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"FOR HERE HAVE WE NO CONTINUING CITY, BUT WE SEEK ONE TO COME." FRIENDS UNITED BY EXILE: ON THE CORRESPONDENCE OF CZESŁAW MIŁOSZ AND THOMAS MERTON.

Abstract: This article discusses the decade-long correspondence of Czesław Miłosz and Thomas Merton, published first in a Polish translation in 1991, and only later, in 1997, in the original English. Though Merton offered to write in French, a language that Miłosz at the time knew much better than English, Miłosz chose to use the latter. The article concentrates on Miłosz's side of the correspondence, comparing the impression of struggle and incomplete command that his letters evoke in the original version with the linguistic elegance and control implied by the Polish translation. The article suggests that Miłosz's slightly foreign English is a kind of reflection of the theme implied by the English title of the correspondence, *Striving Towards Being*. Moreover, the article argues that writing in English, despite the constraints that it imposed, enabled the Polish poet to discover a childlike freedom of expression and to meet his "correspondent," a fellow-sufferer from spiritual homelessness, in sympathetic understanding, though the external experience of the two was very different. Paradoxically, each partner, in his search for someone who "spoke the same language," found what he sought in a person who, in the literal sense, did not.

Keywords: Miłosz-Merton correspondence, exile, spiritual homelessness, writing in a foreign language, Miłosz's English

A late selection of Miłosz's writings entited *O podróżach w czasie* (On Travels in Time), contains a short essay on Thomas Merton, which first appeared in the Polish Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny* in 2002. Although this essay is only incidental to the present discussion, it nevertheless makes a good starting point for the reflections that follow on a correspondence between the Polish poet and the American monk conducted forty years earlier. The title of the essay is simple and highly personal: "Przyjaciel" (Friend).[1] Unlike other essays in the volume that are devoted to friends and acquaintances of the author, this one makes no immediate announcement as to who is to be its subject, naming this person simply *Friend*, and by so doing, suggesting a relationship that is unique, of the kind that a title such as "Mother" or "Wife" would suggest.

As Miłosz himself acknowledges, the bond of friendship that he shared with Merton was extraordinary in many ways, not least in that it was formed and largely developed by means of letters. In the conclusion to this short essay, Miłosz pays a remarkable tribute to his now long dead but very dear personal friend, claiming without hesitation or reservation that Merton was one of only a few "bright figures" of the twentieth century, "whose creative minds, perhaps, have weighed down the scale on the side of good rather than evil" (2004: 156). In paying honour to the memory of the American monk, Miłosz at the same time recalls the correspondence that he conducted with him over one whole decade in the mid-twentieth century, a correspondence whose original remained in manuscript form until nearly thirty years after Merton's death. Now, in hindsight, Miłosz describes this exchange of letters as representing "an interesting encounter between an American and a European mind;" and he adds: "for after all, Merton was very American, while I felt myself to be European" (2004: 155).

Although there might be some disagreement as to whether Merton was really so "very American," this cross-cultural encounter is an undoubtedly important motif of the correspondence. It was initiated by an American, Thomas Merton, who was inspired by his reading of *The Captive Mind* to write to its author, a European so far unknown to him, who was living at that time in Paris. Miłosz himself speaks frequently of the difficulties with which he had to struggle, first in making up his mind whether to return to the United States in the nineteen sixties, and then in adapting for good to the world of America. At times, Miłosz argues fiercely against Merton's way of thinking. Here, however, I would like to draw attention to a different aspect of these letters, as it seems to me even more striking than the encounter between minds shaped by different cultures, fascinating though that is, namely the astonishing affinity between the correspondents on the

[1] This and all subsequent translations from Polish texts, unless otherwise indicated, are those of the author, Jean Ward. See also Miłosz's reference to his friend Merton in *Abecadło Miłosza* [Miłosz's ABC] (Miłosz 1997: 171).

