A R T I C L E

"I inhabited the Land of Ulro long before Blake taught me its proper name": Czesław Miłosz's *Ziemia Ulro*/*The Land of Ulro*

By Eliza Borkowska

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1 Olga Tokarczuk, in her Nobel lecture of 7 December 2019, observed that the public nowadays prefers facts to fiction (10-11). This is an auspicious remark for my purposes, as my theme will be the autobiographical book of Czesław Miłosz, another Polish winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, who received his award in 1980, a year after Tokarczuk's literary debut. The Blake of Tokarczuk's novel *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead* is part of a fictional world, a curious addition to the story: Agnieszka Holland's film *Spoor*, adapted from the book and cowritten by the novelist, eliminates the Blake references without much (or perhaps any) loss to the plot. Conversely, the Blake of Miłosz's *Ziemia Ulro*, initially published in 1977 (a round anniversary of Blake's birth and death), is a vital part of life. I will first recall a few relevant details from Miłosz's bi(bli)ography, then reflect on the character and quality of his tribute to William Blake. Unlike my chapter for *The Reception of William Blake in Europe*, whose profile dictated the method (that is, an overview) and the narrow focus on the role Miłosz's book played in the history of the reception of Blake in Poland (Borkowska 485-92), I will engage here more intensively with *Ziemia Ulro* and, by doing so, postulate a much more extensive appeal of Miłosz's work. In particular, I will be pointing to the importance and value of this book—translated into English by Louis Iribarne as *The Land of Ulro*—for international Blake circles.

2 Miłosz (1911–2004) was the author of numerous volumes of poetry, volumes of translations of poetry (into and from Polish), and a variety of works in prose. The last category includes literary history and criticism (the massive *Historia literatury polskiej* [*The History of Polish Literature*] and countless essays and prefaces), fiction (for example, the novel *Zdobycie władzy* [*The Seizure of Power*]), and a number of works in which, as he puts it in the preface to the English translation of *Ziemia Ulro*, he "tried to explain the corner of Europe from which [he came]" (v), like *Zniewolony umysł* (*The Captive Mind*) or *Rodzinna Europa* (*Native Realm*). In 1951, he emigrated from communist Poland to the West, first to France, then, in 1960, to the United States of America. At the time he was writing *Ziemia Ulro*, he was a professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of California, Berkeley, teaching courses on Dostoevsky, Manichaeism, and Polish literature. The latter, as he repeatedly emphasizes, was a spectacularly inconvenient position, because "what … Polish writers could have been taught in America in the absence of any translations? Only Gombrowicz and Witkiewicz" (13).[1] This explains why Miłosz was so active as a translator of Polish literature into English: he needed material he could teach (see Franaszek 401-02). At the same time, he continued writing his own poetry and prose in Polish, his "incomprehensible language," as he calls it (8). "I do not believe in the possibility of communing outside a shared language, a shared history" (4), he adds; this claim receives a complex illustration in *Ziemia Ulro*.

3 The book, conceived as a work "for an exclusively Polish audience" (7), is principally Miłosz's intellectual autobiography, his "spiritual self-portrait," as it is characterized on the jacket of the English translation. Yet, while looking back at the six-odd decades of his life from the vantage point of his residence in America, Miłosz traverses the twentieth century, moving between Poland and the West, Europe and America, and offering in this way a humanist reflection that is much wider and more resonant than just a personal memoir. When he says, "I inhabited the Land of Ulro long before Blake taught me its proper name" (183), he does not mean capitalist America, or capitalist France, or, for that matter, communist Poland, but modern civilization: as he sees it, "the only civilization that has conquered the entire planet Earth" (50)—that is, both the West and the East. "Originally confined to a small Western European

1. Unless specified otherwise, quotations from *Ziemia Ulro* derive from Iribarne's translation (with references to page numbers in the 1984 edition).

peninsula, that civilization elaborated its philosophy and science by modifying concepts of Christian theology.[2] Since the eighteenth century, it has turned openly against its Christian sources" (50).

