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Wanderers – Pilgrims – Soldiers – Emigrants. Themes in the War Poetry of the Second Polish Corps

Wędrowcy – Pielgrzymi – Żołnierze – Emigranci Motywy poezji wojennej 2 Polskiego Korpusu

Abstract

The main purpose of the article is to review imageries and experiences of a specific group of poets organized within the frame of the Second Polish Corps during World War II, and to analyze its most characteristic motifs within a deeper historical context of Polish romanticism, as "replayed" in the paths and roles of the Corps poets-soldiers. The study is based on the extensive use of all available books of verses and other literary publications of the Corps, which were produced on the long way from the Soviet Union, where the bulk of Corps was formed in 1941–1942, through the Middle East, Italy, to the final exile station, London in most cases. This material is analyzed within the reference framework of the Polish poetry of World War II studies, as well as comparative studies on the Polish romantic literary tradition, especially that of the Great Emigration. This comparative point of view and method of analysis is used in all parts of the chronologically organized text. From a short presentation of the history of the Corps variegated cultural life which accompanied its development from 1941 to 1945, it proceeds to similarly succinct picture

of the group of more than 80 active poets publishing in the Corps. The study centers its analysis on the main theme forming the time-perception of the world presented in soldier poetry: the motif of the road or path. It reveals a phenomenon of uniting very different poetic "schools" and styles (from extreme avant-gardist and futurist, through neoromanticism, to cabaret texts) under the pressure of the war and exile experiences, as well as the strength of the great romantic tradition of Polish poetry formed along a very similar path: from Russia, Siberia, through the Middle East, to Italy, where Polish soldiers had fought under Napoleon, to London and Paris, centers of the Great Emigration. Topoi of martyrdom, strengthened through Siberia and the Holy Land connections, homelessness, martial experiences in Italy, a "treason" of Western allies (Teheran and Yalta conferences) are effectively "refreshed" in this comparative approach.

Keywords: Polish poetry, World War II, Second Polish Corps, romantic literary tradition, exile

Abstrakt

Głównym celem artykułu jest prezentacja wyobraźni poetyckiej i doświadczeń grupy twórców skupionej w 2 Korpusie Polskim w czasie II wojny światowej, jak również analiza jej najbardziej charakterystycznych motywów w kontekście tradycji polskiego romantyzmu, „odgrywanych" na trasie i w rolach poetów-żołnierzy Korpusu. Studium wykorzystuje wszystkie tomiki poetyckie, a także inne literackie publikacje wytworzone na długiej trasie ze Związku Sowieckiego, gdzie trzon Korpusu się uformował w 1941–1942, przez Bliski Wschód, Włochy, aż do ostatniej stacji – emigracji, najczęściej w Londynie. Materiał ten jest analizowany w nawiązaniu do badań nad polską poezją czasu II wojny oraz porównawczych studiów nad polską tradycją romantyczną, zwłaszcza literaturą Wielkiej Emigracji. Ten porównawczy punkt widzenia i metoda stosowane są we wszystkich częściach ułożonej chronologicznie analizy. Od prezentacji zróżnicowanego życia kulturalnego Korpusu, przechodzi ona do zwięzłego zobrazowania grupy ponad 80 czynnych w nim poetów. Studium skupia się na analizie głównego tematu, który formuje postrzeganie czasu w świecie przedstawionym przez żołnierską poezję: motywu drogi czy ścieżki. Odsłania fenomen pewnego zbliżenia nader różnych „szkół" i stylów (od awangardy i futuryzmu, poprzez neoromantyzm do tekstów kabaretowych) pod naciskiem doświadczeń wojny i wygnania, jak również siły wielkiej romantycznej tradycji poezji polskiej, która formowała się na podobnej trasie: od Rosji, Syberii, przez Bliski Wschód, do Włoch, gdzie Polacy walczyli pod Napoleonem, do Londynu i Paryża – centrów Wielkiej Emigracji. Toposy męczeństwa, wzmocnione przez Syberię i pobyt na Ziemi Świętej, bezdomności, doświadczeń bojowych, „zdrady" zachodnich

sojuszników (Teheran, Jałta) są efektywnie „odświeżone" w takim właśnie komparatystycznym podejściu.

Słowa klucze: poezja polska, II wojna światowa, 2 Korpus Polski, romantyczna tradycja literacka, wygnanie

The well-known literary themes of homelessness, forced separation from the homeland and being sentenced to wander a hostile or at least foreign world, themes of the impossibility of return to the motherland and the necessity of living in an "alien" country – a stepmother-country – are not, of course, a Polish "invention". Neither are the related themes of exile, wandering, and pilgrimage. However, these themes are undoubtedly deeply rooted in Polish collective memory. In terms of their significance for the historical experience of the Polish people they give the feeling that they can understand as few others "the tears at the rivers of Babylon", yearning or the need which dominates all wanderers to return to Ithaca, to return home. A desire so strong that even long, at least seemingly hopeless wandering does not suffice to subdue it.

These motifs are inextricably bound up with not only Polish consciousness, but also with the literature of two periods in Polish history. The earlier, which has engraved itself more strongly on our consciousnesses, is the nineteenth century, and particularly the romanticism of that century.

The second period which is very clearly bound up with romantic models of thought and feeling occurred during the Second World War and the early post-war period. The "romanticism" of this period existed simultaneously in both the work of young war poets in Poland as well as in the poetry of exile, born in the communities of wartime wanderings after 1939.

Particularly interesting in this regard are the poetic works of Polish soldiers, and specifically the works created in the ranks of the Second Polish Corps – not only the largest Polish unit fighting on the side of the Western Allies, but also the most important cultural, printing and educational centre outside Poland during the war. In the case of their poetry, circumstances did not simply lead to a style and feeling of closeness to romanticism – the soldiers of the Second Polish Corps almost exactly shared the fate of the romantics. They passed the same "milestones" which developed the collective consciousness of Poles during the partitions, and which became the supporting pillars of the national mythology.

The central experience was the 123 years of slavery under the Austrian, Prussian and Russian partitions from the end of the eighteenth

century. These years were filled with collective repressions, among which the mass deportations of Poles to Siberia or other places of exile in the Russian empire. The years of partition were divided very distinctly by the *caesurae* of consecutive uprisings for independence (1794, 1830–1831, 1863, 1864). Their consequences were mass forced political emigrations, the so-called Great Emigration. Another important chapter of our nineteenth-century history – forming the above-mentioned canon of national consciousness – was the participation by Poles in the Napoleonic Wars. An important part of this experience were the battles of the Polish Legions formed in Italy in 1797 under the leadership of General Jan Henryk Dąbrowski, the clearest and most enduring legacy of which are the words to the present-day national anthem. The reward for their fidelity and for the blood spilt on alien fronts was meant to be help in gaining a free and independent Poland. Finally, a substitute for independence arose: the Duchy of Warsaw called into life by Napoleon. Its existence was brief, from 1807 to 1815 when it was abolished by the Congress of Vienna.

Memory of these experiences, and also our way of thinking about them (their own and not other interpretations) lasted for generations thanks in large measure to romantic poetry, which consciously undertook the mission of maintaining national identity.

The world-views of wartime and post-war migrants[1] were formed decisively by the romantic tradition and a sense of the parallels in historical experience. At least basic familiarity with this history and tradition was the essential piece of "baggage" which no migrant ever parted from. Memory of the past imposed itself on the experience of the twentieth century – there was a universal feeling of the unavoidability and implacability of Polish fate. Grandsons followed their forefathers to Siberia, a new wandering-emigration, as they fought far from Poland for Poland, as they fought for other peoples' freedom, as they also lost an independent fatherland: in 1939, when Poland was attacked by both Germany and Russia; and in 1945, when as a result of the conferences in Teheran, Yalta and Potsdam (felt as a betrayal by the Western Powers of their always-loyal Polish ally), Poland became the Soviet prey.

