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## The Philosophy of Julian Tuwim's Stanza<sup>1</sup>

You know it, Skamandrites are “stanzers”! The poets of the inter-war avant-garde nursed a great grudge against them because of that. Their main objections pertained to the rhythmic monotony, the primitive, barrel-organ-like musicality, the trumpery of the used rhymes and inertial acquisition of verse patterns from old poetry. Perhaps those accusations were most concisely expressed by Tadeusz Peiper in his essay *Nowe usta* (*New lips*). Although neither Tuwim's, nor any other Skamandrite's name is mentioned, contemporary readers could have little doubt who the real addressees were:

Those “songful” bars, which you can still hear tapping in; and those other ones, monotonous, created as if for the deaf, who must have the rhythm beaten into them with constant repetition; and those close rhymes, placed right above each other and crashing into each other with a bang; that music of circling and crashes. It was understandable in the time of poor ears. Today it seems to be monotonous dittingy<sup>2</sup>.

Can we still consider those accusations valid today? Surely not with respect to Tuwim, His poetical habit, revolving around the stanza – that “music of circling and crashes” – motivates poetical philosophy. It can be described in concise theses:

In Tuwim's work and his reflection on it, the stanza is the atom of poetry and the starting point for the crystallisation of linguistic awareness. And that linguistic-poetic awareness has the power to organise around it the whole structure of reality. It can be said that in the hearing and the mind of that poet the world, similarly to poetry,

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<sup>1</sup> In a sense this essay refers to the questions raised in my book – see P. Matywiecki, *Twarz Tuwima*, W.A.B., Warsaw 2007 (chapter *Kosmologia i pitagoreizm*). This article thoroughly develops the topic.

<sup>2</sup> T. Peiper, *Nowe usta*, in: *Pisma wybrane*, compilation by S. Jaworski, Ossolineum, Wrocław 1979, p. 232.

reveals its strophic structure. Tuwim spoke about it a number of times, most clearly in the interview for Roman Brandstaetter from 1927: I usually write [...] in chunks, fragments, later I fill them in. First, the nucleus of a poem has to be created, its axis. Next, around that axis grows the whole substance. Therefore I always know which stanza in the poem is its core, the starting point for the whole piece<sup>3</sup>.

In a letter to Bolesław Miciński, Tuwim writes about “creative torment”, about

trembling in an as yet non-existent rhythm, carving out words from resistant things and most important events, grouping them into explosive collocations, boiling sentences in order to freeze them with the frost of their final form<sup>4</sup>.

Poetic work is presented here as searching the world for its verbal, strophic essence – revealing itself in some sort of explosive, “chemical” reaction.

It is peculiar to other Skamandrites – take Jan Lechoń, so trusting in the stanza – not to let their preferences be analysed in any deeper aesthetic-philosophical way.

My essay elaborates on and justifies the above-stated theses. I would like to make a reservation that my thoughts do not pertain strictly to the problem of versification. What I intend to do is to grasp the phenomenon of Tuwim’s stanza in its aspects more elementary than the shape of stanza versification, however, rhythmic issues will be of interest.

### Chaos and order

If I were to name the juxtaposition most common in Tuwim’s poetry, it would be the contrast between chaos and order. On the one hand, his poetry stands out because of its plasma-like changeability of meaning, indeterminacy of words, blurring of the boundaries between meanings in phrases. Here is one of the many examples<sup>5</sup>, the seemingly unambiguous title of the book *Słowa we krwi* (*Words in blood*). It can mean: “bloody words” or “words circulating in the system like blood cells”. It seems, however, that the disjunctive “or” is not in place here, Tuwim wants that **fuzzy**, plasma-like impression of continuous reversibility of the relationship: part-whole, whole-part. It is rare, however, that such instability is

<sup>3</sup> *Rozmowy z Tuwimem*, selection and compilation by T. Januszewski, Semper, Warsaw 1994, p. 29.

<sup>4</sup> J. Tuwim, *Listy do przyjaciół – pisarzy*, compiled by T. Januszewski, Czytelnik, Warsaw 1979, p. 191.

