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Literature, Politics and the CIA: Polish-English Literary Translation at the Time of the Cold War

Abstract

The paper examines the interdependence of literature and world politics, focusing on contemporary Polish prose, mainly in English translation, promoted in the West between 1945 and 1989 for its anti-communist message, not rarely with the financial backing from the CIA, denied to apolitical Polish writing. Among others, it addresses the question of the instrumental treatment of writers on both sides of the Iron Curtain and the ideological censorship of the original as well as of the translated literary texts. Taken into account are works of fiction by Czesław Miłosz, Marek Hłasko, Witold Gombrowicz, Jerzy Andrzejewski and Ryszard Kapuściński.

The idea for the present paper originated in reaction to the striking gap discernible between the high reputation and continuing popularity of many Polish narratives dating to the 1945‒1989 period and their absence in English translation. Naturally, one-to-one correspondence between any long-established literatures is impossible, especially if power relations between them are asymmetrical. As Benjamin Paloff noticed: “beyond the academic world, [in the West] the phrase ‘Polish literature’ is not equivalent to [the Polish understanding of] literatura polska” (87; trans. S. Sz.). Even if we accept this unflattering truth, unflattering since it denotes the lack of popular interest in Polish culture in the West, the study of what has or has not been translated into English and what forms the Anglo-American concept of Polish literature remains valid. The question becomes especially interesting when extra-literary factors come into play, be it international politics of the Cold War period (1945‒1989) or publishing policies prevailing nowadays, according to which publishers are unwilling to invest in unknown writers and books from the old literary repertoire.

The lack of pre-1990 English versions of prose works by Kornel Filipowicz (1913‒1990), Zofia Posmysz (b. 1923), Jan Himilsbach (1931‒1988), Wiesław Myśliwski (b. 1932), Edward Stachura (1937‒1979) or Edward Redliński (b. 1940) proves that indeed the main factor behind the discrepancy between the image of contemporary Polish literature in Poland and that which emerges abroad from its English-language renditions was Cold War politics. Even if appreciated at their...
source, novels and short stories by the above-mentioned authors stayed outside the scope of interest of Anglo-American translation commissioners, focused on the anti-communist aspect of literary works.2

Literature, also that in translation from and into English, had an important role to play in the Cold War propaganda struggle. The strategy was simple enough: import translations of any works which testify to the corruption of the ideas professed by your opponent, export anything which will change the mindset of the people in the enemy’s camp in order to attract them to your (ostensive) values and make them support your cause. In her fascinating book, The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters (2013),3 Frances Stonor Saunders gives a comprehensive account of the postwar situation in the cultural contest between the East and the West, which initially was dominated by the Soviet Union:

Experts in the use of culture as a tool of political persuasion, the Soviets did much in these early years of the Cold War to establish their central paradigm as a cultural one. Lacking the economic power of the United States and, above all, still without a nuclear capability, Stalin’s regime concentrated on winning “the battle for men’s minds.” America, despite the massive marshaling of the arts in the New Deal period, was a virgin in the practice of international Kulturkampf. (15)

The Americans, however, soon learnt how to respond to the Soviet cultural offensive, subsequently surpassing their enemy. “Mindful of Disraeli’s injunction that ‘a book may be as great a thing as a battle,’ […] suitable texts were ‘whatever critiques of Soviet foreign policy and of Communism as a form of government [they found] to be objective, convincingly written, and timely’” (qtd. in Stonor Saunders 19). The same principle applied to Polish authors published in the West. As a result, instead of being assessed for its purely literary or existential values, contemporary Polish literature was selected for translation into English primarily on the political basis. In her Introduction to Polish Literature in Transformation (2013), a volume of papers on Polish literary production since the fundamental political and economic changes in 1989, Ursula Phillips remarks:

The continued prolific activity, success and recognition of such writers [as Wiesław Myśliwski (b. 1932) or Marian Pilot (b. 1936)] begs questions about the relationship (if there is one) between literary production (in terms of universal human or artistic values) and political dissidence: were certain opposition writers, but not those honoured here, artificially promoted pre-1989 by émigré milieus or by scholars sympathetic to the opposition for the content rather than the literary value of their work? (9)

The answer to the question posed by Phillips is affirmative, but the question itself does not take into account one more powerful agent active in the promotion of
anti-communist literature: the CIA. The Agency’s involvement in dissident book publishing, whether in émigré, academic or commercial presses, at home and abroad, as well as in book distribution, is a historical fact. Although some of the crucial documents are still classified, the Final Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, conveniently referred to as the Final Report of the Church Committee, gives testimony to the US-sponsored promotion of opposition writers in the US and abroad (192–201). Apart from being the stimulus for the secret funding of certain publications, translations included, world politics also influenced reading fashions. In 2009 Jarosław Anders recalled:

[O]wing to dramatic events in Eastern Europe, including the Solidarity uprising and martial law in Poland and growing political dissent throughout the region, the literature of Eastern Europe was very much en vogue in literary New York and beyond. Miłosz on his frequent visits from Berkeley and Joseph Brodsky in his Greenwich Village basement apartment were the new arbiters of literary “seriousness.” In Paris, Milan Kundera and Danilo Kiš were grudgingly assuming a similar role. American publishers, normally scared of contemporary translations, were bringing out a whole slew of East European authors of different caliber, though with impeccable dissident credentials. (xiv–xv)

Marek Nowakowski’s (1935–2014) Raport o stanie wojennym is a perfect illustration of Anders’s words. Notwithstanding the fact that Raport was a literary failure (Jarosiński 146–147), only this book was chosen for translation into English out of the writer’s whole oeuvre. Originally brought out in 1982 by Instytut Literacki in Paris and by the Warsaw-based underground publisher NOWa, the collection appeared in English as The Canary and Other Tales of Martial Law (1983 and 1984). It was also rendered into Swedish (1982) French (1983), German (1983, in Munich and Vienna), Norwegian (1983), Spanish (1984, in Argentina), Serbian (1984, by an independent publisher) and Dutch (1986), an example of “coordinated publishing,” typical of literature which served as a warning against communism. Although the situation described by Anders, as well as Nowakowski’s example, refers to the first half of the 1980s, when martial law was imposed in Poland, such a publishing tendency, guided by the political agenda, was already in operation in the 1950s (Final Report... 181; Nowak-Jeziorański and Giedroyc 219, 236, 244–245, 247, 297–299, 326, 419; Stonor Saunders 100–101, 112–113). Of course Nowakowski’s case does not mean that all such books were artistic disasters; some of them led to genuine interest in such writers as Czesław Miłosz or Ryszard Kapuściński. Nevertheless, the state of “the cultural Cold War” meant that English-language publishers were unwilling to bring out contemporary literature from the Eastern Bloc which was meaningless from the political point of view and extremely risky from the financial one, especially if not supported by external sources. As mentioned above, it was
the CIA which played the role of a generous sponsor of anti-communist literature. University presses as well as privately owned publishing houses were often infiltrated and subsidised by the Agency, “regardless of commercial viability”\(^4\) *(Final Report of... 193; Matthews; Reisch).* Published in 1976, the *Final Report of the Church Committee* stated:

Well over a thousand books were produced, subsidized or sponsored by the CIA before the end of 1967. Approximately 25 percent of them were written in English. Many of them were published by cultural organizations which the CIA backed, and more often than not the author was unaware of CIA subsidization. (193)

After the CIA’s funding of a number of organisations and publications in America and abroad was disclosed to the general public in 1967, consequently causing much outrage and many accusations, George Kennan of the Free Europe Committee, pointedly replied: “This country [the USA] has no Ministry of Culture, and CIA was obliged to do what it could to try to fill the gap. It should be praised for having done so, and not criticized” (qtd. in Stonor Saunders 344). Desmond FitzGerald, the Deputy Director for Plans of the Central Intelligence Agency was of a similar opinion. As a result, the publishing and mailing programmes continued, with some modifications, until the fall of the Soviet Union (FitzGerald; Matthews; Reisch; Stonor Saunders 341).

In the context of Polish literature, the implementation of the book publishing programme directed against communism was possible largely due to the following groups of authors:

- Asylum seekers who defected to the West from postwar Poland, for example Czesław Miłosz (1911‒2004; asked for asylum in 1951 in Paris), Marek Hłasko (1934‒1969; asked for asylum in 1958 in West Berlin), Leopold Tyrmand (1920‒1985; asked for asylum in 1966 in the USA) and Sławomir Mrożek (1930‒2013; asked for asylum in 1968 in Paris).
- Opposition writers of the younger generation who never championed communism in Poland, among others Marek Nowakowski (1935‒2014), Janusz Glowacki (b. 1938) and Janusz Anderman (b. 1949).
- Authors of anti-totalitarian works, whose message was limited in the West
to the unambiguous anti-communist interpretation, such as Stanislaw Lem (1921–2006) and Ryszard Kapuściński (1932–2007).

