

Piotr Mitzner\*

## At Home and Abroad Julian Tuwim and the Russian Emigration

They quickly took him for one of their own. They took him for somebody different. Their own – a poet, a brilliant translator of Russian poetry, a Polish author who wasn't afraid of eastern miasma and masculine rhymes. Somebody different – a misfit, an alien among his own kin, somebody open, somebody who was ready to help exiles and runaways and so, as he put it, “the writing Russian brothers”<sup>1</sup>.

In Poland, especially in the first years of independence, it wasn't that obvious. Only a few members of the Polish intelligentsia made contact with Russian emigrants. It was usually the Russians that sought contact, learnt about Polish culture and wrote about it. This was the advice of Dmitry Filosofov, a far-sighted editor, critic, and essayist, who stayed in Poland until his death in 1940. He believed that Russian emigration literature had to maintain the highest artistic and intellectual standards, but could not develop in isolation from its cultural surroundings – in this case, Polish.

It seems that the first one to notice Tuwim was Evgeniy Shevchenko<sup>2</sup>, who in 1922 wrote in the newspaper edited by Filosofov “Za svobodu!” about the representatives of new Polish poetry: about their courage, their outbursts in their struggle for that which is human and cosmic. “Whitman taught them something”<sup>3</sup> wrote Shevchenko. And he mentioned Tuwim.

A few months later he published an essay about the Polish poet in connection with the publication of *Poems, Volume Four*.

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\* Dr hab. prof. UK SW; e-mail: pmitzner55@gmail.com, Department of European Modernism, Faculty of Humanities, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, 01-815 Warsaw, 5 Dewajtis street.

<sup>1</sup> As cited in: W. Borkowski, *Julian Tuwim*, “Russkij Gołos” 1964, issue 7–8.

<sup>2</sup> Jewgenij Szewczenko (1877–1932) – before the revolution in the south of Russia he worked as a qualified lawyer; in the years 1924–1932 as a member of the editorial board of “Za Swobodu!”, author of literary and theatrical reviews.

<sup>3</sup> J. Szewczenko, *Litieraturnaja Chronika. Sozruczije*, “Za Swobodu!” 1922, issue 321. All translations from Russian are mine.

He isn't looking for God. He demands God for himself. He's lurking in wait for him. He believes in his coming, in him, in the ubiquitous, obvious Great Existence, because he feels his own existence, that's unquestionable... Poetry is the jump of a barbarian who has felt God. Everything exists, all things, objects. And that existence is God. And flows the universal, all-encompassing song of the "community". In his decree Tuwim also announced the equality of everyone and everything<sup>4</sup>.

But we shouldn't fear the revolutionary zeal of the poet, the repercussions of *Marsylianka*, "fieriness itself – is nothing to be afraid of", it will pass, "Tuwim won't march to the sound of Majakowski's snare drum..."<sup>5</sup>. Besides, "there is also another Tuwim, the third and the fourth one. In a sense he is infinity"<sup>6</sup>. Shevchenko returns to the question of infinity later: "Julian Tuwim sees infinity in that which is minute. And a great tragedy in everyday poverty"<sup>7</sup>. Here the reviewer cites an excerpt from *Piotr Plaksin*, praising not only its verse, but also the Chechov-like approach to the world (*nota bene* that poem written in 1914 was translated into Russian several times). It is a very apt remark. In Tuwim's poetry you can trace that motif, you can also find it in the selection of his translations of Russian texts, like: *The Bronze Horseman* and *Coat*. At the same time Shevchenko tries to find Tuwim's closest poetic kin. Beside Whitman, he notices Baudelaire, Balmont, Bryusov and Jesienin<sup>8</sup>.

Some of Shevchenko's suggestions were later followed by Sergey Kulakowski, a critic and literary historian, the author of the anthology *Sowriemiennyje polskie poety (Modern Polish poets)* published in Berlin in 1929 by the Petropolis publishing house<sup>9</sup>. Poems of all authors: from Tadeusz Miciński and Bolesław Leśmian to Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński and Julian Przyboś were translated by Michał Choromański, then still a Russian language poet. Looking back, the anthology is very representative, the choices turned out to be surprisingly apt, as are most of the several-pages-long notes about the authors. While the introduction to Tuwim might not be the most interesting one, since influenceology was, at that time, more important to Kulakovsky than the poetry itself, it is still worth reading, because it makes it possible to understand why Russian readers liked and appreciated the poet so much. Kulakovsky compared Tuwim's demonism to that of Sologub. In his urban imagery, especially in *Spring*, he sees not only Rimbaudian fascinations, but also Majakowski's rhetoric. And again he sees the same collec-

<sup>4</sup> Idem, *Litieraturnaja Chronika*. "Raduna", "Za Swobodu!" 1923, issue 100.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>9</sup> *Sowriemiennyje polskie poety. W oczerkach S. Kulakowskiego i w pieriewodach M. Choromanskogo*, Petropolis, Berlin 1929.

tion as did Shevchenko: Baudelaire, Balmont, Chekhov in connection with Piotr Plaksin. Writing about *The Czarnolas affair*, Kułakowski raises an interesting point – he claims that in the tome its author “keeping his command over words is more of a ‘man’ than a ‘poet’”<sup>10</sup>. Unfortunately he doesn’t develop the idea further. Russians, despite such elaborate suggestions regarding the influence of this or that poet on Tuwim’s work, were still convinced of his greatness.

