

A portrait of a woman with short, wavy, light brown hair and glasses, smiling slightly. She is wearing a dark, textured top and a long, thin necklace with a small pendant. The background is dark and out of focus, with a vertical strip of reddish-brown fabric on the right side.

„Tu jestem / zamieszkuję własne życie”

STUDIA I SZKICE
O TWÓRCZOŚCI
ANNY FRAJLICH

pod redakcją

Wojciecha Ligęzy
Jolanty Pasterskiej

„TU JESTEM / ZAMIESZKUJĘ WŁASNE ŻYCIE”

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Studia i szkice o twórczości Anny Frajlich

**pod redakcją
Wojciecha Ligęzy
Jolanty Pasterskiej**



Kraków 2018

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Spis treści

Wprowadzenie	9
BEATA DOROSZ	
O Annie Frajlich i jej wierszach (z nagrodą w tle)	15
ZBIGNIEW TRZASKOWSKI	
Poetical Habitus of Anna Frajlich	29
WOJCIECH LIGĘZA	
Wobec upływającego i odzyskiwanego czasu. O twórczości Anny Frajlich.	41
BARBARA CZARNECKA	
Anna Frajlich w odmianach czasu – kim jest, kim bywa poetka. . .	57
JUSTYNA BUDZIK	
Anny Frajlich czas (nie)powtarzalny i nienazywalny.	71
JERZY MADEJSKI	
List, listopad, literatura. Miniatura biograficzna Anny Frajlich. . .	85
AGNIESZKA NĘCKA	
(Nie)dopowiedziana „przejrzystość szkła”. O miniaturach prozatorskich Anny Frajlich.	97
MARIAN KISIEL	
Poetka wygnania. Na marginesie dwóch wierszy Anny Frajlich . . .	109
BOGUSŁAW WRÓBLEWSKI	
My z wieku minionego? Stałość i zmiana w twórczości poetyckiej Anny Frajlich.	121
JÓZEF WRÓBEL	
Polska Anny Frajlich z wygnańczej perspektywy	135
ALICE-CATHERINE CARLS	
Wychodząc poza życie. Upamiętnianie Holocaustu w poezji Anny Frajlich.	149

SŁAWOMIR JACEK ŻUREK

- Poezja Anny Frajlich wobec dziedzictwa kulturowego judaizmu.
O Wierszach izraelskich 167

AGNIESZKA ŻMUDA

- Portret wygnanej – Polki i Żydówki w poezji Anny Frajlich. 177

ANNA FIEDEN-KUŁAK

- Milczenie w poezji Anny Frajlich 187

AGATA PALIWODA

- „Był tutaj”. *O Tryptyku żałobnym* Anny Frajlich. 199

JOANNA BIEREJSZYK-KUBIAK

- Miasto a mit. Poezja Anny Frajlich wobec zagadnień
 mitografizmu. 209

KATARZYNA NIESPOREK

- Miejsce na ziemi: Nowy Jork. *O poezji Anny Frajlich* 219

KAZIMIERZ ADAMCZYK

- Nowojorska przystań Anny Frajlich 235

EWA BARTOS

- Tropy cielesności w poezji Anny Frajlich. 249

EWA GÓRKA

- „Ciemne korytarze”. Serce jako centrum ciała w poezji
 Anny Frajlich. 265

ALICJA JAKUBOWSKA-OŻÓG

- „Między harmonią a chaosem”. Obrazy przyrody w wierszach
 Anny Frajlich jako język diagnozowania świata 275

ARKADIUSZ LUBOŃ

- Aklimatyzacja poezji. Polsko-amerykańska antologia wierszy
 Anny Frajlich *Between Dawn and the Wind* 287

MARCIN WYREMBELSKI

- Ocean między nami* – wiersze Anny Frajlich w przekładzie
 na język włoski 301

EWA KOŁODZIEJCZYK

- Amerykańskie laboratorium Anny Frajlich 311

JANUSZ PASTERSKI

- „Ten co ocalił”. Miłosz Anny Frajlich. 321

RAFAŁ MOCZKODAN

Anna Frajlich – krytyk literacki. Notatki do portretu 337

JOLANTA PASTERKA

Obraz Kirgistanu w dzienniku podróży *Dach Świata jeszcze raz* .. 359

ANNA WAL

Wygnańcy 1968 roku w świetle listów Felicji Bromberg,
Anny Frajlich, Władysława Zająca 373

