



The Poet's Work: An Introduction to Czeslaw Milosz

Leonard Nathan, Arthur Quinn

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Born eighty years ago in Lithuania, Czeslaw Milosz has been acclaimed “one of the greatest poets of our time, perhaps the greatest” (Joseph Brodsky). This self-described “connoisseur of heavens and abysses” has produced a corpus of poems, essays, memoirs, and fiction of such depth and range that the reader's imagination is moved far beyond ordinary limits of consciousness. In *The Poet's Work* Leonard Nathan and Arthur Quinn follow Milosz's wanderings in exile from Poland to Paris to Berkeley as they chart the singular development of his art. Relating his life and his works to the unfolding of his thought, they have crafted a lucid reading of Milosz that far surpasses anything yet written on this often enigmatic poet.

The Poet's Work is not only a solid introduction to Milosz; it is also a unique record of the poet's own interpretations of his work. As colleagues of Milosz at Berkeley, Nathan and Quinn had long, detailed discussions with the poet. It is this spirit of collaboration that brings a sense of immediacy and authority to their seamless study. Nathan and Quinn reveal as never before why Milosz is a true visionary, a poet of ideas in history. And they show how the influence of Blake, Simone Weil, Dostoevsky, Lev Shestov, and Swedenborg, together with Henry Miller, Allen Ginsberg, and Robinson Jeffers, has enriched his vision. Milosz's lifelong experience of totalitarian regimes that exalt science and technology over individual needs and aspirations, his acute sense of alienation as an émigré, and his humanistic zeal and belief in the primacy of living have brought a prismatic quality to his poetry.

At seventy, Milosz spoke of himself as an “ecstatic pessimist.” In their sensitive mapping of his art, Nathan and Quinn skillfully demonstrate that Milosz's global influence has been achieved by the ever-shifting balance he strikes between ecstasy and pessimism. Irony and humor are never far from this book, which not only communicates Milosz's polyphonic message but also evokes his uniquely humane sensibility. *The Poet's Work* is an illuminating introduction to Milosz that will inform and engage scholars and general readers for years to come.

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