

Blooming Machines: Floral Inspiration in Polish Avant-Garde Poetry

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1. Introduction¹

When observing the tendencies, focuses, and prospects for the development of contemporary global humanities, one cannot help but feel that plants have occupied a special place within them in recent years. The emergence and rapid growth of transdisciplinary plant studies have resulted in a range of landmark research on plant beings conceived simultaneously as material, physical, and biological, as well as semiotic, symbolic, and cultural entities.² With analytic and conceptual tools such as *phytographia*,³ grafting,⁴ or cultural botany⁵ (to name those whose authors have had perhaps the most significant impact on the advancement

1 This paper was funded by the 2020–2024 science budget as a research project within the 'Diamentowy Grant' programme: *Wykorzenione i zakorzenione w polskiej poezji XX–XXI wieku. Projekt krytyki fitograficznej* (DI 2019 0106 49).

2 Cf. Monica Gagliano, John Charles Ryan, and Patrícia Vieira, ed., *The Language of Plants. Science, Philosophy, Literature*, Minneapolis, MN; London, UK: U of Minnesota P, 2017.

3 Patrícia Vieira, *Phytographia: Literature as Plant Writing*, in: *The Language of Plants*, 2017, pp. 215–233.

4 Michael Marder, *Crafts. Writings on Plants*, Minneapolis, MN: Univocal, 2016.

5 John Charles Ryan, *Green Sense. The Aesthetics of Plants, Place, and Language*, Oxford, UK: TrueHeart Press, 2012.

of plant humanities), scholars have been able to show how often and in what ways cultural production remains ontologically rooted in the world of plants: how the extra-textual, material vegetal presence shapes human living conditions⁶ or triggers affective responses,⁷ thus preceding and providing grounds for semiotic articulations. Today, due to the considerable efforts of plant scholars, it is no longer possible to echo Michael Marder's words from his seminal, ground-breaking study, saying that plants "populate the margin of the margin"⁸ of Western humanities.

However, this process of rediscovering plants is far from complete, and vegetal presence remains to be disclosed in many areas of humanistic thought. When it comes to the case of poetry, which is of interest to me in this paper, the primary means of retrieving vegetal beings from the oblivion or objectification in which they have been stuck is through critical, plant-oriented reading. John Charles Ryan, the author of a path-breaking study of plants in Anglo-Saxon poetry, refers to such a mode of reading as "phytocriticism":

A phytocritical outlook emphasises the agencies of botanical beings in poetic texts and considers how plants are rendered, evoked, mediated, or brought to life in and through language. [...] One of the tasks of the phytocritic is to identify the potentially negative construal of the vegetal world through the human proclivities for aestheticisation (plants as pretty objects and picturesque scenery), appropriation (as expendable materials or throwaway matter), and figuration (as symbols, tropes, and linguistic artifices rather than presences, bodies, and sensory entanglements).⁹

6 Cf. Lynne Feeley, *Plants and the Problem of Authority in the Antebellum U.S. South*, in: Randy Laist, ed., *Plants and Literature. Essays in Critical Plant Studies*, Amsterdam; New York, NY: Rodopi, 2013, pp. 53–74.

7 Cf. Michael Marder and Patrícia Vieira, *Writing Phytophilia: Philosophers and Poets as Lovers of Plants*, in: *Frame: A Journal of Literary Studies* 26, no. 2 (2013), pp. 39–55.

8 Michael Marder, *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life*, New York, NY: Columbia UP, 2013, p. 2.

9 John Charles Ryan, *Plants in Contemporary Poetry. Ecocriticism and the Botanical Imagination*, New York, NY; London, UK: Routledge, 2018, pp. 14–15.

To extract plants blended into their backgrounds; to pull plant life out from beneath the layers of symbolic surplus, from the languages that are imposed on them;¹⁰ to glimpse agency in what seems an ornament or passive matter – such are the goals of phytocriticism, which aspires to demonstrate that textual depictions of plants are necessarily anchored in and animated by extra-textual, physical, organic matter.

