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THE TOPOS OF EXILE. WITTLIN, GOMBROWICZ AND MIŁOSZ – THE REVIEW OF ROMANTIC TRADITIONS

TOPOS WYGNANIA. WITTLIN, GOMBROWICZ, MIŁOSZ –
REWIZJE TRADYCJI ROMANTYCZNYCH

Abstract

The Second Great Emigration, shaped in a historical context different from the one of the nineteenth century, inherited after the first one the romantic myth of exile. The main goal of the article is to present what Polish writers: Józef Wittlin, Witold Gombrowicz and Czesław Miłosz thought about exile, how they understood the concept of exile and how they defined the problem of artistic communication in the situation of exile and what were their methods for upgrading the romantic context.

Keywords: The Great Emigration, The Second Great Emigration, Polish Romanticism, Messianism, exile

Abstrakt

Druga Wielka Emigracja ukształtowana w odmiennym niż dziewiętnastowieczny kontekście historycznym otrzymała w spadku po pierwszej romantyczny mit wygnania. Głównym celem artykułu jest zaprezentowanie tego, co pisarze polscy tacy jak Józef Wittlin, Witold Gombrowicz and Czesław Miłosz sądzili na temat wygnania, jak rozumieli to pojęcie oraz jak definiowali problem komunikacji artystycznej w sytuacji wygnania oraz jakie były sposoby aktualizowania przez nich kontekstu romantycznego.

Słowa kluczowe: Wielka Emigracja, II Wielka Emigracja, polski romantyzm, mesjanizm, wygnanie

1. The romantic topos of exile

If we were to define in the most general way the peculiarity of the Polish Romantic topic of exile in the literary works of Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki, Zygmunt Krasiński or Seweryn Goszczyński, it would appear that – irrespective of their type or genre – it was constructed by the multi-level denial and despecification.

Such stylistic solutions meant, firstly, that the idea of an exiled nation was rarely clarified and most often replaced with a more general one. For example, the loss of Polish statehood was considered by Mickiewicz in *The Books and the Pilgrimage of the Polish Nation* to be the consequence of the rejection of the idea of justice by the power-hungry emperors which had happened much earlier – in the era of the Roman republic that sanctioned slavery. Secondly, to describe the condition of Polish exiles the term “exile” was substituted and the already mentioned *The Books and the Pilgrimage of the Polish Nation* constitutes a meaningful example of this solution. Therefore a forced stay abroad was not called exile nor emigration, but it was allegorically depicted as pilgrimage. It contributed to endowing the condition of exiles with clear teleology, helped to assign it with a universal and often mystical meaning, transferred it into a different, positive axiological order. [see: Mickiewicz, 1983, p. 222]. Mickiewicz wrote:

The soul of the Polish nation is — the Polish pilgrimage.

And no Pole, in his pilgrimage, is called vagrant; because a vagrant is a man that wanders about without having any object in view.

Nor is he rightly called an exile; because, he only is called an exile who is expelled his country by the decree of a tribunal; but no tribunal of his country has expelled any Pole.

The Pole, in his pilgrimage, is not yet called by his proper name; but the time will come, when he shall obtain that name; like the disciples of Christ, whose name was given them in due time.

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[*The Books and the Pilgrimage of the Polish Nation*].

In the poem *Before dawn [Przedświt]* by Zygmunt Krasiński, the topos of exile received a similar, allegorical form. Emigration has been associated in the text with being in hell in which the invaders are identified as devils and the lyrical ego is compared – by an intertextual reference – to Dante, the author of *The Divine Comedy* and a patron of poets in exile, who wanders in the afterlife. That association became the

starting point for delineating (in the Messianic spirit) the Polish exiles as pilgrims and apostles of the new world order. It is worth mentioning that allegorically-shaped theme of exile-pilgrimage became also an element of nostalgic poetry, an example of which is *Hymn* [*Hymn*] by Juliusz Słowacki. It also appeared in his “poem of digression”, the title of which contains supposition of pilgrimage – *Journey to the Holy Land from Naples* [*Podróż do Ziemi Świętej z Neapolu*].

