

There is a Voice: Woman to Woman, Poet to Poet.
A Tribute to Professor Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka

Christine McNeill-Matteson*

Abstract: The gentility and strength of the female gender is intrinsically woven within the very detailed chromosomes of her deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA). It has been an expression from the beginning of her existence within the cosmos. The expression of selfless love and sacrifice is explicit in the very make up of her place(s) in time. Today we see changes we think of being distinct only to Government and our social climate. Yet, we fail to look at the past and we fail to look at other beginnings. My paper will look at the subtle yet profound phenomenological contributions to humanity through the sung/unsung *poetica* works of Professor Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (1923-2014) and the *poetica* expressions of my own voice. The delicate and profound voice of the works of Tymieniecka was the force that connected her works to mine. It will reflect the value of womanhood, the value of relationship, the value of a feminine poet, but most importantly the value of phenomenology and its place in the on-going mystery of women's evolution in the cosmos: "If I could pick the pieces of all our pain, / and build the hopes of the strength remain. / We would hear the chorus of all before us, / and harmony welcome those to come." (Christine McNeill-Matteson, *Women Before*).

Keywords: woman, poet, cosmos, love, humanity, phenomenology, Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka

*Through art, we are able to break bread with the dead,
and without communion with the dead a fully human life is impossible*
W. H. Auden

INTRODUCTION

Professor Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka was/is a phenomenologist, a scholar of *Analecta Husserliana* but mostly important to me, she was/is a Poet.

* Christine McNeill-Matteson (✉)
University of Kansas, USA
e-mail: mzrtslady2@gmail.com

Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka often referenced the relationship of Mary in her publication, “The Father – Not enough. The Son / The Mother” in *The Song of the ‘Promised One’*. An outstanding woman in our history and she understood the cosmos, “but Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart”. (Luke 2: 16)

Mary, the Mother, understood the meaning of universal time, and the importance of love’s effectiveness transcending our limited understanding of the divine design of the cosmos. She understood the divine made human, she kept her wisdom until the time was to be fulfilled. In the biblical teachings of the Christian World, Mary possessed and contributed to the ultimate expression of love in the universe/cosmos as Tymieniecka referred in *The Song of the ‘Promised One’*. I quote, “Mary under the cross called on Magdalene for support, she, the real mother, the one initiated into the mystery of it.” (Tymieniecka 2011, 233)

Professor Tymieniecka’s voice delicately opened the eyes of the world and changed it with the ultimate force, which calls her from the beginning of our existence, love within universal time and the cosmos: the *logos of life*. In my poem, an expression of *Women Before*:

If I could pick the pieces and build a bridge from me to you,
We’d brush our hair with scents of yesterday’s living.
Cover our lips with stains of mauve secrets
There would be miles of many years,
Across miles of tears and sacred truths.
We’d hang the railings with aprons tied together,
our bras that covered our bosoms with nurturing souls.
Bridging over rivers of birthing beds,
wet with sweat and fluid from the womb.
We would cry the storms with tears of sorrow,
spring rain with tears of joy.
If I could pick the pieces of all our pain,
and build the hopes of the strength remain.
We would hear the chorus of all before us,
and harmonies welcome those to come.

We want to think of ourselves from a myopic view in our feminine journey. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka as a female phenomenologist/philosopher/poet saw us from a cosmic view, as reflected in her poetry, her life-long work in phenomenology, and her philosophy. Her understanding did not have borders or boundaries; it was/is a part of the universal beginnings of time and the cosmos. It is

unmeasured; it is timeless; it is the string theory of existentialism understands of all existence.

Tymieniecka did not fit in a mold prepared for her gender or her time. Her call and understanding of the study of phenomenology is expressed in the following words: “we are coming to imbibe the existential forces of the architectonic projection of being and becoming.” She speaks of being/becoming, which “crystallizes within the infinite circumference of the intrinsic possibility available to the logos of life.”

Karol Wojtyła, Pope John Paul II, in the English edition of his 1979 book *The Acting Person* (originally published in Poland and entitled *Osoba i Czyn*), begins with thanks to Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka for publishing it in the series of *Analecta Husserliana*. He concludes the Preface in another “thank you” to the Polish-born American Professor “who, guided by her excellent knowledge for the philosophic environment of the West, gave to my text its final shape. Written in Rome, March 1977” (see Wojtyła 1979).

As I read, *The Acting Person*, I found myself constantly looking for the poetic *creatrix* I have come to know through Tymieniecka’s philosophical writings. Although the substance of Pope John Paul II’s work is that she shared with her lifetime friend known in the beginning of their friendship as Karol Wojtyła and later as Pope John Paul II. His work in *The Acting Person* was of ‘ontic’ studies, not of phenomenology as he expresses in conclusion of his study.

The cosmos conspires, as I think of Pope John Paul’s blessing that brought me to Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka. A friend in 1998 was traveling to Italy and was attending a conference at the Vatican. He shared with me, while there, he would ask Pope John Paul II to give me a formal blessing for my birthday; and so, he did.

