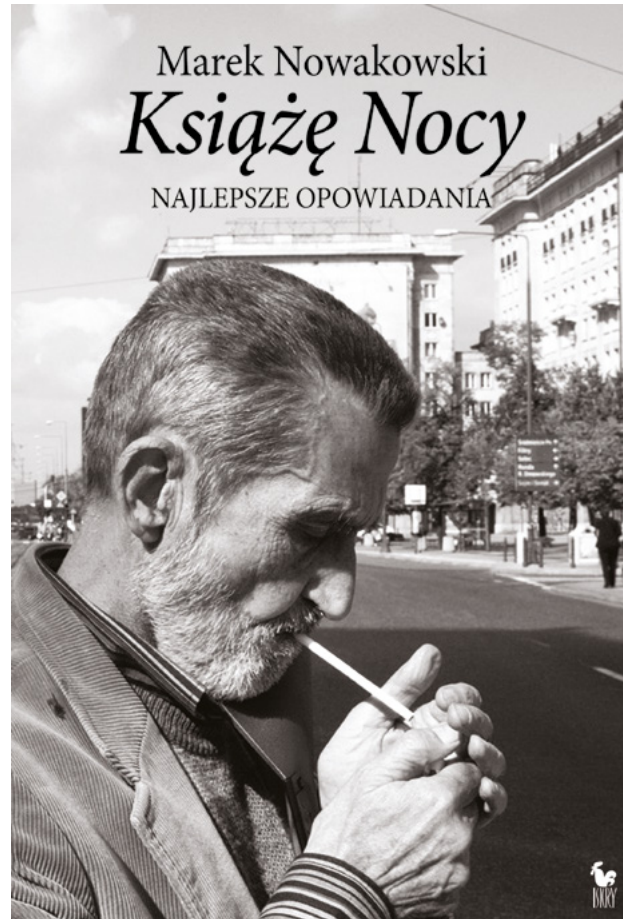


Prince of the Night. The Best Short Stories

Beneath the surface
of everyday life



THE MASTER OF SHORT FORMS

The prose writer Marek Nowakowski, who died in 2014, is today a classic of Polish literature, and his stories are literary paintings that encompass his country's reality from the late 1950s to very recent times. It is enough to recall that Marek Nowakowski is the author of about 500 stories published in more than 60 books. This huge legacy is the result of a bold response to everyday life and a persistent, day-by-day recording of images that fascinate, frighten and, above all, inspire readers of this prose to reach deep beneath the surface of seemingly everyday life, discovering its hidden and encrypted meanings. The book contains the best stories of Marek Nowakowski arranged in chronological order, starting with his feted debut *Square* from 1957. We also find here classic prose, such as *Benek the Florist*, *Where is the Road to Walne?*, and *Wedding Again!* as well as some great stories from the acclaimed *Report on Martial Law*, translated into many languages and widely commented on in the world literary press in

its time. The dark 1980s are symbolised by *Death and Two Days with an Angel*. It was during this period that the writer was arrested and accused of "slandering the regime". After 1989, Marek Nowakowski assiduously described the beginnings of Polish capitalism, as evidenced, for example, in the stories *Edek Gets the Upper Hand* and *Czarna and Mata* from the selection. It is impossible to raise here all the elements that can be found in this anthology of more than a thousand pages. But one thing has to be said: it is the tip of the iceberg, after having become acquainted with it, one can delve into this unique work and find such pages to which one will often come back.

