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The Idea of God and Religion in the Poetry of Anna Frajlich

Man is but a reed, the most feeble thing in nature, but he is a thinking reed.
Blaise Pascal

I. Introduction

The purpose of the article is to examine the poetry of Anna Frajlich, using the unique perspective of God and religion, which was never applied to her poetry in the past. This review is also an attempt to comprehensively envision her poetry as the “palimpsest of meanings” that exists independently of the author and leads to polyphony of aesthetic values.¹ The methodology of this examination is based on a thematic critique.² Poetry is treated as an open structure that exists independently of biographical and historical aspects implied by the poet. Thus the “poetic subject” (who speaks up in poems) is not directly defined as the author. Benedetto Croce (1866-1952) argues in his books that there is always a division between poetical statements and the life of a poet.³ Adam Zagajewski (1945-) states that poetry is autonomous in itself.⁴ In addition, we use the principles of the “hermeneutic circle” by Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) to conduct the analysis.⁵ The “hermeneutic circle” stresses codependency and the repeated movement between the “whole” and “parts” of poetic texts. This movement goes back and forth between parts and the whole. Finally, we underline Frajlich’s symbolic imagination as part of our methodology. We try to avoid situations (if possible) in which the meaning is not determined by poetic texts, but rather, depends on random psychological interpretations of the reader.

¹ Ingarden, Roman, *O poznawaniu dzieła literackiego*, Lwów: Ossolineum, 1937.

² Richard, J.-P., *L’Univers imaginaire de Mallarmé*, Paris, 1962, p. 24-25. See also: Głowiński, Michał *Francuska krytyka tematyczna*, Pamiętnik Literacki, LXII, 1971, z.2., cz. III: *Przekłady*.

³ Croce, Benedetto, *Essays on Literature and Literary Criticism*, trans. M.E. Moss, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990.

⁴ Zagajewski, Adam expresses his view on the role of poetry. See: Best, W., Jolanta, *Poetry Summons Us to Life. A Conversation with Adam Zagajewski*, The Sarmatian Review, January 2006, Volume XXVI, No. 1.

⁵ Dilthey, Wilhelm, *Hermeneutics and the Study of History*, eds. Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989. See also: Jean Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. by Joel Weinsheimer. Foreword by Hans-Georg Gadamer, New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1994, p. 84.

Anna Frajlich is the author of poetry and prose⁶ which have been analyzed by various scholars.⁷ It also has been said that she represents the poetry of exile.⁸ According to Jan Zieliński, her “poetry can be called the poetry of removal, the poetry of uprooting and poetry of dreams of return.”⁹ Born in Kirghizia, she studied, worked, and lived with her family in Poland until 1969. Forced by the communist ideology of anti-Semitism (known as “March 1968”), she left Poland, went to Italy, and settled in America.¹⁰ Currently, she teaches Polish language and litera-

⁶ Anna Frajlich’s writings include several poetry books: *Aby wiatr namalować* (To Paint the Wind), London: Stanisław Gliwa, 1976; *Tylko ziemia*, (Only the Earth), London: OPIM, 1979; *Indian Summer*, Albany, NY: Sigma Press, 1982; *Który las* (Which Forest), London: OPIM, 1986; *Drzewo za oknem* (The Tree Behind the Window), New York, 1990; *Between Dawn and the Wind/Pomiędzy świtem i wiatrem*, Bilingual Edition (English-Polish), trans. with an Introduction by Regina Grol-Prokopczyk, Austin, TX: Host Publications, 1991, 2006 (2nd Edition); *Ogrodem i ogrodzeniem* (The Garden and the Fence), Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1993; *Jeszcze w drodze* (Still on Its Way), Warsaw: NOWA, 1994; *W słońcu listopada* (In November’s Sunshine), Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2000; *Znów szuka mnie wiatr* (The Wind Seeks Me Again), 50 pages, Warsaw: Czytelnik, 2001; *Le vent, a’ nouveau me cherche/Znów szuka mnie wiatr* (The Wind Seeks Me Again), Bilingual Edition (French-Polish), 112 pages, trans. by Alice-Catherine Carls, preface by Jan Zieliński, Editinter, France, 2003; *Le vent, a’ nouveau me cherche/Znów szuka mnie wiatr* (The Wind Seeks Me Again), Bilingual Edition (French-Polish), Special Second Edition for Biennale Internationale de Poesie De Liege, 114 pages, trans. by Alice-Catherine Carls, preface by Jan Zieliński, Editinter, France, 2012; *Łodzią jest i jest przystanią/ It is a Boat, and It is a Harbor*, Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Forma, 2013. Also, Frajlich is the author of the following prose and scholarly books: *The Legacy of Ancient Rome in the Russian Silver Age*, Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2007; *Laboratorium*, Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Forma, 2010; *Czesław Miłosz. Lekcje. Prywatny Hold*, Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Forma, 2011.