Filosofov, in his essay on Aleksandr Brückner’s *Polish etymological dictionary*, digressed about Tuwim and his fascination with dictionaries, especially that one. He wrote:

Julian Tuwim isn’t a “Slavist”, isn’t a professional linguist. He creates words, creates the Polish language on a par with all outstanding writers. Future dictionary makers will use his poetry to analyse Polish and its development. Tuwim isn’t a scientist, isn’t a professor, isn’t an expert. In the context of linguistics he’s an amateur. Who knows, though? Maybe the opinion of such an amateur as Tuwim is exceptionally important to a learned man like Brückner<sup>11</sup>.

Russians recognised Tuwim’s talent as a translator as early as in the twenties. Dmitry Filosofov himself made a strong claim in 1927 that Tuwim’s translation of *The Tale of Igor’s Campaign* is perfect, better even than the existing Russian versions<sup>12</sup>. A few years later, Tuwim entranced a Russian audience in Warsaw with his translation of *The Bronze Horseman*. Leon Gomolicki described in detail the public reading of the freshly printed translation<sup>13</sup>:

I was sitting in the audience, he was on the stage with a traditional carafe of water, sitting stiff as a lecturer would, more stiffly even due to his slimness. But what he read [...] and how he read it wasn’t stiff.

Pushkin, I learnt to hate in my school years, which I spent in the Russian Partition until the eighth grade, was resurrected like Lazarus. That miracle, or a magical process – as it was closer for Tuwim – was presented to me during a spectacular performance. Poetry mummified by teachers, something of stylistic archaeology – transferred to non-existent conventions of Polish poetry **came to life!** Commented, translated twice: not

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, p. 107.

<sup>11</sup> D. Filosofov, *Słowo i język*, “Mołwa” 1933, issue 12.

<sup>12</sup> DF [D. Filosofov], *Słowo o polku Igoriewie w pieriewodie Juliana Tuwima*, “Za Swobodu!” 1927, issue 253.

<sup>13</sup> The first reading of *The Bronze Horseman* by Aleksander Pushkin took place during a *Litieraturnowo Sodruzestwo* Night in the hall of the Anthroposophical Society on 31 January 1932. Tuwim read then not only the translation of Pushkin, but also those of A. Tolstoy and F. Sollogub. The information was printed by “Express Poranny” from 28.01.1932, issue 3. First printing: A. Puszkina, *Jeździec miedziany. Opowieść petersburska*, translated by J. Tuwim, Studium W. Lednickiego, Instytut Wydawniczy “Biblioteka Polska”, Warsaw [1932].

only into a different language but into itself, which I accepted mechanically from my first grade as something already there, not worth the effort of commenting, affected me with its charm, melodiousness, familiarity. And the discovery that something like that can exist – thus far I had believed that each translation of poetry is gloomy talentless writing. Moreover, it was the poem that I have just written a, so I thought, fresh and original text about. I claimed that it wasn't Pushkin's poetry, just creating epigones, but it was his prose that gave rise to the **main currents** (so I wrote) of Russian literature. *The Bronze Horseman* was there in a neuralgic point (a contemporary term) of those rising currents – a novella-poem, not yet prose and yet already prose-like text. [...] My article was printed and Tuwim read it<sup>14</sup>.

Stop! There wasn't any such article. Maybe Gomolicki was wrong, maybe he made it up for auto-fiction<sup>15</sup>, which we can find in some of the books he wrote when he was older. He, however, certainly did visit Tuwim in his apartment:

I was carefully hiding my shoe under the armchair, the same I put ink on (possibly black) to hide fatal cracks in it. But he saw everything with his crow-like gaze: tilting his head, as if he was pecking that embarrassing detail of mine, he looked into me uncovering my topic: Pushkin.

So, please help yourself to the fruitcake, you yourself haven't tried to translate? I have quite a lot of it, you see [...] It piled up and I finally want to organise it, some selection, I'm looking for a title, for example *Pushkin's Lyre*, what do you think?

And when, years later, the *Lyre* was ready to be printed [...] and again – can't say which time it was – I was sitting at his place, drinking his tea, when he quoted: *u lukomoria dub zielionyj*<sup>16</sup> and smoothly went on to: you know what, I invited you with a little intrigue in mind, I was hoping you would agree to help me with it, actually I will do all the preparatory work myself, it's mainly about the spelling, you still remember it clearly, I'd have to learn it all again, you'll get to correct it, agreed? Oh yes, I knew, I even counted on you a bit, I'd like you to do me a little favour too – you will go to Przeworski<sup>17</sup> and sign the contract for that work, it's a detail, but a necessary detail, eventually you will get some money for it, it might come in handy, and they can't without those papers. I'll promptly write a few words and give you some

<sup>14</sup> L. Gomolicki, *Dzikie muzy*, in: *Proza*, vol. 2, Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, Lodz 1977, pp. 270–271. It should be noted that Gomolicki as a poet was shaped by books from outside the school curriculum, from a very young age he read Russian avant-garde of the XX century and was fascinated by Whitman, something which he had in common with Tuwim.

<sup>15</sup> The term used by Isaak Bashevis Singer to define his own works.

<sup>16</sup> Working on the translation of *Ruslan i Ludmila*, Tuwim found it especially difficult to translate the first pp. of the poem. He described it in the quatrain *Czterowiersz na warsztacie* ("Wiadomości Literackie" 1934, issue 47, 18.11.1934), later reprinted in an extended version in: J. Tuwim, *Pegaz dęba*, Czytelnik, Warsaw 1950, pp. 190–209.