<sup>5</sup> I included many more in my book *Twarz Tuwima* – see P. Matywiecki, *op. cit.*

the thematic core of a poem, most often it is just a microscopic fluctuation of the relationship, spread all over the poem. In the first poem of *Words in blood*<sup>6</sup>, in *Stowo i ciało (Word and body)* the ending of the first stanza reads: “Words [...] / I squeeze like young leaves, / I rub with fragrances”<sup>7</sup> – we can see a complete blending of actions and space: rubbing leaves to extract their smelly essence and next rubbing that essence on the leaves. On the other hand, the reader can see the structure of stanzas, the stable construction of Tuwim's poems.

We find such a contrast between the fuzzy **plasma** of meanings and islands of crystallised, precise sense, maturing with various forms, in all Tuwim's poems. It often happens, as in the example above, that this plasma serves the function of the crystal, and the crystal that of the plasma! It takes place not in abrupt switches of structures, but rather in a **continuous** way, simultaneously, always. Who knows if it isn't the most exact image of the process of creating meaning by speech, at least internal speech? – The image of chaos achieving a stanza order, an order always ready for the liquidity of meaning. Order, however, seems to dominate. Guided by such an intuition, many literary historians write about the transition of Tuwim's poetics from expressionist into classicist.

In *Rzecz Czarnoleska* we find an important sentence: “From chaos order is created”<sup>8</sup>. And the poet adds: “It shapes itself into its finality”<sup>9</sup>. The stanza is for Tuwim the elementary order impressed on the chaos of speech and the chaos of life. He expressed it earlier in his poem *Ogień*, the simplicity of that order is immediately changed into existential wisdom and Pythagorean mysticism:

Be my, dear creative life, a polyhedron,  
Inexorably, coldly in yourself symmetrical,  
So that hard, clean you are with your contents  
And full in your form with mystical harmony.<sup>10</sup>

The crystalline structure of that stanza embodies the idea it talks about: the crystallisation of life, which alienates itself from its innate chaos.

In a less exalted form, without the interference of the Young Poland style, that aspect of the stanza is presented in the poem *Do siebie (To myself)* – it is the taming of chaos, it lightens the world for the mind, structures it with insight. The stanza is a mnemonic of sound, “sounding remembering”:

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<sup>6</sup> The quoted poems in Polish are presented as cited in the edition based on the compilation by A. Kowalczykova: J. Tuwim, *Wiersze zebrane*, vol. I–II, Czytelnik, Warsaw 1975.

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem, vol. I, p. 317.

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem, vol. II, p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, vol. I, p. 9.

Create, you charming bastard,  
 Mount chaos with verse  
 Decompose the lumps of the world  
 Into things clean and first

Here come the happy years  
 Of piercing reality with current:  
 An enlightening in thought  
 A cleaving insight

That was a distant thing  
 And though incomprehensible  
 That which can be said  
 That which can be soundly remembered

J. Tuwim, *To myself*<sup>11</sup>

And in the poem *Śława (Fame)*, poetic craft is presented thus:

[...] and congeal will anxious words in a poem  
 Bound by songful knowledge like cement binds bricks.

J. Tuwim, *Śława*<sup>12</sup>

There is sweetness and bitterness in such a calling:

Entrust the rhythm with passing moments,  
 Trembling with Apollonian consideration,  
 Strictly assemble and measure,  
 Strict words with great artistry

And when the shape of a living flesh  
 Into foul decay falls apart,  
 That stanza, tight, brief and whole  
 Unmoved will remain  
 In cold, cruel glare of fame

Julian Tuwim, *To fate*<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem, vol. II, p. 79.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, vol. II, p. 114.

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, vol. II, p. 164.

Tuwim expressed the idea of fighting for the harmony of words, which results in the stanza and competes against disorder, in the sixteenth fragment of the prose poem *Skrzydlaty Złoczyńca* (*Winged villain*).

I craved finished and clear words like letters carved with a sharp knife in black linoleum; thoughts simple and undoubtable like a hard square of a marble tablet. Black letters on a black square. Meanwhile in the grey scrambled eggs of my brain hatched painful nightmares: a dream about collecting in a terribly big library all the books in the world, which suddenly scattered and all the letters fell out. There lies a heap of mixed fonts<sup>14</sup>.

But in the same poem, in part 23, Tuwim spins a ghastly vision of such an order terrorising the appearance of the world and its social functioning:

I think [...] that this process of “mathematising the appearance” of the Earth and life has been going on since time began. From laxity of “styles” it has been steadily and slowly moving towards solidifying into **finality**.

