

„[...] We have lost
our hearts to you”.
Some initial remarks
on the correspondence
between Zygmunt Haupt
and Maria and Józef Czapski

Paweł Panas

ORCID: 0000-0002-7611-1992

The correspondence between Zygmunt Haupt and Maria and Józef Czapski dates to 1950-1975¹. All surviving letters are stored in Haupt's archive at Stanford University Library, and in Józef and Maria Czapski's Archive at the National Museum in Cracow. The whole collection comprises sixty-one letters and postcards (including one letter sent to Haupt's widow following his sudden death).

Thirty-one of those letters were written by Haupt (thirty are handwritten, one is typed), nine were addressed to Józef Czapski, and twenty-four to Maria Czapska. Some contain information addressed to both siblings, especially letters to Maria at the time she was suffering

¹ All quotes from Haupt's correspondence with Maria and Józef Czapski are from Jerzy Giedroyc, *Zygmunt Haupt, Listy 1947-1975*, edited by Paweł Panas (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Więź, 2022); all quotes are followed by a reference to the page number in the source text. The titular line comes from Czapski's letter to Haupt from 9 April 1964 r. (p. 197).

from severe vision problems (resulting in two surgeries), and so her brother would read her letters to her (knowing this, Haupt would address a substantial part of his letters directly to him). Haupt's letters are well-preserved and legible. For some time they were stored in the Przewłocki family's private collection, and later they were sold to the National Museum. Notably, Haupt's Stanford archive does not hold any copies or drafts of his letters.

Maria and Józef Czapski jointly sent thirty letters and postcards to Haupt (twenty-eight are handwritten, two are typed), which are all stored in Haupt's personal archive. Their letters are much harder to read due to their somewhat illegible handwriting. Moreover, some letters are poorly preserved because of improper storage and extensive damage from flooding². As a result, some fragments are rendered completely illegible – fortunately, not many, and thanks to modern methods of working with archival materials it is possible to read most of those letters, as well as to recreate the original shape of the correspondence³. Additionally, there are some issues related to uncertain or incorrect dating of some of the letters, which creates additional difficulties with establishing the chronology and logics of the reconstructed correspondence.

The earliest surviving letter (most likely indeed the first one in that correspondence) was written by Józef Czapski at the time he was travelling in the USA, raising funds for Instytut Literacki [Literary Institute] and his magazine “Kultura” [Culture]⁴. In that letter, dated to 28 January 1950, Czapski declines Haupt's invitation to New Orleans:

Thank you very much for your kind letter and invitation. I would love to accept your proposal to come to New Orleans, but it seems completely impossible for the time being.

I will be trying to postpone my planned return to France by a few weeks, because I have received so many invitations to give lectures, and I am so busy that I am unable to attend even to my most urgent matters. And New Orleans is so terribly far away.

I need to prepare three lectures for Harvard University, Georgetown University in Washington, and in the meantime, I am going to give many speeches for the Polish diaspora, and since my English is not very good, I am taking lessons every day and studying a lot.

Once again, many thanks for your kindness, and if by any chance my plans change, and I am able to visit you, I will let you know at once and accept your invitation (p. 191).

² Part of Haupt's personal archive was flooded while still in his possession in New Orleans, see Aleksander Madyda, *Zygmunt Haupt. Życie i twórczość literacka* [Zygmunt Haupt. Life and literary work] (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, 1998), 12.

³ The present paper was delivered at a conference in Poznań (Zygmunt Haupt. *Warsztat pisarski – inspiracje – kontekst* [Zygmunt Haupt. Writing – inspirations – contexts, Poznań 20–21 September 2021]), and it is part of a bigger project: publication of Haupt's correspondence with Giedroyc and “Kultura” environment, including – of course – Maria and Józef Czapski. The edited correspondence between Haupt and Giedroyc (referenced in the first footnote), including an appendix containing, among others, letters to Maria and Józef Czapski. Janusz S. Nowak assisted with transcribing letters by Maria and Józef Czapski with such skillfulness that only short parts of individual letters could not be transcribed (each such case is scrupulously marked in the text).