The most acute blow at the early stage of the East-West literary Cold War came with the publishing of two dissident books by Czeslaw Milosz, in their Polish, English and many other language versions. Stonor Saunders writes: “In May [1951], the Congress [for Cultural Freedom] ‘presented’ a prize intellectual defector at a press conference in Paris. He was the young cultural attaché at the Polish Embassy, a poet and translator of The Waste Land, Czeslaw Milosz” (84).

In 1953, Milosz’s anti-totalitarian study, Zniewolony umysł, was published in Jane Zielonko’s translation as The Captive Mind in two English-language editions: by Secker & Warburg in London and by Alfred A. Knopf in New York. What is crucial here is that at that time, both publishing houses were involved in bringing out publications opposing communist ideology. According to Stonor Saunders, Frederic Warburg wittingly cooperated with American intelligence agencies (332), publishing Encounter (146–147; 275) and distributing Partisan Review in England (284). Alfred Knopf, in turn, refused to bring out Howard Fast’s novel Spartacus, sending “the manuscript back unopened, saying he wouldn’t even look at a work of a [communist] traitor” (qtd. in Stonor Saunders 44). Until 1956, the year of the Polish October Thaw and the bloody Hungarian Revolution, after which the American propaganda operations in Europe subsided and were redirected for some time to Asia, Zniewolony umysł appeared in Polish (1953 in Paris), English (1953), French (1953), German (1953), Italian (1955) and Swedish (1956). The French, German and Swedish editions were additionally accompanied with a foreword by Karl Jaspers.8

Another book by Milosz, Zdobycie władzy (1955), known in the United States as The Seizure of Power (1955) and in the United Kingdom as The Usurpers (1955), was a political novel whose writing was stimulated, in all good intention, by the philosopher Jeanne Hersch, a student of Jaspers,’ whom Milosz met through Józef Czapski (Franaszek 221). All the circumstances of the novel’s creation point to it being one of the books whose writing and publication were carefully staged by the American secret services according to the specifications contained in the Final Report of the Church Committee (192–193). The fact that Zdobycie władzy was written on commission in only two summer months of 1952 in order to be presented (in a manuscript form) by October of the same year for the 1953 Prix Littéraire Européen confirms this supposition, since Milosz’s winning the prize provided, via numerous translations, a perfect opportunity for the proliferation of the anti-communist message contained in the book in all the sensitive areas of the world where socialist ideals were gaining strong ground. Among others, in the 1950s and 1980s the book was published in English, French (France and Switzerland), German (Germany, Switzerland and Austria), Gujarati, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean (two different translations), Malayalam, Marathi, Norwegian, Portuguese (Brazil
and Portugal), Serbian, Spanish (Colombia and Spain) and Swedish. In contrast, *Kimmerische Fahrt* (1953) by Werner Warsinsky, a narrative about the Second World War which won the *Prix Littéraire Européen* together with *Zdobycie władzy*, appeared only in Japanese translation in 1955.

Significantly, the organization which gave the idea for the *Prix Littéraire Européen*, the European Centre of Culture in Geneva, was created by Denis de Rougemont, the President of the Paris-based anti-communist Congress for Cultural Freedom, aware of it being the CIA’s operation from the very beginning (Stonor Saunders, qtd. in Lucas 29). However, even years after the CIA’s role in many “spontaneous and independent” initiatives targeted at fighting communism became public knowledge, Miłosz remained blissfully unaware of the circumstances of the award’s creation. In 1999 he wrote:

In 1952, Les Guildes du Livre in Switzerland [...] announced a competition for a novel submitted in one of the Western European languages. The prize, *Prix Littéraire Européen*, guaranteed to the winner a considerable sum of money and the novel’s publication by the book guilds. I decided to take part, although I had never written a novel before. [...] The book was created in two months. I used to write a chapter in the morning and in the afternoon it was delivered to my French translator, Jeanne Hersch. [...] Following the terms of the competition, the first selection of the manuscripts was the responsibility of national juries, depending on the language. I submitted my novel as *La prise du pouvoir*. [...] The *Prix Littéraire Européen* was awarded in 1953. Warsinsky, the candidate of the German jury, was my rival. Both of us received the Prize. It was timely. I was completely broke. (7‒8; trans. S. Sz.)

Financial hardships evoked by Miłosz return like a mantra in the reminiscences by many émigré and dissident writers and although the ideological or ethical concerns were the prevailing factor in their anti-communist stance, money was a tool with which they could have been potentially manipulated.

