

New Books from Poland

2020

BOOK INSTITUTE



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Dear Reader,

The autumn of 2019 and the whole of 2020 are a time of significant achievements for Polish literature. First, Olga Tokarczuk was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, crowning the writer's long and successful career. Then Andrzej Sapkowski's *Witcher* novels reached the top of the world's bestseller rankings. Known and loved for decades by an international community of readers, they've now been given a new lease of life with the Netflix serial. The prose of Szczepan Twardoch, who is steadily evolving into one of Europe's leading writers, received splendid reviews in the United States.

Our new reality, set against the threat of the Covid-19 pandemic, in which we've now lived for many months, has complicated the lives of writers, translators and publishers all over the planet. A host of personal meetings didn't happen, it's more difficult for us to make plans now, and we simply had to abandon some projects. Because of those challenges, or perhaps in spite of them, we are all craving passionate stories, literary discoveries, and getting to know other people also through the medium of books.

We're convinced that Polish literature – a review of which we're offering you in this catalogue *New Books from Poland 2020* – meets those needs. In the company of the characters from novels by Szczepan Twardoch, Dominika Słowik, Wiesław Helak and others we can move through vividly, mesmerisingly described landscapes of the provinces and the restless streets of great metropolises. Authors like Jacek Dukaj and Radek Rak transport us to invented worlds, confirming that fantasy can handle the most important subjects concerning the condition and identity of contemporary people. As you read the prose presented in the catalogue you will come to know people flung into the thick of armed conflicts, social unrest and dilemmas concerning public safety, but also people grappling with individual and family dramas.

The authors of non-fiction works take up with bravado and tenacity the burning issues of the day: the crisis of civilisation, life after death, clashes of ideas, and coming to terms with history. Alongside them other writers in this vivid mosaic examine the subtle meanings emerging from the arrangement of veins in a leaf, the texture of a glaze, the tones of twentieth-century music or the aroma of food drifting from a dictator's kitchen.

I warmly invite you to an encounter with Polish literature, trusting that the melange of hot topics and universal literary values, variety and perspicacity it offers will be a worthy companion for these challenging times.

Dariusz Jaworski
Director of the Book Institute

Translated by David French

Humbel



Full-blooded novel with a generous helping of 20th-century history of Silesia

A NEW NOVEL BY THE LITERARY STAR

Literature needs stars. Today, Szczepan Twardoch is without doubt a star of Polish literature. He's a writer whose work has been adapted for screen (a serialised version of his *King of Warsaw* will soon premiere on TV) and is translated more and more often into the most important world languages (including German and English), a writer whose readers can't wait for his books and whose public pronouncements arouse emotions – a rare feat for contemporary prose writers. But despite the contemporary cult of celebrity, you can't become a star of literature without knowing how to write. And Twardoch can write – proof of which is his new book *Humbel*.

In *Humbel*, Twardoch takes up topics explored in his earlier works. We'll find here issues of Silesian identity tangled up in conflicts between Poles and Germans; fratricidal struggles, from which no winners emerge; the sufferings of individuals caught up in the turbulent maelstroms of history; male desires; and finally, the figure of the *femme fatale*. The author impresses with

his sensitivity to detail and psychological insights, but above all with his rare ability to sustain a narrative and intrigue. Thus, readers aren't given an elegant yarn spun around the decoration of the era or a moralising treatise on the subject of the fluid identity of Alois Pokora, who is wounded in the French trenches of the First World War, but a full-blooded novel with a generous helping of 20th-century history of Silesia peopled by well-drawn protagonists.

Humbel may call to mind to an extent Pierre Lemaitre's Prix Goncourt-winning novel *The Great Swindle*, although with regard to its universal – literally parabolic – dimension it's closer to another work set during the First World War: Erich Maria Remarque's classic novel *All Quiet on the Western Front*. As with Remarque, history touches everybody here, even if they gamely try to give it the slip.

Krzysztof Cieřlik
Translated by David French

I raise my face toward the late-autumn, post-war sky. I am twenty-seven and I feel ancient. I've been through a great deal. I am twenty-seven years old, five foot nine, I am thin, my uniform hangs on me like a sack pulled in at the waist. I am clean shaven, though I haven't been to the barber in a long time; my salt-and-pepper hair is ruffled and old blood still makes it clump into unpleasant tufts, and I have lice, too. I try to put on my officer's cap, it barely fits over the bandage on my head, so I remove the bandage and feel the back of my head growing damp; a little blood continues to seep from my still-unhealed wound, making my hair stick together even more. It's nothing. It's nothing.

On the corner of Wrangelstrasse stands an old, moustachioed veteran, with no right arm and no insignia on his grey uniform. At the front, the regiment numbers sewn on to epaulettes have long since been covered by grey sheaths, but this man has completely unstitched his epaulettes, along with the stripes on his collar. On his cap, instead of the imperial black, white, and red cockade, he has pinned on a red ribbon, as if someone had shot him through his forehead. Like me, he has no coat – I can see he must be as cold as I am, and I am very cold. I approach and greet him, but he only snaps something in response, though he can see perfectly well I'm in an officer's uniform. I should be surprised, but I'm not. Hanging from his one remaining forearm is a ring of the cheapest sausages, which contain practically no pig's meat, but which still look mouth-watering; I'd gladly buy a few, I'm hungry, but I remember that I literally haven't got a *pfennig* in my pocket. Nothing. I remember how back in 1917, when I was on my final leave in Berlin and when the scar left by the continental blockade on our economy was both terrible and visible to the common people, even in those days traders would set out street stalls with sausages. I remember one young man in particular who stood not far from the hotel I was staying in, on Friedrichstrasse. He was as strongly built as a militia grenadier, he wore a bowler hat, a monocle, and a little waxed and black-dyed moustache curled straight up, with a white apron over his dark clothes and a tin pot marked "*Wurst*" hanging around his neck and resting on his belly, and from this pot he sold steamed sausages, less fatty than before the war and much more expensive, but he sold them, and I could afford them and I bought one every time I went past; I'd stand next to him and eat, much happier at being able to buy a frank than at the frank itself, which tasted awful.

Now I can't even afford the cold, ersatz franks this one-armed veteran is selling, I can't afford anything.

I haven't been this poor since I started earning money tutoring during my last year of prep school. I learned well the value of money, every mark, every *pfennig*,

I know how hard my papa and little brothers worked for their pay. And I always wanted more. More money, more of what I could buy with it. I didn't want to save every *pfennig*, conserve matches by snapping them in two, smoke the cheapest tobacco, I didn't want to do everything my father did because he had to.

Excerpt translated by Sean Gasper Bye



© Zuza Krajewska

SZCZEPAN
TWARDOCH
Born 1979

Pokora (*Humbel*)

Publisher: Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2020
ISBN: 978-83-08-07066-6; 520 pages
Translation rights: Wydawnictwo Literackie
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Selected novels

Królestwo, 2018
Król [The King of Warsaw], 2016 – over 100 000 copies sold; TV series on Canal+
Morfina, 2012 – over 100 000 copies sold; film rights sold
Drach, 2014 – over 50,000 copies sold
Twardoch is also the author of short story collections, essays and journals.

Foreign language translations

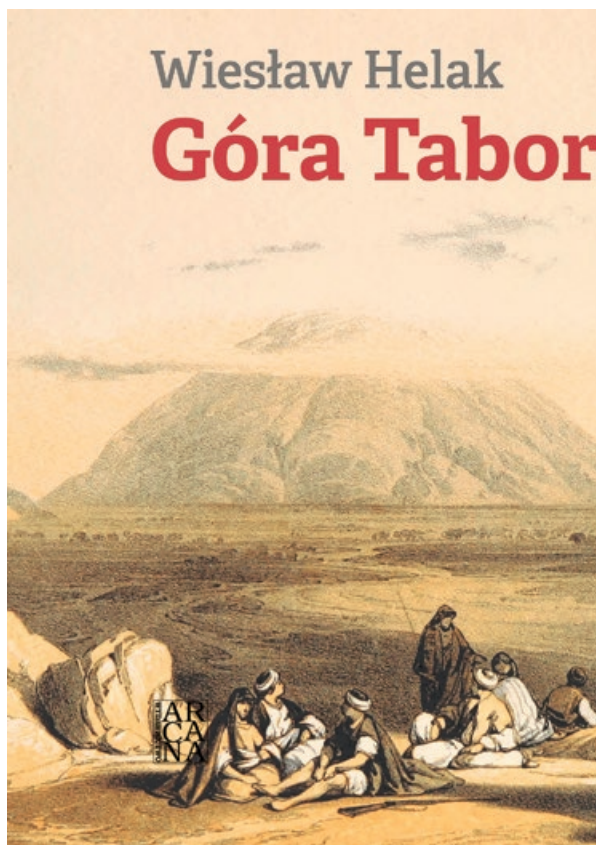
Twardoch's works have been published in Bulgaria, China, Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Macedonia, Netherlands, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine, and USA.
Rights to *Humbel* have been sold to Germany (Rowohlt) and Netherlands (Nieuw Amsterdam).

Selected awards

Nike Literary Award (2013 – Readers' Choice; 2014 and 2019 – nominations)
Brücke Berlin Literatur und Übersetzerpreis (2016) – with the translator Olaf Kühn
Le Prix du Livre Europée/European Book Prize (2015)
Angelus Central European Literary Award (2012) – shortlisted
Polityka's Passport Award (2012)
Gdynia Literary Prize (2012, 2013) – nominations
Józef Mackiewicz Literary Prize (2009 – nomination; 2011 – distinction)
Janusz A. Zajdel Award (2008 – distinction; 2011 – nomination)

Mount Tabor

The fascinating story of an individual tangled in history



BY THE WINNER OF THE MACKIEWICZ PRIZE

Wiesław Helak is well known to readers as the author of novels set during the last two centuries of Polish history – including the award-winning *On the River Zbruch*. He is also a film director and screenwriter. His oeuvre, which came to the public's attention rather belatedly, has been something of a revelation. His newest title, *Mount Tabor*, describes the interval between the First and Second World Wars – a difficult time in Polish history. The novel's protagonist is Janio, a landowner from the *Kresy*, or Eastern Marches of pre-war Poland. He is a complex character. On the one hand, Janio has an artistic soul. He enjoys playing the piano and listening to opera, while on the other, he is attracted to military service – the setting of the world in order, a respect for command, uniforms, and authority. For these reasons, he decides to enlist in Józef Piłsudski's Polish Legions. An event of epochal significance, both for the future destiny of the protagonist, and the axis around which the novel turns, is the May Coup (a successful military coup d'état led by Józef Piłsudski, in 1926). The dramatic circumstances of the Coup cause Janio to betray his ideals and take decisions which will have grave significance for his later life.

Helak's novel is the fascinating story of an individual entangled in history, often facing difficult choices and searching for their way in life. It is also an interesting and far from clear-cut reconstruction of the – often idealised – realities of the Second Polish Republic. For Helak does not shy away from describing the competing world views of Polish society at the time, or the immaturity of some of the élite. Finally, he provides us with a description of European history from the early decades of the 20th century – the Soviet invasion of Poland and its consequences, the challenges arising from the formation of the newly-independent Poland, and its intensifying ethno-national conflicts.

Mount Tabor is a novel in which every reader will find something for him or herself. Along with the historical and psychological themes and love interest, Helak offers us detailed interpretations of works of art, battle scenes described with panache, and an extraordinarily vivid grasp of the landscape of the Eastern Marches. Furthermore, the easy flow of the language, which springs from the greatest narrative traditions of Polish literature, adds significantly to the pleasure of reading.

Anna Czartoryska-Sziler

Translated by Charles S. Kraszewski

And then he'd return – all sick inside, aching – from these wanderings home, for that's what he had to call, in the end, his soldier's room in the guardhouse, constructed of rough boards, but with a concert Bechstein in the centre. He ate his dinner – which his wife always provided for him hot and fresh – and then he'd sit down at the piano then he'd sit down at the piano, playing until late in the evening, so as to chase away gloomy thoughts.

Sometimes he'd have to arrange service schedules and that's what he found most unbearable. The regulations clearly stipulated that every person's freedom of religious practice was to be respected, whether that meant morning prayers, evening prayers, or the most varied holidays. And he had his hands full with them, as he said. One day he counted them all up. There were fifteen Orthodox holidays, eight Protestant, five Jewish and six Muslim – not to mention the Catholic holidays; a person could go batty. This one has to have leave for the Feast of Tabernacles; that infantryman needs to be free for Resurrection services on Easter Sunday; here the Julian calendar, there the Old Testament calendar; one has the Baptism of the Lord, another Yom Kippur, and still another Ramadan or Bayram – and don't forget that the Muslim year, based on the lunar calendar, is shorter than the solar year, so the dates are all movable feasts... He tossed it all in the corner and returned to the piano with just one thought in his head: *How are they going to fight when it comes to war? And in whose name?*

And once more he remembered the Marshal's bagel. Maybe Roman was right? That you have to count on your own, and not on strangers... He heard the words of his father tumbling through his head as he drowsed from fatigue.

* * *

At last autumn arrived. The days grew ever shorter and the rains fell incessantly, making the road to the little town impassable. This worried him, because Marion's due date was fast approaching, *she'll need a doctor, or at least a midwife, but how? with mud and darkness covering the whole area...* This thought kept him awake at night, what would be and how to make sure that the child would come safely into the world, but you can never be certain, as with death. He thought of his mother, when she was dying and that time, hidden, mysterious, when you don't know anything. And he felt that again now, but after all, this is meant to be a beginning, not an end. Maybe the difference between them is small... Again, ill forebodings began to crowd

in on him in those backwoods. Marion could read his mind. He didn't say anything to her – as always, he didn't have to – again and again she repeated: 'Don't be afraid, Janio, don't be afraid...' and gripped his hand tight, so that he would remember what strength flowed through them, between them. This time it didn't help; he knew that the responsibility fell to him, and he didn't even want to lay an eye on any of the old village gossips who prowled around the guardhouse, like crows, asking constantly if he needed any help. He chased them off, taking them for a bad omen, but told his wife nothing of that. He just imagined all the more strongly what he'd do when the day came – his motions, his gestures, his words. He wanted to get everything ready within him, now.

Excerpt translated by Charles S. Kraszewski



© Wiesław Helak

**WIESŁAW
HELAK**

Born 1948

Góra Tabor [Mount Tabor]

Publisher: Wydawnictwo Arcana, Kraków 2020

ISBN: 978-83-65350-51-0; 368 pages

Translation rights: Wydawnictwo Arcana

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Books published

Nad Zbruczem, 2018

Tchnienie, 2015

Tryhubowa, 2014

Scenariusze syberyjskie, 2013

Lwowska noc, 2012

Wiesław Helak is also a film director and screenwriter.

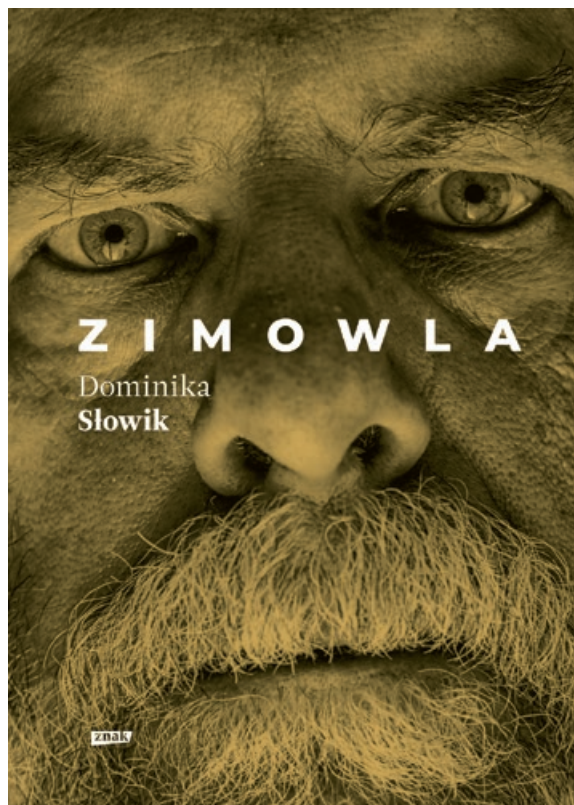
Selected awards

Identitas Award (2019)

Józef Mackiewicz Literary Prize (2018)

The Hibernation of Bees

A new book by one of the most promising Polish writers of the younger generation



POLITYKA'S PASSPORT AWARD

A town cut off from the rest of the world, and in it, a closed society in which we find the family of the narrator, a girl who talks obsessively. She must keep talking, about everything, giving testimony to a mass of incredible events, shocking and even terrifying the reader.

A woman neighbour sings from the rooftops. Strange things are going on with a sacred image and statue of Mary in the church. The narrator's father indulges in esoteric practices. Chickens which have been sold return to their former owner. The narrator has not seen all these things with her own eyes; she often repeats absurd gossip which builds up to nonsensical aggregates, which she later undermines, for she herself is not sure what actually happened, and what only *seemed* to happen in the eyes of others.

Are the residents of the town regular people, or superstitious idiots blathering about fantastic things, unable to come to interpretative terms with an overabundance of strange, troubling phenomena? Does the pathological flood of words that leaps from the narrator's lips spring from the unhealthy atmosphere of gossip around her, or is it her storytelling that is imposed on others? And because she herself doesn't believe in coincidence and the

nonsensical nature of mysterious happenings, she strives to impose her own sense upon them, with varying degrees of success, ordering the chaos logically, objectifying it, straining the probable from the improbable, searching for rational explanations.

The Hibernation of Bees is prose which is female and male at the same time. Its femininity becomes apparent in the initial portions which concentrate on menstruation, the body, and physiology. Its female characters are strong, active and capable, the men – weak and marginalised. We get the clearest picture of the narrator's mother and her ruthless, vicious grandmother, an ex-communist, as well as her father, a coward and conformist with a black-and-white view of reality, the opposite of these three active women. Misza and Hans, the narrator's friends, are also important characters. She shares adventures with them, which draws Słowik's debut novel towards the adolescent genre of *Bildungsroman*. All of these characters constitute a well-developed gallery of original figures, rich, varied, each with his or her own history or past trauma.

Grzegorz Filip

Translated by Charles S. Kraszewski

O r perhaps it started when they cut me in half?

I remember I was only able to move my head. Next to me lay Magda, whom I didn't know at the time, but had heard about from Grandmother Sarecka (who had already left me her estate by then). Above my head I could see the dado of the sports hall, the dirty ceiling, the tissue paper rosettes, the letters cut out of styrofoam. Somewhere at the back there was a screen covered with navy blue fabric with silver foil stars all over it. They looked like yellow splodges. The PE teacher Baniowski's board with exercise instructions filled with figures halted mid-mechanical-move. The man who was cutting us, panting, as if it really was a gruelling job. His breath smelled foul. He touched my head before he started sawing. He was holding a toothed saw. My father was in the audience, he had taken time off work especially for this, and was clapping in delight. I tried to look down, I wanted to see what the saw was doing to my body, but the view was obstructed by the edge of the wooden box from which only my head was sticking out. The rest was kind of not there.

When the man finished, he took a piece of paper – a regular sheet of paper – and slipped it into the slit, into the incision mark, and this sheet – I could distinctly feel it – flitted straight through me, dropped to the floor and skidded across the parquet as far as the audience's feet.

When it was all over I found out that we were chosen because of our shoes: Magda and I both had the same green plimsolls which, for some reason, mattered in the trick presented in our primary school by the travelling magician, who was performing in provincial educational establishments to make some money.

My father, when I was telling him the day before that I needed money for the ticket, had become strangely excited. At that time, he was still hoping to find an opportunity to experience a real miracle.

So I wasn't surprised when the following day I saw him nudging his way forward through a crowd of small kids. Clearly thrilled, he sat on a bench that was too low for him. His knees went all the way up to his chin. He had lied at work that I was unwell and he needed to take me to the doctor's.

The magician was wearing a tailcoat made of shiny fabric and a lopsided top hat. When he announced the most important trick in the programme – cutting a person in half – and asked for “willing volunteers”, almost all hands shot up. Today I can't remember any more if I did volunteer, I don't think I did, because I was staring in embarrassment at my father, who was also waving his hand in the air, with some peculiar tenacity on his face, as if he really cared deeply about being chosen by the magician.

One of the teachers pushed an anxious pupil forward, but the magician shook his head and shouted, ‘Ladies and gentlemen, dear audience, this time I would like

to invite some girls to come forward! Two brave girls!’ This was embraced by the audience, because at the time they were showing Copperfield's shows on TV, and indeed, it was always women who were cut in half. The magician looked keenly around, as if searching for something or somebody specific, and then, before I knew what was going on, he grabbed me by the hand and pulled me into the centre of the room.

I like to think that it started with being cut in half.

I had watched Magda for a long time in the school corridors, but she didn't seem to notice it at all. I think I was most fascinated by her thin, cotton gloves, which she never took off.

The Dygnar girl was in a different class than me. She probably didn't even remember me. After all, when she was being cut in half, she wasn't even looking in my direction.

But still, when we met a few months later in front of the school nurse's room, she looked at me with such attention, that I blushed. [...]

I was surprised to find Magda there with me. We were waiting for our Year 10 health check-ups, but Magda was a year above us. Only later did I find out that the Dygnar girl had started school a year early.

Excerpt translated by Anna Błasiak



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**DOMINIKA
SŁOWIK**

Born 1988

Zimowla [The Hibernation of Bees]

Publisher: Znak Publishers, Kraków 2019

ISBN: 978-83-240-5909-6; 617 pages

Translation rights: Znak Publishers

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Novels published

Atlas: Doppelgänger, 2015

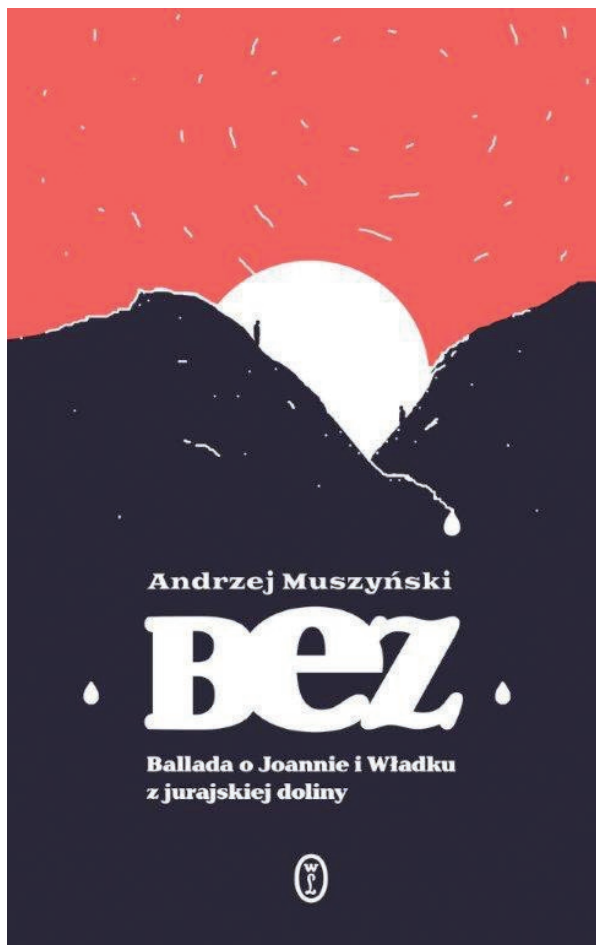
Selected awards

Polityka's Passport Award (2019)

Gdynia Literary Prize (2017) – nomination

Without. The Ballad of Joanna and Władek from a Jurassic Valley

**A husband, a wife and the
stigma of infertility**



Literature never seems to run out of stories about the excessive wonder of ordinary events or about life in a metaphysical void. So far, Andrzej Muszyński's fiction and reportage has talked about surpluses and declines in one of the most interesting, literary voices. This time that voice is describing a form of non-existence, suspended in a valley outside Krakow, where a husband and wife aged forty are trying to survive an everyday situation in which their life as a married couple has lost its meaning. The reason for this loss – infertility – is irreparable, and nor is it softened by the passage of time, because Joanna and Władek live within a closed, rural society, heavily influenced by a cultural tradition that regards childlessness as a lack of fulfilment in family life. Yet Muszyński is far from demonising provincial stereotypes, and in this novel the stigma of infertility is not just a feature of the conservative countryside. It's a stigma that's expressed in set phrases, in the language of proverbs, but also in official, clerical style. Thus it goes beyond a simple division into the superstitious, traditional world of popular religious

beliefs and the progressive, open-minded world of the big city – the void experienced by Joanna and Władek in either place is their defining hallmark. But it makes its deepest impression at the level that forms the basic material of the novel, which is the personal psychological life of the two central characters. Each of them expresses their pain differently, and finds different ways to soothe it; in their turn, these differences lead to emotional asymmetries, because joint suffering does nothing to ennoble or to unite those who are going through it.

