

CZESLAW MILOSZ IN TRANSITION

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“Different, but yet the same and an infinite number of moments between me in the past and me now.”¹

He was sitting at the table in his new room, in a place he had never been before, drawing flowers and circles on the envelope. Occasionally he stopped and looked through the window. The view of deathly still trees increased his sense of aimlessness and disintegration. He kept adding new figures to his picture, one after another. It took him two hours to cover a whole envelope with flowers and geometrical shapes; it takes me much more time to reveal the state of his mind.²

The letter in the envelope was from his wife, Janina, who had been apart from him for the past ten months. She wrote to her husband about their little son, whom he had never seen. It had been three months since he had decided to flee Poland, his homeland, and he had lived incognito in Paris in fear of being kidnapped or even murdered. He had spent many sleepless nights since his decision to break with the Polish communist government. This act had changed everything in his life.

Czeslaw Milosz was a Polish poet, writer, and translator, who was born in 1911. He survived WW II in Poland. In 1946, he became a diplomat representing the Polish communist government in Washington and New York. In 1951, he fled from Poland, and lived in France for the next ten years. Then, in 1960, he moved to California with his wife and two sons. For twenty years he was a professor in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of California, Berkeley. Milosz received the Nobel Prize

¹ *W ciagu ostatnich kilku lat [In the last couple years]. Unpublished essay, 1953.* Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 4., folder 57.

² The envelope of Janina Milosz’s letter from 06/22/1951. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 15., folder 467.

for literature in 1980. After the collapse of communism in Poland in 1989, he often visited his native land. In August 2004, he died in Cracow.

This essay focuses on Milosz's experience of political exile in the years immediately following defection. It argues that the poet in the years 1951-1953 remained in a state of painful transition, a wanderer suspended between multiple worlds. Being a writer in exile, Milosz was torn between different languages, cultures and intellectual milieus. Additionally, the political character of his exile put him in an uneasy position between the two Cold War blocs. Finally, not only did Milosz experience the process of cultural adjustment, well-known by all exiles, but he also remained suspended between contradictory states in his private life. Consequently, all the spheres of Milosz's life in the period 1951-1953 were characterized by transitional manner and by passing from one condition to another.

This study of Milosz contributes to the rapidly developing field of academic studies on intellectual exile. My research project is important for a few reasons. It is the first scholarship devoted to the crucial period in the life of this Nobel Prize winner, and it gives a broad picture of Milosz's private, professional and political choices in that time. Secondly, in my paper I propose the concept of *transition* and I show how Milosz's *transition* relates to other cases of writers in exile. In respect to the existing scholarship on the subject, the concept of *transition* offers a new framework for analyzing the very first experience of intellectual exiles. Although this paper focuses on a particular case of a political refugee, his story and its analysis are also relevant to a broader group of intellectual migrants who live across national borders and across established boundaries of cultural identity.

Thirdly, the subject of exile is perennially topical. Since the first documented case, that of the Egyptian Sinuhe, who lived around 2000 B.C., exile has been a recurrent human experience. In the 20th century, among the exiles were those who fled the Nazis, Asians and Latin Americans who migrated to escape war, Soviet dissidents and various African groups. The list of the 20th century most renowned intellectual figures who lived in exile is long: Vladimir Nabokov, Samuel Beckett, Pablo Neruda, Isaac Singer, Ernest Hemingway, Henry James, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, Edith Wharton, Thomas Mann, W.H. Auden, Aldous Huxley and many others. Through the analysis of their cases we can understand better the experience of exile, shared by people living under different geographical longitudes. Finally, my study on Milosz sheds more light on the phenomenon of exile, which has transformed into a potent, even enriching, motif of modern culture. I am convinced that in today's globalized world, in which all of us are being increasingly compelled to transgress established boundaries of cultural identity, Milosz's initial experience of exile offers a rich case study of both the struggles and costs, the creative and productive aspects, of a life lived in perpetual displacement.

The secondary literature on Czeslaw Milosz does not satisfactorily answer the questions about the initial period of his exile and only briefly discusses the years 1951-1953. Mirosław Supruniuk writes about this period in the introduction to the Polish version of *La grande tentation. Le drame des intellectuelles dans des democraties populaires*.³ Wojciech Karpinski, in his essay "The Exile as Writer: A Conversation about Sorrow and Joy," deals with Milosz's lifetime perspective on the problem of exile.⁴

³ Mirosław Supruniuk, Introduction to: Czeslaw Milosz, *Wielkie pokuszenie: Bielinski I Jednorozec*. Torun 2002.

⁴ Wojciech Karpinski, "The Exile as Writer: A Conversation about Sorrow and Joy", in John Glad (ed.), *Literature in Exile* (London: Duke University Press, 1990).

George Gasyna does the same in a study “The Dual Exile of Czeslaw Milosz.”⁵ In the only biography of Milosz by Andrzej Zawada the author dedicates no more than a few pages to describe the two first years of the poet’s exile.⁶

Czeslaw Milosz addressed his first years in exile in his autobiographical prose: *The Year of a Hunter* (written in 1990), and the *Milosz’s ABC* (written in 2001).⁷ This subject is also discussed in several collections of interviews with Milosz: *Rozmowy polskie 1979-1998 [The Polish Talks]*, *Czeslaw Milosz: conversations (1980-2001)*, *Czeslawa Milosza autoportret przekorny (1988)*, *Conversations with Czeslaw Milosz (1987)*.⁸ However, because of the substantial gap in time between the moment when Milosz gave the interviews and his transition period, events and their interpretation are to some degree distorted and obviously influenced by Milosz’s ex post-facto analysis.

The academic scholarship on the subject displays writers’ recognition of exile. Julia Kristeva argues for the popular theory in the field, namely, that exile is a necessary condition of the intellectual. Writing is only possible for someone who has become a stranger to his country, language, sex and identity (“A New Type of Intellectual: The Dissident”; Blackwell, 1986).⁹ According to Edward W. Said, a writer in exile is, unlike other people, aware of at least two cultures. This plurality of vision produces a *contrapuntal* awareness of simultaneous dimensions, which exercises a beneficial influence on the writer’s creativity (*Reflections on Exile*; Cambridge, 2000).¹⁰ Similarly,

⁵ George Gasyna, “The Dual Exile of Czeslaw Milosz”, in *Russian Literature LII* (2002), p.355-377.

⁶ Andrzej Zawada, *Milosz* (Wydawnictwo Dolnoslaskie, 1996).

⁷ Czeslaw Milosz, *The Year of a Hunter* (New York, 1994); *Milosz’s ABC* (Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2001).

⁸ Czeslaw Milosz, *Rozmowy polskie [The Polish Talks]* (Warszawa 2006); Cytia Haven, *Czeslaw Milosz: conversations 1980-2001* (Jackson 2006); Aleksander Fiut (ed.), *Czeslawa Milosza autoportret przekorny* (Warszawa 1988); Renata Gorczynski, *Conversations with Czeslaw Milosz* (San Diego 1987).

⁹ Julia Kristeva, “A New Type of Intellectual: The Dissident”, in Toril Moi (ed.), *The Kristeva Reader* (Blackwell, 1986).

¹⁰ Edward W.Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, 2000).

Eva Thompson claims that life abroad can be a source of artistic inspiration and that it often broadens the writer's perspective to a degree that could not be reached in his own country ("The Writer in Exile: The Good Years"; 1989).¹¹ The experience of the other Polish writers living in exile is analyzed by Halina Stephen in her book, *Living in Translation: Polish Writers in America* (Rodopi 2003).¹² Marc Robinson's book *Altogether Elsewhere: Writers on Exile* is a collection of essays, in which notable literary exiles reflect on what it means to live outside one's cultural roots.¹³ Finally, the link between a writer's individual exilic experience and his literary works is analyzed in several studies, including *Displaced Persons: Conditions of Exile in European Culture, Exile in Literature, Exile and the Writer, Literature in Exile, Transcending Exile*.¹⁴

These studies are not satisfactory, as they do not discuss an author's experience of change and adjustment to the exilic circumstances. Rather they focus exclusively on the influence of exile on a writer. I believe that we should know more about the exiled intellectual, whom Hannah Arendt described as the "stateless person."¹⁵ The inquiry into the state of his mind would surely enrich our perspective on both: the phenomenon of the intellectual emigration and the literary works influenced by the exilic experience. Kramer has it right when he states: "The experience of living among alien people, languages, and institutions can alter the individual's sense of self about as significantly as any of the

¹¹ Eva Thompson, "The Writer in Exile: the Good Years", *The Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (Winter, 1989), pp. 499-515.

¹² Halina Stephen, *Living in translation: Polish writers in America* (Rodopi 2003).

¹³ Marc Robinson, *Altogether Elsewhere: Writers on Exile* (Faber and Faber, 1994).

¹⁴ Sharon Ouditt (ed.), *Displaced Persons: Conditions of Exile in European Culture* (Ashgate, 2002); Maria-Ines Lagos-Pope, *Exile in Literature* (Bucknell University Press, 1988); Bettina L. Knapp, *Exile and the Writer* (The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991); Asher Z. Milbauer, *Transcending Exile* (University Presses of Florida, 1985); John Glad (ed.), *Literature in Exile* (London: Duke University Press, 1990).

¹⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego, 1973), p. 286.

traumas known to psychologists.”¹⁶ Clearly the sorrowful rite of passage calls for further research.

