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**The Issues of Art and the Artist
in Karol Wojtyła's Literary Works**

ABSTRACT

The relevance of the selected research topic, especially the meaning of art and the artist in Karol Wojtyła's poems, arises from the current growing crisis of civilization, in which modern man does not occupy a key place, but gets lost in the technological space and armed conflicts. The subject of this study is the concept of ethics, the moral character of man in the role of God's co-creator of the world, which is omnipresent in K. Wojtyła's poems. It is not only about religious foundations, but also about the integral human essence inherent in the behavior of a person. This is ethical personalism, a theory developed by John Paul II at an early stage of his career. It dominates the sphere of images, motifs, stylistic figures, etc. The individual is at the center of John Paul II's thinking as a poet and thinker. Based on the ethical personalism developed by the author himself, we have traced the main directions of the spiritual renewal of the individual and of the society indicated by him. It is not only about a separate nation or nationality, but also about an integral human community to which Karol Wojtyła spoke in his works. Based on the analysis of the poems, it was concluded that the categories of artist and art are presented in Karol Wojtyła's poetry in various ways, taking into account the horizontal and vertical peculiarities of

their semantics, have a universal resonance, and contribute to the development of patriotism and moral values of society.

Keywords: poetic anthropology, co-creation, ethical personalism, artist, art.

The literary works of John Paul II, despite a significant number of publications dedicated to him, have not been comprehensively studied. At the same time, it's worth noting that Karol Wojtyła's works have been republished in the Polish literature, but only a few of their translated versions have been published in Ukrainian.¹ All these factors substantiate the relevance of the research.

In the problematics of K. Wojtyła's poems, man with his spiritual questions and searches is placed in the foreground. Almost all of the poetic works we have studied were created in the spirit of Christian anthropology, of the public speeches of the Pope and his theological appeals to people of different states and continents are also subordinate to him.

The purpose of our publication is to return to the ethical personalism in the context of studying the problem of the artist's role in society in order to emphasise the importance of art on the example of K. Wojtyła's poetry.

K. Wojtyła's anthropological approach to art and to the artist through the prism of his poetic heritage is highlighted in the scientific publications of the following: Jan Ciechowicz,² Krzysztof Dybciak,³ Stanisław Dziedzic,⁴

¹ Йоан-Павло II, *Римський триптих*, Білий Дунаєць, Острів, 2008; К. Войтила, *Вибрані поезії*, Львів 2001; К. Войтила, *Святиня: вибрані поезії*, Київ 2001.

² J. Ciechowicz, *Dom opowieści. Ze studiów nad Teatrem Rapsodycznym Mieczysława Kotlarczyka*. Gdańsk 1992; Ibidem, *Na początku było słowo. Król-Duch w wersji Teatru Rapsodycznego (1941, 1946, 1957)*, [w:] *Studia o Królu-Duchu Juliusza Słowackiego*, red. M. Kuziak, J. Ławski, Kraków–Białystok 2020, pp. 455–464.

³ K. Dybciak, *Karol Wojtyła a literatura*, Tarnów 1991; Ibidem, „*Myśle... o tym co sercem tropię*”. *O twórczości literackiej Karola Wojtyły*, „*Więź*” 1979, No. 5, pp. 88–103; Ibidem, *Trudne spotkanie. Literatura polska XX wieku wobec religii*, Kraków 2005.

⁴ S. Dziedzic, *Rapsodyczny „płaszcz niewyżebany” Mieczysława Kotlarczyka*, „*Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis. Studia Historicolitteraria*” 2012, Vol. 12, pp. 122–138; Ibidem, „*Zapowiada się nadzwyczajny aktor*”. *Karol Wojtyła w Podziemnym Teatrze Rapsodycznym*, „*Roczniki Humanistyczne*” 2020, nr. 1, pp. 153–171.

Mirosława Ołdakowska-Kuflowa,⁵ Mateusz Pindelski,⁶ Jacek Popiel⁷ and others.

