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## Baroque Tradition in the Poetry of Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki. Reconnaissance

### Tradycja barokowa w poezji Eugeniusza Tkaczyszyna-Dyckiego. Rekonesans

**Słowa kluczowe:** Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki, tradycja barokowa, poezja współczesna

**Keywords:** Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki, baroque tradition, contemporary poetry

#### Abstract

Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn Dycki (born 1964) belongs to the group of poets whose work has been awarded many times in prestigious literary competitions; the poet received, among others, The Nike Literary Award (2009), the Gdynia Literary Award (twice: in 2006 and 2009) and the Silesius Wrocław Poetry Award (twice: in 2012 and 2020). His poetry has been systematically elaborated on the themes of madness, disease and the obsession with death. When writing about death Dycki refers to the baroque tradition. Therefore, the aim of this article is an attempt to interpret the works of Tkaczyszyn-Dycki in the context of questions about the Baroque tradition and its various continuations in contemporary Polish poetry. Dycki certainly refers to the Baroque (or more broadly the Old Polish tradition), but this Baroque undergoes a far-reaching metamorphosis. It is an obscure, non-obvious Baroque, functioning rather as a specter haunting the language, through which Dycki fights for his own speech, still watching death.

In her important book *Teksty w ruchu* [*Texts in movement*], Elżbieta Dąbrowska aptly says that what can be noticed in Polish modern poetry are not only references to the literary output of 17th-century authors (with regard to stylistics, genology and motifs) but also the ways in which the “properties of Baroque literature and culture” are uncovered in the texts of contemporary poets and writers (Dąbrowska 2001: 19). There are two significant aspects to this reflection.

The first is the presence of still alive Baroque tradition, its continuations and creative transformations; the second is related to much broader and more complex problem of understanding and interpreting the Baroque as a specific culture which produced not only certain patterns in music, literature, painting and other visual arts but also provided – often diverse – ways of experiencing oneself and the world<sup>1</sup>. It should be noted that post-Renaissance tradition has appeared at different levels of meaning, particularly in the works of Ernest Bryll, Jerzy Harasymowicz, Stanisław Grochowiak, Stanisław Barańczak, Czesław Miłosz, Tadeusz Różewicz and Wisława Szymborska<sup>2</sup>. Attempts are made to expand this well-known catalogue of names by adding authors from the interwar period –, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, Jerzy Libert and Wojciech Bąk (Łozowska-Patynowska 2011; Łozowska-Patynowska 2020) – as well as poets active at the turn of the 21st century. Therefore this article aims at interpreting the works of Eugeniusz Tkacyszyn-Dycki in the context of questions asked about Baroque tradition and its diverse transformations and continuations in contemporary Polish poetry.

Eugeniusz Tkacyszyn Dycki (born 1964) is a poet whose works have been nominated in many prestigious literary competitions; he received the Nike Literary Award (in 2009 for the volume *Piosenka o zależnościach i uzależnieniach* [*A Song of Dependencies and Addictions*]), Gdynia Literary Prize (twice, in 2006 for the volume *Dzieje rodzin polskich* [*History of Polish Families*] and in 2009 for *Piosenka o zależnościach i uzależnieniach* [*A Song of Dependencies and Addictions*] and the Silesius Poetry Award (twice, in 2012 for the volume *Imię znamię* [*Name and Birthmark*] and in 2020 for his lifetime's work). His poetry has been the subject of comprehensive analyses, focusing on the motifs of madness, illness or homoerotic experiences, so strongly marked in Dycki's texts (Śmieja 2010: 222–245; Świeściak 2010: 147–181; Śliwiński 2012; Hoffmann 2012).

The single focus of his poems, which deal mostly with death and dying – so emphasized by critics – had to evoke association with the works of 17th-century writers. In particular, early readings of Dycki's poems, which concentrate on death and dying, were linked to questions about the “dark light of the Polish Baroque”. Marian Kisiel wrote:

<sup>1</sup> The fundamental problems related to defining and understanding Baroque are well known to the historians of pre-Enlightenment Polish literature and thus will not be discussed here. See e.g. Pelc (2004); Mrowcewicz (2005), Nowicka-Jeżowa (2009–2011).

<sup>2</sup> Besides the texts mentioned above, see also e.g. *Barok i barokowość w literaturze polskiej*, Kaczmarek, (1985); M. Eustachewicz, (1993); A. Nawarecki (1993); a special issue of *Znak* no. 7 1995.

