

UTWORY POETYCKIE: POEMS. By *Czesław Miłosz*. Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1976. xxviii, 401 pp.

Czesław Miłosz hardly needs an introduction: American students are familiar with his *History of Polish Literature* (1969), political scientists will remember his *Captive Mind* (1953), and readers of the leading Polish émigré journal, *Kultura*, appreciate his frequently published essays. But above all, he is known to the general public as an outstanding poet. Indeed, his poetry has established him as one of the most accomplished masters of modern poetry. Although he is officially banned in Poland, he is still widely read in that country and abroad (in the original as well as in numerous translations). Last year the University of Michigan bestowed upon Miłosz an honorary degree, and, as a fitting tribute, Michigan Slavic Publications has published this impressive collection of his poems.

The collection contains poems written between 1933 and 1974, a forty-year period encompassing his youthful volume of poetry, *Trzy zimy*, published in Vilnius (1936), and his most recent, mature poems, *Gdzie słońce wschodzi i kędy zachodzi*, written in Berkeley. Such a span of time and space may very well illustrate the long road covered by the author in his relentless search for the truth, and yet, interestingly enough, it confirms the notion of uniformity in Miłosz's personality as a man and as a poet. Faithful to his poetic credo that "one good stanza weighs more than many laborious pages," as he stated in probably his most important poem, "Traktat poetycki" (reprinted in this volume), he has followed this conviction throughout his literary career, and as a result, has produced some excellent prose fiction and essays as well as poetry. In his constant quest for stable values in a world shattered by the experiences of our cruel century, Miłosz has remained devoted to the lost land of his youth—Vilnius and Lithuania—and his last poems in the collection are a moving testimony to that everlasting bond. Therefore, his poetic *oeuvre*, all natural transitions and developments of the form notwithstanding, remains uniquely homogeneous, solid, and as impressive as it had promised to be forty years ago. Today one cannot imagine modern Polish poetry without Miłosz's lasting contribution, which is constantly being revived by the generation of Różewicz and his followers.

Professor Alexander Schenker has provided a brief but enlightening English introduction to the collection.

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MODERN HUNGARIAN POETRY. Edited and with an introduction by *Miklós Vajda*. Foreword by *William J. Smith*. New York and Budapest: Columbia University Press and Corvina Press, 1977. xxxv, 289 pp. + 12 pp. photographs. \$11.95.

In his elegant and generous introduction to the anthology, the editor, Miklós Vajda, claims that "it was designed to survey post-war, that is to say, contemporary Hungarian poetry in the variety of its attitudes and approaches, its richness of themes and styles, with a strong emphasis on the most important poets." With the help of an impressive array of distinguished poet-translators—essential to any good anthology of foreign literature—Vajda succeeds in presenting a wide and attractive picture of contemporary Hungarian poetry or, at least, parts of it. Sensitively registering the tremors of both history and the soul, the translators render the poems into vivid, colorful, and poetic English (a language distant from Magyar in syntax and diction). The reader is grateful for the warm empathy of Robert Graves in translating Deve-

cséri's lovely Greek-poems, for Kenneth McRobbie's insightful reevocation of Illyés's ironic *Wonder Castle*, for William Jay Smith's skillful poetic rendering of the complexities of István Vas's *On Approaching Fifty*, and for Edwin Morgan's excellent transplantation of László Nagy's sensuous images and metaphors in his beautiful *Bliss of Sunday*. One could mention many more. One could also mention some of the problems of the translations, generally minor misunderstandings or misrepresentations that can be easily corrected in following—and, one hopes, expanded—editions.

This brings up the matter of Vajda's selection. If the poems chosen for *inclusion* in the anthology raise some questions concerning relevance and quality, so do the poems *left out*. Arbitrariness or subjectivity could, of course, be the salt of good anthologies. In Vajda's case, however, the process of selection—instead of reflecting his personal choices and literary idiosyncrasies—becomes a political filter, carefully preserving poems that do not offend ideological or political sensitivities, and carefully excluding those that would seem to contradict his general theme, which is “the final collapse [after World War II] of a totally rotten, anachronistic, and reactionary social structure,” and the emergence of “the socialist transformation” of society. Thus, in the introduction Illyés is hailed (and rightly so) as a poet “with a strong social and moral passion, a master of the political poem” but none of his great and recent political poems is included (“One Sentence on Tyranny,” “Oceans,” “Bartók,” “Standing in Front of the Monument of the Reformation in Geneva,” and so forth). After almost two decades of official distrust and rejection, one can only welcome the generous presentation of the poetry of János Pilinszky, a neo-Catholic, and one of the most original poets of the postwar years. Another, equally important socialist poet, László Benjamin, however, is represented only by two insignificant and uncharacteristic poems, while his major poetic achievements (“The Magic of Everyday Things,” “One Life,” “Fragments,” “Two Decades”) are ignored and his name is omitted in Vajda's introduction.

But the real unpersons of the anthology are the poets who left Hungary after 1956 and now live in exile. They are integral parts of what the editor calls “modern Hungarian poetry,” and include among their ranks major poets whose significance is far greater than that of any of the younger poets in this purportedly representative selection; apparently these exiled poets have been cast into outer darkness for political reasons.

One of the most important achievements of Vajda's anthology is the introduction it provides to the young generation of poets, some with great promise (Otto Orbán, Dezső Tándori, István Ágh), whose notions about the role and function of poetry seem to differ profoundly from those of their elders. Yet Vajda's claim that the anthology offers, as the title suggests, an all-inclusive view of modern Hungarian poetry is, at best, misleading. Without such major figures as György Faludy, Győző Határ, and Tamás Tűz, or such excellent and accomplished younger poets as Ferenc Fáy, Elemér Horváth, József Bakucz, and György Vitéz, Vajda's anthology remains incomplete and unrepresentative (particularly because it includes minor talents without promise or achievement—Mihály Váci, István Kormos, Gábor Garai). It is regrettable that Columbia University Press saw fit to lend its imprint to this kind of distortion.

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