In the *Letter to Artists*, John Paul II clearly outlines the role of art in the process of spiritual formation of the individual. In his opinion, its dimension is multifaceted and covers two main areas – life itself as art (an attempt to create oneself in the image and likeness of God) and creating masterpieces to change the world for the better. In the first case, every person is a creator, but in the case of creating works of art, we are dealing with a special vocation of the people chosen for this.

The Pope, directing his poetic worldview in the figure of many people, of various states and professions, wrote:

It is important to recognize the distinction, but also the connection, between these two aspects of human activity. The distinction is clear. It is one thing for human beings to be the authors of their own acts, with responsibility for their moral value; it is another to be an artist, able, that is, to respond to the demands of art and faithfully to accept the art's specific dictates. This is what makes the artist capable of producing objects, but it says nothing as yet of his moral character. We are speaking not of moulding oneself, of forming one's own personality, but simply of actualizing one's productive capacities, giving aesthetic form to ideas conceived in the mind. The distinction between the moral and artistic aspects is fundamental, but no less important is the connection between them. Each conditions the other in a refund way. In producing a work, artists express themselves to the point where their work becomes a unique disclosure of their own being, of what they are and of how they are what they are.⁸

We see that in the concept of Karol Wojtyła, from the beginning of his creative and religious activity, anthropological personalism covers all types of creation, combining ethics and aesthetics as the task and vocation of the individual.

⁵ M. Ołdakowska-Kuflowa, *Blask słowa. Inspiracja biblijna twórczości literackiej Jana Pawła II*, Kielce 2004.

⁶ M. Pindelski, *Przestrzeń poezji Karola Wojtyły*, Kraków 2014.

⁷ J. Popiel, *Karol Wojtyła i Mieczysław Kotlarczyk. Historia artystycznej przyjaźni*, [w:] M. Kotlarczyk, K. Wojtyła, *O Teatrze Rapsodycznym*, red. J. Popiel, T. Malak, J. Popiel (selection of texts), Kraków 2001, pp. 269–282; Ibidem, *Los artyści w czasach zniewolenia. Teatr Rapsodyczny 1941–1967*, Kraków 2005.

⁸ John Paul II, *Letter to Artists*, https://jpcatholic.edu/NCUpdf/courses/HUMA-122-JPII_LetterToArtists.pdf [date of access: 29.01.2023].

The first of the aspects, ethical, is clearly expressed in the cycle of poems *Profile Cyrenejczyka* [*Profiles of a Cyrenean*], which is divided into several parts. In the first of them – *Zanim jeszcze potrafiłem rozróżnić wiele profilów* [*Even before I Was Able to Distinguish Many Profiles*] – Karol Wojtyła drew the general figure of a person – the Other, who, according to the biblical story, helps Christ to carry His cross to Calvary. At the same time, the author emphasizes the connection of a person not only with the sky, but also with the earth, with other creations of God, with the nature of human existence.

The poet invites the reader to co-creation, as he writes:

Weż myśl i dokończ człowieka
lub też mu pozwól rozpocząć siebie samego na nowo
lub też inaczej: niech on Ci tylko pomaga,
a Ty go prowadź.^{9, 10}

In addition to Simon of Cyrene, in the poetic reflections of Karol Wojtyła, another figure appears on the way to Calvary – Veronica, who took pity on Christ and wiped the bloody sweat from his face. A religious tradition in the form of a legend tells about the first non-manmade image of God preserved on Veronica's scarf. In this place, the author goes from the moment of creation of the inner world of a person to the essence of true art, which cannot exist without goodness, mercy, courage and truth. He emphasizes that this process, which began in the actions of Simon of Cyrene and Veronica, now continues unceasingly, and the path they embarked on never ends. This opinion is stated in the form of a rhetorical question, the answer to which is obvious: "Do you remember that first step, which you have been taking without a break until now?"¹¹

The second part of the poetry cycle *Teraz już zaczynam rozróżniać poszczególne profile* [*Now I'm Already Starting to Distinguish Individual Profiles*] is dedicated to different categories of people – children and adults, healthy and disabled, workers and representatives of intellectual specialties, melancholics and madmen, etc. The author tries to answer the question

⁹ K. Wojtyła, *Poezje wybrane*, Warszawa 2001, p. 52.