Thirdly, the previously mentioned topos was presented in a figurative, symbolic manner in which the author of *Konrad Wallenrod* excelled. In this way it was suggested that the explanation of the causes of exile is not and cannot be confined to historical exegesis. On the contrary, it was stressed that it contains a hidden meaning. In the poems by Seweryn Goszczyński such as, for example, *Wyjście z Polski* (*Leaving Poland*) or *Przy sadzeniu róż* (*When Planting Roses*) created in 1831, the topic in question gains a metaphorical meaning, too. In the first of the two poems, Polish units led by generals Dezydery Chłapowski and Antoni Gielgud and forced to cross the border with Prussia in 1831 are referred to as *your march (is) like a funeral*. As the poem ends, the march appears to be an implied prediction of the homeland’s resurrection and the titular act of leaving Poland is assigned with a patriotic and metaphysical goal – in the future it is to make the homeland “happy forever”. In the second poem the condition of the exile is explained with a metaphor of a gardener who plants the roses for the future generations, knowing that he will not see the flowers himself.

Similar imagery can be found in Juliusz Słowacki’s work *Paryż* (*Paris*) in which the misery of exile is compared to *the tree of hope without leaves and flowers* [Słowacki, 2005, p. 78] Examples could be quoted on end.

When compared to the solutions typical of the texts of the authors of the Great Emigration, the analysed topos gained most original conceptualisation in the works of Cyprian Norwid. Despite the fact that the poet left his homeland in 1842, Norwid thought of himself as a political exile only after the incident in Berlin in 1846. The author of *Vade mecum* was grassed up by the Prussian police to the Russian embassy and imprisoned when he refused to cooperate with Russian intelligence. After being released from jail thanks to the help of his friends, Norwid emigrated first to Belgium, then to Italy, next to Paris (1848), the United States (February 1853) and after a year and a half he returned to Europe. The category of exile in his texts was not only political, but also philosophical: aesthetic and metaphysical, ethical and existential. In the early *Listy o emigracji* (*Letters of Emigration*) you could still sense the Messianic idea (especially when the author of *Promethidion* wrote that the Polish nation bears resemblance to The Passion of Christ [Norwid, 1973, p. 22]) and in the poems *My Song I* and *My Song II* the construction of the lyrical ego was typical of nostalgic poetry of the artists of the Great Emigration. The basic framework of Norwid’s views on the state of the exiles focused around the idea of demystifying the romantic notions of Polish people in which they saw themselves as the chosen nation. He substituted the sublime phrase with *the dead nation* [Norwid, 1971, p. 643]. In the works of this poet we can find statements showing that enforced emigration may paradoxically bear marks of an ethical choice.

In 1852 the author of *Promethidion* wrote sententiously: *A noble man could not live one day in a homeland whose happiness was not only a percentage of the happiness of humanity* [Norwid, 1984, s. 346]. What draws attention in his works is also a different shape of the topos of the pilgrim. In the poem under the very title, the pilgrimage is described as *the state above states* and gains an aesthetic and metaphysical character, which the stanza shows clearly:

*I, too, have only the land
that my foot covers
Long as I go!... [Norwid, 1984, p. 76].*

In Norwid's poetry the fate of exiles awaits outstanding individuals, for example, Dante Alighieri and Napoleon mentioned in the poem *Coś ty Atenom zrobił Sokratesie? (What did you do to Athens, Socrates?)*. It is significant that in Norwid's poetic and epistolary legacy the topos of exile understood as rejection of the poet by his countrymen and his homeland coexists with a theme of voluntary abandonment of the homeland by the poet. The abandonment was understood as a sign of a disagreement with an existing model of Polishness and a manifestation of *internal exile*. In a letter to August Cieszkowski in 1852 the author of *Czarne kwiaty (Black Flowers)* wrote: *from the depth of my spirit there is nothing that I can give to my homeland because it firmly pushed away everything* [Norwid, 1984, p. 310]. Fifteen years later in a poem *Do współczesnych (Oda) (To Contemporaries)* he wrote ironically:

*And
And I bade farewell to my country and known shores
I pushed off like a boat rower
Pushes the ground - and how? he pushes the foam
Lazily- smooth and loose...
A country! – – where every-deed is too early
But – every-book... too late!*

*II
My foot pushed the shore which humbly
Bent under my heel;
And creaked that he's a martyr, finely
(But his curses were hard as steel!) (...) [Norwid, 1984, p. 142].*

Significant gestures of pushing off the shore of his native country and moving into the unknown appear here as a sign of voluntary farewell to his homeland understood as Polishness in the existing form. Norwid deeply believed that *in order to be national, be above national!* which he stated in the poem *Rzecz o wolności słowa (About Freedom of Speech)* [Norwid, 1971, p. 569].

