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## **VIGILANT EXISTENCE IN THE EARTHLY LIFE. YET AGAIN ABOUT THE PREDOMINANT FEATURE IN BOLESŁAW LEŚMIAN'S POETRY**

### **1.**

All outstanding poetry researchers writing about Bolesław Leśmian – Waław Kubacki, Ireneusz Opacki, Julian Przyboś, Kazimierz Wyka, Jan Błoński, Jacek Trznadel, Tymoteusz Karpowicz, Zdzisław Łapiński, Janusz Sławiński, Anna Czabanowska-Wróbel, Marian Stala – on the one hand underlined dynamics of depicting and language significant for this poetry, on the other hand they emphasized the fact that we are dealing with exceptionally cohesive, consistent, and expressive poetics. With its stabilizing opinion about the validity of this poetry, its originality and role in the Polish literature, the hinge of disputes over Leśmian became the most important concepts of human language – grounded in temporality, and at the same time opening the infinity: world, existence, life, death, love, truth. The dominant of this poetry was invariably sought, and the basis for general conclusions was almost always textual, structured matter. The frequency of word usage and their proximity were tracked, types of lexical formations were defined (e.g. neologisms), the functions of the language have been hierarchised (e.g. conventionally-persuasive constructions, rhetoric, lyric). The pictorial components of the poetic language were separated and grouped: colours (e.g. green, gold), time of day and night (e.g. evening, morning), spaces (e.g. cemetery, lake, thicket, sleep, window, mirror), beings (e.g. animals, angels, cripples, ghosts, doubles), fictional motives (e.g. dance, transgressions, transformations, wandering, fixation, flow, run, escape), emotional states (e.g. surprise, delight, musing, nagging, confession, terror, longing, loneliness, tenderness, crime). Attention was paid to genre choices (e.g. ballad, elegy, song, fairy tale), grouping of works (e.g. cycle), functionality of descriptive or narrative forms (e.g. poem, monodrama, legend). The catalogued values that allow poetic heroes to survive – to experience and to live on – are described as unfavourable, unstable, too far away (duration, vitality, rhythm...) in the extrapoetic world. It was written about the duality (or “polytheism”) of Leśmian’s world and to split (“spreading for both”) of his characters, submerged, reflected or “happening” in the real nature or in the imaginary landscape. The functional opposition between expressiveness and non-expressiveness, real, unreal and surreal, was considered. Stylistic practices have been emphasized

(e.g. popular character of a literary work), the roles of romantic heritage and symbolism were emphasized. Aspects of poetic imagination, the role of primordially, dreaming, memories, grotesque, love, tragedy or fairy tales were discussed<sup>1</sup>. The philosophical backdrop of this poetry was underlined (Plotinus and Neo-Platonism, Baruch Spinoza, Friedrich Schelling, Edmund Husserl, Henri Bergson, Vladimir Solovyov, Eastern philosophy, modernism/secession)<sup>2</sup>. Thus, the most important metaphysical, ontological and aesthetic categories were drawn, not always remembering that Leśmian-the artist emphatically underlined the symbiosis of experience, and overlapping plane of meanings, and its sensual reality. He wrote: "Let this fairytale be terrible and menacing, if only interesting and beautiful"<sup>3</sup>. It was always a "fairy" about "this being", place, time, event, device. It is therefore worth to look at the precision, determination, or mindfulness with which Leśmian, through the ontological and epistemological "power" of his characters, distinguishes and differentiates between parts of the world and worlds, even when those characters disappear of the world and beyond the world.

## 2.

Bernadetta Kuczera-Chachulska, in her book from 2012, wrote that every word here is used "in symbiosis with the next one", that the lexis giving "immeasurable, infinite, the other and beyond" is not alienated here, that "is giving a beauty effect"<sup>4</sup>. And further – poetic works ("written in the right for poet language"), constitute "an incomparable exposition of existence" and:

The power to look at the beauty of the world and wordliness, the love for it, the absolute master melted into poetic language and images, of which Leśmian is the faithful servant of lyrical traditions (especially romantic) and at the same time exceeds them in an extraordinary and excessive level, is the dominant of his poems<sup>5</sup>.

The opinion quoted above does not necessarily have to be obvious today. In the mid-1970s, Michał Głowiński published an excellent text in which the essence of

1 V. e.g. E. Sidoruk, *The Character and Place of the Grotesque In Leśmian's Poetry*, [in:] *Bolesław Leśmian's Works. Studies and Essays*, ed. T. Cieślak and B. Stelmaszczyk, Kraków 2000; eadem, *Grotesque in the Poetry of 1920s and 1930s. Leśmian – Tuwim – Gałczyński*, Białystok 2004; B. Stelmaszczyk, *Poetic Garden of Leśmian. About Duality, Reflection and Changing Perspectives of the World Perception*, "Rocznik Towarzystwa Literackiego im. A. Mickiewicza" 2003 (XXVIII); A. Czabanowska-Wróbel, *Tales As a Worldview. Fairy Tales and Mythical Character of Tales In Leśmian's Works*, [in:] eadem, *Fairy In the Literature of Young Poland*, Kraków 1996.

2 V. e.g. A. Sobieska, *The Writings of Vladimir Solovyov among the Philosophical Inspirations of Leśmian's Poetry*, "Pamiętnik Literacki" 2000, vol. 1.

3 B. Leśmian, *Ali-Baba and the Forty Thieves*, [in:] idem, *Sesame Folk Stories*, Warszawa 1968, p. 41.

4 B. Kuczera-Chachulska, *Aesthetics of the Infinity in the Polish Lyric of the First Half of the 20th Century (Exploration)*, [in:] eadem, *From the Aesthetics of Infinity. Essays on Polish Poetry (Not Only) of the 20th Century*, Warszawa 2012, p. 19.

5 Eadem, "I Am also, Though I Am by You". *Anthropological Argument In Poetic Conversations with God In the Lyric of the 19th and 20th Centuries*, [in:] eadem, *From the Aesthetics of Infinity...*, pp. 84-85.

