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THE RECEPTION OF POLISH ÉMIGRÉ WRITING IN POLAND

Chinks in the Iron Curtain.
The Migration of Authors and their Books.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall, an invisible wall which had been created by censorship in every Communist country and had separated émigré and domestic literature fell as well. In Poland, the barrier between the emigration and the country had been strong but never absolute. Except for the most difficult, hard-core Stalinist period in the early 1950s, there were always at least some news, names and texts which managed to infiltrate. The predominant routes included: the clandestine circulation of Polish books printed abroad, programmes of Radio Free Europe and, of course, the movement of people.

There were at least three waves of emigration. Within each wave of social displacement there were, of course, some writers.¹ The first and largest wave occurred during World War II. It has often been compared to the Great Emigration after the November Uprising of 1830. Most romantic Polish stereotypes about emigration have their roots in this period, and many of them were revived after the Treaty of Yalta. In 1951, Czesław Miłosz's decision to remain in the West and his famous article "Nie" [No] in the monthly Kultura were the loudest reverberations of a closing Iron Curtain.² Many people thought it would last forever, but five years later the Polish October of 1956 clearly damaged the curtain. A small opening was made and writers managed to flee one by one: Marek Hlasko, Aleksander Wat. Others, like Henryk Grynberg, Leopold Tyrmand and Stanisław Wygodzki, had already departed before the second wave of migration, caused by antisemitism in the late 1960s, when many Polish Jews left the country.

The third wave was the so-called "post-Solidarity emigration". This was the last and strongest since the Second World War. Among those emi-

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¹. For basic biographical information, see Bolesław Klimaszewski, Ewa R. Nowakowska, Wojciech Wysiciel, Mały słownik pisarzy polskich na obczyźnie 1939-1980 (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Interpress, 1992).

grants about ten additional writers moved to the West or remained in the West, having been caught by surprise by the declaration of martial law. Among them were Kazimierz Brandys, Stanislaw Barańczak, Adam Zagarzewski, and Janusz Glowacki.

During the entire Iron Curtain period the barriers were being crossed, and although it may sound strange to some and we may have forgotten this, they were being crossed in both directions. Writers who fled Poland during the Second World War and subsequently returned did so in two distinct periods. The first was immediately after the Treaty of Yalta, when the political instability aroused a false sense of hope for the future of democracy in Poland. Among those who returned were the poets Julian Tuwim and Władysław Broniewski. The second period was after 1956 and in the early 1960s, when a few outstanding authors from the wartime emigration like Zofia Kossak-Szczucka, Melchior Wańkowicz, Maria Kuncewiczowa and Teodor Parnicki returned to Poland, believing in the promise of political détente.

The Iron Curtain was seriously affected by the Polish October of 1956 and became increasingly rusty thereafter. In fact, a symptom of this condition was that some writers, like Sławomir Mrożek, somehow managed to retain an ambiguous political status. He lived abroad continuously from 1963 but did not ask for political asylum. Therefore he was allowed to publish within the country. Only after he had publicly criticized the Polish authorities after the intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968 was he banned, for many years, from publishing at home.

Mrożek's case helps to clarify the distinction between an émigré writer and a domestic writer. One aspect concerns the biographical facts (for example, where they lived and their political status). A second consideration is the Communist authorities' prerogative to evaluate authors' political acceptability. An author residing abroad who publicly criticized the political decisions of the Polish authorities (like Mrożek after the intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968) or someone whose texts appeared in émigré publishing houses (like Hłasko in 1958, after his arrival in Paris) was almost automatically banned from publishing in Poland — especially if he used his own name and not a pseudonym. It was even possible to maintain the peculiar status of "virtual" émigré writer while still living in Poland, as Stanislaw Barańczak did in the late 1970s. Such a status of "domestic émigré" like Barańczak or "émigré against their will" like Hłasko and Mrożek usually led to actual, full-scale emigration in the sense of really living abroad.