2. Writers of the Second Great Emigration and exile – Wittlin, Miłosz, Gombrowicz

The Second Great Emigration, shaped in a different historical context, inherited after the first one the Romantic myth of exile determining the specificity of the condition of the Polish nation to which independence is not permanent. The myth provided a framework to a world view paradigm to which twentieth-century artists had to refer to, even if the main purpose of this reference would be to reject axioms characteristic of Messianic reflection. It is also worth noting that scrutinizing the origin of Messianic idea, comparing its variations (even the basic ones, formulated by Adam Mickiewicz and August Cieszkowski [see: Walicki, 2009, p. 83–171] or probing into its nuances did not typically interest the artists of the twentieth century, such as Józef Wittlin, Czesław Miłosz and Witold Gombrowicz. They could not, however, not respond to this tradition (most often understood in a simplified way), even if the way they left the country was different from that of the Romantics. Both Wittlin and Gombrowicz heard about the outbreak of the Second World War when they were abroad. The former one was in France, the latter got the news on the ship to South America. Neither of them came back to Poland. Miłosz's exile, in turn, started in 1951 and lasted till 1993. The decision to remain abroad in the case of these three writers was made for similar reasons – none of them (not even Miłosz who worked as a cultural attaché in the diplomatic service of the communist Polish government in the United States and in Paris till 1951) accepted the situation in Poland. The testimony of emigration experiences of these authors are lengthy parts of *Dzienniki (Diaries)* by Witold Gombrowicz, written in English *Blaski i nędze wygnania (Sorrow and Grandeur of Exile)* by Józef Wittlin and *Noty o wygnaniu (Notes on Exile)* by Czesław Miłosz [Olejniczak, 1989]. For the author of *Ferdydurke* an immediate impulse to reflect upon the previously mentioned matters was a commission from Jerzy Giedroyc for the translation of an essay by Emil Cioran *Advantages and Disadvantages of Exile* [Cioran, 1952, 1990]. The translation prompted the author of *Pamiętnik z okresu dojrzewania (Diary of Adolescence)* to write a commentary to the text by a Romanian philosopher and to present his own views on the condition of a writer in exile. Gombrowicz continued his reflections in *Dziennik (Diaries)* and *Trans-Atlantyk (Trans-Atlantic)* placing them in the context of Romantic tradition [see: Inglot, 2006]. Wittlin's essay *Advantages and Disadvantages of Exile*, in turn, is a speech delivered in "PEN Club in Exile" in New York (1957) and a year later at the Congress "PEN Club in Exile" in Munich. Wittlin's text appeared later in the collection of essays *Orfeusz w piekle XX wieku (Orpheus in the Hell of the XXth Century)* [Wittlin, 1963, 2003]. Miłosz's *Noty o wygnaniu (Notes on Exile)* was written in 1975 in Berkeley and published a year later in *Books Abroad* and reprinted in 1981 in *Kultura (Culture)*. Importantly, all of the authors in their reflections upon emigration include several common themes:

- A) all of them describe it as exile and unlike the Romantics they do not use teleologically oriented alternatives terms such as pilgrimage or journey;

- B) each of them, to a greater or lesser extent, upgrades the Romantic context;
- C) all of them address the issue of artistic communication in exile. Norwid's reflections upon emigration echo in each of these aspects, even though they are not cited directly by any of the artists. It is impossible today to say conclusively what the reasons for the situation were. We cannot state whether the analogies in the manner of addressing the theme of exile resulted from the similarity of not so much the historical situation as the existential one of the writers of the nineteenth and twentieth century. Maybe the lack of open references to Norwid resulted from careless reading of his 's texts or from the fact that his message was already so well assimilated by the culture of the twentieth century in Poland and internalized by the essayists of this period that his observations began to function as *loci communes*.

