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CANONICITY AND (IN)VISIBILITY OF POLISH AMERICAN LITERATURE

Due to the fact that officially no legitimate bibliography of Polish American fiction exists, and little valuable criticism is available, according to Thomas Gladsky, Polish American literature was not of the main or profound interest to scholars, and “the New World culture and Old Country heritage of approximately fifteen million Americans of Polish descent are [probably] among multicultural America’s best kept secrets”¹. In this context, the question arises whether literature produced by the descendants of Poles in the United States is not worthy of scholarly attention only because literary works, which are labelled as ‘Polish American,’ lack sufficient artistic expression, or maybe they still remain unappreciated because canon, in the popular understanding of the word, on the one hand, seems to constitute the sphere of dynamic interactions between art and literature and, on the other hand, between discourses of politics and economy. Taking into consideration the polysystem theory, advocated by Itamar Even-Zohar, the aim of the present article is to address the question of

¹ T. Gladsky, *From Ethnicity to Multiculturalism: The Fiction of Stuart Dybek*, “Melus” 1995, vol. 20, p. 105.

(in)visibility of Polish American literature in the context of the history of American ethnic literature(s) and the ongoing debate on the canon formation.

If Polish American literature is still perceived as “multicultural America’s best kept secret,” as Gladsky once noticed, the only exception is Karen Majewski’s study *Traitors and True Poles: Narrating a Polish American Identity: 1880–1939*, published in 2003 by Ohio University Press, as it includes the list of Polish American immigrant fiction writers, who wrote their works in Polish. In Thomas Napierkowski’s opinion, Majewski’s landmark publication constitutes a credible bibliography even though, as Majewski herself maintains, “university repositories facilitated the process, it still meant tracking down clues and half-clues about authors and titles buried in Polish language histories and memoirs [...], [and] some works have undoubtedly been missed”². Thomas Gladsky’s pioneering study *Princes, Peasants and Other Polish Selves* is also worth mentioning at this point because Gladsky was probably among the first scholars, who coined the existence of Polish American fiction and his literary work “has immeasurably enriched our knowledge of the treatment of Polish Americans in American literature”³. Although Gladsky offers his readers the analysis of the enormous number of works

² K. Majewski, *Traitors and True Poles; Narrating a Polish-American Identity: 1880–1939*, Athens 2003, p. xiii.

³ T. Napierkowski, *Does Anyone Know My Name? A History of Polish American Literature*, “Polish American Studies” 2005, vol. LXII, no. 2, p. 26.

written by the host culture, i.e. consent writers, who wrote about Poles in America, as well as the analysis of the literature of descent penned by Polish American authors themselves, still there does not exist any official list of Polish American English language immigrant fiction writers.

The complicated nature of ethnic literature implies that the brief presentation of the literary history of Polish American penmen is far from simple or straightforward as the problems occur at the outset, and they are connected with defining the Polonian writer and Polish American literature itself. Franciszek Lyra in his article “Following the Cycle: The Ethnic Pattern of Polish-American literature,” published in 1985, suggests that “the whole subject [of Polish American writing] bristles with questions that cannot yet be answered, but they must be asked if satisfactory answers are [...] to become possible”⁴. Lyra asks:

Can we include [in the body of ethnic literature] letters and totally artless amateur memoirs? In the traditional genres of belles-lettres, how much emphasis should we put on aesthetic quality and form? What makes an ethnic author ethnic?⁵

Konstanty Symonolewicz-Symmons attempts to answer the question of who exactly might be considered as the Polonian penman and takes into consideration the author’s place of birth,

⁴ F. Lyra, *Following the Cycle: The Ethnic Pattern of Polish-American Literature*, “Melus” 1985, vol.12, no. 4, p. 63.

⁵ Ibidem.

choice of subject matter, and ethnic consciousness. Symonolewicz-Symmons expresses his dilemmas as follows:

Native Poles writing in English, whether Polish subjects play any kind of role in their works or not? Or American literati of Polish extraction, although their works have nothing in common either with Poland or with Polonia? Or authors of Polish nationality who write in English but on Polish subjects? Or writers of Polish nationality or Polish extraction who write in English but on subjects from Polonian life? Or, finally, writers and poets who write in both languages?⁶

Thomas Napierkowski, in his article devoted to the history of Polish American literature entitled “Does Anyone Know My Name?,” does not mention anything about the fiction of the Polish diaspora, written and published in Poland⁷, or the works of immigrant authors who eventually returned to Poland even though their literary works were published in the United States before the authors’ repatriation⁸. Therefore, the above mentioned quotation and Napierkowski’s analysis prove that the answers to

⁶ K. Symonolewicz-Symmons, *Ze studiów nad Polonią amerykańską* as quoted in: K. Majewski, op. cit., p. 5.

