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Miłosz's *ABC* as a postmodern work

ABC Miłosza jako dzieło postmodernistyczne

Keywords: concept of memory, irony, intertextuality, encyclopaedia, existential challenge, poetics
Słowa kluczowe: koncepcja pamięci, ironia, intertekstualność, encyklopedia, wyzwanie egzystencjalne, poetyka

Abstract

This study aims to identify postmodern features in the composition and poetics of Czesław Miłosz's *ABC*, understood as a form of literary thinking that integrates intellectual reflection with a fragmentary mode of writing. The research is based on a detailed analysis of the text's structure, stylistic organisation, and ideological content, with particular attention to intertextual references,

ironic strategies, and elements of cultural memory. The findings demonstrate that the postmodern character of the work extends beyond formal devices, permeating its thematic and conceptual dimensions, where issues of identity, historical memory, the ethics of language, and the limits of interpretation come to the fore. Irony functions not merely as a rhetorical technique, but as a mode of critical distance and epistemic uncertainty within conditions of ethical instability. The study further establishes that Miłosz's late poetics exemplifies a distinct variant of Central European postmodernism, grounded in ethical reflection, the logic of testimony, and the notion of an open cultural map that encompasses both personal experience and collective memory. These results may serve as a foundation for further research on postmodern poetics in European literature, as well as for their application in courses on literary theory, cultural studies, and textual interpretation.

Introduction

The work of Czesław Miłosz, the renowned Polish poet, essayist, and Nobel laureate, has attracted significant attention from researchers seeking to comprehend the depth and multifaceted nature of his literary legacy (The Nobel Prize 2025). His works are characterised by a complex interweaving of cultural, historical, and philosophical motifs, reflecting the complexities of twentieth-century Europe. One of the key aspects of Miłosz's work is the dialogue of cultures, which has been the subject of analysis by numerous scholars. In particular, Khmialnitski (2020) explores how Miłosz depicts multiculturalism and borderlands in his works, emphasising the influence of interwar Vilnius and the romantic tradition of Adam Mickiewicz on the formation of his poetics. The author focuses on how cultural and political events are reflected in Miłosz's legacy, especially during his emigration and return to his homeland. The problematic of reality and memory in Miłosz's works of the 1980s and 1990s is examined by Keba (2020), who analyses how the poet conceptualises the past and its influence on the present, considering questions of identity and historical consciousness. This work highlights how Miłosz uses literary devices to reconstruct and reinterpret collective and individual memory. The philosophical and theological aspects of Miłosz's poetry are examined in detail by Rzepa (2021), who explores how Miłosz interacts with the modernist crisis in Christian theology, comparing his approaches with authors such as Rilke and Eliot. This study demonstrates how the poet combines theological and poetic elements in his work, creating a unique synthesis of religious and literary motifs.

The linguistic dimension of Miłosz's work also attracts scholarly attention. Zych (2023) analyses his activity as a language teacher, highlighting the poet's contribution to the popularisation of Polish culture among foreigners. The author shows how Miłosz uses language as a tool for intercultural communication and learning, contributing to the dissemination of Polish literature abroad. The theme

of dialogue between Polish and American poets is examined by Florczyk (2019), who explores the mutual influence and exchange of ideas between poets of both cultures, highlighting Miłosz's role as a bridge between East and West. The author analyses how these intercultural contacts enrich literary traditions and promote mutual understanding between nations.

Jissov (2021) explores the concept of "captive mind" in the context of Eastern Europe, as presented by Miłosz in *The Captive Mind*. The author considers how the poet used the notions of colonialism and imperialism to describe the mental and political state of the region, emphasising the complexity of identity and subjectivity in post-totalitarian society. Finally, Kazmierczyk (2021) investigates the "cinematicity" of Miłosz's poetic language, analysing how cinematic techniques and visual imagery influenced the perception of his poetry. This research opens new perspectives in understanding Miłosz's poetics and his ability to combine different artistic forms in his works. Despite the significant number of studies devoted to the work of Miłosz, a number of aspects remain that require further investigation. Previously, these themes were mainly considered fragmentarily or in the context of individual works, but not within a comprehensive analysis of the poetics of *ABC* (*Abecadło*) as a genre and philosophically hybrid phenomenon embodying postmodern features of thought, structure, and style.

