, suddenly, easily, I suspended my empathy, stopped, thought indifferently, 'Well, time to go back,' and left."

For all in intents and purposes this naturalizes the civic festival into a celebration of biological power and virility. It is offered as a counter-liturgy that worships sex and power, or sex as power.

The inheritors of the first swerve of transcendence, both Protestant and Catholic, are not immune to the breakdown in forms either. Their ecclesial liturgies are also skewered,

> A service was also being celebrated in Christian churches
> Where liturgy consisted of discussion
> Under the guidance of a priest in Easter vestment
> On whether we should believe in life after death,
> Which the president then put to the vote. (129)

The central mystery of the resurrection, the question of "life after death" does not escape the withering away of language and its inability to signify anything of importance. These solipsistic debates, whose symptoms mirror the solipsism of "To Raja Rao," a symptom of original sin, put the fundamentals of belief "to the vote" as if only contemporary believers were capable of judging these religious events. Even more significantly, their debates, stringing together speech that "grooms itself," rather than pointing beyond itself, are conducted during Easter, a time when speech should be used in praise of the transcendent, rather than dryly debating and voting on its possibility.

While it might seem that Milosz has reached the zenith of negation through presenting the negating possibilities of language, nature, history, culture, and religion, the most powerful negation comes in the section we will consider at length now. The section is entitled, "VI. The Accuser." Six is a number associated with evil across various cultures and it fulfills this role in

both the Old and New Testaments. It most notably appears in Revelation 13:18 ritually repeated thrice as the number designating a beast who fools people into following him through working miracles. The number 666 is associated in Christian legend and thought with both the Antichrist and Satan. What's more, the label of "Accuser" is given to Satan in the Book of Job who is traditionally identified as the Devil in Christian theology.[123] Conversely, the Holy Spirit who already visited us in our interpretation of "Veni Creator," is called the Advocate-Paraclete (John 14:26) in the New Testament, because he is a defender against the false accusations of the Devil. Rene Girard captures the importance of courtroom drama of accusation for the origins of Christianity and its apocalyptic literature thus:

> The birth of Christianity is a victory of the Paraclete over his opposite, Satan, whose name originally means 'accuser before a tribunal,' that is, the one responsible for proving the guilty of the defendants.[124]

Therefore, we can legitimately read this section of the poem ("The Accuser") as making the analogy between the struggles of a post-modern person with the anti-demonic battles of the New Testament.

With this display of biblical numerology and drama Milosz manages to pack a volume of references and research into merely the title of this important section of a poem. Such polyphonic and compressed stage-setting is crucial for understanding the contexts of this, perhaps the most

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[123] Although, in Job, he is clearly a servant within the heavenly court who is given permission by God to test Job's faithfulness through severe personal and physical trials. This does not affect the reinterpretation within the Christian context, because religious traditions have their own hermeneutic standards that encourage the shifting of meanings with new developments. This is also the case with another biblical episode we have discussed at length in this study, the story of Adam and Eve. The shift toward seeing it as an account of original sin begins with Paul and only comes to full doctrinal fruition in the fifth century works of St. Augustine.

[124] Rene Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightening*, trans. James G. Williams (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001) 199.

Manichean, poem-section in his entire work.[125] The voices vary throughout "From the Rising of the Sun," however, the narrator mostly has control between his own voice and the voices he calls forth in other sections of the poem. The reader is immersed in this interplay, however, in "The Accuser" Milosz cedes the narrator's voice to that of the Accuser-Satan, who is given free rein in putting the narrator on trial with a laundry list of accusations. This fits into the apocalyptic setting of the poem's opening. First, the Accuser takes a swipe at the poet's relevance, "You say a name, but it's not known to anyone," then proceeds to strike at the very practice of poetry,

> And what about your teachers who repeated:
> *Ars longa, vita brevis*?
>
> Their laurel-crowned deceptions will soon be over.
> Do you still say to yourself: *non omnis moriar*?[126] (130)

It is difficult to tell whether it is the narrator who answers these distressing questions with this self-deprecating irony, "Oh yes, not all of me shall die, there will remain/ An item in the

[125] Our discussion so far should have made it apparent that polyphony has always been a fundamental structure in Milosz's oeuvre. You see it not only in the middle, but also late and early poems. There does seem to be an intensification of the application of this trope during the middle period. During this time Milosz was exploring the polyphonic novels of Dostoevsky through the lens of his best known Russian interpreter Mikhail Bakhtin. See: Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1984). See especially: Ch. 1 "Dostoevsky's Polyphonic Novel and Its Treatment in Critical Literature," 5-46. For Milosz's engagement with Dostoevsky through Bakhtin see: Leonard Nathan and Arthur Quinn, *The Poet's Work*, op. cit., 100-101.

[126] The phrase comes from Horace, see: *The Complete Odes and Epodes*, III.30, trans. David West (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008) 108.

fourteenth volume of an encyclopedia / Next to a hundred Millers' and Mickey Mouse" (131), or whether it is the Accuser mocking him.[127]

The stanzas now expand in length as the accusations continue by way of recounting episodes that read very much like biography. The first one is striking, because it once again makes a definite Eucharistic parallel. It sets the stage thus: "A traveler. Far away. And a low sun. You sit in a ditch and to your bearded mouth / You raise a slice of bread cut off with a penknife" (131). This quotidian gesture opens up into a communion with an epiphany of being analogous to the episode recorded in Luke 24:13-35 set on the road to Emmaus. After Milosz consumes the bread his understanding seems to open up exponentially like the apostles who were listening to Jesus on the road, "And there, splendor. Parades, Carriages. Youth all in flowers," but given the tone and narrator of this section, the epiphany is quickly foreclosed, "A short while ago you were one of them. Now you are watching" (131). When this incarnational temptation is foreclosed a Manichean possibility is then quickly substituted for it by The Accuser,

> Confess, you have hated your body,
> Loving it with unrequited love. It has not fulfilled
> Your high expectations. As if you were chained to
> Some little animal in perpetual unrest,
> Or worse, to a madman, and a Slavic one at that. (131)

This is not Milosz himself confessing a dogmatically Manichean hatred of the body. It comes from another voice that wants him to succumb to personal temptations. The "you" being

[127] The liminal status of the Accuser is reminiscent of Ivan's demon in Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage, 1990), especially the chapter "The Devil: Ivan Fyodorovich's Nightmare" (634-650). I know of no essay that has explored this parallel.

addressed here is Milosz, because the mention of Slavic earthiness is reminiscent of the values Milosz has argued for in "To Robinson Jeffers." The Accuser, on the other hand, reduces these provincial qualities to animality like Jeffers might if he were to write a response to Milosz. Milosz also places himself through the Accuser's words on the side of the body. This is not the first time he has done so in the poems we have interpreted. Another place where he makes a somewhat embarrassed case for the body is in an introduction to the work of Simone Weil, a quasi-Gnostic Christian mystic he translated and valued. In an otherwise mostly positive appraisal of her subsequently influential work:

> I translated the selected works of Simone Weil into Polish in 1958 not because I pretended to be a 'Weilian.' I wrote frankly in the preface that I consider myself a Caliban, too fleshy, too heavy, to take on the feathers of an Ariel. Simone Weil was an Ariel.[128]

For Weil the world and the body were subject to strict necessity and almost automatism, grace was a violation of this law. Whether Weil was entirely a Manichean is still up for debate among Weilians. It might be more accurate to call her a Christian with a severe dialectical imagination instead. Milosz, on the other hand, saw dialectics as a disruption in the normal analogical functioning of his Catholic imagination.

The disruptions that Simone Weil posits as being fundamental are more of an anomaly when Milosz experiences the world in the manner described by Weil in one of her *pensees*:

> The world is the closed door. It is a barrier. And at the same time it is the way through. Two prisoners whose cells adjoin communicate with each other by

[128] Czeslaw Milosz, *Emperor of the Earth*, op. cit., 97.

> knocking on the wall. The wall is the thing which separates them but it is also their means of communication. Every separation is a link.[129]

Milosz's rejection of Weil the Ariel and his identification with the extreme physicality of Caliban is perhaps the reason why the Accuser-narrator slyly posits a disturbing distance from "The so-called sights of the earth," (children playing, seeing the woods from a train, and the sight of one's beloved descending down a flight of stairs) as Milosz's primary *modus operandi*. Accordingly, the Accuser switches up the conversation by floating the possibility that Milosz's incarnational-earthiness was merely an illusion and that he was secretly on the side of Ariel,

> In truth, perhaps you never took part in all that.
> A spirit pure and scornfully indifferent,
> You wanted to see, to taste, to feel, and nothing more. (132)

The "nothing more" is not a denigration of sense perception, rather it is a sly accusation leveled against an absence of an analogical imagination that would give participatory depth to sensual relations. It seems that the Accuser judges his opponent according to the measure of analogy and accuses him of being merely a spectator who instrumentalizes the senses for his own pleasure. According to the Adversary-narrator, the poet's observations, and one can assume the writings that proceed from them as well, lack a level of participation that would give them a purpose through contact with the fleshly messiness of reality, "For no human purpose. You were a passerby / Who makes use of hands and legs and eyes…" (132). Such an approach, as the next line continues, is antiseptic in the negative Cartesian sense, "…As an astrophysicist uses shiny screens, / Aware what he perceives has long since perished" (132). The accused is bluntly being

[129] Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, op. cit., 145.

told that life slips through not only his poetic lines, but also his personal life, as it does for the astrophysicist studying long-gone phenomena left behind by dead stars.

The scab is then picked further with a look into Milosz's biography. The following question is posed: "Do you remember the textbook of Church History?" (132). Those who have read Milosz's autobiography *Native Realm* will remember the reference to the manual of Church history he read in high school. He read it not only for keeping alive what he calls a "European consciousness," because "The manual… contained the history of Europe in its entirety" in ways that Polish history books did not with their much more local focus.[130] But Milosz also says he was especially drawn to the small print notes in the manual about heresies, "My favorites were the Gnostics, the Manicheans, and the Albigensians" and wryly notes, "They at least did not take refuge behind some vague will of God to justify cruelty."[131] But they did shun the material world, because of a hyper-dialectical imagination that could not see how the divine could participate in the messiness of creation. Thus, the case against the poet continues with,

> Indeed, quite early you were a gnostic, a Marcionite,[132]
> A secret taster of Manichean poisons.
> From our bright homeland cast down to the earth,
> Prisoners delivered to the ruin of our flesh,
> Unto the Acheron of Darkness. His is the house and the law. (132)

[130] Czeslaw Milosz, *Native Realm*, op. cit., 77.
[131] Ibid., 77-78. He then adds, "They called necessity, which rules everything that exists in time, the work of an evil Demiurge opposed to God. God, separated in this way from the temporal order, subsisted in a sphere proper to himself, from responsibility, as the object of our desires. Those desires grew purer the more they turned against the flesh; i.e. creation" (78).
[132] Marcionites were followers of Marcion who were condemned at the Council of Sinope in 144. Their dualistic teachings chiefly denied the humanity of Christ and the normative status of the Old Testament. Their extreme interpretation of Paul also led them to oppose the flesh to the spirit.

