

## EXCERPTS FROM A PANEL DISCUSSION HELD ON 13 MAY 2011 IN KRAKÓW DURING THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL MIŁOSZ FESTIVAL

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The title of the panel devoted to Czesław Miłosz's works and their translations in international circulation is meant to allude to the title of Jan Błosiński's book *Miłosz jak świat* (Miłosz Like the World), and at the same time to *The World. A Naïve Poem*, one of the most frequently translated works by the Polish Nobel laureate. The discussion featured translators of the poet's work into different languages, people involved in creating his image; they spoke of his work and the realities of their respective cultures and traditions, and the readers apprehending it from a range of very different experiences. They all shared the belief in Miłosz's importance for the literatures of their countries and for world literature, and an awareness of the many difficulties in translating Miłosz's works. The discussion, excerpts of which are presented below, was the culminating point of the international translation seminars of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Czesław Miłosz Literary Festival. During the seminars more than twenty individuals from different countries worked for four days with the assistance and guidance of experienced translators of Polish literature and Miłosz scholars.

Miłosz like the world; Miłosz and the world; Miłosz in the world; Miłosz as a world poet: this may suffice as the briefest summary of the debate chaired by Magda Heydel, a conversation that featured:

**Anders Bodegård**, a Swedish Slavist, translator of Polish and French literature, for many years a teacher of Swedish at the Jagiellonian University and the University of Warsaw. A figure of vast importance for the promotion of Polish literature and culture in Sweden. He has translated Witold Gombrowicz, Zbigniew Herbert, Paweł Huelle, Ryszard Kapuściński, Ewa Lipska, Wisława Szymborska and Adam Zagajewski, among others.

**Clare Cavanagh**, a professor at Northwestern University, researcher in European literature, Russicist, Polonist, author of books on the poetry of the Eastern Europe and an eminent translator of Polish literature, especially poetry, into English. She has studied and collaborated with Stanisław

Barańczak. Her work to date has included translations of Wisława Szymborska, Adam Zagajewski and Ryszard Krynicki, among others.

**Wu Lan**, a translator of Polish literature into Chinese. She worked in Chinese embassy in Poland in the 1970s, and currently presides over the chair of Polish studies at the Beijing University of Foreign Languages. She has translated such authors as Ryszard Kapuściński and Bruno Schulz, as well as two books by Czesław Miłosz.

**Andrei Khadanovich**, a Belarusian poet, lecturer in world literature and translator of poetry from English, French, Russian, Ukrainian and Polish. His body of translations includes such poets as Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński, Jan Twardowski, Zbigniew Herbert and Czesław Miłosz. His own poems have been translated into a number of languages, including Polish (*Święta Nowego Rocku*, 2008). He is the president of the Belarusian PEN Club.

**Ashok Vajpeyi**, an Indian poet, translator, publisher, literary critic and an outstanding figure on India's cultural scene. The author of thirteen books of poetry, seven volumes of essays in Hindi, and three books on the arts written in English. He is a cultural activist, and an organiser of literary meetings and festivals, as well as arts festivals. He translates and promotes Polish poetry. A selection of his poems has appeared in Poland in Renata Czekalska's translation, titled *Gramatyka wyobraźni* (2008).

**Renata Czekalska**, a translator, lecturer in Oriental studies at the Jagiellonian University, and collaborator with Ashok Vajpeyi, with whom he has translated Polish literature into Hindi.

The discussion saw also the participation of a number of translators and Miłosz scholars from the audience: Mitsuyoshi Numano, a Japanese Polonist, professor at the University of Tokyo; Constantin Geambasu, a Romanian Polonist and translator of the Romanian canon of Polish contemporary poetry; Nikita Kuznetsov, translator of Polish literature into Russian; Xavier Farré, a poet and translator of Polish poetry into Spanish and Catalan; and Danuta Borhardt, translator of Witold Gombrowicz into English.