As befits a ballad, the novel takes up a number of literary aesthetics, and offers plenty of incidental themes, including the clash of social strata and the post-transformation setbacks apparent in supposedly classless Poland; there are some peculiar religious rituals and some bitterly cutting humour. But what isn't in the novel is just as important: this is a story written *without* pathos, and *without* glorifying pain, which is something that literature does to excess.

Katarzyna Trzeciak
Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones

Of course at first I was upset, but it happens to everyone, doesn't it? Oh God, an ordinary matrimonial quarrel, a bad day. On top of that, in the third month I felt that void inside that's a forewarning of someone's presence. Two days later we were drinking tea in the kitchen. I told Wladek I must go to the doctor. He thought I was exaggerating, but all right. When the doctor starts poking around inside you like in a car engine and announces that there's no heartbeat, the world doesn't stop. The nurses continue to walk down the corridor. The hands on the clock don't snap in two. The water in the kettle still boils. In the name of solidarity, the world really ought to stop for a minute, like the Poles do on the first of August to commemorate the Warsaw Uprising. Wladek asked if it could have happened because of stress. The gynaecologist replied that it was unlikely; selection is coded into the structure of nature. I asked Wladek to wait for me in the corridor.

As they were taking me to the ward, I saw Wladek standing in the middle of the corridor with his back to me, leaning slightly, as if resisting the current of a mountain river with the last of his strength. He didn't hear me. Peace and quiet, just wait. Three days, four nights perhaps. I can't remember a single one of Wladek's visits, though he spent all those hours with me. The only thing I can remember is the grey-blue light that cut into the room at night and froze like a block of ice, with the vague shape of nurses peeping from behind it. I pressed the red button when I felt the moment had come. I asked what I was to do with it now, and she replied that that was what the waste bin was for. Three or four centimetres, a sea horse, a tiny head like a cherry. I lay there for a long time, staring in that direction. I felt as if any moment now it would scramble its way out of there, and there'd be a tiny person standing on the floor, who'd wave at me and say: 'Hey, Mum, to hell with them! We'll be all right. Shall we go?'

I went home; for a week Wladek didn't say a word.

Usually I got up earlier and woke him for breakfast, which on Saturdays we ate together. If he hadn't slept enough, he'd chew each mouthful in silence and apply ice lumps to the puffy bags under his eyes, which dripped onto the tablecloth. 'Do you have to slice the bread so thickly? Does everything have to be done the peasant way?' he'd ask. And then he'd shut himself in his room. Sometimes I really did need his help, so I'd shout: 'Wladek, come here a minute!' If he didn't answer for some time, I knew that up there, in his

cage, a fight without rules was going on, which Wladek would lose, because soon I'd hear the delirious clatter of footsteps on the stairs, I'd see his torn underpants, and his face, not yet rinsed clean of the night, from which words as tough as nuts would fall: 'If you're going to call me, try to explain what it's about at once, or I don't know if there's any point in coming down!' In the afternoon he'd lie for hours at a time on the couch in front of the TV, smoking. Sometimes he shared the thought with me that he couldn't bear to look at my father any more. I'd sit opposite, wanting to tell him something. I believed that the appropriately tuned words could heal.

Excerpt translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones



© Andrzej Banas

**ANDRZEJ
MUSZYŃSKI**

Born 1984

Bez. Ballada o Joannie i Władku z jurajskiej doliny
[Without. The Ballad of Joanna and Wladek from
a Jurassic Valley]

Publisher: Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2020

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Selected books

Fajrant, 2017

Podkrzywdzie, 2015

Cyklon, 2015

Miedza, 2013

Południe, 2013

Selected awards

Gdynia Literary Prize (2014, 2016) – nominations

Polityka's Passport Award (2015) – nomination

Beata Pawlak Award (2013) – nomination

Under the Sun

Fiedorczuk touches the agony of war, destruction, poverty, the concealment of identity, and the loss of sanity



‘What do people gain from all their labours at which they toil under the sun? Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever.’ (Eccl. 1:3-4). These are disturbing words in the epoch of the Anthropocene, as human beings – lords of the earth, waters, and animals – grow more distant from the commonweal of nature founded on the coexistence not only of what is known and is like them, but also on that which is different – alien, yet immanently inscribed into existence on earth, under the sun. Julia Fiedorczuk is well aware of this, and in her remarkable novel she traces the history of this coexistence, her vision spanning the past, namely the vicissitudes of successive generations of families inhabiting the villages of Podlasie, in eastern Poland.

The historical arc drawn by the writer is a long one, extending across the twentieth century, to be precise – she touches on the agony of war, destruction, poverty, concealment of identity, and the loss of sanity; it depicts the building of a new fatherland – the grassroots work of Michat/Misha and his wife, Miłka, in a village school; the war in Yugoslavia; and the slow incursion of capitalism into a reality beset by successive divisions.

This is not, however, an entirely realistic work – Fiedorczuk opens a narrative window onto the magical force of the imagination, which always defends itself against a literal or uniform and obligatory vision of the world. Misha is, after all, an artist; he speaks several languages and is learning Esperanto in order ‘to be at home everywhere, here, there, and in-between’.

In Fiedorczuk’s novel, being in-between requires becoming rooted in one’s own landscape – the external one, interwoven with nature, and that completely individual landscape related to emotions, the psyche, and hope. Fiedorczuk conveys just how difficult a task this is through her portrayal of Marianna – a contemporary “holy fool”, who ‘wandered and wandered. As though she were searching for something. She searched, but could never find it’.

The emptiness which dismays Marianna has become, with time, the universal experience of the contemporary human being – perhaps even more acutely so in the 21st century. And yet always ‘the sun rises and the sun sets, and clambers again across the horizon. Rivers flow to the sea, the human being searches for a way’.

Magdalena Brodacka
Translated by Anna Zaranko

The house was a mess. When she finally got around to tidying up, she'd drop things, break dishes, and then stare out the window so that once or twice Zając swept up the shards of crockery himself. If she cooked, she'd burn the food or forget to add salt. She'd start on something, but forget what it was a moment later and begin something new, only to drop that quickly too and stare out again. She'd stand for ages at the window stock-still, as though bewitched. In the afternoons, she often fell asleep, and in the evenings, she'd go out and wander the village or the fields – quite aimlessly. These evening escapades worried Zając most – for what's in the house stays in the family – but hanging about the fields to no purpose – what would people say? He was right, as it turned out, for they soon had plenty to say. That she was mad. That she followed the moon. That she clambered on the burial mound in the woods where the memory of distant times lay gathered and buried in the earth, that she scrabbled in that earth with her bare hands, as though she were looking for something. That she would lie down on the field's ridge, hitch up her skirt, and wait. Zając felt completely helpless. [...] Several times, it occurred to him that he could forbid it, yet he was afraid she might not listen, and that would be worse than anything – hence he did nothing in the end, and even began to pretend that he had accepted his wife's odd behaviour; thanks to this, the impotence of his anger was less obvious. [...]

One evening, she was waiting for him in bed under the quilt completely naked. Her soft, copper hair was spilling across the pillow, her eyes shone with an unearthly glow, and heat radiated at a distance from her parted lips. She pulled him close with her warm white arms and so enthralled him that Zając lost his head completely. He forgot his anger and about meting out a punishment, he tossed all cares aside and for a moment felt young again. She took him into herself as forcefully as though she wanted to absorb him entire, along with his bald patch, his farm and his field. And he submitted like a sacrificial victim, alarmed, but raised for that one moment above the daily travails, to some kind of heaven – low, not far above the earth, tasting of sweat, smelling of a woman's hair, like the fur of an animal – but heaven all the same. He forgot himself. He forgot everything. He merged with her warmth, the taste and scent of her, her breath.

But when he'd come round, after it all, he felt awkward, as though he'd sinned. For he'd not made love to his wife, but to some strange, wild woman who heeded nothing in her blind pursuit of some quite unhuman passion. It occurred to him that he could go to confession, but how to put such a thing in words? That he'd committed adultery? No, that wasn't it. It was all a puzzle, and most puzzling of all was the painful pleasure which he'd felt not only then, in the night, but long afterwards. He could not oust those strange feelings from his heart for a long while and in the end, he began to avoid Marianna. He was simply afraid of her. [...]

Marianna, meanwhile, sank more and more deeply into her strange state. Her son now prepared the meals. The two grown men ate in silence; she didn't sit down to table with them, but only slept, and dreamt, almost as though every night she were setting off on some distant journey, from which it grew increasingly difficult to return. Was it night or day? After waking, she'd lie a long time in bed, recollecting who she was – stupid Marianna with three grown children and a husband, Zając. The incontrovertible truths of the day seemed to Marianna less real than what she experienced in sleep; she repeated them to herself each morning like a dull lesson, and once repeated, she'd stretch like a she-cat and climb out of bed in just her nightdress, oblivious to who might see her, dishevelled, surrounded by some sleepy sensual aura.

Excerpt translated by Anna Zaranko



© Edyta Dufaj

**JULIA
FIEDORCZUK**

Born 1975

Pod słońcem [Under the Sun]

Publisher: Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2020

ISBN: 978-03-08-07012-3; 454 pages

Translation rights: Wydawnictwo Literackie

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Selected prose

Każdy śnił swój sen, 2019

Bliskie kraje, 2016

Nieważkość, 2016

Biata Ofelia, 2011

Poranek Marii i inne opowiadania, 2010

Most recent poetry collections

Psalmy, 2018

tuż-tuż, 2012

Tlen, 2009

Selected awards

Wisława Szymborska Award (2018)

Silesius Poetry Award (2018) – nomination

Nike Literary Award (2016) – nomination

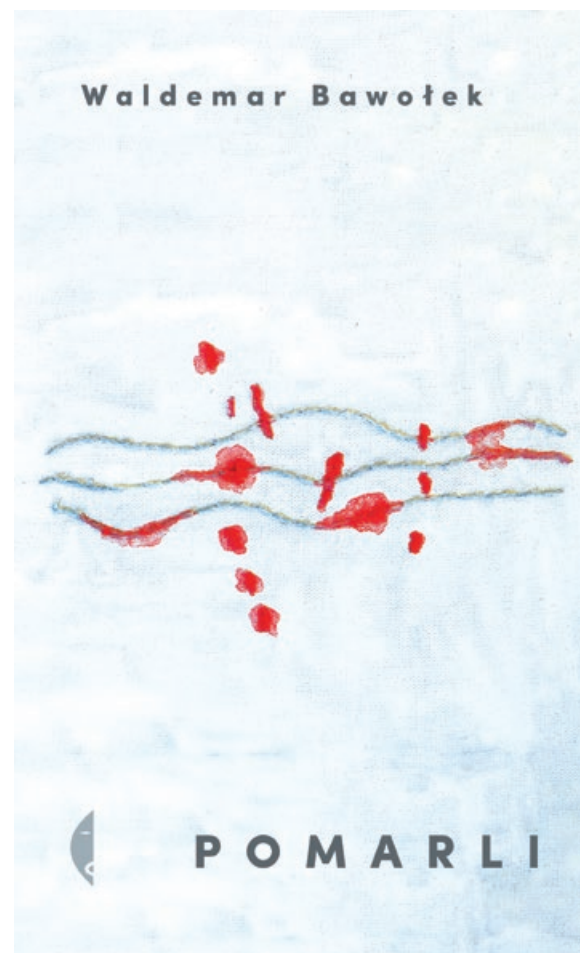
Foreign language translations

Fiedorczuk's poetry books have been published in the USA, Mexico, Serbia, and Sweden

The Dead

Bawołek's beautiful way with language is a delight

For years Waldemar Bawołek has consistently described the world of Ciężkowice, a small town in the south of Poland. He has lived there continuously for almost sixty years, and the characters in his fiction are friends and relatives, though the central one is usually Bawołek himself, appearing autobiographically. He has devoted this novel, *The Dead*, to people who are now lying in Ciężkowice's graveyard, for whom it could be said that he has composed epitaphs. There are thirteen of them, while the fourteenth part of the book is about a day in October when Waldek (the narrator) encounters all his dead friends and relatives in the street. Although he makes reference to religious symbolism (there are fourteen chapters, like the fourteen Stations of the Cross), the book is not at all concerned with metaphysical questions. On the contrary, the dead people in this story were quite ordinary in every way; they had their comical peculiarities and eccentricities, and they were happy to spend their time on simple pleasures. So Bawołek doesn't aspire to solemn thoughts, he doesn't ask any questions about the



mystery of life or the horror of death. He simply wants to preserve the memory of his relatives, his school friends, and the mates he used to meet up with at the local pub. And although *The Dead* reminds us of a masterpiece of this kind of writing, *The Spoon River Anthology* by Edgar Lee Masters, Bawołek's tales are fundamentally different from the American poet's epitaphs. Here it is not the dead who take the floor, it is not they who brood upon their ruined or wasted lives. It is Waldek who reminisces, talking about his own loneliness, his unfulfilled dreams and failure in life. Perhaps the most interesting feature is the way in which the past connects with the present. There are lots of events that Waldek isn't sure about, so he has to supplement his account with fantasy. Here small-town gossip is combined with personal memories, but it often borrows from dreams as well. Bawołek's beautiful way with language is a delight; in a single sentence he's capable of elegantly combining a poetical turn with crude expression.

Dariusz Nowacki
Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones

As Antoni Sojat squinted, it suddenly dawned on me that he must be on his way back from a meeting at the firehouse, where they had established the rules for the games due to take place on Sunday at the sports field. Combat units from each local village would compete against each other. Mr Sojat was a tad tipsy – they must have had a drink or two.

‘So what’s up, Waldek, what are you doing with that basket? Where are you off to? Lessons are over, it’s getting dark, it’s late, but you’ve gone out for a walk – does your mother know where you are?’

‘Yes, Sojat, I’ve got some saffron milk caps here, I picked them today, real beauties.’

Once again I’m unpicking the threads, once again I’m running away from the falling sky, once again I’m going to give a little bit of myself away without getting anything in return.

‘I’m in a hurry, my wife is sure to be cursing me at home by now – the meeting went on a bit. Come to the games, you’ll see how our boys beat the shit out of everyone, they won’t let those lads from Jastrzębia or Ostrusza win as much as a broken tooth.’

‘Well, I don’t know,’ I whispered.

And when I saw Mr Sojat walking off, everything began to wobble strangely. An abrupt dissonance pervaded the order of the street. I suddenly had to find my place in a new and unexplained situation. Mr Koryga came to my rescue. He had just left the house for a breath of fresh air; what’s more, ever since he got home from work, his wife had been bleating without a break, so his head was aching. He removed his cigarette from its holder and lit it. He soon noticed me too, so he asked what was up.

‘I’ve been to get mushrooms, I picked some saffron milk caps, we’ll be having them for supper.’

‘Mushrooms for supper aren’t good for you, they’re hard to digest, wait until morning to eat them.’

Well, yes, I’m still staring like a calf at a painted gate. I was cross with myself, or maybe just tired? Tired, tired, there were reasons to be tired. Oh well, I had no reasons to take pride just yet.

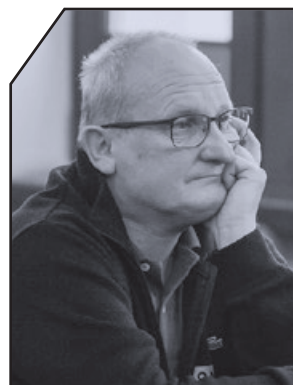
‘Yes, sir!’

First Mr Koryga said that if I wanted, he could take me mushroom picking on Sunday, he knew some places in Przylasek that’d blow me away, nothing but penny buns, gorgeous, pretty as a picture. Then he started asking about my mum, how was she doing? Because he’d always liked her, he still did, such a honey, he envied my father such a beautiful wife, he’d come and see us as soon as he had the time, he’d bring some good wine, to share a glass with my mother, the right thing to do, from the heart, because we should respect and like each other, offer a kind word, after all, we’re neighbours, we know each other, we help each other. And he’d probably have gone on in that vein, but he’d finished his cigarette; he stubbed it out and said he must be getting home.

‘Give your mother my very best wishes.’

I looked into the future of the street, at its perspective, at the horizon. The twilight’s settling, billowing around me. It feels as if every detail is losing its character. What will my street be like one day? What will it look like? What will the old bicycles change into? Will the tired glances give way to energetic footsteps? Will we walk along the pavement without splashing in the mud? Will the neighbours dress fashionably? Abandon their rakes and hoes? The present day cannot explain everything and does not entirely satisfy me, when I look at it that way. Why so? I don’t know. Suddenly out of the greyness comes my granny. She’s walking slowly up the hill, pacing along in a red headscarf. A scarf with fringes, rose-patterned. She wouldn’t have left the house without it, because as she always says, the wind would blow through her ears. There goes granny, stooping, with a rosary in her hand, the rosary’s dangling, touching the ground, Mass hasn’t started yet. Will she notice me, when she’s so intent, probably saying her ten Hail Marys by now. But no, as we pass each other, she stops and looks at me in surprise, she looks at the basket of mushrooms, she’d probably like me to go to church with her, but the basket has put her out of joint, because how can you push your way to the altar with a basket like that one?

Excerpt translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones



© Magda Skrzyszowska

**WALDEMAR
BAWOŁEK**

Born 1962

Pomarli [The Dead]

Publisher: Wydawnictwo Czarne, Wołowiec 2020

ISBN: 978-83-8049-972-0; 208 pages

Translation rights: Andrew Nurnberg Associates Warsaw
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Books published

Bimetal, 2019

La petite mort, 2018

Echo storica, 2017

To co obok, 2014

Humoreska, 2012

Raz dokola, 2005

Delectatio morosa, 1996

Selected awards

Gdynia Literary Prize (2015, 2018) – nominations

The Tale of the Serpent's Heart

Class divisions and economic violence in a legendary world



NOMINATED FOR THE NIKE AND GDYNIA AWARDS

In his third novel, Radek *Rak* takes us to two places. The first is Galicia (a historical region located between south-eastern Poland and western Ukraine) in the mid-19th century, at the time of the so-called Galician Slaughter of 1846, a bloody peasant rebellion against the nobility, led by Jakub Szela. Szela himself is *Rak*'s main character (though here he is called Jakób, not Jakub, suggesting a unique, creative vision of the figure) and it is the conditions of his back-breaking peasant life as well as his relationship with the "lords" – meaning the nobility – that form the narrative backbone of *The Tale of the Serpent's Heart*. Yet there is another layer here as well – a mystical, legendary Galicia, a Galicia inhabited by the Snake King at the foot of the Beskid Mountains. Historical events and characters mingle together with magic and folk beliefs, creating a story that is in many respects faithful to the actual series of events, yet deeply immersed in folklore.

In this sense, *Rak* has something in common with Tolkien, who built Middle Earth because he wished

to create a mythology for his homeland that it had always lacked. *Rak* is doing something similar as a Polish author, spinning his tale so naturally that it seems copied from ancient scrolls of legends. But the greatest difference is that barely two centuries divide *Rak*'s story from our reality. Radek *Rak* also shares qualities with Andrzej Sapkowski and his stories of the *Witcher* – *Rak*'s fantasy is similarly realistic in portraying violence, sensual in its love scenes, and grounded in issues that are still current in today's world, such as class divisions and economic violence. *Rak*'s great feat is that this fantasy novel was nominated for the prestigious Gdynia and Nike literary awards and has enjoyed the approbation of critics, something no fantasy author in Poland other than Sapkowski can boast.

Marcin Zwierchowski
Translated by Sean Gasper Bye

They say that nothing would have come of it anyway. For there are loves that from the earliest are condemned to defectiveness and “cripplehood”, and that beget only sorrow and suffering. Everyone can see this, apart from the lovers themselves.

When Kóba finally dragged himself all the way to the inn, he knew things were bad. The dilapidated inn was writhing before his eyes, doubling and whirling, as if wicked devils were twisting it. Then there was a black hole, and momentarily flashing inside it, the worried face of Old Myszka.

In the distance, Rubin Kohlmann was jabbering something about Shabbos, that now he’d, *ayneklayne-miteshmok*, take a rest. It even sounded funny, but Kóba couldn’t laugh, because he thought it would make the top of his head fall off. It went dark again, though it was probably because night had fallen. Kóba wanted badly to fall asleep but somehow wasn’t able to. Sleep circled him like a wary dog, afraid to approach closer. So the young man was adrift on a choppy sea of darkness, and sometimes Myszka would emerge out of the blackness, as wrinkly as an old apple – and sometimes he wouldn’t.

‘Go to sleep, won’t you,’ grunted the old man. ‘It’s fine for you, tomorrow you can sleep in, but I gotta work at the crack of dawn. Here, I’m leaving you some water and some linen, change the compress during the night. Oy, you’ll cough up a lung, I’m gonna sleep in the pantry, I ain’t getting any shut-eye with you here.’

‘*Ayneklayne-miteshmok*,’ croaked Kóba, with a stupid grin.

Someone’s hands caressed the young man’s face, from the base of the ears to the neck. They were the smooth hands of someone who did little labour, and they definitely didn’t belong to Old Myszka. They smelled of aniseed and carnations.

She slipped in beneath the covers. She interlaced her toes with Kóba’s – they were freezing cold, as if she’d been walking around barefoot for a while. It tickled, but pleasantly. She snuggled all the way up to Kóba, a little warm, a little cold, smooth as muslin and seemingly totally naked. The farmhand started feeling blissful and as if his fever was draining away. He fell asleep with his face nestled in the sea of black, fragrant hair spread over the pillow.

In the morning he felt a little better, though he remembered little of the previous night. He was surprised that the mattress smelled of spices, like the Jewish incense Kohlmann smoked up the whole house with every Shabbos. Then Jakób found a hair on the pillow – thick, dark and curled. He sat for a while on the bed and twirled it in his fingers, and felt peculiar things inside.

He was still weak, but the illness had left his chest and he wasn’t even coughing so hard. This was certainly helped by the thick chicken broth Chana gave him to drink. Meanwhile, old Kohlmann gave him lighter jobs, like sprinkling water over the inn’s dirt floor or

wiping down the tables; the innkeeper knew he had to look after his farmhands, even if they were goyim. That night, the moon again shone bright and at midnight Chana went out onto the roof once again. As Kóba struggled his way up to lead her back down, she peered at him completely lucidly and smiled strangely. ‘You’re going to fall, Chana.’

‘No I won’t.’

‘Let’s come down.’

‘It’s fine here.’

And Chana slid one hand over her nightshirt. And then the other. And then she undid a few upper buttons and stood like that in front of Kóba, naked from the waist up. She had beautiful shoulders and unattractive breasts – triangular, their nipples too large and too dark. Kóba was just, *just* about to say ‘no’, he didn’t want to, he couldn’t, but the laws of the night are different from the laws of the day. And he didn’t say anything, because he knew that ‘yes’, he did want to, and he knew he could.

But the girl just reached between her breasts and pulled out her heart – small, fluttering and feathery.

‘This is for you,’ she said.