⁴ Józef Czapski was in Canada and the USA from December 1949 to June 1950. See Andrzej Stanisław Kowalczyk, *Wena do polityki. O Giedroyciu i Mieroszewskim* [In mood for politics. On Giedroyc and Mieroszewski], vol. 1 (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Więź, 2015), 232–246.

The final letter was sent by Maria Czapska to Haupt in May 1975, soon after his death (Czapska was unaware of it at the time)⁵. She opens the letter with an apology:

It has taken me ages to answer your letter from 1 April – whole 2 months! It so happens that I have had other things than letters on my mind. I am replying now, or rather completing the message from my last letter (p. 257).

Today we know that Haupt died in the two months of delay mentioned by Czapska. Czapska clearly felt guilty about her delayed response, as she returned to that question also in the 1975 condolences letter sent to Edith Norris, Haupt’s widow. In that letter she writes:

Mister Zygmunt’s death has deeply saddened us – in the prime of life, so suddenly, a dear friend, excellent author, so admired by us and wide circles of readers! This is such a great loss for us, his friends, as well as to Polish literature, not to mention you!

[...]

In the meantime, you received a letter I sent after he had passed. Had I not delayed my response, he would have received it!

Now, at an old age – I am 81 years old – I feel every day go by like a drop of blood of my life running out. Once again, many thanks for your letter, and goodbye to you, with deepest respect (p. 258).

The whole correspondence is characterized by an exceptionally personal attitude, sometimes bordering on tender. This is a unique case in known Haupt’s epistolography, as he tended to write reservedly, which resulted in equally reserved responses. Even in letters sent to his family members, e.g. his sister from Warsaw, we will not find the tender tone and numerous emotionally positive phrases like those in the analyzed corpus of letters. Here are four characteristic examples:

Thank you for your kind letter from the bottom of my heart, to which I am replying so late, even though we reminisce and think about you so often.

We have not found you many new followers, but those few we have recruited are avid fans of your work, including my younger sister, Platerowa from Cracow.

The longer I have lived with your book, the more precious it is becoming to me. Please believe me, these are not just empty words. I am very offended that in Paris, you treated me like a teacher who forces his students to run from one exhibition to another.

[...]

I am shaking your hand most kindly. Please do come back to Paris before we all die. And you should really hurry, we have lost our hearts to you (p. 196–197)⁶.

The t i m e of life flies so quickly at my old age, that what I thought was maturity and a source of new strength, that there is so much that I k n o w , s e e , w a n t in my thoughts and imagination, to write to someone dear to me, but as a result of the number of those wishes? visions?

⁵ Haupt died on 10 May 1975, and Maria Czapska’s letter is dated 30 May 1975.

⁶ Józef Czapski to Zygmunt Haupt, 9 April 1964.

illusions of visions? – this is senile impotence. I no longer can. I have read *Nietota*. For so many years I have been thinking about you, reminiscing about you – because of your *Pierścień* [Ring] in a way you are always with me, and now *Nietota* has moved me again. It was Jerzy Stempowski who once wrote that if someone discovers, experiences one musical “platitude” in some unknown composer’s work, they have all of them. This composer can write 40 more operas – or not – it no longer matters!

I have this feeling for you and for *Nietota* – to me, this is complete emotionality from *Pierścień z papieru*, although you have hurt *Nietota* – you returned to your notes about *Nietota* too late. You have not saved enough, and maybe t h i s i s w h y this short story is so moving, because it is so untold, and suddenly that last money – just like *Mutter ich trage die Fahne*. Why am I writing this to you? Because I would like you to know that, together with my sister, we love you, that what you have given us always lives inside us, always equally important and close (p. 199–200)⁷.

Our joy about seeing you is “subdued” because you write: “it seems that I will go”, and Jerzy tells us that “it has seemed...” so for two years!

[...]

A heartfelt plea from my Sister and myself: please do send us a card with the exact day of your arrival a few days before you come to Paris – otherwise we will learn about it at the moment of your arrival at “Kultura” or later, and in this “breathless” period in life, this “essoufflement”, we would like to schedule our time with you, for you know that we love you (p. 203)⁸.