¹⁰ Here and below, quotations from the poems are given in the original language.

¹¹ K. Wojtyła, *Poezje wybrane*, p. 53.

of how all these categories can be combined in the process of creation and moral responsibility for one's activities.

We can single out the poem *Myśli człowieka* [*Man's thoughts*], which testifies to the weakness of human nature, to the doubts and obstacles on the way to this knowledge. On the basis of this, it is worth affirming the dualism of man-creator, who is created for co-creation, but without the help of God and another person, remains powerless, as presented in Wojtyła's poems.

Karol Wojtyła claims that we can consider the first works of art to be the details that come out of the hands of a worker at an automobile factory and that shape the evolution of the world. The products made by another worker who creates parts for weapons constitute the counterbalance of his activity. Is the second of these characters also a creator – the author asks the reader. Can that which leads to destruction be art or a masterpiece? – he also asks himself.

The main character of the poem *Robotnik z fabryki broni* [*The worker from weapons factory*] is looking for answers:

Świat, który tworzę, nie jest dobry –
Lecz ja nie tworzę złego świata!
Czy to wystarczy?¹²

The summit of these reflections is another cycle of poems – *The Quarry*, in which, in addition to the work (the material and what arises from it), several other aspects of the artistic process are taken into account – inspiration and participation, in which the connection between the work of hands is implied and the human heart. Therefore, several parallels arise: work as art, every activity as art, and the whole human life as art and the creative process. In view of this, language is also created, and the top of it as a creation is the Word.¹³

This process complements the obligatory element of participation, since a person is never alone on the path of creation. In particular, Karol Wojtyła noted: "He wasn't alone. His muscles grew into the flesh of the crowd, energy their pulse."¹⁴

¹² K. Wojtyła, *Poezje wybrane*, p. 62.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 72.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 75.

Therefore, the quintessence of all images of a man-creator is the figure of a symbolic Titan who changes the fate of the world thanks to the combination of physical and spiritual principles. And although the writer emphasizes its deadly nature (“his time stopped suddenly”¹⁵), the connection of generations remains no less important, and thus the tradition of creation continues and never stops. And the man who left “took with him the inner structure of the world”¹⁶ passing with it into eternity as a result of his love.

Thus, in a poetic form, Karol Wojtyła recreated the fate of the creative man, who, despite the weakness and duality of his nature – the fact that he himself is a creation – is assigned a place next to the creative mission of God himself.

In his poems, Karol Wojtyła singled out the process of art as a special vocation of selected people who offer the world works full of beauty and reflection, and thus change it, defeating evil and sin. Previously, we considered the image of an anti-hero (*Robotnik z fabryki broni* [*The worker from a weapons factory*]), who is a co-creator of weapons and evil. As the author invites the readers to a discussion and deeper thoughts on this topic, it is worth to consider in detail his understanding of the place of the artist in society, the formation of the nation and its culture.

Carrying out the duties of the Pope, Wojtyła, who sacrificed his creative, particularly theatrical, career for the sake of the priestly path, once again returns to the topic of the essence of human art, defining not only its spiritual, but also its social dimension and pointing to its high purpose. In the *Letter to Artists*, relying on the idea from the Old Testament that the world is good by its nature [Gen., 1: 31], he also emphasized its primordial beauty, which must be multiplied, like biblical talents received from God [Mt., 25: 14–30]. We can trace this worldview of Wojtyła since his youth, as he declared it in his early poems.

At the moment of combining a person’s inner life with talent, his artistic tasks and vocations intersect. Karol Wojtyła noted that there are many types of this vocation:

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 79.

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 81.

Here we touch on an essential point. Those who perceive in themselves this kind of divine spark which is the artistic vocation – as a poet, writer, sculptor, architect, musician, actor and so on – feel at the same time the obligation not to waste this talent but to develop it, in order to put it at the service of their neighbour and of humanity as a whole.¹⁷

All these types of creativity have the same importance and special mission.

