

articles

TYMOTEUSZ KARPOWICZ / POLAND

The Naked Poetry

Usually when one talks about Polish poetry to a non-Polish audience, one stubbornly repeats the names of Czesław Miłosz, Tadeusz Różewicz, Julian Przybos and Zbigniew Herbert. A small group of more knowledgeable experts of contemporary poetry adds such names as Miron Białoszewski, Wisława Szymborska and, occasionally, my own. Many anthologies of modern Polish poetry, as well as separate volumes, have made these names known, if not famous. There are even some people in European countries—e.g., West Germany—and in the United States who are ready to acknowledge that this poetry is of a very high order. And it's true that the highest praise encourages Polish poets to greater effort: the sweet torture of obligation!

Surrounded as I am here by such eminent experts of world literature, and by its eminent creators, I am reluctant to talk about those poets I have mentioned, because so much has already been said and written about them. Moreover, they are now more a part of the history of Polish literature than a living process, and for the youngest generation of Polish poets they are a part of the archeology, if not the paleontology of literature. The same is true as far as the readers of poetry are concerned. School-children don't believe that Różewicz or Karpowicz or Herbert are still alive; when their teachers suggest a meeting with one of these poets, they react as if they were being invited to a spiritualistic seance to meet distinguished ghosts—but ghosts just the same. Their reaction is not all that strange; after all, to us these children are ghosts, too, only unknown and young ones.

I should like, therefore, to talk about the newest Polish poetry; poetry less known or altogether unknown abroad. In doing so, I shall not be able to avoid over-simplifications, unfair summarizing or unintentional bypassing; many poets will fall victim here to the abundance of our poetry, to its surplus of variety. After all, I don't even know how many young poets there are in Poland; I am only aware of the fact that there are many young people writing poems. I believe that one could construct a list of some 300 names of young writers publishing poems regularly in periodicals or in

book form. Nearly 100 volumes of poetry are published in Poland each year, and of these a large number are debuts or books by poets in their twenties. In effect we would be able to pick out from this list all the trends of modern world poetry, from classical to concrete. But to show all these trends would reveal nothing, just as the map of river basins explains nothing about the rivers themselves. I am going to concentrate on some outstanding trends, that is to say, on some remarkable personalities, for only individual talents, not a full-length list of names, can give some idea of the newest poetry in Poland. In art, quantity never becomes quality.

The newest Polish poetry hates classicism, avoids it like the Devil avoids holy water. Perhaps that is why one sometimes finds young Polish poets being pushed into aspersoria. The result is, however, that for poets like Ryszard Krynicki, Stanisław Baranczak, Adam Zagajewski, Stanisław Stabro, Julian Kornhauser, Janusz Styczen, Stanisław Gostkowski, Krzysztof Karasek, and for the younger ones like Leszek Szaruga, Marek Lehnert, Krzysztof Mrozowski and Jacek Bierezin, the representative of typical classical poetry, overwhelmed by myths and the sheared, sweet gardens of Delille—Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz, only a few years older than they—is nevertheless much further from them, in cosmic distance, than dead old Julian Przybos, who would have been 73 years old today. They ignore the “Współczesność” (“Contemporaneity”) group which was so important quite recently and which tried to resolve all the problems of contemporary life, cruel and ruthless, in pure, aesthetic categories. None of them turns to Grochowiak any more, because his celebration of ugliness is aesthetic too; because his description of ugliness employs contemplative methods, because his poetry lacks impetuous resistance or boisterous acceptance and, above all, because it lacks a simple, straightforward language. They have no time for Jerzy Harasymowicz and his adoration of primitive folklore, his cult for hand-carved statuettes of saints, his kowtowing to wayside chapels, frolicking in beautiful countryside metaphors. These young poets seem to be saying: try to survive this life without any ornaments or emperor’s clothes—be naked and open to the light, feel always like a perennial child, act simply like a child. Herbert seems to have no progeny among them because he, like Saint-Exupéry, claimed: “no phenomenon has any meaning to us if it is not looked at through some culture, civilization or definite profession.” This lost him in the eyes of the youngest poets who decided to experience all phenomena *ab ovo*, personally, outside the tradition of culture, civilization or profession. Only through their own ego, their “I,” their own bodies separated from the history of the human kind. By being *hic et nunc*. They set out to abolish all cults, one by one. To abolish Carlyle’s cult of the hero, Ruskin’s cult of the beautiful, Newman’s cult of faith. In their place they wanted something supremely simple—the cult of life. Only one of them,

