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# Books from Poland 2017

BOOKS FROM POLAND 2017

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# Dear Readers,

The catalogue *Books from Poland* 2017 is a window display of Polish literature. It presents the most important and interesting books that have appeared or gained recognition recently in Poland.

We created this year's catalogue together with over a dozen critics and scholars of literature, trying to show the thematic, genre, and cultural wealth of Polish literature. We also wanted to present different sensibilities and poetics, being guided in our selections mainly by the work's artistic and intellectual quality.

The catalogue is extensive because the genre spectrum of Polish literature is extremely broad; it is diverse, because both Polish authors and their works are diverse; and the catalogue is also original, because Polish culture is original and extraordinary.

In *Books from Poland 2017* you will find works by famous and recognized authors. In addition, authors who have not yet been promoted, though they've certainly deserved it, are also featured. This applies both to the younger generation as well as to mature and experienced authors.

Polish critics and readers alike agree that science fiction is definitely flourishing in Poland. This is why we include Jarosław Grzędowicz and Robert M. Wegner, who are becoming worthy successors of the classics of the genre: Stanisław Lem and Andrzej Sapkowski.

For many years, the distinguishing feature of Polish literature has been the essay—the genre that's unique as much as it is extremely important for the quality of public debate. That is why we recommend that you take note of the book by Paweł Lisicki, who writes in an uncompromising way about the jihad problem facing contemporary Europe; the book by Marta Kwaśnicka, showing the unusual format of the personality of the medieval Polish Queen Jadwiga, one of the women who contributed to the creation of medieval Europe on an equal footing with their male counterparts; or the book by Tomasz Terlikowski, which tells the story of the Franciscan martyr of Auschwitz, St. Maximilian Kolbe, who voluntarily gave his life for another prisoner.

However, most of the catalogue is devoted to the latest Polish prose. Szczepan Twardoch, Jakub Małecki, and Jakub Żulczyk are three novelists of the younger generation who have conquered the hearts of readers and the analytical minds of literary critics. Certainly, this group must also include Elżbieta Cherezińska, the most popular Polish historical writer today, and Wojciech Chmielewski.

We also recommend the work of two mature authors: Bronisław Wildstein (*Dom wybranych* [*House of the Chosen*]) and Stanisław Aleksander Nowak, whose late debut, a family saga, *Galicyanie* [*The Galicians*], refers to the tradition of the great epic works of Polish literature, whose authors create their own original language for the needs of the story.

In *Books from Poland 2017* we present three prominent and award-winning poets: Bronka Nowicka, Jan Polkowski, and Wojciech Wencel. Another genre is represented by Jarosław Jakubowski's collection of plays (*Prawda i inne dramaty* [*The Truth and Other Dramas*]. We also recommend a crime story by Wojciech Chmielarz, who is becoming more and more popular in Poland. In addition we have a collection of aphoristic reflections by Bishop Grzegorz Ryś, a personal story about Nepal by Natasza Goerke, and Florian Czarnyszewicz's *Nadberezyńcy* [*People of the Berezyna*], which earned recognition from Czesław Miłosz. Polish reportage, which has received special acclaim throughout Europe, is represented by Marcin Mamoń (a journalist, restless spirit, uncompromising truth-seeker, hostage of the ISIS terrorists), while Magdalena Kozieł-Nowak, Jona Jung and Roksana Jędrzejewska-Wróbel represent children's literature that has won awards around the world.

Here is what, in our opinion, is the best of what Polish literature has to offer today, though we are also aware of the modesty of this selection. Nonetheless, it's a reflection of Poland's rich past, its vibrant present pulsating with many hues, and its spirituality offering promise for the future. Polish literature is worth reading, translating, and publishing.

Dariusz Jaworski, Director of the Book Institute

Professor Krzysztof Koehler, Deputy Director of the Book Institute

Translated by Piotr Florczyk

One of the most popular Polish fantasy writers, with close to half a million copies of his books sold.

*A full-blooded novel.*

Michał Wasilewski, *bestiariusz.pl*

# Jarosław Grzędowicz

(born 1965) – is one of the most popular Polish fantasy writers. His most important work is the four-volume saga *Pan Lodowego Ogrodu* [*Master of the Ice Garden*], whose sales have surpassed 300,000 copies. It's a story in the style of classic science-fiction, whose protagonist is on the hunt for some scientists who've disappeared from a research station on an alien planet. He has been nominated for numerous awards and received the most prestigious award in Polish fantasy literature: the Janusz Zajdel Award.

© Fabryka Słów

## HEL 3

Polish fantasy in the nineteen-eighties was the domain of writers such as: Janusz Zajdel, Rafał Ziemkiewicz, Maciej Parowski and Tomasz Kołodziejczak. Although Jarosław Grzędowicz belongs to that generation of authors and wrote at that time, he only gained popularity almost 20 years later. His last novel *Hel 3* is something of an homage to that brand of classic fantasy. At the same time, he draws on contemporary motifs, but adapts them. In this way, classic fantasy interacts with the present day.

A little background: the nineteen-eighties was a very difficult period in Poland as the Polish People's Republic crumbled. According to many experts that period was – owing to its unconcealed cynicism and ruthlessness – the worst phase of the communist system following the Stalinist Era. It was precisely in that period of hopelessness – following the brief carnival of Solidarity – that modern Polish fantasy was born: socially engaged but not naive. It drew on the subject of space in order to talk about the mundaneness of totalitarianism. In that literary atmosphere, a group of young authors inspired by the works of Janusz Zajdel decided to take on reality with the help of fantasy. One of those authors was the young Grzędowicz.

Although without doubt talented, he wasn't a force in the wider consciousness at that time. Only after the decade was over and after achieving the title of a master of horror writing, did Grzędowicz write the massively popular *Master of the Ice Garden* – a powerful novel ranging across four volumes. After a considerable break, Grzędowicz returned to writing with *Hel 3*. On the one hand, it's a novel addressing contemporary issues, phobias and anxieties, and on the other it's written in the style of Grzędowicz's contemporaries from the eighties. Is that a criticism? No, more an indication that as the saying says – a lot had to change for everything to stay as it was.

*Hel 3* is the story of Norbert. A cynical "eventer" – the equivalent of a contemporary YouTuber – who takes a trip around a world that could be called post-mod-

ern. History has ended, and instead of it we have an epoch of "sustainable development", i.e. stagnation. The cult of healthy living has turned into a totalitarian regime controlling the dietary habits of its citizens. The Internet has replaced journalism. Public opinion doesn't exist, and instead of it we have a "many-eyed beast" craving simple entertainment. In this world, however, in spite of the apparent stagnation, a struggle for power and natural resources is still being waged behind the scenes. This invisible war is gradually unveiled by the protagonist – first as an observer, and later as an active participant in events.

Grzędowicz, though, doesn't flirt with cheap social commentary, his fantasy writing is more profound. On the one hand, it's an homage paid to classic, Zajdellian sociological fantasy, and on the other a novel driven by a very modern dynamic and discussing contemporary issues. It could be said that it's the last of the great sociological novels of the late eighties. But written now. And as important as those earlier works.

Arkady Saulski
Translated by David French


JAROSŁAW GRZĘDOWICZ
HEL 3
FABRYKA SŁÓW
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RAGANA AGENCJA LITERACKA I TŁUMACZEŃ LITERACKICH

He was only unconscious for a few seconds, or even less. It was a short blackout, like before a commercial break. He fell back on the scorching day of Dubai City, in a clamour of bangs and screams, muffled as though his ears were full of jelly.

Someone was dragging him by the collar, fast and roughly. He saw his own shoes sliding over the pavement, his shirt was cutting into his neck.

He saw a shape swathed in a loose blackness, crumpled like discarded clothing, but crawling sluggishly along with the senseless movement of a wind-up mechanism, wrapped around its head was a soaking wet turban, which flies were already settling on, a gap where a single goggling eye – flooded by scarlet blood as sticky as syrup – was sparkling. The swarthy arms, its wrists criss-crossed with henna stripes, the fingers bent and with broken nails, leaving rust-coloured streaks on the concrete.

And a black, triangular-bladed knife with an opening in it, shining on the pavement like a splinter of the moon.

And that movement, slower and slower, but dogged, as though moved by the last spurt of energy from an almost totally unwound spring. The stench of blood, rose water and shit.

'Stand up! I'll help you!' the one who was dragging Norbert barked at him just over his head. A stifled, soft voice. Speaking Polish.