We are in Brittany. We have visited Finis Terre and ruins of German bunkers, the ocean stretching under our feet, just as it had under yours some time before, so we thought of you most kindly and longingly!

[...]

We would like to thank you for all the beautiful things you wrote to us, and we are waiting for more, and we are embracing you.

[A handwritten note by Józef Czapski:] We love you very much, we are very lucky to have known a few people in life, a few people – like you (p. 213)⁹.

There are numerous examples of frequently articulated admiration for Haupt’s work in those letters, e.g. enthusiastically rereading *Pierścień z papieru*¹⁰. “You have enriched us, you reached the depths of experience, and now this book shall travel the world on its own, quiet paths” (p. 195) – writes Czapska in a letter from 31 August 1963. This is overlapped with unconditional acceptance for Haupt’s writing idiom and stressing the high artistic level of his prose. This,

⁷ Józef Czapski to Zygmunt Haupt, 9 January 1969.

⁸ Józef Czapski to Zygmunt Haupt, 27 September 1969.

⁹ Maria Czapska to Zygmunt Haupt, 15 August 1971.

¹⁰In a letter to Haupt from 8 October 1963, Jerzy Giedroyc writes: “It is not just Hostowiec that has taken to your book. You have another avid admirer, Józio Czapski” (Giedroyc, Haupt, 100). Many years later, in a letter from 26 August 1974, Haupt writes to Giedroyc: “When I visited Marynia Czapska and Józef Czapski, the siblings whose affinity and friendship I do not deserve, I have come across the greatest compliment an author can experience. They were in possession of my book (Biblioteka „Kultury” Tom LXXXVI), literally worn down from reading, i.e. it looked like a book one rereads many times, rather than a book that sits forgotten on a shelf” (Giedroyc, Haupt, 178).

combined with the fact Haupt struggled with creative and existential isolation, and with his peculiar imposter syndrome, contributed to the personal bond between the correspondents – already strong – growing even stronger. The siblings decisively take the role of Haupt’s closest, most faithful readers, able to fully appreciate his true value. In the same letter from 31 August 1963, Czapska writes:

Thank you for your letter to me and another one, to Józio. You know, we had similar reactions to those letters, we were miffed, maybe even a bit offended by you, and we would like to bring this matter to you, as we are taking offence at you – as if you do not appreciate yourself, as if you did not know your worth!

I know that your modesty is honest, but it is really out of place! – your wife is American, perhaps she is your nearest and dearest, but she is unable to evaluate, nor appreciate, nor I think truly understand what you have written – and how! Unable to reassure you, nor to be the first one to praise! – Perhaps this is why you doubt yourself so much.

Meanwhile, we are running a promotional campaign for you, saying that every Pole should read your work etc.!

(p. 194–195)

The whole correspondence indicates that the siblings, especially Maria, sensed Haupt’s need for acceptance and appreciation of his efforts, additionally reinforced by his reclusive lifestyle and numerous wants resulting from the specific nature of writing in exile (conditioned by Haupt’s personality and external circumstances)¹¹. On the other hand, Haupt did not really try to conceal his anxiety, typically thinly veiled with self-irony, and various modest, rhetorical phrases. For example, in a letter from 29 January 1969 he wrote:

I was overjoyed by your letter, but also saddened by it. Not only by the news of Miss Marynia’s accident, who you are writing is in a clinic (I hope she can go home soon), but also by some melancholy. Perhaps this is because you have always been doing so much for others, and so you cannot come to terms with thinking about yourself. And even in your letter you are constantly thinking about others, for example about me, or my writing. What you wrote is both flattering and needed, necessary for an author, and if I know that I write for the two of you, and my work is met with such understanding, this is satisfying and rewarding for me (p. 201).

The level of intimacy and personal bond between the correspondents also manifest themselves on Haupt’s side, normally rather reserved in his letters. A letter from 4 March 1974 is a good example: Haupt addresses memorable words to Czapski. Their highly personal tone (for Haupt) is thought-provoking. Introducing a religious reference, even the most discreet or negative, is a rarity in his epistolography. A short phrase incorporated in a concise narrative highlights its personal tone, breaking Haupt’s typical restraint, at the same time showing his great trust for Maria and Józef Czapski.

