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The Issa Valley in Censorship Documents
On the Thaw Reception of Czesław Miłosz's Novel

“One of the books, unknown to the so-called ‘wider audience’, reached with difficulty, a book the fortunate owner of which will not want to give it to fellow man, unless he/she receives in return *Journey to the End of the Night* or *The Vatican Cellars*. White cover paper. Czesław Miłosz *The Issa Valley*, Instytut Literacki, Paris, 1955”.

(J.M. Rymkiewicz, *Materiały do portretu dziecięcia Europy*; a fragment of a removed review of *The Issa Valley*; 1957)

The Issa Valley by Czesław Miłosz, first printed in the initial six issues of the Paris-based *Kultura* in 1955, was published in the same year by Instytut Literacki as the 10th volume of the *Kultura* Library and, in spite of censorship, gradually began to reach Polish readers. The goal of this chapter is to, on the one hand, trace the reception of the novel during the thaw period in the light of official national publications and in the light of Control Office documents on the other.

Issued and halted reception proofs

The novel, appreciated by both Paris and London emigre communities¹, was also recognised nationally, though not as much as *The Captive Mind* or *A Poetic Treatise*. The lack of a wider interest in the book could not be explained by the fact of “assigning” it to Miłosz as the year of its double publication was also the year in which Miłosz was once again discussed in the national commentaries spurred by the September publication of a story entitled *Nim będzie zapomniany*

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¹ Londyńczyk [J. Mieroszewski], *Najwybitniejsza książka roku 1955*, “Kultura” (Paris) 1956, issue 4, p. 92.

[Before He Is Forgotten]² and a polemic response by Flaszen to the story by Brandys³. The voices raised in the Polish cultural and literary journals between the autumn of 1955 and autumn of 1957 were proof of mainly critical attitudes towards the emigre writer. Commentators mainly focussed on Miłosz as the author of *The Captive Mind* and their delayed “reception” (because of censorship) obscured the writer’s most recent publications, particularly because they reached Poland with some delay. Because of the lack of a publication permit in Poland, Paris-based *Kultura* did not reach Polish readers⁴, which they often complained about in press releases, which were consistently removed by censorship. Therefore, in 1956, there was almost no evidence of the reception of *The Issa Valley*. There were also relatively few in 1957. Censorship documents are also free of any traces of attempted re-prints of fragments of the novel, though there was a place in Poland for a fragment of Miłosz’s first novel entitled *The Seizure of Power*⁵, while in 1957 individual parts of *A Poetic Treatise*⁶ and other poems by Miłosz were published and there were a relatively large number of discussions about them. The faint interest in the novel could only be explained by its absence or its delayed availability since the often referenced *A Poetic Treatise* was published a few months later than the novel. It might also have been a result of self-censorship: the knowledge that the Control Office intervened in texts related to the Borderlands theme and those reminding, if only allusively, of the ethnically complicated past as well as the present of those areas. Moreover, *The Issa Valley* was not a work for which the fragments could function as “winged words” or comments on disputes and polemics of contemporary times, while that was exactly how both *Treaties* functioned (in the form of quotes or crypto-quotes) (cf. sub-chapter *Winged words*). The fact that the majority of comments about Miłosz at that time were critical, entering into polemic with his political views, was not insignificant and perhaps

² K. Brandys, *Nim będzie zapomniany*, “Nowa Kultura” 1955, issue 38.

³ L. Flaszen, *O trudnym kunszcie womitowania*, “Życie Literackie” 1955, issue 44.

⁴ Paris-based “Kultura”’s national publishing permit was officially revoked by the order of the Main Director of GUKPPiW (Main Office of Control of Press, Publications and Shows) of 3 July 1950. A communication discovered in a censorship documents at the State Archive in Poznań sent out from the central office to all voivodship Control Bureaus read: “Pursuant to Art. 2 Para. 1 Letter B of the Resolution of the Prime Minister dated 9 May 1949 on the organisation and functions of the Main Office of Control of Press, Publications and Shows and subordinate bureaus (J. of L. of the Republic of Poland No. 32 Item 24), I hereby revoke the publication permit and prohibit the propagation of the “Kultura” journal published in Polish in Paris”. Considering the date when the communication was sent to divisions, the ban was actually binding since mid-July 1950 [cf. APP, WUKPPiW in Poznań, ref. no. 14, l. 39].

⁵ The fragment was included in the December issue of “Życie Literackie” of 1956 (issue 52/53, pp. 5–6) where it received a commentary by W. Maciąg (*Miary protestu*, “Życie Literackie” 1956, issue 52/53, pp. 5, 14).

⁶ *A Poetic Treatise* [fragments], “Ziemia i Morze” 1957, issue 1, p. 4; *Oda*, “Ziemia i Morze” issue 6, p. 2.

even decisive. Through its disparity and apolitical nature, *The Issa Valley* did not qualify as a target for attacks. That reception paradox was confirmed in the very first Polish text referring to *The Issa Valley* – a column entitled *Piękno i polityka* [Beauty and Politics] by Zygmunt Lichniak, published on the penultimate page of the Christmas issue of the PAX-published *Kierunki* journal concluding the year 1956⁷. In fact, the book was also referenced by Tadeusz Byrski, who praised it, though those were only fringe remarks in an article on poetry⁸.