⁷ Selected articles on Anna Frajlich’s poetry include the following: Ligęza, Wojciech, *W samym oku cyklonu jest żrenica ciszy*, Tygiel Kultury, nr 3/1998; Żmizdiński, Jakub, *Drzewo i dom. O wierszach Anny Frajlich-Zajac*, Polonistyka 6/1998; Sobolewska, Justyna, *Przekształcony ból*, Midrasz, wrzesień, 2001; Gross, Natan, *Miejsce na ziemi*, Nowiny Kurier, 7 września, 2001; Jamrozek-Sowa, Anna, *I tam gdzie mnie nie posiało do słońca wyciągam gałęzie*, In: *Poezja polska na obczyźnie. Studia i szkice*, tom 2, pod red. Zbigniewa Andersa i Jana Wolskiego, Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, 2005; Biskupska, Beata, *Między ‘jeszcze’ a ‘już’. Trwanie zagrożone w poezji Anny Frajlich*, Akcent, rok XXVII, nr 4 (106), 2006; Karkowski, Czesław, *Życie bolesne, życie radosne*, Przegląd Polski/Dodatek Kulturalny Nowego Dziennika, 23 lutego, 2007; Drzewucki, Janusz, *Pomiędzy świtem i wiatrem*, Rzeczpospolita, 3-4 marca, 2007; Zieliński, Jan, *Pojedyńcza perła*, Przegląd Polski. Tygodniowy Dodatek Kulturalny Nowego Dziennika, 25 lipca, 2008; Zurek, Sławomir Jacek, *Voices of the Exiled Generation of 1968. On the Poetic Biography of Anna Frajlich*, In: *From the Borderland. Essays on Polish-Jewish Literature*, Lublin: Publishing House of Catholic University of Lublin, 2008.

⁸ See: Karpińska, Marta, *Poety emigracyjnego zmagania z biografją (na przykładzie twórczości Anny Frajlich)*, Akcent, Rok XXVI, Nr 3 (101), 2005.

⁹ Jan Zieliński presents Anna Frajlich’s poetry on the web site:

http://www.culture.pl/web/english/resources-literature-full-page/-/eo_event_asset_publisher/eANS/content/anna-frajlich-zajac. In addition (Access, 31.03.2013).

¹⁰ Anna Frajlich-Zajac, *Dwa istnienia rozszczepione/Two split beings. Conversations with Czesław Karkowski*, Part II, Przegląd Polski, November 28, 2003. Also, see interviews with Anna Frajlich published by Nowiny-Kurier (Tel-Aviv, Israel), August 17, 2001.

ture at Columbia University in New York City. Frajlich received the Kościelski Foundation Award (1981) and W&N Turzański Foundation Award (2003), the Knight Cross of the Order of Merit (2002), and a title of honorary Ambassador of Szczecin (2007).

In addition to her awards and recognition, Frajlich should be also recognized as a woman-poet who writes about reality, using a female-oriented perspective. Her poetry probes existential topics on God, religion, suffering, pain, aging, female psychology, and nature. However, this poetry cannot be fully defined through the historical, immigrant, and feminist perspectives. T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) argues that good poetry goes beyond biographical determinants and subjective perspectives. It creates an “objective correlative” which is built on a connection between words of texts, literary events, states of mind, and experiences.¹¹ Any good poetry should be measured by its universality. It must be recognized as polyphony of aesthetic values that exist independently of external conditions linked to the author or the readers.¹² Therefore, Frajlich’s poetry should be viewed as the “palimpsest of meanings” expressed via the poet’s imagination as “themes” and “key words.”¹³ Also, it should be recognized by its existential character that stresses ideas related to being, existence, and human consciousness in its attempt to grasp the meaning of life. Thus, Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), who is the father of existential philosophy, could be envisioned as the patron of poetry by Frajlich. He glances at human affairs through the prism of the aesthetic, ethical, and religious mode of existence.¹⁴ Frajlich also depicts life, nature, art, and ethics by connecting the lines of the aesthetic, ethical, and religious in her poetry.

II. “Homo Viator” or the Metaphysics of a Journey

Frajlich’s earliest poetry book is titled *Aby wiatr namalować*, 1976 (To Paint the Wind). It introduces the symbolism of the wind which returns in her *Znow szuka mnie wiatr*, 2001, 2003, 2012 (The Wind Seeks Me Again), *Indian Summer*, 1982, *Ogrodem i ogrodzeniem*, 1994 (The Garden and the Fence), and *Łodzią jest i jest przystanią*, 2013 (It Is a Boat, and It Is a Harbor). For Frajlich, the wind signifies the poetics of motion, change, and an inner journey. It also reminds the reader of Henri Bergson (1859-1941) and his *Creative Evolution*, 1907. Furthermore, it brings back the poetic principles that Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962) established in

¹¹ T. S. Eliot, *Hamlet and His Problems*. See in: *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*, 1922.

¹² Ingarden, Roman, *O poznawaniu dzieła literackiego*, op.cit.

¹³ Podraza-Kwiatkowska, Maria, *Symbolizm i symbolika w poezji Młodej Polski*, Wydanie 2, Krakow: Universitas, 1994.

¹⁴ Kierkegaard, Soren, *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life*, (ed.) Victor Eremita, trans. Alastair Hannay.

his *Poetics of Reverie*, 1960.¹⁵ For Bergson, Bachelard, and Frajlich intimate memories, inner slices of time and reverie are the acts of an especially dynamic epistemology and artistic creation. According to dictionaries of symbols, the wind symbolizes the “air in its active and violent aspects and it is held to be the primary Element by virtue of its connection with the creative breath or exhalation. Jung recalls that in Arabic (and paralleled by the Hebrew) the word *ruh* signifies both ‘breath’ and ‘spirit.’”¹⁶ In its deepest meaning, the wind opens up the problem of fecundation and regeneration.¹⁷ Frajlich’s image of the wind is close to Blaise Pascal’s idea of the “thinking reed.” Pascal stresses the connection between God, the universe, and a human being. Frajlich also reveals the necessity to know a reed: *Aby wiatr namalować-trzeba poznać trzcinę /tak strzelistą wśród ciszy i w czas burzy-zgiętą* (to paint the wind-one needs to know a slender reed in the silence and in the time of the storm-bent- translation by JWB). This poetic message seems to imply: in order to know the “wind,” and “air,” at first one needs to know the earth and human being as a “reed.”