## On the presence of Miłosz in other cultures:

### Anders Bodegård:

Miłosz and Sweden is a fluctuating affair, as is often the case with the careers of authors in translation. The whole story began in Sweden quite early. Ingrid Ekman Nordgaard translated *The Captive Mind* into Swedish as early as 1956, released as *Själar i fångenskap*, and to this day it remains the best known of Miłosz's works in Sweden. And, well, then there was a long pause until – guess what happened? In 1980 Miłosz received the Nobel Prize in Stockholm. This is a most important award, and so the book of course came back in print, along with *Native Realm*, *The Issa Valley*, *The Seizure of Power* and poems, lots of poems were translated into Swedish. Towards the end of the 1980s Professor Nils Åke Nillson, who was Miłosz's main translator at the time, translated nearly all of the poems with the help of others. So we have those works, and this is a very important fact, though of course there is also the whole story of who actually reads them today, and so on. I was lucky to have the chance to translate and publish *Facing the River* (*Vid flodens strand*) in 2000 and *This* (*Det*) in 2004.

I must add that in Sweden Miłosz's career, and the career of Polish literature as such, owes everything to Polish refugees. For example, in 1968 Adam Bromberg, who had been the main publisher in the People's Republic of Poland, was exiled from Poland and found himself with his wife and two daughters in Uppsala, a small town in Sweden. And what could this brave fellow do with his world wide literary contacts? He set up a small press in Uppsala. And of course he already knew, well ahead of everyone else, who was soon to receive the Nobel Prize. So he published, for instance, Czesław Miłosz, whom he happened to know personally. And he also published Singer, who also went on to receive the Nobel... he printed Octavio Paz, another winner... and so on, and so forth. He was a brilliant publisher.

But the key person, in fact, was Katarzyna Gruber, who had also been exiled from Poland. She found employment at the Nobel Library of the Swedish Academy, which she helped plan. What she did for Slavic literature, for Polish literature and for Miłosz remains unrecognised. Then there is Leonard Neuger, who arrived in Stockholm as a refugee during the Solidarity period, in 1982 most probably, to become the first professor of Polish literature; it is thanks to him that I have the opportunity to speak

to you today. We have made a new selection of Miłosz's poetry, for the Brombergs. About sixty poems, a truly original selection. I won't tell you the contents, because it's going to be a surprise. There was also Agneta Pleijel, a Swedish writer interested in Polish literature – she and her husband Maciej Zaremba have translated Herbert into Swedish, for instance. Agneta Pleijel will write a preface to our selected poems, entitled *Ärlig beskrivning*. This is from the title of a poem in the *This (Det)* collection: *An Honest Description*. The complete title is *An Honest Description of Myself with a Glass of Whiskey at an Airport, Let's Say in Minneapolis*.

Before coming here I took a small survey of the Swedish writers I know of various generations. This is not going to be a full report, but my findings are fairly interesting. Mikael van Reis, of my generation, a very important critic from Göteborg and a writer, adores Miłosz, and often reads him. But he only could recall that there is a sentence somewhere in Miłosz about us all melting in the sky like raspberry ice cream. He also knew “*Campo di Fiori*” in Swedish by heart. In 2000 Miłosz was invited to Stockholm by Minister Anna Lindh. She was chiefly interested in *The Captive Mind*. Miłosz lectured two or three times a day for an entire week. He also had a long conversation with a Christian poet, Ylva Eggehorn, which she has decided to publish (it will appear also in her latest book). Turgén Jelenski loves Miłosz's essays and has read everything by Miłosz, though long ago, so he intends to go back to him. Martina Lowden, a literary star of the younger generation, admitted: “I'm poring over Gombrowicz right now, so as yet I have had no time to get acquainted with Miłosz.” Malte Persson, a young literary scholar, has read everything he could by Miłosz. He highly appreciates him as an essayist. At the same time he cannot agree with him on religious issues, for he is quite Swedish in this respect. That is all – it was just a short survey.