<sup>17</sup> Marek Przeworski (1875–1935) – a publisher and a bookseller.

paper – I was afraid of the responsibility which fell on me so unexpectedly. The day after, I signed the contract and after some time I received the brush proofs of the *Lyre*. I spent whole nights over the text, in panicked fear that I could let a mistake slip, I read every line ten times until I realised that Tuwim meant an inconspicuous form of help (not my help, his). He liked sponsorship and supporting beginners. Obviously, he had corrected the *Lyre* himself<sup>18</sup>.

His consultations with Eugenia Weber-Hiriakowa, a publicist and an editor, were similar in nature. Gomolicki also recollects seeing Tuwim in Pushkin's academy in 1937<sup>19</sup>:

I was standing on a podium next to Professor [Tadeusz] Zieliński and someone else, in front of us the space of the Hall occupied by a crowd, there was no Tuwim – we waited for him to start, but he didn't come for a long time, it turned out that he had forgotten to take his invitation from home and they didn't want to let him in, but he somehow managed to get through, he arrived with his coat unbuttoned, with a dangling scarf like in a sketch by Czermański<sup>20</sup>.

Filosofov valued Tuwim highly as a mindful translator, he praised his essay *Work on quatrain* devoted to hopeless but also stimulating work on the translation of the first stanzas of *Ruslan and Lyudmila*<sup>21</sup>. He also appreciated his linguistic experiments and musings on asemantic poetry – *Atuli mirohtady*. From Filosofov's letter to Tuwim<sup>22</sup> we can conclude that the editor considered "zaum" work as very important, especially in Poland, where in the reception of a literary work the contents are often more important than the form, and where all conversation about the text is soon replaced with debates between linguists. It's a pity that we don't know how Tuwim reacted and how the conversation went.

<sup>18</sup> L. Gomolicki, *Dzikie muzy*, p. 272. The text mentions the translation of: A. Puszkina, *Lutnia Puszkina. Wiersze i poematy*, compilation and translation by J. Tuwim, Wydawnictwo J. Przeworskiego, Warsaw 1937.

<sup>19</sup> Celebratory Gathering of Warszawskowo Puszkinskowo Komitietu on 11 February 1937 in the hall of Resursa Obywatelska attended by 1000 people. The academy was organised by a committee whose secretary was Lew Gomolicki. See *Puszkinskije dni*, "Miecz" 1937, issue 7.

<sup>20</sup> L. Gomolicki, *Dzikie muzy*, pp. 272–274. Zdzisław Czermański mentioned in the text (1890 or 1896–1970) was a painter and a caricaturist. The caricature is available at: <http://www.audiovis.nac.gov.pl/obraz/119680/> [accessed on: 8.03.2014].

<sup>21</sup> Lew Gomolicki also wrote about this essay: L.G., *Czterostiszcze Puszkina na stankie Juliana Tuwima*, "Miecz" 1934, issue 29; reprinted in: L. Gomolickij, *Soczinienija ruskogo pierioda*, Compiled by L. Biełoszewska, P. Mitzner, L. Fleishman, L. Fleishman, Vodolej (eds.), Moscow 2011, vol. III, pp. 284–288.

<sup>22</sup> Dymitr Filosofov to Julian Tuwim, Warsaw 15.11.1934, in: *Nieizdannyye pis'ma D.W. Filosofova*, Compilation by J.S. Durrant, "Russian Studies. Jeżekwartalnik rusckoj fiłologii i kul'tury" (Sankt Peterburg) 1999 [vol. III ], issue 1, pp. 74–75.

Filosofov readily forgave Tuwim the fieriness that Shevchenko wrote about, his left-wing (sometimes even pro-Soviet) inclinations. He pricked him slightly only once in writing – in his review of *Birds* by Aristophanes staged in the poet's adaptation he wrote: "If only Tuwim would quit his jokes, abandon the artificial lighting of theatrical wings and the cafes and, instead, step onto the real stage of life!"<sup>23</sup>. That call signalled that Filosofov, like Kułakowski (writing a few years earlier about Tuwim, the man defeating Tuwim, the virtuoso in *The Czarnolas affair*), had a certain idea about the real, yet thus far unfulfilled, greatness of the Polish poet, however he reminded him that he was "fortune's pet"<sup>24</sup>.

Tuwim wasn't offended at all and was invited to a meeting in Domek in Kołomno, a Polish-Russian discussion club, which operated in the office of the "Miecz" newspaper in the years 1934–1936. It happened on 3 November 1934. Józef Czapski read *Ivory tower and the street*. It's certain that everybody carefully observed the poet's reactions and so a reporter noted even that Tuwim was "especially happy" about the green lamp that was a part of Domek's decor<sup>25</sup>. In his account of the evening, Gomolicki wrote:

Czapski talked, as usual, with zeal, with tension, spreading his enthusiasm to the audience and the subject itself was so topical that it triggered, in the second part of the meeting – over tea – an exceptionally interesting discussion. (By the way, Julian Tuwim expressed, it seems, a very sound idea: between the artist and the topic lies his creative individuality – the formal aspect of his work...)<sup>26</sup>.

We can learn more about the poet's speech from a recollection of Jerzy Stempowski:

I once met Tuwim around 1936 in a literary club, where people discussed the social situation of the writer. Tuwim took part in the discussion and said that the thing that separates him most from others, making him feel different and lonely, was the exclusiveness of his poetic trade and the power over words. He expressed that idea concisely and clearly, just like we talk about things nearly obvious. I was struck then by its classicality and closeness to the age of Augustus<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> D. Filosofov, *Posiejdon, Promietiej i Julian Tuwim*, "Mołwa" 1933, issue 127. Earlier, an equally critical review of *Ptaki* was published by L. Gomolickij, "Pticy" *Aristofana w pieriedielkie B. Zimmera i J. Tuwima w Polskom teatrze*, "Mołwa" 1933, issue 110.

