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# Unassigned (XV)

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*Poetry of the Time of Martial Law* is an immense body of poetic texts, created and received as a response to what the colloquial language has recorded under the name of “Jaruzelski’s war.” If the beginning of this kind of poem-writing is clearly marked by the date of 13 December 1981, the end of this practice appears somewhat blurred over time. It can be assumed that the martial law, regardless of its suspensions and terminations, continued as a poetically open reality up to 1983, but not later. It was then that it started to shift in the public consciousness from the position of lived and felt present to that of a memory of yesterday, which, albeit not completely closed, was gradually being obscured by the experience the next day.

When speaking of poetry of the martial law, we explicitly indicate its constitutive aspect – the particular mode(s) of communication, which gave birth to this poetry and at the same time placed upon it an indelible stigma: it was the kind of work un-thinkable outside the specific determinations of martial law. They delineated its framework of possibility, determined where it would appear and what would be its linguistic, cognitive and axiological horizon. It lived in the world of martial law as one of the forms of independent communication between people about the meaning of the new situation. At the same time the fact of the martial law was in a sense internalized by this poetry – as a task (semantic, artistic, moral), which it attempted to fulfill. What’s more, it tried to make noticeable its direct connection to the unique conditions of time and place, highlighting them clearly through appropriate language. Not only were the TV presenters given military uniforms on 13<sup>th</sup> of December ... Even the titles of numerous collections of poetry testified – from the other side of the barricade – that the authors felt the need to use military terminology. *Raport z oblężonego miasta* [“Report from a Besieged City”] (Zbigniew

Herbert), *Wojna nerwów* ["The War of Nerves"] (Artur Miedzyrzecki), *Reduta Śląska* ["Silesian Redoubt"] (a collection subtitled *Wiersze wojennej zimy* ["Poems of the Winter of War"]), *Kłęski wojenne* ["Military Defeats"] (Antoni Szymanek, alias Grzegorz Białkowski), *Pierwsza i druga wojna światów* ["The First and Second War of the Worlds"] (Leszek Budrewicz), *Wiersze w trybie doraźnym* ["Poems in Summary Mode"] (Sergeant Pepper) – the list could continue, especially when looking at titles of individual works. The lexical field of "war" extended indeed in many texts metaphorically to provide quite non-military images, such as landscape (*Wkrótce świt wezjdzie / w błyskach bagnatów* [Soon dawn will rise/ in the flashes of bayonets] – Szymanek), physiology (*mój brzuchu / od pewnego czasu / grasz tylko wojskowe marsze* [my stomach/ for some time / you have played only military marches] – Marek Mayer, alias Ryszard Holzer) and writing (*moje dywizje maszerują / równym rzędem / przez tę stronicę* [my divisions march/ in even colum / across this page – Szymanek]). Various uses of such vocabulary, whether treated literally or metaphorically, whether serious or ironic, pathetic or mocking – proved that the discourse that employed them wanted to pass for militarized speech, for language called to arms and ready to fulfill his duties on the battlefield.

10<sup>th</sup> August 1985

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After the shock of the night of the 12<sup>th</sup> December 1981, but even before the start of circulation of the first underground newspapers and newsletters, which would contain information about what happened and first attempts at commentary, we started receiving, along with leaflets and proclamations printed in striking factories, verse records of the experience of martial law everywhere. I say everywhere, because it seemed as if those sheets of paper carrying poetic speech, were conveyed to us from all corners of the country at once. How many had to provide relevant texts, copy them, spread, distribute or scatter! The form of these papers resembled the most archaic creations of underground printing. Plain typescript was the common – the prototype of all underground self-publishing – typed mostly on light green tissue paper. The light green color is irrevocably fused in my memory with verses of martial law. When we received an unfortunate later copy of the typescript, the text was often almost completely illegible. Then upon the typescript a zealous and pedantic reader would by hand put the missing letters, the most likely words and even whole lines.