He rose obediently on his wobbly legs, and the other threw his arm over his back, his other hand seizing him by the belt and dragging him more quickly. Others were running around him. He saw shapes in fluttering red and blue abayas, black burqas, hiking trousers with bulging pockets on the thighs, he heard the thudding of heavy boots.

He saw guns. Lots of guns. Stubby, massive carbines, sight rails on barrels adorned with various kinds of electronic marvels, everything solid, battered and clearly well-used. Blood on khaki shirts, drawn, concentrated faces, the plastic growths of communicators stuck onto their temples or curled around their ears. The acrid, metallic smell of cordite and the heavy, musky odour of sweat. Eau de cologne and grease.

The ringing in his ears slowly subsided, ushering in the electronical lament of dozens of sirens and the clatter and high-pitched whistle of quadropter turbines.

Everything was mixed up and whirled like the image in an insane kaleidoscope. Jerky, almost strobe-like frames like in a music video. Flashes and patches of shadow, sounds, smells, a cocktail of different kinds of stench. The stamping of boots, the whine of hydrogen turbines.

Four-wheel drive microbuses hurtled into the small square, manoeuvring by the fountain, grey, covered dully in rusty, laterite dust, almost windowless, with bizarre, obliquely bent hulls like coffins on wheels. Sliding doors clattered.

'Get a move on! Get a move on! Move!'

'The hatewagon up front! Where are the body collectors?'

'Finishing their work!'

'Into no. 3! After them! Hosts get to no. 2!'

'What about him?' said the one with the big shaved head and a tattoo on the back of his neck, the one that had been pulling Norbert.

'Evacuate! In number two!'

'That wasn't in the fucking plan!'

'What's going on?! Move!'

'That's an order!'

The bus doors slid open and several hands emerged, seized Norbert by the arms and shirt and hauled him inside. The interior of the vehicle seemed more sheltered, shielded from the chaos by its tinted windows, full of the smell of hot plastic, varnished leather, and in the background the metallic odour of air-conditioning and a trace of tobacco smoke, mixed with a faint chemical smell of artificial pine.

The gunfire fell silent, every now and again a single shot regularly sounded.

(...)

Norbert gazed on it all dumbstruck, with the strange feeling that he'd got in somewhere without a ticket, gate-crashed somebody else's wedding or something.

'Tiger, what about this castaway?' a voice asked. 'Why are we taking him?'

'Because he's my homeboy, for fuck's sake,' replied Tiger in embarrassment from the door. 'Should I leave the twat there to be shot?'

'What the hell was he doing there? He's not in the contract. I'm not responsible for him.'

'Can't you do something good now and again? Simply to please the angels? Hey, hiker! Who are you? You hurt?'

'Erm . . .' said Norbert, not knowing exactly where to start. 'I'm a journalist . . . Norbert Roliński . . . I'm an . . . independent journalist . . .'

'What? What's he on about? Independent journalist? What the hell? Independent from what?'

'From the Net. He doesn't work for a station, he just uploads clips onto the Network and hopes for views. He's an Eventer. Fuck me! He's filming!'

'What?'

'He's been filming the whole time! He has an omniphone on his belt and it's running! He's filming us, hosts, the vehicle, everything! Fuck me, wave to your auntie, Tiger! You'll be on TV! A star of the MegaNet!'

Translated by David French

*North-South* has been named fantasy book of the year in Russia.

*Globally speaking, one of the best contemporary fantasy series. (...) Wegner should also captivate anyone who's fallen in love with George R. R. Martin's writing atfter watching HBO's blockbuster...*

Marcin Zwierzchowski, *Polityka*


© Jan Kosik

# Robert M. Wegner

Fantasy writer, winner of awards not just in Poland (where he's a five-time holder of the Janusz Zajdel Award and has twice been awarded the Sphynx), but also abroad. He was selected as the most promising young writer by the European Science Fiction Society (ESFS) during Eurocon 2014, and one of his novels was selected as Fantasy Book of the Year in Russia in 2017. Most of his awards have gone to the compelling series *Opowieści z meekhańskiego pogranicza* [*Tales from the Meekhan Borderlands*], which critics have hailed the successor to Andrzej Sapkowski's *Witcher* saga.

## THE MEMORY OF ALL WORDS

The Meekhanian Empire. A world modelled on ancient empires, where magic and various races, cultures and religions interact, and where ancestral codes of behaviour and traditions are occasionally more important than feelings or intellect, and the gods play dice over human fates. A world where the concepts of honour and brotherhood clash with shame and treachery, and the nature of good and evil is not always clear-cut.

When Deana – a warrior of the Issaram tribe from the south, whose members cover their faces from strangers – fights a duel with a female member of a neighbouring family and mortally wounds her, she faces the necessity of marrying a man from the hated family. The only solution is to leave the *afraagra* (the settlement where she was born) and set off into the world. Travelling across the Travahen desert, she rescues a prince and his friend from the hands of bandits. They trek to White Konoweryn, the city of the Fire Master, which is plunged in familial infighting and is battling a slave rebellion. The protagonist didn't expect to be forced to take up the most difficult battle – a battle with herself, her feelings and the rules of behaviour inherited from her ancestors and instilled into her since childhood.

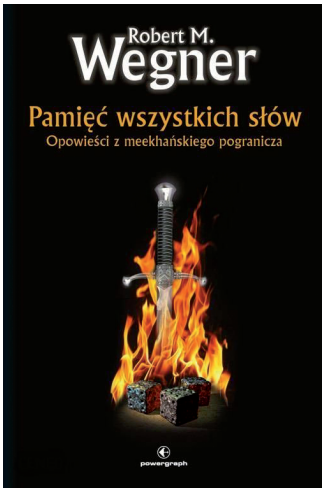
On the other, western side of the Empire on the island of Amoneria, the former thief Altsin dons a habit belonging to the order of the Friars of Eternal Mercy. In his hermit's life, he is searching for escape from what dwells inside him, namely part of the soul of Reagwyr, the Lord of Battles – a cruel, insane and furious god, who plans to use Altsin's body for his own ends. The only person who can help the thief to free himself from this uninvited guest is a witch belonging to the tribe of Seehijians. This tribe rules almost all of Amoneria, is isolated from the rest of the world, devoted to its tribal deity Oum and kills any strangers setting foot on their territory.

Travelling between the world of people and that of the gods is the third protagonist – the mysterious, reckless and unpredictable Little Kana and her com-

panions: the Issarian warrior Yatech, Deana's brother, who's been banished by his family; and the taciturn knifer, Iavva.

Robert M. Wegner's *Pamięć wszystkich słów. Opowieści z meekhańskiego pogranicza* [*The Memory of all Words. Tales from the Meekhan Borderlands*] is classic, universal fantasy, exploiting elements of the culture, beliefs and traditions of ancient peoples, extending to primitive myths and the roots of civilisation. It's an intricately constructed world, thought through in minute detail. Some of the protagonists and stories will be familiar to readers from the author's earlier works *(The Memory of all Words* is the fourth part of the series). The ease with which the author weaves them into the narrative allows readers to treat each volume as a free-standing novel. In Wegner's prose, the reality of people and gods interpenetrate each other and complement each other; human beings are subject to the will of higher entities, the power of the gods over them isn't absolute. People's determination and courage can mean that the fates both of individuals and entire societies unfold quite differently than might be expected. Robert M. Wegner's writing is compared – and rightly so – to such classic global fantasy as the books of Andrzej Sapkowski and George R. R. Martin.

Katarzyna Wójcik
Translated by David French




ROBERT M. WEGNER
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She shifted her gaze to the wall of the tent. The silk, embroidered with silver and gold thread, billowed gently, quite as though surrounded by a shimmering light. One wall emanated more light, so the sun must have been on that side, but Deana was unable to tell if it was morning or afternoon. Around her pallet lay carpets the value of which she couldn't have even estimated. She'd occasionally seen objects like that in the homes of the wealthiest families of the tribe, but in comparison with what was now lying on the ground . . .

The wealth not only stabbed her eyes, but tried to gouge them out.

'It's the prince's personal tent,' the man dressed in gold and white nodded his head, betraying his abilities to mind-read. 'One of several. You are a great hero, you saved the life of the heir to the throne, the Flame of the South, the Breath of Agar, and so and so forth.'

He waved a hand. 'Never mind.'

'Did you look for us?

