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# **Female Perspective in Szyborska's Poetry: An Attempt at a Post-feminist Reflection.**

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### Female Perspective in Szymborska's Poetry: An Attempt at a Post-feminist Reflection

"Women make up about half of the world's several billion inhabitants, so do men, and nothing about this fact is of consequence to poetry,"<sup>1</sup> says Małgorzata Baranowska in an excellent essay on the poetry of Wisława Szymborska (among others.) "Gender does not determine the shape of work,"<sup>2</sup> observes Grażyna Borkowska discussing the characteristics of women's writing. There seems to grow a conviction that it does not matter for literature whether the author is male or female, what matters is rather how they can express their femininity in the language of literature. And this precisely is the core of the issue at stake, as it is not entirely clear how exactly one expresses femininity in the language of literature and what femininity in literature is or should be. Borkowska believes that "we are...helpless against the phenomenon of female literature/poetry, as we are convinced that definitions, paradoxically, do not meet the need for clarity inscribed in every act of expression and that clear expressions are not entirely true."<sup>3</sup> The problem we are facing here is, in fact, even more serious as it concerns the concept of "femininity" in general, as well as the different ways of defining femininity. For instance, femininity defined within the male world order meant a complete (or an almost complete) submission to the stereotypes and formulas created by men for women. Feminist criticism, on the

<sup>1</sup> Baranowska, M. "Szymborska i Świrszczyńska – two poles of the everyday." *Sporne postaci polskiej literatury współczesnej. Kontynuacje*. Brodzka, A. and Burska, L., eds. Warszawa: 1996. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Borkowska, G. "Metafora drożdży. Co to jest literatura / poezja kobieca." *Teksty Drugie*, 1995. Vol. 3/4. 38

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

other hand, attempts to tackle the popular (patriarchal) uses of this category and adjust its meanings to its own needs. It also does not help that what is referred to as “femininity” includes, in fact, two terms: biological affiliation (female) and a set of properties or values (feminine) while their culturally determined relationship remains one of the subjects of feminist analysis. The very fact that these two are not distinguished in the Polish language is also significant.

Clearly, the problems with the concept (or, perhaps, with the concepts) exceed terminological frame. Thus, for instance, Cynthia Griffin Wolff, notes that in literature:

the definitions of women's most serious problems and the proposed solutions to these problems are...tailored to meet the needs of fundamentally masculine problems...Women appear in literature ...as conveniences to the resolutions of masculine dilemmas.<sup>4</sup>

Wolff believes that a sufficiently non-stereotypical female literature is yet to emerge which is due to the fact that women have also allowed themselves to be dominated in their work by the models created by men. German Ritz<sup>5</sup> believes that in Polish poetry, the female voice, dominated by the male imagination, had to work its way through the world of stereotypical images of women and femininity, created as part of the male symbolic order. Interestingly, opinions presented above, despite their extreme poignancy regarding the general phenomenon of women's writing, find little application to Szymborska's poetry while Szymborska herself has not attracted particular interest of the feminists.<sup>6</sup>

That Szymborska's “femininity” largely escaped the attention of feminist criticism<sup>7</sup> may result from the fact that her poetry neither focuses on the problems of women, nor attacks the male world order, in other words, Szymborska's is not feminist poetry. Several feminist categories<sup>8</sup> – especially those that emphasize political aspects of literature and literary criticism seem unfit in reference to her work, unable to reveal much about it or even describe it. It is thus no coincidence that in her attempt to define female literature/poetry – having assumed that “wherever the gender of the speaking subject is emphasized, wherever the connection between the body and the text is revealed, we are dealing with female literature/poetry” – Borkowska did not use a single example from

<sup>4</sup> Griffin-Wolff, C. “Mirror for Men: Stereotypes of Women in Literature.” *Woman: An Issue*. Edwards et. al., eds. Boston: 1972. 207, 208 and 217.

<sup>5</sup> Ritz, G. “Dyskurs płci w ujęciu porównawczym.” *Teksty Drugie*, 1999. Vol. 5. 117-123.

<sup>6</sup> I can recall only one attempt to use feminist categories in an analysis of Szymborska's poetry – Grażyna Borkowska's “Szymborska ex-centriczna” – that I refer to further in my essay. One should bear in mind, though, that in the 12 years from its publication both feminist criticism and Szymborska's poetry have developed to include new aspects.