A. The concept of exile

In a discussion with Cioran, Gombrowicz, a tireless critic of the views of Polish Romantic emigrants, actually repeated Norwid's observations formulated in relation to Dante in the poem *Coś ty Atenom zrobił, Sokratesie?* ("What did you do to Athens, Socrates?"). In line with these views, outstanding artists tend to be banished by his contemporaries in a literal or metaphorical sense. Gombrowicz's critical commentaries – similar to Norwid's reflections – focused on the statement that the choice of the artistic path makes a writer an exile and consequently condemns them to solitude. Gombrowicz emphasized: *But each of the prominent ones, due to their prominence, was a foreigner even at home* [1997, p. 65]. The writer believed that the greatest ones created not for the reader but "against them" [Gombrowicz, 1997, p. 65]. This assertion can be safely applied to the biography of the author of *Promethidion* who, instead of catering to readers' tastes, chose the critical reflection. He wanted to write for his countrymen but was not understood by them. Norwid saw in solitude not only the element of his own condition, but also a universal mechanism deciding about the fate of an independent artist who was in exile among Polish emigration. In a letter to Teofil Lenartowicz (1859), he wrote: *I believe that everyone who takes a few steps into Polish life, will find himself in such solitude* [Norwid, 1984, p. 316].

Gombrowicz, however, tried to re-evaluate the situation of exile in a positive way. The author of *Ferdydurke* believed that emigration, described by him as *immersion in the world* [Gombrowicz, 1997, p. 66] and *being cast out from convention* [Gombrowicz, 1997, p. 67], was a chance and a "stimulus" for literature because the exile provides the writer with a greater distance, extends the space of spiritual freedom and, although it requires uncompromising attitude, allows for a more authentic intellectual life.

This, in turn, is the way Wittlin, whose emigrant path led through France and Portugal to the United States, explained his view on exile:

It is not a voluntary emigration but the one to which a writer was forced by a bitter necessity, catastrophe, disaster. And also a need for active resistance against the

disaster, along with a hope of victory. Anyway, our kind of emigration was caused by a threat if not to the writer himself, then to his work [Wittlin, 2003, p. 249].

The Second World War broke out when Wittlin was in France. Soon, he was joined by his wife and daughter, but after the attack of the Third Reich on the country the Wittlins left Paris and headed south to the unoccupied part of France. In 1940, after its total defeat, the writer and his family went to Portugal in order to emigrate to the United States and live in New York. Wittlin was there, among others, an editor for “Tygodniowy Przegląd Literacki Koła Pisarzy z Polski” (“Weekly Review of Literary Writers from Poland”).

The writer tried to redefine the word exile in several ways. Firstly, he did that by using the oxymoronic phrase when referring to *not banished exiles* [Wittlin, 2003, p. 49], that is artists who left their country voluntarily because they could not stand its conditions. Secondly, when he invoked the biblical story of exile from Paradise, he tried to see in exile one of the universals of the human condition. The writer described the character of human life on earth with a Latin concept *exilium*. On the basis of the religiously interpreted topos of expulsion from Paradise, grounded in the historical situation, Wittlin formulated a conclusion that writers are exiled in the triple sense and that, paradoxically, this should be seen as advantages of their situation. In Wittlin’s opinion – it had been earlier noted by Norwid and repeated in *Dziennik (Diaries)* by Gombrowicz – an outstanding artist due to his great talent is an outcast even in his closest environment. Otherness and artistic individuality make him an exile in his own country.

Compensation of the three losses: the loss of paradise, homeland and *common-sense* shared by his countrymen, becomes an individual point of view which turns out to be a necessary prerequisite in the process of creation. It is worth stressing that Wittlin – like Romantics – conceptualized political emigration as misery. He felt that those who saw this condition as normal were under a lot of distress. However, unlike Mickiewicz and Krasiński, he also claimed that he “who creates a religion out of his misery, will not deserve salvation [Wittlin, 2003, p. 251].

Miłosz, however, in his *Noty o wygnaniu (Notes on Exile)* conceptualized the topos of exile in fatalistic categories. To describe it, the writer used a metaphor of incurable disease and understood exile as destiny that should become a starting point for shattering fundamental illusions.

It is significant that Miłosz, recalling – as Norwid did – Dante as the patron of all exiled artists finally defined the decision about emigration as a choice. In a speech to the Swedish Royal Academy he emphasized:

(...) Exile of a poet is nowadays a simple function of a relatively recent discovery: that whoever wields power can also control the language, not only with the prohibitions of censorship, but also by changing the meaning of words. (...) It seems that there is a hidden bond between the theories of literature as écriture, the speech feeding on itself and the growth of a totalitarian country. In any case, there is no reason for a country not to tolerate an activity that consists of creating poems and prose understood as auto-

nomous systems of reference, enclosed within their own borders. Only if we assume that the poet constantly strives to liberate himself from borrowed styles in search for reality, is he dangerous. In a room where people agreeably support a conspiracy of silence, one word of truth sounds like a pistol shot, and, what is worse, the temptation to pronounce it, similar to an acute itching, becomes an obsession which does not allow to think about anything else. That is the reason why poets choose the exile [Miłosz, 1987, p. 352–353].