Wojciech Chmielewski, translated by Katarzyna Popowicz

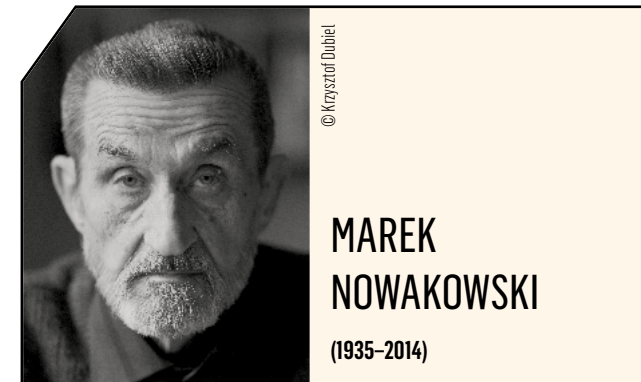
Our world was small but seemed enormous. The daily local EKD train ferried us from the distant outskirts through fields and past low wooden buildings to the town centre. We were running away from our homes, from our parents' complaining, from school obligations, and from the quietness and relentless order of our district – unchanged for generations – where people called the man who emptied the septic tank 'goldman', and where that nickname was passed like a relay baton from the older boys to the younger. We were running from voices announcing, "Any old iron" or "Pots to mend", and our eyes no longer wanted to look constantly at that same old view from the window. And we thought we could really run away. Sometimes, without shoes or clothes, or shut up at home by my mother, I would close my eyes and all sorts of amazing worlds would appear. The intensifying rattle of wheels on tracks aroused my imagination to take action. Family connections prevailed on our route. We knew the guards, they knew us and occasionally they also let us travel without tickets. We passed Wiktoryn, Rapp's bakery, the roadside cross and the clay pits of Szczęśliwice. And thus, after twenty minutes, we reached the town centre.

The town centre consisted of a few surviving tenement houses sticking up amongst ruins and piles of brick. Trams and horse-drawn carriages, the old hotel decorated with Art Nouveau reliefs, open markets and stalls, where commercial life teemed, shops, workshops, and small restaurants. Here in the town centre it seemed to us that we had reached the nucleus of the great big world. And after alighting from our blue and yellow train we tirelessly trod those streets, endlessly hoping for something, endlessly expecting something. Night was the best time. It veiled everything in thickening darkness, there were few streetlights at that time, and every gateway, every pile of rubble grew enormous, enhancing that portentous mood of mystery. Cries, whispers, and wheezes drifted from the ruins, and we – trembling in excitement – imagined dramas full of danger and pathos. The Prince of the Night stopped us on a night like that.

"My stable is in danger," he announced, outraged. Zbyszek Młotek and I were at his beck and call. The Prince of Night had a hawklike nose, a grey mop of hair, and wore richly patterned cravats. He peppered his speech with foreign words and was familiar with the connexions obtaining in many of Europe's prisons. His appearance was that of a many-coloured bird. The young militiamen who had come straight from the countryside to keep order in the town stared at him mutely. One batty old woman who used to frequent the Cinderella bar was unendingly astonished by him: "Where could such a flower have sprung up from?" So he was different. And that was actually enough for us. (...)

Zbyszek Młotek's ribs were fused together and he claimed he could take any punch. While I had nothing. A skinny, snot-nosed kid with unruly, sticking-out hair, who wasn't much good at fighting either. And I so wanted something to happen! (...) Zbyszek Młotek and I unanimously agreed that our former lives had been flat and dull. Which is why when the Prince of Night appeared on the scene, everything immediately whirled around like a merry-go-round.

Excerpt translated by David French



Książę Nocy. Najlepsze opowiadania
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Short story collections (selection)

Benek Kwiciarz, 1961
Silna gorączka, 1963
Zapis, 1965
Śmierć żółwia, 1973
Wesele raz jeszcze, 1974
Chłopak z gołębiem na głowie, 1979
Raport o stanie wojennym (1982-1984) [The Canary and Other Tales of Martial Law], 1990
Opowiadania uliczne, 2002
Dziennik podróży w przeszłość, 2014
Marek Nowakowski's work includes several novels, non-fiction books, and screenplays as well. It has been adapted into films and stage plays.

Foreign language translations

USA, UK, Germany, France, Netherlands, Serbia
Sweden, Norway, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Azerbaijan, Japan, Vietnam – in anthologies

Selected awards

Kościelski Foundation Award (1968)
Freedom Award of the French Pen Club (1983)
Władysław Reymont Literary Award (2002)
Nike Literary Award (2002) – nomination
Literary Award of the Capital City of Warsaw (2010)