<sup>24</sup> D. Filosofov, *Słowo i język*.

<sup>25</sup> "Domik w Kołomnie", "Miecz" 1934, issue 26. For more on Domek in Kołomno see also P. Mitzner, *Warszawski "Domek w Kołomnie". Rekonstrukcja*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego & Towarzystwo "Więź" [series: Biblioteka "Więzi"], Warsaw 2014.

<sup>26</sup> L. Gomolickij, "Osiennije listia", "Now" 1934, issue 7, reprint in: idem, *Soczinienija russkogo pierioda*, vol. III, p. 292.

<sup>27</sup> J. Stempowski, *O pewnej tradycji klasycznej*, in: *Notatnik niespiesznego przechodnia*, compilation and introduction by J. Timoszewicz, compilation by D. Szczerba, Instytut Dokumentacji i Studiów

Such a declaration of the autonomy of the literary work was clear to Stempowski and Filosofov, even though they both (and the poet himself) never lost social and political life from sight – they followed them with attention and analysed them in their peculiar way. According to their track of thought, form was not a display of artistic abilities, but a firm bridge between tradition, present and future.

Filosofov referred to Tuwim's words in a letter to him:

I learned how easily your words reach the audience during the first meeting in "Domek in Kołomno". Your short, but so very important, speech is still discussed among the participants of that meeting.

Sincerely Yours,  
D. Filosofov

PS I'd like to remind you that on this Saturday (17 XI) there's going to be another meeting of "Domek". The topic – Lermontov. I can tell you in secret that, as a Pushkinist, I'm quite reserved about Lermontov. But among our emigration he's very popular. DF<sup>28</sup>.

We don't know if Tuwim ever appeared in "Domek in Kołomno" again, but he attended various meeting organised by Russians in Warsaw, for example the aforementioned celebration of the hundredth anniversary of Pushkin's death. It was possible to meet him in the Rossica bookstore in Chmielna street.

He also continuously tried to support Gomolicki. In a letter to Alfred Bem, a philologist living in Prague, Tuwim wrote:

I'm doing what I can for him, but, unfortunately, I can't do much. [...] The tragedy, dear Professor, is that it isn't Gomolicki the Russian that starves, it's Gomolicki the Poet, because Polish poetic youth is in the very same position<sup>29</sup>.

Tuwim probably knew Bem from the time he was staying in Warsaw in the early twenties<sup>30</sup>. Thanks to Tuwim's intercession in "Skamander", they published

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nad Literaturą Polską Oddział Muzeum Literatury im. Adama Mickiewicza & Towarzystwo "Więź" [Biblioteka "Więzi"], Warsaw 2012, vol. I, issue 22 (first printing: "Kultura" 1954, issue 4).

<sup>28</sup> Dymitr Filosofov to Julian Tuwim, Warsaw 15.11.1934, in: *Niezdannyjepis'ma D.W. Filosofova*, p. 75.

<sup>29</sup> Julian Tuwim to Alfred Bem, Warsaw 20.10.1936, Archiwum Alfreda Bema. Literární Archiv Památníku Národního Písemnictví, Prague. All cited letters of Julian Tuwim were written in Polish.

<sup>30</sup> Alfred Bem was then the leader of the Tawerna Poetów group. In 1934 he met Tuwim in Warsaw at the II International Congress of Slavists. Tuwim regularly read Bem's reviews and essays printed in Russian newspapers.



Gomolicki's essay, an extended version of the reading from "Domek in Kołomno". In the first paragraph he wrote:

Tuwim's article about the zaum language titled *Atuli mirohlady* reminded me of the years before the revolution, which opened an impassable chasm between the old and the modern Russia. It was then that Russian cubo-futurists with their characteristic zest started to propagate zaum... Among them was Chlebnikow, a true pathetic poet, not an advertiser, whose work had a dash of genius in it, a monk or, rather, a fool for Christ of poetry<sup>31</sup>.

In 1936 Tuwim published in "Skamander" a brilliant translation of one of Gomolicki's early poems [Pre-thunder electric grass]<sup>32</sup>. Years later Gomolicki wrote about the circumstances in which his translation appeared and its repercussions:

Soon after my first visit to Tuwim's – a letter from him: in the envelope on a folded letter sheet a rough copy crossed with corrections – a translation of my old Russian poem from 1925 (one from the end of a lyrical diary – separated and printed somewhere had found its way to Tuwim, which I didn't even know). The copy suffered the same fate as all my books and manuscripts from before the war – it burnt in the Warsaw Uprising. The translation survived and was printed in "Skamander" (1936, vol. 75). Czechowicz came to us to Leszno (oh yes, we still lived in Leszno at that time) with that issue of "Skamander" and smiled with his double smile:

– I came by tram, I've never been in this district much, so I'm making some interesting observations and somewhere here, quite near, I saw over a hair salon a sign: Tuwim – backcombing of poems. And here, I'm now reading your poem, which came straight from that place. I will translate it **for real**.

I'm sorry I somewhat became the reason for that competition. I thought that Czechowicz had forgotten, but two years later his translation appeared in "Kamienie" (1938, vol. 7). Now, after all that time both translations were included in collections – the multi-volume works of Tuwim and the modest Czechowicz's collection<sup>33</sup>.

