Jerzy Stempowski was one of the closest collaborators of Jerzy Giedroyc, editor of the Paris monthly *Kultura*, from the time of the journal’s inception, and had a serious influence on its political standpoint. As an author publishing on its pages, he co-created the particular profile of the journal and his texts became a crucial component of *Kultura’s* “Eastern European” discourse. It’s worth reminding ourselves that for a long time he occupied fourth position in the list of *Kultura’s* most frequently published authors.

Commissioned by Giedroyc, he wrote various kinds of text—from essays and reportages, reviews and verdicts of literary awards, to commentaries on current political affairs. He signed himself not only with his own name, but also with pseudonyms: “The Unhurried Passerby” (“Nieśpieszny przechodzień”), Paweł Hostowiec or Leon Furatyk.

There is no doubt he played an important role in *Kultura’s* stance on Poland’s internal politics. Meeting in person or corresponding with many writers and intellectuals in Poland, he shared the information he acquired with *Kultura’s* editor, providing him with tactical advice on how to deal with the Polish intelligentsia or public opinion within Poland. He also left his stamp on *Kultura’s* policy towards Germany in the post-war years.

I would not wish to suggest that Giedroyc behaved exactly as Stempowski advised, or that Stempowski always gave in submissively to the editor’s own opinions. Giedroyc often took decisions contrary to Stempowski’s recommendations while Stempowski did not accept all his boss’s ideas. For example: Stempowski was against associating themselves with American policy in the immediate post-war years and took a critical stance towards the then concept of a Polish-German alliance. He expressed similar doubts about Giedroyc’s and *Kultura’s* position regarding Poland’s home intelligentsia in the years 1950-1953.

Stempowski’s moderate approach towards elites in Poland clashed with the then pro-American option and with *Kultura’s* anti-communism, in the wider framework of which war against the Soviet Union was not ruled out. I don’t need to add that this did not lead to a breaking-off of cooperation, although, as an author, Stempowski considerably reduced the number of items he published in the journal during this period.
As to the Ukrainian question, Stempowski’s role was similar to that in the case of German understanding or internal Polish politics. From the time of the journal’s inception, Giedroyc aimed to establish collaboration with Ukrainian intellectuals who found themselves in the West at the end of the war. This was no easy task, since old resentments from before the war as well as new disputes, which had deepened during the war and grown even more complicated, stood in his way. Here, it was Stempkowski who came to his aid and acted as go-between in establishing collaboration with Ukrainian émigré writers and politicians. Already in July 1947, and hence several months before the first number of the Paris edition of *Kultura* appeared, Stempowski wrote to Giedroyc:

I consider the cooperation of Ukrainian writers with *Kultura* to be assured. I have in mind three excellent writers: Yurii Klen, Leonid Mosendz and Evhen Malaniuk. I know these three well and will certainly manage to persuade them to contribute.

Thanks to Stempowski’s mediation, Giedroyc also turned to a former professor of Kharkiv University, Yurii (George) Sherekh-Shevelov. The result was the publication of the article “Młodzież czwartego Charkowa” (“Young People of the Fourth Kharkiv”). Apart from Sherekh, the other Ukrainian literati mentioned above, whom Stempowski had known from pre-war Warsaw, also collaborated with *Kultura*. And so in 1948, there appeared a text on Ukrainian neoclassical writers by Leonid Mosendz, writing under the pseudonym of Leonid Korzon.

Using the pseudonym Julian Kardosz, Evhen Malaniuk also began to cooperate with *Kultura*, his initial publication being the essay “Naród w wędrówce” (“A Migrating Nation”), which was an overview of Ukrainian cultural life in emigration.

A year after Malaniuk, professor Mykola Hlobenko, literary historian and managing editor of *Entsiklopediia Ukrainoznavstva* (Shevchenko Society, 1949), published a text entitled “Inside the Iron Ring” in *Kultura*, likewise under a pseudonym.
This was the first wave of Ukrainian contributions to *Kultura*, whose authors, however, did not cooperate with the journal for very long. The second wave began when Giedroyc’s collaborators became Bohdan Osadczuk and the Ukrainian authors commissioned by him.