1 A valuable study of emigrant attitudes is the article by Krzysztof Dybciak, "Powojenne spory. Światopogląd emigracyjnego piśmiennictwa na terenie Wielkiej Brytanii w latach 1945–1956", *Arka* 5/1 (1987): 22–36. The Polish spelling of surnames has been preserved throughout the article. All titles in the footnotes are in the original language.

The History of the Second Polish Corps

The history of the Second Polish Corps had its origins in July 1941 when, on the basis of Polish-Soviet undertakings, the Polish Army in the USSR was called into being under the leadership of General Władysław Anders, recently released from prison in Moscow. Soldiers were recruited from among thousands of Polish exiles, prisoners and prisoners-of-war (those who had fallen into Soviet hands after the USSR invaded Poland on 17 September 1939[2]). From March to September 1942, the Polish Army (with as many civilians as possible) evacuated from the USSR to the Middle East: some to Palestine, some to Iraq. However, Iraq was the ultimate "rallying point" for the soldiers and therefore the true birthplace of the Second Polish Corps. There, in Autumn 1942, the forces from the Soviet Union were joined with the Independent Division of Carpathian Sharpshooters (an earlier brigade which had been stationed in the Middle East since 1940 and had several victories in the Libyan campaign, most notably Tobruk[3]). The leader of the Second Polish Corps formed in this way[4] (numbering approximately 53,000 soldiers) was General Anders.

It was not immediately possible to speak of the unity of the Corps – the divide between into two groups even found expression in the commonly-used system of nicknames: those from the Soviet Union were known as *Orthodox* or *Buzułuki*,[5] in contrast to the *Pharaohs* of the Carpathian Brigade. There was also a third, less numerous group of instructors sent to the division from England, known as the *Lords*. With the passage of time, the different experiences of the exiles and the veterans of the African campaign in the first three years of the war lost their significance, being covered over by new, collective experiences.

The first of these was training in the desert of Iraq and the mountains of Syria and Palestine. Then the period in Egypt, waiting to be taken to Italy where the Corps became part of the British Eighth Army. Then at last fighting side by side in the Italian campaign, marked by successive victories. From the battle on the River Sangro (in January 1944) through

2 In total approximately 1.5 million Polish citizens were to be found in the USSR at the time.

3 In Tobruk, fighting alongside the Ninth Australian Division, the legend of the Brigade was born: the resolute, heroic, rats of Tobruk. (German propaganda termed the defenders of Tobruk in this disrespectful way, however, in the face of German intentions, the label became a badge of honour).

4 Though the name only applied from 1943.

5 The term comes from the city of Buzuluk in Russia where the Polish Army was initially formed.

the taking of Monte Cassino, the main point of German resistance before Rome, the later battles on the Adriatic coast, the liberation of Loreto, Ancona, until the freeing of Bologna in April 1945. After the end of hostilities, the Corps remained in Italy as an army of occupation. In this period the Second Corps continued to increase in size (the number of soldiers grew to 120,000), filled by new volunteers: soldiers of the AK (the Polish Home Army) and former prisoners of war. Initially the soldiers hoped for the quick outbreak of a third war, this time with the Soviet Union, which would restore the former borders of Poland. It quickly became apparent, however, that it would not come to war. It was the darkest of times for the Second Corps: a final coming to terms with loss – with the awareness that the future of the fatherland had not been decided by the heroism of soldiers at Monte Cassino or Bologna, but by the cool calculations of the leaders of the superpowers at Teheran, Yalta and Potsdam.

Despite the propaganda of the British, an insignificant number of soldiers chose to return to Poland. As a result, the British government decided in 1946 to transfer the Second Corps to England and to demobilize it by transferring the soldiers to the Polish Resettlement Corps (*Polski Korpus Przysposobienia i Rozmieszczenia* – PKPR), a paramilitary unit under British command. During the two-year period of service, they had courses intended to prepare them for new civilian trades (for example as watchmakers, carpenters, shoemakers, or tailors) as well as English language courses. 114,000 people passed through PKPR up to the end of 1946, and 91,000 settled in various Western European countries and in America. The real "permanent" number of soldier-emigrants was only to be definitively set in later years.

The literary melting-pot of the Second Corps

Alongside its imposing martial achievements, the Second Corps also made a huge contribution to wartime Polish culture, as an environment in which many great writers worked. There were novelists (Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, Teodor Parnicki, Józef Czapski, Melchior Wańkowicz, Roman Brandstaetter) poets (of which more in a moment) and remarkable reporters and journalists (Adolf Bocheński, Juliusz Mieroszewski, Jerzy Giedroyc). Many magazines were produced (there were eighty in Italy alone at the end of the war), with "White Eagle" at the forefront.[6]

6 I write more about this in my book: Justyna Chłap-Nowakowa, *Sybir, Bliski Wschód, Monte Cassino. Środowisko poetyckie 2. Korpusu i jego twórczość* (Kraków: Arcana, 2004).

Some were at phenomenal level of editorial and literary quality, as well as being very diverse in character. It was around these that the cultural life of the Second Corps organised itself: they became a true "forge" of literary talents, notably of poetry. Many books were published (from both new and classic literature, for example the hundred-volume "White Eagle Library" edited by Jerzy Giedroyc as well as more than fifty volumes of poetry), along with textbooks and brochures. At the same time, military publishing units (the Publishing Section and Cultural and Press Section of the Second Corps) and civilian publishers (the Palestinian publishing house "W Drodze"; the "Literary Institute"[7] coming out of the Second Corps) functioned superbly as educational publishers, meeting the burning educational needs of Polish children evacuated from the Soviet Union. Leisure institutions were also unusually inventive, especially the theatres: for example, the *Czołówka Rewiowa* and *Czołówka Teatralna*.

The most numerous group among the writers of the Second Corps were the poets. The list of authors – "professionals" and amateurs – publishing work during the war (in the press, in anthologies, and in individual volumes) runs to more than eighty names. The number of people writing poetry, however, was significantly higher.

The poetic elite of the Second Corps, restricted here to some several names, was created by both authors well-known before the war and those who made their debuts during wartime. The list of authors includes poets with personal experience of the Soviet Union. They were: Władysław Broniewski, the most renowned and highly-esteemed poet of the Second Corps; Józef Bujnowski and Marian Czuchnowski – two leaders of the pre-war poetic *avant garde*; Feliks Konarski and Kazimierz Krukowski – connected before the war, as in the Second Corps, with the cabaret and theatre; finally Anatol Krakowiecki, Beata Obertyńska,[8] Anatol Stern and Tadeusz Wittlin. The following were linked with the Carpathian Brigade: the superb pre-war satirist and cabaret artist Marian Hemar,[9] the leader of the "Carpathian" poets (among other things the author of the hymn *The Carpathian Brigade*) and creator of soldiers'

7 Founded by Jerzy Giedroyc in Rome in Spring 1946 (from where it moved to Paris, publishing amongst other things the monthly magazine "Kultura") the Literary Institute was for years one of the most important centres of emigrant Polish literature.

8 Both were authors of terrifying volumes of memoirs recalling their Soviet experiences: Anatol Krakowiecki, *Książka o Kołymie* (Londyn: Katolicki Ośrodek Wydawniczy "Veritas", 1950) and Beata Obertyńska (under the name Marta Rudzka), *W domu niewoli* (Rzym: Oddział Kultury i Prasy 2. Korpusu, 1946).

9 Hemar was not formally attached to the Second Corps (indeed he left the ranks of the Corps in 1942 and went to London), however, in respect of his long-time and soldierly in spirit output, he was regarded by the soldiers of the Second Corps as "theirs".

theatre; Stanisław Młodożeniec, a colourful pre-war futurist. Ksawery Glinka, a poet who made his debut before the First World War, settled in Jerusalem in 1942. And finally, a very interesting group made up of those freed mainly from German camps: Bronisław Przyłuski, Stanisław Czernik, Tadeusz Sułkowski, Kazimierz Sowiński and Adolf Fierla.