Postmodernism may be defined as a heterogeneous intellectual and cultural paradigm that emerged in the mid-to-late twentieth century as a critical response to the epistemological certainties of modernism, characterised by scepticism toward universal truths, the rejection of "grand narratives", and the privileging of plurality, fragmentation, and interpretive openness (Geiko et al. 2023; Stadnik 2024). Foundationally theorised by Lyotard (1984), who described it as "incredulity toward metanarratives", postmodernism challenges the legitimacy of overarching explanatory systems in favour of local, contingent forms of knowledge. Similarly, Jameson (1991) interprets postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism, marked by pastiche, depthlessness, and the erosion of historical continuity, while Hutcheon (1988) emphasises its self-reflexivity, irony, and intertextuality as key aesthetic strategies. Within literary studies, postmodernism manifests through non-linear structures, hybrid genres, and the destabilisation of authorial authority, producing texts that function as open systems of meaning rather than closed, hierarchical narratives. As also reflected in the analysed work, postmodernism involves the blurring of genre boundaries, the use of irony as critical distance, and the construction of polyphonic, fragmentary textual spaces in which identity, memory, and history are understood as dynamic and interpretively constructed rather than fixed or objective.

It becomes necessary to examine *ABC* not only as a late autobiographical project but also as a postmodern work that embodies the fundamental ideas of European postmodernism in terms of composition, style, and philosophy. This makes it possible to re-evaluate both Miłosz's own writing and the Central European model of postmodern literature, which is very different from the Western version of this movement in terms of its humanistic foundation, ethical tension, and reflection on historical traumas. The topic's relevance also stems from the fact that reading Miłosz's postmodern literature allows one to see how art can both reflect and critically rethink reality in an era of growing relativism threats, historical memory loss, and ethical instability.

The aim of this research was to interpret Miłosz's *ABC* as a postmodern literary work in which a complex reflection on identity, memory, language, and history is realised through a poetic and fragmented structure. In accordance with the stated aim, the research objectives were to analyse the genre structure of *ABC* and its hybrid nature, identify the key postmodern motifs in the text and trace their influence on the perception of the text, and explore the philosophical and cultural aspects of the work in the context of postmodern thought.

Literature review

Research into the work of Miłosz encompasses a wide range of aspects, from the analysis of his poetics to the consideration of philosophical and religious motifs. Stråth and Witoszek (2023) examine the postmodern challenge in the context of East and West European perspectives, allowing for a better understanding of the cultural context in which Miłosz's work took shape. The authors emphasise that postmodernism requires a re-evaluation of traditional narratives and canons, which directly concerned Polish literature of the second half of the twentieth century. The concepts of canon and literary heritage, traditionally associated with Polish literary identity, were rethought in the work of Rawski (2023), who analysed the debates surrounding the Polish literary canon of the second half of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The author showed that Miłosz's position was simultaneously central and marginal: on the one hand, recognition of his figure as a symbol of intellectual resistance to totalitarianism, and on the other, a distancing from national pathos, which created an ambivalent reception.

Scott (2023) described Miłosz as an "ecstatic pessimist" – a poet who could combine the experience of catastrophes with a profound hope for meaning. At the centre of the analysis is the paradoxical dynamic between tragedy and faith, be-

tween apocalypse and the yearning for spiritual salvation. In Miłosz's poetic texts, a particular rhythm of time is discernible – his "eternal moment", which becomes the material for poetic reflection on reality. Fiut (2023) emphasised the meditative nature of Miłosz's poetry, where every detail is an entry into the metaphysical dimension. In his interpretation, the poet is one who does not oppose the corporeal to the spiritual but seeks a form of harmony between them.

A perspective on Miłosz through the prism of law and philosophy was presented by Snarski (2023), who explored how poetic language can become an instrument of moral critique of the legal system. In his interpretation, Miłosz was not only an artist but a "jurist in poetry" who addressed concepts of justice, guilt, and responsibility. This approach opened a new dimension for the analysis of Miłosz's poetics in the context of the ethical dimension of testimony, which was particularly relevant in the sections of *ABC* related to nationalism and the politics of memory. The theme of the sensory dimension of the Christian imagination in Miłosz's poetics was the subject of in-depth research by Banowska (2024), who treated the poet's imagery as a "sixth sense" – the ability to see the metaphysical through the material. The author emphasised that religiosity in Miłosz was not orthodox or dogmatic – it arose at the intersection of sensory experience and the need for hope. This is entirely consistent with the tonality of *ABC*, where the concepts of faith, loss, guilt, and hope exist in a tense balance.