Leśmian's poetry is considered to be the "negative ontology" founded on grammatical denied formations, confrontational to the attitudes of the real world and to the affirmative ways of telling it. In his essay, not much later incorporated in one of the most important monographs on the author of *Forest Dziejba* [author's neologism, meaning closest to happening]<sup>6</sup>. Głowiński undertook a valuable attempt to comprehensively cover the subject matter known to commentators of this work: he wanted to combine specific linguistic aspects and a general, philosophically conceived vision of existence. At the same time, he underlined the fact that the issues of grammar are just a segment – and not the most important ones – of the poet's mind. He also stressed that "the issue of negation" is reaching for the whole of poetic language<sup>7</sup>, it goes beyond the framework of this only creation and its recognized existence.

Since the publication of the study (1976) and later Głowiński's book (1981), there has been a great deal of reflection on the works of the author of the *Orchard Cross-Roads*. If today, I come back to the essay from almost forty years ago, it is because too much has happened in literary methodologies, and the text dated back from the period of humanities disputes (structuralism vs. genetic research, hermeneutics vs. structuralism), seems to anticipate another "breakthrough" happening on our eyes. The essay on the functions of the negative structures in the however Young Poland creator<sup>8</sup>, was after all, a matter much more general than that one delivery, and interpreted by Głowiński's conceptual centers – the world, the truth, and the sense – are the ones that undergo the most rough axiological modifications. Głowiński has written an excellent study and book, not only about Leśmian, but also about the features of poetry or, more generally, the creative attitude – which from today's point of view is often referred to as not innovative, but modern and modernistic, or up-to-date and postmodern<sup>9</sup>. While Leśmian's role in the constitution of "modern Polish poetry" was determined by Ryszard Nycz, and since related reflections were and are continued in unequivocal formulas (experience lost the status of direct knowledge of reality, the language of poetry re-establishes the non-existent world; poetry words pretend to refer to something...)<sup>10</sup>,

6 M. Głowiński, *Leśmian: Poetry of Negation*, "Pamiętnik Literacki" 1976, no. 67/2, pp. 127-172, p. 127; idem, *The Beyond presented*, Warszawa 1981. V. polemics: C. Rowiński, *The Man and the World in Leśmian's Poetry, A Study of the Philosophical Concepts of the Poet*, Warszawa 1982. The quotations from Leśmian's poetry are from the edition: B. Leśmian, *Collected Poetry*, elaborated by: Aleksander Madyda, introd. Maria Jakitowicz, Toruń 2000.

7 M. Głowiński, *Leśmian: Poetry of Negation*, p. 130.

8 V. e.g. M. Podraza-Kwiatkowska, *Where to Classify Leśmian? An Attempt of Historic-Literary Location*, [in:] *Studies about Leśmian*, ed. M. Głowiński, J. Sławiński, Warszawa 1971.

9 V. e.g. Z. Łapiński, *Two Modern Ones: Leśmian and Przyboś*, "Teksty Drugie" 1994, no. 5-6; J. Sławiński, *Modernism* [entry], [in:] M. Głowiński, A. Okopień-Stawińska, J. Sławiński, *Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Wrocław 1998, p. 319; W. Bolecki, *Modernism in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Polish Literature (Exploration)*, "Teksty Drugie" 2002, no. 4.

10 R. Nycz, "In Words... In the World I look". *Bolesław Leśmian Modern Poetry*, [in:] idem, *Literature as A Track of Reality. The Poetics of Epiphany In Modern Polish Literature*, Kraków 2001, p. 118

it is worth to return to Glowński's study and pay attention to what concerns in it even today. It worries even more, the more the conclusions derived from the pictorial nodes of poetry seem to explain not the mystery or wonder of the textual details, but the methodological usurpation<sup>11</sup>.

### 3.

Also Michał Głowiński has made the selection. When writing about Leśmian, he repeatedly uses the word *world*, but in the world organizing that dialectic ("is" – "is not", "exists" – "does not exist") the researcher was primarily interested in "denied" and "impossible" beings. Moreover, the researcher has proved that this negation is the foundation of not only this, but poetry in general and – in general – contemporary existence<sup>12</sup>. Firstly, they are a way to justify positive statements; secondly, they are powerful means of literary expression; thirdly, they are a way of communication; fourthly, they are the way of existence. Starting from the genesis of the extraordinary abundance of discord in Leśmian's works and following the accumulated relations between the

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("Without much risk of misjudgement, it can be said that modern Polish poetry starts with Bolesław Leśmian"). V. e.g. J. Zięba, *Bolesław Leśmian's Modern Worldview. On the Essays of the Poet*, Kraków 2000; P. Łopuszański, "Going with the Truth In the Lips and in the Eyelids...". *An Attempt at a New Look at Leśmian's Works*, "Teksty Drugie" 2002, no. 6; A. Kluba, *Incomprehensible – Unnamed – Modern. Leśmian and Iwazskiewicz – Two Models of Poetic Inexpressible*, [in:] idem, *Autotelity – Reference – Inexpressible. About Modern Polish Poetry (1918-1939)*, Wrocław 2004; A. Skrendo, *Bolesław Leśmian: "The Most Enduring of All Imaginations and Oddities"*, [in:] *The Poetry of Modernism. Interpretations*, Kraków 2005; P. Śniedziewski, "Content When the Rhythm Goes Down". *Leśmian and Symbolist Fascination with Rhythm*, "Pamiętnik Literacki" 2006, vol. 3; M.P. Markowski, *Leśmian. Poetry and Nothingness*, [in:] *Polish, Modern Literature. Leśmian, Schulz, Witkacy*, Kraków 2007; E. Winięcka, *Distance and Desire of Directness: Modern Consciousness of Bolesław Leśmian*, "Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne. Seria Literacka" 2009, no. 16 (36). From the achievements of the younger Polish Studies, striving for the so-called. Realization of stereotype by so-called modern methodological perspectives, v. e.g. Michał Nawrocki, *Variations of the Existing. On the Poetic Ontology of Bolesław Leśmian*, Tarnów 2009; Agnieszka Łazicka, *Poetry and Cognition. About Bolesław Leśmian's "Elias"*, "Białostockie Studia Literaturoznawcze", 2015, no. 7.