2. Blooming on European Peripheries: Polish Avant-Garde

If applied on a broad, historical scale, phytocriticism – like any critical current within literary studies – may have considerable implications. This is because its revelatory potential can uncover the presence of plants, and in great abundance, where one least expects them: in cultural, artistic, or intellectual formations that are rarely, if ever, associated with vegetal imagery. I believe one such place would be the history of the European avant-garde, with a particular focus on its techno-enthusiastic manifestations during the interwar and war periods. My primary goal in this article is to demonstrate that, while conducting their literary experiments and exploring novel perspectives on poetic text, avant-garde poets at that time frequently sought inspiration in the bodies of plants – especially in flowers.

This objective is clearly counterintuitive. How, one might rightly ask, is it possible to reconcile fragile, ephemeral, and fragrant flowers with machines, steel, and factories – the hallmarks of European modernity? The emergence of avant-gardes is closely tied to the explosive development of cities, to the fascination with modern technologies (let us recall Marinetti's canonical 'roaring car'), as well as to unbridled, landscape-consuming industrialism – images hardly compatible with pollen and petals.

This doubt can be addressed in two ways. Firstly, the Western avant-gardes in the first decades of the 20th century do indeed appear as

10 Cf. Isabel Kranz, *The Language of Flowers in Popular Culture and Botany*, in: *The Language of Plants*, 2017, pp. 193–214.

urban, industrialist, and dominated by modernolatry¹¹ – but only if one considers the centres of modernism and modernity, namely, the traditional New York–London–Paris axis.¹² In less culturally influential, semi-peripheral European countries, not to mention cultures on other continents, the avant-gardes prospered not in the scenery of a giant city but in the countryside, on a meadow, in a forest. In Portugal, for example, the avant-garde poetry is linked to Fernando Pessoa's heteronyms, one of which, according to Alberto Caeiro, attentively contemplates the vegetal life ([*Há metafísica bastante...*]); in Lithuania, the avant-gardist Kazys Boruta uses agrarian images to convey his social message (*Artoji maištas*). Even in France, on the fringes of the Surrealist movement in Paris, Francis Ponge scrupulously analyses vegetation in *Le parti pris de choses*. The urbanism and industrialism underlying the writings of the first (Charles Baudelaire) or the most boisterous (Futurists) avant-gardists are not at all inherent to the avant-garde as such.

The second response delves into the gap between avant-garde's innovative approaches to poetic text and the local imagery found in relatively less industrialised and urbanised countries, such as Portugal or Poland. In these settings, there is a natural inclination towards reality untouched or minimally transformed by humans: rural landscapes, forests, fields, animals, and plants. Of course, semi-peripheral avant-garde writers actively participated in the Europe-wide quest for innovation. Still, they did so by focusing on new poetic and rhetorical strategies, as well as ideas concerning the ontology of the text and the role of poetry in society, and not primarily by evoking images of modern cities and machines. The artistic experiments of European borderland avant-gardes were conducted with the use of locally available materials.

11 Renato Poggioli refers to avant-garde modernolatry as cheapened and vulgarised modernity or "nothing but a blind adoration of the idols and fetishes of our time." See Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, translated by Gerard Fitzgerald, Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1968, p. 218.

12 Cf. Rebecca Walsh, *The Geopoetics of Modernism*, Gainesville, FL: UP of Florida, 2015, p. 8; cf. also Mary Louise Pratt, *Planetary Longings*, Durham, NC; London, UK: Duke UP, 2021, p. 51.

Consequently, local expressions of the same European trend (e. g. Futurism), even when employing universal poetic strategies (e. g. words in liberty) and proclaiming similar ideological goals (e. g. the praise of the machine) in manifestos, ultimately yielded poetic images that significantly diverged from one another.¹³

In the context of the Polish avant-garde, the disparity between the modernity inherent in the aesthetic projects of the European avant-garde and the available symbolic material on-site was notably pronounced. Given its roots in a traditionally rural society, Polish literature had historically inclined more towards nature, including plants, than towards the human-dominated city. The initial modernists could not fully disentangle themselves from this historical context, and not all attempted to do so. The literary tradition in Poland, rich with Renaissance rural poetry,¹⁴ Enlightenment poems celebrating agriculture and gardens,¹⁵ and artful, emotionally charged depictions of domestic vegetation in Romanticism¹⁶ and Realism,¹⁷ contributed to the prevalence of plants as among the most frequently recurring figures in Polish literature on the cusp of the first avant-garde manifestations.