Neither East nor West

In 1946, Janina and Czeslaw Milosz moved to Washington, where the poet commenced his service as a diplomat of the Polish communist government. Being far away from their homeland, in the stuffy air of an embassy where no one could be trusted, drew the couple close to each other. Janina shared all the problems and successes of her husband’s professional life. She was a fastidious, rather unsociable woman, who did not make many friends during her stay in the United States. Because of her loneliness, rare contacts with her family and friends in Poland, and her emotional predisposition, she was highly dependent on her husband, Czeslaw.

In Washington, the Miloszs began discussions with each other about the possibility of breaking with the Polish government and exiling themselves from Poland. In 1950, the Polish authorities transferred Czeslaw Milosz to Poland’s embassy in Paris and called him to Warsaw. They suspected that Milosz might wish to flee the country, like a few other Polish diplomats who had defected while working in the West. Milosz decided to visit his homeland, as he yearned to know more about the actual situation there. This decision was hazardous, since the Polish government could have taken his passport and prohibited him from leaving the country. Milosz was not quite aware that the Polish authorities wanted to use his writing for political purpose and that they planned to force him to stay in the country. Janina did not join her husband on his trip, as she was pregnant with their second son and had to stay in the United States to give birth there.

¹⁶ Maria-Ines Lagos-Pope, *Exile in Literature* (Bucknell University Press, 1988), p.111.

She was aware of the risk of her husband traveling to the communist-ruled Poland, but she did not discourage him from going.¹⁷ A few months later, she wrote to a friend, “Shortly before embarking in New York he (Czeslaw Milosz) telephoned me to say that if our son and I were there with him then he would refuse to board the ship.”¹⁸ Evidently, Milosz anticipated troubles connected with his visiting Poland, and he was reluctant to leave his family in America. Yet, as long as he wanted to stay loyal to his homeland, he had no other choice.

This visit to his homeland had only confirmed his worst presumptions and gave him a broad picture of a life behind the Iron Curtain. In Poland, Milosz had his passport taken by the Polish authorities; yet, he managed to get it back, and departed immediately to Paris. Being in France, he decided not to return to his home country and broke ties with the Polish communist government. In February 1951, the poet was granted asylum in France. Milosz found a shelter in the house of Jerzy Giedroyc, who was a publisher of the Polish emigrant monthly *Kultura*. The poet became a political refugee from a country which would remain under the communist regime for another 50 years.

Political views were decisive for Milosz’s breaking with the Polish government, as well as for his isolation after the defection. The poet was inclined towards socialism from his youth. He was a leftist, but he did not belong to the communist party, not even during his service as the Polish diplomat.¹⁹ Milosz opposed Stalinism, but he did not want to condemn Marxism, which he perceived as an ideological basis for achieving socialism in Poland. His approach made it impossible to find his own place in the binary system of

¹⁷ Janina Milosz’s letter 11/10/1952. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 15., folder 467.

¹⁸ Janina Milosz’s letter to Harold C. Vedeler (Department of States) 06/29/1951. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 15., folder 467.

¹⁹ Czeslaw Milosz, “Nie”[“Not”], *Kultura*, 5/43 (1951), p. 3-13.

the Cold War world. In August 1951 the poet wrote, “If I had to, I would describe my political views as: leftism and anti-Stalinism.”²⁰ Such an ideological position was a lonely one to defend and caused Milosz’s alienation from the both Cold War camps.

In November 1951, Milosz published, *La grande tentation. Le drame des intellectuels dans les democraties populaires*, in which he considered his experience with the communist regime.²¹ Milosz argued that the West simplified the situation of the political emigrant from the East, “For the West, if one was involved in the communist regime, he must have been a Stalinist; if one chose freedom (fled the country), he must have gotten disillusioned.”²² In order to explain adequately the complexity of this experience, as well as to free himself from the overwhelming influence of historical fatalism, Milosz wrote *The Captive Mind*.²³ In 1952, he believed that the analysis of his experience with Marxism and Stalinism would help him to overcome his own ideological doubts. He wrote, “This book is a battlefield, in which I have given shape to my combat with the doctrine I have rejected.”²⁴

According to Milosz, Marxism was a fascinating ideology because it provided a sound analysis of the possible improvements in social organization, and it focused on the most important contemporary issues. Moreover, Marxism was a powerful intellectual tool, and could not have been simply rejected, but called for further reflection.²⁵ Milosz corroborated his opinion with the example of the contemporary French intellectual milieu

²⁰ Czeslaw Milosz, “Odpowiedz” [“Response”], *Kultura*, 7/45 (1951), p. 103-105.

²¹ Czeslaw Milosz, *La grande tentation. Le drame des intellectuels dans les democraties populaires*. (Paris, 1951).

²² Czeslaw Milosz, *Wielkie pokuszenie: Bielinski I Jednorozec*. (Torun 2002), p. 13.

²³ Czeslaw Milosz, *The Captive Mind* (Vintage International, 1990), Preface.

²⁴ *Ibidem*; p.xiii.

²⁵ Czeslaw Milosz’s letter to Melchior Wankowicz, 1952. Renata Gorczyński Papers Relating to Czeslaw Milosz. General Collection, Beinecke Library Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 1, folder 43.

which was heavily influenced by Marxism.²⁶ He argued that Marxism was an intellectually attractive philosophy that had filled the ideological vacuum of postwar Poland. He wrote, “The only hope was to set up a social order which would be new, but would not be a copy of the Russian regime. So what was planned in Moscow as a stage on the road to servitude, was willingly accepted. Men will clutch at illusions when they have nothing else to hold to.”²⁷ In the year 1951, Milosz referred to Marxism as the *New Faith*. Years later, he would state that through communism Poland had joined the European intellectual sphere for the first time in history.²⁸

In 1952, Milosz wrote to a friend, “Did I believe? I did not believe in Stalinism, but obviously I did believe. I believed that something might have been done.”²⁹ The poet hoped that the communist regime would successfully deal with the postwar devastation of Poland. According to Milosz, the regime had already had some achievements: lower class students could enroll at an university, Poland had been industrialized, and agrarian reform was introduced. Milosz also appreciated the fact that the semi-feudal structure of prewar Poland had been terminated.³⁰ The poet was willing to stick to his nativeland, because he believed that Poland was on its way to socialism. Milosz thought communism gave postwar Poland a chance, and an individual should support his country in the postwar

²⁶ Ibidem.; Czesław Miłosz, “Nie”[“Not”], *Kultura*, 5/43 (1951), p. 3-13.

²⁷ Czesław Miłosz, *The Captive Mind*; p. X.

²⁸ Czesław Miłosz, *Rozmowy polskie* [The Polish Talks], p. 203.

²⁹ Czesław Miłosz’s letter to Melchior Wankowicz, 1952. Renata Gorczyński Papers Relating to Czesław Miłosz. General Collection, Beinecke Library Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 1, folder 43.

³⁰ Czesław Miłosz, “Nie”[“Not”], *Kultura*, 5/43 (1951), p. 3-13.

effort. This notion underpinned Milosz's willingness to serve as a diplomat for the communist regime.³¹

Another idea behind his service was to prevent the implementation of the Soviet model by active participation in the shaping of the Polish intellectual sphere. Milosz argued that he and some of his friends supported the communist regime, but it was not equivalent with being Stalinists. They believed in the possibility of developing a distinctive, third path for Poland, which would have enabled the introduction of socialism, and simultaneously it would have prevented the implementation of Stalinist norms. Milosz wrote, "I suffered torment because of my repugnance of Russia, and because of Russia's gradual gaining power over Poland."³²

At some point, Milosz had to decide whether he was fully committed to the communist regime. Writers' roles in the communist regime were privileged as long as they were willing to produce works supporting the ideological lines of the regime. As an artist, Milosz was expected to subject himself to the rules of "socialist realism." The poet referred to his decision in *The Captive Mind*:

Socialist realism is not merely an aesthetic theory to which the writer is obliged to adhere. On the contrary, it involves by implication the whole Leninist-Stalinist doctrine. (...) Socialist realism is much more than the matter of taste. It is concerned with the beliefs which lie at the foundation of human existence. It preaches a proper attitude of doubt in regard to a merely formal system of ethics but itself makes all judgement of values dependent upon the interest of the dictatorship. Human sufferings are drowned in the trumpet-blare: the orchestra in the concentration camp; and I, as a poet, had my place already marked out for me among the first violins.³³

³¹ Czeslaw Milosz's letter to Melchior Wankowicz, 1952. Renata Gorczynski Papers Relating to Czeslaw Milosz. General Collection, Beinecke Library Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 1, folder 43.

³² Ibidem.

³³ Czeslaw Milosz, *The Captive Mind*; p. XII.

Milosz withstood the pressure of socialist realism, he did not want to compromise in the sphere of literature, and as a result, he exiled himself.³⁴

After defection, Milosz devoted much time to writing *The Captive Mind*, as well as other essays, in which he dealt with his own attraction to Marxism.³⁵ Some critics recognized it as an attempt to excuse for the previous service. His colleague commented, “Milosz analyzes how to de-Stalinize communism in order to make it work.”³⁶ An acquaintance stated, “He is anti-Stalinist, but he is still attached to Marxism.”³⁷ Another friend saw Milosz’s case as a tragedy of an apostate.³⁸ Jerzy Giedroyc, who provided Milosz with shelter after the poet’s defection, stated, “Milosz is clear that if he had the opportunity to write in Poland without ideological constraints, he would have stayed there.”³⁹ Another friend recollected that Milosz denied the existence of gulags.⁴⁰ In his personal notes, Milosz noted that he was still longing to have an ideological point of reference other than historical determinism.⁴¹ The year 1951 was just a prelude to a longer process of Marxist analysis, during which Milosz distanced himself from the *New Faith*. He never, however changed his opinion on Marxism’s seductive power.⁴²

³⁴ Czeslaw Milosz, “Nie”[“Not”], *Kultura*, 5/43 (1951), p. 3-13; Czeslaw Milosz, *The Captive Mind*; p. X..