After the publication of Pushkin's Lyre, Gomolicki wrote in "Miecz":

Tuwim works hard with his "translator's" skill, doesn't wait for inspiration to come. It comes on its own. He avoids the temptation of the easy correlation of rhymes and verses in similar languages. He uses all his poetic experience to create a harmonious equivalent of the original "precisely showing its spirit and power" (as Sumarokov

<sup>31</sup> L. Gomolicki, *Od pozarozumowości, poprzez milczenie...*, "Skamander" 1935, issue 57.

<sup>32</sup> Idem, [*Przedpiorunowe elektryczne trawy...*], translated by J. Tuwim, "Skamander" 1936, p. 75.

<sup>33</sup> L. Gomolicki, *Dziki muzy*, p. 336.



taught us Russians<sup>34</sup>). In most cases he keeps the Russian verse form, so extremely hard to keep in Polish with its monosyllabic rhymes. He keeps it and even enhances it, at the same time, cleansing his poetic tone. And so he creates (not always, but in many places, which create this book's leitmotif) the illusion of Pushkin's poetic melody, Pushkin's rhythm – his lilt. It's amazing that when a Russian reads these translations, Pushkin's words sound anew, distilled, in the proper rhythm, as if all the dust that has covered since childhood the school notes and collections fell off at the touch of the Polish poet's hand. The words that we have gone past a hundred times, the compositions of sounds, which became “darvaldai” [meaningless words]<sup>35</sup> (Biety), suddenly come back from the past, full of depth and meaning. For too long we have looked into the world of Pushkin, so long in fact, that we stopped seeing its phenomena and beauty. Tuwim, like a wizard, shows them to us again in all their initial non-obviousness, with different words from a different language<sup>36</sup>.

Tuwim, in turn, praised highly the translations of Polish romantic poetry into Russian made by a writer from Vilnius, Dorofey Bochanas. They were supposed to be printed in “Russian Word” with an introduction from Tuwim, but in the end it didn't happen. The community of Russians in Vilnius suffered greatly in the late thirties due to the anti-minority politics of the provincial governor, Ludwik Bociński, and their activity was greatly limited.

From an interview given for the Vilnius-based magazine “Russian Word”, we find out that Tuwim was well oriented in current Russian emigrational poetry. “I know your young ones from Warsaw” – he said in the interview. – “It is a tragic generation of people who have lost touch with their homeland. But, among them are people with a spark, who will hopefully not be suffocated by an atmosphere of backwardness. Maybe something good will come of them”<sup>37</sup>. Those “young ones” were surely Lew Gomolicki and Georgij Klinger, a promising Russian poet, and, after the war, a brilliant Orthodox Christian theologian. Their visit to Tuwim's house was described by Gomolicki before the war:

Tuwim was not expecting anybody else besides the two of us. We sat and talked about the “edges of Skamander”. The doorbell. An unexpected guest. Tuwim is waiting – who will appear in the still closed antechamber door? All that appears, however, is a hand with a book. The hand waves the book in the air, then the book

<sup>34</sup> Aleksandr Sumarokow (1717–1777) – a poet, a playwright, a representative of Russian classicism.

<sup>35</sup> A. Biety, *Pierwoje swidanije*. Zapożyczenie z *Trojki* Fiodora Glinki, used as a proper name in the novel by Andrey Biely *Kotik Lietajew*.

<sup>36</sup> L. Gomolickij, *Lutnia Puszkina*. *Julian Tuwim*. Warsaw 1937, “Miecz” 1937, issue 7, reprint in: idem, *Soczinienija ruskogo pierioda*, vol. III, pp. 449–450.

<sup>37</sup> W. Borkowski, *Julian Tuwim*.

falls to the carpet. The hand disappears. Tuwim jumps up. “What is this?” – He runs to the anteroom. A pleasant guest. He says to him: “Zbyszek”, kisses him on the cheek and leads him into the room. He picks the book up from the floor, laughing he points to the inscription. It is Uniłowski’s sea log. Uniłowski had brought his new book. He stooped, fooled around, and mumbled: – Give me something. – But what, what?! And he left. In the anteroom, Tuwim offered him his cane, but he declined: – I would, but I do not usually use canes. He seemed jovial, full of vitality, strong and very young. I did not find out about his terminal illness until the day that Tuwim was experiencing some complications of the flu. He was especially lively that day. In his hand, he held our tiny “Holy” [small poetry collections published by Gomolicki – PM], when the news about Uniłowski was broken. He fell silent. This information crushed him<sup>38</sup>.

Here I will mention a young female poet whom Tuwim mentored. She was born in Kiev, came from a Jewish family and Russian was the primary language spoken in her home. She grew up in Volhynia, where there was a numerous community of Russian immigrant poets, and she could well have begun writing stikhi (Russian for “verses”) instead of poems. The part which Russian poetry played in building her craftsmanship remains up for discussion. The poet mentioned was Zuzanna Ginczanka.

Besides that, Bem sent Tuwim poems written by a group called “Skit” from Prague. This is what he wrote about them:

All of these pieces are heavily influenced by Pasternak, but this is no offence: anyone who has read this unusual poet cannot resist the charm which flows from his poems. One intriguing thing: How intense and beautiful is the creativity of the women represented by Skit!<sup>39</sup>.

And in another letter:

Please send my sincere appreciation to the (female) poet Czegrincewa! Gomolicki sent me two of her poems: Bolezn’ and Skul’ptor – so beautiful! I’m still waiting to receive the collection of her poems you told me you would send. I think I will pick a few and translate them<sup>40</sup>.