In the group of less experienced authors, who turned to poetry only in the war years, those who had come from the Soviet Union also dominated: Czesław Bednarczyk, Zdzisław Broncel, Jerzy Dołęga-Kowalewski, Stefan Legeżynski, Artur Międzyrzecki, Henryk Mirzwiński, Jan Olechowski, Halina Terlecka, Janusz Wedow, Jerzy Woszczynin and Józef Żywina. The young faction of the Carpathians was created by Bogumił Witalis Andrzejewski, Bolesław Kobrzyński, Jerzy Laskowski and Tadeusz Sowicki. Maria Petry stayed in Palestine for the duration of the war, whereas Józefa Radzymińska and Zofia Górska were the leaders of the "Italian influence". (Most of the above-mentioned also either wrote or translated poetry after the war).

The works of these poets (as well as many others, less well-known), scattered among many journals, daily papers and magazines, was saved in large measure due to the efforts of Jan Bielatowicz, a Carpathian Brigade poet and also a superb literary critic, who collected these verses in four anthologies corresponding to periods in the history of the Second Corps.[10]

This explosion of poetic creativity was understandable – poetry gave authors the chance to express reactions almost instantly; writing live became not only a commentary and chronicle of contemporary events, but also a seismograph, expressing common moods and feelings. It was at the same time a instrument of immediately influencing the reader.

Soldierly poetry achieved the scale of a mass phenomenon, spontaneous and to a large degree uniform. The shape of the verse was formed above all around the experience of the Polish romantics, from whom were "borrowed" not only motifs, phraseology and vocabulary, but also melody, rhythm, stylistic figures, versification and the appellative function of the texts.[11] The most obvious sign of the vitality of these models

10 *Poezja Karpacka. Zbiór wierszy żołnierzy Brygady Strzelców Karpackich*, ed. Jan Bielatowicz (Jerozolima: W Drodze, 1944) (hereafter *PK*); *Azja i Afryka. Antologia poezji polskiej na Środkowym Wschodzie*, ed. Jan Bielatowicz (Palestyna: Oddz. Propagandy i Kultury D-twa Armii Polskiej na Wschodzie, 1944) (hereafter *AiA*); *Nasze granice w Monte Cassino. Antologia walki*, ed. Jan Bielatowicz (Rzym: Oddział Kultury i Prasy 2. Korpusu, 1945) (hereafter *NgMC*); *Przypływ. Poeci 2. Korpusu*, ed. Jan Bielatowicz (Rzym: Oddział Kultury i Prasy 2. Korpusu, 1946) (hereafter *Prz*).

11 Another set of models was provided by "Skamander", a pre-war poetry group which was unusually popular and fashionable, but also worthwhile.

in soldierly poetry along with the feeling of spiritual continuity with their predecessors was the appeal to the deepest layers of the national consciousness.[12] At the same time these themes were updated: they were put in a contemporary context, in order, however, that they remain recognisable and readable as references.

In the case of less able poets, this uniformity, repetition and aesthetic conservatism certainly resulted from lack of skill in going beyond the forms. When talking, however, about poetic individuality it represented a deliberate resignation from innovation, with respect to reader expectations and the needs of the moment: the reader (or student) would better understand the content in a familiar form.

The situation in which these soldier-poets or soldier-exiles found themselves led to the consolidation of the poetic community. They created a situational-biographical community; the biographies of the poets, though individual, can be grouped into types.[13] They did not, however, form programmatic groups or groups based on generations. The feeling of connection with their fellow writers-in-arms and their readers was, however, very strong. This explains the frequent use of the first person plural – in the name of the collective, touching on subjects significant for all, or expressing common feelings and experiences – often common to the entire nation.[14] It was undoubtedly a romantic inheritance.

Wanderers

Regarding the world presented in the poetry of Second Corps, we see at once its unprecedented variety; deepening our analysis, however, we see many similarities, the most important of which in the perception of time and space in the pattern of a road or path.

The first and most obvious issue concerning the role of time as a fundamental element of the presented world is the very clear presence of historical *caesurae* marking the beginning of the given theme or thematic

12 See, among others: *"Ktokolwiek jesteś bez ojczyzny…" Topika polskiej współczesnej poezji emigracyjnej* ed. Wojciech Ligęza, Wojciech Wyskiel, Łódź 1995; Jerzy Jarzębski, *W Polsce czyli wszędzie* (Warszawa: PEN, 1992).

13 Wojciech Ligęza has written about this: idem, "Między autentykiem a mitem", [the introduction] in: *Wiatr nas nosi po świecie. Antologia polskiej poezji powstałej na obczyźnie 1939–1945*, ed. Bogusław Klimaszewski, Wojciech Ligęza (Kraków: Baran i Suszczyński, 1993), 20.

14 Józef Wittlin, "Blaski i cienie wygnania", in: idem, *Orfeusz w piekle* (Paryż: Instytut Literacki, 1963), 139–152.

thread (the points marking the ends are not as clear). Undoubtedly, important dates were such thematic borders: the outbreak of war; the invasion of Poland by the Soviet Union; the early formation of the Polish Army in the USSR; dates of particular battles; "Yalta"; and of course the end of the war, marking the beginning of emigration.

Another truism is the unevenness with which time flows (of course this means the perception of the flow of time), depending on the situation in which the lyrical subject found itself. In exile time passed slowly (exile was a centuries-long torture), while when acting, and especially when soldiers entered battle, things were otherwise: time passed much more quickly. Individual problems led to a reduced perception of time to one of its episodes or aspects, depending on the "privileges" of, for example, the past (the time of recollections), the present or the future – depending on the character of the poem. Very often, for example, recalling country or one's nearest and dearest, although painful, allowed exile to forget their present suffering for a moment. There existed only the past, living in memories, and the future, with its one true fixed point – return and a final end to suffering. In other works, generally more pessimistic, there existed only the present, without any kind of past or future perspectives.

The central theme forming the time-perception of the world presented in soldier poetry, and very present in the poetry of Second Corps, was the motif of the road or path. It appeared, however, with manifold changes, in all stages of the wartime wanderings of the Anders Army. Beginning with the descriptions of the wartime road to the Army – through the "green line", via Hungary, to the Carpathian Brigade, from France, Romania, from the camps, prisons or oflags (POW camps for officers), through wartime wandering, and then soldierly march "do Polski" – to Poland, and then the post-war road to emigration. The fundamental metamorphoses of this motif are best shown by the poetry of soldiers evacuated from the USSR.

At once, we see in their path the deportation to Siberia, *the country of livid fog* (Seweryn Ehrlich, *Northern Dawn, AiA*) signifying the deaths of their compatriots on this hellish journey. Most often, the picture is of travel in crowded cattle-cars. Sometimes these are terrifyingly naturalistic descriptions (Jerzy Bazarewski, *Road to the North, AiA* or Beata Obertyńska *In a cattle-car*[15]) when those who are otherwise very economical, surprise us with their cool "technical" precision (Bohdan

15 Obertyńska, *W domu niewoli*, 352.

Ożarowski, *Echelons*[16]). In other works the road appears only in a roundabout way (for example, in Letter by A. Krakowiecki, the only trace of the 43-day journey to Kolyma is the *crowded heaven of the car*). The path of some to the lager was by river, on so-called barges (Beata Obertyńska, *Peczora*[17]). In the poem *The Rain is Falling*[18] by Czyżewski, we see how *the ranks tug the wanderer* (an unnamed blusterer who died in 1942) *to the east*, symbols referring straight back to the romantic vision. It was always, however, an unknown road, whose length in time and space was not defined.