<sup>7</sup> It is astounding the name of the only Polish female Nobel Prize poet appeared just once (in the footnote) in a recent book on feminism as a research method and perspective. (*Krytyka feministyczna. Siostra teorii i historii literatury*. Borkowska, G. and Sikorska, L., eds., Warszawa: 2000).

<sup>8</sup> Betsey, C., Moore, J. “Introduction: The Story So Far.” *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. Betsey, C. and Moore, J., eds., Blackwell: 1997. 1-15.

Szymborska's poetry.<sup>9</sup> Borkowska's attempt to use the feminist category of "therapeutic strategies" led her to conclude that "as a result, Szymborska rejected the feminist replacement strategies."<sup>10</sup> At the same time, the fact that Szymborska is a woman, is decidedly important for her poetry.

These are not the only categories of poetic description that the critics rejected when discussing Szymborska. "[The poet] is also a stranger to the Romantic belief in the power of poetry,"<sup>11</sup> notes Borkowska. To clarify, Szymborska's is not a bard, nor a patriotic poet, she does not claim to know more nor understand more than her readers and therefore does not give lessons, she was not chosen by the gods etcetera. My use masculine form [of nouns such as "bard" or "poet" in Polish<sup>12</sup>] is intentional – Szymborska simply does not stand for anything that the Polish literary tradition associates with the role of a poet, a role almost exclusively reserved for men; she does not fit in the existing order of the patriarchal world, refusing to accept the established model of a Romantic poet. At the same time, her poetic persona has nothing in common with a platonic (or demonic) mistress, nor with the patriotic maternal figure, nor with any other role assigned to women by the same tradition. Borkowska astutely observes that

Szymborska's poetic proposal is astounding. It is a consistent criticism of universalist, abstract thinking imposed by the "patriarchal" order. In this sense, Szymborska approaches the practices of deconstruction and feminism, however, no formula – neither deconstructivist, nor feminist, exhausts her richness.<sup>13</sup>

While entirely and undeniably feminine, Szymborska's poetic voice demands a description that will go beyond the categories and formulas aiming to fight for the recognition of female space and value in literature and culture. As such, Szymborska's poetry poses a challenge to feminist criticism, even though it is a realization of several of its postulates.

Szymborska's poetry does not fight the existing tradition of gender discourse because it seems not to notice its existence. It passes over it. It does not reject it but it does not accept it either. It takes a similar approach to cultural novelties – such as talk shows, targeted, after all, mainly at the female recipient, and creating a culture of public deliberations over what was once referred to as intimate matters. It seems almost as if Szymborska did not see that the male and female roles are defined very precisely and in several dimensions, while their hierarchies are culturally determined. In other words, Szymborska's poetry does not enter a direct discussion with the tradition, nor with the present, even though it is formed within their discursive frame. "Sometimes Szymborska's poetry seems to come from a future time where the struggle for the woman's place [in the world], in other words, the place for the human being, both male and female, is no

<sup>9</sup> Borkowska, G. "Metafora drożdży..."

<sup>10</sup> Borkowska, G. "Szymborska ex-centryczna." *Teksty Drugie*, 1991. Vol. 4. 58.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem 46.

<sup>12</sup> Polish nouns and verbs are gendered, as a result a male poet translates to "poeta" whereas a female poet to "poetka." [AW]

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem 58.

longer necessary” notes Małgorzata Baranowska.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps, then, Szymborska’s position is closer to Kristeva’s rejection of the dichotomy of the masculine and the feminine as metaphysical?<sup>15</sup> The creation of a model that cannot be categorized by the existing dichotomous discourse of patriarchal society is one of the most interesting features of Szymborska’s femininity. As a result, constructing hierarchies that ignore the existing order, looking at the world through the categories of the domestic and the private that for centuries have been believed to be the domain of women is, in Szymborska’s poetry, associated neither with something inferior nor with a struggle; instead it is a non-antagonizing deconstruction of the stereotypes that daily glorify the male tradition.