⁷ According to Karen Majewski, the evaluation of this body of literature, as well as the analysis of the works produced by authors who remained in the United States but who published in Poland (e.g. the works of Józef Watra-Przewłocki) has been conducted and initiated by Bolesław Klimaszewski, the author of *Sami o sobie?* and *Pod znakiem potu, lez, i dolara*. Ibidem, p. 4.

⁸ Majewski sustains that Czesław Łukaszewicz, Iza Pobóg and Karol Wachtl were the authors who went back to Poland but after some time returned to the United States; while Stefania Laudyn, Henryk Nagiel, Stefan Nesterowicz, Zygmunt Słupski, Helena Staś, and Rudolf Tarczyński were among the authors who returned to and remained in Poland. Ibidem, p. 170.

Symonolowicz-Symmons' question are definitely complex and probably a monolithic definition of Polish American literature does not exist. In a related vein, Karen Majewski concludes that one may observe "equally valid but oppositional definitions [of Polish American prose which] may suit specific purposes and highlight particular qualities"⁹. Clearly, apart from the literary works written in English and created by the second or third generation of Polish Americans, Polish American literature includes in its body also non-English-language texts,¹⁰ for instance the long-forgotten or rather undiscovered until recently "approximately three hundred novels, novellas, short stories, sketches, and anthologies of short fiction [...] produced by the old immigration"¹¹. In this context, the sizeable collection of Polish language immigrant works written in the United States and analyzed by Karen Majewski "put to rest forever the notion that Polish Americans of the old immigration lacked education"¹². The existence of Polish language immigrant works also proves the fact that Gladsky was wrong stating that Polish immigrants produced nothing significant as "they concerned themselves [mainly] with survival, saving money to purchase land [...], and with work"¹³. Therefore, just to re-emphasize, Majewski's publication destroyed an old myth of illiterate Poles

⁹ Ibidem, p. 11.

¹⁰ Although Karol Wachtl, for instance, in his publication *Polonia w Ameryce* considered writers of the old immigration as exclusively Polish penmen but strongly influenced by the American experience. Ibidem, p. 10.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 3.

¹² T. Napierkowski, op. cit., p. 33.

¹³ T. Gladsky, *Princes, Peasants and Other Polish Selves*, Amherst 1992, p. 40.

and reveals the Polish American community not as powerless, silent or sullen, [...] but as dynamic, independent, and pro-active, even pressuring American politicians to work for independence¹⁴.

There exist several reasons for the invisibility of Polish American literature and the absence of literary texts written by Polish Americans in various anthologies presenting multiethnic American literary works. Anthologies which, undoubtedly, contribute to the canon formation because as Paul Lauter (the author of the Heath Anthology of American Literature published in 1990) notices that literary canon stands for authors and texts included in anthologies, biographies and course books.¹⁵

The first reason for this invisibility is connected with the controversies over the rise of Polish American literature and the fact that little is known about works written and published in the United States by Polish immigrants and their children. Such a prevalent opinion has been strengthened by scholars themselves who have maintained that Polish Americans seem to have produced little literature of their own¹⁶. Stanislaus Blejwas, for instance, once the president of the Polish American Historical Association, in his article from 1988 entitled “Voiceless Immigrants,” which was published in *Polish American Studies*, comments:

¹⁴ T. Napierkowski, op. cit., p. 35.

¹⁵ Cf: Paul Lauter, “Canon Theory and Emergent Practice,” in: *Canons and Contexts*, New York 1991, pp. 154–171.

¹⁶ Thomas Napierkowski claims that the great acclaim in the American literary circles was won by authors such as Czesław Miłosz, W.S. Kuniczak, and Jerzy Kosiński – penmen who lived in the United States but who never addressed Polish American topics in their works. T. Napierkowski, op. cit., p. 25.

