

ON OBJECTS IN THE POETRY OF
WISŁAWA SZYMBORSKA AND NIJOLĖ MILIAUSKAITĖ

AUDINGA PELURITYTĖ

Lietuvių kalbos institutas, Vilnius

God cannot be or appear. If he appeared he would not be God but a phenomenon of existence defined in our words. Also he cannot be he, only a never-healing wound of non-experience.¹

Alfonsas Nyka-Niliūnas

Parallels of Creative Work

The quote from Alfonsas Nyka-Niliūnas chosen for the epigraph of this paper could serve as a basic philosophical provision allowing for the comparison of and research into poetic programmes of two different cultural and literary destinies and different biographical experiences: 'the dame of Polish poetry' as Wisława Szymborska is called in the Polish literary press, and 'the Woman with the Flowers of the Field' as Nijolė Miliauskaitė is called in the Lithuanian literary environment. This is understandable: Szymborska is known as one of the greatest poetesses not only in Polish but also in European literature, and her contribution to the world's literature, apart from numerous awards in Poland, has been marked by one of the highest literary awards, the Nobel Prize (1996). Miliauskaitė is one of the strongest and most subtle contemporary Lithuanian poets, whose star was at its brightest in the 1980s and 1990s. She was awarded National Prize for her poetry collection *Sielos labirintai* (*The Mazes of the Soul*, 1999) and died at the age of fifty. The works of Szymborska, who is perceived as one of the central figures in modern Polish literature, are widely taught in Polish schools and undoubtedly influence the general literary

¹ Alfonsas Nyka-Niliūnas, *Dienoraščio fragmentai / 1971–1998*, Chicago: Algimanto Mackaus knygu leidimo fondas, 1999, 516.

context; meanwhile, Miliauskaitė's work has not acquired such recognition with a wider readership, possibly due to the different possibilities of literary promotion. And yet, experts consider Miliauskaitė's lyric one of the central features in modern Lithuanian literature, which have left one of the brightest traces in the tradition and change of the Lithuanian lyric.

Personal contacts between Szymborska and Miliauskaitė are not evidenced by any personal links or intentions, yet Szymborska's publications have appeared in the Lithuanian and Miliauskaitė's – in the Polish literary press. Miliauskaitė was a very attentive lover of Polish literature and culture who followed Polish literature and history and admired Polish artists. However, even without obvious personal contact, the possibility for comparison and interpretation arises from much more important things pointing to in-depth and universal links, from essential common traits in the creative world outlooks of both Szymborska and Miliauskaitė, from the very close strategies of their respective world outlooks that reveal themselves in their work. In the work of both Szymborska and Miliauskaitė, the prevailing role is played by passing through the mundane and the experience of the simplest objects, which is essential in perceiving the human, the world and God as in its ontological roots it is the closest to the sources of existence. And although neither of them bandies the name of God around, it is the authentic personal relation with the being of things that turns into the key transcendental experience allowing to touch upon the legacy of philosophical and metaphysical thinking inherent in classical Western thinking. It could be that an intentionally unsought affinity of world perception and world outlook arises from much deeper exposures to Western culture² that allow one to read some common information of two different nations united by a common cultural legacy (the tradition of classical thinking and Christian mentality)

² Viktorija Daujotytė, Nijolė Miliauskaitė, *Parašyta moterų*, Vilnius: Alma littera, 2002; "Be pigaus vienadienio skambėjimo" [Aušra Tamaliūnaitė, interview with Vytautas P. Bložė about poetess Nijolė Miliauskaitė], *Moteris su lauko gėlėmis* (sud. G. Gedienė), Vilnius: Lietuvos rašytojų sąjungos leidykla, 2003, 16.

on the world and the individual of the twentieth century and their interaction.

In the history of Polish literature, Szymborska's poetry takes an honourable place next to the classics Czesław Miłosz and Zbigniew Herbert, and it means that these authors find themselves in one paradigm of historically enlightening classical tradition. The poetic world outlook based on the principles of classicism – reason, thinking, a rationalist world outlook, clarity, the canons of the aesthetics of Antiquity – draws an important dotted line of cultural and literary orientation, which opposes both sensual sentimentalism and the nihilist avant-garde, which strongly influenced European literature in the second half of the twentieth century and which left its trace (maybe a little gentler and less negative) in Polish literature. Literature engaged in classical priorities embodies, in addition to the experiments of avant-garde art, a positive system of values and moral responsibility. In contemporary Polish literature, Czesław Miłosz should be considered a reference point for such a system. Zbigniew Herbert and Wisława Szymborska are treated as mouthpieces of and successors to similar world-view values, who in their work originally point to the values of classicism and the enlightenment – respect for empirical data of the world and human life, a mistrust of ideologies that do not come from cultural, scientific and artistic experience (in their works we will not find traces of mysticism, the esoteric, or religious exaltation), an understanding of the human creative potential, evidence of authentic and subjective human experience and tolerance of other cultures, views and ideas.

An important link between Herbert's and Szymborska's work is existential meditation arising from the perception that the key to human existence is implanted in matter³. In their lyric, the imperfect human world has a strong motivation to be reflected upon. Jan Tomkowski called the nature of such reflections relativism: he said that relativism in Szymborska's lyric bears traits of agnosticism, which means that each answer regarding existence in her work turns into a new question, and each statement faces the risk of

³ Bożena Chrzastowska, Ewa Wiegandtowa, Seweryna Wysłouch, "Poezija", *Literatura Współczesna*, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Nakom, 1996, 96.

negation⁴. The very concept of relativism implies a permanent and reflected change of the point of reference in human experience and thinking. The relativist approach to existence of the human in her work who is understood as a thinking being, the existential issues of whom are defined by reason and mind, discloses itself in its full and tragic aspect: the world is constantly changing, each time turning yet another aspect of experience, and therefore is never experienced to the end, to the last correct answer. The classical attitude to the knowledge of the human relying on real experience is in its essence agnostic as well, and thus tragic in principle. Such knowledge is based on actual information and does not resort to measures in judging about the human, the world and existence, other than human reason and rational and empiric experience. Such knowledge is not looking for or expecting relief in irrational worldly experience or faith in God, because God, like eternity, is not cognisable by human reason. The dramatic raising of existential questions to entities of the world and objects of nature and culture becomes a premise for philosophical and metaphysical thinking, which does not provide finite answers or consoling ideas, but only the possibility of raising new questions in the presence of irrevocable and tragic change.