This not an imagination that is presented laudably, instead, there is a certain bite to the idyllic notion of beings so pure that they come from a "bright homeland." A taster of Manichean poisons is not someone who feeds off them constantly, so even the Accuser notably limits his charges; and charges they are, rather than words of praise. This accusation does not make those poisons Milosz's daily bread; hence the label we developed earlier in the introduction of "Cafeteria Manicheanism."[133]

"The Accuser" then turns into an initiation journey that culminates with a scene from *Tristan and Isolde*. The tale is retold in a way that highlights its gnostic elements. After an elaborate buildup of a page a lofty Manichean takeaway is given to the reader,

> Behold the sword that separates Tristan and Iseult.
> Revealed to us was the contradiction between life and truth.
> In the forgetting of earthly years is our movement and peace.
> In our prayer for the last day is our consolation. (134)

In the Romantic idiom of this retelling of a medieval story truth cannot be reconciled with life, because they do not coincide—as they do not coincide in Manicheanism and various types of post-structuralism (the end result of the final swerve of transcendence). Therefore death, release from the lying life of the flesh, is courted as a final release from all the troubles and confusions of life. But even this highly suspect consolation, this comforting lie, does not hold up, because the Accuser cruelly pulls the carpet down from under his interlocutor and says the alluring Manichean illusion was itself a technological illusion, and probably Wagner's most famous

[133] Is it fair to identify Milosz himself with the person who faces these charges? Given the material cited from *Native Realm* this does not seem all that farfetched. The boundaries between theology, philosophy, poetry, and autobiography are quite porous in his literary works.

rendition of the illusion, "There was no castle. You were simply listening to a record" (134). The Accuser then describes his victim's quasi-apocalyptic apoplectic response:

> Then you thought in disgust:
>
> Bestiality
> Bestialité
> Bestialità. (134)

Such a response is consistent with the apocalyptic flavoring of the whole poem. The ritualistic threefold repetition of "bestiality" (made to seem almost universal and ritual by the rendition of the word in three different languages) means the author is also analogously gesturing toward the many beasts of the Book of Revelation.

Then next stanza has a surprisingly unironic voice. Its questions do not appear to be spoken by the Accuser. There is an echo of the Pascalian dread about "infinite spaces"[134] in the mathematics of infinity of these lines,

> Who will free me
> From everything that my age will bequeath?
> From infinity plus. From infinity minus.
> From a void lifting itself up to the stars? (134)

Pascal was perhaps the first truly modern Christian who best described the fallout from the collapse of the medieval universe as it moved into a mathematization that went beyond a human

[134] Pascal, *Pensees*, op. cit., 66.

scale. Then Milosz's poem suddenly ties these intellectual movements to a historical scene of horror,

> Throats.
>
> Choking.
>
> Fingers sinking
>
> Into flesh.
>
> Which in an instant will cease to live.
>
> A naked heap.
>
> Quivering.
>
> Without sound.
>
> Behind thick glass. (134)

The scene is clearly a description of a gas chamber with its list of the agonized actions we've come to associate with those who were asphyxiated in those places by the Nazis. Who is saying these words is unclear until the following words are spoken, "And what if that was you, that observer behind thick glass?" (134). Here the dualistic refusal of participation is condemned by the Accuser on a new, quite shocking, level. It brings up the ultimate guilt-specter of Christian collaboration with the extermination of the Jews (and other Christians as well) by the Nazis. The collaboration is not direct, since Milosz, nor any of his circle ever participated in such events, however, inaction, refusal to actively participate, in this extreme logic, is collaboration.[135]

"The Accuser" section of "From the Rising of the Sun" concludes with a picturesque scene in a southern city, a symbol of decadence, where a soothsayer and conjurer of spirits ("a

[135] One is reminded of the "what I have done and what I have failed to do" of the Confiteor as much as Zen thought.

pythoness") dances in front of a gawking crowd like in the scene from Fourth of July earlier. The problem then is distilled into lines that progressively shrink in order to finally pinpoint the ultimate problem,

> O Emperor.
> Franz Josef.
> Nicholas.
> Ego. (135)

Again Milosz returns to the isolated "ego" as original sin that we saw earlier in this poem and in "To Raja Rao." The next four stanzas, unlike the rest of the text, are marked off by em-dashes and are given in the first person. There is a note of regret, but also something approaching repentance, partial reconciliation, a transcendence of the ego through the acceptance of its foibles, "—Yet I have learned how to live with my grief. / —As if putting words together has been of help" (135). Then poetry is defended as a kind of vocation in the service of others, again a reconciliation, "—Not true, there were others, graces and beauty, / I bowed to them, revered them, / I brought them my gifts" (135). With these words the craft of writing is reframed as almost a prayer in the service of community, beauty, grace.

But the final words belong to the title character of this section. The Accuser twists around the confession, even with its note of desperation, into a play of will-to-power. The will-to-power is then further presented as a mock liturgy, because, after all, the *telos* of liturgies is what has been at stake throughout not only this poem, but also the whole of our argument from the beginning of this interpretation of Milosz,

You would like to lead a gathering of people

To a ritual of purification through the columns of a temple

A ritual of purification? Where? When? For whom?" (135)

The questions are legitimate, because, after all, the larger poem "From the Rising of the Sun" of which "The Accuser" is a part, starts with a liturgical formula that is connected to a ritual of purification for a worldwide community of people, the Eucharist. It occurs anytime, anywhere, where there are people gathered around the tradition that has developed around the teachings of Jesus. All of these theological issues recur throughout Milosz's poems. We have argued they are his central concern.

But how does Milosz resolve language's failure, history's failure, nature's failure, and finally of the ego's failure in "From the Rising of the Sun"? What to do when everything is broken? "From the Rising of the Sun" does so provisionally in the section "Bells in Winter" by hearkening back to the theological notion of *apokatastasis*. The poem itself does a good job of giving the basic genealogy of this doctrine,

Yet I belong to those who believe in apokatastasis.

That word promises reverse movement,

Not the one that was set in katastasis,

And appears in the Acts, 3, 21.[136] (138)

[136] "Repent, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be wiped away, and that the Lord may grant you times of refreshment and send you the Messiah already appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the times of universal restoration [*apokatastasis*] of which God spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old" (Acts 3:19-21). No other parts of the Bible mention the word, although 1 Timothy 2:4 with its hints of universal salvation was sometimes used in conjunction with Acts 3:19-21 in order to suggest God's will to restore creation to its pristine state at the end of time, "This is good and pleasing to God our savior, who wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth."

Such a belief then does not let everything that has gone wrong set itself irreversibly (*katastasis*) in stone. The failures do not have the last word. Milosz alerts to the shaky doctrinal status of *apokatastasis* with the following grouping of historical persons, "It means: restoration. So believed: St. Gregory of Nyssa, Johannes Scotus Eriugena, Ruysbroeck and William Blake" (138). Gregory of Nyssa is designated as one of the thirty-five Doctors of the Church, an elite group of theologians who have made the most significant contributions to Christian theology and have been recognized for doing so by the Church. These thinkers come from all periods of the Church's history and include giants such as Augustine, Aquinas, Teresa of Avila, and Edith Stein. Ruysbroeck is a beatified 14th century mystic of the Flemish school, which put emphasis upon a radical subjective transformation. On the other hand, Erigena and Blake have always skirted on the peripheries of orthodoxy. *Apokatastasis* as a theological topic seems to have originated in the writings of Origen (185-284CE), which were later partially condemned by a church council, however, it is not entirely clear whether *apokatastasis*, in its many variations, was actually condemned.

Actually, the 20th century saw some prominent theologians from several Christian traditions embrace nuanced forms of it.[137] Milosz therefore falls into line with a long line of theologians. Even though for many the concept skirts on the edges of heresy it has become acceptable enough where we find a leading contemporary theologian concluding a chapter on "Imagining the Last Judgment" with the following:

[137] Most notably: Hans Urs von Balthasar among the Catholics, Karl Barth among the Reformed, and Kallistos Ware among the Orthodox.

> The most ardent Christian hope, I propose, will see in the image of the judging Christ the prospect of apokatastasis, and will find in his incarnated presence a living testimony to the difference between God's judgment and the eschatological destiny of those who yet stand under that judgment.[138]

Thiel further reasons that *apokatastasis* is incarnational, because it seriously takes the notion that all of humanity is eschatologically *capax Dei*, "Such a hope will hope that just as the divine Word shared in the humanity of all, so too will all share in the eternal life of the divine Word." One should note Thiel's concerns about salvation and the problem of evil are more narrowly anthropomorphic than Milosz's in "From the Rising of the Sun" for methodological reasons.[139] Milosz wants to include the beetles and everything else under the possibility of *apokatastasis*.

The image of the Heavenly Jerusalem descending upon the earth in John 3 and 21 has frequently been interpreted as suggesting not only the human realm,[140] but all of creation being renewed at the end of time, so perhaps not even a narrowly anthropological focus, like Thiel's, necessarily excludes the rest of the created order. Something like this is suggested by the images Milosz chooses to conclude his poem. In a quick stanza he gives a summary of what *apokatastasis* means to him, "For me, therefore, everything has a double existence / Both in time and when time shall be no more" (138). The reference to time being no more is probably both to Revelation 10:6-7 and Revelation 21:4. The latter is succeed by the ultimate eschatological vision where the one sitting on the throne (Christ) says, "Look, I am making all of creation new"

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[138] John E. Thiel, *Icons of Hope: The "Last Things" in Catholic Imagination* (North Bend, IN: Notre Dame UP, 2013) 152.

[139] Thiel is explicitly dealing only with humanity, the only part of creation to which the Last Things pertain. According to classical theology non-human creation gets a free pass when it comes to the Last Judgment because it is not responsible for its evils in the same way that human beings are, hence the division between natural and moral evil.

[140] After all, the descent of the Heavenly Jerusalem is preceded by the appearance of a "new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1).

(Rev. 21:5). All in all, both Thiel and Milosz show how flexible religious orthodoxy is when it comes to its resources. It is continually reassessing and developing new approaches through the ages as new questions develop and new insights are gained.

