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E.E. and the American Dream : Barańczak, Białoszewski, Sosnowski

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E.E. and the American Dream.

Barańczak, Białoszewski, Sosnowski

The term “barbarian” is hardly a compliment, though in the recent Polish poetic tradition it has evidently lost some of its most crude, vandalistic connotations. The “barbarians” of the early 1990s could be viewed as reviving, rather than destroying the contemporary poetic idiom, even (or especially) in their rebellion against fossilized metaphors and lifeless synecdoches, unable to express anything, including lofty ideas, “those watery substitutes for blood” (Świetlicki 279).¹ The history of Polish literature proves they were not the first to rebel. However, from a historio-literary perspective, the very concept of barbarism as an artistic or intellectual pose need not contain belligerence—it could also be a placid mock self-diagnosis.²

In the latter half of the 20th century two other modern Polish poets—sophisticated, refined, and already renowned—claimed to be “barbarians,” both in similar circumstances, as they were then traveling from their native Eastern Europe to experience the West. Historically and geographically speaking, they were coming from *barbaricum*, the uncivilized lands never included in the Ro-

¹ Karol Maliszewski, who coined the term “barbarians,” claimed: “I prefer the barbarians. They are closer to the bloodstream” (Maliszewski 93).

² As opposed to barbarism defined as the violation of the mental and physical identity of the other, discussed by Julia Kristeva in her lecture *Comment surviennent les actes de barbarie?* delivered in L’Université populaire du quai Branly in Paris on October 27, 2006 (for Polish translation see Kristeva, 2010).

man Empire; at the same time, they were citizens of Europe and heirs to both its Mediterranean and its barbaric tradition.³ The first crossed the ancient Roman *limes* to walk in the garden of art and architecture, starting with Paleolithic cave paintings in Lascaux; the second “left the cloudy provinces behind” to “come to the capital of the world” (Miłosz, 1995: 271)—Paris.

Zbigniew Herbert’s famous essays, the fruit of his travels to France and Italy, were published in 1962 under a rather provocative title: *Barbarzyńca w ogrodzie* (“Barbarian in the Garden”). Their reader is tempted to propose the thesis that the barbarian is the first-person narrator, Herbert himself—the same erudite art connoisseur who later praised (with ironic emphasis indeed) the power of taste. It is worth noting that Herbert uses the adjective “barbarous” very sparingly in his book—it is barbarous, i.e. mindless and therefore destructive, to drink Chianti in haste or to demolish Gothic churches, which in 19th-century Paris were considered “masterpieces of poor taste” (Herbert 114, 118). The author of *Barbarian in the Garden* does not avoid the epithet “cruel,” nor mentions of cruelty—of the Cro-Magnons, Dorians, or the Inquisition—but in his narrative their cruelty always has its own grounds, it is not “disinterested,” destructive for the sake of pure destruction. According to Herbert, apart from showing the precision of a perfect murder, the Paleolithic painters of bull hunts also demonstrate great tenderness (Herbert 7-9). Does he empathize, then, with the (in this case pre-) barbarians, or stress his provincial origins from behind the Roman *limes*, is self-mockery his reason for having chosen his title for these essays, or is it genuine humility in his first direct confrontation with works by old masters? Adam Zagajewski claims the reason is love. In his preface to the French edition of Herbert’s essays, Zagajewski draws an interesting antinomy: a passionate, zealous barbarian versus a decadent. “Only a barbarian can gaze lovingly at the form of a Gothic cathedral, at an outline of Tuscan hills,” argues Zagajewski (107). It may be not as cut and dried; love, in Herbert’s gaze, is often

³ Karol Modzelewski stresses the influence of the cultural heritage of the barbaric tribes on the European culture in his *Barbarzyńska Europa* (Modzelewski, 2004). Cf. Maria Janion’s remarks on “easterly-western” Polish identity, based on a thesis that “The ancient antinomy of ‘civilization’ and ‘barbarity’ in the modern world turned into the antinomy of ‘West’ and ‘East’,” with Poland located at their juncture (Janion, 2004).

tinged with decadent distance, with irony. Still, it is an intriguing assumption that love is an attribute of a barbarian.

