

Zdzisław Pietrzyk

## Wiktor Weintraub (1908–1988)

**W**iktor Weintraub, who in his autobiographical sketch wrote: ‘[...] I was during my life especially fortunate. My memories of childhood are first and foremost those of the warm parental atmosphere of home,’ was born into a clerical family in Zawiercie. His father Maurycy (Mojżesz) was the cashier at a textile works, holding a prominent and important position. During his youth he had studied medicine but was expelled from his degree course for his participation in political demonstrations. His mother was Rywka (Rachel) née Dobrzański. There were no religious traditions in the Weintraub household, with his father being an adherent of positivism. The Weintraubs lived in a wooden villa on the banks of the Warta River; the villa being the property of the owner of the textile works where M. Weintraub worked. According to W. Weintraub’s recollections the villa was surrounded by a most beautiful garden, in which was to be found a pond. Based on the preserved birth certificate, he was born on the 10<sup>th</sup> of April 1908 in Zawiercie. In 1918 he was accepted, after passing his entrance examinations, to the 3<sup>rd</sup> form of the Boys Secondary School ‘Middle School’ in Zawiercie. He obtained his school leaving certificate on the 26<sup>th</sup> of June 1925. The preserved school leaving certificate shows that W. Weintraub’s mathematical abilities were far from impressive, although he clearly could boast of his successes in Polish Language, History and Philosophy.

On the 29<sup>th</sup> of September 1925 he became a student at the Jagiellonian University's Faculty of Philosophy. During his degree he attended the lectures of Jan Łoś, Roman Dyboski, Stanisław Wędkiewicz, Kazimierz Nitsch and Ignacy Chrzanowski. He took part in seminars run by I. Chrzanowski, R. Dyboski, K. Nitsch, R. Dyboski and S. Kot. The history of culture seminar run by S. Kot was to have a profound influence on the young researcher. W. Weintraub's MA dissertation was written under the tutorage of I. Chrzanowski, who was a resolute supporter of the National Democratic Party in Poland. In recollections published later Weintraub did not even mention the political sympathies of his tutor. Possibly in this one may detect a reflection of the atmosphere at the University of the time and the personal class of the professor. In May 1929 W. Weintraub was to obtain his MA degree for his work *The Style of Jan Kochanowski*. This work was to contain only a part of his later Ph.D., this being synonymy and the sentence construction. Professor K. Nitsch wrote thus in the review: 'One could enter a grade of an "A" if it were not for the negligence in the arrangement of sentences and in the punctuation as much as in the control of the typescript.' He was finally to be awarded his MA on the 31<sup>st</sup> of May 1929 with a mark of a 'B'. Later works by W. Weintraub were, before going to print, most carefully worked on and diligently corrected as may be observed from his manuscripts. Thanks to his second wife, Maria Ewelina Weintraubowa, née Żółtowski, these have ended up at the Jagiellonian University Library. During the final stage of his degree he completed a two-year teaching placement at the 8<sup>th</sup> State Secondary School in Cracow. However, he did not take to teaching.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April 1930 W. Weintraub approached the dean of the Faculty of Philosophy with the request to be allowed to embark on a Ph.D. based on the dissertation *The Style of Jan Kochanowski*. He entered as the main examination for the Ph.D., at the time known as rigour knowledge, Polish Philology with English Philology being given as the additional secondary subject. The second examination he took in Philosophy. He was to obtain a distinction in each. His thesis was evaluated by I. Chrzanowski as tutor and K. Nitsch as reviewer. The review by K. Nitsch may be cited in its entirety because of its brevity: 'The work is written methodologically, sensibly and in a good style. It may be accepted as a doctoral work. 25.05.[19]30. K. Nitsch.' W. Weintraub's advancement to the rank of Doctor of Philosophy came on the 20<sup>th</sup> of June 1930. The doctoral thesis was to appear in print in 1932 in the series *Prace Historyczno-Literackie* [Historical literary works], which was edited by I. Chrzanowski. Fifty years later, the ceremonial re-conferring of the Ph.D. on W. Weintraub was to take place at the Jagiellonian University.