Resorting to the lyric of contemporaries who were born in the 1950s and made their debut in the 1980–90s, such as Kornelijus Platelis and Donaldas Kajokas, would facilitate an understanding of the poetry of Miliauskaitė in the process of Lithuanian literature. Up to the 1970s, a romantic literary tendency defending national values and rallying the key contents of cultural identity prevailed that underwent strong political and cultural deformations in the second half of the twentieth century. In the work of the authors mentioned above, the romantic tradition is rejected; they turn to the possibilities offered by avant-garde art, yet simultaneously overcome the avant-garde tendency of nihilism and rejection of values. In Lithuanian literature, the work of Miliauskaitė, Platelis and Kajokas is seen as a sign of positive postmodernism. Assessing this work from a greater distance in time and thus the cultural field

⁴ Jan Tomkowski, "Herbert kontra Miłosz", *Dwadzieścia lat z literaturą 1977-1996*, Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1998, 71.

it becomes evident that at the turn of the century the classical tradition that has never been alien to the history of Lithuania (the experience of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania) is made topical yet again. There is no doubt that the poetry of the world-famous Tomas Venclova and the urban poetry of Judita Vaišnaitė are also oriented to the programme of the classical world outlook and stylistics. And still, the authentic world perception of the Lithuanian nation that took root in the agrarian mentality and chthonic Baltic mythology shaped a romantic cultural identity characteristic of agrarian culture. It is interesting to note that Scandinavian literature, and in particular prose, the traces of which can be seen in modern Lithuanian literature, is very close to Lithuanian national character in its romantic earth-related world perception and universal values standing for individual freedom and responsibility; however, it is not extensively researched. The major factor that to some extent has distorted the natural development of romantic literature would be the political and cultural situation in Lithuania that came into being after the Soviet occupation. The defensive position of culture brought to the foreground a programme of romanticism that was closest to national identity, which turned into the shield of the Lithuanian cultural identity and at the same time hermeticised, in one single field of experience, Lithuanian poetry that stayed in a vigil of the national identity up until the period of the national revival. On the other hand, before the last decade of the twentieth century, in the field of romantic literature ideas close to the classical ideology matured, which flow out of the enlightenment experience of classicism, from literary studies at Vilnius University, from a longing for world literature (the poetry of Justinas Marcinkevičius): ancient mythology, philosophy and literature, the history of world culture.

Signs of the classical world outlook in Miliauskaitė's work can be traced indirectly, like a longing for the aristocratic legacy of culture and art. The thrifty, laconic and minimalist manner of a poem, together with a highly objective look at the world and its objects created by aesthetic distance, turn in the poetry of Miliauskaitė into a form of existential meditation with rationally formulated utterances. Compared to Szymborska's forms of meditation, one could note that Miliauskaitė's meditation is almost devoid of scepticism

arising from agnostic self-determination, which in Szymborska's work turns into a bouquet of forms of intellectual irony, from playful to brimming with bitterness: *Obmyślłam świat, wydanie drugie, / wydanie drugie, poprawione, / idiotom na śmiech, / melancholikom na płacz, / łysym na griebie, / psom na buty*⁵. In the search for a philosophical definition of Miliauskaitė's attitude, it might suffice to turn back to the concept of philosophical sensualism, which, however, should not be applied unconditionally, and only to emphasise the prevailing direction of thought: not relying on any a priori forms of religiosity, Miliauskaitė in her work is open to its metaphysical and transcendental secret. This experience accumulates in the shapes of objects, the past and human memory. Still, speaking of the aesthetics of an object as a special stylistic principle in modern Lithuanian literature, it is worth noting that in Miliauskaitė's work it could be supported with the strongest arguments. Objects appear in their primary shapes, like *skrynutė* (coffrit), *šaukštelis su monogramomis* (a teaspoon with a monogram), *staltiesė* (a tablecloth); they are insistently named and described. In her poetry, the world unfolds as a special offering of special objects (it would be vulgar to call it an accumulation), where one can read the fate of the human and the world. As Rimvydas Šilbajoris noted, such a naming of objects creates a special poetic resonance in her work, transferring the objects and the world of the lyrical subject experiencing them into the level of metaphysical experience⁶. There is no doubt that the roots of such an experience reach the springs opened by Western philosophy and thinking.

The Landmarks of Classicism

Arvydas Šliogeris in his book *Daiktas ir menas* (The Object and Art) has probably been most persuasive in Lithuanian philosophy on the ontological sources of an object. Here he says that the existence of an object that is transcendental to relations and relativity is not

⁵ Wisława Szymborska, "Obmyślłam świat", *Widok z ziarnkiem piasku* [102 wiersze], Kraków: Wydawnictwo a5 Kraków, 2002, 7-8.

⁶ Rimvydas Šilbajoris, "Nijolė Miliauskaitė – sudėtingo paprastumo poetė", *Moteris su lauko gėlėmis*, 210-211.

subordinate to the sphere of consumption, needs, or the function of the object and thus open to metaphysical experience:

That is how an artist, and in our case a poet, is looking at objects. And he is trying to see the existence of the object, its individuality and one-off quality, its strict objective shape standing out in contrast in an anonymous environment; he is trying verbally (or by other means) to record the existence of the object as 'it', to be more precise, to crystallise this existence, to clean it of all the sediment of anonymous meanings and contexts, and to see and to show it idealised.... The existence of an object is always correlated sensually, and no other existence is within a mortal's reach. Both a philosopher and a poet, as subjects of theoretical viewing, reveal the individual existence of the object as a sensually obvious and objectively finalised ideal. In the horizon of philosophical viewing this ideal is called the truth; in the horizon of poetic viewing, it is called beauty.⁷

In this respect it is not only Šliogeris' attitude to art through the viewpoint of existential philosophy (of which Šliogeris is the most outstanding expert among Lithuanian philosophers) and highlighting of the sources of early Greek philosophy that are interesting, but also the fateful parallel between philosophy and the truth. In Polish literature it is usual to view the poetry of Szymborska and Miłosz as philosophical poetry that has undertaken the obligation to purport the existential truth of the world and the human. Jerzy Ziomek, who analysed contemporary literary theory in the context of the rhetoric and philosophical ideas of Antiquity, attributed the need for and logic of the truth expressed through literature to the classical paradigm in general⁸. It means that in its very nature classical art is related to the tradition of empirical and rational cognition, which leaves aside the later sphere of the human's internal fantasies and unbridled demons of imagination developed and fostered by romanticism.

⁷ Arvydas Šliogeris, "Daiktas ir santykis Rilkės poezijoje", *Daiktas ir menas / Du meno ontologijos etiudai*, Vilnius: Mintis, 1988, 44-45.

⁸ Jerzy Ziomek, "Prawda jako problem poetyki" *Prace ostatnie*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo naukowe PWN, 1994, 90.

When describing Miliauskaitė's work, her husband, the poet Vytautas P. Bložė, emphasises the avoidance of the drastic, playfulness and sensationalism as some of its key features⁹. Speaking of a serene subdued voice about the experiences of every day became a sign of Miliauskaitė's poetry. In the search for the landmarks of values, in the work of both poetesses one's attention is drawn to the prominent tendencies of a meditative poem: the desire to withdraw from the bustling and clattering world, to concentrate on the existential experience of one moment, one trial. A moment experienced deeply, to the very existential content, reveals the dramatic nature of human existence – a permanent balancing between life and death, between being and non-being. A thing is the most concentrated object of such a marginal experience, embodying in its existence the contradiction of being and non-being, and the suspense. The experience of a moment, highlighted and brimming with a vast variety of shades, does not hang up in the space of abstract reasoning; each time it reaches for the sources of human memory (which is opposite to fantasy), the ontological origins of which are the past:

*Kiedy wymawiam słowo Przyszłość, / pierwsza sylaba odchodzi już do przeszłości. // Kiedy wymawiam słowo Cisza, / niszczę ją. // Kiedy wymawiam słowo Nic, / stwarzam coś, co nie mieści się w żadnym niebycie (W. Szymborska);*¹⁰

you are like a piece of amber found unexpectedly / by purblind eyes, among sea grass / after long and weary walks / so large and heavy, you can't believe it: do you really need / to be well cleaned / polished / to radiate light and warmth // to wake up / strange intimidating beauty // the smell of amber upon opening drawers // you are the only value that nobody / can take from us, o past (N. Miliauskaitė).¹¹

⁹ Vytautas P. Bložė, "Be pigaus vienadienio skambėjimo", 16.

¹⁰ Wisława Szymborska, "Try słowa najdziwniejsze", *Widok z ziarnkiem piasku*, 182.

