

POLAND – HISTORY WORTH KNOWING

wiepodlega

POLAND
THE CENTENARY
OF REGAINING
INDEPENDENCE



Dear Readers!

“Niepodległa” in Polish means “Independent”. This term refers to independent Poland. In 1795, the Commonwealth of Poland was divided among its contemporary neighbours, thus Poland disappeared from the political map of Europe for 123 years. By virtue of the strength of spirit, heroism, and hard work of several generations of Poles, it was reborn in November 1918 as a free, sovereign, and modern state.

On the anniversary of the centenary of Poland's regaining independence, we have prepared for you a selection of the most interesting books about its history. This collection is only a suggestion, not a fixed catalogue, for it is impossible to make a final selection from the abundance of publications in Poland and abroad.

On the pages of this brochure, you will find valuable and fundamental works of outstanding Polish and foreign historians, as well as popularising titles addressed to a multitude of readers. All these books have one thing in common: it is in a reliable and captivating way that they describe the various aspects of Poland's regaining independence and biographies of fascinating figures who exerted the greatest influence on the fate of Poland and the world in the last century. In this selection, we wished to present the Polish journey to regaining independence and, more broadly, the history of Poland in the most cross-sectional and accessible to foreign readers form.

We assume that it is impossible to get to know, understand, and like today's Poland without getting to know its rich past. We believe deeply that a book is an unparalleled medium for such indepth cognition.

We invite you to celebrate the Polish anniversary together with a good book!

Director of the Book Institute
Dariusz Jaworski

POLAND'S MEMORY OF INDEPENDENCE

Professor Andrzej Nowak

Poland has existed on the political map of Europe since the 10th century. This is a special place: between the two most powerful ethnical-historical-political communities on the European continent: the Germans on one side, and, on the other - the eastern Slavs, from whom the Russian empire will emerge. The historical work of building a separate community and culture in this place was successful for over eight centuries. Poland had 28 crowned kings until the end of the 18th century. Yet, it is not the sovereignty of the monarchs, but another kind of freedom that has been at the heart of this historical experience: the principle of republican freedom of citizens. Wincenty Kadlubek, a medieval chronicler and philosopher, was the first to describe this model, using the Latin term *Respublica* around the year 1200 to describe the political ideal of Poland. This model began to take real form when the Piast dynasty came to an end, and from 1370, Poles began to elect their own rulers and create political self-government. Gradually, a two-chamber parliament was formed (the Senate and the Sejm, elected by citizens uninterruptedly from 1468 to 1793), as well as the principles of free election of kings. Tens of thousands of citizens took part in the elections, and they greatly appreciated this privilege of freedom. It was limited only to the nobility. However, due to its exceptional size (nearly 10 per cent of the general population) and the great cultural strength of its model of freedom, it is this noble privilege that will ultimately shape the political culture of the entire nation. This political model was so appealing that it attracted the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (comprising today's Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine) to a union with Poland, and it allowed this multi-

ethnic and multi-faith union to survive for an exceptional amount of time: more than 400 years (1385-1795).

Proud of its freedom, the nobility effectively defended its Republic against external threats (Turkey, Sweden and Moscow), but also against reforms needed for the modernisation of the state. This resulted in a crisis that was exploited by the bureaucratic and military empires that surrounded Poland in the 18th century: the Russia of Peter I and Catherine II, the Prussia of Frederick II, and Austria - the Habsburg Empire. The weakened Republic was subordinate to the political domination of Russia. It was then that the word independence renewed its meaning in the Polish political lexicon. It brought to the fore the importance of freedom from external domination, from dominance by foreign empires. Against this foreign domination, a series of uprisings will begin: in the years 1733, 1768, 1794 (the insurrection under the leadership of Tadeusz Kościuszko). On the other hand, some of the political elites of the Republic of Poland attempt at the same time to carry out political reforms, the culmination of which was the adoption of the Constitution of 3 May 1791 by the Polish Sejm, the second written constitution in the world (after the American one), which extended civil rights to townspeople and took peasants under the protection of state law. Neighbouring empires did not want to passively watch the renewal of the life force of the Republic of Poland and, with the united forces of Russia, Prussia, and Austria, they partitioned Poland using their armies (finally in 1795).