Barok sarmacki? Ale barokowe są tutaj zdania-zawijasy, barokizująca frazeologia i leksyka (i to w ograniczeniu), a nie klimat wiersza. Jeżeli już odnosić lirykę Dyckiego do tej epoki, to trzeba powiedzieć i to, że jego barok jest współczesny, może przefiltrowany przez (tutaj waham się) Ernesta Brylla, Stanisława Grochowiaka i Jarosława Marka Rymkiewicza, choć jakże od nich różny. Sarmackość jest tu rzeczą wtórną, bo przecież redukcja jej do jakiejś bratersko-szlacheckiej familiarności wypacza całą istotę tego nurtu w literaturze, a zwracanie uwagi jedynie na rekwizyty barokowej *pompy funebris* ogranicza jej znaczenie (Kisiel 1998: 109).

[Sarmatian Baroque? Yet what is Baroque-like here are convoluted sentences, Baroque-style phraseology and lexis (and this only in a limited way), and not the atmosphere of the poem. If Dycki's poetry is to be discussed in relation to this period, it must be said that his Baroque is modern, perhaps filtered through (I hesitate to say) Ernest Bryll, Stanisław Grochowiak and Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz, yet so different from them. Sarmatism here is a secondary matter, as reducing it to a form of brotherly-gentry familiarity distorts the essence of this style in literature, while drawing attention only to the props of Baroque *pompa funebris* limits its meaning].

Let us emphasize how cautious this answer is, how it tries to avoid the almost instinctive association between Polish culture of the 17th c. with Sarmatism and excessive affectation of death. Slightly later Kisiel pointed out that Baroqueness of Dycki's work is extremely intimate and private, yet it registers the most important events in the lives of his neighbors and relatives, as did pre-Enlightenment Polish family chronicles called *silva rerum* (Kisiel 1998: 109–110; zob. Sosnowski 2001: 44). This conclusion is fitting, as Dycki registers all the signs of everyday existence; however, they are marked with omnipresent death.

Kisiel's observations should be read in the context of a thematic issue of *LiteRacje* focused on the Baroque or, to be more precise, the neo-Baroque in contemporary poetry<sup>3</sup>. It was Paweł Koziół who emphasized that "some of what today's authors do with their texts corresponds to what the 17th c. authors did" (Koziół 2004: 11), he included here abandonment of traditional stylistics of texts, obsessive returns to the same motifs as well as emotionality (Koziół 2004: 12). So understood, the neo-Baroque easily encompasses the poetry of Dycki, whose writing practices include the above features. In another essay Koziół analyzed

<sup>3</sup> The list of essays on the literary output of Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki and on neo-Baroque included in the special issue of *LiteRacje* 2004 no. 1 should be expanded by a number of works that problematize this category. Their starting point is Gilles Deleuze's (2014). The topic of neo-Baroque, so strongly present in the area of research on (post)modern culture and literature, would require much broader and deeper reflection, which definitely exceeds the frames of this essay and should be a topic of a separate article. Thus I mention here only examples of such literature: Zamora, Kaup (2010); Egginton (2010), „Perspective. Actualité en histoire de l'art" (2015). See also sample theses: Chiappetta (2012) Young (2012).

Dycki's poems, justly rejecting the earlier autobiography-based interpretations: "For example, there is a phrase 'My friends Andrzej Zbychu write poems'. One could browse different local publications to trace which poets the author had in mind, and it is even possible that such persons can be found – yet for the benefit of interpretation I would like to assume that the poem refers to Andrzej and Zbigniew Morsztyn [...]" (Kozioł 2004: 58) – important figures of the Polish Baroque literature. Kozioł evidently is not interested in meticulous exegesis of a text but rather in suggestiveness of interpretation, in its persuasive dimension.

In turn, Sylwia Omiotek in her essay *Książkowe peregrynacje* perceives similarities between contemporary authors and the Baroque in the "obsession of literariness", which makes 21st-century authors speak in a way similar to Baroque poets (Omiotek 2004: 13–16). According to Omiotek, we cannot escape the magma of literature, connections, quotations and references. She also focuses on Dycki, whose literary output is connected with the Baroque primarily through "using a ponderous phrase [...] a fleshy word [...]. By pinning his poetic vision upon antinomies" (Omiotek 2004: 53)<sup>4</sup>.