Firstly, Karol Wojtyła draws attention to the fact that an artist is, first and foremost, a patriot of his Motherland. A vivid illustration of this is the poem *Pozwól mi patrzeć własnymi oczyma...* [*Let me see with my own eyes...*] from the collection *Wigilia Wielkanocna 1966* [*Easter Eve, 1966*], which states:

Ojczyzna posiada bliskość niewysłowioną – ruch, który przenika stulecia,
Który pozwala wyłonić z pokoleń nie treść, lecz właśnie osobę...¹⁸

In this context, the author's evolution expressed in the collection *Mysłąc Ojczyznę* [*Thinking about Homeland*] is important; in it Karol Wojtyła discovers the connection between the region – language – history – nation.

These are important signposts that help to reveal the vocation of an artist: "Ojczyzna: wyzwanie tej ziemi rzucone przodkom i nam, by stanowić o wspólnym dobru i mową własną jak sztandar wyśpiewać dzieje"¹⁹ ["Homeland: a challenge of this land to our ancestors and to us, to determine the common good and sing history like a banner with our own language"].

Artistic searches in the social dimension contain all these directions of development, which complement each other. Each of the artists interprets these values individually, but there is a common measure of responsibility for artistic activity, to those John Paul II calls:

Within the vast cultural panorama of each nation, artists have their unique place. Obedient to their inspiration in creating works both worthwhile and beautiful, they not only enrich the cultural heritage of each nation and of all humanity, but they also render an exceptional social service in favour of the common good.²⁰

¹⁷ John Paul II, *Letter to Artists*.

¹⁸ K. Wojtyła, *Poezje / Poesie*, Kraków 1999, p. 187.

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 203.

²⁰ John Paul II, *Letter to Artists*.

Therefore, another important factor in the development of a creative person is his civic position.

For Karol Wojtyła, a tree remains the symbol of an artist rooted in his own culture and traditions. This image appears in many of his poems, but its deepest meaning is revealed in the work *Myśląc Ojczyznę, powracam w stronę drzewa...* [*Thinking about Homeland, I return to the tree...*]. Thus, from the primordial tree of knowledge of good and evil, the shoots of human conscience, the roots of history, sprout through the ages. They grow from the earth, which for every artist remains an unchanging value, since he is called to lift it up and regenerate it into a “new earth.”²¹ The premise of this rebirth is “the love of generations that has outgrown hatred.”²²

For Karol Wojtyła himself, as an artist, the Word has always been the source of inspiration. His ethical program was already outlined in one of the first poetry collections – *Renesansowy Psalterz* (*Psalterz Dawidów* or *Księga Słowiańska*) [*Renaissance Psalter, Psalter of David, The Slavic Book*]. According to it, the result of every human creation should be moral goodness in anthropological and theocentric dimensions²³. The most common images in this context, as Krzysztof Dybciak rightly observes, are “the glitter of water, shining objects, the bottom of the soul that reflects and attracts a mirror, the combination of a person with a supernatural space, an enlightened and enlightening eye.”²⁴

The final element of the artistic process, according to Karol Wojtyła, is freedom, which many creators lacked throughout the ages. The author does not mean a feeling of permissiveness, but freedom as the main value of the community. In the poem *Docieram do serca dramatu...* [*I reach the heart of the drama...*] he describes it as a special gift: “I patrzcie! – że wolność waszą i naszą odkrywamy ciągle na nowo jako dar, który przychodzi, i zmaganie, którego wciąż nie dosyć”²⁵ (“And look! – that we discover your freedom and ours again and again as a gift that comes and a struggle that is still not enough”).

²¹ K. Wojtyła, *Poezje*, p. 207.

²² Ibidem.

²³ *Roczniki Humanistyczne. Zeszyt specjalny w stulecie urodzin Karola Wojtyły Jana Pawła II*, Lublin 2020, p. 275.

²⁴ K. Wojtyła, *Poezje*, p. 285.

²⁵ Ibidem, p. 203.

As we can see, the artist in Karol Wojtyła's poems is free, creative, open to other person and a believer, who shows national and civic dignity, an active social position and patriotism. Highlighting this multifaceted image, the author points to the sources of his own creativity, which is both a task and a calling for him.