Szymborska’s poetic persona is not determined by the juxtaposition of woman against man, it is, first and foremost, a human being that does not yield to the division running along the lines of sex and gender. In fact, humanity in Szymborska’s poetry is defined through the obvious, by distinguishing from the “other.” Otherness emphasizes differences but can also transform into a norm, as for instance in “The Onion” from *A Large Number*:

the onion, now that’s something else  
its innards don’t exist  
nothing but pure onionhood  
fills this devout onionist<sup>16</sup>

(NCP 166)

The very notion of “people” is dichotomous – including that and the other, the stereotypical product of culture and the ordinary, living man, as in “Wrong Number” where great men in the paintings

Above it all, in scarlet robes or nude  
they view nocturnal fuss as simply rude  
\*\*\*  
And if some silly man calling from town  
refuses to give up, put the receiver down,  
though he’s got the wrong number? He lives, so he errs.

(NCP 113)

The differences can be biological (natural) but also artificial, created by men, often for our convenience and peace of mind.

To preserve our peace of mind, animals die  
more shallowly: they aren’t deceased, they’re dead.

<sup>14</sup> Baranowska, M. “Szymborska i Świrszczyńska...” 8.

<sup>15</sup> Kristeva, J. “Women’s Time.” *Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. Belsey, C. and Moore, J. Blackwell: 1997. 201-217.

<sup>16</sup> Further quotations from Szymborska’s poems based on *Poems: New and Collected 1957–1997*. Trans. Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh. Mariner Books: 1998, further indicated as [NCP, page number. Quotations from *Monologue of a Dog*. Trans. Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh Houghton Mifflin Harcourt: 2007 further indicated as [M, page number] (AW)

They leave behind, we'd like to think, less feeling and less world,  
departing, we supposed, from a stage less tragic  
(“Seen From Above” NCP 151)

Looking at the man from a distance enhances the (biological) homogeneity of his species, disregarding the (cultural) differences of gender. Szymborska's female “I” is human to the same degree that any “other” – that is man. And indeed, man is not positioned in the center of the world in Szymborska's poetry, but as the “other” and the categories that he created are just but one type of several categories. What lies at the center is not a woman, contrary to what one might expect from the logic of patriarchal dichotomy, but a single human being “of its temporarily human kind.” What matters here is precisely separateness and individuality. Szymborska emphasizes in “Among The Multitudes”

I didn't get a choice either  
but I can't complain  
I could have been someone  
much less separate.  
Someone from an anthill, shoal, or buzzing swarm  
(NCP 267)

Always and above all human, an individual being, Szymborska's speaker is almost never male<sup>17</sup>, although it can be – and quite often is – female. In its non-gendered form it is a person or a being (the feminine [of “person” and “being” in Polish] is rather telling here), aware of its past lives even though – as she says in “Speech At The Lost and Found”:

I'm not even sure exactly where I left my claws,  
who's got my fur coat, who's living in my shell  
(NCP 127)

There is no difference of sexes above – the past forms of verbs indicate both male and female gender – describing the human being in “No End Of Fun” Szymborska ironically speaks of him who “only just whittled with his hand *né fin*/ a flint, a rocket ship.” The division takes place elsewhere. Although not explicitly, Szymborska's poems seem to suggest that we owe the process of evolution and gradually becoming human to actions that are (in the colloquial, figurative sense) typical of women rather than men, actions such as jumping out of our skin, losing our minds, turning a blind eye, waving our hand, or shrugging our shoulders. In other words, we have become and remain human not because of what is masculine, great and heroic; not because of what is rational (male) but because of what is hysterical (female.) It is coincidence – by the way, one of the key notions in Szymborska – and not deliberate, scientifically knowable processes that provides the best and the most complete explanation of history and humanity. This implicit but very clearly implied, boldly feminist and yet seemingly obvious description

<sup>17</sup> I can think of one poem (“Relacja ze szpitala” from *Sto potiech*) where Szymborska uses the masculine singular forms. Szymborska did not include the poem in her exhaustive selection *Widok z ziarnkiem piasku* (1996).

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of the world seen from the perspective of female, “domestic” wisdom is characteristic of Szymborska’s poetry. Let us return again to Grażyna Borkowska:

The originality of Szymborska’s poetry, at least at first glance, is determined by the specific location of the speaking voice. It amazes and astounds as it comes from unexpected places – from the corner of a room, from behind the scenes, from a museum showcase, gutters of a city, from a dream and from deep waters. Szymborska’s poetry is a modest gloss on the margins of the great book of the world, the sixth act of a play, a reverse of a painting.<sup>18</sup>

In other words, it is a voice coming from places marginalized by the patriarchal tradition, from places symbolically assigned to women. And, perhaps paradoxically, it turns out to provide a perspective more interesting than the symbolic positioning of the man in the “center.”

