

**By Randall Stone**

It has been my pleasure to serve as the acting director of the Skalny Center this spring, and I am pleased to announce that I will become the new director as of July 1. The former director of the Skalny Center, Professor Ewa Hauser, was on leave this spring at Petro Mohyla Mykolayiv State Humanities University, Ukraine, as a senior Fulbright Fellow. I would like to congratulate her on this honor, and on receiving an extension of her Fulbright grant for the academic year 2007-2008. Professor Hauser conceived of the idea for the Skalny Center, wrote the first grant proposal, forged an enduring partnership between the University of Rochester and Jagiellonian University in Krakow, and built the center into an important part of the undergraduate curriculum at the University of Rochester.

During the coming years, I plan to build upon and expand the existing programs of the Skalny Center. The objective is to build a strong scholarly presence here in the field of Polish and Central European studies, which can play an important role in transforming

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

the way the field is taught and studied in the same way that Rochester has transformed the study of political science. We anticipate that this development will engage the faculty in the activities of the center, generate enthusiasm and research ideas among graduate students, and attract a new generation of students and scholars to Rochester to study this important region.

The center's primary activities to this point have had the goal of enriching the undergraduate curriculum; the Skalny Center of the future will play an expanded role in undergraduate education. Indeed, we believe that developing a robust research program will significantly enrich undergraduate education, because excellent undergraduate teaching grows out of a serious engagement with academic research. In turn, it is impossible for us to train the kind of future faculty members we seek to produce in our graduate programs without involving them significantly in undergraduate teaching.

The College is providing a substantial infusion of new support for the center and an expanded University commitment to development, which will allow us to enrich our undergraduate offerings while simultaneously expanding our programs to include graduate and postgraduate initiatives. The thematic focus of the center will remain connected to Poland, but will shift to engage more deeply the issues in political science in which Poland figures prominently, particularly international relations, the politics of economic reform, and consolidating democratic institutions. The center will play an important role in one of the most significant curricular innovations in the College's strategic plan, which is to develop a new major in international relations. The new major will include coursework in political science, history and economics, foreign language, and study abroad.

During the academic year 2006-2007, we continued a number of programs that have come to be favorites in the Rochester community—luncheon talks, evening lectures, a Polish Film Festival, and concerts—in addition to sponsoring a few new ones.

Dr. Anna Niedzwiedz of Jagiellonian University, Kraków, and a Kosciuszko Foundation Visiting Professor gave two lectures on religious and national myths and symbols in Poland. (See her article in this issue.)

Dr. Wieslaw Krajka, professor at the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin, a Kosciuszko Foundation Fellow and Skalny Center visiting professor, gave a talk on *Joseph Conrad's Polishness*.

We continued our series of presentations of talented Polish musicians with piano recitals in December by Igor Lipinski of Tarnów, and in May by Filip Blachnio of Ostróda.

We collaborated with the Eastman School of Music on the last event in this academic year, a recital of organ music and a presentation about the restoration of the historic 1776 Casparini organ in Vilnius (Lithuania) and, simultaneously, building a reproduction of this organ in Rochester's Christ Church. Bogna McGarrigle, Organ Department of the Eastman School of Music and Kraków Academy of Music graduate student played baroque and contemporary organ music, and Hans Davidsson, Eastman organ professor, gave a presentation.

In October, we hosted a one-day symposium, *Images of America: Polish Perspectives on the U.S.*, which was co-sponsored by the Polish-American Fulbright Commission, the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, and the Warsaw University American Studies Center. Nine scholars from the University of Warsaw participated in this event. Synopses of three conference talks are published in this issue.

The Skalny Center's connections with Polish universities were strengthened by a semester-long visit by three students from the University of Warsaw's American Studies Center and by the participation of five UR students in the study abroad session at Jagiellonian University this summer. The Warsaw students' stay was supported by the Fulbright Alumni Initiative Award received by Professor Ewa Hauser.

It is an honor to be asked to lead such a distinguished research center, and I look forward to an expansion of the programs of the Skalny Center in the coming years.

Randall Stone, director of the Skalny Center for Polish and Central European Studies, is associate professor of political science at the University of Rochester.

INSIDE OUT AND UPSIDE DOWN:

POPULAR READING OF THE OFFICIAL ANTI-AMERICAN PROPAGANDA IN THE STALINIST POLAND OF 1949-1956

**By M. Gajda-kaszewska**

The night was dark and long, yet, neither so long nor so dark as the present day tends to believe blinded by the pride of one's own innocence.

Tomasz Burek

America has always lived in the minds of the Polish people. Either as the land of the free and the brave, or at least as the country of abundance offering limitless opportunity to all those who were willing to work hard. Reinforced by the accounts of numerous emigrants, idealized by the heroic stories of Poles involved in various wars over the emment. The agency responsible for production and dissemination of messages called the

Ministry of Information and Propaganda (Ministerstwo Informacji i Propagandy) had been created in 1944, by the decree of the Polish Committee of National Liberation (Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego). It was supposed to oversee daily press, periodicals, press and information agencies, radio and film, and deal with the issues of propaganda publications and mass propaganda actions within the country and work on propaganda messages disseminated abroad. On the one hand, the Ministry worked "to strengthen the ideas of democracy in Poland and raise the level of political and social consciousness of wide masses of society" Yet, on the other, it was entrusted with a much more serious task, that of fighting the reactionary elements and enemy propaganda. Numerous resources were provided for the special "propaganda brigades" created for that matter. At this point, it needs to be stressed that propaganda of the Stalinist period in Poland was of a much different nature than the one carried out, for example, in America during the world wars. Rather than being pragmatic, aimed at achieving particular behavior and triggering desired actions on the part of citizens, it was concerned to change the entire system of values and thought and conversion of people to the new ideology.

Since the United States of America was considered the embodiment of exploitive capitalism, imperialism and moral degeneracy, the number one enemy on the road to communism, it is not surprising that Polish propaganda messages portraying the United States constituted quite extensive materials. Posters as well as newspaper articles, two most common and pervasive propaganda vehicles, dealt with almost all aspects of

American reality as seen through the communist party perspective and with a party commentary, from politics through social life, economy, culture, moral values, or children's upbringing. We can say they covered American reality A to Z. They aimed at rendering this rotten bastard of capitalism, its politics and lifestyle repugnant to the Polish people, yet more frequently than not they miscalculated badly as to the effect they wanted to achieve.

Instead of being accepted and believed, they were laughed at and ridiculed by the public. Moreover, they triggered a counter-reading on the part of the citizens and engaged Poles in the constant pursuit of forbidden fruit. Rather than removing America from view, these posters made it present and an object of dreams, of the young generation in particular. The planned and carefully employed anti-Americanization brought the (side) effect of the unplanned, unexpected and, worst of all, uncontrollable Americanization, which must have infuriated the party leaders and made them experience the feeling of futility and inefficiency only at the outset of the road to implementing their apparently ideal scheme of the state.

There were a number of reasons responsible for this situation. The first, and probably one of the main among them, was the crudeness and primitiveness of the messages, especially visual and artistic ones, executed along the requirements of social realism. According to the guidelines of social realism, or socrealism, the one and only rightful way of artistic expression

Continued on page 2



The Splendor of Teaching Joseph Conrad



By Wiesław Krajka

In spring 2007, I once again had the pleasure of teaching a course on Joseph Conrad at the University of Rochester. I had taught similar courses twice before in the 1997-98 and 2001-02 academic years.

None of the students was of Polish-American origin so the course was outside the milieu of American Polonia. Special emphasis was given to Conrad's Polish and East-Central European aspects and contexts, which constituted about 20 percent of this course. The purpose of the course was to draw general conclusions about Conrad's literary output: his place in the history of English and world literature; the artistic, ideological, philosophical and psychological mastery of his works; the international context of his works, including Polish and East-Central European contexts; and the importance of Joseph Conrad's literary output to American culture and literature. The course applied mainly the method of students' class discussions guided, elaborated and augmented by the instructor's commentary and occasionally supplemented by his lectures. Five screenings of film adaptations of Conrad's works and educational films on Conrad took place outside of class time.