4 In this way, *Ziemia Ulro* transcends the boundaries of Miłosz's twentieth century. It relates to the entire "secular age" (Taylor), including our own times, labeled in sociological and political discourse as a/the "post-secular moment." Exactly as Miłosz predicted when he claimed that "this book joining past and present … is, in fact, a book addressed to the future, if not my own, then that of others" (27), *Ziemia Ulro* participates in the ongoing debate concerning the division between modern philosophy and theology—science and religion, reason and faith—and the resultant antinomy between scientific truth and human truth: "The world of scientific laws—cold, indifferent to human values—and man's inner world" (94). Miłosz is concerned with the psychological, moral, and spiritual effects of this schism, with the state of man who imbibes the attitudes and beliefs (and disbeliefs) of this science-oriented and science-defined civilization, which, following Blake, he calls "Ulro": "Urizen's domain," "that realm of spiritual pain such as is borne and must be borne by the crippled man," "the land of the disinherited … where man is reduced to a supererogatory number, worse, where he becomes as much for himself, in his own eyes, in his own mind" (183, 32, 122). "Myriads of planets spinning around in an infinite and absolute space. Easily said," he reflects, "but let us try to imagine, to locate our home in that infinity" (153).

5 The primary focus of his discussion of this civilization is, for obvious reasons, literature; after all, *Ziemia Ulro* is an intellectual autobiography of a man who devoted all his life to writing, translating, anthologizing, criticizing, and teaching literature on an academic level. Bearing this in mind, a particularly striking feature is that this outstandingly active, versatile, and well-read man of letters, when reflecting on the contemporary literary scene, is not able to name any authors who could suggest a convincing and sustaining alternative to this scientifically defined (and confined) paradigm. He says, "My blood runs cold when I pronounce the words: the twentieth century. Vast territories of silence. In the din of language, in the millions of words per minute" (41). As Miłosz sees it, the literature of what he calls "our savage century" (125) is a growth of Ulro. It is a

2. Miłosz further elaborates on this point in a later chapter of *Ziemia Ulro*: "By professing Christianity, we assume a long legacy of spiritual and bodily oppression, of pacts between the altar and the throne, between the altar and the power of money. And yet there is the Christianity of the locomotive and the electric bulb, of the atomic bomb and the laser, in short, of that mighty technology which rules the earth. … Modern science and technology, universally studied by people of all races and tribes, is the product of tiny Western Europe, whose boundaries roughly coincide with the territorial radius of ecclesiastical Latin" (265).

product of the crippled imagination chained within a crippling culture, unable to offer anything but vagueness,[3] despair, or decadence with its puerile tactics of self-defence—sarcasm, irony, mockery, blasphemy—which merely reflect this civilization, endorse its philosophical nihilism, and confirm the diminution of human values and the diminishment of humankind.

6 It is in this context that Miłosz points to four authors who, he claims, offer a much more adequate response to Ulro in that they put up resistance and seek release. They engage "the 'scientific world-view' in a fundamental dialogue" (158) and come up with imaginative alternatives—"a countervailing argument," as he calls it. He identifies these authors in retrospect as the most important influences on his own "mind's progress" (159). "Life is short," he adds, "and I am attracted less and less to a literature which is self-consciously literary. The degree to which a work is of extraliterary importance is determined by the power of a given author's philosophy, that is, by the passion with which it is engaged with ultimate things" (121). These authors, whom I briefly survey below, are the four pillars of Miłosz's book.