Asking the question “Where is she?” Hélène Cixous invokes several oppositions:

Activity/passivity,  
Sun/Moon,  
Culture/Nature,  
Day/Night,

Father/Mother,  
Head/heart,  
Intelligible/sensitive,  
Logos/Pathos

... Always the same metaphor: we follow it, it transports us, in all of its forms, wherever a discourse is organized... By dual, hierarchized oppositions. Superior / Inferior.<sup>19</sup>

Szymborska’s woman does not feel inferiority resulting from the adoption of the male symbolic order, nor does she want to swap places with the man, rejecting the idea of his superiority. Thus, she does not negate her place or the juxtaposition of metaphors, she negates – or at least questions – the hierarchical element of the pairings in question. As a result, the female speaker in Szymborska’s work refers to men ironically.

This adult male. This person on earth.  
Ten billion nerve cells. Ten pints of blood  
pumped by ten ounces of heart.  
This object took three billion years to emerge.

(“A Film From The Sixties” 94)

Irony in Szymborska’s poems is directed at men to such a degree, that whenever the poet speaks ironically of humans in general, not only does she use the male noun form “man” [człowiek] but also her imagery reveals a seemingly male individual.

<sup>18</sup> Borkowska, G. “Szymborska ex-centryczna...” 51.

<sup>19</sup> Cixous, H. “Sorties’: Out and Out: Attack/Ways Out/Forays.” *Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. Belsey, C. and Moore, J., eds., Blackwell: 1997. 91.

with that ring in his nose, with that toga, that sweater  
He's no end of fun, for all you say.  
Poor little beggar.  
A human, if we ever saw one.

(No End Of Fun NCP 107)

Here is an image of man seen from the domestic perspective.

Tomorrow he'll give a lecture  
on homeostasis in megagalactic cosmonautics.  
For now, though, he has curled up and gone to sleep.

(Going Home NCP 123)

Female irony (as this is the kind found in Szymborska's poetry) is born between the sphere of home and the sphere of demands that man must face in the outside world. These include status and professional success but can also exceed their limits, as in "Smiles" where masculinity is associated not with pity but with amusement resulting from the posturing displayed for the public.

And that's why statesmen have to smile.  
Their pearly whites mean they're still full of cheer.  
The game's complex, the goal's far out of reach,  
the outcomes's still unclear – once in a while,  
we need a friendly, gleaming set of teeth.

(NCP 153)

What is public and high (i.e., masculine) is therefore also simply laughable. One cannot disagree with the playful (but also true) observation that "dentistry turned to diplomatic skill/ promises us a Golden Age tomorrow." In other words, the world of men cannot be taken very seriously.

It is not to be underestimated either, as it exerts influence upon entire humanity – the model of masculinity includes, after all, also heroic deeds that are paid for by the woman who – as in "Pieta" – becomes something of an exhibit in the museum dedicated to the greatness of man. Szymborska does not question the core of masculinity or heroism that is a natural consequence of being a man, especially in the patriotically-oriented Polish tradition. She expects her readers to be familiar with the latter, to understand its rules and at the same time she presents it from the surprising perspective of the everyday of existence. For instance, in "In Broad Daylight" from *The People on The Bridge*, a heroic death is used to emphasize the general lack of understanding of the uniqueness of the miracle that is our usual, daily life.

Sometimes someone would  
yell from the doorway: "Mr. Baczynski, phone call for you" –  
and there would be nothing strange about that  
being him, about him standing up, straightening his sweater,  
and slowly moving towards the door.

At this sight no one would  
stop talking, no one would



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freeze in mid-gesture, mid-breath  
because this commonplace event would  
be treated – such a pity –  
as a commonplace event.

(NCP 192-193)

For Szyborska, life is a commonplace but also – as in the poem “Museum” – a presence of feelings and the ability to err, as in “Wrong Number” – “He lives, so he errs.” Life is everything that the patriarchal tradition puts on the side of the irrational, in other words, on the side of that which represents the woman. Even if, as it is in “Museum,” struggle becomes synonymous with battle, it is simply a race against the dress

The crown has outlasted the head.  
The hand has lost out to the glove.  
The right shoe has defeated the foot.