Professor Stanisław Kot was to have a marked influence on the academic development and future life of W. Weintraub. This Cracow academic, whose

seminars W. Weintraub attended, researched, among other things, into the history of the Polish Reformation, with his pupils engaging in problem areas from this period. Research into the history of religion was something new for W. Weintraub, having brought no religious traditions from his family home. Making use of the fact that W. Weintraub knew English, S. Kot inspired him to research into the links between Szymon Szymonowic and the Scottish poet Thomas Seget. The first research work by W. Weintraub to be published was the article *Anglik przyjacielem Szymonowica* [Szymonowic's English friend] that appeared in 'Reformacja w Polsce' [The Reformation in Poland].

Wiktor Weintraub was to subsequently deal with the links between Polish representatives of the Reformation and culture and the reformation movement in Ducal Prussia. In S. Kot's conception this was an extensive research problem, to which W. Weintraub had a predisposition. Unfortunately, there remains only the published study *Udział Prus Książęcych w polskim ruchu reformacyjnym* [The participation of Ducal Prussia in the Polish Reformation Movement] out of this grand plan. In the manuscript collections of the Jagiellonian Library bequeathed by S. Kot, is an index drawn up by W. Weintraub on this subject. The study was a synopsis of the research into this problem area, while at the same time W. Weintraub showed what still needed to be done in the field. Work into the subject required studies to be conducted at the archives and libraries of Königsberg, as well as in Gdańsk. However, Hitler's rise to power meant that research for academics of Jewish heritage in libraries and archives situated in German territories was becoming dangerous.

As Nitsch's protégé, W. Weintraub was employed as a copy-editor for publications at the Polish Academy of Learning. Similarly, thanks to the support of S. Kot, he was to work from 1934 under the guidance of Mieczysław Grydzewski at *Wiadomości Literackie* [The Literary News]. At the time he resided in Warsaw and he was involved in what was, then, the best literary-cultural weekly, producing a review of the foreign press and the reviewing of books published abroad. His first contact with *Wiadomości Literackie* had been already in 1929, when he published his first article. Despite the fact that W. Weintraub complained about the specifics of the routine in editorial work at *Wiadomości Literackie*, as something that distanced him from academic research, he was as a result of his job to meet a lot of interesting people including Władysław Broniewski – who was secretary to the editorial board – and Julian Tuwim.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 1934 he married Anna, née Tenenbaum (6 October 1909–15 March 1967), the daughter of Szymon and Estera née Rejder, whom he had known for many years. Their wedding took place after the completion of her medical degree. In 1937 W. Weintraub left for France having obtained, thanks to the endeavours of S. Kot, a French government scholarship for re-

search in French archives and libraries. He also simultaneously fulfilled the role of correspondent for *Wiadomości Literackie*, relating local cultural events and happenings. For W. Weintraub his stay in Paris was to be a period of intense work on literature and source materials and he worked on seventeenth-century Polish-French cultural relations. However, first and foremost he became acquainted with France, travelling extensively all over the country. After almost two years he returned by sea to Poland in July 1939. The materials he had collected during his stay in France, as well as the notes assembled on the Morsztyns, were to be lost during the war in Warsaw.

The outbreak of war was to find W. Weintraub in Warsaw. He was to leave the capital on the 5<sup>th</sup> of September and head east, intending to reach Romania together with his wife. In Kutu they were held by the Romanian military police who scuppered their plans of escape. After a short stay in Lvov the Weintraubs travelled onto Zdołbunów, a small town located near to Równe, where Wiktor's aunt lived. Here Weintraub was employed as a surveyor while his wife worked as a doctor. After a time they both left for the Urals. Following the signing on the 30<sup>th</sup> of July 1941 of the Sikorski-Mayski agreement and the establishment of diplomatic relations between Poland and the USSR, resulting from the German attack on the Soviet Union of the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 1941, S. Kot was to become Polish ambassador to Moscow. Wiktor Weintraub sent a letter to him in which he expressed his desire to join the Polish armed forces which were then being formed. The letter was delivered to S. Kot, who immediately organised the relevant transfer formalities placing his former pupil in the press section of the Polish embassy. Weintraub was to spend a month in Moscow and later, following the evacuation of government departments, in Kuybyshev. At the time he cooperated with Teodor Parnicki, with whom he became friends, with Ksawery Pruszyński and Bernard Singer. In August 1942 he left the Soviet Union, travelling through Iran and Iraq to Palestine. At the beginning of 1943 S. Kot offered him the possibility to edit the biweekly publication of the Polish II Corps, *W Drodze* [En route]. At the time he was to work closely with W. Broniewski. Books including volumes of W. Broniewski's poetry and the unforgettable *Srebrne orły* [Silver Eagles] by T. Parnicki were also to be published by this press publisher.