On the other hand, it sometimes happened that American periodicals published translations of Polish literary pieces without the author’s knowledge or consent and without any remuneration. Such was the case of two stories by Marek Hłasko, printed in English translation in the American magazine *East Europe,* while the writer was still based in Poland (Nowak-Jeziorański and Giedroyc 236). Initially pampered by the communist authorities, Hłasko soon learnt that he could not count on unfettered artistic expression. In fact, the closing of the intellectual weekly *Po prostu* in 1957 and the withdrawal of Hłasko’s *Cmentarze* (*The Graveyard*) from publication spelt the end of the Polish Thaw (Szymańska 195). Although Juliusz Żuławski from the Polish Writers’ Union managed to assure the Ford Foundation stipend for Hłasko (Żuławski 42), the governmental approval was later withdrawn. Instead of going to the United States, the writer decided to go to Paris, where he had his *Cmentarze*, as well as *Następny do raju* (*Next Stop – Paradise*),
brought out in Jerzy Giedroyc’s *Kultura*.\textsuperscript{11} In a letter to Giedroyc, Jan Nowak-Jeziorański wrote:

> Congratulations on the great success with Hłasko. Publishing his book [*Cmentarze; Następny do raju*, 1958; *The Graveyard*, 1959; *Next Stop – Paradise*, 1960] was a splendid move, all the more important that he didn’t sever his ties with Poland. This is an important precedence, which might open yet another way to the West for writers in Poland. To my mind, if Hłasko “had chosen freedom” the publication of his book would have had much less meaning. (Nowak-Jeziorański and Giedroyc 240; trans. S. Sz.)

Although soon after the appearance of *Cmentarze* and *Następny do raju* their author asked for asylum, the propaganda value of the two books, subsequently translated into English, did not diminish. Brought out in Polish in one volume, the publication received the *Kultura* Award in the *ad-hoc* one-off “home literature” category for the year 1957. In 1958, for his *Cmentarze*, Hłasko was chosen the first winner of the London *Wiadomości* Prize, the émigré literary award founded for the first five years by Auberon Herbert.\textsuperscript{12} Even though the financial remuneration (100 guineas) which came with the winning of the *Wiadomości* Prize was a great help for Hłasko, he found it extremely difficult to make a living from writing in the West. In his autobiographical book, *Piękni dwudziestoletni* (1966; *Beautiful Twenty-somethings*; 2013), he bitterly commented:

> But what to do when you want to keep on writing? You’ll be fine, so long as you were once a communist, a member of the Central Committee, a high functionary in the Department of Security, a spy, or a diplomat. A man who was a spy for the Kremlin behind the Iron Curtain, who tore out his compatriots’ fingernails or put a bullet in the back of their heads, will always find a good career. He’ll be used as a propaganda trump card and a pawn in the battle against communism. An honest man who has never been a communist or a spy just becomes an unnecessary burden for the people of the West. As everybody knows, the people of Eastern Europe hate the commies, and it’s impossible to exploit them for propaganda purposes, since to say that evening is dark and morning is bright isn’t a revelation in the West. (1673–1677)\textsuperscript{13}

With Western publishers disinterested in him as a writer, Hłasko analysed, with typical irony, four further ways of survival in the new circumstances he found himself. These included: feigning insanity in order to be admitted to a mental asylum; finding a “quiet harbor,” in other words going to prison; pimping, which, however, is a difficult and dangerous job; or undertaking “honest work,” i.e. a career in espionage, for which, unfortunately, he has no talent (1693–2167).\textsuperscript{14}

At the same time, Witold Gombrowicz, who did not achieve wider recognition in the West until the 1960s, was struggling to make a living in Argentina. In 1954,
reflecting on his *Ferdydurke* (1937‒1938; *Ferdydurke*, 1961; retranslated 2000) being initially rejected by the French publisher Julliard, Gombrowicz remarked: “How outrageous! The only contemporary Polish novel which could become a success abroad. […] It seems that in order to be translated, a Pole has to write about Bolsheviks. Hopeless!” (Giedroyc and Gombrowicz 172, trans. S. Sz.). Even a year earlier, confident of his intellectual and artistic potential, the writer stated: “[N]ever have we been more torn between East and West. These two worlds, destroying each other right before our eyes, create an emptiness in us which we will be able to fill only with our own contents” (Gombrowicz 2012, 283‒284). And indeed, throughout his writing Gombrowicz abstained from direct political engagement, filling it instead with interhuman (and interspecies) existential experience. However, it would be erroneous to believe that Gombrowicz’s fame and freedom from financial worries, late as they came, were purely an outcome of his creative talent. Rather, it must be acknowledged that his eventual popularity in the 1960s was largely due to protection from the circles connected with the Paris *Kultura* and the Congress for Cultural Freedom, among others Jerzy Giedroyc, Konstanty Jeleński or the chief editor of the CIA-sponsored periodical *Preuves*, François Bondy (Giedroyc and Gombrowicz; Gombrowicz 1998). This proves that even at an extra-textual level, politics played a vital role in the process of accepting or rejecting contemporary Polish writing into the literatures and languages of the countries lying west of the Berlin Wall.\