The above – important – voices need to be completed not only by analyses of specific poems but also by applying much broader interpretative contexts. What seems to be an interesting and at the same time the most useful perspective for reading Dycki's literary output – a perspective which allows indirect reference to the code of the Baroque – is the approach proposed by Alina Świeściak, who primarily perceives the poet's texts through the lens of broadly understood melancholy. The selected interpretation tools, drawn from the works of e.g. Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault and Julia Kristeva, enabled Świeściak to present a multi-faceted discussion of stylistic devices associated with depressive position of the lyrical I, founded on the experience of loss (Świeściak 2010: 147–181). It should be added that cultural approach to the issue of melancholy naturally drifts towards the Baroque<sup>5</sup>. However, this does not mean simple analogies but rather the problem of poetic language attempting to struggle with the sense of finality, which appears radical and ultimate. In this context, it is worth mentioning a fragment from Deleuze's *The Fold*, where he described a crypt as a place in which the Baroque invests (Deleuze 2014: 64). This place can be considered as an aspect of a particular geography of melancholy

<sup>4</sup> Omiotek's remark corresponds to the analyses of styles in today poetry – see Wilkoń (1993:19–20).

<sup>5</sup> What must be evoked here is Robert Burton and his *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, published multiple times in the 17th c. See Burton (2010); see „Literatura na Świecie” (1995) nr 3; Bałus (1996); Bieńczyk (2012); Benjamin (2013).

associated with location of the subject on the border between life and death, as Waclaw Forajter noted (Forajter 2001: 179–201). Poetic topography is related both to the symbolic darkness of a house (the place of writing and madness) and that of a grave (the image of a coffin, funeral, necropolis). Dycki constantly intones words about decay. Below are two sample poems from the volume *Nenia*:

szedłem za twoją trumną aż po dzień dzisiejszy  
szedłem do ciebie aż zblądziłem w rozkład  
moje ręce nie napotkały twojego ciała  
a to co mogłem dotknąć było już we mnie

*XLI.*<sup>6</sup>

jest naga odkąd przyszedłem na świat  
i teraz kiedy podglądam śmierć już tylko w sobie  
wychwalać pod niebiosą materię która tylko we mnie  
przedziwnie żywa w której można jeszcze myśleć

o rozkładzie bo gdzie indziej  
rozkład przychodzi przepada bez wieści

*XXXIX. Idziemy we dwóch i nie boli*

[*We two are walking together and it does not hurt*]

I walked behind your coffin until this day  
I walked to you till I got lost in decay  
my hands did not meet your flesh  
and what I could touch was already in me

she's<sup>7</sup> been naked since I was born  
and now as I peep at death only in myself  
to glorify the matter that's only in me  
amazingly alive a place to still think

about decay because where else  
decay comes and vanishes without a word

The quoted texts, like Dycki's entire literary output, persistently return to the motif of a friend's death (a phrase monotonously appearing in different volumes is "my friend is dead"). The subject in the second of the above poems not only sees the end in himself but also turns his eyes towards matter, an artifact of life as well as a portent of inevitable end, associated also with a mother's womb (see e.g. *IX.*, *XI.*). The sight turned towards what is earthly – "sand is a crumbling sucking mouth of death" (*XII.*) – and constant evocations of bones of the dead are a look of a melancholic, which was diagnosed among others by Walter Benjamin in his discussion of Baroque tragic drama<sup>8</sup>. Obviously, cultural representations of the experience of loss differ but they all involve inventing a language capable of expressing it or inventing a space to regain it (Świeściak 2010: 171). Thus the poet writes in another poem:

<sup>6</sup> If no other editions are referred to, Dycki's poems in Polish are quoted after E. Tkaczyszyn-Dycki (2010). In the text, titles of poems (if there are any) and their numbers according to this edition are given in parentheses.

<sup>7</sup> In Polish the noun for death (*śmierć*) is feminine, and thus death is culturally perceived as female [Translator's note].