The course provided an in-depth study of this great and complex writer; it hopefully made the students appreciate the mastery of the artistic organization of Conrad's literary texts studied as well as their ideological complexities, ambiguities and penetrating and prophetic visions of humanity. It provided both an overview of Conrad's entire literary output and penetrating insights into some of its outstanding, focal specimens. The films used in this course both facilitated students' perception of the literary works of this complex writer and demonstrated infinite imaginative potential of his texts, enabling production of various kinds of film interpretations and testifying to never-ending actuality of his literary works and to their contemporary topicality. The students often displayed brilliant and penetrating insights into Conrad's individual works.

My students' response to Conrad reflected their previous education and immersion in American life and culture. Therefore, they responded especially imaginatively, sensitively and competently to Conrad's critique of European imperialism in "Heart of Darkness" and its reformulation in Francis Ford Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now* as a critique of American engagement in Vietnam; to Conrad's morally-philosophically complex and ambiguous presentations of European imperial expansion in the Far East ("Karain: A Memory") and of European worldwide sea-faring experiences of his time ("The Secret Sharer" and *The Shadow-Line*); to the universal message of "Amy Foster" and its film adaptation *Swept from the Sea*; and, especially, to Conrad's prophetic strictures on the pathology of anarchism (*The Secret Agent*, published in 1907). The ambiguous Romanticism and complex Modernist narrative experimentation of *Lord Jim* and the subtle and nuanced censure of Russian politics and Russian ages-long political mentality and tradition of autocracy and revolutionism expressed in *Under Western Eyes* were more difficult to understand, but these very complex novels pose difficulties for students everywhere (also in a similar Conrad course that I teach in Lublin, Poland). My students contributed interesting and original semester papers on Conrad's works not discussed in class.

Our study of Conrad's Polish and East-Central European aspects and contexts was more difficult: my students saw them as culturally exotic, and I was not surprised to find that I had to explain a lot to help them understand the child and young Conrad's attitude to the romantic anti-tsarist conspiracies of his parents and to the positivism of his maternal uncle; the Polish Romanticism in *Lord*



Joseph Conrad.

Jim; the Carpathian ethnic-cultural identity of the protagonist of "Amy Foster"; Conrad's political views on Russia, Poland and Europe expressed in *Under Western Eyes* and his political essays. On the other hand, my demonstration of the influence of Polish language upon the style of Conrad's works aroused their great interest (probably also because some of them easily related it to their own multilingual experiences in America). I hope our study of various aspects of Conrad's Polishness enabled them to see him as an outstanding Polish and European literary artist and thinker.

On the whole, my course aroused my students' strong, lively and profound interest. Joseph Conrad certainly deserves such study. I regard him as the second greatest master of English literature after Shakespeare; he is studied and read worldwide by academics, students and lovers of literature—by people of various degrees of literary and cultural competence. Conrad is widely studied and taught at American universities.

Joseph Conrad constituted a uniquely successful transmission of the Polish ethos, mentality and culture on an international scale, a particularly strong bridge between Poland and the English-speaking world. Although he wrote in English, Joseph Conrad is also the greatest Polish writer in world literature. The input of the Polish historical-cultural tradition, ethos, mentality and literature constitutes a very significant foundation of his literary output. Teaching Conrad illuminates crucial elements of Polish history and culture that were connected with Conrad.

I wish to express my profound gratitude to the Skalny Center for Polish and Central European Studies at the University of Rochester, directed by Professors Ewa Hauser and Randall Stone, and to the chair of the English Department, Professor Frank Shuffelton, and its Director of Undergraduate Studies, Professor Ken Gross, for their wonderful cooperation and assistance.

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INSIDE OUT AND UPSIDE DOWN *Continued from page 1*

at the time, the presentation was supposed to be "typical," which is expressing the heart of the matter rather than capturing what was most common or most often recurring. This led to exaggerations, very limited repertoire of symbols and finally to enormous literalness. Such outrightness of the message, very much congenial to primitive, was tiresome.

Despite numerous assurances of the opposite being true, it undermined the mental capabilities of simple people and made them fed up with the message. This may have also contributed to venturing a contrariwise reading of the propaganda works. Surely, posters presented the enemies of the socialist people, but did it in such a way that could actually trigger imagination, which was not the case with the "proper" reading of the posters. They themselves contained the grains which planted in the minds of the more inquisitive receivers could result in a series of questions not so easy and obvious to answer. Even overtly negative images, while read against the grain, presented the picture of a very affluent (despite social disparities) and powerful country pulling the strings on the international scene. Such presentation incited attraction to the demonic power, shed the aura of allure of the villain, and made it way more fascinating than the boring positive worker hero.

Besides, it was exactly the image emerging from the counter-reading of the Stalinist posters that tied more smoothly with the people's memories of the times past than the aggressive and primitive simplifications, clichés and outright lies concerning America provided by the state. Communists miscalculated greatly in their fierce attacks on the United States as the country of all evil since they could not tap into the popular belief prevalent among Poles. Historically, there were no strong anti-American feelings in Poland, and the United States tended to be rather idealized than criticized. Poles believed in the concept of the American Dream and the common conviction prevailed that if one is not afraid of work and is willing to toil hard, that country provides the opportunities to succeed—even to common people.

Even a few years before the introduction of the principles of social realism and fueling amassed propaganda messages into people's lives, America was associated mainly with relief programs and UNRRA supplies of livestock, food and clothing to the war weary Poles. The U.S. government was perceived as one of the leading agents behind the provision of so much sought-after articles of everyday life. Moreover, the quality of received goods remained in stark contrast to the later home-produced ones, supposedly coming from the superior system of working arrangements and relations. Thus, it was hard to reconcile this experience with the image of America as a bunch of rotten, exploitive capitalists, warmongers, and social and cultural degenerates lurking from the official propaganda posters massively displayed in public spaces in post-1949 Poland. For people who lived in the gray world of low-quality products and were constantly urged to work hard without proper gratification and give up luxury and comfort, America must have appeared as the colorful land of progress, justice and bounty they themselves would never attain even in the course of fulfilling the thousand-year plan.

The idealistic vision of the communist heaven on earth (certainly in its secular version) was, for some reasons, so distant and not based on any identifiable premises that the rotten capitalist hell constituted a tempting alternative. Another reason why such fierce and pervasive state propaganda of anti-Americanization resulted in the increased interest and eager pursuit of any information connected with the United States and idealization of the country, that is, ultimately, in the unplanned Americanization, was the fact that the communist government never managed to effectively harness the realm of the folk culture in Poland. Favorable, anti-establishment opinions about America functioned in jokes and rumors passed among the people in their communities or work places. They executed comparative freedom due to their immaterial character and low-identifiability of authorship. They were simply disseminated in certain circles and provided relief from the duty of homogenized thinking. They nourished people's hope and strengthened to survive under the government perceived as illegal, only usurping power and people's mandate to gov-



ern in Poland. They created a form of "spoken resistance" against the authorities and constituted a form of "national self-defense."

All in all, fascination with America and yearning for it moved to the realm of folk culture and found a good and safe shelter there in practically ineradicable, though persecuted, rumors, gossips, jokes and sayings. Right after the war, for example, people heartened up one another with the stories of imminent American invasion which was to liberate the country and, during the Korean War, when the rumor was spreading that a Polish corps was to be sent to Asia to fight MacArthur and young people were volunteering massively for the army. They believed they would go to the front and surrender to Americans. Despite threats and denunciations, people were spreading jokes in the form of short rhymes like: "Truman, Truman drop the ball, we can't stand it any more," or "One atomic bomb and we are back to Lvov."

