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**“my body was opened for public view...”
The Metaphorising of the Sick Body
in the 20th- and 21st-Century Polish Poetry by Women**

**„na widok publiczny otwarto mi ciało...”
Metaforyzowanie chorego ciała
w polskiej poezji kobiet XX i XXI wieku**

Słowa kluczowe: współczesna poezja polska kobiet, refleksja antropologizująca, doświadczenie choroby, metafory chorego ciała

Key words: contemporary Polish women’s poetry, anthropological reflection, the experience of disease, metaphors of the sick body

The metaphor features an important ability to materialize abstract phenomena, to express subjective perception of self and the world and to learn and shape it. Revising one of the most difficult existential topics – disease – it exposes, e.g. the motif of battle and war, travel, punishment, but also of the market, dance or theatre (Okupnik 2018; Domaradzki online). In Lakoff and Johnson’s theory of conceptual metaphors, disease is described mainly in the list of terms expressing a downward movement (a popular orientational metaphor: sickness is down; Lakoff, Johnson 2010: 42 et seq.). On the other hand, Piotr Szenajch and Jan Domaradzki, in analysing narrative representations of death and the functioning of metaphors in the interaction between the patient and the medical personnel, demonstrate a very wide and highly differentiated scale of common metaphors materializing the disease and the categories, feelings and places it evokes. An analysis of maladic tropes presented by the researchers stress their role in articulating the patient’s experience, accustoming oneself to unwanted changes, immediate danger; they also emphasize their function in building communication with these people who, because of their profession or family relations, provide the patient with clinical or therapeutic care, accompany and help him or her in everyday struggle with suffering (Szenajch 2015; Domaradzki online).

Conceptualisations of illness in works by the Polish female poets of the 20th and 21st century (Ładoń 2015: 221–238; Grądział-Wójcik 2016a: 39–60; 2016b:

329–346; Morzyńska-Wrzosek 2017: 23–40; 2016: 147–162) also project tropes highly inspired by metaphoric expressions used in colloquial language. They provide a significant reference for poetic models, as they are characterized by conciseness and offer the possibility to introduce an illustrative explanation of what is mysterious, non-literal and difficult to describe (Domaradzki online). What is conventional, coded in the language system, in culture, interpreted and symbolically experienced (Domaradzki *ibid.*) becomes a starting point for the creation of new constructs and complexes expanding the meanings commonly known to language users. Numerous and very differentiated reformulations take place within poetic metaphors, generating new qualities and values, initiating atypical relationships shaping the intended vagueness, accentuating overstepping the existing standards.

Poetic metaphors propose their own flickering sense, impossible to be unambiguously translated, remaining in the sphere of suggestion (Ricoeur 1989: 123–154). They model cognitive schemes, in which transformations escape stereotypical procedures, and which are, to a significant extent, established, as Teresa Dobrzyńska observes, “by a combination of psychological and biographical conditions, as well as individual connotational content” (Dobrzyńska 2000: 109). Following semantic innovations, reconstructing a suggested sense encourages explanations concerning their dimension, in both aesthetic and epistemological terms (Michalski 2010: 226–231). Such inspired explanations, in the context of anthropologising literary reflection, draw attention to the links between maladic metaphors and the issue of self-cognition¹. They determine the type of research, in which, e.g. metaphors function as representations of significant aspects of self-understanding, signal the struggle of an individual with redefining their identity in a multi-faceted situation forced by the experience of sickness or loss; characterize various aspects of individual existence destabilisation initiated by this experience. Those tropes, interpreting the dynamism of subsequent shifts within the framework of self-understanding (Strauss 2008: 95 et seq.), describe the psychophysical sphere of the subject, cognitive processes, emotions, perception, determined by pain, fear, dramatically experienced narrowing of one’s own presence in the world (Chirpaz 1998: 78–88). The scope of issues investigated in this paper include an attempt to formulate, to rationalize the sense of insecurity, disruption of the continuity of existence, loss of control over one’s own body and life, concretized both in single metaphors and in their series, constructing extensive fragments of lyrical narrations. Maladic metaphors in contemporary Polish poetry written by women are additionally specified, among others, by features of somatic dysfunction, its

¹ Its anthropologic orientation is founded on the assumption that the stylistic, linguistic and compositional shape of the text can be interpreted as representations of various aspects of human subjectivity, its expressions. This inspires the reader to also perceive in the literary text the problems of constructing identity, to searching within the text representations indicating the specificity of subjective experiences, see Nussbaum (1990), Brady (1996: 951–959), Czapik-Lityńska (2007: 27–37), Rembowska-Pluciennik (2004), Morzyńska-Wrzosek (2013).

specificity, related pain and its intensity, the effect on the mental condition and progressive indisposition due to the passage of time.