During the interwar period, following Poland's regaining of independence, Polish literature, particularly poetry, which was more attuned to avant-garde experiments, underwent a process of fervent self-modernisation. Local inspirations from Western and Eastern Europe played

13 Cf. Tadeusz Klak, *Czechowicz: mity i magia*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1973, pp. 89–90.

14 Cf. Jadwiga Kotarska, "Co lipie do wirszów?" *Drzewa arkadii ziemiańskiej*, in: Anna Martuszczyńska, ed., *Literacka symbolika roślin*, Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 1997, pp. 37–52.

15 Cf. Alina Witkowska, *Poemat opisowy*, in: Teresa Kostkiewiczowa, ed., *Słownik literatury polskiego Oświecenia*, Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1996, pp. 417–419.

16 Cf. Marian Wachowski, *O rolnictwie w 'Panu Tadeuszu'*, in: *Pamiętnik Literacki* 47 (1956), pp. 242–259.

17 Cf. Magdalena Jonca, 'Pozór malowidła'. *Wokół albumu florystycznego Elizy Orzeszkowej*, in: Eliza Orzeszkowa, *Album kwiatowe Elizy Orzeszkowej*, Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 2018, pp. 7–23.

a crucial role in this transformation, with influences such as Italian Futurism, Russian Constructivism, and Spanish Ultraism leaving their mark. This drive for modernisation was accompanied by Poland's ambitious industrial and urban planning initiatives, exemplified by the construction of the Gdynia port city and the factories' development, which provided poetry with suitably modern images. The admiration (or longing) for modernity and truly modern metropolises led to the infusion of the imagination and, consequently, the verse of the first Polish avant-gardists with images of factories, cars, planes, chimneys, cinemas, trams, mines, and shop fronts. Initially, these elements served as a fitting attire for genuinely modern literature, displacing the hitherto prevalent plant imagery, especially that of flora, which was undoubtedly associated with a bygone era. However, this shift in scenery amounted to a change in props and costumes, a superficial alteration that did not necessarily bring about a substantive transformation of the conception of poetry itself.

On the contrary, it soon became apparent that plants had firmly entrenched themselves in the literary consciousness. As the avant-garde movement in Poland took a more defined shape and poets began to explore topics like the ontology of the poetic text, the creation of literary meanings, or the issue of reference – moving beyond the cityscape or the somewhat naïve admiration of the automobile – they sought inspiration precisely in the realm of plants. The poets' focus turned to the most delicate components of vegetal organisms, far removed from factory fumes and steel machines: the flowers. Consequently, while flowers might not feature as frequently as technological symbols of modernity in this poetry, they underpin various poetic and textual concepts that emerged within it.

Adhering to the revisionist principles of Ryan's phytocriticism, with the subsequent examples, I will illustrate that in the poetry of the initial avant-gardes in Poland, references to the process of blossoming or the anatomy of inflorescences serve as the foundation for the movement of meanings and define the avant-garde text's relationship to the broader, extra-textual reality.

3. Phytofuturism

The incompatibility between the technophilia of the Western European avant-garde and Polish realities becomes most evident in the context of Futurism, the initial avant-garde movement in Poland. According to Artur Hutnikiewicz,

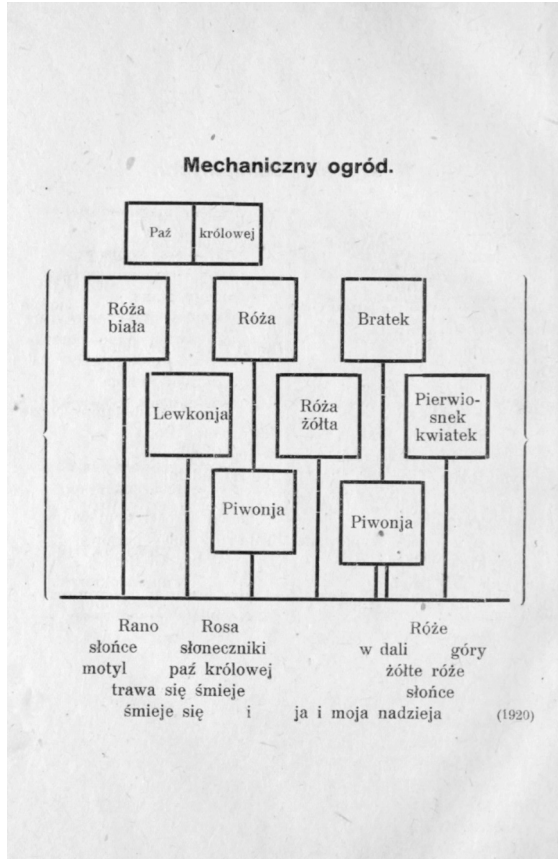
[i]n Poland, futurism was an imported good. In a sparsely industrialised country, with agriculture still the axis of the national economy, the groundwork for the poetry most closely associated with industrialism and modern urbanism was absent.¹⁸