Particular attention to the role of memory in the context of the Holocaust was paid by Bernacki and Hutchens (2023), who, based on archival documents, showed Miłosz as a poet-witness. Their approach is based on the conviction that the poet's language does not describe the event but creates the possibility of its reinterpretation – not as a historical fact but as an ethical presence. The thesis about the inadequacy of poetry as a form of memory, expressed by Filipowicz (2023), contrasts with more traditional views. She noted that the introduction to some of Miłosz's poetic texts contains an awareness of the limitations of language and its inability to adequately convey tragedy.

In this context, it is important to outline the key concepts that become defining in the research. First and foremost is the concept of memory, which in Miłosz's works appears not as an archive or accumulation of the past but as a living structure through which identity is formed. Understanding it as a retrospective construction makes it possible to interpret the author's poetry as a dynamic game with memories, images, and myths. The second concept is irony, which in Miłosz's texts performs the function of distancing, doubt, and an anti-metaphysical gesture – a means of avoiding didacticism and fostering interpretive openness. Finally, the concepts of intertextuality and cultural collage, which are crucial for

the analysis of *ABC* as a postmodern work. These concepts describe the way in which the author integrates other texts, images, and quotations into a single poetic body, creating not an encyclopaedia but a lyrical map of the twentieth century.

Materials and methods

To achieve the stated aim, a range of methods was employed, combining textual analysis, interpretive hermeneutics, elements of post-structuralism, and an interdisciplinary cultural studies approach. The analysis and formulation of the main research conclusions were carried out during the second half of 2024.

The primary subject of the research was the text *ABC* by Miłosz (2001). In addition to this, other works by the author were used, including *The Land of Ulro* (Miłosz 1984) and *The Captive Mind* (Miłosz 2001), as these texts represent key themes, concepts, and stylistic features that later took their final form in *ABC*. In the research process, the context of the author's works in the political, cultural, and philosophical dimensions was taken into account.

Modelling the thematic content of *ABC* using content analysis of individual sections grouped according to the letters of the Latin alphabet was involved. Each fragment was analysed as an independent unit, but also in the context of its interrelationship with other sections. Specific sections, such as "G" – "The Stupidity of the West", "Sz" – "Szetejnie, Ginejty and Pejksywa", "P" – "Truth", "A" – "Angelic Sexuality", "K" – "Kridl, Manfred", "B" – "Baudelaire", were the object of detailed reading.

An approach distinguishing between communicative and cultural memory was applied. Further analysis concentrated on the poetics of silence, irony, and doubt. Philosophical positions regarding language as responsibility, as well as post-structuralist principles of linguistic collapse and the instability of meaning, were considered. The role of the author as a subject who is simultaneously a hero, chronicler, and commentator on his own writing was also studied.

Results

1. Analysis of the genre specificity of *ABC* as a literary phenomenon

The oeuvre of Miłosz encompasses the key themes of the twentieth century: the tragedies of war, the moral choices of the intelligentsia, questions of historical memory, and spiritual identity. He spent a significant portion of his life in exile in

France and the USA, which influenced his perspective on the culture of Eastern Europe from a position of critical distance. His texts combine humanistic sensitivity with philosophical depth and have become an important part of European cultural heritage.

The work of Miłosz is distinguished by a consistent combination of elements from various genre forms with a conceptual analysis of existential, historical, and cultural problems. The hybridity of *ABC* is evident in the combination of several literary forms (Figure 1).