However, the real motivation for such a choice was not clear for Miłosz. He was not sure whether it was a reaction to the current situation in the native country or a result of an irresistible urge to liberate themselves from what is happening in their country and to seek outside a chance of at least partial implementation of the artists tasks which could not be boiled down, according to the author of *Zniewolony umysł (Captive Mind)* to the fight against the political system. The essence of this artistic vocation lies elsewhere, it involves *the contemplation of Being (...)* [Miłosz, 1987, p. 353].

In *Notes on Exile* Miłosz stressed the need to resign from perceiving the condition of a writer in exile in the Messianic paradigm (which, incidentally, quickly became obvious for Norwid). Finally, Miłosz decided that the need of the creator to change the reality and influence human lives via literature was an illusion. He described this desire to “save the world” as “a childhood dream” [Miłosz, 1987, p. 353]. The writer clearly advocated limiting ambitions in this area.

B. Methods for updating the Romantic context

In the essays of Gombrowicz and Wittlin the references to Norwid’s reflections were implied by means of a paraphrase. Unlike the author of *Ferdydurke* who devoted more space in his *Dziennik (Diaries)* to criticize Mickiewicz’s legacy, Wittlin only mentioned the heritage of the author of “The Books and the Pilgrimage of the Polish Nation”. Miłosz, in turn, started his text with a motto from *Konrad Wallenrod*. The implicit presence of Norwid’s thoughts in the essays of these authors can make the readers believe that the influence was irrelevant. The in-depth analysis of the essays by Gombrowicz, Miłosz and Wittlin forces, however, questions this assumption.

In the polemic with Cioran, Gombrowicz admitted that he shared only one view with the Romanian philosopher on the danger of excessive freedom which may threaten the author in exile. Stating that the freedom can be handled by artists who are able to go beyond the values directly related to their homeland and create literary works that can be put in the universal order, Gombrowicz paraphrased Norwid’s diagnosis formulated in the poem *Rzecz o wolności słowa (On Freedom of Speech)* according to which “in order to be national, (you have to) be above national [Norwid, 1971, p. 569]. He did that also in *Trans-Atlantyk (Trans-Atlantic)*. He added: *Modern history turned out to be too violent and borderless for literatures too national and too specific* [Gombrowicz, 1997, p. 66].

Gombrowicz, like the author of *Promethidion*, was aware that the reflection upon exile is mainly retrospectively oriented – which is clearly visible in the nostalgic Romantic texts of . He wrote about *clinging to the past* [Gombrowicz, 1997, p. 67], *organ-*

izing its parody [Gombrowicz, 1997, p. 68] in new conditions, about the attachment to one's own identity, fear of change and about chaos. The consequence of these feelings proves to be a defensive response of focusing on one goal of a *hope to regain their homeland* [Gombrowicz, 1997, p. 68].

He stated:

But the homeland cannot be regained without a fight, a fight requires strength and collective strength can be developed only by abandonment of self. In order to develop it, the writer has to impose upon himself and his countrymen a blind faith and many other blindnesses and a luxury of disinterested and free thinking becomes the gravest of sins. And so, he cannot be a writer without a homeland but to regain the homeland, he has to stop being a writer, a writer for real [Gombrowicz, 1997, p. 353].

He himself called for a prospective model of being in the world and searched for ways to create new aristocracy in literature. The author of *Trans-Atlantic* believed that ideas about the elitism of art and the mission of the creator imported to the West from behind of the Iron Curtain have little in common with the new reality. That disparity makes *s the artist in exile who exists outside the nation, as well as outside the elite, confront much more directly with the sphere less spiritual and intellectual. Nothing isolates him from this contact, he has to personally withstand the pressure of the brutal and immature life* [Gombrowicz, 1997, p. 353].

That is why Gombrowicz believed that the most significant goal is not to be an artist in exile but to be *a writer to the best of exile* [Gombrowicz, 1997, p. 353]. He conceived the latter not in national terms but, like Norwid, in universal ones. The exile was to him a synonym for chaos, existential solitude, almost complete isolation. The features of this condition forced the writer to abandon the attachment to old values altogether and accept the challenge of creating new ones.