After eight centuries, Poles lost their country for the next 120 years. To regain it, they had to

resist the three most powerful empires on the European continent. And they kept resisting. Not all of them of course, but the political elites will resume the fight for independence. They will write down these efforts, their traces in each successive generation: from the voluntary Polish legions formed by Napoleon's side in Italy in 1797, who wanted to carve their way to the country, through a whole series of youth conspiracies, to successive great uprisings against imperial enslavement: the November Uprising (1830-1831), a series of uprisings between 1846-1848, the January Uprising (1863-1865), and finally the 1905-1907 Uprising-Revolution in the Kingdom of Poland. Hundreds of thousands of people took part in this kind of relay race, tens of thousands died in battle, and tens of thousands were also sent to prisons or exiled to Siberia. This experience was reinforced by the culture that accompanied it: the poetry of the greatest authors of Polish Romanticism - with Adam Mickiewicz at the forefront, the universal music of Polish patriotism - Fryderyk Chopin (followed by Moniuszko, Paderewski, Szymanowski), the outstanding works of historical prose by Nobel Prize winners - Henryk Sienkiewicz and Władysław Reymont, dramas by Stanisław Wyspiański, and the works of outstanding writers such as Maria Konopnicka and Eliza Orzeszkowa. At the heart of this experience is the fight for independence, a fight in defence of the Polish language, threatened by persecution from the partitioning powers (banned completely in the public sphere both under Russian and German rule), in defence of Polish culture and identity. The pathos of this experience will also reach the masses: the peasants will join the fight for independence on the threshold of the 20th century, together with the majority of a new class - the workers. The nobility, as the social group leading the movement, will be replaced by the intelligentsia. It was the popularisation of the belief that independence - which is the rebuilding of one's own state, independent from foreign empires - was necessary, essential for a dignified life that triumphed at the time when in World War I the partitioning powers clashed with each other in a deadly battle. Having popular support, the Polish political elite seized this opportunity. The symbol of that moment



© Leszek Suszowski

were the legions created once again, this time under the command of Józef Piłsudski, which undertook a new armed fight for independence during World War I. The Great War, which for many nations of Europe was nothing but a futile slaughter, for Poland ended over a century of fighting to regain its own state.

The fact that twenty years later, in 1939, Poles yet again had to defend their independence against the attack of two totalitarian empires: the German and Soviet (Ribbentrop-Molotov Pacts), and that they lost it again, subjected to an unprecedented, brutal, bloody occupation, will further strengthen the meaning of the concept of independence in Polish consciousness. The Great Warsaw Uprising of 1944 against the German occupiers went down in history as another act in this long tradition. The subsequent steps will form political movements and uprisings against Soviet domination, imposed violently upon Poland after 1945: the Poznań 1956 uprising, the students' uprising in 1968, the 1970 Polish Protests, the re-organised political resistance movement since 1976, to the great, ten-million strong movement of Solidarity in 1980, announced by the Polish Pope, John Paul II during his pilgrimage to the country. In fact, it is difficult to find a Polish family that has no personal connection with this history, with any of its political links. This is what makes the memory of independence, after it was regained again in 1989, so lively and so engaging for the citizens of today's Poland.



Andrzej Nowak
Niepodległa 1864-1924.
Jak Polacy odzyskali Ojczyznę
Biały Kruk 2018,
ISBN 9788375532425

Translation rights: Adam Sosnowski,
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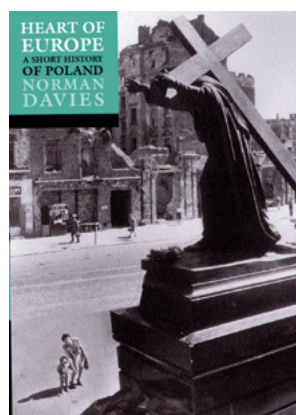
Andrzej NOWAK

INDEPENDENT! 1864-1924

Niepodległa! 1864-1924

Andrzej Nowak, a professor at the Jagiellonian University, has undertaken a monumental piece of work in recent years: to independently create a series of voluminous books entitled “Dzieje Polski” (“The History of Poland”). Originally, the thousand-year history of Poland was to be told in six scenes, now at least ten volumes are being talked about, and already the first three volumes have not disappointed: they talk about the birth of the Polish state in a vivid, artistic language, referring to the latest findings and research, at the same time emphasising unexpected parallelisms and affinities between events distant in time and space, and, in consequence, the specificity of the Polish historical experience.