In March 1945 W. Weintraub was sent to London on the orders of the government, which he reached at the end of April of the same year, in order to work in the Ministry of Information. A. Weintraub did not travel to England for she was managing a hospital at the time. Only after two years of separation was she to receive permission to travel to Great Britain. The letters written daily by W. Weintraub to his wife and her frequent replies constitute the most splendid of documents from a historian's perspective. This correspondence constitutes a most unique source for research into the Polish diaspora

in London, immediately after the end of World War II. During his first years in London W. Weintraub worked intensively at the reading room of the British Museum, studiously working on English literature. He was to write about this period: ‘Following the Germanomania of the pre-war years I have now taken an academic liking to “Anglomania.” At that time the British Museum reading room was frequented by many Polish intellectuals, including ones of Jewish provenance. Everyday W. Wientraub would meet with his former editor and principal M. Grydzewski, a man who reacted most emotionally to patriotic poetry – when commenting on the said he had tears in his eyes. For the years 1946–1948 the corridor leading to the reading room at the British Museum was known as the ‘Polish Corridor’ for it was here that émigrés from Poland would meet and discuss. From 1946 W. Weintraub was a permanent contributor to the *London News*, which had started to appear under the editorship of M. Grydzewski. In *The News* he published many book reports and review from the field of cultural history broadly understood, books that had appeared both in Poland and abroad. He was sent books from Poland by, among others, the eminent literary historian and expert on Polish-English relations Waław Borowy.

In 1948 W. Weintraub became secretary to the editorial board of *Teki Historyczne* [Historical Files], the organ of the Polish Historical Society of Great Britain. The nominal editor-in-chief of the journal was General Marian Kukiel, who ceded the majority of the real responsibilities to W. Weintraub. In *Teki Historyczne* W. Weintraub was to publish *Blaski i nędze dziejów życia prof. Tarlego* [The Flashes and Indigence of History in the Life of Prof. E.V. Tarle], a critical-publicist work that constituted a critique of Soviet historiography.

W. Weintraub was especially active during the London period of his life. Besides publicist activities and a return to academic research he was also involved in teaching work. Initially he took classes in English literature on teaching courses for emigrants in London. Following the demobilization of women from the Polish army, a number of them started to do degrees. The then professor of Polish Studies at the University of London was S. Kot’s first Ph.D. student, William J. Rose. It was he who proposed to W. Weintraub that he take the classes. The proposition was accepted and Weintraub became the part-time assistant of W.J. Rose.

From 1945 to 1950, that is during the London period, W. Weintraub published both academic works and publicist pieces most intensively. He published both under his own name as well as under pseudonyms. Only a small part of his publications from this period constituted research, with the majority being publicist articles on various topics. This state of affairs threatened to move him away from academia towards journalism. During the

London part of his life he returned to research into Kochanowski and began a new research stage – he turned towards Romanticism and in particular to the works of Adam Mickiewicz.

