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## **THE FEMALE BODY – RAFAŁ WOJACZEK’S ICON OF PRAYER. SACRALISATION AND DEFORMATION**

This study is an attempt to take a fresh look at the problem of the body in the work of the Polish poet Rafał Wojaczek (1945–1971). The focus of interest is the motif of the (female) body, desired and transforming, in the perception of the one who desires it, into a body of revelation (icon). In the poetry of Wojaczek, desire determines the desirer’s image of the object of his desire, giving it new meanings, on the one hand sacralising it, and on the other deforming it. With the proviso, however, that the very act of sacralisation, as a kind of semantic superimposition, is in its own way a deformation of the concept of body as such [Longer version of the article was published in Polish – see 4].

However, the female body is not at once the object of desire in Wojaczek’s poetry. The first thing that can be perceived in the work of the poet is an almost morbid desire for fullness, for Transcendence; a desire to sate an existential hunger. The basic situation of Wojaczek’s lyrical hero is post-lapsarian; it is that of the human being deprived of his paradisaic roots and plunged into existential darkness.

The attitude of this hero to the future, however, is characterised by a particular kind of eschatology. The poem *Żyję nie widując gwiazd* [I live without seeing the stars] expresses the expectation of someone’s coming to break through the “wall” of darkness and captivity and to make the experience of revelation possible. In the poem *Dla ciebie piszę miłość* [I write love for you], this “someone” turns out to be the woman-lover:

for you I write love  
 I who have no surname  
 a sleepless animal

I write in terror  
 alone facing You  
 whose name is Be  
 I, meat of the prayer  
 of which You are the bird [23, 99]

The hero who speaks these words is a person assigned to “down”. It is someone without a surname, “an animal”, “meat”. The very order in which

these descriptions appear in the text is not without meaning. For in the poem a gradual process of the hero's degradation, first as an individual personality, and then in general as a living thing (reification), takes place. This process equates in meaning with that of the Fall, and hence with movement "downwards".

Meantime the addressee mounts "upwards"; it is a bird, a being that in its symbolic sense is capable of crossing the border between earth and heaven, winging towards Transcendence, the place where God dwells. The process by which she acquires ever-increasing value is also signalled by the manner of recording the pronouns that refer to her: "you" / "You" — first a lower case, then an upper case letter. But this is not all. The addressee of the poem is a person "whose name is Be". The name does not merely signify the fact of her presence, which so daunts the speaker. It is also a reference to the name of God: *I am that I am*. Thus *Be* not only mounts up towards God, but herself acquires features of the divine.

In relation to the lover, defined and presented in this way, the hero assumes the attitude of a believer. Hence his words take on the form of prayer - a declaration of faith, expressed in a mystical conviction of the existence ("I know of You") and heavenly dwelling ("who art in heaven") of his divine betrothed. In the poem *Błyskawica* [Lightning] we read: "In poetry I grow to You, who art in heaven" [23, 175].

The attitude taken by the hero of the poems cited may be treated as religious. Assuming such an attitude allows him to wing his way "upwards". Prayer makes the hero begin to "grow", to return to his former, human shape. The world surrounding the one praying begins in turn to be brightened by "the heart's lightning".

We should note the fact that in the poem *Dla ciebie piszę miłość* [For you I write love], cosmic brightness undergoes the maximum possible reduction. The only source of light is a drop of alcohol, so the space surrounding the hero must be plunged in almost total darkness.

from her lips runs  
a drop of alcohol  
in it are all suns and stars  
the only Sun of this time

from her lips runs  
a drop of blood  
and where is Your tongue  
that would soothe the pain  
from the bitten through

words I love [23, 99]

This darkness was also, and perhaps above all, the hero's inner darkness, expressing the "pain / from the bitten through / words I love". Thus an analogy is drawn between internal and external space; hence the physical darkness and the symbolic hell of a darkened place in which "loneliness leads the human being to a state of extreme misery, of demonic solipsism, in which no gaze ever crosses the gaze of another" [8, 13].