<sup>38</sup> L. Gomolickij, *Ob uszedszych*, “Miecz” 1938, issue 4 (here you can also find the analysis of Tuwim’s recollection on Bolesław Leśmian from “Wiadomości Literackie”); reprint: L. Gomolickij, *Soczinienija ruskogo pierioda*, vol. III, pp. 527–528.

<sup>39</sup> Julian Tuwim to Alfred Bem, Warsaw 30.05.1933, Archiwum Alfreda Bema, Literárni Archiv Památniku Národního Písemnictví, Prague.

<sup>40</sup> Julian Tuwim to Alfred Bem, Warsaw 20.10.1936.

Tuwim gave advice not only to young Russian poets. He was one of the two Poles who appreciated the work of Sólomon Bart, a Warsaw-based peer of Tuwim, who had only been recalled two years earlier by Lazar Fleishman. Bart was a loner, split off from almost the whole of the “brotherhood of Russian writers”. Tuwim’s letter to him was saved as a quote in a letter from Bart himself to Alfred Bem:

My opinion of your poems is most high. It is another thing, that they are detached from so-called “life”. But who knows, perhaps this “timelessness” is a good thing... The most beautiful of your poems are the ones on pages. 13, 19, 21, 24. The first one especially. But in the rest of your poems (with very few exceptions) you serve the general basic craft (a quote from my poem). It is difficult to reach into the core of poetic emotion more deeply<sup>41</sup>.

\* \* \*

“Timelessness”... Should one interpret Tuwim in the political and ideological categories of the twentieth century? At first glance – sacrilege, yet something and someone (simply the poet himself) encourages it, because sometimes being political, as he wrote, “suited him”.

It is just as difficult to define his stance towards Russia. And the typical pattern, often present in the Polish way of thinking, where we separate Russian culture from the Empire, Pushkin from the Tzar, and Mayakovsky from Lenin, is not enough.

Tuwim’s juvenilia, which were written during the first World War and the Bolshevik revolution, expose the double face of mother Russia – terrifying and fascinating. In the grief rhapsody for Nicholas Romanov, there is no triumph, but there is compassion. Then again in the wild dances of the revolutionary mass in *The Great Teodora* (which are poems which, along with *Ivan the Terrible*, *The Red Amazon* and *Mother Russia*, clearly form a series about the revolution) we see not only terror, but even barbaric ecstasy. Tuwim’s visions become close to those of Alexander Blok, the author of *Scythians*, *The Twelve* and the essay *The last days of the Tsar’s rule*. But “close” is the only adequate word here, there is no correlation, because these pieces and their framework occur simultaneously.

Perhaps analogies are visible due to “musicality”. Blok divided the phenomena of this world into “musical” (essential) and “non-musical”, and the revolution was initially filed under “musical”. The musicality of Tuwim’s poetic world was stressed by its Russian interpreters: Szewczenko and Kulakowski, who claimed

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<sup>41</sup> As cited in: Solomon Bart to Alfred Bem, [Warsaw] 30.11.1934, in: S. Bart, *Stichotworienija. 1915–1940*, compilation by D. Hessen, L. Fleishman, Vodolej, Moscow 2008, p. 259.

that the poet himself remains in an “unusually musical awe at the power which he holds over words”<sup>42</sup>.

It is true that sometimes Tuwim raised his voice, agitated, was delighted with some things, but protested against others. Between these intense stances on political issues and towards Russia, the two Russias: Soviet Russia and the emigrants’ Russia, he spoke in a very balanced manner or rather unstable manner. Borkowski recalls: “Julian Tuwim was a wonderful conversation partner, although very careful in his statements. He made his judgements incredibly carefully, like near questions even, sometime covering one or another difficult bit of a conversation with humour”<sup>43</sup>. His caution was partially due to the fact that he was dealing with a community of Russian emigrants – one which was very divided in terms of politics, ambitions and creativity. He was closest to the community in Warsaw, but he did not want to put off the Russians from Vilnius among whom he saw talented writers. Tuwim’s diplomacy did not always bring good effects. He valued Jewhen Malaniuk, the Ukrainian immigrant poet who did show up to meetings in Filosofov’s circle, but privately, and as a friend, he accused Tuwim of excess fraternization with the Russians. The archives contain a letter which voices this opinion<sup>44</sup>.

One can say that Tuwim was a Russophile, even though he happened to use the stereotypical Russian when in a poetic gallop, and usually the stereotypical Russian immigrant. Hence the random boyars in *Ball at the Opera*, or the free hussar Zhopov fighting for the Frankists in Spain<sup>45</sup>.

As an interpreter of Russian literature, Tuwim maintained a balance between the country and its emigrants. Let’s make a chronological view of this.

In a conversation with Borkowski, Tuwim claims that his first translation from Russian happened at a middle school in Lodz in 1911, when he translated his school-friend’s poem into Polish. Before the revolution, Tuwim was already translating poetry by Vyacheslav Ivanov, Igor Severyanin, Konstantin Balmont, Valery Bryusov, and a play by Dmitry Merezhkovsky *Tsar Paul I*. In 1919, he translated *A Cloud in Trousers* by Vladimir Mayakovsky, and poems by Balmont, Blok, Bryusov, Sologub, and Gorodecki in the years 1920–1924; in 1925 he translated *Ship of the Righteous* by Nikolai Evreinov. Evreinov, a brilliant reformer of theatre, fled Russia, but was received exceptionally unfavourably by the Russian immigrant community, including Filosofov, who considered him to be a cynic. He could not forgive Evreinov his pre-revolutionary parodies of disputes circling around religion and philosophy which he used to organize, and which Evreinov ridiculed on the stage of the small theatre Distorting Mirror.