I am going to conclude with fragments from a text once read by Birgitta Trotzig. Birgitta Trotzig is<sup>1</sup> the central figure of our literature, and a member of the Swedish Academy. When Czesław Miłosz passed away she dedicated this text to him:

A witness of his age. A poet and his conversations with history, with the inhumanity of his modern day and with the timeless beauty of earthly nature. Miłosz: a poetic experience of life as a response to the present, as a diary of the lyrical language of the present day, written by a man inspired and sent on

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<sup>1</sup> Birgitta Trotzig died 14 May 2011, a day after our panel (M.H.).

a mission by the Spirit of History, which in the language of religion is known as the Spirit of Truth, Creator. *Veni Creator* rings throughout Miłosz's work. The shadows of Europe – how did it come to pass that the continent of cathedrals and beauty of thought should contradict itself in almost every way? Ideologies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century? Negation: negation of life by suffocating utopias. Verily, shadows did enshroud this land. The history of modern Europe is – it is an inescapable thought – the beginning of the Apocalypse. And yet it was in facing up to these shadows that Miłosz's world of expression could take shape, in service to witnessing and expressing what can be witnessed. It formed in a dogged fight for the right human expression claims to freedom and complexity. From the world of coercion and darkness nonetheless came witnesses of life. Witnesses to what history and life are in reality. Miłosz was one such witness. Facing the most gruesome paroxysms of Europe's history, he kept, consciously and stubbornly, to the narrow path of poetic experience, showing the way to those forced by various forms of oppression to tread the scorched earth of negation. The shadows of Europe. In the cruel times of the negation of life Miłosz was among those who stood as its creative opposition. One of the great poets of affirmation in contemporary literature. One of the few. He negated neither religion, nor vision, nor love, nor life, nor things, nor touch and the bond between the skin and things, nor did he negate the deep magical labyrinths of dreams, nor the childlike warmth of what is human, nor the shimmer and the wonder of being. His was to affirm.

### Wu Lan:

In China we have had Polish studies for fifty years now. It may not seem many, but about ten individuals occupy themselves with translating Polish literature. In China, Polish literature is not as well known as it is in other countries, such as the United States, but I think it is still worth translating, as it comes as a challenge to Polish scholars in China.

Miłosz in China is particularly associated with the Nobel Prize. In 1980, right after Miłosz received it, a very well known Chinese poet translated a book of his poems from English. Later, in 1993, another recognised poet translated his poems from English. In 2004 two famous writers translated *Miłosz's Alphabet*, again from English.

I believe I started in 2008 on a guest trip to Poland, invited by the Book Institute, where I learnt that 2011 would be Miłosz Year. Although I had no publishing contract, I began translating *Native Realm*. When our publishers knew there would be Miłosz Year, they commissioned *The Captive Mind*. It will first see publication in Taiwan, and then in China.

I believe we are translating a lot of Polish literature. Szymborska has also been translated. Miłosz's prose is not so widely known, perhaps it is a matter of language. Our famous writers seldom read in English, I think, which is why they had no opportunity to learn about Miłosz.

### Ashok Vajpeyi:

Well, I don't know Polish. But I'll translate it. With Renata Czekalska's help. I started a project, entirely on my own, without any support, because I seriously believed – and I continue to believe – that some of the greatest poetry in the latter half of the twentieth century was written in Polish. I decided to bring this great poetry into my language – and retranslated four poets: starting with Różewicz, then Herbert, then Miłosz and Szymborska. We published bilingual editions of all of them, beginning in around 2001, up to 2003. And then recently, when I was turning seventy, my publishers said: “Why don't you put together all the translations that you have done from Polish?” I'm not really a translator. But although I have a bad reputation in many things, translation is not one of them. So I brought out this book, which is called *Between Us and Darkness*, containing translations of the four poets.

How do I see Miłosz? Of course, a very banal answer would be: as a great poet. So why not translate a great poet? Simple as that. But what was so great about him? I think he was a major poet with a very great range of themes that he was alone in tackling; he lived in a very tumultuous part of the world, there's a moral toughness that reveals the capability of the lyric to bear witness to and reflect on the evil of the twentieth century, and to delve to the very core of suffering. To allude to Mahatma Gandhi, I have called him a *satyagraha* poet – somebody who insists on his own truth in spite of everything. It doesn't matter whether the empire approves or not, whether the regime supports it or not... insistence on one's own truth. And in his case as well, because of the experience... in India, of course, we have the experience of the evil British Empire, but we didn't have the experience that you had – of two tyrannies, one after the other. And in Miłosz's case, I think, the personal and the political merge. And they become so organically one that a very personal poem can actually be read as a political poem, perhaps. These are the first ever translations into Hindi from Polish. And I took courage from Miłosz, because he translated many poems, particularly in the *Book of Luminous Things*, from languages he did not know.