As for me, I am still alive, you see.  
The battle with my dress still rages on.

(NCP 30)

When the speaker clearly identifies with the woman, irony is replaced with “good-natured pity.” This is not the only difference between the way Szyborska refers to man in general and man in its female form. As man, the speaker is primarily a biological entity. As a woman, the speaker not only remembers the previous stages of her biological development, but is also aware of the cultural determinants of her existence. As beautiful Helen, she visits Troy, she understands Lot’s wife, or becomes Cassandra. She remembers the characters that created her as a cultural stereotype, in other words, characters that she “used to be” as a cultural construct, she understands them enough to enter the role of a female character from the past. In “Landscape,” already painted as the woman “under the ash tree,” she says

I don’t know the games of the heart.  
I’ve never seen my children’s father naked.  
I don’t see the crabbed and blotted draft  
that hides behind the Song of Songs.  
What I want to say comes in ready-made phrases.  
I never use despair, since it isn’t really mine,  
only given to me for safekeeping.

(NCP 70)

The female speaker of Szyborska’s poems remembers also the characters that the poet herself used to be, for example in childhood. She can look at them from a distance and treat as the “other,” for example in “Laughter.”

The little girl I was--  
I know her, of course.  
I have a few snapshots

<http://rcin.org.pl>

from her brief life.  
I feel good-natured pity  
for a couple of little poems.  
I remember a few events.

(NCP 73)

In "A Memory", from *Chwila* [Moment], the poet's most recent volume, looking at herself from the past is at the same time a reflection on the relationships between women representing different generations, conditioned by their relationships with men.

I thought: I'll call you,  
tell you, don't come just yet,  
they're predicting rain for days.

Only Agnieszka, a widow,  
met the lovely girl with a smile.

(M 43)

While a description of "her old self" is a relatively common theme in Szymborska's work, one similar in tone to the sentimentally-ironic attitude to other "future women" – for instance, the thirteen year olds ("A Moment in Troy") or little girls ("A Little Girl Tugs at the Tablecloth") – Szymborska's work does not look at the woman as the "other." The abovementioned "A Memory" is an exception here, perhaps also a foreshadowing of something new in Szymborska's poetry. The tone, however, that women can use to talk about a potential rival or simply any unacceptable "other" [woman], could be heard already in much earlier poems, even if it is employed most superbly in "Hatred" (*The End and The Beginning*): "See how efficient it still is,/ how it keeps itself in shape" sounds almost like a snippet from a somewhat malicious conversation. Malice and gossip attributed to women by the patriarchal stereotype are not typical of the tone of the female speaker in Szymborska's poems and they never appear when other women are discussed. They are simply a voice, a literary device, another game that reveals and ridicules the patriarchal attitude to women.

Szymborska's characteristic tone of good will irony towards the "others" develops not from the acceptance of "external" or "existing" stereotypes but is an extension of the way she talks about herself as she "used to be." The poet employs it not only in her relations with people but also with several elements of the surrounding world, including the existing and the surrounding modernity.

It'd be better if you went back  
where you came from

I don't owe you nothing,  
I'm just an ordinary woman  
who only knows  
when to betray  
another's secret

(NCP 74)

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Describing herself as “an ordinary woman,” she stresses – in a paradoxically obvious manner – her presence on the margins of the “high” modes of culture. At the same time, it is difficult to define the notion of an “ordinary woman” in Szyborska’s poetry. A woman is, after all, a constant volatility, someone who “must be a variety,” as in “Portrait of a Woman”:

Naive, but gives the best advice.  
Weak, but takes on anything.  
A screw loose and tough as nails.  
Curls up with Jaspers or *Ladies’ Home Journal*.  
Can’t figure out this bolt and builds a bridge.  
Young, young as ever, still looking young.  
(NCP 161)

A woman is also someone whose body is subject to fashion and who is subjected to the current stereotypes of beauty. In “Rubens’ Women” (from *Salt*), noticing the absence of the “skinny sisters,” Szyborska writes:

The thirteenth century would have given them golden halos.  
The twentieth silver screens.  
The seventeenth, alas, holds nothing for the unvoluptuous.  
  