<sup>8</sup> See Benjamin (2013:175–204). Marek Bieńczyk writes: "A melancholic imagination speaks – directly or metaphorically – about dirt, magma, soil; about flesh and meat; [...] it belongs to heavy matter which has weight, which sullies, which sticks and clings" – Bieńczyk (2012: 48).

to jesteś ty która mnie wysławiasz i ty prowadzisz mnie niewysłowionego w załążek słowa to jesteś ty czarna ziemia bo moja matka zagubiona	you are the one who utters me an you lead the unuttered me into a germ of word it is you black earth because my lost mother
zaleca każdy grób i każdy załążek słowa jeżeli mówi ktoś zwróci uwagę że nie powiedziała jest we mnie słowo lecz słowo to taki grób	recommends every grave and every word germ if she speaks who will notice she did not say there is in me a word but word is such a grave
w którym spodziewam się tylko ciebie	in which I expect only you
XLII.	

This poem is built on enjambments and blending of phrases that, while unexpected, can be arranged into a semantic string of juxtapositions – mother-earth, word-grave – As we read it, we can clearly see that it escapes any unequivocal explanation attempting to capture and reveal the meaning of poetic wording, which the subject describes as “unspoken” (literally “unexpressed”). Impotence of words and at the same time their purpose – keeping memory of the dead (XXVII.) – is Dycki’s constant companion as can be seen in the next two examples. The first comes from *Nenia*, the second opens the volume *Piosenka o zależnościach i uzależnieniach* [*A Song of Dependencies and Addictions*]:

więc znowu piszę ten stary wiersz o śmierci i wciąż jeszcze nie wiem od czego zacząć	so I’m writing again that old poem about death and I still don’t know where to start
XVI.	
daj mi słowo abym kres nazwał umiejtnie kresem	give me the word so that I can skilfully call the end the end
CCCXXIII.	

The quoted fragments can, of course, be summed up by a well-known call to “give everything its fitting name”, yet we should remember that Dycki’s speech is centered around loss, so it is an attempt to invent a language that could bear the heterogeneity of death. To avoid slipping into silence, the author updates the old Polish tradition of funeral poetry, particularly the “black carnival” of late-Baroque writer Józef Baka, (Dąbrowska 2001: 230–334) which provides a specific matrix of meaning, of the way to communicate with oneself and with the reader. In *Nenia* we read:

1. Baka uwodzi Stefanię Dycką (Baka Seduces Stefania Dycka)

jeszcze będziesz piękna ino się zobaczymy będziesz taka piękna że zmartwychwstaniemy w popłoch członków które pogrzebiemy tam gdzie przedtem	thou will be beautiful once we meet thou will be so beautiful that we will rise into the panic of limbs which we will bury where we did before
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## 2. Baka winny istnieniu Stefanii Dyckiej (Baka Guilty of Stefania Dycka's Existence)

jeszcze jesteś piękna	you are still beautiful
ja ci nie ujmuję kości	I'm not taking away your bones
choć tyle razy pamiętasz	though so often you remember
nadbierałem z okolicy	I took from around
twojego ciała a zawsze jak złodziej	your body always like a thief
bo ty nie istniałaś	because you did not exist
bo ty byś nie mogła istnieć	because you would not exist
beze mnie	without me

## 3. Stefania Dycka poruszona widokiem Baki (Stefania Dycka Moved by Seeing Baka)

nie widziałem cię jeszcze	I haven't seen you yet
a już widzę twój szkielet	and I see your skeleton
nie byłeś moim kochankiem	you weren't my lover
to tylko dlatego że nie mieliśmy	only because we did not
dość rozkładu by dochować	have enough decay to stay
sobie wierności pod Nieobecność	faithful to each other in Absence

XLIII.

A question arises who is speaking to whom in this poem; who are the protagonists and what is happening between them. As it uses the name of Józef Baka, the author of *Uwagi o śmierci niechybnej* (*Remarks on Inescapable Death*), the staged dialogue is a reference to late Baroque, and in particular to Baka's way of constructing a text as a lengthy story, a conversation confirming an almost intimate contact with the reader (Czyż 1995: 265–287). The composition of Dycki's poem can be associated with Polish pre-Enlightenment cyclical or variation poems (Kotarska 1985: 67–94). While its theme – with its tendency to visualize the end – is related to the Baroque theatre of death, it refers to different clusters of meanings than those suggested by Baroque poetics. The evoked 17th-century tradition of speaking about the end is transformed. Also the archaization used has little in common with Baka's stylistics and rather points to a general poetic practice of writing a “very separate book” and “finding a few archaisms” (*LXXX. Stancja na Lubomelskiej*)<sup>9</sup>. To avoid misunderstandings, it should be pointed out that Tkaczyszyn-Dycki published his texts using heteronyms such as Leszek Ilnicki or already