JAN WOLSKI

„Droga Pani Aniu”. Debiut książkowy, tajniki typografii
i serdeczna przyjaźń w świetle korespondencji
Anny Frajlich-Zajac ze Stanisławem Gliwą 385

JACEK HAJDUK

Rzym rosyjskich symbolistów. Wokół książki Anny Frajlich
The Legacy of Ancient Rome in the Russian Silver Age..... 401

RONALD MEYER

Anna Frajlich's Studies of Russian Symbolism: The Case
of Valery Bryusov 411

Noty o Autorach 415

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Poetical Habitus of Anna Frajlich

Anna Frajlich's poetry captivates the reader on first reading, which does not mean that it immediately reveals all its interpretative possibilities. Reading it, we notice repeated attempts to understand and explain the content, the meaning, and the essence of life in all human relations. Words that we repeat daily, sometimes quite by chance, are discovered here anew. Each word becomes incarnated for the first time in front of our eyes. Is it a paradox? The magic of communication? Or perhaps it is a mystery, albeit easy to explain: poetry exists only in action, and it finds its subject matter only when it is embedded in the concrete "here and now". Then, it imprints on the reader's mind, refreshing and deepening his understanding of the reality.¹ The poetic word may also be a privilege for which one pays a fixed price of misunderstanding, rejection and objection. If we accept the assertion that it is difficult to formulate the theory of poetry, it follows that every single poem is a possible, necessary, and independent but also justified and legitimate theory of poetry.

The truth lives in the word, which is a representation of revealed thoughts. However, in the case of Frajlich's poetry we are not dealing with the ordinary word as a unit of text, i.e. the elementary graphic sign, but *expressis verbis* with a word of sense, carefully inscribed into a certain time, into the laws of history, as well as personal, often intimate, life experiences. This word generously rewards the poet, who – rather than frivolous wordplay and glitzy stylistic ornamentation – appreciates more the participation in

¹ Cf. R. Grol, *Erotyka i wygnanie. Poezja Anny Frajlich*, trans. T. Kunz, [in:] *Życie w przekładzie*, red. H. Stephan, Kraków 2001, s. 99-112; M. Karpińska, *Poety emigracyjnego zmagania z biografią (na przykładzie twórczości Anny Frajlich)*, „Akcent” 2005, no. 3, p. 76-84; W. Ligęza, *W samym oku cyklonu jest żrenica ciszy. O liryce Anny Frajlich*, „Tygiel Kultury” 1998, no. 3, p. 94-99.

the living tissue of existence, and feels empathy with the people whom she has encountered on the way; in the name of humility towards life itself: „a w słowach żyły są i ziarna / i tajemnica siedmiobarwna” (“and in the words veins and grain live / and mystery of seven colours”).²

In a man who unostentatiously gives a helping hand to a neighbour, and who is ready to be with his neighbor in his helplessness, who awakens him to a new life and does not impose help but only gives rise to hope – in such a man charity is manifested: „miłość więcej żąda / darów / nienazwanych / aby nie umarła” (“Love demands more / gifts / unnamed / lest it should die”).³ Love resistant to difficulties and suffering, and one that is shared with others personifies hope. It takes courage and noble character to think that way of another person, we need to make room in our hearts for a love that overcomes hatred and for the belief that our world – often so dark – our personal experience and everything that happens to us and affects us results from the mysterious power of love and leads to axiological fullness.

The poet is capable of identifying the “foreign body” in fate and human drama: it is a result of blunt insensitivity or intentional, inhuman indifference to suffering, a sign of contempt: „a z drzwi warszawskiego mieszkania / czyjaś obelgę ścieram / i dotąd zetrzeć nie mogę” (“and from the door of the Warsaw apartment / I’m wiping out an insult / and I haven’t been able to remove it so far”).⁴ Frajlich does not idealize (or deify as Witold Doroszewski would have put it) the drama of human existence. She thinks and talks about it through compassion, and the ability to draw breath is the only difference between her and those who left. Hence, she is interested in the pain experienced by a concrete person, the suffering of the individual, rather than in the history of suffering, the psychodrama of painful experience: „już nie ma onych” (“there are no others”).⁵ The truth about existential pain is revealed in its ordinariness, in a world where there are so many people, and yet sometimes it is so difficult to find somebody who is a real human being: „Nieraz spotykałam ludzi / którzy nie byli tym

² A. Frajlich, *O słowach*, [in:] eadem, *Aby wiatr namalować. Tylko ziemia*, Szczecin 2016, p. 81. Quotations from Anna Frajlich’s poems were translated into English by Agnieszka Szwach.

