

BURNS SINGER and JERZY PETERKIEWICZ

Poems from the Polish

On the War we wage against Satan, the World and the Body

Peace would make happy: under the heavens though
We fight our life. He who commands the night
Wages cruel war; and vanities delight
In quickening our corruption with their show.

And there is more, O Lord, that you must know:
Our home, this body, greedy, fleeting, bright,
Heedlessly envious of your supreme might,
Continually covets endless woe.

Weak, careless and divided, what can I,
Engaged in all this combat, gain alone?
O universal King, O peace most high,
Your mercy is my hope, or I have none.

Let me come close, Lord, teach me what to do,
Then I shall fight them and, thus saved, win through.

Mikolaj SEP-SZARZYNSKI (1550?–1581)

Queries

Earth and the whirl of air, the circling sky,
These are my triple texts. They clarify
God's goodness till their living image glows
And I read truth through their three folios.
What spark lights up the sun and makes it burn,
An endless lantern as the years return?
Who drives its flame-maned chargers? And what force
Keeps its bright cart so perfectly on course?
Who costumes night, the youthful prioress
Whose face each evening wears new tenderness?
And why is she not weary with the changes?
Who plants the seeds of dew? And who arranges
For morning to be varnished fresh each day?
Who brightens the extinguished stars which play

Poetry

Like shy sharp fingers with the hackled snow ?
 That fleece, what makes it ? How do hailstones grow ?
 And who has pinned upon the wind its wings ?
 Or given this world so many different things ?
 Who tells tonight that last night has gone by ?
 Nor deviates though daylights multiply ?
 What mind hacks minutes from slow centuries
 And documents with clocks what no man sees ?
 As at a rollcall, the small seconds shout
 Their names and hours, and hours take turn about.
 And when Favonius chases lazy ice
 Far into Tartary with his winged device
 The melting snow beyond Hercynian shores
 Grumbles and crumbles almost as it snores ;
 And youthful Spring unsheets her gentle bed
 And rubs her cheeks with dew till they shine red.

(from the idyll *Winiarze*)

Bartłomiej ZIMOROWIC (1597–1680)

Emblem 39

The Bride came to seek the Bridegroom during the night, and found him—asleep upon the cross.

Inscription: “By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not.”

Solomon’s Song, III, 1.

Breathless I run; all day I’ve searched this place
 Straining my eyes and ears to catch some trace
 Of him I love. And then some men reply
 That he was seen asleep at home. So I
 Enter our house and tiptoe to his door
 Afraid to waken him whom I adore.
 But he is gone, and where he lay feels chill.
 Yes, he has vanished. I search again, until,
 Now without hope, at last I see him lie
 Without a sheet or pillow, nakedly
 Stretched on the cross. His only bedding is
 Pain, passion, torment, his death agonies.
 O, my Beloved, is this then your room
 And your repose ? this cross ? this blood ? this doom ?
 Is combat sleep ? a duel where you meet
 Death and the devil, promising defeat
 Since only then can you my sinful soul
 Restore to joy and make my sickness whole,
 When, from your death, eternal my salvation
 Though, for my sins, endless your mortification.

Zbigniew MORSZTYN (1620?–1690?)

The Turkish Army

Those wondrous Negroes massed there, whose white teeth
 (Peering with icy brightness from beneath
 Black smolten glass, their swollen lips,) would scorch
 The eye that watched them as sparks singe a torch.
 The Mamelukes, their tunics broad and white,
 Scattered through that great field and, like a flight
 Of swans above a rookery, banners spread,
 Thick Turkish *bunchuks* flapping overhead.
 Taurus, rock rope where Hercules won fame,
 From both its sides the clambering nations came.
 From Carmel where Elijah's prayers brought tears
 To heaven's cheek that had been dry three years.
 From Calpe's and Abyla's limbs of stone,
 And from tall Ossa, once Typhesus' throne,
 Whence giants who expelled the gods from heaven.

The Lydians came, Pamphylans, Kurds, and even
 Armenians, Myndii, Seres, Macedonians;
 Cyrenaei came, Angorians, Anatolians;
 From Cappadocia, Pontus, and that town
 Where sulphur burns and asphalt glue's upthrown,
 Sodom, they came: bald-headed Arymfaeans,
 Cadurci, Latophagi, Cyrcei, Sabaeans,
 Egyptians, Massagetae, Bisalts, Hyrcanians,
 Imawi, Bactrians, Phrygians, and Albanians,
 Psylli and Pargiotes, Gelonians came:
 Ganges, the Nile, and Tigris, lent their name:
 From where the Hydra meets the Crocodile,
 From Vulcan's Lemnos and from Eden's mile
 Where Adam lived who taught mankind to die,
 From Memphis, Babylon, Cairo, Tripoli,
 From the whole Orient now in decay
 They came. Yet from the Danube, nearer they,
 Bulgarians came, and Bosnians, men from Thrace,
 The Cherkes, Rumi, Silistra, each race . . .

(from the epic poem *Wojna chocimska*)

Waclaw POTOCKI (1625-1696)

Recipe for a Warsaw novel

Three landlords, stupid ones; cut each in two;
 That'll make six: add stewards, Jews and water
 Enough to give full measure: whip the brew
 With one pen, flagellate your puny jotter:
 Warm, if there's time, with kisses: that's the cue
 For putting in your blushing gushing daughter
 Red as a radish: tighten up: add cash,
 A sack of roubles, cold: mix well, and mash.