The poem by the second “barbarian,” Czesław Miłosz, dated “Berkeley, 1980” and included in his volume *Hymn o perle (Hymn of the Pearl)*, (1981), contains reminiscences of his youthful visits to Paris in the 1930s:

Mijając ulicę Descartes
Schodziłem ku Sekwanie, młody barbarzyńca w podróży,
Onieśmielony przybyciem do stolicy świata.

.....
Wkraczałem w uniwersalne, podziwiając, pragnąc.⁴
(“Rue Descartes”; Miłosz, 1995: 270-271)

This reminiscence soon turns into a morality tale: embarrassment about the particular (“the customs of our homes”) can be as lethal as the misappropriation of “the universal, beautiful ideas”—these are the fatal consequences of bypassing the path of *ratio*. Empires fall, the world’s capitals vanish, abolished provincial customs are restored. Eventually the only sign of the speaker’s alleged barbarism is his act of mindless, disinterested cruelty, breaking a taboo:

A z ciężkich moich grzechów jeden najlepiej pamiętam:
Jak przechodząc raz leśną ścieżką nad potokiem
Zrzuciłem duży kamień na wodnego węża, zwiniętego w trawie.⁵
(Miłosz, 1995: 272-273)

Bias versus a fresh, even naïve fascination mingled with love; the inferiority complex of a provincial versus the conviction of one’s own moral, and therefore cultural, superiority. The attitudes of both “barbarians” confronted with the otherness initially regarded as “better” than what they knew contain elements we might recognize to various degrees in prose and poetry by other Eastern Europeans, or more precisely, Eastern European intellectuals, E.E.s, whose model could be the titular protagonist of Stanisław Barańczak’s essay referred

⁴ “Bypassing rue Descartes / I descended toward the Seine, shy, a traveler /A young barbarian just come to the capital of the world. / . . . / I entered the universal, dazzled and desiring.” (Trans. Renata Gorczyńska, Robert Hass)

⁵ “As to my heavy sins, I remember one most vividly: / How, one day, walking on a forest path along a stream, / I pushed a rock down onto a water snake coiled in the grass.”

to in the title of my paper. The average E.E. Barańczak describes is setting out on his journey at a specific point of time—in the very middle of the second half of the 20th century—and is going even further West, to America. At that time America had been the Promised Land to immigrants from Eastern Europe for at least a hundred years, a land of hope, as shown in a survey conducted in 1890 by Colonel John B. Weber, first commissioner of Ellis Island (Szejnert 18-19). In the second half of the 20th century America also became the land of another kind of hope for intellectuals, and writers in particular. The cultural capital of the world had moved further West, claimed Miłosz; in the United States poetry still could win readers (mostly in campuses, however), as well as professorships and awards. International renown began there. “I realize that if I had stayed in France I would have received neither the Neustadt Prize, the ‘small Nobel Prize,’ in 1978, nor then the Nobel Prize,” wrote Miłosz in his *Abecadło* (Miłosz, 1997: 26).

I would like to focus on three visits to America, one short-term, one returning, and one which turned out to be permanent; all were made within ten years, beginning in the early 1980s, by three Polish poets especially preoccupied with language and its possibilities: Stanisław Barańczak, Miron Białoszewski, and Andrzej Sosnowski. Their preoccupation should have made them feel even more acutely the first, onomatopoeic meaning of the Greek noun *bárbaros*, a stranger whose native tongue is perceived as gibberish and incomprehensible.