<sup>11</sup> For example, Andrzej Zawadzki, referring to the verbal formulas of "evenings" and even more "twilights", writes that "the thesis of Leśmian as a poet of nothingness should be supplemented with the thesis of Leśmian as a poet of dusk, disappearance, weakening of being" (*Poor Ontology In Modern Polish Literature, Exploration*), "Teksty Drugie" 2008, no. 3, p. 34). "The disappearance of the content of the world", "the progressive weakening of the metaphysical essence of the world and the desubstitution of things" (p. 33), must mean, in its natural consequence, not to be repeatedly commented ontological complications, but shorten the 'oneness' of the self (*Textual, Poetic In Leśmian, Czechowicz, Gombrowicz, Miłosz*). V. idem, *Norwid, Mallarmé, Leśmian: Mimicry as a Representation of a Performance*, [in:] idem, *Literature and a Weak Thought*, Kraków 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Works mentioned by Glowński e.g.: E. Gilson, *Linguistique et philosophie. Essai sur les constantes philosophiques du langage*, Paris 1969; A. Wierzbicka, *Negation – its Place in the Deep Structure*, [in:] eadem, *Semantic Apprehension*, Wrocław 1969; K. Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action. Essays on Life Literature and Method*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1966; E.M. Cioran, *Le Sceptique et le barbare*, [w:] idem, *La Chute dans le temps*, Paris 1964; J. Błosiński, *Bergson and Leśmian's Poetic Program*, [in:] *Studies about Leśmian*; H. Bergson, *Creative Revolution*, transl. F. Znaniecki, Warszawa 1957.

types of denied formations, this very characteristic of the writer's style has made the researcher a bundle of reflections on the non-, un-, and not- world, evoked in the author of *Forest Dziejba* work. In fact, he made further steps, which in effect affected the fundamental validity of his own, but non-paradoxical opinion on poetic ontology ("The world can only be deprived of the world"<sup>13</sup>), but at the same time gained the final assertion of the negative ontology thesis<sup>14</sup>, done by archpoet through articulation by words, which are not words, however.

Michał Głowiński's thesis remained attractive. It was continued by Marzena Woźniak-Łabieniec in her article on "ontology of nothingness". Recalling the multiplicity of works devoted to the subject of interest, occasionally entering polemics with Głowiński, she emphasized that in the philosophically motivated poetry of Leśmian, nothingness (emptiness, empty space, voidness, abyss, voidness, beinglessness, worldlessness, timelessness) exists and that forms, ways or conditions of existence are astoundingly rich. Nihilism does not need to be absolute (nullification of everything), nor utterly (opposes the being as a whole). It can be transcendent (it is independent of the universe, simply the world, it is the "possibility" of existence), immanent (absent, imperfect in being), may approach the non-absent (emptiness), or significantly depart from it as a differentiating the reality (alienness, difference, dissimilarity). Nonentity can be the subject and object of the action. Various functions, in various ways, are approaching the related concepts and for various reasons depart from them. In the article Woźniak-Łabieniec draws attention to the capacity of the word "nothingness", and thus the scale of these close-ups and distances: at their poles finds the author of the study, nothing, and everything, and timeless (lack of time), and eternity (existence beyond time)<sup>15</sup>. It seems important for me, that the author recall rather the universe ("superior spatial category"), than the fundamental notion of ontology and metaphysics, the world, and even more precisely, to add: overflowing with beings from the consciousness place in the world. The author, in a context of the eschatological vision or philosophical views of the poet, writes about a modest but more natural world for poetry; The world of course appears in the works quoted by the author (e.g. in Trznadel: "world dies", Sandauer – the world as a complex of "local neighbourhoods"), is a common name for the structure of the work (poetic world, world presented), but first of all, in Woźniak-Łabieniec's

13 M. Głowiński, *Leśmian: Poetry of Negation*, p. 138.

14 *Ibidem*, p. 158. An in-depth typology of the "negativity" function in Leśmian's poetry was formulated by M. Woźniak-Łabieniec, *Leśmian's "Ontology" of Nothingness*, "Acta Universitatis Lodzianensis. Folia Litteraria Polonica" 1991, no. 1. Thus, she explained the tautological (or paradoxical) title of her essay:

"[...] can we talk about the theory of being something, that is not? This seems intrinsically contradictory. However, if we assume that nothingness, voidness, emptiness, blankness are often treated by the poet as existing, are subject to concretization, then this title turns out to be simply ... tautology. This will be the ontology of being, which has a special form of existence – it is nothingness" (p. 55).

15 M. Woźniak-Łabieniec, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-61.

dissertation, is a link of the denominational formation (worldlessness), relativising (the beyond, the world of other existence, outside world), suggesting a passing (decaying world), instability, imperfection, or falsehood (e.g. “the worlds: that whirl in skillful idolatry”, *Elias*, p. 478<sup>16</sup>).

The radical propositions, sometimes drastically opposite of the essence of Leśmian's poetry (“There is no world!” – There was not! – It is – again! – “[*In the Clouds of Reflection...*]”, p. 405<sup>17</sup>), after all, and contrary to the essence of poetry, it was necessary to carefully prepare and argue. Głowiński included, in Leśmian's extraordinary allegiance, a number of lexical categories that signify or imply lack, deprivation, vanishing, incompleteness or uncertainty (mostly based on existence-non-existence opposition). He has showed, that in Leśmian all spheres of reality were subjected to the denial: spatial phenomena, performers and ways of doing things, time, categories of reality. He has stressed that the realization of a private composition was in Leśmian a story of gradual and widespread circles, the process of subtraction of “everything”, the process of “depriving the things that they have”<sup>18</sup>, up to “no matter” and “no existence”, and to “nonsense” and “unreal”. From the beginning of the essay, the word “negativity” was put together, by the researcher, especially with the word “negation”. Thus, the reflection at the field of grammar, morphology, syntax, and stylistics has moved into the field of logic and semantics, but also metaphysics and ontology. Recalling at the outset of this discussion, Artur Sandauer's dismal comment on the grammatical properties of Leśmian's poetry:

Not without reason such a huge amount of words used by him [i.e. Leśmian] is preceded by the destructive prefixes [...]. Moreover, he barely uttered a word or sentence, he hurried with his negation, forming a kind of verbal or sentence hermaphrodite ... where the barely begun thought goes back which results in logical suicide<sup>19</sup>

– was extended by Głowiński to the whole of his study, the conviction that the negations-denials express the “drama of nothingness” in Leśmian, the drama of non-existence, and – the most emphatic in the final sections of the essay – the imaginary and philosophical dominant of death.

Everyone wrote about death (dying, passing away) thematically located in the center of Lesmianowski's world<sup>20</sup>. It was not often in these works that a comparable charge of bad energy and untrustworthy self-destruction was depicted. A significant example of

16 Poem from the volume *Shadowy Drink* (1936).

17 Verse from the volume *Shadowy Drink* (1936).

18 M. Głowiński, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

19 Quotation from A. Sandauer, *Leśmian's Philoophy*, [in:] idem, *My Deviations*, Kraków 1956, pp. 87-88 (essay from 1946) cf other initial references in Głowiński's essay, e.g.: W. Kubacki, *Comments upon Leśmian*, [in:] idem, *Years of Terminating. Literary Essays. 1932-1962*, Kraków 1963; S.K. Papierkowski, *Bolesław Leśmian. Language Study*, Lublin 1964.

20 cf e.g. J. Trznadel, *Leśmian's Literay Output*, Warszawa 1965, p. 325.

the destructive power of existence, meaning and truth of the use of negative grammatical formations is in the further parts of Głowiński's sketch, for example, the distinction between time and eternity. Since timelessness (abolition, annihilation of time) is not synonymous with eternity (continuity, renewal), the dominant character of this lyric is, for example, the lack of justification for "something" (read: nothing) appeared (read: did not appear) in the sphere of events (read: unhappened). Głowiński wrote:

This type of privateness, though not very well represented, is particularly important because it reveals in the poetic form the basic properties of Leśmian's poetics<sup>21</sup>.

And one more example: Głowiński argued that Leśmian's poetic practice should be based on the accepted language habits and the expectations of the recipient, for it is evident from the background that the poet "does not permit crystallization of the simplest of concept in such a situation, as if preventively shifting them", let alone – in the extreme solution – preventively "diverts reality"<sup>22</sup>. So it's not just the intention of "negativity". It is also about the prevention and the rush with which Leśmian comes to systematically questioned "real". It is worth noticing here that the word "question" is one of the most widely used by researcher investigating radically negative, but after all – as he writes – not so many "types of privacy".

#### 4.

At the same time it should be recalled that Sandauer's opinion of Leśmian's poetry as a "logical suicide" and an uncontrolled semiosis of "hermaphrodites" has a strong and undoubtedly wise counterpart in Głowiński's study. This is, for example, a formulated by Janusz Sławiński, almost simultaneously with Głowiński's suggestions, idea about the complementarity of the poetic word in this works. Sławiński wrote: "the word in poetic speech should look and find in the surrounding words"; and further – "words of the denied sense" allowed Leśmian to:

limit the large semantic whole. A word with a negative prefix always contains the meaning of two words. The denying sense is built over denied sense, "Non-field" encloses "field" not only formally but also semantically. The use of such a word simultaneously updates the two extremes of a sense zone, the poles of space, in which there is room for the meaning of many other possible, "transitional" words<sup>23</sup>.

Sławiński, of course, saw in Leśmian's poetry the domain of suspicion or disagreement emphasizing the role of negations. At the same time he explicitly wrote about them as senses – superstructured, closed, and narrowed. Sławiński argued that contradictions neither nullified meanings nor destroyed the real being. They were able to update the

21 M. Głowiński, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

22 *Ibidem*, p. 142.

23 J. Sławiński, *Leśmian's Poetic Semantics*, [in:] *Studies about Leśmian*, pp. 107, 116.

semantic poles of words and to designate and, therefore, limit, the area for the semantic usurpation of the poet-experimenter, forcing him to use indirect, optional lexical.

My attention focuses precisely on the process of specifying the attitude of the poet as recognition recognized by Sławiński, referring to Bergson's works, and noticed in Głowiński's text, maybe the affirmation of the reality of the world ("rhythm of poetry" towards the "rhythm of existence") or – less radically, but it is probably fairly poetic and lyric – the recognition or affirmation of the truth of its separate and unique part. This is, Głowiński writes, in the vast majority of Leśmian's works:

private formulas serve not to override what is in the main formula, but to underline some element implicit in it. By denouncing, the poet brings to the surface one of the elements contained in the supposition of the word [...]. This is a particularly example of the positive and negative character of privateness: to lessen, in essence, it is added<sup>24</sup>.

And further: sometimes the tautologies in which the negations take place allow the poet to maintain symmetry between the positive and negative formulas, in the special situation, they repeat not only what has already been verbalized, but also what in the deeper, in the hidden semantic structure was merely a supposition<sup>25</sup>, let us add, that the supposition is sufficiently clear to provoke such precise, non-accidental words. However, in the case of Głowiński, in terms of the denial of certain tautologies, it is prone to see "too obvious" or "apparent", so irrelevant or superfluous (e.g. "inedible weeds", "homeless wastes")<sup>26</sup>. I, in the obvious contradiction, but also the obvious affinity of the words next to each other (the dream that dreams, the sight that is seen), propose to see the next step of a great poet, undoubtedly intentional and how big with the consequences.

After describing and appreciating the negative and positive-negative character of the negations-denials, the positive is worth seeing, and therefore – what was postulated by Głowiński – go beyond the episode and read Leśmian's poems, as all every good poetry should be read: in the textual whole of the work, but above all, in the far away context, not only of the poem, but also the precedence of the semantic of ancient poetry (and culture), e.g. Romantic. Then, Leśmian's illusions of disappearance and misrepresentation would not need to be so striking.

Taking into account current, modern or postmodern suggestiveness of Głowiński's essay, one of the most attractive formulations from here will probably be the "emptiness transferred into the humanist sphere". This expression, which is a part of the current dogma of weakness, instability and invalidity of all forms and relations of existence contained in the literature – in Głowiński, in the context of Leśmian's works, in which denial-negation is applied to the form: under the "absence of human beings", there

24 M. Głowiński, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

25 *Ibidem*, pp. 145-146.

26 *Ibidem*, pp. 146-147.

appear *quasi*-unidentifiable, and above all the nameless (“nobody”, “no one”<sup>27</sup>). The second of today’s tempting expressions written in Głowiński’s essay, could be “identifying the past with what is not present,” as if sounding with Leo Shestov’s idea, that God can make what was in the past, non-existent. But – whether it is untrue and not real?

It should be recalled that after each of these expressions Głowiński added comments on further sequences. He clearly has written that the issues of subject or narrative, as well as the poetic sensibility (time, space, transcendent), are in Leśmian “a wider and more complex problem”<sup>28</sup>. This means that it is worth looking for and another story about Leśmian’s poetry. Through contradictions, Głowiński has written, three main storylines have been formed in Leśmian’s poetry – the story of the “unfinished genesis”, the story of “disappearance” and the story of “wandering around the underworld”<sup>29</sup>, and since the common element of these three stories is death (the basic theme, the principle of organizing the imagination according to the thematic critique), it seems reasonable to ask for another story and its central element. Would it be a fulfilled being and successful journey through worldly life and its central element would be life and beauty? The fact that there would be room for the element of denial-negation is obvious, taking into account, Leśmian’s excellent technique of combining extremes, i.e. the grotesque. It is undisputed that the links of Leśmian’s stories are not only indeterminate (somewhere, nowhere, never), but also linguistic “anchors”: the pronouns, which makes real beings concrete, the spaces or the manifestations of the world (this, that, there, that, here, here, mine, yours), to indicate the sequel of events (once again, today, now, just behind), the possessiveness of qualities or functions (“God of clouds, God of dew”, *Little-Shoemaker*, p. 245)<sup>30</sup>.

There is no doubt, and Głowiński has any, that in the events described by Leśmian, the dead and the living world participates, the inhuman and the human world, the spirit world and the world of matter, the world of denial and the world of affirmation. As the researcher concluded the radiation of death, the central theme of this poetry, enabled the abolition or repeal of the “living world”, but at the same time:

providing a neglected negative sign, which allowed to preserve all of this world’s qualities, its material measurability above all<sup>31</sup>.

Głowiński calls this attitude “a game between negativity and positivity”. He does not comment on the notion of “measurability”, does not indicate the principle of animation or reification as often emphasized in the leśmianology [neologism]. In the final summary of the essay, after Kenneth Burke, he emphasizes that the nature of language does

27 M. Głowiński, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

28 *Ibidem*, p. 169.

29 *Ibidem*, pp. 169-171.

30 Verse from *Crippled Songs* cycle, volume: *Meadow* (1920).

31 M. Głowiński, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

not appear in positive but in negatives. As he writes, negativism mediates between the world of things and the world of words about things, in derangements they “express the most creative powers of speech”, especially poetic speech... The extraordinary frequency and preservation of the linguistic nature of negations making them the main tool of poetic activities, to enter into conflict with the socially acceptable uses, vivacious antimimatism as the central theme in the concept of poetry and art, and poetry which:

establishes its own world, it also establishes it by the use of an negations, which, as Burke wrote, is a miracle of language, a paradoxical miracle, since it creates things, confirming their absence<sup>32</sup>

– such a sequence ends Głowiński’s work about Leśmian’s poetry: variously used negation questions the existence and shaping the linguistic “nothing” to the non-existent world.

## 5.

It may come as no surprise that the notions of “memory” or “memory”, so important in the Leśmian’s language, never appeared in Głowiński’s sketch. At the same time, Łapiński recognized them as one of the psychological paradigms, allowing Leśmian to build half-dwelling “individuals” dying “at the last level of existence” or blurring in the “drive towards nothingness” along with blurring of memory data. Łapiński wrote about the positive existence of non-existence (“existence and non-existence stop to be a separate pair, if there exists – positively exists – nonentity, nothing”)<sup>33</sup>, Głowiński, on the other hand, spoke of an undefined “element of positivity”<sup>34</sup> which, however, hastily (Sandauer’s proposal) is suspended and especially is questioned. It seems that this time the decisions of antinomy being – nothingless are worth looking for in the poet’s own words. The title character of the poem invokes by scholars of Leśmian’s “negative ontology”, Sloven, in vain attempts to know the world with the help of the senses. He is a dead body, so neither the “vainly of the eye” nor the “sensible sense of nothingness” does not allow – as it is accurately written by Woźniak-Łabieniec – “to learn nothing, except Beingless to be in the clouds”<sup>35</sup>. This is an important and worth remembering observation: in Leśmian’s concept it is possible to know the existence (and thus the non-existence) only through the instruments and power proper of that entity (or non-entity), associated with it, resulting from it. The world is open to the eyes. The orbits try to see the universe. A poet, who in his lifetime, used to stand in face-to-face duel with God can only stamp on the Creator with his dead body after death.

32 *Ibidem*, p. 172.

33 Z. Łapiński, *Leśmian’s Methaphysics*, [in:] *Studies about Leśmian*, p. 16.

34 M. Głowiński, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

35 M. Woźniak-Łabieniec, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

Karpowicz, the creator of the notion of “impossible poetry”, wrote: “Leśmian’s world is sick of the desire to have what it is”<sup>36</sup>. These are totally different notions to exist in this poetry and to have subsistence. Leśmian’s beings want badly to possess it. They may be the elements of one of the dimensions of infinity and at the same time they want to live “here, and now”. Holderlin, cited by the researchers of Leśmian’s poetry, is right: “poetically is a man living on this earth”<sup>37</sup>. On this, not the other one. And the desire to live here (not “anywhere” or “somewhere”) one of the Leśmian’s heroes complains “You gave me, God, a bite of existence”, but he also knows that the bite of existence “is enough for the whole way” (*Little-Shoemaker*, p. 246). Another of the crippled heroes of Leśmian “hunches” his flaw in death, because in his life he has “effectively begged and danced”, “pried and roused” (*Hunch-Back*, p. 247<sup>38</sup>).

Of course, even though the intention of the poet is never sure, we want to ask about it: was Leśmian’s intention the negation of the truth of existence in the element of negation, or was it the seeing, knowing and understanding of the world – its expressive reality which is always difficult to accept? Negations do not have to express non-being and non-existence; they do not have to mean neither non-truth, nor non-true. They can also, and it was also written about by Głowiński, express thoughts, doubt, uncertainty, surprise, anxiety or dispute. They can finally – Sławiński was right here – to serve the paradoxes or oxymorons, which Leśmian-poet, but most importantly Leśmian-artist successfully tamed excessive ambitions, typical for those who write poems: the desire to judge the world and its inhabitants outside the world and its inhabitants, and what the world and its inhabitants speak in their own unique and mysterious language. Attributes of this attitude – watchful and unhurried – are clearly visible in Leśmian’s quotations cited by Głowiński. They are also justified in the passages quoted from Bergson’s writings on being not self-reliant, but also about weaker ontological and cognitive positions of negations, which are in fact not judgments, but opinions (e.g. “the concept of a non-existent object” is necessarily the concept of the object “existing”, “the statement refers directly to the thing, the negation refers to things only indirectly, through certain assertion”<sup>39</sup>). Głowiński has not used the expression “poet’s idea”. The idea, however, is the word used by Leśmian in regard to heroes of his poems and poems itself, quoted by Głowiński, while the researcher emphasizes that in the *Janand* quotation there is the an idea of lacking knowledge in the presented character (“I did not know whose intentions or crimes of which”; p. 354<sup>40</sup>). Głowiński writes that this lack of knowledge encapsulates the narrator and also the recipient. Ignorance:

36 T. Karpowicz, *Poetry of Impossible*, “Poezja” 1967, no. 12, p. 37; cf M. Woźniak-Łabieniec, p. 67.

37 V. e.g. M. Woźniak-Łabieniec, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

38 Both verses from *Crippled Songs* cycle, volume: *Meadow* (1920).

39 M. Głowiński, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

40 From the volume *Shadowy Drink* (1936).

is penetrating [...] to a higher degree of narrative structure, except for his [hero] – Ignorance, any knowledge appears, no suggestion of explanation, unconsciousness is not complementary, is not demented<sup>41</sup>.

No one, therefore, from the participants of the poetic event will receive the grace of response? Do they remain in the unconscious? No one will correct it, deny it? The researcher, despite mentioning the ballad convention (by the poem *Invisibility*), did not fully take into account one of the most important holds characteristic of the ballad convention, in which ignorance can only be said from the level of the character (in Mickiewicz: “who is the girl ...”) and not quite attentive recipients, while the narrator, or more strictly – one of the narrators – is ignorant (“I do not know ...”), because in fact there is no doubt and cannot be any. The teller knows, especially a storyteller in poetry, all the more so rooted in romanticism<sup>42</sup>. At the same time, he is inclined to simulate ignorance in trivial matters, but he speaks decisively and precisely about the most secret mysteries of the world, especially that which, apparently, is not accessible to cognition.

At first, Głowiński gave an astonishing commentary to two arch-Romantic works, not just the verse texts: *The Wave* and the *Uninhabited Ballad*:

ignorance, which has become the starting point for quite thorough and detailed knowledge. It is a poetic construction quite unusual, it can be said that the domain of ignorance is all that enters into the empirical contact of the cognizer with the world, this sphere has been consistently negated.

He later has added:

The second, “higher” subject, the one who knows, though it belongs also to those who have not seen, have not heard and were not, is the epitome of creativity.

Negation reveals its creative qualities here, and by language it is possible to talk about what one does not know (in the sense that the elements of positivity are elementals in the sense of negation), it can create measurable poetic reality<sup>43</sup>.

However, he did not acknowledge that the “paradoxical structure” of such works and their “sensual metaphysics” are obvious, natural, and desirable in poetry. And that the poetry of creation is subject to a statement rather than its subject. You just have to be a poet. Like Mickiewicz or Slowacki. Like William Blake or Rainer Maria Rilke. Like Leśmian.

The characters of Leśmian are undoubtedly living in a poetic way. Poetic cannot mean “negative”. The world, based on its “half-lives” (Łapiński), is “sick of the desire

41 M. Głowiński, *op. cit.*, pp. 162-163.

42 Here, works of B. Kuczera-Chachulska, and especially the preceding monumental study of I. Opacki, *The Beauty and the Mourning of Time. Romanticism in the Lyric of Bolesław Leśmian*, [in:] idem, *Poetic Dialogues with the Context. Essays on Poetry of the Twentieth Century*, Katowice 1979. From earlier ones: J. Trznadel, *Leśmian's Literary Output*, Warszawa 1964; W. Kubacki, *Commentary to Leśmian*, [in:] idem, *Years of Terminating*, Kraków 1963.

43 M. Głowiński, *op. cit.*, pp. 163-164.

to have what it is” (Karpowicz)... Poetically, human lives on a piece of this land in the “presence of the gods” (Rilke)... These statements are really diametrically different than the righteous formulas of sustaining (by poets!) the emptiness of the any world, drawn from the sense, without any pattern, purpose and cause, arbitrarily modified and permanently rewritten. Can you get sick of “nothing”, can you want something that didn’t exist and does not exist today? By denying, contradicting, or compromising “here, now” can you talk reliably about eternity and even about “worldlessness”?

The title character of one of the most famous ballads, A Girl, wants to break into life because the author of the work knows that such a world – bad, cruel but “full-blooded” – actually “here, now” exists. The hero of another Leśmian’s ballad, the Hunchback, “dies in a rather good way” because the weather and summer accompanying dying are not phantoms. He does not have to affirm them. However, they must be recognized as having a specific ontological and axiological pact with him. They must be distinguished as “these here” and must retain their substantial realities (*Memories*, p. 42):

Everything – in the dark. – And only that last room  
With the window, in the underworld – in the sun, the belt into the cloud,  
[...]<sup>44</sup>.

He must – first of all – isolate and distinguish “himself”, because only “this here”, being himself, he can lead a dispute, hold on to or persuade (*Green Hour*, VIII, p. 62):

Let me reflect in your dull pupil,  
Let me see these reflections spell and incoherence,  
Let me know what I was for you in your dream!<sup>45</sup>

## 6.

In Głowiński’s dissertation it is not possible to find the words “affirmation”, “delight” or “beauty.” These appear in Władysław Stróżewski’s book published in the mid-1990s, in which the philosopher analyses Leśmian’s works, for a true interpretation of existence, recognizing their “stunning metaphysics” including their fulfillment in the negations<sup>46</sup>. Głowiński has had no doubt: Leśmian was a poet of creation<sup>47</sup>, a poet of a non-existent

<sup>44</sup> Verse with inc. [*Doors wide open...*] from the cycle of *Involuntary Songs*, from the volume *Orchard Cross-Roads* (1912).

<sup>45</sup> This is the last stanza of the final part of the cycle *Orchard Cross-Roads* (1912).

<sup>46</sup> W. Stróżewski, *Leśmian’s Methaphysics*, [in:] idem, *Meaning and Existence*, Kraków 1994, p. 195; cf idem, *Ethics of Affirmation*, [in:] idem, *Meaning and Existence*; idem, *The Truth of the Work of Art. Truthful Interpretation of a Literary Work*, “Studia Estetyczne” 1978, 15. Essay about Leśmian, first ed. “Ruch Literacki” 1992, no. 1-2. It is significant that Głowiński mentions one of Stróżewski’s works (*From the Problems of Negation*, in the collection: *Philosophical Essays. For Roman Ingarden as a Gift*, Warszawa-Kraków 1964).

<sup>47</sup> According to Marian Stal, Leśmian is a poet who “invents” new ways of existence. V. e.g. idem, *Three infinities. About the poetry of Adam Mickiewicz, Bolesław Leśmian and Czesław Miłosz*, Kraków 2001.

world, because of a non-existent God, calling the linguistic, shaded imitation of beings. Stróżewski also has no doubts: “Leśmian is the poet of existence,” and an existing God. And even more strongly: Leśmian’s affirmation of the existence of the real, the recognition of the “consciousness of the existence” (from the last verse of the poem *Elias*; p. 479)<sup>48</sup> and the creativity of the Creator are not “despite” the grammar of denial; are respecting the mystery of “non-existence”<sup>49</sup>. A multidisciplinary, methodological reflection on the existence and tradition of the realistic trend of phenomenology<sup>50</sup> allowed Stróżewski to see in Leśmian’s poetry not death, but life. He wrote:

Life is the “most powerful” way of existence: it assumes the reality of being, its autonomy, self-sufficiency. Such a being can only be a creation of God. But his omnipotence seems limited [...]. But now, as it has already happened, even God is powerless: let us emphasize – in the face of fulfilled and real existence. Yet another way: this existence, in reality, limits the omnipotence of God, even though it was created by him! God is dependent on his creation by the very fact of its happening.

Leśmian’s metaphysics implies not only the notion of existence and being, but also the notions of nothingness and non-existence; In general, the broader definition of negativity, which is translated into more specific terms, is a necessary factor in allowing an adequate description of reality<sup>51</sup>.

“Leśmian’s universe is characterized by fundamental unity”, writes Stróżewski<sup>52</sup>. So what has been created is not hidden, obscured, masked or neglected. Everything, therefore, makes possible an “adequate description of reality” and forms the basis for other intentions: non-being or non-existence is defined in the face of existence. Not the other way around. Any of the beings of the world or of the universe is not in Leśmian pointless, irrational or useless. “It” – though it can be called “nothing” and “nobody” by the poet, although in a poetic storyline he may lose his name and go in the dark – already happened. He’s alive now. It was created by God and anyone besides Him. It was created, so it must be real and must be true and – here one has to go back to the quoted reflection of Kuczera-Chachulska – beautiful. It is because of its constituted reality, because of its true beauty, thanks to and after creation, both man and animal or plant, and finally the dead or dying thing, may, after being free and separated oppose the Creator. And he must confess before his creation that he did not “do anything more”

48 From the volume *Shadowy Drink* (1936). This work is called the most metaphysical piece wrote by Leśmian.

49 V. e.g.: Prof. Agnieszka Kijewska, *Laudation*, [in:] *Celebration of the Renewal of the Doctorate of Prof. Władysław Stróżewski*, Lublin 2009, pp. 22-23. The philosopher characterizes Leśmian’s understanding of existence by indicating not only the hierarchies or types of existence, but also the role of non-existence in the process of their individualization or in the tragic experience of failure.

50 W. Stróżewski, *More about Beauty*, [in:] *Celebration of the Renewal of the Doctorate of Prof. Władysław Stróżewski*, p. 30.

51 Idem, *Leśmian’s Methaphysics*, pp. 214, 216.

52 *Ibidem*, p. 219.

that he did. He was about to create life, to bring them out of the darkness – and he did a great job. Leśmian writes:

„I want to tell you what I will not confess to anyone,  
My world is crossing with me! I feel bad at my house!  
I could have once again forced nihilism young thing  
To smile in the another dark! Darkness was not an obstacle...”  
[...]

[...]  
„Life made! Exactly! Unsupported life!  
On the stars, at the bottom of the lakes, at the top of the hill,  
[...]  
Even in the pulp of the carcass, in the tumult without substance  
Something is tightening, hustling, and rustling!  
[...]" (*Elias*, p. 477).

But since the Creator has created everything that is fit for creation, and since the finite creatures have put into motion the existence, the course towards and in life could not end together with the divine act. He could not only be the run, the more only towards the spring, the sun. He had to last more and to move on elsewhere as a stray, a bust, and struggle. Here, Leśmian tells the story of the Elias-rebel, almost exactly repeats the remarkable words of Konrad from the so-called. Mickiewicz's song of revenge: "With God and even though God" (Part III, sc. 1). From a pagan, satanic song, Leśmian made a song of blindness, indiscretion ("Already – with you! ... Already – without you!..."), because Elias, seeking to reach the powers reserved for the Creator, thus wanted to refuse and, and other beings of the temporal status of "created beings". He did not notice the sign or misidentified him: "The Trail faded and Elias took her Darkness for her consent" (p. 478).

In *Leśmian's Metaphysics*, Stróżewski wrote:

Only pure nothing, can be opposed to pure existence. No word is given to its designation, no name – because they all imply a term (even if not materially defined as "something"). They also fail, trying to imagine it or conception<sup>53</sup>.

Considering the reality of beauty during the lecture given while renewing his Ph.D. thesis, Stróżewski did not have to mention Leśmian (he called the examples of Cyprian Norwid and Czesław Miłosz) to point to the delight as the main cause, also of this poetry. And you could, Stróżewski stated, delight only with beauty, real and existing. Stróżewski spoke about his elemental truth and the fact that existence is the object of "imagination". He said that since non-existent beauty is not a value, even more it will not be ugliness, and even much more – nothingness. Nothingness will not fill the poet

53 *Ibidem*, pp. 228-229.

with joy. What is more, nothingness – non-existence, nonentity – will remain merely an act of intent of subject<sup>54</sup>:

The opposite of existence is non-existence, nothingness. As Bergson argued, nothingness can not imagine or grasp. The access to it is irrational and leads – what Heidegger discovered – through the experience of fear, which unveils the nothingness. But, truthfully, we never experience it. [...] Nothingness reaches us as an event, not a state of affairs in which *ex definitione* does not exist<sup>55</sup>.

## 7.

I wrote recently:

His [Leśmian's] poems transfer the banal idea of the world into the area more interesting than the Young Polish aesthetics, but also other than proposed in the postmodern discourse. Nothingness or timelessness are not synonymous with emptiness, they do not deny existence and do not reveal the illusory character of reality. Being, meanings, and coincidences are augmented by mystery, but also sometimes so simple and concrete that they can find and form personal being<sup>56</sup>.

I quoted – in its entirety, as the whole poetry of good poets should be quoted – one of Leśmian's late, untitled works, [*Dark On the Stairs...*] (p. 526):

Dark on the stairs. Emptiness at home.  
No one will help.  
Your footprints have been snowed,  
Sorrow was lost in the snow.

You must now believe in snow  
And allow it snowed down you –  
And to shade this shadow  
And to silence this silence<sup>57</sup>.

Undoubtedly, the role of the private formulas cumulated in the first stanza is significant in this work (emptiness, will not help, he has set fire, he lost), strengthening the experience of loneliness, hopelessness or grief experienced, with more gentle expression, elegiac, from the distance, on the other shore ... Undoubtedly, the role of the modal word that begins the tautological sequence in the second stanza is important: you must. As a result of the finality of this single word the sequence of recommendations extends – not as in Mickiewicz's [*To devise love*]...? – on the whole poem, thus, the metaphysics of the work is significantly different than the inimitable-cognitive negative dominant in the sketch by Głowiński. The tautologies appear in the neighbourhood of

54 *Ibidem*, p. 237.

55 W. Stróżewski, *More about Beauty*, pp. 33-34.

56 M. Łukaszuk, *Experience and Hermeneutics. Works on Polish Contemporary Poetry*, Lublin-Warszawa 2015, pp. 161-164 (*Chapter Two, New Interpretations*).

57 Verse from the *Forest Dziejba* ([posth.] 1938).

negations, they do not annihilate, do not cancel, do not invalidate the meaning and the existence. They are not only built of words that are close to each other etymologically or formatively (snowy snow, shade shadows, silent silence), which unambiguously merges entity, and sense. They are also – consistently! – referring to “this here and now”, an inevitable being and meaning (snowing with this snow, shining with this shadow, silent with that silence). And yet: they participate in a poetic event whose mystery, miracles and validity is contained in the fulfillment of the modal word. In essence – *o n e m u s t*, is not a single phrase in Leśmian’s poem. The poet in the first line of the second verse wrote a full and powerful sentence that contains an important component of temporality: now. He wrote: You must now believe in this snow. It does not appear, therefore, that Sandauer’s point was right in claiming that there could be “anything” in Leśmian’s poetry that “Nothingness... gives absolute freedom of movement” that private expressions are a “gateway to freedom”<sup>58</sup>.

In Leśmian’s poetry, in the dense and mysterious words of the beautiful and terrible world, the poet-child-artist is the one who has special rights to delight, bewilderment, even ecstasy. Regardless of the adopted perspectives and methodology, and – sometimes – their revision assumptions, Leśmian’s poetry researchers could not ignore cognitive maximalism, in what kind of characters do they penetrate into the world, because only from the perspective it can be seen, by reflection or identification, through the door or window, can be seen “beyond” (*May Twilight*, p. 40):

I know that you now bend your temple  
In the window, open to the light, to the scent.

And you strain your sight, behind life’s end,  
Until the loss of breath and tears – <sup>59</sup>

At point, about such being – the subject or the hero – in Leśmian’s poetry, has been written by Czabanowska-Wróbel:

a kind of “delight”, “glazing” so close to “revelation” in this poem [*From the Childhood*], which is an attempt to recreate the childish choke with a sense of its own existence:

Touch the glass – with lips ... Travel – into nothing, in the glazing –  
And it is vigilant, out of bounds, with all its force! (p. 410)<sup>60</sup>.

One should also remember what the author points out that the above quoted study owed much to the research prospects proposed by Michał Głowiński. So, the conclu-

58 A. Sandauer, *op. cit.*, p. 516.

59 Verse from the cycle: *Involuntary Songs*, from the volume *Orchard Cross-Roads* (1912).

60 A. Czabanowska-Wróbel, *I Was a Child ... Elegies of Bolesław Leśmian’s Childhood*, “Teksty Drugie” 2003, no. 2-3, p. 254. V.: M. Głowiński, *Autobiographical Elegies of Leśmian*, [in:] idem, *The Beyond Presented*. Poem from the cycle *In the Clouds Reflection*, volume *Shadowy Drink* (1936).

sions from nearly forty years ago, were and still are important, but it should be remembered, they are not the only ones.

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**Czujne istnienie w doczesności. Raz jeszcze o dominancie w poezji Bolesława Leśmiana**

STRESZCZENIE: Artykuł dotyczy istotnego problemu w refleksji o twórczości B. Leśmiana. O jego poetyckiej ontologii pisali między innymi M. Głowiński, J. Trznadel, Z. Łapiński. Autorka porządkuje perspektywy badawcze. Proponując uważną lekturę utworów, za dominantę wyobraźni poetyckiej Leśmiana uznaje "ontologię pozytywną": mocny byt i uznanie realności świata.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Bolesław Leśmian – poezja – dwudziestolecie – ontologia – wyobraźnia poetycka – świat – istnienie – afirmacja

**Vigilant existence in the earthly life. Yet again about the predominant feature in Bolesław Leśmian's poetry**

SUMMARY: The given article concerns a significant problem in the reflection about the works of B. Leśmian. On his poetic ontology, i.a. M. Głowiński, J. Trznadel, Z. Łapiński, have written. The authoress arranges research perspectives. By suggesting careful reading of the works, she considers that the dominant character of the Leśmian's poetic imagination is positive "ontology": the strong being and the reality of the world.

KEYWORDS: Bolesław Leśmian – poetry – interwar period – ontology – poetic imagination – world – existence – affirmation