<sup>9</sup> In another poem, included in the volume *Imię i znamię* [*Name and Birthmark*], which evokes the convention of an epitaph, we read: “wprawdzie niewiele tego jest/ ale zadowolili nas każde/ żdziebko (poecie zawsze coś się/ trafi Staś Szpaś lub Dudzik)// otóż poeta robi wiersz z każdego żdziebka choćby z nekrologu” – *XLIV* [“there is not much/ but we'll be happy with every/ bit (a poet always gets/ something a Darling Starling or Robin)// for a poet turns every bit into verse even an obituary” – *XLIV*]. Poems from this volume quoted after the edition: E. Tkaczyszyn-Dycki (2012). “Fair Starling” corresponds to a well-known phrase from Rev. Baka's poem *Młodym uwaga* (For

mentioned Stefania Dycka. Stefania was also the name of the poet's mother (see e.g. *V*.) It can be thus concluded that the poem is a story of poetic dependencies, seduction through literature and performative function of words. Although Baka seduces and gives life ("because you could not exist/ without me"), in the third poem he uses a phrase signifying distance: "you weren't my lover". The poetic discourse becomes an act of agency, makes it possible for speech to exist as it is prior to the subject, which searches among the pre-existing conventions and tradition for its own place to find a possible impossibility (to paraphrase the definition of the concept) of speaking about the end. In the last poem there appears a characteristic motif of decay, which in Dycki's poetry is connected with the archetypical motif of dirt<sup>10</sup>. The ending of the poem "only because we did not// have enough decay to stay/ faithful to each other in Absence" can be read as an expression of the fact that the Baroque way of speaking about death – which in religious poetry was connected with resurrection and the last Judgement – is both familiar and strange. Eschatologically-themed poems with obsessively intoned "beware: [death] strikes" (Mikołaj Sęp Szarzyński) were a constant reminder of God's existence. In the writings of Baka, Dominik Rudnicki and Karol Mikołaj Juniewicz the instability and the stigma of transience of things were supposed to point at death – a gate to eternity. In turn, in Dycki's poems decay occurs and it seems to be the last poetic word to which one must stay faithful, without easy and simple support of catechism answers which Reverend Baka so passionately included in his poems. Dycki evokes the tradition of Baka's poetry and at the same time points to its insufficiency and limitations which, however, still allow the subject to have his monotonous "conferences with death" (*CVII*)<sup>11</sup>. Lastly, the blending of clearly marked erotic discourse

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Youths' Attention) "Śliczny Jasiu, mowny szpasiu" "Fair Darling, chatty starling". Both cases reveal a penchant for word games based on wit or grotesque.

<sup>10</sup> Cf.: "w rzeczach czystych niechaj będzie Twój dom/ a w rzeczach nieczystych moje umieranie [...]// tak wielkie w nieczystości moje umieranie/ że gdybym miał z martwych powstać// to tylko przez człowieczy brud" – *XLVIII. Szpital św. Klary*. ["let your dwelling be in pure things/ and in dirty things my dying [...]// so great is my dying in the dirt/ that were I to rise from the dead// then only through human dirt" – *XLVIII. St. Clara's Hospital*] See also e.g. *XCVI*.; *CX*.; *CLVIII*.; *CCIV*.

<sup>11</sup> In yet another poem we read: "i oddajemy w płótnie pierwsze kości które nam się/ zwidziały i zwielokrotniły pierwsze kości/ na zmartwychwstanie o jakim, dowiedzieliśmy się/ od tych co nie kręcą i nie mówią prawdy" [and we give back wrapped in cloth the first bones that/ appeared and multiplied in our vision first bones/ for resurrection we learned about/ from those who don't twist or tell the truth] (*CXLII*.; cf.: "już tylko trumny wydadzą krzyk ostateczny/ przed wprowadzeniem człowieka na swoje nieobsadzone miejsce/ niezastąpiony jest człowiek gdy krzyczeń ma nikt/ z wołania o Niemoc przyjdą nasze dzieci i zasiądą przy otwartych ustach" ["and only coffins will utter the final cry/ before putting man in their vacant place/ man can't be substituted when nobody is to scream/ from call for Impotence our children will come and sit at the open mouth"] – *VIII*).



with death (the latter better known from the poems of Jan Andrzej Morsztyn and Hieronim Morsztyn) can be read as a desire to unify the both subjects (thoroughly homoerotic if we assume that “Stefania Dycka” is a heteronym of the poet himself), which in Dycki’s poetry is usually signified by the motif of denuding and bones (see e.g. *XXII.*; *XIII.*; *CXII.*; *CXXI.*; *CXXII.*)<sup>12</sup>.