³ A. Frajlich, *Epitalamium*, [in:] eadem, *W słońcu listopada*, Kraków 2000, p. 20.

⁴ A. Frajlich, *Ogrody i domy*, [in:] eadem, *W słońcu listopada*, p. 24.

⁵ A. Frajlich, *Nie ma „onych”*, [in:] eadem, *W słońcu listopada*, p. 65.

czym byli” (“I have occasionally met people / who were not what they had used to be”).⁶

The real creator – rather than the poet’s double – should be thought of as a person changing man into someone better, full of compassion and solidarity with the small. It is a person who is in communion with those who suffer, but, at the same time, it is a person who is looking at the world with trustfulness and optimism inspired by the fact that after a long search and owing to gathered experience the way has been found: „znów jest era poetów rozumnych / choć rozumu czasy nie nastały” (“once again the time of rational poets has come / although it is not the time of reason”).⁷ Perhaps it is time for the prophets ready to enlighten the world that is just coming out of a terrible and tormented century, a world to which people are still unable to bring lasting peace.

Compassion unconditionally requires us to remain at any time and in all circumstances in a state of complete readiness to be there for others, living it through again and again like a dawning day (a recurring theme of Frajlich’s poetry). The difficulty of discovering and expressing the sense of here and now seems extremely overwhelming, „to nie było to czego chciał / to było to / co miał” (“it was not what he wanted / it was / what he had”).⁸ It becomes equally difficult to define the sense of duration when it is obscured by monotonous colors of dull reality which push themselves in between the world of hope and the individual biography of the poet, between the professed values of life and the way an individual experiences the sense of loss of place („myślę o tym ciągle / że powróciłaś tam / skąd uciekałaś pospiesznie”, “I think about it constantly / that you have returned to the place / which you were running from hastily”),⁹ between the experience of uncertainty when life fades away and thoughts that shape future events.

The world and the worlds, the world of the real and of the unreal, the world and the non-world – the poet perceives them first and foremost in terms of the future. The readers do not know what will happen next, how their lives will turn out and what shape the reality, the world around us will eventually assume. The present calls for serious reflection. Despite various achievements of civilization, social circumstances and the condition of

⁶ A. Frajlich, *Azefowe prace*, [in:] eadem, *Łodzią jest i jest przystanią*, Szczecin-Bezrzecze 2013, p. 94.

⁷ A. Frajlich, *Tematy*, [in:] eadem, *W słońcu listopada*, Kraków 2000, p. 36.

⁸ A. Frajlich, *Vita*, [in:] eadem, *W słońcu listopada*, p. 18.

⁹ A. Frajlich, *Myślę o tym*, [in:] eadem, *W słońcu listopada*, p. 43.

humanity inspire anxiety. Times of incredible technological progress frequently resemble a forest full of wolves. Those who enter it to eradicate hatred with yet more hatred return infected with the curse of evil. No human possessed by evil must be hated. The message of humanistic ethics should be sent into the world jungle. It is not an easy mission, particularly because the lack of dialogue among people, in fact, threatens the freedom of choice.

Nic się nie zmienia	(Nothing changes
postęp to rozstęp	the progress is a gap
pomiędzy nami	between us
a tęczę złudzenia	and a rainbow of illusion). ¹⁰

In her poetry Frajlich combines philosophical inspiration with an inclination for detailed observation and attention to the concrete, which is rare in contemporary poetry. She uses all her senses to greedily absorb stimuli delivered by the outside world; her attitude towards the world is characterized by unusual curiosity to see, hear and feel. What is more, sensuality, which fills her poetry with images of reality and bodily sensations, reveals itself as authentic, as systematic training of the senses.¹¹ A subtle network of abstraction is interwoven with concrete and vivid impressions, with fiery images that are full of meaning. This way of writing, which makes difficult issues accessible and clear, is not only therapeutic, but it also functions as a parable.¹² In a human being, Frajlich distinguishes between the superficial “I”, which is unstable and unimportant, and the deep “I”, which is expressed, as Paul Valéry put it, through the search for metaphysics in the depths of one’s own personality.