In 1957, two more reviews of the book were published: by Irena Sławińska⁹ and Jan Błoński¹⁰ and also remarks by Jerzy Zawieyski were included in fragments of a journal published in *Twórczość*¹¹. Additionally, important material offering an account of the reception of the novel can be found in the Control Office documents. A report made after a preventive inspection of Łódź journals in 1957 offers an interesting archival resource in the form of an extensive, in-depth and very favourable review of Miłosz' discussion of *The Issa Valley* submitted for publication with *Kronika* by Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz, at that time assistant lecturer of the University of Lodz Polish Studies. The article was entitled *Materiały do portretu dziecięcia Europy* [Material for the Portrait of the Child of Europe] and it was, among those already found, the most extensive text on Miłosz removed in its entirety by censorship¹². A review of censorship's "thaw" folders revealed four more findings regarding the item. The first one was an intervention into a review by Jan Błoński¹³ included in *Przegląd Kulturalny* material. The remaining three can be found in folders documenting the operations of publishing houses (this will be discussed later): two regarding attempted publications of the novel in the domestic market¹⁴ and the third regarding the publication of an essay collection by Jerzy Zawieyski, which included a commentary to Miłosz's novel¹⁵.

In the chronologically first Polish text on *The Issa Valley* Lichniak clearly, though not directly, indicated the ambivalence surrounding Miłosz displayed by contemporary polemics about the author of *The Captive Mind*: while his literary

⁷ "Kierunki" 1956, issue 32/33, p. 11.

⁸ Byrski stated: "After WWII, a new source of the excellent poet emerged: prose. I do not intend to write about his *The Captive Mind* or *The Seizure of Power*. They are too difficult to evaluate. They include many excellent fragments which will be inscribed in history, yet his passion for polemic forced him to produce excessively contemporary assessments. I wish to highlight an excellent book which offers a revitalising source of childhood memories: *The Issa Valley* (year 1955). The author who seemed to had found the proper way of expression only in poetry turned out to be a very good prose writer as well.

⁹ I. Sławińska, *To jest daleki kraj...*, "Tygodnik Powszechny" 1957, issue 16.

¹⁰ J. Błoński, *Dolina Issy*, "Przegląd Kulturalny", issue 24 (13–19 June 1957), pp. 10–11.

¹¹ J. Zawieyski, *Nad książkami w roku 1956*, "Twórczość" 1957, issue 10/11, p. 47.

¹² AAN, WUKPPiW, ref. no. 475 (37/32), l. 142.

¹³ AAN, GUKPPiW, ref. no. 510 (39/27), l. 109.

¹⁴ AAN, GUKPPiW, ref. no. 426 (34/2), l. 268]; AAN, GUKPPiW, ref. no. 427 (34/5), l. 14.

¹⁵ AAN, GUKPPiW; Training and Documentation Unit; ref. no. 1809, l. 80.

talent was appreciated and his poetry admired, he was criticised for his attitude, his escape and his views on the involvement of intellectuals in communism. Lichniak who himself criticised Miłosz in the first issue of *Dziś i Jutro* in 1956 for *The Captive Mind*¹⁶, praised *The Issa Valley* in the final issue of *Kierunki*:

“*The Issa Valley* is beautiful”, I told Mikołaj, “read it and decide for yourself. You were a poet, you are a politician, you can help me get approval for an evaluation that in the case of Miłosz we can and we should also gather the strength to praise that apocalyptic beauty”. Mikołaj read it and said: “*The Issa Valley* is beautiful”. Something between an epic steel engraving of childhood memories and a lyrical very soft gouache of poetic prose, musing on the charms of Lithuanian landscapes, customs, the atmosphere of the land which you refer to in the moment of defeat: thou art like good health... In all that you can spot the hand of a good craftsman perfecting every detail with cool consideration and hot emotion¹⁷.

By stressing the apocalyptic nature of the novel, Lichniak wanted to clearly differentiate between the evaluation of Miłosz’s political views and the evaluation of his thematically different Lithuanian prose. He went on presenting with subtle irony the paradox in the reception of the work in the context of how the author’s attitude was perceived:

Again pain dominates the question: how could he have done such a book? And how is it that he writes such poems...

I lend colleague Z. *The Issa Valley*. He also read it and admitted that he cannot say that “it is ugly”. But that he must and can say that other thing. And went on about the Lithuanian passport. “Why exactly Lithuania?” he asked. I tried to explain that it basically makes no difference, that actually it might as well be Mesopotamia. He eventually waved it off. I got the impression that he mucked something¹⁸.

The quoted dialogue concisely and accurately reflects the thaw discussions about Miłosz and the problems the Polish critics had with *The Issa Valley*. Another proof is the bizarre note included in the August issue of *Nowa Kultura* in 1956. Its title: *The Issa Valley* was misleading as actually the author meant to condemn Miłosz for emigrating, the act of condemning, magnified by outside importance, was assigned to a French critic from *Le Figaro Litteraire* who in turn quoted a fragment of the introduction by Jaspers to *The Captive Mind*. That layered criticism was presumably aimed at authenticating the evaluation of Miłosz (since they

¹⁶ Z. Lichniak, *Spojrzenie z ukosa, ale nie zezem*, “Dziś i Jutro” 1956, issue 1.

