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**ON *KULTURA MASOWA* [*MASS CULTURE*]  
AN ANTHOLOGY BY CZESŁAW MIŁOSZ OF COMIC DEFEAT:**

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**Resumen**

Este artículo aborda las circunstancias culturales y políticas de la traducción de Czeslaw Milosz en ensayos polacos de *Mass Culture: the Popular Arts in America*, editado en su antología de la *Mass Culture*, París 1959. En él se explica tanto por razones personales e históricas su particular visión de la cultura de masas estadounidense en la década de 1950, en comparación con la cultura popular en Europa Central, que se desarrolló al servicio de la propaganda soviética.

Palabras clave: Cultura, masas, Estados Unidos, revisión, propaganda, soviética.

**Abstract**

This paper discusses cultural and political circumstances of Czeslaw Milosz's translation into Polish essays from *Mass Culture: the Popular Arts in America*, edited in his anthology *Mass Culture*, Paris 1959. It explains both personal and historical reasons of his particular view of American mass culture in the early 1950s as compared to popular culture in Central Europe, which developed and served as a tool of Soviet propaganda.

Keywords: Culture, mass, United States, review, propaganda, soviet.

**Artículo**

Thus Miłosz opens the preface to the anthology *Kultura masowa* [*Mass Culture*], issued by the Literary Institute in Paris in 1959. It was written under the influence of the collective volume *Mass Culture the Popular Arts in America*, issued in 1957. The poet took from the book the sketches which he considered the most representative, and made them available for the Polish reader in his own translation. These are, in order, the articles of Dwight MacDonal, Clement Greenberg, Marshall McLuhan, Leslie A. Fielder and Melvin Tumin. Miłosz provided the collection with his commentary *Pytania do dyskusji* [*Questions for Discussion*].

This collection of essays may be viewed from at least a few perspectives. First: asking whether the diagnoses of the American researchers are correct in the light of today's state of knowledge on mass culture – but then we lose the author of the anthology out of sight. Second: considering why Miłosz chose those and not any other works as the most interesting ones; in other words, defining the author's criterion for text choice. Third: pondering why the book was published as early as the late 1950s, thus almost at the very beginning of Miłosz's second stay in America. And fourth: asking what significance the afterword holds for the anthology and the editor's writing, and why it was placed there.

Here I signal the possibilities of analysing the collection from various perspectives not in order to characterise them all. Quite the contrary: I should like to narrow my own reflections down to those on the role and position of Czesław Miłosz in that publishing venture. I suspend questions about the mass culture and its development in Poland as compared to the countries of Western Europe or the United States. Neither am I interested here in the evolution of knowledge on mass culture, the professional studies on which are constantly growing. I focus mostly on the afterword provided to the collection by Czesław Miłosz, which may allow to include that seemingly separate composition in a wider context of the writing of the author of *Bells in Winter* and prove it to be its integral part.

The title of the afterword: *Questions for Discussion*, causes a certain genre confusion. The author precedes the anthology with a preface, but puts his last word in not as a recapitulation, but partially on the same terms as the sketches of mass culture researchers appear here. He does not generalise or summarise the statements of others. He takes their hypotheses and theorems over to unfamiliar grounds: behind the Iron Curtain, and analyses the issue on his own using the tools they gave him. Miłosz does not give any theoretical foundations for mass culture research in the socialist countries' block. He makes such an analysis – which is necessarily fragmentary. Not sketching the whole image, he names his deliberations, “questions”, stressing the makeshift status of his own reflections, unsupported by research. He is aware that the theses proposed by the American researchers are not final, and hence he adds his voice to the discussion. In the afterword, Miłosz does not finalise the reflections contained in the volume. As he broadens their context to an area of *terrae incognitae*, he opens a discussion, moderates it. It might be said that the title of Miłosz's essay on the one hand uncovers its unprofessional character, and on the other – reveals its contributory nature. Without a pretence to be comprehensive, it is useful for a member of the Western world and provokes its addressee proper: the Polish intellectualist, to think on the matter.

