

# **New Books from Poland**

**2019**

BOOK INSTITUTE



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**W**hat sort of Poland are we presented with in this year's catalogue? What sort of Poland will we come to know, reading the works contained in it? In our opinion, this year's newest literature is extraordinarily interesting. Here we have Barbara Klicka, who, somewhat in the footsteps of Thomas Mann, spins a metaphorical tale of a sanatorium visit, from a strong female perspective. Artur Grabowski, on the other hand, a Pole, a European, leads us on to the 'other side', to America, which he absorbs, digests, accepts, rejects, and finally – above all – considers in ambiguously artistic form. With his strong, masculine, fact-based narrative, Łukasz Orbitowski takes us to the so-called recovered Polish territories to tell the tale of a... usurper? a mystic? and his brother, a dyed-in-the-wool rationalist. Also worth mentioning are the collections of short stories (a genre in which Poles have lately excelled): that of Wojciech Kudyba, which concerns a block of flats, or, rather, the inhabitants thereof, who seem to have missed the train to the future and that of Rafał Wojasiński, who brings us to the world of the provinces, which, so often, we contact only through the window of a train, or during walks beyond the city centre. These are dynamic pictures of today's Poland, ambiguous, fascinating.

This is not to say that history has no place in the Polish narrative. We have here Włodzimierz Bolecki's somewhat roguish novel set in the turbulent years of 1785-1815 (years in which the Polish state floundered, but the Poles continued to exist), dealing with a cardsharp and confidant of the great. We have Michał Wójcik's investigative reporting which seeks to discover the truth behind Wanda Kronenberg, a figure active on several conflicting fronts of espionage during World War II. From the same period Bogdan Musiał provides us with a topic that chronically gets little press in the world beyond Poland: that of Poles aiding Jews during the Nazi persecutions. His book is all the more valuable in that it is based upon newly discovered sources and historical materials.

Certainly, the three-volume edition of Lech Majewski's film scenarios will be of interest to both amateurs of the cinema and those interested in the cinematic craft. Our catalogue also presents the theatrical works of the young Weronika Murek, as well as examples of genre fiction: the strongly generational new text by Wojciech Chmielarz, the master of the Polish crime story. The graphic novel debut of Agnieszka Świętek has won unusual praise. We also have on offer the extraordinary phenomenon of the album dedicated to the artworks (and life!) of Stanisław Szukalski – the subject of a recent documentary film, co-produced by Leonardo DiCaprio (whose parents were

close friends of the artist). Similarly, in the best traditions of Polish reportage, Małgorzata Rejmer journeys to Albania to speak with the victims of the Albanian Communist Utopia.

In the pages of this year's catalogue, we also consider the Poland that is strongly associated with Catholic traditions. For we present the first volume of the literary works of Karol Wojtyła, poet, playwright, and Catholic priest who, in 1978, became Pope John Paul II. As we read the texts of the promising young poet from Kraków, we can discern in them his indebtedness to the Romantic literary tradition, from which not only the literary works, but also the thoughts of one of the greatest pontiffs of the twentieth century arose. We also present the work of one of the more interesting poets of the last century: Jerzy Liebert, who died 1931 at the young age of twenty-seven. Liebert is the creator of a poetry that can justly be classed among analogous works of that period, from the pens of T.S. Eliot, Georges Bernanos, and other Christian writers.

Among the texts included here, we have a riveting biographical essay concerning Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko, murdered by the Communists, from the pen of Milena Kindziuk. This biography is all the more interesting in that it touches upon the absolutely key era in the modern history of Central Europe (and thus, of Europe as a whole) – the Solidarity period in Poland, followed by the years of martial law (the 1980s).

Our catalogue showcases a rich selection of essays, where one may follow the many-voiced dialogue of the Polish intellectual tradition – not only that associated with the nation's Catholic heritage – with contemporary cultural narratives. We are speaking here of Roszkowski, Tysza-Drozdowski, Drenda, Rymkiewicz and Szczerski – the last-named of whom broadens his perspective to take in all of East-Central Europe, spinning a fascinating account of the art of this section of Europe in the period of transformation (the final decade of the twentieth century). Uncommonly interesting, in our opinion, not only for Poles, may be Michał Łuczewski's essay, in which the political traditions of the two most important powers in our region – Russia and Germany – are presented as a background for Polish matters.

We encourage you to peruse our catalogue – and to come to know the Poland that arises from the pages of the works presented here.

DARIUSZ JAWORSKI, Director of the Book Institute  
Professor KRZYSZTOF KOEHLER, Deputy Director of the Book Institute  
Translated by Charles S. Kraszewski

# Sanitorium

**A female, contemporary  
'sanatorium novel' drawing  
on *The Magic Mountain***



**BY A RECOGNISED AND AWARD-WINNING POET**

**Z**drój [*Sanitorium*] is the debut novel by the recognised and award-winning poet Barbara Klicka. The work is written in a style typical of realistic prose – the author does not draw upon her poetic resources. *Sanitorium* could be called a 'sanatorium novel' and connections with this rich literary tradition, which stretches back at least to Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, are obvious. We have a heroine, Kama, who arrives from Warsaw for an extended rehabilitation holiday in Ciechocinek, a well-known spa town in the Kujawy region. Kama is thirty-three years old and has been ill since childhood – as a little girl she had often visited hospitals and sanatoria. This proves to be an important piece of information about her as the account of her week-long sojourn in Ciechocinek is punctuated by numerous flashbacks (most of them from when Kama was a twelve-year-old).

In her novel, the writer reveals something that could be called 'sanatorium culture'. It shows how and what is talked about at a spa, what the typical behaviours of its inhabitants are, and how the medical staff carry

themselves – something to which the author devotes the most space. This last aspect refers to what is perhaps the most interesting matter: attitudes towards the ailing body. Kama comes to the realisation that her doctors and physiotherapists have absolute power over her body, which is inevitably deprived of its intimacy whilst being subjected to various procedures. Some of the ways in which the staff behave can be regarded as inappropriate. We see, for example, those instances when Mariusz the masseur, in his desire to get closer to Kama, makes advances to her. In addition, there is another important male figure, Piotr the invalid, with whom the protagonist carries on fundamentally philosophical conversations about the meaning of life and suffering.

Although *Sanitorium* is a work of modest length, the writer has managed to weave many threads through it, often in just a few salient paragraphs. It is dominated by the poetics of abbreviation and understatement, and the narrative language is unusually concise, yet at the same time supple and precise.

Dariusz Nowacki, translated by Lynn Suh

Off we go anyway. The suitcase trails behind me, like a sad dinosaur. The woman's suitcase is so much smaller that I think, isn't it normal, when you leave town in the autumn, to take wellies in case you go for a walk?

'Are you here for long?' she asks.

'The whole month. That's what my referral says. You?'

'The same.'

So she's not here for less time, so I'm a welly-clad slave to fashion, and one without a scrap of vision when it comes to steps on the return route. I'll surprise her, I think.

'The Social Security Office referred me. I had to. You understand. There was a committee and they said I had to come here for the whole month.'

'It's worse for the Socials,' she says. Her 'expert' mode kicks in. 'First and foremost, we've no chance of getting a single. Even twin rooms are rare. Then there's the trouble with the passes.' She looks at me, checking whether she's made an impression. She has. She continues, 'I'm a Social too this time, but I prefer to go private.'

I'm realising that she spends, so to speak, half her life here, that she's now leading us at a confident pace, that we've turned left, her, me, our different-sized suitcases, and we're heading straight towards our destination.

'You know where we're going, don't you?' I ask.

'Of course. I asked for directions because you have to break the ice somehow.' She stops, extends her hand. 'I'm Beata. I thought, since you look younger than me, that you could be my friend. You'll see, younger friends are very valuable here.'

I can't escape, I think, I've got a big suitcase. I'm not supposed to run, I think. What the hell do I know, I think – she knows, and since she knows, shake her hand and introduce yourself nicely.

'Kama,' I say. 'From Warsaw'.

We're walking again. Well, I'm walking behind her, because she's walking. Behind me is the suitcase.

'From Warsaw,' she says with a hint of disappointment. 'That's not the best. You know no one likes people from Warsaw?'

'I know,' I say, because it's hard not to know that if you've ever left the capital. 'But I moved there for university and I just stayed'.

'Ah, that's a little better,' she says. But she doesn't believe what she's saying, it's obvious. 'I'm from Włocławek. It's a good city. Anyway, there's no need to be ashamed of it.'

I've never been ashamed of a city, I think. How can you be ashamed of a city? What is shame for a city? We're walking. We've made two more turns. The facility building is already looming on the horizon. I know, I've seen pictures of it online.

'I'm a PE teacher,' says Beata. 'Once, quite a long time ago, I was runner-up in the junior artistic gymnastics championship. Over the years it turned out that my bones didn't much like that discipline. Which is why I'm hanging out here now. Though that's not the only reason...' She smiles suddenly. A kind of stretched-out smile. 'Have you had your operation yet?'

Excerpt translated by Kate Webster



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BARBARA  
KLICKA

Born 1981

**Zdrój [Sanitorium]**

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

ISBN: 978-83-280-6012-8; 136 pages

**Translation rights:** Grupa Wydawnicza Foksal,  
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**Poetry collections published**

*Wrażliwiec*, 2000

*Same same*, 2012

*Nice*, 2015

**Foreign language translations**

Klicka's poems have been translated into English,  
German and Croatian.

**Awards**

Silesius Poetry Award (2016; nomination in 2012)

Gdynia Literary Prize (2016)

# Am (A Diary from the Other Side)

**A European intellectual on  
the road through America,  
dealing with midlife crisis**



**DEBUT NOVEL BY AN ACCLAIMED PLAYWRIGHT AND POET**

**A**rtur Grabowski's *Am (A Diary from the Other Side)* isn't a typical journal. It's actually a work combining features of the essay and literary fiction: the account of a Polish intellectual who relocates to the United States to lecture and write. The narrator drinks in his surroundings and travels around, examining Polishness and himself.

The enigmatic titular *Am* is the first syllable of the word 'America' as well as the verb in the phrase 'I am'. The 'other side' is also significant here: the narrator isn't just on the far side of the Atlantic, he is also halfway through his life. Like Dante, he's undertaken a journey that will change him. Grabowski's writing becomes something of a taking stock of life and also a free variation on identity and literature. Reality – his description of life in the States – is here interwoven with philosophical and poetical passages, and in the end with projections of the narrator's overactive imagination. We learn about his literary fascinations,

witness moments of marital intimacy, and are party to encounters with an imagined lover and a homeless friend. With Grabowski we travel across an American wilderness.

Poles have long dreamed about the United States. The fact that Grabowski chose a trip to Chicago as the background for his soliloquy is proof positive. *Am*, however, gives readers much more than an account of time-worn Polish fascinations. The book documents the bitterness with which an epigone of European culture discovers American otherness, its formalism and ahistorical carelessness.

In *Am*, retrospection collides with fabrication. In it, writing is an experiment, a way of creating oneself. Artur Grabowski's story is a compelling self-portrait of a man in a midlife crisis, and as a diary it represents the best of Polish journalling traditions.

Marta Kwaśnicka, translated by David French

22 August

It's my fucking birthday again! A non-moveable feast that even non-believers can't ignore, although it's less and less welcome every year. I'm sitting at Letitia's with my morning coffee (freshly brewed, Italian half-espresso, half-milk) when my mum calls to say she has stomach ache.

For quite some time (it's got to be three years) I've been stuck in the middle of a midlife crisis (does that mean it'll continue?), in the third phase of chronic depression, when the sufferer instinctively forgets about birthdays, and just my luck, my mother's eating up 50 cents from my phone. Because the way that bloody thing works, it expects payment just for dialling, no matter who's calling, and even for missed calls. I can't stand mobiles; I don't know what possessed me to shove it in my pocket. I'm pissed, but I'll soon get over it. Because... Mum, I'm glad you were with me for those two minutes. Tears ought to be rolling down my cheeks, but they aren't. I hang up. And at once I feel a particularly Slavic, spiritual pressure weigh me down. Thanks, my unholy mother, my sinful mother, that I'm still your mummy's boy.

The clock strikes ten (where?); I was born almost five hours ago. My God! If you believe historians and the Revealed Truth, I've outlived Jesus by five years. Well?

Hey, I'm talking to you, Jesus! Why didn't you leave instructions on how to imitate you after crossing that line, when people deserve to be properly crucified?

The End of August

Seven-seventeen. What's everyone doing in the street at this time? I mean they aren't here by choice. They're hurrying. To work.

Work, work. Being constantly busy is the most American of diseases. Barbarka was telling me on the phone yesterday (at almost midnight!) that she was about to leave for a party and, already made up ('I even put a towel on the pillow!'), decided to take a rest on the sofa. She slept for 26 hours.

It isn't obesity but overactivity that kills them. May they rest in peace.

Noble Avenue

The Algren writing method. Write, write again, edit, cut, paste, patch up, write again, write, write out a fair copy, then change something, then rewrite this and that, and so on... First the passages that have to be written down. Why? Keep writing, writing about that. And now more clearly, more neatly. Then the composition, splice it together, matching your memory

to the allegory. The scenes, the frames, each dialogue is a micro-drama. Charging tanks with bravado, drunk, riding a mustang you caught by accident. Heading God knows where, always on the edge of a blank sheet of paper, without a plan, without predictions, without protection. Always disorganised, always desperate, always uncertain. And strong because of that – a literature addict, being held up by what finishes him off.

You become a writer after you die, before that, at best, you can be a narrator.

Excerpt translated by David French



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ARTUR  
GRABOWSKI

Born 1967

**Am (dziennik z drugiej strony) [Am (A Diary from the Other Side)]**

**Publisher:** Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 2018

ISBN: 978-83-06-03448-6; 420 pages

**Translation rights:** Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy,  
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**Poetry collections published**

*Z didaskaliów. 1986-89, 1991*

*Pojedynek. 1990-96, 1998*

*Ziemny początek, 2000*

*Szary człowiek, 2007*

*Jaśnienie, 2011*

*Ładne kwiatki, 2018*

*Wersje, 2018*

**Collected theatre plays**

*Do trzech razy sztuka, 1999*

*Cnoty zachodniej cywilizacji, 2007*

*Trzy, cztery – tragedia!, 2015*

**Selected essay collections**

*Wiersz – forma i sens, 1999*

*Uzmysłowienia, 2010*

**Foreign language translations**

Croatia, Bulgaria, Canada Germany, Italy, Slovenia, Spain, UK & USA – in anthologies and magazines. Grabowski's plays were also staged or adapted for radio in many European countries, including Croatia, Italy and France.

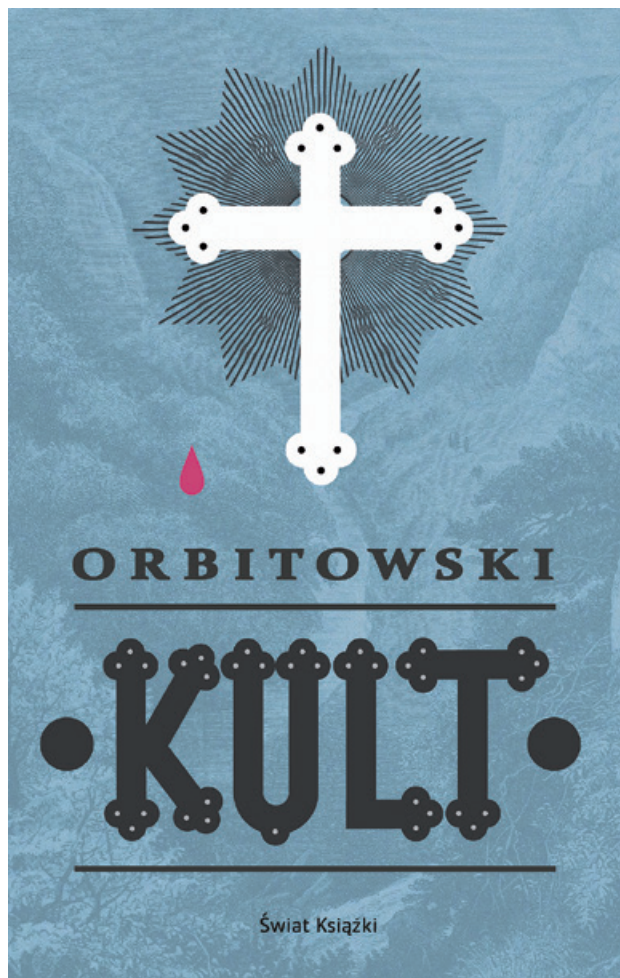
**Selected awards**

Angelus Central European Literature Award (2019) – nomination

Józef Mackiewicz Literary Prize (2019) – nomination



# Worship



## About a religious 'miracle' in Communist Poland

Inspired by true events from 1983, Łukasz Orbitowski has created a quasi-journalistic book portraying the alleged apparitions of the Sacred Virgin and Christ in Oława, outside Wrocław. Mary and Jesus were said to have spoken to a forty-nine-year-old uneducated labourer, who devoted the rest of his life to his religious mission, until his death in 2002. He taught and – as he claimed – healed people. Yet the Catholic Church never recognised the apparitions in Oława, unlike those in Lourdes or Fatima. The Communist authorities attempted to hush up the matter, but news of the 'miracle' swiftly made its way around Communist Poland. Catholic pilgrims came to Oława from all over the country, hoping to be healed.

The narrator of *Worship* is the brother of the alleged visionary. A hairdresser by profession and a sceptic by disposition, he looks coolly on his younger brother's experience. He was always the more resourceful and clever of the two. Suddenly, the brother he treated his whole life long as a silly fool who needed looking after turns out to possess the enormous charisma that draws crowds.

The style in which *Worship* is constructed has the narrator spin his tale, years later in free Poland, into a young journalist's Dictaphone. He not only sketches out the facts of that period, but he also represents, beyond himself, the social mores of that era – of people pauperised by Communism, impoverished and parochial. He is a provincial not only in terms of geography but also mentality. He's never left Oława, nor has he ever felt the need to.

With documentary precision, Łukasz Orbitowski guides us into the reality of the Communist-era periphery. He gives detailed descriptions of clothes, hairstyles, and cars, identifies social divisions, and portrays the entertainments to which people devoted their free time.

In interviews, Orbitowski declares himself an atheist, but he approaches the events he describes without an agenda. He doesn't exaggerate what happened in Oława in 1983 and seems very curious about it himself. A very ambiguous novel written with sociological flair.

Marcin Kube, translated by Sean Gasper Bye



Heniek drove straight from the community garden to Zamkowy Square, to SS Peter and Paul. He found Romek in the parish hall, trying to hook up a video player to the television. Romek was a modern sort of priest. On pilgrimages he played guitar and gave the impression of being happy to talk about any subject. He'd be just as willing to go to a pigsty as to prenuptial lessons. Heniek stopped in the doorway of the parish hall, stammering out 'Praise be' a few times. Romek was so absorbed in the battle with the cables and switching channels that he only heard him after a few repetitions. At last, he invited Heniek in and offered him some tea. Heniek greatly respected the priest, but was too proud to ever accept even a glass of water from anyone.

'I've been setting up a VCR,' Romek told him. 'I want the young people to come here more often. Do you know how to hook it up? No, I'm sure you don't. I've got a couple movies too. You want to watch something? You sure you won't have anything to drink?' He kept on jabbering like that, while Heniek stood there, his ears red as beets.

'The Blessed Virgin appeared to me,' Heniek finally declared.

That was enough to get Romek to crawl out from under the table with the TV on it and put the cord down.