Metaphysical imagination is closely associated with existential problems that are inherently, personally, humanly experienced. Serious reflection upon philosophical problems lies beyond emotion, beyond the “life situation”. Densifying meanings, using double negation, expressing emotions through images, Frajlich finds a language that harmonizes with the point of view adopted by her, a language that creates possible realities,

¹⁰ A. Frajlich, *Postęp*, [in:] eadem, *Łódź jest i jest przystanią*, p. 66, *Tablice*.

¹¹ R. Grol, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

¹² For an example see the poems *Z Bergsona* (*From Bergson*), *Imię ojca* (*Name of Father*) or a few other poems from the collection *Znów szuka mnie wiatr*, Warszawa 2001 (*The Wind Looks for Me Again*, Warsaw 2001).

unmarked, stretched between positive and negative monads. This strategy allows her, in a vein similar to Marcel Proust's, to approach closer the lost part of her identity. Through the prism of metaphysical wonder, she sees exceptionality and mystery in everything that is common and daily. However, she skillfully reconciles individualism with an attitude of openness towards people, the world and knowledge. Frajlich does not overwhelm the reader with her phobias and fears in order to free herself from painful experiences in a narcissistic process of self-cleansing. On the contrary, she creates a vivid pattern of humanity, in which cognitive values combine with ethical ones. Recollection of events and meetings brings her joy, because they make us realize that there is a sign of hope in building human community. Then the testimony of many men and women, who give more love, more power and more time than they have, will force everyone to reflect on the power of life which dwells in them and heralds the coming of hope in everything that is seemingly impossible.

Searching for signs of hope does not mean developing a list of individual and marginal examples, which consequently become unreliable when compared to what one would like to show. Anna Frajlich demonstrates to the supporters of the concrete, who are hungry for tangible things under the spell of realism of human existence, that nothing allows us to capture the facts of life and "glue" labels to them – this is the sign of hope.

We should be attentive and receptive to the positive horizon of life, discover the source of inner peace and the strength coming from the joy of being together. This underlines the close link between people, the community connecting humanity of all times, which is suddenly concentrated in time and closed between past and future. Distance, which perfectly harmonizes with painstaking dissection, allows the poet to undertake the most difficult problems characteristic of elementary existential-metaphysical experiences. Further, it allows the poet to find a sense of her own identity and a manner of self-expression, in this particular moment of time and place. This is an idea that underpins each philosophical reflection deemed personal.

Is it possible to develop a sense of blissful joy despite the painful experiences of exile and wandering? The answer is positive as long as joy is conceived of as a profound state rather than a spontaneous, fleeting emotion. A man of constant joy, friendly and smiling, one who can bridle gloom and anxiety quickly? Is such a man a gift of nature? If so, it's all the better. If those who meet him think "And yet it is possible to be so happy!"; such a man will become a living testimony. The best way to achieve this

state is to make a balance of joys. When the wind of discouragement is blowing, one should make a list of large, medium and small joys.

Anna Frajlich's poems remind us that everyday human existence is filled not only with the gray prose of life, but there is also an element of poetry, which draws our attention to the phenomena of existence which surround us. The analyzed work opens our minds to words that have the power to penetrate our hearts. The word is a means, not an end, a measure which conveys in the most appropriate way what the self-aware poet has to say. This is why her poetry is so rich in meanings, so varied and revealing. Beyond the dialogue between "I" and the world emerges another dialogue: between "I" and the poetic material. The phrase "more than anything" means the abolition of the border between a word and a thing. The awareness of the mystery of the poetic word implies the necessity of its unraveling ("trzeba ją rozdzielić rozszcześcić odkryć rozwibrować", "it needs to be separated, split, discovered, set into vibration"), the need for analysis of the language and the world as seen through the language. For her own sake and the others', the author examines thoroughly the poetic material, she demonstrates its possibilities and limits. The above mentioned poem is a kind of hymn to honor the creative power of man, with all its limitations in space. The relation between man and the word has been presented here as a creative act, the task of processing reality.

