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The Image of the United States in the Published Correspondence of Czesław Miłosz Written Between 1945 and 1950¹

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Abstract: The article discusses the image of the United States depicted in Czesław Miłosz's correspondence coming from the years 1945-1950. The author of the article refers to the circumstances that led the poet to taking up a job as a diplomat and analyses a variety of opinions on that decision circulating among both Polish and émigré writers. The letters discussed reflect the culture shock and the slow process of acclimatization that the poet went through; his way of perceiving and trying to understand America. The article also focuses on the role Miłosz played as a mediator between the Old and the New Worlds, translating American literature into Polish and trying to popularize Polish culture in the US.

Keywords: Czesław Miłosz, United States of America, letters

Czesław Miłosz and his wife left Poland in December 1945.² From February 1946 to the end of October of the same year, he worked as a cultural attaché at the Consulate General of the Polish People's Republic in New York. From November 1946 to October 1950 he served as a cultural attaché, and then the second secretary at the embassy in Washington.³

¹ The article was part of my research project titled "Wątki amerykańskie w twórczości Czesława Miłosza w latach 1945-1953" [American threads in Czesław Miłosz's works 1945-1953]. The project was financed by the National Science Center.

² Andrzej Franaszek provides December 4, 1945 as the date of the Miłoszes departure for London. See: Franaszek, *Czesław Miłosz. Biografia*, Kraków: Społeczny Instytut Wydawniczy Znak, 2010, p. 396. However, from Miłosz's correspondence with Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz it appears that they left Poland at the end of December.

³ See: *Czesław Miłosz. Bibliografia druków zwartych*, edited by A. Kosińska in collaboration with J. Błach and K. Kasperek, Kraków-Warszawa: Instytut Dokumentacji i Studiów nad Literaturą Polską. Oddział Muzeum Literatury im. Adama Mickiewicza, 2009, pp. XLI-II-XLVI. Czesław Miłosz's work and its significance for the government of the People's Republic of Poland is discussed by M. Cichecka in "Czesław Miłosz na służbie dyplomatycznej w USA," *Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne. Seria Literacka*, Vol. 12 (2005), pp. 219-252.

Although after World War II several Polish writers took up diplomatic positions, Miłosz's decision was criticised in cultural circles both at home and abroad. Even stronger reactions could be observed after his decision of February 1950. His resignation from the function of the 1st secretary of the Polish embassy in Paris, application for political asylum and the beginning of his close cooperation with Jerzy Giedroyc's *Kultura* grew to the level of the intensely commented "Miłosz case."⁴ Even those, who did not speak up publicly, expressed their reactions to the poet's decision in their correspondence and diaries.⁵ Zbigniew Herbert commented, with glee: "The Writers' Union has lost an interesting activity it was involved in – looking for a villa for Miłosz."⁶ Evaluation of his decision divided his faithful readers. Even in 1986, Sławomir Mrożek would engage in a polemic with Jan Błoński:

Miłosz's suffering in antebellum Poland was spiritual, and terrible, and all the more so that it was spiritual only. But I can express myself more crudely when referring to the post-war circumstances. Miłosz considers himself a specialist in suffering inflicted by History, that is by Diamat, or to put it simply: by Communism. However, to put it directly, Miłosz got his Spiritual ass kicked by Communism, while we, you included, because it is a generational thing, too, have been busted in a more literal sense. Hence, his considerations are of dual quality: very high Spiritually (an asset) and somehow anaemic, because they refer to something that so many, many people got their ass kicked for – in a very literal sense.⁷

⁴ See R. Gorczyńska [E. Czarnecka], "Wokół 'sprawy Miłosza,'" in: eadem, *Podróżny świata. Rozmowy z Czesławem Miłoszem. Komentarze*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1992, pp. 247–253; J. Pyszny, "'Sprawa Miłosza', czyli poeta w czyśćcu," in: *Poznanie Miłosza 2*, Part one 1980–1998, edited by A. Fiut, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2000, pp. 53–81; M. Danilewicz-Zielińska, *Szkice o literaturze emigracyjnej półwiecza 1939–1989*, 2nd edition, extended, Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1999, pp. 197–199.

⁵ See: J. Giedroyc, W. Gombrowicz, *Listy 1950–1969*, selected and edited by A.S. Kowalczyk, Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1993, pp. 32, 37, 41–42; J. Giedroyc, A. Bobkowski, *Listy 1946–1961*, selected and edited by J. Zieliński, Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1997, p. 180–182; J. Giedroyc, K.A. Jeleński, *Listy 1950–1987*, selected and edited by W. Karpiński, Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1995, p. 54–55; J. Giedroyc, J. Stempowski, *Listy 1946–1969. Część pierwsza*, selected and edited by A.S. Kowalczyk, Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1998, p. 155; M. Dąbrowska, *Dzienniki 1945–1950*, Vol. III, selection, introduction and footnotes – T. Drewnowski, Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1988, Vol. III, pp. 17–18 and 69; J. Iwaszkiewicz, *Dzienniki 1911–1955*, edition and footnotes A. and R. Papiescy, with an introduction written by A. Gronczewski, Vol. I, Warszawa: Czytelnik, 2007, pp. 324–325; J. Lechoń, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 188, J. Czapski, *Czytając*, Kraków: Społeczny Instytut Wydawniczy Znak, 1990, p. 393.

⁶ Z. Herbert, J. Turowicz, *Korespondencja*, manuscripts read, edited, completed with footnotes and afterward by T. Fiałkowski, Kraków: Wydawnictwo a5, 2005, p. 19. All the quotations from the Polish sources have been translated by Elżbieta Rokosz, unless stated otherwise.

⁷ J. Błoński, S. Mrożek, *Listy 1963–1996*, introduction T. Nyczek, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2004, pp. 561–562. The commentaries to *Rok myśliwego* [A Year of the Hunter] made by Andrzej Werner and included in his collection of essays *Krew i atrament*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo PWN, 1997, are also interesting. The largest number of later evaluations of the diplomatic service of Miłosz can be found in J. Trznadel's book, *Hańba domowa: rozmowy z pisarzami*, Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1986.