The spring of 1950 was to change W. Weintraub's life. Michał Karpowicz, the son of an insurgent of 1863, in expanding the Slavic department at Harvard University in Cambridge, proposed to W. Weintraub the position of *visiting lecturer* in Polish studies. The person who recommended W. Weintraub to Karpowicz had been Waclaw Lednicki, a professor at Berkeley University. Over the following fifteen or so years W. Weintraub was to maintain extremely close contact with Lednicki, something borne out by the lengthy correspondence for the years 1949 to 1964. Later, their ways were to part. The invitation to Harvard was only for a year yet it gave Weintraub the prospect of obtaining a permanent university post. On leaving for Cambridge he was frightened of Harvard's reputation, frightened that he would not be able to cope with the teaching requirements. He was, however, to become a respected lecturer within the circle of Harvard Slavists. This was a varied environment both in terms of nationality as in research interests. Research was dominated by the history of Russian literature and culture. In 1954 Weintraub was made a professor following the publication of his book *The Poetry of Adam Mickiewicz*. Its publication was one of the conditions for the post of associate professor in Slavonic Languages and Literatures. Professor Manfred Kridl, during the meeting of the commission to evaluate the correctness of awarding W. Weintraub the said position 'asked mockingly which of Weintraub's achievements should he recognise: that which he wrote for Chrzanowski on the style of Kochanowski, or what he involved himself in under the direction of Kot i.e., the Reformation in Eastern Prussia. I answered then [W. Weintraub] that both belonged to the same clique.' The accusations that W. Weintraub was involved in too many academic fields, including the literary history of the Renaissance and Romanticism, biographical novels and the Reformation, and that such a researcher could not be taken seriously, was to paradoxically result in the quick and positive termination of the debate over a professorship for W. Weintraub, while the accusation was to turn out in essence to be an excellent recommendation. For it was his broad interests and wide research palette that were to broaden the horizons of his faculty colleagues, who involved themselves chiefly in matters of Russia. In 1954, at the invitation of W. Lednicki, he lectured over the summer vacations at the University of California at Berkeley summer school.

In 1955 W. Weintraub obtained a scholarship from the Gugenheim Foundation and spent half a year doing research in Europe. In the 1950s W. Weintraub's main area of research was into the works of Adam Mickiewicz. In 1959 he was appointed professor. From 1956 he had regularly travelled to Europe both for

research and also simply to visit the entire continent. Together with his wife, Anna, they became experienced travellers, covering Europe from its southern and western shores right up to the coast of Norway. A great blow to W. Weintraub was his wife's diagnosis with cancer, which appeared in 1964 and resulted in her death on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 1967. During his wife's illness and following her death W. Weintraub lost himself in a whirl of academic work, labouring even more intensely than before for, as he described his situation, intensive work allowed him to cope with this exceptionally difficult situation.

In 1971 the Alfred Jurzykowski Foundation donated a million dollars for a Department of Polish Studies at Harvard University, with W. Weintraub obviously taking charge. Russian Studies was fascinating and interesting for American students, while Polish Studies was to come into being only after the political thaw in 1956. The first visit undertaken by W. Weintraub to Poland, after almost 20 years of absence, took place in 1958. The impressions left on him by the visit were depressing ones. The huge destruction caused by the war, together with the imposed political system, did not bode optimistically for the fast development for Poland. Professor Weintraub came to Poland with the mission of sounding out the possibilities for real cooperation with Polish academics and Polish academic institutions. He was to come to Poland in the future every year. The effect of these visits were publications in Polish academic journals such as *Pamiętnik Literacki* and *Tygodnik Powszechny*. In the 1970s, when the anti-emigrant line had ceased, his books started to be published in Poland. In 1975 the State Publishing Institute [Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy] issued the book *Profecja i profesura. Mickiewicz, Michelet i Quinet* [Prophetism and professorship. Mickiewicz, Michelet and Quinet]. With the same another two books were officially published: *Od Reja do Boja* (1977) and *Poeta i prorok. Rzecz o profetyzmie Mickiewicza* [Poet and prophet. On Mickiewicz's propheticism] – the latter during the period of martial law (1982).