'We, and half of the tribes from the northern desert. Issars, Kuwiks, Mavvi warriors, the rest of that wandering rabble too. You can't have thought that the abduction of the prince of White Konoweryn could go unnoticed? The bounty that was set for the rescue of Laweneres would have filled with gold the treasure chest of a small state. The mages hopped from oasis to oasis, carrying news and magically sniffing out wherever they could, entire armies of nomads set off in search, and how

many entirely innocent bandits were slaughtered as a result . . . I won't waste my breath. The real gang, part of its force, was broken up just five days before your rescue, but when the captives when interrogated—' a strange tic contorted his face, '—knew almost nothing. With the exception of one who had heard something by chance about the Corpse's Finger. We found you thanks to the fire, which only confirmed us in our conviction that the prince is the true Chosen One.'

She recalled the fire roaring outside the entrance to the cave.

'They started a fire.'

'Naturally. In the desert where there's nothing but rocks and stones.'

'There were lots of . . .'

He crossed a finger across his lips, as though sewing them shut with twine.

'Shhh . . . the prince doesn't need some scrub or some such to start a fire. He is the very Fire, Light and Flame of Agar. And that's the story we will take to Konoweryn, for such has ordered Evikiat, the Grand Kohir of the Court. Remember – or better yet forget – what you have seen and say you were unconscious and recall nothing, though near your hiding place was nothing but stones and bare rock. Thus the prince summoned the power of the Lord of Fire flowing in his veins and set them alight. Thanks to that we found you, for at night the fire was visible for many a mile.'

'Why the lie?'

'For political reasons, of course. And for religion, the faith of simple folk, and to sustain the faith of all the Families of the War. So that no one will dare to question his rights. His rights to anything.'

The world around her whirled slightly, and the man nodded his head as though fully aware, and moreover had been expecting something of that kind.

'You are to rest, drink much and move around little. We shall be spending the next three days in the oasis, the last before the mountains. The people and animals must rest, for many days' march through the desert still await us.'

'Mountains?'

'The Magarhs. The Wall of the Far South, beyond which lies White Konoweryn. The most beautiful city in the world, in my opinion.'

She had expected that, but the confirmation of her suspicions was still like being struck in the head with a mace. So far . . . She was so far from home, at the other end of the Travahen desert, hundreds of miles from her homeland. And everything had seemed so simple when she was leaving the afraagra. Go on a pilgrimage, think over her life and search somewhere for a place for herself, which ought not to have been difficult since every afraagra would take in a sword master. She ought to have had the dreams of a decent woman of the mountains: the desire to find a husband, bear him a dozen children, teach them to fight and be a good Issaram, then die at home, surrounded by a flock of grandchildren and great grandchildren, or on the battlefield, surrounded by a mound of dead foes.

Instead of that she was lying as weak as a new-born lamb on a fortune woven from silk and wool, in the company of a man who had just risen and clearly intended to abandon her.

'What actually is your name?'

'Suchi.' He stopped with his hand parting the flap of the tent.

'Suchi?'

'Suchi,' he confirmed.

She recalled him walking alongside the wagon and smearing something stinking onto her face.

'Was it you who treated me?'

'I kept you alive. Physicians treat the ill.'

'What are you?'

'The prince's poisoner.' He winked at her mockingly.

'Poisoner?'

His smile cut his face in half.

'We do what doctors do, just faster and without trying to hide it.'

He walked out.

Translated by David French

One of the most popular Polish authors:
*Morfina* [*Morphine*]: 85,000 copies sold
*Drach*: 50,000 copies sold
*Król* [*The King*]: 100,000 copies sold,
Canal Plus preparing a screen adaptation

*It is hard to put Szczepan Twardoch's* The King *back on the shelf and pretend you've only read a great novel.* The King *turns you inside-out and digs deep into your conscience.*

Krzysztof Varga, *Gazeta Wyborcza*

The King *is a plunge into a river of evil right at the foot of a waterfall. Twardoch's new novel is a heck of a book.*

Marcin Fijołek, *wPolityce.pl*

© Zuza Krajewska

# Szczepan Twardoch

(born 1979) – one of the most popular, respected, and most award-winning Polish authors. His best-selling novel *Morphine* (2012) received the Paszport Polityki Prize, the Wawrzyn Śląski prize, the Nike Reader's Choice Award, and others. His equally popular novel *Drach* (2014) was awarded the Kościelski Prize and the German Brücke Berlin Prize. Despite his young age he has an impressive output (including 8 novels, 3 short story collections, books of essays and journals). Work is underway on a screen version of *Morphine*, and *The King* has been optioned by Canal+.

Szczepan Twardoch is an author whose stock is running high. In just under five years he has advanced from being an unknown, if hard-working author to the position of a virtual star. Since the autumn of 2012 – when his breakthrough novel, *Morphine*, was released – each new book under his name has sold superbly, increased his fame, and even – unusually for today – become the subject of ideological and aesthetic debates. His recognition as an artist goes hand-in-hand with a wider popularity beyond the field of literature, hence some see in him a new type of success: a fashionable author, featured in colour magazines, but at the same time a writer appreciated by literary critics and respected by the reading public.

It is important to note *Morphine* was Szczepan Twardoch's ninth book (from 2005-2011 he published five novels and three collections of short stories). He therefore had walked a long and winding road before his writing came to be recognised as a superb example of contemporary Polish prose. He tried his hand at historical fantasy, political thrillers, and action novels, jumping from one theme, style, or era to another. His earlier writing experiences can therefore be characterised as a search for an appropriately wide-ranging form maximally attractive to today's readership.

Twardoch's aim is to get a synthesis of social problems, more or less the same as those he tackles in *Morphine*, interweaving historical and national issues with questions about masculinity and individual morals. The historical mask he uses is wonderfully effective – the

story, not including flashbacks, is set in the first month of the Nazi occupation of Warsaw. Yet Morphine is neither historical fiction in the traditional sense nor so-called alternative history. The conditions it describes (which, incidentally, are perfectly reconstructed) serve to present the protagonist in an extreme situation and to force him to choose an identity: he is the son of a German aristocrat and a Polonised Silesian, and at the start of the novel, he is a typical member of the Warsaw intelligentsia and a second lieutenant, just returned from fighting against the German invasion of 1939.

Twardoch's next book, *Drach* (2014), combines the best of an epic history of Upper Silesia, focusing particularly on the last hundred years of that region, with the virtues of a family saga. The ambitions typical of mature modernist literature are also on display: *Drach* deals with the insignificance and haphazard nature of human fate and the power the very land we live on exercises over us. Though Twardoch always crafts an attractive plot, he also makes his readers work hard – he uses simultaneous narration, mixed chronology, dialogue in two languages (Polish and German) and his beloved dialect (Silesian), without sprinkling footnotes around.

Finally, in his most recent novel, *The King* (2016), Twardoch makes the most of the conventions of popular prose – of adventure-thriller, gangster, or retro crime novels – with panache and entirely intentionally. The novel takes place in Warsaw in 1937. Its main story portrays the history of a Jewish boxer and eccentric gangster, the right-hand-man of the King of that era's underworld, though he aspires to taking power himself. Twardoch sticks to his literary guns; here too, he presents a substantial number of social issues, covering such areas as the political conflicts of the era and laying out the diverse social landscape.

In all three novels mentioned here, Twardoch demonstrates a consistent approach which has brought him genuine appreciation: fluency in creating effective plots and presenting them skilfully and dynamically, combined with ambitions that surpass mere entertainment. It is rare to talk about real literature with mainstream appeal. Szczepan Twardoch has become an incomparable master of this type of prose, probably the best in Poland.

Dariusz Nowacki
Translated by Sean Gasper Bye

# THE KING

The central plotline of the novel *The King* takes place in Warsaw in 1937. In the city's poor, predominantly Jewish neighbourhoods, power is cruelly wielded by Jan "the Godfather" Kaplica, king of the criminal underworld and the most important gangster in the city. His right-hand-man, bodyguard and enforcer extorting protection money from shopkeepers and restaurant owners, is Jakub Szapiro, a heavyweight champion boxer. Szczepan Twardoch centres his novel on the story of this Jewish boxer, who after the Godfather's death becomes the titular King of Warsaw's gangsters. This tale – as any of Twardoch's readers would expect – has been written with no small amount of bravado, built on a number vital twists and turns in the action, which come together to make this an attractive read.

Twardoch has made a point of exploiting to their utmost the formats and structures of adventure and action novels, ballads of urban criminals, retro crime novels, and political thrillers about conspiracies planned at the highest levels of power. This last, somewhat surprising link comes from the fact that the gangsters in the pages of *The King* have patriotic backgrounds (for instance, the Godfather is a distinguished fighter for the Polish Socialist Party and a close friend to ministers with wide-ranging connections, while Szapiro is a hero of the Polish-Soviet War of 1919-1921).

