

AMERICAN STUDIES IN POLAND

A solid basis for the future development of American studies in Poland was given first by the establishment of chairs and departments of English at Polish universities. The growth of English studies in this country gradually brought about an increasing interest in the civilization and literature of the English-speaking community beyond the Ocean; the fact that Professor Roman Dyboski, the founder and senior of English studies in Poland, gave also an important contribution to studies in American literature and civilization was a typical precedent for his younger colleagues and pupils before the war.

Roman Dyboski, professor of English at the Jagellonian University in Cracow from 1912, was also active in spreading the knowledge about his country in Britain and in America. In 1928-9 he spent a year in the U.S.A. on a lecture tour visiting universities and the main intellectual centres. A result of his trip was an encyclopaedic study *Stany Zjednoczone A. P.; Wrazenia i refleksje*, Warsaw, 1930. Apart from travelling-impressions and special studies by various authors it was the first ample study of America for the educated Polish reader. The variety of exhaustively treated problems ranges from geography and history as moulding factors of the American nation to a discussion of American political life, American literature or the intellectual qualities of the Americans. Dyboski presents his remarks against an imposing background of his humanistic knowledge of European civilization and of his profound sense of history. This very background makes his book still readable and interesting after thirty years, and some of his statements were fully confirmed by the subsequent course of events.

During his compulsory leisure in 1939-45 Dyboski produced a large history of American literature from the period of the Revolution to 1939 including the results of his many years' lecturing on the subject and of his reflections during the hard years of German occupation. Owing to various reasons the book was published thir-

teen years after the author's death under the title *Wielcy pisarze amerykańscy*, Warsaw, 1958. It is an exhaustive study of American literature discussed in chapters corresponding to the respective stages of the development of America — from Benjamin Franklin to XXth century poetry, novel and drama, including chapters on writers on American civilization: H. Adams, J. Dewey, Santayana, H. L. Mencken and others, and on American literary criticism. As Dyboski could not avail himself of materials published after 1939, his book was supplemented by Professor Stanislaw Helsztynski who gave a compact survey of the activities of modern writers included in Dyboski's study up to the present time and added new informative chapters on Steinbeck, Wolfe, Caldwell, G. Stein, W. Saroyan and H. Fast, on Th. Wilder, Irvin Shaw, Tennessee Williams and A. Miller. Dyboski's work and Helsztynski's supplement form a serious source of information for students of American literature and for the educated public in this country.

Before the publication of Dyboski's book Polish readers were not deprived, however, of a text-book. It was the history of American literature by Professor Tadeusz Grzebieniowski included in vol. III. of the *Wielka literatura powszechna (History of World Literature)* published in Warsaw in 1932. Grzebieniowski's survey is, of course, a briefer one: it has an encyclopaedic character with a large number of authors discussed and presented in a very lucid manner. Vol. VI. of the *World Literature* consisting of samples of poetry and prose has an American section put together by Professor Grzebieniowski from the best Polish pre-war translations of representative American authors by eminent Polish poets and men of letters.

After the war Professor Grzebieniowski published a text-book for dramatic colleges on American theatre and drama from its beginnings in the XVIIIth century up to 1914 (*Dramat oraz scena amerykańska XIX. i początku XX. wieku*; series: *Materialy do nauki historii teatru*, zeszyt II., czesc I., Warsaw-Lodz, 1954). It is the first study of this kind in Poland introducing the readers into the earlier history of the American stage, hardly known before in this country. It also gives summaries and extracts from earlier Ame-

rican plays of historical importance: from Royall Tyler and W. Dunlap to George W. P. Custis, D. Belasco, Clyde Fitch and W. V. Moody. This study forms a very useful background reading for the presently awakened interest in modern American drama by making the public aware of its previous development of almost two centuries.

To pre-war times belong also the first activities in the field of American studies by Professor Stanislaw Helsztynski. Starting in 1928 he began to insert in the then leading Polish literary weekly «Wiadomosci literackie» essays on English and American writers. A collection of these essays appeared in 1939 under the title *Od Szekspira do Joyce'a (From Shakespeare to Joyce)* (Warsaw, 1939; second ed. Warsaw, 1948). The American section of the book includes essays on modern American poets, on Eugene O'Neill, Pearl Buck and other American women-novelists (W. Cather, E. Wharton, M. Kennedy, F. Hurst and M. Mitchell), and a longer study on Walt Whitman being a revised reprint of Helsztynski's introduction to a translation of Whitman by St. Napierski of 1934 (*Walt Whitman: 75 poematów*). Stanislaw Helsztynski being not only an eminent English scholar, but also historian of Polish literature, novelist and a well-known poet is in the lucky situation of being able to illustrate his essays on American poetry with translations of his own; he connects happily the ease of style of a man of letters with a deep knowledge of his subject.

After the war Helsztynski continued his essays, often occasioned by the publication of Polish translations. They appeared in another collection *Od Fieldinga do Steinbecka (From Fielding to Steinbeck)*, (Warsaw, 1948). It deals with the novel only, and the American section starts with F. Cooper and closes with J. Steinbeck. The book played an important part in Poland's literary life shortly after the war by making the reading public aware of the important development of the American novel in the last 25 years and of its increasing importance in world literature. Helsztynski did a lot of pioneer work in this respect by presenting to his readers the work of Hemingway since 1939 and by first introducing W. Saroyan, Th. Wolfe, E. Caldwell, W. Faulkner and J. Steinbeck.