Miłosz's sketch is divided into four principal parts preceded by the *Wstęp [Introduction]*: *Kultura ludowa [Folk Culture]*, *“Wyższa” kultura [“High” Culture]*, *Kultura masowa* and *L'homme moyen sensuel*. In the *Introduction*, the author stresses the supplementary role of his essay, as he says that Western intellectualists:

rzadko i tylko dorywczo szukają podobieństw czy różnic w innych cywilizacjach. Wykrzywia to być może trochę perspektywę i nawet szkodzi niektórym ujęciom teoretycznym (Miłosz, 1959: 129) [see

similarities or differences in other civilisations rarely and only occasionally. It might distort the perspective somewhat, and even harm certain theoretical views].

He draws attention to the presence of mass culture in the cinema and in literature in Central and Eastern Europe before World War II. After the war, when official influence of Western culture was stopped in that area, a specific – terror-born – counterpart of mass culture was born: socialist realism. Miłosz has no illusions as to the similarities of the two phenomena: both mass culture and socialist realism are different but parallel sub-culture branches. Different, since – though both useful in manipulating the social mass – they arise from diverse needs: the former, for entertainment, for interest, for gaining a grip over people’s minds in the democratic system; the latter, nationalist in spirit, as a component of the strategy of forming the new man, a tool of totalitarian pedagogy. Thus using a working division into folk, upper and mass culture, suggested by the American authors, the author of *Zdobycie władzy* [*The Seizure of Power*] poses his own hypotheses as to their differences and similarities.

In his deliberations upon folk culture, Miłosz warns of idealising it and treating it as an independent entirety. He thus writes:

Ta kultura nie jest prawie nigdy “czysta”. [...] Włączały się w nią kolejno różne nurty, często przychodzące z “góry”, asymilowane i przekształcane albo żyjące w postaci szczątkowej, np. wierzenia pogańskie zdolne przetrwać wiele stuleci. Nie jest też prawdą, że kultura ludowa była ogródkiem oddzielnym od formalnej kultury panów (Miłosz, 1959: 130) [The culture is almost never “pure”. [...] It has successively incorporated various currents, often from “above”, which were assimilated and transformed, or survived in a residual form, e.g. pagan beliefs which can survive many centuries. Neither is it true that folk culture was a garden separate from the formal culture of masters].

He gives examples of such assimilation and imitation, such as copying the style of the sacred art in folk sculpture and painting. He does not remain only within the Slavic civilisation, either. Starting – characteristically – from Lithuania, he makes an anthropological journey over to Scandinavia. He does not contend himself with commenting on modern times. He reconstructs the history of folk culture from the modernist fascination with Highlander culture to its made-for-tourists “Cepelia”<sup>1</sup> version in the Communism. Folk culture behind the Iron Curtain, he claims, has also been transformed into a propaganda means. The folk – its creator, moulds into the proletariat, the working people, who aspire to the role of creators and consumers of an altogether different culture than the folk one! Miłosz uncovers the absurdity, with which the Communist regime has treated folk culture:

Stosunek komunistycznych rządów do folkloru jest dwuznaczny i właściwie irracjonalny. Z jednej strony, dążą do uprzemysłowienia, które kulturę ludową niszczy, z drugiej, udzielają jej poparcia, pod

<sup>1</sup> Folk and Art Industry Centre – folk handicraft co-operative (1949-1990).

warunkiem, że jest odpowiednio poprawiona i zwulgaryzowana. [...] Pieśń ludowa, “umasowiona”, z przytarcie jej “dziwactw”, z odrzuceniem tego, co niepotrzebne [...] jest horrorem i najczęściej narzędziem totalizmu (Miłosz, 1959: 131-132) [The relation of the communist authorities to folklore is ambiguous and actually irrational. On the one hand, they aim at industrialisation, which destroys folk culture; on the other, they support it, on the condition that it be suitably corrected and vulgarised. [...] Folk song, “massed”, with its “quirks” rubbed down, with all that’s unnecessary thrown away [...] is a horror and most often a tool of totalism].