7 The first of those figures selected from the literatures of the world to support the argument of *Ziemia Ulro* is Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855), a leading Polish Romantic poet, the author of *Ballady i romanse* (*Ballads and Romances*), the poetic drama *Dziady* (*Forefathers' Eve*), the national epic poem *Pan Tadeusz*, and numerous other works, which are quoted, referenced, analyzed, and criticized on dozens of pages of Miłosz's book. He reads Mickiewicz as a writer resisting "scientific progress" through reliance on faith and the imagination, and as a poet of the Earth-garden, from which the mind was not disinherited; Miłosz once said that "every line of [his own] verse was indebted to Mickiewicz" (120). The second figure in his list is Oscar Milosz (O. V. de L. Milosz, 1877–1939), Miłosz's relative, who mostly wrote in French; the shared family name and the affinity of fates (as émigrés) contributed to his interest in and special understanding of this author. Miłosz lays particular emphasis on the way Oscar Milosz's "metaphysical poems" in prose "lay out a kind of anti-Newtonian 'visual physics,'" opposing the notions of absolute space and time, and "castigat[ing] the mind which condemns itself to a homeless exile in a space factored and divided without end" (202). The third name highlighted in *Ziemia Ulro* is Emanuel Swedenborg, whose presence in this Blakean context certainly does not surprise, but who was, however, an interest mediated by Oscar Milosz:[4] Czesław's studies of Swedenborg were prompted by his engagement with the writings of his relative (136-39), including Oscar's marginalia in a copy of the English translation of *Vera Christiana Religio* "preserved in his private library" (138). And the fourth name in Miłosz's list is William Blake—notably, the only figure in this tetrad who comes entirely from outside the sphere of the author's family connections or Polish roots. Miłosz emphasizes this point himself: "My resistance to foreign influence is worth stressing—first, so no one will doubt that I am most of all indebted to the poetry of my native tongue; and second, so that my weakness for Blake will be judged an exception and the extraliterary reasons for it made evident" (49-50). At the same time, Blake is the strongest presence—the most prominent of the four pillars supporting *Ziemia Ulro*—because it is from Blake that Miłosz derives the metaphors and concepts, including the titular "Ulro," that organize his autobiographical book.

8 What Miłosz calls his "conversion to Blake" dates back to wartime Warsaw. "In one anthology," he recalls, "I came across a few of Blake's poems, and I recognized them at once": "In those times and in that landscape," Blake restored him to the raptures of his childhood. This early attraction was, as he puts it, "an emotional one, for my understanding failed me the moment I began to ponder the meaning of individual poems and lines." Yet these first encounters led to "several more attempts at deciphering [Blake]," which were then followed by a period when he "delved in earnest." By the time he was working on his book, the early "emotional" conversion transformed into an "intellectual fascination," which he defines as "fundamental" (31).

9 Accordingly, throughout his reflection on Blake in *Ziemia Ulro*, Miłosz gives full vent to his expertise. He presents Blake's cosmology, explains his mythology and his system, and supports his readings with references to Blake critics, including S. Foster Damon, Kathleen Raine, and Northrop Frye; the long quotations from, for example, *Fearful Symmetry* (195, 383-84)[5] are explained with a graceful disclaimer: "Paraphrasing is laborious work; if this task has already been performed for us, there is no reason why we should not make use of it" (181). True to the focus of the book, the Miłoszian Blake is, chief of all, a poet of resistance to Ulro: he defends human values and the inner world of man by opposing "scientific progress," the mathematical-empirical "scientific method," and the "objective" mechanistic model of the universe. Simultaneously, Blake is able to offer "a countervailing argument," an alternative to Ulro: he constructs "a vision of man and the world vastly different from that adduced by eighteenth-century

3. Namely, various forms of escapism: the "isms" of twentieth-century art.

4. Miłosz admits: "If not for my interest in the work of Oscar Milosz, I would be largely uninformed about Swedenborg" (136).

5. These passages from *Fearful Symmetry* are quoted on pp. 181-82 and 177-78 respectively.

science and its modern descendants" (135)—just like Mickiewicz, Swedenborg, and Oscar Milosz. What is specific to Blake alone, however, and what constitutes his unique force, is the extent to which he resorts to what Miłosz calls "aggressive tactics" (106). The Blake of *Ziemia Ulro* is "a poet of fury":

> Embattled with the age, he attacks and indicts where others might bemoan: a Christianity become an instrument of control in the hands of the powerful, a system of rules and punishments; the tyranny of kings who wage bloody wars; the human misery wreaked by the Industrial Revolution, then under way in England; the plight of slaves and Indians, of women and children; the puritanical hypocrisy of sexual prohibitions; prostitution. Above all, his fury was directed at that which sustained, facilitated, and sanctioned such an order, which became in a way its code, the language of the Fall: at the science and philosophy founded by Francis Bacon. (165-66)