There was always the "second circuit," the underground, the alternative reality where people shared bits and pieces of information about the world out there and out of scraps constructed their America, yet more perfect and ideal. Open air bazaars, frequented even by the party brass, offered American goods and clothes; popular fashion was appropriating them and turning them into the expression of elegance and chic. The best example of such popular fashion, which emerged as an unwelcome side effect of the anti-American campaigns, was MacArthur's glasses. During the Korean War, cartoonists frequently depicting MacArthur "were overdoing his appearance with sharpening his facial features to make him look like a vulture and stressed his typical dark glasses." Very soon they became enormously popular and got the name "macarthurians." They constituted "one of the most chic elements completing one's attire. Private initiative took up the challenge and soon the glasses being faithful copies of those worn by MacArthur were sold in the open air markets all over the country." In this way, the regime authored the new trend itself and created new fans for America, especially among the young people, while it aimed at exactly the opposite. In this context, it would not be an overstatement to say that we were more Americanized than Americans, yet our America most probably had not much in common with theirs. It was rather an idealized construct put together through the opaque reading of the official messages and filling in the gaps with what they chose to conceal.

In the context of readiness and willingness to venture backward readings and searching for alternative sources of information about reality among Poles, the most bizarre and incomprehensible seem to be the fact that the communist government remained so deeply unaware of the true fiber of the social discourse among citizens and so convinced of its propaganda success. It ventured a few suicidal blows itself in the process of implementation of the new way of thinking. The exact, real-life examples I would like to focus on are the exhibition *This is America* and performances organized during the First of May Parades.

The most spectacular example of such a misfired propaganda event which strengthened fascination and longing for the United States, rather than undermined it, was the exhibition *This is America* opened in the Arsenal in Warsaw in December 1952. The very circumstances I learned about the enterprise leave much space for speculation. I have come across the event reading memoirs, interviews or fiction written by people who grew out of this reality. Mentioning the exhibition seems particularly frequent among artists, mostly musicians, who openly admit that it was during the event when they heard jazz music for the first time in their lives and fell in love with it.

For example, Wojciech Karolak, a world famous jazz musician and composer, recounts: "My interest in jazz started after I had visited the exhibition 'This is America.'" This was a propaganda campaign aimed at showing how vulgar, awful and debauched American life is. Megaphones transmitted, as it turned out, excellent compositions of Ellington, Basie, Peterson or Gillespie." There were other "first time" experiences connected with America attributed to the event. The most often recalled one was seeing with one's own eyes a bottle of Coca-Cola, a semi-mythical drink of the imperial world, not available in Poland.

According to the organizers, the exhibition was supposed to reveal "the true image of the ruling clique of imperialists, heirs to slave traders." Supposedly, "in the entire history of

socialist Poland this was the one and only propaganda event people did not have to be forced to attend. They were coming themselves. And they made a backward reading of the message: the exhibition did not fill them with disgust but created admiration for the achievements of the country." The exhibition was enormously popular: people queued for hours to get in and see this vulgarity and degeneracy. They were treated to the abominable products of mass culture (bikini ties, comic books, porno magazines but also huge photos of inhuman conditions of life on Indian reservations and brutally suppressed workers' strikes). "Tinsel next to misery, this is the American way of life," wrote the newspaper about the exhibition to uncover the "imperial plotting of the Washington clique." Yet, only excitement and thrill rather than disgust or anger remained in the memories of visitors. Dorota Terakowska, in her book *Ono* (It), gives a detailed account of a guided tour through the exhibition:

Noisy, rhythmic music greeted us right at the entrance. Strange music. Different from the one we knew so far. Stimulating, making our body gambol in its rhythm, beyond one's will. Originally, we resisted, yet unobtrusively we started losing with this infectious rhythm. . . . Rock and roll. This is what American savages listen to – stated the guide in a green scout skirt, but her own leg started to move with the rhythm. She tried to prevent it and she could not. One of her legs was dancing while the other stood stiff, at attention. . . .

Cans with tomato soup ("Working class, abused by capitalists toils from dawn till dark and does not have time to cook"), tail coats and top hats ("everyday attire of a capitalist"), thick, brown cigars ("Cigarettes are for the poor, cigars for the rich"), billboards ("Advertising wants to make you believe that you buy with big money what you do not need, advertising precedes demand, lies and cheats working people"). . . .

In the next case Coca-Cola. . . .

In a big glass case, there was one, one and only, small, steam-lined bottle with brown liquid and red label. All gazes hang on it with such intensity that the bottle should explode and scatter together with the case. Yet, it still stood there. Not big, motionless, unreachable. . . .

A favorite drink of capitalists. Thousands of workers from dawn till dark to produce it, while capitalists grab the profits they don't deserve. Coca-Cola ruins your teeth and stomach. There is an hypothesis that it contains some drugs and poisons, which cause progressive addiction and numbness of the brains of the working class – the guide went on monotonously but nobody listened to her.

And finally, the last but not least among the instances of the internal subversion and favoring the imperialist enemy over the communist friends of the people, namely the Academy of Art performances during the first of May workers' parades.

They were a phenomenon of the entire communist block. People from factories, offices, universities and institutions could not miss this common celebration of their hard work, sacrifice and drudgery. Although presented in the media as spontaneous occasions, the need of the hearts of working people, in fact the parades were mandatory and carried out strictly according to the prepared script. Those in the years 1949-1954 seemed most institutionalized and based on most elaborate scripts developed by the propaganda department of the party central committee.

First of all, the parades were massive events. In 1949, the year of the break-through, as far as their organization and arrangement is concerned, *Trybuna Ludu* reported that there were 300,000 people participating in the march, plus the families of the working people watching the event from the pavements (originally these two groups did not mix and were carefully separated). The mass of working people was carefully managed and shaped along to the internal logic. All of the participants had their assigned places in the scheme, they could not just come and cheer with their friends or family; they had to obey the rules.

This was despite the fact that those who were organized to cheer and enjoy the parades looked so serious and lofty. In order to prevent mounting tensions, there was a need for a lighter element, for a fully controlled burst of laughter. And this is where the art students' parade performances came in. There was a place for irony and satire but it was also very strictly defined and permission was given to a particular insti-

tution and particular performers. It served as the counterpoint of the entire parade as the one and only element that did not attempt to glorify the achievements of the socialist regime and working people of towns and villages, but rather derided the faults and policy of the enemy of the people. And here was the place for America and other western capitalist countries. These performances were mainly political in their character and were supposed to ridicule the western world leaders (favorites among them were Churchill, Truman, Eisenhower but also Tito, and Adenauer), point to their degradation, war-mongering and servile attitude toward the U.S., which was pulling the strings in the world using its dollars. One of the main socialist papers so commented on the performance in 1949: "A group of students performed in an extremely witty way promises of the authors of the Atlantic Pact: powdered eggs, bubble gum, etc., and the final result of their war plots – a coffin for war-mongers followed by a dog, a hooker and a pimp."

These performances featured huge, grotesque figures with heads made of paper-mache, walking on stilts and making their movements more artificial and equipped with comic attributes. Each year they had a different title and a leading theme, yet they opened up similarly with the announcers who carried the title banner and signaled the entry of a different reality. These announcers were usually students disguised as Ku-Klux-Klan members in their hoods. In the year 1949, they carried a title "Churchillada" while the play included a lion training, where Uncle Sam was whipping a British lion simultaneously deceiving it with a dollar. A year later, the performance was called "Circus Trumanillo" and commented the creation of the Atlantic Pact with the concept of the Atlantic orchestra where a cacophonous suite was performed by American musicians in SS uniforms. It featured also "atomic marriage" of Eisenhower and Adenauer with a headline "Newlywed couple of the old war-mongers." Moreover, it also had a duck representing radio's "Voice of America" (reporter's duck – hoax, canard).

It is very difficult to get sincere assessment of these performances as there are very scarce sources to rely on. The first of May performances were definitely a clever way to prevent any unrest and possible tension during the parade. They engaged students, the most explosive element anyhow, and kept them busy apparently allowing them freedom of expression on the issues of very delicate and risky matters. Yet, for the same reason it seems hard to believe that these performances were through seriously developed propaganda actions. After all, they were put together by art students: people more open, freer in their thinking, also those who, it can be assumed, had more access to what was going in the world of art in the West, so not thoroughly secluded and unaware.