who paid the highest price for his revolt against all these cults, wanted to establish the cult of the anti-hero, the cult of abasement, the cult of degradation. A cult of provocation.

The most striking feature of contemporary Polish poetry is, then, its anti-aestheticism, its dedication to brutal concreteness and literal nakedness, its anti-ambiguity. Its celebration of *hic et nunc*, far removed from no-man's lands and eternity. The most important young Polish poets are grouped round the Cracovian "Teraz" ("Now"). The name of the group is characteristic. It underlines their preoccupation with time present, not time past or future. Such excellent poets as Adam Zagajewski, Stanisław Stabro and Julian Kornhauser from "Teraz" call into question the continuity of man's spiritual, cultural and social experience as well as the heritage of civilization and science. Of course, they don't propose a return to the caves, that man should be a *Pithecanthropus erectus* of the Neanderthal era. For from it. They are very sophisticated and open-minded. Some of them are doctors of philosophy and university lecturers. They merely attack all over-evaluations of our heritage. They simply claim that the experiences of our ancestors are irrelevant because the time in which we are living is completely different. The distance of one minute is sufficient to separate us one from the other forever: what then can be said about the separation invoked by the distance of a whole generation? At the same time they question all the political and social commandments and taboos created by their parents, by the community, by authorities, by government. They believe that there exists something like a frontier of pure consciousness which is passed at the moment of birth. That is the zero degree of consciousness. Anything that happened on the other side of that frontier cannot be taken into account by the individual making his present decision. We can compare things only in the same time; by comparing phenomena from the present with those of the past we are only changing a living presence into a dead past. *Nolens volens*, they have come back to the old thesis of the *tabula rasa*. As a result, they accept neither future nor past tenses. Their idol is time present. They deny the existence of an intensive time called by Mircea Eliade sacral time which is the common genetic heritage for all generations. "It suffices that we listen to some good music" says Eliade, "or fall in love or lose ourselves in prayer to get out of the historic time present and join the eternal time present of love and religion. It is enough to open a book or go to the theatre in order to discover a different temporal rhythm—something, which one can call intensive time, which, in any case, is not a historic time." The poets of the "Teraz" group ostentatiously proclaim the existence only of a historic time present. *Hic et nunc*. They oppose eternity with the present moment, the community with the individual, the general with the detailed. The world begins with us and with us it ends. The world ends as many times as we feel it end:

Once every few or more years
a real end of the world takes place

. . .

The end of the world always takes place at night
when you feed your hungry ancestors with your dream

Over a few hours portraits go grey
and a tongue changes
which as from tomorrow you'll speak loudly in

. . .

There's a kind of moment when there is nothing
neither faith nor love
and the world would split apart
like two people who are losing strength
if it weren't for your deep sleep
the dream in which you suddenly become
two thousand years of the new era older
and as young as the unborn day

Adam Zagajewski: "The End of the World"