¹¹For an extensive discussion, see my book: Paweł Panas, “Zagubiony wśród obcych”. Zygmunt Haupt – pisarz, wygnaniec, outsider [Lost among strangers. Zygmunt Haupt – writer, exile, outsider], (Bielsko-Biała–Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe ATH, Instytut Literatury, 2019).

Thank you for your long letter, news and comments, which I greatly appreciate. But first and foremost, I would like to thank you for the exhaustive bulletin on Miss Marynia's health and doings. I am confident that her second surgery will go as well as the first one. If I could pray, I would love to pray for this to be over soon. I am looking forward to this beautiful day when your letter arrives informing me that the surgery went well, and that *Gwiazda Dawida*¹² [David's star] is in print, followed by the next installment of *Europa w rodzinie* [Europe in family] (p. 249).

In the discussed correspondence, there are also interesting mentions of issues and topics which were important to Haupt. The intimacy allows him to incorporate personal testaments and declarations in his letters, inaccessible to scholars interested in his life and work. For example, in a letter to Maria Czapska from 15 December 1972 about *Gwiazda Dawida*, which she was preparing for print, Haupt confessed:

I am very curious about your project on a Jewish family. The issue of Polish Jews is of great interest to me, as I grew up in a small town in Podole, I have childhood memories of local town Jews; I am unable to separate Polish matters from theirs, fellow human beings, even though they were so different from us (they were such Galician Hasidic Jews!). And they are no more, which I perceive as a great loss in my life, just like the fact that I no longer live among fellow speakers of Polish, among Polish trees, waters, fields, rains, winds, and snow. I am looking forward to reading your book (p. 228).

There are more such examples. I believe that they constitute a valuable contribution to Haupt's persona, meticulously reconstructed by scholars, as well as to his artistic image. In this context, Haupt's considerations regarding the nature of creative work – not only literary, but also painting – more or less elaborate, seem to be especially significant. For example, in a letter to Józef Czapski from 4 March 1974, in answer to comments regarding *Zasypie wszystko, zawieje* [It will snow over everything] by Włodzimierz Odojewski¹³ Haupt added:

Jerzy Giedroyc wrote to me about Odojewski's book, and he promised to send me a copy, because I have only read an excerpt published in "Kultura" last year. Based on that excerpt, and on what you are writing, I am very curious of the whole book. And I may even venture into writing about it for "Kultura", as even though I am not a reviewer, but rather a resonancer of what I read ("resonancer" refers to "resonance", i.e. what consonance a text inspires in me, not to the verb "resonate"), this will be an opportunity to reflect upon this book (p. 249).

As can be seen, Haupt did not limit his considerations to Odojewski's book, as he was planning to write a review for "Kultura"¹⁴. A reference to this novel is his opportunity to define his

¹²Maria Czapska, *Gwiazda Dawida. Dzieje jednej rodziny* [David's star. A story of one family] (Londyn: Oficyna Poetów i Malarzy, 1975).

¹³Włodzimierz Odojewski, *Zasypie wszystko, zawieje...* (Paryż: Instytut Literacki, 1973).

¹⁴Haupt's text was published in the first double issue of "Kultura" in 1975: Zygmunt Haupt, "Dziś, przedwczoraj, wczoraj, jutro..." [Today, the day before yesterday, yesterday, tomorrow...], *Kultura* 1-2 (1975): 204–210. This was the last text by Haupt published in "Kultura" while he was still alive.

own way of reading books sent to him by Giedroyc¹⁵. Reading – we should note – typical for Haupt in general, which deserves a separate discussion. It is interesting that Haupt does not stop there, instead extending the field of his considerations, moving on to the presence and role of representations of cruelty in art:

Your letter, Dear Sir, about literature, writing, this subject still moves me, has encouraged these reflections. When you write about Żeromski’s “sadism”, it is the sort we know from Goya’s paintings. It seems to me that in both cases this is under the influence of baroque, but in baroque art using shocking elements of cruelty, shocking with horror contrasted with graceful, flowing lines was a deliberate choice, in cold blood. You must be familiar with the incredible etchings, in which Jacques Callot showed us the monstrosities of the war of his times (the world of religious fights of the Thirty Years’ War). The scenes of torture, executions, rapes shown through the artist’s eye, insensitive like a camera lens (p. 250).