In the end we are brought back to the Eucharist as "From the Rising of the Sun" concludes. The return to the Eucharist is one reason why the last section of "From the Rising of the Sun," a lucky and complete seventh section in the poem, is called "Bells in Winter." Winter imagery is frequently associated with death[141], and there has been plenty of death in Milosz's poem thus far, historical and symbolic. However, winter also contains the second most important holiday in the Christian liturgical calendar: Christmas. This is the ultimate feast of the Incarnation. And so the season is fruitful in its ambivalence for the poem, because the lion-share of its stanzas have been devoted to utter fallowness across several imaginations (linguistic, scientific, religious, etc.), at the same time, if we are to take the hint of the "double existence" Milosz says is implied by *apokatastasis* seriously, then there has to be at least the suggestion of a reverse movement. Milosz then gives an extensive list of Vilnius church baroque bells ringing, quite a few of them named after Doctors of the Church (138). Bells in churches usually are only rung at Christmas, Easter, and special occasions. It would not be too much a stretch to assume they are tolling for Christmas here. The effect is, "Many, many bells. As if the hands pulling the ropes / were building a huge edifice over the city" (138). Who are they tolling for? Lisabeth, a socially insignificant person identified as an "old servant woman" who used to work in the apartment building where Milosz stayed as a student. They toll "So that Lisabeth wrapped in her

[141] Most significantly for Milosz in the "Snow" chapter of Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*, trans. John E. Woods (New York: Vintage, 1996) 460-488. The importance of this book cannot be underestimated for Milosz and Polish debates about the place of religion in everyday life in the 70's and 80's. Milosz even wrote a poem entitled "A Magic Mountain" (142-143) during that period. Much earlier, in *Native Realm*, op. cit., 69-90, the chapter "Catholic Education" is presented as a battle for the allegiances of the high school students between the religion teacher styled as Naphta and the Latin humanist instructor styled as Settembrini.

cape could go to morning / Mass" (139). Thus, we circle back around to the Mass at the end of the poem, thereby echoing the beginning, suggesting a subtle reverse movement.

Lisabeth comes to the altar, and Milosz does not fail to recount the persecution of women throughout its history, thereby showing he is aware the medieval abuses that caused the collapse he describes in the poem. The Mass is then set into motion and "…the choirmaster, a sacrificer, a Levite / Ascending the stairs, sings: *Introbo ad altare Dei, / Ad Deum qui laetificat juventutem meam*" (139). The Latin means, "I will go in unto the Altar of God. To God, Who giveth joy to my youth." The reverse movement the rite seems to echo the resurrection as the narrator comments with words that could just as easily apply to Lisabeth an elderly woman, "My youth. / As long as I perform the rite / And sway the censer and the smoke of my words / Rises here" (139). Milosz then gives a Swedenborgian date for the apocalypse (1757), only to undermine it with his agnosticism about its precise date, "Though not for certain, perhaps some other year" (141). He then adds several other possible dates that only further distance themselves from certainty,

> It shall come to completion in the sixth millennium, or next Tuesday.
> The demiurge's workshop will suddenly be stilled. Unimaginable
> silence.
> And the form of every single grain will be restored in glory
> I was judged for my despair because I was unable to understand this. (141)

It is only appropriate that the poem concludes with a confounding "Cafeteria Manichean" mashup. The world is identified as a work of the demiurge, meaning, a secondary Manichean deity who does not share in the purity of the supreme God. But at the same time "every single

grain will be restored in glory," is an anti-Gnostic affirmation of the goodness of matter. In fact, the notion of *apokatastasis*, like in the New Testament, appears only once in the Gnostic gospels, in the Gospel of Philip, but in no way does is its use there an affirmation of the goodness of the material world.[142] Milosz instead uses the concept to affirm the goodness of creation despite his own despair at recovering a fully analogical vision of creation.

Finally, it is notable that Lisabeth, the unlikely sign of hope, a kind of anonymous saint who remains faithful despite being an old servant woman, echoes the biblical Elizabeth who appears in Luke 1 as the barren wife of Zacharias, future mother of John the Baptist. To her Mary speaks the *Magnificat*, one of the eight oldest hymns used in the Church,

> My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior; because he has looked upon the humiliation of his servant. Yes, from now onwards all generations will call me blessed, for the Almighty has done great things for me. (Luke 1:46-49)

This leaves the reader and the narrator with a possibility amidst all the contemporary humiliations even if the last note is one of exasperation, "I was judged for my despair because I was unable to understand this" (141). But this takes on a different coloring if we remember what Milosz said in a poem of his youth "Love," "It doesn't matter whether he knows what he serves: / Who serves best doesn't always understand" (30).

[142] Jean-Yves Leloup, *The Gospel of Philip: Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and the Gnosis of Sacred Union* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2004) 97.

Chapter 3: Analogy and the Problem of the Good[143]

Milosz's intense engagement with the implications of his Catholic imagination continued through his final years confirming his affirmation of the religious nature of his poetic undertaking.[144] The seriousness of this commitment led Milosz to a letter exchange with then pope John Paul II. Here is what the poet said to the pope:

> As one ages, one's perspective changes. When I was young, it was considered unseemly for a poet to ask the Pope for his blessing. And yet this is now the object of my concern, for over the last few years I have striven to write poetry that should not depart from Catholic orthodoxy, and I don't know how successful I have been. I humbly beg therefore of a word or two confirming my striving towards our common goal. May the promises of Christ be fulfilled on the day of His Resurrection.[145]

In response to Milosz's query the pope wrote that "Such a stance by a poet is a deciding factor. In this sense I am glad that I can confirm your words about 'striving toward a common goal.'"[146] However, it would not be entirely true to say that Milosz strove to write within Catholic orthodoxy only in the last years of his life, because we have seen that his poetry is saturated with a Catholic imagination that shaped the whole of his oeuvre. Furthermore, this intellectual commitment did not interfere with his ability to engage with wider intellectual trends, both religious and secular, because Catholicism gave him a long historical perspective on contemporary problems that seem novel only if such a perspective is missing.

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[143] Nota Bene: Throughout this study the numbers given in parentheses correspond to page numbers in Milosz's *Selected and Last Poems*.
[144] See the Introduction to this study.
[145] Cited in Charles Kraszewski, *Irresolute Heresiarch*, op. cit., 14.
[146] Ibid., 51.

Milosz's poetry goes beyond repeating dogmatic affirmations word for word, because the poems also expose neuralgic points where dogmatic affirmations are failing to register imaginatively in the present historical moment, even if they once did within other historical moments. These contemporary historical areas of crisis, usually recognizable because they are written in an extremely dialectical Manichean style, have been time and again exposed and probed by Milosz. The areas of crisis for the analogical imagination coalesce around difficulties in appropriating newly emerging conceptions of nature, history, religion, science, and literature. They are points where theology needs to resurrect itself. If not, then orthodoxy will risk straying into heresy[147] by only getting at a portion of the wider existential concerns it wants to translate and inculcate imaginatively through its liturgies. If anything, Milosz's poetic statements can serve as prolegomena for a more relatively adequate future theology—one which can serve an analogical imaginations and all its inherent difficulties.

While Milosz is frequently pegged as the poet of the problem of evil, and we have seen that it might be fair, at best, to apply this label for the middle of his poetic career, the problem of the good and the beautiful strikingly occupies his poetic imagination in his last years. In the poems of those years there is an overwhelming wonder at the goodness Milosz experienced through others during a very long life. This is in keeping with the Catholic imagination's focus upon exemplars, who are conventionally called saints. The notion of sainthood as accessible to every person is in tune with this focus in Milosz's late poetry. The saints are not held out as impossible ideals, even if some of them do reach rare heights, rather, they are there to serves as mimetic models who are tantalizingly close enough to every person to emulate.

[147] The original Greek *haeresis* means "to choose." In the context of theology this means choosing a partial solution that overlooks wider concerns. Heresies always see some part of the picture sharply, whereas they miss the wider picture.

3.1 I Entered the Universal

BYPASSING RUE DESCARTES

I descended toward the Seine, shy, a traveler,

A young barbarian just come to the capital of the world.

We were many, from Jassy and Koloshvar, Wilno and Bucharest, Saigon and Marrakesh,

Ashamed to remember the customs of our homes,

About which nobody here should ever be told:

The clapping for servants, barefooted girls hurry in,

Dividing food with incantations,

Choral prayers recited by master and household together.

I had left the cloudy provinces behind,

I entered the universal, dazzled and desiring.

Soon enough, many from Jassy and Koloshvar, or Saigon or Marrakesh

Would be killed because they wanted to abolish the customs of their homes.

Soon enough, their peers were seizing power

In order to kill in the name of the universal, beautiful ideas.

Meanwhile the city behaved in accordance with its nature,

Rustling with throaty laughter in the dark,

Baking long breads and pouring wine into clay pitchers,
Buying fish, lemons, and garlic at street markets,
Indifferent as it was to honor and shame and greatness and glory,
Because that had been done already and had transformed itself
Into monuments representing nobody knows whom,
Into arias hardly audible and into turns of speech.

Again I lean on the rough granite of the embankment,
As if I had returned from travels through the underworlds
And suddenly saw in the light the reeling wheel of the seasons
Where empires have fallen and those once living are now dead.

There is no capital of the world, neither here nor anywhere else,
And the abolished customs are restored to their small fame
And now I know that the time of human generations is not like the time of the earth.

As to my heavy sins, I remember one most vividly:
How, one day, walking on a forest path along a stream,
I pushed a rock down onto a water snake coiled in the grass.

And what I have met with in life was the just punishment
Which reaches, sooner or later, the breaker of a taboo. (175-176)
Berkeley, 1980

"Bypassing Rue Descartes" (175-176) is another poem, like "To Robinson Jeffers" (78-79) and even parts of "From the Rising of the Sun" (109-141), where Milosz takes the side of local customs, what we might call local liturgies, against liturgies that would reach for unmediated universalization. The issue of mediation is something we explored briefly in the introduction to this study. While the analogical imagination strives to create a global network of analogies, it only does so through a highly mediated manner that incorporates (and preserves) local cultures.[148] If one looks at it from an outside perspective, then one might be tempted to say—given all the rites, national church histories, and so on—that there isn't one Catholicism, but only Catholicisms that are inflected locally. But if the Catholic imagination is analogical then it has to incarnate itself in the concrete everyday givens of the culture where it finds itself rather than vague abstractions. Even though there is a plurality of results, there is a Catholic (but also lower case) unity in the imperatives of the imagination that underlie all these differences.

Milosz happens to come from one of the chronologically last European Catholic outposts. Lithuania only became Christianized during the latter part of the 14th century. The pagan roots were therefore unusually deep there as the conclusion to "Bypassing Rue Descartes" suggests. Furthermore, geography is doubly important for this poem because of its title. Rene Descartes (1596-1648) is one of the founders of modern philosophy with its aspirations to universality, and certainty above all, freed from the vicissitudes of particularity. This aspiration grew out of the

[148] See: Catherine Pickstock, "Modernity, Liturgy and Reification: Remarks on the Liturgical Critique of Modernity," *Telos* 113 (Fall 1999): 34, for an excellent account of how the local and universal interact in Catholicism. Pickstock's account is especially fascinating when she talks about the role Catholicism has played in preserving indigenous cultures by integrating the symbols of their liturgies into itself in ways that globalism has not: "Catholicism much more tolerant than [classical] liberalism [capitalism/globalism]. In this schema, each difference is fully tolerated precisely because it is more than tolerated, since each difference is a figural repetition of the other differences. Thus, Catholicism has allowed many local rites and variations, and has sheltered much traditional folk narrative and practice. It has been able to reconstrue pre-Christian myths and rituals as figurative anticipations of Catholicism. This may seem like an imperialist gesture, but this figurative reading enriches the sense of Catholicism. Thus, in the legends of the Holy Grail, Celtic ideas of inspirational cauldrons are read eucharistically. This also discloses new dimensions in eucharistic understanding."

thoroughgoing skepticism that arose out of the doctrinal disputes of the Reformation, therefore, theology is not entirely innocent of setting into motion the very processes that ultimately led to its partial eclipse.[149] As we have briefly discussed in the introduction, Descartes' philosophical skepticism also abandoned the phenomenal world to the emerging sciences to describe the world according to the *mathesis universalis* that would overcome irresolvable disputes that could not be adjudicated by greatly weakened, fragmented, philosophies and theologies.