¹⁷ Idem, *Piękno i polityka*, “Kierunki” 1956, issue 32/33, p. 11.

¹⁸ Ibidem.

in the West write like that about him...) but also to relieve the commentator of *Nowa Kultura* (anonymous in fact) of responsibility for the words:

The Issa Valley is the title of the third book in succession by Czesław Miłosz translated into French. The two previous ones were *The Captive Mind* and *The Seizure of Power*. When presenting a rather extensive summary of the story of Miłosz's book the critic of *Le Figaro Littéraire* quoted instead of his own an evaluation by a well-known existentialist writer. "In the introduction to *The Captive Mind*, Karl Jaspers," wrote Jean Blauzot, "emphasised what was typical and tragic in the case of Miłosz, an intellectual emigre": "Even if he (Miłosz) manages to acquire a new passport, he will be cut off from his roots. What can he become in spiritual, moral, and human terms"¹⁹.

The words of the French existentialist, taken out of context from the *Introduction*, were supposed to apply to a broader context. But the author of the note failed to mention this, plus the majority of *Nowa Kultura* readers probably did not know the introduction and only a few were able to read Miłosz's book. Thus, the information about *The Issa Valley* proved to be only a pretext for yet another attack on the emigre poet.

Another chronologically consecutive proof of the negative reception of *The Issa Valley* was a review by Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz entitled *Materiały do portretu dziecięcia Europy* that was removed by censorship.

Materiały do portretu dziecięcia Europy

The text submitted to *Kronika* is worth mentioning extensively as it has never been published. Upon the introduction, which particularly alarmed the censor (cf. motto of this article), Rymkiewicz, by alluding to the ambivalent perception of Miłosz, tried to shift the focus to the apolitical values of his output:

I am convinced that out of all Miłosz's books published abroad, it is *The Issa Valley* – and not *The Seizure of Power* or *The Captive Mind*, attractive also for non-literary reasons – that could become a bestseller in Poland, a book of the season. In this case, it would gather many devoted readers. We should include among them all those who in their IDs in the *place of birth* section have the abbreviation: USSR (...) ²⁰

¹⁹ [author missing] "Nowa Kultura", issue 35 of 26 Aug 1956.

²⁰ Cf. Preventive inspection report no. 77/57; "Kronika" issue 8 of 16–30 Apr 57 [AAN, WUKP-PiW ref. no. 475 (37/32), l. 142].

The highlighting of the novel's biographical inspirations approximated it to topics forbidden by censorship and could have influenced the final decision to remove the article. Rymkiewicz, presenting the main plot, makes a reference to Mickiewicz. However, it was not the Lithuanian theme of the work that seemed the most important:

When writing about Miłosz's novel, the critic was ready to summarise the work using a crafty subtitle: *Dolina Issy czyli ostatni dwór polski na Litwie. Historia szlachecka z XX wieku* [The Issa Valley, or the last Polish manor in Lithuania. Nobility history from the 20th c.] And that was it. But the first layer, interesting only because of its morals, did not determine the value of the work. What was more important was the attempt to take an attitude towards the past which has been uncommon in Polish literature. Miłosz the prose writer remained in line with his poetic expression of 1947:

Wybacz mi, proszę, brak tego wzruszenia,
Które prowadzi przemocą z powrotem
W miejsca i wiosny dawno zapomniane,
Aby maluczkich uwodził poeta
Patriotycznym sentymentem, serce
Cisnął stęsknione i farbując łzy
Mieszal dzieciństwo, młodość, okolice.
Mnie to niemiłe

[Forgive me, please, the lack of that emotion,
Which led by force back
To the places and springs long forgotten,
For the little people to be seduced by the poet
With a patriotic sentiment, the heart
He tossed yearning and dying the tears
Mixed childhood, youth, the surroundings.
That is unpleasant to me.]

he wrote in a poem entitled *On a Bird's Song Heard on the Banks of the Potomac*. *The Issa Valley* seems to have been created with complete awareness that when one looks into the *Lakes of the past*: "tafla ich rdzą powleczone inną ukaże twarz niż się spodziewałeś" [their russet face shall present differently than you would expect.] The Materials for the portrait of the child of Europe are yellowed, frayed and difficult to decipher. Therefore, there is a danger of blurring the text and finding various interpretations for it. The changeability and uncertainty of the past requires the person recreating it to maintain a distance from the events he/she describes. The author was able to maintain that distance by assuming the po-

sition of a chronicler or by creating characters and perceiving the world through their eyes. An approach similar to that of Mickiewicz when he wrote *Ballads and Romances*. By attempting to describe the Invisible Force operating on the banks of the Issa, the moving columns of steam and creatures with three Tatar heads, reaching for motifs of a folk song, (maybe even the same one that Mickiewicz used*), Miłosz reached for a writing technique and a manner of perception similar to that used in *Ballads and Romances*. It seems quite appropriate to recall his words in *A Semi-Private Letter about Poetry*: “Were I to read *Ballads and Romances* as we read them at school, I would have to come to the conclusion that the author of *Zima miejska* [Urban Winter] was childish in them and I would not be able to explain their place within his output. I love them for all the shades of distance Mickiewicz displayed towards Nowogródek songs and tales, a distance full of careful praise, for his embodiments of the characters of hunters and maidens, for his abundance of skills for underlining intricacies and the use of simple language. It is a work of artistic irony (not irony in the common sense)”.