The avant-gardists were aware of this to some extent. Therefore, it is not surprising that, despite its seeming contradiction, modernity within Polish Futurism often engaged in a dialogue with tradition. For instance, Tytus Czyżewski, a prominent figure in the movement, combined Futurist poetics with traditional Tatra mountains Christmas songs in his work *Pastorałki* ('Carols'), published in 1925.¹⁹ As an experimental poet and painter, Czyżewski, (who painted flowers, like in *Kwiaty i motyle*, 'Flowers and butterflies', 1921) also authored the volume *Noc-dzień: mechaniczny instynkt elektryczny* ('Night-Day: Mechanical Electric Instinct', 1922), that, featuring "vegetal" titles like *Wiosna* ('Spring') and *Las* ('Forest'), includes the renowned graphic poem *Mechaniczny ogród* ('Mechanical Garden', figure 1).

18 Artur Hutnikiewicz, *Od czystej formy do literatury faktu. Główne teorie i programy literackie XX stulecia*, Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna, 1974, pp. 99–100. (If not indicated otherwise, all the quoted passages were translated by me, Ł. K.).

19 Tytus Czyżewski, *Pastorałki*, Paris: Polskie Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Książki, 1925.

Figure 1: Tytus Czyżewski: *Mechaniczny ogród.*



Tytus Czyżewski: *Noc-dzień: mechaniczny instynkt elektryczny.* Kraków: Druk. "Czasu". 1922. P. 24. Source: Polona.

Comprising extremely simplified depictions of flowers in the form of rectangles and line segments, along with the species names inserted into them, the poem was traditionally interpreted in line with Marinetti's ideological (progressive mechanisation of life) and aesthetic (words in

liberty) principles, envisioning the garden as 'a substitute paradise: an urbanised, or rather mechanised world of technology' and, therefore, 'an artificial nature'.²⁰ This straightforward (if not somewhat oversimplified) interpretation, reducing plants to an example depicting modernist denaturalisation processes, appears insufficient when considering Czyżewski's comprehensive body of work. Firstly, the transformation trajectory in his poetry does not consistently follow an organic-to-mechanical pattern (as indicated by the poem *Od maszyny do zwierząt*, 'From a Machine to Animals'). Secondly, Czyżewski is not exclusively a techno-enthusiast; instead, he exhibits a keen sensitivity to biological life, exemplified by his exploration of non-human perspectives such as that of a tiger;²¹ he also examines the conditions for the non-human's life emergence in poetic text, as seen in a significant portion of the poem *Kantyczki* ('Canticles'), which comprises onomatopoeias that stage bird voices.

Such is also the case of *Mechanical Garden*. Through his experimentation with graphic and concrete poetry, Czyżewski directs attention to the mechanisms of linguistic and visual representation, which, while doubling the referent, necessarily reduce and distort it. The central concern of many avant-gardes, the issue of poetic reference, manifests in Czyżewski's work as a reflection on semiosis: the process of producing and translating meaning. In *Mechanical Garden*, the geometrisation, standardisation, and mechanisation of the referent, flowers, equates to its extreme simplification. In the poem, flowers have been stripped of all physical properties (shapes, colours, sizes) and extracted from the environments they usually inhabit so that their recognition is only possible through captions: human-made, conventional names assigned to them.