The poet many times referred to the circumstances of his departure and the several years staying in the United States,⁸ not refraining from such a judgement of his decision as that expressed in the following fragment:

From the beginning, my departure from Poland occurred under the sign of deception, because I was guided by a single desire to leave. And then we'll see. Before her death, my mother simply ordered me to leave. Later, finding myself in America, I noticed that I had absolutely nothing to do there, in any sense at all. Aside from earning my living, along with "eating, defecating, and sleeping." My conflict with *Kultura*, when I wound up there in 1951 – a conflict that may seem funny today, but wasn't funny then – gives some idea of the extent to which any integration at all into émigré circles was internally impossible for me.⁹

Miłosz justified his decision to accept and then to resign from the position of a diplomat in the service of the People's Republic of Poland. Over time, his statements became richer and more developed versions of earlier ones. They could be explained by the need for purification, by attempting to understand; we can see in them a measure taken to construct his own biography, which he called "a creative fabrication."¹⁰ Those measures became more understandable when he started to be written about as a poet laureate.¹¹ The moment he took his wife and children to France closed the first period of the poet's stay in the United States, which was at the same time the initial stage of the long-term process of Miłosz's discovery of America. It seems surprising that up till now that period of his activity and creativity

⁸ See: C. Miłosz, M. Wańkiewicz, *Korespondencja 1951–1956* [Correspondence 1951–1956], Warszawa: Głos, 1986, pp. 10–19; C. Miłosz, *Rodzinna Europa* [Native Realm], Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2001, pp. 290–317; A. Fiut, *Rozmowy z Czesławem Miłoszem* [Conversations with Czesław Miłosz], Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1981, p. 107; C. Miłosz, *Rok myśliwego* [A Year of the Hunter], Kraków: Społeczny Instytut Wydawniczy Znak, 1991, pp. 51, 91, 134–135, 141, 145, 159, 170, 273–275; R. Gorczyńska (E. Czarnecka), *Podróżny świata. Rozmowy z Czesławem Miłoszem. Komentarze* [The World Traveller. Conversations with Czesław Miłosz. Commentaries], Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1992, pp. 68–73; *Czesława Miłosza autoportret przekorny*, the conversations were led by Aleksander Fiut, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1994, pp. 113–114; C. Miłosz, *Wielkie pokuszenie. Bieliński i jednoróżec* [Great Temptation. Bieliniski and a Unicorn], afterword by M.A. Supruniuk, Emigration Archives, Toruń: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2002, pp. 7–30; C. Miłosz, "Przedmowa," in: idem, *Zaraz po wojnie. Korespondencja z pisarzami 1945–1950* [Right after the War. Correspondence with Writers 1945–1950], Kraków: Społeczny Instytut Wydawniczy Znak, 2007, pp. 5–13.

⁹ C. Miłosz, *A Year of the Hunter*, translated by M. G. Levine, New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1994, p. 212.

¹⁰ See: C. Miłosz, *Rodzinna Europa* [Native Realm], Kraków 2001, p. 15; C. Miłosz, *Inne abecadło* [A Further Alphabet], Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie 1998, p. 66.

¹¹ See: "Pamięć ran. Z Czesławem Miłoszem rozmawia Jerzy Turowicz," in: C. Miłosz, *Rozmowy polskie 1979–1998*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2006, pp. 33–43; J. Jarzębski, "Być wieszczem," in: *Poznawanie Miłosza 2. Part 2 (1980–1998)*, edited by A. Fiut, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2001, pp. 102–124; C. Miłosz, *Rok myśliwego*, pp. 17 and 126; M. Zaleski, "Arcywzór biografii poety," in: *Zamiast. O twórczości Czesława Miłosza*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2005, pp. 249–269, A. Werner, *Myśliwy Miłosz i ekologia kultury*, pp. 74 and 82–83.

has not been fully discussed. Perhaps the poet's own statements inhibit the discussion, since in *A Year of the Hunter* he admitted:

I have been thinking a lot about quite an important topic – about examination of my stay in America from 1946 through 1950. More precisely, what America meant to me in those years. It was not what it is today, nor, I think, what it is for almost all my contemporaries. Were I to try to ascertain this on the basis of my verse and prose writing from that period, I would not come to any unambiguous conclusions. I would characterise my situation as backbreaking, unbelievable, illogical, immoral, indescribable. After the passage of so many years, what I have managed to achieve in literature is projected backward; that is, the false game of the those days is grounded *ex post*. At the same time, that whole historical phase loses its sharpness and its most important features, perhaps, sink into oblivion.¹²

Miłosz's perception of the New World from the years 1946-1950 transformed itself in a typical way. Over time, the poet departed from the original impressions and formed the first diagnoses, passing from perception to cognition, from observation of the material culture to understanding the symbolic culture. The process can be most easily observed in the correspondence from that period. The context of his first impressions is significant. As the poet recollected, his image of the United States was created on the basis of the books about Indians he had read as a boy,¹³ while as a young man he became fascinated with the cinema and with Walt Whitman's poetry.¹⁴ As a former member of the poetry group *Żagary*, he belonged, as we know, to the Polish avant-garde studying English and translating English-language poetry. While in America, he started to implement an intensive and extensive self-education project, reminiscent of the enlightenment, according to his own principle of usefulness. However, during the first months and years of his stay in the New World, Miłosz – just like earlier writer-emigrants – compared America with Europe and confronted his observations with the then-existing European myth of America, which he had internalised from books and films, not without some influence of Oskar Miłosz's prophecies. Other factors influencing his perception of the New World were his recent experience of German occupation and the fact that for Miłosz leaving Poland was a form of escape. The memory of the war returned in his letters to Jerzy Andrzejewski and to Zofia and Tadeusz Breza. Over time, it was replaced by descriptions of current experiences. Miłosz confesses: "I have gained weight: the 2 liters of milk which I drink every day do the

¹² C. Miłosz, *A Year of the Hunter*, translated by M. G. Levine, New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1994, p. 116.

¹³ See: C. Miłosz, *Rodzina Europa [Native Realm]*, pp. 179.