Miłosz stressed several times that he was given the role of a chronicler. However, to maintain that role, to conduct that game to the end, is not easy. Surely it was difficult for the chronicler to keep his distance, remain only a cool or even a sensitive observer when he was bound to the events he described by many threads of emotion and sentiment. The approach did not fail him when he was outlining the setting of the great adventure of Tomasz Dilbin, when he presented the mixture of folk beliefs, politics, nationalist resentments, when he introduced the reader to the intricacies of the family tree of the Surkonts and the Dilbins. However, in the 1948/1949 narrative poem entitled *Toast* [The Toast], the chronicler’s pen was more virulently and menacingly. In *The Issa Valley*, that pen became slightly quieter and kinder. How to describe demons, which, wearing the dress of Immanuel Kant of Królewiec, live on the Issa? Forces which regardless of whether they can help or harm man are helpless when it comes to his will? The kind sound of the pen, that is the first sign of menace which consists of surrendering to sentiment. That is why Miłosz more often used the other method of maintaining distance and perceived the valley of the Issa through the eyes of his characters. Thus, even when using warm and kind words, he strived to avoid perceiving distant times through the rainbow of a tainted teardrop²¹.

It was symptomatic that the author of the review revealed an excellent knowledge of all Miłosz’s works, including commentaries, and used it to present *The Issa Valley* as a continuation, though formally different, of previously raised themes as well as a work to which Miłosz’s later works referred (at that time, Rymkiewicz shared many of Miłosz’s views. The author of *A Poetic Treatise* would become an ally of the future creator of contemporary classicism in the dispute with Przyboś’

²¹ Ibidem.

avant-garde). The interpretative context, apart from the clearly important Mickiewicz, included both Miłosz's previous works and *A Poetic Treatise* published after *The Issa Valley*:

Surely the readers will not discover anything psychologically sensational in the description of Tomasz's childhood. The question: why one becomes who he/she is and not someone else? must be shared by every child. Tomasz discovers the world just like we all used to once. Thus, we will find in *The Issa Valley* accounts of the first encounter with books, of the first encounter with the phenomenon of death and passing, of the first musings on the laws governing the life of plants and animals. The world of snakes and bees, the kingdom of birds – that is the valley of the Issa seen through the eyes of Tomasz. There are also other worlds, enclosed in books, which bring about the visions of distant countries and stories from several centuries back. All that patiently awaits to be discovered and Tomasz will rip the curtains of childhood, one by one. Hieronim Surkont, Arian, will introduce him to the house of history, Romuald Bukowski, his neighbour, to the house of nature.

(...) The narrator of Miłosz's novel remains hidden, he views the world through the eyes of a naive child and his knowledge of the expected does not exceed Tomasz's knowledge. Thus, the reader as well shall discover new things each time. It is not the first time that Miłosz assumed the attitude of a naive observer. If the recurrence of the circumstances: the gate overgrown with vines, beetles hiding in the hot bottom of peonies and orchids, is not enough to identify the similarity, then the scene with a map where under the boy's fingertips rush small horses and dogs, and people no bigger than ants should immediately bring to mind the correct association. That is *Świat, poema naiwne* [The World, Naive Poems]. By repeating the method of perception the developed there Miłosz's win is twofold: he maintains the distance to past emotions avoiding the all too common in literature teary memoir sentimentality and presents the obvious psychological conditions of a child in the form of discoveries.

The Issa Valley has some other links with Miłosz's poetry. A careful critic will find them mainly in the mode of constructing the image, similar to that in novels and poetic works. If interpreted using a dictionary, the epithets used by the poet and the prose writer would seem identical. But that is not what I mean at this point. It is also necessary to postpone any attempt at finding in Miłosz's narrative poetry motifs, and there are plenty of those, which, previously only signalled with a few strokes, become expanded in *The Issa Valley*, even receiving their own fictional subplots. Two most important similarities linking the novel to the poet's other works are, first of all, the above-mentioned similarity of the attitude of the writer and author of *The World* and, secondly, the fact of raising in *The Issa Valley* the same themes as in the fourth part of *A Poetic Treatise* entitled Nature. Both in his poetry and *A Poetic Treatise*, Miłosz attempted to describe the relationship between man and nature presenting his idea of

the relations and differences which exist between us and the kingdom which cannot be described in words. (...) ²²

Rymkiewicz proceeded to offer some quotes from *A Poetic Treatise* to indicate the similarities between a narrative poem and the novel in their view of nature as that which links man to the animal world. He also quoted fragments of the poem *Miłość* [Love] from the narrative poem *Świat* [The World] to indicate the possibility of a unity with nature even though the human mind remains on the borderline marked by civilisation. Tomasz's story concludes with him exiting the Arcadian world. What is interesting is the style of the review. By utilising poetic devices, the author lyricised his own language foreshadowing his poetic talent which he revealed in some years:

“All there is, is to wish you luck, Tomasz”. That simple sentence concluding the story I read as ironic. “All there is, is to wish you luck, Tomasz”. The island of joy, to which you can never go back, you are leaving, still unaware; but History already awaits you, rather cruel one. A careful reader will find you on the pages of *The Seizure of Power*. Underneath the wheels of a departing aeroplane you will see a country covered with snow for centuries. Born on the Issa, in the last Soplicowo, you shall be called: the child of Europe ²³.