This is a good example of Haupt’s narrative technique, i.e. conscious, gradual extension of the field of reflection. Some historical detail, anecdote, or text can be the starting point. At first, his attention turns to a detail, a single fact, to eventually move on to describing a larger slice of reality. Significantly, in such cases the subjective perspective of the narrator is highlighted (“this subject still moves me”, “It seems to me that in both cases this is under the influence of baroque”), and additionally it is not always possible to find relationships directly connecting subsequent parts of the narrative. The clearly outlined persona of the author (who engages in a peculiar dialogue with his correspondent) is the most important binder in such situations, as it constitutes the basic modal framework and guarantees cohesion (“Your letter, Dear Sir, about literature, writing, this subject still moves me, has encouraged these reflections”).

In the analyzed correspondence, there are also examples of Haupt’s self-reflection regarding his own work, in which the element of auto-thematic considerations proves more important than his declared aversion to talking about himself and his work. Such examples are not numerous, but they seem to be significant from the perspective of studying Haupt’s work. Here is a fragment containing unobvious comments from a letter to Czapski from 15 December 1972 regarding the essence of creative work:

Dear Mister Józef! I am reading your “provocations”, a complement to my reading of “Ziemia” [Earth]. Your book is gripping, perhaps a bit too cryptic, although I did not find the code of initials too challenging. I believe in the type of creative work relying on symbols, ambiguity, as it invites the reader to co-create. Besides, any work of art is what its authors wants it to be, and what the recipient interprets (sometimes such interpretations are things which the author did not intend to include!), (p. 228).

¹⁵In a letter from 13 February 1974 r. Giedroyc writes to Haupt: “I have a great favor to ask you. Recently I sent you Odojewski’s book, *Zasypie wszystko, zawieje...* published by us, and I would like you to review it. I believe this book – in my opinion, outstanding – will be of particular interest to you, not only because of its topic, but also due to its language. I hope that you will agree, but – I hope that this is understood – only if you are actually interested in this book. Please do not think of my request as some social commission” (p. 172).

Finally, the analyzed correspondence offers excellent material for reconstructing Haupt's multifaceted persona, flesh and blood – no worse than the correspondence with Józef Witlin, Aleksander Janta-Pończyński and Zdzisław Ruszkowski¹⁶ does. Obviously, in each case the circumstances and general tone will differ, and so will the style of Haupt's letters. To put it metaphorically: various Haupt's personality traits manifest themselves in different situations and in reference to different recipients. Even though he was generally reserved in his correspondence, he was able to model the tone of his voice perfectly.

A living, breathing man emerges from those letters – with a specific personality, way of being, advantages and disadvantages, part and parcel of specific times, space, and culture. In the case of such a mysterious figure, all information is important, as it helps construct a complete picture. Different elements comprise the special dimension of the correspondence between Haupt and Maria and Józef Czapski, including – obviously – auto-thematic considerations. Some letters contain previously unknown anecdotes from Haupt's life, whose significance goes beyond the immediate context, and sometimes gain even a symbolic dimension, such as this anecdote from a letter to Maria Czapska from 6 February 1973, in which Haupt describes how he recited Mickiewicz's poetry:

Whenever I think how to repay you, there is one certain way: I praise Mickiewicz, as you are his avid, talented fan. Whenever I read or reread His poetry, I am itching to share my new impressions with you. Recently, as I was driving with my son, already a grown-up man, who is, well, completely Americanized, I wanted to test him and so I recited *Alpuhara* to him. I had not forgotten a single word from my prehistoric school days, when I had learned it by heart, and Artur was ravished by it.