¹⁴ See: C. Miłosz, "Walt Whitman," in: idem, *Ogród nauk [The Garden of Science]*, Kraków: Społeczny Instytut Wydawniczy Znak, 1998, pp. 243–251; C. Miłosz, *Życie na wyspach [Life on Islands]*, Kraków: Społeczny Instytut Wydawniczy Znak, 1998, p. 97; R. Gorczyńska (E. Czarnecka), *Podróżny świata...*, pp. 144–145; C. Miłosz, "Whitman Walt," in: idem, *Abecadło [Miłosz's Alphabet]*, pp. 338–340. C. Miłosz, "Słowo wstępne," in: *Pisarze o Ameryce. 15 głosów*, with an introduction by Czesław Miłosz, edited by G. Clack, translated into Polish by L. Aleksandrowicz-Pędich et al, the coordinator of the Polish edition Peter Sawchyn, Warszawa: 2004, pp. ix-x.

job” (ZPW, p. 528).¹⁵ Being familiar with the conditions of life in Poland, the Miłoszes sent parcels from America, containing, among others, medications and a layette for the Andrzejewskis, clothes, coffee, and tea for Irena and Juliusz Tadeusz Kroński. The poet tried to get Americans acquainted with the Polish war experience – he asked for copies to be sent to him of Pola Gojawicyńska’s, Seweryna Szmaglewska’s, Tadeusz Breza’s and Stanisław Dygat’s books, which he wanted to show to the local publishers. He thought it was very urgent, because, as he complained to the Brezas in 1946: “You have no idea, how much we suffer here due to the ridiculous anti-Jewish histories in Poland. The word Pole is becoming gradually synonymous with the word »Nazi« and the commotion caused by antisemitism in Poland is greater than that caused by the Oranienburgs and Auschwitzes. Nobody cares what the Polish government thinks about it; it is the Polish nation that is being accused” (ZPW, p. 528) and in another place: “Poland is more hated here for its antisemitism than Germany” (ZPW, p. 542).

For Miłosz, his stay in America was a compromise, which he could hardly stand. He very slowly adjusted himself to the East Coast. When describing the American landscape in one of his first letters to Andrzejewski, he used the term “the waste land” (ZPW, p. 32), which coincided with his meeting with T. S. Eliot and sending his own translation of *The Waste Land* to Kazimierz Wyka. Miłosz did not tolerate well the high temperature and humidity, and the difficulties with acclimatization, resulting in minor, but annoying indispositions, were accompanied by the discomfort of a man detached from his own environment, deprived of the feeling of rootedness and familiarity. Out of the feeling of estrangement, his critical remarks about American special planning, its artificiality and theatricality, arose. Descriptions of the cities in which the Miłoszes subsequently lived reveal a gradual rejection of the stereotypical bias towards the New World. These are not descriptions *par excellence*, but rather notes on his first impressions. Their spontaneous impressiveness and sketchy nature are striking. It is also understandable that initially the poet perceived American civilisation in an ahistorical way – the form of the descriptions of places corresponds with that; it is based on enumeration and reporting. It is worth noting, however, that Miłosz seems to have been relieved by such a lack of forced historical thinking. Considering his stay in the United States as temporary, he concentrated on what was happening in Poland and in Europe, i.e. in the locations where history – as he silently assumed – was truly taking place and whose participant he considered himself to be, despite the distance that divided him from his homeland. As early as in 1946 he reached for the monumental work of Arnold J. Toynbee, from whom he learned a

¹⁵ All the quotations from the poet’s correspondence come from the 2007 edition of C. Miłosz, *Zaraz po wojnie. Korespondencja z pisarzami 1945–1950* [Right after the War. Correspondence with Writers 1945–1950]. Further on I refer to that edition with the “ZPW” acronym of the title and page numbers in parenthesis.

different perspective from which to look at history. He admitted that to a few people only:

One thing is good about those journeys: indifference to monumental historic events is out of the question, and here is youth again, and burning curiosity in human affairs. You will laugh at me – he writes to Andrzejewski – but sometimes I feel as if I have found myself in ancient Rome or Greece and for one reason only: the mass, the swarm of human bodies committed to their physical needs and appetites only, *living* physiologically, which in Europe is no longer known. [...] The sea is howling. It is a considerable piece of exoticism, that America. Not New York – for me, it is simply an awfully ugly city. But what nature and climate (I think we are at the latitude of Sicily). (ZPW, p. 46)

In this respect, Miłosz was not – obviously – consistent. His letters reflect a range of emotions, which built his dynamic and ambivalent attitude to the situation. In the middle of 1946, he stated that: “[w]e have got used to America already, which consists in realising that for a European at a certain age it is a country you cannot get used to. Every little country has its little squares, some narrow streets, some smells, which you become attached to, and even in its ugliness has something peculiar. Here it is not so” (ZPW, p. 531). The former inhabitant of Wilno (Vilnius) talked about the impossibility of isolating one’s place out of the space provided, of settling down in America even at the sensual level. He was also bothered by the role in which he appeared, hence quite frequently in his correspondence we can find statements like one from his letter to Breza about: “[l]iving surrounded by a huge theatre decoration made by a decorator whose taste you question, [...]” (ZPW, p. 531).

Miłosz balanced the gains and losses he had experienced as a writer, not only as a way of compensation, and he stressed the significance of the former. He discovered the therapeutic dimension of his position. In his poem *To Jonathan Swift* he admits, *And sincere rage irradiates/ My multiple duties* (*Daylight*, vol. I, p. 8), and he considered memory as his duty, in his letters expressing his hope to distance himself from Europe:¹⁶

I think that it was worth it, after all, because I am learning the world better than I would have while in Cracow, and first of all, I am learning to discard further many interests and respects for various human and literary things being simply rubbish. (ZPW, p. 532)

The poet made an impressive effort toward self-education. As Elżbieta Kiślak puts it:

Miłosz treated his stay in America as “years of one more university” (ZPW, p. 65), a laboratory of new experiences. His time was filled with studies, making notes, reading, writing and translating. As it appears from his letters, the main subject of his studies was the society, its customs and culture. He absorbed with curiosity the exotic world, which from the very beginning both attracted and repelled him with its “chronic” – as he wrote – stupidity and silly smile. In his correspondence, enthusiastic admiration is mixed with complaints that America has “grossed him out,” with despondence not understood by those who stayed in his homeland. [...] After the years of war deprivation, he enjoyed the benefits of the warm

¹⁶ E. Kiślak devotes quite a lot of attention to this issue in *Walka Jakuba z aniołem. Czesław Miłosz wobec romantyczności*, Warszawa: Prószyński i S-ka, 2000, p. 128.

climate and civilizational comfort – he had access to television, drove cars and travelled by plane. He followed closely the list of bestsellers, spent lots of money on books, went to the cinema, discovered the pleasures of having his own record collection, went to exhibitions and concerts.¹⁷