Secondly, in the entire monumental enterprise of the glorification of the system, these only instances of negative propaganda, these interludes of humor and satire could apparently smuggle the grin or two and allow the safe, concealed, outer-directed laughter at the entire arrangement. Besides, the puppets were clearly overdone, drawn to absurd proportions and exemplifying absurd features. In fact, many claimed they were so exaggerated and artificial that they were not funny at all. Instead of serving as a reason for ridicule and contempt, they rather provided a painful reminder of the other reality out there, while for some could even work like ads, as in the case of "Voice of America."

All in all, despite relentless efforts to do so, "the USA was perceived as the country of liberty and abundance. Nobody believed in the official slogan about the misery and exploitation. Too much of it could be seen in the socialist reality." People's memories of the times past combined with the deep conviction of illegitimacy, forced installment of the socialist government in Poland, and fueled by the roughness and primitivism of the aggressive official propaganda, more often than not resulted in the reversed reading of ideological messages. Rather than discourage people successfully from looking up to the rotten imperialist, they provided bits and pieces of information about the promised, yet forbidden land. The official anti-American campaigns backfired since what they actually achieved was the involuntary Americanization of society, much to the distaste of the propaganda agents.

Paper presented on October 11, 2006, at the symposium Images of America: Polish Perspectives on the U.S. Dr Gajda-Laszewska is assistant lecturer (adiunkt) at the American Studies Center, Warsaw University.



A Poet in the Promised Land: Adam Lizakowski's American Experience



By Ania Kowalik

Born in Dzierżonów, Lower Silesia, in 1956, Adam Lizakowski is considered to be one of the most interesting poets currently living and composing in the United States. Lizakowski left Poland in 1981 for Austria, where he was staying when martial law was declared in his home country. He then applied for political refugee status and in June 1982 emigrated to San Francisco, where he resided for nine years, to finally settle down in Chicago in 1991. In 1986, the poet was invited to Berkeley to visit Czesław Miłosz, the Polish poet and Nobel Prize winner who had migrated to America in 1960 and taught Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of California. This visit initiated a series of meetings during which Miłosz would read Lizakowski's poems, encourage him to write, and offer him his support. Those meetings lasted until 1991 and resulted in the exhibition of poetic photographs of Miłosz taken by Lizakowski.

Lizakowski is a prolific poet, playwright, and prose writer as well as a translator of American poetry into Polish. He is also a winner of several literary awards. In California, Lizakowski set up a poetry group, "Krak," and between 1985 and 1990 he edited a socio-cultural monthly "Razem"/"Together"; in Chicago, he became the leader of the Unpaid Rent Poetry Group. The group existed from 1992 until 1995 and issued the pioneering Polish-American literary quarterly "Dwa konce języka." / "Two Ends of the Tongue."

Leaving Poland in 1981, Lizakowski became one of the "cherry bandits," as he calls the first wave of the post-martial law emigrants who left Poland in 1980 and 1981. For the majority of those young people—most of them were under 24—it was the first occasion to travel abroad. They were leaving for adventure or employment, most often, however, with the intention of coming back to Poland. Lizakowski claims that "the 'cherry bandits' were the only wave of Polish emigrants in our history who were leaving the country smiling, accompanied by the sound of guitars and songs. Joy, not sadness, was our traveling companion. . . . [W]e were a generation setting out to find the mythical Golden Fleece, just as one goes to the woods on a field trip."¹

In his "Notes from San Francisco Bay," Lizakowski recalls a conversation with a friend of his who provoked him to reflect on the subject matter of his poetry. "These poems are about my life here," Lizakowski replied, "about emigration, about how I have found the America of my dreams. I describe my hopes and disappointments. I'd like to . . . sing my America."² Lizakowski's is America of immigrants who, as Michael Walzer explains in "What Does It Mean to Be an American?," "however grateful . . . for this new place, still remember the old places. . . . The people are Americans only by virtue of having come together. And whatever identity they had before becoming Americans they . . . are free to retain afterward. . . . Americans are allowed to remember who they were and to insist, also, on *what they are*."³

The forming of Lizakowski's new exilic identity called for working through the Polish and the American. In April 1983, he wrote in his journal:

There are two Adams in me at present. One would willingly discard his Polishness which has become an obstacle in the process of reaching, or let's say, switching to Americanness. One could call this ability to switch from one mentality into another the conquering of the self, but, unfortunately, I cannot do that and I suffer. I know that my Polishness is something I will never get rid of. . . . The second Adam has had enough of "Americanness" and Americans themselves. In general they have done nothing wrong, he even likes them, but he doesn't understand them. . . . What is this Americanness, the one seen on TV, or the one I've seen at school? It seems Adam would do things in a different way. Can one be surprised that Americans are so different from Poles? Sometimes I think that they are not so different really; we've been brought up in a different way, that's it.⁴



Adam Lizakowski.

Lizakowski's most immediate observations usually concern language and socializing. Translation becomes more than a mere linguistic process, it also requires the change in quality of human relationships. "Just like them, I use the word *friend* more and more," Lizakowski observes. "At first it was a struggle. A friend is a friend, and here suddenly everybody is a friend of everybody else. A friend—in the American sense of the word—is a person we met a few minutes ago or a few years ago, and that's it."⁵

In a similar manner, the ritual of greetings and saying goodbyes does not resemble the tradition of entertaining guests in Poland. "[G]reetings and goodbyes are much shorter than in Poland. Here *hi* and *bye*—that's it. In Poland shaking everybody's hand, three or four times, clutching the knob then getting back in, was normal. . . . Not to mention gossiping about one's neighbors, which belonged to the ritual of entertaining guests just like serving coffee, tea, even dinner, not to mention drinking vodka."⁶ Acknowledging those differences makes the poet aware of the necessity to work through what has been known and familiar in order to accommodate himself in the new situation. "Dividing myself into 'the new world' and 'the old world' is out of the question,"⁷ Lizakowski observes. Since it is neither possible to abandon Poland, nor to unquestionably accept American ways, it becomes necessary to negotiate between the conflicting identities. This is an ongoing process in which one always balances on the hyphen. The hybridized consciousness that emerges is alienating and estranging, as portrayed in the poem "From Pieszyce to San Francisco."

The poem is an experiment in trying to mark the boundary between the two worlds which the poet inhabits and which can never merge. The huge geographical distance between San Francisco and Pieszyce converges in the poet's bedroom, on his bed, in the intimate space in which he is always alone and which distances other people. The two worlds are always kept separate, but the split that emerges is not invasive—San Francisco is the reality principle whereas Pieszyce remains in the realm of the imaginary and is thus idealized.

This experience of twoness, this constant need to negotiate between what one used to be and what one is becoming, is an experience shared by all migrants. In *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*, Iain Chambers points out that,

To be forced to cross the Atlantic as a slave in chains, to cross the Mediterranean or the Rio Grande illegally, heading hopefully North, or even to sweat in slow queues before officialdom, clutching passports and work permits, is to acquire the habit of living between worlds, caught on a frontier that runs through your tongue, religion, music, dress, appearance and life. To come from elsewhere, from 'there' and not 'here,' and hence to be simultaneously 'inside' and 'outside' the situation at hand, is to live at the intersections of histories and memories, experiencing both their preliminary dispersal and their subsequent translation into new, more extensive, arrangements along emerging routes. . . . Cut off from the homelands of tradition, experiencing a constantly challenged identity, the stranger is perpetually required to make herself at home in an interminable discussion between a scattered historical inheritance and a heterogeneous present.⁸

The simultaneous experience of being "inside" and "outside" that Chambers refers to prevents one from inhabiting a single space but, at the same time, it allows multiple perspectives on the surrounding reality. Even America, the place Lizakowski inhabits, is experienced from two perspectives simultaneously. When in 1984 an anarchist group from the University of San Francisco asked him to prepare a lecture presenting Solidarnosc as an anarchist movement, Lizakowski faced the dilemma of how to talk about his experience in America:

In my poetry I wasn't pleased with my immigrant life and America. This isn't how I imagined my life here. In fact, I don't even remember how I imagined it, but in my presentation I didn't want to speak badly of America. . . . [I]f it's so hopeless here, then why am I not going back to the communist paradise? . . . [T]he myth of America is big in the part of Europe which I come from. America—the symbol and hope, the symbol of paradise on Earth. Whatever I say about America, I'm always going to respect her.⁹ On the one hand Lizakowski looks at America through the eyes of a Pole escaping the communist terror. In this "inherited" perspective America becomes a savior and a symbol of hope and promise of a better life inscribed in the reality of communist Poland. To respect the mythology of the oppressed homeland, one has to respect its symbols which in this case work through opposition. On the other hand, however, in confrontation with the myth, real America disappoints and thus poetry becomes the vehicle for expressing Lizakowski's ambivalent feelings about the United States.