Twardoch portrays the links between the political world and the Warsaw mafia as being extraordinarily strong, with the Godfather's downfall in fact the result of political intrigue. This is an important question, for Twardoch infuses his gangster story – whose protagonists are villainous men and fallen women – with considerable knowledge of the social and political conditions of the era, as he reconstructs the conflicts of the late 1930s and colourfully describes the mores and day-to-day life of Warsaw of that period. He has devoted considerable attention to what in his view was omnipresent anti-Semitic violence. Suffice it to say that Szapiro and the other gangsters, on their off-hours from collecting protection money, keep themselves busy battling Warsaw's fascists and their sympathisers.

Yet all of these historical references and the multitude of problems the characters face do not change the character of *The King* – it is a novel designed to provide intelligent entertainment. Some commentators have found this entertainment somewhat unsettling because it is founded on ardent praise for criminal muscle combined with cunning and masculine charms. The ever-present violence in the pages of this book is not at all a neutral motif we might expect in a gangster novel. Twardoch suggests the only thing that makes a man is his willingness to get into a brutal fistfight or one-on-one duel, while his most important organ is – here's a surprise – his clenched fist. It is the same with love of firearms, fast cars and lascivious women – anyone not manifesting these proclivities is most certainly not a man. Yet this type of judgement is appealing to the reading public, perhaps because it appears exclusively within the limits of literary invention, and is therefore safe and has compensation qualities.

Dariusz Nowacki
Translated by Sean Gasper Bye


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WYDAWNICTWO LITERACKIE

"What are we looking for?" the Godfather asked fifty years ago, looking around the bar.

"Bernard Singer," answered Szapiro.

"That journalist...?" said the mustachioed gangster, surprised.

Szapiro nodded.

A tall, thin man in a brown suit and round, wire glasses dashed out from behind the bar and up to Kaplica, greeting him with the requisite humility of people who live to serve others, and assuring him he would find a table right away.

"We don't need a table, Mr. Handszer," Szapiro replied, which to me seemed insensitive to Kaplica. Yet Kaplica didn't share my opinion.

"But I insist, just for a quick one on the house..." said Handszer.

"We'll sit," said Kaplica, making up his mind.

Handszer immediately threw out two slightly drunk young men, who had been wobbling over a single cup of tea at a table right next to the bearded Jews, then he personally wiped down the tabletop and pulled up two chairs.

"We're gonna need three," murmured Kaplica and a third chair immediately appeared. Although perhaps he didn't say that at all, perhaps Handszer simply pulled up another chair for me, unasked. Or maybe I stood alongside? I don't remember.

The bearded Jews finished their vodka and then made an unpardonable error: they stayed at their table, rather than hastily making their way off somewhere else.

Meanwhile, I was invisible. Almost noticeable, because I'd come with Kaplica, but invisible nevertheless; I was a shabbily dressed, thin, Jewish youngster with short-cropped hair, and clumsy arms and legs. It was as though I weren't there at all.

A waiter ran up to the table with a bottle and a tray bearing small glasses and a plate of bread, gherkins and gefilte fish. He peered inquiringly at Kaplica.

"The kid's gonna have something to drink too," said Kaplica.

So the waiter put the glasses on the table, poured the vodka, bowed, and ran off. Szapiro didn't sit down. He looked around the place, and finally noticed someone at the bar.

He easily made his way through the crowd, which parted before him like the Red Sea before Moses' staff.

At the bar stood Bernard Singer, a man of diminutive stature, slim, dark-haired, and wearing an elegant suit. I don't think it's an exaggeration to say he was probably the best-known Jewish journalist. Even I had heard of him. My mother adored his columns in the Zionist newspaper Nasz Przegląd.

"Mr. Singer?" asked Szapiro.

Singer contemptuously looked Szapiro up and down. He didn't answer, but rather turned back to the bar and continued drinking his beer.

"We need to talk, Mr. Singer," said Szapiro.

Singer didn't react.

"Well if that's how you want to play it..." said Jakub sadly, giving a helpless shrug and then pounding Singer's head into the bar counter.

The band stopped playing. The customers fell silent. Singer slid, unconscious, onto the floor, blood flowing from his broken nose. Szapiro made his way back toward our table, rubbing his right shoulder.

"I expect Mr. Szapiro just didn't like Mr. Singer's article in the latest Przegląd, and this is what it looks like when a boxer decides to become a literary critic," said Kaplica loudly, smiling under his moustache. "And next time any of you scribblers gets it into your head to call Mr. Szapiro a thug posing as a sportsman, or gives quotes from memory, you'd better think twice."

Handszer ran, horrified, up to Singer, wailing and trying to revive him. The customers in the bar stood stock-still, observing the entire incident in silence. One of them was apparently staring too brazenly, because as Szapiro walked past him, he suddenly turned toward the man as though to give him a punch, but just shouted "boo!" and kept going. The terrified man spilled his beer all over himself.

Szapiro sat down at our table.

"I pulled my damn shoulder," he said grimly. "Let's drink."

I'd never drunk vodka before. My hands were trembling.

"Drink, kid," Kaplica ordered.

I reached for the glass.

"Like this," he said, demonstrating by plunging his mustache into the vodka and throwing his head back in a sudden motion, taking the glass with it.

I brought the glass to my mouth—it smelled foul. I took a sip—it burned.

"Drink!" snarled Szapiro.

I drank. Or really I only poured the vodka into my mouth. It was so disgusting I spluttered, choked, and nearly threw up.

Kaplica and Szapiro both roared with laughter.

Meanwhile Singer, now revived, was led out of the restaurant.

"Maybe he'll run to the police," laughed Szapiro.

"Then they'll hit him with a fine for disturbing the peace," replied Kaplica.

I didn't understand it then, but they were showing off in front of me. These two fully-grown, powerful, wealthy men, showing off in front of a little squirt like me. Everyone needs an audience.

Translated by Sean Gasper Bye

*Ślady [Traces] provide yet more proof that Małecki is a rarity in Polish literature, a master of both form and plot. And that he cannot be easily classified.*

Kamil Śmiałkowski, *naEKRANIE.pl*

# Jakub Małecki

(born 1982) – writer and translator; author of eight books, including the celebrated *Dygot* [*Tremble*]; winner of the Jerzy Żuławski Award, nominated, among others, for the Angelus Central European Literature Award and, twice, for the Janusz A. Zajdel Award. His most recent book, *Traces* has been nominated for the 2017 Nike Award.

© Tomasz Pluta

## TRACES

Jakub Małecki's *Traces* is a book about life in a world ruled by blind fortune. It is devoid of nobleness, even trivial; fate manifests itself, for example, in the form of a rifle bullet or a stroke. Those two options appear in the first and last episodes of the story and form its frame. Both are entitled "Mine", which means: in the custody of the executor of an irreversible judgement.

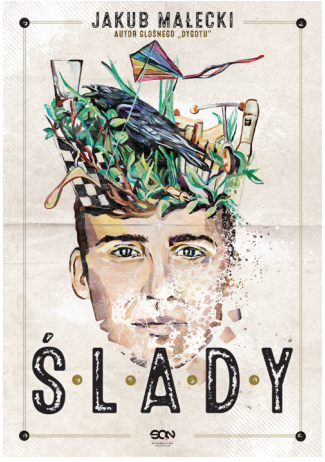
The last sentence of *Traces* goes: "The world ends and then speeds on". The contradiction between a human life and the world speeding finds its confirmation not only in sudden death, but also in the fate of those who followed the rules of the world and lost what was the most precious – the connection with their dearest ones. Such is the case of Bożena Czerska – once a world-famous model, now a terminally ill woman, alone and going through the painful experience of life "vanishing". This process applies not only to memory and recollections, but also to somnambular visions of Warsaw drowning in a fog of nothingness. What this somatic and spiritual condition results in is the unfulfilled desire for the tangible closeness of her husband who died in a plane crash. Instead of his tender touch, the protagonist "slumps into eternal embraces of the silent thing that waited for her for a long time [...]".