Another Blakean strength underscored by Miłosz is that, unlike, for instance, Mickiewicz (who was "sheltered, for a time, by his provincial Muse, Lithuania" and "protected himself from the 'learned'"), Blake "bravely joined the battle" (122, 106). Like Goethe, who was waging his "Thirty Years' War against Newton" (94, 135)[6]—and also like Oscar Milosz, who was laying out his "anti-Newtonian 'visual physics'" and envisioning a science of the future[7]—Blake "carr[ied] the contest to the enemy" (106). The Miłoszian Blake is a poet "endowed … with an intuitive grasp of the most complicated problems of physics" (172), a point that Miłosz supports with references to *Fearful Symmetry*, as well as to books by Ronald Grimes and Donald Ault. "The material contained in these works," he adds, "like the Blakean oeuvre itself, would provide enough food for thought to last the next couple of [centuries]" (171-72).[8]

10 A particularly precious feature of *Ziemia Ulro*, when measured against Anglo-American scholarly and critical studies, is that the unusual context and environment in which Blake is placed here—in this autobiography of a Polish poet, written in Polish for a Polish public—enable several vital insights into Blake's writings, bringing into focus a number of qualities of the prophetic works that become especially apparent when these works are handled in the medium of a foreign language. One of those insights concerns Blake's mythology. Specifically, the strengths of Blake's system emerge through the juxtaposition with the systems of Swedenborg and Oscar Milosz. When handling their writings, Miłosz was assuming that all those foreign-language materials were unfamiliar to his Polish reader because they were unavailable in Polish translation. (Again, we are dealing here with that communicative impasse: Miłosz stood vis-à-vis his original reader in the same inconvenient position from which he faced his American students at Berkeley.) As a result, his commentary on these sources takes the form of descriptive discourse, whose function is to introduce and elucidate. What is especially striking in this context is that, when handling Swedenborg's writings, Miłosz repeatedly acknowledges that a variety of ideas are "implausible" (151); he also mentions the "cloying repetitiveness," the "manifold tautologies," the "pedestrian style, stripped of poetic fancy" (147). To read Swedenborg's "multi-volumed work running into thousands of pages, and all composed in a pedantic Latin … is to wander through a hall of mirrors arousing a range of conflicting emotions: mockery abruptly turns to awe, rejection to assent and vice versa, curiosity to strenuous boredom, and acceptance to categorical rejection" (137). When reflecting on Oscar Milosz's French "metaphysical poems," Miłosz regularly interrupts his discussion with frustrated comments acknowledging the "obscur[ity]," "intractab[ility]," "inaccessib[ility]," lack of "intelligibility," and "inscrutab[ility]" of numerous aspects of the system (64, 188, 219, 239, et passim). In the case of Blake, there are no interruptions or qualifications of this kind.[9] This prompts an important inference concerning Blake's mythology (the overall argument of *Ziemia Ulro* means that the chief emphasis falls on Blake's imaginative rendering of the catastrophe—that is, the Urizenic myth, including the creation of Ulro—but a lot of attention is also devoted to, for example, Blake's conception of the contraries, or his idea of states). Considering that Miłosz is not able to construct a similarly convincing discourse when dealing with his other sources, Blake's myth transpires as remarkably plastic material, which can be transposed into another language and culture without a single apology for its minute particulars.

11 Other important conclusions that can be drawn from Miłosz's testimony in *Ziemia Ulro* concern Blake's style and language. Miłosz opens his discussion of the prophetic books with a disclaimer asserting that this material cannot be successfully translated into Polish;[10] this point has been

6. Miłosz borrows this phrase from Erich Heller (Heller 12).
7. As Miłosz further explains, "Although he had not so much as heard the name Einstein in 1916, [Oscar Milosz] had found—as early as *Epître à Storge*—confirmation of his intuition of the general theory of relativity" (202).
8. I am correcting here an obvious misprint in the English translation; where Iribarne reads "decades" (172), the Miłoszian original reads "centuries" ("dwieście lat," *Ziemia Ulro* 177).
9. On the contrary, Miłosz uses Blake to elucidate some of the Miloszian intricacies (see, for example, his discussion of *Les Arcanes* in chapter 34).
10. He claims, "I swear that I am not now trying to convert anyone to Blake—still less when I foresee how he would be travestied in translation" (159).