The process of making folk culture to mass production in socialist countries was not much different from similar practices in the west, where black music was promoted to wider circulation, and in westerns there appeared suitably civilised Indians. The mechanism – as Miłosz sees it – is analogous, although in the Communism it served heavy-handed politics, and in the Western democracy, political correctness...

Coming to comments on high culture, Miłosz wants to clarify what the concept means on the European ground. He relates the American highbrow-middlebrow division to the sharp contrast between intellectuals and intelligentsia which has had a long tradition in Europe and an inspiring effect on poetry, not only that of the turn of the century. Referring to the interwar period, the poet draws a line to divide intelligentsia, whose tastes were satisfied by “Wiadomości Literackie”<sup>2</sup>, and intellectuals who gathered around the artistic avant-garde, the source of the then highest culture. It is on that dividing line, according to Miłosz, that Witold Gombrowicz located his prose, as he was fighting an intellectual’s battles with intelligentsia. After the war, due to central culture management, that division had been upset. In fact, the conflict might have become even more acute, as the artistic taste of the intelligentsia began to turn “mass-like”, and the intellectuals, pushed to the margins of cultural life, partly went underground or emigrated. The poet shares the view of Dwight MacDonal (2005: 42), who claims that:

Until about 1930, High Culture tried to defend itself against the encroachments of Mass Culture in two opposite ways: Academicism, or an attempt to compete by imitation; and Avantgardism, or a withdrawal from competition.

Academicism is *kitsch* for the *élite*: spurious High Culture that is outwardly the real thing but actually as much a manufactured article as the cheaper cultural goods produced for the masses.

Miłosz notes the phenomenon of “Przekrój”<sup>3</sup>:

[...] który łączy porady towarzyskie, modę, sensacyjne opowieści (często pióra najlepszych autorów) z informacją, rysunkiem i bardzo

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2 Wiadomości Literackie [Literary News] – a weekly on social and cultural issues.

3 Literally: “Review” – a weekly, established in 1945.

niezwykle wyszukany dowcipami. Ten gatunek tygodnika jest nieznanym na Zachodzie – gdzie żadne pismo o 400.000 nakładzie nie odważyłoby się drukować nowel Kafki (Miłosz, 1959: 139) [which combines advice on social life issues, fashion, thrillers (often by the best authors) with information, graphics and oftentimes very sophisticated jokes. That type of a weekly is unknown in the West – where no periodical with a circulation of 400,000 would not dare to print Kafka's short stories].

“Przekrój” was a cultural hybrid in the times of socialism. It combined the elements of popular culture and high culture in a shape in which it was able to function in a totalitarian state. Referring to that example, Miłosz shows the cultural chaos in the country in which official order was established with a heavy hand. Additionally – between the lines – he suggests that the process of cultural homogenisation has not yet fully taken place in Poland. Moulding the recipient top-down gives an official pretence of social uniformity – and “Przekrój” is its patent contradiction.

Steering the culture centrally in totalitarian states could remind only those who do not know its rules of functioning, of the subsidy system in the West, as described by the author of *Legenda nowoczesności* [*Legends of Modernity*]:

“Wyższa kultura” jest na Zachodzie dzisiaj przeważnie subsydiowana. Subsydiowane są prawie wszystkie miesięczniki literackie – przez fundacje, uniwersytety albo firmy wydawnicze [...] Subsydiowane są trudniejsze książki [...] Subsydiami są posady na uniwersytetach dla pisarzy (Ameryka), stypendia dla kształcących się artystów, nagrody, zakupy przez muzea (Miłosz, 1959: 134) [Today, “high culture” in the West is mostly subsidised. Subsidised are almost all literary monthlies – by foundations, universities or publishing companies [...] Subsidised are the more difficult books [...] Posts at universities for writers (America), scholarships for artists' education, awards, museums' purchases come from subsidies].