spiritual-intellectual-emotional plane. Not, of course, that the matters discussed in the correspondence are of an exclusively intimate or spiritual nature; the letters of both authors reveal clearly how deeply both were involved with the life and problems of the day. Nevertheless, it seems that the editor of the correspondence in its English original, who chose as the book's title a phrase from one of Miłosz's letters, *Striving Towards Being*, was right to emphasise above all the spiritual dimension of this meeting of minds. "All is futility except our striving towards Being," wrote Miłosz (Merton, Miłosz 1997: 133); and it is noteworthy that the word *Being* is capitalised. The pages of this book have preserved not merely an exchange of thoughts and opinions, of reflections on an impressive and unusual variety of reading, but they have also recorded shared feelings, spiritual experiences, inner fears and conflicts. For today's reader, "listening in," as it were, to the conversation between Miłosz and Merton, what emerges from this exchange is an unexpected glimpse of deeply personal realms in the lives of each of the two participants. Sometimes, indeed, readers might wonder if they had not been placed in a position rather uncomfortably close to an occupied confessional.

Although the question of the origins of the two writers and of the differences between them is an important one for present-day readers of this correspondence, what is likely to occur to them before anything else is a rather sad reflection. For it seems that the days when such a book, the extraordinary record of dialogue and of two men's inner struggles and conflicts, could be published have quietly, but quickly and irrevocably, slipped into the past. In our world of electronic communication, this is a loss that can never be sufficiently mourned. Grandiose though it might sound, one is tempted to reflect, recalling the title of these considerations, that humanity has largely been exiled – or perhaps better, has exiled itself – from a realm of life that was once a haven for the soul, where it could rest calm and safe and open itself frankly to others.

It was in this now largely vanished realm of letter-writing that in the 1960s, an American Trappist monk and a Polish poet estranged from his homeland found refuge from the sense of exile that dominated their experience. Miłosz shows himself in this correspondence to be a thinker of formidable intellectual powers, who pondered – most often critically – a variety of aspects of American culture as he was coming to know it in these years. More significantly, he reveals above all the extent of his personal vulnerability, his uncertainties and doubts, his dissatisfaction with himself and his need for being understood by fellow human beings. And in spite of many critical remarks directed at the institution of the Church, he also reveals a yearning love for Her, not as caricatured in nationalistic interpretations, whether Polish or American – both repelled him – but in Her true depth and catholicity. As he himself writes, although he was "never (…) ranked among 'Catholic writers, '" his interests were always "fundamentally religious" (Merton, Miłosz 1997: 30–31). In his correspondence with a man whose way of life and circumstances were utterly different from his own, Miłosz found a haven in which he felt himself to be neither an exile nor a stranger, but deeply understood. The Polish poet appreciated Merton's great effort to understand other cultures, his respect for different ways of thinking, his humility and his critical attitude towards himself, towards the country of which he was a citizen and also towards the Church. Similarly, Merton discloses in these letters to Miłosz his uncertainties and longings, his inner rebelliousness of spirit and his loneliness within the monastic community.

A striking feature of this correspondence is Miłosz's evident desire to have Merton come to know him as he really is. As early as his second letter, written on Easter Saturday, 1959,[2] he hastens to explain himself, as if he did not wish Merton to ascribe to him motives that were purer and more noble than those that truly governed him. As I have already hinted, one might even say that these letters bear witness to a certain kind of examination of conscience, a kind of informal confession on Miłosz's part, although, as he acknowledges to Merton, he availed himself formally of the Church's sacrament only "once every few years" (Merton, Miłosz 1997: 44). By linking this admission of how rarely he could bring himself to enter the confessional with an expression of what his epistolary friendship with Merton meant to him, providing him as it did with a space within whose bounds he could be completely frank, Miłosz exposes the painful nature of his complicated bond with the Church. To be able to correspond with a monk who was neither offended nor shocked by any of his outbursts of anger was a kind of lifeline, ensuring that this fragile bond did not break

[2] It appears that Miłosz dated this letter only by reference to Easter, in this way testifying, even if unintentionally, to the importance of the rhythm of the liturgical year in his thinking. The editor of the English text provides an approximate date: "before May 21, 1959" (Merton, Miłosz 1997: 21), in other words, before the date of Merton's reply, whereas the Polish editor, Jerzy Illg, must have checked to see on what day Easter Saturday fell in 1959, since he provides a precise date: "March 28, 1959" (Merton, Miłosz 1991: 24).

altogether. Writing in the context of confession of his hope that Merton may one day be able to help him, Miłosz indicates that even in these years, the yearning for complete reconciliation with God within the Church was never far from his thoughts, though it was a longing that was not to find fulfilment until many years later, close to the end of his long life and long after the death of Merton.