15 Luckily for Gombrowicz, François Bondy, one of the most influential “cold warriors” in the West, showed a genuine interest in his literary creativity. Aware of Bondy’s political significance, the Polish writer characterised him in the following way:

>This important editor, whom it is difficult to imagine without four phones and three secretaries, is very much the poet. He is a poet so much that sometimes we, poets, harbor the suspicion that his indolence, his expression of a lost child, greedy eyes, the strange capacity for just appearing (instead of walking in normally), are to lure us and use us coldly to his own purposes. But I cheer myself that politicians are inclined to do the reverse, to nurture the fear that Bondy’s cold organizational talents are to dupe them and to catch them in nets of poetry. (Gombrowicz 2012, 496‒497)

In his dedication in Bondy’s copy of the French-language edition of *Bakakaj* (1933‒1953; *Bakakaï*, 1967), Gombrowicz wrote: “My Dear François, it was you who discovered, promoted, supported, defended, imposed and crowned me and I am writhing at your feet with my 20,000 [dollars – Prix Formentor] in absolutely incredible convulsions” (R. Gombrowicz 87; trans. S. Sz.). That Gombrowicz successfully conquered the Western literary mind, may be proved by the presence of *Ferdydurke* (1937‒1938; *Ferdydurke*, 1961; retranslated. 2000) among Emma Beare’s *501 Must-Read Books* (2006 and later editions), next to Stanislaw Lem’s *Solaris* (1961; *Solaris*, 1970; retranslated 2011).\[16\]
While Gombrowicz might be said to be the only contemporary Polish writer of apolitical works who was widely translated into Western languages before 1989, all the other authors from Poland who became well-known in the West, whether émigré or home-based ones, entered the translated English-language literature thanks to the anti-totalitarian message contained in their books. Such, for instance, was the case of Jerzy Andrzejewski’s post-Stalinist *Ciemności kryją ziemię* (1957; *The Inquisitors*, 1960) and *Bramy raju* (1960; *The Gates of Paradise*, 1962). However, it is the unauthorised censorship of Andrzejewski’s *Popiół i diament* (1948; *Ashes and Diamonds*, 1962) that most reveals the anti-communist slant of Western publishers.

The book was brought out in English translation fourteen years after the novel’s publication in the original Polish. It depicted the general instability in postwar Poland: in-fights between groups representing different political options, hopes for a better future and its uncertainty, as well as moral dilemmas which accompanied people and affected their choices and lives. What may have seemed too unsavoury in the novel for official reviewers in Poland, for example the depiction of the lack of widespread popular support for the new communist government in Polish society, as well as the pessimistic ending, automatically became an asset for capitalist propaganda. The book, however, did not draw the attention of English-language publishers at the time it first appeared in Poland. This may have been caused by Andrzejewski’s reticence about the Soviet involvement in the takeover of power by communists in Poland (Synoradzka-Demadre xvii‒xix). Moreover, in 1950, Andrzejewski renounced all his pre-communist writings in the self-critical confession “Notatki: Wyznania i rozmyślania pisarza” (4). As such, the writer and the books he published before his departure from communism would not have been welcome in the West. The fact that Andrzejewski was the prototype of Alpha, one of the captive minds portrayed by Czesław Miłosz did not help, either.

It is no coincidence then that Andrzejewski’s novels, *Popiół i diament* included, were translated into English only after he became a communist dissident. Andrzej Wajda’s film of the same title (1958) must have been an additional factor, if not the spur for the book’s publication in the West. Wajda’s work owed its huge popularity not only to its cinematic values, but also to the shift of accents in the original plot. In his film, the Polish director moved the tragic figure of Maciek Chełmicki, the anti-communist Home Army soldier, decidedly to the fore. The English translation of the novel also differed from its Polish basis, not only because Maciek became Michael in David John Welsh’s rendition. More importantly, *Ashes and Diamonds* was severely mutilated by Weidenfeld & Nicolson, the London publisher of Andrzejewski’s books. The translator of *Ashes and Diamonds*, thus commented on the shape of his rendition in the published form:
Probably the best known Polish novel in my translation is Andrzejewski’s *Popiół i diament* (*Ashes and Diamonds*) (largely due to the film). The translation was published in London and is now available in paper-back there. But we have not been able to find a publisher in the US, so the novel is not available here. In connection with *Popiół i diament*, I might add that my translation was subjected by the publisher to ruthless cutting, entirely without my knowledge or approval. Only when the page proofs reached me, did I see what they had done. By that time it was too late to protest. The cuts completely ruined the novel and made nonsense of the title. (88; emphasis mine)