In the West, however, the system of institutional support for high culture was characterised by that blessed curse, or cursed blessing of freedom, which Adolf Rudnicki, quoted by Miłosz, was grappling with. That moment of the anthology's author's reflection is undoubtedly one of the most crucial parts in the sketch. Miłosz knows what curse is bemoaned by Rudnicki. In the conditions of freedom, when an artwork is measured with aesthetical value criteria, the creator – a refugee from a totalitarian world – was sometimes stranded, unable to find himself in a situation of full autonomy, which he felt to be a useless feature. Let us quote Rudnicki's own words:

U nas nie ma zbędnych kart, wszyscy biorą udział – są za lub przeciw! Jeśli nawet nie chcesz, jeśli nawet nienawidzisz, twoja nienawiść daje ci rację bytu, głos, treść, robi z ciebie filozofa, ideologa, człowieka. [...] Tkwi w tym fascynacja, idea, której siłę i wagę odczuwasz dopiero tutaj, na tutejszych ulicach, gdzie widzisz nagle, że nie masz co począć ze

swą wolnością, gdzie widzisz, że ona może – zabić (Miłosz, 1959:135-136) [With us, there are no redundant cards, everyone takes part – for or against! Even if you don't want to, even if you hate something, your hatred gives you a *raison d'être*, a voice, makes you a philosopher, ideologist, human. [...] There a fascination in it, an idea, the power and weight of which you feel only here, in the streets here, where you suddenly see that you don't know what to do with your freedom, where you see it can – kill].

Miłosz bluntly states that if high culture is to develop and give its creators the sense of personal importance – as in their work they act against the system which ties their hands, but which through its existence also validates their actions – then he is for freedom with its various curses. In other words: Miłosz does not favour high culture created in a totalitarian environment. He writes:

Powiedzmy jednak okrutnie, że “wyższa” kultura wygrywa w warunkach dla przeciętnego człowieka nieznośnych, że ten rozwaliby ją, byle mieć przyzwoite ubrania, lodówki i samochody. Rudnicki w Paryżu tęsknił do Polski, *paradisum doctorum, infernum rusticorum*, bądź co bądź (Miłosz, 1959: 136) [Yet let us state cruelly that “high” culture wins in conditions which are unbearable for the average individual; the individual would smash it just in order to have decent clothes, refrigerators and cars. In Paris Rudnicki missed Poland, *paradisum doctorum, infernum rusticorum*, after all].

The victory of high culture over mass culture in the socialist countries is illusory, says Miłosz. In another place he adds that material prosperity does not create a social demand for high culture, thus destroying *infernum rusticorum* alone will not enhance the culture's position. Here it might be worth considering why Miłosz addresses such a booklet to the Polish reader, if the Western version of mass culture reached the said reader in trace amounts, the local socialist realism did not satisfy anyone's needs and, basically, between high culture and folk culture there stretched an undefined space, not conquered by middlebrow culture.

The author states that in Poland there has not yet occurred a homogenization process advanced enough to unify the labourer, peasant, clerk into a collective type of recipient. And in his opinion the best moment to present the issues of mass culture to the Polish intellectuals, so that they may anticipate the phenomena to be observed soon and – in the situation which gives them a privileged position – take actions to weaken its invasion. Unity of culture in its high-, middle- or lowbrow version is an illusion for Miłosz – he heralds enrichment of the uniform paradigm with new elements, towards which the work of the élites will have to take a stand. The poet speaks about the future with surprising intuition:

Skoro zgodzimy się, że masowość jest nieunikniona, pojawiają się planowej ubszą biorąc, następujące możliwości:

1. Niszczenie kultury “wyższej” jako niepotrzebnej, co jest żadnym rozwiązaniem. 2. Ochrona jej w rezerwach dla rzadkiej zwierzyny,

ze względu na wartość “laboratoryjną”, “eksperymentalną”. Taka kultura będzie jednak chorowita wskutek zwężenia terenu. 3. Bogactwo, różnorodność poziomów, ze stałym ruchem pomiędzy nimi. [...] Tylko zachowując świadomość, że potrzeby poszczególnych grup są różne, można zredukować kicz do rozmiarów względnie nieszkodliwych (Miłosz, 1959: 140) [If we agree that the mass character is inevitable, the following possibilities, roughly defined, appear in the planned economy:

1. Destroying “higher” culture as something unnecessary, which is no solution.
2. Protecting it in reserves for rare animals, due to its “laboratory”, “experimental” value. Such culture, however, will be sickly due to a narrowed area.
3. Richness, variety of levels, with constant movement among them. [...] Only by keeping in mind the fact that the needs of particular groups are different, the kitsch may be reduced to a relatively harmless size].

Bringing the discussion on mass culture into the Polish language would mean as much as showing its possible consequences to its participant. *L’homme moyen sensuel* always has existed and always will, thus Miłosz answers the charges of Edward Shils, who seeks Marxist roots in the criticism of the industrial society, and who places the Polish poet among the intellectuals leading in that criticism. Shils believes that the Marxist sympathies of mass culture critics have them form accusations against it, because it opposes their fantasies of a “height of humanity for all people” (Miłosz, 1959: 143). They’d like – according to Shils – to shape it against its will, like once their spiritual masters wanted to create a new human on the ruins of capitalism. Miłosz replies to Shils:

Mój system odniesienia jest inny: kraje, gdzie masa albo pozostaje bez formy (w czym kryje się nadzieja?), albo wtłaczana jest w formę najwyraźniej sztuczną, niewygodną, która nie tylko nie robi z niej geniuszów, ale nawet może ją zmusić do szukania jedynej rozrywki w pijaństwie czy zapasach niedźwiedzi (Miłosz, 1959: 144) [My system of reference is different: countries where the mass is either formless (which might raise hopes?), or is squeezed into a clearly artificial, inconvenient form, which not only won’t make it to geniuses, but may even force it to seek its only entertainment in drinking or bear wrestling].

The Polish poet doesn’t aim to attack *l’homme moyen sensuel*. On the contrary, he notes something that escaped Shils:

Bo ten sam przeciętny człowiek, który dba tylko o zarobek i przyjemność, równocześnie nosi w sobie impulsy zdolne uwikłać go w ideologię, w politykę, w poezję, a nawet kazać mu umierać na barykadach (Miłosz, 1959: 144) [For that same average man who cares only for money and pleasure, at the same time carries in himself impulses which are able to entangle him in ideology, politics, poetry, and even make him die on the barricades].

That important statement encourages to seek special reasons why Miłosz is addressing the anthology to the Polish reader in the late 1950s. The stay in America let the poet acquaint himself with the situation, new for him, of – shall we call it – literary communication in the New World, orient himself in what cultural system he was functioning and what recipient he might count on. In the preface, *Przedmowa*, he notes that literature and art should be aware of the conditions they are developing in, and if a component of the said conditions is mass culture – called a powerful competitor by Miłosz – ignoring it will only distort the image of culture contemporary to the poet. Let us thus say that reading the collection from which the translated sketches were taken, was useful for himself as a writer who found himself in the new conditions for creating. Yet if he passes them further to the Polish intellectuals, then not only to broaden their horizons.

It is, as it seems, also about the *l'homme moyen sensuel* which Miłosz wants the reader of *Kultura masowa* to think of. First, because he sees the future of culture as a kind of circulation of its higher and lower products among the social groups. Second, because he sees the vacuity and evil of socialist realism and is afraid that high culture may be closed in the social trenches of élites, unable to permeate to lower social strata, which in turn are in danger of becoming the more stupefied.