¹¹ Nijolė Miliauskaitė, "esi kaip gintaro gabalas", *Sielos labirintas /Rinktinė/*, Vilnius: Vaga, 1999, 155.

Unlike in works of romantic authors where the motion of creation and language embodies divine possibilities of creation and language (and their tragic consequences to the human), in work stamped with lassical traits this motion embodies the dramatic situation of cognition. In this situation language, as an instrument of empirical knowledge, turns into a threshold, into an insurmountable obstacle to transcendental cognition of the secret of the world. The philosophical experience of objects in these works unfolds exclusively through the mechanism of a hint, pause and suppression. The highest value-related experience – silence and peace – becomes a premise for metaphysical experience in the work of Szymborska and Miliauskaitė.

The relation with the past of the objects that show up in the perspective of the glance of the lyrical subject is especially strongly motivated in Miliauskaitė's poetry. Wandering along the intricate mazes of the memory became the key topos in her poetry; however, the meaning of this wandering usually unfolds in the surroundings of everyday objects and actions. The world of Miliauskaitė's objects is like an objective-made mirror of the internal experiences of the lyrical subject, in which each sensitive touch of ancient and present objects polished by a multitude of hands reveals ever-deeper layers of experience of the individual world. The recurring monotony of everyday existence becomes a ritual of knowledge, the hallowed of which is usually the *mergytė* (a little girl) of Miliauskaitė's poetry. The world that doubled in the present and the past comes together on the border of everyday existence, by an object with the least aesthetic or philosophical motivation – *drobė* (linen), *flanelė* (flannel), *cukrinė* (sugar bowl) – and is raised, in the metaphysical experience of the *mergytė*, to the highest metaphysical level. The past in this process of the confrontation of memory and the present is important in that it liberates trivia from the practical and relative claws of everyday existence. A simple object, wrenched by an individual look from the faceless sea of things (the past imparts individual qualities), acquires a dimension of the universal truth of the world (the past is experience). An ordinary utensil of everyday life thrown into the highest level of the secret of the world acquires in Miliauskaitė's work the content of existential phenomenon – the entire individuality and uniqueness

of the empirical and universal, but also immeasurable and unspoken, world experienced by the human. And the dimmer the idea of philosophical experience is seen in the everyday practical space of an object and the stronger the urge of transcendental movement the lyrical subject experiences, the stronger and more comprehensive is this content as it unfolds in the metaphysical experience of the *mergytė*, pointing to the content of the philosophical secret in the human's world:

*kai valydavo
paveldėtą stalo sidabrą
su monogramomis (vis trumpesnės
dienos), kaip atsargiai
kaip švelniai
tų moterų rankos
kreidos milteliais, šiltam vandeny sudrėkintu
skudurėliu nušveisdavo
šaukšteliu, šaukštus, peilius ir šakutes, cukrinė*

*paskui šypsodamos (vis ilgesnės
ir ilgesnės naktys) blizgindavo
minkštos flanelės gabaliukais*

*kiek
prisiminimų
kiek kalbų*

*o ta mergytė
nenuleidžia akių*

dedasi viską į širdį

*kiekvieną daiktėlį
atskirai suvynioja
į juodą popierių (kaip greitai jau
temsta), paskui dar kartą į drobę
sukrauna į stalčius*

*nieko
neliko, nė vieno
prisiminimo*

nė vieno

*kur tauriu mėnesienos švytėjimu
tau nušvistų
tamsią vėjuotą lapkričio pavakare
geriant arbatą¹²*

eil. „kai valydavo...“

In the work of Miliauskaitė and Szymborska, history saturated with the cultural heritage becomes subordinate to the rhythm of individual experience. Respect for the facts of culture and history turns into respect for the material and rationally classified nature of history. Human memory becomes a pretext for classification, yet the most important history lessons of the classics are dictated by nature, the natural make-up of the human, which on a metaphysical level is generalised by human experience and the mind. For classics, such as one of the most influential 18th-century European philosophers of history Giambattista Vico, history turned into natural laws generalised, on a philosophical level, by the human mind. The understanding of the secrets of nature raised to metaphysical reflections on the natural laws becomes a part of philosophy, while the understanding of the distinction between nature and history draws nature into the field of rational and empirical study (it was important news in the epoch of the origin of classicism). In Szymborska's work this tendency is especially palpable, although it unfolds in a different way from the perspective of an 18th-century philosopher who saw nature in his field of vision – with centuries-

12

Ibid., 150-151 (“when they would clean...”: “when they would clean / the inherited table silver / with monograms (shorter are / the days), how carefully / how gently / the hands of those women / with chalk powder, / a cloth moistened in warm water, would clean / teaspoons, spoons, knives and forks, the sugar bowl / then with a smile (longer / and longer were the nights) would shine / with soft flannel pieces // so many / memories / so much talk // while that girl / is looking without a blink // puts all in her heart / each little thing / wraps separately // in black paper (so fast it's / getting dark), then again in linen / stow into drawers // nothing / is left, not a single / memory / not a single // where in noble shining of the moonlight / would shine to you / on a dark windy November afternoon / while drinking tea”).

old experience of the cultural heritage and the bitter history of facts. In one of Szymborska's most outstanding poems *W rzece Heraklita*, in history, where according to the Western world, Heraclitus' constant is embedded, nothing happens twice, and human history is seen through the eyes of a fish: in history, a fish eats another fish, a fish oppresses a fish, loves a fish, while a colony of fishes embodies the whole meaninglessness of historical laws experienced by a human. According to Stanisław Barańczak, in Szymborska's work history teaches us nothing¹³. As Anna Legeczynska, a critic of Szymborska, observes, the only important moment in history that echoes the rhythm of nature is the present¹⁴. In the view of Malgorzata Anna Packalén, having absorbed the philosophical experience of history, this present has become an important argument in Szymborska's original philosophical thought: moments of human experience replace other moments, and they do not recur; thus the fragile world of human history, bidding by the laws of nature, is only fiction which is dictated to us by our memory (the past), only a construct of the mind, only an intellectual hypothesis (Ibid.).

An important tendency in the work of Szymborska and Miliuskaitė related to the typological classical tradition, which to some extent motivates the mechanism of the hint, pause and silence in their work, is the priority of the visual world over the music of language, against the world recorded by the possibilities of euphony and rhythm. The prevailing principle in their work is that of the sparing word, and it is embodied by the poetic of *vers libre*. Of course, the poetic of *vers libre* is not identical to the strict and precise principles formulated by the theoretician of the classical poetics Nicola Boileau, but in its inner determination, world outlook and poetic strategy this poetry is a fruit matured by the classical tradition. In one of her interviews, Miliuskaitė touched upon image

¹³ Stanisław Barańczak, "Posłowie*", *Wisława Szymborska, Nic dwa razy / Nothing Twice*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2004, 392. (*Przekład artykułu *The Reluctant Poet* ogłoszonego w "The New York Times Book Review", 27 października 1996).