Miłosz's correspondence with Merton makes deeply moving reading. At every moment, amid discussion of matters such as the sickness of American society (on which both write with equal passion), some generous concern for the other will appear, some proposal that anticipates the practical, ordinary needs of the other: for instance, where Miłosz's wife and children might be accommodated in the event of his being able to come to Kentucky to visit Merton at the monastery (Merton, Miłosz 1997: 112). Extremely moving, too, is the moment, two and a half years into the correspondence, when Miłosz, in a letter of even more than usually intimate content (May 30, 1961), makes the decision to move to first-name terms, signing himself for the first time, with innocent simplicity, merely *Czesław*. As if Merton recognised this expression of trust as a watershed whose importance needed to be marked, he penned his equally heartfelt response exceptionally swiftly (June 5, 1961); it contained an answering cry of agreement, protesting against facile and insensitive responses to human doubt and suffering (Merton, Miłosz 1997: 120–125). This friendship, formed and sustained almost exclusively by means of letters, was evidently a matter of great joy to both men, since each of the correspondents recognised in the other a "soul mate" whose patience with him could not be exhausted. Yet at the same time, the exchange of letters is full of pain, probing to the quick and touching the springs of uncertainty and self-doubt in both its authors.

It might be said that in the outstanding intimacy of this correspondence, each of its contributors discovered "correspondences" in another sense: the same concerns, the same sufferings and loneliness of soul, the same experience of spiritual exile. Evidence of this occurs in the letters of both parties: Miłosz, for example, after reading Merton's article on Heraclitus, expresses his astonished sense of a "deep spiritual affinity" with his correspondent (Merton, Miłosz 1997: 100). Merton, in his reply, acknowledges similarly: "what you say affects me deeply, seeing that we are in many respects very much alike. Consequently any answer must involve the deepest in me" (Merton, Miłosz 1997: 108). The impression of spiritual affinity between the two writers created by these letters is so strong that sometimes, if readers ignored the signature at the end of the letters, they might not know which of the two was speaking at any given moment. However, for reasons that I shall try to show, this impression of identity between the two writers is much less likely to be the experience of the reader of the English original than it is of the Polish reader, whose access to the correspondence is via Maria Tarnowska's translation of 1991.

For it needs to be emphasised that Miłosz's correspondence with Merton has a highly unusual publication history (a history that Miłosz recounts in the essay "Friend"). It appeared first in a translation into Miłosz's native language, Polish, and only later, in 1997, in the English original. This publication history in itself may be read as a symbol of Miłosz's struggle with Western culture and with his place in the world, a symbol that reveals the extraordinary nature of this correspondence, in which two people of different nations and different experience, who did not share a mother tongue, strove by their combined efforts to understand themselves, their personal history and their vocation in the world into which it was their lot to be born.

Whether the task of rendering the letters of Thomas Merton into Polish caused the translator any particular difficulties I cannot tell; but there is not the least doubt that translating the letters of the other partner in the correspondence into his own native language was a matter of no difficulty whatsoever. For Miłosz's "original" in this case **is** in itself the required translation. Under the English word surface, the sentences of the original flow as if "in Polish." Or, to put it another way, Miłosz writes Polish using English words. To illustrate my point, let us look at his first letter, in which he responds to Merton's attempt to initiate contact. We find here a whole range of linguistic and stylistic phenomena, which, even if they are not precisely mistakes (though small mistakes do occur) nor obviously awkward (though such expressions are also to be found), are nevertheless in subtle ways not quite natural in English.

Here are the opening sentences:

> Dear Mr Merton,
> Your letter travelled quite a long time. I thank you cordially for it and feel it created already a tie between us.