But in that climactic year, the globe became as if a ready puzzle: the previous generation put the last “blocks”, last letters in. The block and letters of not only cities, houses, buildings, factories, streets, roads, markets, stadiums and god knows what else, but blocks into brains!<sup>15</sup>

That which was in the realm of poetic metaphysics a desired “finality” of order, in the social domain turns out to be a form of spiritual totalitarianism.

In a natural way such a chaos-defeating stanza (stanza as an ideal and that just written) becomes a microcosm<sup>16</sup> – in multiple meanings of the word. Something of an archetype of those meanings, simple like a geometric figure in abstractionist painting is the poem *Matematyka* (*Mathematics*):

Oh, universal church!  
Oh, escape from the devil driving me into madness!  
The one bedrock of verity,  
Oh, accurate Eye of eternity,  
Looking at me with vastness!

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, vol. II, p. 92; (emphasis added – P. M.).

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem, vol. II, p. 102; (emphasis added – P. M.).

<sup>16</sup> And because of that microcosm quality it seems natural to use [in Polish] the word “strofka” (“little stanza”) and not “strofa” (“stanza”), that’s why I use it more often in the [Polish version of the] essay. By that choice I’d like to suggest that something so “small” can contain a cosmos of meanings.

Oh, number, my saviour!  
 Result! Become! Show me!  
 With unrelenting MODEL  
 Describe, rename and harness!

Here's a square and nothing but a simple square.  
 Within the bounds of four lines one thing is locked.  
 Oh, mathematics bitter! You handled the world out there!  
 You mocked God and the Devil, you cruel heretic!  
 The square cuts into chaos,  
 And there isn't more beautiful poetry!

Here's finity, wisdom, finality,  
 The proud onliness of the joyful Law,  
 That with four lines I made necessity.  
 Nothing is happening here. Lasts eternal Awe.

Oh, Christ! If only your blood hadn't been so ardent,  
 Which took you to heaven to reveal the truth,  
 Had you one day longer thought, stern and silent,  
 You would from straight lines have built a figure  
 And spared us the cross – redeemed us with Compasses.

J. Tuwim, *Mathematics*<sup>17</sup>

In Tuwim's poetry the stanza becomes a microcosm amazingly true to the world it maps and has cosmological importance: it is a microcosm of the order of the world and a pattern of the tensions holding it; tensions, as we can see in the poem above, of eschatological character. Because of that, it is also a microcosm of human existence, a difficult order imposed on life and the sometimes experienced vanity of that difficulty. We can see it in the poem *Litery (Letters)*, which joins the universality of human existence with its aspects specific to the vocation of the poet:

Pray for my letters,  
 So they could join in a song.  
 You listen at night – I tear papers,  
 You think fearfully: "why is he still awake"?

And he's awake, because behind him hisses  
 Anxious destiny.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, vol. II, pp. 32–33.

Counts seconds with letter  
And hangs on the neck with a stone.

And on his shoulders wells a stony night,  
Angrily reminding its tomorrow about itself,  
With a whisper of letters it cascades darkly,  
With a sand of seconds over-gravely rises.

Pray, pray over that everyday grave,  
Under which life slithers,  
Until the assembler, a sleepless TYPESETTER,  
Pierces black desert with a song.

J. Tuwim, *Letters*<sup>18</sup>

In that poem about the dialectic of chaos and order, chaos has many names: letters, seconds, stone, sand. The letters are meaningless signs, seconds are unversifiable sounds of fate, the stone is that fate's mortal substance, a symbol of the final contents of the poem. And against it we find just one, but a decisive aspect: four quatrains, a magic mandala of order after all.

I find the term "mandala" very appropriate. Most often in the poetry of Tuwim we encounter a four verse stanza, which with its symmetry resembles the symbol of mandala, which psychoanalysis considers to be a symptom of mental maturity. Not to mention the poem consisting of four four-verse-long stanzas. Let's have a look at the poem *Kwiat (Flower)*:

The flower behind the window abruptly blossomed  
For fear of being late  
Wind, rain, the heart and the myth  
Worked as if at a blacksmith's.

The night, sympathetic to such affairs,  
Warmed it with orangery,  
And you (what luck!)  
Took me seriously for once.

Of co-blooming, eager lips  
Unlimited resource  
With whisper whetted the passionate growth  
And multiplied it by four.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, vol. II, p. 22.