To be for the very first time is something of great importance: from now on nothing can be justified by history. Everything depends on the individual, who is both the spring and the fall of history. These poets have learned a merciless lesson from the sophistry of politicians: they know that hope is a good breakfast but a bad supper. Cold-bloodedly they put all the Polish romantic impulses, the Polish inclination to servility and crowd psychosis to the test. They demolish commandments prepared openly, or secretly, by dogmatists out to use the masses. Instead, they construct their own decalogues which are born with them and which grow with them like their own organism. They accept the moral risk involved in taking the first step. They are extremely moral in that meaning of morality which is close to Alberes' when he says that "morality understood as the obeying of norms must be replaced by a morality understood as a risk." They negate the continuum of spiritual and material culture that imposes a certain dutifulness to itself, and they deprecate the importance of substantial objects—they don't want to slip into the iron, plastic or electronic suits prepared for them by their parents and their parents' parents. Besides, the clothes vary according to the environment and bank balance, but the essence remains the same inasmuch as it never changes its destiny; its user must multiply the inherited object and pass it on to his sons and daughters in its multiplied form. The

poets of the group "Teraz" never put the object before the human being. There is no fascination with the object itself, as there was in Herbert or Grochowiak or, in French poetry, Francis Ponge. The makers of things, not the thing itself, are the heroes of this poetry. It's not Herbert's wooden dice which are being split apart, but the living human body—with a bayonet. Everything bleeds, not hiding its life. The severed umbilical cord is not plastic.

Coming into life for the first time, into time without history, they find their very own, aggressive symbol: nakedness. It's easy to see why: every birth is a repetition of paradise. But paradise contains the two greatest dangers: the snake and God. The former will force his way into your life through sin, decay and darkness—the other through holiness, ascent and light. They are insistent because their existence is dependent on you. If you ignore them—they will perish. They provoke anger—because we look at people most often when we are angry; they tempt us with love—because we find pleasure in looking at the face of a person we love. They create the immortal chain of dependence. The carnal nakedness of the heroes of the majority of these poets is usually a manifestation of the beauty of life, sexual freedom, a symbol of a lost paradise, of a purity of intention and an absence of fear of the world, a fear usually brought on by moral veils and tight, ethical suits. Nakedness is a sign of frankness, of a demolition of the distance separating an individual and the world. This nakedness is often accompanied by a social strip-tease, a stripping off of the robes imposed on one by the herd life, the impersonal life:

One day I decided
to find out who I am

. . .

I took off all my medals
and I returned my distinctions
I lost my passport
and my discharge papers

. . .

Finally the white robe of nerves
fell off me
I was safe to the marrow

Adam Zagajewski:

"One Day I Decided to Find Out Who I Am" (Kommunikat)

Fromm gives us a fairly convincing interpretation of nakedness: "Naked-

ness can, for example, be a symbol for truthfulness. The fact that we are naked can signify that we are not pretending to be anyone whereas the fact that we are dressed can signify that we are expressing thoughts and feelings which others expect of us while, in truth, we think and feel differently. The naked body can, therefore, symbolize the real 'I'; whereas clothes can symbolize the social 'I' who feels and thinks in the categories of the universally accepted cultural models." For this trend in the newest Polish poetry, nakedness is, first and foremost, a rejection of pretence and artificial gestures. It is a coming to people with no dagger hidden in the folds of a psychic tunic. It is a hostility towards the coldness of logic and an affection for the authentic reaction which has still been retained by a wild animal. Nakedness is a revolt against the degradation of life's authenticity. All the periods of human life are changed by social conventions into rites: birth is changed into the rite of nativity, puberty into the rite of maturing, learning into the rite of the lesson, teaching into the rite of wisdom, aging into the rite of preservation and death into the rite of burial. Social conventions change even man's most profound experience—death—into an empty pretence. Not long ago I was reading a French textbook on the art of war written in the eighteenth century, which contained a chapter explaining what pose and what expression of face should be assumed, with the last dregs of his strength, by a dying soldier in battle so that the enemy will not know that he is afraid of death. Unfortunately, the art of dying, the pose of dying is being taught us by our rulers to this day. And so this cult of nakedness, which is to say authenticity, is a furious attack on the cult of masks and clothes. I would like to remind you of a beautiful and sage fragment of Rainer Maria Rilke's "Malte," where he says "that, for example, I should not have realized how many faces there are: there are many people but considerably more faces, because everyone has several. There are people who wear the same face for years, naturally, a face becomes tattered, dirty, breaks along wrinkles, falls to pieces like gloves worn on a journey. They are thrifty people, simple people; they don't change their face, they don't even ask to have it cleaned. They claim that it's good enough, and who can prove otherwise? The question is, of course, that since they have several faces, what will they do with the rest? They save them. Their children have something to wear. But sometimes it just so happens that dogs in the yard wear them, too. And why not? A face is a face.