“Independent! 1864-1924’ does not belong to this series though, it was written somewhat “during the break” from this great effort, with a view to the celebration of the centenary of regaining independence in 1918; however, it is impossible not to notice that it is from the same craftsman, from the same pen. As early as in the introductory chapter, Andrzej Nowak draws attention to the ‘signs’ scattered throughout the country’s history (the first of which, in his opinion, is the peace treaty concluded in Bautzen between Emperor Henry II and the Polish ruler Bolesław I the Brave, on the threshold of the 11th century), betokening his strong attachment to the idea of sovereignty. Then, he fully accomplishes one of the most important tasks facing a historian, revealing a deep ‘substratum’ of events which do not take place in isolation: each of them constitutes a consequence of the earlier ones. Contrary to an anonymous couplet from a hundred years ago, “And without rhyme or reason / Poland was born for that season”, which expressed astonishment at “the miracle of independence’ in a humorous way, Nowak shows that it was carried out with the effort and consequence of three generations.



Norman DAVIES

HEART OF EUROPE:

A SHORT HISTORY OF POLAND

The masterpiece of popularisation, “Poland in a nutshell”, condensation of facts, anecdotes, and fascinating analogies, published for the first time in 1984, this book was yet another achievement of Norman Davies, a young historian from Oxford, who, at that time, became an informal ambassador of the Polish past to the Anglo-Saxon world. It was also somewhat the essence of the “God’s Playground” published three years earlier.

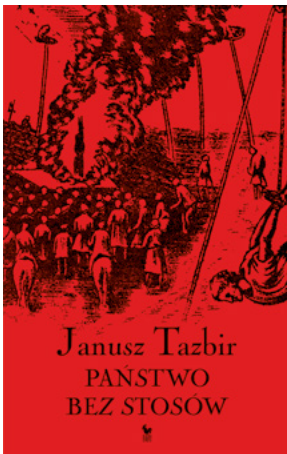
Norman Davies
Heart of Europe:
the past in Poland's present
Oxford University Press, 2001,
ISBN 0192801260

Translation rights: Oxford University
Press, translation.rights@oup.com

What is fascinating is the very structure of this book, which, unlike the vast majority of historical works, is written a tergo: Davies, like an archaeologist, reveals successive layers of history, starting with the “The Legacy of Humiliation”, i.e. the fate of Poland after the Yalta agreement, through the “The Legacy of Defeat”, i.e. the time of World War II, a short period of independence, 123 years of partitions, in order to reach the time of splendour

and twilight, which is medieval and modern Poland. Having done so, he returns to the present day, A.D. 1984, to the Poland of the decade of martial law and the underground resistance of Solidarity.

It is the only book by Davies which, only a few years later, required a thorough revision with the fall of communism. But the concept itself, allowing for a clear indication of the ‘roots’ of various attitudes, attachments, and sometimes flaws, drawing the peculiarities of Polish politics and customs from the experience of partitions, wars with Swedes, and struggles with the Teutonic Order, has not ceased to fascinate readers for years.



Janusz TAZBIR

A COUNTRY WITHOUT STAKES

Państwo bez stosów

“Had it not been for the Warsaw Confederation, the stakes in Poland would have been burning for a long time, as in France for the French and in Belgium for the Belgians,’ wrote Lutheran Ulrike Schober five centuries ago, a citizen of Toruń, commenting on the act of the Warsaw Confederation adopted in 1573 by the Sejm of the Republic of Poland, an act which “guaranteed unconditional and eternal peace among all those who differed in their faith.”

This was an unprecedented act in Europe, which was already preparing for the Thirty Years’ War, for the devastation of Germany and the Netherlands, and for the exile of the Huguenots, imprisoning, decapitating, and burning at the stake ‘heretics’, the followers of every faith diverging from the beliefs of the ruler. The phrase ‘country without stakes’ became soon, at least in Poland, one of the ‘winged words’, and although a pedant could prove that at least one stake in the Republic of Poland was ignited (in 1539), the tolerance that the multi-faith and multilingual nobility was able to muster can be a legitimate reason to be proud of.

How did this compromise come about? Was it more as a result of a fine political compromise, republican models of life, so close to the nobility raised on Cicero, or - as many zealous preachers accused Poles of, from Counter-Reformation priests to Calvinist theologians - a certain spiritual “tepidness” and lack of religious zeal, the zeal which led Western European believers to commit atrocities? The doyen of Polish historians, Janusz Tazbir, who died in 2016, did not settle this issue; in turn, he showed the phenomenon of a multi-faith state, which can still be thought of with jealousy nowadays.