And then began the wandering through the soviet nameless hell (Beata Obertyńska, *Peczora*). Dante's Hell with its motif of circles became a particularly effective metaphor for Siberia. All roads led beneath the whistle of the whip[19] (Bolesław Redzisz, *Bonfire at Vologda*): or building railways *in the "white nights" and in the dark half-night of the snowstorm* where each *had to dig and carry wheelbarrows/ with seven cubic metres of frozen earth* (Stanisław Brochwicz-Lewiński *Road to Poland*[20]) or logging taiga forest (Jerzy Woszczynin, *Lumberjack*, *AiA*) or while "touring" the Gulag Archipelago – as with wrote Czuchnowski in his autobiographical poem, *Writing*, *AiA*, in which he enumerated his camps – "health resorts" (Odessa, Kharkhov, Gorky, Kotlas and Uchta). But this forced displacement was devoid of purpose for these prisoners and exiles; with time it became a road to nowhere, with no end and often without hope that any other fate but loss and death was possible (Halina Terlecka, *Steppe*[21]). Another romantic theme returns here: the lonely grave in a foreign land.

16 Bohdan Ożarowski, *Droga do ojczyzny. ZSRR. Środkowy Wschód. Italia. Anglia* (Londyn: Oficyna Poetów i Malarzy, 1990), 20. All of the references to his poetry in this study come from this volume.

17 Obertyńska, *W domu niewoli*, 348.

18 (?) Czyżewski, "Spływa deszcz", *Junak* 3/13 (1945): 3.

19 The whip of course is one of the lexical traces of how the twentieth-century Siberia was regarded through the prism of the experiences of the romantics. The majority of verses by Redzisz come from the volume Bolesław Redzisz, *Droga do Polski* (Bagdad: Wydział Informacji i Propagandy A.P. na Wschodzie, 1943); other citations will be given individually.

20 All citations from Brochwicz-Lewiński come from the volume Stanisław Brochwicz-Lewiński, *Droga do Polski. Sekstyny niepolityczne* (Jerozolima: published by the author, 1946).

21 All citations from Terlecka come from the volume Halina Terlecka, *Stepem i oceanem* (Edynburg: Składnica Księgarska, 1944).

Soldiers on the road to Poland

The opposite of such a time perception came very suddenly, created by external, non-literary factors – the formation of the Polish Army in the USSR. Martyrological themes did not, it is true, disappear altogether, but the road ceased to be a wandering one, but became a march or pilgrimage with a strictly directed aim. The aim, of course, was Poland. The division between the wanderer and the pilgrim was of course, inherited from the romantics.[22] In contrast to the wanderer, the pilgrim knows the purpose and aim of his path – a holy purpose. (The mix of religious of patriotic and religious feelings meant that Poland became something sacred, even a *second Holy Land*, as Hemar wrote). Similarly, the theme of the collective Polish pilgrimage was revived. However, the symbol of the ragged soldier-wanderer, although recalling romanticism, was truly developed by Stanisław Wyspiański and Stefan Żeromski, part of the early twentieth-century literary foundation of Polish independence.

The happy turn of fate, whose external, but symbolic sign was the putting on of uniform (Zdzisław Broncel, *Virtuti Militarii, AiA*; Czesław Dobek,[23] *We are again an Army*) and the mood of hope and expectation did not fail to leave its mark on the time-perception of poetry. This time the present almost disappears, covered by the future: the suffering of "today" ceases to matter in the context of the joyous prospects for the future (F. Konarski, *They walked…*[24]). The mood of those days is reflected in the titles of the mass of verse which appeared (Jerzy Bazarewski, *Return*,[25] Józef Żywina, *The road before me*[26]) or in the titles of the

22 Compare with Irena Maciejewska, "Topika tradycji narodowych", in: *Słownik literatury polskiej XX wieku*, ed. Alina Brodzka, Mirosława Puchalska, Małgorzata Semczuk, Anna Sobolewska, Ewa Szary-Matywiecka (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1992), 1124–1130; as well as Anna Nasiłowska, "Topika-Motywy-Tematy", in: *Słownik literatury polskiej XX wieku*, 1078–1082; as well as Wojciech Ligęza, "Problematyka 'miejsc wspólnych' we współczesnej polskiej poezji emigracyjnej", in: "*Ktokolwiek jesteś bez ojczyzny…" Topika polskiej poezji emigracyjnej*, 19–43.

23 Czesław Dobek, "Jesteśmy znowu wojskiem", *Orzeł Biały* 2/1 (1942): 3.

24 All the wartime verses by Konarski come from the volume F. Konarski, *Piosenki z plecaka Helenki* (Rzym: published by the author, 1946), the post-war references from *Wiersze sercem pisane…* (Chicago: Hollywood Press, 1972).

25 Jerzy Bazarewski, "Powrót", *Na Szlaku Kresowej* 2/7 (1945): 19. Published also: *Junak* 3/13 (1945): 27.

26 Józef Żywina, "Przede mną droga", in: idem, *Rozmowa z księżycem* (Rzym: Oddział Kultury i Prasy 2. Korpusu, 1945), 19.

collections published in the Middle East (for example Janusz Wedow, *On the road to the fatherland*, Bolesław Redzisz, *The Road to Poland*)[27].

Of course, the motif of the return to Poland appeared in works written before the amnesty, especially in prayers or letters (replacing real letters, which were of course impossible to send). These visions of return, however, though extremely evocative, remained dreams, devoid of any clear prognosis in regard to the time and manner of actual return (characteristic of poetry in the army):

> The sweet word "fatherland", the holy word "Poland"…
> O, when will the Lord give me these great words
> As once again a new reality and clarity?
> (Halina Terlecka, *Confession to the fatherland*)

The road taken by the former exiles will not be *easy, straight or kind* (Czesław Rosiński, *Today and tomorrow*) when they leave the gate of the camp in Buzuluk symbolising liberation. In any case, in their striving they will not be happy, though their reward and cheer was to be the hope expressed in the words of General Anders that "perhaps not all of us, but we shall get there". This very attitude, characteristic of all the poetry of Second Corps, can be found in one of the best-known works from this period:

> Cadets, leader of the team, there is no death: there is an order
> Every grave is a trench, every body a signpost
> (Władysław Broniewski, *The Road*)

Visions of a victorious return appeared as general leitmotifs in the songs composed in the Soviet Polish Army, and also later in the Middle East.

The same perception of time and space, in which all roads lead to Poland, is also characteristic of the poetry of the Carpathians, whose aim – *through the Carpathians to Poland* – was defined soon after the creation of the Brigade. This slogan was immortalised by, among others, two Carpathian hymns: in *The Carpathian Brigade* by Hemar and *The Soldier's Song* by Młodożeniec.

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27 Janusz Wedow, *W drodze do ojczyzny. Wiersze wybrane* (Tel Awiw: Harcerskie Biuro Inform., 1942); Bolesław Redzisz, *Droga do Polski* (Bagdad: Korpus Oficerski 18. Pułku Piechoty, 1943).

The certainty that nothing would now stop them in their march to the fatherland was also associated with the ranian shore. The former exiles and soviet prisoners greeted by *clamorous streets, exotic clothes* (Bohdan Ożarowski, *Letter to my sister*[28]), by the new and unknown world of the Orient. Before they had begun to recognise the exotic "otherness" of this world (Ludwika Biesiadowska, *The day today*[29]) they perceived the characteristic that was most important to them: that this was a truly free world. In all works there appear traces of joy and disbelief in their luck (*It's hard to believe, my God, / That the growing shore – is Iran* (Artur Międzyrzecki, *Port Pahlevi*. *Joyfully I remember Pahlevi* is similar).

A feeling of liberation and reawakening from the edge of death dominated, along with the consciousness that the change in their fortune was a sign of God's grace – *O, God, is it true that you once again give us life?* – asked Wedow. The end of the journey, though distant – through the *fatherland of the unknown*, as Zygmunt Nowak wrote in his poem *I return again* – seemed however beautifully clear.