"Other people put their faces on remarkably quickly, wearing them out one after another. At first they think that their store will last them forever, but scarcely do they reach the age of forty and they've only the last one left. There is, of course, a certain tragedy in this. They aren't used to saving their face, the last one is worn thin after a week, full of holes and paper-thin in places—and then, gradually, the bottom layer comes out on top, that non-face which they parade."

This hostility of the naked poetry towards masks has far-reaching philosophical consequences. Openness joins it to a love of freedom, directs it against all forms of oppression including political oppression, which is nothing but an attempt to put on a mask on the live, real face of the nation, thereby wounding it and bloodying it since every universal mask must crush the individual, unique features of each person. It is, then, a poetry whose chief aim is to speak the naked truth in naked language stripped of exaggerated aestheticism and meaningless slogans, to speak the truth that is instantaneous, today's truth—not yesterday's or tomorrow's, a truth untainted by the sleight-of-hand of political double-thinkers. A truth similar to an instinctive blow in self-defense. A truth slapping lies across the face without waiting for second thoughts:

Refuse to give this man your hand
straighten yourself and dry your tongue's swab
come out of this cocoon rake these membranes aside
breathe in the deepest layers of air

. . .

tell the truth that's what you're for

Adam Zagajewski: "The Truth"

It is not surprising that this poetry and its so-called linguistic variant (Baranczak, Krynicki, Balcerzan) expressed the dramatic events of the last few years, which culminated in the Polish December of 1970, most fully. This poetry was the most vehement in describing the acts of violence of the rulers against the individual and the masses, the firing at the just in the name of justice—the dramatic events which, fortunately, led to the victory of the more open-minded wing of the country's government and the Polish United Workers' Party. Stanisław Baranczak's "The Morning Daily," which is dedicated in its entirety to this struggle against the attempt to put a mask on the whole nation, is the most impressive volume of poetry to have appeared in Poland in the last few years.

This poetry is characterized by a specific worship of the body. This is a simple consequence of accepting the existence only of time present—of today. The only proof of our birth is the appearance of our body. Everything else—the earth's scenery, the environment's scenery—is alien. Man comes to this earth with only one thing of his own: his body. His body is his contemporaneity—absolutely and exclusively his own. Heaven and earth and the world of people around him are the historic past tense. His body is his one and only laboratory. His body is, therefore, the alpha and the omega of his experiences and life. His body is the axis of the world. It is the nest of all

his personal experiences, the nest of sadness and joy, light and darkness, knowledge and superstition, ascent and descent, life and death. The key-word becomes blood, just as in Arcadian poetry it was wine. In this context, political violence is expressed first and foremost as violence offered to the body. Oppression has physical features: it crushes, breaks, destroys and shoots. This is an extraordinarily surprising element of this poetry bearing in mind the fascination in Polish poetry generally with psychological aspects—this poetry does not portray mental tortures which are so much more dangerous than physical ones. It is obvious that these poets have decided to close all human experience within the bounds of the five senses, treating mental phenomena as simple or complex combinations of sensory experience (just as we can construct an infinite number of arithmetical operations out of ten basic numbers). It is not surprising, therefore, that they recognized the physical destruction of a man—death—to be his greatest tragedy. A dead man has no more chances. He cannot touch a living person. This is a platitude, but there are ages when platitudes become revelations; they are the ages of ethical decay, says Tacitus, the awful ages. One must fight against death with the same violence as death fights against life. A dead man is nothing, he is just a mark instead of life. Motionless. In Różewicz's poetry, the dead victims of the last war could still tip the boat of a shipwrecked survivor. But here, a live man cannot be conquered by a dead one. The power of ghosts is over forever—even at midnight. The only threat to a live man is—a live man. Only one terror remains that so many have died irrevocably—but it is not the dead men who inspire terror in these poets, it is the irrevocability. The body's last word is its absence.