The journey "upwards" in *Błyskawica* [Lightning] brightens the surrounding space, which, as it turns out, "can exist only thanks to light, which turns it into the cradle of all life"; "life and light are identical with each other", while light itself "gives life to every creature, turning it into someone who is present, who sees, and is seen by, other beings" [8, 12]. In Wojacek's poem the appearance of light in itself constitutes revelation, as on the first day of creation. Woman is the image of this light, the word that the hero speaks and that becomes flesh. This incarnation, however, is only a projection of the desire of the hero; it is a being without any existence of its own: "By poetry I grow to You, who know nothing of me. / But I know of You, which means that you are" (*Błyskawica*). The movement "upwards", however, fills the hero with hope. The world acquires dynamism, a rhythm expressing the joy of life.

taking You, drinking of You, I cared no more  
for heaven seeing that it is one [23, 154]

Woman in Wojacek's poetry is identified with heaven. Thus the only appropriate term for her is "icon": the image that is a cult object in Christian churches of the East. It is worth emphasising that the treatment of the human person by which he or she undergoes a process of sacralisation as a living icon is nothing out of the ordinary. This conception has an ancient origin in the Christian world and has frequently been observed in modern times in Russia, where the Tsars were perceived as living icons [24, 110–218].

The icon, as Pavel Florensky writes, is "a revelation in and through what is sensual of a true reality, something of absolute and eternal value" [9, 69]. In Wojacek's poetry, woman, as in the Orthodox metaphysics of the icon, both links and separates visible and invisible space, becoming a border between heaven and earth, a window through which the light of God himself breaks through to us. She has a dual nature, being visible and invisible, physical and metaphysical, at the same time. She is thus something considerably more than a sign of Transcendence. She is its

revelation, a reminder of the primordial paradisaal image. Externally, also, woman's body possesses the features of an icon: it radiates brightness; it shines. Florensky writes that "the icon is revealed to us as luminous, a vision emanating light. And independently of the positioning of the icon, vertical or horizontal, one cannot say otherwise of this vision than that it towers. We become aware that it is higher than all that surrounds it, that it derives from its own, other space and from eternity" [9, 128]. The light of the icon is an expression of the holiness of the person presented in it. In the same way in the poem *Mapa* [Map], Wojaczek "colours" the woman's body with gold and light. "Gold, metal, the sun have no colour because they are almost identical with the sun's light" [9, 171], and hence also identical with heaven.

everywhere that I touch you, the finger  
prints on your skin shine and you are already like heaven [23, 60]

The attitude of the Orthodox religious believer is marked by great humility. The faithful do not question the divine truths revealed in the icon. If there is the *Trinity* of Rublev, there must also be God — according to Florensky the best proof of His existence [17, 223]. Wojaczek's hero, however, appears here to represent another tradition. Faith is not enough for him. He requires proofs as to whether transcendent reality really exists, or is only a false product of cultural processes. In order to convince himself of what the truth really is, he begins a dramatic process of seeking. From this point, it is not the woman as a person, but her body that becomes an icon. But since the space of heaven and the space of Wojaczek's icon — the female body — are identical, it becomes necessary to penetrate to the body's interior and seek proofs there of the existence of metaphysics, love and humanity. *Piosenka z najwyższej wieży* [Song from the highest tower] seems to constitute an expression of unsatisfied desire for these three values. However, it is not easy to find them in the body of the lover, dismantled into its primary elements. The hero penetrates in vain every smallest fragment of her body: he cuts it into pieces, passes it through a meat-grinder, splitting even hairs, and spreads the blood on the glass.

It has already been said that the icon constitutes a border between two spaces, a kind of window, through which, "from here", someone may observe some "there". But as with a door, so with a window, one may not only look through it, but may also cross over its threshold — that border between inside and outside.

Wojaczek has already tried to penetrate the female body, its every organ separately, its every centimetre. Despite the fact that faith in success

remains (“For I still believe that I will find it”), the quest has not brought the desired results, or at least the poet says nothing about this. Now the hero seeks a “normal” entrance, by way of window or door. The female body takes on the form of an enclosed space — a room or a house. Entering this body-house is the equivalent of entering Transcendence. In the poem *Jeszcze w nią nie wszedł* [He hasn’t entered her yet], the sex act is presented as entering the inside of a house — the female body.