The work of Descartes (along with the Reformation) was also instrumental in destroying the widespread acceptance of the Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophical-realist-analogical tradition that nonetheless continued to feed both Catholicism and Milosz. When it comes to the former, Pope Leo XIII crowned the Thomistic revival of the 19th century with his encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1879) that recommended the study of Thomism as an antidote to modern philosophy.[150] Milosz, frequently the poet of God as Being Itself, in turn was one of those laypeople who profited from the renewed emphasis upon the teachings of the Angelic Doctor.[151]

Continuing with the significant geographical thread of this poem: Rue Descartes is located in the 5th arrondissement of Paris. This part of the city contains both the Pantheon and the Sorbonne[152] making it the intellectual center of French cultural imperialism. During the 20th century Paris was considered to be the intellectual capital of the world and the best minds from

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[149] See: Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*, op. cit.

[150] It should be added that Thomism is a quintessentially hybrid approach to theology and philosophy. Its roots are manifold and owe as much to Aristotle as they do to Neoplatonism and the Church Fathers. The movement emerged through contact with Arab philosophers and their translations of Aristotle. We tend to forget how pluralistic and intellectually innovative the Middle Ages really were—in part thanks to the polemics of Descartes' inheritors, that is, the French Enlightenment.

[151] Even after Vatican II loosened some of the Thomistic fervor of the 19th century, his writings continue to exercise their influence on all levels of Catholics, from the clergy to the faithful in the pews. There is even a new wave of studies from scholars such as Fergus Kerr, OP and David Burrell, CSC that put emphasis upon reading Aquinas within his own context and within the context of contemporary philosophy.

[152] Interestingly enough Aquinas taught at the University of Paris for two extended periods of time.

around the globe flocked there. The narrator bypasses it in this poem in order to "descend toward the Seine" (175).[153] He is in fact heading in the general direction of Notre Dame de Paris, an amalgam of Romanesque and Gothic symbolism of a specifically (local) Gallic Catholicism.

When the narrator calls himself "A young barbarian just come to the capital of the world" (175), it sounds an awfully lot like the provincial memories he recounts in his autobiography *Native Realm*:

> For people from other large cities, Paris is not the same thing as it is for a young man raised in the mountains of Peru or, like myself, in the provinces. If Wilno seemed exotic to the inhabitants of Warsaw, I must have preserved some of that exoticism in myself. The collision of two historical phases and two sets of behavior within me deepened my inner split, but the injection I received was not such a bad thing: while learning the gestures and habits of Westerners I recognized that they were hollow, as if eaten by termites, and would soon collapse. Their big names, which Eastern Europe also uttered with a pious sigh, Oscar Milosz dismissed with one snap of his fingers, and I see not that he was correct. The whole Eastern European attitude toward 'centers of culture' is false; it comes from timidity. They imitate instead of opposing; they reflect instead of being themselves. Through his very existence, my relative worked a cure in me, and fortified my contempt for the shrines of the vanguard back home, where ears strained to catch the latest novelties from Paris.[154]

[153] Meaning, he is heading in the general direction of Notre Dame de Paris.
[154] Czeslaw Milosz, *Native Realm*, op. cit., 181.

As a young man Milosz spent a short period of time in Paris in 1931, then a year studying there in 1934. This passage comes from his account of the second stay. [155] In "Bypassing Rue Descartes" the narrator twice recounts that there were many like him during those times. They came from provincial towns and regions: Jassy (Romania), Koloshvar (a Hungarian ethnic part of Romania), Bucharest, from French colonies Saigon and Marrakesh, and Milosz's own Wilno. Pol-Pot was one of them.

Unlike Czeslaw, those memorialized in this poem, did not have a spiritual guide like Czeslaw did in his uncle Oscar to put the spectacle of the City of Lights in perspective.[156] Notably, however, the narrative voice of this poem does not exclude itself from the company of those who were "ashamed to remember the customs of our homes" (175). The customs listed are of the variety Milosz commends to Robinson Jeffers in the poem-conversation we analyzed in Chapter 2, "The clapping for servants, barefooted girls hurry in, / Dividing food with incantations, / Choral prayers recited by the master and household together" (175). These are the embarrassing rituals of traditional societies, which weave the sacred and profane together constantly—note how he once again uses the example of a ritual meal with its Eucharistic association. Although these traditional societies are not entirely romanticized, since Milosz's words convey an awareness of deep divisions between social classes, there was something to be ashamed of amidst the apparent harmony.

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[155] He recounts these stays in detail in successive chapters of *Native Realm*, op. cit., "Journey to the West" (148-167) and "The Young Man and the Mysteries" (168-184).

[156] Milosz's uncle Oskar Milosz was a Catholic mystic who worked as a Lithuanian diplomat in Paris and had a substantial literary career writing poetry in French. He was probably the most significant spiritual guide Czeslaw had. His influence in turning the very young Milosz toward the serious study of theology is recounted in *Native Realm*, op. cit., 168-184.

Even though Rue Descartes is bypassed by the narrator, the very provincials described in these poems are striving to assimilate the spirit of Cartesian France. The attraction of the new and exotically modern culture is described in terms of irrepressible attraction compounded by the first-person construct, "I had left the cloudy provinces behind, / I entered the universal, dazzled and desiring" (175). Designating the provinces as "cloudy" gives them a taste of the worldly confusion that Descartes attempted to escape with his system. The "universal" dazzles through an excess of light. Light is frequently utilized as a metaphor for knowledge, which throws light, gives clarity, to phenomena. However, the verb "dazzled" anticipates the confusion caused by this situation, because an excess of light can be blinding, especially when it is coupled with an uneducated desire.

The next two stanzas quickly debunk the effects of the City of Lights upon those who visited it. They both begin with the phrase "soon enough," which conveys an aloof air of inevitability to what happen to those who returned to their homelands after the bedazzling. One of the eventualities is that "Many from Jassy, Koloshvar, or Saigon or Marrakesh / Would be killed because they wanted to abolish the customs of their homes" (175). This in turn ("soon enough") reproduces the war of all against all that we have already seen in Milosz's treatment of the worshippers of progress in "The Spirit of History": "Soon enough their peers were seizing power / In order to kill in the name of the universal, beautiful ideas" (175). The language here is taken from Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground* where the Russian novelist lampoons the disconnect between idealist Romantic aspirations for pure beauty and the travesties they lead to when applied to historical situations. The ironic phrase "beautiful and lofty" is sprinkled throughout his story of the Underground Man as he descends further and further into spite and

misanthropy.[157] Milosz's poem has the added dimension of horror in that it corresponds to stories of people who, unlike the Underground Man, were able to execute their plans on a full political scale, instead of merely musing about them in their cellar—people like Pol-Pot.

After this unfolding of the story the reader is sent back to Paris with a "Meanwhile" (175). The city comes across as indifferently continuing its ancient hedonistic rituals with a minor dose of cynicism:

> Meanwhile the city behaved in accordance with its nature,
> Rustling with throaty laughter in the dark,
> Baking long breads and pouring wine into clay pitchers,
> Buying fish, lemons, and garlic at street markets. (175)

This echoes one of Milosz's better-known poems, "Campo dei Fiori," on the execution of Giordano Bruno. Bruno was ironically one of the intellectual figures who helped to usher in the search for universal ideas (the very ones that would cause so much trouble for the people described in Milosz's poem) that sought to overcome Post-Reformation antagonisms,

> Before the flames had died
> the taverns were full again,
> baskets of olives and lemons
> again on the vendors' shoulders (16).

[157] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Underground*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage, 1994).

The poem under consideration here further mocks both the provincial desires for universality and the Parisian ethos by exposing the utter emptiness of the latter and therefore the vanity of the former,

> Indifferent as it was to honor and shame and greatness and glory,
> Because that had been done already and had transformed itself
> Into monuments representing nobody knows whom,
> Into arias hardly audible and into turns of speech. (175)

This essenceless essence of the postmodern is something we already have come across in our discussion of "From the Rising of the Sun" in the previous chapter and it is something that Milosz dwelt on in several other poems. On the margins the above suggests postmodernism was not an intellectual fad, but an *ex post facto* description of a situation that had materialized long before Foucault, Derrida, and others found the concepts to capture it.

"Bypassing Rue Descartes" then fast-forwards into what seems like the present. The narrator returns to study the city once more, burdened with a whole lifetime of memories, including those of the war that overtook the city and the rest of Europe less than a decade after Milosz first visited it,

> Again I lean on the rough granite of the embankment,
> As if I had returned from travels through the underworlds
> And suddenly saw in the light the reeling wheel of the seasons
> Where empires have fallen and those once living are now dead. (175-176)

The Dantesque metaphor is appropriate given the destruction of war Milosz witnessed during his lifetime. The reflection upon the vanity of human strivings borders upon the revelatory. Moreover, not only are the great humbled, but also the provincial is also raised up after the cycles of history have run their course. The imagery he uses here can either be construed as ironically alluding to resurrection, *apokatastasis*, or both, "the abolished customs are restored to their small fame" (176). All of the insights in this stanza are then rounded out with a decidedly biblical tone, "And now I know that the time of human generations is not like the / time of the earth" (176). This relativizes human time, but from what we've learned from our explorations, Milosz is not advocating that humanity somehow adopt, or go back to, biological time, especially given his grave misgivings about the picture of nature propagated by popular appropriations of Darwinism.

The poem then rounds itself out with two confessional stanzas. First, the narrator recounts an episode of transgression against a local pagan code,

> As to my heavy sins, I remember one most vividly:
> How, one day, walking on a forest path along a stream,
> I pushed a rock down onto a water snake coiled in the grass. (176)

This seems like a mysterious sin without explanatory notes, however, Milosz gives us the following information in his second novel *The Issa Valley*,

> A water snake was crossing to the other bank, bearing high its perpendicular head, with tentacle-like ripples forming diagonally in its wake. Dominic measured the distance with his eye and felt in his arm the certainty of a bull's-eye. But the water

> snake was a sacred being: whoever killed one did so at the risk of tempting fate.[158]

The final stanza then internalizes the blame for what was done by those who went to Paris thus: "And what I have met with in life was the just punishment / Which reaches, sooner or later, the breaker of a taboo" (176). The punishment meted out for breaking the taboo gestures toward the doctrine of original sin, which is still a constitutive element of a Catholic analogical imagination, even if it does not reach the level of emphasis as in doctrines of double predestination in some dialectical Christian traditions. At the same time it also preserves a sense of the sacredness of the created world that is so central to a Catholic imagination. In the end, one does not have to choose between the Christian and pagan codes, because Catholicism has preserved much of the latter with its analogical imagination that preserves (if not always perfectly or blamelessly) local customs through incorporating them into its incarnational-immanent emphasis. So much so, that the snake, generally a symbol of immense evil because of Christianity's original sin rereading of the Garden of Eden myth can be nearly venerated within the local Lithuanian context. Milosz's own interest in this symbol and its contextual de-demonization, which reappears in several other of his poems and essays, might even suggest redemption's breadth of possibility.[159]

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[158] Czeslaw Milosz, *The Issa Valley: A Novel*, trans. Louis Iribarne (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux: 2000) 95.