¹⁴ Malgorzata Anna Packalén, *A Domestication of Death: The Poetic Universe of Wisława Szymborska*, in: Nobelprize.org/literature/articles/packalen/index.html.

and rhythm – but not repetition – that bear more importance in the structure of poetry, and upon understatement, pause and suppression¹⁵. Such a perception of the poetic image would be close to Szymborska's poetry, in which the priority of the image, rhythm and suppression over other means of expression is also evident. In this respect, it is important to note that an analysis of imagery in poetry is a relevant part in the classical theory of art and poetic studies. Attempts to perceive the mechanism and the nature of a poetic image in 'picturing words', attempts to convey the poetic image through the possibilities of language and the word become important to classical theoreticians (mostly Swiss and German)¹⁶ of the 18th century. In the European context, these ideas reach the Polish classicists somewhat belatedly and consolidate in somewhat eclectic forms (Ibid., 461). And although over the course of centuries the statements of some categorical 18th-century scholars underwent changes, the division between truth and fiction, between reality and the poetic image has remained the key object of research in the paradigm of the classical art up to the present day. In Renaissance and Baroque epochs the topical antique theoretical tradition was rethought and imparted with entirely new theoretical accents among which the leading roles are played by the issue of classical tragedy, the category of Aristotelian catharsis, and the theory of time, location and action underlying the genre of tragedy (Ibid., 454, 469). The most important aspect of this theory is the idea of defining the reference points of existence, the strategy of locating world experience and major existential experiences.

What is special about this strategy? It rejects the possibility of reflecting on Plato's world of ideas; topical in the field of philosophical thinking is the world perceived by the senses and feelings, in other words, the actually experienced world. Sensualism and relativism are trends of thought fairly close in their views; their sources reach the science of ancient Greece. However, empirical

¹⁵ "Tai, kas nebūtinai išreikšta žodžiais" [Audinga Pelurytė, Interview with Nijolė Miliuskaitė], *Moteris su lauko gėlėmis*, ibid., 245.

¹⁶ Elżbieta Sarnowska-Temeriusz, "Rozwój oświeceniowych badań nad poezją", *Przeszłość poetyki*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1995, 468.

scientific research and the rationalist world outlook determined their flourishing in the classical and Enlightenment epochs. One of the key achievements of the scientific – including humanitarian – thought of the classicists and Enlighteners was empirical experience defined by rational analysis. Spiritual experience is also considered cognisable, classified and evaluated. The Aristotelian scientific tradition, which standardises and classifies experience, becomes a pretext for such an analysis. Ancient scientific thought is revised from the perspective of the possibilities of knowledge: gnostic and sophistic considerations are rejected, or approached from entirely different positions. The classical human knows and recognises the possibilities of his knowledge. In the world of art, the restoration of the immense divine worldview on the earth, in the three-dimensional system comes to the foreground; in this system, empirical data on the objects' volume and texture, their location, proportions and lighting becomes important. The worldview of the classical art could best be illustrated by the architecture, characterised by its laconic and monumental qualities, while works of painting and the literary worldview stand out in the accuracy of the drawing, the nuances of the palette, and recurring scenes of everyday life. In the work of Szymborska and Miliauskaitė, we should focus on several aspects close to the setting of classicism: on the image of the mundane where the participants and the plots of everyday life are recorded in precise strokes, as on stage. They are recorded in a laconic but not in a petty manner, the look is objective, the nuances important. One of the best-known poems by Szymborska, *Kot w pustym mieszkaniu* (A Cat in an Empty Flat) could be a perfect example of a poetic image 'painted in words'. The poem is concentrated in the perspective of the look, and the essential in it is that the personage's inner life is perceived and 'read' through external features of the world, through the atmosphere, motions and objects of the surroundings:

*Umrzeć – tego nie robi się kotu.
Bo co ma począć kot
w pustym mieszkaniu.
Wdrapywać się na ściany.
Ocierać między meblami.
Nic niby tu nie zmieniane,*

*a jednak pozamieniane.
Niby nie przesunięte,
a jednak porozsuwane.
I wieczorami lampa już nie twieci.*

*Słychać kroki na schodach,
ale to nie te.
Ręka, co kładzie rybę na talerzyk,
także nie ta, co kładła.*

*Coś się tu nie zaczyna
w swojej zwykłej porze.
Coś się tu nie odbywa
jak powinno.
Ktoś tutaj był i był,
a potem nagle zniknął
i uporczywie go nie ma.*

*Do wszystkich szaf się zajrzało.
Przez półki przebiegło.
Wcisnęło się pod dywan i sprawdziło.
Nawet złamało zakaz
i rozrzuciło papiery.
Co więcej jest do zrobienia.
Spać i czekać.*

*Niech no on tylko wróci,
niech no się pokaże.
Już on się dowie,
że tak z kotem nie można.
Będzie się szło w jego stronę
jakby się wcale nie chciało,
pomolutku,
na bardzo obrażonych łapach.
I żadnych skoków pisków na początek¹⁷*

17

Wisława Szymborska, *Nic dwa razy / Nothing Twice* (translated by Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh), 346-349 ("Cat in an Empty Apartment": "Die – you can't do that to cat. / Since what can a cat do / in an empty apartment? / Climb the walls? / Rub up against the furniture? / Nothing seems different here, / but nothing is the same. / Nothing has been

Although the plot of the poem is emphatically mundane, its theme is not. The story is narrated from the perspective of a cat left alone in an empty room. The mood of meaningless waiting permeates the poem, although the cat, the 'hero' of the poem devoid of any heroism, expresses indirectly the states of its non-verbalised uncertainty and anxiety – by walking round the room, looking at the usual objects located in their usual places. It is the attentive author who is speaking of the cat's realisation that although nothing has changed in the room, something is essentially different. She does not try to identify with the cat's entity or to reveal the form of the author's *alter ego*, yet from the logic of behaviour she recognises the state of anxious loneliness: expecting and not seeing the one who always used to be here, who turned on the lights in the evenings, the cat breaks the sacred taboo not to scatter papers around. As it turns out in the final lines of the poem, the unnamed subject of the prohibition is the real owner of the cat and the room. The author knowingly uses the nature of the cat and does not name the situation, although it becomes clear from the final lines that death is being discussed. The metaphor *na bardzo obrażonych łapkach* is the premise of the distance between the author and the 'hero' of her story: the two closing lines change the perspective of the cat's point of view into human understanding. To the unnamed yet implied human, the empty room no longer embodies the trivia of the room but opens up for the understanding of emptiness, which is non-existence. The warmth and affability of the poem is created by an accurate study of a cat's reactions, which is nevertheless gene-

moved, / but there's more space. / And a nighttime no lamps are lit. // Footsteps on the staircase, / but they're new ones. / The hand that puts fish on the saucer / has changed, too. // Something doesn't start / at its usual time. / Something doesn't happen / as it should. / Someone was always, always here, / the suddenly disappeared. // Every closet has been examined. / Every shelf has been explored. / Excavations under the carpet turned up nothing. / A commandment was even broken: / papers scattered everywhere. / What remains to be done. / Just sleep and wait. // Just wait till he turns up, / just let him show his face. // Will he ever get lesson / on what not to do to a cat. / Sidle toward him / as if unwilling / and ever so slow / on visibly offended paws, / and no leaps or squeals at least to start.”).

ralised by the human mind. Like a raw nerve of the empty room, the cat touches the objects in the room, pointing to the genuineness of the room's earlier experience and present situation.