Historically and geographically speaking, Barańczak, Białoszewski and even Sosnowski, who visited the United States on several occasions between 1989 and 1991, i.e. in the final years of the Cold War, were all newcomers from the ancient *barbaricum*, but with the baggage of the European cultural tradition; they came from the Old Continent, but their native country has been “rebarbarized,” cut off from the rest of Europe in the Sovietization process, and was economically, technologically, and also culturally backward. The E.E.s come to a land whose dominant cultural tradition was incomparably younger than their own, and which in many respects originated from Europe’s. Was it derivative, and thus barbarian? The Americans take pride in their national ethos of liberty bringing prosperity, the widespread use of advanced technology and living standards incomparable to those the E.E.s left behind the Iron Curtain. A paradox: a citizen of a civilized country could not be a savage *per se*;

however, “civilization” has varying degrees, and a foreigner could be regarded as more or less “civilized.” According to the dictionary, the adjective “barbaric” “frequently applies to a state about midway between full civilization and tribal savagery” (Merriam-Webster’s, 2000). From this point of view, the E.E.s might be perceived as semi-civilized strangers, freakish foreigners.

As diagnosed by Jean Baudrillard, who visited the States on several occasions in the 1970s and 1980s, the America of the time was a land of radical modernity, though inhabited by “the only remaining primitive society,” rootless and therefore primal and vital, yet technologically refined; a country where savagery to the first degree coexisted with a third degree of hyperreality, absolute *simulacrum*, with nothing in between (Baudrillard 7, 101). Baudrillard made this point—about the alleged lack of anything in between, of a second level involving analysis and reflection, a domain where only subtle European minds excel—even more strongly elsewhere: American intellectuals, shut away in their campuses, were incapable of analyzing their own society; there was no culture, no cultural discourse in America (Baudrillard 22, 97). I recount Baudrillard’s rather superficial comments on alleged American superficiality, mocked by Dennis Dutton⁶ as “frivolous,” “amusing,” “bombastic,” and “brazen” (“I do hope Baudrillard will continue to visit the States . . .,” wrote Dutton in 1990), because in many respects they seem to coincide with the views held by the E.E. from Stanisław Barańczak’s essay, as well as by the speaker in some of his American poems.

Mr. Baranazack does not socialize

Stanisław Barańczak’s visit to America began in March 1981—and continues to this day. Barańczak, a laureate of the Alfred Jurzykowski Prize (1981), was a visiting professor at Harvard University till 1984. When his passport expired and his request to prolong his leave at Adam Mickiewicz University was rejected, he was appointed Alfred Jurzykowski Professor of Polish Language and Literature at Harvard. It was a long-awaited visit: Barańczak, the repressed

⁶ And defended by Alan N. Shapiro (2009).

founding member of KOR (The Workers' Defense Committee) had to wait three years for an exit visa from Poland.

His essay *E.E.: The Extraterritorial*, written in 1984, seems to start with the fascination and bedazzlement we have observed in the attitudes of the “barbarians” in Herbert and Miłosz. Barańczak’s main character, “the average Eastern European, (E.E., for short),” discovers that the New World is much brighter and bigger than he expected; “brilliantly multicolored, pluralistic” America stands out against the dreary background of communist Eastern Europe:

E.E. never expected houses to be painted so brightly purple or blue, schoolbuses to be so warmly yellow, street signs to be so invitingly green. The way America is painted seems to him shockingly but pleasantly different from the drab colorlessness that envelops everything—streets, cars, housing projects, peoples’ complexions—in his own country. The color of Eastern Europe is gray (with occasional flashes of red on national holidays) . . . Besides being gaudier, the components of American reality are also bigger . . . [E]ven the gulls at the beach seem to be somewhat oversized here, as if they had been fed all their lives with some especially nutritious gull food, sold in easy-to-open cans. (Barańczak, 1990: 9)

To the overwhelmed newcomer from a backward country America is brighter, bigger—should it not also be better? A note of irony appears in the quoted excerpt, but for now, the other parts of this picture are allegedly painted in good faith, with comparably bold brush strokes: E.E. is a fatalist, of course. A statement: “In Eastern Europe, one always expects the worst” has the depth of a question: “*La Pologne? La Pologne?* Isn’t it terribly cold there?” from a famous short piece *Słówka* by Wisława Szymborska.⁷ Barańczak continues as follows:

In Eastern Europe, one always expects the worst. Nothing is guaranteed or even predictable; everything—from the meat supply to the course of your own career—is subject to the mysterious whims of “them,” meaning those who hold power at all levels (even the plumber is one of “them”—his power derives from his being in constant demand) . . . In America, “them” seems to be replaced by “me.” . . . Acceptance of the idea that everything in America works or can be worked out, whether this idea is true or not, is perhaps the watershed moment for someone who has recently arrived from Eastern Europe. Having gotten used to this, he becomes a new man. (Barańczak, 1990: 10)

⁷ Translated by Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh as *Vocabulary* (Szymborska 27).