Returning to Stempowski, he assisted Giedroyc not only as a mediator in contacts with Ukrainian émigrés. He was also Giedroyc’s confidant and adviser in formulating *Kultura’s* Ukrainian policy. In April 1949 Giedroyc wrote to him as follows:

> [...] a project [has occurred to me—J.K.], which I would like to persuade you to join. It’s about our approach to the Ukrainian problem. It seems to me we should draw up a brief and basic declaration making this approach clear [...] independently of present-day tactics, and announce it via those few people who have shown an interest in it, and who have the moral right to speak out about the matter. [...] such a declaration will undoubtedly become the point of departure one day for resolving or regulating these relations [...].

The declaration planned by Giedroyc unfortunately never appeared in the journal (and was most likely never written?). On the other hand, more than two years after Giedroyc’s words quoted above, it ran the notorious letter by seminarian Józef Z. Majewski, which is often interpreted inaccurately by researchers as *Kultura’s* “relinquishing” of Wilno (Vilnius) and Lwów (L’viv).

Let us recall a few facts. In his letter to the journal sent at the end of 1952, and published in “Letters to the Editor,” Majewski, recognizing the post-war lands of the Polish People’s Republic (PRL) as historically and ethnically Polish, postulated the ceding of Wilno and Lwów. He assumed that in exchange, “Our neighbours to the East and North will show their trust in us. With the cooperation of Ukraine and Lithuania, the Federation of Central and Eastern Europe will become a fact.” Majewski, an advocate of the Piast idea of Poland, was more concerned about the Western Lands, and therefore wanted to concentrate on defending the border with Germany. By “ceding” Wilno and Lwów, he wished to gain not only moral, but also political and propagandist advantages. For *Kultura*, Majewski’s letter proved convenient, because it opened up a problem that Giedroyc too had been trying to raise in some way in the journal for several years.
There is nothing to indicate, however, that *Kultura* agreed in 1952 with the plan expressed in this published letter and especially with the part about the way of resolving the problem of the borders, because it had still not bid farewell at that time to Wilno and Lwów.

[15]

If this had been the case, there would certainly have been a statement from the Editor, a text by Juliusz Mieroszewski or a declaration edited by Stempowski. On the other hand, we know that Giedroyc cared very much about a—at least symbolic—gesture of reconciliation with the Ukrainians and Lithuanians, since it could speed up closer relations and hence the realization the plan he was then pushing for the creation of a Central and Eastern European brigade in emigration. The initiator of the creation of the brigade was James Burnham. It was to take part alongside British, American forces and German forces in a war against the Soviet Union. Stempowski, as we know, was opposed to the Piast idea and so maybe for that reason abstained from expressing his opinion at that time.

[16]

Apart from that he was critical towards to the creation of any kind of organization, and especially military units composed of émigrés from the Central and East European countries.

[17]

In a letter of January 1951, he wrote to Giedroyc:

> [...] the émigrés cannot throw themselves head first into a swimming-pool where there is as yet no water. If, therefore, the moral capital so far amassed by *Kultura* is not to be wasted, if *Kultura* is to continue to be some kind of support to readers in Poland, then it should maintain its distance from Burnham’s plan. [...] In the current situation, it seems to me absurd to create any kind of general émigré organization in Europe, which in the case of war could serve no other purpose than seeing its members quickly captured.

[18]

Stempowski therefore believed the notion of creating a Central and Eastern European brigade was a misguided one. He thought that *Kultura* was calling—in his opinion—Poles to arms without any guarantee that what they would gain would be anything other than a “new German occupation,” and so he warned Giedroyc as follows:

> [...] one reckless step could create the impression we’d already swallowed a German protectorate in Poland and surrendered to General Guderian. [...] As you must have noticed, in my plan for solving the German issue there are no political ideas. We should seek friends in Germany, but avoid counting our chickens before they’re hatched.

[19] [20]
Giedroyc did not accept Stempowski’s warnings, although—as the future was to show—he took note of them. At that time he preferred to stick to his own tactics, assuming that until it came to the anticipated war, the Poles would obtain American and German guarantees and thereby eradicate the dangers which Stempowski feared.