Janusz Tazbir
*Państwo bez stosów. Szkice z dziejów
tolerancji w Polsce XVI i XVII w.*
Iskry, Warszawa 2009,
ISBN 9788324401192

Translation rights:
office@bookinstitute.pl



Andrzej Chwalba

GREAT WAR OF POLES

Wielka wojna Polaków

It is not uncommon for researchers of collective memory to think that World War I left a much smaller mark on Polish memories, not only because of the greater time distance that separates us from it, but also because, in some way, it was ‘not ours’: the vast majority of recruits were not sent to Polish independence formations such as the Legions, but to the armies of the partitioning powers, fighting either on distant fronts or, worse still, against each other in fratricidal battles. The empires which had partitioned Poland a hundred years earlier, and which also treated its lands as a battlefield or as a resource and recruitment base in 1914, clashed in a gigantic confrontation.

In this opinion, there is a grain of truth, and, in the “Great War of Poles”, Professor Andrzej Chwalba allowed millions of Polish participants and victims of the war to regain their subjectivity, describing in a witty synthesis all the actions that took place in the years 1914–1918 in the later territory of independent Poland: from mobilisation, the first gunshots, cavalry battles, attacks with the use of poison gas near Sochaczew, or major war operations like the Gorlice-Tarnów Offensive, to ‘everyday life’ away from the front, shortage economy, spy paranoia, or half-hearted political initiatives undertaken by the occupants in the hope of winning over the local population. The war of 1914–1918 turned out to be ‘great’ for Poles not only because of its unexpected fruits, but also because of earlier effort.

Andrzej Chwalba
Wielka Wojna Polaków 1914-1918
PWN Warszawa 2018,
ISBN 9788301197827

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Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN S.A.,
agnieszka.piotrowska@pwn.pl



Włodzimierz SULEJA

JÓZEF PIŁSUDSKI

“Conspirator. Commander. Chief of State. Dictator” – as Włodzimierz Suleja wants, thus naming four parts of his work. But also, one might add, the last truly romantic Polish hero: in the nineteenth century, they were in abundance in all the irredentism movements and uprisings, from the Vistula and Neman to the Seine, as well as in literature. To many of his contemporaries, Józef Piłsudski seemed to be an animated book character, and the story of his “legend”, which was cemented by the aversion of communists who ruled Poland after the war and who wanted to condemn him first to infamy and then to oblivion, is the subject of separate research.

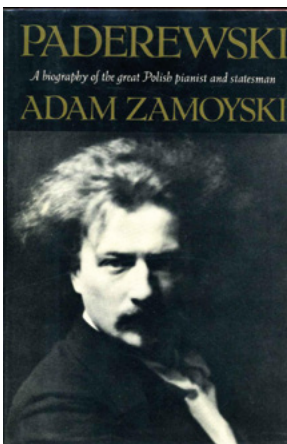
In this biography, however, we deal with the living Piłsudski: a son of a small noble family, a conspirator, and an exile to Siberia, a socialist and underground press publisher, a homebred politician and strategist who took advantage of the only chance for Poland to regain its independence – the conflict of the partitioning states – and subsequently, he confronted the Red Army, advancing on Warsaw and Berlin in 1920.

Horseman and solitary lover. Grey-eyed raconteur and a ruthless player. A supporter of strong-arm régimes, especially at the end of his life. A man who reads poets and quarrels with them, and who chose his favourite poem as his epitaph during his lifetime.

Włodzimierz Suleja
Józef Piłsudski
Ossolineum, Wrocław 2006,
ISBN 9788304047068

Translation rights:
Renata Łukaszewska,
Wydawnictwo Ossolineum,
renata.lukaszewska@ossolineum.pl

Włodzimierz Suleja weaves his biography – the first one that could have been written without censorship – from opulent archives and memoirs, focusing primarily on the game of power that Piłsudski played, dreaming of his unfulfilled goal to the very end: The Republic of Poland of many nations.



Adam ZAMOYSKI

PADEREWSKI

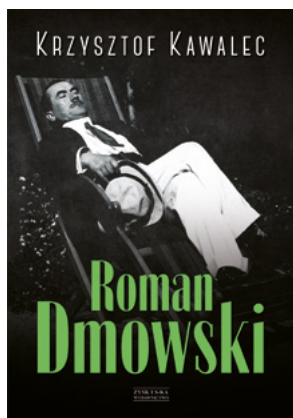
“For those who knew nothing about music, he was a model pianist; for those who knew nothing about Poland, the embodiment of a fiery Pole; and, finally, for those who had no clear idea of his political career, he resembled Moses, the leader of his people.” Adam Zamoyski, a British historian of Polish origin, multiplies similar striking paradoxes with a similar lightness as Ignacy Paderewski, the most popular pianist in the world at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, and twenty years later the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of a reborn Poland, played Beethoven’s Piano Sonata in A-flat major.