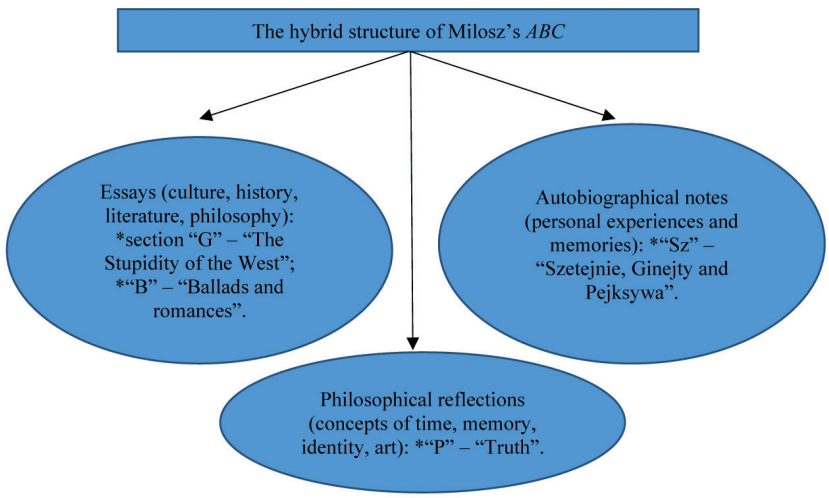

Figure 1. Genre organisation of Miłosz's ABC
Source: compiled by the authors based on Miłosz (2001).

Each section of the work can be seen as a separate essay, in which the author reflects on various aspects of culture, history, literature, and philosophy. For example, "G" – "The Stupidity of the West" – in this section, Miłosz, in essay form, critically examines the phenomenon of the "brevity of Western thought" – that is, the limited or naive nature of the Western worldview. Drawing on his own experience of living in Eastern Europe and in exile, the author polemically analyses the errors and contradictions of Western culture: "I admit that I have suffered from a Polish complex, and because I lived for many years in France and America, I gritted my teeth and had to learn to restrain myself" (Miłosz 2021). "The Stupidity of the West" best illustrates the book's essayistic style because it is a reflection on historical experience and ideas, presented in the author's subjective, analytical manner. Miłosz often refers to his own life experiences, weaving in personal

memories and reflections. In the section "Sz" – "Szetejnie, Ginejty and Pejksywa" – Miłosz delves into memories of his childhood places – the familiar corners of Lithuania. He describes scenes from his interwar youth, the people he knew at that time, and the atmosphere in which he formed as a person. Recalling small details of his childhood years, the author is effectively writing fragments of his own biography. Such notes are filled with nostalgia and details of the era's everyday life, making them vivid autobiographical illustrations: "There is no longer the green of orchards embracing the roofs of the cottages – apple trees, pear trees, plum trees in every farmyard, between house, barn, and granary, so that the village streets were framed in trees" (Miłosz 2001).

The work is full of profound philosophical reflections on the nature of time, memory, identity, and the role of the artist in society. In the section "P" – "Truth", Miłosz pondered the concept of truth in human life. He emphasised that the truth about a person is complex and multidimensional – like a mosaic of many different coloured stones, as each memory and point of view adds its fragment to the overall picture. The author concluded that life's truth consists of contradictory testimonies and experiences of different people, making it difficult to grasp. This section illustrated the philosophical side of Miłosz's work: through reflections on the essence of time and memory, he explored how identity is formed and what role art and literature play in the cognition of truth. For example, the book also contains other similar philosophical sketches – in particular, the section "A" – "Angelic Sexuality", dedicated to a review of the mystical-religious philosophy of Swedenborg: "No theosophical system assigns as central a place to the love of two people as does Swedenborg's imagined edifice" (Miłosz 2001).

Although the main text of *ABC* is prose, Miłosz includes poetic fragments that enhance the emotional impact and add rhythm. Using the alphabetical principle of organisation, he created a text that does not follow a linear narrative structure but instead offers a mosaic reflection of themes and images (Muravin 2025; Papa et al. 2025). This approach reflects the postmodernist tendency towards fragmentation and non-linearity, where the absence of a single narrative is compensated by polyphony and a plurality of perspectives. In this context, *ABC* acts not only as a literary work but also as a kind of map of the cultural, intellectual, and spiritual landscape of twentieth-century Europe, centred in the consciousness of one author.

Another sign of the deconstruction of genre boundaries is the conscious rejection of the dominant authorial position characteristic of the classic essay (Brait et al. 2025; Ovcharuk 2024). Miłosz, although acting as an omniscient intellectual, did not try to impose a definitive interpretation of certain concepts on the reader.