Mieli słuszność wszyscy – pisze Miłosz – którzy w tępieniu prawdziwej myśli, prawdziwej literatury i sztuki dopatrywali się nie tylko przykości dla elity, ale groźnego niebezpieczeństwa właśnie dla mas, wszyscy ci, którzy, jak artyści plastycy marzący o produkcji pięknych przedmiotów codziennego użytku, składali dowód, że wierzą w taką czy inną łączność pomiędzy kulturą wyższą i masową, mimo wrogości rządzących dla tej idei (Miłosz, 1959: 145) [Right were all those – Miłosz writes – who in the fight against true thought, true literature and art saw not only a source of distress for the élite, but a serious danger for the very masses; all those who, like artists dreaming of producing beautiful items of daily use, proved that they believed in some or other communication between high culture and mass culture, despite the authorities' hostile attitude towards that idea].

For the higher impulses inside *l'homme moyen sensuel*, the writer decides to anticipate the development of culture in Poland and wishes to give a testimony to the captivity of minds in democratic conditions with the few sketches. After all, it seems that such closeness in time of the *Zniewolony umysł* [*The Captive Mind*] and the anthology discussed here should not be surprising. Both publications are divided by mere six years, and only four passed between the issue of *Zniewolony umysł* and Miłosz's meeting with *Mass Culture*...

Following Ewa Czarnecka (Gorczyńska, 1992: 254-258), who compares the statements of Karl Jaspers and Witold Gombrowicz on *Zniewolony umysł*, one might in a similar way compare two level of reading the book: the moral level which stresses its metaphysical aspect, according to Jaspers, and the cultural, or sociological one suggested by Gombrowicz. The author of *Kosmos* [*Cosmos*] distinguishes two attitudes in Miłosz: defender and rival of the West. If that intuition be right, it may

explain the poet seeking parallels between mind captivity in the East and in the West. While in *Miasto bez imienia* [*City Without a Name*] or in *Widzenia* [*Visions over The San Francisco Bay*] he shows rather a personal sense of alienation in the New World, weariness and disgust with rubbish, what prevails in *Kultura masowa* is his sociological passion, reflection on culture mechanisms and dynamics, which brings the text closer to – *Zniewolony umysł*. In that sense, *Kultura masowa* may be the other side of the coin, which is Miłosz's reflection on the state of mind – not of a person from the East or the West, but of a member of Western civilisation in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century: spiritually crippled by war, enslaved by authoritarian government systems or mass media active within exemplary democracies. Yet the anthology is not to fortify its few (as it were) readers from behind the Iron Curtain. It is rather a report – depressing with its conclusions, but still realistic – about the mental condition not only of *l'homme moyen sensuel*! In that sense, Jaspers' words about *Zniewolony umysł* may be related to it:

Odwieczne przeciwieństwa dobra i zła, szlachetności i nikczemności, prawdy i fałszu pozostają u Miłosza wyczuwalne na dnie wszystkiego, co pisze, jakkolwiek daleko im do wygodnych zgrabnych formuł. [...] Dochodzi tu do głosu serce, które drży na widok każdej rzeczywistości niszczącej ludzi, oko o wielkiej precyzji psychologicznej, poczucie niesprawiedliwości, niezdolne do wybiegów (Czarnecka, 1992: 254) [The eternal opposites of good and evil, nobility and wickedness, truth and falsehood, remain palpable with Miłosz at the bottom of all that he writes, even if they are not put in convenient, well-rounded formulas. [...] Here the heart comes to the fore, a heart which trembles at the sight of any reality which destroys people, and the eye of great psychological precision, the sense of injustice, incapable of tricks].