From the reflection on the miracle of the changing world, on passers-by and thoughts that preoccupy them, the author derives a mild affirmation of life, „pogodna mądrym smutkiem i wprawna w cierpieniu, [...] z rzeczy ludzkich nic nie jest jej obce” (“cheerful with wise sadness and skillful in suffering, [...] of human things nothing is strange to her”),¹³ culminating in an aphoristic couplet: „bo było tylko to co było / i tylko jest co jest” (“because there was only what was / and there is only what is”).¹⁴ To many people the world gives nothing but a continuing threat, the experience of meaninglessness. “Where is humanity heading?” is a question posed by many, who stretch out their hands in hope that they can get a glimpse of future life. Tormented by anxiety, we are sensitive to any glimmer of hope. Many days in our lives are filled with monotony and concern for material needs. Finally, one day, questions crawl out of the mysterious corners of the subconscious: “Who am I? What has my existence been like until

¹³ An adapted extract from Leopold Staff's poem *Przedśpiew* (*Pre-song*), [in:] L. Staff, *Poezje zebrane* (*Collected Poems*), vol. 1, Warszawa 1980, p. 573.

¹⁴ A. Frajlich, *Nad oceanem*, [in:] eadem, *W słońcu listopada*, p. 70.

now? Where am I going?” Frequently, it is an awakening to the fragility of human existence that serves as an immediate impulse, releasing a swarm of accumulated thoughts.

Co było połączone	(What was connected
nie jest już połączone	is no longer connected
co kruche było i całe	what was fragile and whole
stało się pokruszone	has become crumbled). ¹⁵

It is difficult to express more vividly the evanescence of existence. It is equally difficult, using the precision of poetic expression, to be more discreet in showing emotions in the face of sudden events that are defined by the words: I fear for the life of someone close to me. The moment of hesitation ultimately leads to mature hope. Hope comes from past personal experience, from intimate present emotions and future openness towards other people: „i jest źródło / z którego upiję [...] i jest droga / i... nie zawrócę” (“and there is a spring / from which I will drink [...] and there is a road / and ... I will not turn back”).¹⁶

What allows the lyrical I to accept another person is the paradoxical language of hope, which is directed towards future and gives signs that invite to a meeting and dialogue without calculation. If the world and life use incomprehensible language, then hope allows us to understand something of that language. We continually face a multitude of different signs, opportunities, puzzles, unknown representations of reality. The fragile human being embraces a dream of the unlimited power of hope, which helps to overcome any difficulties of fate. The idea that it is possible to shape one's life in a conscious way does not leave the lyrical I. The poet like an attentive passer-by observes everyday reality and considers the available choices, not at all easy.

Hope is not only the patient fruit of time and the process of discovery – often through momentary doubt – of the depth of things, but also a new way of exploring the world, finding out a deeper understanding of the seemingly mundane events. In our eyes, the world acquires a new meaning. Hope means interpreting the world, events and oneself according to the higher sense: love. There is no hope without genuine love. It is love that

¹⁵ A. Frajlich, *Wylew*, [in:] eadem, *W słońcu listopada*, p. 30.

¹⁶ A. Frajlich, *Rymy najprostsze*, [in:] eadem, *Aby wiatr namalować. Tylko ziemia*, p. 40.

sends us hope. Lack of hope occurs where there is lack of love and where hatred has crept in. And then all the odds are against man. There is no such evil power that would be able to undermine a person's hope unless love is first taken away from them.

One can easily see the sincerity of expression in Anna Frajlich's poetry. Between the lines of her poems we find a direct appeal urging us to avoid the life of falsehood and to speak the truth. It is the future happiness of man, his ability to fill the future with meaningful content that is at stake. Without future, man loses elementary understanding of moral concepts and his duties towards others. The poet's rich life experience gave her the wisdom of the heart, which may be expressed in the phrase: there is nothing that hurts more than injustice. Since human life is not a gift but a loan with usurious interest rates to be paid in the form of undeserved suffering and personal tragedies, Frajlich identifies any moral decay with injustice. Paradoxically, adversity helped her to draw the most important lesson within the scale of individual experience: you should not live your life mindlessly and strive for perfection. Authentic satisfaction with an ideal comes only if our craving for it does not lead to disillusionment or disappointment. On the contrary, we gain confidence that we chose the only road that had to be chosen to find a solution to our longings.