Lizakowski refers to his poetry as "the gate onto the garden of suffering," which comes from the confrontation of dreams with reality. That mythical, imagined America, the hope and the promise of a better life, disappoints as it reveals the harsh logic of capitalism.

The Myth of America

America the mythical land on the other side of the ocean
 a great dream factory for the unemployed
 a huge bakery for the starving
 a big house for the homeless
 a bottomless piggy bank for the poor
 a great circus for the naive children of the world
 where dreams and desires
 jump through rings of fire just like tigers

. . .
 in America everything is supposed to be much
 easier than in the homeland
 the grass greener, the usually long way to success
 is just half that way here, talent is merely
 to amaze or to be admired
 God, though as helpless as behind
 the old ocean, is much younger here
 and he's on the side of those who wind up their clocks
 in the morning saying: time is money
 America one big myth of contemporary
 humanity like colorful splinters of glass
 it attracts our attention
 the myth of many symbols, riches and freedom
 only the immigrant, escaping himself,
 locked in the cage of old habits
 struggles, but that too is an old myth

. . .
 and nobody really knows what it really is that
 America and that love of America
 is not really love, just the key to a door
 behind which there are more doors
 and even more doors, and more
 and still more doors. . .
 apart from that everything is OK
 come and see for yourself

in *Chicago miasto nadziei*, p. 38-39
 (trans. Ania Kowalik)

Lizakowski's humble and intimate poems are snapshots of incidents from the lives of immigrants, their habits, duties, and hardships. These poems are written in the form of lyrical reportage, taking place at a specific time and venue. The poems' protagonists and everyday events are described in detail with great sensitivity, understanding, and often humor. Alongside those poems-photographs, depicting people caught in the middle of performing their everyday activities, Lizakowski captures the fate of immigrants as a collective. A quick look at some of his poems' titles—"Brave Immigrants," "Immigrants Are Like God," "Upon Hearing About Immigrants," "Us Immigrants"¹⁰—



reveals that the immigrant experience is universalized and their misery eternalized. The immigrant existence is elevated as a form of spiritual being that is crucial to the ethnic constitution of America. The immigrants are thus indispensable, their lives are not a waste but rather trigger healthy change.

Upon Hearing About Immigrants

Immigrants have always been and always will be believe me just like there is good and evil the sun and the wind wherever it begins blowing whatever storm or muddle some gust will impetuously blow them out like rubbish nobody will want them they will spread around the world nobody will claim them

in *Chicago miasto nadziei*
(Torun: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2000) p. 55
(trans. Ania Kowalik)

One of the more interesting issues recurring in Lizakowski's poems is that of the public encroaching upon the private and the problems such a situation might cause in a larger, political arena. Adrienne Rich in the essay "Blood, Bread, and Poetry" argues for political poetry and stresses the importance of minority voices as a subversive presence in American socio-political sphere:

Perhaps many white North Americans fear an overtly political art because it might persuade us emotionally of what we think we are "rationally" against; it might get to us on a level we have lost touch with, undermine the safety we have built for ourselves, remind us of what is better left forgotten. This fear attributes real power to the voices of passion and poetry which connect us with all that is not simply white chauvinist/male supremacist/straight/puritanical—with what is "dark," "effeminate," "inverted," "primitive," "volatile," "sinister."¹

In a similar vein, Lizakowski ascribes political power to those typically thought of as powerless. Stressing the importance of the everyday, the short, but strong poem "What I was thinking about on my way to Chinatown" may be read as a wake-up call meant to shake America out of its self-congratulatory vision.

What I was thinking about on my way to Chinatown

Dangerous things are bread and water,
sugar, freedom, meat, shoes, work.
Because of hunger nations and empires crumbled away
Beware, America.
We have a mighty fleet,
the fastest planes, the most powerful army
so what, if a loaf of bread has more power
than the atomic bomb.
(I finally understood why Grandma would kiss
every crumb that fell on the floor)
I was thinking about all this when I was going to Chinatown.

in *Złodzieje czeresni*
(Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek: Torun, 2001), p. 186
(trans. Ania Kowalik)

By means of his observant, yet humble poetry Lizakowski writes his immigrant existence into the American landscape. In the Whitmanian spirit, the poet sings his America and asserts his right to define himself as American, at the same time accepting the hardships inherent in his exilic life.

I too am America

Not because so strong or so rich
nor because I play the market
or sleep with a woman who can very well be a man
from the corner of 24th and Market
not because I feed the starving in Ethiopia
not because I threaten Russia with the atomic bomb
and not because I leave tips in five-star
hotels on the Canaries
but because I live in San Francisco
I won a ticket in the lottery of life.
I too am America.
I walk the sapphire streets
with diamond curbs
with golden sand on the beaches where angels stay
for the night.
I am America, this little America
that has made it, that is being envied
modest with the burden of everyday life
sometimes hungry, sometimes without hope

but always proud and smiling in the picture.
I write poems against the cruel empire
I sing the immigrant's song
can you hear it?
I too am America

San Francisco, 1987
in *Złodzieje czeresni*
(Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek: Torun, 2001), p. 174
(trans. Ania Kowalik)

¹ Adam Lizakowski, "Złodzieje czeresni prosza o głos, czyli manifest pokoleniowy" in *Złodzieje czeresni: wiersze i poematy* (Torun: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2001) p. 121 – 165 (all translation mine unless otherwise stated).

² Adam Lizakowski, *Zapiski znad Zatoki San Francisco* (Rzeszów: Otwarty Rozdział, 2004), p. 369.

³ Michael Walzer, "What Does It Mean to Be an 'American'?" in David A. Hollinger and Charles Capper, eds. *The American Intellectual Tradition: A Sourcebook, Vol. II* (Oxford: OUP, 1993), pp. 388, 390, italics in the original.

⁴ *Zapiski*, p. 205 – 206.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 207 – 208.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

⁸ Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 6.

⁹ *Zapiski*, p. 339 – 340.

¹⁰ All poems in Adam Lizakowski *Chicago miasto nadziei* (Torun: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2000).

¹¹ Adrienne Rich, "Blood, Bread, Poetry: The Location of the Poet" in *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979-1985* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1986), p. 179.

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What Republican America Can Teach Republican Poland



By Jan Mirosław

Once, Poland was a European country. For 16 years after the fall of communism, it was guided by ever-alternating governments of the right-wing and the left-wing coalitions, which nevertheless shared strategic goals, of which the membership in the European Union was the most important. Those political forces, including the post-communist Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), the rightist Solidarity Electoral Platform (AWS) and the neo-liberal, elitist, but highly influential Union of Liberties (UW), struggled for power in what seemed like a brutal battle between two political poles.

The country, however, was on track with deep structural changes that led to the approval of a new Constitution in 1997, which enforced a parliamentary system with a strong Prime Minister, checked by a semi-strong President with veto power. Poland was admitted to NATO under a right-wing government and to the EU under a left-wing one. All along, nearly all state companies were being privatized, which attracted major foreign investments both on the stock exchange and in direct investments. The currency was stable as inflation was defeated by the independent central bank, guided by two stalwarts of monetarism, Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz and Leszek Balcerowicz.