'What are you talking about, Heniek? You mean in a dream?'

'It happened just now in the community garden. I was tying up my tomatoes, I went back to the shed for some string and Our Lady was already waiting there, on a little cloud.'

'A little cloud?' our priest said, making sure. Romek was exactly the type who had to hear everything twice.

'Yes. And she was incredibly beautiful. She was wearing this light beige dress, a brown robe on top of it, and a crown just like the one in the painting from Licheń. And I also have to add she had this gentle little face and sad eyes. And such delicate hands, I mean, you could tell right away she was a real queen. I thought she seemed so fragile and when I was driving to see you it occurred to me that she lifts up all our sins to God. If I see her again I'll try to apologise. But what would she get from me apologising?'

'Well, not that much,' agreed Romek. 'This happened here, in our community garden.'

'Yes! Please father, you have to tell people about this as quickly as possible!'

Romek pulled Heniek toward the door and, if I know him, he glanced once more at the video player and the cassettes in their cardboard boxes.

'I will, sure, of course I will. These are great things, dear Heniek, the most marvellous things. We've got to be careful with things like this, because they're fragile, delicate. It's best if we talk tomorrow. Absolutely come see me, even first thing in the morning, but before you do, make sure you get a good night's sleep. And I'll think everything through. We'll make sure it's done right. Well now, why should it be wrong?'

Excerpt translated by Sean Gasper Bye



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ŁUKASZ  
ORBITOWSKI  
Born 1977

**Kult [Worship]**

**Publisher:** Świat Książki, Warszawa 2019

ISBN: 978-83-813-9098-9; 480 pages

**Translation rights:** Świat Książki,  
joanna.laprus-mikulska@swiatksiazki.pl

**Selected novels**

*Horror show*, 2006

*Tracę ciepło*, 2007

*Święty Wrocław*, 2009

*Widma*, 2012

*Szczęśliwa ziemia*, 2013

*Inna dusza*, 2015

**Short story collections (selection)**

*Wigilijne psy*, 2005

*Nadchodzi*, 2010

*Rękopis znaleziony w gardle*, 2014

**Foreign language translations**

Hungary

**Selected awards**

Polityka's Passport Award (2016; nomination in 2013)

Nike Literary Award (2014, 2016) – nominations

Gdynia Literary Prize (2016) – nomination

Janusz A. Zajdel Award (2017 – together with Michał Cetnarowski; nominations in 2007, 2009, 2013)

# Olanda



**Stories full of suppressed emotion,  
about people who find themselves  
beyond the main current of contemporary life**

**The** main characters in *Olanda* by Rafał Wojasiński, are made up of spoken words. To them, to speak is to *be* (meaning to exist).

The characters in Wojasiński's stories are solitary and lost people, familiar with fate's trials and tribulations, who nonetheless do their best to trust that there is really no 'greater power than existence' (*The Visit*) and love. Marked by loss (*Heaven for Mela*), an empty life (*Void*), or suffering (*My Husband*) they have abandoned all delusions and dreams of happiness, but nonetheless have paradoxically accepted (sometimes in reflexive resignation) their sadness and its bitterness. And they want to talk about it, and direct their words to us, to others, and to one another, because that is the only way they can reach the truth about themselves and reconcile themselves with the world. They therefore examine themselves in words as though in a mirror, or rather create their own portraits out of words – people with tired faces, off the beaten path of life.

In Rafał Wojasiński's focused, sometimes intimate short stories (at times reminiscent of the prose of Raymond Carver), all these smaller or larger tragedies play out seemingly imperceptibly: outside of time and history, on the borders of spoken words. Wojasiński's spare, minimalistic style brings out the power of stifled emotions, and also underlines the tragedy of his characters' fates. They search for some sign to accept things as they are. As the protagonist of the title story says: 'There's maybe one piece of advice to be offered – admit you are absolutely unworthy of existence. Then faith, happiness, hope, and love will come to you. Then true religion will be born in your heart and you can even begin to think about something like salvation or the meaning of existence'.

Karol Alichnowicz, translated by Sean Gasper Bye

I sat in the little Chinese restaurant for five hours. I ate a lemon chicken soup. The bowl had plenty of pieces of chicken breast in it. Rice or soy noodles, I don't remember. It was great. I felt like a reasonable person. Like Grandpa Kalina.

In my head, I was talking to you, Olanda: 'A cow doesn't bother worrying about life, she doesn't yammer on about her existence. The cow has outgrown Socrates and every poet. What a joke. There are new girls behind the counter in this Chinese place and the ones who bring out the food are new too. I look at them, but I don't get anything out of looking. There's no path. Life isn't one path, Olanda, there's no Ithaca or home you're aiming for. Even if a person's at home, they keep leaving it so they can come back home. They go home, but they left home long ago. It's just a trip but you have to justify it somehow. In a wise way, ideally. But fate, the path, Ithaca, predestination – these sound smarter. So it's important and continues to exist for centuries. We can't live without it. We have to justify humanity, so there's culture and manners too. There's no wisdom in humans measuring time and learning this and that. That way lies madness, which will so deceive a person that they surrender to ideas, religions, wisdoms, for the sake of calling something the truth. A person can't withstand being human. They've given their fate a tremendous historical weight. Show me, Olanda, the billions of fates of those who've died in the history of the world. What are they, those fates, what kind of wisdoms, Ithacas, discoveries of life's path? Discoveries of life's path which many billions of people have already gotten to. And newly-born humans keep reaching them. I'm ashamed of that, Olanda. I'm ashamed. I only feel shame. But I love life very much. And I know nothing beyond this, that at all costs the naked must cling tight to the naked.'

You know what's just? That justice doesn't exist. If there was justice, humanity would have no hope of surviving. There would be no exploitation, manipulation, domination, rule. Meaning there'd be no work, earning money, competition between people. There'd be no slave labour or pyramids in Egypt. The lack of justice breeds the energy out of which religions, ideas, systems, and social welfare are created. The lack of justice is us. Oh Lord! How glorious. Stupid, but glorious.

Am I deceiving you? No, Olanda, I'm not. Don't say that. Please, don't say that. Everyone deceives, but there are some who deceive better. And there are also those who deceive intelligently and so well that they become truth incarnate, the voice of truth, which many believe in. Many, my dear. Because everyone believes

in some lie. Every individual person in the world believes in at least one thing that's a lie. Otherwise a person can't survive.

Excerpt translated by Sean Gasper Bye



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**RAFAŁ  
WOJASIŃSKI**  
Born 1974

**Olanda**

**Publisher:** Nisza, Warszawa 2018  
ISBN: 978-83-62795-72-7; 119 pages  
**Translation rights:** Rafał Wojasiński, Wydawnictwo Nisza,  
niscal25@gmail.com

**Selected books**

*Pocieszenie i dziesięć listów*, 2000  
*Złodziej ryb*, 2004  
*Przyjemność życia*, 2005  
*Humus*, 2006  
*Piękno świata*, 2009  
*Stara*, Warszawa 2011

Wojasiński's dramas have also been produced on television,  
and by Polish Radio.

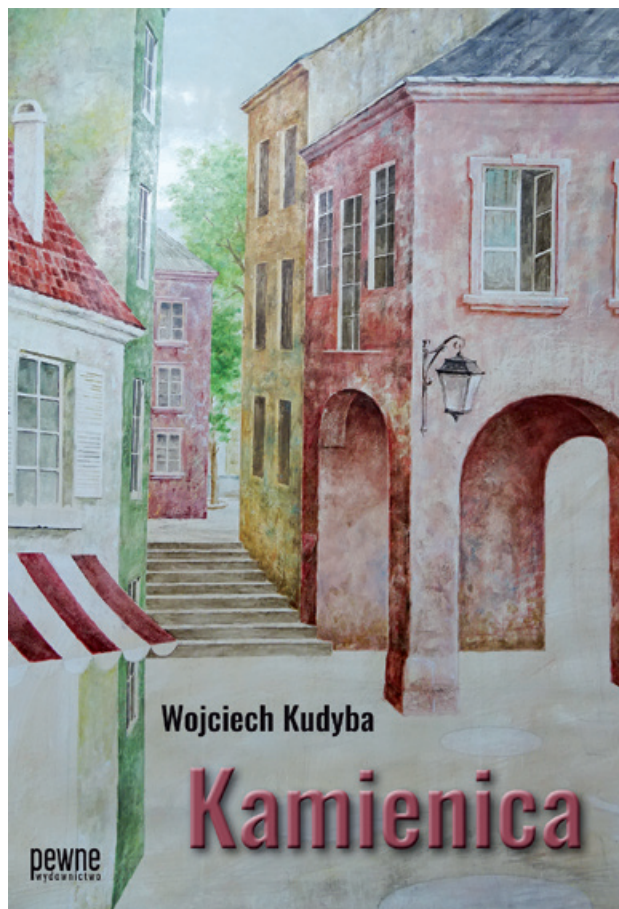
**Foreign language translations**

Bulgaria (*Olanda*), Croatia, France, Hungary, Spain,  
UK (other works)

**Selected awards**

Władysław Reymont Literary Award (2011) – nomination  
Józef Mackiewicz Literary Prize (2005; nomination in 2012)  
Literary Award of the Capital City of Warsaw (2012) – nomination  
Winner of the Marek Nowakowski Prize (2019)  
Gdynia Drama Award (2019)

# Townhouse



## The inhabitants of a block of flats are unable to adapt themselves to the swift pace of economic transformation

A local eccentric – an amateur herbalist; a melancholy writer, who only becomes well-known after his death; a young family dreaming of getting away on a holiday; and a single, retired surveyor are the neighbours in the eponymous *Townhouse* by Wojciech Kudyba, a renowned literary critic, poet and prose writer. Like the old building they live in, the lives of the protagonists in the four stories included in the book are on the brink of utter devastation and ruin. They're unable to adjust to the too-rapid pace of economic change, the technology that drives the world and business deals that are not always honest. Left to themselves, they resign themselves to life in a small, disorientated community of people on the margins of civilisation – people like themselves. Although their efforts to fight the destructive development and progress prove futile, they don't despair; they don't submit to doubt and apathy, but serenely go on with their everyday lives. They are evicted from this broken world that gives them, in spite of it all, a kind of sense of security

and certainty, by the crooked activities of a developer who tries to rid himself of the inconvenient residents in order to convert the townhouse into luxury flats. Thus, he enters an unfair, dangerous game with them. *Townhouse* is a literary picture of a fading world of old-fashioned values in which a small community of neighbours – the residents of one building, people connected by a place – seem to exist in a reality alongside rapid, modern urban life. Subtle and sophisticated humour is also discernible in this psychological portrait of the small group of protagonists, residents of the same building, sketched in deeply evocative and rich language pervaded with melancholy dread. The essence of this prose is a tender remembrance about times and people who have passed on, expressed in the stories of 'grey people' living in a city that spat them out to the periphery. But 'a house is not bricks and mortar, it is people'.

Katarzyna Wójcik, translated by David French

There's no one around. Everything is sparkling clean. The entire building. And the smell is strange, chemical, not like it used to be. Because in the past, at dawn, it seemed to smell of dew, and at lunchtime – of lunches behind doors. Here chicken soup, there borscht, somewhere else something fried. I move further inside, my heels bang on the steps, my fist against the banister. Nothing... I can see for myself... So perhaps I'm actually not banging. Perhaps I'm just bumping around noiselessly – from banister to wall, from door to door. Perhaps that silence, hanging like a cloud in the very centre of the house absorbs everything, so they can't hear me. Perhaps something's happened. I hurry up and whack the door at number two and then the one on the first floor, and then on the second and shout:

'Mr Konrad! Mrs Halinka!'

I shout like that because they always used to come out when the postman was there. Of course. He's getting on, his bag's heavy. He often even said it got heavier from year to year, although people have stopped writing to each other. And even if it was a bit lighter, who could climb stairs like that? Old people can't and youngsters really can't either, because they're weak these days. They rush around with flyers and they've had enough after one day. Here it's not about a day or a week, but life, because you don't become a postman for a month – it's for life. Am I really saying these things.

So they used to come out at once; sometimes you didn't even have to call. Banging the front door was enough, or the heavy sound of steps, the jangling of keys. There was no doorbell. If necessary, you knocked and called:

'Mr Artur! Pension!'

I had a strong voice, but not now. After the illness it's just a croak. But there's no point complaining either. I mean, I was lucky. There were no secondaries and I'm just about alive. And Mr Artur at number three would come out in his dressing gown, put on his glasses and count the money.

'Bugger them, they can go to hell!'

He would take a step forward, rest on the banister, count it again, even though he knew precisely how much there was. Stand with legs slightly apart, focussed. He'd even count it a few times, because it wasn't the money he was adding up, but his own life.

'Thieves, bastards, red brigade! Come here, all of you! I'll show you equality and fraternity! How about you try and live on twelve hundred złoty! And keep telling yourselves that after thirty years of farting behind your desk that's all you're worth! One thousand two hundred and twelve złoty and fifty-five grosze. Come and get it. I won't miss the notes or the coins! I'll give it all away and watch. After thirty years of hard graft we'll see what you can afford! Because it has to cover everything! Water, gas, electricity, rent and medicine, food and prostitutes!'

Excerpt translated by David French



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WOJCIECH  
KUDYBA

Born 1965

**Kamienica [Townhouse]**

**Publisher:** Pewne Wydawnictwo, Kielce 2018

ISBN: 978-83-63518-24-0; 114 pages

**Translation rights:** Wojciech Kudyba, kudyba@op.pl

**Novels published**

*Nazywam się Majdan*, 2015

*Imigranci wracają do domu*, 2018

**Selected poetry**

*Wierność w małej rzeczy*, 1992

*Tyszowce i inne miasta*, 2005

*Gorce Pana*, 2007

*Ojciec się zmienia*, 2011

*W końcu świat*, 2014

Wojciech Kudyba is a professor of humanities, a literary scholar, and the author of numerous books and academic articles.

**Foreign language translations**

France, Germany, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Turkey, UK – poems in anthologies

**Selected awards**

R.M. Rilke Contest in Poetry (2003 – second prize)

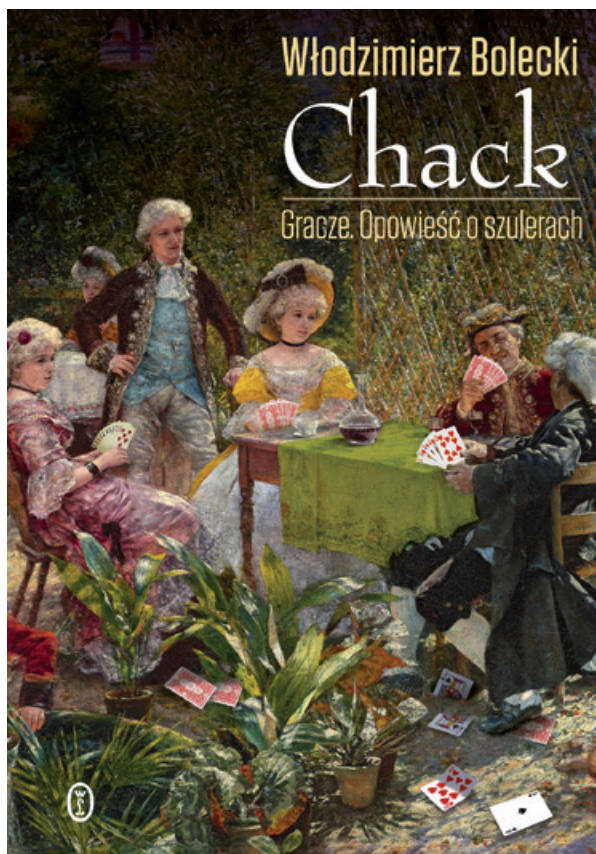
Józef Mackiewicz Literary Prize (2008 – distinction; nominated in 2019)

Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński Poetry Prize ORPHEUS (2012 – finalist)



# Chack. The Gamblers

**A talented and depraved cardsharp wins (and easily squanders) a fortune at cards, while mingling in the most privileged circles**



Until the twentieth century, when history fell off the rails, there had never been a more dynamic three decades in the history of Poland than the years between 1785 and 1815. During this period, the Partitions occurred, the Constitution was ratified, independence was lost, followed by the emigration and nomadic diaspora, or fading away, of the Polish élite, the conditional re-establishment of independence, Napoléon's Moscow campaign, and the subsequent rebirth and fall of the nation. This novel, by a literary historian, speaks of those times through the prism of the alleged, fleshed-out biography of an unusual hero, who carefully hides his tracks.

The history of those three stormy decades might be condensed into a narrative concerning the fate of an ambitious military officer or a poet. After all, the years 1785-1815 were lacking in neither. Yet instead of them, for his medium to evoke the truth of the period, Włodzimierz Bolecki chose a character who, while historical, figures only as a footnote to that history, a character on the absolute margin of the era: the talented but depraved cardsharp Ignacy Chodźkiewicz (who also possessed a good half-dozen other aliases). Winning (and easily squandering) fortunes at the card tables, Chodźkiewicz frequented the most privileged social milieux.

It was in the interest of Bolecki's hero to cover his tracks. He figures in the memoirs of those contemporaries who mention him as a very equivocal character. In his reconstruction of the life of Chodź- or Chaćkiewicz, one comes across large lacunae – some of them years-long – which Bolecki fills up with invention or persiflage, having his gambler 'know everyone, be present everywhere', thus making of him one of the witnesses to the times he describes.

However, this novel makes no pretensions to simple, realistic historical narrative. It is rather a portrayal of how one might 'twist' the truth to oneself; how the mind can shut itself up in imaginations of the world, which have nothing in common with reality. The patriots struggling for the continued existence of the Republic believe strongly in their own delusions and strength. On the other hand, the adherents of the Targowica Confederation – a political formation which, to this day, is a synonym for treason in Poland – no less strongly believed that the Empress Catherine II the Great was the defender of noble freedoms and liberty in the face of something that they saw as a 'dynastic conspiracy' and a 'Jacobite frenzy' at the same time. And the eponymous hero, Chodźkiewicz, or Chack, believes in his own immortality.

Wojciech Stanisławski, translated by Charles S. Kraszewski



So who was he, back when he was? – They called him the king of the cardsharps, the Polish Casanova, the noble king of rascals, whose name was ‘on everyone’s lips as sure as salt is in the dish’. Nobody ever let an occasion for mentioning him slip by, whether diarists, people who knew him, or people who’d only heard tell of him. He was a legend in his own lifetime, enjoying the cultish aura of the exotic, in which there was both tender delight and repulsion. Sharpster and troublemaker, agent and traitor, a master of the word, the aphorism, the joke; elegant in all senses of the word – he became lord of the collective imagination of his age, in spite of the fact of his being little known. But that’s another matter entirely. From these contradictory descriptions of his character and assessments of his activities there breaks through a yearning after nobility and the beautiful – entangled, who knows why? with villainy, cynicism, ruthlessness and brutality. (...)

He was known in the manors of magnates and at royal courts, in the staff headquarters of great armies and in the hush-hush departments of the secret police. He knocked about the most repugnant dives and lowdown locales, but above all he frequented the residences of aristocrats, and the alcoves of the richest and most beautiful women in Europe. Tender-hearted and affectionate, he could still, without so much as winking an eye, stab a friend in the back, sell out a lover, betray his fatherland.