As the underground publishing movement became more organized in publishing and editorial teams, the mass of poetic texts relating to the realities of martial war gradually increased, to reach its peak in the late spring and summer of 1982. This growth remained more or less stable throughout the whole of the next year. Green tissue paper gradually disappeared from circulation, replaced by poems published in newsletters and magazines. Among the periodicals created in the first half of 1982 the unique contribution to the work of collecting poetic texts on martial law belongs to Warsaw's "Wezwanie" (The Call) which from its first issue had been publishing

large sections of contemporary poetic art. What is more, it was “The Call” which offered has the earliest, but at the same time surprisingly sober and accurate, critical readings of such productions. Since mid-1982 more and more individual collections and anthologies had been appearing, including the most comprehensive *Antologia wierszy wojennych* [Anthology of War Poems] published by NOWa, and soon after *Noc generałów. Zbiór poezji wojennej* [The Night of Generals. A Collection of War Poetry] by Wojenna Oficyna, containing only anonymous works. Józef Gajewski’s bibliography, published last year, recorded more than thirty large and small anthologies of this sort published in the two-year period 1982-1983 in different regions of the country. So far, I managed to get to fourteen of them, and yet it is much more than can be found in the library of the Institute of Literary Studies, which after all houses a large body of uncensored publications. As far as is known to me, it seems that such collections repeated largely the same texts (a sort of nationwide canon), while more local works, written by local authors and addressed to local audiences remained in the minority.

Who spoke to us in these transmissions sent illegally on tissue paper, in copied newsletters, magazines, pamphlets, and books?

Seen from this point of view, these works can be divided into three categories.

The first includes works by authors who signed them with their own names, more or less known based of their prior, and legal, literary output. Often these were the texts of authors who remained in confinement, were interned or in imprisoned and who, unlike those acting outside detention, had no reason for literary conspiracy.

The second category consists of works by authors hiding behind aliases and pseudonyms. Some of them used pseudonyms only in this uncensored sphere of their writing, while publishing other works legally and under their own names.

The third category includes texts which circulated anonymously, whose identity and integrity was not protected by any writing subject, whatever its name. The sender of those was – as Stanisław Barańczak insists – the People’s Anonymous. Named thus, the phenomenon appears to be a sort of sociopsychological-literary construct; in reality, however, behind this “folk” quality of anonymous poems one could usually find professional writers with recognizable names. The lack of authorial credit was in the case of most works compensated by their reliance on texts already known to the audience. There appeared a remarkable number of messages of “secondary” character: paraphrases, travesties, or parodies, referring to the most popular works, and as such easily recognizable to the public. In some cases they were subject to only minor modifications or adaptations so that they could fit in thematically to the circumstances of martial law. The range of original texts thus appropriated and utilized on secondary level of literary communication was wide and varied; it mainly included carols, hobo ballads, soldier songs, cabaret pieces, prayers (especially litanies), poems from school reading lists (such as *Do Matki Polki* [To the Polish Mother] and *Rota* [The Oath] ). Some of the more visible texts were contrafacta, new lyrics written for well-known church hymns, folk songs, or even disco hits.

This increased intertextuality in anonymous texts, did not, by any means, secure their integrity. The fact that they were openly parasitic in nature only encouraged their offhand treatment. In the course of circulation they underwent various deformations, divisions, interpolations, and contaminations. As a result different sources frequently offer different local or regional variations of the same texts. Such multiplicity led to blurring of the limits of texts, with none that would pass as the original. The texts' existence involved minor or major modification, as required by circumstances of performance, needs or tastes, similarly to works found in folk circulation. The interesting aspect of this phenomenon of folklorization was, however, the fact that is occasionally involved works belonging to the other two categories. Sometimes the text originally published as anonymous appeared later under a pseudonym, and then again under its creator's actual name, gradually bridging the gap separating it from its author. I remember Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz's sheer amazement at an IBL conference devoted to contemporary poetry (Warsaw 1984), when one of the speakers, a native of Lublin, provided a striking example of anonymous folk art: Rymkiewicz's own poem, whose authorship he never denied! The opposite also happened, situations when an anonymous text circulated under the name of a famous writer. This happened, twice I think, to Czesław Miłosz, causing his irritated protests.