Frajlich’s poetry supports dynamism. It is accentuated by images of a journey, return, farewell, locomotive, bicycle, walking, and nature. In the volume, *Aby wiatr namalować* (To Paint the Wind) the reader can observe an evolving and dynamic image of God. At first, God is recognized through the sacred time of traditional holidays. Frajlich’s time evolves from being psychological to being religious and metaphysical. Time transcends layers of everyday events and anticipates a hidden description of reality. Time is measured through a rhythm of different days, holidays, seasons of nature, and memories. For Frajlich, as well as Bergson and Bachelard, God and a person’s secret nature reside beyond the realm of rationality, laws, and clock-time. The essence of reality can be measured by reverie.¹⁸ Similarly, the experience of God is stimulated by a rhythm of holidays and “small epiphanies” in nature. Frajlich puts more emphasis on Christmas. It is not envisioned, according to stiff rules. Rather, it reveals itself as quality-time. In the poem *Przed wigilią* (Before Christmas Eve) from the volume *Aby Wiatr namalować* (To Paint the Wind, p. 40) we see a Christmas tree and (almost Polish) images of the holiday. It is a special time of waiting for the birth of the Baby Jesus. The perspective of Christmas is not distant, but the anticipated holiday of the birth of Jesus is viewed intimately and personally. The poetic subject is full of emotion, wants to share holiday wishes, and asks for God’s blessings. Christmas wishes are directed to a poetic

¹⁵ Frajlich quotes Bachelard in her poem *Wina* (Guilt) in *Który las* (What Forest, 1986, p. 5).

¹⁶ Cirlot, J.E., *A Dictionary of Symbols*, trans. by Jack Sage, New York: Barnes Noble Books, 1995, p. 373.

¹⁷ Percy Bysshe Shelley in his poem *Ode to the West Wind*, 1819, stresses a destructive and regenerative quality of the wind.

¹⁸ Bachelard, Gaston, *The Poetics of Reverie*, 1960.

anonymous “you” but possess a universal meaning. God seems to be close to everyone in this “sacred hour”:

i w taką godzinę
kiedy Bóg odpoczywa przed zbawieniem świata
niechaj spojrzy na dom twój

niech cię nie ominie.

(*Aby wiatr namalować/To Paint the Wind*, p. 40)

In my loose translation:

and in this hour
when God rests before the salvation of the world
Let him look at your home
Let him not miss you.

By becoming a sign (hierophany) of God, Christmas reveals the “dialectic of the sacred.”

“Any object whatever may paradoxically become a hierophany, a receptacle of the sacred, while still participating in its own cosmic environment.”¹⁹

Christmas is also an “escape from time.”²⁰ For Frajlich Christmas is never measured by a “string of pearls.” She uses Bergson’s idea of clock-time as represented by a string of pearls. The poem *Z Bergsona* (From Bergson) in the volume, *Znów szuka mnie wiatr*, refreshes Bergson’s idea of time:²¹

Czas nie jest sznurem perel
tylko jedną perlą
nanizaną
na ziarno niepojętej rany
sączy się płynną masą
odwieczną i zmienną
i bezmiar nienazwany
wypełnia swym trwaniem.

(*Le vent, a’ nouveau me cherche/Znów szuka mnie wiatr*, p. 92)

¹⁹ Eliade, Mircea, *Images and Symbols. Studies in Religious Symbolism*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991, p. 84-85.

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 85.

²¹ All quotes from *Znów szuka mnie wiatr* by Anna Frajlich refer to the following source: *L e vent, a’ nouveau me cherche/Znów szuka mnie wiatr*, Bilingual Edition (French-Polish) Special Second Edition for Biennale Internationale De Poesie De Liege, 114 pages, trans. by Alice-Catherine Carls, preface Jan Zieliński, Editinter, France, 2012.

In my loose translation:

Time is not a string of pearls
It is only one pearl
thread upon
on a grain of inconceivable wounds
dripping like liquid mass
eternal and variable
and vastness of the unnamed
fills up its duration.

For Bergson, clock-time is pictured as pearls on a string. Each pearl represents a separate moment. We move from one pearl to another with a tick of the clock²². However, this image of time is false. Bergson rejects clock-time as insufficient and instead chooses a dynamic “lived time” of duration. The “lived time” of being is a time that endures. According to this “lived time,” the past and future are related to the present in the form of memories, expectations, and desires²³. The present time is a palimpsest of dynamic connections between the past and future. Therefore, the essence of time cannot be explained by its chronological and horizontal order. Rather, it should be perceived as a vertical line of past memories, actual, and virtual instances of temporality experienced by a human being. For Frajlich, this psychological time is represented only by one pearl. Time as one pearl is linked to human pain and suffering. Frajlich modifies Bergson’s theory of time. In her poetic comment on Bergson, she points out the necessity of connecting metaphysics and ethics to understand time. Thus, she goes beyond Bergsonian descriptions to argue that the essence of time cannot be grasped by purely philosophical concepts. Time is not understood by philosophers. Human pain and suffering help us to grasp the mystery of time²⁴. Frajlich underlines that a search for ideal values (the pearl can symbolize God) requires the ability to endure pain on a difficult journey of life²⁵.