Interestingly enough, a similar turn from “them” to “me” occurs at the time in Barańczak’s poetry—with the reference to the topic: from the volume *Atlantyda i inne wiersze z lat 1981-1985* (1986) (*Atlantis and Other Poems 1981-1985*) onwards his perspective, previously more clearly concerned with language of politics and dilemmas of the socialist society, becomes much more personal, focused on individually perceived details.⁸ In the essay under discussion we also observe a passage from a generalized construct, the figure of an “average E.E.,” initially quite euphoric and willing to believe in the American dream, to “me,” a translator of literature, who in spite of his proficiency, can express neither his general mental state nor his political views in the foreign language. It is virtually impossible to express what he really feels (“The question one hears at [stand-up] parties—‘Is everybody happy?’—if translated literally into Polish, would seem to come from a metaphysical treatise or a political utopia rather than from social chitchat”; Barańczak, 1990: 12) or what he stands for (“‘I’m neoconservative’ would more or less transfer the desired meaning to the American ears, but E.E. cannot force his lips to pronounce that; ‘conservative’ sounds like the opposite of what he has always considered himself”; Barańczak, 1990: 13). Being an indispensable part of the culture, “AA” language, i.e. “Authentic American” language, is presented as much poorer in subtle shades of meaning and less sophisticated than “EE,” “Eastern European.” This assessment is projected on the whole of American culture—and the figure of E.E. is like a handy shield which allows Barańczak to express this.

I don’t mean to say that Americans are a nation of superficial, backslapping enjoyers and happy-makers, as opposed to our suffering Slavic souls. What I’m trying to point out is only one example of the semantic incompatibilities which are so firmly ingrained in languages that they sometimes make mutual communication impossible—or, rather, they turn into a ritual exchange of meaningless grunts and purrs. ‘Are you happy?’ E.E. is asked by his cordial host. ‘Yes, I am.’ ‘Are you enjoying yourself?’ ‘Sure I am.’ What else could be said? (Barańczak, 1990: 13)

Confirmation through denial? The above conversation could have served as a model for the concept on which the poem “Small Talk” from *Atlantis* is

⁸ Jerzy Kandziora argues that this is the beginning of Barańczak’s new poetical path, when a language regarded as a social construct ceased to be the world represented in his poetry (Kandziora 159).

based. In this poem, the eponymous verse that opens the poetic cycle, casts Barańczak in the role of a host feigning cordiality in the world, *ten świat, gospodarz przyjęcia, . . . poświęca / chwilę cennego czasu, całkiem przy tym świadom / że wszystko, co odpowiem, i tak nie będzie mieć większej / wagi*⁹ (“Small Talk,” Barańczak, 2006: 309). But Barańczak also writes poems which do not adopt this level of generalization. It is hard to read “Garden Party” as anything other than a bitter satire on American society. Even if Barańczak does not truly mean to say that America is superficial, some of his poems clearly seem to express this. In “Naród, któremu się lepiej powiodło” (“The Nation Which Has Been More Successful”) the figure of E.E. finds his counterpart in the person of an American student at the School of Dentistry:

Naród, któremu się bardziej udało,
ma, domyślasz się, swoje własne poważne problemy,
trądzik młodzieńczy, egzamin, od którego wszystko zależy,
skandaliczny koszt studiów, niezrozumiały fakt,
że Jane z drugiego roku udaje obojętność.