[...] there does not exist a Polish American literature; that is, a literature penned by Polish immigrants and Polish ethnics about their existence in America, and readily available to the American reading public. While my seminar colleagues overwhelmed us with pages of ethnic literary bibliography (novels, poetry, plays, essays, biographies, and literary criticism), it was, and still is, impossible to locate more than a dozen Polish American novelists and short story writers, while there is not a major Polish American poet or dramatist¹⁷.

Anthony Bukoski, an American writer of Polish descent, who refers to Blejwas's article and analyzes possible causes for the lack of fully developed, or at least appreciated by the national audience, body of Polish American literature, admits that the oral tradition Polish peasants brought with them to America "did not fare well in an urban, industrial society,"¹⁸ because the immigrants did not perceive gaining university education as a guarantee for "a profitable economic return". Additionally, again alluding to Blejwas's comments, Bukoski concludes:

[the] strict adherence to 'the inerrancy of [church] dogma and structure may have effectively stifled intellectual curiosity about the world in which man lives and struggles,' and that the rapidity with which many second generation

¹⁷ S. A. Blejwas, *Voicless Immigrants*, "Polish American Studies" 1988, vol. 45, pp. 5–11.

¹⁸ A. Bukoski, *A Bottle of Milk for Poland: Nelson Algren and I* in: "The Polish Diaspora: Selected Essays from the Fiftieth Anniversary International Congress of the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences of America" 1993, eds. James S. Pula & M.B. Biskupski, p. 193.

American Polonia denied their ancestors' peasant roots 'manifested a sense of cultural and psychological inferiority' toward the past¹⁹.

At the same time, what also deserves scholars' attention is, using Blejwas's terminology, the "serious" external causes for Polonia's lack of voice. In his view, these are American publishers' perceptions that Polish topics do not sell, and Polish Americans neither read nor receive any literary prizes²⁰. One may mention at this point some conclusions drawn by Piotr Wilczek, who analyzed American reception of Polish literature in the United States and stated that "the literatures of smaller nations have a chance to begin to function in the universal canon only if they are published in English translation" (which explains why Polish language Polish American writings are not appreciated as, with only some exceptions, they have not been translated into English) and admitted that "without the four factors of an influential translator, well-known publisher, the recommendation of a respected public intellectual, and enthusiastic reviews in prestigious journals and magazines, even the greatest masterpieces remain unknown in the mainstream market"²¹. Taking into consideration the above mentioned assumptions, one may conclude that canon, in fact, constitutes the sphere of dynamic interactions between art and

¹⁹ Ibidem.

²⁰ Ibidem.

²¹ P. Wilczek, *The Literary Canon and Translation. Polish Culture as a Case Study*, "Sarmatian Review" 2012, vol. Sept., p. 1692.

literature, on the one hand, and discourses of politics and economy on the other hand.

Thomas Napierkowski, who puts forward several factors which might have influenced the lack of the impressive body of Polish American English language literature maintains that the post-World War II immigrants from Poland gave new strength to “the Polish roots of Polonia;”²² in his words:

[post-World War II immigrants’] focus on Poland seems to have detracted from an emerging American agenda for the community. Similarly, the revitalized use of Polish may have psychologically discouraged the use of English as a literary language for the community. This, combined with a general indifference to non-English literature on the American scene, no doubt took its toll²³.

Napierkowski continues that the unfavourable and violent atmosphere of the years which preceded the advent of the Civil Rights Movement, as well as the ethnic awareness did not encourage Polish Americans to create works on their own or literature about their ethnic community. On the contrary, the “overwhelming pressure for assimilation devalued Polish American topics as a subject area for literature and [persuaded] aspiring writers to look elsewhere for their vision and their voice”²⁴. Here is

²² T. Napierkowski, op. cit., p. 41.

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ Ibidem.

how Napierkowski explains the unwillingness to produce literary works by Polish Americans:

Polish Americans [...] found themselves branded as the racists and super patriots, a primary source of America's domestic problems and supporters of unpopular wars abroad. It didn't really matter that hard evidence disproved the first charge or that ethnics had little to say about American foreign policy and were drafted in high percentages. There was little reason for Polish Americans even to aspire to write about their ethnic identity or community (unless to repudiate or demean them) – let alone to try to find a national audience for such literature²⁵.