This vision of the female body, constructed with the help of a spatial metaphor, is also confirmed by the woman herself, who is aware of the fact that the semantic superimposition ascribed to the space of her body is a product of male desires. In the poem *Pewniki* [Things not to be doubted], the following words fall from the lips of the woman:

only the high prayer of Your desire  
raises the Church of my sex [23, 309].

Comprehended in this way, the body is no longer a mere ordinary house. It is a temple - the house of God, and hence the place where Transcendence is revealed to man, the link between earth and heaven. The temple is a text symbolising the conjunction of the two spheres. But the temple itself is understood dualistically. As Władysław Panas comments, “From the external point of view it constitutes the border between heaven and earth. From the internal viewpoint, it contains in itself the visible and the invisible, heaven and earth. Thus while being a border in its totality, it also possesses an interior border. This border within a border is the iconostasis, or barrier separating the altar from that part of the temple intended for the faithful” [17, 221].

What, however, is this internal border, recalled in the course of interpretation, in the female body? Though the conclusions that suggest themselves at this point may appear blasphemous, the discussion must be followed through. This internal border in the female body, which separates earth from heaven, the visible from the invisible, *sacrum* from *profanum* is “the open / window of her groin”.

For Wojacek, the essence of the universe can be revealed only within sacred space, and thus inside the female body. Entry into that space takes place during the act of sex. In the poem *Krzyż* [Cross], Wojacek presents this act through the symbolism of crucifixion. Both partners are subordinated to the geometrical space of a cross, while revelation is supposed to take place nowhere other than on the “mount of orgasm”, Wojacek’s Golgotha. In Christian thought, human redemption, by which the gates of Transcendence are opened to ordinary mortals, takes place by

means of the martyr's death (sacrifice) of Christ on the cross. In Wojaczek, in contrast, the revelation of the sacred takes place during the act of sex, which is also linked in his poetry with the experience of death ("he felt the whole of death in himself") and the sacrifice of the crucifixion.

Thinking of the body in spatial terms and treating it as an organised and in a sense separated space leads Wojaczek to construct a vision of a body-city and a body-universe. The body-city variant appears in the poem *Ulica* [Street]. Here we are dealing with a particular kind of corporal topography, where the body of the lyrical hero is the main street of a town. Sometimes, however, the body spreads out and takes on shapes that are infinitely and inconceivably huge. In the poem *Twoje ciało moje dzieło* [Your body my work] - very much as in Rabelais - the part of the body endowed with positive features grows more powerful. Thus this body may herald the appearance of a body of another kind: the female body as a body-cosmos. To express Transcendence by means of space is, according to Wojaczek, to show it as infinity (cosmos). The poem *Mapa* presents a vision of this kind, in which the body-heaven is built of elements of the female body transformed into cosmic bodies. The body as a whole is the skies. Those parts of the body that have an erotic character (breasts, nipples) are stars forming the Milky Way. The woman's laughter, in turn, is the energy liberated during the explosion of a Supernova. And "finally the Great Rose: / the Southern Cross in the northern skies" is the element of the body-heaven that is distinguished from the rest by the greatest mystery.

The rose in Wojaczek's symbolism denotes the female sex organ. When, as here, it is described as a cross, however, additional associations are brought into play. The poem calls to be placed alongside others: *Krzyż* and *Jeszcze w nią nie wszedł*. In this confrontation, it emerges clearly that for Wojaczek, every erotic act is an opening up to Transcendence, an opening that is at the same time an experience of death.

Wojaczek's body-heaven becomes such by touch, while touch itself, understood in this way, becomes a semiotic act. The semioticising of individual parts of the body makes them mean more than merely themselves; by referring to another reality (a cosmic reality), they become the language of spatial modelling. And thus the space of the body again becomes a model of another space. This time, however, heaven does not in the first place connote transcendent images. Rather, we are dealing here on the one hand with an idiosyncratic kind of astrology, and on the other with the body as the building material of a new universe.

The semantic aspect of the body-language space is only perceptible against the background of non-signs, or (within a given structure) in the process of confronting defined oppositions of meaning. In Wojaczek's

poetry, the semiosis of the female body is conducted according to the second variant. For this reason, also, in order to assert the roundness of the breasts, it is necessary to experience them in opposition to the hollowness of the hand, while the smoothness of the buttocks appears in opposition to the coarseness of the fingers (*Pewniki*).