It would be unfair, given the rarity of the circumstances (it is not every day that one engages in correspondence with a Trappist monk, in a language not one's own to boot!) to criticise Miłosz for not being cognisant of the accepted mode of address. But what of *Your letter travelled quite a long* *time*? What is wrong with this sentence? Nothing, in a sense; but still, a native speaker of English would put the matter somewhat differently: "Your letter took rather a long time to reach me," perhaps, or "I have only just received your letter." And what of the phrase *I thank you cordially for it*? It would be a rare thing for a contemporary native speaker of English to use the form *I thank you* or to add the slightly archaic-sounding adverb *cordially*. Possibly he or she might say: "I am very grateful to you for writing to me" or, much more likely, "Thank you for your kind letter." Then: *I feel it created already a tie between us*. The word *tie* is of course comprehensible; but, nonetheless, it would not be a natural choice for someone who had been brought up speaking English. And what of the position of the word *already* in the sentence? And the choice of tense? For the sentence to sound even moderately natural, a whole range of minor changes would have to be made: "I feel it has already created a bond between us."

Examples of this kind could be multiplied to infinity. The following fragments are all taken from the first of Miłosz's letters: "I shall try to find for you one of his books published in French translation" (Merton, Miłosz 1997: 7); "Not only I do not attempt to translate my poetry but I am unable to write prose in any other tongue than my own" (Merton, Miłosz 1997: 8); "How to combine 'transcendence' and 'devenir' (we shall return to this word) has been always my main question" (Merton, Miłosz 1997: 9); "As to millions of dollars thrown every year through the window for 'combatting communism' I have my own opinion on that subject; Some Catholic monthlies (…) are on a very good level; I see often translations from your works in periodicals" (Merton, Miłosz 1997:10); "Had not occurred that change in 1956, I would be pessimistic, this is obvious" (Merton, Miłosz 1997: 12). Or finally: "I profit from the occasion to ask you whether you know the works of Oscar de L. Milosz" (Merton, Miłosz 1997:12–13).

The "mistakes," or perhaps better, departures from natural English evident here are of various kinds. All of them, however, become explicable when we try "translating" these sentences into Polish, or when we compare them with the translation made by Maria Tarnowska. It then becomes clear that very little effort is necessary to obtain a stylish and elegant Polish text. All that is required is to restore the Polish sentences that lie hidden under the cloak of the English words, as the examples in the footnote reveal.[3]

[3] *Pański list wędrował dość długo. Serdecznie Panu za niego dziękuję i mam poczucie, że on już wytworzył jakąś wieź między nami* (Merton, Miłosz 1991: 12). *Spróbuję znaleźć dla Pana jedną z jego książek wydanych we francuskim tłumaczeniu; Nie tylko nie próbuję*

Miłosz's English betrays the foreignness of the language for him. In itself, it is a symbol of the problem of exile, estrangement and alienation that are his constant theme, both in these letters and elsewhere.

Already, in his very first letter to Merton, Miłosz laments the situation of the "writer who is separated from the Western public by a barrier of language" (Merton, Miłosz 1997: 8). This problem becomes visible in the very linguistic fabric of the correspondence. Tarnowska's translation, meanwhile, may create in the Polish reader exactly the impression that Miłosz wished to avoid: that he is at ease in the English language, "pretending" to be a "Western *writer*" when he is not (Merton, Miłosz 1997: 9). The Polish version of the poet's correspondence with Merton creates the impression of order and stylistic elegance, as if each of the participants were able to express himself with equal freedom and fluency. Yet what makes this exchange of letters so important and unusual is a fact that the translation must inevitably conceal: that writing in English was a great effort for Miłosz, involving a fierce struggle with linguistic material in which he did not feel "at home." This vital aspect of the correspondence, this paradox, that it was in writing to an American in a language that was foreign to him that Miłosz, far from his homeland, found a place of spiritual shelter, vanishes entirely in the Polish translation. I am not suggesting, of course, that this is the translator's fault; rather, it is an unavoidable consequence of the extraordinary circumstances of the correspondence. Nonetheless, it is a consequence whose significance deserves to be taken into account.