[159] This is not unusual among Catholic authors. The French Catholic novelist Georges Bernanos—best known for *The Diary of a Country Priest*, which became a cinema classic in Robert Bresson's rendition—extended his hope for salvation, in other words reintegration into the analogical communion of saints, so far that he is said to have daily prayed for the salvation of Judas.

3.2: Our Song Soared Up Like Smoke from a Censer

REALISM

We are not so badly off if we can
Admire Dutch painting. For that means
We shrug off what we have been told
For a hundred, two hundred years. Though we lost
Much of our previous confidence. Now we agree
That those trees outside the window, which probably exist,
Only pretend to greenness and treeness
And that the language loses when it tries to cope
With clusters of molecules. And yet this here:
A jar, a tin plate, a half-peeled lemon,
Walnuts, a loaf of bread -- last, and so strongly
It is hard not to believe their lastingness.
And thus abstract art is brought to shame,
Even if we do not deserve any other.
Therefore I enter into those landscapes
Under a cloudy sky from which a ray
Shoots out, and in the middle of dark plains
A spot in the brightness glows. Or the shore
With huts, boats, and, on yellowish ice,
Tiny figures skating. All this
Is here eternally, just because once it was.

Splendor (certainly incomprehensible)
Touches a cracked wall, a refuse heap,
The floor of an inn, jerkins of the rustics,
A broom, and two fish bleeding on a board.
Rejoice! Give thanks! I raised my voice
To join them in their choral singing,
Amid their ruffles, collets, and silk skirts,
one of them already, who vanished long ago.
And our song soared up like smoke from a censer. (234)
1995, [No place of composition given]

The late poem "Realism" (234) finds Milosz experimenting with a Thomistic variation on the poem "Esse" we explored earlier in this study. The opening line of this poem is surprisingly hopeful,

We are not so badly off, if we can
Admire Dutch painting. For that means
We shrug off what we have been told
For a hundred, two hundred years. (234)

These lines are also a continuation of the vistas on human generations of the poem we just finished analyzing. Meaning, they suggest the possibility of shifting one's imaginative frame in such a way that it goes against contemporary commonplaces if one has access to wider historical frames provided by older imaginations.

"Realism" also finds Milosz's analogical imagination implicitly taking a stand against the orthodoxies of critical theory. He had seen a lot of intellectual fashions cycle in and out by the time the poem was written in 1995. At this point he had spent thirty-five years on the sidelines of the critical theory and later postmodern revolution in literary studies, which featured Berkeley as one of its centers. His distance from the intellectual scene is best captured by his bemused (if not entirely unappreciative) reaction to his colleague, Herbert Marcuse's, work:

> Unlike him, I do not equate rage at necessity with the purity of protest against imperfect society. The mark of today's style is rage directed against Existence. Though there are Manichean elements in me, I find such rage indecent, and it is my guess that God does not like it either. Necessity can be overcome only by remembering that it will never be entirely overcome, and that the 'limited empirical world,' loathed and ridiculed by Marcuse, where, he says, 'the broom in the corner and the tasted of pineapple have great significance,' will never cease to preoccupy us.[160]

Milosz then finishes his train of thought with a jab at the uncritical dialectics of critical theory, "Changed into a politicized angel, man would burn with the most holy wrath against what *is* and, one may assume, would have all the makings of an inquisitor or a servant of the Inquisition." The limits of dialectics are exposed here. How much can we, or ought we, tarry with the negative? How long before we lose sight of is/being/esse, which is essential for a productively analogical imagination that, at the very least, needs to start rebuilding the ruins, because multiplying ruins leaves the body and the imagination no place to inhabit.

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[160] Czeslaw Milosz, *Visions from San Francisco Bay*, op. cit., 196.

The last two hundred years have seen a trend toward the decomposition of ordinary human and natural form in literature and the arts. The latter has seen an epochal shift from realism into abstract art, from representation to presentation. The process became especially accelerated in the 20th century, those 100 years the narrator mentions. It was coupled with a linguistic turn philosophy that started with de Saussure and Jakobson, ending with de Man and Derrida. In this skeptical crisis "we lost / Much of our previous confidence" (234). The symptoms of this loss of confidence are as follows,

> Now we agree
> That those trees outside the window, which probably exist,
> Only pretend to greenness and treeness
> And that language loses when it tries to cope
> With clusters of molecules. (234)

The "clusters of molecules" might be a transposition of Democritean atomism onto late modern thought. Since this is a poem about painterly styles and their metaphysical implication there is no reason to exclude the possibility that he also had the pointillism of Seurat in mind.

The ability of language to both pick our particulars and universals is something that has cropped up in several poems we have already looked at in this study. It is also the topic of a well-known poem, "Magpiety," where Milosz takes the everyday experience of looking at a magpie and analogically transposes it onto scholastic debates about universals. That poem ends with,

> … If however magpiety does not exist
> My nature does not either
> Who would have guessed that, centuries later,

I would invent the question of universals? (59)

Milosz's encyclopedic historical knowledge is helpful to his readers because he is able to put contemporary debates into diachronic relief. Postmodernism is one of the latest outworkings of sophism, nominalism, and baroque skepticism. All three schools of thought have a long history, therefore there is no need to throw oneself at their latest incarnation as the last word in epistemology.

The possibility of affirming the solidity of things against tarrying with the negative is suddenly proposed to the reader. They are pointed to something they must confront,

> And yet this here: A jar,
> a tin plate, a half peeled lemon,
> Walnuts, a loaf of bread—and so strongly
> It is hard not to believe in their lastingness. (234)

There are any number of Dutch paintings that might fit this description and fulfill the function of exemplar of lastingness. There is, for example, Pieter Claesz's, "A Still Life with a Large Roemer, a Knife Resting on a Silver Plate Bearing a Partly-Peeled Lemon, Walnuts and Hazelnuts, on a Marble Ledge."[161] Ironically, Dutch still-life usually fulfilled the double function of signaling the wealth of Dutch Calvinist culture, but also, to remind their owners (one wonders how effectively) of the vanity and inevitable passing of earthly things.

Milosz, as he does in "The World: A Naïve Poem" analogically accentuates the permanence and solidity of passing things, even as they pass, or as they are copied in "mere"

[161] The placing of the bread last might have some Eucharistic undertones.

representations. His reading is decidedly Thomistic because that is where his roots lie, but also, perhaps, because Thomism, with its emphasis upon the depth of ordinary being, does a better job accounting for the depths that radiate not only from human beings, but also from the most mundane objects and nature. Milosz then digs at both himself and the audience, "And thus abstract art is brought to shame, / Even if we do not deserve any other" (234). Read within the context of the earlier, "Oeconomia Divina," there might be an element of divine judgment in "Realism." The judgment in the earlier poem is more passive in its execution, although more active in its identification of the workings of Providence,

> I did not expect to live in such an unusual moment.
> When the God of thunders and of rocky heights,
> the Lord of hosts, Kyrios Sabaoth,
> would humble people to the quick,
> allowing them to act whatever way they wished,
> leaving to them conclusions, saying nothing.[162]

Compare this with St. Paul's understanding of God's withdrawal as a type of punishment for sin, "And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God handed them over to their undiscerning mind to do what is improper" (Romans 1:28). We also ought not forget that this passage also occurs within the contexts of St. Paul positing the natural law of God being written upon the hearts of each and every human being whether they acknowledge him or not (Rom. 1:19). Pascal's *deus absconditus* and the Pauline concept of *kenosis*, both important for Milosz, can be read within this framework of immanent judgment built into human actions. Thus, there is a kind

[162] Czeslaw Milosz, *New and Collected Poems*, op. cit., 263.

of demythologization within the biblical witness itself, rendering modern demythologizers like Bultmann superfluous.[163] This framework also fits well with the Catholic imagination's emphasis upon the immanent presence of God in creation, especially with its emphasis upon the human realm.

After that chastisement the next couple of lines return us within the realm of grace mediated by the paintings of the Dutch masters. The narrator says, "Therefore I enter under those landscapes" (234). This might mean that the viewer is standing below one of the paintings, or has imaginatively entered into the settings of one of these canvases. The landscape he enters (into/under) is highly reminiscent of Vermeer's landscapes,

> Under a cloudy sky from which a ray
> Shoots out, and in the middle of dark plains
> A spot of brightness glows. (234)

Of course, light in darkness (John 1:4-5; 8:12) has worked itself out within the tradition as a symbol of grace's presence within the world. We are then immediately transported into one of Breughel's paintings, "Or the / With huts, boats, and on yellowish ice / tiny figures skating" (234). Unlike in "*Esse*" this is the first time when we encounter a human presence within this poem, albeit, these are human beings represented in a painting. Therefore, throughout this poem we have remained in the realm of objects and their ability to confer the immanent presence of

[163] See: Rudolf Bultmann. *Kerygma and Myth*, trans. Reginald H. Fuller (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961).

God. This, along with some of Milosz's nature poetry, goes to show that his "Manicheanism" has its limits, because the world is not consigned to caducity in his poetry.

There is, as well, a theology of glory (or splendor) evident here. The topic of God's glory is a central concern of Exodus 33. There Moses asks God to show him his glory (*kabod*) and God tells him to hide behind the rock as he passes. The precautionary measure is taken because nobody can see the fullness of God's glory and live. Therefore, in a (perhaps) unintentional comic moment Moses, a little like a voyeur, spies out God's backside as he passes in his glory. Referring back to the Dutch paintings he has exposed to the reader, Milosz writes of the inexplicable depths of divine glory as it refracts itself through the ordinary stuff of life,

> All this
> Is here eternally, just because, once, it was.
> Splendor (certainly incomprehensible)
> Touches a cracked wall, a refuse heap,
> The floor of an inn, jerkins of rustics,
> A broom, and two fish bleeding on a board. (234)

This then leads the narrator to a doxology to b/Being in a way that is similar to the one in "*Esse*":

> Rejoice! Give Thanks![164] I raised my voice
> To join them in their choral singing,
> Amid their ruffles, collets, and silk skirts. (234)

[164] Giving thanks, *eucharistion* in the Greek, has obvious connections with the ritual meal at the center of the Christian liturgy.

This differs slightly from the earlier poem in that it has a slightly more communal aspect with the accent put upon joining "them" in a hymn of praise. Even if we are still talking of inanimate objects, their final connection with the human sphere through the items of clothing forms an analogue with the communion of saints.