So I thought: “If he could do it, why can’t I? I’m a smaller fry but I will take the same path.” And there you are.

There is one other thing about Miłosz – most of his poetry was known in India from English translation. English works in India in a very strange way. It prevents us from learning other languages directly. Because we are satisfied: everything is available in English, and therefore all the translations mainly came from America, all the books, including *The Captive Mind* etc. But more famously... *The Witness of Poetry*, it is called – the Charles Norton lecture – *The Witness of Poetry*? That was quite discussed, because his was a different view of poetry.

And I think another problem that we face in translating is that he’s a poet who names everything: individuals, people, locations, cities, aspects of nature. And some of these names carry resonance in Polish but they do not in Hindi. So what do we do? We avoided those which were specifically rooted in a resonance. On the other hand, Lithuanian rural life pictures and images were much akin to Indian images. So we took them. And there were things like his poem to his wife Janina, which is giving the body to fire, which is a very Hindi way of doing it... So there were things of that kind that we discovered, and I would say that at least in four or five languages he is well known, in the poetic circles: in Hindi, in Bengali, in Malayalam, in Marathi. And there was a time when I was accused of suffering from a Polish malady. Because every time I would call somebody, I’d quote either a Polish saying or a Polish poet. And many of these were taken, at that time, from English, because the *New Yorker* reviewed poems. “What is poetry which does not save nations” and things of that kind. I would pick these up and use them. While acknowledging them, of course... or sometimes stealing them quite shamelessly. But that’s how it is.

Also, I think... I had an interview with him. Perhaps the last interview that he gave, in Krakow. Was it in 2001? No, 2003. Anyway, he was very well-dressed for the occasion. In fact, I was poorly dressed to meet a great poet, I just went in a casual way. I had sent questions in advance. And one of the things that I asked him was about his notion of suffering, because it was very close to the one in Buddhism. And he mentions this – the Clown Prince who watches four elements: this is very Buddhist. But when I asked him “Do you believe in the Buddhists’ concept of negativity or the concept of vacuity?,” he said: “No. It is indecent.” And he said it with such vehemence – it is indecent, the notion of vacuity, the notion of negativity is indecent – I think this vindicated my understanding of him. That in spite of

the fact that there was suffering at the core of his writing, in spite of the fact that he coped with evil of the twentieth century, he had a zest and a faith in life. And his poetry, on one level, is a vindication of this faith. I was very happy and very grateful that I could bring him into Hindi, though I translated only seventy-five of his poems.

### Clare Cavanagh:

First I beg your pardon for my linguistic imperialism – this is not my fault. I am of Irish descent, so I could call myself a victim of the same imperialism. What can I add... Miłosz is simply omnipresent, not only in the poetry of the English language but also in poetry as such. Not just in the US or in Ireland, or in England. And the credit for that is his, of course, it is thanks to himself that we know him: that our poets, writers and even ordinary readers (believe me, there are also ordinary readers in America!) know Polish poets. And I have to say Polish poets have been enjoying amazing popularity in the United States for many years – and this is by and large thanks to Miłosz. I have translated only one poem by Miłosz, and I blame him for that. Already before his Nobel he had been known particularly – and he would complain about it – as the translator of Herbert, as a translator of many Polish poets, since *Postwar Polish Poetry: An Anthology* was released. Many American and English-language poets say how tremendous an impact that anthology had on them. Around that anthology and around his own prose (for in America before the Nobel he was known more as the author of prose) he assembled kind of a team, a workshop: Renata Gorczyńska, Louis Iribarne, Catherine Zielonko, Bogdana Carpenter, Lilian Vallee, to name some of them – these were his students at Berkeley...