Naród, który wygrał lepszy los,
jest godny twojego podziwu, nie taniej kpiny.
.....
Przechodzisz obok niego, a naród znad ramy roweru
ogarnia cię pojemnym, nie czyniącym różnic uśmiechem.¹⁰

(“Naród, któremu się lepiej powiodło,” Barańczak, 2006: 300)

The smile aimed at anyone without exception becomes indifferent. Immune, self-advertising, empty, as Baudrillard puts it, calling the smile a key element of American culture (Baudrillard 31-32). The “serious problems” of “The Nation Which Has Been More Successful” may seem laughable compared

⁹ “. . . dedicating / a moment of his precious time, fully conscious / that all my answers will be of no / importance anyway.”

¹⁰ “The nation, which has had more luck, / does have, as you could expect, his own serious problems, / adolescent acne, the exam which determines everything, / scandalous costs of studying, the incomprehensible fact / that Jane, the sophomore, feigns indifference. // The nation, which has had a better chance, / deserves your admiration, not cheap derision. / . . . / As you are passing by, the nation takes you in / its all-embracing, all-including smile from above the crossbar.”

to those E.E. has (only physically) left behind. They are youthful, immature—and selected unjustly and superficially, without aspiring to objectivity, as *Atlantis* is a subjective record of subjective first impressions by an alienated foreigner. Barańczak makes similarly bold comparisons at least twice more in this volume, in “Garden Party” and “Nowy świat” (“The New World”), which opens with a statement: “The only problem—to find a parking space,” and closes with a postcard bearing greetings from a Polish friend, who was “arrested in the meantime.” The protagonist of Barańczak’s poems is “not quite social” (he may not be willing to chat with his American neighbors, but a poetic dialogue with Robert Frost and Emily Dickinson is a different story) and hates “small talk,” which ranks fifth on E.E.’s partial list of American things perceived as alien. At the same time he himself could be perceived as alien, not an E.E., but almost an E.T. A stranger, whose name is impossible to pronounce and therefore becomes mangled: “Banaczek,” “Mr. Baranazack.”¹¹ A barbarian. A significant detail: *Breathing under Water*, the collection of essays in which “E.E.: The Extraterritorial” is included, are published under the name “Stanisław Baranczak.”

Miron Białoszewski comes out of the closet

Miron Białoszewski, the 1982 winner of the Alfred Jurzykowski Prize, came to collect his award in October, and spent six weeks visiting New York, Buffalo, and Boston. His Wanderlust had been sparked both by curiosity (“I want America in America,” he wrote in his prose work *AAAmeryka*, published posthumously [Białoszewski, 1988: 72]) and by anxiety: “I came here for the prize. I could have collected it through a bank. But I was tempted. Then frightened. But it would have been a shame to cancel the journey” (Białoszewski, 2012: 802), he noted in his *Tajny dziennik (Secret Diary)*, kept at the time and published only in 2012. Distinct traces of his impressions of America are also found in the poems in *Oho* (1985), and in a poetic cycle, “Wiersze amerykańskie” (“American Poems”) from *Wiersze ostatnie* (“Last Poems,” 1988).

¹¹ The phenomenon of Barańczak’s “escaping name” has been discussed by Leonard Neuger (2007).

Białoszewski's visit to America was preceded by a cruise around Europe, reportedly undertaken in hope of seeing Sibyl, sitting in the middle of the sea, and sewing a huge shirt; the world was to end with her last stitch. Białoszewski sees the end as unsettling and intriguing. His account of his trip to the New World is at the same time his parting with this world, suggests Tadeusz Sobolewski; it is how he gains evidence that *omnia ubique*, everything is everywhere; it is the poet's self-confirmation (Sobolewski, 1989: 119, 120). Indeed, if Białoszewski was as overwhelmed as E.E. by his first contact with an America that was bigger and brighter than he had expected, his strategy was to conceal. He entitles one of the poems "W Ameryce jak gdzie indziej" ("In America as Elsewhere"). "Na rzymskim równoleżniku / ale w Ameryce / prędko zwyczajnieje / wszystko / i ja"¹² (Białoszewski, 1988: 128), he notes in another. Białoszewski likes New York. "That is, Manhattan. Metropolitan and what is familiar" (Białoszewski, 1988: 63). The familiar Polish sights are his constant point of reference, sometimes quite amazing (Manhattan by night—like Przasnysz). Title *AAAmerica* seems to allude to his misinterpretation of subway markings.