The Roman Triptych [*Tryptyk Rzymski*] is rightly considered the peak of the poetic genius of John Paul II, created at the final stage of his pontificate, in which rhapsodic, dialogic motifs are expressed in the most open way, and Christian personalism is given a key role. In the poem, we trace various forms of dialogue that help reveal the essence of art as a multifaceted phenomenon.

First of all, it is necessary to pay attention to the double roots of Wojtyła's poetics: "Polish" and "Roman", the first of which is connected with a typical Slavic way of expressing thoughts, the second – with a Christian message. We are dealing here with "poetic" and "theological" elements. These are two voices that harmonize with each other.²⁶

The reader is presented with several projections of the perception of the modern world and the role of the artist. In the first chapter *The stream* is the revelation of a person whose gaze is directed at nature. In it, the problem of "ecological thinking" is raised, since the poet, in a conversation with a mountain stream, addresses it with an existential question:

Co mi mówisz górski strumieniu?
w którym miejscu ze mną się spotykasz?
ze mną, który także przemijam...²⁷

So, the first discovery of the essence of art is "astonishment" or "searching for the source", as the Pope describes it, God, created the world around us, filling it with purity, is the First Creator. Giovanni Reale offers to look at the origins of this "astonishment", which come from ancient Greece, from the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle.²⁸

The drama of a person's creative search is depicted as climbing up, breaking through thickets, moving against the current. Myroslawa

²⁶ G. Reale, *Karol Wojtyła. Pielgrzym Absolutu*, Warszawa 2008, p. 25.

²⁷ Jan Paweł II, *Tryptyk Rzymski. Medytacje*, Kraków 2003, p. 9.

²⁸ G. Reale, *Karol Wojtyła*, p. 44.

Oldakowska-Kuflowa explains these poetic lines in a biblical perspective: "The image of breaking through thickets means at the same time approaching in thought, through meditation, to the beginning of time, to the beginning of creation."²⁹ In this regard, the image of the first man, Adam, the forefather of mankind, to whom the second chapter of the poem is dedicated, is logical.

The second opening is a meditation on the *Book of Genesis* in the Sistine Chapel of the Vatican, with the telling panorama of the creation of the world, which was depicted by Michelangelo. Adam is distant from the Creator by the distance of an outstretched finger on it, so, according to the interpreters of this picture, in this way he expresses his own will, on which every creative act depends. A person is free by nature and his/her actions, fate, results of work and efforts depend on his own choice.

However, in the opinion of the author, the second part of the polychromy is no less important, on which the personified image of God the Father is eternalized, which is "visible sign of eternal Love."³⁰ Without His invitation – a gift that a person receives, his activity is incomplete, unrealized:

Przedwieczne Słowo jest jak gdyby progiem,
Za którym żyjemy, poruszamy się i jesteśmy.³¹

Several more important images emerge in the artistic panorama. On the one hand, this is the figure of Eve, who is created as one whole with a man, and their union is key – "beyond his horizon paternity and motherhood opens."³²

On the other hand, the perspective of God's judgment is ambiguous, because it has an individual dimension for everyone:

To, co we mnie niezniszczalne,
teraz staje twarzą w twarz z Tym, który Jest.³³

²⁹ M. Ołdakowska-Kuflowa, *Blask słowa*, p. 62.

³⁰ Jan Paweł II, *Tryptyk Rzymski*, p. 22.

³¹ Ibidem, p. 19.

³² Ibidem, p. 23.

³³ Ibidem, p. 24.

The common motif of all the three parts of *The Roman Triptych* is stopping at the beginning of the journey, so there is always a perspective ahead, and the search for human meaning is a continuous process, like progress or evolution. John Paul II defined it as the threshold of the creation of the world and the threshold of history from which the human pilgrimage begins.

The third part of the triptych *Highlands in the Land of Moriah* is a journey that has its own purpose. First of all, this is the biblical Abraham who goes to the promised land according to the Voice of God. The primary cause of the journey is a vocation, without which human pursuits are aimless. As long as a person does not hear the Voice (the author indicates that for this we must cultivate "transparency of conscience"³⁴), he/she cannot create his/her own work of genius.