In the sociological diagnosis, Jaspers finds metaphysical motivation, which – regardless of the kind of harvest it may bring – always accompanies Miłosz as he writes. The antinomy: universal – makeshift, on which the poet builds his literary statements, is also present in *Pytania do dyskusji*, and bears testimony to the state of culture of the middle 20<sup>th</sup> century in socialist countries and shows its spiritual anti-values. Let us say it outright: the reality of culture described by Miłosz is evil, because it is based on evil. Censorship, lack of freedom, printing ban, the falsehood of socialist realism which popularises a certain anti-humanism, are doubtlessly evils of a greater specific gravity than the evils of mass culture, which are: mental shallowness, impoverishment of aesthetic taste, lack of originality or promoting a false vision of the human. But still, we are talking about a lesser or greater evil, not

about any opposing values. Miłosz notes a very important issue:

Gdyby jakaś magia usunęła barierę, Polska natychmiast zostałaby pochłonięta przez kulturę masową komercyjną i to w stopniu o wiele większym niż przed wojną, kiedy brakło do tego społecznych warunków, bo cała niemal wieś (wtedy przygniatająca większość ludności) była wyłączona z obiegu (Miłosz, 1959: 138) [If some magic

was to remove the barrier, Poland would immediately be engulfed by commercial mass culture, and that to a much greater degree than it was before the war, as then there were no social conditions for that since almost all of the countryside (at that time farmers made up a vast majority) were excluded].

That does no credit for the interwar culture, Miłosz would say, as a well-known critic of the social relations of the Interwar Period. Yet the poet adds that an analogous process of mass culture deluge would have occurred much more violently in Russia. This means simply that popularising materialist philosophy in socialist realism slogans – in the opinion of the author of *Zdobycie władzy* – brought abundant harvest there. That the people brought up in socialism, deprived of subjectivity, who do not ask about any supernatural reason for their existence, and who use a quantitative and not qualitative criterion for assessing reality, will enthusiastically add colour to their dull lives with kitsch. After all, let us agree that the average representative of Western culture, who has not been subject to political indoctrination, reaches for mass culture product no less willingly. Here, the essence of Miłosz's thought is probably to be found: the conviction that the erosion of religious imagination of the modern human – resulting from unquestioning acceptance of a scientific image of the world – the impersonal technologizing of life which has transformed people into a social mass, the tragic history of the first decades of the past century, have all warped human understanding of good and evil.

Maybe saying that mass culture is one of the faces of Ulro in the opinion of Miłosz, would be going too far in interpretational guesses. If the land of Ulro is supposed to be the place where the spiritual wreck exists who was stripped of his faith in the supernatural order of the cosmos by the scientific worldview, what can mass culture have to do with that? And yet it does. Art deprived of the metaphysical point of reference – and that is how Miłosz views at least some artistic goings-on of his times – reflects those changes in thinking which have made the land of Ulro real. As a representative of sub-art, mass culture is the most primitive mirror of those changes. MacDonald (2005: 43) writes:

There are theoretical reasons why Mass Culture is not and can never be any good. I take it as axiomatic that culture can only be produced by and for human beings. But in so far as people are organized (more strictly, disorganized) as masses, they lose their human identity and quality.

Mass culture is not good in two senses: aesthetic and axiological. Not losing faith in the impulses of good which dwell inside *l'homme moyen sensuel*, Miłosz actually respects him more than Shils, who attacks the former. He resents:

Zwolennikom politycznie wydajnego kiczu, próbującym uzyskać “jedność” kultury, że owocem ich zabiegów był nie “nowy człowiek”, ale człowiek emocjonalnie skurczony, stary *l'homme moyen sensuel*, tyle tylko, że obolały i nienawistny (Miłosz, 1959: 145) [The followers of the politically efficient kitsch, trying to obtain the “uniformity” of

culture, for the fact that the fruit of their work was not the “new human”, but an emotionally shrunk human, an old *homme moyen sensuel* just aching and hateful].