What was lacking from the English-language version of the book were two long passages: one devoted to Maciek Chełmicki’s hesitation before the completion of his mission to assassinate Stefan Szczuka, an idealistic communist functionary; the other, Szczuka’s moving funeral speech at the graves of two workers whom Chełmicki had mistakenly killed instead of Szczuka himself. The key words: “ashes” and “a star-like diamond,” crucial for the understanding of the book’s title come from the first of the excluded passages, which contained two quatrains from the Prologue to Cyprian Kamil Norwid’s drama *Za kulisami* (1865‒1866; Behind the Scenes), inscribed on one of the gravestones at the cemetery where Chełmicki is lying in wait for Szczuka.

The way in which Welsh’s rendition of *Popiół i diament* was treated by the translation commissioners is a perfect illustration of publishing policies at the service of big politics. Both, George Weidenfeld and Nigel Nicolson, who co-founded their publishing house in 1948, held conservative views, with Weidenfeld being one of Nicolas Nabokov’s, Secretary General of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, closest contacts (Stonor Saunders 185). No wonder then that Weidenfeld & Nicolson commissioned, or agreed to commission, the translation of Andrzejewski’s anti-totalitarian books and felt at ease to selectively “edit” the pre-dissenting novel that *Ashes and Diamonds* represented. In the United States in turn, the novel was not published until 1980, when it appeared in the Writers from the Other Europe series, also in a censored form. In 1991 both missing fragments were restored in the Errata part of the Northwestern University Press edition of the novel.19

Ryszard Kapuściński’s *Szachinszach* (1982; *Shah of Shahs*, 1985) fell prey to similar “selective editing,” this time in “the land of the free,” to use Francis Scott Key’s words from the US national anthem. Translated by William R. Brand and Katarzyna Mroczkowska-Brand, *Shah of Shahs*, lacks about 15 pages which contained references to the CIA’s involvement in the 1953 overthrow of Iran’s democratically elected Prime Minister, Mohammad Mosaddegh (Domosławski 285‒287). Even though Artur Domosławski, reporter and Kapuściński’s biographer, speculates that the Polish writer censored his own book for the American market (386‒387), Kapuściński himself claimed that he did it on the request of the American publisher, as indeed he wanted the book to appear in English translation (Domosławski 286).
Martin Pollack, a well-known translator of Ryszard Kapuściński’s works into German, recalls that in the spring of 1983 the German publisher Kiepenheuer & Witsch, known for its previous affiliations with the Congress for Cultural Freedom and the CIA (Boge 386‒402), approached him about a translation of *Cesarz* (1978; *The Emperor: Downfall of an Autocrat*, 1983), after another translator had refused to accept a commission to render the book from English (Pollack 34). As a result, Kapuściński’s *Cesarz* (1978) became the first book Pollack translated from Polish and the German *König der Könige* was published in 1984 by Kiepenheuer & Witsch, to be reissued in a pocket edition by Fischer Verlag in 1986. Interestingly, the latter publisher is to be found on the list of “Sponsors in Europe,” typed on 1st March 1968 in connection with the partly declassified book distribution and publishing programme masterminded by the CIA (Matthews 422). An identical publishing pattern applied to Szachinszach. The German editions, translated from Polish, but mysteriously missing the troublesome pages on the overthrow of Mosaddegh’s democratically elected government, appeared as *Schah-in-schah* in Pollack’s translation in 1986 by Kiepenheuer & Witsch and in 1988 by Fischer Verlag. The fact that neither the German translator, nor Drenka Willen of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, the editor of the English-language edition of *Shah of Shahs*, knew that the book would be censored (Domoslawski 287) points to somebody taking such a decision behind their backs. In a paper on the reception of Kapuściński’s books in Germany, “Ryszarda Kapuścińskiego przypadki…,” Pollack tried to understand the publishing market mechanics which prompted Kiepenheuer & Witsch to invest in *Schah-in-schah* (1986), although Kapuściński’s previous book *König der Könige* (1984) proved to be unprofitable, in order to suddenly break a translation contract on the third book: *Jeszcze dzień życia* (34‒35). The most likely answer to this question is that the political changes which started gathering momentum in Eastern Europe at the end of the 1980s must have withdrawn both the attention and financial support of the American-financed book publishing programme in the West and brought this kind of sponsorship there to an end, leaving the risk of publishing Kapuściński’s *Jeszcze dzień życia* (1976; *Another Day of Life*; 1987) to the sole discretion of the publisher.