20 Alicja Baluch, *Wizualność w poezji Tytusa Czyżewskiego*, in: *Rocznik Naukowo-Dydaktyczny* 101 (1986), p. 125.

21 Cf. Anna Barcz, *Realizm ekologiczny. Od ekokrytyki do zookrytyki w literaturze polskiej*, Katowice: Wydawnictwo Naukowe 'Śląsk', 2016, p. 314.

And yet, as phytosemiotics²² suggests, it is the physical characteristics, inseparable from flower bodies, that constitute the indexical signs providing information about its species, developmental stage, flowering, health status, and environment. The primary meaning of flowers (in the biosemiotic sense) is thus inscribed within their anatomy; in this way, flowers ‘articulate themselves with themselves.’²³

As a result, what Czyżewski effectively demonstrates is how the translation of flowers into a graphic poem equates to their virtualisation and idealisation, accomplished through the semiotic operation of transforming indexical signs not merely into icons (as icons imply a similarity between the sign and its referent) but into symbols: the most abstract of signs. Affixed to impoverished, homogenised models of ‘plants’, botanical names (such as ‘pansy’, ‘primrose’, ‘rose’, ‘peony’) and colour designations (‘white’, ‘red’) conspicuously lose significance. In the absence (or through simplification) of the referent, Czyżewski abruptly lays bare the conventionality of symbols, exposing that even the most virtual signs can only function, that is, convey meaning, under their relationship to pre-textual, material (in this case, organic) reality. Devoid of the experience of the colourful, fragrant, delicate bodies of flowers, their names become hollow signs, incomprehensible and devoid of meaning. As Michael Marder rhetorically inquires:

[t]o what extent can the signified tree persist in the absence of an actual tree growing in my backyard [...]? Even if we erroneously assume that the plant itself is meaningless, the ideal meaning and its noematic permutations still require at least the possibility of a perceptual approach to the plant as the phenomenological basis for (and the deepest stratum of) all other noematic operations.²⁴

22 Cf. Martin Krampen, *Phytosemiotics*, in: Donald Favareau, *Essential Readings in Biosemiotics: Anthology and Commentary*, Dordrecht: Springer, 2009, pp. 257–277.

23 Michael Marder, *To Hear Plants Speak*, in: *The Language of Plants*, 2017, p. 120.

24 Michael Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 2013, pp. 76–77.

Why would a Futurist be the one championing the reality of meaning embedded in organic life against the encroachment of a virtualising poetic discourse? Firstly, as a meta-poetic condemnation of the semiotic impoverishment of plant life, *Mechanical Garden* could be an indictment aimed at the Symbolists (reviled by Futurists) who consistently disregarded the tangible, sensual aspects of life, perceiving it as a mere medium or manifestation pointing back to a paramount, invisible, spiritual reality. Yet, there might also be a cautionary note here, directed both at modern civilisation, where the proliferation of industrialism and the subjugation of nature ‘brought about the loss of something precious’,²⁵ and at modernist poetry. By indulging in textual and formal games, the latter risks veering away from life and succumbing to an autotelic, self-referential play of simulacra. And this is a prospect that Czyżewski, whose Futurism originated from vitalism and a yearning for authenticity, could never endorse.

4. Flower as a Structure

Inspiration drawn from the physiology of flowers stimulated the imagination of another avant-garde cohort, the Krakow Avant-Garde, active between 1922 and 1927. While its members countered Futurist explosive energy and demolition of rules with constructivist discipline and formal sophistication, they shared with Futurism a yearning for a new poetry befitting modern society. By articulating this aspiration in manifestos, including the renowned *Miasto. Masa. Maszyna* (‘City. Mass. Machine’, 1922), the founder and leader of the Krakow Avant-Garde, Tadeusz Peiper, known in Poland as the ‘pope of the avant-garde’), made a significant contribution to associating avant-garde poetry with technology and urbanism. While past critics suggested that technological and urbanist elements entirely overshadow the pre-cultural and biological

25 Matei Țălinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*, Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1987, p. 265.

aspects in Peiper's poetry,²⁶ such claims are not wholly justified. This is because Peiper depicts both the urban environment and society, as well as the relationship between them, in organic and evolutionary terms that precede and condition artificially induced, technological, and urban development: '[Throughout history – Ł. K.], the city evolved the way life required it'.²⁷