²² Bergson, Henri, *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1923), trans. by Mabelle Louise Andison, Dover Publications, 2007. See also, Wróbel-Best, Jolanta, *Bergson and Miciński: kręgi znaczeń*. In: *Misteria czasu. Problematyka temporalna Tadeusza Micińskiego*, Kraków: Universitas, 2012.

²³ DeLuze, Gilles, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. by Hugh Tompkinson and Robert Galeta, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989. Also, see: Kołakowski, Leszek, *Bergson*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.

²⁴ Emmanuel Levinas argues that suffering and time help the “self” to be individualized, but death stops this process of individuation. See: Levinas, Immanuel, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. by Alfonso Lingis, Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 19988 (Sixth Edition).

²⁵ Miłosz, Czesław, *Hymn o perle*, Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1982. Also, see: Zieliński, Jan, *Pojedyńcza perła*, Przegląd Polski (NYC), July 25, 2008.

Christmas holidays offer a special spiritual journey. The poetic subject thus can be defined as a Christmas wanderer and “Way-Farer” (or *Homo Viator*) who searches for the meaning of life. It is a journey which takes place within, starts from his/her own “self,” and is directed toward the “other.” The “other” beings include other people and the ultimate “Other” or God.²⁶ In the poem *Pora się żegnać* (It Is Time to Say Goodbye) Frajlich shows a philosophical, but not orthodox, approach to Christmas and religion. The sacred time of Christmas is given dynamically as a gesture of farewell:

Pora się żegnać (...)
deszcz nagle spadnie i Bóg
się narodzi jakby chciał znowu
uczyć miłowania
nic jeszcze nie wie, że trzeba odchodzić
od tych których ukochać...

In my loose translation:

It is time to say goodbye
rain suddenly falls and God
will be born again
to teach love
He does not yet know you must depart
from those whom you love...

(*Aby wiatr namalować*/To Paint the Wind, p. 42)

The Baby Jesus, who will be born on Christmas, does not know that we must leave behind the people we love. We could be suddenly leaving them and other precious landscapes such as: flowers, rivers (*zieloną barwę jeszcze nie zmieszana*/the green color has not mixed yet-JWB), springs, and rocks. The poetic descriptions underline the dualism between the sacred (Christmas) and the profane (human finite life). In Frajlich’s poem, God is born on Christmas to teach us how to love. Love, the poem argues, is the way to Transcendence.²⁷ The birth of God on Christmas and the rain²⁸ are related to each other in the poem. They belong to a

²⁶ Marcel, Gabriel, *Homo Viator: Introduction to the Metaphysics of Hope*, trans. by Paul Seaton and Emma Craufurd, St. Augustines Press, 2010.

²⁷ In addition, the idea of love, as the way to Transcendence, is present in Frajlich’s poem *Byle wiatr/As Long as the Wind*. In: *Aby wiatr namalować* (To Paint the Wind), op. cit., p. 49.

²⁸ Rain appears as purification (like before the Last Judgment) in Frajlich’s poem 5749. The title is composed, according to the Hebrew calendar which is lunisolar. The calendar stresses Jewish religious observances.

general symbolism of life and signify purification, when heaven is descending upon earth²⁹.

Similar connections among the divine, human, and nature exist in the poem *Prośba o deszcz* (Request for Rain) from the volume *Tylko ziemia* (Only the Earth, p.32). The poetic subject states:

(...)
niech nam Pan
ześle wielką burzę
tak
jak nam dar pragnienia zesłał.

In my loose translation:

May the Lord send
a big storm
like the gift of desire He sent us.

Frajlich's poetic subject recognizes God and the "self," using a dynamic epistemology which does not depend on a traditional time and space. It is a relational epistemology in which:

"We affirm our identity through a relationship to others. We recognize our self-identity through their recognition of who we are."³⁰

In conclusion, Frajlich does not speak easily about God and religious matters. Rather, she uses understated words to signify God. The idea of God as well as religion is an important part of her poetry that probes existential and religious links among the deity, the universe, and human beings. Frajlich talks about God, using a multilayered perspective of a journey which embraces motion, modes of transportation (cars, boats, etc.), jumping hurdles, and images of farewell and return. It is mostly Frajlich's inner journey through a spiritual space and vertical time. The special emphasis is put here on religious holidays (Christmas, Easter, Jewish religious holidays, etc.). They bring back forgotten memories, enrich the present time and structure the future. Of course, it is not the only way in which Frajlich discusses God and religion³¹. It is difficult to know God, according to Frajlich's poetry, but

²⁹ Cirlot, J.E., *A Dictionary of Symbols*, op. cit, p. 271-272.

³⁰ Mulliken, Benjamin, *The existentialism of the self with regard to others, according to Gabriel Marcel*, Education & Schools, May 25, 2009.

³¹ Frajlich introduces the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the poem *Santa Maria Ausiliatrice* in *Aby wiatr namalować/To Paint the Wind*, London, 1976, p. 16. The Blessed Virgin Mary is envisioned as the Mother of Perpetual Help and Mediatrix. The Mother of God has the function of saintly intercession in the poem.

sometimes the divine being can be affirmed. The poem *Z innej przyczyny* (The Other Reason) shows the affirmation of God³² as Providence:

A przecież to pod Jego
błądzimy oknami
o każdej porze roku
w siebie zasluchani
przeskakujemy płotki
jak na olimpiadzie
i nie pytamy kto je ustawił
przed nami.