In and around that time, as a member of MLA, I received a call for papers from The World Phenomenology Institute, the title: “Sharing Poetic Expressions: Beauty, Sublime, Mysticism, in the Modern Worlds” I submitted my abstract, and it was the beginning of my journey with Professor Tymieniecka and the academic organization she has founded.

CREATIVE PHILOSOPHIZING: WOMAN TO WOMAN, POET TO POET

We philosophize and write and create art, to put into words the existentialism of *phenomenology of life*. The original and inspiring

creation of Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka - she has developed throughout life, especially in her treatises *Logos and Life* (Books 1-4, 1988-2000) and *The Fullness of the Logos in the Key of Life* (Books I-II, 2009-2012) - represents “a phenomenology of phenomenology”, which focuses on the “organic phenomenon in vital expansion, as one living and expressive body that had reached and touched her with its generative/propulsive energy, involving her empathetically in its productive *logos*” (Verducci 2015, 9; 10), and which is rightly considered to be “a new Copernican revolution” in philosophy (Backhaus 2001, 18)¹.

This peculiar, artistic, creation is emerging from and is realizing itself throughout the cosmos. It is for this reason I refer to my paper, ‘poet to poet, woman to woman’, with Professor Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka and my own personal experience.

In the words of Pope Francis (2019), “Do not be afraid to weep when you encounter difficult situations; tears are drops that irrigate life. Tears of compassion purify hearts and feelings”.

In poetic form I share a piece of the hiddenness of the feminine which continues; the promise of humanity:

I enter my garden of Gethsemane,
With the shroud of my womb
Choking closely on my shoulders.

Weeping across my soul the red stain
Flows into the vine now twisting into my
Human flesh of pain and sorrow.

Mother of Mothers, whose loneliness
And desperation sheds the crust of my body
Calling out for the new bread.

New bread, for the generation left
From a Mother’s tears,
At Mary’s feet; the world weeps.

Garden (see McNeill-Matteson 2017, 105)

¹ Many exegetical approaches of Tymieniecka’s “phenomenology of the logos of life and the human condition” have been published. See, for example: Gary Backhaus (Ed.), *Thinking through Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka’s «Logos and Life»*, Hanover, NH, 2003; Carmen Cozma, *On Ethical in the Phenomenology of Life*, Rome, 2007; Daniela Verducci, *La fenomenologia della vita di Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka. Prova di sistema*, Roma, 2012; Salahaddin Khalilov, *Phenomenology of Life or Life of Idea*, Baku, 2012.

Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka did not bellow from the pen. She quietly, poetically, philosophically brought to the pages of her work the phenomenological source of her strength in the existence of a world governed (word defined many ways) by men. In her words in *The Maiden* (Tymieniecka 2011, 229-238), she poetically expresses her need to understand and in her understanding: “You caress my eye blinded by hate and you reconcile me with the lack of love; your airy swing of arms touches my neglected head and I do not feel lost anymore with the inimical world of men.”

In Tymieniecka’s *poetica* she pulls you into her search and with the source of her strength, intelligence, completeness, you will walk the existential journey toward *The Song of the ‘Promised One’*. She spoke out to the Mother’s from the past who secretly underlined passages, so their daughter would understand “becoming like a snail in his shell instead of a flower to unfold its petals and radiate nature, / Keeping the law in all its useless emptiness to herself”. She goes on to say:

A woman who did not murder herself, her genuine self, for the sake of empty-headed social necessity or cultural fashion, remains all her life a maiden at heart. This influx of faith in life of this weak self might break its way through. This dynamism carrying us in a creative effort that makes us to transcend our narrow boundaries - where then this great inspiration comes from? How is this accomplished indeed? ... Not from a distance but from within.” (Tymieniecka 2011, 235-237).

The life of our philosopher-poet woman was not without challenges. As a daughter of an heiress family belonging to Poland’s landed nobility, she grew to become the creator of the “phenomenology of the logos of life and human condition”. In 1968, Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka founded the prestigious series of *Analecta Husserliana: The Yearbook of Phenomenological Research* – published by D.Reidel, then by Kluwer Academic Publishers, and now by Springer (Dordrecht, The Netherlands). She also founded, in 1976, the World Institute for Advanced Phenomenological Research and Learning, in Belmont, Massachusetts, which became the World Phenomenology Institute in Hanover, New Hampshire (see Cozma 2013, 7-19); and she presided this very important academic organization for almost four decades. It’s worth noting that “since 1969, Professor Tymieniecka began to organize international and world congresses, conferences and symposia of phenomenology, in which many scholars meet under the auspices of making all human beings part of the concern of practical philosophizing upon *life*” (Ibid., 11),

manifesting herself as a role model of contemporary philosopher acting to develop a world-wide dialogue.