Self-observation carried out in metaphoric personalisations, exposing suffering, loneliness, exclusion, places the body in the central place. An ailing body which is disobedient and, at the same time close and arousing tenderness, may also be hostile and intensify the feeling of impatience and is a source of mysterious, real danger. The body as the basis for constructing the identity of an individual, the prerequisite for shaping the presence of the subject in the world, “transparent” in everyday life, treated by healthy people as a submissive tool, usually unnoticed, becomes the focal point when it starts ailing, when it is excessively weak or tired. It comes to the fore when a certain limit of its fitness, attraction is broken when its functionality is strained to the degree that it disorganizes the previous existence of the individual. This is the moment when an intensified feeling of limitation emerges, a reflection on the fragility, finiteness of one’s own body, and therefore also of one’s own “self”.

Metaphorical conceptualisations of the body, more or less awkward, unstable and disturbing, imposing the need for subjective compliance, are often based on the direct juxtaposition “myself is the body” and “the body is an item”². Within this scope of imagining, various types of models can be distinguished, characterizing the issues related to breaking the boundary of the body, penetrating inside, poetically projecting the confirmation and surpassing the materiality of one’s existence.

Susan Sontag (2016) observed that one of the most often metaphorised diseases, apart from tuberculosis and AIDS, is cancer. This type of ailment, in common metaphors (existing not only in the medical discourse but also in the media rhetoric) is often presented as an aggressor, which is proved by numerous conventional military-type combinations (Fuks online), e.g. “cancer invades”, “attacks suddenly”, “cancer is a hidden enemy” (Domaradzki online). This category allows us to realize complex abstractions: “disease” and “health”, marking a clear distinction between them. It also triggers a series of associations stressing the need to mobilize, to immediately undertake – both by the medical personnel and the patient – dynamic actions, explicit, strongly counteracting its development (e.g. “activate the body’s defence mechanisms”, “fight cancer”, “conquer cancer” (Domaradzki online). Also in the contemporary works by female poets, cancer is characterized through formulas referring to metaphors functioning in the natural language. It is presented, e.g. as disaster, defeat (“w piersiach dwóch silikonowych kulach / bombach tykających wiekuisty stygmat / matka zostawiła katastrofę” [“in breasts two silicone balls / ticking bombs eternal stigma / mother left a disaster] (Augustyniak 2017: 63)), is gets revived: it occurs as a predator that nests in the body, an internal parasite

² This type of maladic metaphors is discussed in B. Morzyńska-Wrzosek, *Choroba i jej metafory we współczesnych narracjach maladycznych polskich poetek* [Disease and its Metaphors in Works of Contemporary of Polish Female Poets] (in print).

destroying it („z jedną tylko wadą złośliwego somla / co to zjadał piersi kości płyny ustrojowe” [“with only one defect of a malicious code / eating breasts bones bodily fluids”] (Augustyniak 2017: 56)), as well as a human being with pathological tendencies, provoking violence-related actions („obaj gwałcą / możliwości wywinięcia się / o profesji raka świadczą nie najlepiej / tak morfina jest na koniec” [“both violate / possibilities to evade / they do not reflect well on the cancer profession / so morphine is at the end”] (Augustyniak 2017: 61)). The quoted examples of poetic metaphors originate from the latest volume of Anna Augustyniak, titled *dzięki bogu* [*thank god*], in which the author presents, among others, her experiences related to breast cancer. The descriptions push to the background concretization of hospital spaces, typical situations and props, or anticipations concerning recovery. On the other hand, they clearly introduce a perspective marked by subjective permanence in the boundary situation, accompanied by the feeling the threat of death, awareness of self-perception by the suffering body, its deformation, and overwhelming, progressing weakness. The poet emphasizes that this experience is close to women representing various generations, not only those nearest but also much more distant. For instance, the main character in the poem *marihuana* [*marijuana*], is a Siberian „księżniczka z Ukoku” [“the Ukok Princess”] living twenty-five hundred years ago (Landau 2014, online; The Siberian Times reporter 2012, online).