Descriptions of the Middle Eastern World

The oriental world soon began to appear in soldiers' poetry (in the poetry of the "Carpathians" it was evident much earlier). The poets of Second Corps, finding themselves in the Middle East, willingly attached themselves to various romantic visions of the east which had endured in Polish poetry of the nineteenth century and to the oriental travels of the romantics (to the eastern accents in Mickiewicz's *Crimean Sonnets*, but especially to the works of Juliusz Słowacki[30] inspired by his voyages to Egypt, the Holy Land, Syria, Lebanon, and also Greece and Italy). They also referred to the biblical themes the romantics had made their own (especially the exile and the journey to the Promised Land as well as the tears by the rivers of Babylon).

The motif of the path of exile, well-known from the exile poetry of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, returned: the echo of Psalm 137 was heard actually *by the rivers of Babylon* (Jan Olechowski, *Refugees;*

28 Ożarowski, *Droga do ojczyzny*, 45.

29 Ludwika Biesiadowska, *Po drodze. Zbiór poezji po drodze z Wilna czy Nowogródka na Syberię, a przez Persję, Irak, Palestynę i Egipt do Turcji* (Glasgow: Książnica Polska, 1945).

30 The travels of Słowacki are described in minute detail by Ryszard Przybylski in: idem, *Podróż Juliusza Słowackiego na Wschód* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1982).

AiA, Ksawery Glinka, *Refugees*[31]) and, on the other hand, it is a road for which the guide is the Son of God suffering on the road to Golgotha (Artur Międzyrzecki, *The Road, AiA*).

The short stay of the army in the hospitable lands of Iran did not bring forth great fruits in poetry (though poets do note it, for example in the titles of volumes[32]): the brevity of their stay was reflected in the poem by Stefan Legeżyński bearing the title *Persia Fleeing*[33] (crossed by a transport column taking troops to Iraq). Iran appears instead as a legendary country of gardens and Persian nightingales, as a world of indescribable, softly defined contours (Bolesław Kobrzyński, *Royal Palm* from *The Sincere Guide*; Artur Międzyrzecki, *Kermanshah*[34]).

Only in Iraq did poetry based on eastern motives formed an avalanche. Most was written about Baghdad. Some described its beauty and atmosphere from the thousand and one nights of fairy tales (Bolesław Redzisz, *Baghdad, AiA*; similarly Jan Zaściński, *Legend from Baghdad*[35]): others preferred its homeliness, the atmosphere polonised by the presence of the army:

> A forest of minarets,
> One looks at the Arabs
> But suddenly hears
> "Panie kapral, bakszysz" –
> The Polish town of Baghdad.
> (W. Broniewski, *The Polish Town of Baghdad, AiA*)

A sensitivity to finding similarities to distant lands in the landscapes before them starts to appear, along with places and views from Poland that are dear to the heart (characteristic, of course, not only of verses about Iraq). Janusz Wedow sees in the waters of the Tigris *the foam of the Prut* (*On the Tigris* from the volume *Returning by sail*), Kazimierz

31 All verses by Ksawery Glinka are taken from the volume: idem, *Krwawa Róża. Wiersze* (Jerozolima: published by the author, 1944).

32 Czesław Bednarczyk, *Na postojach. Irak. Iran. Palestyna. Liban* (Tel-Awiw: published by the author, 1943) and the volume by Biesiadowska, already mentioned above (footnote 28).

33 The verses by Stefan Legeżyński, "Persja uciekająca", in: idem, *Sydria. Wiersze jerozolimskie* (Tel-Awiw: "Przez Lądy i Morza", 1944), 3.

34 The majority of verses by Artur Międzyrzecki are taken from the volume: idem, *Namiot z Kanady. Wiersze 1942–1944. Rosja-Iran-Irak-Palestyna-Liban-Egipt* (Tel-Awiw: "Przez Lądy i Morza", 1944); other citations will be given individually.

35 Jan Zaściński, "Legenda z Bagdadu" in: idem, *Pieśń o Warze* (Warszawa: Bellona, 1999); all references to this poet come from this volume.

Nałęcz saw the Dniestr (*Evening on the Tigris; AiA*), Anatol Krakowiecki however paces the streets of Baghdad always seeing Poland (poems from the volume *On the flying carpet*).

However, despite the momentary illusion of homeliness, everything became thoroughly alien, even *steps are ringing without sense, like foreign words*, as Jan Olechowski wrote in *Nights in Mosul (AiA)*. A similar impossibility of finding oneself in this world, where the heart does not feel if it is winter, or if the day is hot, became the subject of the poem *In Baghdad* by Jan Bielatowicz.

Joy sometimes sweetens the experience of a foreign land when familiar birds come into view: sparrows, starlings, storks (S. Legeżyński, *Starlings*, A. Krakowiecki, *Storks*). However, the sight of birds returning to Poland evokes nostalgia (Władysław Marynowicz, *Flight of the Starlings*[36]), leading the author to thoughts of return to his dear ones, to his own place.

Although Iraq was not remembered negatively by Poles, the day the army moved on was the most important day of their time there (A. Międzyrzecki, *My Kirkuk, the last morning in Khanaquin*). The road would lead them through the Holy Land.

It was in Palestine that the lion's share of Second Corps's Middle Eastern poetry would be written. Here also the poetry was most varied, it breathed "with the whole chest"; military and wartime themes would be subordinated to descriptive, reflective, religious and erotic lyrics. The Carpathians were "permanent residents" – among well-known corners, friendly "Polish" shops run by Jews from Poland, restaurants serving schnitzel, Polish *bigos* and vodka, and bands playing "Polish pieces". In this wonderful atmosphere those who had come from Russia felt a thirst for Polishness. For them the transition from the house of slavery to the Holy Land was also a great religious experience. Thus, was in spite of the intensification of military exercises, the stay in Palestine became at the same time a pilgrimage along biblical trails.

From the huge variety of verse composed in Palestine (prayers both collective and personal, litany, confessions of faith, verse about the Virgin Mary, countless works concerning religious holidays, messianic-martyrological lyrics, etc.). I am going to consider only those works in which the motif of "holy places" appears. These are not, however, something the soldier-poets passed by with indifference, by the way – they became the object of pilgrimages by the soldiers. Their faith was renewed there; there they sought faith and found it. In these works we

36 Władysław Marynowicz, "Odlot szpaków", *Przy Kierownicy w Tobruku* 3, no. spec. (July 1943): 9.

can observe a clear change from the works with the feeling of wandering: hope appears, along with distance in respect to their suffering – the road home no longer scares them.

The Old Testament is evoked often: the Egyptian desert and Sinai (J. Żywin *Sinai*, from the volume *Conversation with the moon*); Carmel, where *the Prophet Elijah had his holy visions/ Pure virgins, poczety without zmaza* (Vlastistil Hofman, *Carmel*, from the volume *Through suffering to freedom*) and the eternal and earthly *Valley of Jozafat* (B. Kobrzyński, *Valley of Jozafat*).

The poetry of this period is above all, however, rooted in the New Testament: the soldiers' stay in the Holy Land is a pilgrimage over *the land on which God walked* (C. Bednarczyk, *Promised Land*, from the volume *Halted*) and where one can still find Him (Teodozja Lisiewicz, *On the road to Jerusalem, AiA*).

The most works are devoted to a contemplation of the passion of Jesus and its stations (Vlastimil Hofman *Golgotha*; Janusz Wedow *Gethsemane*). It is also the grave of Christ around which *stood a Polish guard* (Marian Hemar, *Guard*, from the volume *Two Holy Lands*). This event, described in the first stanza of the poem, in later portions loses its present-day "momentary" character, becoming a clear foretelling of Polish messianism: the Polish guard will *stand for eternity - / Covering Cross and Earth*. And finally there is one more place: the road to Emaus. Here from the mouth of the encountered Christ fall the most important words concerning the fate of Poland: Resurrection, just as I rose again… (Janusz Wedow, *I am already returning, AiA*).