Travelling about the great theatre of eighteenth century history, he squandered his parents’ fortune without even asking May I. He was everywhere: in Russia and Asia, in the Polish Crownlands and in Lithuania, in Turkey and the Balkans, in Italy, in Prussia, in France. He was even planning an expedition to America. Supposedly, he made some threats about founding a colony in Madagascar, but that information comes from an unverified source. He was a roisterer such as had never before been seen. At the very least, that’s how his legend described him in his own lifetime.

He was an ardent tribune of revolutionary slogans: words such as ‘republic’ and ‘liberty’ ‘equality’ and ‘fraternity’, ‘independence’ and ‘Poland’ were ever on his lips. He was both a frequent prisoner of the police in different European lands and the head of the same (in Naples) as well as its most secret, frequently used, agent. He was a brave soldier and a passionate lover (of Mammon, power and women, as well as the Fatherland, when it so suited him and as the occasion presented itself); he was known and admired by all. Here of course I’m exaggerating again. But let that be. So, how can it be then, that he has been forgotten? That, although he once existed, he no longer really does? That, even if he does, it’s like he’d never really been?

And that’s it exactly – it wasn’t completely like that at all... But enough of this game already. It’s time for some facts, documents, and a handful of assumptions.

Let’s begin.

Excerpt translated by Charles S. Kraszewski



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Wiśniewska-Krasńska  
(author’s archive)

WŁODZIMIERZ  
BOLECKI

Born 1952

**Chack. Gracze. Opowieść o szulerach [Chack. The Gamblers. A Story of Cardsharps]**

**Publisher:** Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2018

ISBN: 978-83-08-06582-2; 652 pages

**Translation rights:** Wydawnictwo Literackie,  
j.dabrowska@wydawnictwoliterackie.pl

**Selected essay collections**

*Widziałem wolność w Warszawie. Szkice 1982-1987*, 1984

*Prawdy niemiłe. Eseje*, Warszawa 1993

*Polowanie na postmodernistów (w Polsce) i inne szkice*, Kraków 1999

*Ciemna miłość. Szkice do portretu Gustawa Herlinga-Grudzińskiego*, 2005

*Inna krytyka*, 2006

Włodzimierz Bolecki is a professor of humanities, an eminent scholar of twentieth-century Polish literature. He specialises in the works of Witkiewicz, Gombrowicz, Schulz and Gustaw Herling-Grudziński (whom he knew as a friend). He also published two volumes of interviews with Herling-Grudziński.

**Foreign language translations**

The scholarly works of Włodzimierz Bolecki have been translated into many languages. They have appeared, among others, in the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Russia, Slovenia, the USA and the UK.

**Selected awards**

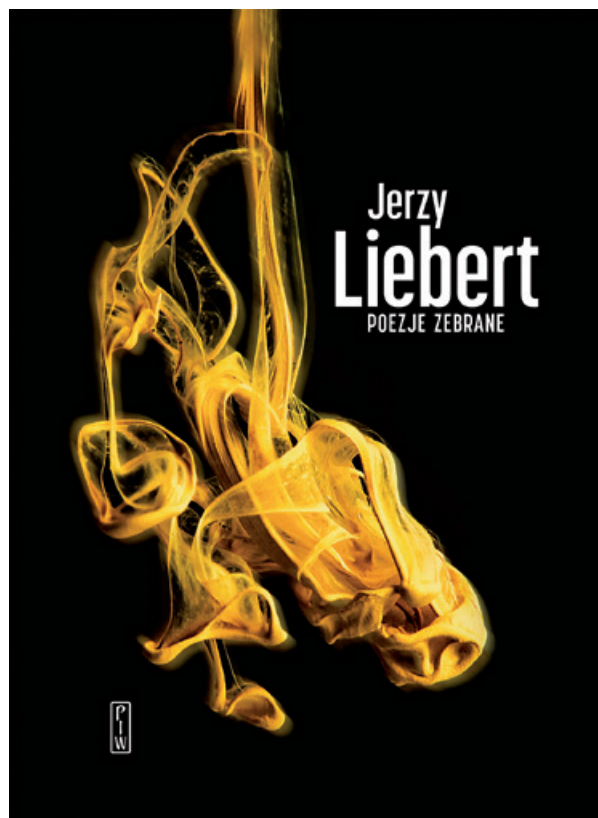
Andrzej Kijowski Award (1987)

Kościelski Foundation Award (1989)

Zygmunt Hertz Literary Prize, awarded by the Paris *Kultura* (1991)

Winner of the Kazimierz Wyka Prize for achievements in the field of literary criticism, essay and the history of literature (2007).

# Collected Poems



## Liebert's legacy reflects the dilemmas of a generation which was to create Poland anew

**J**erzy Liebert (1904-1931) was a Polish poet whose work covers the experience of the transcendent. It is vigorous in its descriptions of reality. Before his untimely death from tuberculosis, Liebert revealed himself to be a talented translator of Alexander Blok, and a fan of Sergei Yesenin. As a poet, he followed in the literary footsteps of the likes of Jan Kochanowski, and Cyprian Norwid, was associated with the Skamander poetic group, and a keen reader of John Henry Newman, Stanisław Brzozowski, Thomas Mann and Joseph Conrad.

His life story reflects the complex fates of the Polish nation; his legacy – the dilemmas of a generation which was to create Poland anew, having brought it back into existence in 1918, only to meet with the challenges freedom presents us with. This young generation was faced with a situation radically different from the four previous generations of their countrymen, who were forced to live under foreign oppression. Liebert showed his fellow poets a path which led them to the most difficult existential and metaphysical questions.

Liebert's poetry celebrates language as a communicative device, necessary for expression, but also as a meeting place, a phenomenon of ineffable, spiritual and restricted coexistence. The spiritual dimensions

found in these poems provoke the contemporary reader with their dynamism and dramatic nature, their condensation of meanings and tensions.

Liebert's poetry features angels who are not the winged creatures of Christian iconography, but a completely new quality, a relational drama, a concretisation of extreme situations. Everyday objects are participants in the process of transience. Paradoxically, the experience of the passage of time does not answer any questions about the meaning of existence, but leads instead to acceptance of the process of things passing on, revealing itself as meaning in itself. Formal rigorism brought to absolute perfection endows this poetry with lightness and musicality, something recognised by Karol Szymanowski, the Polish composer who, between 1930-1933, wrote a two-part cantata entitled *Litany to the Virgin Mary op. 59* in which he set Liebert's poetry to music. It was this cantata he once referred to as his 'deepest, most condensed piece'.

In 2008, Sir Simon Rattle recorded this work with the City of Birmingham Orchestra, which went on to win the prestigious Gramophone Classical Music Awards.

Anna Szczepan-Wojnarska, translated by Marek Kazmierski

To a Poet

What are they to the heavens and void dark, mad  
Our hells familiar, absolute, over which  
We stretch half-yellowed skies with a lute pitch  
In order to cast them longingly after earth – so sad?

Oh, what is this love, the heart on an endless beat,  
Gales and storms, wise retreats, doubts and defeats,  
Compared to mighty gales sent by the highest seat,  
And quiet and humble 'neath angels' feet?

From the world's bottom we scoop up words  
Wisdom, feeding hearts with supercilious despair –  
And if our words count only here, not there,  
If our talk is to the heavens something unheard?

Oh, now poet inspired! Neath a statue gleaming  
Bent double and beating those strings with all might!  
Your lute silver, black, so much alike the night,  
When you lay it down, exhausted, pray as if dreaming!

Painful Inspiration

In among my sinful acts as among sleepy grasses  
Your stream floats, Lord  
Moving my lands, cracking open mountain passes  
Hard, massless,  
Allow this stream and mead and milk  
To climb up aboard  
For human kind, for their love, its ilk  
I pray, dear Lord.

\*\*\*

I am learning you, human.  
I am learning slowly, so slowly.  
Because of this difficult study  
The heart is both joyous and lowly.

At dawn, with hope it blooms,  
Come evening in nothing believes,  
Else doubts, else trusts – equally –  
Is down to you, your duty it seems.  
I learn you and learn again.  
Yet I still lack your command –  
But your morning elation,  
Your evening woes I understand.

Ark

An ark not too large, without windows and towers,  
From end to end measuring few cubits entire  
Not all that tall – the bottom by the lid asides,  
But it will be as tall as me lengthwise!

Of oakwood, a god-fearing ship,  
It will sail from the room, begin the void to rip...  
A dozen nails, bits and bobs, six oaken planks –  
And to think that it awaits a little olive branch...

Translated by Marek Kazmierski



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w Stawiskach FOTONIA

**JERZY  
LIEBERT**  
(1904-1931)

*Poezje zebrane [Collected Poems]*

**Publisher:** Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 2018

ISBN: 978-83-06-03522-3; 483 pages

**Translation rights:** In the public domain.

Rights to further elaboration (including the afterword) must be obtained from the publisher: e.szwagrzyk@piw.pl

During his short life Jerzy Liebert published only two volumes of verse. Still, despite having died of tuberculosis at age 27, he is recognised as one of Poland's most important religious and metaphysical poets.

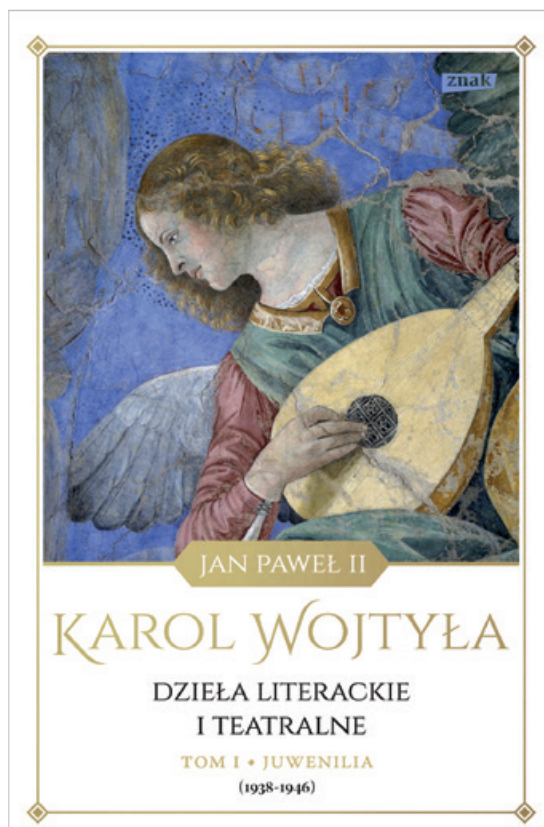
The essential theme of Liebert's poetry is faith. In his works, God is treated as a challenge to the Christian. Also, it is faith that endows the labour of poetry with sense, as a repetition of the act of Creation. The second great theme of Liebert's poetry – which dominates the posthumously published volume *A Lullaby of Fir*, is his illness, and the process of dying, which are described in these poems objectively, soberly, and frequently with mordant irony. Liebert's epistolary output is also quite interesting. In fact, it is considered one of the greatest achievements of the genre in Polish. The addressee of his letters is Bronisława Wajngold – his friend and unfulfilled love. His *Letters to Agnieszka* constitute a sizable corpus of correspondence which give witness to his spiritual and religious maturing, while also remaining an important document of the literary life of the 1920s.

**Foreign language translations**

Belarus, Czech Republic, Germany, Italy (in anthologies)

# Literary and Theatrical Works. Volume I: Juvenilia

**The early literary works of Pope John Paul II – a valuable testimony to the transformations occurring in him during this period of his life**



**CONTAINS PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED TEXTS**

**T**his hefty volume consists of Karol Wojtyła's juvenilia; that is, texts that he wrote between 1938-1946, while he was, respectively, a student of Polish Philology at the Jagiellonian University, a labourer, and a seminarian at the archdiocesan seminary in Kraków. Poetry predominates. Above all, we have the future pope's first collection of verse entitled *David's Psalter (The Book of the Slavs)*, a collection of seventeen sonnets and several longer lyrics. Besides this, his *Autumn Poetry* and the mature *Song of the Hidden God* are included among the verse selections. As far as a worldview is concerned, the above-mentioned texts are syncretistic, bringing together as they do traditions classical, Slavic (pre-Christian), and Catholic. One senses in them the influence of Renaissance literature, as well as that of the periods of Romanticism, and that version of early twentieth-century Modernism known as Young Poland.

The volume in hand includes dramatic works as well. There is *Job*, written at the outbreak of the Second World War, and the later *Our God's Friend* (the precursor of the play better known as *Our God's Brother*). The first two dramatic works form an artistic commentary on the tragic events of the first phase of the war,

yet they are set in the past – the Biblical era, and Poland of the early seventeenth century.

The prose section is very interesting indeed. Here, for the first time, the fragment known as 'I am still at the same shoreline' has been published. This is a prose work built up from essayistic and fictional elements, which was discovered by chance during research at the Metropolitan Curial Archives of the Kraków archdiocese. Wojtyła's letters to his acquaintances from Wadowice have special weight as documents descriptive of the author's philosophical, aesthetic and meta-literary opinions during the period in which they were written.

Among the addressees are the sculptor and painter Wincenty Bałys and Mieczysław Kotlarczyk – Wojtyła's older friend and theatrical mentor, who was to found the Rhapsodic Theatre. The letters to Kotlarczyk constitute, especially, a fragmentary quasi-manifesto as far as literature is concerned, and give voice to the author's *Weltanschauung*. In them, Wojtyła displays a critical attitude toward current events, contemporary cultural and political realities, while also exhibiting strong prophetic tendencies and neo-messianistic elements.

Krzysztof Dybciak, translated by Charles S. Kraszewski



*(Before the entry of the Prologus  
the gates of the theatrum spread open wide  
and there you see:  
merely steps, arrayed in one tier  
a backdrop of three open walls  
divided by a colonnade  
of double columns, simple rows.)*

#### PROLOGUS

There was a man in the land of Hus, whose name  
was Job, and he walked in righteousness before  
both God and man  
– and the Lord gave him seven sons  
and daughters three  
– and multiplied his earthly goods:  
seven thousand sheep and camels three,  
five times one hundred oxen yoked  
– and so too did He fill his house  
with servants numerous.

(...)

8. Swag art thou for the ravens black.
9. Upon thy brow sift ash in sorrow.
10. For now a terror grips us fast
11. We must undo thy gall and grief.
12. Kindle a fire unto the Lord  
Bewail thy sins.

*(The chorus disperses on all sides  
and Job remains there all alone  
beside the slab of sacrifice.  
Job gets up slowly, shuffles close  
and tosses myrrh upon the ash.  
The embers flame, the myrrh ignites  
and flame and incense climb aloft.  
In clouds of incense Job takes voice:)*

#### JOB

Blessed forever be Thy Name.  
Thou hast given,  
Thou takest away.  
Thine is the Will and Thine the Power.  
Just as it has seemed good to Thee  
thus has it come to be –  
Thou hast given,  
Thou takest away –  
Blessed forever be Thy Name.  
What is a man before Thee, Lord?  
Though he have wealth and dowry,  
though he be worthy in his soul,  
what is a man before Thee, Lord?  
A leaf chivvied by the fall wind,  
a blade of grass bent by the gale.  
– I thought myself a wealthy man.  
I thought me worthy in Thine eyes  
and I am naked – naked now –  
naked I left my mother's womb

and I am naked now –  
– what of goods?  
– what of sons?  
Thou tramplest them, for Thine the right;  
Thou seizest them, for Thine the right,  
and that I naked be,  
and that a wretch I be,  
exposed to misery  
– What is righteousness before Thee?  
– What is humanity to Thee? –  
Behold – the spirits to Sheol  
descend, and what remains of them?  
Blessed forever be Thy name.  
Thou hast given  
Thou takest away –  
And I am righteous? – What of that?

Excerpt from *Job*, translated by Charles S. Kraszewski



© fot. EastNews

**KAROL  
WOJTYŁA**  
(1920-2005)

***Dziela literackie i teatralne. Tom I Juwenilia (1938-1946)***  
**[Literary and Theatrical Works. Volume I: Juwenilia  
(1938-1946)]**

**Publisher:** Znak Publishers, Kraków 2019

ISBN: 978-83-240-5837-2; 540 pages

**Translation rights:** Wydawnictwo Św. Stanisława BM,  
redakcja@stanislawbm.pl

#### Selected works

John Paul II has left us a rich heritage of writing, both as the earthly head of the Catholic Church (encyclicals, exhortations, apostolic letters and other writings) and as a poet, playwright, scholar and essayist. Among his best-known works are his ethical study *Love and Responsibility*, the philosophical monograph *Acting Person*, the autobiography *Gift and Mystery*, the essays *Memory and Identity*, the plays *Our God's Brother*, *The Jeweler's Shop*, *Radiation of Fatherhood* and the poetic cycles *Song of the Hidden God*, *Song of the Brightness of Water*, *The Quarry* and *The Roman Triptych*.

#### Foreign language translations

Karol Wojtyła's/John Paul II's writings have been translated into many languages and published in several countries, including France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Spain, and USA.

# The Hungry Sun



## Set in an alternate world where Spaniards never conquered the Americas

Let us imagine that Hernán Cortés' fifteenth-century invasion of the coast of present-day Mexico ended in calamity for the European interlopers. Let us imagine that the Spaniards, decimated by disease, retreated to the Old World, bringing with them a devastating plague. The colonial period never happened, nor did modernity with its great strides in technology.

So begins Wojciech Zembaty's two-part series *The Hungry Sun*. The books are set in an alternate world infused with fantasy elements. The title references the god worshipped by the Kruz people, who succeeded the Aztecs after the latter died off. The cruel and ruthless Kruz people built an empire, enslaving all potential rivals and rebels.

The story has several heroes and shifts between their viewpoints, recalling George R. R. Martin's *Game of Thrones*. The characters tend to represent the younger generations across diverse cultures, clans and social classes. Each of them bears the burden of tradition – a burden they must inevitably confront. Some yield to fate while others spurn it, choosing to forge their own paths.

We meet the young imperial leader Quinatzin, who toils to reform his world and curtail the power of the priests. Then there is Haran, a boy of partially European extraction adopted into the Druazz clan, who falls into captivity and becomes a forced labourer in the mines. Our third hero is Tennok of the people of the Turquoise Spear. This introvert is demure and faint of heart, a disgrace to his family and scourge to his hypermasculine father. Finally, there is the heroine Citali, who rejects the role assigned to her as lady of the court. She refuses to bear more children or while away her life in stuffy chambers. She does everything she can to change her fate.

The world rendered by Zembaty in these two volumes is brutal yet suffused with mysticism and intriguing hallucinatory details. For the real force lording over the Kruz empire is 'braazatal' – a substance used to fabricate weapons that doubles as a potent narcotic. *Hungry Sun* reads as literary black metal, and it entrances readers with its raw, pagan gloom.

Marcin Kube, translated by Eliza Rose



Delores opened her eyes and by reflex, groped for her swollen belly. Her pale skin was taut as a drum. She listened, her attention trained on every slight impulse of her body. When she finally heard a kick, a feeble smile transformed her livid lips. Relief smoothed away the fear and pain. For one moment, her world was cleansed of nightmare.

This was no dream, but a bottomless well of screaming, of red waves, of the patter of bare feet and faces sputtering away, extinguished like candles. Here, in the depths of this well, she relived the raid on their village once, twice, then in endless repetition. The panic, the frantic escape. Anything to get far away from the ravaged interior of their home: furniture strewn in the mud, loose cotton whirling in the air, down feathers, and hair flying loose from scalps newly cleaved. Anything to get far away from the crackle of flames and the hiss of human fat, from that terrible sound of the blow to her husband – and then, that red dash seeping suddenly through his brown hair, as if it were not she but he who was about to give birth. Delores felt an urge to cry, but the life inside of her begged her to stifle the sob in her throat.