Reflection on the writer's condition in exile contributed to forming Gombrowicz's attitude towards the legacy of the author of "The Books and the Pilgrimage of the Polish Nation". These views were also not that far from the main points of Norwid's criticism. The author of *Ferdydurke* believed that Mickiewicz confirmed Poles in their self-satisfaction which can be achieved by ignoring ugliness and *hushing up sins* [Gombrowicz, 1997, p. 355].

Gombrowicz wrote about Mickiewicz:

The greatest weakness of Mickiewicz is that he was a national poet, i.e. he was identified with the nation and spoke for the nation and therefore he was unable to see that nation from the distance of other nations. [Gombrowicz, 1997, p. 356].

According to Gombrowicz, Mickiewicz's identification with the nation proved that the author of *Pan Tadeusz* found no support either in himself nor in the new reality. The poet seemed not to be strong enough to change the nation. Mickiewicz was only able to adorn the weakness (of the nation – postscript. Ż. N.) with a plume of Romanticism, made Poland the Christ of Nations (...) [Gombrowicz, 1997, p. 353]. His critical attitude towards Mickiewicz's Messianism was reflected in a negative assessment of his

legacy which he believed to be a result of his simplified, binary (in the axiological sense) world-view. Polish Christian values were contrasted with the evil of the invaders. *Pan Tadeusz*, however, was described by him as a text in which the author *sang the beauty of our landscapes* [Gombrowicz, 1997, p. 353]. Similarly, Norwid once called the text *a poem by a landscape painter and satirist*. [Norwid, 1971, p. 272, see also: Chwin, 1975].

Gombrowicz, on the other hand, stressed that the author of *Konrad Wallenrod* never freed himself from the role of the poet of a conquered nation, the virtuous son of Poland [Gombrowicz, 1997, p. 357]. He constantly reminded of the defeat and made his countrymen feel its consequences, inhibited their already weakened vital forces. From this perspective, the writer's statement that *«Trans-Atlantic» was the most patriotic and the bravest* [Gombrowicz, 1997, p. 162] of his works is no longer a surprise. He believed that Polish literature needed a radical metamorphosis. *Instead of seeking greater unity binding the Poles with Poland* – wrote the author of *Dziennik (Diaries)* – (Polish literature – postscript Ż.N.) should rather create a certain distance between us and our-homeland. We need to tear ourselves away emotionally and intellectually from Poland in order to gain greater freedom of action to be able to create it [Gombrowicz, 1997, p. 163]. To change Poland, a Pole, should banish himself from it in a mental sense, should be able to – of which Cyprian Norwid was well aware – seek internal exile from Poland.

In Wittlin's essay *Blaski i nędze wygnania (Sorrow and Grandeur of Exile)* there is only one direct reference to the Romantic context – it is assessment of Mickiewicz's oeuvre. According to the author of *Sól ziemi (Salt of the Earth)*, Mickiewicz managed to avoid traps that exile authors frequently fall into when they choose to describe their experience with nostalgic undertones because he ventured *à la recherche du temps perdue* in order to “indulgently play” [Wittlin, 2003, p. 255] with the past. The text, however, does not specify what this “playing” would look like. We can learn much more about Wittlin's attitude towards the Romantic legacy can from the reconstruction of implied information contained in the essay. He defined the situation of exiles not only in the spatial terms (an exile is a man without land), but also temporal ones (an exile is someone cut off from the experience of time in the home country). He pointed to the fact that the temporal cut off – which affected Polish Romantics – about which none of them but Norwid was fully aware of - condemns the exile to a life at the same time in the present, in exile, and in the past, in the thoughts about homeland. Wittlin believed that the state of being anchored in the past is one of the greatest dangers to the writer because longing distorts the sharpness of his literary vision. Hence, the popularity of nostalgic poetics so characteristic of the works of Polish Romantics that resulted in the loss of the ability to select memories. Wittlin, like Norwid, saw that “the writer in exile lives in a constricted community, in which creation does not come easily, all the more publishing revolting works. Such community pays heed most eagerly to what is long known [Wittlin, 2003, p. 255].

In this phenomenon the essayist discerned not so much a distinctive feature of his own condition, but rather a universal mechanism which fostered conflict between the artist and the emigration community.