In verse written in Egypt (and equally in the earlier poetry by the Carpathians as by the work produced before the evacuation of Second Corps to Italy), both history and the present day are postponed before the reader's eyes: the pyramids,[37] the Sphinx, the Nile, Suez, Alexandria (Adam Jaman, *The Return of the Polish Brigade. An Egyptian Ballad*; *Pk*), Cairo (Tadeusz Wittlin, *Write home first, AiA*; Czesław Bednarczyk, *Cairo, AiA*). They are postponed for life on the borderlands of various cultures and continents. In the work of the Carpathian the wartime face

37 These motifs, the pyramids and the Sphinx, enjoyed popularity, although in certain poems there is a lack of enthusiasm for their power and indestructibility, and indifference towards their age and the events which they have witnessed. The pyramids are, however, a universal symbol of tyranny (Stefan Legeżyński, "Suez Canal", in: idem, *Sydria*, 7), their power built on the deaths of countless victims (J. Laskowski, *Not necessary…*). In such a vision the connection between the building of the pyramids and of the canals in the north is easily made (this was, at least, how the former exiles saw it, for example Legeżyński in "Pyramids", in idem, *Sydria*, 8).

of Africa is also presented: of Tobruk, and the heroic defence of the fortress-city (Tadeusz Sowicki, *Tobruk*, Eugeniusz Kaminski, ***. *For the Transport Staff*,[38] Vlastimil Hofman, *The cemetery in Tobruk*, from the volume *Through the darkness…*).

Reflective or even philosophical lyrics, however, remained on the margins of soldier-poetry – the wartime reality was not favourable for them: first the fighting by the Carpathian Brigade and then – in the works of the "second phase" of Egyptian poetry – soaring above the feverish atmosphere of waiting for the evacuation to Italy and to battle (Artur Międzyrzecki, *Cairo Glances*).

Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Egypt – they were only phases on the road to the fatherland of one's dreams. And even if they drew the attention of soldiers and poets, it was only for a moment, to then become an enchanting recollection. The next phase, in Italy, was supposed to lead straight to Poland.

From the land of Italy to...

The poetry of the Italian period is, like the Middle Eastern verse, "road poetry". It was a road which led the soldiers, and among them the "poets of the march" (A. Międzyrzecki, *Poets of the march*), the whole length of Italy: *how much of the road along Italian rivers have we covered*, Józef Bujnowski asks rhetorically in his rhapsody *In the sun and blood* (from the volume *Birches in flames*). This aim is seen in the mere titles of poetry (for example, Jerzy Bazarewski, *Via Romagnola*, Bolesław Kobrzyński, *Via Adriatica*: both in *NgMC*) or in the creation of whole cycles of poetry reflecting the displacement of Second Corps over the map, an example of which might be the work of Wiktor Szach and Czesław Bednarczyk, who described the "odyssey" of the *grey soldier*.

At the same time, alongside an abundant descriptive-reflective literature a powerful current of fatalistic literature sprang into being (similar in spirit to the earlier poetry by the Carpathians). It is a particular "report" of the progress of the whole campaign by the Polish soldier, of which only a fragment is included in Bielatowicz's anthology *Our limits at Monte Cassino*.[39] The above-mentioned descriptions of the Italian march are accompanied by "moments from history" – the traces of Dabrowski's

38 Eugeniusz Kaminski, "***. Służbie transportowej", *Przy Kierownicy w Tobruku* 1/100 (1941): 1.

39 See also Róża Krystyna Jaworska, "L' Italia in tempo di guerra. Imagini della penisola da Taranto a Bologna, nella opere dei soldati del Second Corpo d' Armata polacco", in: *Viaggiatori Polacchi in Italia. Biblioteca del viaggio in Italia* 28, ed. Emanuele Kanceff,

legions (for example, citations or paraphrases of the Polish national anthem, are included in many works, such as The Road by Konarski, from the volume, Verses written from the heart, giving encouragement that *from the land of Italy it is not far to Poland!*).

The most numerous type of poems were those devoted to the battle of Monte Cassino, as if in this battle was encapsulated everything most important for those fighting in Italy: a chance of the direct fight with the Germans for which they had waited so long, a chance to show the world that Poland had not perished, had in fact achieved victory through heroism, desperate courage and determination and, finally, the hope that this victory would weigh upon the sphere where the fate of Poland would be decided. The work whose popularity would outstrip all others was written during the battle and immediately venerated by those fighting – the song *Red Poppies on Monte Cassino* (words by Feliks Konarski, music by Alfred Schuetz), as symbolic as it was literal, describing the poppies red from Polish blood. In second place came the verse-manifesto by Władysław Broniewski, titled *Monte Cassino* (*NgMC*), showing the determination of those fighting, whom even the greatest losses do not halt in their angry march – to Poland, of course.[40]

In descriptive-reflective lyrics two kinds of works dominate: one type describing the landscape, and another the culture of Italy – its literature, sculptures, painting (also important are Polish souvenirs of Italy), the remains of antiquity, and even some papal themes. In the landscape poetry we find a way of looking at the wanderings of the Anders Army familiar from an earlier period: perceiving its beauty along with its strangeness (Artur Międzyrzecki, *I am alien here, I am different here*[41]). Wandering through Italy, *the barbarians in green battle-dress from the North* (Helena Zelwerowicz, *Layer*[42]) – *blind with yearning* – are aware that in other circumstances they would be fascinated with Italy.

There are, however, works such as *Italia bella* (*NgMC*) by Jan Olechowski, in which there is an unquenchable delight. From them is received a highly populist and clichéd picture of Italy – of the Italian sky, of beautiful Italian women, melodies ringing in the ear, vineyards, the traces of antiquity, cypresses (J. Zaściński, *Avenue of Cypresses*). It is

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Richard Lewanski (Geneve: Centro Interuniversitario di Richerche sul "Viaggio in Italia", 1988).

40 The title of the anthology *Our limits at Monte Cassino* is a quote from this poem.

41 Artur Międzyrzecki, " Ja jestem tutaj obcy, ja jestem tutaj inny", *Na Szlaku Kresowej* 2/10 (1945): 13.

42 Helena Zelwerowicz, "Ścieżka", *Ochotniczka* 4/4 (1946): 14.

worth mentioning as well that both Italy and the Italians are treated with true sympathy, as a country damaged by the war (B. Obertyńska, *Margherita*), and fascism is treated in the poetry of the Second Corps – with some exceptions – as a closed, almost nonexistent, subject.

With the passage of time, descriptive or martial themes began to replace politics. If even the Teheran conference remained (as a subject of verse) in the shadow of the military successes of the Second Corps, Yalta provoked an avalanche: it created a common and complete "about-face" in mood. It also caused a general change in the organisation of time and space in soldierly poetry: circumstances created models similar to those developed in the soviet period – the vision of exile, either unending or undefined, returned. In a less pessimistic version there was a lengthening of perspective: in space as in time.

Lost illusions. Toward emigration

The end of the war, which finally made clear the futility of hopes for independence, frustrated hopes that the behind-the-scenes shift of the allies towards Poland was a misunderstanding which they would retreat from when we threw onto the scale our victories, our suffering, our blood shed *for your freedom*. Such 'calculations' – reminding the allies of our swiftly belittled and unmentioned service for which we would not only receive no reward, but not expect one either, was most sharply presented by poet-satirists led by Marian Hemar (in *Pathetic Satires*) and Feliks Konarski – but done collectively (*the cemeteries grow, all the time distant from the Vistula…* we read in *Hexameters*, *AiA*, by Bolesław Kobrzyński). These texts were normally written in a tone of the bitterest irony and sarcasm (the presence of which was signalled by, among other things, the use of quotation marks, and which tone characterised a significant part of the political poetry of the soldier-poets).