In that context, the letter to Jerzy Turowicz of October 1952 with a “repair programme” may be seen as further deliberations of Miłosz (2001) on modern culture, on the future of intellectual élites and *l’homme moyen sensuel*. If the poet proposes a certain intellectual contraband to the editor of “Tygodnik Powszechny”<sup>4</sup>:

Powtarzam, widzę szansę i czuję wielką próżnię, czuję przez chaos i miotanie się młodzieńców w literaturze, a ponieważ grafomania w Polsce kwitnie i tysiące najbardziej aktywnych umysłowo młodych się o nią ocierają, trzeba by umieć ich przekonać, że sama literatura jest bzdurą, że w niej samej i poprzez nią samą nikt żadnych mądrości i wskazówek jak żyć nie odkryje, że trzeba szukać poza literaturą, i że my (wy niby) nie chcemy was nawracać, tylko dać narzędzia do poszukiwania. [I repeat, I see a chance and I feel a great void, I feel it due to the chaos and the young shavers thrashing about in literature, and since talentless writing blooms in Poland and thousands of the young people most mentally active come in contact with it, we need to be able to convince them that literature itself is rubbish, that no one can discover any wisdom and guidelines on the way of life therein and there through, that they need to seek beyond literature, and that we (you, sort of) don’t want to convert you, but just give you the tools to seek with].

It is in order to use the crack between the conservative ideology of church institutions, the tendency of “Pax”<sup>5</sup> to compromise, vulgarised Marxism and true Marxism, and show valuable philosophy and modern art in a non-distorted form to the Polish intellectual and the intellectual-to-be. The falsehood of mental life in Poland can be approached cunningly, as Miłosz argues:

[...] przydałyby się jakieś programy specjalnej szkoły, która nosiłaby jakąś jadalną nazwę, choćby w ramach Klubów Inteligencji Katolickiej czy oddzielnie, ściągnąć do takiej szkoły młodych literatów i nie traktować jej jako środka indoktrynacji, brać wszystkich, wyrobić podstępnie przekonanie, wiaterek, że chcesz być poetą, pisarzem, to bez znajomości filozofii XX wieku ani rusz, i tam im przedstawiać sytuację światopoglądową, od dzisiaj wracając wstecz...<sup>6</sup> [we would need some programmes of a special school, with some digestible name, for instance within the Clubs of Catholic Intelligentsia<sup>7</sup> or separately, then attract young writers to such a school, and treat it not as a means

4 Tygodnik Powszechny [General Weekly] - a Polish weekly magazine focusing on social and cultural issues, published since 1945.

5 The PAX Association - a pro-communist secular Catholic organization created in Poland in 1947.

6 Ibid.

7 Polish organization grouping Catholic intelligentsia, founded in Poland in 1956. A mild Catholic-centre opposition group in communist Poland.

of indoctrination, take everyone, cunningly develop in them the conviction, a breeze, that if you want to be a poet, a writer, then it's just not possible without knowing the 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy, and show them the ideological situation, going from today backwards...].

*Kultura masowa* may be treated as Miłosz's contribution to such actions as the poet encourages Turowicz to take.

Where can the book be placed on the horizon of Miłosz's works? Simply indeed. If we view the works of the author of *Ocalenie* [*Rescue*] – according to his declarations – as arising from the need to praise things because they are, to describe and extol the *esse*, then *Zdobycie władzy*, *Zniewolony umysł*, *Kultura masowa* and *Ziemia Ulro* [*The Land of Ulro*] must be seen as resulting from that attitude: they defend and attempt to save the *esse*. Miłosz (1959) compiles *Kultura masowa* to be useful, and mainly because:

Ostatecznie nie chodzi o to, żeby, pokazując ludzki grzech, dać do zrozumienia, że gdzieś za kurtyną działa jakiś *deus ex machina*, ale żeby nie poniżać Etre, nawet w jego formach dotykalnych i ziemskich. [In the end, it's not about giving to understand, by showing human sin, that somewhere behind the curtain works some *deus ex machina*, but not to demean the Etre, even in its tangible and earthly forms].

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