Until panting and all in tears  
 Of emotion and dew  
 Eros – Helios – Apollo – Dawn  
 With a lily leaned out of night.  
 J. Tuwim, *Flower*<sup>19</sup>

That poem is the stanza of stanzas, a verbal **mandala** of erotic fulfilment. Four stanzas with four lines each, four elements (wind, rain, the heart and the myth) in the first stanza, in the last four deities (Eros, Helios, Apollo, Dawn) and all that concluded with and multiplied by the word “by four”!

We can see the euphoric variant of the connection between the existence of the poet-conjurer and his poem in the piece *Hokus-pokus*:

I have a rhyme, firmly stuck in the speech,  
 And I hang from it my stanza first,  
 And then, with a solid verbal grasp,  
 I turn myself sentence-side down.  
 J. Tuwim, *Hokus-pokus*<sup>20</sup>

So the stanza as a repetitive rhythmic pattern is a microcosm of the whole of the poem it is a part of, even if the meaning seems to contradict such a hierarchical order, tangling up the poet’s “ego” into the problem of creating that poem.

Filled with a sentence, the stanza is a microcosm of the syntactic nature of human speech, it provides it with cohesion and drives its sentence-creating energy. Here is a fragment of the poem *Składnia* (*Syntax*):

With a sentence cross-woven  
 With an eye-sight you patternedly watch,  
 What was said, that was woven,  
 With a chain-wreath into speech ascended.  
 J. Tuwim, *Syntax*<sup>21</sup>

We can say that the stanza enables the poem to turn inside and multi-directionally mirror itself. It sometimes happens that it loses its energy and through its monotony becomes a symptom of melancholy. We can see that in the poem *Zadymka* (*Blizzard*):

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem, vol. II, p. 262.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, vol. I, p. 349.

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem, vol. II, p. 78.



Sleepiness thick like snow and circling like snow  
 Snows with snowy, sleepy flakes  
 Reasonless is my day, pointless my age  
 And those tracks of my chaotic steps on the earth.

If I want to, I can sleep; If I want to, I can stand up,  
 Sit by the window with last week's newspaper,  
 Or go into the sleepiness of the day – then somebody else, not me,  
 Sitting by the window will see a distant passer-by.

Is it good or bad: to fall asleep like this in the fog?  
 To whisper post-snow, post-bell, late news?  
 Is it good or bad: to follow a shadow against a background  
 Of circling blizzard and dimmed epoch?

The snow fell on me with a comforter, the age with hours passed me  
 In a white nap, in a fluffy, snowed stroll,  
 Reasonless my day, pointless my age  
 I sacrifice for my slow verses.

J. Tuwim, *Blizzard*<sup>22</sup>

We shouldn't be surprised by that melancholy, because Tuwim's stanzas, despite being almost always presented as internally tense unities, differ from each other. Sometimes we can see it within one poem and within the same strophic, verse pattern. It's enough to compare two fragments of *Strof o późnym lecie* (*Stanzas on late summer*). That lyrical poem doesn't describe the pre-autumnal, melancholic atmosphere, but rather it refers to the strict forms of the very passing of times. They are characterised by contradiction, the contrast of tension and inertia:

Summer into bottles poured,  
 On the shelves with malt simmers,  
 It will soon blow the corks,  
 It can't stand any longer.

[...]

Hay dry and honeyed  
 Stands above the meadow with wind.

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, vol. II, p. 210.

It'll sigh, blow with a whiff  
And calm down again.

J. Tuwim, *Stanzas on late summer*<sup>23</sup>

### Self-grasping

The stanza not only connects with various formal and semantic fabrics, it closes itself in that splice. The stanza creates its rhythmic form like a target for the accuracy of its meanings. The stanza contrasts its “rhythmical target” so that it attracts the arrow of meaning. And it directs the meaning in such a way that it is accurate, so that it can “hit the rhythm” of the stanza, embody that rhythm. When from the inside of the exceptionally dynamic *Prośba o piosenkę* (*A request for a song*) Tuwim wants to shoot his enemies with a “Bullet from a six-shooter, shiny song!”<sup>24</sup> he initially trained the accuracy of his semantic shots in the strophic structure of that poem, which attracted them! We can also see it in the poem *Dziesięciolecie* (*Decade*):

With a crack of breaking stanzas smash those idiots  
And with a volley of winged arrows shoot their kilims!  
And on the arrows put happily whistling  
Edges of words aflame, flaming rhymes!