Political problems discussed in the poetry of this period (and later) revolved around the issue of Polish independence – its loss and the possibility of winning it back. From this, the list of the most frequently-occurring motifs and themes is fairly predictable. The most important was the necessity of continued fighting, the loneliness of Poland, the betrayal by the Allies, soviet power in Poland, and visions (whether optimistic or pessimistic) of Poland's future, and, lastly, the decision to return to Poland or remain in foreign lands – as emigrants.

"Yalta" is, strictly speaking, a rallying-cry or signal, the sound of which brings to mind a whole host of associations and the whole field

of antecedents and consequences: if there had been no Yalta, the whole post-war world would have looked different. If there had been no Teheran, no Yalta, no San Francisco, no Potsdam – the *successive criminal pacts and mirages* (Witold Szyfer, *Spring*; see also *Our rye* by Anatol Krakowiecki; *The Empty armchair* by Konarski; *The Philosopher's Stone* by Hemar)[43] – we would be free, and May 1945 would also represent a true end to the war for Poland, and not also the anniversary of the soldiers' emigration… The term Yalta is automatically associated with others (chronologically earlier): the hated Curzon line (representing the new eastern border forced on Poland) and the Atlantic Treaty, the fine-sounding but lying declaration of which Poland believed in (and, as Konarski wrote in *Yalta* it did not mean believing *Judas*, who *instead of silver took in his hand / the Atlantic Treaty…!*)

This led to the devaluation of words before treated as unambiguous, such as "liberation", "freedom" and "victory" – which Poles do not speak differently, but in quotation marks (Józef Bujnowski, *In Praise of "Victory"*, from the volume *Birches in flames*).

The religious poems of this period ceased to be "simple" prayers for return: motifs from exile poetry started to appear, as the heretofore steadfast soldierly "spirit" fought despairingly with downfall. *Prayer* by Jan Olechowski is representative of this group.[44]

One of the main problems in this poetic political journalism is the changing position of Poland in relation to the allies as a result of unfolding events. Initially (until December 1943, that is, until the Teheran Declaration), although one could find a feeling of regret and accusation for the abandonment of Poland by the West in September 1939, an attitude of forgiveness and of not looking back dominated. The confirmed alliance, already from our point of view certified in blood, meant that hope in the common march to victory dominated (Marian Hemar, *To the Allies*, Lucjan Paff, *To the Friends of the English*, Jerzy Bazarewski, *Friendship*).[45]

In the verses appearing at the end of 1943, however, a new note appeared. Although Poland at last fought arm-in-arm with other *allies*,

43 Witold Szyfer, "Wiosna", *Na Szlaku Kresowej* 2/2-3 (1945): 25; Anatol Krakowiecki, "Nasze żyto", in: idem, *Na latającym dywanie* (Londyn: Katolicki Ośrodek Wydawniczy "Veritas", 1951), 31.

44 Jan Olechowski, "Modlitwa", in: idem, *Prostą jak sosna wyrosnąć...* (Rzym: Oddział i Prasy 2. Korpusu, 1944), 85.

45 Marian Hemar, "Do aliantów", in: idem, *Dwie Ziemie Święte* (Londyn: King & Staples, 1942), 14–15; Lucjan Paff, "Do przyjaciół Anglików", in: idem, *Jutro odwet* (Tel Awiw, 1943), 46–47; Jerzy Bazarewski, "Przyjaźń", in: Kultury, *Antologia poezji polskiej 1939–1945*, ed. Stanisław Lam (Paryż: Księgarnia Polska w Paryżu, 1945), 130.

a resignation from the frequently-used "we" of earlier verses (we, meaning Poland and the rest of the allies) and the appearance of a duality: "we" meaning "Poles" and "them" meaning the allies.

It is important to note, however, that this "us and them" did not refer to other soldiers – brothers-in-arms – but to the *lords of the cabinet*. (Churchill became a focus for Polish criticism of the allies, for example in *The Road to Poland* by Stanisław Brochowicz-Lewiński). Allied soldiers, however, are on "our side" (Marian Hemar, *Prophecy*).[46]

The main principle which organises poems describing the relations between the lyrical "us" and "you" or "them" is polarisation: on one extreme is the moral victory of Poland, the absolute certainty in the rightness of Polish opinions ("for us there is no discussion" wrote Józef Bujnowski[47]) and the indisputable justness of the Polish position. On the other, there is the brutal force of the *red executioner* and the treachery of the *British lions* and the *stars*. There was treachery and breaking of promises – and a "conspiracy of silence". A common theme was the search for parallels between the behaviour of the allies and that of Judas and Pilate. Prophetic verses also appeared, concerning the future fates of Poland and the treacherous allies: for us awaited a hard, lonely struggle, with a final victory (*justice we shall achieve alone*) and rebirth; for them nothing waited – On Europe's fallen neck / Flow the young men (speaking of Poles) wrote Redzisz in his poem *Idziemy* (We go).[48]

The treachery of the allies was not only in cabinet. The propaganda of the allies also misled and betrayed us – whether speaking of political impotence or total subordination. The verse by Sowicki *** (inc. *Before you throw on him your beautiful reportage in the press*) published on 5 June 1944[49] (for example, the British censor did not allow open discussion of Soviet crimes in Katyn during the war).

The honour of the Poles is another important and frequently-emphasised theme in the vision of the Poles in those works underlining the difference between "you" and "us". Their word is sacred for them, though they must pay the highest price for it: *And we are of that nation for whom our word - / Though it dies, it does not break. It will come to a bad end, but it will keep the promise* (Marian Hemar, *Conversation with a soldier*).

46 Marian Hemar, "Przepowiednia", in: idem, *Lata londyńskie* (Londyn: Stowarzyszenie Pisarzy Polskich, 1946), 32.

47 Józef Bujnowski, "Dla nas dyskusji nie ma", in: idem, *Brzozom w płomieniach* (Włochy: Referat Kultury i Prasy Bazy 2. Korpusu, 1945), 12.

48 Bolesław Redzisz, "Idziemy", *Pion* 1/1 (Bejrut, 1946): 1.

49 Tadeusz Sowicki, *** (inc. "Nim rzucicie swój świetny reportaż na prasę"), in: *Goniec Karpacki* 3/14 (1944), 3; also in: *Nasze granice w Monte Cassino. Antologia walki*, 171.

Adolf Fierla, in *The Soldier's Ballad* (*Prz*) writes in turn of the pride which is not only the surest, but also the last shield of the steadfast Polish soldier who, losing everything, knows how to enjoy that *in this pride the world could not shake his faith…*

Just as Poles are presented a special people, a "chosen people" so their country is "chosen" in its unity and mission. Poland is *the conscience of the world* (Marian Hemar, *Introductory article*), it is the Ark of true values, of which *Prophecy* by Hemar speaks so movingly. It will be a *new capital of the world* (Jan Olechowski, *New Capital of the World*), a *new Jerusalem*, to which *will be directed a new crusade* (Marian Hemar, *Prophecy*).

In order to fulfil these dreams of regaining "former" Poland, it would be necessary to defeat the "darkness in the East" and also retaining the spark of hope in one's own return to Poland. In works declaring the will for further struggle the unity of thought among soldiers is stressed. The total solidarity of General Anders himself (the leader *of their souls and honour*) with the attitudes of his soldiers was an extraordinarily important factor in reinforcing these views.

AND FROM THE WOUNDS WILL BE POLAND, WHOLE
Or – General, Leader –
FROM THE WOUNDS WILL BE OUR COMMON DEATH![50]

In this direction ran the majority of poems envisioning a future return, whether armed or not. It was, though, not an easy future to place in time: some saw it near, almost within reach, while others ran from such optimism, placing the return in the distant, undefined "sometime" (Jerzy Bazarewski, *Return*[51]).