Excerpt translated by Sean Gasper Bye



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RADEK RAK

Born 1987

Baśń o węzowym sercu albo wtóre słowo o Jakóbie Szeli
[The Tale of the Serpent’s Heart or the Second Word on Jakób Szela]

Publisher: Powergraph, Warszawa 2019

ISBN: 978-83-66178-11-3; 464 pages

Translation rights: Powergraph

kasia@powergraph.pl

Books published

Puste niebo, 2016

Kocham cię, Lilith, 2014

Selected awards

Gdynia Literary Award (2020) – nomination

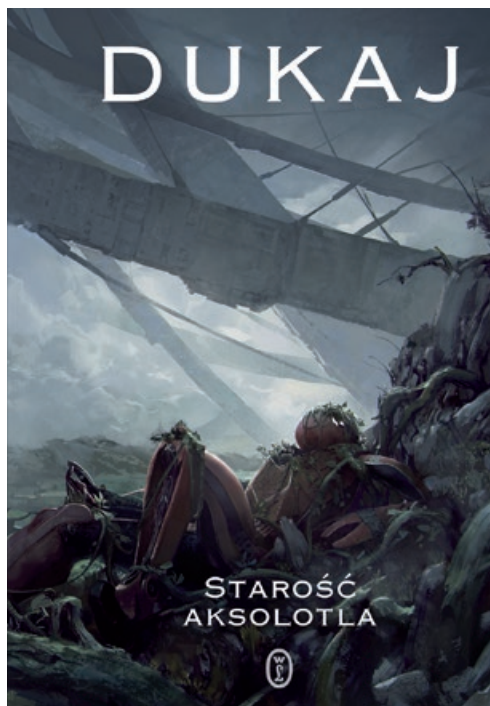
Nike Literary Award (2020) – nomination

Janusz A. Zajdel Award (2017) – nomination

Jerzy Żuławski Literary Award (2017)

The Old Axolotl

A novel with an astounding richness of imagination about the future of humanity



NETFLIX ADAPTATION

Like with Hitchcock: we start with the apocalypse, but from there, the tension only builds. Earth is hit by deep-space radiation of unknown origin, annihilating all organisms to the level of bacteria. The only ones able to escape destruction are a few thousand people who have copied their minds onto hard disks and into mechanical robot bodies. Thus begins humanity's afterlife, with the creation of the "transformers": humans inside industrial robots, sex-androids and automated medical assistants. Following the initial shock, they begin rebuilding civilization. But what form will it take, now that they know a biological body is no precondition for existence? This new hardware society causes changes in politics, sociology and psychology – religions of metal spring up and wars for resources break out. Will the transformers be able to recreate biological life? If so, in what form? And most important of all – who caused the destruction that reset the Earth? Does some objective cosmic

process lie behind it, or an alien civilization with reasons of its own?

The Old Axolotl started out as an innovative e-book – built out with a layer of expanded notes including more stories about the world described, as well as a range of cover designs. Now that format has been skilfully translated into a more traditional medium. Jacek Dukaj has written a novel with an astounding richness of imagination about the future of humanity and needing to redefine what it means to be human. Just a single episode of *The Old Axolotl* became a well-received series on Netflix: the legend of a group of survivors on a plane who avoided the Death Rays by remaining above the surface. The story holds many more such fascinating motifs. This is how the world ends: not with a bang, but with the screech of metal.

Michał Cetnarowski
Translated by Sean Gasper Bye

‘Another vodka?’
‘Hit me.’

Steel fingers grip the delicate glass with surgical precision. There are special programs to support the motor skills required for vodka drinking. Of course, they cannot really drink vodka, and the drinks are mere mock-ups. They cannot drink anything, they cannot eat anything – quarter-tonne mechs in the Chūō Akachōchin bar. All they can do is perform these gestures of life, laboriously repeating the customs of bygone biology.

A barman in the shell of a mechanised barman pours out the Smirnoff. His three-jointed arm brushes against the polymer mitt of a transformer-playing bar customer with the same desperation. The grating sound is audible even under Hauer’s monologue. *That’s the real curse, thinks Bart. Metal on metal, heart on heart, and every awkward moment multiplies the pathos of loneliness a thousand times. As if under a microscope. As if projected on a hundred-hectare screen. We are monstrous shadows and scrapheaps of human beings, the molybdenum despair of empty hearts.*

Manga blues – they sit on the Chūō Akachōchin terrace, under the last red lanterns, sad robots regaling one another with legends. The first legend is about man.

‘It had wings like a butterfly’s dream,’ says Dagenskyoll, his shoulder speaker crackling slightly on the sibilant consonants. ‘Propellers that whirred into light-blue rainbows. Dawntreader XII, all nanofibers and carbon fibre, an angel stingray cross,’ he continues, his chest screen displaying sketches and schematic diagrams of the plane ripped from Google caches. ‘Wingspan: 78 metres. Mass: 1.64 tonnes. It had just been serviced; they kept it in a hangar at the airport in Dallas. When the Death Ray hit the other hemisphere, they had enough time to load their families, some provisions, and equipment. They took off with a several-hour head start on the Meridian. The Earth rotates at a speed of 1,674 kilometres an hour – but that’s at the equator. The Dawntreader couldn’t go faster than 300 kilometres an hour, so in order to keep ahead of the Death Meridian, they had to stay above the eightieth parallel. Of all the solar aircraft, only the Dawntreader could manage it.’ Dagenskyoll displays the structure of the photoelectric cells that cover the wings and fuselage of the plane. In the pictures they really do shimmer like butterflies in the sun. ‘By their second circuit they were flying above an Earth roasted clean of all its organic life. Only machines answered their radio calls: the automatic systems of airports and armies. When the Ray died out after one hundred and seventy-seven hours, they could only reach this conclusion from the information being transmitted by machines from the other hemisphere. They made no contact with any transformers; they did not go online. They flew on. Votes were held on board the Dawntreader: to land or not to land? Should they land for a short

while, stock up on provisions and then fly on, or wait and find out whether the Ray had really died out? In the end they split up. After two weeks, some of them had had enough, so they touched down somewhere in the north of Greenland, on a runway near an ice settlement, stocked up on water and food, offloaded the unwilling, and took off again.’ Dagenskyoll raises one of his four skeletal-mosaic arms and points to the zenith of the starless sky over Tokyo. ‘They’re still up there, flying, circling above us in the transoceanic heights.’

Excerpt translated by Stanley Bill



© Albert Zawada

JACEK
DUKAJ
Born 1974

The Old Axolotl [Starość Aksolotla]

Publisher: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2019
ISBN: 978-83-08-06939-4; 280 pages
Translation rights: Andrew Nurnberg Associates Warsaw
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Selected works

Po piśmie, 2019
Wroniec, 2009
Lód, 2007
Perfekcyjna niedoskonałość, 2004
Inne pieśni, 2003
Xavras Wyżryn, 1997

Selected awards

Janusz A. Zajdel Award (2000, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2007, 2010)
European Union Prize for Literature (2009)
Polityka’s Passport Award (2004, 2008) – nominations
Nike Literary Award (2008) – nomination
Kościelski Foundation Award (2008)
Jerzy Żuławski Literary Award (2008)

Foreign language translations

Rights to the *Old Axolotl* have been sold to Hungary, Russia and Ukraine.
Rights to the full English translation by Stanley Bill available.
Other works by Dukaj works have been published in Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Macedonia, and Slovakia.
The UK edition of *Lód* is in progress.

They Too Were Banished

**A hero full of inner conflict:
a gentleman and an arrogant
snob**

This novel is set at the turn of the twentieth century. It is made up of short chapters in non-chronological order, which adds to the pleasure of the reading experience, as does the person of its protagonist: the extraordinary, controversial Ignacy Karol Korwin-Milewski (1848-1926). He was an art collector, part of whose collection is today found in national galleries, represented by canvases painted by Jan Matejko, Jacek Malczewski, Józef Chełmoński, and others. A friend and patron of artists (it was he who first showed significant interest in the work of the Polish Munich Group), he was at the same time conservative and a cosmopolitan, a landowner and a loyal subject of the Russian Tsar. He once purchased an island in the Adriatic, where he built a sumptuous palace, decorating its walls with famous works by Polish artists; he enjoyed litigations and duels, had many mistresses; in short, he led a colourful life, full of adventure.

Wacław HOLEWIŃSKI brings his main character to life, vibrantly describing his story, including his childhood and adolescence. He equips his protagonist with



characteristics that attract the reader's sympathy and respect – but also their antipathy and even disgust. In this way he creates a hero full of inner conflict, a gentleman and an arrogant snob, a lover of Polish art who, with pride and splendour, exhibits his collections in the Vienna Künstlerhaus, while at the same time remaining a supporter of his nation's subjection to the Tsar and a critic of Polish insurrectionary movements. As a background to all this, HOLEWIŃSKI paints a suggestive picture of contemporary Europe, with all its cultural and ethnic variety, casting a stronger light on the panorama of revolutionary movements and the consequences of wars and other conflicts.

They Too Were Banished is one of the most interesting historical novels to recently appear in Poland, and among the works of Wacław HOLEWIŃSKI, perhaps the best. It offers splendid material for cinematic treatment or serialisation on television – thus it's worth mentioning that TVP (Polish Television) is currently televising another novel by this author, *Pogrom 1905*.

Jakub Paczeńskiak

Translated by Charles S. Kraszewski

He'd been in a good mood since the morning. That was no surprise: the verdict of the court in Vienna, which definitively laid the spectre of a prison cell, was just what he had expected. But the certainty that his abandoned lover would creep off with empty hands imbued the whole world with a new colouration from the very break of day. He settled his account with his lawyer Rosenberg, even tossing in a nice tip, before plunging into the newspapers. *Wealthy Pole acquitted, lover left without a cent.* That was the headline, below which the journalist related, in somewhat flowery terms:

The verdict arrived at in court yesterday puts an end to the case of the Pole, Count Ignacy Korwin-Milewski, his former lover Cecylia Włodzimierska, and Barber, her protector and a citizen of Bukovina, who had been shot, which had been played out over the course of an entire year. In 1904, Milewski, a resident of the Hotel Astoria, published an account of a romance, in which he described his achievements, so to speak, in the field of Cecylia Włodzimierska. The woman in question had been his mistress for eleven of the previous twelve months, and, so it seems, during that time the couple had scorned propriety, morality, civilised behaviour and the honour of a young woman's family.

The count had a good laugh at that. Propriety, morality, civilised behaviour and family honour... He thought of those journalistic hacks with bitterness. Yeeesss. Ciunia, a young girl when he had met a few years earlier, all of twenty-one summers, had a body like a dream. Long fingers, a tight little derriere, breasts just right... Oh, just to sink into her, breathe with her breath, touch her, caress her. It's true, she didn't come cheap. Always demanding more and more presents. He'd have gladly passed her on to one of his artist friends. Chelmoński, maybe Gierymski or Pankiewicz. Let 'em paint her portrait. Those delicate veins beneath that crown of hair, those beautiful green eyes of hers. He read on:

It is known from well-informed sources, however, that Milewski was not satisfied with carnal relations with the beautiful Viennese girl. He also spent his time in establishments worthy neither of his noble family, nor his earlier accomplishments. After her divorce, the jealous mistress subjected him to frequent scenes in public, in which words that would be inappropriate to our Readers' eyes often fell.

At least that was true. She swore like a sailor, and ran roughshod over the whole clan.

Bored, perhaps terrified, the amorous count elbowed Włodzimierska out of his circle of friends, until the

fateful day of 6 July 1904, when, in the company of the above-mentioned Herr Barber, she fell upon him at the Southern Station just as he was entering his carriage on the evening train to Kraków. According to eyewitnesses, harsh words were exchanged between the two former lovers, to which a young man claiming to be Frau Włodzimierska's intended soon chimed in. The latter two demanded a significant sum, to the tune of twenty-five thousand crowns, as satisfaction for the alleged injuries to her reputation and loss of honour; they also demanded the return of certain letters in Herr Milewski's possession. Frau Włodzimierska's escort seconded her efforts in this conflict in so pressing and eager a manner that, at a certain moment, he not only insinuated the use of physical force against the count, but also struck the older man in the head. For his part, the count, without quite thinking things through, pulled out his revolver and shot Herr Barber in a region it would be shameful to mention.

Excerpt translated by Charles S. Kraszewski



© Radek Zawadzki

**WACŁAW
HOLEWIŃSKI**

Born 1956

Oraz wygnani zostali [They Too Were Banished]

Publisher: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 2020

ISBN: 978-83-8196-028-1; 256 pages

Translation rights: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy
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Novels published

Pogrom 1905-1907, 2018-2020

Honor mi nie pozwala, 2015

Szwy, 2013

Opowiem ci o wolności, 2012

Nie tknął mnie nikt, 2008

Droga do Putte, 2007

Choćbym mówił językiem ludzi i aniołów, 2005

Przeżyłem wszystkich poetów, 2004

Za późno na modlitwę, 2003

Lament nad Babilonem, 2003

Foreign language translations

Hungary (*Droga do Putte*)

Selected awards

Józef Mackiewicz Literary Prize (2004 – distinction, 2013)

Warsaw Literary Premiere Award (2003, 2004, 2007)

Nonjoy

The “nonjoy” of the title does not overwhelm us with hopelessness but encourages us to take heart



BY THE WINNER OF GDYNIA PRIZE

There is a Polish saying, “old age is no joy”, and it is this saying – alluded to in the title – that serves as the point of departure for Paweł Soltys’s poignant short story collection. Having reached the symbolic age of forty, the writer – also known in Poland as a musician and singer – has turned his focus to ageing. That is, to something largely ignored by contemporary culture or plagued by stereotypes. In twenty-five short pieces, Soltys tells a series of discrete stories set in different sociohistorical contexts. He plays with narration, demonstrating his stylistic range, though more often than not he writes in the first person. In one story, he is his own alter ego – a writer tired of author talks; in another, he is a drunk accosting people on a Warsaw street, trying to get them to drink beer with him. Elsewhere, he is a child naively observing his grandparents, or a septuagenarian reminiscing about his youth in provincial communist-era Poland. Soltys talks about ageing and transience in different guises in order to show that they are aspects

of human experience on a par with others: different from childhood or youth but not necessarily worse. The stories share a certain melancholy, reinforced by descriptions of decaying matter and withering bodies. A sense of being tired of life takes the protagonists by surprise. Some fight against it; others submit to it calmly. There is a place here for illness, sadness and dwelling on missed opportunities, but there are also small joys and the bustle of the everyday, which reassures and gives meaning to passing life. Soltys’s prose is close to poetry in its precision and brevity; it is wise without being condescending. He makes us believe that everyone has a story to tell, and that the feeling of dissatisfaction in the face of passing years is something natural. This is why the “nonjoy” of the title does not overwhelm us with hopelessness but encourages us to take heart.

Marcin Kube

Translated by Eliza Marciniak

Adam looks like a former wrestler, boxer or maybe a footballer, but one of those less brilliant ones, the sort you love for ‘tough tackling’, a ‘good engine’, being ‘solid and dependable’. It’s the way he walks, his body straight, with a row of invisible medals on his hard, skinny chest. A gold medal in the shape of a calf muscle, a silver one with horsehair and a cross engraved with drops of oxygenated blood.

[...]

Since we moved here, I’ve seen him almost every day, and almost every day I’ve tried to match him up with former glories. Football glories one day, wrestling ones another, and boxing ones on other days. But his nose is rather unboxerlike. I ought to be the sort of person who looks for an opportunity, starts a conversation, buys the first round of vodka. Unfortunately, I’m not. So we’ve been walking past each other, sitting back to back at the Frigate or standing in parallel queues at the supermarket. Till today.

A small concrete square behind a large shop – a good shortcut for those in a hurry, with a low wall for the likes of us. Adam is sitting on the wall as I’m walking with my shopping, arms weighed down, a cigarette in my mouth like a compass needle. In the middle of the square, right in my path, in front of Adam’s feet, there are two dead cats. It’s impossible to say, ‘They look like they’re asleep.’ They’ve been mauled and are lying in unnatural positions, even for cats. Adam keeps getting up from the wall to chase away birds.

Suddenly he says to me, ‘The fuckers are taking revenge! Who knows how many of their children they’d killed.’

But he’s got no sympathy for bird revenge. A magpie trying to poke at a dull dead eye gets a kick and flies away shrieking. I’m standing there like an idiot. We know each other and we don’t, I was walking home, there are two dead cats in the spot where they probably liked to sun themselves.

‘Best to call somebody.’

‘Who?’ I reply, spitting out my cigarette, because I haven’t put my bags down. I’m just standing there like a scarecrow, for magpies and pigeons – there are no crows in sight. Finally, I rest my shopping on the wall and say, ‘One time when a bat flew in through my window, I called the municipal police. They have a special number for animals.’

‘They do?’

‘Yeah, they do.’

I call and a woman tells me they won’t come if they’re dead, that it’s up to animal control or the city cleaning department. I pass this on to Adam. He curses under his breath, spits and lights up a Viceroy.

‘Somebody killed them.’

‘What do you mean? A dog maybe; there’s lots of big dogs around here. Or foxes – I heard they’ve been spotted in Kępa.’

‘Two of them? One would be hard enough for a dog, but two? No, somebody killed them and dumped them

here. When I find out, I’m going to kill them.’

‘Who?’

‘Whoever did this. I’m going to kill them.’

We’re smoking, chasing away birds, people are looking at us in surprise and disgust. There’s no good way to start a conversation over dead cats’ bodies. It’s muggy – there’s going to be a storm before dusk.

Eventually I hear, ‘Why don’t you go home. There’s a vet around the corner, I’ll go and ask, maybe they can... Or they might tell me who...’

I say goodbye, and he extends the hand of a former boxer, wrestler, or footballer. Or maybe a weightlifter? ‘See you.’

I pick up my bags and turn into the street from where I’ll turn into my own street. I don’t look back; I don’t buy the vegetables I was supposed to buy; Adam is going to kill them.

Short story *A Skinny Man*, translated by Eliza Marciniak



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PAWEŁ
SOŁTYS

Born 1978

Nieradość [Nonjoy]

Publisher: Wydawnictwo Czarne, Wołowiec 2019

ISBN: 978-83-8049-919-5; 176 pages

Translation rights: Andrew Nurnberg Associates Warsaw
anna.rucinska@nurnberg.pl

Books published

Mikrotyki, 2018

Music

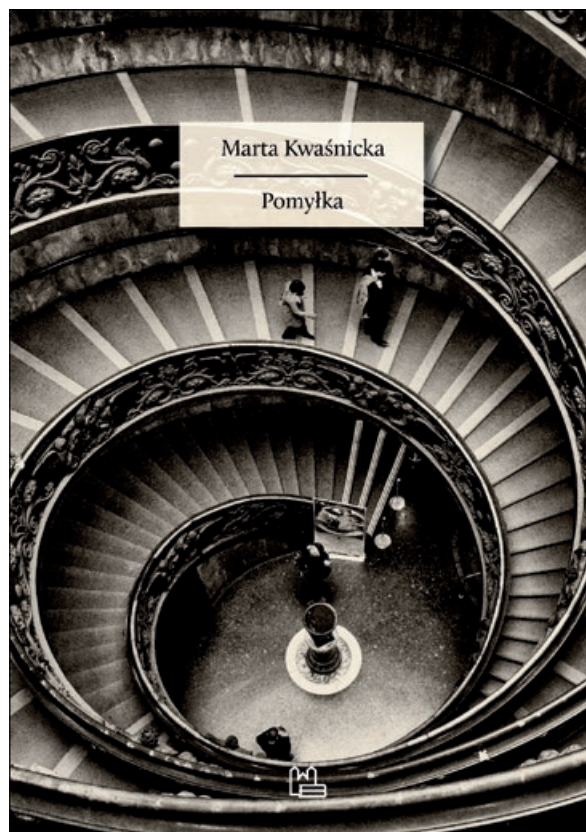
Under the stage name **Pablopavo** he has released 14 albums and played 1000 concerts. He has also received Polityka’s Passport Award (2015).

Selected awards

Nike Literary Award (2019) – nomination
Marek Nowakowski Prize for the best short story collection (2018)
Gdynia Literary Prize (2018)
Witold Gombrowicz Literary Prize (2018) – nomination
Joseph Conrad Award for the Best Literary Debut (2018) – nomination

Mistake

A portrait of a generation living off loans and “junk” contracts, house moves and emigration



MAREK NOWAKOWSKI PRIZE

Mistake is a collection of thirteen stories by Marta Kwaśnicka, a highly-regarded writer and essayist born in 1981. The book can be read both as Kwaśnicka's secret autobiography and as a portrait of the generation that entered adulthood following the fall of communism in 1989. Post-communist Poland was supposed to have been a brave new world for this generation, but reality soon dispelled those illusions. The biography of this generation is riddled with “mistakes”: living off loans and “junk” contracts, house moves, emigration, a sense of defeat and uprooting, breaking with history. Kwaśnicka's volume is thus a short-story version of the tale of a lost generation that must meet the world's ruthlessness head-on, shedding its childish naivety and embracing maturity.

Kwaśnicka tells this classic story in an original format. She invites the reader to see things through a young woman's eyes, reconstructing the past with a realist's precision, and displaying her interest in the spiritual dimension of generational disillusionment. The protagonist of *Mistake* explores issues of identity, evil, love, the meaning of art, and the place of women in a male world.

Kwaśnicka – or rather, the narrator – spins tales around apparently banal events from the past, be it a game of chess with a second-hand bookseller in London while waiting for a coach to Poland, an optician's appointment, or meeting a beggar on a tram in Krakow. Specific objects play an important role: a vodka bottle in *Moskovskaya* or an old piano in *Ignaz*. Most of Kwaśnicka's stories also strive for a discreet moral, in addition to employing different variations on the short-story format. *The Fruit* mirrors quasi-biblical apocrypha, *Moskovskaya* resembles a vignette of society, *Scumbag* is a classic short story, and *Lava* is somewhere between a self-portrait and an essay. Drawing on the best traditions of Polish short-story writing, Kwaśnicka perfectly describes the atmosphere of modern cities such as Warsaw, Krakow and Rome. Her interest lies in the mystery hidden in everyday life. *Mistake* was the winner of this year's Marek Nowakowski Award.

Maciej Urbanowski
Translated by Kate Webster

The man I was watching was rather dapper. He was nothing like those tramps whose appearance on a tram or bus causes panic to break out among the other passengers, who bring with them the stench of such great misfortune that the vehicle empties at the next stop. This poor wretch smelled only of alcohol, and not too strongly. He clambered onto the tram with great difficulty and sat in the first free seat, right by the door. He clearly had trouble walking. He wore an old, baggy jacket that had been mended in a few places, and a woollen beret with buttons, pulled down low over his ears. This strange get-up indicated that the man lived in a shelter and someone, perhaps the nuns, had got him dressed, because he seemed too muddle-headed to have done it himself. I had the impression someone else had put the beret on him like a child, and he'd been walking around in it like a little scatter-brained tot, forgetting he had something on his head. He was holding a large, half-empty cotton shopper. It was hard to say what was inside. Probably he was a can or bottle collector and, despite his evident mobility problems, he was going into town to try and make some money.

'Sit down, madam, don't validate your ticket,' he said to a woman who got on after him. 'Why should we? We don't owe them anything.'

He moved over to make room for her to sit down next to him, but she had no intention of doing so. Casting him a suspicious glance, she walked past him, heading towards the back of the tram.

[...]

Silence fell in the carriage. The man's raised voice had shaken everyone from their apathy. Conversations ground to a halt.

Eventually, a woman sitting nearby broke the silence. 'Such profanity. That's Poland for you,' she said in disgust.

'Traffic disruptions on Długa Street,' came the voice of a controller from the depot.

'Shut it, you scumbag. Don't be making a noise here,' replied the tramp angrily, not taking his eyes off the Basilica. 'Yes, Wyspiański's buried there too. A great man, I saw a photo of him once when he was in Paris. I've also been to Paris.'

Some of the passengers started exchanging amused glances, but the poor wretch in the beret, his eyes still fixed on what was outside the window, kept talking: 'You oaf! You had the Golden Horn! You oaf! You had your feathered cap which was stolen by the breeze. The Horn resounds among the trees – you're left with nothing but the strap! All you're left with is the strap!' His hoarse, breaking voice contrasted strangely with the words he was speaking. He sounded like an old, malfunctioning contraption playing a familiar melody off-key. The young lad sitting opposite him pulled his hood down over his face; someone else got up and moved further down the carriage, as far as possible from the man and his monologue.

'He had a good friend, Rydel,' continued the tramp. 'I

remember that because I had a good friend once too. They called him "Rome" even though he only drank beer and smoked cigarettes. There was nothing Italian about him. Nor noble, as it turned out. But all the same, they called him "Rome", that was the nickname he got, the scumbag.'

He shook his head nervously, turned away from the window and looked around the tram.

'There was a student as well,' he said to a young woman sitting nearby. 'They called her "Muriel". Beautiful, like you, I liked her very much. Very much. We used to go to the Basilica together.' The young woman didn't reply. She pretended to be occupied by something outside and kept staring through the window.

'Then Muriel had Rome's baby, a son. The weather was like today when they whisked her off to the hospital on Copernicus Street. Scumbag. Her hair was auburn.' The lights that illuminate Wawel Castle at dusk were shining on the Vistula, so the tramp looked in that direction too.

'Oh, that's where they should have buried Wyspiański,' he muttered and fell silent.