The same holds for poetry, which Peiper regarded as autonomous, abstract, and conceptual, free from any traditional canons of beauty and devoid of all mimetic or representational ties to empirical, extra-textual reality. In this perspective, the modern avant-garde poem is envisioned as a mental artefact erected or manufactured by the poet-craftsman. However, its most perfect constructional principle is not to be found in the architecture of a modern city or the mechanics of a machine but instead in the growth of plants. The central concept in Peiper's theory of poetry, the 'blooming composition' (originally 'układ rozkwitania,' formulated in a text with the typically avant-garde title *Poezja jako budowa*, 'Poetry as Construction'), strives to mirror the process of blooming within and through the poem:

[The blooming composition] consists of the poet presenting a particular image, an event, or an X in several unfolding stages. Each unfolding contains the whole image, event, or X in question but is more lush and richer than the previous unfolding. The poem would develop like a living organism, blooming before us like a bud. Already, the first fragment contains everything that will follow; a further fragment would be a gradual unfolding of the bud-like content of the first, and in the last fragment, we would have a flower before us, already fully expanded.²⁸

26 Cf. Stanisław Jaworski, *Wstęp*, in: Tadeusz Peiper, *Pisma wybrane*, Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1979, p. XXXVII.

27 Tadeusz Peiper, *Miasto, masa, maszyna*, in: idem, *Pisma wybrane*, 1979, p. 7.

28 Tadeusz Peiper, *Poezja jako budowa*, in: idem, *Pisma wybrane*, 1979, pp. 229–230.

The guiding principle orchestrating the generation and flow of poetic meaning in the 'blooming composition' is growth, an inherent and fundamental faculty of plant life. This growth unfolds on three distinct levels: (1) as the elongation and intricate development of syntactic units in successive strophes; (2) as the accumulation and gradual elaboration of metaphors, culminating in the creation of images that transcend imagination; (3) as the expansion of the graphic layout of the text, with stanzas progressively extending in length.

1.
Silver. A roadway. A rally of colours. Pavements.
Women. Straw-wraps of aroma. Specular gowns. [...]
2.
The roadway's skin envelops the car's tailcoat with silver.
The dreaming pavements lie on the women's gowns. [...]
3.
The silver, the roadway's skin, spatters into the sides of the car,
which is carrying a joy as fat as a circle.
Women's gowns, under the straw-wraps of specular aroma,
of bottle-like dreams, of liquid light,
reflect the pavements, sown joyfully
with colours by the afternoon hour. [...] ²⁹

In the successive fragments of *Kwiat ulicy* ('Street Flower'), each corresponding to the other, one observes the unfolding process of poetic blossoming. The X + n logic (with 'X' representing the initial image and 'n' signifying the syntactic, semantic, and graphical surplus) relies concurrently on additivity and immanence. In this, it resembles the ontology of flowering, where the flower is a part of the plant, and something super-added to it. It exists and simultaneously does not entirely coincide with the plant, thereby challenging the cognitive faculties shaped by Western metaphysics.³⁰

29 Tadeusz Peiper, *Kwiat ulicy*, in: idem, *Pisma wybrane*, 1979, pp. 302–303.

30 Cf. Emanuele Coccia, *La vie des plantes: une métaphysique du mélange*, Paris: Éditions Payot & Rivages, 2016.

5. Plants: Bodies and Words

'I have not written a poem that would either, like a plant, not be attached to the landscape seen, or that, like a plant, would not have grown [...] from a determinate place on Earth.'³¹ This self-reflection by Julian Przyboś, a disciple of Peiper and another member of the Krakow Avant-Garde, who quickly surpassed his master's teachings, bears witness to the fundamental shift in the Polish avant-garde from the early 1920s to the fourth decade of the 20th century. The futuristic cosmopolitanism anchored in technology and urbanism is supplanted by Przyboś' affirmation of the local, the extra-cultural, and the unaffected by human influence. His poem-plant transcends the limitations of Peiper's utopian radical conceptualism by exploring the inevitable embedding of poetic language in sensory experience ('seen') and, more crucially, in the totality of the inorganic and organic milieu ('landscape'). This milieu serves as the source and guarantor of the meaning of poetic words, even in the most innovative experimental configurations. In this optic, a skilful metaphor, which is the primary tool of Przyboś' poetic text (in contrast to Futurism's words in liberty and Peiper's syntactic operations), serves as (1) a point of contact between immaterial language and the entirety of the material world, and (2) a site of generative transformation and condensation of meanings imported from outside the text.