If the entirety of our happiness is to be found in our bodies, then carnal love will become the most privileged. The lack of mental mainstays is compensated for by physical sensations, by the act of copulation. Physical love is undoubtedly the center of the carnal paradise. It's very easy to see why: in the face of the acceleration of death's production by contemporary wars and aggression, physical love accelerates the reproduction of the human race. It's an automatic compensation. The celebration of the carnal is a degradation of religious experience—a bed is installed in place of an altar. Love in the poetry of "Teraz" is determined absolutely by flesh; nobody repeats Marcel Proust's definition, "love is space and time felt by the heart," because here love is space and time felt by coitus, the growth of an embryo, the pain of childbirth, the worrying about the yet-unborn child's education and future, by financial difficulties created by its birth, and by the arguments about the sharing of parental duties:

Ever since the child started to move in her belly
the whole of this impossible world began to be heavy on her
the pollution of wars on the triangular peninsulas of Asia

filled her with terror
which grew in her like blood and wine

Adam Zagajewski:
"The Whole of This World Began to Grow Heavy"

So whereas many of the trends in Polish and world poetry saw their purpose as a search to discover the ambiguities of every phenomenon, this particular trend in Polish poetry is headed in another direction—towards the univocal, literalness, towards bluntness. Whereas many poets have searched and are searching for truth in speculation, they are trying to find it in the obvious. In banality. In that which is lying in the road, as naked as they themselves are. In what can be seen by the whole world and not only by the inner sensitivity of a poet. It is the poetry of the obvious, the poetry of a world without speculations; the ideal here is the language of advertisements, newspaper headlines, everyday idioms, a language with no tradition or semantic complications. Language must be born with the poet. It must live and develop with him—and it must die with him. What self-denial! Nobody here dreams of the fatal power of language. It must be a language which, to use a phrase from the theory of information, is devoid of "semantic interference," of the mystery of incomprehensibility which tempts so many young artists, whom Nietzsche mocked so mercilessly with the words: "Make the water muddy, poets, so it seems to be deeper." But this poetry has a different ideal: the language of immediate comprehension, the language of posters, newspapers, a language *in statu nascendi*, developing naturally. It doesn't want semantic complication—it wants simplification. Whether they want to or not, these poets are repeating the theory and, to a lesser extent, the practice of the American beat poets like Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Allen Ginsberg, Frank O'Hara and Gregory Corso. In practice, the poets of the group "Teraz" use very refined, multivocal language, and the gap between the theory and the practice in this instance makes for very interesting results.

I have already mentioned that some of these poets who retain the same philosophical aims as the group "Teraz" differ in their approach to language. Such first-rate poets as Stanisław Baranczak, Ryszard Krynicki and Edward Balcerzan accept, like Adam Zagajewski and his colleagues, the existence of a time present only; they also agree with the group "Teraz" that the human body is the only receptacle for man's riches, natural as well as supernatural. They acknowledge the philosophy of nakedness and the same criteria of truth. But they reject "Teraz'" view of language; they claim that language is not born with us but is the heritage of many generations—language is a collective creation. Our personal language contains elements of a common language. They agree with the findings of structural anthro-

pology and with Noam Chomsky's views on the genetic character of grammar. Language is a link which keeps together much more than one individual life. Poets who use language join indirectly with the past and the future of generations, civilizations and races. Language prevents them from shutting themselves up within the category of *hic et nunc*, as the poets using the language of contemporary newspaper headlines do. Finding his place, his contemporaneity in the shared language means for a poet discovering his own, unique semantic code, his unique unrepeatable existence in the faceless crowd.

