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ČESLOVO MILOŠO SKAITYMAI 4
TĖVYNĖS IEŠKOJIMAS IR TREMTIES PATIRTYS

CZESLAW MILOSZ'S READINGS 4
THE SEARCH OF HOMELAND AND
THE EXPERIENCES OF EXILE

Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas
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WELCOME ADDRESS BY PROFESSOR ALGIRDAS AVIŽIENIS

Vytautas Magnus University

Dear colleagues, guests, and members of academic community, I had the privilege of serving as the first Rector of Vytautas Magnus University when it was reborn in 1989 after having been closed by the Soviet occupants in 1950. Before returning to Kaunas, the city of my birth that I left at the age of eight, I was on the Computer Science Faculty of the University of California at Los Angeles for thirty years.

It was one of the most treasured experiences of my service at Vytautas Magnus University to be able to invite professor Czesław Miłosz who was my friend and colleague at the University of California, although at the Berkeley Campus, to return to Lithuania, the country of his birth, after an absence of fifty-two years and to receive the Doctor Honoris Causa degree at our University on May 28, 1992.

In his acceptance speech Czesław Miłosz stated that one reason why this Doctor Honoris Causa degree was very special for him was that his mentor Oscar Miłosz had received the Doctor Honoris Causa degree from Vytautas Magnus University in 1936.

It is true that Adam Mickiewicz did not get the Doctor Honoris Causa from Vytautas Magnus University since it was only founded in 1922, but I am happy to observe that the great poet was a teacher at the secondary school here in Kaunas after he had completed his studies at Vilnius University in 1819 until his arrest in 1823.

I thank all researches of this book for joining our academic family in celebrating the year 2011 as the Year of Czesław Miłosz that was declared by the Seimas (Parliament) of Lithuania to observe the Centenary of his birth on June 30, 1911.

WELCOME ADDRESS BY PROFESOR ZBIGNIEW WILLIAM WOLKOWSKI

University of Paris X-Nanterre

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My presentation is concerned with geopoetics and identity. Identity is defined as a state or fact of remaining the same, as under varying aspects or conditions. It is the condition of being oneself or itself, and not another. In the exact sciences, identity is described by mathematics, for example in the case of an equation which is valid for all values of its variables. When proceeding into less exact areas of study, such as geolinguistics or geopoetics, identity becomes only the ideal direction for an isomorphism or an analogy.

The bicentennial of the birth of Adam Mickiewicz, poet, bard, social and political activist, first professor in the Chair of Slavic Literature at the College de France in Paris, was celebrated worldwide in 1998. This was an opportunity to invite and collect translations in 109 languages of the 22 opening verses of his famous epic poem *Sir Thaddeus*. A copy of the subsequent publication may be found also in the National Library of Lithuania, and the internet catalog of the National Library of Poland contains the full list of languages and translators. These verses, commonly known as *Invocation*, are the cry of an exile “on the pavement of Paris” in 1832, in the direction of a lost Homeland, “precious as health”, to his Heavenly and Earthly Mothers: “meanwhile transport my longing soul” to the Landscape, Flora and Identity of his Homeland, which is Lithuania.

Indeed, a good part of humanity may identify itself on one or several levels of reality, metaphor or emotion with the poet. When the poet, a refugee in Paris, longs after his lost Homeland, he translates into verse the feelings of many an artist in exile, from Antiquity to Nobel Laureates. When he recalls the miraculous healing or identifies his Heavenly and Earthly Mothers in prayer, he does what millions of human beings do, day after day. And Czesław Miłosz himself testifies of a similar experience involving our Lady of the Gate of Dawn in Vilnius. When he requests the wings of poetry to “transport my longing soul” to the Landscape, Flora and Identity of his lost Homeland, the poet identifies himself with millions of refugees worldwide, now mainly from Africa and Asia. The Homeland of the poet Mickiewicz is Lithuania, but the language he uses to invoke it is Polish. Together with Czesław Miłosz, Nobel Laureate in literature, he is one of the two most famous poets of a Homeland, yet both never used nor even communicated in the current national languages. A case when geopoetics transcends geography.