He did not create a finished hierarchical system of knowledge but offered an open form for reflection, which is typical of the postmodern concept of the text as an "open structure" (Chursinova et al. 2021; Chukhanov and Kairbekov 2024). This is observed, in particular, in the section "K" – "Kridl, Manfred", dedicated to the concept of a nation. Miłosz simultaneously criticises nationalism and shows an understanding of cultural identity as an important tool for self-determination.

It is also important to note that the alphabetical principle, seemingly simple and mechanical, acquires a metatextual significance in the context of *ABC*. It transforms into a symbol of systematicity, which the author seeks to simultaneously affirm and destroy. By structuring the text according to the letters of the alphabet, Miłosz imitated an encyclopaedic approach to knowledge, but in reality, offered a fragmented, subjective, and often emotional view of reality. This is the paradoxical logic of the work, because *ABC* is not an encyclopaedia but an attempt to convey the disorder of human experience in a form that resembles an ordered system.

2. The philosophical and cultural dimension of *ABC* and postmodern features in the structure of the work

Miłosz explores the issues of identity, memory and history, critically rethinks rational discourse and demonstrates the coexistence of humanistic ideals with scepticism, which are characteristic features of postmodern thinking (Table 1).

Table 1. Postmodern themes in Miłosz's work

Topic/category	Content of the programme	Postmodern aspect
Identity	A dynamic, fragmented construct; formed at the intersection of personal experience and collective memory, including exile, loss, and the experience of war.	Decentredness, multiplicity, trauma and flexibility of the postmodern personality.
Memory	A living process that determines the perception of the present and the future; not an archive, but a mechanism for interpreting experience.	A retrospective construction; memory as a process of creating meaning.
History	It is presented as a field of conflicting interpretations, where facts lose their objectivity, becoming a means of power and myth-making.	Denial of "grand narratives"; history as myth, not truth.

Topic/category	Content of the programme	Postmodern aspect
Humanism and scepticism	Combining faith in culture and doubt in its salvific function; rejection of absolutes while maintaining an ethical impulse.	Pluralism of meanings; humanism without utopia; ethical doubt as a virtue.
Language	Understood as a tool of responsibility and a space of doubt; a means of resistance, not idealised.	The concept of "ethical language"; criticism of linguistic transparency and linguistic power.
Rationality and modernity	Rationality is criticised as a source of ideologies and violence; instead of linear progress, there is a multiplicity of experiences.	Exposing the metaphysical foundations of rational thinking; disbelief in progress.
Art and poetry	Poetry as a form of testimony, not a carrier of truth; aesthetic expression combined with an ethic of doubt.	Interpretability of art; criticism of aesthetic dogmas.

Source: compiled by the authors based on Scott (2023).

Key to his approach is the re-evaluation of humanistic orientations, which retain value even while being under constant scrutiny. The author did not oppose concepts such as memory and history, or language and truth, but rather created a space between them for coexistence, internal tension, and mutual criticism. It is precisely this structural tension and internal contradiction that shape the specificity of his postmodern writing. The structure of Miłosz's *ABC* encourages fragmentation, as individual sections are not connected by a linear narrative but function as independent essays.

This mosaic of meanings reflects the postmodernist aspiration to dismantle hierarchies and give equal representation to different aspects of human experience. For example, reflections on the transcendent can be placed alongside descriptions of everyday events, highlighting the interpenetration of different levels of reality. Miłosz appeared in *ABC* simultaneously as author, hero, and observer, which underscores the self-reflexive nature of the work. He analysed his own thoughts, experiences, and memories, questioning established truths and his own beliefs. This self-reflexivity corresponds to the postmodern doubt about the objectivity and immutability of knowledge, emphasising the subjectivity of any experience and its interpretation (Harvey 2008; Kenbayeva et al. 2025). The author's presence in the text becomes another level of the game with the reader, inviting them to a joint search for meanings and a re-evaluation of their own views.

In postmodernism, the fragment is perceived not as a defect but as a basic principle of structuring reality (Ivanova and Lysytska, 2020; Shershova and Chaika 2024). Miłosz consciously chose this form, where each element of the text (the

section for each letter) is self-sufficient and at the same time potentially connected to others. This corresponds to Umberto Eco's concept of the "open text" (Hoxha 2022), according to which meaning is formed in the interaction between the text and the reader. The structure of *ABC* is an embodiment of this approach, as the author does not impose a certain order of perception but rather creates a field for free navigation, where the reader themselves establishes connections between sections.