I see an approaching train marked "AA." It makes me think of America. Double "A" is like a huge exclamation point. I asked if it was a special one. On the contrary. Single "A"s are fast trains, double "A"s are standard. (Białoszewski, 1988: 61)

AAAmerica with a triple "A" may be something that was supposed to be worthy of the highest admiration, but turned out to be quite ordinary. Or is it just an initial domesticating gesture? For Białoszewski, New York becomes a "narcotic," "absorbingly curious" (2012: 809) and "orgiastic" (1988: 95) only after the poet gets used to his room in a hotel run by nuns, relieves his anxiety about possible "traps," and starts to treat his bed as a safe center.

At the beginning of 20th century Slavic immigrants sailing to New York were instantly recognizable by their attachment to their feather quilts as the most important part of their baggage (Szejnert 27). Several decades after the event, Danuta Mostwin tells the story of a fire in Baltimore in 1912 in her collection of essays on Polish immigrants in the United States. Out of all the belongings rescued from the fire by a mother of a bride, a feather quilt was the only one

¹² "On the Roman parallel / but in America / everything / soon gets commonplace / including myself."

aleś zwierzęco
wolniejszy
cicho idź
cicho bądź¹⁴ (Białoszewski, 1988: 129)

Białoszewski is silent wandering the streets of New York City, visiting museums and male porn clubs he acts as if he was deprived of the power of speech. “Here in New York I do not use language at all. I can wrangle everything using signs. In NY they reportedly speak bad English anyway” (Białoszewski, 2012: 805). Pretending to be mute, he strikes the pose of a barbarian—a “mute”: *niemy*, or *niemiec* was an old Slavic equivalent of the ancient Greek *bárbaros* (Modzelewski 9).¹⁵

An earthling writes a letter home

Andrzej Sosnowski visited the United States several times between 1989 and 1992, while he was doing a doctorate on Ezra Pound at the University of Western Ontario. His American impressions, written between autumn 1989 and spring 1991, were initially sent to Bohdan Zadura as (un)common letters (Zadura 113). The volume, published in 1994 as *Nouvelles impressions d'Amérique*, was a tribute to Raymond Roussel and his *Nouvelles impressions d'Afrique*; titles of impressions by Roussel accompanied by drawings by Henri A. Zo serve as a structure for Sosnowski's book.

Reading *Nouvelles impressions d'Amérique* is a serious challenge for people who appreciate sense in poetry; they may feel prompted to interpret it *ad infinitum*, in an effort to find a method to its composition, linking a title, a picture, and a text. Is there meaning, apart from sheer association, in this shifting from one “impression” to another? “Poezja. Czy gdzieś na krawędzi świata można

¹⁴ “in a foreign country / in an unknown language / meanings are flying by / whirling / want to / cluster / around / me / think / around / And I say to myself: / – you are losing / but you are more free / animal-like / go quiet / be quiet”

¹⁵ Still, Białoszewski, being silent, can—and does—write. But in his writing he is so focused on himself that “his America consisted of dumb Americans and dumb Poles. A pity,” observed Bogusława Latawiec, “Obserwacja się opłaca,” *Kultura Niezależna* 1984; text reprinted in Latawiec, *Zegary...*, 2012, 181-186.

by położyć kres fabule w boskiej monotonii wstrzymanyh sezonów?”¹⁶ The book certainly is not a linear account of Sosnowski’s American travels. Nor is America the subject of these impressions. *Nouvelles impressions* seem reminiscent of Roussel not only in their outline, but also in the method, described by Sosnowski in a poem “R.R. (1977-1933)”: “. . . utwór / nie może zawierać nic rzeczywistego, żadnych obserwacji, / a tylko zupełnie wymyślone struktury”¹⁷ (Sosnowski 2006: 64).