The collection of poems by Augustyniak conceptualises sensitivity to a sick body, its painfulness, marking with dysfunction; it brings many images triggering metaphors constructing physical infringement of body limits, and the scale of sensations evoked by this act. One of the poems, describing breast removal, a dramatic experience for the woman, emphasizes the experiencing of one’s body through infringement of its completeness, deficiency classified as an irretrievable loss and related feeling of destabilisation, suffering:

1.

pod moją skórą nie ma rekwizytu
strój leży nie należy się przyglądać
bezużytecznym strukturom
nie ucieknę od tego nie uciekniesz
mówią mi teraz jesteś do strawienia
aż staniesz się brakiem rzeczywistym

2.

z kilograma więcej składa się strój
dla maski dla oka w biustonoszu
na widok publiczny otwarto mi ciało
[.....]
strój nie zakryje wydobywania na jaw

1.

[under my skin there is no prop
the costume fits, you shouldn't gaze
at useless structures
I will not run away from, you will not run away
they say, now you are bearable
until you become an irretrievable loss

2.

my costume weighs one kilogram more
for a disguise in my bra
my body was opened for public view
[.....]
the costume will not cover the exposure]
(Augustyniak 2017: 59)

The concept of metaphorical imaging of individually perceived surgical procedure very clearly demonstrates the revised permeation of two important aspects of self-experience in a terminal illness. On the one hand, there is an irreversible body injury, a wound, and questions about uncertain future; and on the other, the awareness of social classification of the altered appearance of the woman, assessments of her body by other people in the context of cultural expectations, and norms defining the category of femininity specified by those expectations. A surgical skin incision, penetration inside the body, reveals its imperfection and crisis, but it is also an activity with the aim to rescue, one of the first stages of oncological treatment. However, the female character not only focuses on the course of her hospitalisation and accompanying physical pain and uncertainty. Facing imminent danger, she does not forget the look of other people, close relatives and strangers, with the culturally accepted observation of a female figure, assessing the attributes of her gender. The mechanism of her perception is shaped by “the man’s eye”, which stops at selected fragments of the body (Melosik 1996: 75 et seq.). The woman is aware that one of the most significant details of her image, determining her social attraction, has just been removed. She focuses on this new imperfection and, describing the empty place after the removed breast as “bezużyteczna struktura [“useless structure”], concentrating on keeping symmetry in her figure, tries to hide it from the gaze of others. Including the social perspective, potential external evaluation affects the desire to reconstruct her former look and to recover its lost regularity. This procedure is illustrated by a series of metaphors applying terminology typical for manifesting femininity, focusing mainly on selected elements of the body, frequently pointing out the outfit, the main aim of which is to hide it (e.g. „pod moją skórą nie ma rekwizytu” [“there is no prop under my skin”], „strój leży” [“the costume fits”], „strój nie zakryje wydobywania na jaw” [“the costume will not cover the exposure”] or „z kilograma więcej składa się strój” [“my costume weighs one kilogram more”]).

In the entire poem of Anna Augustyniak, particular importance is put on what physically does not exist – a loss, a removed organ. But also, by implication, a scar on the skin, the body marked by the surgical intervention. They become in the subjective self-understanding a mark of damage, body injury, invalidating its harmony. They define a turn in the process of shaping the identity of the woman suffering from breast cancer. In her self-experience through the body, she articulates irretrievable breach, invalidity of the whole; she emphasizes that the dramatic loss is also recorded as aesthetically classified change. It concretizes disability and deformation, progressing weakness and intensifying pain, which directs attention towards the transience and fragility of existence and exposes individual transformations characterised by atrophy, intimacy and loneliness. A poetically manifested loss, an empty place, their metaphors are connected by a specific kind of surplus, which causes that the amputated breast wound will never turn into a scar. In this way, the author defines “This mark of injury, which lasts [...] long or may never be erased, is a constant painful presence of what is absent” (Skarga 2004: 90).