Any methodical analysis should include an extensive field of texts which, while themselves do not fall under the label of "martial law poetry" as they did not arise at that specific time, were probably the most important component of the soil in which it grew. I refer here to numerous collections of earlier works, songs and song-like, since the time of the Bar Confederation until the sixteen months-long carnival of "Solidarity," which appeared during the period of martial law (though in later years as well), creating one of the most visible segments of second circulation. Most popular among them were the collections of patriotic or insurrectionist songs, religious hymns, songs of the Polish Legions and from the Bolshevik War, songs from the Second World War and the time of occupation. Just as important were songs associated with the tradition of "Solidarity" (especially works of Jacek Kaczmarski and in a different way those of Jan Krzysztof Kelus). This field of texts includes reprints of the old hymn books, but also new compilations based on them, both standard sets of well-known works, as well as specialized and themed anthologies, e.g. *Polskie koledy patriotyczne 1831-1983* [Polish patriotic carols 1831-1983] or *Piosennik Powstania Styczniowego* [Songbook of the January Uprising]. In numerous collections old songs could be found next to current (both anonymous and signed) works written during the martial law. Such is the nature of, for example, *Piosenki internowanych* [Songs of the interned]. There are a few such collections, and each appeared in several editions, but all had the same title, an ambiguous one at that, since it meant both the songs created by interned authors, and all the songs which were simply sung collectively in detention centers. A similar mixture of old and new songs can be found in collections associated with some permanent locations, usually places important to the community where these songs were sung. An example of this

is the collection, however incomplete, of songs sung at the flower cross in Warsaw, which was published in several editions by the underground publishers of Huta Warszawa. These mixtures of old and new material provide very good insight into the local repertoires and more than other types of publications can be a significant source of ethnographic data on the culture of the martial law period.

In general the field of texts discussed above should not be treated as a background for what is important in the poetic output of the time of martial law, but it must be seen as an active element in the creation of poetic speech. It offered a *supply of ideas*, utilized by the authors of the poetry of the time, a reservoir of images, symbols, comparisons, formulas, and clichés, from which they drew both creative stimuli and means of expression, a dictionary providing the necessary tricks and patterns of speech. On the other hand, the collection of texts drawn from tradition and placed in the context of current social experience, created for the readers a frame of reference, allowing them to expect something new from writing initiatives, shaping their ideas about the character of speech that could *today* poetically describe a national disaster, express the feelings of collective despair, and rekindle hope and the will to resist.

15<sup>th</sup> September 1989

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The poetry of martial law left no room for complications or ideological dilemmas. In all its versions, it shared a common point of view: it consistently remained the speech of the abused, the intimidated, the persecuted, and the humiliated: the voice of those targeted by the war machinery. *Ex post*, this unified perspective seems to us quite natural, though, theoretically, its monopoly was not a foregone conclusion. After all, the introduction of martial law involved multitudes of people, not only policymakers, executors, activists, and officials, but also the apologists, heralds, hacks and silent supporters, realists, pragmatists, the ideologues of the lesser evil, and possibly countless more! And yet, curiously, or strangely even, the state of mind of all these people, their convictions, hopes, rationalizations, and even scruples have not found any poetic expression.

Of course, they were verbalized in areas of public speech other than poetry. Thus poetry which recorded the point of view of victims and rebels placed itself in opposition not to another poetic discourse, which would express different point of view (as it didn't exist), but to the non-poetic discourse used by the power structure and its political collaborators. Newspaper disinformation, propaganda, the deceitful rhetoric of TV news, evasive arguments and excuses by egghead supporters, martial orders and notices, sentences by military tribunals – all of those marked the martial law poetry's negative linguistic horizon. It assumed the role of counter-language, opposed to modes of speech in the service of violence. Hence the multiple references to this negative context; the adoption of words originating in the discourse of violence in order to immediately unmask the lie it conceals; the use of the propaganda formula in order to be able to boil it down to what it was in reality – a hypocritical

cliché; recalling the arguments of newspapers in order to promptly expose their absurd, deceitful, and meaningless nature. This kind of relationship cannot be identified with any form of dialogue. To quote the hated words was to refuse them, to depreciate and expose to ridicule or contempt. This double gesture of invocation and rejection, or, to mimic Białoszewski, of rejection through invocation, was often what prompted the very act of speaking, maintained it and to managed the growth of semantic expression.

In the anonymous (pseudo)folk poetry we observe at every step the references to the formal patterns of the official language of policy, quoted in the characteristic seemingly dependent speech of a street singer or a beggar from the church steps:

Partia, wiodąca siła narodu  
Ona ocali kraj nasz od głodu.  
Rurarz, Spasowski za oceanem  
Podstępnie knują razem z Reganem  
Brać robotnicza już im nie sprzyja...

*(Santa Milicyja)*

The Party, the leading force of the nation  
Will save our country from starvation.  
Spasowski and Rurarz are overseas  
with Reagan hatching treacherous plot  
Brotherhood of workers supports them not.