Even though Tymieniecka didn't like to make a radical genre distinction between philosophers², her writings carry the seal of some particularities of feminine manner of thinking, comprehending, explaining and interpreting *life* in its in-depth and various forms of which the "impetus and equipoise" principle is precisely the "logos of life" (see Tymieniecka 2000). Thus we may get the significance of her words about 'the strength of women', speaking on "Mary, the Mother" so intimately connected to "the great mystery of the creativity of nature", and wondering as concerns the "utmost secrecy" of life and questioning the impression of the other's thrust: "but, thrust in what." (Tymieniecka 2011, 233; 236).

The phenomenologist of life writes near her conclusion of the *Song of the 'Promised One'*:

The real task is not to stretch a strong arm to protect the fragile budding flower of love and sweetness, but to hold an iron shield against all that would not match the text to be written together for the wings to take off. This *Thrust* once unfolded and all the rest is solved in eternity. (Ibid., 235-236)

CONCLUSION

Womanhood is a legacy passed within the deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA). A legacy the universe has placed among the cosmos. The human expression is recognized in the greatness of paintings of Rembrandt and his "Prodigal Son" as one of the Father's Hand is painted in the feminine. We are the feminine hand of the universe, in the words of Professor Tymieniecka "and yet, written before all times, like a stone thrown by the sea's tide to the shore shows a heart engraved within another." (Tymieniecka 2011, 236)

The universe speaks, it calls attention to the feminine voice, and poets and philosophers/phenomenologists often hear the voice and echoes back the wisdom of the cosmos *as the universe has allowed the times that are of phenomenological expression in our humanity.*

² During the debates within a session of the Third World Congress of Phenomenology, with the topics "Logos of Phenomenology and Phenomenology of the Logos", held at Wadham College, University of Oxford, England, August 15-21, 2004, Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka has stressed that she doesn't consider herself a 'feminist' philosopher. The participants (among them: Gary Backhaus, Nancy Billias Mardas, Carmen Cozma, Lawrence Kimmel, Peter Abumhenre Egbe et al.) can confirm in this regard.

Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka responds; she, “follows in total abandonment, not asking where it leads, knowing full well, there is no one there no cipher to write a next text.” She reminds us, “it is the task of the ‘Promised One’, to write such a text together in order the wing of the soul grows.” (Ibid.)

Yet, the roaring gentle touch of her Motherhood is a phenomenological strength recognized only by the wisdom of the cosmos over time. I end my paper with a poem I wrote in 2012, dedicated to my Mother:

Touching the ground, wet grass, and still morning.
You lie beneath my feet, feet that feel as though
they are sinking into the very void of your presence.
Leaving barren ground to follow without you,
Holy-ground, hallow feelings of yesterday.
You do not exist in temporal tomorrows of living every day.
I kneel, to keep from swaying in the feelings of uncertainty.
I want to lie and sleep near you, to feel you again.
A fragment of time, going and gone, and soon to be gone again,
I mix the moisture of the day with the moisture of my tears.
In the passing of life as I seek to find reason,
I bow my head to pray. I feel the swelling of life and death
fertilize the ground inside my grounding, so that I may never forget.

Passing

REFERENCES:

- All Poetry by Christine McNeill-Matteson.
- Backhaus, Gary. 2001. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka: The Trajectory of Her Thought from Eidetic Phenomenology to the Phenomenology of Life. *Phenomenological Inquiry*, vol. 25: 17-53.
- Cozma, Carmen. 2013. Phenomenology of Life in Understanding the Cosmopolitan Humanness. *Agathos: An International Review of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol. 4, Is. 1 (6): 7-10.
- McNeill-Matteson. 2017. A Walk among the Brushes. A Personal Reflection of Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka: The Poet. *Agathos: An International Review of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol. 8, Is. 2 (15): 103-109.
- Pope Francis. 2019. “Do not be afraid to weep”. *Pathways to God*. Jesuits in Britain E-News. <https://www.pathwaystogod.org/my-prayer-life/thought-day/do-not-be-afraid-weep2019> [accessed: 06.26.2019].
- Tymieniecka, Anna-Teresa. 2000. *Logos and Life*. Book 4: *Impetus and Equipose in the Life-Strategies of Reason*. Dordrecht / Boston / London: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Tymieniecka, Anna-Teresa. 2011. The Song of the “Promised One”. A Christian “Song of Songs” (A poetical fragment). In: Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Ed.),

Sharing Poetic Expressions: Beauty, Sublime, Mysticism in Islamic and Occidental Culture. Dordrecht: Springer, pp. 229-238.

Verducci, Daniela. 2015. The Re-Found Life in A.-T. Tymieniecka's Phenomenology of Life. *Agathos: An International Review of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol. 6, Is. 1 (10): 7-23.

Wojtyła, Karol, Pope John Paul II. 1979 [1969]. *The Acting Person*. Translated by Andrzej Potocki. In Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Ed.), *Analecta Husserliana*, Volume X. Dordrecht / Boston / London: D. Reidel Publishing Company.