In his *ABC*, Miłosz constantly engaged in intertextual dialogue with figures, texts, and ideas of world culture. This interaction was not limited to citation or reference – it was a deep form of polylogue, in which the author entered into a conceptual and emotional conversation with thinkers, poets, and philosophers. For example, in the section "B" – "Baudelaire", Miłosz focused on the French poet as a figure embodying the religious-aesthetic conflict of modernity. He analysed not only Baudelaire's biography but also his "theological" position, focused on despair and disillusionment, calling him "very interesting from a theological point of view". This is not just a literary allusion but a reflection of Miłosz's own internal philosophical struggle.

3. The place of *ABC* in Miłosz's work and the Polish postmodern context

Miłosz's work is characterised by a profound philosophical foundation and a continuous search for new forms of expression. In his early poetry collections, such as Salvation (Antoniuk and Franaszek 2024) and Daylight (Bem 2020), he engages with existential questions, reflecting the traumatic experience of the Second World War and the moral dilemmas of the individual. His essays, particularly The Captive Mind (Miłosz 2001), offer a rigorous analysis of totalitarian ideologies and their impact on the intelligentsia. In his later writings, Miłosz increasingly turns towards personal and cultural reflection, intertwining autobiographical elements with broader philosophical inquiry.

At the same time, Miłosz remains deeply embedded in the Polish intellectual tradition, especially within the contexts of modernism and émigré literature. His work enters into a sustained dialogue with figures such as Gombrowicz (Olejniczak 2021) and Witkiewicz (Dombrowski 2020), who similarly experiment with literary form in order to capture the complexity of human existence. While, like Gombrowicz, Miłosz employs irony and intertextuality, his mode of expression is more restrained and contemplative, reflecting what may be described as a "quiet" variant of postmodernism characteristic of Central European culture. His intellectual orientation also resonates with the philosophical positions of Kolakowski, particularly in the critique of totalitarianism and the emphasis on individual freedom.

In this sense, Miłosz's later works exemplify a form of "quiet" postmodernism that diverges from its Western counterpart through its measured tone and depth of reflection. Rather than pursuing radical deconstruction or shock aesthetics, he adopts postmodern strategies as a means of exploring cultural memory, identity, and historical experience. This approach aligns with the broader specificity of Central European postmodernism, often interpreted as a response shaped by the post-traumatic condition of the twentieth century (Stråth and Witoszek 2023).

Autobiographism plays a significant role in this process, acquiring not only personal but also cultural-historical significance for Miłosz. While in *The Land of Ulro* (Miłosz 1984), autobiographical elements were interwoven with metaphysical or political contexts, in his later texts they became material for reflection on the changing paradigm of writing itself. Miłosz demonstrated that personal experience is not an anecdote, not an individual story, but a manifestation of a cultural matrix that changes depending on the political landscape, linguistic identities, and even the existentiality of time. This characteristic takes on particular weight in comparison with other figures of Polish literature in the second half of the twentieth century. For example, Herbert (Górko 2024), although a contemporary of Miłosz and also writing about morality, memory, and history, constructed a poetics of resistance – his lyrical hero often had the traits of a stoic humanist capable of resisting the barbarity of history. Miłosz, on the other hand, gravitated towards introspection, the breakdown of systems, and dialogue with doubt. It is precisely this willingness to doubt that brings him closer to the postmodern situation of culture, although he never directly identifies himself with this movement.

In the Polish intellectual context, *ABC* can be seen as an example of responsible writing in the post-catastrophe era, writing that refuses total condemnation or glorification, instead forming a discourse of doubt, complexity, and openness. This corresponds to a trend in Polish philosophy of the second half of the twentieth century, particularly in the work of Kolakowski, who opposed dogmatism – both religious and secular – and developed the idea of "incomplete truth" (Rojek 2024). In this context, it can be argued that the late Miłosz, although not a philosopher in the traditional sense, adopted a similar position, namely that of a cultural thinker who recognised the limitations of all forms of systematic knowledge. *ABC*, unlike many texts of Polish postmodernism of the 1990s, does not appeal to the marginal, the corporeal, or the traumatic as such, but instead brings intellectual tradition, the work of memory, and moral reflection to the centre of attention.