*(Santa Milicyja)*

...nam groziła wojna domowa  
I wszystko przez Solidarność  
Bo ona ponoć miała liworwer  
I chciała władzę zagarnąć

*(Grudzień)*

we were threatened by civil war  
And all because of Solidarity  
it apparently had a leverver  
and wanted to take over

*(December)*

By położyć kres anarchii i kontrrewolucji,  
Warcholskim rozruchom, partyjnej destrukcji,  
By zalety socjalizmu poznał naród ciemny  
Wprowadził Pan Premier w Polsce stan wojenny

*(Anarchia)*

To put an end to anarchy and counter-revolution,  
the rioting of thugs, and party's dissolution,  
So that values of socialism would enlighten Poles  
The Prime Minister today declared martial law

*(Anarchy)*

## Czesław Miłosz and the Polish School of Poetry

Sometimes the text develops through the collision of two units of meaning: one corresponding to the quoted speech, the other expressing the subject's own words. The latter in a sense invalidates the former by means of an unexpected clarification or simply lethal negation. We learn that the "leading force," by declaring martial law:

Wnet odzyskała swą wiarygodność  
*Tak jak eunuch odzyskał płodność.*  
Na lepsze wszystko się odmieni  
*Różowa przyszłość nam się czerwieni.*  
Ekonomia tak się poprawi  
*Ze nam bez bólu odpadnie narwis.*  
(*Wojenny walczyk*)

Soon regained its credibility  
*As the eunuch who regained fertility.*  
Everything will change for the better  
*As rosy future gets redder and redder.*  
Our economy is certain to improve the most  
*And we'll find our monetary overhang lost.*  
(*The Martial Waltz*)

And so on and so forth. We can observe here a kind of stichomythic pattern: the first line semantically collides with the second, which is symmetrical and related by rhyme. The result is that of two voices alternating as in a comedic dialogue.

Such a mechanism of signification, however simple or even primitive, was used not exclusively in the poems belonging to folklore, or imitating the works of folklore. It was equally employed in "literary" poetry, the political lyric, especially from the beginning of martial law. We find its workings in Ryszard Krynicki's epigrams (from the volume *Jeżeli w jakimś kraju* [If in a country]) full of noble pathos, in which this double gesture of invocation/rejection appears as a fundamental principle for the development of speech:

Na jaki naród  
śmie się jeszcze powoływać  
samozwańcza władza,  
która na obcy rozkaz wypowiedziała wojnę narodowi?  
Jaki naród miałaby ocalać?  
To naród szuka przed nią ocalenia  
(*Na jaki naród?*)

What nation  
do they dare invoke,  
the self-appointed authorities  
that acting on a foreign order declared war on the nation?  
What nation would they save?  
This nation is looking to be saved from them.]  
(*What nation?*)



– Ratuujemy ojczyznę –  
mówią dyktator i zdrajca,  
gotowi nadal okupować kraj,  
więzić niewinnych

\*\*\*  
(*Ratuujemy ojczyznę*)

– We’re saving the homeland –  
say the dictator and the traitor,  
willing to continue to occupy the country,  
imprison the innocent

\*\*\*  
(*We’re saving the homeland*)

Kłamią:  
– Nie chcemy krwi –  
a rozkazują,  
żeby bić i zabijać.

Krzyczą:  
– Historia nas osądzi –  
kiedy zbrodnie już ich osądziły.

(*Drżą ze strachu*)

They lie:  
– We do not want blood –  
and they order,  
to fight and kill.

They shout:  
– History will judge us –  
when they have been judged already by their crimes.

(*They tremble with fear*)

All oppositions here are clearly visible. There is the speech of those who spread false platitudes (about saving the country or saving the nation – or vice versa) aimed to obscure what they actually do as dictators, traitors, torturers and murderers, and opposite there is the speech of those who expose their actions. It’s them – and us. There’s no complexity or ambiguity of dialogue, because in this relationship any possibility of dialogue has been eliminated. There are two types of speech – incompatible and mutually untranslatable. And there are two types of speakers, between whom exists a yawning and impassable chasm. *They* cannot be considered partners in communication, for they have become our occupants. Jerzy Malewski (Włodzimierz Bolecki) aptly called the writings of martial law “a poetry without illusions.” Indeed, it seems it finally broke away from all utopian negotiations, so much alive in the period of sixteen months of “Solidarity,” said goodbye to the naive hopes for an effective agreement and settlement and to the belief in the possibility of developing the language capable of mediating between the discourse of the communist regime

and the language of social aspirations, of assuming the role of a shock absorber in their inevitable collisions. Martial law put an end to these hopes, precisely because it exposed, hidden beneath the camouflage and disguise of everyday existence, the true nature of the political system in defense of which it was declared, namely the *occupational nature of communism*.