"Realism" extends this communion metaphor even further with, "Already one of them, who vanished long ago. / And our song soared up like smoke from a censer" (234). The poet, in his eighties when he wrote the poem, seems to have his own impending death in mind when he counts himself as being "[a]lready one of them, who vanished long ago," however this does not seem to be a lonely possibility, but one that opens out to a communion outside of time, but already anticipated in viewing the works of the Dutch masters in a way usually preserved for icons. But unlike icons, these paintings sing back, "And our song soared up like smoke from a censer" (234). The symbolism around censers and their use in the Catholic mass is rich, but at the most basic level the smoke coming from them symbolizes purification and sanctification.[165] Likewise, Milosz's meditation on painting was meant to serve a similar function by inviting the reader into a purification and sanctification of the reader's imagination. Perhaps this poem approaches an answer to the Accuser's question about conducting a ritual of purification in "From the Rising of the Sun"?

One final note, after reading the whole poem one cannot help but suspect that its billowing shape encapsulated within one long single stanza might have been meant to resemble the smoke of incense.

[165] They are most prominently used during the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

3.3: Evil (and Good) Come From Man

Where does evil come from?
It comes

from man
always from man
only from man

- Tadeusz Rozewicz[166]

Alas, dear Tadeusz,
good nature and wicked man
are romantic inventions
you show us this way
the depth of your optimism

so let man exterminate
his own species
the innocent sunrise will illuminate
a liberated flora and fauna

where oak forests reclaim
the postindustrial wasteland
and the blood of a deer
torn asunder by a pack of wolves
is not seen by anyone

[166] The Tadeusz Rozewicz original is also entitled "Unde Malum" after these lines it makes the following statement:
a human being is a work-related
accident
of nature
an error
See: *Sobbing Superpower* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011) 215-216

a hawk falls upon a hare
without witness
evil disappears from the world
and consciousness with it

Of course, dear Tadeusz,
evil (and good) comes from man.

Tadeusz Rozewicz (1921-2014) comes from the nearly the same generation as Milosz (1911-2004) and Zbigniew Herbert (1924-1998). All of these writers were affected by the experience of World War II in ways that Witold Gombrowicz (1904-1969), the other world renowned giant of 20th century Polish literature, was not. These three near-contemporaries took different paths in response to the horrors of the war. Rozewicz threw his cards in with nihilism, Herbert with humanism, and Milosz with theology.

Milosz takes on Rozewicz on several levels in his poem "Unde Malum" (251). He takes over both the title of the Rozewicz original, its line of argument (for the most part), even two stanzas from the original, and finally, the sparsely punctuated style. There is more than a little irony in adopting these avant-garde conventions from his poetic rival only to place him firmly within the Romantic tradition, which Polish modernism sought to either abolish, or take it to its extremes. Milosz's own relationship with that tradition in Poland is very complicated. There is even an extended study on his relationship to Polish Romanticism.[167] Polish Romanticism is a tradition that was politically and religiously engaged in the affairs of partitioned Poland. The poems and plays of Mickiewicz and Slowacki dictated Polish politics of resistance to Russia, Prussia, and Austria. Thus, to a much greater degree than its German and British counterparts,

[167] Elzbieta Kislak, *Walka Jakuba z Aniolem: Czeslaw Milosz Wobec Romantycznosci* [Jacob Wrestling with the Angel: Milosz on Romanticism] (Warsaw: Proszynski i S-ka, 2001).

the Polish version of Romanticism concentrated upon, and encouraged, collective political action. Most of this resistance proved to be disastrous, but its influence remains, which is why Milosz uses its name to criticize Rozewicz,

> Alas, dear Tadeusz,
> good nature and wicked man
> are romantic inventions
> you show us this way
> the depth of your optimism (251).

This accusation against Rozewicz somewhat papers over Milosz's own debt to Polish Romanticism, which clearly shows itself in poems such as the following stanza from "Dedication":

> What is poetry which does not save
> Nations or people?
> A connivance with official lies,
> A song of drunkards whose throats will be cut in a moment,
> Readings for sophomore girls. (42)

This salvific, quasi-religious, power of poetry was a central focus of Polish Romanticism.[168] It was not infrequently combined with Polish nationalism through the designation of Poland as the Christ of Nations. The borrowing from Russian messianism involved an important shift in priorities. Polish nationalism was exocentric as attested by the scores of Polish nationalists who

[168] For the best single volume English account of Polish Romanticism see: Andrzej Walicki, *Philosophy and Romantic Nationalism: The Case of Poland* (Notre Dame IN: Notre Dame UP, 1994).

fought for the freedom of nations not only in Europe, but also the Asia, Latin America, North America, and Africa.[169] Their battle cry was "For our freedom and yours."

Milosz's rootedness and ambivalence about the Romantic tradition shows itself clearly in two other important places in his oeuvre. The chapter on Adam Mickiewicz in Milosz's *The History of Polish Literature* contains a curious re-appropriation of the bard for literary classicism.[170] Milosz's move is curious because Mickiewicz is acknowledged by everyone in Poland as the literary tradition's arch-Romantic, in fact, he was one of the first literary figures to import the trend into Poland. This demonstrates the amount of ambivalence, perhaps an anxiety of influence that Milosz has for Romanticism. Mickiewicz's Romantic poetry is Milosz's chief inspiration, but he wants to distance himself from the disastrous historical effects and the nationalism it inspired. Therefore he masks his literary primogenitor's genealogy in order to make him more palatable, and to give Milosz space to continue his attacks against the excesses of Polish nationalism.

Another place where Milosz is at pains to define himself critically toward Romanticism, is the ode he wrote in celebration of John Paul II's 80th birthday. We have already discussed how much effort Milosz put into confirming his strivings toward Catholic orthodoxy earlier in this study. He hints at the connection between Polish Romanticism and Polish Catholicism, in the following words:

> Foreigners could not guess from when came the hidden strength

[169] For a one volume popular account of these Polish peregrinations there is no better book than Adam Zamoyski, *Holy Madness: Romantics, Patriots, and Revolutionaries, 1776-1871* (New York: Penguin, 2000).

[170] Czeslaw Milosz, *The History of Polish Literature* (Berkeley: California UP, 1983) 208-231. The use of the definite article in the book's title betrays its highly idiosyncratic reading of Polish literature, especially its disparaging account of Romanticism. This goes so far that Milosz quotes Metternich (favorably!) against the revolutionary innovations of the Romantics. See especially: pages 200-202.

Of a novice from Wadowice.

The prayers and prophecies

Of poets, whom money and progress scorned,

Even though they were the equals of kings, waited for you

So that you, not they could announce, *urbi et orbi*

That the centuries are not absurd but a vast order.[171]

The prayers and prophecies probably refer to the well-known prophecy of Juliusz Slowacki who during the 19th century made the unlikely prediction there would be a Polish pope. It might not be noticeable to non-Polish eyes, but, there are two digs at the Polish Romantics thrown in this Milosz poem. First of all, the claim that the Polish poets were scorned by progress, then the celebration of John Paul II giving the *urbi et orbi* message of the centuries being a vast order also takes the poets down a notch by giving priority to the pope's message. All of this, however, also underscores how important the Romantics were for the development of the Polish pope's imagination. He was a trained actor and sometime poet and playwright whose imagination was in part furnished by the prayers and prophecies of the Polish Romantics.[172] He is not the only contemporary Pole formed by Romanticism because, as the Polish critic Maria Janion has noted frequently, Romanticism is not over in Poland by any means. It has continued its influence right up to the Solidarity movement and its aftermath.[173] Its aspirations for literature as the center of

[171] Czeslaw Milosz, *New and Collected Poems*, op. cit., 709.

[172] Gary O'Connor, *Universal Father: A Life of John Paul II* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2005) is the one biography that puts the most emphasis upon interpreting the influence of Polish Romanticism and the pope's own literary output and work in avant-garde theater.

[173] She makes these claims over several essays and books, among them Maria Janion, *Niesamowita Słowiańszczyzna. Fantazmaty Literatury* [The Slavic Sublime: Phantasms of Literature] (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2006).

discussion for social, political, and religious questions remains relevant. Our study has aimed at demonstrating that these aspirations clearly are also operative in Milosz's own work.

After covering this very important aspect of the poem in depth, we ought to return to the text itself. Milosz sarcastically goes along with Rozewicz's anti-humanist ruse,

> so let man exterminate
> his own species
> the innocent sunrise will illuminate
> a liberated flora and fauna. (251)

Even the mention of "liberated" nature here has a vaguely Romantic liberationist tone to it. The next stanza then takes up the burden of describing the world minus human consciousness,

> where oak forests reclaim
> the postindustrial wasteland
> and the blood of a deer
> torn asunder by a pack of wolves
> is not seen by anyone
> a hawk falls upon a hare
> without witness (251).

The result of this liberation drips with irony, "evil disappears from the world / and consciousness with it" (251). These lines make an important tie between evil and human consciousness that will work itself out more thoroughly later in the poem.

It is then followed up with a final agreement with Rozewicz whose substance is quickly reversed with a parenthetical comment, "Of course, dear Tadeusz, / evil (and good) comes from man" (251). Those parentheses are one of the places where the problem of the good becomes just as crucial to late Milosz as the problem of evil was to him in his middle period. In the late poems he consistently registers surprise as the ability of human beings to break through their constricting environments, especially within the context of 20th century totalitarian and total war context.[174] This is the reason why John Paul II's witness is so important to the poet, because it is a witness to goodness and a humane order,

> You are with us and will be with us henceforth,
> When the forces of chaos raise their voice
> And the owners of truth lock themselves in churches
> And only the doubters remain faithful,
> Your portrait in our homes every day reminds us
> How much one man can accomplish and how sainthood works.[175]

Not how this description plays upon the communion of saints and the practice of iconography, both in Western and Eastern analogical Christian traditions. The saints serve as exemplary models for the rest of humanity, even, or especially, for those, who do not belong to churches. Why? Because there is a catholicity to their witness that draws people in from the outside, especially when church observance has lost sight of its mission to the world and has become a

[174] The Western philosophical tradition has broken up the problem of evil into two domains: natural evil and moral evil. Natural evil does not incur guilt because it is the result of the necessities of nature's functioning and its perceived lack of free will; it is innocent. On the other hand, moral evil is understood as freely chosen actions by human beings that do harm. Transferring outrage over nature's evil requires some amount of anthropomorphism, because it registers protest against something that was not done out of conscious malice.

[175] Czeslaw Milosz, *New and Collected Poems*, op. cit., 710.

mere hiding place. Finally, “how much one man can accomplish” also pits itself against the anti-humanism of a Rozewicz, because it places a singular human example, and its potential for transformation, at the center of the world’s drama of striving for the good.

3.4: But I Grew Up in a Catholic Family

When I ran barefoot in our gardens by the river Niewiaza

Something was there, that I didn't then try to name:

Everywhere, between the trunks of linden trees, on the sunny side of the lawn, on the path by the orchard,

A Presence resided, I didn't know whose.

The air was full of it, it touched me, it held me close.