English was not the first, but only the second of the foreign languages of the West that Miłosz learned, and he was an adult before he came to learn it. Bearing this in mind, one may only admire the degree of freedom with which he was able to use the language even at this relatively early stage. However, he knew French much better than English and frequently in his correspondence with Merton he resorted to this language. We have already seen an example in his first letter, in the word *devenir*. Elsewhere, Miłosz writes: "I could not write anything directly related to my feeling of precarity of everything." In a bracket, the author explains his use of the word

przekładać mojej poezji, ale nie jestem też w stanie pisać prozy w żadnym innym języku niż mój własny (Merton, Miłosz 1991: 13). *Jak połączyć „transcendence" i „devenir" to był zawsze mój zasadniczy problem; Co do rokrocznie wyrzucanych w błoto milionów dolarów na „zwalczanie komunizmu", to mam na ten temat swoje własne zdanie* (Merton, Miłosz 1991: 14). *Są na bardzo dobrym poziomie* (Merton, Miłosz 1991: 15). *Korzystając z okazji zapytam…* (Merton, Miłosz 1991: 17).

precarity, which he rightly guessed was a neologism: "Perhaps there is no such word in English – it comes from 'précaire'" (Merton, Miłosz 1997: 132).[4] Much more often than is natural in English, Miłosz makes recourse to French phrases, revealing in this way the effort involved in finding the best words to express his thoughts. Merton too, knew French; indeed in his initial letter he encouraged Miłosz to answer either in English or in French, as he preferred. And yet Miłosz chose English, a language whose use demanded a much greater effort on his part than French. Why he did this, he does not say; but it may be assumed that he wanted at least one party in this most intimate exchange to be able to use his native language, and since it could not be him, he left this privilege to Merton. Or, perhaps more probably, it was a matter of taking the trouble, in the name of an emerging friendship, to step out towards the other, to accommodate his point of view, even at considerable cost to himself.

Miłosz's English greatly improved during the time in which he corresponded with Merton, but never so much as entirely to erase the impression that the letters of the Polish writer are a somewhat foreign linguistic product. Even where the syntax is irreproachable and there are no grammatical errors, the register is sometimes inappropriate, and sometimes Miłosz appears to misunderstand the meaning of a particular idiom. "I loathed my guts," he writes, with reference to his hesitation over whether or not to break with Poland (Merton, Miłosz 1997: 48). The expression he uses will probably be understood by the English-speaking reader as an expression of thorough-going self-hatred, couched albeit in somewhat startlingly colloquial terms. Certainly it is possible that this is the meaning that Miłosz wished to convey, though it seems unlikely that he was aware of the degree of colloquialism in the phrase he chose. However, it is more probable that he misinterpreted not only the register but also the meaning of the phrase, understanding it as his Polish translator suggests: the expression of the loathing he felt towards his own courage (*guts*).

On the other hand, precisely because of the linguistic incapacity that limits and sometimes distorts Miłosz's choice of words, a spirit of engag-

[4] Other examples include *gratte-menton* (Merton, Miłosz 1997: 82), *au fond* (Merton, Miłosz 1997: 86), *raccoursi* (Merton, Miłosz 1997: 91), *rongé par ma culpabilité* (Merton, Miłosz 1997: 103), *on s'arrange* (Merton, Miłosz 1997: 107); *avec tout le baratin* (Merton, Miłosz 1997: 119). On page 134, Miłosz presents a fragment of his own poem in French translation – it was only later that the English translation of this poem, quoted by the editor in a footnote, came into being.

ing, childlike sincerity and simplicity emerges from his letters to Merton in their original version: "Your letters give me always joy (Merton, Miłosz 1997: 58); Your letters are very dear to me" (Merton, Miłosz 1997: 68). Perhaps this impression is created by Miłosz's inadequate sense of what is "appropriate" in English. We may take as an example the valediction "with love," with which Miłosz after a while comes to conclude his letters (Merton, Miłosz 1997: 94), even before he signs himself simply "Czesław." It seems unlikely that Miłosz, if he had been brought up speaking English, would have used such an intimate expression in correspondence with a man whom up to this point he has come to know only by letter! Merton never responds in precisely the same way; instead he writes, for instance, "With all affection in Christ" (Merton, Miłosz 1997: 113); "God bless you, and all love" (Merton, Miłosz 1997: 124). But the "unsuitableness" of expression on Miłosz's part certainly cannot have disturbed him; for it answered to a deeper truth, a truth that "linguistic correctness," if Miłosz had known English better, might have prevented from being voiced. Behind Miłosz's English there lay neither the countryside nor the speech of his childhood, that language in which alone, as he believed, poetry can be written (Karwowska 2011: 126) – and yet in this exile from his own homelands and speech, in making use of the mother tongue of his "foreign correspondent," he unwittingly found ways to return to the language of a child! Perhaps it was the very foreignness of English that gave the Polish poet a greater freedom of spirit, making a greater directness possible.