Realising that the sum of those activities did not constitute the value of his life in America, he called them *activités de surface* (ZPW, p. 56) – he took them up, trying to be useful. As early as in 1946, in a letter to Andrzejewski, he formulated his aim: “I am trying to create a certain special service providing Poland with information about American literary, artistic and scientific life – maybe I will succeed” (ZPW, p. 32). First, he sent his essays on America, its culture and literature, as well as his translations of selected works in English, to *Kuźnica*, *Odrodzenie* and *Przekrój*,¹⁸ and then also to *Nowiny Literackie* and *Twórczość*. In 1946, his articles on the cinema¹⁹ and on Hemingway²⁰ appeared, as well as an extensive cycle “*Życie w USA*” [Life in the USA] published under the pen name Jan M. Nowak.²¹ He also published under his own name²² and as “*Żagarysta*.”²³

The poet engaged himself in the popularisation of Polish culture in the United States, renewing his contacts with war emigrants, such as Józef Wittlin, Aleksander Janta-Połczyński, Manfred Kridl, Ignacy Świącicki, among others, and getting acquainted with the local Polish diaspora. He met the Primavera Hutterite community, and considered joining them²⁴ (ZPW, p. 591). He became interested in the existing *polonica* and works of authors unknown in Poland, such as, for example, the abovementioned Franciszek Andruszkiewicz, whose poems Miłosz copied in letters to his friends.²⁵ In his correspondence, he did not hide his resentment for part of the post-war Polish diaspora,²⁶ and that is why he chose the American environment, which gave him the necessary perspective towards the issues of his home country. However, neither his numerous acquaintances, nor travels, nor frequent meetings with various people managed to weaken the feeling of loneliness.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 133–134.

¹⁸ See: C. Miłosz, “Notatnik nowojorski” [New York notebook], *Przekrój* 1946, No. 79.

¹⁹ See: C. Miłosz, “O kilku filmach” [On a few films], *Kuźnica* 1946, No. 20. Later on Miłosz would watch Charlie Chaplin’s films with interest.

²⁰ See: C. Miłosz, “O Hemingwayu” [On Hemingway], *Kuźnica* 1946, No. 38.

²¹ See: J.M. Nowak [C. Miłosz], “*Życie w USA*” [Life in the USA], *Odrodzenie* 1946, No. 51–52; *Odrodzenie* 1947, No. 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 19, 21, 22, 25, 27, 30, 46, 47, 48.

²² See: C. Miłosz, “Na Independence Day” [On Independence Day], *Odrodzenie* 1947, No. 29.

²³ See: C. Miłosz, “Zabawy i spory” [Games and disputes], *Odrodzenie* 1947, No. 31.

²⁴ See: C. Miłosz, “Primavera”, in: idem, *Abecadło [Miłosz’s Alphabet]*, pp. 249–251.

²⁵ The presentation of Andruszkiewicz’s works in *Odrodzenie* was very sharply commented on by Jan Lechoń. See: idem, *Dziennik*, Vol. 1, p. 268.

²⁶ This aversion was, as we know, reciprocated. Jerzy Giedroyc in his letter to Andrzej Bobkowski of March 8, 1949 reports that: “There is [in the US – added by E. K.] a fierce row, ignited against him [Aleksander Janta-Połczyński – added by E.K.] by Lechoń and Wierzyński, suspecting, among others, that he is under the influence of Miłosz. Since a similar campaign is conducted against Wittlin, I have turned to him with a request for cooperation in *Kultura*,” op. cit., p. 76.

Although, as he claimed in his letters, he did not miss Poland in the way the local emigrants did, he did, from time to time, go through crises of various natures. He found some form of therapy in his work. He organised a student exchange program and considered a similar one for writers and scientists. Sensing the post-war interest in Poland, he asked for new books to be sent to him that he could recommend to the local publishers, as well as poems, which could be compiled into a representative anthology of Polish poetry.²⁷ In his cycle *Życie w USA* [Life in the USA], he wrote a report on an exhibition of Polish books organised in the years 1945-1947 in New York.²⁸ Over time, he observed that Poland was being perceived in the US with growing mistrust:

I keep thinking how to bring Polish writers here – we can read in his letter to Iwaszkiewicz – I have recently written an extensive memorial concerning this issue to the Commission for International Reconstruction. In a few days' time, I will visit the president of the Rockefeller Foundation – I am trying to get it through to them as well. I am not losing hope, although among Americans two tendencies collide, as far as Eastern Europe is concerned – an urge to show the newcomers how lovely America is, and their fear of “the reds.” They are so disgusted with Slavs that they cancel all radio programs in Polish, no matter what political angle they have (i.e. programs made by American Poles for the Polish diaspora). (ZPW, p. 185)

His friends tried to persuade him to write a book on America,²⁹ but Miłosz was still gaining knowledge about it. As he confessed in his letter to the Brezas from May 16, 1948, after the winter of 1947 there was a breakthrough in his life in the USA – he ceased to be anonymous, his work gained momentum, and his activity started to bring measurable effects. Miłosz's position was strengthened and his relations with the Polish émigré intelligentsia were improved by the opening of a Department of Polish Studies at Columbia University, named after Adam Mickiewicz and headed by Manfred Kridl.³⁰ This resulted in increased writing activity by Miłosz – he continued his *Życie w USA* [Life in the USA] cycle in *Odrodzenie* and new articles on literary culture in the US appeared there,³¹ as well as translations of Pablo Neruda's poetry³² and an essay on Faulkner.³³

²⁷ We can find numerous references to that in C. Miłosz's letter, ZPW, pp. 534, 538, 540.

²⁸ J.M. Nowak [C. Miłosz], *Życie w USA* [Life in the USA], *Odrodzenie* 1947, No. 25.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 130, 539, 573.

³⁰ We can find out more about this in: C. Miłosz, “*Mój wileński opiekun.*” *Listy do Manfreda Kridla (1946–1955) z uzupełnieniem o listy Manfreda Kridla i addendum* [My Guardian from Wilno. Letters to Manfred Kridl (1946–1955) with the Addition of Letters from Manfred Kridl and Addendum], prepared from a manuscript by A. Karcz, who also wrote an introduction, footnotes and editor's notes, Toruń: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2005. For the organisation of the Department and the attacks on Kridl and Miłosz by the press of the Polish diaspora, see C. Miłosz, ZPW, pp. 98, 208–209, 215, 224.

³¹ See: C. Miłosz, “Książki i pisma w Stanach Zjednoczonych” [Books and essays in the United States], *Odrodzenie* 1947, No. 6; idem, “Abstrakcja i poszukiwania” [Abstraction and search], *Odrodzenie* 1947, No. 7.

³² See: “Pablo Neruda w przekładzie Czesława Miłosza” [Pablo Neruda in Czesław Miłosz's translation], *Odrodzenie* 1947, No. 23.