It spoke to me through the scents of grass, the flute voice of the oriole, the twitter of swallows.
Had I then been taught the names of gods, I would easily have known their faces.

But I grew up in a Catholic family, and so my surroundings were soon teeming with
devils, but also with the saints of the Lord.

Yet in truth I felt their Presence, all of them, gods and demons,

As if rising within one enormous unknowable Being.

Tuesday, July 23, 2002 [most likely Krakow]

The poem "Presence" was composed on Tuesday, July 23, 2003 (273). The preciseness of the dating is unusual for Milosz. He usually gives a year and location for his poems. Some of the later poems list the day, month, and year for the poems. This is the only poem I know of that includes both the day of the week, month, and year. The precision of the dating suggests the possibility that its writing was a momentous breakthrough of some sort.

This poem is important because it clearly delineates the importance of a religious liturgical formation for giving shape to one's experience of the divine. It also forms an excellent counterpoint to the nature-skepticism of "Unde Malum" (251). Its almost oceanic floating around in a childhood paradise of the fullness of Being yet again proves how complicated Milosz's attitude toward nature was, "When I ran barefoot in our gardens by the river Niewiaza / Something was there, that I didn't then try to name" (273). The garden once again returns to this poem. We explored its connection with the Eden myth while discussing "Hope" in the first chapter of this study. For now it is important to know that this is a recollection, not necessarily a constant state of attunement. The whole world, "everywhere," is suffused with this presence. But there is an apophatic refusal to name this experience, because the poem describes a state in childhood, possibly before the full acquisition of language, "A Presence resided, I don't know whose" (273). Yet, the capitalization of the noun "presence" is already a tip of the hat to the necessity of naming this presence. Furthermore, this presence is also already given a personal nature with the pronoun "whose." The experience is mediate through the senses and the immanent world, "The air was full of it, it touched me, it held me close" (273). The air is the natural analogue of the Holy Spirit whose presence is supposed to guide the believer as we saw in "Veni Creator." Christian theology has, as we already have mentioned, projected this presence of the Holy Spirit onto the spirit moving upon the waters in Genesis 1:2. It has also projected it forward in its post-biblical exegesis. The spirit derives from the Greek *pneuma*, which is nothing other than the human breath in its very intimate closeness.

The narrator then goes on to say, "It spoke to me through the scents of grass, the flute voice of the oriole, / the twitter of the swallows" (273). This is a pretty straightforward analogical statement that give speech to, anthropomorphizes, nature. The grass gains further

significance as a personal symbol if we take into consideration the passages cited earlier in this study from "The World" and *Native Realm*. Then the reader is halted by a return to language and the necessity of naming with, "Had I then been taught the names of gods, I would easily have known / their faces" (273). But the Greek and Roman pagan liturgy was not operative during Milosz's childhood, nor were the remnants of Lithuanian paganism a live option. The narrator's imagination was instead shaped by the following: "But I grew up in a Catholic family, and so my surroundings were soon / teeming with devils, but also with the saints of the Lord" (273). It seems that this is a limited gain over the pagan gods, but only if we totally ignore their cruelty, which Milosz's described so incisively in his response "To Robinson Jeffers." Populating the imagination with demons looks a lot less sinister if we remember this important historical contextualization of the Greek and Roman heritage. In turn, the Christianization of the imagination also has its positive gains by positing a communion of saints of the Lord. The appropriation of the Catholic, in the ecclesial sense, imagination seems to leave opened a gap for the presence of the pagan past still, "Yet in truth, I felt their Presence, all of them, gods and demons" (273). The demons come from a Catholic imagination, whereas the gods come from a pagan imagination. But could it be more complex than that? After all, the narrator claims a specifically Catholic genealogy for his imagination, therefore, could it be possible that the meaning of "gods" has shifted here and they denote the "saints of the Lord"? After all, divinization is one of the hallmarks of Catholic and Orthodox spirituality. The false promise of the Devil in Genesis 3:5 to make humanity as gods was seen by the Early Fathers as actually realized through Christ, "He [Christ], indeed, assumed humanity that we might become God."[176] Thus, the saints might be rightfully, within an orthodox perspective, equated with gods.

[176] Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation*, trans. Anon. (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1993) 93.

Finally, the whole poem rounds itself out with a heavily Pauline sentiment that at the same time touches upon the Thomistic theology of God as *esse*. The presence of all these mediating figures is then recast, "As if rising within one enormous unknowable Being" (273). This corresponds to a Pauline commonplace from his speech at the Areopagus to the pagan philosophers. In Acts 17:28 Paul goes on to identify the theological and literary searches of the Greeks with a statue to an "Unknown God" (in line with the apophaticism earlier in "Presence") whom he then identifies with the Christian God. This Christian God is characterized in what would later become a Thomistic idiom, "For 'In him we live and move and have our being,' as even some of your poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring.'" Thus the analogies and bridges between the two traditions are even surprisingly played up within the biblical record itself. Furthermore, St. Paul give poetry a pride of place in naming these immanently present divinities, or, Divinity. Milosz's own poetic exploration takes up this tradition, repeats St. Paul within the itinerary of his own life, by conducting the translations of the idioms of his own experience thanks to the liturgical training that he underwent within "a Catholic family," or as we would say, within a Catholic imagination.

Conclusion: Yet I Sing With Them

From TREATISE ON THEOLOGY

Treat with understanding persons of weak faith.

Myself included. One day I believe, another I disbelieve.

Yet I feel warmth among people at prayer.
Since they believe, they help me to believe
in their existence, these incomprehensible beings.

I remember that they were made to be not much inferior to angels.

Under their ugliness, which is the stigma of their practical preoccupations,
they are pure and when they sing, a vein of ecstasy pulsates in their throats.

Most intensely before a statue of Holy Mary,
as she appeared to the young girl in Lourdes.

Naturally, I am a skeptic. Yet I sing with them,
thus overcoming the contradiction
between my private religion and the religion of the rite.[177]
[No date or place of composition given, most likely Krakow 2002]

[177] Czeslaw Milosz, *Second Space*, op. cit., 47-64.

We will conclude our study with a brief discussion of Milosz's "Treatise on Theology," which is the conclusion to his triptych of major poetic treatises. There is nothing surprising about this topic choice for a final major poetic sequence after we have explored a wide range of the poet's other works. Writing about theology seems like a natural outgrowth of the Polish poet's work from beginning to end. Our discussion will be compressed because this extensive poem opens a further vista for a more specialized and extended treatment (enough for a whole book) of Milosz as a 'poetic' theologian. Briefly, the topics that resurface in this poem include the following: the importance of liturgical formation, the swerves of transcendence of Post-Reformation Europe, and the impediments to analogy (Manicheanism and original sin). We will concentrate upon the last two sections of "Treatise on Theology" because they bring to light aspects of the poet's work that were only indirectly thematized in his other poems: the importance of participating in (ecclesial) liturgy and the importance of beauty for an analogical worldview.

The treatise begins with the following straightforward, conversational, declaration about the reasons behind is writing:

> A young man couldn't write a treatise like this,
> Though I don't think it is dictated by fear of death.
> It is simply, after many attempts, a thanksgiving.[178]

There is something of an inconsistency within this statement. Milosz claims that a young man could not write a treatise like this, but he has written plenty of poems in his (relative) youth that fit within the theological ambit of this treatise. If he could not precisely write a treatise like this

[178] Ibid., 47. "Treatise on Theology" runs from page 47 to page 64 of *Second Space*.

one, then the "many attempts," as we shall see, came to build up the topics that will concern the poet in this lengthy poem. As for the reasoning behind this, he gives an Aristotelian explanation, in tune with his Thomistic proclivities. He asks, "Why theology?" and answers with "Because the first must be first."[179] He then follows this up with the reason why poetry needs theology,

> And first is a notion of truth. It is poetry precisely,
> With its behavior of a bird thrashing against the transparency
> Of a window-pane, that tells us
> That we don't know how to live in a phantasmagoria.[180]

Therefore poetry, even when it fails to symbolize or address the divine, through its very failure, its thrashing against the window-pane of speech, through its stuttering, attests to a need to overcome the phantoms that haunt late-modern thought. In a way, this poem strives to be a recapitulation, a partial overcoming, of the failures so carefully documented in "From the Rising of the Sun." Whereas in that poem speech is overwhelmingly shown in its circular breakdowns in a "Treatise on Theology" we hear the following call: "Let reality return to our speech. / That is, meaning. Impossible without an absolute point of reference."[181]

Yet, the somewhat unusual confidence of this opening salvo is then complicated by familiar personal obstacles. We will here focus mainly on the highlights of these other parts of the poem, because we aim to concentrate upon the last two sections on the last two pages of the poem where Milosz lays down the innovative conclusions to his deliberations. The body of the poem lays out the failings of the poet in a familiar idiom. He resorts to the trope of separation,

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[179] Ibid., 47.
[180] Ibid., 47.
[181] Ibid, 47.

solipsism, as original sin. For example, right after the opening section we just analyzed Milosz describes his own separation from Polish believers whom he considered insufficiently catechized into the theological problems that have haunted his poetry.

The treatise, which is a response to this situation, was conceived in California, one of the parts of the United States where there is a substantial Catholic heritage interwoven into the geography,

> Once, driving on the freeway and coming to a fork
> Where one lane leads to San Francisco, one to Sacramento,
> He thought that one day he would need to write a theological treatise
> to redeem himself from the sin of pride.[182]

St. Francis is one of the two or three most popular figures in the officially acknowledge communion of saints. Sacramento derives its name from the Eucharist, which is the ritual practice that most clearly gathers up those here on earth into a visible communion.[183] Therefore, the communal nature written into these geographical place names makes sense as the locus for the narrator to make a decision to redeem himself from the sin of pride by writing a poem—an artefact that tends toward communion, because in a poem individual thoughts are gathered up into a language that seeks a public, an audience that will make sense of them.

This prideful exclusion from communion is then set into a wider problem, by now familiar to us: the historical breakdown of Catholic dogma's intelligibility in the 19th and 20th

[182] Ibid., 48.
[183] The Spanish explorers who came upon the region that became Sacramento were so impressed with the natural beauty of the region they made the following analogical comparison: "Es como el sagrado sacramento! [It's like the Holy Sacrament.]"

centuries vis-à-vis cultural changes that were enunciated in the introduction and in subsequent analyses of poems. In the face of these problems Milosz names his own aims, "There must be a middle place between abstraction and childishness / where one can talk about serious things," while the language of theology seems out of reach, "Catholic dogma is a few inches too high; we stand on our toes and for / a moment it seems to us that we see."[184] Milosz then rehearses all the possibilities that allow for a middle position, including variations on Cafeteria Manicheanism, settling accounts with the Polish Romantics, and the problem of evil.