That conflict, according to Wittlin, should be cultivated by the writer because the price for patching up differences of opinion is upholding *outdated myths*, irrelevant *rules of national aesthetics which guided old emigrations in the assessment of their poets* [Wittlin, 2003, p. 255]. Contrary to Mickiewicz, Wittlin saw positive sides of being cut-off from the matters of your homeland which could protect the writer from enslavement in their own time. He believed that the author should strive to go beyond their epoch.

In Miłosz's *Noty o wygnaniu (Notes on Exile)* [Miłosz, 1987] there is a different form of reference to the Romantic tradition than in the works of Wittlin and Gombrowicz (in their cases the references to Norwid's reflections were not explicit but implied). Whereas the mentioned text was accompanied by the motto which is a quote from *Konrad Wallenrod* by Adam Mickiewicz *happiness he did not find because it was not at home*. Motto – as an element of a paratext in the sense given by Gérard Genette [Genette, 1987, 2003] – situated on the edge of the text becomes a threshold that must be crossed to be able to penetrate the meanings of the text. It therefore influences the process of reception. In this way reading *Notes on Exile* by Miłosz is directed towards the Romantic tradition which – in a hermeneutical sense – is seen as the most appropriate context for reading the text. Miłosz choosing a passage from Mickiewicz's text as a motto was, however, far from repeating his diagnoses. The author of *Notes on Exile* stressed that conscious temporal and spatial cut off from the country forces upon the writer a radical change in the style of thinking, otherwise his reflection resembles phantasmal and idle speculations.

By means of increasing spatial and emotional distance as well as by enforced adaptation to the new environment, there arises a need to change one's viewpoint on the country's matters and to choose new means of literary expression. Lack of possibility of daily observation of events at home precludes the use of realistic narrative and forces the writer to search for the formula of artistic generalization. According to Miłosz, however, that generalization — had little in common with Messianic ideas.

C. Exiles and the problem of artistic communication

In the Romantics' reflection there was rather no problem with choosing the language of artistic communication other than Polish (a separate matter was the correspondence of Polish emigrants which was influenced by the remnants of French language popularity). Since the existence of the nation was decided by two essential criteria, namely the possession of one's territory and the preservation of one's language, the latter – especially in the literary version – was the last stronghold of identity for the members of the Great Emigration.

The choice of the language of artistic expression in exile was, however, of utmost importance for Wittlin and Miłosz. The former one realised that being faithful to one's

mother tongue mostly condemns the writer to anonymity. He saw in it not only misery, but also a blessing, through which the writer can indulge in selfless work, ceases to be a *slave of his own name* [Wittlin, 2003, p. 258] and has a chance to remember that *at the beginning there was no speaker, only the Word* [Wittlin, 2003, p. 259]. Miłosz, on the other hand, in *Notes on Exile* wrote that resignation from the mother tongue – although it makes the adaptation to a new location easier and partly allows to break with the condition of an exile – does not solve the paradox of unnecessary communication associated with the question *to whom do you write?* In his opinion it is not so sure that the situation of an exile has to be the worst possible and that fellow writers in the country to which the artist migrated reach a wide audience with their literature. Included in this perspective, the desire (of the Romantic provenance) to govern souls began to appear as anachronistic usurpation.

It should be recalled at this point that Romantic writers sought to influence their compatriots both in an enslaved country and abroad, and not only through artistic texts. A telling example of this was the journalistic activity of Adam Mickiewicz. Norwid's activity was not different, he wrote memoranda and proclamations and also tried to be included in the discussions on emigration assemblies. The writer even planned to publish a journal because he wanted to shape the mindset of Polish emigrants through it. However, he did not find the audience neither in the country, nor – due to his language – outside it.