Episodes from Bożena's story are woven into the broken, but still coherent story of the Czerski family, as well as of other characters who cross paths with them. This discontinuity is well illustrated by maps of places where things described by Małecki take place: 19 maps and 19 stories, with the topographical, narrative and existential links revealed bit by bit and only partially. While maps provide the reader with the standard zooming in, the literary story allows for deeper inspection of human fortunes. In this respect Małecki can be a real master, which will not surprise the readers of his novel Tremble. A good example of such memorable inquiry into the tangle of human thoughts and emotions is the chapter entitled "Olo". Its protagonist is most likely the author's age (who was born in 1982). Exasperation reinforced with animosity stemming from the generational divide, thoughts on his own relationship with women and the relentless rules of life, final-

ly a tinge of longing for authentic human closeness observed in accidental travel companions – all of it is described on several pages in the form of a seemingly predictable story of strangers meeting on a train.

Małecki subtly adds the historical context to the described events, for example in an episode with Hermann Göring. A business card given by him to a woman he met on the beach saves the life of Bożena's future husband, a Jew in hiding in Warsaw under the German occupation. However, it isn't political history that's most important here, but the roots in the past of people families and interpersonal relations. The historical rootedness described in this way is situated in the realm of feeling and affection and not of points of view – hence the book's literary strength.

Tomasz Garbol
Translated by Anna Hyde




JAKUB MAŁECKI
ŚLADY
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ANDREW NURNBERG ASSOCIATES
WARSAW

The end of the world never looks the same.

This time I'm born in Warsaw, among the tissue. I push and shove, there's not much space. Mine is already around me, I know him; I can hear the blood pulsating rhythmically. Years go by. Mine grows; I watch it in silence. I manifest myself for the first time in summer, shortly after a storm.

A yard. Hot weather. Open windows, laundry drying on washing lines. The smell of fried meat in the air. Mothers' voices resound:

'Paula!'

'Radek, dinner!'

'Angelica!'

'Bolek!'

Paula, Radek and Angelica reluctantly abandon the nooks and crannies of their secret world and head towards the block of flats, armed with plastic spades, sand moulds and buckets. The sun warms their heads and necks. They know that by the time they come back, the mud, now soaked after an overnight downpour, will dry. But they still go.

Mine doesn't.

Mine sits in the shrubs and moves his mouth. His hands rummage around in the moist, cool soil. Minutes go by and he can feel them, just like he feels many other things with his fingertips, for example...

'Bolek!' a scream carries above the ground and ricochets off the neighbouring buildings.

... for example a worm, water and roots. Mine smiles and withdraws his finger. He has a black crescent of dirt under his fingernail. His other hand still pokes around in the wet soil. He can sense gunshots and people's screams in it. He can feel the kicks of heavy boots and the limp body of a man with a mutilated face...

‘Bolek!’

OK. He gets up and starts walking. He’s tall for his age, has strong legs and shoulders. He stoops a bit and moves sluggishly. His head seems to be too large for the rest of his body. It’s plastered with a tangle of sweaty red hair.

I’m six years old. So is mine. He lives with his mum. Her name is Klara, she’s slim and likes watching TV. She watches it at night, filling the flat with the muffled sounds of documentary films about ancient civilizations, about distant stars and life at the ends of the world. Mine doesn’t like watching TV; it bores him quickly. He likes being outside. He likes animals. Dogs, cats, earthworms. Ravens, beetles and flies. He once saw a hyena in a magazine. He likes hyenas too.

Mine doesn’t like eating, but he eats, because his mum tells him to. Mine does everything his mum says, because he knows that then he’ll be allowed to go outside and do other, more important things. He doesn’t like eating, but he grows as if he did. He keeps hearing that he’s turning into a man. Female neighbours ruffle his hair, telling him that in the future he’ll move mountains. He doesn’t think it’s true.

At night he can feel me growing inside him and waiting. Sometimes he has such headaches that all he can see are bright, smudgy blots. He shuts his eyes then, takes loud, deep breaths. Eventually the pain goes away.

Mine rarely plays with toys or plastic weapons. He prefers to go outside. To the bushes. He gets older and older, and he understands more and more, but not everything, not yet.

He is nine years old now and only learned to whistle yesterday. He whistles non-stop. Mum introduces a new ban: no whistling at home. So mine whistles outside, at the playground, by the carpet-beating rack, in the car park. But most often in the thicket behind the flats, not far from the allotments. Sometimes, when he whistles, I say something softly and then they come. Earthworms, mice, beetles. Moles, spiders, millipedes. Mosquitos and flies come flying. Ravens land in front of him and trot, comically swaying their heads from side to side.

Bolek doesn’t know why they come. He doesn’t know why they watch him without fear. Crows land in his lap; he lowers his head and bites them gently on their wings. He carefully puts handfuls of earthworms into his mouth and then spits them out onto the grass. He clenches his teeth on the tails of patient, motionless mice. Before he goes home, he always lays his forehead on the ground and slowly licks the soil with his tongue. At night he has splitting headaches. Pain pounds like his heart.

It’s harder in winter; that’s why he doesn’t like the season. Sometimes he’d like to hide away from me, but he doesn’t know where. He’d like to scratch the snow and the hard ground, get inside. Maybe the throbbing would stop there? But every time he tries he just hurts his fingers. One time his mum asks him if he’d like to go to the ping-pong classes her friend runs every Saturday in the school common room, but he shakes his head and goes to his room to wait for spring in peace.

He doesn’t like ping-pong, football or basketball. He doesn’t like sports, neither at the sports ground, nor on TV. He doesn’t like PE classes, he doesn’t like TV series or comic books, he doesn’t like his computer or the game console a school friend once lent him. He likes singing. He sings when he’s on his own.

Translated by Anna Hyde

[Żulczyk] has written some of the greatest bestselling novels of the last few years. His screenplays for CANAL+ and HBO series have enjoyed immense popularity.

*Żulczyk is growing into one of the strongest writers who help bring our dreams into this world and who hold the key to our collective imagination.*

Andrzej Horubała, *DoRzeczy*

© Zuza Krajewska

# Jakub Żulczyk

(born 1983) is a writer, screenwriter and columnist. With the bestselling novels *Ślepnąc od świateł* [*In Blinding Lights*] (2014) and *Wzgórze psów* [*Houndhill*] (2017) under his belt, he is considered a major rising star of contemporary Polish fiction. Critics have hailed him as the most important literary voice among Poland's millennials. His other publications include the novels *Radio Armageddon* (2008) and *Instytut* [*The Institute*] (2010), as well as two parts of a fantasy adventure series – *Zmorojewo* [*Bogeyville*] (2011) and *Światynia* [*The Temple*] (2011). He has also written the screenplays for the series *Belfer* [*The Teach*] (CANAL+) and for the HBO miniseries based on his novel *In Blinding Lights*.

# HOUNDHILL

Jakub Żulczyk's *Houndhill* and previously *In Blinding Lights* are the most outstanding sensational novels to have come out of Poland in several years. On the surface Żulczyk appears to use the form of crime fiction, but his goal goes beyond merely applying the structures and tropes of the genre in a skilful way. The majority of Polish (and not just Polish) crime novels present moral, political, social or psychological motifs as a valuable bonus rather than the actual core of the story. The entertainment factor often ends up dominating over those themes, resulting in a conventional distance between them and the reader. Jakub Żulczyk proceeds differently. The crime plot, relentlessly dark and gripping, is the tool with which he executes his grim moral and socio-cultural diagnosis of contemporary Poland, be it Warsaw seen through a drug dealer's eyes in *In Blinding Lights* or a provincial town in *Houndhill*.

*Houndhill* focuses on a failed writer who, having lived in Warsaw for many years, hits rock bottom and returns to his home town to try and save his marriage. But he finds no peace there. First he must rebuild his relationship with his father and brother. They have become embroiled in a quarrel about power and money that involves the mysterious disappearance of prominent members of the small-town community. What's more, he must confront the trauma that had driven him to the city in the first place – the brutal and only superficially resolved murder of the love of his youth well over a decade earlier.

Żulczyk's gloomy and disturbing narrative offers a bitter account of Poland's political and economic transformation, both its successes and the side-effects with which Poles must still contend today. The artistic and moral significance of his novel lies not only in Żulczyk's obvious skill as a writer, his powers of observation, or the way his language faithfully reflects the world it represents. Above all, it is the fact that the key question is not that of the eternal "whodunnit" but something much more serious and rooted outside the crime plot: What has happened to us that we have become like this? Could we have been different? Could we

have made different choices, individually and collectively? Despite his scathing criticism of Polish society and politics, however, Żulczyk steers clear of moral absolutism and black-and-white divisions. Essential to his story is the realistic way his characters develop as the events unfold – a rare feat in Polish crime fiction. But *Houndhill* is not just a brilliant crime novel. It is, simply, one of the best Polish novels of the last few years.