(*Który las* / Which Forest, 1986, p. 33)

In my loose translation:

Yet it under His
windows we stray
at any time of the year
in ourselves listening intently
jump hurdles
as we do in the Olympics
and we do not ask who set
them in front of us.

III. An Open and Closed Religion

Frajlich's poetry does not promote orthodox viewpoints on God and religion. In the early volumes there are vivid images linked to Christianity and Judaism. The author recognizes normative moral laws, customs, and rites of the sacred time of holidays. This type of religion can be defined as the "closed religion." It is organized around traditional religious views and around God perceived through a lens of typical religious imagination as "Pan Bog"/Lord God. In the poem, *Nie było mnie* / (I Wasn't) from the volume *Aby wiatr namalować* (To Paint the Wind) rules of the Ten Commandments are contrasted with the beauty of creation: colors, first birds, and the dawn. The poetic subject is given divine moral laws, but they are not sufficient. Frajlich recognizes the "split reality" between rigid laws and the life of creation. The laws do not show humans how to go in the right direction:

³² The affirmation of God as Infinity and the Creator appears in the poem *W bezmiarze wśród chaosu* (In the Vastness of Chaos) from the volume *Ogrodem i ogrodzeniem*, (The Garden and the Fence, p. 54). Frajlich writes in Polish: "niezasłużony darowany/włożyłeś w dłonie moje czas'a hojność Twa-jak Ty bez granic-/osłania mnie....".

Nie było mnie
gdy Pan Bóg barwy tworzył
i kiedy świtem budził pierwsze ptaki
nie było mnie
zastałam tedy już
czarno na białym dziesięć przykazań
i stron świata cztery
wiem
co jest dobre i co złe
i tylko nie wiem
w którą iść stronę

In my loose translation:

I was not there
When God created colors
and when the dawn awoke the first birds
I was not
I found, therefore, already
black and white Ten Commandments
and four corners of the world
I know what is good and what is bad
I just do not know
In which direction to go.

(*Aby wiatr namalować* / To Paint the Wind, p.13)

Frajlich rejects rigid rules of the “closed religion”.

“There is the closed morality, where religion is static, and there is the open morality, where religion is dynamic. Closed morality and static religion are concerned with social cohesion. Nature has made certain species evolve in such a way that the individuals in these species cannot exist on their own. They are fragile and require the support of a community. The force of these needs is the source of the closed morality.”³³.

She does not believe in social cohesion either. In the poem, *Jestem oddzielna* (I Am Separate), in the volume *Aby wiatr namalować* (To Paint the Wind) the subject is defined through a prism of freedom. Freedom bridges the macrocosm of God and the microcosm of man:

³³ *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, trans., R. Ashley Audra and Cloudsley Brereton, with the assistance of W. Horsfall Carter, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977 [1935]. See: Lawlor, Leonard and Moulard, Valentine, "Henri Bergson", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2013 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2013/entries/bergson/>

Jestem oddzielna

(...)
żadna część systemu
niczyja własność
ni kółko w maszynie

(...)
mogę pokochać-mogę
nagle rzucić
i umierając wyświęcić wargami
oddzielne imię oddzielnego Boga.

(*Aby wiatr namalować/To Paint the Wind*, p. 10)

In my loose translation:

(...)
I am separate
no part of the system
nobody's property
not piece of the machine
(...)
I can love - I can
Suddenly quit
and ordain in dying lips
the separate name of a separate God.

The vision of God, separation, and freedom open up a problem on the metaphysics of God³⁴.

Prawo moralne (The Moral Law) from *Indian Summer* (1982) refers to the moral code of Scripture and Ethics. It is also a polemic with Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and his deontology.³⁵ Its conclusion is that stiff religious rules (expressed in the poem as the “camel-like humps”) make any religion and ethics static. Ironically, rigid religious rules seem to be limited in comparison with the complexity of human life. Frajlich states: “we go through the eye of a needle (translation-JWB) with camel-like humps and milestones mock us.” We have it in Polish as: “Z wielbłądzimi garbami/poprzez ucho igielne przechodzimy/.../drwią z nas słupy milowe.” (p. 31). Frajlich criticizes Kant's ethics of duty. She paraphrases Kant's famous pronouncement formulated in *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), “Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the more often and

³⁴ Dolezal, James, *God without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God's Absoluteness*, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011.

³⁵ Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by Mary Gregor, with an Introduction by Christine M. Korsgaard, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

steadily we reflect upon them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.”³⁶ The dictum by Kant is reversed in the poem:

“gwiezdna otchłań nad nami
i gdzieś w trzewiach uwiera prawo.”
(*Indian Summer*, p. 31)

In my loose translation:

starry abyss above us
and somewhere in bowels hurts the law.

The entire phrase accentuates negative connotations. It is not the “starry heavens” above us, as Kant implies, but it is an abyss. Similarly, the moral law is not placed within the human heart, but it is located in the “bowels.” The expressions do not support dynamism and change which belongs to the “open religion and morality.”³⁷ Rather, they create the world of rules recognized by Kant as categorical imperatives. Creativity, on the contrary, is the essence of the “open religion”:

“The open morality and dynamic religion are concerned with creativity and progress. They are not concerned with social cohesion and thus Bergson calls this morality ‘open’ because it includes everyone. The open morality is genuinely universal and it aims at peace. It aims at an “open society.”³⁸

Frajlich’s late poems depict universal principles of an American “open society” that stress everyone’s religious tradition as important. This perspective of coexistence and pluralism of religions appears in the poem *Wielkanoc w Nowym Jorku* (Easter in New York City).³⁹ It describes Good Friday in the diverse society of a big city and embraces religious syncretism.