Excerpt translated by Kate Webster



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MARTA
KWAŚNICKA

Born 1981

Pomyłka [Mistake]

Publisher: Tyniec. Wydawnictwo Benedyktynów, Kraków 2019

ISBN: 978-83-7354-938-8; 321 pages

Translation rights: Marta Kwaśnicka

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Essay collections published

Jadwiga, 2015

Krew z mlekiem, 2014

Selected awards

Józef Mackiewicz Literary Prize (2020) - nomination

Marek Nowakowski Prize for the best short story collection (2020)

Skrzydła Dedala [Daedalus' Wings] Literary Award (2016)

Identitas Award (2015)

Catholic Publishers' Association Award FENIKS (2015)

Foreign language translations

Hungary (*Jadwiga*)

The Magic Light of the City

Scrupulously realistic portrait of Warsaw beyond the tourist hot-spots



A big city's atmosphere is created by the people who live there – not only the wealthy, the upper classes, but above all the ordinary, grey people whom we pass by indifferently every day on streets, in hallways, in parks and underpasses, the ones focused on their small, everyday affairs. It is they – the ordinary inhabitants of Warsaw, eternally blended into the fabric of the city – who form the foundation of Wojciech Chmielewski's stories. A young woman with a little baby – the widow of a Polish soldier killed in Afghanistan, a drug addict without enough strength to pull himself together and start a new life without his addiction, a cleaning lady in a museum earning money to top up her pension, a drunk spending every night wandering the same route from bar to bar, or a boy taking his dog for a walk in a courtyard amid collapsing apartment houses. They all live in their own worlds, built from accumulated frustrations, unfulfilled plans and ambitions extending beyond their actual opportunities – but also from positive memories, desires and dreams. When these everyday

small stories – so familiar to so many, illuminated by the magical light of the city where they take place – are turned into literature, they become extraordinary and take on a morally universal dimension.

This scrupulously realistic portrait of Warsaw, and these stories of Varsovian main characters, are drawn from penetrating observations of the capital's streets beyond tourist hot-spots. Chmielewski peeks into ruined pre-war courtyards, between little suburban houses, into the corners of squares and parks. This forms the setting for situations that interrupt the monotonous life of his characters, giving them hope for change.

As he wanders through this urban labyrinth, he is kept company by the ghost of Marek Nowakowski – the late author of stories about communist-era Warsaw and its inhabitants, to whom the final story in this collection is dedicated.

Katarzyna Wójcik

Translated by Sean Gasper Bye

I walked through my city without pleasure – as always. I had an errand to run. It was noon. Marszałkowska Street, Constitution Square – the architectural ghosts of communism. Except that in this present-day neo-capitalism, the dead had come a little to life. The square held rows of traders’ stands, signs, advertisements, a host of goods for sale. More colours. More life. I turned onto Wilcza Street – at this end, preserved in its pre-war form. Art Nouveau apartment houses, their frontages decorated with garlands, columns, cupids. I stopped. I took a look inside one of the courtyard entrances. And kept going. That’s how it started. I walked into the courtyard and followed the trail of the past: marble steps, bronze door handles, stuccoed vault ceilings, little windows of doormen’s lodges, little statues of the Virgin Mary in niches. Sitting beneath one, like a chaplain or guard, was an impressive, grey-brown cellar tomcat. I thought of life in days long since passed, of however many cursed generations that lived within these walls. A magical light revealed itself inside the dark, miraculously preserved recesses.

The city as a world. Its streets, alleys, squares, buildings, cafés, restaurants. People, atmosphere, history. The past stored up in walls, memory, customs. And something more! The radiation that creates the city. Because such a thing exists, without a doubt. Its influence on people, on language. A city is not only a material thing. It is also a spirituality. The spirit of the city shaping the identity of its inhabitants and its culture, creating conditions where their talents can thrive.

In the sky over the city, clouds arrange themselves in the shape of Pegasus. A boy gazes out of the window of his room at the mystery of these feathery clouds. An invisible painter keeps repeating the same motif. The boy feels a strange excitement. He has already been marked.’

This is what Marek Nowakowski wrote in his sketch *The City* about his Warsaw, which he also called ‘an Atlantis ravaged by hostile elements’. He searched for traces of it every day, industriously filling up pages that came together into a one-of-a-kind work. It was born in moments like when the two of us, having purchased a small bottle of vodka, entered an artisan’s workshop. Nowakowski said a warm ‘hello’ to the owner and a conversation began, interspersed with sips of alcohol. Suddenly this sorry-looking cramped interior was packed with people, acquaintances now departed, the neighbourhood’s former residents – ordinary, average, but through the power of performance suddenly particular, elevated by the spirit of the city where their lives’ good and bad times had played out.

In my city, Marek Nowakowski was a discoverer of the forgotten, above all of human characters, the personalities who pass away so quickly. That is why, when from time to time I would visit him and we’d strike up a conversation, I found it remarkable that he spoke so little of himself, of his writing. Sometimes

I felt as though he didn’t like talking about it. At such times we would plunge into tale-telling about writers from the past, about books that lit up the imagination or, on the contrary, turned out to be bitter disappointments. I saw them walking around Warsaw: there was Kazimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer, who went insane at the end of his life, and the elegantly dressed Julian Wołoszynowski, surely thinking up yet another Podolian intrigue as he walked by. Meanwhile, Stanisław Rembek was feeding a fresh sheet of paper into his Monarch Pioneer typewriter to record what the next day of the German occupation would bring. We wandered through Odessa, Vladivostok, the Bieszczady Mountains and the spa town of Konstancin, spent time in the sewers of Paris, and in Prague, where the Golem was magically brought to life to defend the Jewish nation from persecution. In Berlin, Franz Kafka died of consumption; in Vienna, Joseph Roth knocked back yet another glass of cognac in a hotel bar; and Saul Bellow sat on a bench in a Chicago bathhouse with gangsters who regaled him with stories from their world. ‘Hey Saul,’ they’d say to the writer, ‘can a fella make a living doing that?’

Excerpt translated by Sean Gasper Bye



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WOJCIECH
CHMIELEWSKI

Born 1969

Magiczne światło miasta [*The Magic Light of the City*]

Publisher: Wydawnictwo Arcana, Kraków 2019

ISBN: 978-83-65350-39-8; 202 pages

Translation rights: Wydawnictwo Arcana
arcana@poczta.internetdsl.pl

Selected books

Belweder gryzie w rękę, 2017

Najlepsza dentystka w Londynie, 2014

Kawa u Doroty, 2010

Brzytwa, 2008

Biały bokser, 2006

Selected awards

Marek Nowakowski Prize for the best short story collection (2017)

Angelus Central European Literary Award (2011, 2017) –
nominations

Józef Mackiewicz Literary Prize (2007) – distinction

The Hidden Web



A breath of fresh air in a genre that so easily slips into cliché

After graduating from journalism school, Julita – the book’s main character – wanted to become a reporter and to fight for the truth, crafting articles on important issues. Yet she ends up at an online tabloid where the name of the game is cheap thrills and celebrity news, and the journalists’ main task is achieving the highest possible “clickability.” One day, as she is reporting on a car accident that killed the former star of a TV show, Julita notices a small detail in a photograph that seems to undermine the official version of events. She starts digging into the topic – yet someone is doing their best to throw her off the trail... In consequence, Julita loses her job and reputation, while even her loved ones turn their backs on her. We read with horror how little it takes to ruin someone’s life: Julita discovers someone has intercepted her email password, access to her smartphone memory, and the entry code to her apartment building... It is of course a truism to say that technology plays an enormous role in today’s world – both in the life of

individuals, as shown in the first book in this series, and in society (the sequel is focused on online elections). It also reminds us that online privacy is almost non-existent. Yet by showing us the potential consequences for the go-getting, smooth-tongued, determined, and all-around sympathetic and authentic Julita, Szamałek is much more convincing than a dozen news stories on this very subject. The same could be said of the security tips Julita receives from Janek Tran – a police officer and cybersecurity specialist. The character of Janek, who is half-Polish and half-Vietnamese, is a breath of fresh air in a genre that so easily slips into cliché. *The Hidden Web* has everything a reader would expect from an ideal thriller: fantastic pacing, an intriguing mystery, compelling characters and a background of present-day social issues.

Agnieszka Urbanowska
Translated by Sean Gasper Bye

Julita Wójcicka stared at the letters on her computer screen. They stubbornly continued to glow green. Not good.

‘C’mon, come on...’ she whispered, twirling a heavily gnawed pencil in her fingers.

‘Told you,’ Piotrek said from the seat next to her. He took another sip of his tea, wiping his fashionably trimmed moustache afterwards. ‘Even our followers won’t fall for such brazen clickbait.’

‘Ha!’ Julita pumped her fist in triumph. ‘Read ‘em and weep!’

Her headline’s background had turned red. That meant in the last minute at least one thousand people had been lured in by Julita’s article, tantalizingly entitled “ILONA ZAJĄC FLASHES BIKINI PICS ON HER GRAM: I’M NOT GONNA JUST SIT AND LET HATERS CALL ME FAT [GALLERY].” As a result, the text would be promoted to their portal’s homepage, leaving behind the dusty recesses of the “Culture” section.

Piotrek said nothing. Instead, he let out a dramatic sigh and turned back to his MacBook. Julita understood his frustration. He hadn’t had an article go red for a week. His most recent attempts – “THE STARS OF ‘THE CLAN’, THEN AND NOW”, “A MUSHROOM HUNTER’S GRISLY HARVEST”, “KOALA BEARS ON SLEDS – CUTEST THING YOU’LL WATCH TODAY” – were all green or, horror of horrors, blue, the mark of the Internet’s complete indifference. Worse still, Piotrek spent hours polishing each article, endlessly swapping sentences around, racking his brain for synonyms and unique turns of phrase. Julita, meanwhile, had prepped her piece about Ilona Zajac in about fifteen minutes, smoke break included.

Julita stood up from her desk, stretched and plodded over to the kitchen nook. With a red article in the bank, she had fulfilled her quota and could take the rest of the day easy. The water burbled in their cheap, calcified kettle and she poured it over her instant coffee, filling the air with its pleasant, familiar aroma. Julita lifted her furiously red MEGANEWS.PL mug, took a small sip and cast her eyes over the office.

At a dozen-odd white desks, computers hummed, mice clicked and a soft, blueish light glowed, reflecting off the users’ glasses. There were two gigantic, wall-mounted TVs, one showing the homepage superimposed with a heatmap to chart the popularity of featured articles, the second tuned to a 24-hour news channel. Opposite them, glass partitions separated off three rooms (management, HR, and IT); in the corner stood printers and a scanner; out of the windows, the wide asphalt of Cybernetics Street and a cloudy sky latticed with construction cranes.


This is not how Julita had imagined her career in journalism. She had dreamed of working for a prestigious paper like *Wyborcza* or a serious weekly like *Polityka* or *Newsweek*. Heated discussions during morning editorial meetings, finishing copy at three in the morning, meeting politicians in smoke-filled restaurants, anonymous informers in trench coats

sliding binders of receipts across sticky bar tables – that sort of thing. Julita had even snagged an (unpaid, of course) internship at such a publication. For three months, she had sorted papers, organized archives and moderated Internet forums, hoping someone would notice her and take her under their wing. Thing is, big papers have stacks of interns, including the golden youth of Warsaw, with influential parents watching over them in the wings. Next to them, Julita, fresh off the bus from the provincial town of Żuków, in a wardrobe fished out of rummage bins, had a hard time catching anyone’s eye.

But then she happened across a listing for a job at MEGANEWS.PL. They were looking for a journalist to join their news division, promising a young team, competitive pay and business trips. Their shiny new office building had made a strong first impression; their editor-in-chief had switched right away to the informal “you” and laughed at her jokes. *Whatever*, she’d thought. *YOLO*.

Excerpt translated by Travis Currit

Extended English sample available: krystyna.kolakowska@gwfoksal.pl



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JAKUB SZAMAŁEK

Born 1986

Ukryta sieć: t. 1: Cokolwiek wybierzesz; t.2: Kimkolwiek jesteś
[The Hidden Web: vol.1: Whatever You Choose, vol. 2: Whoever You Are]

Publisher: Foksal, Warszawa 2019-2020
ISBN: t. 1: 978-83-280-6124-8; 448 pages; t. 2: 978-83-280-6504-8; 416 pages
Translation rights: Foksal, krystyna.kolakowska@gwfoksal.pl

Foreign language translations
The Hidden Web has been published in Czech Republic.

Crime series published
Leochares, vol. 1-3, 2011-2015

Selected awards
Wielki Kaliber [“High Caliber”] Prize for Poland’s best crime novel (2011 and 2016 – Readers’ Choice; 2020 – nomination)
Film rights for *The Hidden Web* optioned by NAIMA FILM

Flea

There's no motive, no fingerprints, only an elaborately prepared crime scene



What do you do when history starts interfering with your life, when the dormant past suddenly awakens, exploding like an extinct volcano? Confusion reigns, and all you know is you've been dealing with a brutal crime that is inexplicably intertwined with ancient history, a story from eighty years ago. Such is life for the heroes of *Flea* by Anna Potyra, whose debut crime fiction novel creates an evocative picture of the big city and the main characters living there as they try to get to the bottom of a mysterious murder.

Interestingly, both the reader and the investigators – Superintendent Adam Lorenz and psychologist Iza Rawska – know exactly the same: nothing. There's no motive, no fingerprints, only an elaborately prepared crime scene, the blood mopped up and the corpse tastefully arranged. However, the murderer does leave a hidden “signature” – part of an old photograph. Could it be that a serial killer straight out of David Fincher's *SE7EN* is roaming the streets of Warsaw? Or perhaps it's a one-off crime? Why does the killer allude to

the events of World War II, so inextricably linked to Poland's capital city: to the history of the three days in August 1944 when the Germans murdered between 30,000 and 65,000 civilian residents of Wola district? Each new question gives rise to many more, awakening the curiosity of the reader and simultaneously vexing the protagonist.

Anna Potyra's debut novel is thus bestowed with a classic plot, the solution to which we find out just in time. In keeping with the hallmarks of the model crime novel, the author lays false trails and skilfully feeds us the answers by way of minor details. Her writing style is light, devoid of linguistic brutality. However, it would be wrong to characterise her novel as old-fashioned; it pulses with modernity, the pace of the big city that atomises the characters and hinders Superintendent Lorenz in dealing with the mysterious tragedy from the past.

Michał Żarski

Translated by Kate Webster

She wiped the kitchen surface with a damp cloth. She could hear that Bartek was reaching the end of the kids' bedtime story. As she was putting the remains of the dried fruit compote back in the fridge, she noticed an envelope sticking out from behind the toaster. Now she remembered finding it in the letterbox yesterday. She'd been so laden down with shopping bags, she'd brought it into the house between her teeth, chucked it on the toaster and started unpacking the groceries, and had completely forgotten about it.

The envelope was carefully addressed in blue pen. Probably a Christmas card. She wasn't sure who it was from. There was no sender's address and she didn't recognise the handwriting. She cut the envelope open. Inside were some folded pieces of A4 paper with a small yellow Post-it Note stuck to the front. Written in evenly-spaced letters, in the same handwriting as the address, were the words: *Do you think your life is so big? You're a flea.*

Agnieszka frowned. What the hell was that supposed to mean? She unfolded the pieces of paper and started reading the printed text.

How would you feel if you heard that 40,000 people had been shot in two days? You'd probably think: 'that's a lot'. Or perhaps you have more empathy? In which case you'd slip into a momentary reverie and say: 'God, what a tragedy!' And then you'd return to your life. To your problems, which are weighing heavy on you after all. If you were to stand over a mass grave and read some of their names: the old, the young, the really tiny. If you could imagine those people, their fear, their despair, and their end, perhaps then the melancholy would engulf you for a few hours. Whole families that disappeared like dust blown by the wind. You'd start to understand that those people experienced a hell you can't even imagine. Nor can I. And if you're thinking that fate couldn't be any crueller, guess what...

Some people survived that hell.

Agnieszka turned the piece of paper over and skimmed the first paragraph on the other side: *Let me tell you a story. When the Warsaw Uprising broke out, Basia was just six years old. Her mother...* She threw the letter down on the table. She didn't want to read any more.

'Who is this headcase?' she muttered under her breath. Angrily, she crumpled up the pieces of paper, opened the drawer under the sink and threw them in the recycling bin.

The door to the kids' bedroom closed with a gentle clatter. Agnieszka heard her husband's soft steps in the hall, and a moment later Bartek appeared in the kitchen.

'I know it's greedy, but I'm cutting myself another piece of poppyseed cake...' he began cheerfully, breaking off when he saw his wife's face. 'What's wrong?' he asked, the tone of his voice instantly changing.

Agnieszka shook her head. She was annoyed that the

letter had upset her so much. Or maybe it was because she hadn't been able to hide her mood changes from her husband? She wasn't sure. She rubbed her forehead hard, as if to chase away the bothersome thoughts, and trying to make her voice sound as care-free as possible, she replied: 'No, it's nothing. The tiredness just caught up with me. Put on the DVD. I'll just cut the cake, I'll be right there.'

When she heard the first few bars of The Pointer Sisters' hit song, her legs started jiggling and she broke into a smile. She pranced over to the sofa. Even though they knew the film by heart, they still watched *Love Actually* every year after their Christmas Eve meal. They'd developed a tradition of starting from the part where Hugh Grant displayed his incomparable choreography to the song *Jump*. That scene was just too good to watch only once.

Today, just like every year, Agnieszka got caught up in the magic of the film. But although she was cuddled up next to her husband on the sofa, alternately amused and moved as she followed the capers of the well-known characters, her mind kept coming back to the words on the yellow Post-it Note: *Do you think your life is so big? You're a flea.*

You're a flea.

Excerpt translated by Kate Webster



© M. Potyra

ANNA
POTYRA
Born 1982

Pchła [Flea]

Publisher: Zysk i S-ka, Poznań 2019

ISBN: 978-83-8116-681-2; 350 pages

Translation rights: Zysk i S-ka

anna.giryn@zysk.com.pl

Books published

Facet kontra kłopoty, 2011

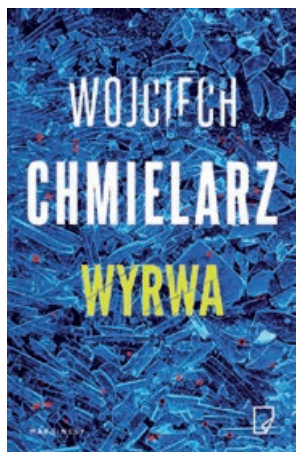
Anna Potyra has also published children's books, including *Zuzia* series.

Selected awards

Piła Crime Fiction Festival Award (2019) – nomination

Always in demand: new thrillers by bestselling authors

The most wanted Polish crime writers never let their readers down: the past year brought us plenty of new instalments of the popular series. Whether it's the skeletons in the closet of the modern marriage, gambits of secret service agents, the provincial tragedy of two conflicted families, or the suspense of a treasure hunt – each author knows how to skilfully mix intrigue with contemplation of the world around them. And all that while maintaining the highest standard of literary craft.



Rupture

Rupture is the latest of three standalone novels by the master psychological thriller writer Wojciech Chmielarz. This time, the author of *Wound* and *Den of Vipers* draws us into a reality shaped by the undertones and secrets bubbling underneath the surface of a marriage. The portrait of a grieving father of two daughters is dimmed by doubts and questions leading to contradictory answers about his wife Janina's tragic death. Once again, Chmielarz leads us down the winding road towards the unearthing of the truth, along with the question of whether having the full knowledge of the past can really bring about the longed-for peace of mind. Subsequent stages of discovering the past, along with the in-depth portrait of the main character, are more than just a journey through various criminal riddles. They also serve as a journey to one's inner self in search of some fundamental truth. Chmielarz constructs his novels on several planes of interpretation, the outcome being universally applicable stories with a criminal flavour. This approach might be the key to the author's success, as his works are popular in France and among numerous TV producers in Poland.

Author: Wojciech Chmielarz

Publisher: Marginesy, 2020; ISBN: 978-83-66500-16-7; 383 pages

Translation rights: Marginesy, k.rudzka@marginesy.com.pl



The Matter of Price

The Matter of Price can be read as the continuing adventures of the character from Miłoszewski's previous novel *Priceless*, or as a standalone novel. Bogdan Smuga, scientist and rationalist, tries to find a mysterious treasure described by explorer and scholar Benedykt Czerski, whose writings on the topic have been scattered around the world. As luck would have it, the only person ready to join Smuga on his expedition is a Warsaw historian, Zofia Lorentz. Thick with subplot and narrative detours, the novel visits various places and timelines, taking us from Siberia through Paris, and all the way to Poland. The novel's main theme revolves around one keyword: *challenge*. The ambitious structure of this epic palimpsest mirrors the intricacies of the plot and interrelations of numerous characters. Zygmunt Miłoszewski is probably the most popular Polish crime writer internationally: his books have been published in 20 languages. Two of his novels have been adapted for the cinema. Now he's back, bringing us an adventure novel, thriller, and crime story, all neatly wrapped up in one.

Author: Zygmunt Miłoszewski

Publisher: GW Foksal, 2020; ISBN: 978-83-280-7219-0; 576 pages

Translation rights: GW Foksal, Krystyna.Kolakowska@gwfoksal.pl



The Executioner's Right Hand

The latest novel of the bestselling noir crime stories is the eighth book about the trials and tribulations of Edward Popielski of Lviv, a secret agent during the Second Polish Republic. It's a retro whodunit reminiscent of the classic picaresque or spy fiction, set in pre-war Central Poland and Kresy or Eastern Borderlands. Krajewski skilfully merges historical facts with fiction, steeping the plot in his signature dense atmosphere of gloomy, monstrous cities. After the assassination attempt on the Soviet ambassador in Warsaw in the summer of 1927, the Polish and Bolshevik special services clash, setting off a maelstrom of plot twists and intrigues. As relations between the two countries start going downhill, the infallible Agent Popielski springs into action...

Krajewski's books have been translated into 20 languages. A TV series based on his work is being developed by Netflix and TVP.

Author: Marek Krajewski

Publisher: Znak, 2020; ISBN: 978-83-240-6023-8; 400 pages

Translation rights: Znak, bolinska@znak.com.pl



Splinter

Splinter is the third novel in one of Polish readers' favourite crime series, featuring Police Commissioner Bernard Gross. The previous two novels in the series are *Defect* and *Flaw*. The latest instalment is multi-plot crime fiction, seamlessly merging action with drama, in typical Małecki style. While investigating the mysterious discovery of human bones in some woods, Commissioner Gross comes across the case of an unexplained disappearance of two students sixteen years before. In *Splinter*, Małecki highlights the dramatic and social aspects of the story to a much greater extent than in his previous books (subtly inspired by the story of two conflicted families in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*), which, at times, lends the novel the distinct flavour of a psychological thriller. The author draws a multi-layered portrait of the main character, further deepening it with dark reflections upon the destructive force of love – and the trauma of loneliness brought upon by unresolved loss.

Author: Robert Małecki

Publisher: Czwarta Strona, 2020; ISBN: 978-83-66431-76-8; 528 pages

Translation rights: Czwarta Strona,
a.tomczyk@wydawnictwopoznanskie.pl

Nominated for Wielki Kaliber [“High Caliber”] Prize for Poland's best crime novel

Paulina Subocz-Białek, translated by Aga Zano

How to Feed a Dictator

Everyone has to eat, including dictators



ENTHUSIASTICALLY RECEIVED BY U.S. CRITICS

The idea behind *How To Feed A Dictator* is simple, but that's exactly where its strength lies. There's a Polish idiom that translates literally as "to get to know something from the kitchen", which means showing some aspect of life from the unfamiliar, unofficial side. And it's quite literally from the kitchen that Witold Szablowski has chosen to present some of the world's greatest evildoers. Everyone has to eat, including dictators. And so the people who cooked for them had to be highly trusted, and under constant surveillance.

Szablowski spent several years trying to get in touch with the chefs who worked for Idi Amin, Fidel Castro, Pol Pot, Saddam Hussein and Enver Hoxha. Most of them keep a low profile. The Cuban who cooked for Fidel Castro is the only one to boast about it publicly. He gives interviews to the Western media, runs a restaurant in central Havana and is a local celebrity, which was probably only possible because in the past he had been a comrade-in-arms of Castro and had done his bit for the revolution. But he became a cook rather by accident.

Each of these stories is different, but they're all fascinating. The woman who cooked for Pol Pot, the Cambodian dictator – the worst mass-murderer

since Adolf Hitler, responsible for the death of two million people – talks about him with genuine love and devotion. She still believes he did a great deal of good for the country. Idi Amin's cook has answered the question of whether the Ugandan dictator was a cannibal thousands of times. His story is incredible in that he survived, despite having also cooked for the country's previous president.