Adam Zamoyski,
Paderewski. A Biography,
Collins, London 1982,
ISBN 0002166429

Translation rights:
office@bookinstitute.pl

The historian fulfilled his promise to show the real life of Paderewski-musician and Paderewski-politician. Being one of the first modern stars of the emerging mass culture, the idol of the crowds and the market (after a tour in the United States his name was used to advertise shampoos, steamers, and strychnine tablets!), the musician was also the subject of countless legends and rumours; some of them, let’s add, he himself fuelled, hiding behind them as if it was smokescreen.

Adam Zamoyski, without resorting to sensationalism, explains the history of the two marriages and many affairs of Paderewski and his extraordinary popularity in the USA, which allowed him to raise the “Polish cause” with President Woodrow Wilson, a broker of international order after World War I and the first such determined spokesman for Polish independence. Above all, however, he shows how the virtuoso, the favourite of the crowds, the man wealthy and slightly spoilt by circumstance, achieved influence over the Versailles Peace Conference with his personal charm and connections.



Krzysztof KAWALEC

ROMAN DMOWSKI

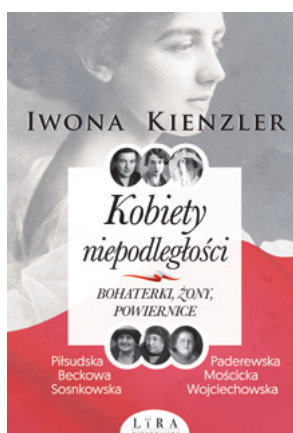
The hero of Krzysztof Kawalec's monumental biography did not become the hero of mass imagination on such a scale as his historical rival, and ultimately "the father of the independence of Poland", Józef Piłsudski. Much stood in the way of this, from political reasons, through Roman Dmowski's personality – a cool introvert, reluctant to make strong gestures and phrases – up to the fact that many of his political followers and successors of his formation included enthusiasts of the most aggressive forms of nationalism.

He himself, not having lived to see the days of World War II and the Holocaust, kept his distance from the romantic dreams of a "brotherhood of peoples". At the same time, as we can see from the perspective of a hundred years, he had a decisive influence on Poland's regaining independence in 1918 for two reasons. First, as a creator of a movement which, in the economically and culturally underdeveloped partitioned lands, made Poles of illiterate peasants, who often declared themselves simply to be "locals", by creating underground educational structures; then, during World War I, as the most serious representative of the "Polish cause" among the politicians of Triple Entente, and finally, as a negotiator of the Treaty of Versailles, guaranteeing Polish independence and defining most of its borders.

Privately, he was a fascinating personality: a traveller, an observer, a polyglot, biologist by profession, privately fascinated with British culture and customs; he constituted a denial of the "nationalists" who set the tone for Europe a generation later. The fact that a man of so many talents did not ultimately lead any of the numerous governments of the Second Republic of Poland makes Dmowski, probably against his objectivity, somewhat a romantic, tragic hero.

Krzysztof Kawalec
Roman Dmowski,
Zysk i S-ka, Poznań 2016,
ISBN 9788377857625

Translation rights: Anna Giryń,
Wydawnictwo Zysk i S-ka,
anna.giryń@zysk.com.pl



Iwona KIENZLER

WOMEN OF INDEPENDENCE: HEROINES, WIVES, CONFIDANTS

Kobiety Niepodległości: Bohaterki, żony, powiernice

The anachronistic vision of the 'creators of independence', moustached and stern, united as one (funnily enough) man, fails to defend itself.

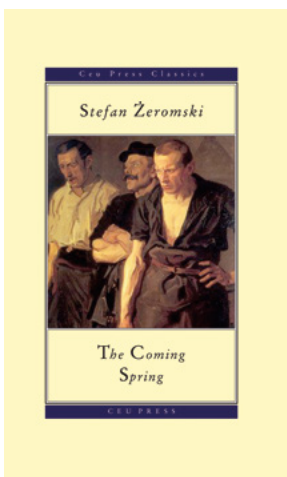
The memory of the generations of conspirators, couriers, assassins, nurses, teachers at rural schools, without whom independence nor its necessary foundation, i.e. national and civil awareness, would not have been possible demands to be recognised. Still underestimated is the very certain contribution of certain women to underground and military activities leading to the restoration of independence: neither the successful smuggling of printing presses, nor the exercises of the Legions, nor the intelligence networks of the Polish Military Organisation, extending from Silesia to Kiev, would have existed had it not been for the heroines. Yet, there is also a truth which sounds slightly droll, slightly cabaret-like, but it's undeniable: of the

Iwona Kienzler
*Kobiety Niepodległości: Bohaterki,
żony, powiernice*
Lira Publishing House,
ISBN 978-83-658-3844-5

Translation rights: Wydawnictwo Lira,
lira@wydawnictwolira.pl

women who support their husbands fulfilling themselves, but also giving their all, in public service.