Instead, the drama of the meeting with God takes place precisely on Mount Moriah, where the hero must sacrifice his only son. The reader comes to understand that a person is called not only to receive gifts, but also to donate, give, dedicate himself to something and someone. Through this understanding, we realize the price of human Redemption.

Jeśli dziś wędrujemy do tych miejsc,
z których kiedyś wyruszył Abraham,
gdzie usłyszał Głos, gdzie spełniła się obietnica,
to dlatego,
by stanąć na progu –
by dotrzeć do początku Przymierza.³⁵

So, it is worth summarizing that in the poetry of Karol Wojtyła (John Paul II) we are dealing with a dialogic speech, which derives its traditions from the rhapsodies and anthropological literary achievements of previous generations, but goes further, creating its own "theater of the word", in which everything aimed at the contacts of the individual with another person, with the world, with God and ultimately with his inner self. The dynamics of this process are contained in the following verbal vectors – "astonishment", "contemplation" and "sacrifice". This, according to Karol

³⁴ Ibidem, p. 27.

³⁵ Ibidem, p. 36.

Wojtyła, is the essence of art and the place of a creative person in the world, closely connected with the essence of the Almighty Creator, whose creative process arises from Love.

The meaning of the artist and art in an anthropological dimension is of key value for the entire literary era – our modern age, in which Karol Wojtyła lived and created, and his works continue to change the world.

Conclusion

Having analyzed the categories of the artist and art highlighted in the poems of Karol Wojtyła (John Paul II) in the context of ethical personalism as a form of the Christian anthropology, we reached the conclusion that the topic chosen for research is one of the leading ones for this author.

We managed to trace the motifs of the value of the human life related to ontological questions. The author of the poem himself enters into an open dialogue with his contemporaries, paying special attention to the need for inner growth of youth. His lyrical interlocutor takes on different faces – from an unremarkable worker, whom the author elevates to a pedestal of human dignity, to God himself, whom the poet can trust in an individual meeting and conversation. It is highlighted in several important dialogic projections: “man – God”, “man – society”, “man – other man” and “man – his own inner world”. An additional artistic projection is the author’s dialogue with the reader, which has a trusting and sincere tone.

All these dominant elements of Karol Wojtyła’s work resonate with the poems of Cyprian Norwid, a representative of the school of late Romanticism, who introduced Polish literature into the philosophical space of anthropology. At the same time, the artistic experiments of the Rhapsodic Theater, in which he also participated as an initiator, writer and actor, had no less influence on the poetic genius of the future pope. Among artistic achievements, Karol Wojtyła singled out the achievements of writers whose creative essence is undeniable. Occasionally, the author highlighted moments of his own inspiration and creativity with the help of the power of words.

Karol Wojtyła’s poetic lines are a successful combination of universal and religious inspirations, addressed to representatives of different social

classes, of different ages and statuses. This approach can be traced in the poems *Thinking about Homeland*, *I return to the tree*, *Inspiration*, *Material*, *Magnificat*, *Invocation*, *Specific gravity*, *Participation*, *At the well in Sychem* etc.

His last poem *The Roman Triptych*, which sounds like the spiritual testament of John Paul II, acquired a special sound in highlighting the problems of art and the artist. In it, Michelangelo's high work of art in the Sistine Chapel of the Vatican is superimposed on the co-creation of man with God, and, therefore, in harmony with nature, with spiritual life and with the search for the essence of human life. The work emphasizes the immortality of true art and its projection of the relationship between man and God.

All these poems indicate the weakness of the artist, who is himself a creation in the eyes of God the Creator and is unable to build either himself or the surrounding world without him. At the same time, the poet emphasizes the importance of the human will, without which a dialogue with the world is impossible. The combination of two planes of human existence reveals the dualism of the human nature. At the same time, the author reveals the greatness of art and its high purpose, emphasizing that behind the efforts of human hands and hearts there is a force that encourages creation.

As we can see, the prospects of studying the Karol Wojtyła's poetic achievement in the anthropological context are significant, so further scientific investigations are needed.

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