(...)
Dziś Wielki Piątek
jedni lilie niosą
a inni windą zjeżdżają
do pralni
pod kościoła bramą
bezdolny drzemie

³⁶ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Practical Reason*, (ed.) Mary J. Gregor, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997. See the section: 5:161-2.

³⁷ Bergson, Henri, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, op. cit., p. 96.

³⁸ Lawlor, Leonard and Moulard, Valentine, *Henri Bergson*. See: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Spring 2013 Edition, op. cit.

³⁹ Frajlich also compares New York City with the “heavenly Jerusalem” in the poem *Historia* (History) published in the volume *W słońcu listopada* (In November’s Sunshine, p.52).

(...)

A naprzeciwno
w błyszczącym chałacie
Chasyd już wraca z porannej
modlitwy
bo dziś jest piątek paschalny
czasem się zbiegają
kalendarz słońca
kalendarz księżycy....

(Le vent, a' nouveau me cherche/Znów szuka mnie wiatr, p. 68)

In my loose translation:

Today, Good Friday
some carry lilies
elevator attracts others going
for dry cleaning
at the church gate the homeless is dozing

On the opposite site
in shiny gabardine
Hasid is already back from the morning prayer
because today is Friday Easter
time to converge
solar
lunar.

The poetic subject connects different layers of reality by creating emotive and imaginary associations. The reader sees events that are put together simultaneously: the lilies, elevator, church gate, homeless person, and Hasid in his shiny gabardine. The images bring the idea of a hidden kaleidoscope which could have been installed somewhere in New York City to capture the atmosphere of the holiday. This powerful kaleidoscope is built on powers, or “creative emotions,” of the poet. Creative emotions come first and representations of life come second. The poem applies this mechanism of creative emotions to break a chain of events based on routine. According to philosophers, creative emotions also support the “open religion” and are responsible for the “impetus of love” which is a mystical experience⁴⁰ *Wielkanoc w Nowym Jorku* is a poetic paradigm of the “open religion.” It enhances religious syncretism and shows the unity among multiple religious traditions. In addition, the reader should put special stress on Frajlich’s Israeli poems

⁴⁰ Bergon, Henri, *The Two Sources of Religion*, op. cit., p. 96.

(*Wiersze izraelskie*). The poems are the result of her trip to Israel in 1991. They probe rich biblical motifs, using a frame of contemporary events. They show interconnections between the “sacred” and the “profane” dimensions of life. In *Jerozolim* (Jerusalem) we observe an intricate fusion of horizons:

Bram osiem
którą wjedzie bramą
na ośle czy helikopterze
kiedy z Oliwnej Góry wstaną.

(...)

Tymczasem spięcie krótkie kroki
żałuzje opuszczone-strajk
To tu turystkę z Francji
-nożem
To tam pod ścianą
-wieczny płacz

(*Ogrodem i ogrodzeniem/The Garden and the Fence*, p. 71)

In my loose translation:

Eight gates
What gate will He enter
on a donkey or helicopter
when they rise up from the Mount of Olives.

Meanwhile quick nervous steps
blinds lowered-strike
It is here a female tourist from France
-by knife
This is there beside the wall
-crying centuries.

The poem does not stress Jerusalem as the old capital of Israel from the time of King David. It depicts, instead, the city as a traditional place for lamenting and burial on the Mount of Olives. Golgotha is the place (near the southern summit of the Mount of Olives) of the crucifixion of Christ.⁴¹ God is sketched in the poem as “Jesus Christ of Resurrection.” Jerusalem’s Wall of Cry is another place of divine presence. It unites the biblical pain and contemporary suffering in “wieczny płacz”

⁴¹ Ludvig van Beethoven is the author of an oratorio *Christ on the Mount of Olives* (1802). This famous musical piece depicts the figure of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane prior to his crucifixion.

(eternal cry – JWB)⁴². Frajlich groups different symbols to create parallel lines of a universal religious meaning. These semantic lines mirror a modern pluralistic society in which there are many “ways” leading to God. Different cultural traditions show -Frajlich-alternate ways of looking at the divine.

In addition, the poems accentuate pain, suffering, and death. They open up the problem of theodicy⁴³. Life is viewed through a prism of suffering and death in various poems, such as; *Ontologia/Ontology* (from *W słońcu listopada/In November’s Sunshine*, p.5), *Jest /Is* (from *W słońcu listopada/In November’s Sunshine*, p. 10)⁴⁴, *On kocha chaos/He Loves Chaos* (from *Ogrodem i ogrodzeniem/The Garden and the Fence*, p. 55), and *Pokuta/Penance* (from *Łodzią jest i jest przystanią/It is a Boat, and It is a Harbor*, 2013, p.5). Suffering, death, and “evils” of life anticipate the question: Who created evil?⁴⁵ Frajlich does not answer this metaphysical aporia that probes the nature of God.⁴⁶ However, she points out the role of empathy in the world where suffering exists:

Jednostajnie
Do znudzenia
świersz
pobrzękuje na tę samą nutę
Pan Bóg skarał go za jakiś grzech

taką właśnie naznaczył pokutę.

Pokuta/Penance
(*Łodzią jest i jest przystanią/It Is a Boat and It Is a Harbor*, p. 9)

⁴² In the poem *Cezarea* (Caesarea) from *Ogrodem i ogrodzeniem* (The Garden and the Fence, p. 76) Frajlich shows Israel through “eyes of tourists” to connect the past and the present. She writes: “Czy to możliwe/że w miejscu tym samym/gdzie siał Herod(...)/my obejrzawszy szczątki starych murów/także siusiamy?”