Zoetal had carried her off, heaving her, dragging her in stride into the woods. Briars had mangled her puffy, bloodstained legs when finally, she roused herself and dug her feet in the ground, clutching her stomach. How on earth had she done it? Just yesterday, she'd spent half the day in contractions. There's no way, she thought. There's no way I can get up from this bed to scamper through the shrubs like a stump-legged duck. Please, at least bring a bucket – she'd asked Zoetal. But yesterday? Yesterday was a thousand years ago.

At first, she'd deceived herself. She told herself that the raiders would never chase them into the woods. That they were just petty thieves after loot: metal tools and weapons. The weapons whose craftsmanship had brought her people fame. Forbidden by the edicts of the Kruzian kings – and priceless. But no, they had not come to plunder. In no time, they set off on the hunt. Missiles hurled by atlats whistled past like diving hawks, seeking out their guts, their hearts. This was not the first time that Delores felt herself quarry for a hunt, but back then, at least the Kruzian cronies had aimed for their legs. They treasured their hostages – live vessels for the Precious Water they'd soon pour down the red, parched throat of their eternally hungry sun.

But back then – back then was a thousand years ago.

Then there was the root, the crack of twisted bone and the first decent hiding spot: a wooded pit strewn with the leaves that fell so relentlessly here in the rainforest. The fallen leaves, and Zoetal's soothing whisper.

Below them, there were bodies. Delores understood. She knew that their assailants had found other villages, too. That this was no chance raid but an organized campaign. For Delores and for Zoetal, this could be to their advantage. So the Kruz raiders roving through the forest had overlooked two women packed in among dead leaves and human remains. So they had pushed onward. Her lips moved soundlessly, mouthing a silent prayer. Delores huddled close to her friend and then froze. Someone was coming.

They exchanged a deep glance, embracing like the lovers they had never been. The voices of the men grew louder, hoarse and ragged with aggression, rattling with wild laughter. More bodies tumbled onto them. Blood flowed. Delores stared into Zoetal's green eyes and then watched the light leave them with a dull hiss as a bubble of air and blood burst between her handsome lips.

Excerpt translated by Eliza Rose



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**WOJCIECH  
ZEMBATY**

Born 1978

*Głodne słońce: t. 1: Dymiące zwierciadło, t. 2: Ołtarz i krew*  
[The Hungry Sun: vol. 1: The Smoking Mirror, vol. 2: Altar and Blood]

**Publisher:** Powergraph, Warszawa 2016, 2019

ISBN: vol. 1: 978836438455-4; vol. 2: 978836438466-0

vol. 1: 544 pages, vol. 2: 656 pages

**Translation rights:** Powergraph, [kasia@powergraph.pl](mailto:kasia@powergraph.pl)

#### Books published

*Koniec pieśni*, 2011

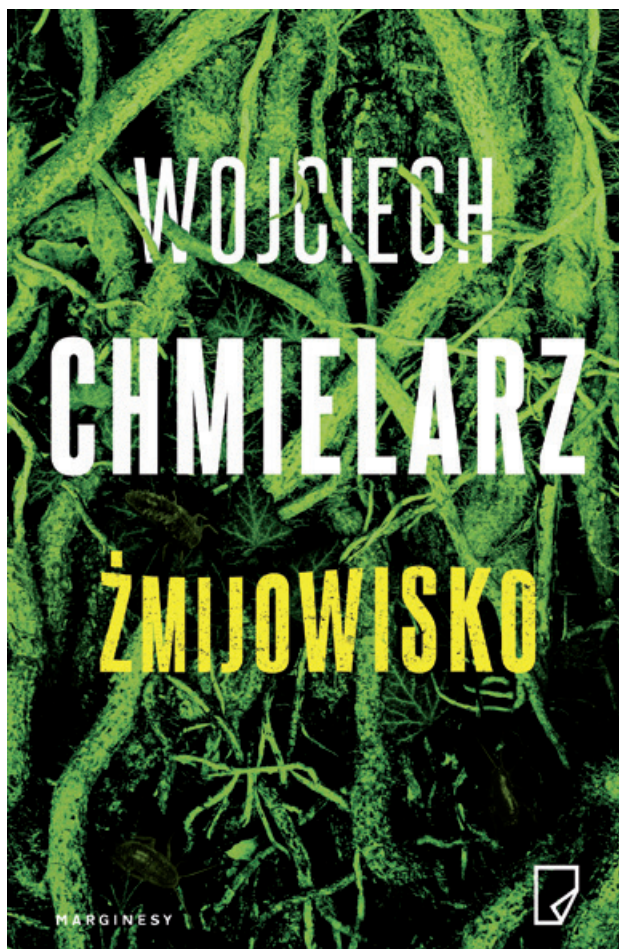
Wojciech Zembaty is also the author of short stories (published in Polish literary and fantasy magazines), songs and screenplays.

#### Awards

Reflektor – *Nowa Fantastyka* Prize (2016)

# Den of Vipers

**A successful combination  
of social drama and  
psychological thriller**



**ADAPTED INTO A CANAL+ TV SERIES**

**W**ojciech Chmielarz is one of the most popular names in Polish crime fiction. This young, barely thirty-five-year-old author already has ten novels to his name, and with each book his talent matures. *Den of Vipers* shows that Chmielarz not only has valuable skills as a storyteller, but that he's also a keen observer of social transformations. It was no accident that this book was chosen to be adapted for television by Canal+.

*Den of Vipers* is the story of a group of the author's peers, people who've crossed the border of thirty and are slowly approaching forty. They grew up after the fall of Communism in now-free Poland. Some have had more success than others. They include managers, typical corporate employees, but also a real estate agent and a TV star. They have problems raising their children, their marriages haven't worked out, some are still single despite their age, but they share a tradition of gathering every year somewhere on a lake in the forested wilderness to reminisce about the good old days. But were they so good? In the end it turns out that these college friendships and acquaintances are streaked with negative feelings,

and passions – maybe even hatred – smoulder under the surface. Arguments get out of hand, someone tries to drown someone else in the lake, someone is insanely jealous. Finally teenage Ada, who's come on vacation with her parents, goes missing during one of the parties. Despite an intensive year-long search, no one can find her. Some of those implicated in these events meet in the same place a year later to search again. The most determined of all is the girl's father, who alone seems to believe that she's still alive. And though the village of Żmijowisko – whose name means 'den of vipers' – reluctantly accepts his presence, he doesn't give up.

*Den of Vipers* is not only a well-written intrigue, it's also a fascinating portrait of contemporary Poland. This book examines the conditions of Polish society thirty years after the transition to democracy, not only from the perspective of Warsaw, but that of the provinces as well. It's further proof that genre hybrids – for instance, a combination of social drama and thriller – are the future of crime fiction.

Mariusz Cieřlik, translated by Sean Gasper Bye

She'd tried to kill herself twice. The first time she'd taken sleeping pills. A whole handful of Rohypnol, which she washed down with vodka. She felt relaxed and happy as hell. Bad thoughts fled from her mind, though earlier they would coat her cerebral ganglia in a layer of black, sticky pitch. And then, out of the blue, she got scared. She went to the bathroom, bumping painfully into the wall on the way. She knelt by the toilet and put two fingers deep into her mouth. She started to vomit, but the toilet lid fell on her and hit the back of her head. Once she had thrown up everything in her stomach and only yellowish, sour saliva poured from her mouth, she went back to the bedroom and fell asleep for sixteen hours.

The second time had been a matter of impulse. February. Wet, cold, and dark. She had been crying for a long time in the bathroom. She used up almost an entire roll of toilet paper, wiping tears from her face. Finally she got up. She went to the parlour. She opened the balcony doors. A cool breeze fanned her. She first placed one leg over the railing, then the other. She gazed down. There were five floors below her, and at the very bottom, a walkway laid with paving stones. There was nothing in the way to break her fall. Nothing that could save her life.

“Mom?”

She looked behind her. Ignas stood in the balcony doorway. She had completely forgotten he was in the house. She quickly got down from the railing. Her heart was pounding painfully, knocking against her ribs. She hugged her son to her and ran home with him. Again, she started crying.

She was glad the little one was only three, that he wouldn't remember the sight of his mother planning to throw herself from the sixth floor. But then she realized he wouldn't remember Ada either. She didn't want to live in a world where her son's only recollections of his sister would come from other people's stories.

Mothers always say they love all their children equally.

Mothers lie.

Ada took up more space in her heart than Ignas. And although she had been only fifteen and he only three, Kamila still knew nothing would ever change. It made her ashamed. She did her best not to think about it, but it was true.

(...)

Adaoma loved Nigeria from the moment she set foot there. No city, no London, Paris or New York had as

much energy in it as Lagos. She adored going back. To blend into the noisy crowd, observe others, go to parties where wildly dancing people showered banknotes over one another. Yet her true life was here, in Poland. In a country which was sometimes better, sometimes worse, which lacked much, but which was her home. Her place on earth, which she would not exchange for any other. No matter how many people on the internet wrote she wasn't a true Pole and never would be. Or how many would like to drive her out beyond the Mediterranean Sea, because it, they claimed, was the border between humans and apes. She concealed her disdain behind a practiced smile while in her heart she wished them all the worst, realizing how ultra-Polish this behaviour was.

Excerpt translated by Sean Gasper Bye

Extended excerpt available (a.urbanowska@bookinstitute.pl)



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WOJCIECH  
CHMIELARZ

Born 1984

*Żmijowisko*

**Publisher:** Marginesy, Warszawa 2018

ISBN: 978-83-65973-37-5; 480 pages

**Translation rights:** Marginesy, a.galandzj@marginesy.com.pl

**Novels published**

*Podpalacz*, 2012

*Farma lalek*, 2013

*Przejęcie*, 2014

*Królowa głodu*, 2014

*Wampir*, 2015

*Osiedle marzeń*, 2016

*Zombie*, 2017

*Rana*, 2019

**Foreign language translations**

France

**Awards**

Wielki Kaliber ["High Caliber"] Prize for Poland's best crime novel (2015; nominations in 2013 and 2014; 2019 – Readers' Choice Prize)

# Mud Sweeter than Honey

**Vivid and powerful picture of the communist regime in Albania – by an acclaimed young reportage writer who gives a voice to those who had been denied their own**



Małgorzata Rejmer  
*Błoto słodsze niż miód*  
*Głosy komunistycznej Albanii*



## POLITYKA'S PASSPORT AWARD

**A**lbanian communist Enver Hoxha made a Utopia in his country – he took everything from his people and forced them to live from one moment to the next; he deprived them of their property and their God. However, none of this brought them happiness; on the contrary, it drove them into bondage, fear, and misery.

Almost thirty years after the fall of the communist dictatorship, Małgorzata Rejmer interviewed those Albanians who managed to survive. This was no simple matter. Their country had undergone a criminal Utopian experiment with which Poles are intimately familiar, except that they experienced it for only ten years, while the Albanians endured it for forty-six. To render a picture of this system, the author talked to writers, artists, and simple folk, patiently listening to their tales of how Communism drove their homeland back to the times of indenture, making them a 'reserve of browbeaten animals'.

We should recall that, in the latter half of the progressive twentieth century, one-third of the countries in Europe were groaning under communist regimes. Among these, the Albanian regime was the worst. This is a book about a penal system and the incomprehensible

cult of a good and faultless leader; about the willpower of an oppressed nation to endure suffering; about their will to live, and the triumph of opportunism which helped them survive the nightmare of hunger, humiliation, and torture. It is also about the dignity, which many Albanians refused to surrender. This book is spare and simple in form, but it runs deep.

Now that no one shoots at people attempting to flee the Albanian Gulag, the depleted country is trying to find its feet once more. This will not be easy. There has been no reckoning with the past: none of the parties responsible for the crimes of the Hoxha era have been brought to justice, and the new system, as well, is founded on lies. There is no one to forgive, for the guilty have vanished. In effect, one half of Albanian society continues, in childlike fashion, to believe in the myth of a righteous, though mismanaged Utopia, while the reflections of the more conscious citizens stop in midstream. Everything is coated in mud. One reads this book with a powerless sense of rage that Communism – the most despicable evil that the world has ever seen – has never been brought to justice, and never will be, not in Albania or anywhere else.

Grzegorz Filip, translated by Soren Gauger



Today, the people who tortured me are shadows in my head. I met one of them on the street once, during a demonstration.

‘Fatos!’ he cried. ‘Do you recognise me? It’s me, Gjergji!’

Of course I recognised him, because he was the guard whose kicks were particularly brutal, a ruthless man. Now he was supporting us in the protests against the government of Sali Berisha. One day I’d like to sit down opposite the people who tortured me and ask them: ‘Who were you then? Were you people?’ But I know they’re not capable of reflection. Only a few of them really understand what they did to others. The rest see themselves simply as tools in the hands of the system, and that’s why they don’t feel any responsibility for their actions.

I also once met one of the three judges who sentenced me the second time, and who in 1979 sentenced three of my friends to death: Fadila Kokomani, Vangjela Lezhe and Xhelala Koprenck. On my way into a café, I stopped to let an elderly man go ahead of me, but he also stopped to let me through, and then he looked me in the face and asked: ‘Do you recognise me, sir? Can we get a coffee?’

And then I realised who was there in front of me. We sat down at a table.

That man had determined my fate and that of my friends. Perhaps you’re wondering why I didn’t hit him in the face? I think I just wanted to understand him. But I couldn’t look at him. I just sat there and listened to his voice.

‘Yes,’ he said. ‘I signed those sentences condemning you... I signed them and I know it was wrong. But did I have a choice? I’d have ended up in prison, just like you. Do you remember when Vangjel Lezho asked for some spectacles, to read out his defence, and I gave him my own?’

I looked him in the eyes, as I had many years ago. When you have charges hanging over you and you enter the court room, you immediately scrutinise the judges’ faces, you look for any trace of goodness, empathy, a modicum of humanity, you look for hope for yourself. It occurred to me then that he might not have been as bad a man as I’d thought.

‘Did you realise the accusations were fabricated?’ I asked. ‘Did you really believe it was all true?’

‘No... I mean, it was obvious... We knew the accusations were fabricated.’

They knew. So they could have said, ‘No, I won’t sign this death sentence.’ They could have said, ‘I love

the party, I love the laws it passes, but I will not consent to falsehood.’ But they didn’t say that. They signed it all.

Now when I think about it... How free were they? Is your consciousness free? They were all like children whose lives lay in the hands of the adults, in the hands of the party. They couldn’t grow up, they couldn’t be free. In some ways that excuses them... But in those days everyone took certain decisions. Everyone had a margin of freedom, everyone had a choice. Those who determined the lives of others could have behaved dishonourably or correctly too.

While I was in prison, I sometimes wondered why my father didn’t do anything to help me – he was an influential Communist, after all. Why did no one in Hoxha’s entourage oppose the regular purges? Nobody ever stopped him from doing anything. Nobody ever stood up to him.

Excerpt translated by Zosia Krasodomska-Jones  
Extended English sample and book report available  
(anna.rucinska@nurnberg.pl)



© Katarzyna Lasoń

MAŁGORZATA  
REJMER

Born 1985

*Bloto słodsze niż miód. Głosy komunistycznej Albanii [Mud  
Sweeter than Honey. Voices from Communist Albania]*

**Publisher:** Czarne, Wołowiec 2018

ISBN: 978-83-8049-745-0; 339 pages

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

**Foreign language translations**

Spain, Italy; an excerpt was also published in *Granta Magazine*.  
Rejmer’s previous books were published in Czech Republic,  
Estonia, Italy, Romania, and Serbia.

**Books published**

*Toksymia*, 2009

*Bukareszt. Kurz i krew*, 2013

**Selected awards**

Gdynia Literary Prize (2010) – nomination  
Nike Literary Award (2013, nomination in 2019)  
Teresa Torarńska *Newsweek* Award (2013)  
Gryfia Literary Award for the best Polish female author (2014)  
Polityka’s Passport Award (2018)

# Who would help the Jew...

**Without Polish help,  
it would not have been  
possible for any of them  
to survive**

Poland was the only country occupied by Nazi Germany where any help given to Jews was punished by death. This was stated in German law for the occupied territories. Poles did not have free choice as to their attitude toward their Jewish neighbours, because there were even cases of shootings for failure to report Jews, much less giving them any assistance whatsoever!

Bogdan Musiał, a historian, writes about all this in his latest book. *Who would help the Jew...* shows how insufficient the state of knowledge is about the Holocaust in Poland, how the relevant documents and archives still remain undiscovered. And these exist, refuting the thesis about the alleged cooperation of Poles with the Nazis in the process of exterminating the Jews. The author of the book makes use of German decrees and ordinances, but also recounts family stories known to him from the vicinity of Dąbrowa Tarnowska, where, among others, his grandfather, who fearing for the lives of his family, refused to shelter a Jewish girl. 'Volksdeutsch lived in the village, and they would inform the Germans, and they would shoot me, my wife and children', he recalled, stating the literal truth. This is evidenced by the crime committed against the Ulma family in the village of Markowa near Łańcut, where Germans

murdered a Jewish family of eight found in hiding as well as those who gave them shelter: Józef Ulma, his wife Wiktoria, who was in her last month of pregnancy, and six children aged from one-and-a-half up to eight-years-old. The commanding officer of the German police, Eilert Dicken, did not receive any punishment for acts he committed in Poland; he continued his service in the town of Essen in the north of Germany. The occupation administrator of Łowicz, Dr. Heinz W. Schwender, continued his legal career in Germany after the war. Apparently, it did him no harm to sign a 1941 pronouncement reminding all that 'the death penalty applies to anyone who assists Jews leaving the place of internment without the permission of the authorities, or otherwise aids Jews' (original wording).

Even more significant is the fact that under these draconian conditions, and despite cases of betrayal by informers, about 100,000 Jews survived the German occupation in hiding on Polish territory, according to estimates by Dr. Szymon Datner from 1970. Without Polish help, it would not have been possible for any of them to survive.

Krzysztof Masłoń, translated by Peter Obst





One of the greatest crimes committed by the Germans on the Polish population in retribution for assisting escaping Jews took place on December 6, 1942 in the Radom region, in the town of Stary Ciepiałów (county Lipsko) and the neighbouring village of Rekówka. Among the victims there were twenty children, the youngest seven months old. The course of this crime has been well documented. On that fateful day a group of German policemen came to Stary Ciepiałów and surrounded three farm compounds, belonging to the Kosior, Obuchiewicz and Kowalski families. The Germans detained the owners along with their wives and children, and two runaway Jews. After a few hours they began to shoot the people. First murdered were the Kosiors and their six children, ages from six to eighteen, and the two previously mentioned Jews. The executions took place in the hay barn, which was then burned down. Then the Kowalski family was murdered, together with their five children, aged one to sixteen. The Obuchiewicz family followed with four children, aged seven months to six years. After the murders were committed, the Kowalski home was set ablaze and burned.

At the same time a different group of some ten German policemen arrived in the nearby village of Rekówka. They surrounded two farm compounds - one belonging to the Kosior family (relatives of the Kosiors from Stary Ciepiałów) with their four children, aged two to ten, and the other belonging to the Skoczylas family. All those detained were herded into a barn, then shot and the barn burned. On that day the Germans shot a total of thirty-three persons in Stary Ciepiałów and Rekówka. This included two adult runaway Jews. Word of this and other repressive acts echoed across the region and, as a result, few Poles would commit to assisting Jewish escapees.