³³ See: C. Miłosz, “Faulkner,” *Odrodzenie* 1947, No. 24.

Starting from 1947, the poet travelled more frequently and his excursions were longer. In 1948 he visited California for the first time – he travelled to San Francisco with Wanda Telakowska, an exhibition of whose work he organised there. As it appears from his correspondence, he then visited Santa Fe in New Mexico, flew over the Grand Canyon and went to Los Angeles and Santa Barbara. The landscape he observed there looked like “on the second day of the creation of the world” (ZPW, p. 201), and that thought would return in his poems and essays in the Californian period.

Official meetings encouraged him to get acquainted with American cultural patterns – he wrote about some of them, like, for example, standing parties, small talk, superficial contacts with people, in a tone similar to that which Stanisław Barańczak would also later use. His private observations at this stage were quite typical for an intellectual from Europe: the declared American puritanism, binding especially in the media, struck him in the context of the acceptance of sexual freedom, which was much more conspicuous than in the Old World. In his essay on Henry Miller he developed this thought: “The code of manners is quite peculiar, both freer and less free than what we know from our history [...]”³⁴ In American jokes, he couldn’t hear the note of the absurd, so close to him, but most of all, he reproached the new human species he considered Americans to be for their limitation of ahistorical thinking. In that period Miłosz started to understand the structure of American society – from his remarks on the new species, which he was eagerly observing with a passion equal to that of Linnaeus, he moved to considerations of the differences in the mentality of the inhabitants of Northern and Southern states (it is interesting that he accused the former of racism),³⁵ he appreciated the input of African Americans and Native Americans in the literary culture of the United States. In his letters he used more and more English words, not only to describe things and cultural phenomena for which there were no Polish equivalents – he discovered that English was much more economical.

Quite soon after getting settled, Miłosz refreshed his interest in nature. According to the logic of settlement in a new place, his attention was drawn to those elements of space whose recognition was not of primary importance. He observed the dynamic changes of the seasons, discovered their colours, and distilled characteristic colour tones from cityscapes and rural landscapes. He tried to remember them to build, as far as possible, a picture of the continent out of the comparisons. In America, he became acquainted with species of plants unknown to him before, dreamt of writing an essay on American trees and birds, and having polished his English, he studied natural history books, highly appreciating the

³⁴ C. Miłosz, “Henry Miller, czyli dno” [Henry Miller, or the rock bottom], *Odrodzenie* 1948, No. 39.

³⁵ Miłosz mentions the specificity of the South and refers to the way it is perceived in different regions of the US in his article on Henry Miller. See: *ibid.*

Anglo-Saxon advancement in that discipline. In the years that followed, thanks to having a driving licence, he more and more willingly spent his free time at the coast or in the woods, where he observed beavers and a porcupine. After the dark years of occupation, three of Miłosz's statements made in 1947 seem to be of particular importance – one made in January, in a letter to Paweł Hertz:

America has brought me back the taste for observation of the phenomena of the world. My ambition, for a long time, has been for a certain internationality of the mind, which, in fact, protected me during the war (ZPW, p. 497),

another one in April, to Iwaszkiewicz:

You know that America, after all those years of the war at home, requires some sort of digestion, not to mention the fact that in general our life after the war requires some sort of digestion. I think it was wise of me to be willing to go abroad. Proportions have become altered; I have been awakened in some sort of a new stage, but after a longish period of adaptation to the world. (ZPW, p. 164)

and the last one in June to Breza:

The world is, after all, charming, as long as there are trees and birds in it, I frequently live in a state of sensual agitation, I would just sit and describe the matters of sight and hearing. (ZPW, p. 555)

It seems that Miłosz slowly regained the ability to enjoy the world, smothered by the war experience, and his feeling of appropriation allowed him to enjoy the right to an ecstatic life, so much consistent with his inclinations.³⁶

He read more and more literature in English. In his correspondence from 1947 he shared his impressions from reading Arthur Koestler's novel *Darkness at Noon*, which he read to appreciate the value of the depiction of terror in the USSR. He was also interested in the American reception of Marxism; he observed its local "maceration" (ZPW, p. 310). That curiosity led him to the leftist environment of "politics."³⁷ He became interested in the works of Americans of European descent, Chinese poets, Afro-Americans, whose Negro spirituals he translated and sent for publication in Poland, as well as some other authors from outside the Anglo-Saxon culture. He studied Spanish to translate Pablo Neruda's poetry.³⁸ His fluency in reading and translating made him happy in the context of his mission of being useful – that word appears in many of his letters from that period – and also became a tool in his personal struggle with romanticism:³⁹

³⁶ See: C. Miłosz, *Rodzinna Europa [Native Realm]*, pp. 292–293.

³⁷ See: C. Miłosz, *Abecadło [Miłosz's Alphabet]*, pp. 204–208.

³⁸ As Zofia Nalkowska writes, Miłosz met Neruda at the theatre during his stay in Poland in 1949. See: Z. Nalkowska, *Dzienniki 1945–1954. Część 2 (1949–1952)*, editing, introduction and commentary – H. Kirchner, Vol. II, Warszawa: Czytelnik, 2000, p. 107.

³⁹ This aspect of Miłosz's interest in English-language poetry has been extensively discussed by E. Kiślak, "Szkło amerykańska," in: eadem, *Walka Jakuba z aniołem*, pp. 133–141.

As far as I am concerned – he confesses to Kroński – I am learning in America a whole lot; here the struggle with romanticism is treated very seriously, and the grounds of it are constituted by the English poetry of the 17th and 18th centuries. (ZPW, p. 307)

He complained about boredom and excessive clerical work – he dreamt of having more time for translating. He hoped to quit his diplomatic service and support himself with translations, but realised that it would not be possible in the near future. He also understood that if he had a chance to live independently abroad – he mentioned such a possibility already in 1947 – that would mean working as a translator rather than establishing himself as a poet. Very early, in 1948, he expressed his conviction that he could not create in any other language but Polish. He was also reluctant to think of creating for a Polish reader in the United States or about access to the local literary circles:

As far as my expansion over the local territory is concerned, the Polish language is out of the question, because the local Polish diaspora is at the caveman level; I felt the urge once to “enter the local market” in some form, but I do not feel that anymore. To translate my poetry, I would need a poet here who can speak Polish, and there is none. Secondly, neither that nor writing any kind of prose would morally pay off, as I have nothing in common with the picture of the world that people here have in their heads. I write from time to time an article in English, wondering how Conrad could write in a foreign language – it is a bit like chopping wood and is never entirely correct. Actually, there are quite a lot of foreigners here writing and publishing in English, mainly German emigrants – they usually write drafts and have proof-readers, who make those texts stylistically smooth – I am curious if you could write like that, for me it appears to be rather unbearable, since one of the greatest pleasures of writing is a certain precision of shades in wording. (ZPW, p. 97)