The above study of interrelations between contemporary Polish literature and Cold War politics in the context of Polish-English translation helps to draw a twofold conclusion. First, it reveals that, initially, strictly artistic values present in the writings by Czesław Miłosz, Marek Hłasko, Witold Gombrowicz, Jerzy Andrzejewski and Ryszard Kapuściński were not decisive in the acceptance of their works into the English-speaking world, then lying at the opposite end of the political spectrum than Poland. Moreover, in some cases, their works fell prey to political censorship in the countries where, officially, it did not exist.

Secondly, the political criteria applied to books selected for translation from Polish at that time set up “an arbitrary and factitious system of values” (Epstein 20), in which many outstanding Polish writers remained outside the scope of
interest of Anglo-American translation commissioners who were focused on the anti-communist aspect of literary works. Although certainly not exhaustive in all cases, this fact should be borne in mind whenever searching for an explanation why so many notable works of Polish literature dating to the 1945–1989 period have never made their way into the English-language; especially since, all too often, this argument is usually overlooked in the corpus of literary criticism.

Notes

1 A detailed analysis of this issue is the subject of my PhD dissertation, written at the Institute of English Studies at the University of Warsaw under the supervision of Professor Aniela Korzeniowska. Fragments of the dissertation are presented in the following article. The theoretical framework adopted here remains in accordance with the polysystemic approach, theorised by Itamar Even-Zohar (1990a and 1990b). Drawing on the ideas of the Russian formalists, Even-Zohar suggested that in analysing the status and image of translated literature in a given target culture, extra-literary factors should be taken into account as well. Questions about how a text is selected for translation, what role translation agents (the commissioner, the publisher, the translator, the editor) play in it, or how a text will be received in the target system are at the heart of the polysystemic approach to studying translation.

2 In reference to these and other noteworthy authors whose writings were not concerned with exposing the cruelties or absurdities of the communist system, it is even possible to talk about “a lost generation of Polish writers,” lost to the English-language readership, since they were born too early to be considered for rendition during the times of the Cold War and too late to be promoted after the political changes took place in Poland. The fact that the old patron of literary translation, the Author’s Agency, ceased to play any significant role after the introduction of martial law in 1981 and that the creation of a new patronage body, the Polish Book Institute, did not occur until 1998 decided about their long-time oblivion when it comes to promotional activities connected with literary translation. After 1989, only Wiesław Myśliwski’s narratives were successfully translated into English by Ursula Phillips and Bill Johnston.


4 A notable exception to this rule were books published by Marian and Hanna Kister, the owners of Roy Publishers, the American embodiment of the pre-war Warsaw-based Rój. Just as before the war in Poland, the Kisters remained objective in promoting Polish writing on an apolitical basis throughout their presence on the Anglophone publishing market.

5 Some of these authors received financial support from the National Committee for a Free Europe (later known as the Free Europe Committee), thanks to the
intercession of Jerzy Giedroyc, who at that time was unaware of the Committee’s links to the CIA. The stipends were awarded until the end of 1957 (Yarrow), after the London-based Union of Polish Writers in Exile abolished the infamous prohibition on publishing in Poland.

6 Although Brandys remained abroad from 1981, his anti-communist stories and novels started appearing in English while he was still based in Poland.

7 Founded in 1950 in West Berlin, the Congress for Cultural Freedom was “one of the CIA’s more daring and effective Cold War covert operations” (Warner 89). The central office of the Congress was opened in Paris in 1952. It had its affiliates in the United States (the American Committee for Cultural Freedom), the United Kingdom (the British Society for Cultural Freedom) and Australia (the Australian Association for Cultural Freedom).


9 “‘A Point, Mister?’ Or: Everything Has Changed” (an anonymous translation of “Kancik czyli wszystko się zmieniło”), East Europe, 9, 1957, 10‒14 and “We Take Off for Heaven” (an anonymous translation of “Odlatujemy w niebo”), East Europe, 10, 1957, 31‒35. Between 1950 and 1956 the monthly appeared as News from behind the Iron Curtain, changing its title in 1957 to the more conciliatory East Europe. The magazine had also German and French editions (Reisch 8) and was published by the CIA-sponsored National Committee for a Free Europe / Free Europe Committee.