D’ from the title *Nouvelles impressions d’Amérique* refers less to a description of something (America), as it does in *un roman d’amour* (“A Story of/about Love”) than to its origin (impressions *from* America). If their content is not a subjective view of reality (“Każda rzecz powinna kosztować tyle, ile słowo w tym telegramie. Dopiero wówczas udałoby się ustalić związek między rzeczą a słowem”¹⁸ writes “Columb” in one of the impressions), then what is it? To define this would be to suspend the flow of meanings, the eruption of erudite allusions, most beautiful and most seducing feature of the volume (“I fell in love with the book—at first / sight,” wrote one critic [Majeran 7]).

I chciałbym cię ukryć w ciemnej masie prozy, bo przecież nie w szczupłym wierszu, z tym białym marginesem niebezpieczeństwa, który pozostawia tyle miejsca na plotki i donosy: ktoś liczy kroki, ktoś je interpretuje, ktoś kreską zaznacza miejsce zbrodni i dopisuje ołówkiem: Leta – w mitologii: rzeka.¹⁹

¹⁶ “Poetry. Would it be possible, somewhere at the edge of the world, to put an end to the plot in the divine monotony of suspended seasons?” (“XLVII Mężczyzna przy zastawionym stole, odczytujący etykietkę na fiolce z lekarstwem,” Sosnowski, 2004: 11)

¹⁷ “. . . a text / should never contain anything real, any observations, / but wholly imaginary structures.” Dorota Walczak-Delanois has commented upon the incongruity of the observed world and the observer in Sosnowski’s volume *Stacje* (1998: 6).

¹⁸ “All things should cost as much as one word in this telegram. Only then could we establish a relationship between a thing and a word.” (“XIV Kobieta otwierająca telegram, na jej twarzy maluje się niepokój,” Sosnowski, 2004: 33)

¹⁹ “I want to hide you away in a dark mass of prose, not in a slender verse with its white margin which opens up so much space for rumors and denunciations: someone counts the steps, someone else interprets them, another one underlines place of the crime and adds in pencil: Lethe. In mythology: the river of oblivion.” (“XLV Głowa myśliciela [sama głowa] – zmarszczka między brwiami,” Sosnowski, 2004: 97)

The subject is indeed well hidden, elusive and magnetic. I would risk the assumption that it is also female; Sosnowski's dream of America is an erotic dream (of golden-haired Kansas, happy and indifferent among skylarks and sunflowers; of Missouri, shameless in her voluptuous dance; of naked Arizona with a saguaro flower in her teeth and a wren on her brown breast; Sosnowski, 2004: 41-42). However what interests me most in the context of this discussion is Sosnowski's specific writing regime. The image of Sosnowski as the author of *Nouvelles impressions* is more one of an Earthling²⁰ than of an E.E. Yet his elusive, magnetic prose is the result of having set in motion a certain defense mechanism:

At first I wrote two or three very inept poems, weak, dull, and monotonous—because it turned out that, in using a foreign language, hearing different rhythms everywhere around, one starts to defend some basic Polish rhythms in his writing, and ends up with some eleven-syllable poems etc. And then I thought I could try to write something that would be an adventure for my native language, which was under siege by a very different linguistic force, by completely different rhythms. At the same time, this siege resembled a love affair, so I wanted to write with open arms, without sticking to my identity in transition (Sosnowski, 2010: 30-31).

Paradoxically, in writing *Nouvelles impressions d'Amérique* in accordance with Roussel's outline, Sosnowski tried to defend his poetics less against "barbarisms," foreign (American) words, or expressions offending contemporary standards of acceptability in the Polish language, than against insistent echoes of Polish classical poetic rhythms, which were amplified by the foreign language element.

Barańczak, Białoszewski, Sosnowski. The protagonists of their writing are very different incarnations of an E.E., an intellectual from behind the Iron Curtain visiting America. Confronted with the American otherness, they adopt different attitudes—hold an alienating belief that painful personal experience

²⁰ This was also Sosnowski's pen name; it was how he signed his articles published in *Odra* in the latter half of the 1990s.

equals psychological maturity and cultural superiority; set off on a prejudiced exploration resulting in their own numbness; develop a controlled fascination that cannot reach fulfillment—as their creators adopt different poetic strategies. What they all have in common, however, is their focus on self-observation: the journey evidently and not surprisingly increases their self-consciousness, which in case of a poet would be considered a gain.