Discussion

The interrelation of corporeality, spiritual wholeness, and metaphysical integrity in Miłosz's poetry – evident in motifs of love, bodily existence, ageing, death, and resurrection – resonates with the analysis proposed by Zaleski (2024). The researcher underscores Miłosz's conviction that the body constitutes a locus of spiritual identity, not a disposable оболочка but a medium of revelation. However, Zaleski does not fully develop the eschatological dimension of this relationship. By contrast, the present analysis demonstrates that Miłosz extends the notion of corporeal integrity into the transcendental sphere, maintaining the idea of bodily and personal resurrection rather than reducing post-existence to an abstract persistence of the soul.

Wood's (2023) interpretation of Miłosz as a poet of an era marked by terror aligns with the findings of this study, particularly in recognising that Miłosz assumes ethical responsibility for articulating the traumatic experience of the twentieth century without reducing it to political testimony or documentary narration. In his work, trauma is not presented as accusatory discourse but is integrated into a broader metaphysical framework, shaping an image of the human subject who endures not only physically, but also morally, culturally, and spiritually. Wood (2023) emphasises the role of the poet as a bearer of collective memory and a voice of a historically afflicted epoch. While this position is confirmed, the present analysis further foregrounds the intimate dimension of such testimony. Miłosz appears not merely as a witness to events, but as an interpreter who seeks to transform them through poetic expression capable of resisting apathy. In this sense, testimony assumes the form of an aesthetic act of solidarity with a wounded world, rather than a gesture of political protest.

The images of everyday life and cultural memory in *Roadside Dog* and *ABC*, analysed by Olyander (2022), had a direct connection with the motifs of fragmented reconstruction of identity through poetic encyclopaedias identified in this research. As in the work of Olyander (2022), this research found that Miłosz, using the alphabetical form as an opposition to linear narrative, constructed a text in which each letter became an autonomous unit of meaning and at the same time part of a broader cultural mosaic. In this context, the research reinforced the observations of Olyander (2022), revealing not only the autobiographical potential of the alphabetical form but also its ability to become a mechanism of critical memory.

In conclusion, this research revealed that the images of death, the body, evil, faith, and memory in Miłosz are not merely themes but constitute a coherent ontological system in which creativity becomes a space of metaphysical resistance.

The results confirmed that Miłosz did not belong to artists of one ideology or one aesthetic: he integrated the religious, the philosophical, the mythological, and the historical into one language that did not reject contradictions.

Conclusions

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the genre specificity, philosophical and cultural dimensions, and postmodern structure of Miłosz's *ABC*, thereby clarifying its position within late twentieth-century Polish literature and the broader European postmodern context. The findings indicate that *ABC* transcends the conventional framework of an essay collection, emerging instead as a hybrid form that integrates elements of essay, autobiography, philosophical reflection, poetic miniature, and cultural diary. Such generic multiplicity reflects a defining feature of postmodern poetics, namely the rejection of stable classification and narrative unity in favour of fragmentation, mosaic composition, and polyphony. The alphabetical structure functions not only as an organising device but also as a metaphor of encyclopaedic order, which is simultaneously destabilised by the discontinuous and associative presentation of material.

The authorial voice is marked by deliberate indeterminacy, shaped by irony, hesitation, and internal tension. In this respect, Miłosz can be understood as a representative of a "quiet" Central European postmodernism, oriented less towards formal radicalism than towards sustained cultural and philosophical reflection, where experimental form serves interpretive depth rather than aesthetic provocation.

The practical implications of this research lie in the potential use of *ABC* as a model for analysing genre transformation in postmodern literature, as well as in courses addressing the philosophy of literature, cultural memory, and identity. At the same time, the focus on a single text necessarily limits the scope of conclusions, and a fuller account of Miłosz's postmodern poetics requires engagement with a broader corpus of his later works. Future research may therefore benefit from comparative analyses of *ABC* alongside works by other Central European authors, such as Witold Gombrowicz, Joseph Konrad, and Zbigniew Herbert, as well as from further exploration of its role in shaping the concept of "quiet postmodernism" within Polish literary discourse.

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