For even the sky bulges here  
with pudgy angles and a chubby god  
(NCP 47)

In the poem above, the woman and her role are a function of the image of the body, and the female body is subjected to the same categories of aesthetic appraisal as art is. A commentary on such perception of the female body has a lot in common with feminism, except in Szyborska it is not a phenomenon judged only negatively since in art it also concerns godly – in other words – most honored characters. Precisely this kind of commentary – noticing the issues raised by feminism and (not) solving them in a (non) conventional way is fairly typical of Szyborska.

Another typical feature of her work is the focus on what does not exist, which in itself is no surprise as, according to Lacan, “the woman does not exist.”<sup>20</sup> There is nothing unusual about the fact that in the world of a “non-existing woman,” things that did not happen matter as much as those that did. Szyborska’s “The Railroad Station” about the “nonarrival in the city of N.” is a good example here. Also, the opening of “\*\*\*” – “Nothingness changed radically also for me” [Nicość przenicowała się także i dla mnie] – is worth mentioning in this context. The non-existence spreads further – into the non-existence of singular realization of stereotypes. Thus, the family from “Family Album” consists of people that refuse to yield to stereotypes, and when a sentimental stereotype does appear, years later, in Szyborska’s description of a photograph, it will be in “Hitler’s First Photograph” (*The People On The Bridge*). The stereotype does not

allow to see or describe reality, and often actually opposes common sense. "True love" – writes the poet – "couldn't populate the planet in a million years,/ it comes along so rarely." What is important for our existence is not the stereotype used to describe reality but reality itself. Similarly, Szymborska's speaker recollects love in "Love At First Sight" as "something [that] was and wasn't there between us,/ something went on and went away." And it is not the stereotype of eternal first love that makes it so important but rather the fact that it is gone forever

Yet just exactly as it is,  
it does what the others still can't manage:  
unremembered,  
not even seen in dreams,  
it introduces me to death.

(M 47)

Interestingly, this play of stereotypes reappears especially in Szymborska's poems about love where she practically abandons the existing, patriarchal tradition of female poetry. In her early work, love is actually a lack of love, an impossibility of meeting the ideal

I am too close for him to dream of me.  
I don't flutter over him, don't flee him  
beneath the roots of trees. I am too close.  
The caught fish doesn't sing with my voice.

(NCP 55)

In her later poems love is expressed not with grand words, not through the extraordinary but precisely through the miracle of everyday:

And it just so happened that I am with you  
and I really don't see anything  
ordinary about it

(\*\*\*\*) *Wszelki wypadek* (1972)

In other words, love is a privilege of youth, a stereotypical emotional torrent but rather a quiet coexistence with another man, a mature emotion of a mature person. In her love poems, Szymborska reaches for the pronoun "you" which – in contrast to "us" – allows to maintain one's own self, the "I", to stress the "separateness" and the respect for the "I" of the beloved and at the same time – unlike the pronoun "he" – does not put the addressee in the position of the "other." The lyrical "you" appeared relatively late in Szymborska's poems, and is, in fact, expressed fully only in the poems written after the death of the loved one.

I survived you by enough,  
and only by enough,  
to contemplate from afar.

(NCP 241)

The woman's voice in Szymborska's poems is not a battle shout or a submissive whisper. It is a voice of a woman who feels – as an individual but also culturally – equal to man (if

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this division should remain in force), and as a result, does not need to fight for anything, nor yield to anyone. It is a voice of a woman who knows that even if history belongs to heroes, “after every war / someone has to tidy up.” (“The End And The Beginning”). A voice belonging to someone who – perhaps paradoxically – growing out of the very patriotic Polish culture, instead of agitating for the creation of another veterans’ organization, allows the patriotism of the ancestors to be forgotten.

Those who knew  
what this was all about  
must make way for those  
who know little  
And less than that

(NCP 229)

And, which is probably most typical of women, it is the voice of someone who does not have to actually change reality, who can simply – as a non-existent entity – not participate in it, just as women did not participate, for centuries, in the creation of descriptive categories of the world they live in while all that was left to them, apart from adaptation, was a quiet, peaceful dissent. That and, naturally, caring for the continuity of everyday life while male heroes were leaving to fulfill more important social and historical roles. This is probably one of the reasons why it is so difficult to capture and describe the essence of self-assured femininity, awarded eventually, with the Nobel Prize in literature.

*Translation: Anna Warso*