Dycki’s poems are haunted not only by the dead but also by imperfect language (see *CLXXXVII. Piosenka o sytuacji bez wyjścia (A Song About a No-Win Situation)*; *CLXXXVIII.*), snippets of overheard phrases, and too-familiar genre conventions that are no longer able to carry the existential experience of the subject and poetic attempts to express it:

<p>powiadam wam iż w waszych miastach nie ma Najwyższego/ ale są wieże barokowych kościołów kościółów karmelitów reformatów w waszych miastach są wymowni kaznodzieje</p>	<p>verily i say to you in your towns there is no Lord/ but there are Baroque church spires churches of Carmelites Reformed Franciscans in your towns are eloquent preachers</p>
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Suspension of voice in the face of Christian tradition as well as the ‘Absence’ to which Dycki refers point to temporal distance between the religious world of Baroque and (post)modern culture. His poetry can be read in the context of post-secular literature. Giorgio Agamben’s observations seem relevant here: “If God was the name of language, ‘God is dead’ can only mean that there is no longer a name for language. The fulfilled revelation of language is a word completely abandoned by God. And human beings are thrown into language without having a voice or a divine word to guarantee them a possibility of escape from the infinite play of meaningful propositions. Thus we finally find ourselves alone with our words; for the first time we are truly alone with language, abandoned without any final foundation [...] we are the first human beings who have become completely conscious of language.” – Agamben (2011: 375). Zob. Bogalecki (2002: 267–285). Another text worth quoting here is the meaningful poem by Tadeusz Różewicz *Francis Bacon, czyli Diego Velázquez na fotelu dentystycznym [Francis Bacon, or Diego Velázquez in a Dentist’s Chair]*, where we read: “Bacon osiągnął transformację/ukrzyżowaną osobę/ w wiszące martwe mięso/ wstał od stolika i powiedział cicho/ tak oczywiście jesteście padliną/ [...] Rembrandt Velázquez/ no tak oni wierzyli w zmartwychwstanie/ ciało oni modlili się przed malowaniem/ a my gramy/ sztuka współczesna stała się grą” [“Bacon achieved transformation/ of a crucified person/ into dead meat hanging/ he rose from the table and said quietly/ yes of course we are carrion/ [...] Rembrandt Velázquez/ right they believed in resurrection/ of bodies they prayed before they painted/ and we play/ modern art has become a game”]. Talking about Różewicz, we should also recall here the opening stanzas of *Totenzanz – wierszyk barokowy [Totentanz – a Little Baroque Poem]* in which the poet not only echoes baroque stylistics as a parody but also shows how the language of *danse macabre* has taken over the language used to speak of death: “dostałem dziś w nocy/zaproszenie do tańca/ hop! dziś! dziś!/// leżę cicho w ciemności/ mięso odpada od kości/ hop! dziś dziś!” [“I got invited/ for a dance tonight/ dee-do-dah!/// in the dark I lie quietly/ flesh falls off the bones/ dee-do-dah!”]. Poems quoted after the edition: T. Różewicz (1998). Baroque overabundance of words and images seems alien to Różewicz, whose poetry approaches silence as a way of evoking the unimaginable.

<sup>12</sup> This motif is discussed by Forajter (2001: 186–188).