emphasized in my chapter for *The Reception of William Blake in Europe* (Borkowska 492). On second thought, however, it is important to pay attention to his practice. He regularly supports his summary with quotation, and in fact the further he goes into his discussion of Blake, the more of that quotation/translation (from *Milton* and *Jerusalem*) he provides. One critical inference that can be drawn from this is that Blake cannot be rendered adequately through mere summary; you must quote to give the right insight. The minute particulars are as important as the overall design (this can be contrasted with Miłosz's discussion of Swedenborg, where he does not offer a single passage in translation, but relies exclusively on explanatory discursive paraphrase, as if assuming that quotation is unnecessary). Another important implication is that, as he progressed and multiplied his translations from Blake's prophetic writings, Miłosz clearly recognized that, despite his skepticism and his disclaimer, Blake actually sounds phenomenally good when translated into Polish. To draw a larger context around this claim, the history of the reception of Blake in Poland legitimizes the conclusion that Polish Blake translators could be divided into two categories: first, Blakeans, who primarily aimed at transmitting the originals; second, the growing number of poets whose major objective was, of course, to produce good poetry. It appears that Miłosz, who obviously started as a representative of the first group, must have recognized in the course of his work that Blake is excellent material for the second category of translators as well. (The huge presence of Blake in translation, as evidenced by the *Reception* volumes, probably suggests the same about the translatability of Blake into other languages.)

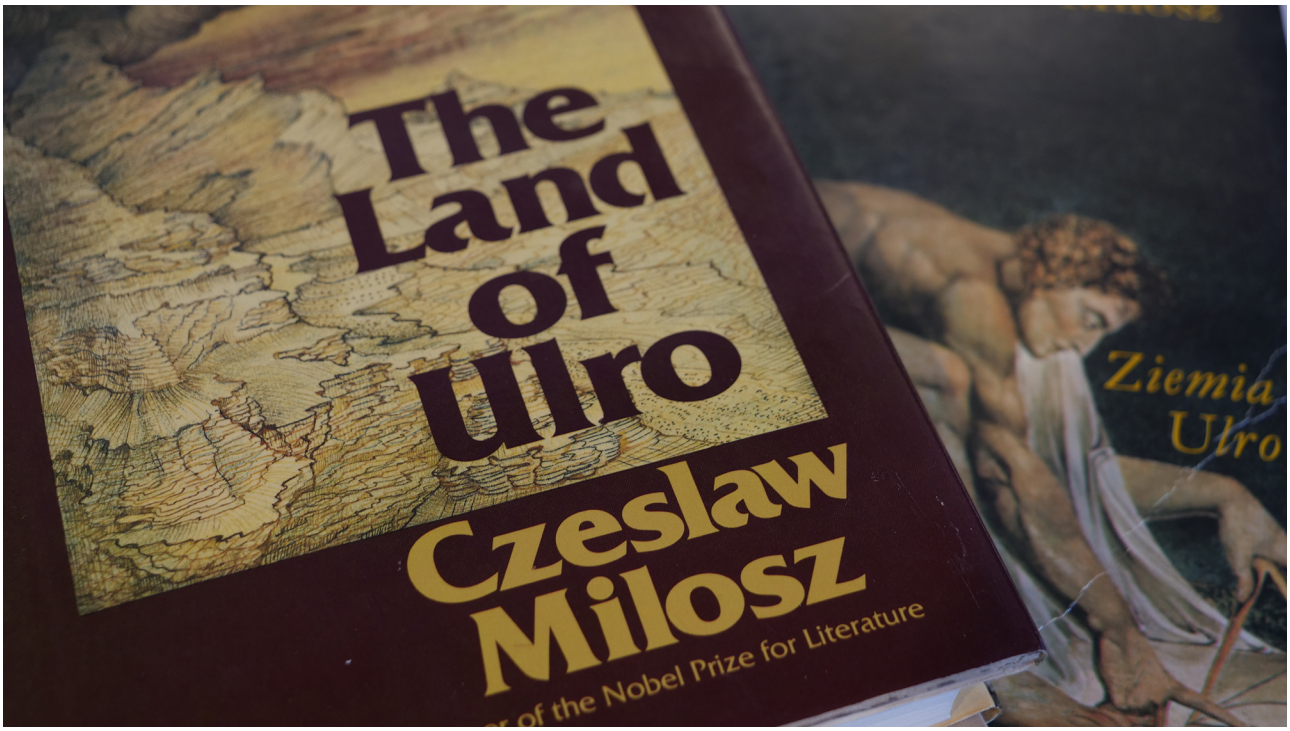
12 Yet another insight prompted by *Ziemia Ulro* concerns the idiom of the prophetic writings, Blake's own linguistic practice. From all the systems at his disposal, and all the languages among which he moved (Polish, Russian, French, English, Latin, Greek, Hebrew), Miłosz chose Blake's neologism "Ulro" as the leading metaphor and the most adequate name[11] for the "*Spectral*" civilization that is "the great paramount theme" (6) of his book. In a work that repeatedly underscores the limitations, failures, and insufficiencies of language, Blake's idiom strikes as a powerful means of communicating with extreme precision. Regardless of the context in which this neologism is used, it cannot be confused; it points instantaneously and unambiguously to Blake and to *his* definition of its meaning (evoking in this way the entire mythology). One other feature that is particularly visible in Miłosz's book, so deeply concerned with the subject of untranslatability and "barriers posed by language" (93), is that Blake's neologism is perfectly translingual. "Ulro" does not need translation, and since it does not derive from any English-language root, it does not lose anything when transposed into a different language.