The constitutional scheme was respected, the separation of powers never questioned, and the occasional clashes between opposite values were resolved in discussion or shelved. The spiritual presence of Pope John Paul II influenced heavily the outcome of moral consensus that favored the Catholics, yet excluded fanatics of all kinds from mainstream politics. Agnostic and left-wing President Kwasniewski was invited for a ride in the Pope's car, an honor unheard of before, and opposed any attempt to liberalize the abortion laws by his own party. On the other side of the political spectrum, right-wing parties and the Church seemed satisfied with the existing abortion compromise, which is rather, but not completely, pro-life. Religion was introduced as a subject in public schools, but remained optional. No major political force was inter-

ested in warming up those issues, since the status quo ensured the backing of the adhesion to the E.U. by the Church, as well as the comfortable exchange of the majority with each election.

Obviously, there was always a noticeable fascination by the American way. Ever since Ronald Reagan supported the Solidarity movement and condemned martial law in the 1980s, Polish politicians have looked at the U.S. with unconditional admiration. Referring to our common national heroes, Tadeusz Kosciuszko and Kazimierz Pułaski, and reminding that Poland was second only to the U.S. in adopting a modern Constitution¹ became *de rigueur* in official speeches of Polish officials describing our relations with America. There was even a proposition to rename one of the main squares in Warsaw after Ronald Reagan, because its current name, the Constitution Square, allegedly refers to the Communist Constitution of 1952. The proposition did not pass, but it showcased an uninhibited zeal of some right-wing politicians to demonstrate their attachment to the hard-line politics of Reagan.

The fascination was not entirely on the right side. Not unlike Britain's social democrat Tony Blair, Poland's Aleksander Kwasniewski opted for a close relationship with America under George W. Bush. Even before, our country was dubbed a Washington's "Trojan horse" in Europe, for the unconditional support that our diplomacy gave to the U.S. in international organizations like the U.N. and NATO. Poland's positions upset two countries that had been instrumental in our accession to the E.U., France and Germany, with which a platform of cooperation had been established under the name of the Weimar Triangle. The effectiveness of this platform and, more generally, the ability of Polish diplomacy to influence European foreign policy was compromised as a consequence of the outspoken pro-Americanism. The purchase of Lockheed Martin's F-16 jet fighter instead of Dassault's Mirage2000 was met with manifest irritation in Paris, as was the signing of the "Letter of Eight"² by the Polish PM, Leszek Miller. President Chirac aggravated the rift (and consolidated Poland's position) by his now-infamous speech, in which he told our government that it had lost the opportunity to remain silent.

After Sept. 11, 2001, Poland was in the avant-garde of militant U.S. supporters, first taking part in the mission in Afghanistan, and in 2003 sending troops to fight in Iraq from day one as one of only three American allies; Marek Belka, the future Prime Minister, was respon-

sible for the economic policy in the interim coalition administration of the occupied country, and Poland was in command in the South-Central Zone. The decision to send the troops was made by President Kwasniewski, who used his discretionary powers as Commander-in-Chief. The inflamed parliamentary debate took place only after the fact, and there was an ambiguity concerning the constitutionality of the decision, since it was based on the act referring to the peacemaking operations, whereas the act of war requires the approval of the lower chamber. Furthermore, the decision was made against the will of three-quarters of the citizens. However, there is a strong argument that the decision was based on solid premises from the realist point of view. It was aimed at solidifying the image of Poland as a staunch ally and aspiring player in international relations. The expectations concerning more measurable rewards (including preferential arms contracts, access to oil fields, abolition of visas) were not to be fulfilled, though.

Nonetheless, it was the subsequent administration that took the affection for American solutions to the next level. The word "administration" is being used here on purpose, even if it rarely applies to non-American political systems, with their different institutional logic. However, the last double election of the head of state and both houses of Parliament demonstrated a departure from this logic, as the voters endorsed an ambitious project of unification of the executive branch under the auspices of the party-revelation, Law and Justice (PiS, Prawo i Sprawiedliwość). Parting as a runner-up to the Civic Platform (PO, Platforma Obywatelska) and its presidential candidate, Donald Tusk, it managed to steal the spotlight and double-win thanks to an aggressive campaign, during which the Republican-esque strategy of relying on the Christian right, raising patriotic banners and demonizing the opponent became apparent. Skillfully planned and dramatized, the campaign changed the terms of the whole debate, polarizing the society along the lines favorable to PiS. Rather than accepting a pre-scripted scenario of two concordant right-wing parties taking over from the discredited left, PiS invented and imposed a new division. Other than cosmopolitan, wishy-washy "liberals" from the Civic Platform, Law and Justice's leaders were to be determined to guide the moral renewal.

The need for such a renewal was widely accepted after a corruption scandal that brought down the left majority, but the Law and Justice extended this discourse and outbid the competition in moralistic ardor, putting forward a scheme for a radical turn. To imply the vastness of the



Symbols, Myths and Rituals in Poland



By Anna Niedźwiedz

(Note: The interviews I quote in this text were done during my 2000-2001 field research about the meanings of the image of Our Lady of Czestochowa in Poland; in 2004-2006, I also led field research in Poland connected with contemporary religiosity, sacred places and devotional iconography.)

Norman Davies, the British historian who has dedicated his scientific life to the scholarly research on the history of the Polish state and nation, described the Polish culture as "full of instances where the national imagination triumphs over realism." Polish national mythology is very deeply connected with a popular vision of history. History—or more precisely, its common, popular version—is seen as a means of interpretation of contemporary events. Present events are located by common sense within this mythical vision and as so, they receive immediate, popular interpretation. They are "tamed" and located within a mythical order of common history.

It is very interesting to observe that the popular vision of a nation and its past has a very strong religious dimension in the Polish case. Sacred and profane visions of time, cyclical and linear, mythical and real, are mixed together. Religious symbols are often tied strictly with the national discourse. That makes it difficult to distinguish which symbols are more religious, and which are more national. A good example can be the image of Our Lady of Czestochowa¹, which is often described and treated as a national emblem. As one interviewee explained: "The image of Our Lady of Czestochowa is worshipped in Poland a lot. For us [Poles] it is a national symbol, even more important than the eagle [a white eagle is the official Polish emblem]." (female, born: 1959)

The first historical period, which had a huge impact on the creation of national mythology and which is still present in contemporary discourse about national symbols, was the Baroque period. At the beginning of the 17th century, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious state. However, within the course of this century, we can observe the growing strength of the Catholic Reformation movement (Counter-Reformation) and the appearance of a few important symbols and myths which till nowadays are milestones in the popular vision of Polish history and are often interpreted in religious terms.

"The century of wars," as the 17th century is often called, brought deep internal crisis of the state as well as many serious military confrontations with neighbors and other growing political powers. An increase in religious piety was historically connected with the constant state of war, fear and confrontation with the cultural and religious "other."

The second period extremely important in the development of the Polish national mythology and its combination with religious symbolism and religious language was Romanticism. Many factors influenced such a development of this cultural and artistic movement which—as many scholars emphasize—has influenced the mentality and popular vision of the Polish nation for two centuries. In the Polish case, the appearance of Romanticism coincided with a historic period of partitions of



Underground Easter card from the 1980s; Stanislaw Kuc's private archive

Poland, when the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth disappeared as an independent state and was divided among three neighboring powers: Russia, Prussia and Austria.

Secondly, the 19th century brought a new development of the modern understanding of "nation" and nationality. A situation of growing national consciousness in a political period of a nation not possessing its own sovereign state raised a growing importance of national and religious mythology as one means of creating and protecting the "national identity." Within the course of the 19th century, symbols generated by Romantic art and philosophy, developed the status of easily recognizable popular tokens summarizing the "Polish fate" and "mission."

The Baroque-Romantic mythical vision of national history was present within the Communist period and used by the Catholic Church in the confrontation with the totalitarian regime. I argue that in the Polish case, the official Church hierarchy decided to support popular mass religiosity and even to strengthen it and use it as an opposition and challenge to the mass official events organized by the state regime. Especially Polish Primate Stefan Wyszyński (1901-81), since 1948 the primate of the Polish Catholic Church) introduced the immense, precisely planned program of "mass religious events." In his vision, the idea was to connect the popular, mythical vision of the history of the Polish nation with a mass, folk devotion dedicated to Mary, Mother of God.