It forces the poet to discover unexpected and remarkable things in a flat, humdrum world. It is not the language of semantic agreement but semantic disagreement, a language of simultaneity, full of contradictions and interference, a language of maximum difficulty, not facility. It is built on a foundation of idioms. Sometimes it recalls the buzz of a crowd and we must make efforts to distinguish the separate senses of individual speech. At the same time it is the most individual poetic language. The personality of the poet is a kind of lens for a common stream of words, focusing them into a dense, individual, clear voice. Using a stream of messages it must, at the same time, be absolutely distinguishable and personal, sharp and aggressive—but above all unique. Because only unique phenomena can teach us any kind of universality. Universality cannot be enriched by a phenomenon which is not personal. It can merely magnify the universality—but gigantism in art is not a richness of meaning, it is a poverty of self-discipline. It is mere obtrusion.

At a time of a deluge of unifying facts in our civilization, there is only one means of salvation: the highest degree of dissimilitude in artistic language. Of course, that does not mean it can be bought at the price of meaningless gibbering. It is our language which enlarges our realms of speech, distinguishes the "I" from the "we," our personal time from collective time, our *hic et nunc* from the collective *hic et nunc*. For the poets of the group "Teraz" it would be very difficult to say that "The Mayflower" is a part of the universe and shares the fate of thousands of galaxies, the Milky Way, but if they were to say it, they would use sentences from some popular, paper-backed handbook of astronomy without resorting to metaphors or metaphysics. Not so the young Polish linguistic poets who wouldn't hesitate in saying that "The Mayflower" is part of the universe—more, they would have no objection to saying that the universe is part of "The Mayflower." The representatives of linguistic poetry, like those from "Teraz," admit the physical independence of the human body, the absence of a physical heritage and the absolute limits drawn by birth and death—but at the same time they accept a spiritual continuum of the human species *homo* in the petrification of idioms and archetypes—through language. Their language is charged not only by their own psyches but by the psyche of the

species too. This separates them from their contemporaries, from "Teraz," who believe that uniqueness and univocality are the cornerstones for all acts of cognition. The linguistic poets believe in the variety of unity and the unity of variety. They are totally Heraclitian and relativist. They accept Roland Barthes' description of the role of the word in contemporary poetry: "Under every word of poetry in contemporary poetry there is, as it were, an existential geology, in which the contents of the Name are concentrated and not merely selected, as in prose or in classical poetry." This poetry divides unity and unites what has been divided, accepting the reality of the subconscious and the subconsciousness of reality. It unmasks fossilized axioms and takes them apart to their primal elements, saying in their own, complicated language what Kotarbinski said in our philosophy, that "there is no battle, only warring sides; there is no consciousness, there are only conscious bodies; there is no rain, there are only falling drops; there is no justice, there are only just judges" (Władysław Tatarkiewicz about Kotarbinski's philosophy). If the poets from "Teraz" profess a kind of philosophical monism and attempt to reduce the masses of points of view to just one, to the one which is relevant only and exclusively to the individual, whose aim is to eliminate details and points of reference, then the relativist linguistic poetry, assuming that there is no objective truth, only the process of discovering it, that there is no objective untruth, only the process of proving a reverse truth, strives to the greatest multiplication of points of view for the "single eye," to an unending proliferation of aspects. It is a poetry of aspects, then, not of a whole. Despite the philosophical differences they wholeheartedly agree with Sartre's relativism: "We must learn objects, that is to say, multiply upon them the possible points of view. The object itself is the synthesis of all these appearances. The perception of an object is thus a phenomenon of an infinity of aspects."