³⁵ Czeslaw Milosz, *La grande tentation. Le drame des intellectuels dans les democraties populaires*. (Paris, 1951).

³⁶ Krzysztof Pomian (ed.), *Listy 1949-1956 / Jerzy Giedroyc, Juliusz Mieroszewski* (Czytelnik, 1997), p.55.

³⁷ Jan Zielinski (ed.), *Listy 1946-1961 / Jerzy Giedroyc, Andrzej Bobkowski* (Czytelnik 1998), p. 89.

³⁸ Krzysztof Pomian (ed.), *Listy 1949-1956 / Jerzy Giedroyc, Juliusz Mieroszewski*, p.112.

³⁹ Jan Zielinski (ed.), *Listy 1946-1961 / Jerzy Giedroyc, Andrzej Bobkowski* (Czytelnik 1998), p. 60.

⁴⁰ Milosz explained that he had made these statements in order to irritate his friends, and that he had not seriously negated existence of the gulags. Czeslaw Milosz, *Rozmowy polskie* [The Polish Talks], p. 55.

⁴¹ Czeslaw Milosz, *W ciagu ostatnich kilku lat* [In the last couple years]. *Unpublished essay, 1953*. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 4., folder 57.

⁴² Czeslaw Milosz, *Rozmowy polskie* [The Polish Talks]; Cyntia Haven, *Czeslaw Milosz: conversations 1980-2001*; Aleksander Fiut (ed.), *Czeslaw Milosza autoportret przekorny*; Renata Gorczynski, *Conversations with Czeslaw Milosz*.

Milosz emigrated when Cold War tensions were extreme, and the poet could not escape their pressure. The Warsaw regime and whole communist bloc defamed Milosz and called him a traitor. Because Milosz considered himself a socialist at heart, the West doubted Milosz's intentions and suspected him of being a communist spy. In the United States, McCarthyism was growing stronger every day, and Milosz was not welcome there. Many Marxist French intellectuals, on the other hand, castigated Milosz and accused him of abandoning 'the promised land of communism.' Consequently, Milosz could not be fully understood and accepted by the West or the East. In this binary world, he perceived his emigration as an act against both established world orders. He dared to trespass the Cold War order and as a result, he remained on the border. He states, "What is sad to me is that I am always being classified: one more ex-communist, who renounces his beliefs and goes to the other side."⁴³ The poet was overwhelmed with the immense coercion that the two blocs sought to exercise on the individual. In Paris in 1951, a friend of Milosz followed him everywhere to protect the poet from possible abduction by policy officers sent by the Polish government. The poet was positive that his name appeared on the Soviet secret police's black list and that he was being followed by the NKVD's officers.⁴⁴ In fact, it was the French police – Sûreté - that had put him under surveillance.

Moving to the West left Milosz without an ideological home. He constantly dwelled upon the past. He stated, "In the West, which becomes my home, I should actually try to erase the memory of this act of going to the other side. It would be the best

⁴³ Czeslaw Milosz, *Moja uciezka [My Escape]*. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 2., folder 24.

⁴⁴ NKVD, or People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs was the leading secret police organization of the Soviet Union that was responsible for political repression during the Stalinist era.

to integrate oneself, not dwell on the past.”⁴⁵ But he remained mentally fixed in a space that hovered somewhere above the East and West, always on both realms, belonging to neither. The only sphere that he could really call his own was his inner being. He was constantly on edge. Milosz’s world involved shades and undertones, and was more complex than the Manichean division of the good Western camp versus bad Eastern one. He was evidently displaced, as well “as in search for his own place on Earth, somewhere between the East and the West, which are linked by many mysterious passages.”⁴⁶ For him moving to the West was not an act in favor of the values of the Western world, but rather an escape from the Eastern reality. In 1951, Milosz wrote, “Many people still refuse to believe that there are only two sides, and that the only choice is between absolute conformity to one system or the other.”⁴⁷ Milosz’s situation was similar to the case of Albert Camus, who was an anti-Stalinist leftist. Camus was told by Sartre, “If you do not like either Communism, or capitalism, then there is only one place for you - the Galapagos Islands.”⁴⁸

Milosz was not charmed with the West, but he did not openly criticize the United States either, as he wanted to get his American visa.⁴⁹ In private notes from 1953, the poet wrote:

I am on one boat with the reactionary, and I am aware that he has no ability to pilot the boat. I understand his gestures very well, but he does not grasp mine. He

⁴⁵ Czeslaw Milosz, *W ciagu ostatnich kilku lat [In the last couple years]. Unpublished essay, 1953.* Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 4., folder 57.

⁴⁶ Czeslaw Milosz, *Zamiar [Aim]*, ca.1950. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 4., folder 61.

⁴⁷ Czeslaw Milosz, *The Captive Mind*; p. IX.

⁴⁸ Czeslaw Milosz, *Rozmowy polskie [The Polish Talks]*, p. 729.

⁴⁹ Albert Einstein’s letter to Czeslaw Milosz, 07/12/1953. Papers: correspondence, manuscripts, printed material, photographs, and memorabilia by, to, and relating to Czeslaw Milosz. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 1 D.

perceives me as a suspicious agent, writer, socialist, trotskyist, communist, intellectual – and these terms mean more or less the same for him.⁵⁰

Milosz had other terms to describe himself, namely “a fool” trapped between East and West.⁵¹

When he first exiled himself in Paris, Milosz intended to get back to the United States and his family as quickly as possible. Immediately after his defection, Milosz wrote in a desperate tone to Albert Einstein, Thomas Stearns Eliot, Congressman John Besterman, and others. He appealed for their help in getting a visa. His wife, in a letter to the United States Department of State, called him the last Pole who had spent several months in Poland and had got out to tell his story.⁵² At first, it seems that Milosz, if willing, could be a source of information for the West, but there were many concerns that put him in a bad light: Why had not he broken with the Polish government during his stay in the United States? Why was not he seized when he returned to Poland? Finally, how did he manage to leave the country, when no one else was allowed to do so? U.S. officials suspected him of being a communist and only masquerading as anti- communist.⁵³ Additionally, certain Polish emigrants submitted letters denouncing Milosz as a spy. They argued that only a person with the highest connections could have left communist Poland. A few Polish emigrants denounced Milosz as a servant of Stalin, or a communist agent in the West.

⁵⁰ Czeslaw Milosz, *W ciagu ostatnich kilku lat [In the last couple years]. Unpublished essay, 1953.* Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 4., folder 57.

⁵¹ Ibidem.

⁵² Janina Milosz's letter to Secretary of State, Washington D.C., 02/09/1951. Papers: correspondence, manuscripts, printed material, photographs, and memorabilia by, to, and relating to Czeslaw Milosz. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 1U, Visa dossier.

⁵³ Walter H. Waggoner, “Denying Visas to Non-communist Specialists”, *New York Times*, 12/09/1951.

Last but not least, Czeslaw Milosz “was not willing to sign any kind of declaration inimical to his country, a declaration which would be used for propaganda purposes.”⁵⁴ He refused to sign a statement that would have beguiled him of his homeland. Consequently, his application for a visa languished. Meanwhile, Milosz’s case got more complicated, as the McCarran -Walter Act was enacted in 1952 by the American Congress. The Act was used to bar members, former members, and "fellow travellers" of the Communist Party from entry into the United States. It put restrictions even on those who were no longer associated with communism. This act prevented many prominent individuals from entering the United States, including Julio Cortazar, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Pablo Neruda, Michael Foucault, Dario Fo, and Graham Greene.

For two years Milosz lived “under the nearly intolerable strain of waiting.”⁵⁵ His efforts to get the visa proved futile. Milosz had received multiple letters from different people and organizations, all of a similar content. Albert Einstein wrote to him, “I can not do much about your case. I am a black sheep myself.”⁵⁶ Other acquaintances replied, “I do not know any influential persons in either Washington or London. I cannot intervene”;⁵⁷ or “I am very sorry, but I cannot help you. This matter does not lie in my hands.”⁵⁸ All too few friends tried to support Milosz in getting the visa and surviving this difficult time. The poet felt humiliated and wondered why had he left his country, if

⁵⁴ Albert Einstein’s letter to Czeslaw Milosz, 02/02/1951. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 14., folder 369.

⁵⁵ Margaret Storm - Jameson’s letter to Czeslaw Milosz, 06/22/1951. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 14., folder 395.

⁵⁶ Albert Einstein’s letter to Czeslaw Milosz, 02/02/1951. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 14., folder 369.

⁵⁷ T.S. Eliot’s letter to Czeslaw Milosz, 02/15/1951. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 14., folder 370.