A censor by the name of Damian Kulak initially did not plan to remove the entire text, as the justification in the intervention card suggested:

Article halted to be discussed with GUKP (in line with the instruction not to promote this type of authors). Additionally, I believe that if it receives a publication permit, the initial remarks of the reviewer should be removed ²⁴.

Therefore, he had some reservations not in relation to the theme of the article submitted for verification but to the author himself. The censor's uncertainty and a lack of readiness to make an independent decision was significant. The need to consult with his central supervisors (who eventually halted the article) proved that applicable provisions were unclear or that there was an unwritten practice in the bureau of gradual tempering their usage. Bear in mind that the intervention was made on 13 April, i.e. after the Polish press published fragments of Miłosz's works as well as numerous discussions of his output ²⁵ and, even more important

²² Ibidem.

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ Ibidem.

²⁵ Cf. i.a. R. Matuszewski, *O Traktacie poetyckim Czesława Miłosza*, “Nowa Kultura” 1957, issue 8, pp. 2, 7; J. Kwiatkowski, *Poeta epoki*, “Życie Literackie” 1957, issue 11, p. 3.

in that case, before two reviews of *The Issa Valley* were published. In less than two weeks after the rejection of Rymkiewicz's discussion, *Tygodnik Powszechny* published two articles sympathetic towards Miłosz: a review of *The Issa Valley* by Irena Sławińska and an article about his poetry by Zdzisław Łapiński²⁶. The review of *The Issa Valley* by Błoński was published in June. What does the chronology indicate? Since it was permitted to not only mention Miłosz but also publish texts sympathetic to him (an exception applied to praises of *The Captive Mind*²⁷) the reason for the intervention must have lay outside censorship regulations. Probably the article was removed because the Łódź-based *Kronika* remained under careful supervision of censors, particularly since the first issue when the insolent editorial board tried, to no avail, to publish a fragment of *The Captive Mind*²⁸. It could have influenced the tightening of Łódź Control Office approach to the journal. Had Rymkiewicz's article ended up on the desk of another censor or had it been sent to another periodical, it would have been published as in the case of permitting the publication in *Tygodnik Powszechny* of the review by Irena Sławińska.

Approved for publication

The review was published in the Easter issue of *Tygodnik Powszechny*. Its author offered Miłosz's novel many kind words calling it "exceptional", "charming and so shocking". She noted its humanistic layer which enclosed the tragedy but also the beauty of human experience. The narration of the novel is conducted from the position of a wise and mature person, though, at the same time, emotionally engaged in the issues of the presented world. "In that world," wrote the author of the review, "there is basically no judgement about man, there is no fault, there is only the tragic nature of the clash of the great power of necessity or passion". Miłosz's book was particularly close to the author of the review also because of her origin. Born in Vilnius, Sławińska studied at Stefan Batory University. Therefore, the former inhabitant of the Borderlands, aware of the possible problems with censorship, even though she mentions the national disputes referred to in the novel, she also tried, as Miłosz himself intended, to indicate the universal character of the novel's world ("It is a distant, unique, exotic coun-

²⁶ I. Sławińska, *To jest daleki kraj...*, Z. Łapiński, *I z ruchu zebrać moment wieczny*, "Tygodnik Powszechny", 1957, issue 16 of 21.04.57, p. 9–10.

²⁷ Though, in that case one could also find inconsistencies, e.g. in the form of an article by A. Mularczyk and K. Dziewanowski defending *The Captive Mind* from Kałużyński's attack (cf. *Wielki konflikt i... makulatura*, "Świat" 1956, issue 47).

²⁸ Cf. chapter on *The Captive Mind*.

try, as if outside the borders of Europe and the 20th century”), which was not negatively affected by referring as the context *On the Niemen* by Orzeszkowa and Mickiewicz’s *Pan Tadeusz* as works mythicising the Lithuanian space. The universal character is further confirmed by metaphysical subplots in the novel when “God and Satan enter Miłosz’s poetic world. He enters together with the man from the Issa, with his naive unconventional faith but also outside that, as if from the narrator himself”.

The folder containing prevention inspection reports of *Tygodnik Powszechny* of 1957, though full of various material, lacks any traces of interventions into Irena Sławińska’s review. The Control Bureau was less benign when handling the other review of the novel: Jan Błoński’s published in June in *Przegląd Kulturalny*. According to the report card, the text was submitted for inspection on 12 June and was evaluated by two officers of the Bureau. In the form, it was marked that an intervention was “necessary”. Fragments struck out by the first censor (in the card in black pencil) are marked below in bold in square brackets:

[It is a story (more of a story that a novel) about everything that was “before”, that is before the protagonist became a European, a Pole, a citizen of the 20th century.] The prehistory of an individual: exactly in that sense that the individual has not yet managed, at least consciously, to enter history.

(...)

Tomasz also meets a teen-aged boy who profanes the host wishing God will strike him with lightning. He also suffered from a “secret illness”. **[One might assume that the son of a landless widow will become a communist in the future: and he will try to give some meaning to life. But the poet has, considering his calling, some other more spontaneous solution in store.]**

(...)

The Issa Valley was published by *Kultura* in Paris in 1955. Soon, it will be published in Poland as well²⁹.