From this dispute, it is clear that significant differences existed, and not simply tactical ones, between Stempowski’s and Giedroyc’s approaches to the same problem. While Giedroyc represented political pragmatism, for which he was well known, his collaborator and adviser intended to push “no political ideas,” as he himself put it. Stempowski proposed a different course of action from the one on which *Kultura* embarked, following the brief immediate post-war period.

Already in the inter-war period his political views had been far from typical. Today we know they were ahead of their time. Critical of Józef Piłsudski’s dictatorial ambitions, he did not accept many of the actions of the presidential camp, and the repressive policies of the Sanacja regime towards national minorities were anathema to him. He was especially appalled by the pacification of Ukrainian villages in Volhynia.

In contrast to many Poles ending up in the West only after the end of World War II, Stempowski had a long personal history of emigration. Even before the war he was lugging around the baggage of his dozen-or-so years of experience. He was therefore well aware of the situation of powerlessness in which Poles found themselves in emigration. He also had his own deep reflections on the nature of the cultural and political changes taking place in the West over many years. All this made him resistant to empty declarations about taking armed action, such as the West might propose with the aim of liberating Central and Eastern Europe. The Unhurried Passerby had no intention of hurrying... Instead of presenting their neighbours with *faits accomplis*, he suggested that Poles should work out first a system of common ideas that might enable understanding. Old ideas, in his opinion, were compromised and no one even knew what words to use, since each side ascribed to them their own meanings. He also foresaw that until prejudices had been overcome and mutual suspicions dispelled, and before doubts about the aims and intentions driving the Poles had been explained, it would not be possible to undertake any concrete political action.

How then, in such a situation, does one build understanding? On what does it depend? Stempowski’s answer was paradoxical: one had to begin with [the] imagination... since “[the]
imagination is volatile; it runs ahead, doesn't cling to things that exist only by the power of inertia.” [25] The author of Esej Berdyczowski (Berdychiv Essay) proposed a reverse process to that which the collective imagination had succumbed to on the road to multinational Poland’s downfall. Because it was precisely changes in mentality, or above all in culture—according to him—that had led to this downfall:

It obviously wasn’t enough to marry off Jadwiga to Jagiello to create the Polish-Lithuanian state; a lot of other things were needed as well, above all a stock of ideas suited to the task. These ideas crumbled away with the passage of time; in the period encompassed by the memory of generations alive today, almost nothing of them remains. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Polish opinion resisted with bizarre unanimity any attempt to recreate a federation with the Lithuanians. [...] For a long time therefore before the total dematerialization of Jagiellonian Poland, Poles were already living with ideas that better suited the needs of Piast Poland. [26]

Hence ideas, notions, words, just like artistic achievements and manifestations of material culture, were the most important things to Stempowski. In the 1960s, for example, he was amazed that there were still Poles “through whose mouths the word ‘Ukraine’ or ‘Ukrainians’ never passes.” He made this remark while reviewing an anthology of works about Ukraine published in emigration. [27] One of the authors used exclusively such terminology as “lands on the edge [i.e. “ukrainne” instead of “ukraińskie”] or “in Ruthenia/Rus” [“russ”]:

This terminology gives the impression the author is talking about territories and landed estates which Poles had possessed “in Ruthenia/ Rus,” more or less like the French possessed them in the Far East or the Dutch in Indonesia. [28]

Stempowski, therefore, would like to have bid farewell to the mentality that identified the Polish presence in Ukraine with a colonizing mission. He even considered the article by Professor Wielohorski, included in the anthology under discussion, [29] to be a manifestation of this mentality:

This is in essence the history of the Polish population of Ukraine, its ebbs and flows, its distribution and the state of what property it owned. [...] The history described here ends with the year 1909, when “the Polish community possessed more than a quarter of the entire private property and apportioned land holdings in Ruthenia/Ruś.” I don’t know whether Professor Wielohorski, in devoting so much attention to the position and state of Polish possessions in Ukraine, wasn’t dwelling on the most thankless and sterile aspects in the history of both
countries. Until the Emancipation of the Serfs under Tsar Alexander II, Poles were serf-owning landlords in Ukraine, and remained in this capacity—surrounded by a host of land stewards, estate officials, overseers of farm labourers and distilleries—in the memory of the Ukrainian masses for a long time to come. For the Ukrainian peasant population these were such hard times—so I heard from my grandfather, born in the Ukraine in 1838—that the men had no desire to sing, and the women ceased to sew shirts. Almost a hundred years have passed since then; such memories have perhaps faded in the memory of Ukraine; let us leave them in peace. Besides, the riches amassed by Poles later in Ukraine have also vanished, having brought little benefit either to Poland or Ukraine. It’s perhaps a waste of time compiling inventories of these manors on the moon.”

Similarly incomprehensible to Stempowski was the expectant attitude of the Polish intelligentsia. Polish literature and journalism—according to him, writing in the 1960s—“had so far not provided any successful formula to express the feelings of Poles who wished to bid farewell to Ukraine.” Let’s leave aside the question of the borders, over which we can exert no influence today—Stempowski seems to be suggesting—let’s forget the “manors on the moon” which benefit no one, and let us concentrate instead on creating a new kind of imagination and a new mentality, on building more intelligent forms of coexistence informed by the experience of recent cataclysms. Here he was not alone. For several eminent philosophers and writers, the Second World War—as for Stempowski—was not only a war about political domination, but also a struggle about a vision of the world, and about the shape of its future culture. As Marek Zaleski writes, it was a war:

[...] against the usurping of historical historiosophies and against ways of thinking barbarized by the demands of efficiency and servitude to corporate political, class and national interests. [...] Understood in this perspective, it was essential not to take delight in the moral inferiority and barbarism of the enemy, but rather to look for blame in oneself and in the order of values recognized until then as one’s own. [...] In this respect the huge number of problems requiring fresh consideration was by no means trifling [...].

This meant that those who had survived the war were confronted by the task of re-evaluating tradition and reconstructing it afresh. Only this could assist in creating a new culture. I should add that, for Stempowski, this was linked to the emergence of a new Polish cultural identity, which was the thing he was concerned about most.

Stempowski and Giedroyc were aware—not only in the 1950s but even before the start of World War II—that Poles should bid farewell as soon as possible to their imperialist ambitions with regard to Ukraine. How best to bid farewell to Polish memory of Ukraine, and how to do it in
such a way that would not split both nations, Stempowski knew better than anyone. In his view, this was first and foremost a task for the imagination and not for politics. It involved working out a style of thinking about the past as part of a desirable vision of a good-neighbourly future.

Translated by Ursula Phillips


[4] A complete set of evidence is still lacking. While underlining the significance of the fact that the first selection of Stempowski’s letters to Giedroyc appeared already in 1991, we should add that there is no mention in that volume of how the selection was made (for example, no letters were included from the years 1949-1955). The fact that Stempowski did not exchange a mere two letters during this period with Giedroyc is testified by other published works (for example K. Kersten, *Między wyzwoleniem a zniewoleniem*...), where other letters from the same period are cited by the authors. Published in 1998, the two-volume edition of Giedroyc’s and Stempowski’s letters still contains gaps and does not explain the principles of selection, despite
being provided with a “Publisher’s Note” (“Nota wydawcy”). One could ask, for example: why, for a whole year (at a crucial moment for

between 26 September 1949 and 22 September 1950) the two correspondents—who usually wrote to one another frequently—exchanged only one letter? See J. Giedroyc and J. Stempowski, 


[5] In the years 1951-1953, six items by Stempowski appeared in Kultura, whereas in the period 1954-1957 there were twenty-eight... During the first period, Kultura published in addition two occasional pieces (a letter and an appraisal of a prize) as well as items sent earlier.