At a time when walls are being built more readily than bridges, this is an inspiring case of transcultural communication between nations with poetry as a vehicle, in the best tradition of Ancient Greece.

So far, *Ode to Youth* was the only poem by Mickiewicz translated into all fourteen Slavic languages. Needless to say, many translators considered this project impossible, yet it

became a reality because such difficulties were ignored by other linguists, with contributions from Sanscrit to Siberian Yupik. The latter had only forty speakers left ten years ago, and probably even less today. Regarding native Lithuanian Flora, mentioned in the poem, most translators preserved identity. Several African sources, however, were adopted completely from this approach. Instead, they selected the corresponding Flora from their own ethnological and cultural environment, and considered the role and use of these plants. Therefore this on-going project opens new horizons in the rich and multidimensional interplay among geolinguistics, geopoetics and identity, between unity and diversity, hopefully for peace and understanding.

Independently of the obvious influence of Mickiewicz on O. Miłosz and Cz. Miłosz, keeping in mind that the former was a French poet, and the latter a Polish poet, the thesis of this contribution is that the concept of geopoetics may also be used to describe their mutual relationship, and study spiritual, poetic, linguistic and national identities.

To put this into perspective, I wish to quote from the Nobel Lecture delivered by Cz. Miłosz in Stockholm on December 8, 1980. "It was my good fortune to be treated nearly as a son by my relative Oscar Miłosz, a Parisian recluse and a visionary. Why he was a French poet, could be elucidated by the intricate story of a family as well as of a country once called the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Be that as it may, it was possible to read recently in the Parisian press words of regret that the highest international distinction had not been awarded half a century earlier to a poet bearing the same family name as my own. Oscar Miłosz, like William Blake, drew inspirations from the writings of Emmanuel Swedenborg, a scientist who, earlier than anyone else, foresaw the defeat of man, hidden in the Newtonian model of the Universe. But transformation has been going on, defying short term prediction, and it is possible that in spite of all horrors and perils, our time will be judged as a necessary phase of travail before mankind ascends to a new awareness. Then a new hierarchy of merits will emerge, and I am convinced that Simone Weil and Oscar Miłosz, writers in whose school I obediently studied, will receive their due. For we all who are here, both the speaker and you who listen, are no more than links between the past and the future."

Please allow me to suggest some indications taken from the quotes present in the chirographic and semiotic study currently on display at the entrance to this lecture hall: "Les deux Miłosz: l'Esprit et la Lettre". In the *Arcana*, we can read these lines by Oscar Miłosz, which may accompany the Labyrinth from the Cathedral in Chartres: "Nothingness is the password of recognition by noble travelers, the entrance and the exit of the labyrinth". Or the epitaph of Oscar's tomb at Fontainebleau near Paris, where every year in May the Society of Friends of Oscar Miłosz together with the Ambassador of Lithuania present their homage: "We are entering the second innocence, in the joy we deserved, conscious and conquered again". Or perhaps another quote from the *Arcana* will offer a clue: "May there be no more finity and infinity, may love alone remain, becoming a location in space".

It appears to me that Czesław Miłosz himself also gives indications, at least three times. Once in the *New York Review of Books* in 1980: "Before being confronted by essential questions, the poet must observe a certain code. He must be respectful of God, love his country and his mother tongue, listen only to his conscience and avoid all alliance with evil, be attached to tradition. These elementary rules cannot be forgotten nor ridiculed by the poet, since their approval is part of his initiation or, more exactly, of his ordaining in a sacred

profession”. A second time in *Oeconomia Divina*, written in Berkeley in 1973: “I did not expect to live this singular moment, when the Lord of Hosts, Kyrios Sabaoth, would humiliate men in such a painful manner, allowing them to conclude, and yet remain silent”. And thirdly, on a monument to workers killed in 1970 at the Gdansk shipyard: “You, who mistreated the simple person, meeting his suffering with laughter, do not feel secure. The poet remembers. All the deeds and words will be written down”. Please note that this text was composed in 1950 in Washington DC.

Clearly, it is necessary to study Adam Mickiewicz and Oscar Miłosz in order to understand Czesław Miłosz.

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