Miłosz had absolute control over translation of his own poems. Not only in America: even in Canada, England, Ireland. People think they know Miłosz as he was. But this is just not true. They know Miłosz as he wanted to present himself in English. For example there's no rhymed Miłosz in the English-speaking countries. This is Miłosz in the world, the Miłosz of the US, but in a certain way this is a very narrow and specific Miłosz.



### Andrei Khadanovich:

I can say this and you can take my word for it: perhaps this will change somewhat, but to date Miłosz has not seeped into Belarusian literature through Polish émigrés nor through the English language – for technical reasons the latter has not yet occurred to Belarusians. Later I will say what is Miłosz to Belarusians. To Poles Miłosz is one huge alibi. Miłosz, Giedroyć – they are alibis for the Polish. Why am I saying this? From the perspective of a Belarusian the supposed non-imperiality of the Polish language is less than timely or apparent. Of course, thanks to Jerzy Giedroyć and Czesław Miłosz we can joke about it.

Miłosz liked to say that he did not envy his critics and literary scholars their task, as he was a multi-instrumentalist. I envy neither myself nor other Belarusian translators. There is always the temptation to portray Miłosz on only one instrument – and usually the instrument that we ourselves find most appealing. This is best demonstrated through examples: you pull out one theme, while Miłosz is entangled in mass of others... The translator will change the text just a bit, yet what comes out is quite another Miłosz. There is a phenomenon in Belarusian literature – the Vilnius Miłosz. He lived in Vilnius and was sentimentally attached to the city, but the poet Oleg Minkin, a resident of Vilnius, translated Miłosz as if he were his compatriot. There is a constant temptation for a Belarusian: everyone believes that they understand Polish perfectly if they can read the Latin alphabet, mainly thanks to the Internet. They sometimes take words that look similar in Polish and in Belarusian to mean the same, so you can read some very funny things in these translations. And there's another temptation: metaphorically speaking, Miłosz is a neighbour for Belarusians, and a very close neighbour, who, as many people do, left his village for the wide world... As such, I could reformulate the topic of this discussion, “Miłosz – World,” with reference to a great and important book by Miłosz, *Native Realm*, and change it to “Miłosz and the Native World.” This is how it seems through the eyes of a Belarusian: here's a neighbour who came home after being in France, America, the Second World War, Berkeley and whatnot.

Miłosz is a neighbour you can call on for a piece of advice, for help. He is a major authority, it can't be denied, and at the same time the “most Belarusian” of the Nobel laureates... This is, for many reasons, as cool as it is hazardous for the translator. There is the constant temptation to translate Miłosz as one's compatriot. And with such an approach the inherent dis-

tance disappears, a distance which exists between Belarus, the Belarusian reader and Miłosz – there’s a kind of mythologisation. Sometimes a Belarusian village is cleft by a road, sometimes a motorway. With Miłosz it is like crossing a road on the way to one’s neighbour: much can happen on the motorway, for the traffic is quite heavy at the border between the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. We have translated him for some dozens of years now; my predecessors, my seniors, chose to translate the Polish literature which for various reasons also belonged to Belarus. We would choose Mickiewicz and it was like pulling the blanket over to our side. We say: Nowogródek, Zaosie and so on... I think Lithuanians did the same with the blanket. I have no doubts that there are enough great poets for everyone.

You can use the great national poets, but you need to mind the distance. Let’s imagine that someone pulls out one theme, publishing a couple of poems in, let’s say, in a journal called *Our Faith*. And automatically Miłosz becomes Poland’s main Catholic poet. Let’s be frank: in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Poland there were a few important artists more Catholic than Miłosz. Another person pulls out another theme from Miłosz’s work and we’ve got some kind of provincial Miłosz, like in translations by Alesh Tshobhat, a poet from Grodno. His Miłosz is a Polish-Belarusian poet, a poet of the Borderlands (Miłosz himself would protest against such notions as the Eastern Borderlands). The first translator of Miłosz into Belarusian was Jan Tshykvín, a poet of the Belarusian language living in Poland. He was close to the source, the originals were available much earlier to him than they were to his Belarusian colleagues, but the strategy he used yielded quite a peculiar Miłosz. Just as Miłosz admitted (my thanks go to *Zeszyty Literackie* for the book about Russia) that he set up psychological barriers against Russian, so Jan Czykwín evidently had linguistic barriers against Polish when translating Miłosz. To put it bluntly, he overused Russianisms in Belarusian to make his translation nothing like the original text. Jurash Bushliakhov and I rendered Miłosz more Polish and we watched some stylists’ hair stand on end.