Iwona Kienzler, a successful populariser of history and biographer, probably has a penchant for this third approach, and, in the half-dozen biographies she has gathered, there are many anecdotes, spice, piquancy and family stories rather than accounts of battle. But it is impossible to hide: both Jadwiga (Beck and Sosnkowska), Michalina Mościcka, and Maria Wojciechowska, as well as the most famous ones: Aleksandra Piłsudska and Helena Paderewska, even though we know them from preserved photographs as dignified wives of prime ministers, presidents, and the Head of State, they had their own time when, slim and hungry, they smuggled secret reports and ammunition in the folds of their clothes. It was only years later that, rustling with velvet, they played the role of *éminences grises* – and it is to Kienzler's merit to aptly combine these two perspectives.



Stefan ŻEROMSKI

THE COMING SPRING

Przedwiośnie

The novel, published nearly a hundred years ago, was in 1924 the first attempt to summarise not only the battles that took place during World War I (and earlier) – there had already been a lot of such militaristic-memoire prose – but also to tell, in the literary vision, about the very experience of independence: what led to it and, perhaps even more importantly, what dilemmas faced those who had lived to that day.

Stefan Żeromski (1864–1925), at the height of his fame at the time, was too experienced a writer to create a ‘typical’ character who would follow a well-established or, at least, predictable path. Cezary Baryka, the main protagonist of the novel, is almost eccentric: a peer of the twentieth century, coming from a family of Poles living deep in Russia, will not experience any battles during World War I. He will only cross the Polish border with a crowd of refugees seeking help from the revolution and civil war in the Russian lands. Also, his later life in the country will be unexpected and non-stereotypical: indeed, he will enlist in the army in the face of the Bolshevik offensive, but he is far from grandeur: as befits a temperamental 20-year-old, he will be most involved in his own ambitions, romances, and idealistic impulses alternating with ennui.

It is thanks to this, however, that Baryka remains a figure with whom one can identify, and the dilemma that he will face on the last pages of the book – the choice between radicalism and creating order – was experienced for a whole generation of his real peers, who grew up with the Second Republic for 20 years.

Stefan Żeromski
The Coming Spring (Przedwiośnie)
Central European University Press,
London 2007,
ISBN 9789637326899

Translation rights:
Central European University Press,
ceupress@press.ceu.edu



Anna Skowrońska
Alfabet Niepodległości
Wydawnictwo Muchomor, 2018
ISBN 9788365650160

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Anna SKOWROŃSKA

ALPHABET OF INDEPENDENCE

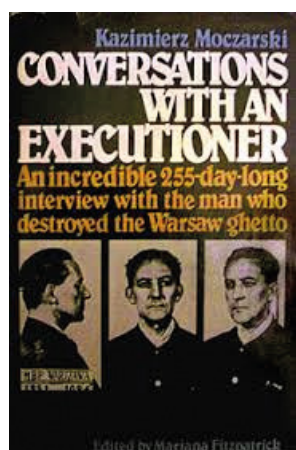
Alfabet niepodległości

How to tell children about history? We know how to do it badly, there are many ways: from a pompous lecture, full of incomprehensible terms and unknown names, which you have to listen to standing up and applauding, to a comic book presentation, in which there is so much colour, exclamations, somersaults, and winking that a young reader focuses unreservedly on the anecdote itself.

Anna Skowrońska found a way to happily avoid such shallows of “history-telling for children”. Her story, fortunately divided naturally into short episodes using the ‘alphabet’ convention, evokes names and battles, but also the most unexpected clashes of facts: for adults, there is (abovementioned) a fascinating biography of Ignacy Paderewski, a pianist and prime minister, whereas children only need to know that one of the ‘fathers of independence’ was not a military man or patron, but a musician...

Similarly, the anecdote about King-Kong, who is still alive in pop culture today, allows mention of the American air squadron fighting against the Bolsheviks on the Polish side, a squadron where Meriam Cooper, the originator and creator of ‘the most famous monkey in Hollywood’, was flying in.