<sup>42</sup> *Sowriemiennye polskije poety...*, p. 107.

<sup>43</sup> W. Borkowski, *Julian Tuwim*.

<sup>44</sup> A letter from 14.03.1936, Archiwum Juliana Tuwima, Muzeum Literatary im. A. Mickiewicza w Warszawie.

<sup>45</sup> J. Tuwim, *Wezme ja kontusz...*, “Szpilki” 1936, issue 33.

Starting at the end of the twenties, Tuwim paid more attention to the translations of classic Russian literature (Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Lev Tolstoy, and most importantly – Pushkin); and poems by nineteenth century poets (Fet, Nekrasov, Tyutchev), emigrants (Khodasevich, Gomolicki) and poets from Russia (Pasternak, Biezymiński, Svetlov). This was the beginning of Tuwim's planned great anthology of Russian poetry.

As we know, Soviet journalism devalued emigrational literature, and emigrational journalism devalued Soviet literature. Tuwim looked for good poetry on both sides of the barricade. Both the white and the red Russia read and valued his works. His popularity in the Soviet Union was immense, and lasts until this day. The numerous translations of Tuwim's works confirm the suggestions made by Lechoń and Zawodziński who believed that he is the most involved Polish poet when it comes to the tradition of Russian poetry.

Here I will digress as Jerzy Pomianowski asked me to. During the war, after being free from forced labour in the mines, Pomianowski started medical school. He interrupted his studies in order to return to Poland in 1946. He planned on finishing them. This was when Tuwim authorized him to withdraw his unused honorariums from Soviet publishing houses. Thanks to this, Pomianowski could study medicine in Moscow for two more years.

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A map of Tuwim's pre-war contacts in the world of literature could be made based on his correspondence. Unfortunately, only bits and pieces of it remain. The poet's archives contain singular letters from Balmont, Filosofov, Khodasevich, Erenburg and Chaliapin. Three letters from Tuwim to Alfred Bem were found. Several years ago, *Burning Contents* with a handwritten dedication for Vladislav Khodasevich was available for purchase for an immense amount of money in a Warsaw used book store. How did it get back to Warsaw and who bought it? We would give a lot for a transcript of the conversations between Julian Tuwim and Roman Jakobson – first in Prague, later, during the war, in New York. After the meeting in Prague, Tuwim wrote to Bem

As for the very nice Jakobson – please, if you may, send him my sincerest and warmest regards! Strange thing: I saw him once in my life, for half an hour (we had wine in Prague just before my departure), and this man charmed me! And how educated is he! Such a word leader! I am an amateur of linguistics, but I read linguistic works avidly. Unfortunately, I only know two of Jakobson's books: one about Khlebnikov and another about a Czech poem<sup>46</sup>.

<sup>46</sup> Julian Tuwim to Alfred Bem, Warsaw 20.10.1936.

They had a bit more time for each other in New York: “Such knowledge of poetry – and besides that, what a comrade and gypsy!” – Tuwim wrote in a letter to his sister<sup>47</sup>.

One could say that even during the commotion of the war, Gomolicki did not lose touch with Tuwim. We read that he valued the “Scraps of Polish Flowers which got through during the occupation. Through the ocean, through the army fronts. I copied them on my typewriter, they worked as well as pamphlets”<sup>48</sup>. Let us notice that rewriting these texts could have had a clear purpose. We know that Stefan Żółkiewski, Gomolicki’s supporter after the war, transferred written literature into the Warsaw Ghetto, including fragments of Polish Flowers. They could have known each other from before the war, for example through Seweryn Pollak.

“It was then [during the occupation] that I read *Ball at the Opera* – fascinating! – Leon Gomolicki recalled”<sup>49</sup>. It is possible that Polish Flowers in some way influenced the form of his autobiographical poem which he wrote in the years 1940–1941. Gomolicki recalled Tuwim in a series dedicated to Dmitry Filosofov at Christmas 1939:

I do believe that our ancestors were quite bored  
In the little house in Kolomna. But we recall  
Our little house ever so warmly where we would greet  
Poles with heart, and Russian oil cake  
Hospitable out here in a foreign land just the same.  
The cardboard samovar smokes like a real one.  
The smoke’s made of paper, Pushkin stands behind it  
Tuwim recites poems with excitement<sup>50</sup>.

They met again in Lodz in 1946:

I stood in front of a bookshop display and – someone embraced me from behind. For the first time in years I saw his face up close, the attentive, amicably attentive glance: you’re alive, how great! The meaning of these words = how good is it, that we are alive at all. Upon his return he searched for people that he knew before the war’s flood. During that first meeting he complained that he could not publish *Ball at the Opera*<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> Julian Tuwim to Irena Tuwim, 1943. As cited in: J. Tuwim, *Listy do przyjaciół-pisarzy*, compilation by T. Januszewski, Czytelnik, Warsaw 1979, p. 438.

<sup>48</sup> L. Gomolicki, *Dzikie muzy*, p. 274.

<sup>49</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>50</sup> L. Gomolicki, *Świątecznyje oktawy (Bożonarodzeniowe oktawy)*, in: *Soczinienija russkogo pierioda*, vol. I, p. 589.

<sup>51</sup> L. Gomolicki, *Dzikie muzy*, p. 274.

Because of his past as a journalist on emigrational papers, Leon (no longer Lev) Gomolicki tries to lie low after the war. He joins the Polish Worker's Party, and the Polish-Soviet Friendship Society. He even tries to change his surname to Gomulicki, (but is convinced not to do so, since there was already one activist by that last name – Juliusz Wiktor), but at the end of 1947 a report was sent to the party organization.