Another metaphoric classification of a wound is presented in texts by Ludmiła Marjańska and Teresa Ferenc. In both poets, surgical skin incision is, among others, a symbol of a positively valued change:

Na chirurgicznym stole znów
 leżę nakryta chłodnym prześcieradłem
 znieczulona nieobecna rozdwojona
 między tym co przeżyłam
 a wyobrażonym
 wierząc w chirurga
 w sprawność skalpela
 nieomylność ręki
 [.....]
 przywraca moim nogom
 taniec i radość pływania

[On the surgical table, again
 I'm lying covered with a cold sheet
 anaesthetized, absent, split
 between what I experienced
 and what is imagined
 believing in the surgeon
 in scalpel efficiency
 sureness of his hand
 [.....]
 restores to my legs
 dance and joy of swimming]
 (Marjańska 2003: 225)

– To się załata zarośnie zażyje
znowu będziesz bogata
w dni noce lata

[– This will be fixed, skinned over, healed
you will be rich again
with days nights years]

(Ferenc 2012: 31)

The above fragments, concretizing the indisposition of the patient, the need to carry out the procedure, introducing the figure of the surgeon and the situation in the operating room, indirectly trigger a number of suggestions concerning a breach of skin integrity. Metaphorical manifestation of surgical cutting directs the attention not only to the confrontation with one’s own physicality and its weakness, with inexorable finiteness. Surgical intervention brings hope for improvement of the ailing body, recovery of the previous fitness, but also becomes a starting point for the reflection covering much wider issues. It concretizes a desire to distance oneself from prior sensations, intensifies memorial experience and exposes their personal dimension.

The situation described in Marjańska’s poem – an exposed body, operating table, preparations for the surgery – emphasizes the loss of consciousness under the influence of administered medications („znieczulona nieobecna rozdwojona” [“anesthetized, absent, split”]), evoked by anaesthesia the state of suspension „między tym co przeżyła / a wyobrażonym” [“between what I experienced / and what is imagined”]. She records, first of all, the current moment, leading to experiencing its particular pausing, immobility, the aim of which describes the preparations for what is about to happen. The moment described is not isolated from the past and future, but only defined as a point that can be reached after a long journey, or from which further journey can commence³. Self-understanding in the “between” category is characterized by artificial elimination of physical suffering and a direct focus on body requirements, its susceptibility to pain and injury, and automatic subordination to them. This is determined by surgical cutting, waiting for this cutting, which, however, does not result in fragmenting the body and the existence of the subject, but defines their multi-faceted re-evaluation. Its metaphorical imaging – „wierząc w chirurga / w sprawność skalpela [“believing in the surgeon / in scalpel efficiency”] – by triggering a complex set of dependencies conditioned by the presented space and type of doctor’s activity, articulates, in a particular way, here and now, exposes a naked, defenceless body on the operating table. It strengthens the somatic dimension of the existence, emphasizes its tangibility and attachment of the subject. It directs the attention towards the body,

³ This situation is additionally described by Joanna Grądział-Wójcik (2016a: 52) as “new beginning, a certain re-birth”.

which after the surgery, in better condition, will again become a source of self-experience in the sense of security and continuity, perceiving one's own autonomy.

Metaphorical illustrations of surgical cutting, which not only intensifies self-perception through the body and its biology, take different forms in contemporary women's poetry. In poems by Ferenc, originating from the cycle *Szpitalne okno* [*Hospital Window*], they are also linked to the issues of self-experience, but here, the attention is directed clearly to what has passed. In the quoted piece, titled *Ciało wiersza* [*Poem's Body*], the reflection is determined by the mental return to the experience from a distant past, pacification of a family village in the Zamość region in 1943 and the tragic death of loved ones⁴. Its main topic is a traumatic memory, impossibility to eliminate, reduce its impact, crushing and prolonged suffering that entirely disintegrates the process of shaping the identity of the subject („Nie umiem patrzeć / Nie umiem widzieć / Życ nie potrafię” [“I cannot look / I cannot see / I cannot live”]). In this situation, the present physical injury, surgical cutting, is recalled, and one of the elements reinforcing its imagining is the juxtaposition with the motif of fire, typical for the poet (Wądolny-Tatar 2016; Legeżyńska 2009: 156–160). The semantics of this element is established here by the cultural image reduced to extermination and destruction (Legeżyńska 2009: 158). It concerns not only the past, but also the present, since in spite of the passage of time, the loss is still painfully experienced, and the order of the private world, abolished many years ago, has not been rebuilt. The efforts to alleviate past dramatic experiences are judged to be pointless, and they are accompanied by a deep feeling of powerlessness. Additionally, breaking the time continuity principle and its collision-free passage are emphasized („– Kalendarz spłonął / jak czasu anioł...” [“The calendar burnt down / as the time angel...”]), which determines self-understanding in a paused state, in a situation deprived of natural dynamism („– Tyle papieru o nic / Tyle słów bez oddechu bez wiary” [“So much paper for nothing / So many words without the breath, without faith”]). In this poetic projection, a clearly outlined metaphorical manifestation of surgical intervention is to bring relief to an ailing body, but first of all, the mark on the skin („załata zarośnie zażyje” [“will be fixed, skinned over, healed”]), brings the hope for stopping internal devastation, overcoming the tension it evokes („Właśnie cię ożywiamy / Talita cum” [“We are just bringing you to life / Talita cum”]). The cutting opens the subject to a new experience, guarantees life energy, which will dismiss the struggle with the past, will help to regain control over what brings destabilisation, what stubbornly stays in memory. Thus, the metaphorical interpretation of the cutting does not revise the physical pain and attempts to avoid it or minimise its perception. Constructing an endeavour to discharge the tensions accumulated for years by the victim and witness of the tragic death of her family, the extermination of the community and