⁴³ Using the term “theodicy,” we stress a defense “of the justice or goodness of God in the face of doubts or objections arising from the phenomena of evil in the world.” See: *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, (ed.) Robert Audi, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 910. Please note, the problem of theodicy in Frajlich’s poetry requires a separate investigation. We introduce this issue and ask the question: How does the idea of theodicy evolve in Frajlich’s poetry?

⁴⁴ In the poem *Jest* (Is) Frajlich creates two important images related to death: 1) “Then God summoned the angel of death, saying, ‘Come, Death, you cruel one, hide your fierceness, veil your foulness and, disguised in youth and glory, go down and fetch My friend, Abraham to Me. ‘ (Hebrew Myths); 2) „ Śmierć jest/-on jest/-Niepostrzeżenie dojrzewa w nas i krzaku bzu/i długo piękna jest.“ See: *W słońcu listopada/In November’s Sunshine*, 2000, p. 9).

⁴⁵ For the purpose of the current analysis, we define the word “evil” as “bad states and affairs of any sort.” See: *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, op. cit, p. 910.

⁴⁶ The poem, *On kocha chaos* (He Loves Chaos) by Frajlich possesses Manichean elements. It has the dualistic structure of light and dark. It asks questions about the nature of God and the divine creation. Frajlich writes: pomiędzy światłem i ciemnością/jak gwiazda która ciemno świeci/(.) i On dosięgnąć go nie może/ponad milczenia/nie-Stworzenia. (*Ogrodem i ogrodzeniem/The Garden and the Fence*, p. 55).

In my loose translation:

Uniformly
Ad nauseam
a cricket
makes the same note
God punished him for some sin

had appointed just such a penance.

The world is cruel and even the smallest creatures (like crickets) suffer. The poetic subject is overwhelmed by the suffering of the creation.⁴⁷ Frajlich quietly implies that we may never know why “God punished him (a little cricket) for some sin.” We only observe this suffering “bug” that might symbolize “everyone.” Thus empathy—this human ability to understand the feelings of another – may be just left for us in this suffering world.

III. Conclusions

The reader observes a dynamic image of God and religion in the poetry of Anna Frajlich. At first, God is recognized through the sacred time of traditional holidays and “small epiphanies” stimulated by nature. Frajlich stresses time which evolves from being psychological to being religious and metaphysical. God resides beyond the realm of rationality, laws, and clock-time. There is the necessity of connecting metaphysics (like Bergson’s theory) and ethics in order to understand the essence of God and time. Human pain and suffering help us to grasp the mystery of time. However, suffering also opens up the problem of theodicy, and this problem requires a separate examination in Frajlich’s poetry. The poetic subject, who seeks God, can be defined as a “Way-Farer” or “Homo Viator.” He/she undertakes a journey that takes place within and is directed toward the “other.” The “other” beings include other people and the ultimate “Other” or God. Love (of the “other”/“Other”) is the way to Transcendence, according to Frajlich.

⁴⁷ Maria Podraza-Kwiatkowska wrote the article (*Przeciw okrucieństwu/Against Cruelty*) in Kraków’s *Dekada Literacka* in 1993. It probed the problem of suffering in the world. Czesław Miłosz submitted his literary response, *Do Pani Profesor w obronie honoru kota i nie tylko. Z okazji artykułu ‘Przeciw okrucieństwu’ Marii Podrazy-Kwiatkowskiej*, in 1994 (DL nr 3/86/). Podraza-Kwiatkowska was against cruelty to animals because animals are able to feel pain. On the other hand, Miłosz argued that only humans have fully developed consciousness to feel pain. See: Maria, Podraza-Kwiatkowska, *Labirynty-Kładki-Drogowskazy. Szkice o literaturze od Wyspiańskiego do Gombrowicza*, Kraków: Universitas, 2011, pp. 7-14.

The author recognizes the “split reality” between rigid religious laws and the life of God’s creation. The laws do not always show humans how to go in the proper direction. Thus, Frajlich rejects the “closed religion” of rules and stiff requirements. Rather, she embraces the “open religion” of creative emotions, mystical experience, and (finally) religious syncretism. The poem, *Wielkanoc w Nowym Jorku*/Easter in New York City, becomes a poetic “paradigm” of the “open religion.” It stresses religious syncretism and shows the unity among multiple religious traditions of the diverse (American) society. Furthermore, Frajlich’s poetry also includes the “religion of life”⁴⁸ which is built against any suffering and pain. It is an inner attitude which embraces/values morsels of joy, existence, flowers, trees, growth, and development:

puch mamy wszystko
i wiatru gonienie
trwale są tylko na obrusie plamy...

(*Gonienie za wiatrem I*
(In: *Ogrodem i ogrodzeniem*/The Garden and the Fence p. 21)

In my loose translation:

miserable all things
and wind chasing
only permanent stains are on the tablecloth...