But the most shocking story of all concerns the man who cooked for Enver Hoxha, the Albanian dictator. For more than a decade the poor man had to take part in daily self-criticism sessions. Anyone who did this unconvincingly might not survive. On top of that, he had to break all his ties with the outside world, apart from the most essential. One time, when he accidentally ran into an acquaintance in the street and exchanged a few words with him, the other man ended up in the security service's dungeons.

In fact, *How To Feed A Dictator* is a tale about terror – the terror of murderers who are afraid for their lives, and the terror of those whose lives are at the mercy of their whims.

Mariusz Cieřlik

Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones

We lived poorly, but I can't remember us ever going hungry. We usually ate manioc, or manioc flour with a vegetable of some kind. Meat was an extreme rarity. My father always had two or three cows, but if he did slaughter one of them, all the meat went to the market. We needed the money to pay our debts; we always owed our neighbours for something. The food eaten by the Luo, the tribe I am from, is quite like the food of the *mzungu*, the white people. The main ingredients are cooked vegetables or meat. The *mzungu* eat potatoes; we eat manioc, buckwheat, or rice. Except that it's not enough for the *mzungu* to have a little buckwheat or manioc, and a small piece of meat; the *mzungu* have to bake cheese too, put it on their vegetables, and stew the meat in wine first. *Mzungu* cuisine is the food of people who want to show that they have power. Because food is power. I learned that from cooking for presidents. If you have food, you also have women, you have money, you have people's admiration. You can have whatever you want. Our food is the food of people who know what hunger is. We have nothing to prove to anyone. We eat to have the strength to go on working.

While I was living with my parents, I had various occupations. First I dabbled in music; I played the *orutu*, a kind of fiddle that's popular among people from the Luo tribe. It has one string, and you play it with a bow, resting the instrument against your hip. I used to earn money playing it at weddings and other special events.

Then my uncle took me out on his boat to be a fisherman. I sailed with him for about two years.

Until one day a hippopotamus attacked our boat. We saw it from afar, swimming toward us. An angry hippo is much worse than a crocodile: it moves very fast in the water. It swam up and overturned our boat, sending us all flying helplessly in different directions. It's a miracle no harm came to anyone that day, because that hippo had already killed several people, and all the fishermen around the lake were afraid of it. After the hippo attack I said to my uncle, 'I wasn't the only one of fourteen siblings to survive just to die now if it comes back.'

My uncle agreed with me. One of his sons, Sylvester, was working in Kampala, Uganda, at a club that was popular with the *mzungu*. My uncle said I should take the boat to Kampala and find the club, and his son would be sure to help me to find a job.

For us, the Luo, family ties are very important. Did you know that the former American president Barack Obama is Luo too? His father comes from a village twelve miles from here. And even though he has never lived here, Obama often helps his family in any way he can. So I knew that Sylvester would not refuse to help me.

I boarded the boat from Kisumu to Entebbe, and as soon as it docked, I went straight to my cousin.

The "Kampala" club was a very important place for

the *mzungu*, because most of the people sent by the British government to work in Uganda spent their first few weeks living in the hotel next to it, until a suitable rental home was found for them. My cousin was a groundskeeper there and swept the floors. He was very pleased to see me and went straight to the manager and instantly got me a job as a waiter's assistant. I didn't know a word of English, but luckily it wasn't necessary. All I had to do was smile and carry food from the kitchen to the dining room.

What about the hippopotamus, you ask? One day it simply disappeared. People say it must have been the spirit of a warrior who had come to take revenge on his enemies.

Excerpt translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones



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WITOLD
SZABLŃWSKI

Born 1980

Jak nakarmić dyktatora [How to Feed a Dictator]

Publisher: Wydawnictwo W.A.B./ Grupa Wydawnicza Foksal, Warszawa 2019

ISBN: 978-83-280-6991-6; 320 pages

Translation rights: Andrew Nurnberg Associates
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Foreign language translations

Czech Republic, France, Holland, Italy, Russia, Slovakia, USA, Ukraine
(*Jak nakarmić dyktatora*)

Szablowski's other works have been published in Estonia, Finland, Germany, and Spain as well.

Selected books

Sprawiedliwi zdrajcy. Sąsiedzi z Wołynia, 2016

Tańczące niedźwiedzie [Dancing Bears. True Stories of People Nostalgic for Life Under Tyranny], 2014

Zabójca z miasta moreli [The Assassin from Apricot City. Reportage from Turkey], 2010

Szablowski is the author of award-winning reportages and interviews published in magazines and newspapers.

Selected awards

Edward Stanford Travel Writing Awards (2019) – nomination

Angelus Central European Literature Award (2017) – nomination

Teresa Toranska *Newsweek* Award (2016)

Ryszard Kapuściński Award for journalists (2013)

Nike Literary Award (2011) – nomination

Beata Pawlak Award (2011)

European Parliament Journalism Prize (2010)

Jan Sehn. The Nazi Tracker

Sehn was the first investigator to create a precise description of how Auschwitz operated

'He was the most original Nazi hunter you could imagine'. Thus was Jan Sehn described in *The Nazi Hunters* by Andrew Nagorski, long-time editor of *Newsweek USA*. He placed Sehn among such other famous figures as Szymon Wiesenthal and Fritz Bauer, who was responsible for apprehending Adolf Eichmann. Born into a family originally from Germany, yet always giving "Polish" when asked for his nationality, this lawyer and investigator devoted his life to exposing the truth of the German crimes committed during World War II, with special attention to the German Nazi concentration camp in Auschwitz. Sehn was the first investigator to create a precise description of how the death factory operated. He got his knowledge first-hand: from surviving prisoners and captured executioners, including camp commander Rudolf Höss, who wrote a thorough report of his criminal actions specially for Sehn. An examining magistrate at the time, Jan Sehn wrote the indictment in Höss's trial, which concluded with a death sentence. He was also the first head of the Chief Commission for



the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation. Until the final days of his life, he took active part in collaborating with the West German government in tracking down the agents behind the Holocaust. 'Bringing the criminals to justice should weigh on the public conscience of all of humanity', he would say at international conferences.

Filip Gańczak's book is brilliantly documented, combining the inquisitiveness of a reporter with the technique of a professional historian. This is the first full biography of Sehn, who left behind very few private documents, but whose research and investigative work ranks him among the most important *Nazijäger*s. It is also a great tribute to the decades of work of a man whose examination of German crimes was peerless. Since 1966, the Institute of Court Expertise in Krakow, the most important centre of its kind in Poland, bears Jan Sehn's name. It is time the rest of the world learned of Poland's most extraordinary Nazi hunter.

Piotr Gociek

Translated by Soren Gauger

Witness reports are invaluable, but there was no getting around a professional on-the-spot investigation in Auschwitz. Sehn and his colleagues from the legal subcommission want to see the former camp grounds just as soon as possible. Though it may now seem scarcely plausible, it takes them ages to arrange a car. The trips can only be arranged in May.

The blurry photographs from the period show the members of the subcommission on their way. A roofless truck has been equipped with benches to seat Sehn, Pęczalski, Jarosiński and three record-takers: Krystyna Szymańska, who ‘had a fluent command of German and somewhat “mangled” the Polish language,’ Stefania Setmajer and Jadwiga Wojciechowska. ‘[W]e made occasional use of the truck – a banger provided by the administrative authorities,’ Jarosiński recalled years later. ‘Later we reached an understanding with a private car owner who, in exchange for being able to use the vehicle, agreed to let the commission use it half the time, while he got it for the other half.’ ‘We generally left Krakow on Monday, returned home on Saturday, and the Monday after that we headed back again to the former camp,’ Szymańska recalls. [...]

Despite the adverse conditions, the Krakow commission ultimately manages to get a great deal done. The lawyers have a look at the objects from the camp, they try to safeguard the documents the Germans left behind. As Szymańska states, they searched for them: ‘in all corners of the former camp. They lay there scattered on the ground, on the floors of various rooms, in especially large quantities in the camp administration offices. Judge Sehn said that any pieces of paper with writing had to be gathered up, and only later would we decide if they were of interest. That’s what we did. We even dug camp files out of the garbage cans and latrines. We stuffed them into big paper bags. Then from time to time our truck shipped them off to Krakow’. There, in the Court Evaluation Institute, they are scrubbed free of dirt and excrement and then read under infrared light.

In this way they manage to tease out lists, correspondence and commands by the German camp commanders. In the attic of Block Eleven, known as the Execution or Death Block, Sehn and Pęczalski find a prisoners’ card catalogue. ‘The search led me to the demolished barracks, to the waterlogged basement, where the papers, which had been literally kicked around, had to be gathered up,’ Sehn tells Marschak. ‘In the charred remains of one barrack, for example,

I found questionnaires from prisoner interrogations, elsewhere I stumbled across a camp map. The documents had to be carefully segregated, any one of them could have documented a crime.’

Yet the commission was short on workers and means of transport. The truck that the Krakow voivode had rummaged up was not making its daily rounds. Sehn and Pęczalski warned that ‘the bags full of documents waiting to be packed into the vehicle were, in two cases, snatched by Soviet soldiers.’ The investigative judge orders an intervention, but the materials cannot be retrieved. All they tell the Krakow team is: ‘No! That’s our loot and we’re not giving it back.’

Excerpt translated by Soren Gauger



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FILIP
GAŃCZAK
Born 1981

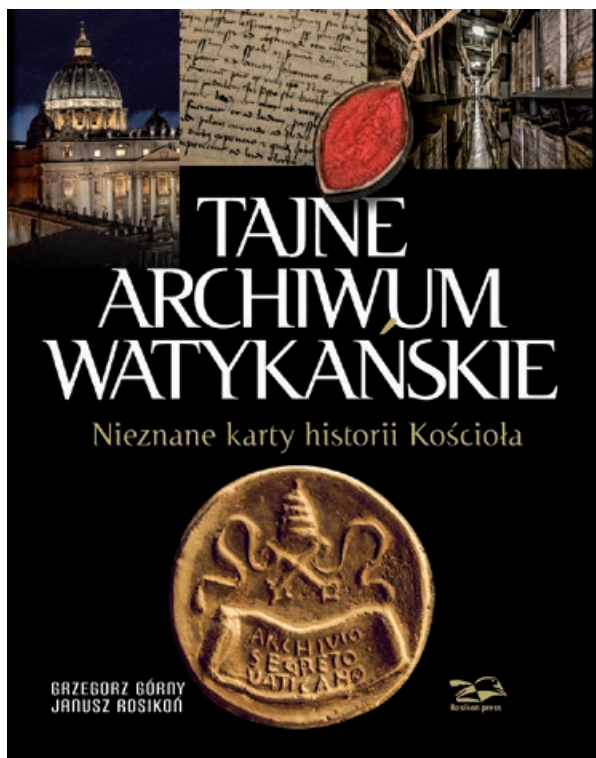
Jan Sehn. Tropiciele nazistów [Jan Sehn. The Nazi Tracker]

Publisher: Wydawnictwo Czarne, Wołowiec 2020
ISBN: 978-83-8049-978-2; 264 pages
Translation rights: Andrew Nurnberg Associates
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Books published
Polski nie oddamy. Władze NRD wobec wydarzeń w PRL 1980-1981, 2017
Filmowcy w matni bezpieki, 2011
Erika Steinbach. Piękna czy bestia?, 2008

Selected awards
Kazimierz Moczarski History Prize (2017) – nomination
History Book of the Year Award (2011) – nomination

Vatican Secret Archives



A richly illustrated story about unknown pages of Catholic Church history

There is no running away from history. It shapes our reality, and as time goes by, we become a part of it ourselves,' this is how very seriously two Polish authors, a writer and a photographer, start their richly illustrated story about the Vatican archives. They are secret in name only, but not really, as the authors actually visited there. They were secret over a period of over a dozen centuries, when they accumulated large numbers of parchments, papyri, and later, paper documents. Generations of historians will make truly epoch-making discoveries there for a long time to come.

These discoveries, well described in this book by Grzegorz Górny and Janusz Rosikoń, are fascinating, though they often run counter to popular ideas about the "secrets of the Vatican". The stereotypical views of the millions who consume mass culture are shaped by pop culture films. And these are often echoes of religious conflicts from centuries ago, when Protestants vilified the "papists". In today's world where it has rightly been recognised that prejudice and false stereotypes are a source of conflict and

unnecessary confrontation, real knowledge is a preventive treatment for this kind of misfortune.

One can learn from Górny and Rosikoń's book how many falsehoods and stereotypes have been wrapped around the history of events such as the Crusades, the trials of the Templars and Galileo, the Inquisition, and the Conquista. There are also more recent matters, which constantly arouse great emotions: the French Revolution, the Spanish Civil War, and the attitude of Pope Pius XII toward the Holocaust.

In addition, this book is a pleasant remedy, because it is interestingly written and beautifully illustrated. The Vatican is one of the few places on the planet where for several centuries people could continuously accumulate the products of their minds and hands. And although wars did not bypass Rome, the institutional continuity of the Catholic Church saved a great number of works of human genius.

Piotr Gursztyn

Translated by Peter Obst

It was September 13, 2001. People throughout the world were still living the events that had occurred two days earlier, when Islamic terrorists attacked the World Trade Center in New York City. Barbara Frale, however, an Italian mediaevalist, had other matters on her mind, as she was carrying out an investigative search at the Vatican Secret Archives. She was poring over registers of Avignon documents from the time of Benedict XII, whose pontificate was from 1334 to 1342. She came across a parchment that was catalogued as a protocol of one of the many French Inquisition investigations in the diocese of Tours. She would probably not have paid much attention to it had she not noticed a name that was familiar to her: Bérenger Fredoli.

Frale was very familiar with this man's biography. She immediately realised that she had no ordinary document before her. Bérenger Fredoli was one of the most influential Catholic hierarchs of the early 14th century: a French cardinal, the most outstanding canonist of his time, and a trusted associate – even nephew – of Pope Clement V, who sent him to various corners of the world on particularly delicate missions. What could such a person have possibly done during interrogations carried out by some provincial inquisitor in the diocese of Tours?

Frale looked at the bottom of the document. There were three seals on the parchment: one from Fredoli and two from other cardinals, Étienne de Suisy and Landolfo Brancaccio. Frale could not believe her eyes. She realised that she had found a seven-hundred-year-old document that historians had regarded as irretrievably lost, since it had been mistakenly catalogued in 1628 and again in 1912. It shed new light on the most notorious trial of the Middle Ages, particularly on the attitude of Pope Clement V, who, together with King Philip the Fair of France, was generally regarded as the main culprit in the dissolution of the Knights Templar and the execution of its leaders.

French historians certainly did not encounter this parchment at the beginning of the 19th century, when Napoleon had the Vatican Secret Archives transported to Paris. Enlightenment anticlerical officials were particularly interested in the catalogues pertaining to the Knights Templar trial and the trial of Galileo Galilei. They expected to find confirmation of facts that would set the Holy See in an unfavourable light. The French kept the files on the Knights Templar trial even after the fall of Napoleon, the restoration of the monarchy, and a decree to return all documents to the Vatican, as they still hoped to find material compromising the papacy. Fr. Marino Marini, the chamberlain of the prefect of the Vatican Secret Archives, persuaded them to return the files, telling them that the publication of the complete dossier would tarnish not Pope Clement's image, but King Philip's.

Was Fr. Marino Marini bluffing in order to regain the files? The answer became evident when Bishop Sergio Pagano, the prefect of the Vatican Secret Archives, presented an over three-hundred-page publication, *Processus Contra Templarios*, at the Vatican Palace's Aula Vecchia del Sinodo on 25 October, 2007. The publication contained the most important material concerning the Templars' trial, including the Chinon Parchment, discovered by Barbara Frale.

Excerpt translated by Stan Kacsprzak



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GRZEGORZ GÓRNY

Born 1969

JANUSZ ROSIKOŃ

Born 1942

*Tajne archiwum watykańskie.
Nieznane karty z historii Kościoła
[Vatican Secret Archives. Unknown Pages of Church History]*

Publisher: Rosikon Press, Warszawa 2020
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rights@rosikonpress.com, g.kasprzycka@rosikonpress.com

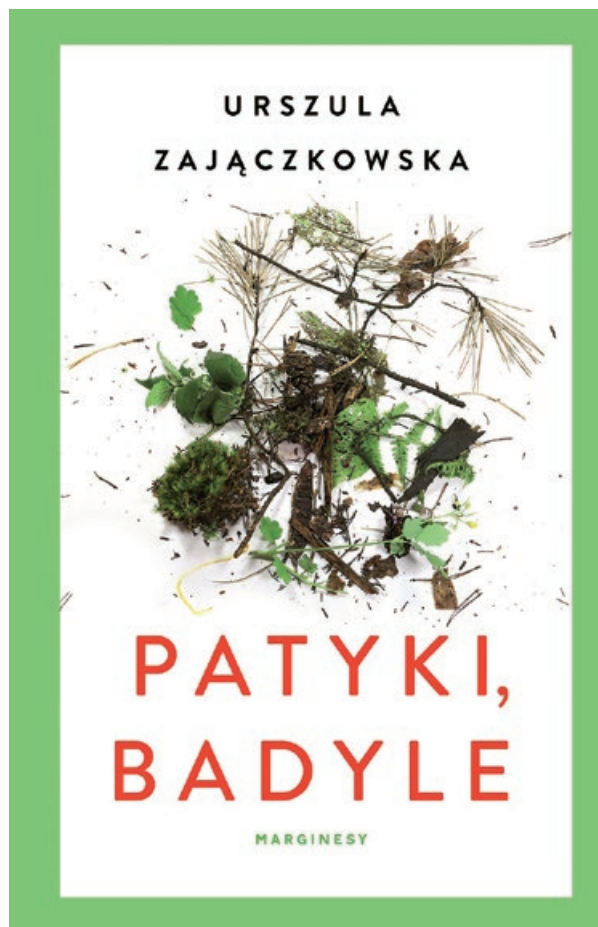
Selected books
Tajemnice Fatimy [Fatima Mysteries. Mary's Message to the Modern Age], 2016
Sekrety Guadalupe [Guadalupe Mysteries: Deciphering the Code], 2015
Ufam. Śladami Siostry Faustyny [Trust. In Saint Faustina's Footsteps], 2014
Trzej Królowie. Dziesięć Tajemnic [Three Kings, Ten Mysteries. The Secrets of Christmas and Epiphany], 2014
Świadkowie tajemnicy [Witnesses to Mystery: Investigations into Christ's Relics], 2012

Grzegorz Górny is a reporter, essayist, publicist, film, and television producer. His texts have been published in many Polish and foreign newspapers. Janusz Rosikoń is a photographer, whose photographs have been featured, among others, in *TIME*, *Newsweek*, *Schweizer Illustrierte*, and *Reader's Digest*. His work has been exhibited in many galleries in Poland and abroad.

Foreign language translations
Slovenia, USA (*Tajne archiwum watykańskie*)
Other works by Górny and Rosikoń have been published in Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Italy, and Spain.

Sticks and Stalks

**Zajączkowska combines
the wisdom of a poet and
a researcher**



GDYNIA LITERARY PRIZE

The paths of botanists and of those who can lose themselves in the crimson crowns of maple trees divided a long time ago. The first wield their microtomes, a guillotine for maniac miniaturists, cutting every tissue into slivers and sequencing genes to examine nature inside out. The latter simply appreciate what's "pretty" – whipping tails of long grasses, lush bird feathers, lakes at dawn – never even asking how it all works. True, their ecological conscience rests heavily upon their shoulders (as it does for most of humanity), making them save water and recycle. Still, when it comes to DNA and plant tissue, they only know as much as they have forgotten after graduating from high school. They rarely give a thought to the philosophy of nature, either, not that it should come as a surprise: the last time it was in vogue was during the Renaissance. After that came Charles Darwin, wise and sorrowful. And it's better not to read too much into him, or you'll realise the world is all made of violence.

Who could and would notice the tragedy occurring in the atrophy of tree cells becoming vascular bundles

used for transporting water up, up to the highest twigs, and in the pressing forces of juices that make spring plants burst like "taped-up mouths, filled with water"? Only someone who combines the wisdom of a poet and researcher could do such a thing; someone intimately familiar with the secrets of metabolic and vegetative cycles; ready to cut, scan and split while maintaining their careful attention to death, birth, solitude, bravery, and light. And that's Urszula Zajączkowska.

She opens her book with a short essay on gravity that determines plants' fates far more than animals do, writing of waves and caves of gravity – and such a world view remains omnipresent here. To the author, reality is just a whirlwind of matter that arranges itself in wisps, wounds, and streams that shiver, shatter and flow. Everything heaves and pulses, following its own rhythm. How strongly does one need to react to the world, and how many bundles of nerves does it take to write about it with such harrowing intensity and self-imposed discipline?

Wojciech Stanisławski
Translated by Aga Zano

Whenever you walk down a forest path, through a coppice or a meadow, you experience the harmony of nature. After all, it is a perfectly composed entity. There are no discords, no false notes, no arrhythmias. You absorb its gentle impeccability and restore your inner peace. In nature, there is duty and humility, the beauty and fierce will of life. And this energy that is so foreign to you, the energy of a wild matter, saturated with the hope of re-nascence, re-growth, re-cuperation, of sprouting and regeneration, this energy causes you to drink from it, drawing strength in knowing that you, too, will be given nature's spark of life. You too will get a chance to create yourself anew, forgetting what once was. And then, you will get to do your own thing afresh. But the tree you're touching to borrow its energy, this tree to whom you press your tired, tried face – this tree consists mostly of cells that committed a cruel suicide a long time ago. Almost all of them killed themselves ruthlessly, self-digesting and burning their own life away with acid-like severity, leaving nothing but an empty shell, a husk. They have done it before, and they will keep on doing it. All this for the sake of physiological pragmatism.

Suicide is imprinted in every plant cell, designed as an act of life that must ring out for the plant to exist and self-create. Apoptosis, the pre-programmed death of a cell, happens for real. No rehearsing, no pretending. Trees use this process mainly to create wood and bark.

In the spring, when vascular cambium – the thin jelly film that covers the wood – multiplies, new cells come to life, fresh and alive, so hydrated that everything inside them is tender and transparent like candy wrappers. They are about to turn into wood, become trunk and branches, fill the scaffolding of every leaf's net of nerves, build root cores; it doesn't matter whether it's a root of a wild pansy or a sequoia. Therefore, cells must gain strength first, reinforcing their walls. And just several weeks later, each living stem cell of wood buries itself alive from the inside like Antigone, bricking the exits up with lignin that hardens up like cement. It's happening right there when everything is in bloom, at the height of summer when everything lives, and photosynthesises, growing and persisting. A ripe time for suicide. The cell digests itself, hydrolase enzymes popping inside it. They were there from the very start. The living parts inside the cell vanish. Only when it's almost done killing itself, do the nucleus and DNA disintegrate, only then is the gene book annihilated. As if the dictate of survival was there until the very end.

The mass death of tree cells is a thoroughly pragmatic sacrifice by their mother plant. All this is done to let the water flow through the desolate labyrinthine corridors of wood, this being the only way for it to reach every leaf, every living cell.

But why? Why do cells have to die, why didn't those systems evolve towards preserving life, all life, at any cost?

It's because the Universe is overrun with physics – just like Prigogine's sentences, in which he described the chaos of all complex structures. Billions of multiplied cells, making for an endlessly rich system, this hive of diversity can function only up to a certain level of multiplication. A rebellion is always simmering there, and so are tumours and uncontrolled laziness. It would be too difficult to maintain and synchronise in such a towering living structure.

I'm writing those words; it's very quiet. I place my palm on the beechwood table, push my feet down on the spruce floor.

Excerpt translated by Aga Zano



© Tomasz Gogolewski

URSZULA
ZAJĄCZKOWSKA
Born 1978

Patyki, badyle [Sticks and Stalks]

Publisher: Marginesy, Warszawa 2019

ISBN: 978-83-66140-13-4; 300 pages

Translation rights: Marginesy

k.rudzka@marginesy.com.pl

Poetry collections published

minimum, 2017

Atomy, 2014

Selected awards

Gdynia Literary Prize (2020)

Witold Gombrowicz Literary Prize (2019) – nomination

Polityka's Passport Award (2019) – nomination

Silesius Poetry Award (2015, 2018) – nominations

Kościelski Foundation Award (2017)

Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński Poetry Prize ORPHEUS (2018) – nomination

100 Years of Polish Music History

Gwizdalanka sets the history of Polish music against political and social backgrounds



Musical compositions form a part of the greatest accomplishments of twentieth-century Polish culture. Beginning with Karol Szymanowski, an entire pantheon of neoclassical composers (such as Grażyna Bacewicz and Michał Spisak) leads to the post-war “Polish School” (Witold Lutosławski, Henryk Mikołaj Górecki, and Krzysztof Penderecki) all the way to the composers at the turn of the twenty-first century (among others: Paweł Mykietyn and Agata Zubeł).