⁴ This subject matter determines the poetic works by Teresa Ferenc (Wądolny-Tatar 2016: 239–257).

the place, it confirms building of the significance of a wound enriched with associations going beyond the material sphere. It realises the belief of an individual in the possibility to redefine oneself, additionally specified by finding the rules in order to “(regardless of the result) make a new covenant (pact) with the world” (Wądołny-Tatar 2016: 251).

In poetic women’s narrations of the 20th and 21st centuries, dysfunction, a progressive loss of control over everyday activities, entering, or rather “being thrown” into the trajectory of unwanted change, noticeably project complex questions about the body, about the need to redefine the category of intimacy. The patient is under pressure related to a very strong feeling of lamination, powerlessness, an inability to conceal suffering and shame, and is often accompanied by the feeling of exclusion, loneliness and failure. Strong self-experience through the body determines pain, fatigue, tensions evoked by them and disintegration. The body, eluding the control of the subject, disabled, causes anxiety and irritation, but also a desire to find out what is inside and what is the cause of the progressive weakness. Modern technology can be helpful here, offering the possibility of penetration into the body with the use of specialist equipment enabling diagnostic and/or therapeutic actions (Rakowski 1999: 170). The effects of its functioning – recognizing what is directly unavailable to the senses – are used by one of the models for metaphorical manifestation of the sick body.

The motif of an image, X-ray documenting the health status, occurs, among others, in the poems by Aneta Kamińska. In her volume *Czary mary (hipertekst) [Hocus-Pocus (Hypertext)]*, characterizing self-experience in disease, the author returns multiple times to the thyroid gland scintigraphy, placing beside its poetical description authentic results and specialist images performed at the nuclear medicine sites. The examination, consisting in administering to the patients chemical agents labelled with a radioisotope, the aim of which is to detect irregularities in the organ functions (Budlewski, Franek 2009: 37–41, online), is described by the poet as follows:

(nie wiem kto jest
na zewnątrz czymś kropią o szyby czymś
trzeszczą w słuchawce)
serce się trzęsie raz lewe raz prawe
[.....]
lekarze nuklearni
mają gotowe
uczucia i **bezpieczeństwo**
[.....]
promienna promienista
napro
mienio
wana

[I don't know who is
outside, something is sprinkling against the pane something
is cracking in the stethoscope)

the heart is shaking once left once right
[.....]

nuclear doctors
have ready-made
feelings and **safety**
[.....]
radiant radiating

ir

radiat
ed]

(Kamińska 2007: 40)

cały czas zapominam że jestem już **napro-**
mieniowana, idę na imprezę poetycką

[all the time I forget that I am already **ir-**
radiated, I'm going to a poetry party]

(Kamińska 2007: 40)

otwieram
się
na przestrzał
przeświewam przenikam i słucham
pukania od środka dzwonienia i **dobijania**
(się oraz mnie)
[.....]
nie myśleć
czym jestem
od spodu

[I am
opening
right through
showing penetrating and listening
knocking from outside ringing and **banging on**
(to me)
[.....]
not thinking
what I am
underneath]