10 Stefan Bratkowski, Włodzimierz Godek, Marek Hłasko, Jan Olszewski, Agnieszka Osiecka, Ryszard Turski and Jerzy Urban were among the Po prostu contributors.

11 Not having enough money for the trip, the writer had to borrow from an American correspondent in Warsaw (Grabowska 7).


13 An allusion to Darkness at Noon (1940) by Arthur Koestler (1905‒1983). Celebrated in the West as a leading anti-communist propagandist, for many years Koestler overused his powerful position with impunity. “In 1998, Koestler
was literally taken off his pedestal when his bronze bust was removed from public display at Edinburgh University following revelations by biographer David Cesarani that he had been a violent rapist” (Stonor Saunders 356).

14 In his autobiography, Jerzy Giedroyc gives evidence of how Americans “took care” of young people escaping from Poland to the West, in order to recruit, train and send them back home to serve US intelligence purposes (152).

15 On the other hand, works by Gombrowicz were banned in Poland until the 1980s, with the exception of the 1957–1958 period when his Ferdydurke (1937–38; Ferdydurke, 1961; retrans. 2000), Bakakaj (1933; Bacacay, 2004), Trans-Atlantyk (1953; 1994; retrans. 2014), Ślub (1953; The Marriage, 1969) and Ivona, księżniczka Burgunda (1938–1958; Princess Ivona, 1969 – British title; Ivona, Princess of Burgundia, 1970 – American title) (re)appeared, the result of the short-lived Polish Thaw.

16 In contrast to the author of Pornografia (1960; Pornografia 1966; retranslated 2009) and Kosmos (1965; Cosmos, 1967; retranslated 2005), who skilfully used Bondy for self-promotion, Gustaw Herling-Grudziński and his political involvement were used by other “cold warriors.” Herling’s name appears in the CIA’s financial report concerning the coverage of travel expenses to the 1965 International PEN Club Congress in Bled. The event was crucial in promoting American interests in international politics, through seeking support among writers and intellectuals, unaware of the Agency’s machinations behind the scenes (Minow; Stonor Saunders 306–308).

17 Even Stanisław Lem’s example follows this pattern, since his renown among the Polish and American publishers and readers was stimulated by the Cold War tension, space and arms races included. Nevertheless, his sci-fi narratives proved to be authentically popular among mass readerships in many countries on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

18 Earlier, parts of the novel, in a slightly different form, appeared in instalments in the 1947 issues of the weekly Odrodzenie under the much-telling title Zaraz po wojnie (Right After the War) (Synoradzka-Demadre xviii).

19 I have not managed to establish the authorship of the English version of the restored fragments. The Errata section of the Northwestern University Press edition of the book gives the following introduction: “In the D. J. Welsh translation of Ashes and Diamonds several of the Polish names have been translated incorrectly into English and two lengthy passages have been omitted from the text. The corrections and missing texts are here provided” (Errata xv). There is, however, no information on who “omitted” the fragments nor who rendered the ones in the Errata. The editor of the book, Barbara Niemczyk, left my enquiries unanswered. It can be presumed that the restored pieces come from David John Welsh’s manuscript.

20 This and other fragments of Pollack’s account (34) prove that the German translation of Cesarz was commissioned by the Americans, for whom the
question of translation ethics was unimportant. It was only by chance that the book’s rendition into German was entrusted to a translator sensitive to the issue of indirect literary transfer. In turn, the first French edition of Kapuściński’s book (*Le Négus*, 1984) appeared as an indirect rendition from English. In 2010, *Cesarz* appeared again, this time translated from the Polish by Véronique Patte. Domosławski writes that although the German translation (*Schah-in-schah*, 1986) was done from the Polish, the American edition (*Shah of Shahs*, 1985) was taken as its basis (Domosławski 286). Literally, the copyright note to the 1986 German version states that the book appeared “With the approval from the Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers” (Kapuściński 6; trans. S. Sz.). The French edition (*Le Shah ou la démesure du pouvoir*, 1986), published by Flammarion, was translated from the English and lacked the same portion of the original book as the American and German texts. In 2010, *Szachinszach* appeared in a complete direct translation into French (*Le Shah*), done by Véronique Patte. No complete renditions into German or English have appeared to date.

Paradoxically, thanks to institutional censorship in Poland, it is much easier to trace the purging process in translations from English into Polish than from Polish into English. For example, while working on his *Censorship, Translation and English Language Fiction in People’s Poland* (2015), Robert Looby was able to use archival evidence from the files of Poland’s Censorship Office. No such material is readily available for Polish researchers into British or American publishing policies.


References


Filmography