On December 8, 1942, that is two months after the massacre in Stary Ciepiałów and Rekówka, a group of German policemen arrived in the Boiska settlement (county Lipsko) during the morning hours. They came from their stationhouse in Lipsko and surrounded the farm compound where Wiktoria and Leon Kryczka lived with their two children and their relatives Barbara Stefanek and Józef Ciesielski. The policeman in charge allowed them to send the children to a neighbour's house, after which the four adults were shot on the spot. Despite severe wounds Wiktoria Kryczka survived the shooting, but died two days later. The motive for this act was that the Kryczkas were allegedly hiding

a runaway Jew, who, however, was not found during the search. The inhabitants of Boiska suspected that the Kryczka family had concealed an escapee from the ghetto. A conversation between two persons must have been overheard by an informer in a public place who then reported it to his German masters.

Excerpt translated by Peter Obst



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**BOGDAN  
MUSIAŁ**  
Born 1960

*Kto допоможе Żydowi... [Who Would Help the Jew ...]*

**Publisher:** Zysk i S-ka, Poznań 2019

ISBN: 978-83-8116-625-6; 460 pages

**Translation rights:** Zysk i S-ka, [anna.giryn@zysk.com.pl](mailto:anna.giryn@zysk.com.pl)

**Selected works**

*Na zachód po trupie Polski*, 2009

*Przewrót majowy 1926 roku w oczach Kremla*, 2009

*Wojna Stalina*, 2012

*Geneza paktu Hitler-Stalin. Fakty i propaganda*, 2012

*Sowieccy partyzanci 1941-1944. Mity i rzeczywistość*, 2014

Bogdan Musiał is a historian writing in Polish and in German.

**Foreign language translations**

Belarus, Estonia, Germany

# Baroness. On the Trail of Wanda Kronenberg

**The story of a shockingly  
beautiful and dangerous  
secret agent**

**A**s was the case in many cities during wartime, in Nazi-occupied Warsaw many intelligence agencies were at work: that of the Poles, associated with the Home Army (Armia Krajowa); those of the British and the Soviets, as well as more than one semi-private spy network. The Nazi special services, from the Gestapo to the Abwehr, did battle with them all. In such a labyrinth wandered a certain young, beautiful, and unscrupulous woman trying to survive – and maybe climb her way to the summit. Seventy years after the war, a Polish historian strives to find the thread of Ariadne, which will lead him to the heart of this maze.

The journalistic research undertaken by Michał Wójcik, a reporter who specialises in the history of the Second World War (his previous work *Treblinka*, concerning the armed uprising in the death camp, was awarded by *Newsweek*), can't cross all the 't's and dot all the 'i's; he can't arrive at any solid final conclusions. But this is, perhaps, impossible in the face of such material as arises from the fluid game of spy vs. spy in a Warsaw gutted by the Warsaw Uprising.

The entanglement of Wanda Kronenberg began early: in September of 1939 when, along with her 'wartime husband' Witold Jasiłkowski, she landed in Lwów, which was then under Soviet occupation – and there, most likely, she began to collaborate with the NKVD. But even this prologue must be fitted out with the caveat 'most likely', which is all the more necessary considering all her later involvements: her return to Warsaw, still before the outbreak of the Nazi-Soviet war and all the consecutive stages

of her cooperation with ever more professional German services, from the SiPo through the Gestapo to the Abwehr.

There were several such collaborators as she. The difference with her lies in the fact that, at the same time, Wanda advanced in parallel fashion through the ranks of the agents working on behalf of the Home Army. As a double agent, Wanda is, in both of her roles, strikingly authentic. One reason for this is the fact that she is never entirely professional. From the several reports of hers which have survived, written in a clumsy young hand and in the style of a 19, 20-year-old girl, we find her succumbing to bouts of megalomania, to infatuation, never comprehending for a moment the entire context of the mortal conflict, which – especially as far as Poland was concerned – was the world war. Wanda was head-over-heels fascinated with the game.

How was it possible that organisations so professional as the Abwehr, the Home Army, and – it cannot be entirely discounted – the British and Soviet secret services failed to notice her inconsistencies, the misrepresentations, in her reports?

This story is something of a melodramatic film noir, like *The Maltese Falcon*. The author masterfully toys with the pathos, again and again deciding on such campy phrases as 'the empty eye-sockets of death'. However, in those places where Wójcik succeeded in arriving at important research discoveries, he presents them with an icy logic.



Wojciech Stanisławski, translated by Charles S. Kraszewski

**A**t the beginning of April, 1943, Anna confessed to a weakness in her report to the AK. She informed headquarters that she had been flirting with a certain American in Warsaw. This was George Scott, a well-known black musician. Before the war he was a force to be reckoned with. It was he who imported American jazz to Poland. He performed in Artur Gold's swing band, then later he had his own group. He was the star of the Adria. Literally everybody was fascinated with his solos: prime ministers, officials, the whole *crème de la crème*. Scott didn't only compose and perform, he also educated the Poles musically. After the outbreak of the war he remained in Warsaw and continued to perform, not just in the Adria. In the Chameleon Café, on the corner of Mokotowska and the Plac Zbawiciela, he conducted jazz mornings for a very chosen public. As Andrzej Łapicki recalled, 'each Sunday, young people gathered in the Cameleon – the place where decisions were made about verdicts and other Underground activities. How the Germans permitted those performances in the café I still can't figure out, to this very day. The band was fantastic. Scott directed it American-style...'

Scott also performed at the restaurant *U Aktorek*, on Mazowiecka. Here too the audience was select: the pre-war élites, patriots, members of the Underground. Was it there that Wanda met him? Their first contact was certainly of a private nature. The rest, not so. In her report to the AK Wanda revealed that Scott had been performing in the German Savoy club for some six months. It was there probably, that he met some well-positioned German who facilitated the regulation of his status as a foreigner before the outbreak of the war with the Americans in 1941. 'In this way he avoided internment. He still holds on to his old American passport. Scott feels 100% American. He's a very clever and worldly-wise man,' she wrote before getting to the point. She revealed that she had been tasked by the Gestapo with spying on him. The walls were slowly closing in around him.

(...)

Wanda requested the Underground to take the jazzman under its protection. However, she wrote in such a way so as not to reveal that there was anything between them. It was just a professional suggestion made in the course of her service as an agent: 'If, however, he is politically engaged on behalf of the Anglo-Americans, it would be proper to warn him that the local Gestapo has its eye on him.' Scott survived the occupation, and the Warsaw Uprising as well. How their

acquaintance developed – is unknown. The American was not Wanda's only male interest, however. In the end, I found what I was looking for. It's a dramatic story of her relations with a certain young Pole. Was it love? I don't know. Perhaps it was only a crush and, in her hazel eyes, he saw only a shark of the Underground, a giant of the conspiracy, a mistress of political intrigue? At any rate, he seems to have forgotten himself, until the warning system started to blare *Pull up! Pull up!* As a result, Wanda was able to wind him around her little finger, and for his erotic adventure, he paid a stiff price.

Excerpt translated by Charles S. Kraszewski



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**MICHAŁ  
WÓJCİK**

Born 1969

*Baronówna. Na tropie Wandy Kronenberg – najgroźniejszej polskiej agentki. Śledztwo dziennikarskie* [Baroness. On the Trail of Wanda Kronenberg – the Most Dangerous Polish Secret Agent. A Journalistic Investigation]

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ISBN: 978-83-240-3825-1; 320 pages

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

#### Books published (selection)

*Powstanie Warszawskie*, 2004

*Błyskawiczny przewodnik historyczny po Warszawie*, 2010, 2012

*Królestwo za mgłą* (rozmowa z Zofią Posmysz), 2017

*Terrorysta. Wywiad-rzeka z Józefem Piłsudskim*, 2018

*Treblinka 43. Bunt w fabryce śmierci*, 2018

#### Foreign language translations

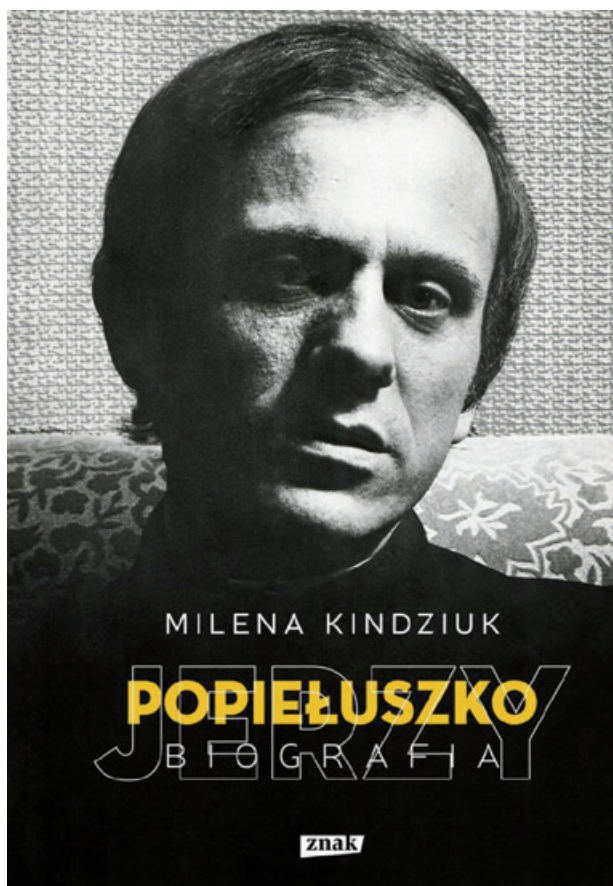
Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Netherlands (*Treblinka*)

#### Selected awards

Winner of the *Polityka* History Prize (2015)

Winner of Teresa Torańska *Newsweek* Award (2018)

# Jerzy Popiełuszko. A Biography



## Popiełuszko's death suffered at the hands of the Communist Security Service remains a mystery to this day

**T**his biography of Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko – beatified on June 6, 2010 by the Roman Catholic Church – is a comprehensive story of his life and activities. The composition of the book is defined by a chronology of events: from childhood in a peasant family in Podlasie, through seminary studies and pastoral work in Warsaw, to a martyr's death suffered at the hands of Communist Security Service officers and the events leading to his beatification process. Rich photographic material and a section consisting of letters and documents form a valuable complement to the whole. The subject of this biography still arouses great interest in Poland and the world for several reasons, which are discussed in the book in an interesting manner. Above all, his death remains a mystery to this day – for it is not known who ordered his political murder. Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko is also an intriguing witness to faith – an ardent, self-sacrificing and caring priest, very much loved by those around him, who maintained a serenity of spirit despite harassment by the political police and the constant threat of death. His writings, interesting as a testimony of the times, have universal dimensions – reflections on the fate

of man, his freedom and its endangerment. Finally, Jerzy Popiełuszko's activities are a fascinating example of heroic resistance, as they were devoid of any prospects for success against a repressive state. Milena Kindziuk's book also gives an insight into the life of Poles under Communist rule. One example is her portrayal of the Podlasie village, where the protagonist of the story grew up and the special military unit for seminarians in which he first experienced persecution. The heritage of the family home – reconstructed through the author's interviews with parents and relatives of Jerzy Popiełuszko – provides the reader with an important context that helps in understanding his choices and decisions. The main part of the biography concerns Fr. Popiełuszko's pastoral work combined with his civil and patriotic involvement during the years when the Solidarity social movement took root in Poland. So it is also a story about the historical nuances of the Solidarity movement and the lives of the people who made it happen.

Tomasz Garbol, translated by Peter Obst



For the clerics, not only the raw living conditions, but also the intense system of punishments, were extremely oppressive. One also should consider the poor nutrition. Three meals a day, small portions, and a repetitive menu. If a meat dish ever appeared on the table it was sausages, and with premeditation, it would be served on Fridays when the clerics would be abstaining from meat products. It was known that they would not eat and they were punished for it. Popieluszko once had to endure a thirty kilometre march. And when the soldiers were late returning from exercises, the food was standing cold on the table and that's how they would have to eat it. All of this had a negative effect on the health of the divinity graduates.

Likewise, there was hard labour, often beyond their strength. For example, the clerics were assigned to construction work. One of them remembers, 'We were extremely tired, could not sleep at night because tanks were on the move and the mosquitoes were biting. On the second day this was repeated. The tanks were on the move, followed by ammunition trucks. Then came the pontoon squad from Żagan, our old friends, with whom we built several bridges.' Another time they were assigned to work in the fields. 'Work on a 700 hectare farm, work with no end. Wheat and wheat. Day and night. Work with sacks and with straw. Very tiring...'

At the same time, medical care in the army left much to be desired. There was a doctor's office, but in theory only. It was hard to say if one could get professional medical treatment there. Past friends of Fr. Popieluszko remember to this day how every divinity graduate who fell ill and went to see the local doctor, received the same one pill, labelled 'for sore throat'. It did not matter what the complaint was.

'Soon we stopped going to see the doctor,' remembers Fr. Wasiński.

It may be that this situation was caused by instructions issued by Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski, which demanded the greatest suspicion when dealing with the clerics and recommended that 'attention be paid to frequent cases of simulated illness by divinity graduates, especially in the early phase of their service time. Each case of a divinity graduate soldier being sent before a medical committee should be preceded by an alert to the deputy political unit commander, who then is obliged to personally inform the head of the proper medical committee about the fact that the illness in question may be simulated.'

As time went on, the need for medical attention definitely grew, especially in the winter when the officers would not permit the clerics to put on warm clothing and these young men started to catch influenza en masse. Fr. Dusza remembers how on November 1, 1966 there was a sudden onset of harsh winter during

which frost nipped fiercely at their faces. Meanwhile, the divinity graduates were not allowed to wear even a neck scarf.

'The soldier is not a Christmas tree!' the officers told us.

And at the same time they showed their extreme cynicism.

Fr. Jerzy was also among the sick. His friends noticed that his body was getting weaker. Popieluszko had asthma, which started to show itself especially when he had to wear a gas mask, as then he would start to choke. He had no strength to run in the snow, and such orders were given to torment him further. 'The more sweat during exercises, the less blood spilled later in battle,' said the officers in justification.

Excerpt translated by Peter Obst



Author's archive

MILENA  
KINDZIUK  
Born 1970

**Popieluszko. Biografia [Popieluszko. A Biography]**

**Publisher:** Znak Publishers, Kraków 2018

ISBN: 978-83-240-4956-1; 923 pages

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

**Books published (selection)**

- Jedynie miłość ocaleje. Z ks. Janem Twardowskim rozmawia Milena Kindziuk, 1999
- Kardynał Józef Glemp. Ostatni taki prymas, 2010
- Prymas Tysiąclecia, 2011
- Matka Papieża. Poruszająca opowieść o Emilii Wojtyłowej, 2013
- Cuda księdza Jerzego. W oczekiwaniu na kanonizację, 2016
- Rodzice Prezydenta. Janina Milewska-Duda i Jan Tadeusz Duda w rozmowie z Mileną Kindziuk, 2016
- Matka Świętego. Poruszające świadectwo Marianny Popieluszko, 2017

Milena Kindziuk is a doctor of humanities, a university lecturer, a journalist and a publicist.

**Foreign language translations**

Italy, Slovenia

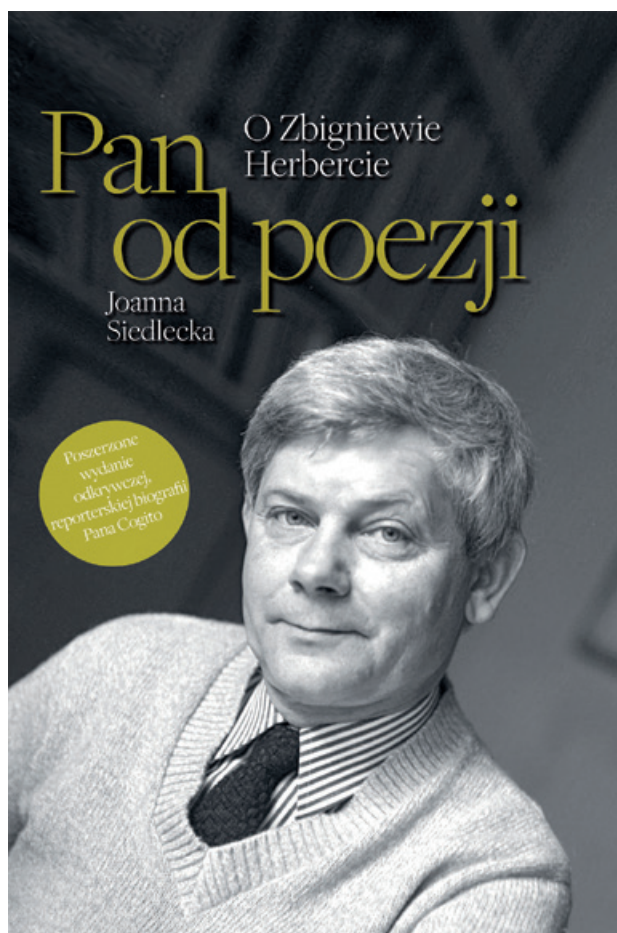
**Selected awards**

Catholic Publishers' Association Award FENIKS (2016)

# Poetry Man

## The life of an individual enmeshed in history

This book, a biography of Zbigniew Herbert, one of the greatest Polish poets of the twentieth century, examines the background of his life from the earliest years to the last, and also offers posthumous opinions about the poet who near the end of his life expressed some uncompromising political views, polarising the Polish intellectual environment during an intense time of political change. Joanna Siedlecka, a reporter and journalist with a keen detective sense, has uncovered numerous pieces of evidence documenting previously unknown facts in the biography of Herbert. The poet began his career with the volume *String of Light* (1956). This placed him on the map of Polish poetry as a classicist, while his most recent poems, including those published in the volume *Epilogue of a Storm* (1998), strongly influenced both the post-thaw development of Polish poetry and the formation of an uncompromising stance in opposition to the governing regime. The author, who has published books that expose the infiltration of Communist influence into the literary milieu (*Declassified Biography, Case Name 'Lyricist'*), as well



as biographies of controversial writers (*The Ugly Black Bird*, *Mahatma Witkac*), illuminates both the personal aspects of Herbert's complicated life, as well as his attempts to find a place for himself within the realities of People's Poland. It also depicts the divergence between Herbert's actual private life, and the legend of the poet as a hero and an 'unbreakable prince' that he shaped himself and which grew within the milieu of the opposition. The book is enriched with numerous illustrations, copies of documents, letters and photos from various periods of his life. It is written in a lively, clear, and accessible language, a pleasant read not only for literary scholars, but also for the general public. Its undoubted value, but also a quality of Siedlecka's writing, is to show the life of an individual enmeshed in history, in the life of society. In this instance, the reader – through Herbert's personal history – is introduced not only to the realities of a socialist country, but also to the complicated history of the fall of Communism in Poland during the early nineties.

Marzena Woźniak-Łabieniec, translated by Peter Obst



‘He started an acrimonious quarrel with a waiter, who on noticing that we were foreigners, decided that he could treat us with contempt,’ recalled Andrzej Bernhardt. ‘Mirek Chojecki invited us to dinner at Brasserie Lipp. We left a lot of food on the plates, so my uncle asked the waiter to wrap up the leftovers the way it was done in America. With a scornful expression, the man threw everything into one bag, so uncle demanded three separate ones – one for the French fries, one for the meat, and one for the salad. The furious waiter finally complied, but he also overcharged us on the bill! This was not, as it may seem, a minor pub squabble. He simply would not let one thing go, he would not let anything pass. He was so sensitive, so thin skinned, that it seemed he had almost no skin at all.’ (...)