Miłosz indirectly repeated after Baudelaire: the poet is one who remembers. This makes it a way of being. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century a motto was coined by Yevtushenko: “In Russia a poet is more than just a poet.” Unfortunately, in Belarus this is still the case, for rather non-poetic reasons. In such circumstances there is the temptation for poets to be less than a poet; this is due to the proselytising tone of their reactions to injustice. Miłosz is a great example of being more than a poet without losing good taste. The tyrants

whom he addressed in “You Who Wronged” have been long forgotten, while the poem itself is still read and remembered. This is precisely one of challenges for Belarusian translators: to keep the distance, remain responsible for the style, at a time, in an age when style is more than just a style.

## On difficulties translating Miłosz:

**Wu Lan:**

Translating Miłosz and other Polish writers is an enormous challenge for us, primarily because of our word order. When we start translating we always first have to mind the grammar. When there is also history, sociology, politics, philosophy involved – one must understand all of these too. As there are not many Poles in China it is impossible to consult on one’s choices. And that’s why I was very nervous when I translated Miłosz, him in particular. There are many who try translating Miłosz from English – this is a frequent translatorial practice. One of Miłosz’s poems, “Gift,” was translated by seven poets! I therefore think it is better to start with his prose, especially since it is not widely known in China. Besides, one has more freedom in translating.

What is more difficult in his prose is that he speaks about the history of relations between Poland and the Soviet Union. That the Soviet Union played an ambivalent role in Polish history, communism was in fact a yoke for Poland – these are little known facts in China. That’s why I believe we have to translate Miłosz’s prose – for Chinese readers to know more.

**Renata Czekalska:**

If this is going to be an anecdote, I feel at a loss, as I can’t recall the title of the poem I’m going to talk about. Well, as one of the more serious problems we encountered was dealing with all the attributes of the Christian tradition, I remember a poem where a Corpus Christi procession appears. I must confess I felt rather helpless, so I decided to consult its translation into English by Miłosz himself and Robert Hass. You can imagine my disappointment when I saw the phrase “Corpus Christi Sunday” in that version. As those among us who grew up in Poland know, Corpus Christi never falls on a Sunday... There were also situations when we found our-

selves absolutely helpless. For example, there is a Polish word *gruda*, not only practically untranslatable, but also impossible to describe in Hindi, as those who inhabit the Hindi-speaking region of the world cannot really imagine frozen mud. And approached descriptively, frozen mud still means nothing. The translator has to write about frozen mud, or a frozen field, and hope that the reader will have enough good will to imagine something *gruda*-like. The situation is much the same with birch trees. Of course, the word *birch* exists in Indian languages – also in Hindi – and is easily translatable; however, the load of emotional connotations attached to *birch* in the collective mind of our region is impossible to relate.

### Ashok Vajpeyi:

I just want to say we had this problem of how to do the formal structure of the poems in Hindi. So we decided, rather arbitrarily, that we were going to depend on the music of Hindi language itself, rather than trying to replicate, or in some way approximate the rhythmic structure of the original Polish. And the only constraint that we put upon ourselves was that if there are twenty-seven lines in the poem, we will have also twenty-seven lines, no more, no less. And this seems to have worked. You might be interested to know that Delhi University recently added a course of world literature in Hindi translation. And they have included Miłosz as one of the poets to be studied in that course.

The other thing was that while translating Miłosz and the other three Polish poets, I discovered the possibilities of my own language. I did not know that my language had so many words which are there, at which one would have never glanced twice. But under the pressure of looking for a synonym one has to discover those words. I discovered hidden geographies of my own language, which I think is a great creative gift.