Miłosz did not really count on getting American readers interested in his poetry. Firstly, he noticed the end of the post-war interest in the writing of Slavs. Secondly, he noticed stereotypical treatment of Slavs as a homogenous ethnic group – the classic mechanism of grouping – and the equating of Slavs with Russians. Thirdly, having lectured on Polish literature in different environments, he realised how different the social role of a writer in the US was from the one a writer played at that time in Europe, and that any attempt to enter the local literary market would be connected with learning that role.⁴⁰

The role of a writer is different here – he writes to Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz – his position is different, it is a rather obnoxious and inferior profession, evaluated positively only at universities, which seem to be here some kind of secular monasteries. It is not Latin America, where a poet is at the top of the hierarchy, to such an extent that even in one of the revolutions one of the dignitaries wanted by the revolutionists, when he climbed a tree and those chasing him were to shoot him, shouted: “Don’t shoot! I am a Poet!” and that apparently saved him. (ZPW, pp. 178–179)

⁴⁰ See: R.N. Wilson, “Poeta w społeczeństwie amerykańskim” [“The poet in American society”] translated into Polish by A. Gettlich, in: *W kręgu socjologii literatury. Antologia tekstów zagranicznych*, Vol. II: *Zagadnienia. Interpretacje*, Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1977; C. Miłosz, “Życie na wyspach,” in: idem, *Życie na wyspach [Life on Islands]*, pp. 82–92; J. Wittlin, “Mój pierwszy rok w Ameryce,” in: idem, *Orfeusz w piekle XX wieku*, afterward by J. Zieliński, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2000, p. 324.

In his essay on Henry Miller he devoted a few sentences to the conditions of living of the writer, who had gained fame and popularity among the readers:

He lives in California, but not in an exquisite villa, as Europeans are likely to imagine it. The life of an elitist writer in America is hard. He is more likely to live in a dilapidated cottage located somewhere on the rocky Pacific coast, with a rent of 6 dollars a month.⁴¹

We can observe an interesting paradox here, which Miłosz would overcome later: on the one hand, poetry in English was his commitment to the struggle against romanticism, but on the other, it was not easy for him to part with the privileges that precisely that era had given European poets. Fourthly, Miłosz noticed that the space of the written word was organised differently there than in Europe. In American democracy, an intellectual was not an authority, and in the public debate *vox populi* was represented not by a poet, but by a columnist and a journalist. In his letters, Miłosz stressed a number of times the significance and the high level of international journalism. He also observed the methods of shaping public opinion, the subtlety of American propaganda, in comparison with which “the methods used by the security service are like the Stone Age and the 19th century” (ZPW, p. 72). And fifthly, he held a very critical opinion about the American recipient. In 1948, with the passion of an enthusiast of work at the grassroots, he expressed an opinion – which he was to repeat in the future and would result in his editing of the 1953 *Mass Culture* anthology – that it was wrong to assume that securing the material needs of an individual guaranteed his or her willingness to develop spiritually and intellectually. As an argument against such a stand, he provided examples of Negro spirituals and Native American art. He fought against the unfounded and, in his opinion, very European division into the lesser and the initiated, based on a belief in which the conviction grows that those unenlightened should receive art of a moderate level, because encountering true art can be harmful both for them and for the artists. Miłosz’s words from his letter to Ryszard Matuszewski anticipate his future polemics with Edward Shils, but do not change his earlier conviction about the very small chance of getting through to the American reader with his poetry. Who can be sure whether it was not popular culture that Miłosz considered his greatest rival, claiming it to be a manifestation of American sentimentalism? Following bestseller lists, he did not expect to find Faulkner’s novels there. Popular culture, being in his opinion a refined form of control of the society, seemed to be, from his perspective, a contemporary leviathan – we can see a convergence between Miłosz’s thinking and that of Antonio Gramsci, a Marxist’s.⁴² The poet devoted a lot of attention to the way the media shaped the American

⁴¹ C. Miłosz, “Henry Miller, czyli dno” [Henry Miller, or the rock bottom].

⁴² See: J. Storey, *An Introduction to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998, pp. 13–16.

art market and the recipients' taste. His criticism of radio and television can be seen in his later correspondence with Thomas Merton. If he was ahead of his own assertions from *Visions from San Francisco Bay* and *The Land of Ulro*, speaking of the "spiritual poverty of America" (ZPW, p. 427), the genesis of those statements can be found in his conviction of the lack of correlation between developed material culture and intellectual culture, and of the disastrous effects of the communication control of the society.

Hence, Miłosz's decision to use his short stay in America in the most effective way. From 1948 his reading, translating and essay writing became more and more extensive. In that year the largest number of his articles and translations appeared in *Kuźnica*,⁴³ *Odrodzenie*,⁴⁴ *Nowiny Literackie*⁴⁵ and *Twórczość*.⁴⁶ At the same time, he prepared an essay on Adam Mickewicz to be published in America.⁴⁷ He became acquainted with Edmund Wilson's literary criticism, the history of American literature – and in that context he placed his fascinations with William Faulkner, Herman Melville and Norman Mailer and disappointments with Henry and William James, Henry Miller (read in French due to American censorship)⁴⁸ and John Steinbeck. Faulkner was, as we know, a very early discovery of Miłosz, and the poet enthusiastically encouraged a number of people to read Faulkner's novels, himself translating parts of *Wild Palms*. However, it was Melville that impressed him the most – he asked for a Polish translation of *Moby Dick* and prepared an extensive article on the novel.

Miłosz's discovery of Negro spirituals is an interesting phenomenon. We can assume that one of the reasons for his interest in the African American songs was his view that in American society, dominated by the media and believing in the ideas of the middle class:

The only people alive [...] are Negroes and Indians – if one considers groups, not individuals. Those, who are the lowest, the poorest, the most underprivileged. Mexicans, who *en masse* live at the level of Polish peasants, or even lower, are alive – feel, love, create art, fill exhibition halls; from there the great, leftist, political Mexican painting sucks its juices. (ZPW, p. 428)

Miłosz wrote in that tone to several people.⁴⁹ Years later, when considering the justification for the publishing of his translations of Pablo Neruda's

⁴³ See: "Carl Sandburg. Przekłady Czesława Miłosza" [Carl Sandburg. Czesława Miłosz's translations], *Kuźnica* 1948, No. 13–14.