The second censor added his own corrections (correcting the first censor as well) in green ink, limiting, both in the case of the first and the second fragment, his interventions as much as possible, at the same time removing the note about the planned publication of the novel in Poland. The final version of the article was the version after the second intervention:

²⁹ Preventive inspection report no. 25, “Przegląd Kulturalny”, issue 25, [AAN, GUKPPiW; ref. no. 510 (39/27), l. 109.]. The text was published in issue 24 of “Przegląd Kulturalny”.

It is a story (more a story than a novel) about everything that was “before”. The pre-history of an individual: exactly in that sense that the individual has not yet managed, at least consciously, to enter history.

(...)

Tomasz also meets a teen-aged boy who profanes the host wishing God will strike him with lightning. He also suffered from a “secret illness”. One might assume that the son of a landless widow will become a communist in the future: and he will try give some meaning to life. But a poet has – another solution.

(...)

The Issa Valley was published by *Kultura* in Paris in 1955³⁰.

The first intervention proved that censors read Błoński’s review carefully, particularly his remarks on the autobiographic nature of the novel (for the artist “his own past constitutes (...) creative material”). Therefore, seeing in Miłosz the prototype of Tomasz, they removed the kind words about the author that in adulthood the protagonist became “a European, a Pole, the citizen of the 20th century” in line with the principle not to present Miłosz in too favourable a light. The intervention in the second fragment was eventually limited to the removal of the phrase belittling the new faith which stated that the choice of communism is a “quite non-spontaneous solution” for the peasant protagonist. The final deletion (regarding the information that the novel will be published in Poland) heralded the tightening of the publishing policy. It preceded the October decision of the Control Bureau to remove *The Issa Valley* from the announced publications of Wydawnictwo Literackie for the first quarter of 1958³¹, which proved synonymous to a rejection of the publication permit application.

In the censorship documentation of publishers

In the report card after the title and technical details regarding a given item, the publisher included a description. It deserves closer inspection for two reasons: first, the period of the novel’s plot was slightly shifted forward, second, the author of the note stressed the novel’s image of the relationship with nature limiting as much as possible any references to history, possibly in order to appease censorship through emphasising the book’s apolitical nature:

³⁰ J. Błoński, *The Issa Valley*, pp. 10–11.

³¹ Report of preventive inspection of Publishing announcements no. 40; Book documentation (reviews, interventions). Various publishers, cat. A; [AAN, GUKPPiW, ref. no. 426 (34/2), l. 268].

The novel includes various biographic elements. The story is set in Lithuania during WWI and in the years directly preceding it. However, it almost does not reach the consciousness of the protagonist, a talented boy by the name of Tomasz. Unaware of the laws of history he learns the laws of nature by living in close contact with it, amongst the primitive in terms of morals and economic advancement rural population. The problem of nature and its laws, which apply to all living things from birth to death, is raised throughout Miłosz's output. (...) ³²

Thus, in October, *The Issa Valley* vanished from any publication announcements. The decision was confirmed in March of the following year according to the *Preventive inspection report no. 3, Books announced for 1958*, the National Library publishing house. In section 20 of the catalogue censors removed: Miłosz Cz. *The Issa Valley*. Wydawnictwo Literackie. The note stated the price of the book and the planned number of copies: 15 PLN; 10,000 copies. In that instance, the description was brief and laconic: *The Issa Valley* is “**A novel about childhood and youthfulness. The story is set in Lithuanian lands**”³³. A summary of GUKP interventions for the period of 1 Jul 1957 – 15 Apr 1958 indicated that *The Issa Valley* was one of 67 books confiscated (or intervened into) during the time – within only ten months. The summary includes the name of the author, title of the item, publisher and a short description (unfortunately, it was not a justification of the decision but only information about the type of intervention): “The publishing house applied for an approval of the work. The Bureau's response was negative”³⁴. In the summary, *The Issa Valley* was joined by such works as *Wspomnienie i notatki* [Memories and Notes] by Rowecki-Grot and *Next Stop – Paradise* by Hłasko (also confiscated in its entirety).

On the same month when *The Issa Valley* disappeared from Wydawnictwo Literackie's announcement, the book received an enthusiastic evaluation in *Twórczość*. It was not, however, a review, rather a collection of pages from Jerzy Zawieyski's journal; in one of those marked 24 March 1955, the author shared his impressions upon reading the novel:

Reading in the afternoon: Miłosz's novel entitled *The Issa Valley*. Constant awe. What an outstanding prose! It is actually poetry. Miłosz's word is concrete, real, yet poetic. It probably is not the novelist prose mode of writing but everything here is interesting, revealing, extremely fresh. *The Issa Valley* – the land of Vilnius, the story of Tomasz – **is the story of the author himself. Through the means of his marvellous speech Miłosz can not only bring about the atmosphere of the land of lakes**

³² Ibidem.

³³ Book documentation (interventions, reviews) [AAN, GUKPPiW, ref. no. 427 (34/5), l. 14].