Whatever the causes, there has existed a strong need to create Polish American English language literature, to give voice to the voiceless, so that they would not have to suffer from “cultural amnesia” or be “stereotyped by those who understand neither [them=Polish Americans] nor [their] experience”²⁶. Artur Waldo, the author of *Zarys historii literatury polskiej w Ameryce*, stresses the significance of the development of Polish American literature (as well as the need to translate Polish language Polonian texts into English). He clearly explains: “we have to give America Polish-American writing, Polish-American literature [in order] to establish a foundation for the power of the Polish spirit in the United States”²⁷.

²⁵ Ibidem.

²⁶ A. Bukoski, op. cit., p. 194.

²⁷ Artur Waldo as quoted in: K. Majewski, op. cit., p. 11.

Despite the fact that more than a half of the century has passed since Waldo's publication of *Zarys historii literatury polskiej w Ameryce*,²⁸ his inducement to create Polish American literature seems to be still valid. Anthony Bukoski, for instance, relying on his own experiences in publishing his short stories, claims that even though Polish American writers have reached the era of multiculturalism, they still have to fight for a place in the American literary world as they are deprived of *any* representation in ethnic literary anthologies, special journal issues, multi-cultural readers, or are even excluded from the discussions of diversity. What might also be surprising, Bukoski continues, is the fact that even the idea of printing a Polish-American dictionary for "the second largest migrant group to the United States in the twentieth century"²⁹ met with considerable hostility as the panel of the National Endowment for the Humanities found it "difficult to be enthusiastic about"³⁰. Thus, analyzing in 1993 the position of aspiring Polish American authors and the obstacles the writers must encounter, Bukoski maintains that "[their] own amnesia will be forced on [them] from outside by an indifferent academy and by seemingly hostile media,"³¹ and adds that "now in the decade of

²⁸ Waldo's *Zarys historii literatury polskiej w Ameryce* was published in 1938.

²⁹ Bukoski, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

³⁰ NEH Division of Research Program's Panel Comment Sheet Number RT-21280 as quoted in: *Ibidem*.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

‘diversity’ and ‘multiculturalism’ [they] are being denied [themselves] again, this time by diversity planners”³².

Apart from their invisibility, another feature of Polonia’s unenviable standing in the American literary world is strictly connected with the tendency of American authors to depict Polish Americans in a blatantly negative way, as if Polish Americans in their community and life “had no history, rituals, or culture to sustain [them]”³³. Clearly, such a tendency results from the lack of American knowledge or authority to contest the prevailing negative impressions of Polish Americans in American literature. This may lead one back to the initial claim that the culture and heritage of Americans of Polish descent still remain a great mystery to mainstream Americans. Magdalena Zaborowska, for example, suggests that although Americans may have heard about the Revolutionary War battles in which Tadeusz Kościuszko and Kazimierz Pułaski led American troops, they are generally not aware of the writings produced by immigrants from Poland, not to mention the whole body of Polish American literature which emerged after the World War II and was created by the descendants of Polish immigrants³⁴. As it has already been suggested, the (American) perception of Poland and, in particular, the American perception of Americans of Polish descent, was influenced by the

³² Ibid., p. 197.

³³ T. Napierkowski, op. cit., p. 25.

³⁴ Cf: M. Zaborowska, *How We Found America: Reading Gender Through East-European Immigrant Narratives*, Chapel Hill, London 1995, p. 14.

portrayals of Polish literary characters in numerous plays, fiction and poems created by more or less two hundred mainly American writers who eagerly employed Polish characters in their literary works. What seems to be significant however, is the fact that most of these unfavourable depictions³⁵ contain “abbreviated characterizations, predictably simplistic portraits, or, in some cases, merely composite Slavic cultural representations”³⁶. The well-known examples include Stanley Kowalski from *A Streetcar Named Desire* written by Tennessee Williams, or Nelson Algren’s literary characters.

Thomas Napierkowski goes even further and concedes that American writers in general failed at presenting the national mosaic of their society and many of their books reinforce negative stereotypes consolidating rather than bolstering the distorted images of ethnic minorities³⁷. It seems that Caroline Golab and Thomas Gladsky share his opinion and add that such warped images, unfortunately, tend to transform Polish American culture into a caricature. Napierkowski lucidly spells out: literature treating Polish Americans was marked by a distinct weakness of

³⁵ Thomas Gladsky claims that only a few writers of classic ethnic or immigrant fiction “sensitively explored” the culture of Polish-Americans among whom were: Karl Harriman, Edith Miniter and Joseph Vogel. Thomas Gladsky, *From Ethnicity to Multiculturalism: The Fiction of Stuart Dybek*, “Melus” 1995, vol. 20, no. 2, p. 105.