Danuta Gwizdalanka’s book speaks of this phenomenon in atypical fashion. For she sets the history of Polish music against political and social backgrounds – from the restoration of Poland’s independence in 1918 through the cosmopolitanism of open borders and Poland’s accession to the European Union in 2004. The history of Polish music, as well as the history of its institutions and festivals (chief among them being the Warsaw Autumn International Festival of Contemporary Music) reflects the stormy history of the nation as a whole: the interwar period of the Second Republic, occupation during World War Two, the imposition of communism, the pontificate of John Paul II, the rise of Solidarity and the final fall of the communist dicta-

torship. The author also considers music from other perspectives: aesthetic controversies, Polish religiosity, folk music and folklorism, the work of Polish émigré composers (above all, Andrzej Panufnik), the situation of female composers and... musicologists. A separate chapter is devoted entirely to opera, and Gwizdalanka’s summation is a reflection of the mythology that has developed around Polish music.

The book is addressed to the general reader. Written with zest and wit, it avoids specialist jargon. Its rich illustrations give it a special value. The photos and reproductions, along with their captions, can be considered mini-essays, which emphasise characteristic events, phenomena, and figures.

The genesis of *100 Years in the History of Polish Music* can be found in the “100 for 100” project, which celebrates the centennial of the restoration of Poland’s independence. Another aspect of this project is a box set of 36 CDs presenting recordings of 101 musical compositions, one for each year of the century 1918–2018.

Marcin Trzęsiok

Translated by Charles S. Kraszewski

Much as composers had previously created new melodies or harmonies, now they were looking for new sounds. In Poland, music associated with the “Polish School” was usually called Sonorism, from the Latin word *sonus* meaning “sound”. The originator of this term was the musicologist Józef M. Chomiński, who, in studying the evolution of music, noticed a growth in the meaning of colour after periods in which melody, rhythm and harmony had dominated. The expanding orchestra, to which new instruments were introduced, allowed for a continual broadening of the sound colour palette. In the mid-20th century, a multitude of new colouristic effects emerged from unusual ways of producing sounds from instruments.

In his works, Krzysztof Penderecki – who had taken violin lessons in his youth – required violinists, violists, cellists and double bassists to tap the bodies of their instruments or rub their top plate with the bow, to play between the bridge and the tailpiece or on the tailpiece. If the audience was prompted with a suggestive programme, then they approved of such unconventional sounds. In this way, Penderecki beat a path to the concert hall for his *Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima*. This music dedicated to the victims of the first atomic bomb was heard by the audience as a poignant illustrative and programmatic piece; they did not expect nice sounds or a predictable musical process.

Listeners reacted differently to music in which what underwent transformation was the colours, density of sound, volume and mobility of individual sounds or motifs than they did to works in which melody and harmony were the most important thing. Such music evoked feelings of awe, amazement, and even terror. This was quickly discovered by horror film directors. In 1973, William Friedkin used Penderecki’s music in *The Exorcist*, and soon after that, Stanley Kubrick used it in *The Shining*, where he had a “sound salad” comprised of four tracks (*De natura sonoris II*, *Canon*, *Polymorphia* and *Utrenja_II*) montaged for the film’s finale. The unusual sounds produced from acoustic instruments, as well as the whispers and screams of the choir, were exceptionally effective in intensifying the horror of the world in which the ghosts inhabiting the Overlook Hotel lived, and in reinforcing the atmosphere of madness engulfing the main character. These examples proved contagious, with Martin Scorsese making use of Penderecki’s music for the horror scenes in *Shutter Island*, and David Lynch making use of it several times as well. In his homeland, the composer is considered the personification of patriotic-religious and spiritual music; abroad, he is associated with horror films and ghosts.

Kazimierz Serocki created a different sonic landscape in his works. He had a predilection for using delicate, diverse, often vibrating sounds. From segments of contrasting instrumentation, full of unconventional sounds, he created pieces of diverse

dramaturgy, sometimes based on classic models. In 1965-66, he composed the first important piece in Polish music for percussion alone: *Continuum*. Six musicians positioned around the audience produced subtle sounds from 123 instruments in a quiet dynamic. Serocki was a pianist, so he displayed an inclination toward finding new ways to play the piano. He prepared the instrument, required the performer to pluck or strike the strings, or tap on the instrument’s wooden parts as if playing the drums. *Phantasmagoria* was scored for his favourite instruments, i.e. percussion and piano. The pianist plays on the keys and the strings with hands and sticks.

Excerpt translated by Karol Thornton-Remiszewski and Michał Szostało

Full English manuscript available



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**DANUTA
GWIZDALANKA**

Born 1955

**100 lat z dziejów polskiej muzyki
[100 Years of Polish Music History]**

Publisher: PWM Edition, Kraków 2018

ISBN: 978-83-224-5015-4; 284 pages

Translation rights: PWM Edition

aleksandra_myk@pwm.com.pl

The book was prepared as part of the PWM Edition's programme “100 for 100. Musical Decades of Freedom”.

Foreign language translations

100 Years... has been translated into English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Spanish, and Russian.

Other books by the author have been published in Germany and Lithuania as well.

Selected books

Symfonia na 444 głosy, 2020

Der Verführer. Karol Szymanowski und seine Musik, 2017

Złoty wiek muzyki kameralnej, 2016

Witold Lutosławski, 2003-2004

Mieczysław Wajenberg. Kompozytor z trzech światów, 2003

Muzyka i płęć, 2001

Muzyka i polityka, 1999

Brzmieniowe aspekty kwartetów smyczkowych Ludwiga van Beethovena, 1991

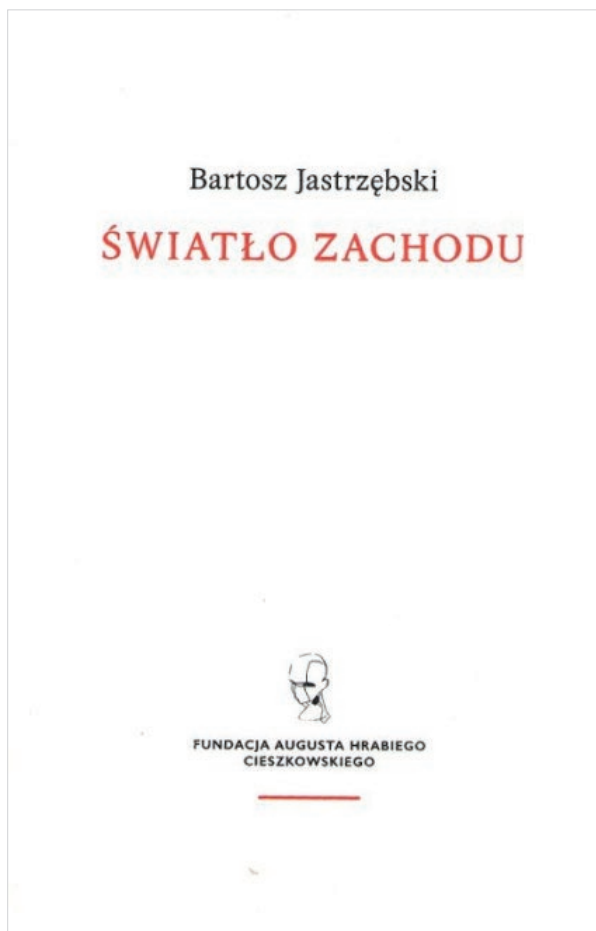
Gwizdalanka is the author of almost 20 books on music, including textbooks, biographies and a glossary of musical terms.

The Light of the West. Sketches on Christian Thought and Culture

An important voice, above all, in the context of Biopolitics and Transhumanism

Bartosz Jastrzębski's book is an unexpected and surprising defence of the heritage of Western Culture. Unexpected, as we've become used to expect criticisms of that culture. Surprising, as the study is carried out, not from a contemporary perspective, but rather a traditional understanding of the phenomenon of the West. For Jastrzębski repeats the now age-old definition of Feliks Koneczny: that the West is constituted of Greek philosophy, the Christian religion, and Roman law.

That these three 'pillars' of the West are shown to be strong and stable is the book's next inspiring surprise, because of the fact of human mortality. In Jastrzębski's musings, death is a constant point of reference, something that is well expressed in the title of one of the chapters, formed as a question: 'Is a Person Born into the Process of Dying?' The Christian understanding of death lends sense to the matter constituted by those three pillars. For Christianity understands death, not as an experience that reduces the value of human existence, but as an 'eternising' of human matters, as von Balthasar puts it.



The West's memory of death is therefore a fuller memory of life. The message of Western culture is not 'thanatic,' but 'vitalistic' in the most noble sense of the affirmation of life. The spiritual and intellectual horizon of Western culture is the eternisation of life.

The topicality of Jastrzębski's considerations has only been strengthened by the recent events of spring and early summer 2020 – and not only in the *ad hoc*, current, context of disrespecting Western culture, which has been expressed in an extremely destructive manner. *The Light of the West* is shown to be an important voice, above all, in the context of Biopolitics and Transhumanism.

Bartosz Jastrzębski's book is a work that continues the reflections on matters most important to the identity of the West broached earlier by such remarkable authors as C.S. Lewis in his *The Abolition of Man* and A. MacIntyre in *After Virtue*.

Tomasz Garbol

Translated by Charles S. Kraszewski

In recent years one hears ever more frequently about the crisis of the West, its sickness, its twilight, and even its demise. Some politicians speak of this (eagerly making use of the rhetoric of the coming catastrophe for political gain), as do publicists, artists and teachers, as well as many political scientists, scholars of culture, and philosophers. Conferences, debates and symposia are organised, the goal of which is to throw light upon the symptoms, and propose diagnoses of the lethal causes of the supposedly moribund condition. The West, as a certain defined type of cultural-civilisational formation, as a complex of historically conditioned, characteristic spiritual, moral, creative and socio-political practices (which have a range somewhat beyond the geographical borders of Europe, containing as they do Byzantine and non-western territories) should be – before our eyes – inexorably and finally approaching the exhaustion of its constitutive powers of creation and self-sustenance, simultaneously succumbing to multifarious external threats. Chief among these would be the demographic pressure of the southern peoples and the economic pressure of the mighty economies of Asia and the Far East. Thus the West – it is said – is in decline, as once the Roman Empire, geopolitically and demographically exhausted, spiritually indifferent and militarily and socially exploited to the maximum, fell beneath the blows of wild, yet vital and power-hungry Vandals, Alemanni and Lombards. Of course, this sort of predicting and prophesying is nothing new. It constitutes the repetitive refrain of nearly every reflection on Europe; after all, as early as 1917 Oswald Spengler published his famous *Decline of the West*. And he was not the first. For in the mid-19th century, Friedrich Nietzsche had already mercilessly described the deep crisis of European culture and its pertaining narratives in detail. In their own ways, the other “masters of suspicion” – Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud – pointed to it as well. All of these thinkers – as well as countless numbers of their more or less capable epigones – have argued tirelessly that Western man has undergone a transformation of epochal significance: he has lost faith in himself, in his founding myths and chief virtues, which means that he has exhausted his vitality – at least in the form in which it has appeared heretofore – as well as his ability to form and impose sense and meaning, in short, all that has made him, up until now, reasonable, courageous, creative, expansive and sure of himself. Some of them have stated this truth with unfeigned satisfaction – seeing in the formation of the West the root of all evil or, at least, spiritual mediocrity – others, not without sorrow or deep apprehension concerning the future.

[...]

For the West is beginning to worry about itself, to calculate, retreat, and “abandon” the realisation of its vital goals even where it still possesses the advantage and could achieve them without much

trouble, so preserving the state of its spiritual and material possessions. But the West has begun to doubt in its God, who is the necessary foundation and philosophical support of all its values, power, art, law and customs, as well as knowledge, science, political stability and societal achievements. On the other hand, the instability of cultural bases and the contempt in which they are held, a direct result of their constant relativisation and ferocious, destructive self-criticism, which gives birth to distaste, and even disgust and hatred, constitute already terminal symptoms for the given formation. For no culture which has ceased to believe in itself and its historical mission can endure. An organism which turns against itself, which hates itself, which no longer wishes to live – must die. This process is known as an auto-immunological disease, and leads inexorably to death.

Excerpt translated by Charles S. Kraszewski



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**BARTOSZ
JASTRZĘBSKI**

Born 1976

Światło Zachodu. Szkice o myśli i kulturze chrześcijańskiej
[The Light of the West. Sketches on Christian Thought and Culture]

Publisher: Fundacja Augusta hr. Cieszkowskiego, Warszawa 2019
ISBN: 978-83-65787-38-5; 170 pages

Translation rights: Fundacja Augusta hr. Cieszkowskiego
fundacja@kronos.org.pl

Essay collections published

Vestigia Dei, 2017

Ostatnie królestwo. Szkice teologiczno-polityczne, 2016

Wędrowki po codzienności. Eseje o paru ważnych rzeczach, 2011

Próżniowy świat, 2008

Pająk. Szkice prawie filozoficzne, 2007

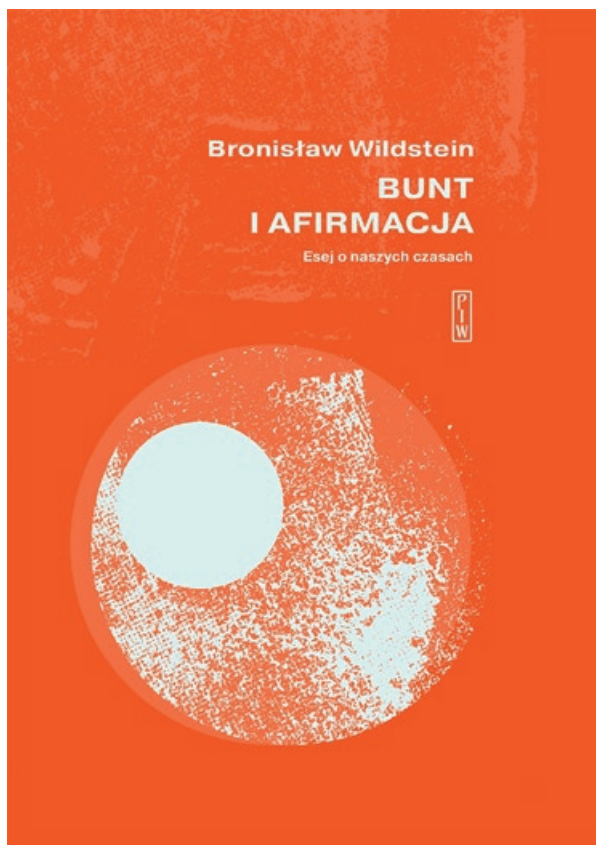
Awards

Józef Mackiewicz Literary Prize (2020) – nomination

Catholic Publishers' Association Award FENIKS (2017)

Rebellion and Affirmation. An Essay about Our Times

**Contemporary disputes placed
in a broad historiosophical
context**



The Cold War played a particularly important role in recognising freedom as one of the primary political values of the West. Priorities were then decided by the threat posed to the world by Soviet communism. Apparently, therefore, history has agreed with all kinds of liberals. They treated the rights of the individual as sacred. They warned against the oppression of all power. Their thinking has become universally accepted. The trouble is that the liberals, by claiming individual freedoms, disregarded the role of authorities and communities. They assumed that a free man could do without them. Only his own reason was necessary. The wasteland of such a narrative about freedom is indicated by the writer and publicist Bronisław Wildstein in his latest book *Rebellion and Affirmation. An Essay about Our Times*. But the subject of this magnum opus are not just contemporary disputes. The author places them in a broad historiosophical context. And so, on over five hundred pages he presents the centuries-old evolution of Western civilisation.

Wildstein looks at various trends in literature, painting and cinematography. He shows the causes and effects of eliminating the sacred from public spaces.

The thesis put forward by the writer is superbly summarised in the following statement from the book: 'The idea that reason itself, and thus also the person using it, is able to capture the world in all its complexity, as well as redesign it to an ideal form, is the main source for the crisis of modernity'.

Wildstein points out that liberals who criticise communism also fall into the trap of utopian thinking. They delude themselves that without the restrictions that arise from culture, religion and tradition, man can build a new, better world by himself.

Meanwhile, such attempts lead nowhere. The author shows many examples where instead of freedom they have set free egoistical attitudes and destructive behaviour.

Filip Memches

Translated by Peter Obst

Voltaire was not a radical. His maxim is often quoted:

‘If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him,’ which should be considered as an expression of a kind of ideological and political moderation. Less known is the justification preceding it: ‘I want my lawyer, my tailor, my servants and even my wife to believe in God, because then I will be cheated, robbed and betrayed less often.’

This statement manifests the striking paternalism of Enlightenment intellectuals, which will become the trademark of the vanguard fighting for equality and emancipation. Nothing will change this even today. It sounds a bit paradoxical, but these are merely appearances. ‘You must not rely on the opinion of the crowd on issues of reason and philosophy; the voice of the crowd is vicious, stupid, inhuman and prejudiced. The crowd is dark and stupid. Do not trust it in matters of morality.’ This is Diderot’s statement. I am not saying that he does not indicate the real threats that his countryman Gustave Le Bon wrote about a hundred years later in *The Psychology of Crowds*. Another thing is that the author of *Jacques the Fatalist* was writing not about the specific phenomenon of the human mass, which in its momentary connection can unleash specific emotions and attitudes. The term “crowd” should be rather be translated as “plebeians”. One can agree that humanity as a whole is not particularly inclined to philosophising or moral considerations. The question remains, as to what conclusions should be drawn from this.

Les philosophes were extremely outraged that the people did not follow their enlightened ideas, especially where the “prejudiced” did not want to reject Christianity. And yet: ‘Every reasonable and righteous man must feel disgust at the Christian sect,’ wrote Voltaire. It seems inconsistent with the declaration of the need for God. But the author of *Candide* justified it only as a means of keeping society, along with his own imaginary wife, in check, as until his death he remained a bachelor. The fact that he did not count them among the “reasonable and righteous” seems unquestionable. In this context, his next declaration sounds logical: ‘We never pretended to try enlightening shoemakers and servants; that is work for apostles.’ The waves of literary passion that allowed him to pose as an apostle remained only on paper. Voltaire, Diderot or d’Alembert definitely preferred enlightening Frederick II or Catherine II. No wonder, as this was undoubtedly associated with more tangible rewards.

Without being unkind, it can be assumed that an enlightened despot is a gift from heaven for (not only) an eighteenth-century intellectual who is preparing an all-encompassing and unique project to remake the world. Ordinary politics must take into account the

attitudes of the general public, at least the subjects who are moulded by their devotion to a dark tradition – one that is considered inimical to the enlightened. The ruler embedded in it is bound by custom and religion and though he sometimes breaks the rules, this is not the norm but the exception. Power in monarchical systems is inscribed in an organic, not only social, but even cosmic system, which imposes laws and limits the arbitrariness of those in power. Enlightened despots have already given up these principles, they consider them superstitions, so they do not have to reckon with them.

Excerpt translated by Peter Obst



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BRONISŁAW
WILDSTEIN

Born 1952

Bunt i afirmacja. Esej o naszych czasach
[*Rebellion and Affirmation. An Essay about Our Times*]

Publisher: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 2020
ISBN: 978-83-8196-077-9, 460 pages
Translation rights: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy
e.szwagrzyk@piw.pl

Selected essay collections

O kulturze i rewolucji, 2018
Cienie moich czasów, 2015
Demokracja limitowana, czyli dlaczego nie lubię III RP, 2013 – over 10,000 copies sold

Selected novels

Dom wybranych, 2016
Ukryty, 2012 – 18,000 copies sold
Czas niedokonany [Imperfect Time], 2011 – over 20,000 copies sold
Dolina nicości, 2008 – over 20,000 copies sold
Jak woda, 1989

Foreign language translations

Wildstein’s novels have been published in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Romania, and USA.

Selected awards

Polish Journalists Association Award [Laur Stowarzyszenia Dziennikarzy Polskich] (2015)
Dariusz Fikus Award, one of Poland’s most prestigious prizes for excellence in journalism (2009)
Józef Mackiewicz Literary Prize (2009)
Andrzej Kijowski Award (2004)
Kościelski Foundation Award (1990)

Sister

The author creates polysemic images with few words



ORPHEUS POETRY PRIZE

In his collection *Sister*, Piotr Mitzner refers to the Augustan tradition of memory's containers, and to an understanding of the most intimate part of the soul as a closed container. There, every night, 'the ritual takes place of restoring the slices onto the whole loaf again.' In the meta-literary epilogue, the slices crumble, darken, and become curtain lace. Simple, nostalgic rhythms demonstrate how grief works after the death of his sister, as well as lost time, and a never written poem. Poetry 'exclaims: today we only have black letters!' Poetry is 'home for the lost ones' in which we search for our dead ones, even though, in fact, we are searching for ourselves. Mitzner's latest collection derives from a deep metaphysical longing for a literature which is able to bring things closer to words. The poet confesses, 'I would like to write water.' That's also why he is particularly sensitive to the rhythm of the images, which position themselves within the network of universal symbols from the grand Book of pain and transience. Souls wandering

like moths; apples in an orchard hand wired and resembling barbed wire; a postcard morphing into the Wailing Wall. Simple enumeration cannot convey the depth of the metaphors, because the author has the ability to create polysemic images with only a few words. Mitzner generously utilises the multiplicitous nature of short verses, and his phrasing consequently stays away from classically understood rhymes. Puns and the act of yoking together seemingly disparate images and associations (for example; wounds and strings in his poem *Wound Blues*) constitute a formal equivalent of the attempt to reconcile oneself with the Arcadia of lost childhood. A childhood compared to colourful pictures on black asphalt reflected in a puddle. When the memories of his beloved deceased sister, Krystyna, morph into a series of oneiric images, the protagonist is left with only trust in language and letting the rhythm of speech take over.

Ireneusz Staroń

Translated by Ewa Chrusciel

O App

at bottom it's late autumn

are you sure
these holiday
snapshots
are safe
in the cloud?

since i sense
it's going to be windy

O Little Lane

lead

the dog and its drunken master
the drunken master and his dog

joined by the leash

Provisions

i've bought a loaf of bread

and not to go out tomorrow
i bought two more loaves

i've bought seven loaves for the week

i've bought a great deal of bread
then i've bought a very great deal
of bread

my whole flat up to the ceiling
is full of dried bread

i think i'll go to the grocer's
to buy one fresh loaf

or maybe two

For Mother's Day

you repeated many times:
don't open the door to strangers
so i do not open to anyone
so many times i heard:
you are capable but lazy
after all those wasted years
i am already capable
of anything
you told me so many times
that i was guilty

so at long last
i want to commit something
so that it can be true
because what you say is true

Translated by Marian Polak-Chlabicz



© Magdalena Chabier

PIOTR
MITZNER
Born 1955

Siostra [Sister]

Publisher: Wydawnictwo tCHu, Warszawa 2019
ISBN: 978-83-63104-18-4; 78 pages
Translation rights: Piotr Mitzner
pmitzner55@gmail.com

Selected poetry collections

Ulica tablic, 2017
Klerk w studni, 2016
Kropka, 2011
Niewidy, 2009
Myszoser, 2000
Zmiana czasu, 1990
Dusza z ciała wyleciała, 1980

Selected essay collections

Biedny język. Szkice o kryzysie słowa i literaturze wojennej, 2011
Gabinet cieni, 2007
Zagrać wszystko, 2003
Kto gra „Antygonę”? O tragicznych przyczynach i skutkach, 2002
Hania i Jarosław Iwaszkiewiczowie: esej o małżeństwie, 2000
Poeta w ruinach teatru, 1981

Foreign language translations

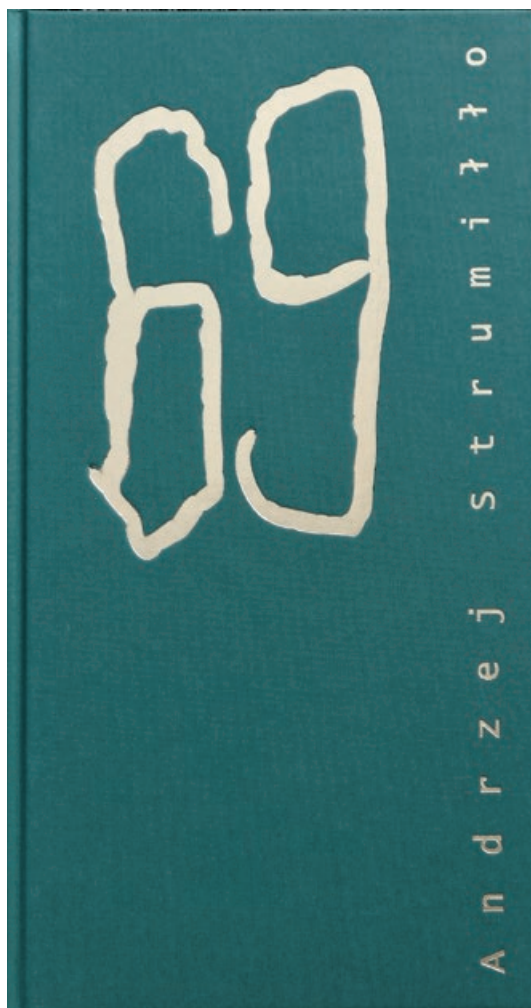
English (by Marian Polak-Chlabicz, *Sister*), Russian (by I.N. Sitnikov, selected poems).
Mitzner's poetry has been published in literary magazines in Albania, Belarus, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Lithuania, France, Russia, and Slovenia as well.