This diagnosis led to an immediate disambiguation of the ideological situation: those who realized that they lived in the occupied country could not avoid extending that awareness onto the past stages of their existence in that country. They had to look again at the past through the lens of their current experience. The reality in which they lived now turned out to be just another form of experience that they had known for a long time, but did not know how to properly categorize. This in turn meant that the opposition to martial law was in fact an opposition to communism as such: it was its clear and decisive rejection.

In this state of mind grew the kind of poetry we are discussing here. Of course, its definitive “no” was first and foremost a response to the circumstances of the time: tanks in the streets, mass arrests, raids, internments, fatalities during police and military action – this was a reality that demanded opposition in the first place. Bitterness and anger were initially aimed at symbols and figures directly related to 13<sup>th</sup> December. But the verse attacks against WRON or Jaruzelski (Jaruzel), himself probably the most insulted figure on the Polish political scene since the anti-Targowica literature, against the traitors in generals’ uniforms, very quickly expanded beyond this limited frontline, and embraced the whole of PRL experience. Indeed, the poetry of martial law, and I mean mostly its folk and pseudo-folk sections, became a huge record of anti-communist curses, complaints and grievances, expressed simply and bluntly, without any indirect or metaphorical devices; a register in which higher ideas, of national and democratic aspirations, were intertwined with mundane troubles of the poor and neglected everyday existence. These complaints and acts of condemnation, the ridicule and the insults were much older than the martial law, older than the “Solidarity”; some referred to the years immediately after the World War II and the time of Stalin, others to the time of Gomułka or Gierek. But so far they existed in isolation, in everyday speech of different social strata, in political jokes, sayings, nicknames, rhymes or wordplays. They were only consolidated and in a sense systematized through the anonymous works of post-December years. It was a kind of totaled bill, presented to the rejected system.

8<sup>th</sup> October 1987

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Martial law presented poetry, the literary, rather than the folk kind, with a truly difficult task. Made lazy by its long time existence on the reservation provided by PRL, it now had to leave its refuge and desperately seek an appropriate language that could be used specifically to construct a poetic analysis of the changes in collective consciousness after the shock of December 13th.

In order to treat this issue from a researcher's perspective, one should first attempt to create a kind of sociographic description of various versions of this analysis, taking into account their location – a place occupied by the author in the community of martial law, which defined the specific perspective of viewing the phenomena. Poetic speech recorded several of the most common “locations”:

- the point of view of the “underground people,” the conspirators;
- the point of view of the internees and prisoners;
- the point of view of university intellectuals;
- the point of view of the frightened and confused “population”;
- the point of view of an exile who receives bleak news from the country.

Considering these perspectives, we can observe the recurring coexistence of two writing strategies, methods of coping with the troublesome task of describing a new and thus unnamed situation, which poses a challenge to the existing “state of word” (to use Jozef Wittlin's term) in poetry. Speaking about the coexistence of two strategies, I mean the fact that both can appear in the works by the same author, and even more – they can work together in a single text. However, they remain directed towards two contrastingly different models of poetry.

The first one I refer to as second-hand imaging. At its core lies the conviction that what the society painfully experienced in the months of martial law, only appears to be a new phenomenon. In fact, it is simply a variant of the eternal Polish destiny – inevitably returning in the biographies of successive generations.

I znowu – długie nocne rodaków rozmowy

Czas tego kraju kołem się zatacza

Z powstania w wojnę na nowe powstanie

Krótki czas wolny – i podziemna praca

I długie trwanie policyjnych nocy

And again, the long night talks of my countrymen

This country's time returning in a circle

From uprising through war into new uprising

Short time off – and more underground work

And the long duration of curfew nights]

Thus in the poem *Do Matki Polki* [To the Polish Mother] Mat (Jarosław Markiewicz) writes about this idea of recurrence and return. The thought of the fundamental identity of destinies, duties, and defeats of successive Polish generations, naturally leads to another thought: namely, that there is no need for poetry to work hard on inventing a new language to give an account of our present destiny, duty, and defeat, as the images generated by earlier, especially romantic poetry, remain perfectly adequate. Stanisław Barańczak correctly emphasized the role that chorus plays in many poems of the martial law, a formula that states that something is here *again*: “I znowu – długie nocne rodaków rozmowy” [And again, the long night talks of my

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countrymen], “Znów zdławiony świt wolności” [Again is smothered the dawn of freedom], “Znowu łamiemy się czarnym opłatkiem polskiego losu” [Once again we break the black wafer of Polish fate].