The story can be read as an alphabetical list, or it can be wandered through by dates: a nine-year-old reader will create many memories, and, moreover, his artistic imagination will be enriched: most illustrations (as adults will first notice) discreetly refer to graphic styles that were particularly popular during the years of regaining independence.



Kazimierz Moczarski,
Conversations with an Executioner
(*Rozmowy z katem*),
Prentice Hall 1984,
ISBN 9780131719187

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Kazimierz MOCZARSKI

CONVERSATIONS WITH AN EXECUTIONER

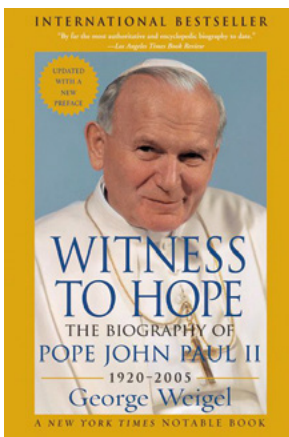
Rozmowy z katem

It is yet another written-accusation, a book depicting the drama of people fighting for independence, whose not only lives but also dignity were at risk of being taken away. After the war, Kazimierz Moczarski – a lawyer, journalist, democrat, and a Polish Underground soldier – arrested by the communist authorities and sentenced to death (the sentence was ultimately not carried out), was imprisoned in one cell (and thus symbolically made equal) with SS-Gruppenführer Jürgen Stroop, a war criminal who, among others, commanded the suppression of the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto and the murder of its last inhabitants.

Even in this situation, Moczarski remained faithful to his vocation: while awaiting his death sentence, he spoke to the criminal in an effort to understand his reasoning, conditions, and limitations, which forced him to commit atrocities. On his own, weakened by scurvy, for months deprived of contact with his closest ones, and expecting execution every morning,

Moczarski conducted a kind of private, one-man investigation into the “roots of totalitarianism” – totalitarianism, let’s add, which he fought against during the war and of which he himself became a victim.

The author of “Conversations with an Executioner” was released from prison, and then acquitted only in 1956, as a result of the liberalisation of the system after the death of Stalin. He could not make any notes in his death cell: he kept the contents of his conversations with Stroop in his memory. It took almost twenty more years for him to muster himself up and write them down.



George WEIGEL

WITNESS TO HOPE

Świadek nadziei

“A Witness to a Century” is a phrase often used to refer to long-lived statesmen, who acquired an exceptional knowledge about events and secrets of the world. This title could certainly also be used for Karol Wojtyła, who headed the Catholic Church for nearly 30 years, leading the faithful out of communism and introducing them into the 21st century. However, George Weigel decided to “break” this formula by talking about a witness to hope and thus showing a different horizon of activity of the Polish priest and philosopher, who was the first non-Italian in several centuries to be elected head of one of the largest religious communities in the world. A few years after his death, the Pope was proclaimed blessed and then a saint of the Church, which must have complicated the task for the biographer: saints are written about easily only if it is done with the intention of praising them to the skies, or vice versa, with their ‘demystification’ in mind.

Instead, Weigel chose the tools of a historian, who has to draw a complex “genealogy” of the future pope: an early orphaned boy from a small town, strongly rooted in the culture of Polish Romanticism, growing up during the German occupation and the Holocaust, receiving ordination on the eve of the Red Army entering Polish territory. And yet, this is only the beginning of the journey of a man who, from a village parish, through to a bishop’s throne, from which he fought for a “reign of souls” with communists, came to the Vatican, and, with his journeys, encyclicals, and sermons, he influenced the fate of the world, from communist China to Latin America.

George Weigel
Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II
HarperCollins Publishers 2005,
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Adam Cyra
Rotmistrz Pilecki.
Ochotnik do Auschwitz
Wydawnictwo RM,
ISBN 9788377732007

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Adam CYRA

THE AUSCHWITZ VOLUNTEER

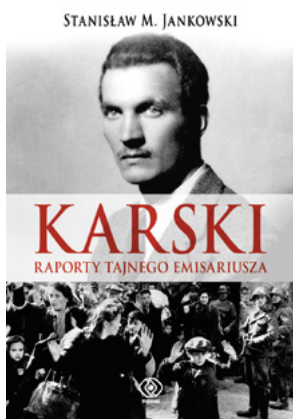
Ochotnik do Auschwitz

Thousands of accounts of prisoners of German concentration camps, including Auschwitz, have survived; however, one can count on one hand those who went there voluntarily. One of them was Witold Pilecki, a pre-war officer of the Polish Army and a member of the anti-Nazi underground, who was sent to Auschwitz in September 1940 and survived there for nearly three years, creating the so-called camp underground, gathering information and preparing reports for the Polish underground for independence. They were then passed on to the West, and they constituted one of the first reliable sources of information on the functioning of death camps and the Holocaust taking place there.