³⁴ Department of Non-Periodic Publications; DPN-03 A, Summary of interventions; 1958 [AAN, GUKPPiW, ref. no. 591 (60/2), l. 4].

but also offers people so interesting and diverse, so moving and so original that that is the most astonishing. The characters of Batłazar, both grandmas, grandpa, priests, children – they will remain in the memory of literature forever. It's a shame *Kultura* printed only 50 pages of the novel³⁵ – and I don't think I will read the whole soon. Great joy that Miłosz is writing there. He writes about his childhood, about the country so it will surely be an excellent and magnificent work. The charming dash of irony elevates Miłosz's work high. It is sometimes reminiscent of Mann, but only sometimes; sometimes also of Nałkowska. Those are only flashes of other people's traces and dust of others. But everything is so Miłosz-like, his own, even that which is not that pleasant. Because Miłosz is difficult, not always even or kind. Rather harsh, terribly keen, perspicaciously intelligent, passionately revealing reality. He is not indulgent to anyone. He is merciless. But that is how a writer should see the world because such a view offers a lot of truth, more than if he had kept silent about it, omitting the things that are painful, sparing someone or something – for the sake of propriety or nobility even³⁶.

That grand commendation of Miłosz was, through the form used, somewhat camouflaged. The published pages from the journal covering a period from 16 March until 29 September 1955 included various mentions about Polish and foreign writers: Gombrowicz, Dąbrowska, Nałkowska, Eliot, Mann, etc., as well as the writer's impressions after watching theatre plays. The accumulation of cultural events and names of writers, among which Miłosz was in no way highlighted, enabled the author to draw the censor's attention away from the ill-viewed writer. But already a year later the same text was removed³⁷ from a submitted collection by Zawieyski entitled *Próby ognia i czasu* [Trial By Fire and Time]. A folder marked *Intervention reports in religious books* includes a letter of 1958 sent from the Poznań publishing house PALLOTINUM to GUKPPiW with a request for a publication permit for his literary essays³⁸. In the enclosed test print censors marked interventions. They removed fragments in which Zawieyski, from the position of a Christian, indicated the lack of Marxism, when he entered into a polemic with Żółkiewski suggesting that gagging writers will reflect negatively on the quality of literature, and when he presented Sartre as

³⁵ Zawieyski's remarks indicated that at that time, in late-March, he only knew a fragment from the first issue of "Kultura".

³⁶ J. Zawieyski, *Nad książkami w roku 1956*, "Twórczość" 1957, issue 10, p. 47.

³⁷ The situation was not extraordinary. Any text, even the most innocent, had to be submitted for inspection before its new publication, even if it had been published recently. The guidelines, which sometimes changed overnight, required a re-inspection often concluding with a removal of such a text, which writers often complained about when they attempted to submit for publication collected essays or stories which had previously been published.

³⁸ *Intervention reports in religious books (political interventions) 1958* [AAN, GUKPPiW; ref. no. 1809 (361/3), l. 67].

an illuminating example of the consequences of living a life without God filled with fear. The removed fragments included a sympathetic account of reading the Paris-based *Kultura*, including Miłosz's texts on translations of Gałczyński and on Pankowski and the publishing of *Twórczość* entire paragraph on *The Issa Valley*. *Próby ognia i czasu* was published according to the announcement in 1958 missing the removed fragments. The remarks on *The Issa Valley* were also missing from the following three publications of various fragments of Zawieyski's journal, even though they covered the year 1955³⁹. They have never again been published.

The intervention in Zawieyski's journal occurred in June 1958, but let us return to December 1957 when Jerzy Kwiatkowski mused on *The Issa Valley*. He included it in an extensive discussion of *Poemat o czasie zastygłym* [Poem of the Frozen Time] when pondering on nature in Miłosz's works. "**Miłosz praises Nature**, he seeks its strength by attempting to face History"⁴⁰. Miłosz tamed Nature which brings about "biological and metaphysical tragedy", the dread of death, pain and passing, which can actually be overcome by accepting the world and its laws:

The origins of that victory in the internal debate on nature, in the debate which is conducted by every writer, every person in general, should be sought for much earlier. The document – much later. The document is *The Issa Valley* published in 1955; the origins is the poet's childhood spent amongst primitive nature and people⁴¹.

Interestingly enough, the majority of critics writing about the novel placed considerable emphasis on its imagery of nature and its relationships with the life of the inhabitants of the Lithuanian countryside. But all reviews and remarks left out the metaphysical aspect of the novel. Błoński defined Domcio as the son of a landless widow, yet it was he that Miłosz entrusted with uttering the most dramatic question of theodicy. Such a distribution of emphases in reviews could have been a result of the problems associated with religion (domestic writers were used to censorship's aversion to such topics), but it could have also been a result of the suggestion by the author himself who omitted that aspect (consciously or not) when talking about his novel in *Ankieta noworoczna* [New Year's Questionnaire] conducted among emigre writers by the Polish Division of BBC Radio Station at the turn of 1955. Miłosz said, e.g.:

The story is set in some out-of-the-way rural backwoods after WWI. I was most interested in describing certain natural observations, which does not mean that the book

³⁹ Cf. *Brzegiem cienia. Kartki z dziennika* (Znak, 1960); *W alei bezpożytecznych rozmyślań*, PIW, 1965; *Kartki z dziennika 1955–1969* (Pax, 1983).

⁴⁰ J. Kwiatkowski, *Poemat o czasie zastygłym*, "Twórczość" 1957, issue 12, p. 83.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

does not include persons, some tragic, others comical. The novel will be published soon in Paris, in Polish. It is currently being translated into the French⁴².