Between January 3 and January 5 1948, Tuwim sent a telegraph to Gomolicki: "I will do everything you ask for, do not worry"<sup>52</sup>. Soon, he writes up a letter in defence of Gomolicki. It did not remain whole, we only know the first page. It was directed to the chairman of the Board of Inspections of the Polish Worker's Party Committee in Lodz:

Honourable citizen!

In the letter from 31 December 1947, you ask me to define the political face of citizen Leon Gomolicki in the period between 1932 and 1939. This request is directed at me due to citizen Gomolicki's account that the two of us are familiar. I find out from your letter that citizen Gomolicki, a member of the Polish Worker's Party, has been accused of anti-Soviet and anti-leftist activity on Warsaw territory before the year 1939. Here is my answer:

I cannot provide a political description of citizen Gomolicki during the given time frame, because our conversations pertained mostly to literature, art, and Russian-to-Polish translations. Citizen Gomolicki was, and is, a great expert on these topics, he has been of great help with his expert advice numerous times, and he was already doing good for the cause of a deeper understanding of Russian literature in Polish society. I know nothing of citizen Gomolicki's anti-leftist or anti-Soviet activity. As far as I remember, he published his literary and poetic works in Russian emigrational magazines, but there were no other Russian magazines on Polish territory. He wrote solely in Russian and had no access to Polish magazines.

It is hard to imagine the anti-democratic (therefore fascist) activity of a man who, during the greatest intensity of nationalistic and anti-Semitic reactive trends, had always shown me great kindness and never avoided me, quite the opposite: he underlined the feeling of friendship which connected us every chance he got. And this was during a time when Polish fascists were calling on people to (literally) hang me<sup>53</sup>.

One must add that Filosofov's circle, of which Gomolicki was a part, was devoid of any chauvinism, therefore devoid of anti-Semitism. It is possible that thanks to Tuwim's intervention, Gomolicki's case was closed. During one of his

<sup>52</sup> J. Tuwim, *Listy do przyjaciół-pisarzy*, p. 440.

<sup>53</sup> Muzeum Literatury w Warszawie (signature 3050). Leon Gomolicki didn't agree to the publication of that letter in the collection of Tuwim's correspondence, *Listy do przyjaciół-pisarzy*.



visits to Warsaw, a well-remembered, because it was the last, meeting took place between Gomolicki and Tuwim:

In Warsaw's Kopciuszek<sup>54</sup>, When I stepped in to rest and began looking for a seat – from a faraway table under a wall painted a vague white he waved me over with his bony hand. His arctic-white hair surprised me. A caring tone – he knew about my troubles, those which he had helped remove. [...] My first novel came out six years after his death. To him, I remained a Russicist<sup>55</sup>.

The echoes of Tuwim's pre-war contacts with Russian immigrants reached him through many paths. Maybe he remembered Vladimir Czichaczow, a man known for performing as a loon and litigant, from a meeting at the Literary Community. He wrote to Tuwim after the war, while living in destitution. He wrote long letters, he came to his house in Anina. He attempted to convince the poet, that he had (in his memory) unknown poems by Lermontov. In reality, these were his own works.

Patient, Tuwim read the letters, wrote back, some of these poems he considered good and helped Czichaczowow earn a stipend from the Ministry of Art and Culture in 1952.

Early in the spring of 1953, Borkowski – the same one that interviewed him for the Vilnius-based "Russian Word" – visited Tuwim like a guest from outer space. It is not impossible that this pseudonym hid one of the pre-war Russian journalists from Vilnius – Sergiusz Powołocki or Georgij Sorgonin-Rozwadowski. This time he was sent by a newly established monthly magazine of the Russian minority named "Zwieno". Based on a conversation with Tuwim, he (anonymously)<sup>56</sup> published an article, as well as eight of his poems, *To the Simple Man* coming first (it was also the only poem which was dated 1929 as a precaution). In the middle of the columns of verses, a facsimile of a specially made signature in Cyrillic appeared: "Юлиан Тувим".

During the final years of his life, the Polish poet, this time in much more difficult circumstances, sees and feels two Russias again. One side shows the nation which defeated Hitler. The other – immigrants, even more alien in Poland now than before the war, forced to hide their identities or forced to carry them at the price of painful compromises.

<sup>54</sup> A popular café near Al. Jerozolimskie (between Krucza and Marszałkowska).

<sup>55</sup> L. Gomolicki, *Dzikie muzy*, p. 275.

<sup>56</sup> [W. Borkowski], *Julian Tuwim*, "Zwieno" 1953, issue 4–5.

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Piotr Mitzner

**At Home and Abroad. Julian Tuwim and the Russian Emigration**

(Summary)

Julian Tuwim was an accomplished translator of Russian poetry. Until recently, his contacts with the Russian emigrants in Poland in the interwar period had been scarcely known. The article expands on the topic of the influence of Tuwim's poetry on the members of the Russian emigration and attempts to describe his role in the life of the Russian diaspora. What is even more interesting, Tuwim maintained his Russian relations also in communist Poland, helping and supporting those who were forced to hide their past. Members of the Russian emigration (especially a distinguished critic Dymitr Filosofov) held Tuwim's poetry in high esteem, and they also appreciated him as a gifted translator. The article builds its critical argument on rare texts published in Russian emigration periodicals, archives and the post-war writings of Leon Gomolicki.

Keywords: Julian Tuwim, Dymitr Filosofov, Leon Gomolicki, Polish-Russian literary connection