Selected awards

Orpheus Literary Prize (2020; nominations in 2018 and 2017)
Literary Award of the Capital City of Warsaw (2018) – nomination
Nike Literary Award (2012) – nomination
Józef Mackiewicz Literary Prize (2008) – nomination
Silesius Poetry Award (2008) – nomination

69

A farewell credo and artistic crowning of Strumiłło's prolific oeuvre



ORPHEUS POETRY PRIZE

69 is the title of Andrzej Strumiłło's collection of poems which together with drawings and photographs constitutes an interesting example of correspondence of the arts.

Unfortunately, it is the last collection of the author, who passed away in April 2020.

Hence, we can treat *69* as the farewell credo and artistic crowning of his prolific oeuvre.

What is, then, the essence of these final lyrics? They gather over the decades, short reflections about the world, people, and being, which condense spacious concepts and reveal life experience and a stoic containment of language and form. This brevity and spaciousness make Strumiłło's poems accessible, yet composed of important topics in his existential reflection on reality. In the collection, we find poems posing questions about the first and last cause of

being. Reflections on the end of life permeate the poetic tissue of the poems and transpire into an insight about a second dimension.

These poems oscillate between topoi of *vanitas*; a realistic self-portrait of an old man, and an eschatological vision which expresses his own version of *non omnis moriar*. Lyrical impressions liberate a subject from rational frames of the world, forming the allegory of human life with a subtle metaphysical note. Strumiłło's work demonstrates that cognitive synthesis is possible and most effective in old age, thus superseding a contemporary understanding of the world. It gives the reader a voice which is hard to find within herself.

Tomasz Pyzik

Translated by Ewa Chrusciel

I feel time accelerating
The skin of my hands
Resembles ravines
Veins – strong branches
I bend towards earth
I seek a moment and a place

24 August 2016

A Wooden Bird on a Windowsill

Two swans through a window
A day full of clouds
A ring of black on a palette
Today Synaxarium from Mount Athos
Recalls St. Isidore from Pelusium
Who lived on grass and leaves
I lift my brush over the space
Black is my prayer

4 February 2018

When I leave
The view through the window will remain
A pair of swans in a bay
A bent tree
Mossy stones
The book of poets and prophets
A spot left by a fly on the window

15 February 2018

We march
Each with a sack on our shoulders
With foreign lives in it
Above us banners
And what behind?
A sip of cold tea
Sleepless nights
A trace of breath among clouds

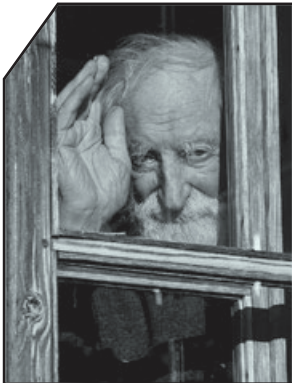
27 March 2017

Awaiting

I lie on a bed by Thuiszorg Groningen
It's a gift from the rich
Previously used by many
Suffering
Their breath sweat, and urine
Left rusty traces
In solidarity with pain

hospital, Suwałki, 21 March 2017

Translated by Ew a Chrusciel



© Anna Strumitłło

ANDRZEJ
STRUMIŁŁO
(1927-2020)

69

Publisher: Galeria Strumitłło, Maćkowa Ruda 2019

ISBN: 978-83-954001-0-0; 112 pages

Translation rights: Anna Strumitłło, anna.strumitłło@gmail.com

Poetry collections published

Powidoki. Wiersze i zapiski z lat 1947-2019, 2020

Sto, 2016

Ja 2, 2011

Ja, 2010

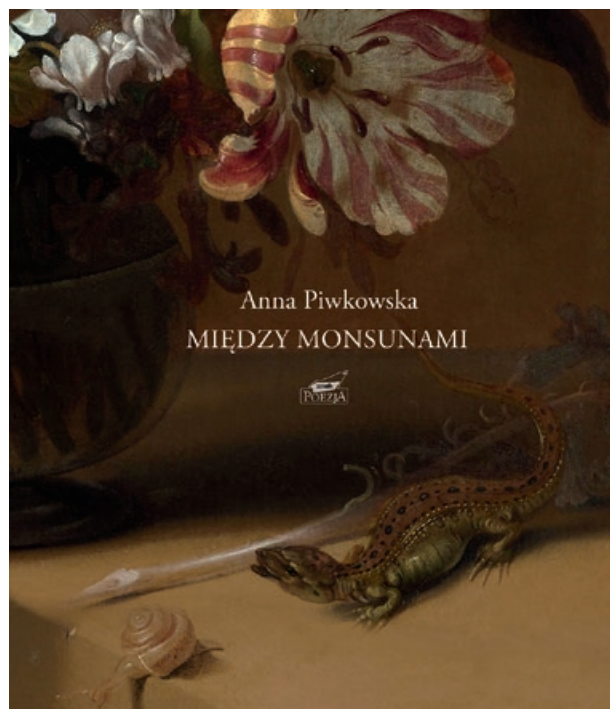
Jak, 1983

Moje, 1970

Awards

Orpheus Literary Prize (2020)

Between the Monsoons



Subtle, linguistically refined poetry links various cultural traditions

Anna Piwowska writes poetry of captivating images which exist suspended between the past and the present; the human world and the natural one; life and death; fullness and emptiness... Sometimes – or maybe always? – these poems comprise opposites so as to pose the question: 'Can one trust the reason,/ whom instincts contradict?/ And the instinct which lie/at every step, step by step?' (*So It Revolves in the End?*). The poet does not want to resolve anything; her words are not meant for that role, but describe, instead, the fullness of experience, which is a stranger to neither laughter nor tears, nor to contentment with what there is, nor a loss of what is. Bitter awareness accompanies this endeavour, since a word only embraces bits of reality. 'This is perhaps the biggest sin – to be/and not be able to name what is created and named' (*Things We Lose*).

A fragile human existence, endangered by its finiteness, at the mercy of grander forces, such as history (for

example: *It's Me, A Jew from Auschwitz*) and nature (for example *Lucky Charm*) have their places in the world's eternal order. Perhaps it is the place of Atlantis (*Golden Fleece*), the islands buried in the abyss, as the life of a man seems to pass away between monsoons, when 'time freezes' – as we read in the titular poem recalling the life of Karen Blixen. To describe it all, Anna Piwowska, in her subtle, linguistically refined poetry, links various cultural traditions (we find here mythological, biblical, literary, and fine arts allusions) and various poetic forms (formal and free verse). The world of her poems vibrates, shimmers, as if the poet wanted to say that everything is contained in 'metre, rhythm and rhyme' (*Plantation*). And that 'the non-existent changes into the existent/ and then the alive into the dead and living/somewhere else' (*Somewhere Else*).

Karol Alicznowicz
Translated by Ewa Chrusciel

Old Women

Old women – helpless and beautiful
with pearls in their ears and sapphires in their eyes –
maybe faded from tears, maybe washed out,
onyx of pain in shining pupils,
in carmine of lipstick in this dump
where next to trash – refined trinkets.

Old women remember well
sheep, hills, meadows, and robes
tossed in the grass, their nudity in a stream,
sturdy lacey shoes with worn soles,
when the paths still led them up.

Old women entombed in amber
like two butterflies, dragonflies in wetlands
while through the windows the glitter of city lights
and they see again: they stand in the strip of fire,
lean, in uniforms, in the limelight of history
and they – young women, young brides
run in their dresses and lacey shoes.

Old women remember well
long hours in queues in snow
for bread, for a good word of somebody’s Christmas.
And now they sit fragile and helpless
in plush purple, gilded chairs,
while they bring them gold discs on satin,
splendid medals, special addresses.
Precious women, rescued widows.

Old women remember well:
Wolves left, wolves came again.
Old women got up, cleaned, left.

Red Bucket

He came out the door with a red bucket
and splash!
Rays and leaves pirouetted in a flush.
And when the movement ceased, a flock of jackdaws
lifted off to drink moisture from drops before they
vanish in grass.
Everything transforms, and movement and being
are not separate forms of consciousness.
Waking sleep waking are the same:
a conversation with the receding world
and the beloved dead.
For a moment it seemed
that in this splash, flush, motion
I see your and my faces, my and your faces
when they lean towards each other in a quiet talk,
interrupted by laughter, lost forever.

Translated by Ewa Chrusciel



© Witold Franko

ANNA
PIWKOWSKA
Born 1963

Między monsunami [Between the Monsoons]

Publisher: Znak Publishers, Kraków 2019
ISBN: 978-83-240-5927-0; 80 pages
Translation rights: Znak Publishers, bolinska@znak.com.pl

Selected poetry collections

Wyspa Nieborów, 2016
Lustrzanka, 2012
Farbiarka, 2009
Niebieski sweter. Wiersze dawne i nowe, 2004
Po, 2002
Wiersze i sonety, 1992
Szkicownik, 1989

Essay collections

Wykłęta. Poezja i miłość Mariny Cwietajewej, 2017
Achmatowa czyli Rosja, 2015
Achmatowa czyli kobieta, 2003

Novels

Franciszka, 2014
Ślad tyżwy, 2007

Foreign language translations

Piwkowska’s poems has been published in anthologies in Bulgaria, Germany, Italy, Israel, Lithuania, Russia, Serbia, Spain, UK, and USA. The novel *Franciszka* was translated into Lithuanian and Slovenian.

Selected awards

ORPHEUS Literary Prize (2020) – nomination
Literary Award of the Capital City of Warsaw (2010, 2015)
Polish Section of IBBY Literary Award (2014, for the best YA book of the year)
Kościelski Foundation Award (2002) – distinction
Georg Trakl Literary Prize awarded by the Austrian Institute (1995)

Sex Machine and Other Ones

The author explores the limits of love and devotion, duty and morality

Tomasz Man is an acknowledged and multi-award-winning playwright, and an original theatre and radio director. He has a sure hand with colloquial language, from which he can extract an unexpected poetic ambiguity. His plays have been performed in many countries.

The plays gathered in this volume are merely a sample of Man's oeuvre, but they are representative, exhibiting the scale and originality of his talent. *The Story of a Certain Love* is a lyrical monologue of a man recalling his lost wife, a record of slowly coming to terms with conscious love, only just experienced and appreciated. *Sex Machine*, in turn, is a brutal tale, its construction and language modelled on Greek tragedy, detailing a single mother's smothering love for her only son, now an adult. Here the author explores the limits of love and devotion, duty and morality, scripting a score of desire and hatred for four voices and a chorus. *Job* is part of an ambitious project: a dramatic rewrite of the main bible stories. It is relatively short, a quartet of monologues examining how modern man



is tempted by weakness and doubt as he pursues worldly success. The drama *I'll Go, Though My Feet Are Cold* is practically religious in nature, formally approximating a medieval morality play; it depicts the infamous murder of a Krakow student by communist authorities. The author lays bare the cynical behind-the-scenes machinations of the culprits against the mother, who is helpless against the state apparatus. The monodrama *Impurity* explores a paedophile's internal monologue as he is released from prison after a twenty-year sentence. This is a man who is able to meticulously analyse his own psyche, yet is incapable of any sort of moral feelings. The volume ends with an allegorical fantasy from the future. We are inside a bunker just after a nuclear explosion. A father and daughter locked up inside and a man outside, pounding on the door to get in, are forced to make unexpected decisions in extreme conditions: in isolation and with the vanishing of all forms of life on earth as we know it.

Artur Grabowski

Translated by Soren Gauger

MOTHER
I have no desire to
breathe
eat
sleep

WOMEN
you are as weary as a tree
after a gale

MOTHER
that was a month ago
the day of his birth
I fixed a dinner
his favourite shellfish salad
and white wine
I waited all evening
he never said he wouldn't be coming
I called
he didn't answer
I was afraid something had happened

he'd never returned so late
he came home at one twenty-three
I asked him where he'd been
I'm not telling
he replied
he didn't eat his dinner
he didn't wash
he went to bed
without kissing me good-night
there used to be no secrets between us
I tossed the salad in the bin
poured the wine down the drain
I rifled through his jacket pockets
and found a receipt
two plates of shellfish salad
a bottle of white wine
he'd taken someone to dinner
I tossed and turned till morning

WOMEN
the tears etched grooves in your face

MOTHER
he'd never wasted time on dates
he was writing a PhD
I was reading over the chapters
bringing him books
organising his notes
he has no need for girls
he said
only you
yesterday when he returned
from his engagement
I asked him to sit down
to talk to me
he turned on his heel
and went to his room

I wanted to come in
but he'd locked the door tight
I hammered with my fists
but he wouldn't let me in

WOMEN
she fell asleep by his door
like a faithful dog
and in her dreams
her son brought her a handful of tears

MOTHER
he opens the door

Excerpt translated by Soren Gauger



© Tomasz Man

TOMASZ MAN
Born 1968

Sex machine i inne [Sex Machine and Other Ones]

Publisher: Wydawnictwo Księgarnia Akademicka, Kraków 2019
ISBN: 978-83-813-8106-2; 303 pages
Translation rights: Wydawnictwo Księgarnia Akademicka,
prezes@akademicka.pl

Plays staged (selection)

Złoto dziadka, 2015
Mytarstwa, 2013
Moja ABBA, 2011
Bóg i Proch, 2010
Sex machine, 2010
Świat jest skandalem, 2009
C(r)ash Europe, 2007
Dobrze, 2006
3×2, 2006
III, 2004
Historia pewnej miłości, 2001
Katarantka. Requiem. Nieszczęście w dwóch aktach, 1998
Man is also the author of several adaptations, radio plays and plays for children.

Foreign language translations

Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary and Russia (in anthologies).
Man's plays have been staged in Germany as well.

Selected awards

Honorary Award, Two Theatres Festival in Sopot (2010)
Best original screenplay, Two Theatres Festival in Sopot (2005)

New Polish Look

A comprehensive study of Poland's ceramics design renaissance in the 1950s and '60s



Poland's remarkably rich design tradition has yet to receive due attention. Barbara Banaś has begun to correct this with her comprehensive study of Poland's ceramics renaissance in the 1950s and '60s. The effects of this burst of creativity are still visible today. Banaś showcases signature pieces of ceramics, faience and stoneware. She analyses their style and reconstructs their underlying working conditions and production methods. She has collected artists' reminiscences and surveyed the relevant literature. She has worked on this subject for twenty years as a curator at the National Museum in Wrocław. Banaś herself is a great enthusiast and collector of period ceramics. The "new Polish look" was hardly a monolithic trend. The book features seminal and experimental pieces now enshrined in the Polish design canon alongside works produced in bulk for clients seeking a more "conservative modernism." Banaś takes an interest in decorative objects like figurines, vases, bowls and ornamental plates. Artists working in this field enjoyed great freedom to employ diverse styles. Despite being



mass-produced, due to the value and durability of their material and the talented artists involved, these objects were treasured for their ability to impart a modernist mood to the sparsely furnished apartments of the period. Certain signature features emerge to define this moment in ceramics: asymmetry, soft sculptural forms, abstract patterns and bold juxtapositions of colour. This aesthetics, in part, reflected influences from global art. Compared to their predecessors, the generation of designers graduating from art school in the mid-1950s had starkly different aesthetic proclivities. This was more than a simple stylistic shift, for it suggested a new and more liberated way of reacting to official propaganda and its models of living. The younger generation yearned to break free from their parents' wartime trauma and to revel in the joy of life. Ceramics, just like furniture, fashion and textile design, expressed those urges.

Czesława Frejlich
Translated by Eliza Rose

Wanda Telakowska was a remarkable figure who, through her tireless efforts, organizational prowess, and sheer determination, put forth a vision for the future course of Polish design. She began this work as early as 1945 in newly-liberated Warsaw. That March, she accepted a post on the Ministry of Art and Culture's Planning Commission for the Department of Fine Arts. 'The ministry was odd back then,' recalls Bohdan Tadeusz Urbanowicz. 'It operated without decrees, directives, or bureaucratic formalities. [...] The finest musicians, painters and writers were involved. We cannot really call it a bureau – it was more like a club of intellectuals.' Telakowska swiftly recruited collaborators who shared her views and fervent enthusiasm. Most of them were graduates of the Warsaw Fine Arts Academy, such as Maria Skoczylas-Urbanowicz, Anna Śledziewska and Maria Stieber. They shared Telakowska's interest in vernacular folklore as a wellspring of inspiration for artists adapting design to serve the needs of modern industry. This was the direction they envisioned for an artisan renaissance in Poland.

In June of 1945, Telakowska presented the Planning Commission's concept and vision for reforming Polish arts education and for the new social role of artists. The presentation took place at the 1st Polish Congress of the Arts Education Council in Wilanów. The programmatic opening proceedings prompted no official outrage. However, some months later in Krakow, at the 1st Polish Congress of the Polish Artists Union (ZPAP), a speech by Telakowska was fiercely attacked by the local artists community. Her speech was an appeal to abolish the archaic division between "pure" and "utilitarian" art. She called for bringing art into citizens' daily lives and urged artists to be "stewards" and pioneers by transforming the aesthetics of handmade and industrial products.

In her memoir, Telakowska recalls: 'After my speech, local authorities took turns barraging me with criticism. They mocked my lack of culture and likened my speech to the ramblings of a seamstress. A great tumult followed, and when my friend from Warsaw, Stanisław Zamecznik, boldly praised my speech for its profound social implications, they ejected him from the hall in a most vulgar manner. In the end, it was decided by a nearly unanimous vote that my speech could not be published, for it jeopardised the interests of artists. Unfortunately, Vice-Minister Kruczkowski was so shocked by this coordinated attack that he failed to come to my defence.'

Wanda Telakowska was born in 1905 in Sosnowiec and died in 1987 in Warsaw. From 1923 to 1931, she studied at the Fine Arts Academy in Warsaw under Edmund Bartłomiejczyk. In the interwar period, she worked mainly in graphic design and drew high acclaim, receiving gold medals at the Graphic Arts Exhibition in Florence in 1923 and the International Exposition of Art and Technology in Modern Life in Paris in 1937. She was part of Warsaw's bohemian art scene and rubbed shoulders with people like Julian Tuwim, Antoni Słonimski and Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz. She was also active in public service and worked as a school inspector for the arts. During the occupation, she pitched in as a teacher in underground schools. Beginning in 1945, she helped to build new public institutions that would shape and facilitate the campaign to bring designers into closer contact with industry.

Excerpt translated by Eliza Rose



© Janusz Krzeszowski

**BARBARA
BANAŚ**

Born 1970

Polski New Look. Ceramika użytkowa lat 50. i 60.
[New Polish Look. Ceramics in the 1950s and '60s]

Publisher: Marginesy, Warszawa 2019

ISBN: 978-83-66335-32-5; 368 pages

Translation rights: Marginesy, k.rudzka@marginesy.com.pl

Books published

W pogoni za kolorem. Szkło Jerzego Stuczan-Orkusa, 2019

Wytwórnia Wyrobów Ceramicznych „Steatyt”, 2014

Ludwik Kiczura, 2013

Secesja wrocławska, 2009

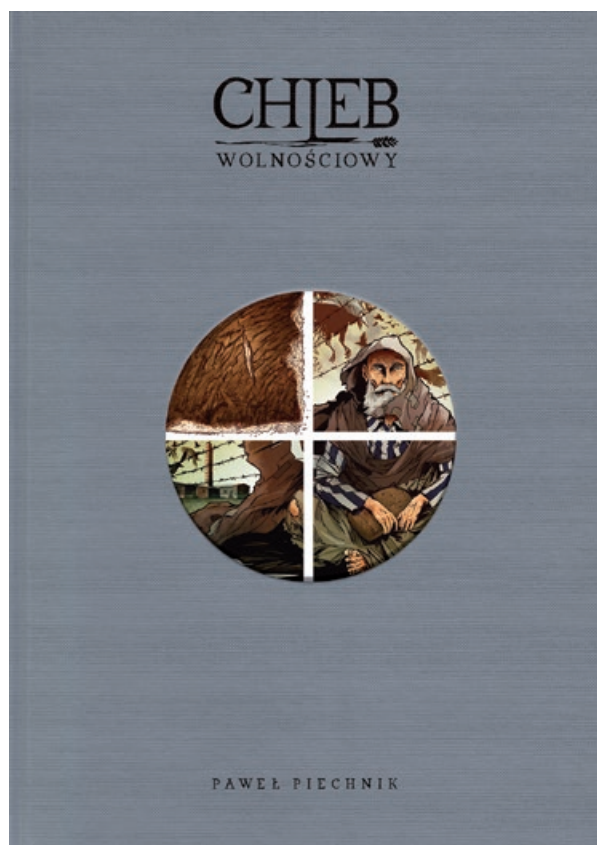
Zbigniew Horbowy, 2009

Krystyna Cybińska, 2008

Barbara Banaś holds a PhD in Art History. She is the deputy director at the National Museum in Wrocław and has co-organised and curated several design exhibitions.

The Bread of Freedom

An innovative narrative approach to the stories of prisoners in a Nazi German concentration camp



The *Bread of Freedom* is an undiluted look at one of the most tragic chapters in the history of the Second World War. Paweł Piechnik's graphic novel takes an artistic view of history, taking an innovative narrative approach to the stories of prisoners in the Nazi German concentration camp in Lublin, commonly known as Majdanek. Piechnik's story is made up of short testimonies from people of different ethnic backgrounds who managed to survive the hell of the camp. These episodes are arranged into three thematic sections: *On Hunger*, *On Death* and *On Freedom*. This division allows us to see the most essential elements of life in the concentration camp in a small number of pages. Inhumane treatment of prisoners was the rule in Majdanek, where the titular bread baked outside the walls of the camp, unavailable to the prisoners, was a synonym for the freedom that they had been stripped of. Paweł Piechnik does not shy away from graphic imagery in his panels, yet at the same time he imbues

his story with a universal dimension that is full of hope. This graphic novel begins with a stylised prologue about a story of danger, and Piechnik maintains the sombre mood for an extended period, only to finally strike out in a new direction with the chapter *On Freedom*, which shows how the prisoners fought against this merciless system.

The Bread of Freedom ends with images whose brighter colours link the painful past to our present, and metaphorically free the souls of those who did not survive this German death factory. But thanks to those who did, we can pore over this graphic novel's short, ostensibly mundane, eyewitness testimonies whose significance is nonetheless disturbing. These are words and images that we ourselves would never want to experience, but which we have no right to ever forget.