⁴⁴ See: C. Miłosz, "Pablo Neruda. Przekłady" [Pablo Neruda. Translation], *Odrodzenie* 1948, No. 23; "Współczesna poezja chińska w przekładzie Czesława Miłosza" [Contemporary Chinese poetry in Czesław Miłosz's translation], *Odrodzenie* 1948, No. 20.

⁴⁵ C. Miłosz, "Notatnik amerykański" [American notebook], *Nowiny Literackie* 1948, No. 8 and 15; C. Miłosz, "Negro spirituals," *Nowiny Literackie* 1948, No. 26.

⁴⁶ See: C. Miłosz, "Wprowadzenie w Amerykanów. Rzecz o poezji amerykańskiej" [Introduction to Americans. On American poetry], *Twórczość* 1948, No. 5.

⁴⁷ The article referred to here is "Mickewicz and Modern Poetry," *The American Slavic and East European Review*, 1948, Vol. 7.

⁴⁸ See: C. Miłosz, "Henry Miller, czyli dno" [Henry Miller, or the rock bottom].

⁴⁹ Miłosz expressed his appreciation for African American visual arts as well as for Mexican painting in his essays coming from that period. See: C. Miłosz, "Abstrakcja i poszukiwania" [Abstraction and search], *Odrodzenie* 1947, No. 7.

poetry, Miłosz stated that they “were part of the actions directed against the barbarism” (ZPW, p. 413) of Moscow, “an antidote to the dullness approaching from the East” (ZPW, p. 149). By translating Negro spirituals, Neruda or Chinese poetry he could feel safe, and at the same time participate in the game that Polish men-of-letters played with the communist authorities. Despite that, Miłosz asked himself:

To what extent was my feeling of “the mission” an illusion? Of course, we can say that such a medication for remorse was like lifting one’s finger. However, today, looking back on the decades of the PRL,⁵⁰ we can admire the extension of the work done by writers involved in that game, first of all, great translators of the world classics in poetry, drama, novels, essays. (ZPW, p. 413)

Negro spirituals did not belong to the classics. We should search somewhere else for the source of Miłosz’s interest in their aesthetics. These were the first translations of African American poetry in the history of Polish literature, so the enterprise itself seemed valuable. Those poems, exotic back then, attracted the poet who was sensitive to all types of locality, nativeness, aboriginality. The future author of *The Issa Valley* saw in them deep layers of folk culture, reflected in their rhythm, incantation and chorus. The song form, so close to Miłosz, took on in them an original character, and what seems most important, they were prayer songs, created in the tradition of religiousness free from the modernist doubts of Europeans, near-equivalents of psalms of David. Miłosz treated them equally with European songs of bards and minstrels. What fascinated him in the songs of black slaves was the close connection of the words and the music with the magical rite, its sacral dimension. It is easy to notice that the poet repeated a gesture known from his own literary practices: just as in the 1930s he introduced into the realm of Polish poetry works of the authors coming from the Baltic countries, in the 1940s, long before postcolonial studies emerge, he initiated an extension of the household of European poetry by introducing poems from outside the canon. The same applies to Asian poetry, which led him later on to a fascination with the form of haiku, and eventually to its blossoming in Poland in the last decade of the 20th century.

From 1948, Miłosz presented in his letters more extensive reconnaissance and diagnoses of the culture, society and politics of the United States. They had a lot in common with the essays sent to Polish periodicals. If the observations concerning culture seem to be deprived of self-censorship, his political opinions are quite predictable and conservative, especially those addressed to some of his correspondents, for example to Jerzy Putrament.⁵¹ He was sceptical about the Marshall plan, predicting it would influence

⁵⁰ The commonly used Polish acronym of the People’s Republic of Poland (translator’s footnote).

⁵¹ Jerzy Putrament (1910–1986), a communist activist and a man of letters, one of the most influential writers in the period of Stalinism, described by Miłosz as Gamma in his *Zniewolony umysł* [*The Captive Mind*] (1953) (translator’s footnote).

the development of Europe less than it did in reality. He was critical about President Truman, although he did notice the case of Byrnes, who in 1947 resigned from the position of secretary of state, and then became one of the leading politicians of the early stage of the Cold War.⁵² He wrote ironically about the way in which the Republican and Democratic parties' conventions were organised. It seems that Miłosz decided to be very cautious in commenting on politics in his private correspondence – his remarks were scarce, seem allusive and understated. It is difficult to say to what extent his friends guessed what his political views were. Another fact is worth noting: from 1948 Miłosz more and more frequently talked about America from the American perspective rather than the European one. He became involved in polemics with authors of anti-American articles in the Polish press, whose number grew together with the process of the sovietisation of the country. The most intimate in this respect seems to be his correspondence with Iwazkiewicz, in which Miłosz is very critical about Zbigniew Bieńkowski's and Kazimierz Brandys' anti-American essays. He wrote to Paweł Hertz:

Unfortunately, in our periodicals we can read many misleading opinions about American literature, with analogies drawn to European relations, which are highly questionable. For example, calling such writers as Steinbeck "un-American" is nonsense and resembles the practices of American reactionaries, which define "anti-Americanism" as everything that is a little less reactionary. Making divisions according to the European models is completely misleading and every person writing should take that into consideration, because it can lead to entirely wrong conclusions. Folk traditions are much stronger in America than in Europe, which struggled through centuries of feudalism, and in Europe every symptom of continuity of that tradition supposedly suggests very definite political views of the authors, which in most cases is wrong. There are traditions of Lincoln, Roosevelt, there is Wallace's movement, but we have to remember that they are not translatable into a European language. It actually is the source of Americans' misunderstanding of Europe and their inability to think in the categories of differences as clear cut as they are in Europe. (ZPW, pp. 499–500)

Miłosz in that letter acted as a mediator between cultures, not realising that he would play that role for the next 50 years. How deeply he became immersed in American culture is illustrated by his short trip to Poland. The poet left the United States on May 6, 1949, on board M.S. "Batory." In Poland, he visited Warsaw, Szczecin, Wrocław, Katowice and Cracow, as well as the area of Olsztyn, and then on July 4 he flew to Paris and from there back to New York. The journey, which he called "a transplantation" (ZPW, p. 230), allowed him to compare America and Europe and carry out self-analysis. His observations are typical symptoms of a culture shock: being in his homeland, he was looking at it as a foreigner, and returning abroad, he felt as if it was his first visit there. His view of Paris had changed: "Paris