All those instances of “again” are followed by appropriate categorizations of what it is that repeats itself. The consciousness of the occupational nature of communism, liberated by the martial law, automatically found the means of expression in the system of references and images of the occupation of World War II (interestingly German, rather than Soviet) superimposed on the current experience. What was perceived and lived began, somehow spontaneously, to fall into a familiar pattern: conspiracy against the occupants, police harassment, raids, the underground state, diversion, sabotage, and camps. This way of reading the present was probably closest to popular imagination. After all, already in 1968 the students shouted “Gestapo” at the police units scattering the street demonstrations. It was not a coincidence either that the musical jingle of the underground “Solidarity” radio was “Siekiera, motyka ...” [Axe, hoe...], one of the “forbidden songs” during the German occupation.

However, poetry did not stop on this first – popular – level of identification. It searched for necessary means deeper in history, drawing on the grim narratives of the nineteenth-century. The era of Paskiewicz and the tragedy of the January Uprising provided the most appropriate, as it would seem, models for the expression of current experience.

Kiedy się obudziłem, Polski już nie było,  
Na skwerze przed Teatrem, jak za Paskiewicza,

Małe włochate konie kozackich szwadronów  
Szczypały suchą trawę, krzyczeli setnicy  
I słychać było śpiew w nieznaney mowie...

When I woke up, there was no Poland,  
On the square in front of the Theatre, as in the time of Paskiewicz,

Small furry horses of Cossack squadrons  
Nibbling at dry grass, the screaming centurions

And I could hear singing in unfamiliar speech

Later in this poem by Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz the image of conquered Warsaw is developed into the image of post-uprising exodus of Warsaw’s inhabitants in the autumn of 1944:

I jak przed wielu laty, Lwowska, Nowowiejską  
Wychodziliśmy z miasta długimi kolumnami  
Pchając dziecinne wózki, dźwigając walizki...

And like many years ago, along Lwowska, Nowowiejska  
We left the city in long columns

Pushing baby carriages, carrying suitcases

Another poet, Krzysztof Karasek, who published his poems as Anonymous, says that before our eyes:

Znów ożywają stare obrazy Grottgera:  
“Branka,” “Założne wieści,” “Lud w kościele,” “Pierwsza ofiara”

...

Jak w 63, u Grottgera  
znowu pukają do polskich drzwi,  
pukają nocą, wyłamują z futryn,  
gdy nie otworzysz na czas im.

Grottger’s old paintings come to life again:  
“Captive,” “Gravely news,” “The people in the church,” “First victim”

...

As in ‘63, in Grottger  
again they are knocking on the Polish door,  
knocking at night, breaking them down,  
should you not open them in time.

Next comes the image of those detained, carried across the city “chained and terrified.” Of course they are carried in kibitka wagons and are:

jak ci z celi Konrada, jak ci spod Belwederu,  
jak ze styczniowej branki,  
z grudniowego poboru.

...

znów powtarzają te same gesty, słowa  
modlitwy lub przekleństw

like those from Konrad’s cell or those from Belweder,  
from January raids,  
or December conscription.

...

again, repeating the same gestures, words  
prayers or curses

In such poems we encounter the world immediately *doubled*. What is present and available for observation had no time to appear in its factuality, because from the very beginning it was imbued with the sense of something historical. That historical meaning came forward, and thus obscured, the image of the present, which as a result took on a half-unreal, spectral character, deprived of its own weight and appearing only as a repetition or copy.

But the historiosophical vision, in which the primary sense of the events of winter 1981/82 amounts to their repetitive character did not satisfy the ambitions of a number of poets who sought to expose even more superior sense – the meaning of repetition itself. And thus was revived an allegorical vision of inevitable martyrdom, of Poland permanently crucified, sentenced to Golgotha.

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Przebita włócznią grudnia  
pęka tętnica tej ziemi  
wybucha  
upływem wisły z wisły  
płaczem zranionych wód

Pierced by a spear of December  
bursts the artery of the land  
explodes  
in the flow of vistula from vistula  
in the cry of wounded waters]

This image comes from the poem *Przepowiednie* [Prophecies] published under the pen name of Maciej Komiega (Jerzy Ficowski). In Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz's poem this romantic allegory is becomes more straightforward:

To ciało gwoździe w dłoniach ma,  
Nad ciałem krąży czarna wrona.  
Jak całun jest grudniowa mgła.  
O patrz! Ojczyzna twoja kona.