Marcin Sendecki
Translatedy by Tul'si Bhambry


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AGENCJA LITERACKA – SYNDYKAT AUTORÓW

Sitting in the confessional he thought he would soon make a move. He longed for the sense of relief in his back. It ached from perching in that wooden box. But the moment of anticipation was brief – he soon heard someone shuffling and searching timidly. He knew those sounds well. Slow-moving, punctuated with long pauses. This knocking and shuffling by people out of practice, people who were afraid, who couldn't remember when they had last confessed their sins.

He found them irritating. Not because they didn't confess regularly, not because they'd finally turned up, but because they always put on such a show. A penitent ought to be strong in his guilt, determined in his remorse. People shouldn't confuse repentance with timidity, he thought.

Odours wafted in from the other side of the lattice – grease, perfume, cigarettes, earth. He couldn't see who had come up, but stealing a furtive glance in his direction he noticed someone wearing a hood over his head. Under the hood he saw his eyes, small and slanted. Not so long ago, he remembered, those same eyes had been gleaming with satisfaction, but drowning in a fat face. Something cold appeared in his throat. He swallowed it quickly.

"Speak up, son," he said.

But he received no reply, and the cold lump swelled in his throat. Of course he could always unlatch the confessional door and leave. But then this hooded man could easily attack him and escape through the sacristy.

No one would notice. The church was empty. They'd find him in the morning.

"Speak up, son," he said again.

He could always pray louder.

"Father, they're after me," said the other. The moment he recognised him he became aware of his own racing heart.

"Maciuś," he said, "what are you doing here? Where have you been?" He got no reply. Besides earth, perfume, cigarettes, he also caught a whiff of sweat – the sharp odour of fear. Maciuś wasn't a bad person. He'd gone astray, was debauched and greedy, quick to use his fists, with women, too. But God's forgiveness knows no bounds.

"They're going to find me," the man said after a while. "They're going to find me any minute."

"Who's going to find you?"

“They’re going to find all of us,” Maciuś said.

This cloud is gathering over the whole town of Zybork, he thought suddenly. A cloud of fear. He had sinned and was praying only for himself. He should better to pray for the whole town. For the whole province.

“Who’s going to find you?” he asked. “Do you owe money? You have plenty of money. Calm down, son.”

“You know what we’ve been up to, Father.The crazy things we’ve done...,” Maciuś said after a pause.

“I know,” he said truthfully.

“Exactly. And that should do, the fact that you know, Father,” said Maciuś.

He wasn’t responsible for other people’s business, he thought. He passed their issues on to God. He only conveyed them upwards.

“Do you want to make your confession?” he asked.

“What for,” Maciuś snorted. This snorting was typical. It betrayed his ruthlessness.

“Peace of mind,” he said.

“Have you found peace of mind, Father?” he asked.

He didn’t answer.

“I’m glad you’ve found it, Father, because they’re going to come and get you, too,” he said and started to cough.

“Who?” he asked, and this was a genuine question. He had a fairly good idea what was going on, but he didn’t know who was involved. By now the cold had spread across his body, especially to his joints. His back ached as if someone had struck him with a cane. “Who?” he asked again, but the hooded figure had disappeared from behind the lattice, just like the smells; there were only quiet steps in the distance, and a few seconds later the door creaked open.

But perhaps you, God, simply want it to be like this, he thought. Perhaps this is your plan. Perhaps there is no point in praying and asking you to hold back your will.

Perhaps we must be ready to trust you, even if it hurts.

“Who?” he said again, quietly, to himself.

He pulled his mobile phone from his pocket and switched it on for the first time since the previous night. He briefly remembered that he ought to call the painter, but a moment later he forgot.

Such are your plans, God, he thought, gazing at the messages and missed call notifications pouring in. They were all from his sister-in-law.

Is there any point in reading the earlier messages, he wondered, when the last one says that his brother just died on his way to the hospital in Olsztyn?

Translated by Tul’si Bhambry

*With a book like this, the more baggage you have in life, the more you'll want to keep coming back to it.*

Justyna Gul, *kulturaslowa.pl*

# Wojciech Chmielewski

(born 1969) – today's most important author of prose from the school of so-called "little realism". His debut collection of short stories, *Biały bokser* [*The White Boxer*] (2006) won the Józef Mackiewicz Literary Prize, and his collection *Brzytwa* [*The Razor*] (2008) was nominated for the Cogito Public Media Prize. In 2010 he published his novel *Kawa u Doroty* [*Coffee at Dorota's*], which was nominated for the Angelus Prize. In 2017 he won the new Marek Nowakowski Literary Prize.

© Grażyna Bryk

# BELVEDERE BITES THE HAND

Reading Wojciech Chmielewski's books, his characters seem familiar. It's easy to come across them – in our families, jobs or neighbourhoods, or among our friends from school or university days. Chmielewski is a very perceptive author, registering the tiny details which, when woven together, constitute our everyday life. That allows him to paint believable psychological portraits of men and women, showing them in ordinary situations. His characters are actually in no way exceptional, they're as average as the conditions in which they find themselves – but that's the result of the author's creative method, rather than a lack of imagination or artistic skill. Chmielewski leaves practically no division between literature and reality – his prose is ruled by mimesis.

His short novel *Belweder gryzie w rękę* [*Belvedere Bites the Hand*] is set in Warsaw's Rembertów district. One of many suburban dormitory towns, it is an entirely unexceptional area, just like the characters who inhabit it – they have aspirations, though unfulfilled ones, and their eyes are fixed on a world centred elsewhere. It is a place to depart from (via the train station or the bus) rather than one that generates its own separate, unhurried provincial life. There, even the young priest dreams of escaping to a Trappist monastery. Poland since 1989 has spawned a proliferation of these places – suspended between the city and small-town country life, never fully belonging. How does a person settle in this world? How does a person experience the fullness of life, its uniqueness, to say nothing of its memory and durability? Chmielewski's protagonists never achieve total stability, or they live in feigned stability. The couples he portrays have relationships laced with growing alienation, anger and distance. One event is enough to tip the scale – to bring them closer together or push them apart. This is the heart of the wisdom of this book and the meaning behind Chmielewski's descriptions of ordinary events.

The central incident of this novel is when a young girl is bitten by a dog named Belvedere. Different plotlines come into focus around this moment as characters' paths cross. It emerges that the main character is Grzegorz – the father of the

bitten child, a would-be author and freelancer. This one unfortunate mishap, and the convictions and traumas surrounding it, become a turning point in the lives of this suburban Warsaw family, though in fact it only accelerates processes already underway and growing in strength. The eyewitnesses to the bite inscribe it with their own interpretations, which seem to force their lives to move in a fatalistic direction. This can be seen clearly in the distance of the narration, as well as this statement by a secondary character: "Whenever we get together you're always going on about that dog. But it was just an accident, an ordinary accident... [...] You have a family, you're healthy," says Marek, whom Grzegorz, for his part, looks down on as a nonentity. "A sweater with reindeer on it, trousers, thinning hair combed back, he sits there and doesn't say anything. There are dozens of Mareks living in this district; every day they get up, take care of their minor little business dealings, come home for some soup, or don't come home at all, going round and round in this undefined landscape they belong to, which has created them and is still churning them out, and they'll never, ever rise any higher."

There's only one difference between Marek and Grzegorz – the latter's pretentiousness, his sense of superiority, which is actually baseless. Chmielewski's prose lays this bare. After all, in Poland we can come across hundreds of these Grzegorzes.

Artur Nowaczewski
Translated by Sean Gasper Bye


WOJCIECH CHMIELEWSKI
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WOJCIECH CHMIELEWSKI

Julka and Ola are dawdling along in their sports shoes, holding one another by their little hands. They're wearing Barbie backpacks one purple, one pink. Julka is taller and wears her dark hair pulled into a ponytail. Ola's is blond. The wave of love now washing over Grzegorz could only be compared to the nausea of a hangover, even though he didn't drink anything yesterday. It is a blessing, manifesting itself even on an ordinary day like this one, though the sun is beautiful today, isn't it? Justyna is already at work, running down hallways, making things happen, sorting them out, producing, working, while I'm at home – before long I'll have to sit down and write my piece for the weekend supplement, they should take it, if not, then next month they definitely will. Only then it would be two months before I got paid. Damn!

Once again he imagines the woman's figure. What does he want from her? Intercourse. Long and exhausting. He likes her, even though she's older. Probably by about ten years. Grzegorz sees her large eyes lowering onto him, he feels her hurried breath. The pleasure comes later, but is unavoidable, and the wait can sometimes heighten it.