⁵² James Francis Byrnes, as the secretary of state in Harry Truman's administration, recognised in December 1945 the governments of Bulgaria and Romania, which made the countries dependent on Soviet politics. He recognised Poland's western borders as temporary and perceived their stability as dependent on democratic elections in Poland. He supported the idea of the American army's presence in Europe to prevent further expansion of communism in Europe. He strived to reconstruct Germany under the auspices of the United States.

impressed me strangely – both its unspeakable beauty and that complete shift in my attitude to the city since the old times of my life there” (ZPW, p. 103); “Paris in July is so beautiful, that it takes one’s breath away, but it might be too sweet; man needs some food that is more raw, I think” (ZPW, p. 230).⁵³ His mental return to America was not easy: “Those 2 months of travelling threw me off balance and I had to adapt myself anew. After all, if you want to lead a European way of life in this country, you can go insane” (ZPW, p. 103). Despite the renewed feeling of estrangement and otherness, aversion and irritation, Miłosz’s return to the New World was smoother and he returned to his former activities. He still actively absorbed American culture – took advantage of the opportunity to see magnificent collections of paintings and posters in New York museums, went to the cinema, having bought a phonograph he gathered an interesting collection of records, and he celebrated American holidays with a group of friends. He wanted, as he wrote, to understand America, although the more he understood it, the less indifferent he could remain towards the dangers imposed by its civilisation:

Well, that America. The two most powerful nations today are so similar to each other and will be more and more similar – probably in around 25 years’ time, they will melt together. How can I write here about America, which leads to general reflections on the complete externalisation, i.e. turning all strength and attention to externality – to machines, machinery, fitness – spiritual death and no happiness. Look – my American friend, a writer, says – those people are not happy, they cannot enjoy life, because they cannot feel what tragedy is. [...] Tell me, how can I write articles about such issues? [...] Tell me, how many people in Poland are as serious about that as I am? – he asks in a letter to Matuszewski (ZPW, pp. 472–473)

The author refrained from description, whose main source would be the senses, to focus on reflection, which requires the use of subtler instruments. In a way, Miłosz was already planning his future work on *Visions from San Francisco Bay* and *The Land of Ulro*. He continued his work on the popularisation of Polish culture – he celebrated the one-hundredth anniversary of Chopin’s death, became engaged in the organisation of the Year of Mickiewicz and preparation of a scholarly book devoted to Mickiewicz’s works.⁵⁴ The Editorial Board of *Mainstream and Masses*, with whom he became acquainted, received some books from him: Nałkowska’s prose, Adolf Rudnicki’s *Shakespeare*, poems by Adam Ważyk and Tadeusz Różewicz. He encouraged his colleagues to contribute articles, which the periodical had agreed to accept, including in Polish. He closely cooperated with the Polish press. He sent translations of poems to *Odrodzenie*⁵⁵ and

⁵³ See: B. Tarnowska, *Geografia poetycka w powojennej twórczości Czesława Miłosza*, Olsztyn: Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej, 1996, p. 128. See also: C. Miłosz, *Rodzinną Europą [Native Realm]*, pp. 190 and 307.

⁵⁴ The reference here is to *Adam Mickiewicz. Poet of Poland. A Symposium*, edited by Manfred Kridl, New York: Columbia University Press, in which Miłosz’s essay *Mickiewicz and Modern Poetry* appeared.

⁵⁵ See: C. Miłosz, “Przekłady z poezji murzyńskiej” [Translations of Negro poetry], *Odrodzenie* 1949, No. 20.

Kuźnica.⁵⁶ In the latter he published an essay on Melville, which – after Polish cultural policy became more restricted in 1949 – was censored.⁵⁷ He offered various editors subscriptions of such periodicals as *Mainstream and Masses*, *Science and Society*, *Saturday Review of Literature*, he encouraged them to read *New Foundations* or *Political Affairs*. Miłosz's last translation published in Poland consists of fragments of Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.⁵⁸ The poet makes no secret of the fact that it was never his intention to create new fashions or literary trends. Through reading and translating he wanted to develop his craft and in that way influence his poetry, not the literary activity of his Polish readers.

The picture of America that emerges from the published correspondence of Miłosz reveals an uneasy process of his confrontation with what was new and incomprehensible. In his comprehension of the New World, the Wilno-born poet, familiar with Western Europe, resembled his literary predecessors, but achieved something that none of the Polish emigrants after World War II achieved – through a kind of intellectual contraband he singlehandedly created a cultural circulation between Poland and America. Although his situation is an interesting example of the Polish, or in a wider perspective: eastern and central European, post-war fate, it can also be considered within the context of the modern formation of intellectuals, frequently also encompassing migration. The published correspondence reveals only a fraction of such experience. Miłosz shared with his correspondents only those aspects of his American impressions that could be described in the times of censorship. He was self-controlled in his letters to all of the addressees. This also resulted from his early maturity; the poet did not reveal prematurely the knowledge he had accumulated; he waited for it to be purified by time and objectified.

Although Miłosz did not consider the United States as a place far enough from communism to be safe, it was without enthusiasm that he accepted a promotion to the position of secretary at the Polish embassy in Paris. He did prefer exile in Western Europe, but the decision to transfer him to Paris caught him at a difficult moment. His wife was expecting their second child, Miłosz feared some birth complications might take place and he did not trust the French health care system. He directed dramatic requests to his friends for mediation in changing the decision in his case. Despite his reservations, when called back to Poland at the end of 1950, he left the United States alone to take up the duties of the 1st secretary at the Embassy

⁵⁶ See: "Ai Czing. Człowiek który umarł drugi raz. Przełożył Czesław Miłosz" [Ai Czing. The man who died twice. Translated by Czesław Miłosz], *Kuźnica* 1949, No. 19.

⁵⁷ See: C. Miłosz, "Moby Dick," *Kuźnica* 1949, No. 6. The author of the article in his correspondence with Ryszard Matuszewski strongly protested against the text's shortening for print. See: C. Miłosz, ZPW, pp. 452 and 467.

⁵⁸ See: C. Miłosz, "Małe wypisy historyczne" [Little historical entries], *Nowa Kultura* 1950, No. 20.

of the People's Republic of Poland in Paris, leaving his wife and son under the care of Ignacy Świącicki.

Translated by Elżbieta Rokosz

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