(13 grudnia)

This body has nails through its hands,  
Above it circles the black crow.  
December fog is like a shroud.  
Look now! Your homeland is dying.

(December 13th)

In general it can be said that poetry discussed here has *historiosophically dreamed through actual history*. Besides, the theme of sleep and dreaming is a noticeably common occurrence (I have not yet mentioned Ernest Bryll: *Śniłem, że Papież w komży tak skrwawionej / aż narodową barwę miała...* [I dreamed of the Pope in surplice so bloodied / until it had the national color...]), creating a kind of framework for all these analogies, parables and allegories. The culmination of historiosophical dreaming was sometimes, especially in the case of second-rate poets, a martyrological kitsch or a chromolithograph of patriotic zeal.

The second writing strategy, in opposition to second-hand imaging I intend to call *poetic documentalism*. At its core was a desire to record the “momentary truth,” and not the essential or model truth of the time; a desire to capture and instantly preserve what has commonly been called the concrete event, situation and experience; a tendency to ground the speech in “here and now” – both through a thematization of the present, as well as by means of indication, by becoming its mark. Such poetry was eager to document the “everyday” of Jaruzelski’s war, the state of mind of people bearing the burdens of martial law, the peculiar atmosphere of different places and centers of social activity, and the ways of verbalizing experiences in different environment. It never strived for a general definition, but was rather satisfied with observations that were aspect-oriented, local, fragmented. It saw the order of the observational data as a basic level of expression, which validates other levels of meaning.

Poetry which aims to achieve such goals must, before it can say anything about the world it wants to document, overcome or remove the obstacles which separate it from its object. These are, first of all, and in the present case, the time-honored (and thus immediately obvious) patterns of poetic speech about national calamities, loss and injustice, a true maze of intricate symbolism and stylistic principles, in which even renowned artists occasionally got lost. Getting through the maze to reach its own world, one waiting on the adequate definition, has become possible because this poetry greatly reduced those aspects of the “poetic” which would naturally push it toward worn patterns. It rejected the rhetorical pathos and the accumulation of meanings. It chose instead the colloquial, prose-like message and literal description. It is interesting that the chance to embrace the linguistic perspective unconstrained by obligations to the stereotype was offered by a turn to the poetics thought by many to be already used up, namely to the poetics of Różewicz. Both indicated moments, that is the colloquialization of speech and the respect for the literal name as the ground of poetic activity, clearly to refer to it.

In some of its manifestations poetic documentalism was tantamount to feeding the tradition of commemorative poetry dedicated to record important or unusual events in the life of a specific community or group (e.g. *Na przełamanie czołgiem bramy Pafawagu* [“On the Tanks Breaking Down the Gate of Pafawag”] or *Żołnierze przerwali strajk, wkraczając do Biblioteki Narodowej* [“Soldiers Broke the Strike by Entering the National Library”] both by Leszek Budrewicz from the collection *Pierwsza i druga wojna światów* [“The First and Second War of the Worlds”]). At other times, documentalism expressed itself through the unusual thoroughness of descriptions, almost dysfunctional in its excess and thus giving birth, as Barthes would have it, to the realistic effect.

Jeden prokurator (łysy, mówi cicho  
i niewyraźnie), trzech sędziów (ten  
z prawej strony zakłada dla zabawy  
okulary należące do tego, który siedzi  
pośrodku), trzech brodatych oskarżonych  
(wymieniają uśmiechy z publicznością),  
trzech obrońców (siwe włosy, notatki,  
togi obszyte wątlym paskiem zieleni),  
...

Za oknem

gawron czyści swoją odwieczną togę.

Protokolantka ziewa

One prosecutor (bald and mutters  
indistinctly), three judges (the one on  
the right puts on glasses belonging to the one  
in the middle, for fun), three bearded defendants  
(exchanging smiles with the audience)  
three defendants (gray hair, notes,  
gowns trimmed with faint green stripe)

## Czesław Miłosz and the Polish School of Poetry

Outside the window

A rook is cleaning his eternal gown.