13 Inevitably, some of the effects I point out above are obliterated in the English translation. It is also fair to acknowledge that making *The Land of Ulro* from *Ziemia Ulro* was, in a number of ways, an exercise in the arts of omission. This book foregrounding the subject of untranslatability wherever its author handled his foreign-language sources often proved intractable material for the translator (Iribarne, and other translators as well)[12] because of the extent to which it engages literature written in Polish, Miłosz's "incomprehensible language." Again, we are dealing with that communicative impasse, whose consequence is that a number of references are abandoned in the English version; many sentences, sometimes entire paragraphs, are skipped.[13] Even so, probably unaware of these numerous concessions, the commentators reviewing *The Land of Ulro* shortly after it appeared in 1984 complained all the same that the book relies too heavily on literature unavailable in English; as succinctly put by Michiko Kakutani in her review for the *New York Times*, Miłosz "liberally quotes the opinions that obscure critics hold of slightly less obscure authors." Other than that, the translation was read through national and political stereotypes. Anne Husted Burleigh, for instance, charged: "There is one figure who is surprisingly missing from this book: Pope John Paul II" (167); dealing with a translation published several years after Miłosz's Nobel Prize, the reviewer clearly failed to note that the original, *Ziemia Ulro*, had been written and published *before* Karol Wojtyła became the pope. Michael Glover, on the other hand, concluded: "There is no denying that the freedom to exercise one's universal pessimism in comfortable surroundings is a freedom of a not altogether undesirable kind. [Miłosz's] Polish kin would surely agree" (54). This comment, no doubt meant as a sensitive and generous reference to the situation of Poland under communist rule, is markedly ungenerous toward Miłosz, who in a number of his other works—*The Seizure of Power* or *The Captive Mind*, for instance—foregrounds the subject of totalitarianism and relates to the contemporary situation in Poland (which, incidentally, largely contributed to his protracted exile). Besides, there is

11. He stresses that Ulro has been given different names, mentioning, for example, the "wasteland"—"another of the names by which it is known" (269). T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* is one of the numerous English-language works that Miłosz translated into Polish.

12. Following Miłosz's Nobel Prize, *Ziemia Ulro* was translated into a number of languages, including Slovenian (1981), German (1982), Serbo-Croatian (1982), and French (1985).