J. Tuwim, *Decade*<sup>25</sup>

Such accuracy is apotheosized by Tuwim in *Rzecz Czarnoleska*:

From chaos order is created. Order, necessity,  
Uniqueness of moment when vastness of resource  
Assembles itself into its finiteness  
And calls what its name is.

J. Tuwim, *Rzecz Czarnoleska*<sup>26</sup>

The strophic connection, that formulation and immobilisation making a “precise shot” of meaning possible bears traits attributed in rhetoric to a period. Here is an explanatory excerpt from Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*:

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, vol. II, pp. 15–16.

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem, vol. I, p. 328.

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem, vol. II, p. 75.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, vol. II, p. 7.

By a period I mean a portion of speech that has in itself a beginning and an end, being at the same time not too big to be taken in at a glance. Language of this kind is satisfying and easy to follow. It is satisfying, because it is just the reverse of indefinite; and moreover, the hearer always feels that he is grasping something and has reached some definite conclusion; whereas it is unsatisfactory to see nothing in front of you and get nowhere.<sup>27</sup>

Tuwim's stanza is a stable verbal unity, but it can hit itself with invigorating meaning. It binds it and makes it more dynamic – it is similar to a period also because of the characteristic of internal tension, which means the speaking subject “strives to achieve his goal, like runners after the race has started”, with circular motion, around the stadium of the stanza<sup>28</sup>.

Tuwim's stanzas have a specific, hard-to-define but very important quality, which makes his poems particularly grainy. They are in a way autonomous stanzas, one could say, independent from the rest of the poem they compose. Although the deducibility and the logic of the poetic discourse remain intact, the independence of stanzas makes them self-reliant, closed unities. The decorum and pathos of that autonomy is presented in the poem *Do losu (To fate)*:

Entrust the rhythm with passing moments,  
Trembling with Apollonian consideration,  
Strictly assemble and measure,  
Strict words with great artistry

And when the shape of living flesh  
Into foul decay falls apart,  
That stanza, tight, brief and whole  
Unmoved will remain  
In cold, cruel glare of fame

J. Tuwim, *To fate*<sup>29</sup>

However, that static, monumental image doesn't reflect the typical essence of stanzas, which bare in Tuwim's work internally mobile unities, independent also when it comes to dynamics. We read in the poem *Praca (Work)*:

<sup>27</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, in: *Retoryka. Poetyka*, translated by H. Podbielski, PWN (Biblioteka Klasyków Filozofii), Warsaw 1988, p. 257. [English version at:] <http://rhetoric.eserver.org/aristotle/rhet3-9.html> [accessed on: 31.10.2016].

<sup>28</sup> That simile was created by Pseudo-Demetrius. As cited in: J. Ziomek, *Retoryka opisowa*, Ossolineum, Wrocław 1990, p. 270.

<sup>29</sup> J. Tuwim, *Wiersze zebrane*, vol. II, p. 164.

And today again into the square of stanzas  
 Thins tenaciously squash,  
 Bend, sculpt and modify,  
 Among four lines – seek the fifth:

So that in it, hidden,  
 (Which one from a thousand?)  
 The content is enlightened by the straining power  
 Of a tight and reddish string.  
 J. Tuwim, *Work*<sup>30</sup>

The search for the “fifth line” seems endless and ensures constant mobility for the stanza substance. In the essay *Czterowiersz na warsztacie (Work on the quatrain)* Tuwim faces the challenges of translating one Pushkin poem. The torment and joy of poetic work become there the search for “the fifth line”, so that the verbal construct could be stable and spacious:

The closed quatrain stanza is like a four-storey house. I can’t build the highest floor of iron and the lowest of paper, because the house would collapse. [...] The house has to be monolithic, simple, comfortable, with a steady flow of light and air<sup>31</sup>.

– So at the same time closed and open! The conclusion of the essay is: “Poetic truth is somewhere, it’s embedded, exists – although immeasurable, invisible, but felt and shining through”<sup>32</sup>.

I call this characteristic poetic work resulting in the internal, dynamic independence of stanzas, “self-grasping”. Such a distinguishing feature of poetry was clearly presented by Virginia Woolf in the essay *Impassionate prose*:

A prose writer may dream dreams and see visions, but they cannot be allowed to lie scattered, single, solitary upon the page. So spaced out they die. For prose has neither the intensity nor the self-sufficiency of poetry. It rises slowly off the ground; it must be connected on this side and on that. There must be some medium in which its arduous and ecstasies can float without incongruity, from which they receive support and impetus.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem, vol. II, p. 30.