Frajlich subscribes wholeheartedly to the popular and oft-repeated claim that one should accept others for what they are, but her agreement is subject to one condition – that others sincerely wish to develop spiritually and to make actual progress in the difficult school of life. Love, that driving force of human action, does not entail uncritical acceptance. A love that does not want development creates only an illusion of feeling. Let us love our family and community, but with a love that demands progress and one that is at the same time discreet, quiet, calm, rational and reinforced by our personal example, one that says, "You can do better... Your words hurt someone and certainly that is not what you wanted." Let us start with ourselves. Let us love each other for what we are – this is the recipe for a successful life. One has to dare and see one's own faults, but only in order to tell oneself with a smile: I can do better!

Can we imagine a poetic word whose authenticity has not been paid for with a lesson in life, one which is not constantly subjected to the test of time and which does not desperately try to escape the fate of silence? Impressions, metaphors and images that Anna Frajlich creates help the reader find in everyday life constant values among persistently opposite

concepts: good and evil, altruism and self-centeredness, life and death: „płynne głoski istnienia / wpisuj w palimpsest śmierci” (“inscribe the smooth sounds of existence / in a palimpsest of death”).¹⁷

The immediacy of lyrical narration defines the axis of her imagination, shapes the subject of her poem, influences the interaction between words, meanings, values in unpretentious creation of space – *locus amoenus*.¹⁸ Straightforwardness sets a narrow and difficult, but after all credible, path leading through two worlds: the mystery of fate and the mystery of existence. In the immediacy of the word, the author of *Jesteś* [You are] discovers a gate to perception and imagination. It is the ultimate and final experience that contributes to the metaphysical dimension of her poetry.

True poetry will always be existential in its nature and will ask the most important questions about the meaning of human life and the possibility of transcendence, which, regardless of place and time, is understood as the spiritual development of a man, as a search into his deepest, most important and innate experiences. The more human mind knows, the more of new mysteries arise. Transcendence does not know the material status or social class. It addresses everyone without exception. It is above divisions and political forces and is not dependent on any of them. However, it can influence all of them to revive and enrich them with its spirit, to give a new dimension to human presence.

Tyle ciebie jest	(So you are
Tam właśnie	there just
gdzie	where
najbardziej potrzeba	most needed).

Humility plays a crucial role in the circle of the author's *humanitas*.²⁰ It does not lie in demonstrating superiority to others, in turning them into one's own admirers, but in elevation of others through showing them help

¹⁷ A. Frajlich, *O tym co martwe*, [in:] e a d e m, *W słońcu listopada*, p. 72.

¹⁸ A. Żmuda, *Ameryka w poezji Anny Frajlich*, „Archiwum Emigracji. Studia, szkice, dokumenty” 2014, z. 1-2, p. 172.

¹⁹ A. Frajlich, *Jesteś*, [in:] e a d e m, *Łódź jest i jest przystanią*, p. 68.

²⁰ It is worth noting that the word man (*homo*) is related to the word humility (*humilitas*) and both come from the word earth (*humus*). The adjective *humble* describes a person who is rational, does not fall into vanity when hearing words of praise. Carl Gustav Jung mentioned patients suffering from the lack of humility who regained health having accepted reality, greater than them, in other words having accepted humility.

and goodness. Thanks to such an attitude there are no single winner and losers, but all benefit. Competition is alien to humanism and replaced by solidarity. Humility does not mean lack of reaction to vile actions, unconditional humbleness. A truly humble man stands in defense of the truth, because he is free. A helping hand, a gesture of kindness, presence make everything simpler.

Through her private and often entirely intimate feelings, the author talks about the loss of the ability to experience feelings in a pure way. She grieves over indifference and contempt, both frequent in people, and asks where evil and pain come from. To her, humanism is more than just a collection of dogmas, commandments, or moral principles. It is serious reflection on the mystery of life, return to the sources of humanity as understood by Cyprian Kamil Norwid. Trustful subjection of one's own ego, personal plans, thoughts, feelings and will for *caritas* is a prerequisite for the meeting in which a man most fully manifests himself in front of others. Without belief and sacrifice of one's own will there cannot be any meeting with love. This is a matter of courage ready to adopt incomprehensible but also demanding love; love that is frequently inconvenient because it makes us leave what is known and comfortable.