13. On the other hand, the translation includes a denouncement of communism (254), which is missing in the Polish original; the topical comment was either censored or, more likely, written purposely for the English version.



the question whether an opinion that denies a Polish writer the license to write on a general humanist theme can actually be considered generous toward Poland; there is an implication in this comment that a writer from a communist country is not supposed to pronounce judgments on topics other than communism. Then again, Glover's review also prompts the impression that the tone of the Anglophone reception of *The Land of Ulro* was largely dictated by commentators who, inevitably, had no access to Miłosz's Polish-language sources, but who did not fully appreciate his English-language references either—specifically, the import of his engagement with Blake's prophetic writings. A reviewer recruited from Blakean circles would have no difficulty seeing that a writer who denounces his own civilization as "Ulro" cannot be labeled a universal pessimist. (See the review written in 1988 for *Blake* by Tadeusz Sławek, a Polish Blakean, who underscores throughout the Miłoszian focus on hope, the future, and "the other shore" [*The Land of Ulro* 270]—that is, his search for the way out of the maze of the wasteland, the exit from Ulro.) Miłosz closes his autobiography with a reminiscence of himself at school, "that boy who as he sat at his school desk, oblivious of the teacher's words …, spent hour after hour filling his notebooks with the fantastic sketches of his ideal countries" (273). I think Blakeans are in a position to capture most readily and imaginatively the analogy that Miłosz proposes: to see that the boy of the past drawing pictures of ideal realms and "the old professor in Berkeley" writing *Ziemia Ulro* indeed engaged in the same activity. As Miłosz sums it up, "The song of innocence and the song of experience share a common theme" (275).

14 Thus, Miłosz's Blakean book has a lot to gain, of course, from being read by Blakeans. To return to the point I made at the beginning, however, the transaction is reciprocal. Notwithstanding the omissions and the concessions, *The Land of Ulro*, Miłosz in the English translation, also has a great deal to offer Blakeans, because the unique formula of the book allows him to put Blake to a number of remarkably unique uses.

15 Perhaps most strikingly, while acknowledging Blake's insightful attacks on the institutions of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England, Miłosz refuses to abide by—and, in effect, makes the Blake of *The Land of Ulro* overcome—chronological and geographical boundaries. He remarks: "If man in the Age of Reason lived with the vision of 'Starry Wheels,' how much more susceptible to such a vision are we who have seen our Earth photographed from the Moon in the shape of a sphere?" (179). As I have stressed before, Miłosz applies Blake, first and foremost, to his own times and culture, pointing to Ulro and the myth that lies behind it as the most valid and imaginatively potent description of the secularized twentieth century, with its Urizenic cosmos, Urizenic consumer culture, Urizenic theology unable to defend religion, and Urizenic literature.

16 Second, Miłosz applies Blake to other authors—Swedenborg, of course, or Jung[14]—but also to authors and texts that lie outside the focus of Blake scholars. He widens the spectrum of Blake reference by indicating, for instance, the consanguinities between Blake and Mickiewicz, or Blake and Oscar Milosz, or, most resonantly perhaps, Blake and Dostoevsky. He uses Blake's categories to diagnose and name the malady of Dostoevsky's protagonists: the Man from the Underground, Raskolnikov, Ippolit Terentiev, Stavrogin, Kirilov, Ivan Karamazov—"Each of them," he claims, "changes gradually to a *Spectre*" ("każdy z nich zmienia się stopniowo w *Spectre*," *Ziemia Ulro* 131).[15] Just as insightfully and valuably, he links "the Blakean Tetrad" to *The Brothers Karamazov*, "that most extraordinary philosophical novel in world literature":

> The father, Fyodor, represents the burden of carnality, Tharmas. Dmitri is the embodiment of blind passion … — or Luvah. Ivan is Urizen, or the suffering Luciferian element. … Alyosha personifies Urthona, Imagination, a vulnerability to the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. (185)

"When applied to the novel as a whole," claims Miłosz, "[this Blakean symbolism] can charge, as though electrically, many hitherto dormant energies into something vibrant and volatile" (185). He adds that, to his knowledge, no one has applied Blake to Dostoevsky in this way (and, to my knowledge, this claim, made nearly half a century ago, is still valid).