The key moment chosen by Wyszyński to accumulate those symbolic levels was the year 1966 announced the "Polish millennium"—one thousand years of the history of the Polish nation as a millennial anniversary of the official baptizing of Poland (966 is the year when the Polish prince Mieszko I decided to accept Christianity from Rome; this date is symbolically treated as the beginning of Christianity in Poland and the establishment of the Polish statehood). Mass religious events connected to the "Polish millennium" overshadowed the official celebrations of the "one thousand years of Polish statehood," showing that the mythical religious-symbolical vision of the Polish history combined with Marian devotion can attract crowds and huge emotions even in the general atmosphere of terror of a state regime.

A program of reinforcing mass religiosity and "preparing the nation" for the millennial year was introduced by Wyszyński in 1957 with one of the most intriguing mass religious rituals connected with the image of Our Lady of Czestochowa. A special copy of the original image was prepared, blessed and dedicated to travel around the whole of Poland—"visiting" every single parish church. The whole ritual was called a "peregrination of the copy of the image of Our Lady" and was often interpreted as a "visit of the Queen of Poland" or a "wondering of the Mother of God through the Polish land." During the *peregrination*, the image was to spend one 24-hour period in each church, where a service was held all day and night accompanied by the saying of prayers. There arose new cult forms and religiousness connected with the image of Our Lady of Czestochowa. The situation of the *visitation*—*peregrination of a copy of the Jasna Góra image*—introduced a new custom and constituted a new feast day, one unknown to that date. It was also connected with the huge growth in popularity of the cult of the Jasna Góra image as well as Marian piety and devotion.

The most emotional moment revealing the power of symbols and mass religiosity as well as its involvement into national mythology was the attempt to stop the *peregrination* of the copy of the image of Our Lady of Czestochowa by the communist authorities. The copy of Our Lady of Czestochowa was held by the Security Services in 1966 and the image was taken back to Jasna Góra. The monastery authorities were informed of the illegality of transporting the image beyond the gates of the monastery. The copy of the miraculous picture remained in Jasna Góra for almost five years (until the 18th of June 1972). During this period, however, there was no break in the *peregrination*. In subsequent churches and locations, there appeared an unusual symbol—an empty frame (together with candles and a lectionary)—which were carried in processions and before which people prayed, in exactly the same way as if to the copy of Our Lady of Czestochowa.

The research conducted in 2000-2001 shows that many interviewees remember those times. In the statements that concern the events of over 30 years ago, one is struck by the lively recollection of experiences and circumstances that accompanied the *peregrination*; even people who were only a few years old at that time talk about the *peregrination of an empty frame*. During interviews on this subject, individuals who were not even born then recall how they had heard about the *peregrination of the frame* from parents and grandparents. The presence of these events within the collective memory may give evidence that the *peregrination of the image without an image* constituted an unusually meaningful sign, which aroused a great sense of experience among those who participated. It appears that the symbol of the image of Our Lady of Czestochowa had again resulted in the unity of patriotic-national themes with the world of popular religiosity. The image itself took part in a direct political conflict and the holding of the image by the enemy authorities came to be called the *arrest of the Virgin Mary*.

The interviewees recall this time:

- People really experienced it deeply [the *peregrination* of the empty frame – A.N.]. They cried secretly because they were afraid of the communists. Only they were capable of **imprisoning the Virgin Mary** (female, born: 1925);
- **When Mary was imprisoned** Poles were sad and suffered



To God and Motherland, underground poster from 1984; Stanislaw Kuc's private archive.

rather funeral.

Sorrow reigned (female, born: 1930);

- In 1966 just the frame visited the parish [...]
- **the Secret Police had at that time arrested the Virgin Mary** (female, born: 1938);
- Only the frame moved around as the **Virgin Mary had been arrested**. There was a ban. The frame was a sign of protest by Poles that they did not agree with this ban (female, born: 1958). [all bold – A.N.]

During the *peregrination of the image without an image*, people prayed to an empty frame, hung votive offerings on it, decorated it with flowers and maintained the usual ceremony. The interviewees point to the conviction as to the actual presence of the image-figure:

- When I was a child the image of Our Lady of Czestochowa was blocked. But it **traveled on with the frame itself**. The communists lost out immensely on this detention, because the empty frame caused greater agitation and the significance of this empty frame was all the greater (male, born: 1957);
- I remember processions with the empty frame. Everyone was under the impression as if **the image had not in fact been removed**. Everyone saw it and all were sorrowful... (male, born: 1937);
- The picture always overcomes aliens. It **spiritually triumphed** when in 1966 the empty frame with a lit candle wandered (male, born: 1958). [all bold – A.N.]



Underground poster from 1984 with the face of Our Lady of Czestochowa with wounds shaped like the number 13; Jagiellonian Library, Fundacja Centrum.



The recalled example of a new form which revived mass Marian religiosity and tied it with the mythical national dimension (built as opposition and resistance to the official state) found further implications within the Communist period. Especially at the end of the 1970s and the unexpected beginning of the pontificate of Pope John Paul II (known in Poland as Karol Wojtyła, Cardinal of the city of Kraków) in 1978 and his first visit to Poland in 1979 literally showed the eruption of the mass religious-national emotional movement. Creation of Solidarity and the occupational strike in the Gdansk shipyard in August 1980 recalled once more the ambience of mass religious-national gatherings. Iconography which spontaneously appeared on the walls and gates of the shipyard (ironically, officially called the Lenin Shipyard at this time) directly recalled the Baroque-Romantic mythical vision of the national history as well as religious language of social resistance. The main gate leading to the shipyard was decorated with the crucifix, portrait of Pope John Paul II and the image of Our Lady of Czestochowa, which by the people of Gdansk started to be called Our Lady of the Strike.

The symbol of Our Lady of Czestochowa was adopted by Solidarity and the resistance movement of the 1980s in Poland. The symbolic small poster pinned to the shirt of Solidarity movement leader Lech Walsa started to be an easily recognizable symbol. Introduction of Martial Law at the end of 1981 and growing persecutions enforced the union of the Baroque-Romantic religious-national symbolism with the symbolism of the resistance movements. Underground production of the Polish samizdat from the 1980s brings countless examples of this mythical religious-national symbolical language.

The fall of Communism in 1989 and huge changes leading toward building a new democratic society brought questions about the role of the Catholic Church as well as about the place of the mythical symbolic discourse which had been present and highly influential during the previous several dozens of years. The last 18 years, in fact, has not brought answers for these important questions. What can be observed in Poland is the constant debate and returning discussion about these important issues. Unstable political situation, shifts and changes of political parties and programs, involvement of the Catholic Church hierarchy in many political issues characterize the atmosphere of the political debate (or a political fight).

One of the arguments in this debate taken officially or at least unofficially into account is still the importance of mass religiosity. The power of the mass religious movement and its connection with the national mythology is still visible. One of the most popular new Marian shrines built around the old church in Lichen in Central Poland is a very good iconographical example of the complex religious-national mythology and the popularity of its symbolism.

The discourse which appears in many official statements of the Polish Catholic Church hierarchy also recalls the symbolical discourse of resistance built within the Communist period. The rhetoric of resistance, however, is now directed against the "liberal lack of values" and "new atheism" (parallel to the past "Communist atheism"). The most radical right-wing faction is located around the controversial Radio "Maryja," which directly uses the religious symbolism of the Mother of God (the image of Our Lady appears on the official emblem of this radio station). The political rhetoric of the Radio "Maryja" is in huge part a rhetoric of radical resistance. For instance, the Radio was opposing the idea of joining the EU by Poland, even though the official stand of the Polish Catholic Church supported the EU membership.

In the contemporary social and political situation the presence of religious-national discourse and the mythical symbolism enrooted in the Baroque-Romantic past is seen by many as a kind of burden. In the new circumstances of the democratic state, the lack of identification between the society and the state—seen at the time of the resistance as a value—disturbs the process of democratization. The language of resistance and myth—important in times of threat as a means to consolidate society—now has started to be the source of ideological conflicts and fights.