Just as Roman Dyboski spent the war period in preparing, among

other works, his history of American literature, Helsztynski began writing from 1942 a study on America entitled *Ave Roosevelt* (publ. Warsaw, 1949). It is a sort of miscellany on American history and civilization beginning with the biographies and evaluation of three presidents: Lincoln, Wilson and F. D. Roosevelt. This is followed by a survey of opinions of eminent French authors on America (Helsztynski justly thinks the French approach the most characteristic and understandable for European readers, and his wide range of sources enables him to build up a fair and objective picture). The French section is followed by a survey of American opinions on the U.S.A. and, characteristically, the verdict here is in general a much harsher one. Finally, in this section, we can look at America through the eyes of a Slav—Louis Adamic, the author of *My America* (1938). The section on American literature deals, apart from classics like Hawthorne or Melville, with such writers not discussed by Helsztynski in his previous books as Upton Sinclair, Th. Dreiser, and authors of popular historical novels (H. Allen, Kenneth Roberts or M. Mitchell).

At present Stanislaw Helsztynski is busy preparing a large study *Profile klasyków amerykańskich* (*Outlines of American Classics*); his longer monographic study on Longfellow is in print being an introduction to the first Polish complete translation of *Hiawatha* by Roman Jackow.

Among younger scholars Bronislaw Wisniowski has been contributing for the past three years a number of longer articles to literary and learned periodicals. His subject, thus far, is the modern American drama, the novel, and the theory of literary research in America (e. g. a general survey of modern American drama in «Dialog» 10, 1957, a study on O'Neill and Tennessee Williams in «Tworczość» 4 and 8, 1958; on Hemingway in «Przegład Humanistyczny» 1, 2, 1958, and on modern American trends in literary research in the same periodical, 2, 1959). He also regularly supplies the magazine «Tworczość» with critical reviews of outstanding modern American works.

Finally, one more contribution should be mentioned in this brief survey. It comes from the borderland between Polish and Ame-

rican studies, being a monographic treatise on the Polish language as used by Americans of Polish origin. It comes from Professor Witold Doroszewski and is entitled *Jezyk polski w Stanach Zjednoczonych A. P.* (*Polish Language in the U.S.A.*, Warsaw, 1938).

As far as preparatory work is concerned, one has to register an increasing interest in American literature among undergraduates. Out of 110 theses presented by students graduating from the English Department of the University of Warsaw between 1955 and 1958 about one sixth was concerned with America, mostly with major contemporary novelists and dramatists. The trend is on a constant increase. It seems that young people are mainly interested in the two literary kinds in which modern American writers give their most original contribution to world literature. Curiosity about life in America as reflected in the works of American novelists and dramatists may also play a certain part in this preference of prose to poetry. There is, however, a number of theses on problems of style and language (e. g. one on Faulkner's style written during the last academic year).

An indispensable basis for the development of interest and of subsequent studies in any foreign literature is always formed by the body of translations. Polish versions of masterpieces of American literature have quite a long history starting in 1784 with an adaptation of Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanach*. It seems, however, that the post-war and the present situation in this field may be of greater interest and of higher importance for the future perspectives of American studies in this country.

The first post-war years in Poland were characterized by a rather haphazard activity. Apart from re-editions of popular pre-war successes (Upton Sinclair, Sinclair Lewis, Pearl Buck or Margaret Mitchell) there were several volumes introducing writers little or not known before in this country (John Steinbeck, Erskine Caldwell), or current light reading like Betty MacDonald's *The Egg and I*. A successful campaign was also started to popularize XIXth century classics. It may be said that in the past decade Hawthorne and Melville, scattered in tens of thousands of copies over the country definitely became part of the national cultural heritage siding with

Poe or Whitman and Twain whose position had been established long ago, not to speak about such eternal classics for the young as Beecher-Stowe, F. Cooper or O. Curwood. In the early fifties the top place among translations was held by Howard Fast and Albert Maltz, but it must be said that the old popular favourites (Cooper, Curwood, London and Twain) firmly held their positions by annual reprints.

From 1956 there started a planned action of introducing modern American literature on a larger scale: E. Caldwell, Truman Capote, J. Dos Passos, W. Faulkner, E. Hemingway, Norman Mailer, W. Saroyan, J. Steinbeck and Thornton Wilder began to be represented every year by several new translations so that the process of catching up with the present developments in America may be considered as fairly well-advanced. There were also, apart from uninterrupted annual re-issues, good collected editions of Jack London (10 vols in 1957) and of F. Cooper's Leather-Stocking series (1956, re-issued 1958). In the post-war period we also had a number of translations from Bret Harte, Stephen Crane, Frank Norris and Dorothy Parker. The activities of the theatres and of the dramatic magazines in popularizing American drama form a large separate chapter. A general increase of interest in reading, large tirage and low prices of books gave also to American literature an unprecedented chance to penetrate among the widest range of readers. At present it benefits from the general cultural policy of the State together with all the other important literatures of the world.

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