<sup>31</sup> J. Tuwim, *Dziela*, vol. V: *Pisma prozą*, compiled by J. Stradecki, Czytelnik, Warsaw 1964, p. 344.

<sup>32</sup> Ibidem, p. 350.

<sup>33</sup> V. Woolf, *Namiętna proza*, translated by A. Ambros, in: *Pochyła wieża*, selection and compilation by A. Ambros, translated by A. Ambros, E. Życieńska, Czytelnik, Warsaw 1977, p. 148. [English version] V. Woolf, *Impassionate prose*, at: [http://www.woolfonline.com/timepasses/?q=essays/impassioned\\_prose/page4](http://www.woolfonline.com/timepasses/?q=essays/impassioned_prose/page4) [accessed on: 30.10.2016].

The verbal structures of a poem hang in the “air of poetry”, without any contact with reality. To achieve any melodic, rhythmic and semantic stabilisation these structures have to grasp themselves in their freedom. Without grounding the spontaneous flow of sounds and meaning they have to circle the form of that flow. In this way they create support for their own substance, support analogous to that offered by reality to any non-poetic utterance. Mastery in poetry lies in, among other things, the ability to change that foundation of the poetic word as auxiliary to reality into its precise depiction. And so in Tuwim's poetry the stanza is a form of such “self-grasping”. It happens that in the works of many poets (Tuwim included) that “self-grasping” is performed beyond any strophic forms. The poem *Of Modern Poetry* by Wallace Stevens is a beautiful, self-reflexive example. The poem has:

[...] To construct a new stage. It has to be on that stage  
 And, like an insatiable actor, slowly and  
 With meditation, speak words that in the ear,  
 In the delicatest ear of the mind, repeat,  
 Exactly, that which it wants to hear  
 W. Stevens, *Of Modern Poetry*<sup>34</sup>

It is difficult to imagine poetics more different than those of Tuwim and Stevens. But there is, as we can see, a certain degree of self-awareness independent from the accepted and practised aesthetic, making the poets arrive at the same self-reflexive conclusions. It may be possible that both of them, despite being so different, belong to the same modern movement, and the matter of “self-grasping” is peculiar to it. It is curious how Tuwim, who belonged to an earlier era of poetics than Stevens, achieved a similar, if not deeper self-awareness. He shows that in the juvenile piece *Muzyka (Music)*:

Form, the creative master of internal gleam,  
 A genius sculptor of fleeting understandings,  
 It precedes itself and becomes a thought,  
 Looks back, comes to itself again.

Then – in that return, in that desire for another  
 Reunion, it again knocks its original

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<sup>34</sup> W. Stevens, *O nowoczesnej poezji*, translated by Cz. Miłosz, in: *...opiewam nowoczesnego człowieka. Antologia poezji amerykańskiej. Wiersze amerykańskie od Poego, Whitmana i Emily Dickinson do poetów dzisiejszych*, selection and compilation by J. Hartwig, A. Międzyrzecki, translated by St. Barańczak et al., RePrint & Res Publica, Warsaw 1992, p. 66. [English version] W. Stevens, *Of Modern Poetry*, at: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/43435> [accessed on: 30.10.2016].

And again runs forward and comes back again  
 Phosphorescing a thought on something that is itself.  
 J. Tuwim, *Music*<sup>35</sup>

There is not much artistism that is detached from life in this “self-grasping”, it is an existential characteristic, although in the above piece it is expressed in a abstract manner, it is tied to childhood experiences. Tuwim reminisces on a boyish fascination with butterfly hunting:

Oh, in a meadow during scorching days  
 The urge of a wild chase jumped and quivered,  
 And as down fell the green net  
 Onto tangled, venomous grass,  
 Under the fabric it beat-fluttered  
 My flying heart caught  
 And sneaked back out like a butterfly  
 J. Tuwim, *Butterflies*<sup>36</sup>

In this fragment of the poem *Butterflies*, the poet’s heart and the subject of the poem – the butterfly and its verbal expression – combine in a frantic flutter, creating an autonomous whole, catching itself like the butterfly.