<p>ale nie ma słowa ani ust pogryzionych          przez milczenie dnia i nocy Słodki który mnie          wydałeś na pastwę ognia dlaczego          w moich ustach stoi Woda          i nazywa rzeczy dziwnie po swojemu</p> <p>w waszych miastach nie ma Najwyższego          ale są klasztory          jezuitów bazylianów barokowych          obłoków które płyną donikąd biorą          wraz ze mną udział w każdym nabożeństwie</p>	<p>but there is no word or lips bitten          by silence of day and night o Sweet who          left me at the mercy of fire why          there is water in my mouth          and strangely names things in its way</p> <p>in your towns there is no Lord          but there are monasteries          of Jesuits Basilians Baroque          clouds that float nowhere take          part with me in every service</p>
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*CCLVII. Niedziela [Sunday]*

The opening verse of the poem evokes the words with which Jesus in the Gospels usually opened His speeches for the disciples or crowds. The title and the flow of poetic speech in the first and third stanza may resemble a sermon, an instruction or an admonishment. The poem mentions overabundance of Baroque churches (their opulence and magnificence is emphasized by enumerations) which, however, do not announce the presence of God. This schematic motif pointing to external displays of religiosity (sometimes called the paradigm of Baroque/post-Trident religiosity, represented by partiality for ceremony and ostentatious services, manifesting the hierarchical power of the Church) and alienation of the subject. Dycki does not end his confession here as the second stanza brings another antithesis between an eloquent preacher, whose words do not stem from in-depth experiencing of the world and himself, and the subject who feels his hollowness and the incompatibility between words and the well-known languages of expressing religious affectation. The complaint-like apostrophe to “Sweet” (a reflection of a prayer book phrase “O, Sweet Jesus”) refers to the poetic vocation (to use this clichéd phrase). It is stereotypically described by a metaphor of fire, with its Gospel connotations (“I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled?” (Lk 12:49) The phrase “there is water in my mouth” echoes a Polish idiom which means keeping silence or being tight-lipped. Thus the subject distances himself from the religious tradition, expressing at the end of the poem his separateness from the world of Baroque churches used as a synonym of fixed senses and meanings. The motif of clouds points the reader not only towards *Sonnet I* by Mikołaj Sęp Szarzyński but also a well-known poem by Czesław Miłosz, titled *Obłoki [Clouds]*. Through intertextual references the subject expresses his complaint and resignation, which are connected with the certainty of the approaching nothingness. The phrase “there is no Lord”, blended with a reference to Baroque religiosity and imagination, sets a distance from the 17th-century sense of the world.

Dycki's poems are often autothematic. As mentioned, they are a struggle with imperfect poetic language. This struggle is most fully visible in the volume *Dzieje rodzin polskich* [*History of Polish Families*], where one of the texts reads: it is difficult to use language I am/ a modern poet" (CCXXIX.). This declaration does not mean, however, that the author decisively abandons the convention of Polish pre-Enlightenment funeral poetry. *Dzieje rodzin polskich* can of course be read in the context of Baroque *funerbris* pomp – as suggested by the cover, inspired by Sarmatian funeral portraits – or the abundant collections of poetic epitaphs, such as those by Wacław Potocki. Dycki writes:

<p>Leszek ukończyłby polonistykę ale śmierć się w nim zagnieżdżyła bardzo wcześniej zapukała do akademika szukając go w naszym pokoju</p> <p>w kłębach papierosowego dymu przewracając dwuosobowy pokój do góry nogami i niczego nie znajdując na dnie popielniczki bardzo wcześniej przyszła na wykład z baroku</p>	<p>Leszek would have finished Polish studies but death nested in him very early knocked on the dormitory seeking him in our room</p> <p>in clouds of cigarette smoke turning a two-bed room upside down and finding nothing on the ashtray bottom came very early to a lecture on the Baroque</p>
CCXCIX. Wybór [Selection]	

Grotesque approach to death is based on combining the gravity of the topic with its humorous presentation. Personification of death, which in the quoted fragment searches for Leszek and marks its presence during a lecture on the Baroque (a stereotypical equation of this period with the concept of *vanitas*) exemplifies a theme known from previous volumes – blending of death-related motifs with surprising, everyday situations (see e.g. LXII. *Awantura z powodu listy nieobecności* [*A Fracas About the Inattendance List*]; CVI. *Piosenka dla burmistrza* [*A Song for a Mayor*]). The comic language used by the poet to familiarize death (see the ending of the volume *Peregrynarz* [*Peregrinary*] LXXIX. *Ad benevolum lectorem*) is also prominent in the poem CCC. *Szlachcic polski Jan Trupski*<sup>13</sup> [*Jan Trupski, a Polish Gentleman*]