A similar situation of emptiness could be read in one of Miliauskaitė's last poems dedicated to the memory of her late mother: 'for a whole year I didn't want / to touch her things: a flower-embroidered / linen bag where she kept handkerchiefs / beads of amber, photographs, receipts'¹⁸ (*Eilėraščiai Persefonės palydai*). The list of objects ends with a message that generalizes the meaning of the things named: 'something more, something more is in it / time has been changing her shapes in me' (Ibid.). Yet the message of Miliauskaitė's poem differs from that of Szymborska's in drawing a slightly different perspective on decisions on things, the world and life. The lyrical subject in Miliauskaitė's poem hopes and believes that *something more is in it*; meanwhile in Szymborska's poem this possibility is not considered and only a new experience of emptiness is reflected upon. Nevertheless, the orientation towards typological classicism in the poetry of both Szymborska and Miliauskaitė is pointed to by the division between reality and fiction, truth and poetic imagination. Looking at the world through the prism of objects emphasises the contours of reality, and records each nuance speaking of genuine experience. The visual nature of the world unfolds by the look and in the world that opens in the tactile perspective, and the images of either the psyche or the subconscious are imposed on reality. On the contrary, this reality is stoically cleaned of any dust of alien experience. The aim is to see, as clearly as possible, the truth of objects, with its material texture, mass and contours. Even the images of dreams that neither Szymborska nor Miliauskaitė avoid in their work do not have anything in the manner of Bosch or Kafka, anything symbolic or surrealist. There exists a deeper motivation underlying the world outlook of typological classicism: a dream is only a part, and not a whole or foundation, of human experience. The world that each moment opens up at a different angle in the poetry of Szymborska and Miliauskaitė, and which is only a fiction or an intellectual hypothesis, is also the equivalent of a dream *seen with open eyes*

(Miliauskaitė). Yet an equivalent to the classics, Szymborska and Miliauskaite among them, is just a metaphor perceived and reflected on by the mind. In this way, a dream is not a genuine experience or reality. A dream embodies a human's world of imagination and artistic fiction that is not identical to the reality and truth of objects.

Similarities and Differences of Perspectives

In Miliauskaitė's work, the world of the dream is identical to the world of desires and fantasies; in other words, the world of imagination that raises the storm of feelings yet does not disturb the logic of reality. The lyrical subject of a poem, the author's *alter ego*, reflects upon a dream as well as upon reality, never trying to muddle the borders and to eliminate contraposition. This poetry accentuates the aesthetic and philosophical experience of the juxtaposition of dream and reality: astonishment, a flash, aesthesia, which for one moment fuses feeling and the mind. 'One / more awakening, happy, with the sun / risen: an apple / on a white warmed window-sill / which someone's hand put / while I was sleeping (like to my young / mother, long ago, in a distant / home): crisp, juicy, fragrant // o summer, o dream!' (Ibid., 227) (*dar...*) Awakening in the opening lines of the poem records a simple thing – waking up in the morning, in youth, woken by sunshine. The poem's key motif is the sensation of the past life and, in general, of life's total transience. This sensation is recorded through a very tangible image of an apple. Like youth, the apple is juicy and fragrant; like reality, it is tangible and material. The experience of the mother and the apple becomes the content that the apple epitomises, in other words, the mother and the past turn into the fragrances and juices of the apple, while the apple becomes the present, a pulsating moment of the present and of life itself. Yet it is the longing for home flashing in the light and sweetness of the present that tosses the apple into the aesthetic experience of the present. In Miliauskaitė's work, the longing for home is the key existential trial that can be linked with the experience of permanent and inconsolable homelessness experienced by a resident of a modern megalopolis. Her poetry is dominated by the theme of home; wandering in the mazes of the alienating world is just the

expression of searching for home and it turns into the most important leitmotif generalising all *topoi* and motifs.

And yet in her work the home is not an object, more likely the other way round: it is the ontological location of the origin and existence of all genuine objects. All concrete objects in Miliauskaitė's work that possess contours and shades of colour – *dėžutės* (trinkets), *audiniai* (fabrics) and *stalčiai* (drawers) – are genuine and point to the truth of the human and the world for the sole reason that they are the objects of the childhood home. Only the childhood home in her work individualises the human, the world and its objects in the surroundings of hostels and wastelands of civilisation, and only childhood objects speak of the reality of the human and the world in the present. Nature, too, with its *smulkios gėlės* (little flowers), *šilkmedžiai* (mulberries) and *debesylai* (elecampane), or even *dilgėlės* (nettles) and *kiečiai* (wormwood), are a part of a childhood world brimming with life that is aggressively attacked by the desolate spaces of the present. However, unlike the objects, which always exist, today as well as yesterday, childhood and the home in Miliauskaitė's work are only a past that can manifest itself in the shape of objects this at particular moment. Therefore home, childhood and the past in her work are a dimension of a dream that is not identical to reality and the truth. In the poem *Namai* this was formulated literally: 'you're our dream / dream seen with open eyes' (Ibid., 208). It thus turns out that the final lines of the poem *dar...*, which signify the highest experience of world truth, the encounter between the past and the present, become aesthesia only because in the blink of an eye this encounter equates life with the dream, but does not ruin the logic of the reality of life. The line 'o summer, o dream!' creates a metaphor of life that is only a fiction, an illusion, a long dream. As in Szymborska's work, this dream is fragile and happens only once, and one can wake up only once, too, having retreated from life. In Miliauskaitė's poem, the awakening in the morning is only one of fragile and crumbling on the spot human glance at the world. The end of the poem formulates this philosophical message: awakening in the morning is awakening to truth and objects, but unlike in Szymborska's work, awakening here from a dream contains the slight hope of

and a somewhat romantic intention of finding something beyond those objects and truth, beyond the horizon of human existence.

In Szymborska's work, the dream is most often encountered as a synonym for fiction or illusion that most globally generalises a human's existential experience. It is symptomatic that the theme of the dream very often contacts with the theme of art, with the names of Vermeer and Brueghel. Andrzej Oseka, a Polish art historian and critic, has noted a touch in Szymborska's poetry that is close to the painting of Vermeer¹⁹. Links with Vermeer's painting are found in Miliauskaitė's work, too²⁰. The American writer Lawrence Weschler relates it to Vermeer's way of painting closed spaces and objects brought out by the falling light, which highlights their natural state, focuses the attention and provokes astonishment²¹. Szymborska has admitted to a considerable spiritual affinity to Vermeer that is manifested not only in one but in several poems dedicated to the painter; however, this amiability and the affinity in the perception of the world by the authors of two different epochs manifest themselves strongest in the poem *Pochwała snów: W snie / maluję jak Vermeer van Delft. // Rozmawiam biegle po grecku / i nie tylko z żywymi. // Prowadzę samochód, / który jest mi postuszny*²². The actions of the lyrical subject listed in the poem are obviously reflected upon like a dream, like an inactive state in which the subject is totally passive and totally influenced by the powerful and dynamic world. The dream and dreaming are equated to a drawing done by Vermeer, the master of everyday plots and details. The plot of this quite long poem resembles a succession of fragments, film shots, where one fragment appears after the next spontaneously and at

¹⁹ Anna Bikont, Joanna Szczęsna, *Kilka chwil z życia, Pamiątkowe rupiecie, przyjaciele i sny Wisławy Szymborskiej*, Warszawa: Prószyński i S-ka, 2003, 241.

²⁰ Janina Riškutė, "Sielos rašmenys", *Moteris su lauko gėlėmis*, ibid., 175.

²¹ Anna Bikont, Joanna Szczęsna, *Kilka chwil z życia*, 241-242.