But, as so often happens, the greatest individual poetic talent of the youngest Polish poetry was to be found outside all the trends. For the destiny of individuality is solitude. I am referring here to Rafał Wojaczek who, a couple of years ago, committed suicide when still in his twenties. Just like the poets from the group "Teraz," he announced that his kingdom was his body and only his body. He recognized it to be the highest value in his life. The second value was poetry. He cold-bloodedly took it for granted that the one must devour the other to feed itself and attain eternity. He left the decision which was to devour which, with the same cold blood—to death. He was, perhaps, the last of the Bohemians who decided, with an indifference unbelievable in its atrocity, to kill himself if it were to be useful to his poetry. Like Rimbaud he resolved to live off indignity and cruelty towards himself and others in order to descend to his own hell and, in the poetic act, to be resurrected. Never has Polish poetry been so beautiful and, at the same time, so hideous. He loved and despised simultaneously.

He created life and destroyed it. He worshipped and he humiliated. He had the heart of a eucharistic angel and the hand of a Marquis de Sade. He talked with himself through self-mutilation, asking himself: what is more important, life or creation? A question posed senselessly, at first as if a joke, to train himself in paradoxes, a little "pour épater les bourgeois," turned what was, in the beginning, a game into a merciless reality. He learned to flirt with death, valuing life more at the same time. He was always full of contradictions. He loved Poland, and he regurgitated Poland. To purify her. To polish her to her former brilliance. He accepted no authority except for the authority of poetry. The sight of restrictions made him blind with fury. Sometimes he hit out, with a huge fist, in an alcoholic fury at anything which wore a uniform—after which he would be beaten himself. The whole of the Polish Writers' Union in its entire history didn't collect as many police-truncheon blows as Rafał Wojaczek did in his short life. He was probably our last great romantic. Beautiful, young and vile. Fervent and cynical. As if the reincarnation of Yesenin in a Polish bar or brothel, designed in part by Toulouse-Lautrec and in part by Renoir. His four loves were life, poetry, Poland and death. One of them, Poland, he loved like this:

Mother wise as the tower of a church
Mother greater than the church of Rome
Mother long as the Trans-Siberian
Railway and wide as the Sahara

And as pious as a Party newspaper
Mother beautiful like a fire brigade
And patient like a magistrate
And painful as if in labor

And real like a rubber truncheon
Mother good as beer from Zywiec
Mother's breasts like two devout glasses of vodka

And solicitous like a barlady
Mother of God like the Queen of Poland
Alien mother like the Queen of Poland

He wrote many poems to his last lover with whom he decided to stay forever—to death. He called her the one "who sings to the heart." He committed suicide not because he was being persecuted or underestimated. He did so at the height of his fame, when he had become the idol of the literary youth in Poland. He prepared his death coolly, without any fanfares,

meagerly—as if he were counting on her for life. His death was the last experiment which he wanted to succeed. He rejected everything, loving life so much, for some awesome game or riddle. As if he were returning, for the last time, to the sense of the words he had once written:

He
who loves
isn't the one who'll
die

Translated by the author and J. A. Laskowski

U. R. ANANTHAMURTHY / INDIA

The Literary Situation in India: Search for an Identity

I

The situation could have turned into a series of laudatory speeches in these days of seminars in India to celebrate centenaries of well-known Indian and international figures. But the secretary of the Ministry of Education which hosted the seminar to celebrate the Aurobindo centenary was a sensitive Hindi poet, who made the occasion an excuse to discuss problems of contemporary writing in the Indian languages. After the Minister paid the expected tributes to Aurobindo and called upon the writers to uphold Indian culture, work for national integration, world peace, etc., we settled down to business. We had met in one of the dingy provincial capitals of North India, and among us we had writers in Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, and Kannada, and an internationally famous Indian painter.

The discussion inevitably turned into a topic that obsesses us Indian writers these days: why is the western mode of thought and writing the model for us? Why aren't we original in our treatment of form and content in the novel, drama, or poetry?

While Indian dance and music are uniquely Indian, why does contemporary Indian literature take its bearings from the literature of the West?