His publishing arrangements in France were going badly; finally during his last stay in Paris, he published a volume with Fayard. He did not have a place in the French book market. He was known in Germany, America, Sweden, he received prizes, including in Israel, where he went while already very ill. He did not count on the Nobel Prize, he knew that political correctness reigned and there was no chance for him at all. Would he have even accepted it – alongside Gorbachev? Being in the society of laureates was very important to him. He was chronically short of money, especially since he did not like to ask anyone for it. He bought a lot of books, and not only literature, but, for example, histories of objects – the hammer, the carpenter’s plane, the wristwatch; lives of ants and apes; a history of ancient Egypt. He bought maps, graphics, stamps. He collected crystals, rocks, that always stood on his orderly desk. He loved beautiful objects – and peace and quiet. As time went on, his contacts with people became more and more difficult. They made him more and more upset, distracted, but especially Poles – who were not punctual, unreliable. (...) He received fewer and fewer telephone calls, though sometimes it happened that some people got lucky, and managed to make contact. He did not respond to letters, especially from young poets who sent him their poems for comment. He thought this was embarrassing. One should judge one’s own work.

(...) He did not want to be an emigrant, he always travelled on the so-called temporary stay, but as he turned sixty, he insured himself and paid premiums. This was fortunate because it was then that his illnesses began. His relations with hospitals and doctors grew worse. He could not find a physician who would satisfy him, he demanded too much. He wanted not only to get good treatment, but that the doctor should be intelligent, well-read, know and understand things. He left the house less and less, and finally stopped going out at all. He went to the bookshops on Saint Germain by taxi, because his home was far from the metro. He no longer took advantage of being in Paris, in France, and

there was no point in staying there, paying rent, a large sum on which he could live in Poland. He returned home in 1992 and we still corresponded. He asked for books that he most needed in Poland. Recently, he was interested in ancient Egypt, and wanted catalogues from exhibitions on this subject. Although I did not want him to, he always sent money, writing that he was going to kick the bucket shortly and wanted to settle all his accounts.

Excerpt translated by Peter Obst



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JOANNA  
SIEDLECKA

Born 1949

**Publisher:** Wydawnictwo Fronda, Warszawa 2018  
ISBN: 978-83-8079-396-5; 656 pages  
**Translation rights:** Wydawnictwo Fronda,  
redaktor@wydawnictwofronda.pl

**Volumes of reportage**

*Stypa*, 1981  
*Poprawiny*, 1984  
*Parszywa sytuacja*, 1984  
*Jaworowe dzieci*, 1991

**Biographies**

*Jaśnie-panicz*, 1987  
*Mahatma Witkac*, 1992  
*Czarny ptasior [Ugly Black Bird]*, 1993  
*Wypominki*, 1996  
*Wypominków ciąg dalszy*, 1999  
*Pan od poezji*, 2002  
*Oblawa. Losy pisarzy represjonowanych*, 2005  
*Kryptonim „Liryka”. Bezpieka wobec literatów*, 2008  
*Biografie odtajnione*, 2015

**Foreign language translations**

Czech Republic, USA

**Selected awards**

Nike Literary Award (2003) – nomination  
Józef Mackiewicz Literary Prize (2016)

# Zouaves of Nothingness



## A splendidly received and widely commented debut of a young historian of ideas

**Z***ouaves of Nothingness* is Krzysztof Tyska-Drozdowski's first book. The author, born in 1991, is associated with the University of Warsaw. His work has appeared in the conservative journal *Arcana*, as well as in *Political Theology*.

This debut volume is made up of eight essays, which in the main are portraits of various artists sketched in the margins of interpretations of their works. The main focus is on French writers, chiefly Henry de Montherlant, with Maurice Barrès and Charles Maurras being recurrent figures. Poland is represented by Henryk Sienkiewicz. These are the eponymous 'zouaves of nothingness'. For they have encountered contemporary nihilism; they knew of the death of God, and they 'waited in expectation of His return'. They did not succumb to the temptation of setting the 'idols' of race, ethnicity or caste upon the abandoned altars. Revolutionary radicalism being foreign to their natures, they felt themselves to be the inheritors of dying Europe: Latin, Mediterranean, Roman Europe. They were both patriots and Europeans, manifesting a paradoxical attitude, which Tyska-Drozdowski reconstructs and comments upon.

This multiple portrait of the 'zouaves of nothingness' is the main, yet not the only, theme of the book. It is

allied to attempts toward a critical characterisation of the Northern nations, to reflections on history and politics, to an analysis of dandyism, to an apologia for classicism, and to descriptions of the oeuvre of El Greco.

*Zouaves of Nothingness* oscillates between essay and manifesto. The spirit of the essay can be seen in its broad and not self-evident erudition, the digressive ease with which the author weaves together various strands, and finally his aphoristic language, which flashes at times with great beauty. (For one example: 'When our ideals end in catastrophe, we reject them out of cowardice. When they triumph, we reject them out of delicacy'.) The manifesto can be seen in the clarity of the solutions offered, the serious passion with which the author sets them before us, as well as in his appeal to his contemporaries to imitate the greatness exemplified by the heroes of his book.

*Zouaves of Nothingness* is vibrant proof that the superb tradition of Polish essay writing is alive and well, enduringly strong, and able to offer us such marvellous, thought-provoking books.

Maciej Urbanowski, translated by Charles S. Kraszewski

The death of God affected all of Europe, eliciting a different response amongst the nations with traditions of Roman civilisation than it did among the Germans and Russians. The former did not greet this event as joyful news. Because of it, their lifestyle, their principles and forms of life, the sensitivity which moulded their saints, their knights, kings, and artists, ceased to be self-evident. The realisation that Providence was not watching over them sowed anxiety in their souls. This unease arose from the fact that now, it seemed, the greatness of which Latin civilisation was constituted was based on no unshakable metaphysical foundations, such as could never be destroyed by anyone. The order that heretofore prevailed amongst them proved historical, that is to say fragile, crumbling. They gazed uneasily at the ruins of Rome, which now no longer were monuments of an ancient glory that still endured, but evidence of the fact that the lives of nations and empires were fleeting, and that not much at all is needed in order to interrupt them. By some miracle, the civilisation that had been trodden underfoot by barbarian hordes had once sprung to life again. But now, everyone was learning that it could disappear once more – that it was indeed a miracle that it had emerged from the dense fog of past history in the first place. The magnitude of the effort that it cost to rebuild it did not constitute any guarantee that such huge efforts were not in vain. In the church there was no longer any God. But even without God – the church was beautiful.

The news that God was dead found a different reception in the North. There, it had long been intuited; people had readied themselves for it. No forms of human life were anchored in any foundation firmer than history; there are no values capable of subduing time. Just as epochs change, so does human nature. Everyone was now conscious of the fact that nothing stood in the way of the transformation of man. Prohibition and taboo are mere illusions; the world, it was acknowledged, can be made over. The heavens are empty. Since Heaven does not exist, the path is free for the creation of paradise on earth. It was believed that the transformation of the world and man lies in man's power. The last words of this conviction were Nazism and Bolshevism.

The frontiers of Roman and Catholic conquest define the border between reactionary nihilism and its revolutionary counterpart. The first of these, Mediterranean nihilism, is focussed on the past, in which history has revealed what is most valuable in man and his works. The Roman nations sought measure in the greatness of their history. Northern nihilism boldly looked toward the future; for it, history imposes no obligations, only burdens. It was not seen as a reserve of examples and lessons, but rather as ballast that impedes freedom of movement. The Northern nihilist does not wish to learn from history, or study

the principles, from which developed the conditions that fostered the flowering of humanity. He wishes to free himself from it. He doesn't want to match, to equal, greatness, for he intends to create the new. Revolutionary nihilists are not interested in man as something shaped by centuries of experience – centuries of subtle pressure, deepened by Catholicism, by an entire sheaf of benevolent influences; they are not interested in the type of person who appears in the portraits of Titian – of whom Eugenio d'Ors once said that man was never closer to superman than he is there. Rather, they wish to transform human nature themselves, without a view toward anything that might increase the happiness of humanity. Although God had disappeared, the Mediterranean nihilist wished to set upon the altar neither Race, nor Caste, nor State, nor Man. The throne remains empty, awaiting His return. The Northern nihilist took the situation in hand without the slightest scruple. It adored the German nation, the proletariat, or man himself, who – so these nihilists would have it – can do anything, including taking the world apart in painstaking detail and transforming human nature in accordance with his own plan. The latest incarnation of revolutionary nihilism – contemporary liberalism, a type of liberalism such as had never before existed among the Latin nations – has founded the Church of the individual. The individual person, and his each and every desire, have become sacrosanct, and the setting up of boundaries to his whim is now blasphemy.

Excerpt translated by Charles S. Kraszewski



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KRZYSZTOF  
TYSZKA-  
-DROZDOWSKI

Born 1991

*Żuawi nicości [Zouaves of Nothingness]*

**Publisher:** Teologia Polityczna, Warszawa 2019

ISBN: 978-83-628-8406-3; 274 pages

**Translation rights:** Teologia Polityczna,  
mikołaj.marczak@teologiapolityczna.pl

Tyszką-Drozdowski's reviews and sketches have appeared in the Polish journals *Kronos*, *Arcana* and *Political Theology*.

# Essay: a trend to watch

**It's** difficult to imagine the Polish book market without the essay. This is a genre which allows the reader an in-depth look into many topics – from political geography through the art of Central Europe during the period of transformation, to the history of literature and ideas. For this reason, we invite you to sample the world of the Polish essay.



## ***Adam Mickiewicz Rides off on a Yellow Bike***

This is the sixth volume of the series entitled 'As the fabled cranes', dedicated to the life and works of the great Polish bard Adam Mickiewicz. Rymkiewicz, a respected poet, essayist, literary critic and scholar, chooses less than obvious topics for his essay, even trivial ones, in order to guide the reader through his narrative to the most important, and frequently vital, matters. With him we follow Mickiewicz on his journeys. We watch him at work, and through the doors of a mental hospital... The bard remains a mystery, although — thanks to Rymkiewicz — after reading this book, we know more about him than we previously had.

**Author:** Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz

**Publisher:** Fundacja Ewviva L'Arte, 2018; ISBN: 978-83-944747-5-1; 228 pages

**Translation rights:** Fundacja Ewviva L'Arte, [fundacja@evvivalarte.org](mailto:fundacja@evvivalarte.org)



## ***Container***

In *Container*, his most personal and perhaps most splendid book, Marek Bieńczyk arrives at literary perfection; both when he is writing about Canetti, Faulkner, and Camus, and when he mentions his loved ones by name — for the author has poured into his 'container' everything that is most dear to him. This includes the things he has lived for, but which have faded away and disappeared, as well as those which continue to fill his life and fascinate him. Bieńczyk has succeeded in linking all these happenings, persons, thoughts and emotions together with the most delicate of threads. He has succeeded in describing the most difficult matters in the simplest words, creating in this way a book bursting with life.

**Author:** Marek Bieńczyk

**Publisher:** Wielka Litera, 2018; ISBN: 978-83-803-2281-3; 304 pages

**Translation rights:** Andrew Nurnberg Associates Warsaw, [anna.rucinska@nurnberg.pl](mailto:anna.rucinska@nurnberg.pl)

**Nominated for The Nike Literary Award**



## ***The Twilight of the Written Word***

Jacek Dukaj's new book is an intellectual journey through the most fascinating issues of contemporary civilisation — unto its very sunset, and that of man as well. For the last several thousand years, the written word, books, and libraries were the conduits and treasuries of knowledge. The technology of writing created mankind's civilisation. Dukaj shows man at the threshold of a new era. The consecutive technologies of the direct transfer of experience — from the phonograph to the television, the Internet and virtual reality — are leading us out of the domain of the written word. It is not man who makes use of the tools he has created, but the tools that ever more frequently employ man for their own ends.

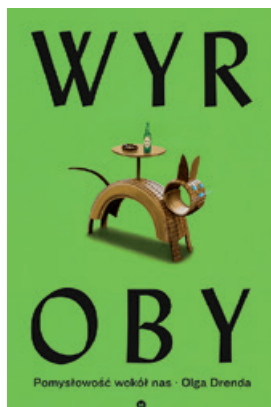
Jacek Dukaj, recognised by many as the uncrowned successor to Stanisław Lem, has many literary prizes to his credit, and is well-respected by both critics and the general readership. His novels and stories have been translated into many languages.

**Author:** Jacek Dukaj

**Publisher:** Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2019; ISBN: 978-83-08-06874-8; 416 pages

**Translation rights:** Andrew Nurnberg Associates Warsaw, [anna.rucinska@nurnberg.pl](mailto:anna.rucinska@nurnberg.pl)





### ***Products. Ingenuity around Us***

Concrete mushrooms in the front yard, swans made out of tyres, knights and dinosaurs of nuts and bolts, religious notions and knick-knacks — what for some people is the nadir of bad taste and kitsch, constitutes for Olga Drenda fascinating material for a study on Polish ingenuity. In homemade creations such as these, the author sees, above all, an unbounded imagination, an unfettered approach to aesthetic and religious norms, as well as a pinch of sentimentality and cleverness. *Products [Wyroby]* takes a fresh look at a phenomenon that some would like to root out of the public sphere, while others consider it unworthy of serious attention.

**Author:** Olga Drenda

**Publisher:** Wydawnictwo Karakter, 2018; ISBN: 978-83-65271-75-4; 240 pages

**Translation rights:** Wydawnictwo Karakter, szczurek@karakter.pl

**Gdynia Literary Prize; nominated for the Polityka's Passport Award**



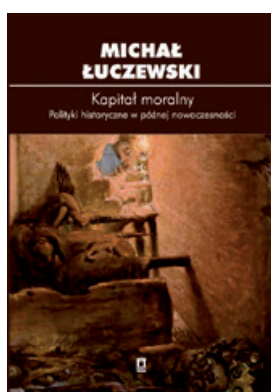
### ***Transformation. Art in East-Central Europe after 1989***

Szczerski's book presents the art of the times of transformation; i.e., that created in the nations of East-Central Europe, from the Baltic to the Balkans, following the events of 1989. He analyses selected phenomena on the artistic scene, which allow him to describe the specifics of the times coming after the fall of Communism and the cultural transformations that arrived in its wake. Among the issues discussed are questions of political art: the engagement of artists in the recovery of freedom in 1989, their current political involvement, as well as the problematics of ambivalent recollections of the Communist period and differing interpretations of history.

**Author:** Andrzej Szczerski

**Publisher:** Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2019; ISBN: 978-83-233-4453-7; 314 pages

**Translation rights:** Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, mateusz.chaberski@wuj.pl



### ***Moral Capital. Historical Politics in the Late Modern Period***

Drawing from truly impressive wellsprings of erudition, Łuczewski delves into theory from several areas; for example, studies on mass memory, or mass social movements. He courageously 'sharpens' a few key ideas (political history, moral capital) and conducts a splendidly thought-out comparative study of Germany, Poland and Russia. Thanks to this combination, in this work we receive a multi-faceted and insightful elaboration of a theme that often arouses strong emotions. Łuczewski's work is a precise guidebook over complicated terrain, the contours of which have been blurred and — more than once — perverted in the chaos of partisan political battles, not only in Poland.

**Author:** Michał Łuczewski

**Publisher:** Ośrodek Myśli Politycznej, 2017; ISBN: 978-83-64753-58-9; 440 pages

**Translation rights:** Ośrodek Myśli Politycznej, biuro@omp.org.pl



### ***The Shattered Mirror – the Fall of Western Civilisation***

Prominent scholar and writer Wojciech Roszkowski offers a deep account of our civilisation. According to him, our ages-old heritage has been entirely discarded by the European and American élite, in the name of... progress. The author analyses hundreds of manifestations of decadence in a colourful and multilateral way. His descriptions and reflections are both logical and convincing. One of the incontestable merits of this book is its language: laconic, sparkling with humour, and simultaneously simple and precise. *The Shattered Mirror* is a book that engages the reader, and provokes serious thought.

**Author:** Wojciech Roszkowski

**Publisher:** Biały Kruk, 2019; ISBN: 978-83-7553-260-9; 560 pages

**Translation rights:** Biały Kruk, adam.sosnowski@bialykruk.pl

# The Path to the Kingdom

**A wonderful testament to the power and vitality of metaphysical poetry**

The late Leszek Elektorowicz turned 95 years old this year. Born in Lwów, this 'old guy' (as he described himself humorously in his new poem titled *Post Scriptum*) suffered from illness and loss of vision, yet still expressed himself with a clarity not often found in poetry written by much younger poets. His work is marked by a gentle, moving eschatology, 'extreme situations', valour in the face of death. The author does not deny that faith in God helps him find meaning in existence. Fate has not spared him terrible wartime experiences, such as when he lost both his beloved city and his father (*Tato*), and was forced to evade 'barbarian hordes' by moving ever westward. Unlike many of his wartime contemporaries, who were not so lucky, he managed to avoid the traps set by the Communist secret police (*Portret, Łączka, Droga*). At university, he studied English Literature, introducing Polish readers to the likes of Edgar Lee Masters, William Carlos Williams, D. H. Lawrence, Percy Bysshe Shelley, W. H. Auden and Allen Ginsberg (*Howl*). *Ścieżka do Królestwa* [*The Path to the Kingdom*] is his poetic last will and testament, summary, and recapitulation. Most of the poems in this collection praise life: a decent, balanced life, in which love triumphs over complaints, mercy over revenge, faith over despair or execration. Many of the verses look at the phenomenon of time (time *is*, it doesn't *pass*), immeasurable, inextensible, unchanging, in spite



of the apparent finiteness of material existence. Time is an extra-terrestrial dimension, cosmic, and the Cosmos a place for immortal souls ('heavenly bodies are not heavenly'). To this end memories suffice, memories which make up for the loss of eyesight, and lessen suffering. This collection contains very moving poems, filled with tenderness – poems about a beloved person, one the poet would like to accompany him on his final journey, riding a 'narrow gauge railway (...), two seats in it asking before I kneel before the Lord'. And what about evil, solidarity with his buddies? Just like Miłosz and Różewicz he ponders: *Unde malum?* Where is the source of evil? This poet strives to answer the question differently: although he has met with much unpleasantness, has been humiliated, ignored and excluded – the sum of his life (active and brave – involvement in democratic opposition movements of the 1960s and 1970s) is positive: he is grateful for his fate and hopeful for eternal mercy, salvation; he expresses gratitude for the grace of faith. Evil deeds and evil people will vanish in the end into a 'black hole', 'between racing electrons'. Just like his last volume, *Rąbek Królestwa* [*The Edge of Kingdom*], this most recent collection is one of his most important achievements, a wonderful testament to the power and vitality of metaphysical poetry.

Jerzy Gizella, translated by Marek Kazmierski

Time

Time is and is  
Time does not pass it lasts  
Omnipresent  
in place and infinity  
beyond dimensions:  
below particles  
above the cosmos  
stars and galaxies  
at the crossroads of heavenly roads  
where waves and rays emerge  
immovable yet moving  
without substance  
without extent  
immeasurable  
down a hollow slope  
numbers run along  
rising without end  
and sans distance  
in boundless space  
from source to infinity  
to the highest number  
which is the  
ONE

My shadow

My long shadow  
Gets ahead of me  
I run breathless after it  
tripping over it  
it drags behind it  
shadows of days gone by  
and those which are not to come  
though they crowd with effort.  
Vertically falling, my shadow  
circles and drills beneath me  
sidewalks heated sparking  
prizes open a hole in the earth  
barren and dark  
penetrating it tightly  
to a point  
vanishing.

Narrow Gauge

Let me not be collected by a golden carriage  
nor by any chariot drawn by heavenly horses  
let me not be collected by a space rocket  
its flight marking out numerous courses  
and do not let salvoes honour me  
let me not be seen off by too many mourners  
let their lips not sing forth commonplace exaltations  
there is one route I will choose to reach my  
destination  
a narrow gauge railway ride into the promised  
asking for two seats in it fore I kneel before the Lord

Translated by Marek Kazmierski



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LESZEK  
ELEKTOROWICZ  
(1924-2019)

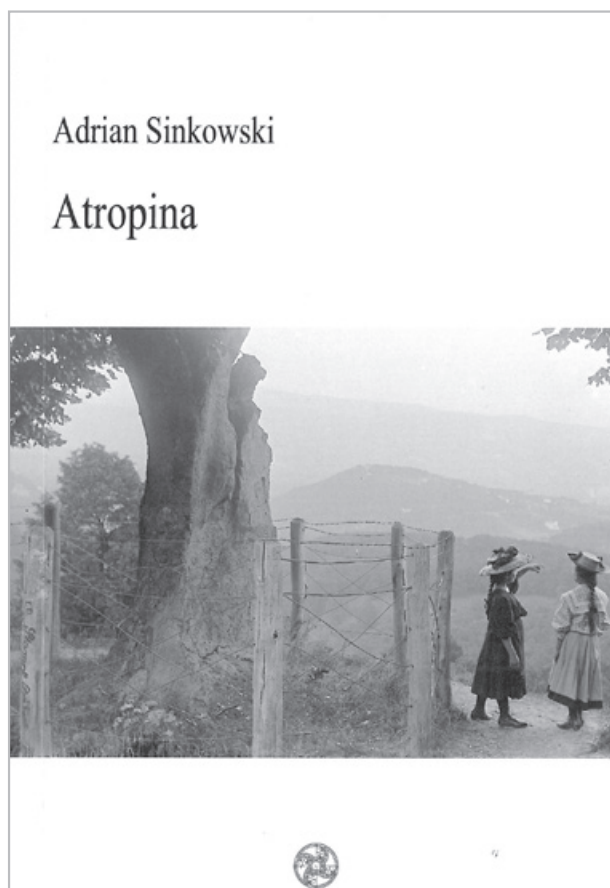
**Ścieżka do Królestwa**  
**Publisher:** Wydawnictwo Arcana, Kraków 2018  
ISBN: 978-83-65350-38-1; 52 pages  
**Translation rights:** Leszek Elektorowicz,  
arcana@poczta.internetdsl.pl

**Poetry collections published**  
*Świat niestworzony*, 1957  
*Kontury*, 1962  
*Przedmowy do ciszy*, 1968  
*Cale kłamstwo świata*, 1983  
*Jeden znak*, 1994  
*Czasy i chwile*, 1998  
*Niektóre stronice*, 2004  
*Z(a)myślenia*, 2006  
*Wiersze dla Marii*, 2012  
*Juwenilia i Senilia*, 2013  
*Rąbek królestwa*, 2016  
Leszek Elektorowicz is also the author of novels, short stories  
and essays.

**Foreign language translations**  
France, Romania, Russia – in anthologies

**Awards**  
Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński Poetry Prize ORPHEUS (2014, 2017) –  
nominations  
Józef Mackiewicz Literary Prize (2017) – nomination

# Atropine



## Writing down irretrievably lost memories from childhood allows one to come to terms with loss

**A**tropine, a chemical substance used in medicine to dilate the pupil of the eye, also broadens the eyes of the soul in Sinkowski's volume of poetry. It allows an adult man, husband, and father to meet his dead grandmother by returning him to boyhood. However, the memory of the past as recorded in verse turns out to be entirely different than what the speaker is familiar with.

The strength of Sinkowski's poems is, above all, their elaborate form rarely found in contemporary poetry. In *Atropine*, the author writes in Polish alexandrine verse. This is a meter that corresponds in Polish poetry to the heroic verses of Homer and is mainly associated with Adam Mickiewicz's national epic *Pan Tadeusz*, in which Mickiewicz writes: 'I see and I describe'. The same thing can be said for Sinkowski, for whom the titular atropine is a metaphor for literature that wishes to note down a fragment of reality. Consequently, each poem in the book recalls a little story. A constant characteristic of the poet's

style is a passion for the seemingly insignificant detail, the description of which becomes a strong metaphor for time irretrievably lost. The most significant theme in Sinkowski's poems is in fact the fear of silence which is synonymous with death. In this book of poetry, a dead grandma still lives, but only in verse. Thus the words of Seamus Heaney return here like a refrain: '[W]hen I have nothing more to say': Sinkowski seems to be saying: When I have nothing more to say, the whole world will die, because only in being retold anew can it truly exist. That is why the title of the book is at the same time the name of one of the Greek Miorai, Atropos, who determines a person's hour of death. Writing down irretrievably lost memories from childhood allows one to come to terms with loss. And this is probably Sinkowski's most significant message.

Ireneusz Staroń, translated by Lynn Suh



Atropine

Outside they're drinking beer. Out of nothing rain clouds gather, a minute later nothing gathers about the rain.

Atropine, is it capable of allowing me to see, grandma dear, one who's no longer here? Or you,

then at forty, making breakfast  
for a boy, a father in the future, long before mom, albeit she, and he, had been missing someone.  
So different were you then that I'm uncertain

of everyone, that includes myself, if time won't leave us twisting in the wind: what courage is required to see in a man one calls dad, who traces and retraces, not always at the right time, his steps

to the theatre and back, as if  
being on the constant move were to somehow help him out,  
to see in him a boy in tracksuit, with a face appointed in people  
to whom it seems nothing is something wrong.

Traction

Chokeberries, nothing more. One, eight, ten or a dozen, as many steps to move on up, past the wicket gate grass leans on the back of a ki-osk.  
I turn, till the railway platform disappears, not at once, in due time

I dig up toys from the ground on the other side of the forest –  
evidence that the chokeberries halfway from home to the station haven't conceived a hopeless mystery for many years, but dote on it, to make it their own.

Pssst, when I won't have anything to say, I don't reckon it will change anything if I sift out of this what is true from what isn't.  
It's something else to enquire to whom belong

the muddled car and model ship made of plastic, an earthworm wrapped around them. Looking at the bite mark, I think that they felt out of place well aware that chokeberries will turn them in.

Hypothesis

Not so long ago I didn't have anything to hide any-more,  
no verse or sentence which proliferated in walls, or grew beneath the floor in silence, becoming somewhat truncated but not becoming senseless,

it's not so certain that the curse (and it was a curse agreeing to use the verse, the sentence, this way and that on paper) will vanish into air, and so it happened not the way it was supposed to, because dust from books took

the curse with it but didn't bring it back on time, causing me to look around at night for an alibi. I'm distracted by too many things. The care with which light undresses sense to the skin, slowly, without euphoria

draws attention away from the sentence, which saw in the curse a last chance to emerge. Apparently probable enough to believe in it. The sentence was left with nothing, nothing stayed with me.

Translated by Lynn Suh



© Piotr Zajączkowski

ADRIAN  
SINKOWSKI  
Born 1984

**Atropina [Atropine]**  
**Publisher:** Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Sopotu, Sopot 2018  
ISBN: 9788365662262; 38 pages  
**Translation rights:** Adrian Sinkowski,  
sinkowski.adrian@gmail.com; Topos, topos10@interia.pl

**Poetry collections published**  
*Raptularz*, 2016

**Awards**  
Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński Literary Prize ORPHEUS (2019) – nomination  
Józef Mackiewicz Literary Prize (2019) – nomination

# How Far

**In a search for meaning  
in a world plagued  
by emptiness**

In his volume of poetry *How Far*, Szymon Babuchowski shows how a man of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – a husband, a lover, a father – is able to fill the world around him, a world plagued by the emptiness of building blocks and interpersonal relationships, with a search for meaning.

The speaker in the book is a man who believes deeply in God, a man living in a subdued landscape of prefab apartment blocks among which life can be disappointing and difficult to bear. Despite his impression of being surrounded by a dying city, he knows that each moment could well transform the face of the world. Against this backdrop, seemingly adverse to momentous experiences and shut off from transcendence, the poet writes poems trembling 'like pages in the wind' through which Miłosz's 'second space' – the supernatural dimension – shines through and is able to light up previously unrevealed corners of reality. For instance, in what is probably the volume's most beautiful poem (*The Stanisław Mineshaft in Murcki*), a fourteen-minute wait for a city bus transfer turns into an occasion to observe an affinity between the subterranean spaces of cemeteries and mines: in both one feels the presence of non-presence, its seductive mystery. In Babuchowski's poetry, the un-earthly, other-dimensional side of reality ceaselessly



emerges from behind the landscapes, objects, and people described.

Relying upon classical diction, without succumbing to the literary fashions which he makes mention of in his book ('one doesn't write this way today'), Babuchowski points out that in poetry a clear medium and message matter.

The most important moment in the volume's lyrical narration comes in the title poem *How Far*, in which the poet is called upon by the Creator who compels him, like Adam in the book of Genesis, to respond to the question 'Where are you?' (This citation forms the collection's epigraph.) In the poem, Babuchowski offers an account, asking himself if he has remained faithful to the truths he has chosen for himself and how this choice has brought him closer to God. Full of affirmation of the everyday, his stanzas are ostensibly his answers, at times reminiscent of songs, which is not surprising given that the author is the leader of the band *Dobre Ludzie* [Good People].

This volume of verse constitutes a story about little loves which become vast under the poet's pen, a poet who does not hesitate to write [as] in *Prayer*: 'may my last / word / be / God'.

Barbara Gruszka-Zych, translated by Lynn Suh

\* \* \*

little boy cast ashore on a Greek island  
 little shell from which life drained quietly away  
 I'd like to hold you wrap you in a towel  
 and carry you to a room full of toys

little boy cast ashore your photo  
 will spread across the world it'll be an argument  
 for and against with it we'll strike each other  
 before a wave arrives and shuts us up

that's always how it is: flocks of birds swarm  
 and peck at everything that still  
 smells of life – don't blame them for this  
 after all even this poem is feeding off of you

little boy cast ashore you could've been  
 an older brother to my daughter who lies down  
 to sleep exactly as you do yes asleep for you didn't  
 die you only sleep and sleep

## A Faroese Ballad

so you've brought me this far to the brink  
 so that I be touched by this cold paradise of yours  
 on the North Shore  
 so that I not overlook  
 or oversleep and miss those waves of yours

and I beheld how the world ends  
 a light rocked to and fro on the edge  
 a white church on the cliff  
 further on were only waters rough  
 with wind

and I ran after the voice of waves  
 with green grass at my feet  
 straight into the vale  
 from where I'll sail one day  
 where I'll be assailed by an unknown tide

\* \* \*

our shadows on the road tall like trees  
 blended in procession: mom – dad – child  
 in orange light just before night arrives  
 our mundane smallness transfiguring to gothic

and the church glides across pavement-waters  
 and the light elevates us the sun reconciles us  
 plunged in afterglow from horizon to toe  
 we sail this boat – with morning ever closer

Translated by Lynn Suh



© Roman Koszowski

**SYMON  
BABUCHOWSKI**

Born 1977

*Jak daleko [How Far]*

**Publisher:** Wydawnictwo Arcana, Kraków 2018

ISBN: 978-83-65350-31-2; 48 pages

**Translation rights:** Szymon Babuchowski, babuchowski@wp.pl

### Poetry collections published

*Sprawy życia, sprawy śmierci*, 2002

*Czas stukających kołatek*, 2004

*Wiersze na wiatr*, 2008

*Drzewo pomarańczowe. Wybór wierszy z lat 1996-2011*, 2011

*Zanim przyjdiesz. Wiersze metafizyczne i religijne*, 2014

### Awards

Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński Literary Prize ORPHEUS (2015, 2019) – nominations

# Screenplays

**Majewski is fascinated by the world of art, painting and symbols**



**BY AN INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNISED FILM DIRECTOR**

The three-volume edition of Lech Majewski's screenplays is an opportunity for readers to familiarise themselves with the world of an artist who since the 1980s has doggedly blazed his own trail, creating original arthouse cinema that is respected all over the world. Majewski's cinema emerges from thinking pictorially and not in terms of narrative; thus most of his screenplays – like his films – have unconventional forms, which record his imagination, his poetic and painterly visions.

The first two volumes present the screenplays of his best-known films (including *Wojaczek*, *Angelus*), as well as uncompleted projects (*Ellis Island*, *Yves, Mon Amour*). Beside these fully auteur works there are also two commercial pictures (*The Flight of the Spruce Goose*, *Prisoner of Rio*) made in Hollywood and the script for *Basquiat* which was ultimately directed by the painter Julian Schnabel.

There are certain threads running through Majewski's cinema, such as: love, death, victimhood, mystery. The artist is fascinated by unusual, over-sensitive individuals who fight against self-destruction, like *Basquiat*, which presents the story of an avant-garde artist who dies of an overdose.

Majewski is fascinated by the world of art, painting and symbols, the fullest expression of which can be found in volume 3, which consists of five screenplays. This newest publication begins with an unrealised script

called *Beuys*, which is a biographical sketch of one of the most important twentieth-century artists. This avant-garde artist transforms his traumatic wartime experiences into his creations, liberating himself from social conventions through form. The theme of the artist also appears in *Glass Lips* and the poetic *Onirica*, inspired by Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Majewski's own biography. The protagonist – who loses his beloved woman and a close friend in an accident – finds solace in the world of dreams, where he meets the two people closest to him. The theme of death is also present in *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, which the director based on his own novel *Metaphysics*. *The Mill and the Cross*, however, is a kind of apogee of Majewski's passion for art. The artist invites us into the world of Pieter Bruegel's *The Way of the Cross*, which is brought to life by giving some of the painting's characters their own stories. The screenplay was co-written by the famous art critic Michael F. Gibson, whose analysis of the Dutch master's work inspired Majewski. The screenwriters made Bruegel himself the guide to this world of rich meanings.

Thus, in the last volume Majewski appears as a cinematic visionary who through his art conducts a dialogue with long-dead masters and at the same time imagines a pessimistic vision of today.

Urszula Tes, translated by David French



*His pencil moves swiftly over the paper.*

BRUEGEL

So what have we here? It's a city. The inner circuit of its walls forms an almost perfect circle – the golden circle of life. Simple as that.

*Looking at the city, Bruegel draws a circle in the upper-left corner.*

BRUEGEL

And another circle on the other side.

*He draws another circle opposite. They are both facing Golgotha.*

BRUEGEL

The black circle is the circle of death, surrounded by a crowd that rushed to the place of execution like starving flies.

*Bruegel quickly draws a few lines along the very edge of the piece of paper.*

BRUEGEL

And down here is the tree of death – with a horse's head at its foot, and us, the two of us beside it; you're leaning against the tree, downcast.

*He quickly sketches them in. Jonghelinck looks over the painter's shoulder to see the sketch better. Bruegel draws a few more lines on the opposite side of the paper.*

BRUEGEL

And here's another tree. Its fresh, delicate leaves tremble in the wind. It's the tree of life. And the back-drop is ready.

JONGHELINCK

Between life and death?

*Bruegel nods.*

BRUEGEL

And here's the third circle, trodden down by the people running from the first to the second. From life to death. Just tell me why they're in such a hurry.

*Jonghelinck looks questioningly.*

BRUEGEL

*(smiling)*

They simply want to know what happens when you reach the gates of death. They want to know but at the same time make it home for lunch.

*Before their eyes two dogs run to each other and begin to sniff each other's tails. Bruegel watches them intently.*

BRUEGEL

They want terribly to sniff Death's backside, but they don't want to be bitten... Or go inside. They know that if you enter once – and we all finally will – going home is out of the question.

Excerpt translated by David French



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LECH  
MAJEWSKI  
Born 1953

**Scenariusze, t. 1-3 [Screenplays, vol. 1-3]**

**Publisher:** Rebis, Angelus Silesius, Poznań-Katowice 2016-2019

ISBN: vol. 1: 978-83-7818-841-4; vol. 2: 978-83-7818-851-3; vol. 3: 978-83-8062-441-2; 320, 384, 312 pages

**Translation rights:** Rebis, rebis@rebis.com.pl

**Selected movies**

*Prisoner of Rio*, 1988

*Gospel According to Harry*, 1992

*The Roe's Room*, 1998 (initially staged as an opera)

*Wojaczek*, 1999

*Angelus*, 2001

*The Garden of Earthly Delights*, 2003

*The Mill and the Cross*, 2010

Lech Majewski is a film and theatre director, member of the Directors Guild of America and European Film Academy, as well as writer, poet, and painter.

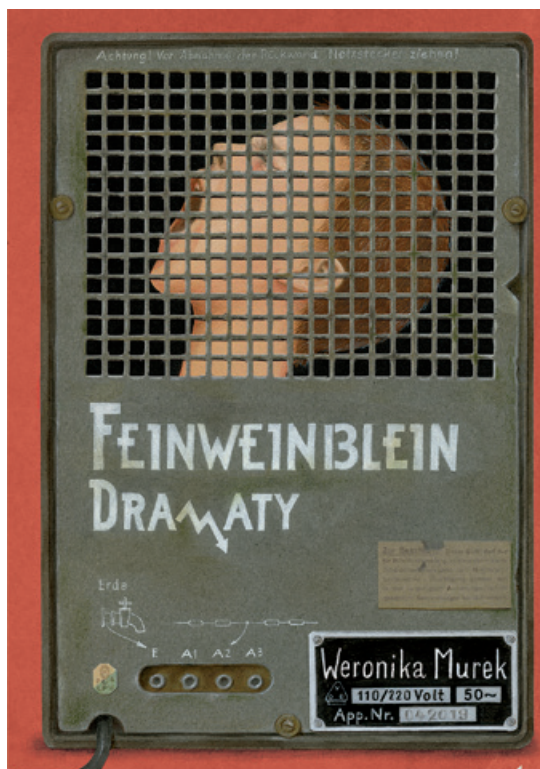
**International recognition**

Majewski's films were presented at numerous festivals, including Cannes, Venice, Berlin, Toronto, Rome, New York, Rio de Janeiro, London, Barcelona, Jerusalem, and Montreal, winning many prizes.

His art was shown in the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, National Gallery in London, Prado Museum in Madrid, Louvre Museum in Paris, and at the Venice Biennale.

# Feinweinblein. Plays

**Well-crafted social and historical anecdotes, amusing and disturbing at the same time, imbued with metaphysical angst**



**BY ONE OF THE MOST PROMISING YOUNG POLISH AUTHORS**

**T**he book consists of three plays by Weronika Murek (born 1989) – the titular *Feinweinblein* (a nonsense word) as well as *Wujaszki* [*Uncles*] and *Morowe* [*Devastating*].

*Feinweinblein* was awarded the Gdynia Drama Prize in 2015. The play is set in the former eastern territories of Germany that became part of Poland after World War II. A variety of voices – ordinary people remembering everyday life during the war, casual clubhouse conversations and chit-chat on the radio – paints a lopsided world in a manner that recalls the theatre of the absurd. People remember the war with nostalgia because the flowers were more fragrant back then; a staff member at the community centre dreams about a career as a cloak-room attendant in the capital; radio presenters discuss whether the deceased ought to be placed in the casket with their shoes on or not. What is the point of these strange stories? Perhaps to cover up the tragedy of a couple who, in the early days of the war, followed the German authorities' orders and sent their mentally handicapped child away 'to be tested'. They received a radio receiver in exchange. But Murek's absurd stories all become the opposite of what they seem to be and end up alluding to the horrific story from which they are supposed to distract. These well-crafted social and historical anecdotes, amusing and disturbing at the same time, are imbued with metaphysical angst. *Uncles* is a visionary comedy based on subversive references to the prominent dramatist and artist

Stanisław Wyspiański (1869-1907). The uncles have come together for a Polish Christmas Eve dinner to reminisce about their country's mythical interwar period and as the drama evolves they somehow come to embody its heroes. But they also lend their voices to characters that are usually overlooked in historical narratives, such as women, or a gardener. True to the Polish folk belief that animals can talk on Christmas Eve, we hear the voices of Prime Minister Paderewski's fattened goose and of the warhorses assembled in the dining room of the country manor. While the era is usually presented in idealised and heroic terms, Murek's grotesque representation deprives it of its pomposity and much of its glory.

The play *Devastating* consists of dialogues about illness. The title is a pun, as the Polish word 'morowe' can mean both 'bringing death' and 'excellent'. Combining these two meanings Murek makes deadly diseases appear as something desirable. The characters discuss their ailments as if they were boasting about goods and achievements – careers, wealth or social standing. With this playful inversion Murek exposes the empty talk about climbing the social ladder that dominates conversations in contemporary Poland. Beyond the distorting mirror of society, however, we encounter the metaphysics of illness and death.

Magdalena Miecznicka, translated by Tul'si (Tuesday) Bhambry

*Darkness. A radio humming: someone is turning the knob, looking for the right programme. A silly tune, like in a circus or amusement park.*

A CHILD’S VOICE  
There is one remedy against death: the leaves of the broadleaf plantain.

FEMALE VOICE 1  
Moisten it lightly and then rub, rub.

*A silly tune: a circus or amusement park.*

FEMALE VOICE 2  
It is four o’clock, the hour of pleasure.

*A spritzing sound: a spray bottle or atomiser.*

FEMALE VOICE 2  
Perfumed water, present in every household back in the day.

*A silly tune: a circus or amusement park.*

MALE VOICE 1  
We just heard Shebalin’s *Sighs*.

MALE VOICE 2  
And now let’s return to our conversation.

MALE VOICE 1  
A question that each of you has asked herself from time to time. Should a husband be buried in low boots and a woolly hat? I say: it depends on the boots and it depends on the hat.

MALE VOICE 2  
If we can afford them, that would be like bowing to him, as long as the body, you know, is still in good condition, a presentable body, in an open casket. If the casket is closed then the shoes would go to waste, perhaps just for a short time and then take them off.

MALE VOICE 1  
Unless we’re talking about a war hero.

MALE VOICE 2  
Oh, if he fell then he’s a war hero, you’re right.

MALE VOICE 1  
And in this case – with shoes.

MALE VOICE 2  
In this case – with shoes always.

MALE VOICE 1  
And in this case – with shoes always, anything else would be unseemly.  
MALE VOICE 2

Many of our women listeners have shared their thoughts on this issue. We’ll be back after the break: Schumann’s *Sighs*.

*A melody: “The Song of the Forests”; interrupted a few seconds in. A silly tune: a circus or amusement park.*

A CHILD’S VOICE  
There is one remedy against death: the leaves of the broadleaf plantain.

FEMALE VOICE 1  
Moisten it first, rub, rub.

Translated by Tul’si (Tuesday) Bhambry



© Anna Mika

WERONIKA  
MUREK  
Born 1989

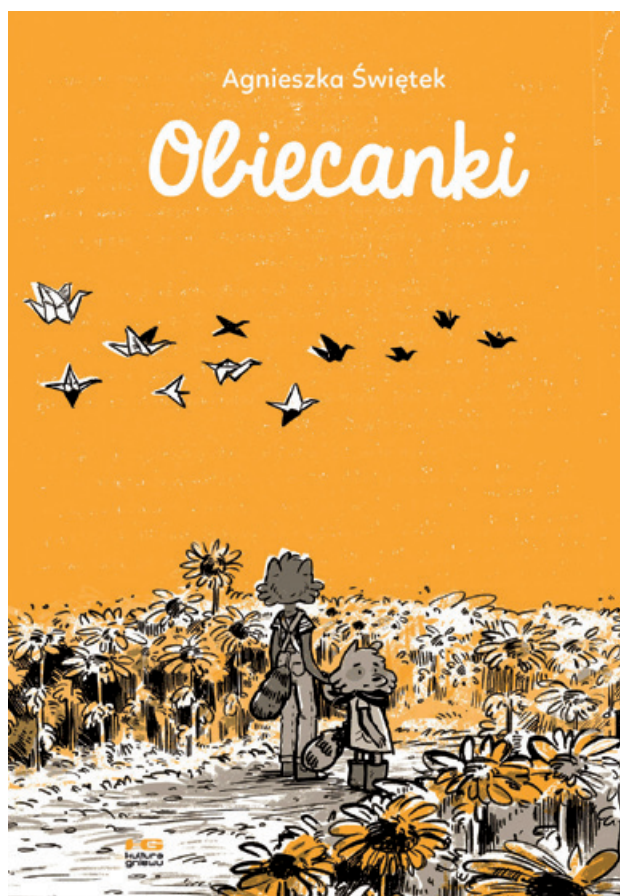
**Feinweinblein. Dramaty [Feinweiblein. Plays]**  
**Publisher:** Wydawnictwo Czarne, Wołowiec 2019  
ISBN: 978-83-8049-838-9; 216 pages  
**Translation rights:** Andrew Nurnberg Associates Warsaw,  
anna.rucinska@nurnberg.pl

**Books published**  
*Uprawa roślin południowych metodą Miczurina*, 2015

**Foreign language translations**  
France, Hungary, Serbia

**Awards**  
Witold Gombrowicz Literary Prize (2016)  
Nike Literary Award (2016) – nomination  
Gdynia Literary Prize (2016) – nomination  
Polityka’s Passport Award (2015) – nomination

# Promises



## One of Poland's greatest stories told in this medium

**A**gnieszka Świątek's debut graphic novel *Promises* swept Poland's major comics awards for 2018. This is the debut of an already mature artist ready to take on serious subjects in her cartoonish, even childlike mode. In *Promises*, the reader witnesses two parents' separation through the eyes of a child.

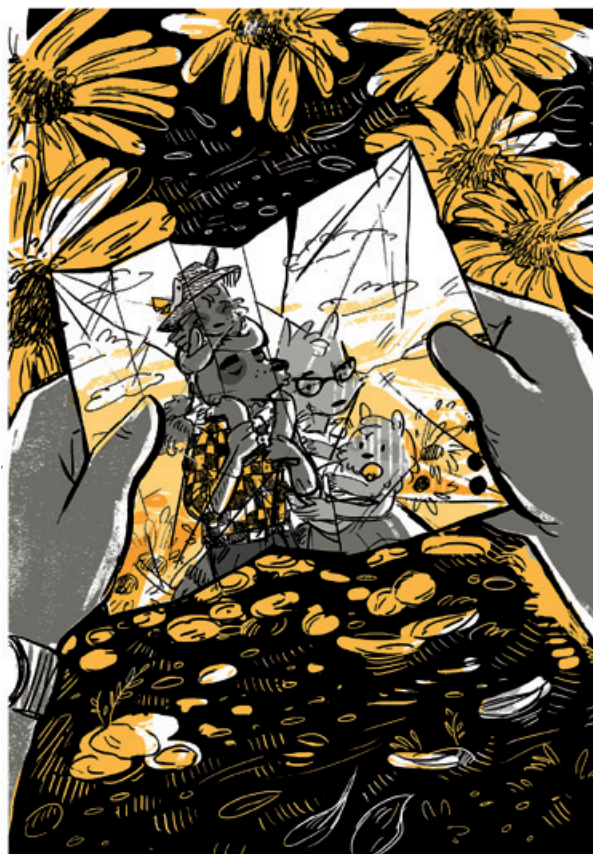
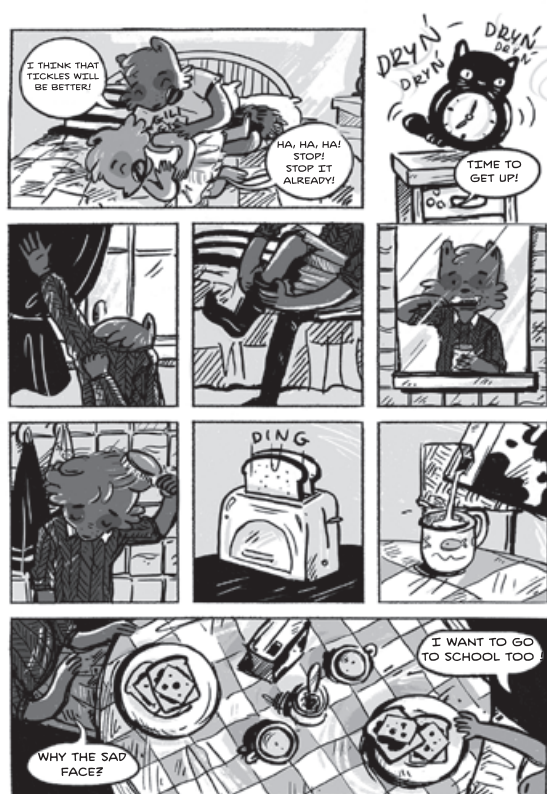
Świątek has chosen to anthropomorphise her characters, and the racoon family we encounter in her story inhabits a contemporary human setting. The emotional climaxes of *Promises* play out at school, where we meet an ensemble of visually and psychologically diverse personae – all of them animals. Against this backdrop, the spotlight falls on the eldest sister of the raccoon clan: a diligent and unusually sensitive student who is deeply affected by her parents' divorce. We also meet her carefree younger sister who seems impervious to the family drama, and the girls' mother, who struggles with depression. Despite his absence from their daily lives, the father remains a central figure to the tale.

Świątek renders this family portrait in black and white, but at crucial moments, the muted graphic tone is peppered with dashes of orange – a colour that summons the absent father. This simple formal device lends *Promises* a universal tone and invites the reader to experience the world through a child's eyes.

This is a subtle perspective, and one eager to writhe free from emotional hardship. The older sister tries to piece back together her fragmented view of a world that will never be the same. But having woken to this new reality, she feels neither animosity nor aggression. Her priority is to cope with her family's crisis by leaning on her own budding and increasingly mature sense of responsibility for her loved ones. It is precisely this attitude that makes Świątek's graphic novel one of Poland's greatest stories told in this medium.

Tomasz Miecznikowski, translated by Eliza Rose





© K. Pawlak

AGNIESZKA  
ŚWIĘTEK

**Born 1993**

### *Obiecanki [Promises]*

**Publisher:** Wydawnictwo Kultura Gniewu, Warszawa 2018

ISBN: 9788364858802; 64 pages

**Translation rights:** Agnieszka Świątek, [agaswiatek1@gmail.com](mailto:agaswiatek1@gmail.com)

### Comics published

*Rufus. Wilk w owczej skórze, 2018*

### Books Illustrated

Dzika, 2017

*Niezapominajka*, 2018

*Tropiciele, 2018*

## Awards

Polish Comics Association Award for the best debut (2018)

Best Polish Album – awarded by the International Festival  
Of Comics And Games In Lodz (2018)

# Szukalski. Album



**More than a catalogue and more than a biography  
or an academic study – much as Szukalski  
was more than an artist**

**NETFLIX DOCUMENTARY ABOUT SZUKALSKI WAS  
CO-PRODUCED BY LEONARDO DICAPRIO**

The Evviva L'arte foundation album devoted to Szukalski is an art project unto itself. The work and life of Stanisław Szukalski is on display in this unusual catalogue of his work, shown through a series of documentary photographs framed with text. The central figure of this publication is an artist who remains underappreciated in the official canons of art history – overlooked by those who create the permanent collections of museums – but who is increasingly present in pop culture. The boisterous life of 'Stach from the Warta [River]', as he preferred to be called, more resembles an adventure film than the biography of a real person. A young genius whose talent was discovered very early on, Szukalski was forever at odds with both critics and the arts community at large, often misguided in his choices and political affinities, but always capable of gathering a group of fanatical devotees around him. He was the creator of a complex mythology centred on Poland, a remarkable iconography, a new history and even experimental linguistics. A sculptor and designer

of monuments, most of whose works were destroyed (or never realised); an inhabitant of Krakow, Paris, and Los Angeles, warmly remembered by Leonardo DiCaprio (who knew him as a child, through his father), Szukalski indeed seems a character plucked from a novel. The authors of this publication have not, however, succumbed to the temptation to fictionalise or mythologise. This reliable biography, interesting in itself, is accompanied by a methodologically astute description of his work and its reception, while the author of the afterword attempts to answer a still-pertinent question: 'Why do we need Szukalski?' There are also some brilliant photographs of works both extant and vanished: designs, drawings, and pictures, all laid out splendidly. All this makes the volume much more than a catalogue, more than a finely published coffee-table book, and more than a biography or an academic study – much as Stanisław Szukalski was more than an artist.

Hanna Wróblewska, translated by Soren Gauger

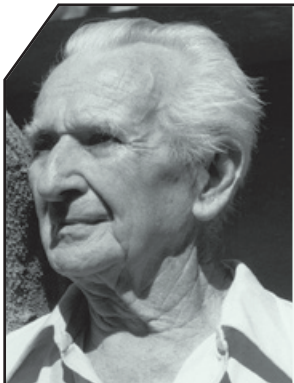
In April and May of 1916, and again in May, 1917, the Art Institute of Chicago held two solo exhibitions of the work of Stanisław Szukalski. The first exhibit was devoted to his best drawings and sculptures, while the second featured drawings and graphic art. At both openings the artist displayed his penchant for outlandish behaviour. At the first, he publicly destroyed the awards he had been given, claiming that the jurors were not qualified to evaluate his work. A year later, protesting an attempt to censor *A Man and His Brother*, a drawing with an anti-British slant, Szukalski tore his works from the wall and ripped them to pieces, after which he proceeded to destroy the furniture in the museum lobby, declaring ‘either all of my drawings will be displayed, or none of them’.

Szukalski’s shocking behaviour at his two Art Institute exhibitions, and in particular his spite for the academic principles of this hallowed, yet conservative municipal cultural institution, won him a certain popularity among young artists, indirectly paving the way for the emergence of new concepts in American art. Realising his popularity was on the rise, Stanisław Szukalski began attaching great importance to his physical appearance and his gait. He was taller than average (174 cm), with a large head crowning a short neck, and a face with symmetrical feminine features, framed by long, gently wavy hair; he wore corduroy pants with a leather belt five or six inches wide, and carried a heavy stick in his right hand. He walked with a jaunty step, swiftly and decisively, taking long strides (his childhood memories include strolls with his father, who forced him to keep pace with the adults).

Stanisław Szukalski’s implacable, even hostile response to his critics, as well as his reluctance to sell his works (he dreamed of donating them all to the re-born Polish nation), meant that he tended to be short of money for food, and often went hungry. Unexpectedly, on 31 May 1922, without having announced the fact to many of his acquaintances, he wed Helen Louise Walker, an amateur painter, the daughter of Samuel L. Walker, a wealthy and respected Chicago physician. Although his father-in-law was thought to be a millionaire, Szukalski took no money from him. Yet, on his first wedding anniversary, the local Covici-McGee publishers released a luxury-bound album entitled *The Work of Szukalski* in a limited run of one thousand copies. The book contained colour and black-and-white reproductions of the artist’s sculptures and drawings, photographed by himself, as well as an autobiographical note and his own brief

commentaries on his works, which took the form of peculiar parables and aphorisms. *The Chicago Literary Times* ran an ad for the volume, calling it ‘the most beautiful and remarkable book ever published in the United States.’

Excerpt from the introduction by Lechosław Lameński,  
translated by Soren Gauger



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publisher's archive

STANISŁAW  
SZUKALSKI  
(1893-1987)

**Szukalski**

Edited by Lechosław Lameński, introduction: Lechosław Lameński,  
afterword: Wawrzyniec Rymkiewicz

**Publisher:** Wydawnictwo Ewviva L'Arte, Warszawa 2018

ISBN: 9788394474768; 232 pages

**Translation rights:** Fundacja Ewviva L'Arte, fundacja@ewvivalarte.org

**Selected work**

Szukalski’s work includes sculptures, drawings, paintings, as well as monument, architecture and album designs. He was also an author of numerous texts on art theory.

Szukalski’s art has been presented, among others, in Warsaw (Zachęta and Polish National Museum), Chicago (Art Institute, Arts Club and Polish Museum of America), Laguna Beach (Laguna Art Museum), Pasadena (Pasadena City College), San Francisco (Varnish Fine Art), and Paris (Exhibition of Decorative Art).

**Varia**

In 2018, Leonardo DiCaprio produced a documentary entitled *Struggle: The Life and Lost Art of Szukalski*, directed by Ireneusz Dobrowolski, which was released on Netflix in 2018.



# 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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Director of the Book Institute  
**Dariusz Jaworski**

Deputy Director of the Book Institute  
Professor **Krzysztof Koehler**



## Selected Polish Book Institute programmes:

**The ©POLAND Translation Programme** aims to promote Polish literature abroad. 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 licence
- // printing.

**Sample Translations ©Poland** – the aim of this programme is to promote Polish literature abroad by encouraging 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](http://www.bookinstitute.pl).

For further information please contact: Ewa Wojciechowska, [e.wojciechowska@bookinstitute.pl](mailto:e.wojciechowska@bookinstitute.pl).

**The Translators' College** – Based at a new building on the grounds of the Book Institute in Kraków, this programme provides study visits for translators of

Polish literature. During their residency, the translators are provided with suitable conditions for their work and assistance with their translations. The college has been active since 2006. By 2018, over one hundred translators from thirty-four countries had taken part.

**The World Congress of Translators of Polish Literature**, which has been organized every four years since 2015. 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:

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

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

2017 // Piotr Florczyk, for *Building the Barricade* by Anna Świrszczyńska

**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:

2019 // Hendrik Lindepuu

2018 // Antonia Lloyd-Jones

2017 // Lajos Pálfalvi

2016 // Constantin Geambașu

2015 // Laurence Dyèvre

**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.





#### **NEW BOOKS FROM POLAND 2018**

Managing editor Agnieszka Urbanowska

Edited by Anna Czartoryska-Sziler

Texts by Karol Alichnowicz, Mariusz Cieślak, Krzysztof Dybciak, Grzegorz Filip, Tomasz Garbol, Jerzy Gizella, Barbara Gruszka-Zych, Marcin Kube, Marta Kwaśnicka, Krzysztof Masłoi, Magdalena Miecznicka, Tomasz Miecznikowski, Dariusz Nowacki, Wojciech Stanisławski, Ireneusz Staroń, Anna Szczepan-Wojnarska, Urszula Tes, Maciej Urbanowski, Marzena Woźniak-Łabieniec, Katarzyna Wójcik, Hanna Wróblewska

Translated by Tul'si (Tuesday) Bhambry, Sean Gasper Bye, David French, Soren Gauger, Marek Kazmierski, Charles S. Kraszewski, Peter Obst, Lynn Suh, Eliza Rose, Kate Webster

English text edited by Charles S. Kraszewski, John Merchant and Peter MacLeod

Layout design by Bogdan Kuc

DTP artist Maciej Faliński

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