Cyprian NORWID (1821-1833)

The Day before Harvest

One day at harvest time the sun
Was burning up the sky;
Great Mr. Godlord took a walk
Through oats that grew hip high.

He walked bareheaded and unbuttoned
Examining every ear,
Wondering just what kind of crop
He could expect this year.

And had the ploughing been quite right?
Had the sowing been well done?
Was he, great Mr. Godlord, worth
The praise he always won?

Then in his wide left palm he crushed
An ear or two at most,
Studied them closely, gently blew
So that no grain was lost.

Davidson came to that same field.
"I'll not have these oats spoiled.
This harvest is my blood and sweat.
My wife scrimped while I toiled."

"Yours, is it? That's a fine one. Mine!"
Old Mr. Godlord spat.

"I ploughed the land, I sowed the seed.
Poor man, you must know that.

But if you still insist, my man,
I'll tell what we'll do.
We'll wrestle to find out if it
Belongs to me or you."

They grasped each other then and fought.
Davidson's skin was torn.
God used his strength. Davidson fell
Stone dead among the corn.

Such is the usual lot of man.
Such things are often seen,
Men falling as fat cattle fall
When clover's thick and green.

Old Mr. Godlord wins and smiles.
"Brother, you must have known
These crops were mine and always will
Be mine and mine alone."

Then in his wide left palm he crushes
An ear or two at most,
Studies them closely, gently blows
So that no grain is lost.

Jan KASPROWICZ (1860-1926)

Spring, 1917

(in memoriam: Apollinaire)

It was the earth I called to, one, two, three.
The sun is just a hole bleeding in the sky.
The dagger that dug it has long been extracted.
A scarlet clown, good Caesar Borgia,
And Richard III, hunched shadow on the wall.
Observe the moon, a sliver that sticks out
from the sack on his shoulders.
And swallows swell within the dome of the sky,
and blossoms thicken in the fields,
and clouds divide to take up battle order:
I see Alexander the Great
as he stands at Pompeii, in ornate mosaic;
the banners make merry as armies emerge
from the trenches of Verdun.

Only among the spring clouds, only there in
sharp silhouette
I glimpse a green artillery helmet.
It's Lieutenant Wilhelm Kostrowicki.
An armoured engine stamps on the sky.
The thunder of spring is shaking the earth,
is probing into the guts of the earth,
is touching the human heart.
A storm will bend the biggest of trees
and leave it leafless in a wilderness of fields.
The wild vine climbs and drapes lush green
around the blackened trunk.

Tytus CZYZEWSKI (1885-1945)

MUSIC

Looking Back on a Decade

By Virgil Thomson

EXAMINING the state of music *now*, in 1960, as compared with its state ten years ago, I shall not be able always to judge changes by the criterion of progress. One is a little close in time for that; and anyway, I do not know what progress means. It can mean improvement; but it can also mean decline, as when we speak of the progress of a disease. Also, music's state to-day could present so great a variety of changes—like the political map of Africa, say—that the mere enumeration of these might well be more informative than one man's estimate of their worth. Actually, I should like to essay just that, a description of the music-world now, as compared in divers aspects and details, with that of 1950. Fitting its changes into any pattern at all, whether of amelioration or of decay, or even estimating whether beneath them all, music may possibly be just plain standing still, like the rock of Gibraltar, neither of these tempting exercises can promise profit save when wrought with facts.

FIRST, from the viewpoint of performance, or execution, no change at all is visible. The standard Western instruments and the standard ways of playing them are the same. The piano, the strings, the wind instruments sound exactly as before. Nor has their pedagogy advanced. A dearth of string players, though frequently announced for the future, is not yet an orchestral emergency. Nor have string teachers, in spite of much thought taken, yet made any major break-through in pedagogical method that might simplify the learning of stringed instruments.

The art of singing, which seems never fully to have recovered from World War I, was not further injured by World War II. But it has never regained the popularity it held before 1920 both in public performance and in gramophone recordings. Indeed, the earlier recordings bear witness to a beauty of tone and sophistication of style rarely matched since. Singing, moreover,

has not even essayed the particular skill that today's chromatic and 12-tone music cries out for, namely, the production of a clean white tone without vibrato.

MUSICAL COMPOSITION has been livelier. Integrated serialism (or multiple-row composition), as announced in the 1940's, has been developed during the 1950's with unquestioned artistic integrity, though in small quantity. The first extended works composed in this technique were, if I err not, by Pierre Boulez. The use of hazard in musical disposition has also been exploited in the last decade. Painters had begun exploring a similar vein some forty years earlier; but chance as an element in music writing, save for those primitive composing-machines that Mozart found briefly diverting, is surely a novelty of our time. Its first user was, I think, John Cage.

Music composed directly on electronic tape, generally known as *la musique concrète*, is another effort begun in the late 1940's that has continued throughout the 50's. Its repertory is still small and its artistic value a matter of dispute, but it too is a novelty of our time, the product of serious effort on the part of perfectly serious composers and engineers.

The acoustical engineers have been collaborating with architects in the designing of new concert halls. Many of these are quite handsome structures. Almost none, however, except for some small ones, is acoustically satisfactory. As a matter of fact, there has not been built anywhere in Europe or America since 1900 an acoustically successful hall or music theatre seating more than 2,600 persons. Nineteenth-century construction methods permitted a better result, as witness notably the Auditorium Theatre in Chicago, not now in use, and the Academy of Music in Philadelphia.

RELATED TO ACOUSTICS are certain new studies of the nature of auditory perception. It is not for me to explain these in detail. You will find them