Summary / Abstract (in English):

The presented article is a conceptual work. It examines the poetry of Anna Frajlich-Zajac (born in 1942-). The article aims at presenting Frajlich’s poetry using a very unique perspective of God and religion, which was never applied to her poetry in the past. It is also an attempt to comprehensively envision this poetry as the “palimpsest of meanings” that leads to polyphony of aesthetic values. The research method applied to the article is based on thematic critique. We also use the principles of the “hermeneutic circle” by Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) to conduct the analysis. The “hermeneutic circle” stresses synergistic effects between the “whole” and “parts” of poetic writings. Finally, we underline Frajlich’s symbolic imagination as part of our methodology. The article shows an evolving structure of the idea of God and religion in the poetry of Anna Frajlich. It introduces the concept of “homo viator,” “religious syncretism,” and “closed”/“open” religion. It provides the unique interpretation of Frajlich’s poetry. The intellectual conclusions of the article are not limited to academia and journalism. They are useful to investigate popular culture and links that exist among religion, literature as well as philosophy. The results of this analysis can lead to new solutions in the humanities (literature, art, and philosophy). Also, they provide grounds for further research. The article is socially applicable in

⁴⁸ Gutowski, Wojciech, *Z próżni nieba ku religii życia. Motywy chrześcijańskie w literaturze Młodej Polski*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2001, p. 11.

academia. It could be interesting for students as well as educators/academic instructors. The article provides a new and creative analysis of literary writings by Frajlich.

Key Words In English: Literary criticism, thematic critique, Polish-American poetry, Polish-Jewish diaspora in America, religious motifs in literature, Frajlich-Zajac Anna (1942-), religion, philosophy, and literature, sacrum in literature, Jewish poetry of the 20th century, "homo viator" as a literary symbol, hermeneutics.

Summary / Abstract (in Polish) / Streszczenie / Abstrakt (po polsku):

Artykuł jest rodzajem tekstu konceptualnego. Analizuje on poezję Anny Frajlich, posługując się ideą Boga i religii, co prowadzi w rezultacie do oryginalnych rozwiązań. Jest on próbą całościowego opisanie tej poezji (definiowanej, jako „palimpsest znaczeń”), która odsłania polifonię jakości estetycznych. Metodologia artykułu opiera się głównie na krytyce tematycznej oraz założeniach hermeneutyki Wilhelma Diltheya (1833-1911). Koło hermeneutyczne jest postrzegane w tej analizie jako zależność interpretacyjna pomiędzy „częścią” i „całością” dzieła. Wychodzimy z założenia, że jednostkowa oraz izolowana „część” poszczególnych utworów wieździe nieuchronnie w stronę ukrytej, semantycznej „całości” w poezji Anny Frajlich. Artykuł odsłania rozwijającą się strukturę tej poezji i wprowadza różnorodne pojęcia („homo viator”, „synkretyzm religijny”, „zamknięta / otwarta religia” i inne), aby ją całościowo opisać. Analiza taka odsłania głębokie i unikalne warstwy wyobraźni poetyckiej Anny Frajlich. Wnioski i rozwiązania intelektualne, proponowane w artykule, mogą być przydatne nie tylko w badaniach naukowych, kręgiach uniwersyteckich lub dziennikarskich. Są one również pomocne w definiowaniu współczesnych założeń kultury popularnej i socjologii kultury oraz relacji istniejących pomiędzy religią, literaturą i filozofią. Mogą one, ponadto, prowadzić do nowych odkryć w dziedzinie nauk humanistycznych, bo badanie linii rozwojowej (znaczenie Boga i religii) w poezji Anny Frajlich jest nowe, twórcze oraz oparte na utworach, wydanych zarówno w języku polskim jak i angielskim.

Key Words In Polish: Krytyka literacka, krytyka tematyczna, literatura polska na emigracji, polska diaspora żydowska w Ameryce, motywy religijne w literaturze, Frajlich-Zajac Anna (1942-), religia, filozofia i literatura, sacrum w literaturze, żydowska poezja XX wieku, "homo viator" jako symbol w literaturze, hermeneutyka literacka.

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[slovenský preklad: Ivica Hajdučeková]

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Йоланга Врубел-Бест изучала польскую филологию и философию в Ягеллонском университете в Кракове. После защиты докторской диссертации под руководством профессора Марии Подразы-Квятковской преподавала в Институте польской филологии Ягеллонского университета. Работала также в Университете Хьюстона в США. Работает там и поныне, читая гуманитарные курсы и философию в колледже; одновременно преподаёт в Карлтонском университете в Оттаве (Канада), где читает курсы о европейских литературах. Автор книги «*Мистерия времени. Временная проблематика ТADEУША МИЧИНСКОГО*» (Краков: Университас, 1999; изд. 2-е – в 2012 г.) и статей о польской литературе и философии. Данные о Й. Врубел-Бест помещены в справочнике «*Кто есть кто в Америке*» за 2014 год. E-mail: bestjwus[at]gmail.com

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Йоланта Врубель-Бест закінчила студії з польської філології та філософії в Ягеллонському університеті у Кракові. Після захисту докторату під керівництвом професора Марії Подрази-Квятковської працювала в Інституті польської філології Ягеллонського університету. Викладала також в Університеті Х'юстона. Наразі викладає гуманітарні курси і філософію у коледжі в Х'юстоні (США), водночас є (запрошеним) викладачем Карлтонського університету в Отаві (Канада), де викладає курси про європейські літератури. Авторка відомої книги *«Містерія часу: Часова проблематика Тадеуша Міціньського»* (Краків: Універсітас, 1999; вид. 2-е – у 2012) та наукових статей, пов'язаних із польською літературою та філософією. Відомості про неї подано на сторінках довідника *«Хто є хто в Америці»* за 2014 рік. E-mail: bestjwus[at]gmail.com

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[Глумачэнне на беларускую мову: Eugeniusz Pańkow і Olga Pańkowa]