The most mature expression of the awareness of poetry as a process of “self-grasping” is a well-known fragment of *Polish Flowers*:

Poetry! What do you call yourself?  
 Creative? And what do you create? Yourself.  
 You are brimstone – flame – smoke –  
 You glisten with harvest as you’re sown.  
 You pour into darkness with star-fall,  
 Into the night I run to pick the stars.  
 They are gone, All that is left  
 Is their bright trail in my eyes – the falling:  
 You are the star, and the star’s trail.  
 Oh, goblet, which all by itself  
 Is both wine and intoxication,  
 And a drunken song at once.  
 And later, yourself when sleeping,

<sup>35</sup> J. Tuwim, *Pisma zebrane*, vol. 2: *Juwenilia*, compilation by T. Januszewski, A. Bałakier, vol. II, Czytelnik, Warsaw 1990, p. 202.

<sup>36</sup> Idem, *Wiersze zebrane*, vol. I, p. 270.

And later – the dream's recollection,  
 And thus I lift you, secret chalice  
 Fire, a fertile sow of stars,  
 You, who is both aim and reason,  
 You, beginning and finality!  
 And toasting wine by drinking wine,  
 I praise your eternity through you.  
 J. Tuwim, *Polish Flowers*<sup>37</sup>

Like in Stevens's poem, the longing for poetry and poetry itself search each other out mutually and constantly, they want to figure each other out, they pass each other the absorbent and absorbent substance of the stanza, which is why Tuwim's stanza is never enough for itself, and always filled with itself, excessively full of itself.

If Tuwim's stanza is a self-grasping microcosm, then its attributes have a cosmic meaning, which can be expressed this way:

The world is endless, tensed with an internal strength, reflexive, rhythmic, so entirely divisible into stanzas, carnally and intellectually portioned, self-replicating. Every single poem is a stanza of the world.

The stanza detaches itself from the carnally-intelligible world, from the world it inherits its distinction, its rhythmic contour.

The stanza is an atom, an elementary particle of the world, that contains all of its above mentioned characteristics. In the world, just like in a poem, the stanza is a self-grasping by the world – it is poetry.

And the poet's calling, revealed to him at the beginning of his creative work in *The Song of Joy and Rhyme*, is included into this cosmic meaning in the closest of ways, existentially even:

I – underneath this massive starry dome,  
 I – who encompasses it with his brain,  
 Who saturates himself with it, melting into myself  
 Slowly – within me – I regain myself:  
 I regain the great joy and the great rhythm.  
 J. Tuwim, *The Song of Joy and Rhyme*<sup>38</sup>

These poetic convictions of Tuwim's have their roots in the oldest religious and cultural layers of human consciousness. Here is the anonymous word: *Rishi* (soothsayer, visionary) placed in the encyclopaedia *Religion*:

<sup>37</sup> Idem, *Pisma zebrane*, vol. 4: *Kwiaty polskie*, compiled by T. Januszewski, Czytelnik, Warsaw 1993, p. 117.

<sup>38</sup> Idem, *Wiersze zebrane*, vol. I, p. 20.

In the Indies, during the early vedic period, an inspired priest-soothsayer; an author of sacred stanzas and hymns (rigs, samans); as a result of “visions” experienced (often associated with the ritual consumption of soma) endowed with the ability of formulating rhythmic statements with magical characteristics, which transverse the secret of cosmic order (rita), which rules gods and men; according to the hymns from the Rigveda, the art of the rishis expressed truth (satja), supported the gods and simultaneously forced them to show benevolent powers; the poetic art of the rishi mirrored the hidden relationships which composed the rita, and this held up the order of the universe<sup>39</sup>.

\* \* \*

The quotes I have chosen for this essay spoke “about” the stanza more or less directly. I am, however, convinced that nearly every stanza in Tuwim’s poetry secretly contains all the aspects I have described.

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<sup>39</sup> *Religia. Encyklopedia PWN*, T. Gadacz, B. Milerski (eds.), PWN, Warsaw 2003, vol. 9, p. 11.



Piotr Matywiecki

**The Philosophy of Julian Tuwim's Stanza**

(Summary)

The aim of the article is to argue that Tuwim's way of conceptualizing both the world and poetry was based on the principle of stanza. In his opinion, the entire world and our experience of it reach us in a stanzaic form. In Tuwim's writing the stanza could be compared to an atom of poetic structure. It also builds our primary consciousness of language. The stanzaic structure of our poetic and linguistic experience imposes an order on the universe as we see it. Tuwim hears and thinks his world as a stanza.

Keywords: Julian Tuwim, poetry, Julian Tuwim's stanzaic philosophy