The above statement was puzzling. Not only did it not encourage reading the novel but it also seemed to undermine its value (“**describing certain natural observations**”, “in some out-of-the-way rural backwoods”). He did not approach the central theme, instead directing reception towards the superficial layer of the text, which was also confirmed by the last post-thaw comment on the novel published in *Dziennik Polski* in the early-1958:

Swiss press published a review from the German translation of a new book⁴³ by Czesław Miłosz, a Polish writer, who after WWII abandoned the Polish diplomatic service and remained in the West – *Tal der Issa*. In the book, Miłosz recalled his childhood years spent in a small village near the Polish-Lithuanian border. Zurich critics highly esteemed the novel emphasising its major qualities: its realism when presenting the Borderlands life of a Polish village, excellent psychological observations, beautiful descriptions of nature and interesting approach to distant political events and social transformations (the times of WWI as the autobiographic background for the recollections of the writer living in the patriarchal environment of an old family⁴⁴.

In order to discuss the book, the author of the comment used the same trick as the author of the 1956 comment, though towards a different end. The reference to the Swiss critics was supposed to, this time, authenticate the positive image of the novel, though the comment, published after the period of Miłosz’s presence in the Polish press and after several articles about him, sounded as if it dealt with a work completely unknown to Polish readers. Even the title expression “a new book by Miłosz” about a novel which had been published three years earlier, and after *A Poetic Treatise* was published in a book form, seemed as if the author was discussing a distant phenomenon alien to domestic readers.

* * *

Considering the above-mentioned material one might pose certain hypotheses which, unfortunately, might prove unreliable, thus, they should be formed with great care, taking into consideration, numerous censor oversights which usually increased during times of political change (censors were not certain how lib-

⁴² Ankieta noworoczna (conclusion); aired on: 1.01. 1055; <http://www.polskieradio.pl/Player>.

⁴³ *Das Tal der Issa* [*The Issa Valley*], translated by Maryla Reifenberg, cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch 1957.

⁴⁴ [author missing] *Nowa książka Miłosza*, “*Dziennik Polski*”, issue 5 of 7 Jan 1958.

erally they could approach writers and publishers) and incomplete and sometimes improperly preserved Control Bureau documentation. In the case of interventions in periodicals, there were rarely any justifications of removals, so valuable from the point of view of academic research. They were usually included in voivodship division documentation and almost never in intervention reports by the Main Office of Control of Press, Publications and Shows. To ensure a complete image it is necessary to study censorship documents in connection with published versions of the texts which enables reconstruction of the “provisions”, though it is also vital to carefully trace the evolution of the Control Bureau’s attitude towards Miłosz: he appeared in national press only to disappear some time later depending on the time of publication, type of periodical and the context in which he was mentioned. What can be said based on the discussed material is: between the autumn of 1955 and the autumn of 1957, the provisions did not block the possibility of publication of references to Miłosz. Authors could also freely write about him in a critical, though not exclusively, way. The reception of *The Issa Valley*, a novel enthusiastically received by literary researchers Sławińska and Błoński, showed that one could write a factual discussion of Miłosz’s works, which even today would not seem outdated, deprived of the Marxist staff (that was not challenged by the similarly factual and extensive review by Rymkiewicz removed by censorship rather for its unfortunate placement in a periodical which had incurred the Łódź Control Office’s displeasure). Meanwhile, the ban on non-serial publications of Miłosz’s works was maintained. Moreover, it was prohibited to announce any publications of his books in Poland. The justifications indicate that it was a transitional period: there appeared new central directions, censors consulted many interventions with division chiefs or with the Chief Bureau over the telephone. They knew that it was actually prohibited to promote Miłosz in Poland, let alone praise (not to “relish” like Piechal “about him”). The situation was re-tightened in 1958. Any references to Miłosz were consistently being removed from most publications regardless of the fact whether they appeared in a positive or neutral context (as exemplified by Zawieyski’s journals).

A study of the official and censored reception of *The Issa Valley* offers only partial examination. It is impossible to reconstruct on its basis the complete image of the activities of censorship towards Miłosz in the thaw period. It could only be possible upon consideration of contemporary reception of his other works and texts about him.

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***The Issa Valley* in Censorship Documents
On the Thaw Reception of Czesław Miłosz's Novel**

(Summary)

Czesław Miłosz's *The Issa Valley* [*Dolina Issy*] was published in the Paris Literary Institute in 1955 and soon after started paving its way to readers in the author's native country, in spite of the censorship. This article traces back the novel's reception in the so-called Thaw (post-Stalin) period (1955–1957) in the light of official domestic publications and the documents of the Censorship Office. Those years saw publication of several argumentative and favourable essays on the novel (by e.g. I. Sławińska, J. Błoński, J. Zawieyski). The censors banned just one extensive discussion text on *The Issa Valley*, by Jarosław-Marek Rymkiewicz, and this owing to where it was published. A ban on publishing the poet's works in a nonserial form was maintained. In that transitional period, new

directives were coming from the communist-party headquarters, and the censors would often consult the heads of departments they reported to, or the Central Censorship Office directly. The situation grew severer by 1958, with the poet's name being consistently removed from most publications.

Keywords: Czesław Miłosz, *The Issa Valley*, censorship after 1945, censorship towards literature, literary life after 1945