They stand at the bus stop, a narrow sidewalk of paving stones, a picket fence behind them. There are a few other people there, Grzegorz recognizes some by sight, a few children with school bags on their backs. There's the fat guy with his mouth eternally hanging open and earphones stuck in his ears. Sometimes he'll stand there with a kid who looks about six, but today

he's alone. A dog is barking, it always barks like that. On the other side of the street, a flock of white doves circle over the houses. Now it's they've divided itself themselves into two. And joined together again. Large birds, flying around aimlessly. Fifty or more? Can he count them? A single black one among them. No, there are two black ones. The sky is clear, though still pale – It'll be a hot day.

Both girls scream. Julka's is louder, Ola's a squeal. Long, painful. Julka screams, then howls, her howl transforms into a long wail. Grzegorz sees himself pulling the child's hand out from between the fence boards. Blood, blood everywhere, the fat guy is racing toward them, everyone is running, Ola's hand is bleeding. Grzegorz takes off his belt, he forms a tourniquet above the bite, under her armpit, but he doesn't know how many cuts there are, he doesn't want to know, he's acting while everyone around is just talking and Julka is squealing. That squeal is worst of all. Olga, covered in blood, is crying.

There's a lot of blood. Spilled on the bus stop, on a concrete paving stone, Grzegorz carries the helpless girl in his arms, the ambulance will come any second. The fat guy has called for one, his hands shaking. Got to call Justyna. Justyna needs to get here. Dammit, kid, you can't die. Julka, you can stop screaming, the ambulance will be here in a minute. It isn't coming, they've got to wait, or maybe flag down a car, that's what they've got to do.

Grzegorz walks out into the middle of the street with Ola in his arms. Julka starts squealing again. A red car stops, a guy jumps out, he doesn't know what's going on. To the hospital, Grzegorz bellows, to the hospital, the nearest one, I guess it's Szaserzy Street or Międzylesie, a dog's bitten my kid, hurry, she's losing blood. The man doesn't say anything, they get in, the father holding his daughter in his arms along with teary-eyed Julka. Międzylesie is closer, he calls out. Honey, don't be afraid, everything's gonna be okay, but Julka keeps crying. Awful sobs. To Międzylesie, of course, yes, drive.

They're on their way. There's a traffic jam on Żołnierska Street. What should he do? That's what the guy driving is asking. What's Grzegorz supposed to say? Ola is conscious. An ambulance would have been let through, but yes, what should they do? All right, I'll call for an ambulance to pick us up on Żołnierska. Grzegorz dials the number, it connects, he speaks, who knows if this will work. Daddy, it really, really hurts, that's what Ola says with her arm squeezed with the belt. It doesn't look like she's bleeding, it's hard to tell anyway, the sleeve of her jacket is soaked. All red. Her body under the fabric is torn by the dog's teeth. Blood on Grzegorz's trousers.

"Have them come here, the kid's bleeding badly, we're on Żołnierska, stuck in traffic. I'll get out and I'll wave, we're in a red Audi. Redirect the ambulance we called to Żołnierska. I'll stand on the side of the road and wave. Redirect it, yes, you've got that right, redirect it! Żołnierska past the overpass... yes, past the overpass."

He lays Ola on the back seat, her head on Julka's lap. He gets out. Rows of motionless cars. Sluggish traffic, Grzegorz keeps an eye out for the ambulance arriving, for a moment he thinks he hears a siren, but no, it's the ringing in his ears, he looks out toward the overpass, guessing they'll have to come from that direction.

There's a siren from the direction of Mars Street. The ambulance is driving on the opposite side of the road, against the traffic, coming closer. Grzegorz jumps onto the grassy median. The ambulance slows down and cuts across the grass, deep gouges in the soft ground, good, there are no guardrails here. The paramedics take Ola. Grzegorz and Julka get into the ambulance as well and Grzegorz shouts a thank-you to the man with the Audi.

Now there's just one thing left to do.

"Hey, we've had a major accident. Ola got bitten by a dog. Her arm is hurt. Just her arm, she stuck it through a fence. We're in an ambulance on our way to the hospital, I'm with Julka. Yes, yes, the paramedic is already looking after her, the bleeding's stopped, I think it has, but her arm must be torn up. She's conscious, just terrified and in pain."

Translated by Sean Gasper Bye

Poland's most popular historical novelist. Each of her books becomes a bestseller, with print runs of 60-70,000 copies. Cherezińska's novels have been praised by President Andrzej Duda, the first lady, and Prime Minister Beata Szydło.

*I don't know how Cherezińska does it, but this is not even a novel—it's a fascinating piece of reportage from a journey back in time.*

Bartosz Węglarczyk

*Cherezińska puts historical giants on stage to reconstruct their actions and words with verve and imagination.*

Maciej Parowski

# Elżbieta Cherezińska

(born 1972) – is the most popular female author of historical prose in Poland, with nearly a million books sold so far. Although her four-volume novel series *Północna droga* [*The North Road*] (on the history of the Vikings in the tenth and eleventh centuries) is what first earned her widespread renown, today she is known for her novels on more local history. In 2010, she published *Gra w kości* [*A Game of Life and Death*], her first novel about medieval Polish rulers. In her two series of novels, *Odrodzone królestwo* [*Reborn Kingdom*] and the duo *Harda/Królowa* [*Proud and Queen*], Cherezińska depicted the realities of medieval Poland and Europe in a vivid and intriguing way.

© Dariusz Chereziński

## FLAMING CROWN

The pace at which Elżbieta Cherezińska writes and publishes her books is astonishing. She has managed in just a few short years to completely revitalize the Polish historical novel, which has once more the loyal following it had here a century ago.

After last year's two wonderful books on the legendary Piast princess and Scandinavian queen Świętosława *(Proud and Queen)*, Cherezińska has returned to her series *Reborn Kingdom*, which remains her best-selling work to date. In *Kingdom*, Cherezińska has set herself the task, as a kind of badge of honor, of bringing back to life Poland's oldest history – a history seemingly long since set in stone. And yet, without concerning herself with the precedent of historical education established by the schools, Cherezińska has managed to make the Piasts – the first Polish dynasty – fresh and completely contemporary, to turn them into thrilling, living figures who will resonate with any reader, whether she is educated and in possession of an extraordinary depth of historical knowledge, or rather a total newcomer whose eyes are opened to the charms of history precisely by novels like *The Flaming Crown*.

The story is set in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Poland, during the period of feudal fragmentation, and it follows the efforts of Władysław the Elbow-High at taking over the Polish throne. Events in the book take place not only on Polish territories, but all over Europe, particularly in the Czech Republic, where John of Luxembourg becomes king despite also holding the title to the Polish throne, which has serious repercussions that will only cease with the repurchase of that title by the Elbow-High's son, Casimir the Great, for the enormous sum of over a

million Prague groschen. But that happens later, and this trilogy ends with the coronation of the Elbow-High and his wife: Władysław I and Elżbieta I. Meanwhile, the prologue to the history recounted in *Flaming Crown* is the conquest of Akka, the capital of the Kingdom of Jerusalem in 1291 – the fall of the last Crusader-held city in the Levant.

Cherezińska – although she has created a novel relevant to our times – is most enthused about the Piasts, joking that she's very "into" them, while very seriously emphasizing their extraordinary dynamism, their natural intelligence, energy and strength. So, too, is the Władysław the Elbow-High of *Flaming Crown* – a ruler of minimal size, we might say, but great spirit.

Elżbieta Cherezińska shows the Elbow-High and the others important to her story from many points of view and distinctive perspectives, so it would be difficult to come up with a single interpretation of this "Little Prince" who became, if not a great king, then at least an important one for Poland's history. And *Flaming Crown* allows us to vividly imagine what might have been had it not been for his determination and his will to unite the Polish lands under his scepter.

In her afterword, the author states that she is not yet ready to part with her heroes. So that although the trilogy *Reborn Kingdom* has concluded, we will no doubt soon have occasion to meet on the pages of Elżbieta Cherezińska's fiction the royal children of Władysław the Elbow-High – Elżunia (Queen of Hungary) and Kaź (that is, the Great, King of Poland). And of course their father. After all it took over ten years from his coronation to get to the Battle of Płowce with the Teutonic Knights. These years have not yet been told in this original new novelization of the history of the Piasts. Which holds – let us add – that same fire possessed by its main character, and a mysticism and fantasy that has equal standing with strictly historical narration. Even the presence of dragons in primeval forests along the Vistula wouldn't be a big surprise here.