The recording clerk yawns

Quoted above is Adam Zagajewski's *Sąd* [The Court], published in 1982 under the pseudonym of Sumero. At other times still, the poetic documentalism manifested itself through a kind of "quotes" from reality – seemingly directs records of what was heard, what came from the outside. As in Wiktor Woroszyński's six-liner which transferred into poetic speech a dialogue between ZOM

O officers:

zdałeś ten łom  
no zdałem  
ja nie zdałem  
trzeba było zdać  
co będę zdawał i brał  
zdawał i brał

you returned the crowbar  
I did  
I did not  
you should have  
why would I return it and take it again  
return it and take it again

In the writings of martial law there is a whole family of related works particularly representative of this type of writing. By that I mean the collections and series of texts produced in the internment camps and prisons. In other words, sets of works whose distinguishing feature is that the situation of speech is clearly defined at least in this one dimension: they are broadcast from *there*: from Białoleka, Jaworz, Darłówko, Gołdap, Strzelce Opolskie, Nowy Wiśnicz, Załęże, and so on. One could mention collections such as the two *Dzienniki internowania* [Diaries of internment] by Woroszyński, *Biała łąka* [White meadow] by Tomasz Jastrun, *Ogień* [Fire] by Jan Polkowski, *Zmierzch i grypsy* [Twilight and kites] by Antoni Pawlak, *Racja stanu* [Reason of state] by Anka Kowalska, *Polska więzienna* [Poland imprisoned] by Lothar Herbst, czy *Listy do brata* [Letters to my brother] by Grzegorz Musiał.

It is indeed significant that the sobriety and relevance of observations, a certain realistic quality of speech, a preference for facts, an emotional restraint, brevity and simplicity of expression were all encouraged by the specific location of the subject. In the Polish literary tradition, the prison cell is rather associated with visionary flights of fancy.

The documentary character of poetic texts was equally determined by their genres. The authors referred to them as diaries, prison kites, letters: in other words, forms used for communicating information, notifying or reporting. For the most part, these texts indicated their own incompleteness or indefiniteness, sketches of possible poems, early drafts, poems with no punch lines, punch lines without poems, ideas for future use, fragments of greater wholes, instances of speech cut in mid-sentence, barely begun narratives. In terms of genre they could all be catego-



alized as “zanoty” [notedowns], to borrow the name from Białoszewski. These are records which are left in the shape that allows the reader to assume they are still close to the objective or psychological situation they have grown out of, and have not yet moved away from it to a distance determined by conventional form. What is more, they would be generally held in such proximity by their date of creation. It was not a secondary or incidental matter for their semantics and pragmatics. By putting the date under the text, the author wished for it to be recognized as related to the content. The text thus became like a ship anchored in the harbor; its creator preventing it from sail on the waters of unauthorized reading. It was to be forever fixed to the days and months of martial law period.

In order to avoid confusion let me make it clear that I do not maintain that the strategy I have called here poetic documentalism transformed poetry into the work of fact or journalistic reporting. It operated within the poetry which was at the same time personal, civic, religious, moralistic, or even (albeit rarely), metaphysical in its lyricism. But the point is that all of its varieties were based on a common ground, formed by new realities, landscapes, places, situations, events, human reactions; all of them experienced, validated by observation, clearly identified and named in a literal way. They constituted a foundation beyond all doubt for this poetry, a kind of basic dictionary from which it could proceed in many different directions. The presence of this dictionary in poetic speech, the way it shone through the moralistic, civic, philosophical or personal content, as well as its role as a factor in initiating the movement of meaning in the text – this is my understanding of poetic documentalism.

7<sup>th</sup> November 1986

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It is in fact quite a bizarre episode in the history of twentieth-century Polish poetry. It appeared busy and energetic, having produced a lot of works, and yet proved to be barren. It did not introduce anything new to the development of the art of poetry; it was not a beginning of any evolutionary sequences, nor did it create a school, a trend or its own recognizable style; it remained a kind of addendum to the various previous conventions, some of them already used up. More importantly, the readability of martial law poems is entirely limited to the conditions of the time of their creation. This is not a poetry simply “to be read” outside its original and primary function. This is where (and when) it was buried forever. I do not deny, however, that is a very interesting subject of investigation for literary history as a rich and complex textual reality. And besides, it can serve as a revealing source material for the study of the changes in the collective consciousness which take place in the process of transition from communism to a time as yet without a fixed name; let us assume, therefore, that it is “post-communism.”

29<sup>th</sup> November 1989