(Kamińska 2007: 39)

The imagining of a sick body undergoing examination is specified by metaphoric juxtapositions stressing the fact of exceeding its boundary, the possibility to penetrate inside (“otwieram / się / na przestrzał / **przeświewam**” [opening / right through / **showing**]). The poem also reports its spatial dimension, identified organs, and processes occurring in them. The specificity of the interior is determined by peculiar density and by the matter projecting it – living, warm, and full of motion – which is recorded by the image (Grądział-Wójcik 2016a: 55–56), documenting “underneath”. The procedure resulting in reaching what is hidden does not show any signs of violence, it does not bring any deformation or destruction, but nevertheless, it causes anxiety. The dynamism of the situation creates the emotional state of the patient, dominated by her disorientation, incomplete understanding of the clinical reality, and the entire focus on the body subjected to the procedure. In the above-quoted fragments, particular attention is drawn to the lexeme „napromieniowana” [“irradiated”], indicating the introduction of a radioactive substance into the body in order to locate pathological changes and differentiate the type of their hyperactivity (Budlewski, Franek 2009, online). Persistently repeated in various forms, it brings associations with tissue damage, suffering and irreversible destruction leading to extermination. The exposure of this element of the described examination projects strengthened self-perception as a psychosomatic entity. It also emphasizes the changes taking place and the fact of undergoing diagnostic and treatment procedures. However, the body, penetrated by radioactive elements, X-rayed, still remains a mystery to the individual. The organic, physiological level of existence and its complicated functioning is not unnoticed, but it is not fascinating and does not lead to any radical redefining of self-understanding. Discovering one’s own, usually hidden, interior rather leads to expressing the acceptance for the existence, within one’s own body, of a close but at the same time inaccessible sphere. A conscious contact with this sphere results in consenting to the truth that the dimension invaluable for the identity of the subject, determining its very nature, remains virtually unknown (Brach-Czaina 2003: 114). What is definitely more important is the return to everyday activities, the previous rhythm, undisturbed by a hospital stay, modelling self-experiencing in the feeling of safe continuity (e.g. „idę na imprezę poetycką [...] zostawiam walizkę w schowku, wchodzę do sali rozmawiam ze znajomymi [...] idę gdzieś z Asią Meller rozmawiamy, trzymam ją mocno za pętelkę od płaszcza” [I’m going to a poetry party [...] I’m leaving the suitcase in a locker, entering the room, talking to friends [...] I’m going somewhere with Asia Meller, we are talking, I’m holding tight the loop at her coat”]) (Kamińska 2007: 40).

Fascination with the body, its interior and the possibility to exceed the materiality of one’s existence are also key motifs in Halina Poświatowska’s poetry. Their poetic presentation very often exposes the metaphoric image of “the body is a container”, which determines the use of the preposition “in”, or particularisation of the boundary infringement mechanisms (Morzyńska-Wrzosek 2003: 156

et seq.). The constant search for new formulas for exposing and overcoming the burden of the sick body, “extending boundaries of existence”, leads to a specifically understood vampirism⁵:

w środku mnie
rozrasta się drzewo
gałęzie ciasno
przylegają do moich żył
korzenie
krew moją piją
brunatnieją
zaschłe usta moje

[inside me
a tree is growing
branches are closely
adhering to my veins
roots
are drinking my blood
browning
my dry lips]

(Poświatowska, 2015: 166)

Crossing the boundary of the corporality imagined in this poem describes supernatural closeness between the “self” and the natural world. It also reveals a tendency to saturate this type of confrontations with aesthetic values. They are constructed by metaphorical harmonies, presenting gradual changes occurring in the body, its progressive impairment, modelling the visualisation of the interior shrouded in mystery, and signalise the specificity of disease conditions. They reveal the feeling of existence of what is hidden under the skin, alive and pulsating, yet remaining unknown. The repertoire of measures, establishing and consolidating visual and haptic values, concretizes the progressive resemblance of the subject to one of nature’s creations and an ambiguous situation implied by this fact. This exceptional relation, specified by the intensive feeling of closeness, intimacy of touch, physical “adhering”, and the awareness of immediate danger is examined here. It confirms the loneliness of the suffering individual, focusing entirely on herself, her exclusion and helplessness, as well as an intensified feeling of transience.