The picture of Miłosz that emerges from his correspondence with Merton shows him to be an artist whose suspension between cultures caused him great suffering, who reflected deeply on the responsibility that he bore for the effect of his writing both in the West and in Poland. This is why he wonders, for example, whether he was wise to allow *The Captive Mind* to be published in English, given that it might as a result have become inscribed in the United States in the over-simplified schemes of thought of the cold war (Merton, Miłosz 1997: 103–104). Miłosz's work, in this case in particular, may be understood as an attempt to explain – both to himself and to the reader – the East for the West, and *vice versa*. It is important, for instance, that in his letters to Merton, reflections on the West go hand in hand with musings on Russian culture and on the incomprehensibility of Russia for the West (e.g. Merton, Miłosz 1997: 83).[5] Miłosz knows that

[5] Elżbieta Mikiciuk notes that in the letter of 1959 dated Easter Saturday, Miłosz writes of his dislike of imperial Russia and loathing of the Soviet system as well as of his "categori-

he is separated from the Western public not only by a language barrier, but also by a whole host of cultural, political and historical "false friends," among which the already mentioned concept of the "Catholic writer" may certainly be numbered. In defiance of these difficulties, Miłosz persistently strives to build bridges. In this context, a mention of Auden in one of his letters to Merton reveals how far back his involvement with poetry in English stretches, and how zealously he strove to make it more familiar to a Polish audience (Merton, Miłosz 1997: 34).[6] Conversely, a frequent motif of the correspondence is Miłosz's desire to make Americans acquainted with the poetry of his fellow-Poles, a desire that Merton worked hard to help him fulfil.

The editor of the English text of this correspondence, Robert Faggen, though not always sensitive to the uncertainties that tormented both of its authors,[7] draws attention in his introduction to the fact that Thomas Merton was always, as he himself put it, "a lone wolf" within the Catholic Church, often remarking that he was inconvenient to his superiors and somewhat suspect (Merton, Miłosz 1997: 40).[8] Miłosz's letters, in turn, are in Faggen's view coloured by the sadness of his exile.[9] The category brought into play by Faggen here may certainly be understood in a variety of different

cal rejection of 'Russianity'" despite his typical Polish "fascination with Russians as human beings" (2011: 206; Merton, Miłosz 1997: 29).

[6] It is worth noting that Miłosz writes here that *The Captive Mind* was in a sense first written in the form of verse, in his *Treatise on Morals*, which he claims was probably inspired by Auden's "New Year's [sic] Letter." Auden wrote this occasional poem at the beginning of 1940 in the form of a letter addressed to his friend Elizabeth Mayer, in which, however, he takes up a variety of themes both public and private.

[7] For example, in a footnote on page 120 explaining who Charles Péguy was, Faggen omits to mention any of the things that were important for Merton in his comparison of himself with the French poet. For Merton, what mattered were not the external facts of Péguy's life: that he was a "man of letters," that he was a convert to Catholicism (if indeed this may be said), or that he wrote *La mystère de la charité de Jeanne d'Arc*. The important things for Merton were the **inward** truths of the poet's life on the fringes of the Church, a life filled with ambiguities and painful inner conflicts. It was a life like Merton's, marked by "metaphysical torment" and the sense of being "spiritually excommunicated" (Merton, Miłosz 1997: 120).

[8] Faggen's interpretation of Merton's correspondence with Miłosz is somewhat different from mine in its underlining of Merton's interest in Buddhism. Faggen takes it for granted that at the end of his life, Merton "embraced Buddhism" (Faggen 1997: xi). Miłosz, however, takes a much more cautious view of Merton's relationship with Buddhism, emphasising that his friend's attitude of "ecumenical openness" was not the outcome of "cheap syncretism;" rather, he "approached the Tibetan monks with a great effort of understanding, yet at the same time as a Christian" (Miłosz 2004: 156).