In *Greeting* by Marian Czuchnowski the return to the country is to take place not long from "today"; but in turn the "today" described in the course of the poem is left undefined.[52]

Perhaps they did not reach Warsaw today
Though they crossed so many countries and seas
They think of the homeland. With a bagnet in hand […]
And they go onward. The march is unbroken.

50 Witold Szyfer, "Generałowi", *Na Szlaku Kresowej* 1/14 (1944): 4.

51 Bazarewski, *Powrót*, 19.

52 Marian Czuchnowski, "Powitanie", in: idem, *Pola minowe* (Londyn: Oficyna Poetów i Malarzy, 1951), 13.

There were, however, works which – in a more or less categorical manner – spoke of the decision to remain outside Poland and explained the reasons for such a decision. Bolesław Kobrzyński, in his poem *Hexameters* written five years after the outbreak of war, has not yet made a final decision, but rather the clearly-expressed fear of his lyrical subject – a soldier – not so much about the chances of return in general, but rather the chances of finding the road to the Poland from which the war exiled him. When they say to you: Poland – think on it for a moment / Let instinct tell you or the homeland you will miss.

The emptiness and confusion connected with the possible return to Poland (or rather, with the impossibility of regaining the world that has been lost) is the leading motif in a cycle of poems by Józefa Radzymińska (*Grey years*, *On a difficult return*, *Interesting end*, *Foreign freedom*[53]).

The tone of satire by Hemar is less pessimistic and angrier and more categorical: endurance in refusal, in refusing to return (*because if they want to go home - / They want to return to their own* – Marian Hemar, *The Return*), in refusing to find a *modus vivendi* with the country which has "gone soviet" is their duty. He attacks the allied poets encouraging Poles to return harshly for covering cynicism and falsehood with their blandishments (M. Hemar, *Liberum veto*).

The Bread of Emigration

At last the day dawned, when they were *no longer soldiers, but civilians, / no longer victors, but losers* (Feliks Konarski, *Conversation with Nina*[54]) finding themselves on English shores. In truth, not all of the Second Corps was evacuated to England, and it was not the "final destination" for all, but England is, however, the place where the history of Second Corps as an active military unit draws to a close, and with it the history of its soldier-poetry – from here its place will be taken by emigrant poetry[55].

The keys to understanding the political status of the emigrant are the words temporariness, uncertainty and impermanence. They describe effectively life in the alien English world (*na angielskiej*

53 Józefa Radzymińska, "Lata siwe", "O powrocie trudnym", "Kres ciekawy", "Obca wolność", in: *Przypływ. Poeci 2 Korpusu*, 92–95.

54 Feliks Konarski, *Rozmowa z Niną*. Recording from F. Konarski's author's evening in London (POSK) 28 VI 1985; from the article author's archive.

55 The world of "Polish London" is very well presented in Rafał Habielski's book *Polski Londyn* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 2000).

obczyźnie), existence *in the station waiting-room* (Kelner), waiting for the train. Olechowski wrote about this in a poetic diagnosis of the time (Jan Olechowski, *Impermanence*[56]). Even the passing of many years in emigration did not change this at all: *Though time weakens the hand and darkens the memory* […] *we were, are and will be – on the march!*[57]

This unearthly "impermanence" means that for many the years of emigration were wasted and fruitless for "real life". Bednarczyk, as cited earlier, underlines this, and returned to the theme many times in later poems (*Meeting of emigrants*, *Biographical fragments*, "*The Tourist*",[58] *Deluge*[59]) Time spent distant from Poland, even such a long time, appears empty: it is a period of suspension. At the same time they were wanderers, tourists: *In the camp they made me a nomad: "Poles…tourists" / And a tourist I became, a tourist without a land / With a foreign passport in my homeland* (Czesław Bednarczyk, "*Tourist*").

Impermanence was often a necessity, but it happened – with the passing of years – that it became a conscious choice. The choice of a life "from a suitcase", the decision to not arrange things "permanently", if it would be sign of becoming accustomed to the status of a "resettled" emigrant and resignation from the feeling that one always marched towards home. A related phenomenon was observed many times in the poetry of soldiers in the early phases of the war: a lack of enthusiasm to perceive and value the beauty of the world they passed, except when it in some way evoked associations with distant Poland. This simple rejection was, however, two-sided: the wanderers did not want or know how to understand this alien world, but the world did not succeed in understanding the situation and soul-condition of the Poles. This was again true in England. Writing of this, without bitterness or accusation against the English, Jan Olechowski, in another "emigrant" verse *In London: a foreign river – I know. You don't understand / And you don't believe. You don't believe.* England was not Poland, it could not therefore be a motherland – it was a stepmother, entirely alien and unwanted. *The heart* – wrote Obertyńska – pulling away *from that land* […] *can never, anywhere else / Accept or put down roots…*[60]

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56 J. Olechowski, "Prowizoryczność", in: idem, *Chwila nocna. Poezje 1945–1950* (Londyn, 1950), 43.

57 Jan Janas, "W marszu", in: *Śląsk pamięci Monte Cassino*, ed. Witold Żdanowicz (Katowice: Muzeum Śląskie, 1999), 276.

58 See in Czesław Bednarczyk, *Rodzaje niezgodności* (Londyn: Oficyna Poetów i Malarzy, 1979), 58.

59 See Czesław Bednarczyk, "Potop", in: idem, *Ziemia trudna* (Londyn: Oficyna Poetów i Malarzy, 1954), 20.

60 Beata Obertyńska, "Jak to się stało...", in: eadem, *Wiersze wybrane* (Warszawa: PIW, 1983), 187.

War poetry, independent of its time or place of creation, is a treasure of universal motifs. It is only necessary to refer to one powerful anthology of war poetry (from Homer to Bosnia) edited by Kenneth Baker[61] to find "eternal" themes of the road and of soldierly wandering. They each have their ends: either death or return to the family hearth (according to the principle of "either with a shield or on a shield"). In the poetry of the Second Corps it is different: return becomes a dream, always receding, and to the roles of soldier and wanderer is added the role of emigrant – and all three become simultaneously true. Soldiers prepared for this threefold role by recalling the romantic tradition of the Great Emigration.

It is worth deciding how Poland changed in these verses, depending on the time and place in which they were created. In works written during the war it remains the country that was left in September 1939, pre-war Poland. In ruins, but known and near. In works written after Yalta, the view changes and splits. From one side in political verses we see a country torn in half by the new eastern border, governed *at the will of the bloody Tsars of Moscow*. On the other, however, we see, under the hated "Muscovite" face, the true face of Poland which no foreign power will ever vanquish as long as the homeland lives in the hearts of its children.

Choosing life in exile, soldiers sentenced themselves to nostalgia – an incurable illness on foreign territory. Each of these writers had their own answers to the question of what they missed most, but their visions of Poland – of course, the "real" one – only appear to differ. Some present a very clear, if idyllic, view in which Poland appears only as a country of unusual beauty. Others present pictures closer to reality, peasant-like, stripped from charm. However, both build a yearning mood of familiarity, evoking a feeling of homeliness and Polishness (perhaps not perfect, but their own!) They do this with simple things, as though it were only necessary to describe a few signs, to make this world present once again. (These *loci comunes* are most often home, family, family, familiar flora, etc.).

Perhaps the most beautiful picture of Poland is from a distance, free of cheap decoration, exaggerated idealism and in any case presenting a country not only ideal but also sacred, in the poem *Earth* by Bronisław Przyłuski.[62] This poem timelessly expresses the feeling common to all emigrants:

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61 *The Faber Book of War Poetry*, ed. Kenneth Baker (London: Faber and Faber, 1997).

62 Bronisław Przyłuski, *Ziemia*, in: idem, *Obrona mgieł* (Londyn: Katolicki Ośrodek Wydawniczy "Veritas", 1949), 38.

Perhaps further on, in another country,
A warmer sun beyond the threshold
But we say it with cooling lips
That such an earth will be in paradise.

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