The poetic presentation, recording the juxtaposition of the progressive disease and life energy being transferred from the subject to the tree, is based on metaphors concretizing the phenomenon of filling the body with a living, growing, alien

⁵ Grażyna Pietruszewska-Kobiela (2014: 168 et seq.) observes that Poświatowska’s works feature vampirism *à rebours*.

being. This experience and its inevitability strengthens the conviction of its material nature, but also that this materiality can be questioned and, then, it becomes possible to exceed individual limitations. The values referred to in the metaphoric presentation disclose the intention of removing human features, invalidating boundaries of the “self’s” body; deny, and at the same time confirm its real shape. They describe the transformation of a sick subject into something that is not human, with the changes not only applying to the interior of the body but also visible on its surface (“brunatnieją / zaschłe usta moje” [“browning /my dry lips”]). Thus, the use of measures spectacularly combining two different orders – the world of nature and the human world – makes it possible to engage in a game with the material dimension of existence, marked with a somatic dysfunction, in order to save oneself from the extremity of absence. Forming a hybrid and transforming one being into another deprives an individual’s death of its violence and extends the boundaries of what is human (Pietruszewska-Kobiela 2014: 175).

Disease is an unwanted metamorphosis affecting all dimensions of the existence; it is related to the need to articulate experiences, understanding the mystery of prolonged disability and waiting for what is ultimate. However, patients do not have at their disposal a multi-dimensional scale of measures expressing different types and degrees of pain intensity, fatigue after attacks, particular sensitisation to the perception of their body, constant rebuilding of attitudes towards the body, themselves and external factors. The insufficiency of the language describing self-experience in the disease was suggestively described by Virginia Woolf:

Finally, among the drawbacks of illness as a matter for literature, there is the poverty of the language. [...] let a sufferer try to describe a pain in his head to a doctor and language at once runs dry. There is nothing ready-made for him. He is forced to coin words himself, and, taking his pain in one hand, and a lump of pure sound in the other (as perhaps the inhabitants of Babel did in the beginning) so to crush them together that a brand new world, in the end, drops out (Woolf 2000: 31–32).

In a maladic reflection, the struggle with the insufficiency of language resources concretizing the experience of a health loss is confirmed, among others, by metaphors. Their analysis, aiming at reaching the sense produced within them, is facilitated by finding motivation, an attempt at harmonious integration into the immediate environment – e.g. a fragment of or entire narration, as well as stressing biographical conditions. Additionally, an anthropologically-oriented literary reflection leads to associating metaphorical expressions with experiencing the “self” and of the external, revising cultural processes resulting from defining the text as a cognitive and aesthetic testimony directly related to a situation of the human being (Czapik-Lityńska 2007: 35–36).

Although the above-discussed examples of metaphors referring to the sick body in the contemporary works of Polish poets trigger a classical model of its

presentation, they offer original solutions. Focusing the attention on identifying the “self” with the body, and describing the body as an item, they apply innovative associations, as well as “the subtle and multi-dimensional system of allusion” (Dobrzyńska 2000: 111). They use multi-faceted concretization of the self-observation act, characterized by physical suffering, pain, uncertainty, present a body that is weak, mutilated, and accentuate a sharpened sense of transience, limitation of the subjective existence⁶. Metaphors also conceptualise a more extensive process of self-determination “in” and “towards” the world, in a sensual and emotional movement, in a situation of a painful change, marking it with particular tension, fascination, acceptance of the mystery, as well as the desire to invalidate one’s own corporeality to save oneself from the ultimate disappearance.

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⁶ The issue of lost health in the context of conceptualisation of the subjectivity has been discussed by numerous researchers: Pietrych (2009), Szubert (2011), Ładoń (2013; 2014), Morzyńska-Wrzosek (2017a; 2017b).

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Summary

This article discusses selected metaphors of the sick body used in the works of Polish female poets in the 20th and 21st centuries. The analysis adopts the perspective of anthropological studies and reveals that these metaphors function as a representation of essential aspects of one's perception and of an individual's struggle to redefine their identity in a situation of health loss. The metaphorical expression of the sick body is most often tangible and refers to the classic image of “a body as a container.” As far as an indicating scope of imaging is concerned, one may find various types of metaphors which characterise issues relating to the acts of breaking body boundaries as well as penetrating it, which is to be viewed as the confirmation of going beyond the physicality of one's existence.