³⁶ Ibidem.

³⁷ T. Napierkowski, *Obraz Amerykanów polskiego pochodzenia w literaturze amerykańskiej* in: *Polonia amerykańska: przeszłość i współczesność*, eds. Hieronim Kubiak, Eugeniusz Kusielewicz and Tadeusz Gromada, Warszawa, Kraków, Gdańsk, Łódź 1988, p. 581.

characterization [...] and, in some cases, presenting entire Polish American communities as not only depraved and backward but essentially subhuman³⁸. In order to prove his thesis, Napierkowski analyzes literary works of such American authors as Nelson Algren, Tennessee Williams or Edwin O'Connor, just to mention a few, whose novels, plays and short stories commanded attention of the national audience, as well as the respect of literary establishment, and at the same time moulded the popular negative opinion³⁹ about the American Polonia for years to come. Asserting that the general knowledge about Poles and Polish Americans is so scarce among the Americans, Napierkowski doubts whether American society is able to change their faulty beliefs about the American Polonia, and even announces that the time has come to “thoroughly investigate how American authors present Polish American selves”⁴⁰.

³⁸ T. Napierkowski, *Does Anyone...*, p. 24.

³⁹ Even though representations of Poles in American films are not the major concern in the present article, it might seem vital to notice that scholars who deal with this subject (e.g. Caroline Golab, the author of the article “Stellaaaaa.....!!!!!” published in: *The Kaleidoscopic Lens, How Hollywood Views Ethnic Groups*; or John J. Bukowczyk, who presented cinematic representations of Polish Americans in his article *The Big Lebowski goes to the Polish Wedding: Polish Americans – Hollywood Style* published in: “The Polish Review” 2002, vol. XLVII, no. 2) also notice the tendency of directors to present Polish Americans as laughably awkward. Caroline Golab ventures to claim that “if one wishes to show a crude, brutish, semi-civilized creature, if one wishes to convey the baser forms of lower-class life destroying higher forms of culture and refinement, if one wishes to portray bigotry in any form, one chooses the metaphor that everyone is most likely to know – the ‘Polak.’” Caroline Golab, “Stellaaaaa.....!!!!!” in: *The Kaleidoscopic Lens, How Hollywood Views Ethnic Groups*, ed. Randall M. Miller, Englewood 1980, p. 149.

⁴⁰ T. Napierkowski, *Does Anyone...*, p. 24.

These concerns notwithstanding, the space has begun to emerge for the serious study of works written by Polish immigrants and their descendants in the United States in order to gain a deeper understanding of how immigrant ethnicity was shaped because “recent scholarship has rediscovered a tradition and achievement of literary activity among Polish Americans which are both remarkable and exciting”⁴¹. Polish American literature has a realistic and fair chance to enter the literary canon of ethnic American literatures and Even-Zohar’s polysystem theory would presumably in the best way show the processes which lead to visibility or invisibility of particular literatures once one compares and confronts such concepts as the canon of ethnic literature and the canon of national literature. According to the polysystem theory advocated by Itamar Even-Zohar the canonicity of a particular literary work or the canonicity of a particular body of literature depends on the hegemony of the stronger culture (i.e. mainstream, White Anglo Saxon Protestant culture) which occupies the centre of the polysystem and becomes the ‘donor’ of values. Such ‘donor cultures’ determine the political and economic global reality creating aesthetic and axiological patterns which are then incorporated into the weaker cultures (i.e. Polish American ethnic culture), performing the accepting role. Even-Zohar notices:

⁴¹ T. Napierkowski, *Does Anyone...*, p. 26.

As a rule, the centre of the whole polysystem is identical with the most prestigious canonized repertoire. Thus, it is the group which governs the polysystem that ultimately determines the canonicity of a certain repertoire. Once canonicity has been determined, such a group either adheres to the properties canonized by it (which subsequently gives them control of the polysystem) or, if necessary, alters the repertoire of canonized properties in order to maintain control⁴².