Threatened with being revealed, Pilecki managed to escape from the camp and take part in the Warsaw Uprising. His wartime merits made him eligible for the highest post-war honours; instead of seeking them though, being an opponent of Poland's post-war loss of sovereignty, faithful to the government in exile in London, he engaged in intelligence activities against the new authorities.

Arrested in 1947 and severely tortured during the investigation, he was sentenced to death and killed a year later. His post war life was only discovered after Poland had regained its independence in 1989.

Because of his voluntary imprisonment in the death camp, he remains the embodiment of utmost courage for many; for others, who remember his struggle with Nazism and communism, which ended with his death, he is a symbol of the bitter fate of Poland after World War II. The biography by Adam Cyra is the first to recreate his fate in such detail.



Stanisław M. Jankowski
Karski. Raporty tajnego emisariusza
Rebis,
ISBN 9788375103953

Translation rights: Paweł Laskowicz,
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Stanisław M. JANKOWSKI

KARSKI – THE SECRET EMISSARY REPORTS

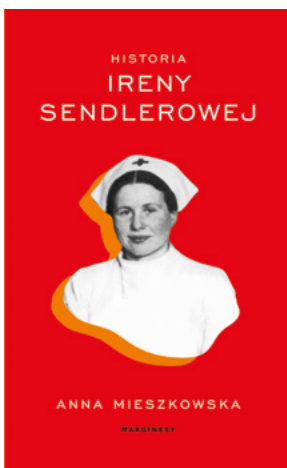
Karski – raporty tajnego emisariusza

The protagonist of this book was born as Jan Koziulewski, but one of his wartime pseudonyms grew with him to such an extent that it became his second name. A law graduate, a young diplomat, and an officer, taken prisoner by the Soviets after they had entered Poland in September 1939, after escaping from the POW camp, he became completely involved in the anti-Hitler conspiracy. He travelled through Europe several times as a courier of the Polish Underground State to London; detained during one of such expeditions by the Gestapo, he cut his veins in order not to betray anyone during the interrogations; however, he was rescued and then reclaimed by the Polish underground.

He found himself once again behind barbed wire, entering, in disguise, the area of the subsidiary of the Izbica death camp. He landed there, just like he

did in the Warsaw ghetto, preparing, on behalf of the Polish government in exile, a report on the Shoah started by the Germans. He ended up in London in the autumn of 1942 with these materials, on the basis of which the first report on the Holocaust was prepared. Because of his account, Karski also appeared before President F.D. Roosevelt, calling for more decisive action to be taken by the Allies.

He also stood before dozens of other listeners, passing on information (often contradictory) to the activists of various Polish pre-war parties operating in the underground, the leaders of the underground Home Army, and social activists. The whole process of preparing reports and transporting them throughout Europe is a phenomenon of both conspiracy and mnemonics.



Anna MIESZKOWSKA

THE TRUE STORY OF IRENA SENDLER

Prawdziwa historia Ireny Sendlerowej

Historians and biographers who care about success usually look for unknown heroes. Irena Sendler's paradox is that her heroism has always been known, at least among researchers, and yet the mobilisation to describe the life and choices of the woman who led the children's section of "Żegota", the deeply underground Polish Council to Aid Jews during the Holocaust, took place only half a century after the war.

Anna Mieszkowska's book is one of the first testimonies of Sendler's heroism, written on the basis of several years of talks with the activist and educator, who died only in 2008. Even people accustomed to modesty are amazed by how humbly the pre-war socialist described her mission, persistently refusing to accept any 'heroic narrative' as her own. Irena Sendler simply describes actions: simple, the simplest, requiring the greatest courage. She herself led several dozen Jewish children out of the Warsaw ghetto, at the same time organising care for hundreds of others, coordinating the conspiracy, which did not use dynamite nor firearms, but fake identity cards, food, and medicines. The participation in it, however, cost the lives of several of Sendler's closest collaborators: she herself, arrested by the Germans, was bought out of their hands at the last minute.

Irena Mieszkowska is told the story by an ailing 90 year old woman. Her story is complemented by the accounts of "the children of the Holocaust", her pupils.

Anna Mieszkowska
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