The objective of an avant-garde metaphor is not merely to represent pre-existing external reality or engage in a cerebral, conceptual exercise. Instead, its purpose is to establish conditions for a sensory and symbolic experience through the linguistic structuring of extra-textual material incorporated into the text. Functioning simultaneously within biological and cultural ecosystems, flowers exemplify generative metaphors and stand as some of Przyboś' most frequently employed figures.³² As

31 Julian Przyboś, *Pytanie o miejsce na Ziemi*, in: idem, *Sens poetycki*, vol. 2, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1967, p. 245.

32 Cf. Dorota Walczak-Delanois, *Przyboś "roślinny" i jego poetycki zielnik*, in: Stanisław Balbus and Edward Balcerzan, ed., *Stulecie Przybosia*, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2002, pp. 325–337.

Ryszard Nycz contends, according to Przyboś, poetry should be for the experience what a sunflower is for the sun: it should simultaneously point to it (as a trace), shape it (give it form), and ‘interpret it semiotically,’ much like a sunflower indicating, depicting, and symbolising the sun.³³

The transformative potential and dual modality of the metaphor-flower are well illustrated in the meta-poetic fragment of the poem *Do ciebie o mnie* (*To You About Me*, 1945), where the verb ‘to blossom’ concurrently signifies botanical blossoming and instigates a poetic ‘blossoming’ of meaning:

świat rozkwita naglej, ogromniej
we wszechkwiat³⁴

the world blossoms more suddenly, more immensely,
into an omniflower

While this passage is nearly untranslatable, it is possible to analytically discern and identify the specific semantic processes at play within it. The world (‘świat’) begins to blossom (‘rozkwita’): inserted into the modality of a poetic text, it undergoes a process of metaphorisation. This process involves (1) an expansion of the original referent (‘world’ becomes ‘universe’), (2) a modification of the lexical unit, and consequently, the meaning (‘world’ transforms into a ‘flower’), and (3) a blending of two lexemes (‘universe’ and ‘flower’ merge into ‘universe-flower,’ or ‘omniflower’³⁵). The flower is simultaneously (1) indicated as one of the poem’s referents;

33 Ryszard Nycz, *Poetyka doświadczenia. Teoria–nowoczesność–literatura*, Warszawa: IBL PAN, 2012, pp. 144–145.

34 Julian Przyboś, *Do ciebie o mnie*, in: idem, *Utwory poetyckie. Tom pierwszy*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1984, p. 232.

35 The Polish prefix ‘wszech-’, forming the word ‘wszechświat’ (‘universe’), carries connotations of totality and unity. The transformation from ‘wszechświat’ to ‘wszechkwiat’ is particularly striking in the original, as there is only a difference of one phoneme between the word ‘świat’ (‘world’) and the word ‘kwiat’ (‘flower’) that replaces it.

(2) it remains immediately present in the text in the form of the ‘blossoming’ of meaning; and (3) ultimately, it constitutes the final product of the semantic and morphological processes that it has itself set in motion.

In Polish 20th-century poetry, Julian Przyboś stands as a prominent figure: his poetics, suggestive, sensual, and acutely attuned to the intricacies of language, provided a key reference point for post-war neo-avant-garde poets such as Krystyna Miłobędzka and, most notably, Tymoteusz Karpowicz. In addition to mastering the craft of a complex metaphor, both embraced Przyboś’ fondness for vegetal imagery. However, Przyboś was not the first to point at similarities between texts and plants and in this respect is profoundly indebted to predecessors: the Futurists’ bio-vitalism and Peiper’s organic constructivism. Perhaps, then, the history of Polish avant-garde poetry could be thought of and transcribed as a story of the gradual relinquishment of artificially imported mechanistic and urbanist accessories in favour of a gradual inclusion of plants? This remains to be seen; in any case, the process of phytocritical rewriting has already commenced.

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