

Title: Inscribing Memories of Sexual Violence on the Male Body in Czesław Miłosz's *A Poor Christian Looks at the Ghetto*

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Abstract:

This paper addresses the palimpsest of silence in Polish literature pertaining to sexual violence in the Holocaust, more specifically violence enacted on the male body. War has always carried implications of impending sexual violence for women who are among the "invaded" or "conquered." However, the Holocaust represents a unique moment in refashioning the notion that only the female genitalia can mark a body as an object or receiver of violence. If a Jewish man was suspected of attempting to pass for a Gentile, he would be instructed by Nazi officers to remove his pants so that judgment could be rendered. It was at that point that the circumcised penis marked the male body for violence and eventually extermination. In "A Poor Christian Looks at the Ghetto," Czesław Miłosz wrestles with his own identification as an uncircumcised Christian who will thus be counted among the murderers by Christ on Judgement Day. My paper examines the way in which Miłosz brings to the forefront an unspoken assault on the body and voice of those who were subjected to sexual violence under Nazi occupation.