This fragmentary picture certainly could—and should—be expanded with other examples, especially female (perhaps those of Ludmiła Marjańska, Julia Hartwig, Adriana Szymańska and others).²¹ The question if any aspects of the E.E. concept are still valid today, after more than two decades, would require further research. America of *E.E.: The Extraterritorial*, of *Atlantis*, of *AAAmerica* and *The Secret Diary*, and of *Nouvelles impressions d'Amérique* belongs to the past—and history, again, is a foreign country.

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²¹ The same goes for the prose incarnations. Dorota Kozicka discusses a genre called "scholarship prose" (*proza pobytowa*), analyzing Polish participants' prose reports of Paul Engle's International Writing Program in Iowa City (Kozicka, 2012).

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Summary

The authoress discusses the uses of the concept of a barbarian as a pose, a mock self-diagnosis of an Eastern European intellectual experiencing the West. She traces the notion of a "barbarian" in Zbigniew Herbert's book of essays *Barbarzyńca w ogrodzie* ("Barbarian in the Garden," 1962), as well as in the poem "Rue Descartes" ("Bypassing Rue Descartes," 1981) by Czesław Miłosz. Key elements of this "barbaric" attitude—bias versus a fresh, even naïve fascination mingled with love; the inferiority complex of a provincial versus a conviction of one's own moral and, therefore, cultural superiority—could be recognized in prose and poetry reports made by other Eastern Europeans intellectuals, whom Stanisław Barańczak dubbed "E.E.s" in his essay "E.E.: The Extraterritorial" (1990).

With this notion in mind, the author focuses on three visits to America made within ten years, beginning in the early 1980s, by three Polish poets: Stanisław Barańczak, Miron Białoszewski, and Andrzej Sosnowski, all of whom were especially preoccupied with language and its possibilities—and therefore more concerned with the first, onomatopoeic meaning of a Greek noun *bárbaros*, a stranger whose native tongue is perceived as gibberish and impossible to understand.

Key words: comparative literature, Eastern European, the West, America, "barbarians," Polish poetry, Zbigniew Herbert, Czesław Miłosz, Stanisław Barańczak, Miron Białoszewski, Andrzej Sosnowski

E.E. wobec *American Dream*. Barańczak, Białoszewski, Sosnowski

Streszczenie

Tekst koncentruje się na koncepcie barbarzyństwa rozumianego jako poza, autoironiczna autodiagnoza intelektualisty z Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej, który odbywa podróż na Zachód. Pierwowzór takiej „barbarzyńskiej” postawy autorka odnajduje w esejach Zbigniewa Herberta „Barbarzyńca w ogrodzie” (1962) oraz w wierszu „Rue Descartes” (1981) Czesława Miłosza. Najistotniejsze elementy: ambiwalencję skontrastowaną z silną, miłosną wręcz fascynacją, prowincjonalny kompleks niższości przeciwstawiony przekonaniu o własnej moralnej, a co za tym idzie, kulturalnej wyższości, można jednak odnaleźć w poetyckich i prozatorskich relacjach innych środkowoeuropejskich intelektualistów, których Stanisław Barańczak w swoim znanym eseju określił mianem „E.E.s”. Tekst analizuje literackie świadectwa trzech wizyt na Zachodzie, konkretnie zaś w Ameryce, które w latach 80. i na początku 90. odbyli Stanisław Barańczak, Miron Białoszewski oraz Andrzej Sosnowski – poeci szczególnie wyczuleni na język i jego możliwości, a zatem tym bardziej świadomi pierwszego znaczenia greckiego rzeczownika *bárbaros*: cudzoziemiec, którego język brzmi bełkotliwie i niezrozumiale.

Słowa kluczowe: komparatystyka literacka, mieszkańiec Europy Wschodniej, Zachód, Ameryka, „barbarzyńcy”, poezja polska, Zbigniew Herbert, Czesław Miłosz, Stanisław Barańczak, Miron Białoszewski, Andrzej Sosnowski