Those remarks are a very preliminary analysis of an unusually interesting archival collection of correspondence between Haupt and Maria and Józef Czapski, as well as an outline of its key directions. Even such initial work demonstrates the significance of this collection, not only for scholars interested in the life and work of Haupt, but also to any historian studying the history and culture of Polish emigration post 1945.

translated by Paulina Zagórska

¹⁶For an extensive discussion on Haupt's correspondence with Witlin and Janta-Pończyński, see my book "Zagubiony wśród obcych"... (Panas, 19–85). For a discussion on Haupt's correspondence with Zdzisław Ruszkowski, see "«Obczyzny nie przełknę». Listy Zygmunta Haupta do Zdzisława Ruszkowskiego" [I will not have any foreignness. Zygmunt Haupt's letters to Zdzisław Ruszkowski] in: „Jestem bardzo niefortunnym wyborem”. Studia i szkice o twórczości Zygmunta Haupta [I am a very unfortunate choice. Studies and essays on works by Zbigniew Haupt], edited by Andrzej Niewiadomski, Paweł Panas (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2018), 167–180.

References

- Czapska, Maria. *Gwiazda Dawida. Dzieje jednej rodziny* [David's star. A story of one family]. Londyn: Oficyna Poetów i Malarzy, 1975.
- Giedroyc, Jerzy, Zygmunt Haupt. *Listy* [Letters] 1947–1975. Edited by Paweł Panas. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Więź 2022.
- Haupt, Zygmunt. “Dziś, przedwczoraj, wczoraj, jutro...” [Today, the day before yesterday, yesterday, tomorrow]. *Kultura* 1-2 (1975): 204–210.
- Kowalczyk, Andrzej Stanisław. *Wena do polityki. O Giedroyciu i Mieroszewskim* [In mood for politics. On Giedroyc and Mieroszewski], vol. 1. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Więź, 2015.
- Madyda, Aleksander. *Zygmunt Haupt. Życie i twórczość literacka* [Life and literary work]. Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, 1998.
- – –. „«Obczyzny nie przełknę». Listy Zygmunta Haupta do Zdzisława Ruszkowskiego” [I will not have any foreignness]. In: „*Jestem bardzo niefortunnym wyborem*”. *Studia i szkice o twórczości Zygmunta Haupta* [I am a very unfortunate choice. Studies and essays on works by Zygmunt Haupt], edited by Andrzej Niewiadomski, Paweł Panas, 167–180. Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2018.
- Odojewski, Włodzimierz. *Zasypie wszystko, zawieje...* [It will snow over everything] Paryż: Instytut Literacki, 1973.
- Panas, Paweł, “*Zagubiony wśród obcych*”. *Zygmunt Haupt – pisarz, wygnaniec, outsider* [Lost among strangers. Zygmunt Haupt – writer, exile, outsider]. Bielsko-Biała–Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe ATH, Instytut Literatury, 2019.

KEYWORDS

Maria Czapska

JÓZEF CZAPSKI

exile

ABSTRACT:

The paper discusses the results of a primary analysis of the correspondence between Zygmunt Haupt and Maria and Józef Czapski. The letters are dated 1950-1975, offering an interesting picture of a friendship spanning over decades. They provide an insight into Haupt's creative persona, an outcast and outsider, and they are also an excellent source of information on the life of Polish emigration post 1945.

Z y g m u n t H a u p t

C O R R E S P O N D E N C E

emigration

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:

Paweł Panas (1978) – D. Litt., Institute of Literary Studies at John Paul II Catholic University in Lublin. His research interests include: emigration literature, Polish prose post 1954, epistolography, semiotics. Author of *Doświadczenia religijne w twórczości Gustawa Herling-Grudzińskiego* [Religious experiences in works by Gustaw Herling-Grudziński] (2012), *Opisanie świata: szkice o poezji Marcina Świetlickiego* [Describing the world: essays on Marcin Świetlicki's poetry] (2014), “*Zagubiony wpośród obcych*”. *Zygmunt Haupt – pisarz, wygnaniec, outsider* [Lost among strangers. Zygmunt Haupt – author, exile, outsider] (2019). He edited and published Haupt's correspondence with Jerzy Giedroyc and others associated with “Kultura” | (J. Giedroyc, Z. Haupt, *Listy* [Letters] 1947–1975, Warszawa 2022). |