⁵⁸ Mr. Besterman’s letter to Czeslaw Milosz, 06/25/1951. Papers: correspondence, manuscripts, printed material, photographs, and memorabilia by, to, and relating to Czeslaw Milosz. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 1K.

nobody in the West shared his values. Eventually, waiting became unbearable. “I decided not to make any further steps in order to obtain that visa,” Milosz wrote to a friend in March 1953.⁵⁹ On the 1st of July 1953, just after his family’s arrival in France, Milosz terminated the visa-waiting period by withdrawing his application of a visa for immigration to the United States.⁶⁰

Family crisis

Milosz’s inability to come to the United States threw his family into a crisis. Janina Milosz and their sons had been evicted from their apartment in Washington in March 1951. ‘Going crazy’⁶¹ about the fate of his family, Milosz wrote to them on a regular basis, and longed for the day he could join his family and be back in America, which he called his home.⁶² He was informed by his wife on measures she had taken in order to get the visa for her husband: letters sent to senators and influential associates, meetings with officials from the State Department, and other unrelenting efforts. In her letters, Janina wrote about their sons, Antek and Piotr, and about everyday routines. She also responded to her husband’s questions and asked about the details of his life in Paris. From her letters Milosz gained the flavor of his home atmosphere and hope for a quick resolution of his problem. “It is only a matter of time,” his wife kept repeating.⁶³ The poet

⁵⁹ Czeslaw Milosz’s letter to Pearl Kluger 03/19/1953. Papers: correspondence, manuscripts, printed material, photographs, and memorabilia by, to, and relating to Czeslaw Milosz. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 1U, Visa dossier.

⁶⁰ Czeslaw Milosz’s letter to the American Embassy in Paris, 07/01/1953. Papers: correspondence, manuscripts, printed material, photographs, and memorabilia by, to, and relating to Czeslaw Milosz. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 1U, Visa dossier.

⁶¹ Krzysztof Pomian (ed.), *Listy 1949-1956 / Jerzy Giedroyc, Juliusz Mieroszewski*, p.75.

⁶² Czeslaw Milosz’s letter to Jozef Wittlin, 05/29/1951, in Anna Ziolkowska, “Wankowicz I Milosz w swietle korespondencji”, *Tworczość*, 10 (1981), p.92.

⁶³ Janina Milosz’s letter to Czeslaw Milosz 10/10/1952. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 15., folder 467.

worried about his family, whether people and organizations would commit to helping them through this difficult period.⁶⁴ His friends assisted him emotionally. “I know your state of restless anxiety to get back to America and your wife,” wrote Margaret Storm. “It is like an illness. You have got to believe that Jane will be helped to endure it until you get back to her. You have got to live.”⁶⁵ This last sentence suggests, that Milosz’s was desperate and in poor psychological condition at this time. In his letters from this period and in recollections years after, he confirms that in the period after defection he was considering suicide.⁶⁶

In the following weeks and months, the communication between Czeslaw and Janina had become more harsh and abundant in tensions. The couple disagreed on their plans for the future. Milosz now preferred to stay in France, where his professional position had been improving, and he was gaining intellectual acceptance. The poet wanted his family to apply for the French visa and join him in France, but Janina was resistant to this idea. She did not want their sons, who were born in the United States and who had their home there, to be emigrants. Milosz’s wife was also afraid of the unstable situation in Europe, and doubted her husband’s ability to earn a living from writing.⁶⁷ The letters from Janina started to resemble a business correspondence, in which she insisted that her husband publish more articles, go to the American embassy in Paris and talk to

⁶⁴ Margaret Storm-Jameson letter to Czeslaw Milosz 02/07/1951. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 14., folder 395.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Czeslaw Milosz’s letter to Jozef Wittlin, 06/29/1951, in Anna Ziolkowska, “Wankowicz I Milosz w swietle korespondencji”, *Tworczość*, 10 (1981), p.92; Czeslaw Milosz, *Rozmowy polskie* [The Polish Talks], p. 414.

⁶⁷ Janina Milosz’s letter to Czeslaw Milosz 10/10/1952. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 15., folder 467.

the consul, and take care of the family finances.⁶⁸ As a result, tensions between the two of them rose. At this time the poet also had no contact with his brother and other members of family who were living in Poland, where letter censorship was in effect.⁶⁹

In this period of geographical displacement and emotional homelessness, Milosz explored the possibility of immigration to Canada, and discussed this option with a friend who lived there.⁷⁰ This plan failed, due to Canada's meager intellectual life and the poor chance to earn a living from writing there. Great Britain was another option. Yet, the poet was reluctant to live close to London, which was the center of the anticommunist Polish emigration. Milosz considered even such an exotic place as Uruguay, and discussed it in a correspondence with a Pole living there. In March 1952, Straszewicz wrote to Milosz, "If you come here, I will be jumping for joy. But you must know that there is no cultural life in Uruguay. Moreover, the freedom of speech and beliefs means that you can say anything and anytime, but, in fact, no one cares what you say."⁷¹

Milosz decided that France would be the best place for him to live and to continue his professional career.⁷² Being a poet, he could always travel in his poetic imagination. He noted, "In fact all the magical lands are inside our mind. The passion of discovering

⁶⁸ Janina Milosz's letter to Czeslaw Milosz 06/11/1952. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 15., folder 467

⁶⁹ Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 15., folder 464, 465, and 466.

⁷⁰ Franciszek Ancewicz's letter to Czeslaw Milosz, 01/21/1953. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 17, folder 554.

⁷¹ Czeslaw Straszewicz's letter to Czeslaw Milosz, 03/10/1952. Papers: correspondence, manuscripts, printed material, photographs, and memorabilia by, to, and relating to Czeslaw Milosz. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 1C.

⁷² Czeslaw Milosz's letter to Ignacy Swiecicki 02/04/1953. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 17., folder 589.

your home arises – the greater, the more somebody experiences in his mind the simultaneousness of events happening in different geographic longitudes.”⁷³

In 1952, Czeslaw worked and traveled around France, made new friendships, and became a more sociable man. His contact with his family declined, prompting Janina to fill her letters with complaints and worry, “You do not care about us at all”;⁷⁴ “Where are you? You have not even left your new address! Have you gone crazy? How can we reach you? Stay at one place, do not run all over the place”;⁷⁵ or: “Czeslaw, I beg you, do not distance yourself from us – both you and we will be lost.”⁷⁶ In July 1952, Janina tried to get in touch with her husband in Paris at avenue Deupert-Rochereau and at his friends house in Maisons-Laffitte, but both addresses were invalid. Milosz was now physically and mentally beyond the reach of his family.

Czeslaw had not told Janina about the new book he was working on in the summer of 1952, or that in order to write it he had moved to Dordogne with a new woman friend – Jeanne Hersch. Hersch was a Swiss philosopher who knew Polish and translated Milosz’s book into French. Jeanne encouraged Milosz to write a novel that he could enter into French literary competitions. Jeanne believed deeply in Milosz’s writing potential, even though Milosz had only three months to write the novel and to have it translated into French. At the same time, Janina Milosz desperately insisted in her letters that her husband revise and submit the English version of *The Captive Mind* to his American publisher. To the disappointment of his wife, Milosz failed to submit the copy,

⁷³ Czeslaw Milosz, *Zamiar [Aim]*, ca.1950. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 4., folder 61.

⁷⁴ Janina Milosz’s letter to Czeslaw Milosz 06/04/1952. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 15., folder 467.

⁷⁵ Janina Milosz’s letter to Czeslaw Milosz 06/16/1952. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 15., folder 467.

⁷⁶ Janina Milosz’s letter to Czeslaw Milosz 11/07/1952. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 15., folder 467.

because he was too busy working on the novel. The book written in Dordogne – *La prise du pouvoir* - received the *Prix Litteraire Europeen* in 1953. Milosz claimed that this prize would not have happened if not for Jeanne Hersch's encouragement and her dedication to the translation of the book.

In autumn 1952, Milosz and Hersch moved in together. Their friends addressed letters to both of them at the address: Hotel Trianon, 3, rue Vangirard, Paris;⁷⁷ Janina Milosz's letters were forwarded to this address.⁷⁸ The relationship of Milosz and Hersch seems to have been important; Jeanne was the woman to whom Milosz's refers to as *my lady friend* in his later recollections.⁷⁹ This phrase in Polish is often used as a synonym of a lover. In his unpublished essay from 1953 Milosz regretted his affair. He wrote, "I should not have been sleeping with Teresa."⁸⁰ He did not put the real name of his lover in this essay, but other details leave no doubt that Milosz was referring to his relationship with Hersch. His papers show, that for at least a year he was simultaneously in a relationship with his wife, who stayed in America, and with Jeanne, his intellectual partner and *lady friend* in France.

It had been two years since the poet last saw his family and he still waited for their arrival, but he confessed to a friend that he doubted the possibility of his marriage lasting.⁸¹ Janina Milosz must have been aware of Czeslaw's change. Her letters to him

⁷⁷ Alfred Loepfe's letter 03/05/1953. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 14., folder 429.

⁷⁸ Janina Milosz's letters to Czeslaw Milosz 11/03/1952, 11/07/1952. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 15., folder 467.

⁷⁹ The collection of Jeanne Hersch's letters to Czeslaw Milosz is restricted up till 2010. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 19., folder 658.

⁸⁰ Czeslaw Milosz, *Unpublished essays ca.1953*. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 4., folder 57.