One of the numerous examples of how Juliusz Słowacki tried to influence his countrymen in Poland was a manifesto in 1846 entitled *Głos wygnania do braci w kraju* (*The Voice from Exile to the Brothers in the Country*) in which, after hearing of the uprising in Galicia (1845–1849), the poet pointed to the fact that Poles, taken over by the idea of independence, at the same time ignored the issue of oppression of the peasants. He wrote among others: *Respect the frock that is what will the future soldiers wear who will save Poland* [Słowacki, 1916, p. 225]. He also addressed the exiles in *Do emigracji o potrzebie idei* (*To the Emigration: On the Need for Ideas*). During *Spring of Nations* he wrote *Głos brata Juliusza Słowackiego do zgromadzonych i w klub chcących się związać Polaków, przedstawiający potrzebę przyjęcia nowej formy konfederacyjnej* (*The Voice of Brother Juliusz Słowacki to Members and Prospective Members of the Polish Club*) [Słowacki, 1997]. However, for Miłosz, Wittlin and Gombrowicz the universality of the problem of unnecessary communication shared by writers in exile did not raise doubts. Miłosz noticed that the writer's message may only be relevant in his country of origin. There, however, it was unfortunately suppressed due to censorship. Such a problem does not occur in exile, however, its place is taken over by another one. What the artist wants to communicate turns out to be completely incomprehensible to the natives, and, above, completely irrelevant. It also becomes outdated in the sense that what the writer, cut off from the events in his homeland, knows is only theoretically and his knowledge is based in the past. The price of the detachment from current events in the country turns out to be the quality of literature. Gombrowicz was also fully aware of this situation. The author of *Trans-Atlantic* tried, however, not to demonize these

observations. The obstacles that artists encountered in exile, such as: problems with publication of their works, being condemned to anonymity or financial difficulties were seen by him as matters of secondary importance. He thought that the inconveniences of the writer in exile were not exclusively theirs since *all art verges upon ridicule, defeat, humiliation* [Gombrowicz, 1997, p. 65]. In the previously mentioned Gombrowicz's fear of *losing one's name*, the writer saw the most reason for sinking into despair, especially in the first period of separation from the country. Whereas Miłosz treated it more like a temporary state for he believed that the exile must change the writer's perspective because the impossibility of sharing the experiences with his countrymen is paradoxically connected with the need to create works which would be important for them. Consequently, during the creation of an artistic text there has to occur fusion of the two centres of imagination and spaces linked with them – the real one, referring to the author's location, and the past one, remembered from his childhood.

Another problem, mentioned by Józef Wittlin, occurring when the author in exile chooses to write in their mother tongue is the disconnection (also called rape) from the living sources of the language, linked with uncritical fascination with foreign culture and the writer's inability to assimilate and utilize it in the artistic manner. However, he pointed to the fact that the disconnection from the mother tongue which forces the writer to derive solely from lexical resources accumulated yet in the country (created by former immigrants or the author himself after leaving his homeland and enriched only in the process of reading) is being as if compensated by the process called *the return of words*. Wittlin coined in this way the involuntary recollection of words that have long lost their value in use, words which are not therefore the voice of life, but its echoi [Wittlin, 2003, p. 256]. Wittlin said:

Such words haunt the writer like shadows. After some time the shadows begin to live their own shadowy lives becoming myths. Every writer in exile has a reservoir of word myths. The writer, especially a poet in exile, also starts using peculiar magic of words which in everyday life mean nothing, or close to nothing [2003, p. 257].

The quotation is a telling illustration of the process of coming to terms by the artist with a new context in which the literary communication occurs in exile, but it is also the attempt to capture its specificity and to define more precisely the mechanisms of compensation which govern it. Czesław Miłosz defined it in a slightly different manner. He argued against the view according to which the writer's long stay abroad – which means his cut-off from a refreshing impact of sociolects, dialects, and finally colloquial language – has to result in impoverishment of his artistic style. In the opinion of the author of *Zniewolony umysł (The Captive Mind)*, the lack of contact can be compensated by bilingualism or/and noticing the peculiarity of the native language against another one and, therefore, result in further refinement of rhythm, emphasis of expression, more skilful use of syntax, more precise use of lexis.

However, regardless of the choice of language (of which Miłosz reminded and Gombrowicz and Wittlin were aware of) the alienation of an exile proves to be impos-

sible to eradicate. He will never become a native and will remain a stranger forever, of which the locals know as much (most often from the media) as did the cavemen from VII book of *The Republic* by Plato. The exiles of XXth century: Wittlin, Gombrowicz and Miłosz understand that they cannot change this fact.

Along with the recognition of this powerlessness and voluntary abandonment of ambition in this field, in the essays of these authors the Romantic idea of national mission becomes outdated. The mission was formulated, among others, in “The Books and the Pilgrimage of the Polish Nation” by Mickiewicz and it was linked with propagation of the true idea of Christianity in a foreign country that was identified as an enemy: *Remember that you are, amidst foreigners, like sheep in the midst of wolves, and like a camp in a hostile country, that concord may be among you* [Mickiewicz, 1983, p. 230–231]).

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