At a time when society faces its own myths and is forced to rediscover and re-discuss its own mythical history (as it happened, for instance, during the debate about the massacre of Jews made by the Poles in Jedwabne town during World War II, or during the debate about the involvement of Catholic priests and bishops in the Communist security service), the petrified language of religious-national symbolism disables the discussion and leads toward radicalization and polarization of society.

Analyzing the power of mythical thinking in the Polish context, Norman Davies stated: "Defeated nations invent myths to explain their misfortune and to assist their survival." The question—in the Polish case nowadays—is: What to do with the power of myths when the time of misfortune and fight is over? How to convert the mythical symbolism of resistance and survival toward the symbolism of new times? What is the place of religion and the Church in the new democratic circumstances and in the framework of civil society?

¹ The image of Our Lady of Czestochowa is also known as image of Our Lady of Jasna Góra. The first name recalls the city (Czestochowa) while the second name recalls the name of the Pauline monastery (Jasna Góra - The Bright Mountain) where the image is held since the 1382/84. It is the most famous and the most worshipped Marian image in Poland connected with the symbol of the "Queen of Poland"

What Republican America Can Teach Republican Poland

Continued from page 5

project, it was given the name of the *IV Republic*, as opposed to the existing Third. The program, concerning deep structural reforms of the country's institutions and restoration of the national pride, calls for a new social contract, reminding us of the *Contract with America*. The Law and Justice presented itself as a force defending traditional Polish values, labeled as the "Poland of solidarity" and opposed to the "Poland of liberalism" projected by the Civic Platform. Through repeated use of the word "liberal" in a negative context, the leaders of the Law and Justice managed to make an insult out of the very term "liberal."

Bringing back values was presented as a task requiring a vast coalition, consisting of the circles not present in mainstream politics thus far. For the first time a major political party coalesced with the radical Christian right, represented by a charismatic yet controversial Father Tadeusz Rydzyk, a Redemptorist Catholic monk who created a media empire consisting of a nationwide radio station, *Radio St. Mary*, a daily newspaper *Our Daily*, and ultimately, a TV station, *I Persist*. Disregarded as a representative of marginal groups of elderly, devout people, he emerged as the most dynamic player on the political scene, disposing of a priceless fraction of disciplined voters who would decide the outcome of election. Father Rydzyk's followers are well-organized throughout the country, where they maintain a network of local *Bureaus of Radio St. Mary*, as well as a grassroots organization of the *Families of Radio St. Mary*. However, strictly political initiatives surrounding Father Rydzyk, like the League of the Polish Families, had not met his expectations in previous elections, as they were unable to advance among the general voting public and had no prospects for participating in the government. The Law and Justice, created autonomously and aiming at moderates as well as at conservatives, was on its way to power-sharing, and therefore it was a much more desirable partner to Father Rydzyk's ambitions. The attraction was reciprocated, as the media controlled by Rydzyk were much less critical of Kaczynski brothers' party than mainstream media, considered a liberal stronghold and accused of bias against PiS.

The dislike for media did not prevent the Law and Justice from skillfully using them to promote its ideas. The campaign set off early with a spectacular convention and a series of costly TV commercials, broadcasted long before the official start of the campaign stipulated by the electoral law. Some of these commercials bear a striking similarity with those used in Ronald Reagan's campaign in 1984 (see pictures).

But it was only after Donald Tusk started his equally massive outdoor and TV campaign that the confrontational line of PiS became clear. In his first advertisement, Donald Tusk presented himself as a "man of honor," showing pictures from his youth, when, as a persecuted member of Solidarity, he had to work in the shipyard, repairing cranes. Very quickly, the footage was contested by his former colleague and also by his former boss, who ran for the Senate for the Law and Justice, in a manner that reminded us of the way in which John Kerry's war record was attacked by the "concerned veterans."

Incidentally, the Law and Justice started running Lech Kaczynski's commercial, in which his past as a member of Solidarity was underlined. Lech Kaczynski's image proved to be a decisive asset. Serving as mayor of Warsaw, and former Prosecutor General, he adopted an attitude often referred to as "sheriff-like," characterized by the tough declarations concerning the fight against crime and corruption, but also on questions of public morality. His position was confirmed by his refusal to authorize the Equality Parade, a Gay Pride-type manifestation, which took him to the Supreme Administrative Court, which overturned it. If the decision did not win him points in Warsaw, it certainly did in the country, where the majority of voters shared his viewpoint. In Warsaw, Kaczynski was given a chance to recuperate in Rudy Giuliani-style during the false bombing alert in the metro on July 12, 2005, when he decided to evacuate all stations.

The election of 2005 was unusual for Poland, because the presidential race coincided with the parliamentary one. It gave the winning party a rare opportunity to take hold of the whole government and form what in America is called an administration. The calendar favored a party with strong leadership and grand vision, since the double election instilled hope for a new beginning after the collapse of the once-dominant left. The Law and Justice, with its "IV Republic" battle cry, gave the impression of being more determined to bring the change.

The course on moral sanitation continued after the double victory. The Law and Justice indeed rejected the logic of majority coalition and tried to pursue one-party politics, having assured a vote of confidence from minor parties. The President's twin brother, who was a natural choice for the PM, stepped aside and promoted a second-row politician, Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz, to the post, signaling that the Presidency acquired a new significance in the institutional order. If not – so far – in terms of constitutional law, surely in terms of political climate and partisan tactics Poland was drifting toward American solutions.

¹ On 3rd May 1791, before the French Revolutionary Constitution.

² Signed on January 30th, 2003 by the Prime Ministers of United Kingdom, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Denmark, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. It expressed support for the United States' ambition of toppling Saddam Hussein as a threat to common security. To most observers it demonstrated an abrupt division within the EU in respect to foreign policy and attitudes towards international law.

Law and Justice 2006



"A new day has come. In Poland, more and more people go to work"

Ronald Reagan 1984



"It's morning again in America. Today more men and women will go to work than ever before in our country's history"

Law and Justice 2006



"Our families are better-off. Inflation is the lowest in Europe"

Ronald Reagan 1984



"With interest rates at the lowest levels since 1980, 2,000 families will buy a new house today"



Greetings from Mykolayiv, Ukraine



By Ewa Hauser

Greetings from Ukraine in spring 2007 while I am on sabbatical in southeastern Ukraine by the Black Sea. I am teaching courses at Petro Mohyla University for Humanities on political speech, comparative ethnicity in the United States and Ukraine, and on political cinema from Hollywood. My ethnicity class was very interesting as the students in their papers and class discussions compared the multiethnic composition of their new independent state with that of the United States.

Mykolayiv is a bit like Rochester. It has a proud past as a major industrial center and the school where I teach is ranked the best of six schools in this old Black Sea port. The impressive shipbuilding industry began when the town was first established in 1789 by Prince Potiomkin as an imperial tsarist sea outpost. Mykolayiv shared its mission with such other Black Sea ports as Kherson, Odessa and Sevastopol. During the Soviet times, the core of the city kept four major docks where Soviet battle ships and aircraft carriers were built or brought for repair and renovation. It also housed a polytechnic institute specializing in various shipbuilding crafts.

During the Soviet period, the city was off-limits to foreigners. The main shipyard employed more than 50,000 workers. Since independence, Mykolayiv has lost its prominence along with Ukraine, giving up to Russia most of its Black Sea Fleet

stationed in Sevastopol. The city's ethnic makeup has shifted from majority Russian to Ukrainian, and the docks stand idle while the number of employees dwindle down to less than 3,000. I am now researching the history of the city and its changing ethnic composition and national identities in the public libraries

and through interviews. I hope to finish my research when I return here in the fall, thanks to my Fulbright grant that has been renewed for Mykolayiv. This research will provide valuable examples for my courses on geopolitical concerns and challenges in the border of the European Union.



Ewa Hauser at the May 9 Victory Parade on Sovietskaya Street in Mikolayiv.

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