⁸¹ Czeslaw Milosz's letter to Ignacy Swiecicki 02/04/1953. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 17., folder 589.

focused increasingly on the children and their need to grow up with both parents. Milosz received the photographs of his older son, Antek, whose childhood he thought he had lost, and of Piotr, whom he had never met.⁸² The poet shared his concerns about the future of the family with his wife, who begged him, "...do not leave us, you are the only one we have got."⁸³ Hanna and Ignacy Swiecicki, mutual friends with whom Janina shared an apartment in the United States, tried to bring the two closer together. In April 1953, Swiecicki wrote to Czeslaw, "Janina thinks that once you are granted the visa, you will come here running."⁸⁴ Meanwhile, another friend advised Janina to "join Czeslaw, he goes crazy without you – and that in turn is killing you – his craziness makes him turn on the people he loves and needs most."⁸⁵

Soon after, in spring 1953, Milosz dropped the bombshell by revealing to his wife the relationship with Jeanne. Janina Milosz immediately decided to join her husband in France. The poet was torn between his wife, and Jeanne. Ironically, it was Jeanne Hersch, who enabled him to bring his family to France, and who appeared to step aside for the sake of family reunification.⁸⁶

Milosz now had an opportunity to put an end to the displacement in his personal life. In autumn the same year, Czeslaw and Janina rented a house in Montgeron, and after three years spent apart, they were together again with their sons. Czeslaw Milosz crossed

⁸² Czeslaw Milosz's letter to Ignacy Swiecicki 02/04/1953. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 17., folder 589.

⁸³ Janina Milosz's letter to Czeslaw Milosz 11/16/1952. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 15., folder 467.

⁸⁴ Ignacy Swiecicki's letter to Czeslaw Milosz, 04/10/1953. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 17., folder 589.

⁸⁵ Jane Zielonko's letter to Janina Milosz 01/30/1953. Papers: correspondence, manuscripts, printed material, photographs, and memorabilia by, to, and relating to Czeslaw Milosz. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Box 1 N.

⁸⁶ Stanislaw Vincenz's letters to Czeslaw Milosz 1953/1954. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 14., folder 345.

the border of separation from his family. His friend wrote to him, “Surely my letters are not needed there as they used to be (judging from the tone of your letters).”⁸⁷ The couple made an effort to overcome this marital crisis, and to create a loving home for their children. The harmony of the family was restored, but the memory of the crisis remained with them in the following years.

With or without the Polish community

One can think that during such a difficult time Milosz would have joined the milieu of the Second World War emigrants from Poland. This act would at least have given him a sense of belonging. But the situation was much more complicated. In May 1951, Milosz published the article “Nie” [“Not”], in which he explained the motives and circumstances of his emigration.⁸⁸ He criticized the Polish emigrant community harshly, “My attitude towards the Polish political emigrants was at least ironic; the quarrels of the tiny parties seemed to me to be useless play; and the politicians were vaudeville figures.”⁸⁹ Milosz did not trust the emigrant leaders, because they had left Poland at the beginning of the war and did not have any valid knowledge about contemporary situation in the country. Milosz criticized them for condemning Poland and for not understanding that many Poles with negative attitudes toward the communist regime had no choice but to continue living there. He distanced himself completely from the Polish political emigrants.

⁸⁷ Stanislaw Vincenz’s letters to Czeslaw Milosz, 12/03/1953. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 14., folder 345.

⁸⁸ Czeslaw Milosz, “Nie” [“Not”], *Kultura*, 5/43 (1951), p. 3-13.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*; p. 4.

Milosz had been previously aware of the Polish emigration's vices, but now he had to face the vindictiveness of its members. This Polish community had some cultural and political achievements, but it was also a dark realm of endless conflicts between people driven by anger and anxiety. The *Polish hell* was described by a former member as a jar with spiders that fight inside, and finally devour each other.⁹⁰ An emigrant, Jan Malinowski, decided to leave this community and return to the communist Poland, because "he would rather be with the devil than with them."⁹¹ One of Milosz's Polish friends wrote to him, "It is your fate that you have always been, are and will be chased, because you are a prominent person."⁹² Ironically, another Polish emigrant thought that Milosz was unusually lucky. He asked the poet, "To whom do you owe so much happiness, and why does the fate endow you so? To end up in Paris, live like a blue bird, in the lap of luxury, and be the object of social discord. You, my dear, live of writing, once here, then there – and everywhere you are fine."⁹³

The Polish emigrant community launched the press campaign against Milosz in June 1951. Mieczyslaw Grydzewski led the way with an article in the Polish newspaper issued in London, *Wiadomosci [News]*. Grydzewski called Milosz a "Guinea pig that ran away from the New Faith's laboratory and keeps vomiting, because it is poisoned."⁹⁴

Grydzewski blamed Milosz for being a megalomaniac who had condemned the political

⁹⁰ Jerzy Jaruzelski, *Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz 1896-1966. Wilno-Londyn-Warszawa*; s.289.

⁹¹ Czesław Milosz's letter to Melchior Wankowicz, 1952. Renata Gorczynski Papers Relating to Czesław Milosz. General Collection, Beinecke Library Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 1, folder 43.

⁹² Czesław Straszewicz's letter to Czesław Milosz, 03/10/1952. Papers: correspondence, manuscripts, printed material, photographs, and memorabilia by, to, and relating to Czesław Milosz. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 1C.

⁹³ Waclaw Korabiewicz's letter to Czesław Milosz, 1953. Papers: correspondence, manuscripts, printed material, photographs, and memorabilia by, to, and relating to Czesław Milosz. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 1M.

⁹⁴ Mieczysław Grydzewski, "La grande tentation", *Wiadomosci*, 34 (1951), p.4.

emigration, but who was simultaneously publishing in the emigrant monthly *Kultura*. The author of another article on Milosz, “Madness and career,” jeered the poet’s decision to break with regime, because it was not accompanied by relief, but by regret over crushed professional career.⁹⁵ Milosz’s act was useless for the emigrant milieu, as emigrants had known the truth about the life in the Soviet bloc for long time.⁹⁶ Another publicist, Aleksander Bregman, insisted that Milosz explain in details the character of his service. Bregman wrote, “We still do not know what Milosz has purchased and for what price; we are also not convinced, whether what he has bought was worth the price he has paid.”⁹⁷

A slanderous article – “Former попутчик Milosz” - was published in *Wiadomosci [News]*.⁹⁸ Its author used the Russian word *попутчик*, which means fellow-traveler, in order to allude to Milosz’s subjection to the Soviet Union. He scolded Milosz for the conformism of his service, for reluctance to apologize the Polish emigrant community, and for maintaining leftist views. The poet was also accused of distorting the truth, as in “Nie” [“Not”] he had boasted about his literary work, but had remained silent about his translation of Mao-Tse Tung poems.⁹⁹ Piasecki referred to Milosz as “one of the traitors, who sold themselves in a way less honorable than that of an ordinary bitch.”¹⁰⁰ Ironically, it was a quote from another Polish emigrant, Stanislaw Cat-Mackiewicz, who found himself back in Poland as a regime writer just five years later. The most severe

⁹⁵ J.S., “Szalenstwo i kariera”, *Dziennik Polski I Dziennik Zolnierza*, (05/21/1951), p.5.

⁹⁶ It was a widespread conviction among the Polish emigrant community that they knew the situation of the contemporary Poland and of other communist countries. In fact, they did not have valid knowledge about the life behind the Iron Curtain. The majority of emigrants gained their knowledge from the Polish emigrant media, which for different reasons, were unable to get and present sound information. Compare: *Druga Wielka Emigracja 1945-1990*: Adam Friszke, *Życie polityczne emigracji*, Rafał Habielski, *Życie społeczne i kulturalne emigracji*, Paweł Machcewicz, *Emigracja w polityce międzynarodowej*; (Biblioteka Więzi; Warszawa 1999).

⁹⁷ Aleksander Bregman, “Sprawa Milosza”, *Dziennik Polski I Dziennik Zolnierza*, 191 (1951), p.2-3.

⁹⁸ Sergiusz Piasecki, “Булу попутчик Milosz”, *Wiadomosci*, 44 (1951), p.3.

⁹⁹ Rimma Volynska-Bogert, *Czeslaw Milosz: an international bibliography, 1930-1980*. (1983), p.88.

¹⁰⁰ Sergiusz Piasecki, “Булу попутчик Milosz”, *Wiadomosci*, 44 (1951), p.3.

accusation was presented in January 1952 by Ryszard Wraga, a former employee of the Polish intelligence service, who claimed Milosz to be a Bolshevik agent in the West.¹⁰¹

When asked for evidence to suggest this, Wraga stated that he had trusted his instinct.¹⁰²

Milosz had defenders as well. *Kultura* writers immediately rose to Milosz's defense arguing that Milosz was a new emigrant, who deserved to be given a second chance, and that the condemnation of all Poles living and working in the country was nonsense.¹⁰³ In December 1951, *Kultura* published an appeal, signed by thirty two Polish writers in exile, asking the *old* emigration to show more understanding of the new exiles from behind the Iron Curtain.¹⁰⁴

The Polish émigré debate about Milosz continued through 1952 and 1953. In July 1951, Milosz began to defend himself in print. He picked up the gauntlet thrown by the emigrant community and started negotiating his status with the broader Polish community. In October, Milosz attacked one of his critics, Piasecki, as a well-known smuggler in the 1920s in Poland. The poet, notwithstanding his previous public statement, cared about the opinion of the Polish community, and he admitted in a private letter that he had to pay a high price for remaining independent from the emigrant parties.¹⁰⁵ Milosz's close friend, Margaret Storm-Jameson, wrote to him in July 1951, "You care too much for émigré attacks on you. They are ghosts, who enjoy life when

¹⁰¹ Ryszard Wraga, "Nie ma zadnej sprawy Milosza", *Dziennik Polski I Dziennik Zolnierza*, 8 (1952), p.2.

¹⁰² Iza Chruslinska, *Byla raz Kultura: rozmowy z Zofia Hertz* [There was 'Kultura' once] (Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2003), p. 56.

¹⁰³ Zygmunt Zaremba, "Wobec nowego uchodzczy", *Kultura*, 7/45 (1951), p.89-95.