[9] See the commentary on the front flap of the dust-jacket.

ways. Thus, for example, Bożena Karwowska recalls the articles that appeared in the world's press after the death of Miłosz, in which the poet was described in postcolonial terms, as an artist who "was unable to find his place in an ethnocentric world" (2011: 125–126; trans. J.W.). Karwowska emphasises that Miłosz's poetry met with a sympathetic response in America's multicultural community, familiar as it was with the experience of alienation (2011: 125–126). In this short discussion, however, I have tried to "unlock" the category of "exile" with the help of a different key, one that helps us to discover the reason for the poet's deep bond with Merton. This key is the fragment from the Epistle to the Hebrews (13:14) that is quoted in my title (in the King James Version as being the closest English equivalent to the Bible that Miłosz would have known in childhood, Jakub Wujek's translation of 1599): "Here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come." It is no accident that these words occur in the New Testament letter addressed to the Hebrews, for this placement, in essence, expresses the same concept of being "exiled from home" that in the opinion of Jan Grosfeld is at the heart of the Jewish understanding of human life as a constant setting out towards the unknown.[10] In the correspondence of Miłosz and Merton, the same concept appears under the name known from existentialist philosophy: "alienation." And – as Miłosz himself believed – "the problem of alienation is basically theological" (Merton and Miłosz 1997: 103).

Miłosz perceives that, in the world that surrounds him, his correspondent and friend is an "exile from home": in the "rat's race [sic]" of a civilisation dominated by commercialism; in the "intellectual and moral weakness of American Christian churches;" in the "chaos in the world of literary and artistic values" (Merton, Miłosz 1997: 87). In these aspects of American life and culture, the Polish poet also feels "homeless." However, as he assures Merton, "every country is difficult to bear" (Merton, Miłosz

[10] The concept of "becoming unsettled" in the world, "being exiled from home," "not being at home" (*oddomowienie się*) appears in the writings of Daniel Epstein quoted by Grosfeld. Grosfeld refers among others to Miłosz's *Visions from San Francisco Bay* (as interpreted by Fr. Sadzik) in an attempt to show the affinities with regard to the concept of spiritual homelessness between thought derived on the one hand from Christian tradition and on the other from twentieth-century philosophers of dialogue and contemporary rabbinic writers such as Epstein. In further illustration of these affinities, we may take note of Karl Rahner's remark on St Ignatius Loyola, for whom life on earth was "a search for the eternal homeland of truth," undertaken in the power of grace in an "unceasing new exodus" (see Knox 2011: 215).

1997: 79). At the moment of writing, the example Miłosz has to hand is France, whose weaknesses he presents as a counter-balance to the accusations Merton has made against American society. For Miłosz understands that the source of the experience of homelessness that unites him with his correspondent does not lie in the inability to accept particular aspects of any one country or system. Rather, this experience springs from the fact that both men can be counted among those "homeless religious minds" whose numbers Miłosz, in almost his last letter to Merton, predicts will increase in the future (Merton, Miłosz 1997: 173). This is why, in my title, I have alluded to the concept of **spiritual** exile, seeing in Merton and Miłosz friends united on the pattern of the Epistle to the Hebrews by their awareness of "not being at home" in the world; by their understanding of the principle that to live honestly means a continual "setting out" in search of truth, a refusal to accept prepared answers or to sit back and rest in the assurance of what one has so far deemed to be right.

Neither Miłosz nor Merton considered himself in the least superior to other people in this consciousness of being an exile; neither rejoiced in nor boasted of the spiritual depths that prevented him from making himself at home in the world. On the contrary, their loneliness was a source of much of their suffering. But by "going out" from themselves towards a "correspondent" of a different origin and different experience, in this great effort to understand, not America, but a particular American by Miłosz, and a particular Pole by Merton, these two writers discovered, if not a "continuing city," then at least a place of temporary shelter, a refuge from loneliness and a place of spiritual refreshment on the exile's way. The paradox of their correspondence remains the fact that each of the partners in the dialogue, in his search for other people who "spoke the same language," as Merton put it (Merton, Miłosz 1997: 40), discovered what he sought in someone who, in the literal sense, did not.

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