²² Wisława Szymborska, *Nothing Twice (Selected Poems) / Nic dwa razy (Wybor wierszy)*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1997, 164-165 ("In Praise of Dreams: "In my dreams / I paint like Vermeer van Delf. // I speak fluent Greek / and not just with the living. // I frive a car / that does what I want it to.").

random, as if dictated by the chaotic logic of the dream. The more vivid and realistic the world in such a dream, the stronger the impression of unreality arising after each fragment: *Nie narzekam: / udało mi się odkryć Atlantidę*.²³ The key idea of the poem unfolds in the following lines: *Ciesz się mną, że przed śmiercią / zawsze potrafię się zbudzić*.²⁴ They point to a similar relation of the dream to life as in Miliauskaitė's poetry: life is an illusion, it is a dream, yet the only comfort in this dream world is the hope that at least before death you will wake up and see reality as it actually is, that you will see truth. Thus the human's situation in Szymborska's work does not have any other opportunity or any hope except for the possibility to actually be, to perceive existence and reflect on it: *Jestem, ale nie muszę / być dzieckiem epoki. // Kilka lat temu / widziałam dwa słońca. // A przedwczoraj pingwina. / Najzupetniej wyraźnie*.²⁵ Unbelievably vivid images are seen in the dream are only a reference to the illusionary vividness of images seen in the world; according to Szymborska, the only way out is to think soberly and gain an awareness of one's nature.

A somewhat different relation to the Christian world outlook and symbols highlights the opposition of objects and a dream that comes to light in the tension of the past and the present, genuine and fictional experience in Szymborska's and Miliauskaitė's work. The images of God, Christ, angels and purgatory that are not frequent and yet turn up in Szymborska's poetry point to permanent balancing in a marginal situation, on the border of the possibilities of human cognisance. However, she does not analyse the truths of revelation and faith in her work, and, according to Packalén, the religious position is not declared²⁶. Szymborska's poetry is an example of extreme scepticism towards sophistic ideas and speculations, yet this scepticism arises not from human nihilism

²³ Ibid. ("I can't complain: / I've been able to locate Atlantis.").

²⁴ Ibid. ("It's gratifying that I can always / wake up before dying.").

²⁵ Ibid., 166-167 ("I'm a child of my age, / but I don't have to be. // A few years ago / I saw two suns. // And the night before last a penguin, / clear as day.").

²⁶ Malgorzata Anna Packalén, *A Domestication of Death: The Poetic Universe of Wisława Szymborska*.

or some special disputes with religious ideas or doctrines, but from the understanding of the limitation of human cognisance. Like the irony in Szymborska's work, this scepticism is brimming with positive optimism and wisdom. In one of her poems, *Cebula*, the author presents her attitude to a human's inclination to perceive himself as an especially complex system, totally different to an onion that peels layer after layer: *Co innego cebula. / Ona nie ma wnętrzości. / Jest sobą na wskroś cebula / do stopnia cebuliczności*²⁷. Comparing the onion to *the stomach of the world* (in the fourth stanza), the author is ironic: *Sam się aureolami / na własną chwałę oplata*²⁸. She lets one understand a human's inclination to vanity in the assessment of himself, the world and surrounding objects. The comparison of a human and an onion is indirect: the onion is attributed with those features that the human only imagines he is endowed with. The effect of the comparison shows in the finale of the poem where the components of the stately human and the pitiable vegetable are suddenly counter-changed: *W nas – tłuszcze, nerwy, żyły, / śluz i sekretności. / I jest nam odmówiony / idiotyzm doskonałości*²⁹. With no additional statements or conclusions, the operation of this counter-change formulates a conclusion about identical matter and carnal nature recorded in the bodies of the human and the onion. The essence of irony comes to the foreground after Szymborska makes a self-ironical step, by drawing an unrelenting line of cognisance and separating this common nature from the desired perfection. Such a rational and self-ironic attitude by Szymborska to a human's pretence to divinity is probably best revealed in the poem *Komedyjki*:

*Jeśli są aniołowie,
nie czytają chyba
naszych powieści
o zawiedzionych nadziejach.*

27 Wisława Szymborska, *Nic dwa razy / Nothing Twice*, 216-217 ("The Onion": "The onion, now that's something else. / Its innards don't exist. / Nothing but pure onionhood / fills this devout onionist.").

28 Ibid. ("the onion drapes itself in its / own aureoles of glory").

29 Ibid. ("We hold veins, nerves, and fat, / secretions' secret sections. / Not for us such idiotic / onionoid perfections.").

*Obawiam się – niestety –
że i naszych wierszy
z pretensjami do świata.*

*Wraski i drgawki
naszych teatralnych sztuk
muszą ich – podejrzewam –
niecierpliwic.*

*W przerwach od swoich zajęć
anielskich czyli nieludzkich
przypatrują się raczej
naszym komedyjkom
z czasów filmu niemego.*

*Bardziej od lamentników,
rozdzieraczy szat
i zgrzytaczy zębami
cenią sobie – jak myślę –
tego nieboraka,
co chwytą za perukę tonącego
albo zajada z głodu
własne sznurowadła.*

*Od pasa w górę gors i aspiracje
a niżej przerażona mysz
w nogawce spodni.
o tak,
to musi ich serdecznie bawić.*

*Gonitwa wękółko
zamienia sił w ucieczkę przed uciekającym.
światło w tunelu
okazuje się okiem tygrysa.
Sto katastrof
To sto pociesznych koziołków
Nad stoma przepaściami.*

*Jeśli są aniołowie,
powinna – mam nadzieję –
trafić im do przekonania
to rozhuśtana na grozie weselość,
nie wołająca nawet ratunku ratunku,
bo wszystko dzieje się w ciszy.*

Ośmielam się przypuszczać,
 że klaszczą skrzydłami
 a z ich oczu spływają łzy³⁰
 przynajmniej śmiechu.

The poem resorts to three looks at the structure of the world, which are embodied by three planes of worldview: human creative, divine angelic and the theatrical, which is common to them. However, the topic of truth and fiction arising from the Christian world perception and the classical world outlook is inherent in all three looks. The three planes of the worldview are linked to this topic and each presents a different version of the answer to the question 'what is truth?' The plane of human creation is dealt with most playfully: looking from the angelic heights, prose and poetry are just an unsupported human pretence to explain the surrounding world. However, any explanations created by the human mind are theatrical tricks (fiction) that to the angels probably resemble comedies from the era of silent cinema. According to the author, the angels are much amused by those little comedies when they are actually attempting to speak of the tragic

30 Wisława Szymborska, *Nic dwa razy / Nothing Twice*, 370-373 ("Slapstick": "If there are angeles, I doubt they read, our novels / concerning thwarted hopes. // I'm afraid, alas, / they never touch the poems / that bear our grudges against the world. // The rantings and railings / of our plays / must drive them, I suspect, to distraction. // Off-duty, between angelic - / i.e., inhuman - occupations, / they watch instead / our slapstick / from the age of silent film. // To our dirge wailers, / garment renders, / and teeth gnashers, / they prefer, I suppose, / that poor devil / who grabs the drowning man by his toupee / or, starving, devours his own shoelaces / with gusto. // From the waist up, starch and aspirations, / below, a startled mouse / runs down his trousers. / I'm sure / that's what they call real entertainment. // A crazy chase in circles / ends up pursuing the pursuer. / The light at the end of the tunnel / turns out to be a tiger's eye. / A hundred disasters / mean a hundred comic somersaults / turned over a hundred abysses. // If there are angeles, / they must, I hope, / find this convincing, / this merriment dangling from terror, / not even crying Save Me Save Me / since all of this takes place in silence. // I can even image / that they clap their wings / and tears run from their eyes / from laughter, if nothing else.")

aspect (truth) of a human's life. The thought that the angels' tears resemble laughter makes one wake up and approach the comedies, which in the course of the poem become increasingly merrier and more ironic, as the destiny of humankind. Meanwhile, in its tragic aspect and helplessness a human's fate can be equated to the divine comedy. In one of her critical essays (she has been writing them all her life) she says that a comedy loaded with the tragic is something that could be the best in theatre in general³¹. The idea of theatre or silent cinema showing the world as a fiction, starts to point to the truth against the background of the angels' tears, and turns into proof of a human's reality and fact.