¹⁰⁴ "Oswiadczenie pisarzy emigracyjnych w zwiazku z pozostaniem Czeslaw Milosza za granica", *Kultura*, 12/50 (1951), p. 3.

¹⁰⁵ Czeslaw Milosz's letter to Pearl Kluger 03/19/1953. Papers: correspondence, manuscripts, printed material, photographs, and memorabilia by, to, and relating to Czeslaw Milosz. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 1U, Visa dossier.

fresh blood is given to drink (like yours).”¹⁰⁶ In November 1952, Janina Milosz asked her husband not to devote his life to fighting Polish emigrants.¹⁰⁷ The poet, both irritated and offended, considered a libel case against certain Polish emigrant publicists.¹⁰⁸ He claimed that he could endure all attacks, except being denounced by his compatriots. In January 1952, Milosz lamented to his friend in the United States that the Polish denunciations caused his problem with obtaining a visa; consequently, he could not join his family, and he had never seen his second son.¹⁰⁹

Milosz was a litmus paper for the ideological conflict between the emigrant community in London and the small Parisian circle of *Kultura*, and his case contributed to the final shift between these emigrant circles.¹¹⁰ His interaction with the Polish emigrants was not a simple trajectory. He was torn between his self-implied separation and his desire to belong to the Polish community.

From poetry to prose

Milosz called his decision to emigrate a kind of “intellectual suicide.” He departed from his literary career of a recognized poet writing for the Polish audience and arrived in the West, where he was deprived of his poetic world: his native language, audience, literary milieu, and prestige. No one could predict whether or not this situation

¹⁰⁶ Margaret Storm-Jameson’s letter to Czeslaw Milosz 07/26/1951. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 14., folder 395.

¹⁰⁷ Janina Milosz’s letter to Czeslaw Milosz 11/10/1952. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 15., folder 467.

¹⁰⁸ Margaret Storm-Jameson’s letter to Czeslaw Milosz 11/01/1951. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 14., folder 395.

¹⁰⁹ Czeslaw Milosz’s letter to Melchior Wankowicz, 1952. Renata Gorczynski Papers Relating to Czeslaw Milosz. General Collection, Beinecke Library Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 1, folder 43.

¹¹⁰ *Druga Wielka Emigracja 1945-1990*: Adam Friszke, *Życie polityczne emigracji*, Rafał Habielski, *Życie społeczne i kulturalne emigracji*, Paweł Machcewicz, *Emigracja w polityce międzynarodowej*; (Biblioteka Więzi; Warszawa 1999).

would last forever. Here he had to navigate his way through yet another sphere of transition.

In Poland, Milosz was a prominent author, whose works were published in mainstream newspapers and magazines such as *Kuznica*, *Odrodzenie*, *Nowa Polska*.¹¹¹ Milosz enjoyed a prominent place among the Polish literary elite, “I was an appreciated Polish poet. (...) My literary name was esteemed, and my professional career was guaranteed?”¹¹² This career and publications were under the regime surveillance, and the poet had to obey some ideological rules. During his time in the United States, however, the pressure exercised over him was not intense. Milosz commented on complexity of his situation, “It is quite difficult to describe all that. You have the sense of being a great, and important, and appreciated writer. Simultaneously, you are bitten behind the curtain before you enter the scene, where you find only flowers and bravos.”¹¹³ The defection made Milosz afraid of being forgotten as a writer, deprived of the possibility to publish, and forced to work in a different profession.¹¹⁴

Milosz could not imagine producing new literary work in a milieu where no Polish was spoken. In interviews, he often emphasized that he perceived the world in terms of words and phrases. How could he live without them? In Paris, he thought that his career had come to an end, because a poet cannot compose away from his homeland.¹¹⁵ He wrote, “I found myself in exile in Paris, with the useless tool of an

¹¹¹ Rimma Volynska-Bogert, *Czesław Miłosz: an international bibliography, 1930-1980*. (1983), p.46-51.

¹¹² Czesław Miłosz, “Nie”[“Not”], *Kultura*, 5/43 (1951), p. 3.

¹¹³ Czesław Miłosz’s letter to Józef Wittlin, 06/29/1951, in Anna Ziolkowska, “Wankowicz i Miłosz w świetle korespondencji”, *Twórczość*, 10 (1981), p. 131.

¹¹⁴ Czesław Miłosz, *Wielkie pokuszenie: Bieliński i Jednorozec*. (Torun, 2002), p.11.

¹¹⁵ Czesław Miłosz, “Nie”[“Not”], *Kultura*, 5/43 (1951), p. 3.

exotic language; it was a reason for my despair.”¹¹⁶ But on other occasion, he stated, “I have lost my homeland, but I still have it in the past and the future of my native tongue.”¹¹⁷ The Polish language was both a curse and a salvation for the poet in exile.

The exile caused Milosz to lose a sense of belonging to any literary milieu. During his time in the United States, Milosz participated in the intellectual life of his Polish colleagues. He kept correspondence with a few figures of the literary world.¹¹⁸ He also got involved in their disputes in order to stimulate intellectually his literary milieu, and to be inspired by them. While working for the Polish government, Milosz enjoyed solidarity with his intellectual colleagues. Then, when he went into exile in France, the same colleagues abandoned him. At the official assembly of Polish artists in Warsaw in October 1951, Milosz’s case was presented by his friend, who castigated the poet for desertion.¹¹⁹ Another Polish writer, Antoni Slonimski, berated Milosz and accused him of contacts with neo-Hitlerism.¹²⁰ The most outrageous attack was *The poem for the traitor*, composed by Konstanty Ildefons Galczynski, whom Milosz greatly admired. With this campaign, Milosz became separated from his previous artistic circle. More important, he had difficulties joining the Parisian intellectual milieu, as many of its members were influenced by Stalinism.

¹¹⁶ Czesław Miłosz, *Rzeczy dziwne mimo wszystko*. Unpublished essay, 1953. Czesław Miłosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 4., folder 57.

¹¹⁷ Czesław Miłosz, *W ciągu ostatnich kilku lat [In the last couple years]*. Unpublished essay, 1953. Czesław Miłosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 4., folder 57.

¹¹⁸ Czesław Miłosz, *Zaraz po wojnie: korespondencja z pisarzami 1945-1950 [After War. Correspondence with Writers 1945-1950]*. (Znak., 1998).

¹¹⁹ Joanna Pyszny, *Boje na lamach. Pisarze i literatura w prasie polskiej lat pięćdziesiątych XX wieku*. (Wrocław, 2002), p.61-95.

¹²⁰ Czesław Miłosz, “List otwarty do Antoniego Slonimskiego” [An Open Letter to Antoni Slonimski] *Kultura*, 12/50 (1951), p.80-88.

Milosz had also lost his Polish readers, because he was not allowed to publish in Poland, and he did not believe in the possibility of finding an audience in the West, where Polish was an unknown language. He could possibly address the Polish emigrant community, but he thought that the language and ideas of his works would be as exotic for emigrant Poles as the tongue of the Papuanian tribe would be.¹²¹ In 1952, Milosz wrote, “My realm is the Polish language, and I have many fans in Poland; I was ready to do anything as not to break this relation with them.”¹²² The lack of audience undermined his sense of work, “Writing in Polish makes sense only if there are Polish readers. And they are in Poland.”¹²³ What could he do, while being a poet without esteem, audience, intellectual stimulation, and above all, partially deprived of his native tongue? The life in Paris, *the city of grief*, was hard due to bad psychological and financial conditions.¹²⁴ Milosz said, “The only pleasure I could afford was a packet of Gauloises and a glass of *vin ordinaire* a day.”¹²⁵ Eventually, this situation compelled him to write again and adjust his writing craft to new circumstances.

The transition in his professional life was expressed by the shift from poetry toward prose, which was logical for many reasons. Milosz was able to express himself easily in prose written in French or English. He had a better chance to attract an audience to prose rather than poetry and thus to enter Western intellectual life. Between 1951 and 1953 he published two books and over forty articles. Milosz was writing for *Preuves*; translations of his works were published in *Der Monat*, *Partisan Review*, *De Revisor*, *The*

¹²¹ Czeslaw Milosz’s letter to Melchior Wankowicz, 1952. Renata Gorczyński Papers Relating to Czeslaw Milosz. General Collection, Beinecke Library Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 1, folder 43.

¹²² Ibidem.

¹²³ Ibidem.

¹²⁴ Czeslaw Milosz, *Paryż 1951* [*Paris 1951*], in Czeslaw Milosz, “Poezja” [Poetry] *Kultura*, 6/56 (1952), p.35

¹²⁵ Mirosław Supruniuk, Introduction to: Czeslaw Milosz, *Wielkie pokuszenie: Bielinski I Jednorozec*. p. 8.

Twentieth Century, and *Problems of Communism*.¹²⁶ He published his only collection of poetry in 1953, and it was primarily composed of poems he had written before 1950.

Milosz's literary transition proved fruitful, as he wrote his first novel, *La prise du pouvoir*. The poet had been previously resistant to the idea of writing a novel, but in 1952, at age forty one, he met this literary challenge. In 1953, Milosz reflected on the motives of this shift, "With the help of prose, not only poetry, one can fulfill own duty, which is linked together to ambition (we are not only noble spirits)."¹²⁷ *La prise du pouvoir* was a political novel, which, like *The Captive Mind*, discussed the complexity of consciousness of people living in the Eastern Europe in the time of great historical transformation. One of Milosz's characters compared this change with the collapse of the Roman Empire. In this novel, Milosz gave a broad picture of Polish society and its attitude to the communist regime. His characters faced a dilemma, because they had to choose between death, isolation, escape or collaboration with the regime. Each of these possibilities, however, led only to a defeat.

The self-imposed obligation to explain the intellectual seduction of Marxism played an important role in Milosz's literary activity. The poet often reflected on his responsibility as a writer, "I try to find out, what are the duties of a writer, who compose in Polish in the year 1953."¹²⁸ He devoted several articles to this issue. He also managed to build new intellectual links through the cooperation with The Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), a U.S. based and CIA supported anti-communist advocacy group

¹²⁶ Rimma Volynska-Bogert, *Czesław Miłosz: an international bibliography, 1930-1980*. (1983), pp. 51-53.

¹²⁷ Czesław Miłosz, *Rzeczy dziwne mimo wszystko. Unpublished essay, 1953*. Czesław Miłosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 4., folder 57.

¹²⁸ Czesław Miłosz, *Na rynku mojego malego francuskiego miasteczka. (Unpublished essay), 1951/1952*. Czesław Miłosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 4., folder 56.

founded in 1950.¹²⁹ Milosz was writing articles and reviews for the CCF's press organ - *Preuves*, and he was giving lectures on intellectuals in the communist countries.

The search for a new audience forced Milosz to encompass new measures in his writing. In 1953, he finished work on *The Captive Mind*, which he addressed to a Western audience with little knowledge about the situation behind the Iron Curtain. In this book, Milosz took the Western reader by the hand and walked him through the path of a gradual commitment: from a slight fascination with the ideology, to the wholehearted involvement in the system. *The Captive Mind* was a study of Eastern-European consciousness, which had been influenced by unfamiliar rules of political and social organization. Milosz believed that the analysis of his experience with Marxism and Stalinism would help him overcome his own ideological crisis, "This book is a battlefield, in which I have given shape to my combat with the doctrine I have rejected."¹³⁰ Milosz applied the ideological apparatus of dialectical materialism to emphasize its immense intellectual power. He examined the lives of four Polish writers: Alfa, Beta, Gamma and Delta, and discussed Polish history in reference to former intellectuals aiming to emphasize 'a necessary process' of historical events that follow a specific, predetermined path. This approach was meant to give a better insight into the psychological and mental changes of the society taking place in the part of Europe which has not had good luck.

Milosz used four case studies to show the Hegelian idea of necessity in history - a history, which was a devastating force, with its own unrelenting laws, and which crushed

¹²⁹ In 1967, it was revealed that the United States Central Intelligence Agency was instrumental in the establishment of the group, and it was subsequently renamed the International Association for Cultural Freedom (IACF).

¹³⁰ Czeslaw Milosz, *The Captive Mind* (New York, 1990), vii.

everything on its way. He wrote, “Only he, the observer, will see into the future like a god, and know it to be hard, necessarily hard, for such are the laws of History.”¹³¹ In *The Captive Mind*, Milosz discussed people's faith in reference to history, using terms such as historical fatalism, necessities of History, inevitability of history or historical determinism. History was a personified power - a being that could make jokes, pronounce bloody sentences or “repay people in jeers,” while the human being was only a tool in the hands of History, “an instrument in an orchestra directed by the muse of History.”¹³² Despite the individual tragedy and personal choices, man's life was determined to be a disappointment, “Indeed, the price one had to pay to remain true to the logic of History was terrible. One had to behold passively the death of thousands, take on one's conscience the torture of women and children transformed into human torches.”¹³³ Consequently, “historical necessity” helped to justify the evil of totalitarianism. Yet, Milosz opposed this understanding of the human fate and declared that his emigration was an act against the blind force of determinism.

The Captive Mind was written in Polish but soon translated into French, English and German.¹³⁴ This publishing tactic was probably an outcome of both the necessity to find own place as a writer in the West, and disappointment with the ignorance of the Polish emigrant readers. In November 1952, Milosz wrote to a friend, “Please, drop me a line. You know, that I care about your opinion, and how much I need it. Whatever I publish in Polish, it never meets any response.”¹³⁵

¹³¹ Czeslaw Milosz, *The Captive Mind*; p.18.

¹³² *Ibidem*; p. 11.

¹³³ *Ibidem*; p.160.

¹³⁴ Rimma Volynska-Bogert, *Czeslaw Milosz: an international bibliography, 1930-1980*. (1983), pp. 9-12.

¹³⁵ Czeslaw Milosz's letter to Jozef Wittlin, 06/29/1951, in Anna Ziolkowska, “Wankowicz I Milosz w swietle korespondencji”, *Tworczość*, 10 (1981), p.92; Czeslaw Milosz, *Rozmowy polskie* [The Polish Talks], p. 414.

Yet, it seems that Milosz was squeamish about the admiration of his work; he yearned to be praised more, he wanted to be *a fondled cat*, as his friend called him.¹³⁶ He complained about the lack of response, but it seems that he was just oversensitive. In the year 1953, he received extensive reviews of *The Captive Mind*: eight Polish reviews, eighteen English, four German, and one Italian. His book had three English editions. *La grande tentation. Le drame des intellectuelles dans des democraties populaires* by 1953 had been published in French, Italian, and Dutch.¹³⁷ Additionally, many of his friends and colleagues wrote to him to express their opinion on his works. Some of them commented on the *The Captive Mind*, others validated its accuracy with their own experience of living under communist regimes.¹³⁸ Milosz's literary colleague congratulated him on his first novel, "You are a literary phenomenon: one of the first contemporary lyric poets, who has written a novel, of which he does not have to be ashamed."¹³⁹

During his two first years in exile, Czeslaw Milosz had established his position in the French, or even in the European literary world; he had become a recognizable writer. In 1953, Milosz received the *Prix Littéraire Européen* (European Literary Prize) for his novel *La prise du pouvoir* (*The Seizure of Power*). He noticed what had happened to his literary career:

It is easier for me to live in Europe, because the audience that I can address is much wider here, and I make a living from writing exclusively, without taking another job.(...) Two years ago, I did not assume that. The situation has changed

¹³⁶ Olga Scherer's letter to Czeslaw Milosz, 04/03/1967. Papers: correspondence, manuscripts, printed material, photographs, and memorabilia by, to, and relating to Czeslaw Milosz. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 1M.

¹³⁷ Rimma Volynska-Bogert, *Czeslaw Milosz: an international bibliography, 1930-1980*. (1983), p. 9.

¹³⁸ 1) Andrzej Nowicki's letter to Czeslaw Milosz, 11/11/1953. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 13, folder 325; 2) Jerzy Stempowski's letter to Czeslaw Milosz, 08/05/1951. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 14, folder 339.

¹³⁹ Kot Jelenski's letter to Czeslaw Milosz, 08/05/1951. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 13, folder 299.

thanks to my strenuous work.(...) My psychological condition has improved due to the fact that my position has strengthened, and I am a prominent person in Paris.¹⁴⁰

Obviously, Milosz was only one among many political emigrants from Eastern Europe. In order to determine whether his exile path has universal or particular character, one has to analyze other cases of political and intellectual emigration. It is impossible to discuss the experience of being an exile without a comprehensive reading of exiles' papers. Therefore, a broad comparison surpasses the frame of this project. Yet, a brief sketch of another emigrant case would give us a better understanding of a variety of responses.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn was a Russian writer expelled from his country in February 1974. The main reason for his banishment was the French publication of his book *The Gulag Archipelago*. The Soviet authorities launched a vociferous campaign against the "traitor," stripped Solzhenitsyn from the Russian citizenship, and expelled him. His situation as an emigrant differed from the Milosz case. First of all, Solzhenitsyn had previously experienced the forced internal exile in Kazakhstan. Moreover, his family joined him in Switzerland after the first six weeks of his exile. Above all, Solzhenitsyn's expulsion coincided with the peak of his success in the West, where he was feted as the author of a shocking testimony of life in the gulag. The book became a bestseller. The writer could at last collect his Nobel Prize, four years after it had been awarded to him.

His permanent presence in the media provided Solzhenitsyn with the opportunity to express his criticism on decadence, materialism, and atheism of the West, where he

¹⁴⁰ Czeslaw Milosz's letter to Ignacy Swiecicki 02/04/1953. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 17., folder 589.

had come against his will.¹⁴¹ His diagnosis was that both the communist East and the capitalist West suffered from the same disease, "...the absence of moral standards that led to the appearance of such horrible dictatorship as the Soviet one, and to such a greedy consumer society as the West's."¹⁴² Once a political opponent in the U.S.S.R., now Solzhenitsyn sided with the Western dissidents. The writer, the same as Milosz, failed to fit neatly into either camp of the Cold War order; consequently, his thoughts were distorted and misunderstood. In addition, Solzhenitsyn involved himself into the conflict with other Russian political emigrants. In 1976, he moved to the United States and dedicated himself completely to writing about Russia, because he perceived it as the purpose of his life.

Solzhenitsyn addressed his works to the readers in his country, and, astonishingly, he did not have the sense of living apart from Russia. "I live in Russia. All my interests, all the things I care about, are in Russia," he said in 1974.¹⁴³ In an interview given in 1979, he confirmed this approach, "I am not an émigré. I took no such spiritual decision as to leave my homeland and start a new life somewhere else."¹⁴⁴ Solzhenitsyn's early response to the exile was a denial of it, followed by his withdrawal from the new reality. In regard to that, the beginning of Solzhenitsyn's emigration can not be analyzed in terms of transition, as the writer, already forced to the physical departure, had mentally remained on the Russian soil.