### Clare Cavanagh:

Before his Nobel, Miłosz barely existed in America, partly due to his complicated metre. I mean that there's practically no early Miłosz in the US. *The Light of Day* exists only fragmentarily, *Rescue* looks quite unlike the Polish original... We know that the poet was against translating poems using different metres. I myself am not sure why he chose that one and not

the other. Towards the end of his life, he translated *A Treatise on Poetry* in an unrhymed form, so then it is a different poem.

### Andrei Khadanovich:

As for selections of Miłosz's works, first of all he was forbidden *en bloc* in the Soviet era, although sometimes people would translate single poems "for the desktop" or "for the drawer" – is that what you say in Polish? And now those poems see publication and their translators turn out to be authors you would never suspect. For example Maksim Tank: the chief Soviet writer turns out to be the first translator of *Ars poetica* into Belarusian. But those first translations are loaded with many problems. To the ear of a Belarusian translator in the Soviet era Miłosz is a poet who strives to write forms which were neither "excessively poetry or excessively prose." He shunned regular versification, though he didn't quite reach free verse in the sense of *verse libre*; he was a master of rhythm. And someone with a Belarusian ear could not but interpret this poetry as *verse libre*, thus rendering those forms of Miłosz's as given slightly more towards prose. If, on the other hand, someone chose the rhymed Miłosz, they usually paid no attention to Miłosz's place in Polish rhyming tradition, how he avoided hackneyed rhymes and so on. And so the style was altogether lost in those other translations. If someone took Miłosz's prose-writing it was mainly on ideological grounds. *The Captive Mind* was the first book translated into Belarusian, by virtue of its acuity and relevance (sad to say, it is still relevant to the current situation in Belarus). The translator was less concerned with artistic details. Haste and the eagerness to reach readers with the book was at stake, and it shows. The result is, sadly, unreadable. Today the book is on the shelves, so – some argue – there is no reason to publish it anew. And so we are now working on a four-volume edition of Miłosz. We're doing a book of poetry, *The Land of Ulro, Native Realm, Issa Valley*. But we aren't reissuing *The Captive Mind* nor working on a better translation. Allegedly Miłosz, yet perhaps not Miłosz.

## Voices from the audience:

### Mitsuyoshi Numano:

Please accept my apologies for my awkward Polish. Although I speak English and Russian much better than Polish, I'm going to try speak Polish here. First of all, I think I'm the only Japanese person present. My role here is more that of a spectator, but I would like to say on behalf of all my colleagues, Japanese Polish scholars, that there has been a long Polonist tradition in Japan and there are fairly good translations of Polish literature. My impression is that Polish literature in Japan is represented mainly by prose, since such writers as Bruno Schulz, Gombrowicz, Stanisław Lem and Mrozek are very well known. When it comes to poetry, including Miłosz's poetry, the situation is far from ideal, for first and foremost – as Robert Frost once said – poetry is what gets lost in translation. And besides, as everyone present is well aware, translating poetry requires a combination of linguistic and poetic talents, and such a combination is rare with the small number of Japanese Polonists. But there are translations of poems by Miłosz, Szymborska, Herbert, Różewicz and even Stanisław Barańczak into Japanese. As for Miłosz, like anywhere else, *The Captive Mind* was the first work of his to be translated into Japanese, back in the early 1960s. Unfortunately, at the time the Japanese knew practically nothing about Miłosz the poet. He was regarded simply as an anticommunist political writer. Only gradually, over many years, have the Japanese learned that he was one of the greatest poets of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore I'm glad that we're now preparing a new book of Miłosz's poetry. It's going to be a collaboration between ten Japanese Polonists. Each Polonist has picked his or her favourite poems. This selection will make for a very interesting tableau of the Japanese reception of Miłosz, as the translators belong to different generations and have different views on literature.