<p>zaczę od tego że nazwisko starodawne niebrzydkie autentyczny szlachcic polski z XVII wieku w każdym razie czuć ski na odległość i to bez ekspozycji zwłok</p> <p>zaczę więc od tego że nazwisko równie starodawne i niebrzydkie co Dycki autentyczny szlachcic z Ukrainy w każdym</p>	<p>I'll start from this an ancient surname not bad authentic Polish gentleman from the 17th century anyway you feel ski from a distance even without exposed corpse</p> <p>I'll start from this a surname as ancient and handsome as Dycki authentic gentleman from Ukraine anyway</p>
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<sup>13</sup> In Polish the surname root "Trup" means a corpse [Translator's note].

razie do Dycia ktoś dodał cki	to Dycio someone added cki
do trupa ktoś dodał ski jakby to było zabawne	someone added ski to a corpse as if it was funny
zresztą co nie jest zabawne w świecie	well what isn't funny in the world
w którym Dycio jest li Dyciem i niczym	where Dycio is but Dycio and nothing
więcej choćbym się związał z Leszkiem	more even if I'd get together with Leszek

The subject plays in an ironic way not only with the 17th-century tradition of writing funeral poetry but also more generally with the Sarmatian culture, rooted in the cult of gentry. A Baroque poet wrote epitaphs; a contemporary poet, while remembering the literary tradition, composes obituaries (see the volume *Imię i zamię: XLIV*). The purpose of today's theatre of death is remembrance and commemoration of the dead: "dziś jednak nie umiem wielu rzeczy/ uściślić (od tego mamy poezję/ ażeby nie rozpadły się w proch dawne/ imiona których już nikt oprócz mnie// nie wprowadzi do porannej i wieczornej/modlitwy) [...] poezja bowiem domaga się (niczym modlitwa za zmarłych)/ wciąż nowych imion ["today I can't specify many/ things (that's what poetry/ is for to keep from turning to dust old/ names nobody but me// includes in morning and evening/ prayer [...] for poetry demands (like a prayer for the dead)/ all the time new names (*Imię i zamię: XLIV. Modlitwa za zmarłych [A Prayer for the Dead]*).

Constant reminders of the graves of the Argasiński, Dycki and Hryniawski families on the one hand evoke a deeply conventional set of death-related signs, and on the other are personal incantations – repetitions that are traces of constantly present traces of finality, represented by the absence of a friend and of the mother. These obsessions are expressed in Dycki's poems through the motif of bones:

oprócz kości moich przodków trawionych	besides the bones of my ancestors burning
długą gorączką nie umiem się niczym cieszyć	with long fever I can't enjoy anything
<i>CCXXIV.</i>	

kości zalegną ci się w wierszu	bones will infest the poem
który teraz piszesz i jutro będą czym innym	you are writing and tomorrow will be something else
<i>CXLIII.</i>	

They reveal the so-to-speak somatic character of the texts themselves – the poems are not only monotonous attempts to conjure the dead but also show auto-thematic commentaries, as well as inclination to repetitions and playing with meanings. In the poem *CXLIV. Manifestacja [Manifestation]* the poet returns to the motif of a university lecture:

[...] mając tyle kości przodków a przede wszystkim/	[...] having so many ancestor bones and above all/
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wiązkę owych profesorskich  
które codzienne zabieram z wykładów  
i wyrzucam za siebie

the bundle of those professorial ones  
which I every day take from the lectures  
and throw away behind me

Reading this poem as Dycki's metaliterary comment on his own literary output, I am tempted to conclude that the gesture of throwing away the "professorial bones" can signify the founding act of poetic speech; while constantly attempting to conjure the dead, this speech avoids schematic repeating and renewing the literary tradition legitimized by academic authorities. In another text the subject adopts the convention of a confession, uttering the words: "wyzbyć się języka dziecka i przemówić/ po męsku jak zmarły do zmarłego" ["to put away child's language and speak/ in a manly way like one dead man to another"] (XLIV.)

Self-reference of poetic phrases, which are broken apart and connected in different configurations, and the fact that Dycki actually writes one text dealing with loss give his poetry a very distinct and unique character. We can say that the poet constantly oscillates between poetic idiom and the institutionalized, well-defined and handy set of poetic expression strategies known in the history of literature. Dycki certainly references the Baroque (or, more broadly, the Polish pre-Enlightenment tradition), yet this Baroque undergoes a far-reaching metamorphosis. It is an obscure, unobvious Baroque which functions rather as a specter haunting the language which the poet used to fight for his own speech as he keeps looking at death.

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