A single, rationally formulated message that makes one perceive a poem anew and paradoxically changes the initial impression is, in principle, characteristic of Szymborska's work. In this particular poem, paradoxical thinking unfolds itself in an especially powerful manner: the world of human ambitions, or comedies, develops into a tragedy, a creative action interpreting the deepest human experience. Due to the mechanism of self-destroying opposition, the little comedies turn into comedies not because of laughter but because of tears (irony). In the context of upturned meanings of fiction and truth, an equation mark is put between the divine comedy and tragedy, while the mechanism of turning over fiction and truth points to the function of theatre – which is a ritual reincarnation that is important to human cognisance. The idea of theatre that embodies the idea of fiction points, via the act of the reincarnation, to something more: to a more universal possibility of reincarnation in the nature of theatre. This possibility is essentially transcendental, metaphysical, because in the cradle of human culture (Greece, for example), reincarnation was an act of the divine, the hallowed and the ordained. In Szymborska's work, this ritual of reincarnation is arrested at the border of human possibilities, not hoping or attempting to see the divine metamorphoses of truth.

One can find reverberations of theatre and ritual in Miliauskaitė's work, too; yet here the mysterious component of the ritual

31 Wisława Szymborska, "Komediant", *Nowe lektury nadobowiązkowe*, Kraków: Książki Wydawnictwa Literackiego, 2002, 14.

that has not yet turned into a performance is more important. The titles of the collections *Namai, kuriuose negyvensim* (Home where We will not Live, 1990) and *Uždraustas įeiti kambarys* (The Room Forbidden to Enter, 1995), and, finally, the image of the maze in the collection *Sielos labirintas* (The Maze of the Soul, 1999) point to a mysterious place at home, in childhood, in the past, which is hard to reach, which inexplicably attracts and simultaneously terrorises. Why am I so afraid – to cross the threshold / to open / the curtain, velvet, in golden pattern / embroidered, where the same episode / reoccurs, ever the same, ever the same / the most horrible, incomprehensible, already forgotten, from distant / childhood, no / I can't³² (*atsargiai papučiu...*). Several motifs of reincarnation can be apprehended in this episode – from the erotic and psychological to the deeply religious. The most important in these lines is universal syncretism of an individual's primary experience in which all these motifs are bound into one ball of associations. The elements of truth and fiction make up one whole, which has not yet been dispersed. Constantly turning back to the world of the past, childhood and dreams, the woman of Miliauskaitė's poetry is turning back to the little girl lurking in the depths of her experience who, being well aware of the reality of her past and present, is trying to return to the state where home epitomizes a world unblemished by contradictions and conflicts. According to the idea of the poem *įsineši vidun...* (You will carry in...), *God lives* in this ideal world that does not recognise the erosion of time (Ibid., 303). From the hurting experience of an eye blink, a moment, which in its fragility resembles a dream, the little girl of Miliauskaitė's poetry yearns to step into the world of an uncrumbling dream, fantasies and fulfilled wishes: but what would you look for here? / why would you chase me / from that far / from the days, since old, since old forgotten // it's only a dream // with livid / nails clutching to / life, meagre and petty // a dark / streak in the mirror of the soul / a wound, ever reopening (Ibid., 319) (*the door, exactly the same...*). The movement of reincarnation in this poetry is constantly trying to overstep the border of human cognisance and possibilities and to land in the light of divine secrets:

32

Nijolė Miliauskaitė, *Sielos labirintas*, 277.

kažkas many
gerai žino kelią

veda mane, girdžiu
fleitos balsą, nieko
nesibijau, esu kaip vaikas

štai – durys į uždraustą kambarį
pravertos
dar vienas žingsnis, dar

kaip tuščia

galvojau, rasiu lobyną, drėgną ir tamsų, pilną
pikrautą aukso ir brangakmenių, ranka išrašytų knygų
muskuso, smilkalų, kvapniųjų aliejų ir ambros
aksomo, šilku, brokato, Kašmyro vilnos
pipirų, cinamono, gvazdikėlių, tikrojo
šafrano, muskato riešuto, ak, ir daugybės
stovyklų, nepažįstamų, dieviškų

pats labirinto centras, šitiek sapnuotas

nuo menės raštuotų grindų
veidrodžio šukę pakeliu

kaip šviesu³³

kažkas many...

33

Ibid., 322 ("Something in me...": "Something in me / knows the way very well // leads me forward, I hear / a flute's voice, I'm not / afraid of anything, am like a child // the door to the forbidden room / is ajar / one more step, one more // how empty // I thought I'd find a treasure house, damp and dark, full / piled with gold and jewels, handwritten books / musk, incense, fragrant oils and ambergris / velvet, silks, brocades, cashmere / peppers, cinnamon, cloves, real / saffron, Muscat nuts, and many / statues, unfamiliar, divine // the very center of the labyrinth, dreamed of so often // I pick up a fragment of a mirror / from the hall's patterned floor // what light", translated by Jonas Zdanys).

The most interesting thing in this poem is that in the presence of the divine secret, in the very centre of the maze, the human of Miliauskaitė's poetry recognises his human, and not divine, identity. In the system of the entire worldview, the final line of the poem – *kaip šviesu* – retains its importance; it makes one understand the mechanism of mysterious, ritual and fictitious reincarnation in Miliauskaitė's work. The sensation of light is the sensation of divine essence; it is represented by the fragment of the mirror, but the divine being does not appear. In the transcendental movement of reincarnation, the essence of light flows into a reflection. The world seen in the fragment of the mirror is the reflection of the divine world; meanwhile, the fragment itself lets one guess about the little girl's attempts to break into the divine world. Wisdom formulated in the final line of the poem is acquired in an authentic, ritual, horrifying experience, and not inherited through cultural continuity. However, as in Szymborska's poetry, Miliauskaitė's wisdom of life is light and full of optimism. Yet the optimism in her poetry – and especially in her last collection – is tainted with the experience of Oriental religion, mostly Vedic. The Vedic, and Oriental in general, experience, the religious and philosophical systems of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism, are also important to the poets Kajokas and Platelis, and have acquired a noticeable intellectual weight in their work. In the poetry of Miliauskaitė, the relation with Oriental religions is more intuitive, permeated by a constant sensation of the experience of the religious environment. What can be called the names of Christianity, Greek and mysterious Baltic religions in the collection *Uždraustas įeiti kambarys*, in the collection *Sielos labirintas* turns into an individual philosophical version of the notion of the world, composed eclectically yet originally and convincingly. In this version the world of home, childhood and the past, the *dream seen with open eyes* unfolds in the concept of Maya that is close to Vedic philosophical thought. Like silk, Maya is covering a human's fragile world with her dreams and illusions. However, the metaphysical look at objects is consistently maintained in Miliauskaitė's work, because the premise that only the world that does not slip out of the contours of objects is real and reliable while divine beings cannot be shelled out of the objects, is preserved. Silk covers the surfaces of things

like a stream of light in Vermeer's paintings, showing the uniqueness of each, reminding us of the value of the divine secret.