In Wojacek's poetry, woman is created by man. The fact of her ontic dependence on the operations and above all the imaginations of man leads to the situation where the hero loses himself in his imagination, while his world turns out not to be a real one, but only a morbid postulate that he desires. For this reason, also, his vision of the world, based on desire, comes to the point of breakdown, while the body itself begins to function completely differently in the Polish poet's artistic model of the world. Since woman does not fulfil the function ascribed to her, the place of exalted eroticism is usurped by brutal and morbid sadism. Let us note that the following words are spoken in the poem *Kobiecość* [Femininity] by its heroine:

Masculinity means beating a woman  
I agree with You I offer my cheek [23, 240].

Wojacek's hero is incapable of accepting woman because she is not an expression of his metaphysical yearnings. This kind of woman begins to be humiliated and beaten (*Kobiecość* and *Nasze żony* [Our Wives]). In consequence, instead of the Kingdom of God on earth, of which the woman-icon was earlier the herald, a vision arises in which heaven degenerates totally into a space of chaos. At the centre of this world is the degenerate macro-body of the hero, a mentally sick demiurge. This kind of vision fills the poem *Ballada bezbożna* [Godless Ballad]. Hence, too, only death can restore the proper balance of the universe. This death, however, is no longer the condition of salvation. It assumes the form of a curtain, a veil that deprives the hero of the sight of heaven (see: *Wiem kto to jest* [I know who it is]). Besides, death, which, instead of opening the gates of Transcendence, is simply a synonym for nothingness, becomes ubiquitous. "Wherever I go, everywhere is haunted by death", we read in the poem *Ja: książkę Pepi* [I, Prince Pepi]

A few summarising reflections are required in conclusion. The desire for Transcendence, fullness and meaning is identified in Wojacek's work with the desire for woman. Although at the outset, a quest for the love hidden in woman is evident, this very quickly transmutes into mere desire for the woman's body. For it is through this body that revelation is to take place.

The sacralising of the body becomes its deformation, both on the philosophical level and in the manner of its presentation. But this is not all. Let us note that the icon does not possess its own reality or existence. In itself it is hardly more than a wooden board (in Wojacek's poetry, a body, or more brutally, meat), whose value depends on the fact that it reveals Transcendence. In the process of constructing a vision of the woman-icon, the woman herself, as a person, a subject that lives, thinks and feels, is thus deformed by the negation of her own sovereign existence. Hence Wojacek's poetry is inscribed into the frame of a discourse present from at least the Middle Ages and continuing through sentimentalism and partly through Romanticism, a discourse that decrees the manner in which man writes of the woman he desires.

*Translated from Polish by Jean Ward*

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### **ОКУЛЕСИКА В РАССКАЗАХ В.М. ШУКШИНА**

Язык представляет собой объединение двух систем: вербальной и невербальной. Вербальные символы, безусловно, основное средство для кодирования идей в процессе коммуникации. Но общеизвестно, что в общении параллельно с языком используется мимика, жесты и другие невербальные компоненты, передающие 60-80% информации. Некоторые элементы, относящиеся к невербальным средствам общения врожденны. Так, человек еще с младенчества может улыбаться, пытаться наладить с кем-то контакт, протягивая руки. Достаточно совсем недолго понаблюдать за разговаривающими людьми, чтобы убедиться в том, что речь почти всегда сопровождается жестикულიцией и мимическими движениями мышц лица. «Этот паралингвистический (или, в буквальном переводе, околязыковый) аккомпанемент речи присутствует неизменно, хотя и неодинаково развит у разных народов» [1, 102]. Еще знаменитый римский оратор Квинтиллиан, живший в I веке н.э., заметил и описал коммуникативные возможности жестикულიции.

Изучение невербальных компонентов особенно актуально в настоящее время, когда в центре внимания оказывается анализ речевого дискурса, включающего не только словесное высказывание, но и говорящего, слушающего, ситуацию, в которой происходит общение.

Работая над проблемой соотношения вербальных и невербальных знаков на современном этапе развития науки о языке, лингвисты выдвигают следующие положения: