

Anna Węgrzyniak\*

## Tuwim: Years After

His 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary is a good time to ponder the presence of Julian Tuwim in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, or the lack thereof. Ten years after his debut with *Plea*, he was dubbed the “Prince of Poets”. Present at the top from the beginning of his career, he entertained Poles with his “tucked muse” by writing satire at the same time. It was a long time before appreciation for Tuwim as a stage songwriter came (especially since he enjoyed writing under a pseudonym), yet today his lyrics (such as those written for Hanka Ordonówna), which gained wide appreciation for half a century, appear occasionally on retro TV shows. In the mid-thirties, Tuwim became a children’s author; although that speciality was not valued at the time, and in the awareness of Polish people he is generally recognised as the author of children’s poems. Skipping political context, and the fact that Tuwim is always praised by some and attacked by others, I would like to draw attention to the fact that both before the war, as well as after – when his poetic spark faded – in Poles’ awareness Tuwim was a Poet, and occupied a due place in the canon. In the sixties, and in the decades that followed, his status dropped while the amount of works on the author increased. It is difficult to undermine a statement made by Stanisław Gawliński on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary<sup>1</sup>, and a later one made by Tomasz Cieślak, who had thoroughly researched various areas of Tuwim’s presence: publishing house offers, choices, anthologies, translations, and events surrounding the celebration of Tuwim’s Year in 1995, but also literary criticism and memoirs, which all suggested that present day interest lies not so much in the poetry, but more so in the person entangled in the web of politics. According to Cieślak, Tuwim’s love poems, cabaret lyrics, and children’s writings gain stable recognition, but disputes tend to focus on his life choices. Show business and publishers react to market demands, “The indicated selection of mass approved content constantly makes Tuwim out to be an inferior

---

\* Prof., e-mail: [anwe@poczta.fm](mailto:anwe@poczta.fm), Department of Polish Literature and Culture, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Bielsko-Biala, 43-300 Bielsko-Biala, 2 Willowa street.

<sup>1</sup> See. S. Gawliński, *Julian Tuwim – poeta przeciwieństw*, in: *Stulecie skamandrytów. Materiały z sesji naukowej na Uniwersytecie Jagiellońskim 8–9 grudnia 1994*, K. Biedrzycki (ed.), Universitas, Cracow 1996.

author, not one who takes part in creating the imagination of a nation.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, until 2007 no re-evaluation or reanimation of Tuwim’s achievements seemed to take place, although works that were important to researchers had appeared; these included *Unknown Works*, compiled by Tadeusz Januszewski and *Kabaretiana* by Tadeusz Stępień. Tadeusz Januszewski edited interviews with the author, as well as his memoirs, Andrzej Kempa presented Tuwim as a bibliophile and collector in *Thoughts on Books and Reading*. In spite of the above being published, no interest in the poet was awakened. Several works enriching our knowledge of Tuwim appeared<sup>3</sup>, but the critical reanimation of his work was not a success. Some scant trail of reference was found by Cieślak in the creative work of neolinguists from Warsaw, which cannot be acknowledged as significant.

When considering the contemporary reception of Tuwim’s poetry, it is difficult to ignore the nature of our times. Firstly, there is a general decline in interest when it comes to poetry. As someone who has been a Polish scholar for forty years, I have noticed a drastic drop in preference for poetry. Biographies, autobiographies, criminal and fantasy stories are being read today, while poetry appears to interest only literary scholars and poets. During the interwar period, Tuwim had unquestionable magnitude. He promoted, anointed and had numerous satellites. His effect on (lesser in significance) poets in exile can be pointed out, but afterwards Tuwim’s star dies. Even those poets who would begin with a phase of Tuwim-like works erase this fascination in later periods. One example is Anna Frajlich, whose debuting poetry style was strongly influenced by Tuwim’s<sup>4</sup>, but it is entirely forgotten in an interview recently published in “New Books”<sup>5</sup>. A search for Tuwim’s influence among well-known and acknowledged poets is a search in vain, however there are several works (more often those of the “old poets”) in which the echo of Tuwim’s works returns in the manner of Proust’s *Magdalenka*:

Listening to the rain fall  
I read poetry  
By Staff and Tuwim  
“I will become the first of Polish futurists

<sup>2</sup> T. Cieślak, *Julian Tuwim – zapomniany i przypomniany*, in: *Julian Tuwim. Biografia. Twórczość. Recepcja*, K. Ratajska, T. Cieślak (eds.), Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2007, p. 282.

<sup>3</sup> See K. Ratajska, *Kraj młodości szczęśliwy. Śladami Juliana Tuwima po Łodzi i Inowłodzu*, Wydawnictwo Literatura, Łódź 2001; R. Gorczyńska, *Jestem z Wilna i inne adresy*, Wydawnictwo Krakowskie, Cracow 2003.

<sup>4</sup> See A. Frajlich, *Aby wiatr namalować*, Oficyna Stanisław Gliwa, London 1976.

<sup>5</sup> See *Wiersze pisze się w języku matki*, an interview with Anną Frajlich by Paulina Małochleb, “Nowe Książki” 2013, issue 9. The poet admits that she respects W. Broniewski, B. Leśmian, M. Jasnorska-Pawlikowska, W. Szymborska, Z. Herbert and M. Białoszewski, recommends Cz. Miłosz, recalls T. Karpowicz, who analysed her poems in his last seminar, but she doesn’t mention Tuwim (even though they are both assimilated Jews and wrote poems in their “mother’s language”).

Which means not that I will be a simpleton  
 Who makes a game of poetry and with a blare  
 Imitates a mage..."

T. Różewicz, *Luxury (Luksus)*<sup>6</sup>

The quoted poem, dated April 2002 – July 2003, written in the season of rain's warm music, plays on emotions literally and metaphorically by recalling a time of pleasant memories. Różewicz certainly read Staff and Tuwim in his youth (The Różewicz brothers subscribed to "Literary News"), before he even began to build his own poetry in juxtaposition to the aesthetic canon of his first master – Julian Przyboś. He also became the literary grandson of the author of *Podwaliny*<sup>7</sup> when he undertook the task of writing "poetry after Auschwitz" (in Theodor Adorno's meaning). Różewicz cannot, of course, follow in Tuwim's footsteps of an emotional poet; leaving the avant-garde, he searched for new ways of "silence" and "lyric shame". He can only allow for the luxury (this key concept is pointed out in the title) of reading what he likes, conversations with old (dead) friends, and rest from the world's clamour, after turning eighty. He does not talk with Tuwim as often as he talks with Staff, but in the aforementioned poem (where summer, not autumn rain is falling) he quotes an excerpt from the fourth part of the Skamandrite's programmatic poems *Poetry*<sup>8</sup>. Let me note that in the first decade of the interwar period, Tuwim was seen as a proponent of a life which is free of social responsibilities, a eulogist of happiness through simplicity: spring and summer, love, vitalism, praise of the countryside – in essence – the things which bring happiness. In the Skamander group's foundation, which revolutionized Polish poetry after 1918, trivial mottoes were found: being natural, distanced from trends, not having to fight for anything, or to compete... A young Tuwim returns in Różewicz's poem, not so much the ecstatic who is "lurking for god", but more so the follower of a sensual "taste of life", a praiser of simple happiness. The issue of God, problematic both in the case of Tuwim and Różewicz, would require a separate study. *Lurking for God* and *Exit* are linked by a constant motif of Christ, a fear of death, and openly admitting to borrowing from the masters. In his manifesto, Tuwim proclaimed, "Of influence ashamed I am not"; accusing poetry of being a game of spent props, he promised to take it "out into the streets". Różewicz – a poet of a different time – while rejecting

<sup>6</sup> T. Różewicz, *Wyjście*, Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, Wrocław 2004, p. 54.

<sup>7</sup> He was friends with Staff and he liked his poems, which can be seen in his introduction to his collection – see L. Staff, "*Kto jest ten dziwny nieznajomy?*", choice and afterword by T. Różewicz, PIW, Warsaw 1964. See also Z. Majchrowski, *Dialog ze Staffem*, in: *Różewicz*, Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, Wrocław 2002, p. 117. We know that Różewicz read Tuwim. Recalling his meeting with Tuwim in 1948, he wrote "I'll never forget that silvery bird, which in memory flaps his wings" (as cited in Majchrowski – *ibidem*, p. 125).

<sup>8</sup> J. Tuwim, *Wiersze zebrane*, Czytelnik, Warsaw 1975, vol. I, p. 4. All Tuwim's poems are presented as cited in that edition.

old forms and props, did not write off tradition; he is in constant dialogue with Mickiewicz, Hölderline, Heine, Rilke... What does an eighty-year old, who repeatedly “killed” poetry, yet in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is again “Learning to Walk” miss<sup>9</sup>? He misses the idea of a life which can be appreciated. When the question, “Can one recall / the taste of life / the taste of wild celery liqueur” (*Luksus*) is asked, I interpret a discreet allusion to the programmatic sensuality of Tuwim’s character who knows how to appreciate the sun, grass, anything really. In 1916, the young resident of Lodz declares contempt for the wise men of the great world.

Beneath a tree I sat  
Peaceful and alone  
Oh, God! Oh, happiness of mine!  
How can I give thanks?

J. Tuwim, *Happiness*

In 2003 while listening to the rain, Tadeusz Różewicz (the subject is identified as the poet due to the poem’s autobiographical nature) shows compassion for all those forced to play out their public roles. He is allowed to listen to the “music” of nature, not unlike Staff and Tuwim; this therapeutic activity allows for an escape from the clamour of contemporaneity. The monologue ends in a culminating point which is as trite as it is Tuwim-like.

So little  
Needs a man  
To be happy

T. Różewicz, *Luxury*

This is a rare attitude for Różewicz; before he quotes Tuwim, the author makes sure to point out that he is giving in to idle pleasure. (“today / is my day off”), he is simply “listening to the rain fall” and is content. For a critic of the present day, someone who is constantly finding the diseases of his civilisation, this situation is atypical, exceptional and precisely luxurious – as stated in the title itself.

More of such dialogues with Tuwim could be found. Traces of poems from *Seventh Autumn* and *Polish Flowers* can be found in allusions and reminiscences by lesser known poets, which means that Tuwim is still present in the memories of Poles, especially in the sentimental writings of poets representing borderland ethnic groups. In a united Europe, due to fear of the consequences of globalisation,

<sup>9</sup> It’s an allusion to the programmatic poem *Learning to walk* from the book *Exit* (T. Różewicz, *op. cit.* p. 44), where Różewicz shows a new inspiration with the writings of a Lutheran priest Dietricha Bonhoeffera. See what P. Dakowicz, the reviewer of *Wyjścia* writes about it – *Tadeusz Różewicz uczy się chodzić*, “Topos” 2005, issue 1–2, pp. 159–163.

the value of local patriotism is rising, and it may be worthwhile researching the writing of local poets. In southern Poland's Podbeskidzie region, where authors tend to maintain old-fashioned poetic models, Tuwim's echo is heard even when a poem lacks direct references – in the manner of representation, vocabulary selection, and versification. I will bring up Juliusz Wątroba as an example. He was a lyricist, satirist, and the author of 33 books. In his writings, this “singer poet”, sometime sentimental, other times ecstatic, combines a pantheistic religiousness with a Franciscan approach. Like Tuwim in his youth, he searches for God outside of church walls, he loves the sun, the wind, and the language of the elements:

The wind shifts branches gently  
 In the wind, my nervousness went silent  
 It is the wind that stirs the quiet air  
 And tugs at lambs' fleece  
 For this wind is heaven's breath  
 My divine ascent to Earth  
 J. Wątroba, *Wind*<sup>10</sup>

As is the case in most Podbeskidzie poetry, Wątroba's poems are sensual, rhythmic, often rhymed, kept within colloquial language (everyday vocabulary, frequently addressing the reader). Could these verses not have been authored by Tuwim?:

Slip on to a poem's string  
 Loveliest of words  
 Choose from a forest of thoughts  
 Between lilacs and hawthorns  
 A hesitant child of the pen  
 guide her over the paper in such a way  
 That at the end of this path  
 With God she may meet  
 J. Wątroba, \*\*\* *Slip on to a string...*<sup>11</sup>

Split the sky with a bolt of thought  
 Pierce the dull earth  
 Chase away herds of cloud-rooks  
 So they caw blackly no longer  
 J. Wątroba, *The Plan*<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> J. Wątroba, *Kryształ*, Wydział Kultury i Sztuki Urzędu Miejskiego, Bielsko-Biała 2013, p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> Idem, *Zanim rzucicie kamienie*, [b.w.], Rudzica 1993, p. 52.

<sup>12</sup> Idem, *Błękity*, Wydział Kultury i Sztuki Urzędu Miejskiego, Bielsko-Biała 2012, p. 29.

I live in a way most beautiful  
 I write the best I know how  
 Even though I failed calligraphy  
 And fathom so little of all this  
                     J. Wątroba, *Journey*<sup>13</sup>

In some of his poems, the lyricist meets the satirist (a continuation of Tuwim's trend) because – as Wątroba's motto states – “it is better that one write with laughter than tears”. In his typical satirical pieces (he cooperated with “Szpilki” and the cabaret Długi) he seduces with the art of pun and allusion. He has much in common with the satirists of the interwar period; his audience “is to be a person educated at no lower than a secondary level, who will interpret the allusions and comic works correctly”<sup>14</sup>. There are no explicit references to the master Tuwim; this is because Wątroba is more of a continuer of expressive enunciation and plays on colloquial word. His diagnosis of Polish reality during the transformation is worth noting:

An electrician is president  
 A glaciologist deals with culture  
 A businessman receives a pension  
 The pensioner feeds on rats

[...]

The drunkard drives a car  
 The whore is named a saint  
 The virgin craves rape  
 In the arms of the prominent

And so, for their own ambition  
 And for the ruin of all which is common good  
 Everyone will blow this country to bits  
 My little friend

J. Wątroba, *All for Everyone*  
 (by Julian Tuwim – a contemporary version)<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, p. 43.

<sup>14</sup> Idem, *Z recenzji tomiku “Śmiech przez bzy”*, in: *Śmiech przez bzy*, Stowarzyszenie Twórcze Krakowski Klub Artystyczno-Literacki, Cracow 2000, p. 82.

<sup>15</sup> Idem, *(B)Łaźnia publiczna. Wiersze wybrane*, Górnośląskie Towarzystwo Literackie, Katowice 2001, p. 109.

It is not by coincidence that the 1991 poem makes a reference to Tuwim's soc-realist children's didactic poem which bears the same title: *All for everyone*<sup>16</sup>. I will not interpret the statement made in the poem, however I would like to point out the parody typical of Tuwim's pro-Sanation satire<sup>17</sup>. The dialogue is most audible at the culminating point, where Wątroba overshadows Tuwim's optimistic teaching, "and so everyone must work / my little friend", with the dark forecast of catastrophe: "Everyone will blow this country to bits / my little friend".

After the Second World War, no literary programme, no great poet (let's say, Miłosz, Herbert, Białoszewski, Różewicz, Grochowiak or any of the "New Wave" ("Nowa Fala") poets, makes references to Tuwim in their works. After "the thaw", Tadeusz Peiper, who was a writer for the twelve, became more prominent due to a shift in the nature of poetry and poets themselves. Tuwim wound up in textbooks and anthologies as an untrendy poet of the interwar period, closing off the period of emotional, melodious poetry to which there is no return.

Such a reception was created by the diagnoses of literary critics and historians (such as the works Michał Głowiński, Jadwiga Sawicka, or "the silesian school"<sup>18</sup>) which were largely dependent on method (and structuralism ruled at the time). To scholars and teachers of Polish language (this is confirmed by the content of textbooks), Tuwim's poetry was a lens that collected all the "isms" (impressionism, expressionism, futurism, and later classicism) in one place. Researchers studied his formal virtuosity, but also his "word philosophy" and imagination. The developmental paths of Tuwim's poetry were studied, as well as themes; research on his passions and eccentricities was done. His more important works were recited in various contexts, but he lost out to the metaphysical Leśmian, and the avant-garde Przyboś. The bibliography of works on Tuwim is immense, and it would be impossible to discuss it here. Although he has become conventional, and younger critics tend to skip him, new works on Tuwim continue to appear. In most cases, these are writings which mean to add to, or complete previous interpretations; but some of them place Tuwim's work in a new context. Stage interpretations in professional, university and school theatres are proof of *Ball at the Opera's* constant success. The resentment in older generations is not surprising, but the fact that young enthusiasts of Tuwim's writing still appear is worth noting; for example, in 2011 the Polish Scholars Club at the University of Warsaw organized a research conference about *Ball at the Opera*<sup>19</sup>. Leaving

<sup>16</sup> J. Tuwim, *Wiersze zebrane*, vol. II, p. 468.

<sup>17</sup> See A. Węgrzyniak, *Język komunikacji masowej w poezji Tuwima*, in: *Skamander. Studia z zagadnień poetyki i socjologii form poetyckich*, I. Opacki (ed.), Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 1978.

<sup>18</sup> The contributions of the literary experts are thoroughly analysed by T. Cieślak, *op. cit.*

<sup>19</sup> See "*Bal w operze*" – 75 lat poematu. *Teksty pokonferencyjne*, M. Stanik (ed.), Koło Naukowe Poetyki i Teorii Literatury, Wydział Polonistyki, Uniwersytet Warszawski, Stowarzyszenie

aside the events connected with the Tuwim Year established by the Sejm, I will have a look at some papers from the XXI century which, for some reason, play an important role in tuwimology.

Children's literature is at the forefront of contemporary readings of Tuwim's work, so I will begin with the author whose commonly known tale "Murzynek Bambo w Afryce mieszka..." ("Bambo the little Negro lives in Africa...")<sup>20</sup> (treated as research material) has become just a pretext for showing pseudo-erudition infected with the bug of neocolonialism. At one point we were all structuralists or hermeneuts, today young scholars march under the banner of deconstruction, feminism, neocolonialism. I understand that every period has its research "methods" but I reject interpretational abuse. And so in a serious scientific journal the author of "*Bambo the little black boy – black, happy...*" *An attempt at postcolonial interpretation of the text*, by using a rich theoretical background (postcolonial theory of Said, Freud, Lacan, Foucault...) tries to convince us that Tuwim's little poem is a product of colonial discourse: Bambo (similar to the offensive Polish "bambus") can't go to school with white and intelligent children because he is "black" and "happy" (or crazy). At the school of the white man a little black boy would be just an exotic, curious exhibit – just the way he is in the text<sup>21</sup>.

There is an outstanding work by Piotr Matywiecki entitled *Twarz Tuwima* (*Tuwim's Face*) – a multi-layered piece, recognised by critics, published in 2007 and awarded a Gdynia Literary Prize in 2008. Nobody had looked at Tuwim so comprehensively, with so much tenderness and understanding before. Even though the author of the monograph notices certain flaws, Tuwim's greatness is for him indisputable. While analysing his relationship with demonism and rubbish Matywiecki remarks that "Tuwim should be read just like the poets who became teachers for philosophers of the XX century. Like Holderlin, Rilke, Celan..."<sup>22</sup> That monograph/essay – both a scientific work and a personal book – was written by a poet and a literary critic. He is not only an expert on the life and work of Tuwim, but also the author of *Kamień graniczny*, a renowned and important book

---

"Nowa Humanistyka", Poznan 2013; the work is available in electronic format: <http://biblioteka.nowahumanistyka.pl/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Bal-w-Operze-75-lat-poematu.-Tekstypokonferencyjne.pdf> [accessed on: 30.10.2014].

<sup>20</sup> J. Tuwim, *Wiersze zebrane*, vol. II, p. 465.

<sup>21</sup> M. Moskalewicz, "Murzynek Bambo – czarny, wesoly...". *Próba postkolonialnej interpretacji tekstu*, "Teksty Drugie" 2005, issue 1–2, p. 268. Even though the author clearly states that he isn't interested in Tuwim, because he deals only with the text (to be understood as in *Criticism and Truth* by R. Barthes), to my mind that work is still, however, an interpretation of a text by Tuwim! He could use better examples. I've asked reviewers from different generations (from eighty-year-olds to children) and nobody believed that Bambo was inferior to us. Different, happier, because he can climb a tree (not a carpet hanger in the concrete jungle) and not at all less sapient. It seems that Mr Moskalewicz didn't attend the same school as we did.

<sup>22</sup> P. Matywiecki, *Twarz Tuwima*, W.A.B., Warsaw 2007, p. 712.



about the Holocaust published in 1995 and awarded a PEN-Club Prize. The author omits the most exploited themes (programmes, the greeting of “spring” and other Skamandrite texts) because he is intrigued with the eponymous “Twarz” (“Face”). That book wouldn’t have been created without a thorough analysis of the source material (letters, memoirs, words of critics, friends and acquaintances), without mini-dialogues (by Martin Buber and Emanuel Lévinas), without its author’s immense erudition and sensitivity. In the book, Matywiecki invokes psychology, philosophy, cosmology, theology, ethnology, politics, and the history of ideas, and by entangling Tuwim’s life and work in various contexts he subverts the “schoolish” stereotype of the writer – one of a shallow, unintellectual, light hearted “comedian”. Matywiecki writes, “Tuwim’s fate does not follow any pattern because Tuwim chooses a vicarious life: either he “flees” existence, or becomes an embodiment of personal stereotypes – of a Jew, a pariah, a petit bourgeois, a poet, a Pole. Because Tuwim’s biography is shaped by two powers: the great fate and miserable fate (which lacks any contents of life), Matywiecki does not attempt to put on it any meaningful whole (that would follow a pattern). Instead, he chooses granularity and discreteness.

I thought about the questions described in the chapter *Między wielkim losem a losem marnym*<sup>23</sup> (*Between the great fate and miserable fate*) while reading *Ostatnie rozdanie* (*The Final Deal*) by Myśliwski. To the constantly asked question of “what is fate?” there is no good answer. What is the fate of a Jew, the fate of a different one, the fate of a man with a difficult identity? Piotr Matywiecki suggests that Tuwim escapes the trauma of jewishness deepened by a family tragedy (an absurd feeling of guilt towards his mother, who took the burden of the alleged wrongdoing of her son acting against the Polish nation and the Polish state) by going to a bar and the theatre. His intense social life (banal, trivial and shallow) is an escape from that which hurts, an escape from “depth”. The author clearly shows a constant mental swing (euphoria and depression) and physical, or rather, psychophysical conditions. Tuwim, an ecstatic and a melancholic (the vitalist-mortalist was once perfectly presented by Artur Sandauer<sup>24</sup>), is most genuine in motionlessness, in coming to a standstill, in the “turning of time”<sup>25</sup> characteristic of him since – as the author of the monograph argues – youth and old age have a deep theological and philosophical meaning for him. By confronting the existential experiences of Tuwim (from childhood traumas till his death) with his roles and masks, Matywiecki is able to make out a “phantom and shady face” (the way Leśmian understood it), one being the “inner” side of the adopted mask. A dark, tragic face stigmatised with anachronism, jewishness and lack; a face carefully

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, p. 106 and further.

<sup>24</sup> A. Sandauer, *O człowieku, który był diabłem*, in: *Pisma zebrane*, vol. 1: *Studia o literaturze współczesnej*, Czytelnik, Warsaw 1985, p. 100 and further.

<sup>25</sup> P. Matywiecki, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

hidden from the world and from himself. In looking for the face, the writer finds a philosopher, a peculiarly religious metaphysical poet. He claims that “Tuwim’s personal nakedness is genetic, eschatological and has a historiosophical, cultural dimension”<sup>26</sup>. By collecting the opinions of his critics, his loved ones and friends Matywiecki thoroughly documents the way different gestures and roles of the poet were received (especially after the Moscow period). Without judging, he assembles those pieces in such a way that the reader – providing they are not biased and can empathise – can see with their own eyes that Tuwim’s authentic and tragic fascination with communism is a consequence of the roles he assumed earlier.

It is not a coincidence that the discussed book was published in the first decade of our century – it was a time when a lively debate on identity was held. Before our human science was dominated by the issue of European multiculturalism, questions of identity were not analysed that often or that capably. Nowadays, when we are building a civil society, this matter engages a host of sociologists, psychologists, philosophers, culture experts and philologists. The recurrent themes are: inculturation and the contribution of national/religious minorities to Polish culture. Tuwim accepted three cultures: Polish, Jewish and Russian (he declared himself as a “gogolist”). It could be shown, then, where and how they meet in his work, where and how they complement each other – because it is in the Polonisation of what is Jewish and Russian that I can see an important contribution that Tuwim made to our culture. Lechoń is Sarmatian from beginning to end, but Tuwim avoids mythologised Polishness and by choosing a Polish Fatherland he creates his own origin myth. In this context *Twarz Tuwima* is a topical book, one not only about Tuwim, but also about the lack of tolerance and the problems of a man who is brave enough to be a pacifist (reaction to the poem *Do prostego człowieka* (*To the simple man*); a man brave enough to live in his Polish Fatherland and to feel a painful relationship with the Jews even in 1944, a man maintaining his attachment to Polishness: “I am a Pole because I like it that way”<sup>27</sup>.

This book presents a new and important ability to recognize a man of the Bible in the poet. Matywiecki reads Tuwim deeply and metaphysically, but he diminishes his “flirt” with the “tucked up Muse”. I, however, appreciate most the Jewish jokes (*szmonces*) and the atmosphere of the cabaret (it was created by Polonised Jews) since for serious Poles it was a good lesson in humour, distance, playing with words. Mariusz Szczygieł, a czechophile, drew my attention to the stereotypical, incomprehensible perception of the Czech. We “Poles, golden birds”<sup>28</sup> in our ethical code – like on banners – “God, Honour, Fatherland” and the

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, p. 96.

<sup>27</sup> That’s a quote from the manifesto *We, Polish Jews*, published in London-based “Nowa Polska” (1944, issue 8). See M. Urbanek, *Tuwim. Wylękniony bluźnierca*, Wydawnictwo Iskry, Warsaw 2013, p. 203.

<sup>28</sup> Because of the context I base that old saying on the counting-out rhyme “Raz, dwa, trzy,

Czech – from Biala Gora – despising bravado conformists, they don't mind the Karel Gott museum, they don't need God, etc. Szczygieł helps us understand that differentness by recalling anecdotes, historical facts, and situations facilitating the assumption of that special attitude. Matywiecki does something similar and he too helps us understand Tuwim. The critic writes about those few years when Tuwim served the communist propaganda apparatus with empathy, excusing his behaviour with the poet's ecstatic disposition.

After the Second World War, the “scandalous” Tuwim's poems (*Wiosna, Do generalów, Do prostego człowieka*) did not stir any emotions, today – when pacifism is fashionable – they can even be likeable. The brilliant *Ball at the opera* – Tuwim used here the techniques used in satiric and cabaret texts – is a poem that won't be forgotten any time soon<sup>29</sup>. A good marker of how present *Ball...* is even among the young, is the aforementioned conference of the Polish Scholars Club at the University of Warsaw and a student play based on it. Moreover it is easy to see (especially if one explores the Internet) that punk musicians have uncovered Tuwim as an anarchist and alter-globalist; who knows, maybe he will be read in that direction?

What I'm trying to show is that Matywiecki's book is a book of our time. The empathetically told story of an assimilated Jew – who fell in love with the Polish language (who appreciated all languages except for Yiddish) who always and everywhere was alien, suffering from emptiness. A story that talks about things universal (like uprooting or anti-Semitism). A book that appeared at a time when the question of anti-Semitism and the contribution that Jews made to European culture is investigated by specially created institutions (The Marek Edelman Dialogue Center, Jewish Historical Institute, POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews). I'd like to note here the social debate stirred up by the books of Jan Gross, the film *Pokłosie* and numerous research projects devoted to Polish-Jewish interactions in the interwar period.

Knut Andreas Grimstad has recently published interesting research focused on Tuwim's work. He wanted to “investigate the popular culture and the Polish-Jewish relationship in Poland in the years 1918–1939”<sup>30</sup>. His conclusions regarding acculturation incidentally overlap with those of Matywiecki, who – as we know – was not very much interested in cabaret. *Twarz Tuwima* can be read in the presented “ethnocultural” context as a work about the tragic alienation of a Polish Jew, who wanted to belong to both nations.

---

wszystkie Żydy psy, a Polacy złote ptacy, a wychodzisz ty” (“One, two, three, all Jews are dogs, and Poles golden birds, and you must go”) – W. Gombrowicz, *Pamiętnik Stefana Czarnieckiego*, in: *Dziela*, scientific editor J. Błoński, vol. I: *Bakakaj*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Cracow 1986, p. 20.

<sup>29</sup> See what M. Urbanek writes about the staging of *Ball...* and other plays (e.g. *Tuwim dla dorosłych* from 2011), *op. cit.*, p. 297.

<sup>30</sup> K.A. Grimstad, *Polsko-żydowskie gry kabaretowe, czyli Juliana Tuwima próba akulturacji*, translated by M. and M. Lachman, “Teksty Drugie” 2009, issue 3, p. 47–62.

I started with the book that, in my opinion, is the most important for literary scholars, but I hope that it will be interesting not only for experts<sup>31</sup>. Maybe, knowing how popular biographies are, I should have started with biographical works: the books by Krystyna Ratajska *Kraj młodości Szczęśliwy*, published in 2002 and *Tuwim. Wylękniony bluźnierca* by Mariusz Urbanek, published in 2013.

Krystyna Ratajska, using her predecessors' works and new sources alike, follows Tuwim's footsteps in Lodz and Inowłódz, presenting photocopies of letters, photographs of streets and people, in a way, allows the reader to touch the physical remnants of the poet's presence. Her reconstruction of his childhood, or the "mythical land of happiness"<sup>32</sup> is a thing that should begin every serious meeting with Tuwim. The knowledge of the context facilitates the reading of *Kwiaty polskie*, familiarizes the reader with the atmosphere of the family home and the multilingual "podwyrko" (backyard) which was at the time a hub for social life, a place where Germans, Poles, Jews and Russians met. It is in childhood that Julek's interest in languages is born, just like his attitude to different cultures and social sensitivity (from his uncle's balcony he watches the June insurrection). In a summers resort in Inowłódz the future collector of curiosities takes his first ethnographic notes and collects his first amazing objects from the fair.

Without such memories he wouldn't be able to describe the common stories of common people, whose everyday hustle and problems caught so much of his attention, not only in *Kwiaty polskie*. This thorough biography, covering the poet's life in Lodz, is supplemented with a chapter *Powroty* (Returns) (about how the poet helps a school in Inowłódz) and a short anthology of his poems, pointing to his relationship with his childhood and youth. When I finished the book I felt I wanted more. There was something missing – the stories about Warsaw, emigration, his return.

That need was met by Mariusz Urbanek. The book has very good reviews and is commented on and read not only by the generation raised on Tuwim. Not everybody knows today how much space in our student books was taken by Tuwim, how eager we were to quote him during our school commemorative meetings or in recitation contests. When my generation went to school, the whole class memorised fragments of *Pan Tadeusz* and *Kwiaty polskie*, Ewa Demarczyk sang *Grande Valse Brillant*, people sang with Niemen "Mimozami zwiędłość przypomina...". In the sixties and the seventies Tuwim was everywhere. The media popularised his stage texts (lyrics for Ordonka or sketches cited in cabarets broadcast on TV), Tuwim's poems were sung by our favourites: Niemen, Demarczyk, Grechuta... We lived differently from the young people of the XXI century, there

<sup>31</sup> That conviction could be confirmed by a national poll on book borrowing, which I haven't made. I know that in Katowice and Bielsko-Biala *Tuwim's Face* sells well (not as well as both editions of Urbanek's book) and is borrowed (less often than Urbanek's text).

<sup>32</sup> The term by K. Ratajska, *op. cit.*

was no Internet, we didn't have passports, so songs and the cabaret were very important to us. Musical poems by Tuwim are excellent for singing – they stay in your memory for ever. It is here – in sung poetry – that I see the strongest, most important influence. My generation still remembers Tuwim's text interpreted by the brilliant Ewa Demarczyk, who sings about a "frightened blasphemer", but today's thirty-somethings have never heard it.

For that reason I'd like to congratulate Mariusz Urbanek on the title: *Tuwim – the frightened blasphemer*. This biography is like a novel, it has its own plot and is very well written. Experts on Tuwim won't be surprised by it (after Ratajska and Matywiecki), but – as librarians say – this is the work that is borrowed most. The readers are attracted by the gift of storytelling, the ability to synthesise and the ease with which the author moves around the collected material. Urbanek had already shown his knowledge about the interwar period and the time after the war in his biographical novels about Broniewski, Wieniawa, Tyrmand and Kisiel.

In *Tuwim...* his knowledge of memoirs, journals, letters and materials from the archives of SPP or IPN bears fruit. He cites all those sources in an extensive bibliography and – what's important for the reader – he doesn't scare them with footnotes. The author sticks to the facts, though we can find there some anecdotes. He tells his story in an interesting, captivating, charming way. He begins with a story, a wonderful key to Tuwim's biography and poetry – as early as in the second sentence we come across the famous poet's *rodnik* (birthgiver, an idea for a poem) "Due to economic reasons I suggest turning off the perpetual light, which might shine upon me"<sup>33</sup>. In that anecdote there is everything: death, a bar, a suit, a joke, a paradox, irony and an immodest feeling of his own greatness. Urbanek shows Tuwim with a historical background, doesn't judge him, doesn't criticise, he tries to be objective. However the very style of his narrative and subtle commentary make the reader like and understand its protagonist. Unless they are an ardent nationalist, of course.

As we know, Tuwim's biography has always been used for anti-Semitic attacks and political divisions. Today the "true Poles" still don't like Tuwim – the nationalist press continues to "bite", but there were no scandals (Tuwim Year passed without mishaps). There are some difficult questions (don't teachers of Polish mind the American and Stalinist episodes in Tuwim's life?) and political divisions strengthen the dark legend: Moscow's minion, a traitor, a self-interested kike. On the other hand, it is worth quoting Marcin Wolski, who in a right-wing magazine "Gazeta Polska", in "free speech zone", writes when reviewing Marcin Urbanek's work:

PRL doesn't turn out to be a world of left-wing dreams, the poet is put under a number of pressures and forced into artistic prostitution. [...] He passed on in the year when Stalin kicked the bucket, but the Thaw hadn't started yet. He left a number of beautiful poems [...] and endless songs, sketches and bon mots, one

---

<sup>33</sup> M. Urbanek, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

of the most interesting being: “Live in such a way, that your friends will get bored when you die”.

It is no wonder that when after the Smoleńsk tragedy I was looking for a means to express the emotions I felt, I based the poem *Na śmierć Prezydenta Kaczyńskiego* (*On the death of President Kaczyński*) on the one that Tuwim used to react to the assassination of President Narutowicz.<sup>34</sup>

I value highly *The frightened blasphemer* by Urbanek, a book addressed to anybody who likes biographies (not only literary scholars). Especially today, when in the common reception Tuwim – a man entangled in social roles – is more important than his literary work; Tuwim – a Polish poet of Jewish descent; Tuwim – a man absent yet still present as an author of books for children. His work raised several generations and I see no signs of the decline of his success. His *Lokomotywa* hits record popularity. I have gone through the programme of events in libraries (pedagogical, voivodship and county), in schools, community centres (it’s a topic for another text) and I conclude that most of them are addressed to children. In Radio Katowice (Sunday, 17 or 24 November, 2013) I listened to coverage of the conference in Silesia Library entitled Julian Tuwim’s work at school and at a library, which took place on 14 November (among its participants there were mainly pedagogues and psychologists). The proceedings revolved around the question: was Gabrys stupid? By bringing up the problem of “stupidity”, they pondered the idea of what is stupid. The result of that debate was the defence of the children’s tendency to put their heads in the clouds, since fantasy (an unquestionable virtue) helps in life. It is good then – said the participants – if there is still some child in an adult. A child that one could and should learn genuineness from. Agnieszka Frączek, an author of children’s books<sup>35</sup>, talked about the passions of Julek, who made trouble, horsed around, but did everything with commitment (a chemist, an alchemist, a wizard) and that “crazy” child paid off in the mature poet. Among the events addressed to children (not only in the Tuwim Year) I consider the most important those that develop imagination. These are the exercises like: choose a piece or a motif and write your own poem, or draw it, or paint, or make a comic, a movie, a pantomime...<sup>36</sup>

We shouldn’t forget about Tuwim-inspired music. As an example I can give the radio broadcast on Czwórka (Polish Radio Channel Four): *Chmura Tuwima*

<sup>34</sup> M. Wolski, *Człowiek z myszką*, “Gazeta Polska” from 6.11.2013, p. 29.

<sup>35</sup> See A. Frączek, *Rany Julek! O tym, jak Julian Tuwim został poetą*, Wydawnictwo Literatura, Łódź 2013.

<sup>36</sup> I found many such “games” on the Internet under the entry Tuwim’s Year. Dom Literatury w Łodzi published in the form of a book an anthology of works submitted to a short comic book competition inspired by the life and work of the author of *Rhymes Fair* (“Julian Tuwim”. *Antologia konkursowa*, M. Bałczewski, M. Lachman (eds.), Dom Literatury w Łodzi, Łódź 2013).

(*Tuwim's cloud*) from 18 October 2013 (which is an aether cloud filled with Tuwim) and a concert of electronic music *e-Tuwim* in the Museum of the History of Polish Jews from 8 December 2013. Apart from numerous traditional forms (concerts, exhibitions, contests, theatre plays) there also appeared new audio-visual forms. We should mention here the musical-graphical project from Lodz – *LodzKoMoTywa*, which blended various forms of expression (with 3D mapping beamed onto a building). This event was accompanied by a specially composed piece (in minimalist style), which was read by dozens of inhabitants of Lodz, representing diverse social backgrounds and professions. The intention of the creators of *LodzKoMoTywa* (a loco-motif from Lodz), being an allegory of the processes taking place in a multicultural and “multi-layered” community, symbolises cooperation – each of the machine’s cogs (estates, city districts) is an important element of the whole. That ingenious project, in its conception a very Tuwimish one, not only builds a bridge between the interwar period and the XXI century, but also integrates the community of Lodz around the multifunctional motif of a loco-motif. The audio/video recording is to be used for a collage and further musical work so we can assume that *LodzKoMoTywa* may appear outside of Lodz to motivate Poles to undertake various forms of artistic integration; forms motivated by Tuwim’s poem.

In the multimedia culture of the XXI century, in an era when the artist is a “mercenary”, and their works are a product on the market of other products, we need to remember that Tuwim searched for his place “between” that which is high, for the elite and that which is low, popular... Aware of the fact that such work presupposes a dangerous affair with mass culture, he still felt his own greatness; a feeling ironically diminished by his attitude towards postmortem glory:

And how sad sounds “Dum Capitolium....”

And how funny is “Non omnis moriar”.

J. Tuwim, *Do losu*<sup>37</sup>

Doesn't it sound very up-to-date?

## Bibliography

“Bal w operze” – 75 lat poematu. *Teksty pokonferencyjne*, red. M. Stanik, Koło Naukowe Poetyki i Teorii Literatury, Wydział Polonistyki, Uniwersytet Warszawski, Stowarzyszenie “Nowa Humanistyka”, Poznań 2013; on-line: <http://biblioteka.nowahumanistyka.pl/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Bal-w-Operze-75-lat-poematu.-Teksty-pokonferencyjne.pdf> [accessed on: 30.10.2014].

Frajlich Anna, *Aby wiatr namalować*, Oficyna Stanisław Gliwa, London 1976.

<sup>37</sup> J. Tuwim, *Wiersze zebrane*, vol. II, p. 164.

- Frajlich Anna (interview), *Wiersze pisze się w języku matki*, by P. Małochleb, "Nowe Książki" 2013, issue 9.
- Frączek Agnieszka, *Rany Julek! O tym, jak Julian Tuwim został poetą*, Wydawnictwo Literatura, Łódź 2013.
- Gawliński Stanisław, *Julian Tuwim – poeta przeciwieństw*, in: *Stulecie skamandrytów. Materiały z sesji naukowej na Uniwersytecie Jagiellońskim 8–9 grudnia 1994*, K. Biedrzycki (ed.), Universitas, Cracow 1996.
- Gorczyńska Renata, *Jestem z Wilna i inne adresy*, Wydawnictwo Krakowskie, Cracow 2003.
- Grimstad Knut Andreas, *Polsko-żydowskie gry kabaretowe, czyli Juliana Tuwima próba akulturacji*, translated by M. i M. Lachman, "Teksty Drugie" 2009, nr 3, pp. 47–62.
- "Julian Tuwim". *Antologia konkursowa*, M. Bałczewski, M. Lachman (eds.), Dom Literatury w Łodzi, Łódź 2013.
- Julian Tuwim. Biografia. Twórczość. Recepcja*, K. Ratajska, T. Cieślak (eds.), Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2007.
- Majchrowski Zbigniew, *Różewicz*, Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, Wrocław 2002.
- Matywiecki Piotr, *Twarz Tuwima*, W.A.B., Warsaw 2007.
- Moskalewicz Marcin, "Murzynek Bambo – czarny, wesoly...". *Próba postkolonialnej interpretacji tekstu*, "Teksty Drugie" 2005, nr 1–2, pp. 259–270.
- Różewicz Tadeusz, *Wyjście*, Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, Wrocław 2004.
- Ratajska Krystyna, *Kraj młodości szczęśliwy. Śladami Juliana Tuwima po Łodzi i Inowłodzu*, Wydawnictwo Literatura, Łódź 2001.
- Sandauer Artur, *O człowieku, który był diabłem*, in: *Pisma zebrane*, vol. 1: *Studia o literaturze współczesnej*, Czytelnik, Warsaw 1985.
- Skamander. Studia z zagadnień poetyki i socjologii form poetyckich*, I. Opacki (ed.), Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 1978.
- Staff Leopold, "Kto jest ten dziwny niezajomy?", T. Różewicz (ed.), PIW, Warsaw 1964.
- Stulecie skamandrytów. Materiały z sesji naukowej na Uniwersytecie Jagiellońskim 8–9 grudnia 1994*, K. Biedrzycki (ed.), Universitas, Cracow 1996.
- Tuwim Julian, *Wiersze zebrane*, vol. 1–2, Czytelnik, Warsaw 1975.
- Urbanek Mariusz, *Tuwim. Wylękniony bluźnierca*, Wydawnictwo Iskry, Warsaw 2013.
- Wątroba Juliusz, *(B)Łażnia publiczna. Wiersze wybrane*, Górnośląskie Towarzystwo Literackie, Katowice 2001.
- Wątroba Juliusz, *Błękity*, Wydział Kultury i Sztuki Urzędu Miejskiego, Bielsko-Biała 2012.
- Wątroba Juliusz, *Kryształ*, Wydział Kultury i Sztuki Urzędu Miejskiego, Bielsko-Biała 2013.
- Wątroba Juliusz, *Śmiech przez bzy*, Stowarzyszenie Twórcze Krakowski Klub Artystyczno-Literacki, Cracow 2000.
- Wątroba Juliusz, *Zanim rzucicie kamienie*, [b.w.], Rudzica 1993.
- Węgrzyniak Anna, *Język komunikacji masowej w poezji Tuwima*, in: *Skamander. Studia z zagadnień poetyki i socjologii form poetyckich*, I. Opacki (ed.), Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 1978.
- Wolski Marcin, *Człowiek z myszką*, "Gazeta Polska" issue 6.11.2013.



Anna Węgrzyniak

**Tuwim: Years After**

(Summary)

The subject of the article is to present an outline of the reception of Julian Tuwim's works in the last decade. "The Prince of Poets" of the interwar period, well known in the post-war era, is less and less known today. Post-war generations of poets made no particular references to Tuwim and his poetry, and even though many critical works are being published about him, Tuwim's works do not engage critics who would be able to reconnect his writing with the contemporary world. Tuwim is disappearing from school literary curricula, contemporary readers remember only his children's poems and one can doubt whether this situation can be changed by an extensive, multifaceted work by Piotr Matywiecki *Twarz Tuwima (Tuwim's face)*, the comprehensive and readable biography of the poet. It is an important book which tackles a number of vital questions concerning for instance the tragic alienation of the Polish Jew who lived between two cultures and wanted to be excluded from neither.

Keywords: Julian Tuwim – contemporary reception