Wiktor Weintraub, as professor of Polish Studies at the University of Harvard, strove to provide scholarships for Polish researchers. He supported the research they conducted. He was closely associated with the circle of Polish scholars from the Warsaw Institute for Literary Research. The ample correspondence that is preserved amongst Warsaw Polish scholars bears witness to the fact of how interested Weintraub was in Polish studies in Poland itself. Of great value are the letters of W. Weintraub to Zofia Stefanowska, Stefan Treugutt, Maria Renata Mayenowa. He also maintained intensive contact through correspondence with Cracow historical circles, with those historians who derived from the seminar programme of Prof. S. Kot, including Henryk Barycz and Jan Hulewicz. He received sincere letters from Tadeusz Ulewicz, who visited him while on a trip to the United States of America. From the

correspondence it results that he helped individuals in Poland who he personally did not know.

W. Weintraub's correspondence is a treasury of the autographs of the great and eminent people of world culture. From amongst almost 1,500 correspondents an especial abundance in attention was shown to W. Weintraub by Jerzy Giedroyc, Kazimierz Wierzyński, Gustaw Herling-Grudzińskiego, Jerzy Wittlin, Sławomir Mrożek as well as Czesław Miłosz; W. Weintraub was in close acquaintance with the Nobel Prize winner for Literature.

W. Weintraub was supported throughout his intensive academic research and teaching by his wife, Anna née Tennebaum, who as a result of a chronic and incurable illness died at the early age of 58. In 1974 W. Weintraub married for a second time. His new wife was a graduate of Yale University, Dr. Maria Ewelina née Żółtowski, the author of an extensive work on Jan Potocki's *Rękopis znaleziony w Saragossie* [Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse: The Manuscript Found in Saragossa]. Mrs M.E. Weintraub created a comfortable environment for her husband's academic work. He was to find in her support during the autumn of his years. When his health started to go, his wife built for him a small house situated on the Atlantic Ocean at Masy, in which, surrounded by pine forests, he was able to rest and work upon further academic projects.

In 1978 W. Weintraub retired, but he was to continue his academic work with intensity. In 1980 there took place at the Philological Faculty of the Jagiellonian University a celebration of renewal after 50 years of his Ph.D. In 1988 he was made a foreign member of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

Wiktoria Weintraub actively worked to bring Polish emigration closer in contact with Poland itself. He worked untiringly for Poland. At the dramatic moment of negotiation over the purchase of a fragment of the Codex Suprasliensis, which prior to World War II had been held in the collections of the Zamoyski family library, W. Weintraub found a sponsor who bought this priceless codex and gave it to the National Library in Warsaw when the University of Harvard withdrew from the purchase.

The Alfred Jurzykowski Foundation was the founder of the department of Polish Language and Literature which from 1971 to 1978 W. Weintraub directed. In 1977 he was awarded a prize by the Jurzykowski Foundation, which he received for his widely acknowledged achievements for culture. From 1977 he sat on the Foundation's Prize Award Advisory Committee, which involved trips to New York. For several years he headed the Committee which bestowed awards on those who served culture in Poland and beyond its borders. A measure of W. Weintraub's academic position internationally was his inclusion amongst those to suggest candidates for the Nobel Prize in Literature.



W. Weintraub final years were marked by a chronic illness that slowly curtailed his academic work. To the end of his days he worked upon the history of Polish literature. His affable appearance with the inseparable pipe, captured in photographs, combined with a reading of his works and correspondence allows one to see an agreeable man who loved his work.

Wiktor Weintraub died on the 14<sup>th</sup> of July 1988 in Cambridge (Massachusetts) and was buried there.

### Bibliography

Jagiellonian Library, manuscript catalogue no. Przyb. 1–433/2007; U. Klatka, “Archiwum Wiktora Weintrauba w Bibliotece Jagiellońskiej”, *Biuletyn Biblioteki Jagiellońskiej* LVIII, 2008, pp. 137–143; Z. Stefanowska, “Wiktor Weintraub (10 kwietnia 1908–14 lipca 1988)”, *Pamiętnik Literacki* LXXXII, 1991, vol. 1, pp. 310–319; W. Weintraub, “Szkic autobiografii”, [in:] *O współczesnych i o sobie. Wspomnienia, sylwetki, szkice*, ed. S. Barańczak, Kraków 1994, pp. 11–41.