The application of the *transition* concept brings a question: did Milosz himself have recognition of this process? Milosz's unpublished essays from the period abound in

¹⁴¹ Joseph Pearce, *Solzhenitsyn. A Soul in Exile* (Harper Collins, 2000), p. 228.

¹⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 227.

¹⁴³ Joseph Pearce, *Solzhenitsyn. A Soul in Exile* (Harper Collins, 2000), p. 228

¹⁴⁴ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *East and West* (Perennial Library, 1980), p.55.

autobiographical data and give a broad picture of his troubled psyche. He was a poet in exile, for whom writing worked as a catharsis, and as a self-cure agent. He wrote, “For me to write means to prevent from accumulation of despair inside me. The writing has a therapeutic, private goal.”¹⁴⁵ After the defection, Milosz entered a realm of sorrow and suffering. The poet described own state:

We are expiring in pain. At first we do not realize what we suffer from. We feel that everything is too tight. The contradictory cravings emerge; they could possibly explode in acts and masterpieces, but they vainly knock on our door.(...)Then, the agony starts; briefly speaking; it is horrible. One is naked to the world, and the cut of a needle, otherwise not even perceived, now hurts sharply. The question is: to stay as this forever, or to choose a new life?¹⁴⁶

Milosz’s psyche was disturbed with pangs of conscious, loneliness, and identity issues. He complained that the day he had become exile was the worst in his life.¹⁴⁷ However, this day was only a beginning of a long and deeply sorrowful period. Milosz kept dwelling on the past, and on his morally unpleasant status of an escaper.¹⁴⁸ Even the smallest gesture and routine of a daily life unnerved him, “. . .it was so strange for me to lean on this windowsill [in Dordogne, France, where he was vacationing], having inside me this great poison: memory.”¹⁴⁹ In two years following his defection Milosz had been struggling with the question: to forget the past, and take care of own businesses, or to remain in obsession and pain of the memory?

¹⁴⁵ Czeslaw Milosz, *Zamiar [Aim]*, ca.1950. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 4., folder 61.

¹⁴⁶ Czeslaw Milosz, *Untitled Essay*, 1953. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 4, folder 57.

¹⁴⁷ Czeslaw Milosz, *Moja ucieczka [My Escape]*. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 2., folder 24.

¹⁴⁸ Czeslaw Milosz, *W ciagu ostatnich kilku lat [In the last couple years]. Unpublished essay*, 1953. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 4., folder 57.

¹⁴⁹ Czeslaw Milosz, *Untitled essay*, 1951/1952. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 4., folder 56.

He obsessed that his emigration was a betrayal of his compatriot-readers, “If a writer of the Eastern Europe had an opportunity to present the reality in his writing, he would not have right to emigrate. He should stay with his compatriots (...), because to run away from sinking boat is not at all honorable.”¹⁵⁰ The struggle to overcome this issue was harsh, “Obviously, I am destined to feel the pure joy (...), but my attention is attracted to sorrowful, distressing, and shameful issues; it is nourished by them, and tries to free itself from their pressure.”¹⁵¹ Milosz saw his future life permanently stigmatized by his defection. Moreover, the poet had been also suffering from extreme loneliness, which he perceived as a master of scholars, but also as a misery. The period of transition was consumed with doubts about his identity. Milosz’s unpublished notes from years 1951-1953 indicate his struggle both with the changeable external circumstances, and with his inner transformation. “Different, but yet the same, and an infinite number of moments between me in the past and me now,” the poet noted in 1953.¹⁵²

The schizophrenic character of his condition was another problem, which bothered Milosz, “Is it, that everyone remains still in the same state, in which he had left his homeland; and is it, that two levels originate in him: first- developing and alien, and second – inactive and Polish?”¹⁵³ The poet referred to himself as being ripped from his roots; nevertheless, he did not long to adapt himself. On the contrary, he found his

¹⁵⁰ Czesław Miłosz, *Moja ucieczka [My Escape]*. Czesław Miłosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 2., folder 24.

¹⁵¹ Czesław Miłosz, *W ciągu ostatnich kilku lat [In the last couple years]*. Unpublished essay, 1953. Czesław Miłosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 4., folder 57.

¹⁵² Czesław Miłosz, *W ciągu ostatnich kilku lat [In the last couple years]*. Unpublished essay, 1953. Czesław Miłosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 4., folder 57.

¹⁵³ Czesław Miłosz, *Na rynku mojego małego francuskiego miasteczka. (Unpublished essay), 1951/1952.* Czesław Miłosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 4., folder 56.

superiority in this state of a partially belonging, or even of an estrangement.¹⁵⁴ The concept of the binary realms of human life was a recurring motive in Milosz's writing. In 1952 he noted, "The human heart is like a minefield. His consciousness, instead of being one in a harmony, is traced with two lines: time given to live and another time."¹⁵⁵

The sense of loss was another crucial factor in Milosz's situation; he was apart from family and homeland, alienated from the Polish milieu, and separated from his previous professional life. He dwelled on recollections of childhood and to "hold on to whatever concretes he found there."¹⁵⁶ The poet was orbiting among contradictory emotional states without a point of reference. Milosz wrote that a move needs a point of reference from which it can be measured; otherwise it ceases to be a move.¹⁵⁷ For him, the transition was much about moving from inertia, or even death, to life. He reflected whether to stay forever in a state of agony, or to acquire a new life, "Now I know what I worried about. I was imprisoned by the dilemma: to dwell in move or to stay in inertia."¹⁵⁸ The motion was equivalent with life, while inertia meant agony and death. Milosz's goal was to terminate being an inactive object, which is driven by the force of a stream, and to become the source of the motion. Only under this condition can one belong to himself. However, motion was possible only if one had a starting point. Milosz had lost almost all his orientation points; consequently, he could not measure his motion,

¹⁵⁴ Czeslaw Milosz, *Zamiar [Aim]*, ca.1950. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 4., folder 61.

¹⁵⁵ Czeslaw Milosz, *Europa [Europe] 1952*. Papers: correspondence, manuscripts, printed material, photographs, and memorabilia by, to, and relating to Czeslaw Milosz. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 1V.

¹⁵⁶ Czeslaw Milosz, *Ze wszystkich mozliwych pobudek.(Unpublished essay), 1951*. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 2, folder 26.

¹⁵⁷ Czeslaw Milosz, *Rzeczy dziwne mimo wszystko.Unpublished essay, 1953*. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 4., folder 57.

¹⁵⁸ Czeslaw Milosz, *W ciagu ostatnich kilku lat [In the last couple years].Unpublished essay, 1953*. Czeslaw Milosz Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Box 4., folder 57.

and was moving randomly without chance to evaluate own activity. The poet had to construct a new starting point, in order to measure own moves, in order to live. That was the reason why the transition period lasted so long.

Life in exile

The *transition* was a dramatic time, but in 1953 things got better: his family joined him in France. He had gained recognition as a writer and even won a literary prize in France. He had become financially independent and rented a house. Last but not least, he cancelled his petition for an American visa. The transition period was over, at least in some areas of his life. Nevertheless, Milosz remained in exile, and the unusual pattern of permanent emigration marked his future life and work. He claimed that his first exile had been the move from his Lithuanian village to Vilnius, at age ten. The pastoral landscape of the beloved Lithuania always remained present in his poetry, even many years later. After his 1951 defection, Milosz spent ten years in France. In 1960, the poet moved with his family to California, where he had been offered a post in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of California, Berkeley. He emigrated once again and became the first Polish literature professor in the department.

Despite the long exile, Milosz remained faithful to his native tongue. To describe what it meant to write poems in Polish he used a metaphor: to put them into a tree's hollow. At this place they are safe, but only few people have access to it. In America, the poet had no sense of belonging to the San Francisco literary milieu, and he missed the attention that had previously accompanied his presence in the European artistic circles. Yet another dimension of his exile resulted from his "defection" from the role of a poet.

In France and in the United States he was primarily recognized not as a poet, but as an author of a political work, *The Captive Mind*. Milosz was upset with this fact, as he considered himself as a poet, and he longed to be known as a poet. Moreover, the years of emigration had gradually reduced his prominence; he was the master of an unregarded language and an unknown literature. In America he was a “Wrong Honorable Professor Milosz/ Who wrote poems in some unheard-of tongue.”¹⁵⁹ Up till late 1970s and his Nobel Prize in 1980 he was an outcast from readers, literary colleagues, and broad publicity. He wrote:

So I won't have power, won't save the world?
Fame will pass me by, no tiara, no crown?
Did I train myself, myself the Unique,
To compose stanzas for gulls and sea haze,
To listen to the foghorns blaring down below?¹⁶⁰

He was in permanent literary exile, but he kept writing anyway.

During all these years the poet suffered from loneliness. His mailbox was empty for weeks and months, so Milosz even considered writing letters addressed to himself. He was an outcast because of his moral and political choices, and because of the obscure language in which he composed his work. He had left his homeland, moved several times, and spent almost all his life far away from the places he dearly loved. Milosz had emigrated from his idea-land; then he found himself an outcast from the Polish emigrant community; and finally, he became an exile from readers of poetry in his native tongue. It is true that his exile was partially self-imposed. He perceived it as a sorrowful experience,

¹⁵⁹ Czeslaw Milosz, "A Magic Mountain" from *The Collected Poems: 1931-1987*

¹⁶⁰ *Ibidem*.

but one that enabled him to become a better poet. Milosz once said, "Like many of my generation, I could have wished that my life had been a more simple affair."¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ Czeslaw Milosz, *The Captive Mind* (Vintage International, 1990), Preface.

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