### Constantin Geambașu

I would like to say a few things. I promoted Miłosz in Romania, I translated *The Captive Mind*, *Native Realm* and *Visions from San Francisco Bay*. What has Miłosz given to us, what has he given to me? In Romania, under Ceaușescu, Miłosz was banned, and in 1998, when *The Captive Mind* was published it was – along with Orwell and a few other books – an important

text for the Romanian intelligentsia, because it revealed the mechanisms of the communist system, and it was badly needed. I belong to the middle generation, who had no access to independent culture under the communist regime, and thanks to Miłosz I learnt the meaning of *ketman*, I saw what kind of behaviour it was. This is, I believe, a fundamental notion, popularised by Miłosz in Central and Southeast European cultures. From *The Land of Ulro* I learnt comparative literature. In this book, Miłosz – drawing on Niemojewski – teaches us a new way of approaching Mickiewicz. And not only that. Later, using the figure of *The Land of Ulro* he refers to other poets: William Blake and Swedenborg. And finally the poet – I think that he can teach every translator about how to act, how to work, how to discipline oneself, how to be sceptical. To sum up, he is an eminent humanist and moralist, and a great thinker of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to whom all translators are indebted.

#### Nikita Kuznetsov:

I have no authority to speak about Miłosz's reception in Russia, as I have spent half of my life in Poland and I'm now a little out of touch with Russian reality. In Russia Polish literature was riding high in the 1970s and 1980s. It is a well-known fact that Poland was a kind of a window to the West... We know that Brodski read western authors in Polish translation. Unfortunately, after the downfall of communism that interest declined as well. And now Polish literature is a niche, and if it so happens that it becomes hot news, it can be a very odd sort of popularity. I remember once Xenia Starosyelskaya being accosted on TV in the following way: "Why don't you tell us a little about the main figures of Polish literature, you know: Mickiewicz, Sienkiewicz, Wiśniewski..."

Spending most of my time in Poland, I don't know the Russian publishing world very well, so I had to call different publishers trying to flog them *The Issa Valley*. This was not easy at all – it took me a couple of years. At one publishing house I had a conversation, and not with the secretary, mind you; I spoke to the foreign literature editor-in-chief. I told her I had a novel by Czesław Miłosz, really interesting, really worth translating. There was a silence on the other side. Finally the lady said: "Milosh, Milosh... Miloš Forman?"

**Xavier Farré Vidal:**

I translated two large selections of Miłosz's poems into Spanish and Catalan. Not so long ago the Spanish edition was released. Miłosz's standing in the Spanish-speaking countries is very strange, he hardly exists there... or hardly used to exist. Only when he was awarded the Nobel Prize were second-hand translations made, from French and English, of *The Captive Mind* and *Native Realm*, and later a tiny selection of poems. This is how it functioned up to very recently, though these titles are no longer available in bookshops. And this is all very strange, as many people in Spain do know Miłosz's poetic *oeuvre*, but they know it through English versions. And as someone has already said, the English Miłosz is quite a different Miłosz. Now that the Spanish selected poems has appeared, it would seem proper to speak about the role of the translator and the person who selects the poems. In fact, I was given free rein. There was only one limitation: the book had to be no longer than three hundred pages. I exceeded the limit slightly: the book is over 450 pages long. But it got approved. It doesn't contain the treatises, there's no "The Rising of the Sun," and this is because that there was no room for so many poems and I believe that you either translate long pieces, like those poems, from beginning to end, or you had better not translate them at all. So now we'll see how our readers respond to the new publication, because they're not going to find the Miłosz they have imagined so far.

**Danuta Borchardt:**

Just a few remarks. I live in the USA and my experience of the Americans' opinion on Polish poets is that Americans perceive them as people who have lived through a lot: they have lived through History, they have lived through tragedies and they write about things that have extreme significance for everyone, while we Americans, they say, are concerned mostly with our own backyards. There has been such an opinion. Someone has mentioned Gombrowicz: well, unlike Miłosz, who reached people in other countries through English, Gombrowicz never reached America or the English-language cultural circle and is barely known. In Sweden, for example, they start with Gombrowicz – in the US they start with Polish poets.

**trans. Mikołaj Denderski**