[11] As Bogumiła Berdychowska writes, “Ukrainian authors immediately after the war generally used pseudonyms because they were afraid of being handed over to the Soviets. Such a threat hung over Ukrainians collectively because they were officially Soviet citizens; but a considerable number were also former Polish citizens, who were accused in turn of collaboration with the Germans during the war.” See Bogumiła Berdychowska, “Giedroyc i Ukraińscy.” In Jerzy Giedroyc—Emigracja Ukraińska.
Warsaw, 2004, p. 10. I think we should also mention here another important aspect of Ukrainians’ use of pseudonyms—namely that they testify to the enormous gulf separating the Polish and Ukrainian sides during this period, and to Ukrainians’ fear of their own public opinion, which might regard the authors of such texts as being advocates of Polish-Ukrainian cooperation despite the unresolved border issues and painful historical events.


[16] The Piast idea and the post-war national-religious homogenization of the Polish state was one of the worst tragedies for Stempowski: “One ‘summit’ conference, a few signatures and vague communiqués were enough to strip Poland of the remains of its ‘Jagiellonian idea’ and return it to its Piast borders. No Grand Duchy of Lithuania, no ‘borderlands,’ no national minorities: one nation, one state, one language, one faith and one party: not unlike one Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer .” J. Stempowski, W dolinie Dniestru. Listy o Ukraine..., p. 96. Stempowski expressed his regret at the defeat of the Jagiellonian idea (“jagiellońszczyzna”) even though he held Poles responsible for that defeat. We should add that, for him, the Jagiellonian idea meant something quite contrary to what it did to the centralizing builders of empire—it literally meant multicultural, multilingual and multi-faith communities, nations and groups living alongside one another in harmony.

[17] Note also the book published in 1950 by Kultura’s American collaborator James Burnham:
The Coming Defeat of Communism.


[21] In the dispute between Stempowski and Giedroyc, it was not a question of differences in their evaluation of the current situation or of future threats (both men agreed on the fundamental points), but of how they should be resolved. Giedroyc preferred a path “from the centre” and opted for an understanding with the Germans and the USA, so that in case of need Poles could exert an influence on American-German policy from within as allies of these states. Stempowski, on the other hand, could not allow thought of a Polish-German alliance in the situation at the time, because he believed that this would threaten—whatever form it took—the European East with German colonialism, or that such an alliance was unacceptable for ethical reasons. An additional reason for Stempowski’s opposition to the proposal of a Polish-German understanding was the fact that it would be greeted with hostility in Poland itself.

[22] “I looked upon emigration much more soberly than my companions in misery. Born in the distant borderlands, already in Poland I was a kind of émigré. I had known intimately many émigrés living in various countries, and from my early youth I could remember even the Polish emigration from 1904-1905. I therefore had an accurate concept of the misery and powerlessness of being an émigré. [...] In addition, having lived in the West for a number of years beforehand, I was convinced that the new Polish emigration—in contrast to that of 1831—would not find any political or moral support.” Jerzy Stempowski, Od Berdyczowa do Rzymu. Paris, 1971, p. 96.

[23] Stempowski believed it was not the Yalta conference that began the civilizational process,
of which it had in fact been the result. This process, in his opinion, had begun much earlier—and had begun in the West. Here he saw the source of the modern idea of the nation state with its national egoism, nationalist ideology, and the imperialist attitude which sprang from it. Such a wave of national egoism had catapulted Hitler to power, a leader who had wished to conquer Europe and the whole world in the name of one ethnic community. The multiculturalism, multi-ethnicity and multilingualism of Central and Eastern Europe were to replace—according to Stempowski—Hitler’s vision of an ethnically Aryan Europe speaking only German.

[24] On 4 September Jerzy Stempowski wrote in a letter to Jeremi Stempowski: “The main task today in Polish-Ukrainian relations are not agreements or pacts marking out in advance borders or political fronts, since there are no people or institutions today on either side capable of negotiating or signing such pacts. We should be content with mutual recognition and understanding, without which no greater ambitions can be realized, and which have been entirely lacking to date, on the Polish side even more than on the Ukrainian. Therefore we should support, as far as we are able, all shared non-political initiatives [...].” Letter to Jeremi Stempowski in W Dolinie Dniestru. Listy o Ukrainie. Warsaw, 1993, p. 298-299.


Ibidem, p. 102.


The birth of a new Polish identity in a future Central and Eastern Europe was to be facilitated, according to Stempowski, by inter alia reviving and modifying the Romantic tradition. Here he cited the achievements of the Great Emigration.