As a consequence, there appears the change in the system of values of the accepting/weaker cultures. This process is also reversed, i. e. the donor cultures absorb selectively the values which were created in the weaker cultures and, as a consequence, naturalize them on its own territory. If one accepts Even-Zohar's way of thinking, it can be concluded that the place of the Polish American culture ('acceptor') within the context of American culture ('donor'), in general, is marginal. The same can be stated about the position of Polish American literature within the context of American ethnic literatures: Polish American literature belongs to the peripheries while African American and/or Jewish American literatures occupy the centre. While American literary market offers multiple anthologies of Hispanic American, African American or Native American literature(s), Polish Americans do not have even one. Visibility or invisibility, as it appears, does not only depend on the aesthetic values of Polish American literary works, but, as it has been already mentioned, on the powers of politics and economy.

⁴² Itamar Even-Zohar, *Polysystem Theory*, "Polysystem Studies" 1990 [= *Poetics Today* 11:1], p.17.

Despite the previously mentioned problems, what seems to be vital, however, is the fact that descent literature of Polish Americans is beginning to capture the attention of the American audience⁴³ and, hopefully, one day it will find its deserved place in the canon of American ethnic literatures, as well as move itself from the peripheries to the centre. To quote Napierkowski again:

[Polish American literature] will document that Polonia has contributed not just economically, politically, and physically to the fabric of American life but artistically, culturally and spiritually as well. It will also preserve the memories of the community and protect them from distortion and falsehood⁴⁴.

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⁴³ Apart from the well-established position on the literary market of such Polish American writers as: Stuart Dybek, Anthony Bukoski, Suzanne Strempek Shea and Leslie Pietrzyk, the new literary voices begin to capture the attention of the readers, e.g. two novels written by Karolina Waclawiak (“How to Get into the Twin Palms” published in 2012 and “The Invaders” published in 2015) and, printed in 2013, “The Lullaby of Polish Girls” written by Dagmara Dominczyk.

⁴⁴ T. Napierkowski, *Does Anyone...*, p. 46.

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Streszczenie

Według Thomasa Gladsky'ego, literatura polsko-amerykańska nie była głównym obszarem zainteresowań dla badaczy, a „kultura Nowego Świata wraz z dziedzictwem Starego Świata w przybliżeniu piętnastu milionów Amerykanów pochodzenia polskiego jest jednym z najbardziej strzeżonych sekretów wielokulturowej Ameryki”. W tym kontekście pojawia się pytanie czy literatura tworzona przez potomków Polaków w Stanach Zjednoczonych nie jest warta zainteresowania środowisk naukowych tylko dlatego, że dzieła literackie skategoryzowane jako „polsko-amerykańskie” cechuje ograniczony potencjał interpretacyjny, czy też dzieła te pozostają niedocenione dlatego, że kanon, w ogólnym rozumieniu tego słowa, z jednej strony jest obszarem dynamicznych interakcji literatury i sztuki, a z drugiej strony wiąże się z dyskursami polityki i ekonomii. Opierając się na teorii polisystemowej propagowanej przez Itamara Evena-Zohara autorka stara się wyjaśnić na czym polega fenomen (nie)widzialności literatury polsko-amerykańskiej w kontekście historii amerykańskich literatur etnicznych i analizuje możliwość znalezienia miejsca dla literatury polsko-amerykańskiej w centrum kanonu literatury amerykańskiej.

Słowa kluczowe: kanoniczność, literatura polsko-amerykańska, teoria polisystemów, autorzy amerykańscy pochodzenia polskiego, Anthony Bukoski, Thomas Napierkowski

Summary

According to Thomas Gladsky, Polish American literature was not of the main interest to scholars and “the New World culture and Old Country heritage of approximately fifteen million Americans of Polish descent are [probably] among multicultural America’s best kept secrets”.⁴⁵ In this context, the question arises whether literature produced by the descendants of Poles in the United States is not worthy of scholarly attention only because literary works, which are labelled as ‘Polish American,’ lack sufficient artistic expression, or maybe they still remain unappreciated because canon, in the popular understanding of the word, on the one hand, seems to constitute the sphere of dynamic interactions between art and literature and, on the other hand, between discourses of politics and economy. Taking into consideration the polysystem theory, advocated by Itamar Even-Zohar, the author of the present paper addresses the question of visibility of Polish American literature in the context of the history

⁴⁵ T. Gladsky, *From Ethnicity to Multiculturalism: The Fiction of Stuart Dybek*, “Melus” 1995, vol. 20, p. 105.

of American ethnic literature(s) and the possibility of moving its position from the peripheries/margins to the centre.

Keywords: canonicity, Polish American literature, polysystem theory, American authors of Polish descent, Anthony Bukoski, Thomas Napierkowski