Without any semantic exaggeration, Frąlich may be called a poet of compassion. Harmed and deprived of home are the privileged characters in her poems. Harmed, but not humiliated. Not humiliated, but at the same time not exaggerated through their experience of suffering. The poet's ethical world-view, derived from the Platonic triad of beauty, goodness and truth, is founded on the idea of justice: to each his own (*suum cuique tribuere*). It is uncompromising and manifests sensitivity to human suffering but at the same time it is not fearful. The poet analyzes the problem of evil without emotion. Humanity is given to anyone and demanded from everyone. It is not a property or financial capital bringing interest rates, but a gift offered again and again and awaiting acceptance.

Any reality towards which our minds open free from prejudices and restrictions, leads to a daily discovery of the gift and mystery of humanity. Despite the ardent desire of the poet that all people should become part of *humanitas*, there is not a slightest intention on Frąlich's part to impose her own vision. On the contrary, her writing is characterized by an absolute respect for the freedom of others. Let us quote here an eloquent and current phrase: „Zapomnieli, że wolność to jest wolność wyboru / zapomnieli że jest wybór między dobrem i złem.” (“They have forgotten that freedom is

freedom of choice / they have forgotten that there is a choice between good and evil").²¹ Not forgetting about freedom of choice, let us look for sources of deeper humanity together with Anna Frajlich.

Streszczenie **Habitus poetycki Anny Frajlich**

Liryka Anny Frajlich wnosi istotny wkład do humanistycznej refleksji nad zrozumieniem i wyjaśnieniem treści, sensu, istoty egzystencji człowieka w jej powiązaniach oraz interakcjach. Inspiracje natury filozoficznej łączą się z rzadko spotykaną we współczesnej poezji inklinacją do wnikliwej obserwacji, dbałości o konkret. Poetka, obdarzona świetnymi zmysłami, niezwykle wręcz ciekawością patrzenia, słuchania, odczuwania, chciwie chłonie wrażenia, jakich dostarcza jej świat zewnętrzny, i daje wzbogacające czytelnika świadectwo o kondycji współczesnej *humanitas*. W subtelnej sieć jej kreacji, bogatej wyobraźni wpadają wrażenia konkretne i żywe, tematy trudne, nasycone emocjonalnie. Ten sposób pisania, immanentnie przeżywany, polegający na uprzystępnianiu, maksymalnie jasnym ujmowaniu spraw trudnych i skomplikowanych, spełnia obok funkcji terapeutycznych również rolę parabolizacji.

²¹ A. Frajlich, *W duchu oświecenia*, [in:] eadem, *Łodzią jest i jest przystanią*, p. 104.

W książce „*Tu jestem / zamieszkuję własne życie*”. *Studia i szkice o twórczości Anny Frajlich* bogaty jest zestaw podejmowanych tematów. Znalazły się tutaj prace współbrzące z aktualnymi nurtami literaturoznawstwa, jak geopoetyka, krytyka feministyczna, *memory studies* czy dyskurs o Zagładzie. Powstała zatem książka monograficzna, a przy tym pionierska, ponieważ oprócz pojedynczych recenzji czy artykułów nie było dotąd pracy tak gruntownie opisującej wielogatunkowe dzieło autorki.

Poza wartościami merytorycznymi książka daje bogaty obraz sposobów prowadzenia badań literaturoznawczych. Na liście autorów spotykają się reprezentanci różnych pokoleń i ośrodków akademickich, co zapowiada też szerszą recepcję i silniejszy rezonans krytyczny.

Wszystkie pomieszczone w tym zbiorze teksty składają się na ciekawy, wieloaspektowy portret poetki, której nomadyczny los nie szczędził emigracyjnych doświadczeń i jednocześnie hartował ducha. Twórczość Anny Frajlich, ujęta w perspektywie wielogatunkowości i czytana jako zapis emigracyjnego, kobiecego czy wreszcie wielokulturowego doświadczenia, odsłania mocne związki z codzienną realnością, historią, geografią i kulturową pamięcią. Jednocześnie obcy jest jej wygnańczy mizerabilizm, melancholia, depresyjne nastroje.

*Z recenzji wydawniczej
prof. zw. dr hab. Anny Legeżyńskiej*