Having settled in Miliauskaitė's poetic visual system, the Baltic mythological or religious experience also played an important role in her work. The title of the book *Moteris su lauko gėlėmis* (The Woman with the Flowers of the Field) is not incidental. The woman in Miliauskaitė's poetry, who reincarnates into the little girl in mysterious experiences of the dream and the past, seems to participate in permanent rituals in the world of objects and everyday life. The episodes of herb picking, soothsaying and sorcery appear in a number of poems, and Kęstutis Nastopka called this poetry 'Female mythology'³⁴. Chthonic motifs of Baltic mythology are made more intense by the chthonic Greek deities Demeter and Persephone. One could even claim that interpreting ancient Greek myths individually, Miliauskaitė broadened the range of meanings of the Baltic myth imparting it with authentic experience coloured in cultural associations. Recovering ever-larger spaces in the present and reality (truth) for her childhood and the dream of her life (fiction), Miliauskaitė actually aims at reviving and livening up the moment of the present that is emaciated and mortified by aggressive civilisation. However, she does not expect to record this moment in her experience, to perpetuate it and turn it into history. In other words, the ritual is resorted to only for a momentary counter-change (in the moment of aesthesia) of the elements of fiction and truth, and is psychologically motivated. At the moment of the ritual turnover the present acquires the content of the childhood dream, while what was the dream turns into reality thanks to reincarnation.

Unlike the *dame of Polish poetry* whom on the occasion of the award of the Nobel Prize a reporter from the Italian daily 'La Repubblica' called the *Greta Garbo of world poetry*³⁵ and who is not looking for any alleviation beyond the borders of rational, real and empirical cognisance and sees the only comfort in the reality of an experience, the Lithuanian *woman with the flowers of the field*

³⁴ Kęstutis Nastopka, "Moteriškoji mitologija", *Moteris su lauko gėlėmis*, 195.

³⁵ Stanisław Barańczak, "Posłowie", 386.

considers the possibility of such comfort, yet accepts reality no less stoically although with a note of despair in her voice, and does not treat a dream that does not come true in reality as a failure. Like in Szymborska's work, the dream in Miliauskaitė's poetry is not only an image but also a category of philosophical dimension that actualises a whole range of decisions related to the worldview. These decisions might unfold in a more apparent manner in the work of other Lithuanian poets, those that are almost a generation older, especially Nyka-Niliūnas and Venclova, where the possibilities of an individual's knowledge are considered even more in-depth, where those possibilities would disclose the relation with God (the epigraph of this paper) and with oneself. In Szymborska's work, the marginal and individual relation with one's own existence is fostered by European culture and points to the situation and experience of a modern European in the world. Rich cultural allusions, contexts and historical references in her poetry present an opportunity to know and analyse this experience. In Miliauskaitė's poetry, this experience is attained intuitively and almost gropingly, by a gifted actualisation of the cultural information lying in individual experience. In the context of Szymborska's poetry, the inclination of Miliauskaitė to mysterious experiences in metaphysical experience of the human, the world and an object does not have to be seen as a hint of mysticism (although it could be discussed), but is argued in the light of archetypal psychology and Vedic philosophy. This lends additional arguments to the European understanding of the world, which is Christian in its main premise and Greek in philosophical premise and that of the natural sciences. This is the most general conclusion and it could close this paper, yet for a comparison of the work of Szymborska and Miliauskaitė, as a metaphor of the similarity / difference between the two cultures, I would like to resort to a thought of Władysław Tatarkiewicz, a famous Polish art historian and philosopher.

Speaking of classicism as the strongest and most influential trend in European art, Tatarkiewicz discerned two types of classicism, two tendencies of it in the common 18th-century cultural legacy of Lithuania and Poland: the classicism of Warsaw and the

classicism of Vilnius³⁶. For Tatarkiewicz, the key riddle of the Vilnius Classicism was posed by Laurynas Stuoka-Gucevičius, the talented architect of late classicism, who imparted the Vilnius classicism of with an impressive power and beauty (Ibid., 419). Tatarkiewicz observes that Gucevičius' theoretical thought (being an architect, he was also engaged in theory) based on the canons of ancient beauty took root not in the rational classical world outlook inherited through cultural continuity, but more in mysticism; Gucevičius devoted his clear-cut and pure architecture to a cognisance of truth, believing that this truth is God (Ibid.). Of course, this comparison of two classical tendencies does not claim to generalise the poetic programmes of Szymborska and Miliauskaitė, but casts some light on the possibilities of common contexts and individual choice.

Conclusions

1. Personal contacts between the poets Szymborska and Miliauskaitė are not evidenced by any personal links or intentions, but even without obvious personal contacts, the possibility of comparison and interpretation of the work of these authors arises from the notable closeness of the strategies of the world outlook. In the work of both poetesses, the dominant role is played by the experience of everyday life and the experience of simple objects, which is essential in perceiving the human, the world, and God. And although neither of them flings the name of God around, it is the authentic personal relation with the being of things that turns into the key transcendental experience allowing to touch upon the legacy of philosophical and metaphysical thinking inherent in classical Western thinking. It could be that the intentionally unsought affinity of world perception and world outlook arises from much deeper layers of Western culture that allow one to read some common information between two different nations united by common cultural legacy (the tradition of classical thinking and the

³⁶

Władysław Tatarkiewicz, *Dwa klasycyzmu: warszawski i wileński, O filozofii sztuce*, Warszawa: Państwowe wydawnictwo naukowe, 1986, 403.

Christian mentality) on the world and the individual of the twentieth century, and their interaction.

2. In Polish literature, Szymborska's poetry is seen as philosophical poetry that speaks of the existential truth of the world and the human. From the point of view of the classical theory, the need for truth conveyed in literature and its logic belong to the classical paradigm in general. It means that in its very nature classical art is related to the tradition of empirical and rational cognition, which leaves aside the later sphere of the human's internal fantasies and unbridled demons of the imagination developed and fostered by romanticism. In search of the landmarks of values, in the works of both poetesses, one's attention is drawn to the prominent tendencies of a meditative poem: the desire to withdraw from the bustling and clattering world, to concentrate on the existential experience of one moment, one trial. A pause, a visual dimension of the world, gains importance. A moment experienced deeply, to the very existential content, reveals the dramatic nature of human existence – a permanent balancing between life and death, between being and non-being. A thing is the most concentrated object of such a marginal experience, and reflections upon it disclose the source of human experience, which is memory. Memory is the past of the objects in the work of these authors, and the history of the human is perceived in the light of this memory. Respect for the facts of history and culture turns into a respect for material, rationally classified nature of history; an illusionary and fictional perception of the world, which slips from the experience of objects, is seen as a dream.

3. A perception of reality and fiction, authentic experience and dream differ slightly in the works of Szymborska and Miliauskaitė. For Szymborska, the dream is a metaphor of intricate and incomprehensible life; she consistently maintains the understanding that dream and reality are two completely different things. In her poetry, the human stoically experiences the reality of life, with no chance of comfort beyond the borders of the reality of this world. In her works, one can wake up from life only once, but irrevocably. In Miliauskaitė's poetry, the human has a slight hope and a somewhat romantic aim to find something beyond these things and truth, beyond the horizon of human existence. In her works, Szymborska

views the human ironically, in the light of divine theatre. The very idea of the theatre points to a more universal possibility of human experience and reincarnation. One can find the reverberations of the theatre and ritual in Miliauskaitė's works, too, yet here the mysterious element of the ritual that has not yet become a performance is more important. In Szymborska's works, the marginal and individual relation with one's own existence is fostered by European culture and points to the situation and experience of a modern European in the world. In Miliauskaitė's poetry, this experience is attained intuitively and almost gropingly, by a gifted actualisation of the cultural information lying in individual experience.