Tomasz Miecznikowski
Translated by Sean Gasper Bye



English and German translation available:
d.niedzialkowska@majdanek.eu



©L. Remiszewski

**PAWEŁ
PIECHNIK**
Born 1981

Chleb wolnościowy [The Bread of Freedom]

Publisher: Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku, Lublin 2019
ISBN: 978-83-62816-53-8; 80 pages
Translation rights: Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku
d.niedzialkowska@majdanek.eu

Animated films

Jeszcze dzień życia, 2018
Hero and the Message, 2016

Computer game films

Wiedźmin 3
Division 2
For Honor 2

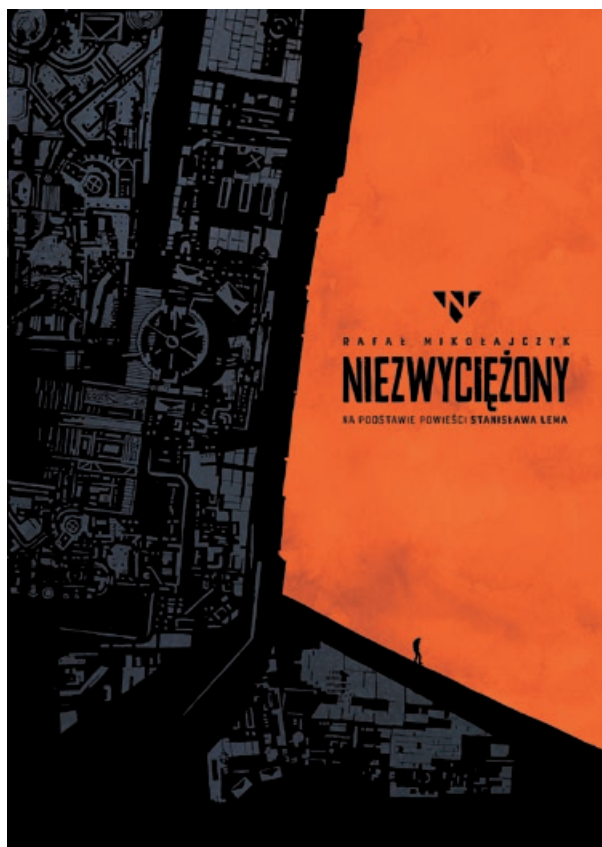
Paweł Piechnik is also the author of many murals and artworks.

Selected awards

Grand Prix – International Festival Of Comics And Games In Lodz
(2012; distinction in 2014)
Winner of Praga Daga Comic Book Contest (2013)

The Invincible

**A masterful graphic novel
adapted from Stanisław Lem**



Stanisław Lem is among Poland's most celebrated and world-renowned authors. His work combines the visionary imagination of science fiction with philosophical musings on human nature. This very fusion makes *The Invincible* so unique, for this is only superficially a novel about space warfare. It tells the story of the titular ship, which undertakes a rescue mission to an uncharted planet. On this barren world, the crew discover a population of microrobots programmed with one sole task: to annihilate all signs of life. Lem uses this setting as a pretext for meditating on fatalism, otherness, and the impossibility of true mutual understanding.

Rafał Mikołajczyk, author of the graphic novel adaptation, has achieved the unimaginable: he has brought his source to life in a new medium, remaining faithful to Lem in both letter and spirit. By condensing the plot and drawing out its salient motifs, he has

preserved Lem's multi-layered narrative. The result is a skilfully told tale of a crew facing various trials that expose their true nature and prompt them to retaliate. The original novel's philosophical dimension is left intact: we encounter questions about the meaning of free will and existence.

Mikołajczyk has also given us a gem of graphic artanship. The comic is rendered in subdued hues of grey and rusty crimson, suggesting a futuristic but technologically archaic vision of another world. What could only be imagined from the pages of Lem's novel is now tangible. The artist cultivates a convincing atmosphere of strangeness and peril. *The Invincible* is a true achievement timed beautifully to anticipate the 100th anniversary of Stanisław Lem's birthday in 2021.

Tymoteusz Wronka
Translated by Eliza Rose



Excerpts translated by Zuzanna Kaszukur

English version available: kontakt@dobrestronybooki.pl



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**RAFAŁ
MIKOŁAJCZYK**
Born 1977

Niezwyciężony. Na podstawie powieści Stanisława Lema
[The Invincible. Based the Novel by Stanisław Lem]

Publisher: Booka, Warszawa 2019

ISBN: 978-83-955214-0-9; 236 pages

Translation rights: Booka, kontakt@dobrestronybooki.pl

English translation available.

Rafał Mikołajczyk has graduated from Fine Arts Academy in Łódź. He works as a graphic designer. *The Invincible* is his debut graphic novel.

Defeat of the Evil Empire. The Year 1920

**What would the world look like
if Poland had not won that war?**



On 25 August, 1920, at a critical stage of the war with Poland, at a meeting of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party, Lenin presented an innovative idea. He suggested dressing up the Red Army soldiers as “greens” (the term he used), and make an incursion of several kilometres into Estonia and Latvia, in order to hang “kulaks, priests and landowners”. The association is obvious – “green men” spreading terror in today’s Ukraine.

The story from one hundred years ago is presented by Professor Andrzej Nowak in his book *Defeat of the Evil Empire. The year 1920*. This is not coincidental. It is not just a story about the causes, course and effects of the Polish-Bolshevik War. The Krakow historian, who is also an outstanding expert on Russia, shows what the 1920 clash really was: a war of two worlds, different civilisations, the confrontation of good and evil. To realise this, it’s worth going beyond the factography and even beyond the time about which he writes. It is important to present the nature of the evil that Poles managed to stop, but not eradicate, in the summer of

1920. Professor Nowak quotes the words of Ronald Reagan, who spoke about the “evil empire” in 1982. He describes the nature of Soviet imperialism by referring to the year 1920.

Key in this book are the circumstances of Lenin’s rejection of an offer made by the British in July of 1920. This went beyond generosity. It would not only have recognized the Soviet Union as a partner, but granted it extensive territory in Galicia. Yet it was rejected, because evil does not compromise, it goes for the entire prize. What would the world look like if Poland had not won that war? Was Józef Piłsudski right in accusing Piłsudski of the sin of giving up in 1919? What was behind the “first betrayal by the West”? Was it possible to get more in Riga? Answers to these and many other questions can be found in the latest book by Andrzej Nowak, illustrated with never-before-published photos taken by Captain Adam Paulo de Silva a century ago.

Piotr Legutko

Translated by Peter Obst

Russia was the most important among the partitioning powers. It was that state that seized the largest part of the old Polish Commonwealth. In this arrangement, which lasted for 100 years after being confirmed in 1815 by the Congress of Vienna, Russia occupied 82 percent of pre-partition Commonwealth territory (Austria took 11 percent, Prussia 7 percent), which included the capital, Warsaw. The struggle for Polish independence seemed to push Poles into taking armed action against Russia. It was Russia, then, that became enemy number one during this struggle. Two great uprisings broke out against Russia, and were suppressed with much loss of blood: the November (1830-1831) and January (1863-1864) uprisings. These followed earlier uprisings that broke out against Russia while the Commonwealth still existed (The Bar Confederation of 1768-1772; and Kościuszko's Insurrection of 1794).

There were nine wars, in which Poland was victorious in two, and Russia in seven; and four uprisings – all unsuccessful for Poland. Russia rose against Polish-Lithuanian domination in Muscovy when for two years (1610-1612) Poles occupied the Kremlin. The Russian uprising was successful. This was the total time that the Commonwealth was dominant over Russia – two years. Russia ruled Polish lands for over 200 years. Indirectly at first during the Reign of Peter I, that is, from the beginning of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the final partition; and then directly – until the disaster of World War I.

During those 200 years, hundreds of thousands of people passed through Russian prisons, incarcerated for their participation in the fight for the rights “of the unreasonable Polish nation”. No less than one hundred thousand people were sent to Siberia or to other distant outposts of the Russian Empire. No less than one hundred thousand persons fell in the uprisings against Russia, or were executed by the Russian authorities. Hundreds of thousands were deprived of their land and property. No less than a quarter million were forcibly inducted into the Russian army after 1832 (of which about 150 thousand died in the Tsar's service). This was the most measurable summation of the political relations between Poland and Russia, at the moment when Poland recovered its independence.

Was the war of 1919-1920 the tenth war in this cycle? One more Polish-Russian war? Before we answer this question, it seems worthwhile to recall this history, even in an abbreviated version, regardless of what that answer may be. After all, it had an enormous impact on the political imagination of those of the generation which defended Warsaw in 1920 as well as among those who tried to capture it. Józef Piłsudski, the first head of the reconstituted Polish nation state, was raised by his mother in the spirit of the insurrectionist tradition, under the influence of the legend of the January Uprising. To him, Tsarist Russia was the arch-enemy. He was not the only one to think this. Most Poles at that time remembered the subjugation of the nine-

teenth century through family experiences. Moreover, the great literary works – chiefly by the Polish romantic authors Juliusz Słowacki and Zygmunt Krasiński – recorded a vision of the Polish-Russian conflict on a spiritual plane. This still was still able to inspire active resonance in thought and emotions.

Excerpt translated by Peter Obst



© Adam Sosnowski

ANDRZEJ
NOWAK

Born 1960

Kłęska imperium zła. Rok 1920 [Defeat of the Evil Empire. The Year 1920]

Publisher: Wydawnictwo Biały Kruk, Kraków 2020

ISBN: 978-83-7553-290-6, 368 pages

Translation rights: Wydawnictwo Biały Kruk
adam.sosnowski@bialykrak.pl

Selected books

- Dzieje Polski*, t. 1-4, 2014-2019
- O historii nie dla idiotów. Rozmowy i przypadki*, 2019
- Niepodległa! 1864–1924. Jak Polacy odzyskali Ojczyznę*, 2018
- Metamorfozy Imperium Rosyjskiego 1721–1921. Geopolityka, ody i narody*, 2018
- Putin. Źródła imperialnej agresji*, 2014
- Intelektualna historia III RP. Rozmowy z lat 1991-2012*, 2013
- Strachy i Lachy. Przemiany polskiej pamięci (1982-2012)*, 2012
- Imperiological Studies. A Polish Perspective*, 2011

Nowak a historian, university professor, publicist and the author of 20 books and almost 200 papers published in joint publications and journals.

Foreign language translations

Nowak's texts have been published in Belarus, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Ukraine, and USA.

Selected awards

- Catholic Publishers' Association FENIKS (2018)
- Kazimierz Moczarski History Award (2016)
- KLIO Award for the best history book of the year (2015, 2016)
- Józef Mackiewicz Literary Prize (2015)

Tyrmand. The Writer with the White Eyes

**Tyrmand emerges
as the spirit of freedom**



Leopold Tyrmand (1920-1985) was a Warsaw-born writer and great promoter of jazz who spent much of his life in the United States. His unbridled personality calls to mind the Silicon Valley giants of today. His tumultuous biography, recounted here by Marcel Woźniak, is a dynamic fresco. Through this one man's story, readers encounter the history of Polish Jews and Poland in the overlapping contexts of communism, fascism and the Holocaust. Against these many forces, Tyrmand emerges as the spirit of freedom.

As a child, Tyrmand and his mother frequented a Warsaw café and watering hole for the literary scene. Here, Witold Gombrowicz (who would become Leopold's mentor) had his own table. During the war, Tyrmand demonstrated a prowess to rival James Bond's. In Soviet and Nazi-occupied Poland, he managed to outwit both the NKVD and the Gestapo. Posing as a Frenchman, he left to work in the Third Reich, where he captured the hearts of German women and listened to the illicit jazz music that had captured his fancy in pre-war Paris. He was enamoured with Duke Ellington and immersed himself in the study

of Le Corbusier. During the war, he even sailed on a Norwegian ship as befits a true lover of Conrad.

After the war, as a journalist, Tyrmand interviewed Pablo Picasso and Mikhail Sholokhov. He went skiing with the late Pope John Paul II and, at the Warsaw chapter of IMCA, created a space for independent culture symbolised by jazz. He organised concerts that attracted audiences of 30,000. In secrecy, he wrote the anti-communist *1954 Journal* and the iconic Warsaw novel *Zły* (published in English as *The Man with the White Eyes*), which was inspired by American comics.

Unable to tolerate the lack of freedom in the Soviet Block, Tyrmand emigrated to the United States, where he swiftly earned acclaim by writing for *The New Yorker*. He told Americans of the pipe dreams of Moscow's Left and the suppression of the freedom protected so dearly in the United States and Western world.

Tyrmand's papers can be found in Stanford University's Hoover Institute Archives.

Jacek Cieślak

Translated by Ezra Oseil

August 1944, Oslo

Leopold Tyrmand is just heading for a rendezvous with the resistance movement when he is arrested. Somebody grassed him up. Was it Klimek? Or Babinicz, like in Vilnius? They're transporting him somewhere. When the doors of the prison van open, he sees the boots of German officers, and right behind them – barbed wire and a sign: "Grini Concentration Camp". 'Oh, fuck,' he says in Polish. 'Now I'm sure to be shot.'

September 1944, Grini near Oslo

Lolek is undressing along with the others. After being inspected they are sent to the washroom, and then have to immerse themselves in vats of Lysol disinfectant. Then their heads are shaved. They are stripped of their names, documents, clothes and finally hair – absolutely everything, so that they became an amorphous and nameless mass of prisoners. The prisoners aren't given striped uniforms here, however, but navy-blue ones. Lolek – wearing an armband with the letter "P" – enters the camp, is told to go to barrack no. 19. During the war he found himself among strangers speaking foreign languages in a strange place so many times he learned to act swiftly. For the time being he'd escaped death again, but for how long? After a few metres he's surrounded by a small group of prisoners. It doesn't look like a friendly welcome. Tyrmand clenches his teeth and looks from face to face. 'You,' says the most menacing of them. 'What?' Lolek replies, acting tough. The guy approaches him and asks: 'How are things in Warsaw?' The question defuses the tension. Leopold looks them over and shakes his head, indicating that things are going badly. He's one of them now.

1943, Majdanek Concentration Camp

There's no hope of surviving here, only a faint hope you won't be next. It's difficult to say how many people in all there are in the camp, the number rises and falls. But people keep disappearing without a trace. Mieczysław Tyrmand, Leopold's father, is standing naked among a hundred other prisoners. His head is crawling with lice. A guard walks up to him and says in German: 'You stink. Boots!' [...] After leaving the barrack the same guard materialises in front of him again. 'Boots,' he says threateningly. 'Boots?' Mieczysław repeats and looks at his companions in misery. They've all obediently removed their footwear, but he's

forgotten himself. A cobbler wearing boots. Then they are all driven in a file, then they pass through a gap cut in the fence. They are now beyond Field V. It's a crisp morning. Now they order him to jump into a pit. He's weak at the knees owing to hunger. And so *these* are the trenches that have been dug, so deep you can't see the field from them. Just boots. Hundreds of officers' boots. The trench turns twice, it was dug zigzag. He sees the end of it. A wall of earth. 'Halt!' yells an officer. Mieczysław looks up and now realises that even though he knows the date of his birth, he will never know the date of his death. He doesn't know exactly what day it is. He only knows it's the last day. And now he was shot and will soon die. A moment later another body falls on him. The last thing he sees are the army boots of the German officer standing above the pit. He couldn't have made better ones himself.

Excerpt translated by David French



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MARCEL
WOŹNIAK
Born 1984

Tyrmand. *Pisarz o białych oczach*
[Tyrmand. *The Writer with the White Eyes*]

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Biografia Leopolda Tyrmanda. Moja śmierć będzie taka, jak moje życie, 2016
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Otcztań, 2018
Mgnienie, 2017
Powtórka, 2017

Emilia and Karol Wojtyła. John Paul II's Parents

A biography written with the dogged inquisitiveness of a detective



Passionately written, Milena Kindziuk's biography of John Paul II's parents (whose beatification process has just recently got underway) fills in many blank spaces in the history of the Wojtyła family. *Emilia and Karol Wojtyła* is a book written with the dogged inquisitiveness of a detective, carefully poring over archival documents and collecting the accounts of eyewitnesses. Thanks to her diligence, she was able to uncover many previously unknown details, and even disprove some persistent theories. What is the actual date upon which the parents of the Pope from Wadowice in southern Poland got married? Why does his mother have two gravesites? Where was Karol Wojtyła's sister born, the name of whom John Paul II most likely never came to know? Kindziuk's book offers us answers to those questions, but, of course, these are not the only discoveries she made.

The character of John Paul II's mother is a very intriguing aspect of this biography. Because her life was threatened by her pregnancy, she was encouraged

to abort the child by Dr Jan Moskała, a well-known abortionist in Wadowice. It turns out that the future Pope's life nearly ended before it even began. But both the woman and the child were saved by Dr Samuel Taub, a Jewish gynaecologist. Milena Kindziuk backs up her assertions with many facts and testimonies confirming this previously little-known story. However, the most moving fragments of the book deal with the years following Emilia's death. They testify to the heroism of Karol Sr., who had to become both father and mother to his growing child, meanwhile dealing with the death of his elder son Edmund Wojtyła, a physician who lost his life saving a patient afflicted with scarlet fever. This was the father that little "Lolek" often saw on his knees at night, in prayer: his first spiritual instructor. Thanks to this book, we can better understand the phenomenon that is St. John Paul II.

Szymon Babuchowski

Translated by Charles S. Kraszewski

The second son of Emilia and Karol Wojtyła was born on 18 May 1920, sometime around five o'clock in the afternoon. The child was an extraordinarily large, strong and healthy boy, who cried loudly, as if wanting to shout to the congregation singing their litany in the nearby church.

When the midwife placed the new-born infant on his mother's bosom, she saw tears streaming over Emilia's face, but also a smile on her lips as well. The mother was moved, but was also experiencing a deep sense of joy and good fortune at the miracle: for both the child, and she, had survived. Moreover, instead of the sickly, weak child that had been predicted, the child she gave birth to was healthy and strong.

The impossible had become possible.

According to Jadwiga Pawłęga, she was to remember that birth for the rest of her life! She'd never assisted at such an unusual childbirth, as she said, during the intoning of the Litany to our Lady of Loretto, as Michał Siwiec-Cielebon emphasises.

Later on, in Wadowice, Pawłęga would say that Emilia had been very weak, but she bravely endured the ordeal of giving birth, as Józef Klauzner states. This is the account given by C. Bernstein in his book: 'When the moment to give birth arrived, Emilia asked the midwife to open the window. She wanted the first sounds that the new-born child would hear to be a hymn sung in praise of Mary, the Mother of God.'

The Pope himself was well acquainted with this story.

'I know that the Holy Father had spoken about this with the midwife who helped bring him into the world, and later, he spoke to me of entering life to the strains of a litany sung in praise of the Mother of God,' says Stanisław Cardinal Dziwisz.

The Pope noticed other significant coincidences as well. On his birthday in 1997 he told one of his Italian parishes, 'I was born between five and six o'clock in the afternoon, which is the same hour at which, fifty-eight years later, I was elected Pope.'

Just as the word "yes," spoken by Emilia Wojtyła in 1920, had to be one of the most difficult words she ever enunciated, so in 1978, that other "yes" was the most difficult word spoken by her son, when he was asked if he would accept his election to the Holy See. With their *fiat*, both of them – mother and son – agreed to self-denial. As if they knew that only at such a price could great things be brought into the world.

[...] According to the midwife's account, after the child's birth, Emilia couldn't wait for Karol and Edmund to return from church. When they came home, the new-

born boy was already asleep. His parents and brother looked down upon the little one. To which of them was the infant most similar?

His likeness to his mother was obvious.

You can see this in photographs. Even in the very first, earliest ones taken in Wadowice, where the mother is holding her son in her arms as a baby. One can see those same features, eyes, the shape of the face. Even many years later, when one looks at photos of the Pope, one can see the common traits shared by son and mother. The most striking thing about these photos, perhaps, is the expression of their eyes. One sees goodness, gentleness, and yet the glance penetrates one deeply. 'The Pope inherited an uncanny resemblance to his mother,' Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński, Primate of Poland, was to say years later, 'The similarity of the two faces, that of the mother and of the child, speaks volumes.'

The boy's parents christened him with two names: Karol Józef.

Excerpt translated by Charles S. Kraszewski



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MILENA
KINDZIUK
Born 1970

Emilia i Karol Wojtyłowie. Rodzice Jana Pawła II
[Emilia and Karol Wojtyła. John Paul II's Parents]

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Selected books
Popiełuszko. Biografia, 2018
Cuda księdza Jerzego. W oczekiwaniu na kanonizację, 2016
Prymas Tysiąclecia, 2011
Kardynał Józef Glemp. Ostatni taki prymas, 2010
Jedynie miłość ocala ze ks. Janem Twardowskim rozmawia
Milena Kindziuk, 1999

Foreign language translations
Italy, Slovenia

Selected awards
Catholic Publishers' Association Award FENIKS (2016)
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The Polish Book Institute

The Polish Book Institute is a national institution established by the Polish Ministry of Culture. It has been running in Cracow since January 2004. The Institute's basic aims are to influence the reading public and to popularise books and reading within Poland, as well as to promote Polish literature worldwide. These aims are accomplished by:

- // promoting the best Polish books and their authors;
- // organising study visits for translators and foreign publishers;
- // increasing the number of translations from Polish into foreign languages with the help of the ©POLAND Translation Programme and Sample Translations ©POLAND;
- // making information on Polish books and the Polish publishing market accessible to foreign consumers.

The Institute organises literary programmes to promote Polish books at international book fairs, appearances by Polish writers at literary festivals, and within the scope of programmes designed to promote Polish culture worldwide, it publishes an annual catalogue *New Books from Poland*.

The Polish Book Institute is also the publisher of cultural journals covering mainly literature and theatre (*Akcent*, *Dialog*, *Literatura na świecie*, *Nowe Książki*, *Odra*, *Teatr*, *Teatr Lalek*, and *Twórczość*).



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Selected Polish Book Institute programmes:

The ©POLAND Translation Programme – The Book Institute provides financial support for publishers aiming to publish works of Polish literature in foreign-language translations.

Since 1999, the ©POLAND Translation Programme has provided about 2,500 grants for translations into 47 different languages published in 63 countries. The average grant was worth approximately € 3,500.

The Book Institute can help cover the costs of publishing the following types of works:

- // literature – prose, poetry, and dramas
- // works in the humanities, broadly conceived, whether older or contemporary (with particular regard for books devoted to the culture and literature of Poland)
- // non-fiction literature (literary reportage, biographies, memoirs, essays)
- // historical works (essays and popular history, barring specialist and academic works)
- // literature for children and young people
- // comics.

The financial contribution of the Book Institute is designed to support the following publication costs:

- // translation
- // copyright license
- // printing.

Sample Translations ©Poland – The aim of this programme is to encourage translators to present Polish books to foreign publishers.

The programme may cover up to 20 pages of the translation. The translator must have published a minimum of one translation in book form before making an application.

Full information on our programmes, including a list of grants awarded to date and a funding application form can be found on the Book Institute's website, www.bookinstitute.pl.

For further information please contact:
Elżbieta Wierzchowska, e.wierzchowska@bookinstitute.pl.

The Translators' College – This programme provides study visits for translators of Polish literature. During their residency, which takes place in Krakow or Warsaw, the translators are provided with suitable conditions for their work and assistance with their translations. The college has been active since 2006. By 2019, 140 translators from thirty-five countries had already taken part.

The World Congress of Translators of Polish Literature, which has been organized every four years since 2005. Around two hundred and fifty translators from all over the world attend meetings with writers critics and academics. The Congress provides an opportunity to find out more about Polish literature, meet colleagues from other countries and exchange information, ideas and opinions.

The Found in Translation Award is given to the translator(s) of the finest book-length translation of Polish literature into English published in the previous calendar year. The winner receives a prize of 16,000 zlotys and a one-month residency in Krakow. The Book Institute has presented this award in partnership with the Polish Cultural Institutes in London and New York on an annual basis since 2008.

Recent winners:

2020 // Anna Zaranko, for *The Memoir of an Anti-Hero* by Kornel Filipowicz

2019 // Madeline G. Levine, for *Collected Stories* by Bruno Schulz

2018 // Jennifer Croft, for *Flights* by Olga Tokarczuk

The Transatlantyk Prize has been awarded annually by the Book Institute since 2005 to outstanding ambassadors of Polish literature abroad. Its aim is to promote Polish literature on the world market and to provide a focal point for translators of Polish literature and its promoters (publishers, literary critics, academics and organisers of cultural events). The prize is worth €10,000.

Recent winners:

2020 // Ewa Thompson

2019 // Hendrik Lindepuu

2018 // Antonia Lloyd-Jones

2017 // Lajos Pálfalvi

2016 // Constantin Geambașu

Seminars for Foreign Publishers – Since 2006, the Book Institute has invited groups of publishers from various countries to Krakow to show them what Polish literature has to offer. During the study visit, they attend meetings with writers, publishers and critics to encourage them to publish Polish literature.

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