We will concern ourselves mostly with the latter, because it builds up material for the discussion of the sections that will be the focus of our analysis. The section "In Vain" is a low point where the narration takes on the legacy of Darwin, treated earlier while interpreting "The Spirit of History." In the treatise currently under consideration Darwin's theories are presented as allied with the Prince of this World, because it is premised upon "the triumph of the strong and the defeat of the weak."[185] This reading of Darwin is then posed as the antithesis of the Athanasian divinization of man, "Everything that creeps, runs, flies, and dies, is an argument against / the divinity of man."[186] Milosz says he turned to art as a protection against nature thus conceived, however, this proved to be inadequate as time marked his days anyway.

The only thing that seemed to offer hope in the face of being, "Ready to be caught by a cold hand reaching out of the abyss to pull / us down together with our unfinished task," was the belief "that some of us had received a gift, a grace, to spite / the force of gravity."[187] Those who

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[184] Czeslaw Milosz, *Second Space*, op. cit., 49.
[185] Ibid., 51. Even if this squares with Darwin's own quite Malthusian take on natural selection, contemporary readings of natural selection have also stressed cooperation within and outside of species. In many ways Darwinism has become much less red in tooth and claw, and more about sustaining life and intelligence.
[186] Ibid., 51.
[187] Ibid., 59.

have received grace are analogous to the community of saints. The poem presents them as examples worthy of imitating, because they have overcome the gravity of the universal forces of death represented by some readings of evolution. The choice of wording here gestures toward the witness of Simone Weil, whose book, *Gravity and Grace*, we have discussed and excerpted earlier here. In Weil's own idiosyncratic vocabulary the word "gravity" denoted the very same mechanical necessity—a strange amalgam of Goethe, Nietzsche, Hegel, and Darwin—that ruled the "The Spirit of History."

The sections of the poem leading up to the two we will shortly consider go through a dizzying itinerary of Milosz's private speculations of the problem of evil and the human capacity to overcome them. There are quite a few references to marginal religious sources, ancient Manicheanism, Kabbalah, early modern Gnosticism, and the Romantics. This is what Milosz means when he says in the "Treatise on Theology" that,

> Wandering on the outskirts of heresy is about right for me.
>
> In order to avoid what people call 'the serenity of faith,'
> which is after all, merely self-satisfaction.[188]

The logic of this statement (and where the heretical speculations fit into his worldview) is very complex. If the problem is avoiding a false "serenity of faith," then wandering on the outskirts of heresy also falls under false comforts, because it is, "about right for me." But "about right for me" falls under the sin of pride—the very thing the poem is supposed to atone for! Time and again we have seen how Milosz equates solipsism with original sin. What is needed is a

[188] Ibid., 48.

resolution between this almost private religion and the religion of the rite. The rest of the treatise builds up to such a resolution.

That reading might seem like a fanciful evasion that permits us to skip to the final two sections of the poem. However, the last two sections of the poem confirm this reading. He repeats the agonized tones of "To Raja Rao" in the penultimate section, "Treat with understanding persons of weak faith // Myself included. One day I believe, another I disbelieve."[189] This seems to be a paraphrase of one of Pascal's best-known aphorisms, "Denying, believing and doubting are to men what running is to horses."[190] Even if this is the case, the narrator notes the following about liturgical (in the narrower ecclesial sense) practices:

> Yet I feel warmth among people at prayer.
> Since they believe, they help me believe
> in their existence, these incomprehensible beings.
>
> I remember they were made to be not much inferior to angels.[191]

The ability of a historical community to confirm one's beliefs is clearly one aspect of the analogical imagination that should not be overlooked. These communities are always-already constituted, their warmth is a sign of life, and therefore they do not suffer from the same problems of mobilization that plague all critical theory, or at times lonely speculators about the infinite like Milosz as well. The line break also offers two different inflections on what is being

[189] Ibid., 63.
[190] Pascal, *Pensees*, op. cit., 180.
[191] Milosz, *Second Space*, op. cit., 63.

said. Beyond helping the narrator believe in the transcendent, they also help him to believe in them, thereby releasing him from his solipsism.

There is a biblical echo in passage we have just cited. Hebrews 2:7 speaks of humanity as being made a little lower than the angels. Milosz adds to this an analogical gloss upon the everyday, playing upon the signing of the heavenly choirs of angels,

> Under their ugliness, which is the stigma of their practical
> preoccupations they are pure, and when they sing, a vein of ecstasy
> pulsates in their throats.[192]

The ecclesial-liturgical setting of this statement is clear enough, but one should also note that it might be a slightly-self congratulatory moment, because poetry is also frequently described as an act of singing. However, the theological settings of what is being said are then immediately brought within the theological when we are told that they sing "Most intensely before a statue of Holy Mary, / as she appeared to the young girl at Lourdes."[193] Lourdes is a major pilgrimage for the sick and infirm and both labels might have applied to Milosz since he was around ninety years old when he wrote this poem. The sanctuary in Lourdes is a public place of prayer and ritual, always filled with people and song. Therefore through immersion within this environment the narrator is able to say,

> Naturally, I am a skeptic. Yet, I sing with them,
> thus overcoming the contradiction

[192] Ibid., 63.
[193] Ibid., 63.

> between my private religion and the religion of the rite.[194]

This, then, is where pride is overcome: within a concrete historical community. Even though the notion of "private religion" makes sense to modern ears, it is an oxymoron, because the word comes from the Latin "religare," which means to bind, as in to bind people together.[195] Therefore, by participating in these religious activities Milosz gets out of speculation and binds himself to the original meaning of religion.

The closing section of the poem "Beautiful Lady" takes up the problem of goodness, or else witness, of ordinary believers from the previous section and adds another transcendental to it. Medieval analogical thinking saw truth, goodness, and beauty as controvertible qualities of being. The aesthetic dimension of this triad has especially suffered since the early modern period, but has made a return thanks in large part to thinkers such as Hans Urs von Balthasar. The Swiss thinker has lamented the loss of beauty and its consequences for belief in the other transcendentals in the following way:

> Beauty is the last thing which the thinking intellect dares to approach, since only it dances as an uncontained splendor around the double constellation of the true and the good and their inseparable relation to one another. Beauty is the disinterested one, without which the ancient world refused to understand itself, a word which both imperceptibly and yet unmistakably has bid farewell to our new

[194] Ibid., 63.

[195] There are plenty of recent scholars who have done excellent work undermining the legitimacy of the notion of private religion. They do this, because the concept of "religion" is a fairly recent mainline Protestant invention that puts emphasis upon individual sentiments. Every other historical "religion" tended to see itself as a communal way of life, a kind of extended liturgy, rather than something that should be held and protected in the private realm. See especially: Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2013), 1-24.

> world, a world of interests, leaving it to its own avarice and sadness. No longer loved or fostered by religion, beauty is lifted from its face as a mask, and its absence exposes features on that face which threaten to become incomprehensible to man… Our situation today shows that beauty demands for itself at least as much courage as do truth and goodness, and she will not allow herself to be separated and banned from her two sisters without taking them along with herself in an act of mysterious vengeance.[196]

Besides the beauty Milosz attributed to his fellow pilgrims singing at Lourdes, the topic of recovering the world's beauty has been implicitly present throughout the poems we have covered throughout this study. Beauty is clearly implicit when Milosz so frequently talks about being/Being, meaning, that beauty is an analogue for being for him. What's more, we have also encountered the "mysterious vengeance" of beauty in the poems from the earliest poems to the last in the ugliness Milosz struggles so much against. It is therefore not surprising that he speculated in "My Faithful Mother Tongue" about beauty saying that to save the debased Polish language[197] by setting "before you little bowls of colors / bright and pure if possible, / for what is needed in misfortune is a little order and beauty" (94). Milosz is aware of this precariousness of beauty when we consider the section "Treat With Understanding" and the "mirror of beauty" that started out "The Spirit of History" section we analyzed earlier.

"Beautiful Lady," is a prayer of praise to the Virgin Mary and her otherworldly yet earthy beauty. Treatment of this typically Catholic analogical symbol is rare for Milosz's poetry; I can think of no other instance. He tends to either concentrate upon the figures of the Trinity, rather

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[196] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord: Seeing the Form* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982) 18.
[197] Note the variation on Romantic messianism.

than upon this feminine element in Catholic piety. The middle of "Beautiful Lady" holds the key to this omission,

> That I come from a country where Your sanctuaries
> serve to strengthen a national illusion and provide the refuge
> of Your—a pagan goddess's—protection against the invasion
> of enemies.[198]

The strong wording here signals that Milosz see Polish Marian piety as a form of nationalist idolatry that borders upon paganism. In part this demonstrates that his appreciation of the pagan holdovers in Christianity is not absolute; he sets limits to their appropriateness.[199]

If Mary as a goddess of wartime protection against invasion is not what this poem wants to highlight, then what is? We are told about the visions to children in Lourdes and Fatima:

> What astonished these children was Your loveliness, unsayable.
>
> As if you wished to remind them that beauty is one of the components
> of the world.[200]

The other components are the afore mentioned Thomistic transcendentals of the good, the true and being. Milosz confirms this Thomistic account with a personal confession seemingly based upon either experience or intellectual conviction, "Which I am able to confirm." He then adds a

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[198] Czeslaw Milosz, *Second Space*, op. cit., 64.
[199] Marian piety also loomed large during the 19th century in Poland, therefore, this might also be a jab at Polish literature-inspired nationalism.
[200] Czeslaw Milosz, *Second Space*, op. cit., 64.

heavily analogical dimension (joining God, man, and world) to the visions with the following detailed description of the immanent sphere as it reflects these visions

> I too have been a pilgrim in Lourdes
> by the grotto, where you hear the rustle of the river and see, in the
> pure blue sky above the mountains a narrow scrap of moon.[201]

This is both evocative nature imagery and a compilation of traditional Catholic piety, which has identified the woman clothed in the sun, standing on the moon, in Rev. 12:1 with Mary. Continuing in a recognizably Catholic analogical fashion, without choosing between the natural world and the mystical, affirming both simultaneously, the poem then switches to a description of the visions. The Catholic materialism of these descriptions stands out the most,

> According to the testimonies, You stood above a little tree,
> your feet about ten centimeters above the topmost leaves.
>
> You had the body not of an apparition, but of some immaterial matter
> so that one could see the buttons of your dress.[202]

Here is it not a matter of choosing either the physical world or the spiritual; they mix together happily. The narrator then admits to asking for a miracle, but we are not told what it is. Yet he then takes a step back by admitting that his presence in such a place was "disturbed," because of "my duty as a poet not to flatter popular imaginings," and qualifies it with "Yet [as one] who desires to remain faithful to your unfathomable intention / when you appeared to the

[201] Ibid., 64.
[202] Ibid., 64.

children."[203] The notion of childhood has been important both throughout the New Testament and the poems we have analyzed in this study. Perhaps the metaphor of childhood is a way of describing the kind of analogical imagination we have sought to tease out throughout these readings of Milosz's poetry? It is a way of seeing that comes out of a particular liturgical formation with a long historical arc that looks for connections. Given our propensity to think dialectically, especially in literary theory, it might not be unreasonable to claim that a productive analogical imagination might require something like a rebirth into a childlike state, a state that trusts and sings with others.

[203] Ibid., 64.

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