17 Similarly, Miłosz widens the range of Blake reference by juxtaposing him with twentieth-century "Urizenic" authors—Gombrowicz, for instance, or, most spectacularly, Samuel Beckett, whom he reads as standing at the opposite extreme from the author of *Milton* and the builder of *Jerusalem*:

> Beckett wishes to tease us with the obvious; he is like a man who sidles up to a hunchback and begins to needle him: "Hunchback, you're a hunchback; you'd rather not be reminded of it, but I shall see to it that you are reminded." As for me, I know I am a hunchback; I make no pretense to the contrary; that is, I know full well the poverty of my human existence. Yes, there were times when I felt like howling, ramming my head against the wall, but from sheer exertion of will, from sheer necessity, I buckled down and went to work. Then along comes this man, boasting to me of his "discovery," and I say there is something not quite right about it. (243)

Miłosz calls Beckett, bitterly, the most "honest" writer of Ulro (240), and he classifies his work among the ("savage") twentieth century's crippling/crippled literature of despair, mockery, and blasphemy—the art of "reduction of human nature" (243). Such "total striptease," he adds, "is not to my taste, not because I am personally incapable of it, but just because it comes naturally, in a way, to a part of the human spirit I regard as inferior" (243-44). He appends a sharp postscript:

> It defies comprehension how the citizens of Ulro can be so solicitous of their bodies—by dieting, by avoiding certain foods, by not bathing in polluted waters—yet seem to take for granted that their souls are vigorously healthy, that it is uncivil to decline some literary or philosophical fare with a polite "I'm sorry, it's bad for me." (247-48)

18 Lastly, and just as memorably, throughout his autobiography Miłosz applies Blake to himself: "I inhabited the Land of Ulro long before Blake taught me its proper name …." He points to Blake as one of the few authors who provided the literary and philosophical fare that stimulated his own "mind's progress." The Blake of *Ziemia Ulro* is not an addition to a story, but the vital tissue of the author's life/*Life*, part of his own story. Miłosz uses Blake's mythology as an instrument of self-analysis and self-diagnosis; he utilizes the Zoas to inspect his own faculties and chart their development and history/*his story*:

> My curse was always the Specter—an ego strong enough to keep me a prisoner of Urizen's domain, where only the general, the collective, the statistical, etc., have any claim to validity. My poor Urthona, or Imagination, tried to release me from that imprisonment; finding all exits barred, she began tunneling an escape route, occasionally—as in *Three Winters* [one of Miłosz's early volumes of poetry]—succeeding. (183)

19 Miłosz's engagement of and with Blake is completely unlike literary reworkings or artistic responses (that is, two cate-

14. He translates Blake's Zoas to Jungian terms, pointing out that Jung, "an empiricist who passionately defended the empirical method, … adduced formulations more or less identical to those of the great laborers of the Imagination" (184). "Some passages," he adds, "read almost like a verbatim transposition" (184-85).

15. These are references to Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*, *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot*, *Demons*, and *The Brothers Karamazov*. I translate straight from *Ziemia Ulro* rather than relying on Iribarne's *The Land of Ulro* because, paradoxically, the Polish original is more "Blakean" here than the English version. Miłosz does not translate "Spectre" (the vernacular equivalent would be "Widmo," regularly used in Polish translations of Blake's prophecies); instead, he reaches for the Blakean term, italicizes it, and leaves it in English, preserving also Blake's capitalization. In the English translation, on the other hand, the presence of Blake in this passage is eradicated; it reads simply "all are reduced to specters" (123). Iribarne's "specter" becomes an ordinary word, not a marker of Blake's presence in Miłosz's analysis of Dostoevsky but part of the translator's vocabulary. (Incidentally, the impossibility of doing this with "Ulro" points to the force and resistance of Blake's neologism.)

gories of Blake-inspired projects that have been important focuses of *The Reception of William Blake in Europe* and *The Reception of Blake in the Orient*), because it is purely *intellectual*.[16] At the same time, *Ziemia Ulro*/*The Land of Ulro* is unlike academic or critical studies, because it is inimitably *personal*: not a scholarly book on Blake, but a self-portrait of a Blake scholar.

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16. "Literarily," he adds, "with respect to literary technique, I have borrowed little from Blake—not one to be easily imitated, by the way" (159); for exceptions (as pointed out by Polish scholars Jolanta Dudek, Aleksander Fiut, and Łukasz Front), see Borkowska 488.