Krzysztof Masłoń
Translated by Jennifer Croft


ELŻBIETA CHEREZIŃSKA
PŁOMIENNA KORONA
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POZNAŃ 2017
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WYDAWNICTWO ZYSK I S-KA

The sword thudded against the floor, propping up its wielder, the prince. Władysław stood firmly on the ground. He looked up. Before him the stone altar awaited, topped with the flaming crown. He began to breathe fast, and at that moment, the cathedral was lit up by the glow of a hundred candles, and his ears were filled with a solemn litany to all the saints sung by the cantor and the choir.

"Sancta Maria..."

"... ora pro nobis..."

"Sancta Dei Genetrix..."

"... ora pro nobis..."

Incense smoke got into his nose. He blinked fast and looked beneath his feet. The illusion of the clouded tombstones of the Kingdom of Poland passed. Janisław, dressed in purple to officiate the Mass of the Holy Spirit, called out from the altar: "Lords of the Kingdom, gathered here! I ask you, will you serve your new king?"

"His will is our command!" echoed through the cathedral. "His will! Our command!"

"Władysław," the archbishop summoned him. "Kneel for the oath."

He fell onto his knees, supporting himself on his sword as though on a cross.

"Will you keep the holy faith?" asked Janisław. "Will you care for and protect the Church? Will you lead the Kingdom entrusted to you with righteousness and justice?"

"Sic me Deus adiuvat et haec Sancta Dei Evangelia," Władysław recited resoundingly. "May God help me, and His Holy Gospel."

The abbots brought the holy oils from the chapel, and the archbishop kissed the golden vessel in which they were kept.

The choir began singing the hymn "Solomon was anointed king by Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet." Janisław went up to Władysław and, running his thumb through the unction, rubbed it over his shoulder, chest and hands. Again he took the cross in his fingers, to anoint Władysław's temples.

"The invisible crown," he whispered. "The secret symbol between you, Władysław, and Almighty God. By virtue of the Lord's anointing, you are Christ's representative on earth. This sacred oil has positioned you thus. You knelt a prince." The archbishop extended his hand to Władysław. "Now stand, king!"

Władysław stood. His battle commanders covered his chest and back. At that very moment the backplate of Władysław's cuirass featuring the image of a lion clattered to the floor.

"You were half eagle, half lion!" Janisław cried loudly. "Now you are become an eagle!"

"How can it be," marveled Władysław, "that the breastplate remains in place?"

He had barely thought about it when he realized. The eagle hewn into the gilded breastplate had set its claws into his chivalric belt.

"Gentlemen!" shouted Janisław like a leader on the battlefield, and held his arm out to show them. "Bow down, witnesses of this miracle. Before our very eyes the crown is restored to the head of a prince of the Piast family. Bishops of three lands—Poznań, Wrocław, Kraków—stand with me as I set it in its royal place."

He took the new crown from the purple cushion on the altar and in a brisk, military step went up to Władysław. Gold and precious gems gleamed in the light of the candles. Gerward Leszczyc, Domarat Grzymała and Jan Muskata reached out towards Władysław's head in a gesture of benediction. Janisław held the crown over Władysław for a moment and whispered:

"The Kingdom is yours. Might and glory everlasting."

Then he recited loudly: "Accipe coronam Regni. Take the crown of the Kingdom."

And he placed it on his head. Władysław took a deep breath. The ring forged from heavenly, flaming iron was warm.

Gerward, Bishop of Wrocław, handed the aspergillum to Janisław.

"Hold out to me your sword, which is the symbol of righteous strength," the archbishop told the king. "You must never use it in bad faith."

He dipped the aspergillum in the holy water and sprinkled the exiled king's weapon with it. Władysław saw the drops flying toward him and the blade. He saw them glimmering in the light of the candles. And the polished blade, glistening. The gold-plated hilt. The sanctified water fell in a luminous stream of droplets onto the sword and at the same time Władysław felt a shiver pass through his body that was as strong as a wave of fire. He felt the heat passing from the sword hilt through his hand, his arm, his shoulder, all the way into his loins and his feet planted firmly on the floor. In a flash, he had turned around to face the assembled throng. He raised his sword high in one quick motion. The afterimage of a purple glow hung in the air. He made the sign of the cross with his sword to bless the crowd.

"Glory to the Father and the Son," Janisław called out from behind him.

Władysław made the sign of the cross again. The streak in the air this time was of a deep blue hue.

"And to the Holy Ghost!" the archbishop continued.

For the third time, he blessed the crowd with the sign of the cross. The blade trailed a streak of gold.

"As it was in the beginning, both now, and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen," Janisław finished, and in his next breath he announced: "Before you stands the crowned king! Władysław, the first king of this name!"

Only now did it hit him. He had just been transformed into a king. This was where the road he had been traveling so long had finally led him. The sword vibrated in his hand, giving him its strength. It was an extension of Władysław, as though there were one system of blood in its hilt and the king's arm.

"Long live the king!" cried the crowd.

Translated by Jennifer Croft

*Fascinating read! Material for a thriller movie. A veritable page turner.*

Antoni Libera

© Andrzej Wiktor Fratria

# Bronisław Wildstein

(born 1952) – Polish writer, columnist, former CEO of Telewizja Polska, Poland's public broadcasting corporation, knight of the Order of the White Eagle (Poland's highest decoration), author of nearly twenty books: novels, collections of short stories, essays and political commentaries. Active in the anti-Communist movement during the 1970s. Winner of the prestigious Kościelski Foundation Prize for his first novel *Jak woda* [*Like Water*]. In 2009 awarded the Józef Mackiewicz Literary Prize for his book *Dolina nicości* [*Valley of Nothingness*]. Polish Television is currently preparing a screen version of his novel *Czas niedokonany* [*Time Continuous*], which follows the vicissitudes of several generations of Polish Jewish families.

Bronisław Wildstein's biography might easily serve as a scenario for a film about Poland's tragic fate during the twentieth century. His mother, a woman of peasant stock, provided aid to the Polish Home Army during the Nazi German occupation. After the war she helped out victims of the SB, the Polish Communist security service. His father, a communist of Jewish origin, fell victim to a wave of anti-Semitic purges and was dismissed from the army. As a child, Bronek contracted tuberculosis and the family were forced to move to healthier regions. Wildstein's difficult character made itself known early in life. Bad behaviour reports led to frequent changes of school. History, of which his parents were both agents and victims, soon caught up with him too. The problems he would encounter throughout his life stem from the combination of his impulsive temperament with the strong sense of justice he came by honestly from his family home.

As a student he befriended Lesław Maleszka and Stanisław Pyjas. In 1977 Pyjas was found dead in a Kraków town house. Years later it turned out that Maleszka was an SB agent who had informed on his friends. The affair subsequently became the subject of a famous feature documentary film titled, *Trzej kumple* [*The Three Buddies*]. Pyjas' death was linked to the activities of the Communist apparatus of repression; however, the inquiry was officially suspended. The murder provoked a wave of student strikes in the late '70s. Wildstein then began organizing the Student Solidarity Committee and the Independent Students Association. In August 1980, after a skirmish with functionaries of the Civic Militia, he and his wife fled the country. There followed the period of his emigration.

Wildstein spent the years of Martial Law and the dying days of the Polish People's Republic in France. In 1989 he returned to Poland to embark on his journalistic work. Like most Poles, Wildstein placed high hopes in the regime change, but the reality of the Third Republic soon proved to be a great disappointment to him. His journalistic work began increasingly to echo the spirit of revolt pervading Poland's public and cultural life. This process came to a climax in 2005 when he publicized on the Internet a list of Communist secret service resources (including names of agents and informers). The event evoked lively political discussion.

Wildstein's writing is mainly concerned with Poland's recent history, the collapse of Solidarity's ideals and chances of creating a responsible modern state. But contemporary nihilism, the degeneracy of the media and stultification of the political class resulting from the crisis of Western civilisation are at odds with Wildstein's profound metaphysical imagination. Hence his need to contrast the twentieth century's barbarities with the metaphysically revealed order.

Some years ago Dariusz Karłowicz wittily remarked that even on a linguistic level Wildstein represents an oxymoron, juxtaposing contrary elements — wildness (a hot head) and stone (solidity). His surname, made up of given, contradictory elements, has become his fate. Wildstein remains one of Poland's keenest observers of reality, skilfully weaving allegorical images into his novels. He has earned his name.

Jerzy Kopański
Translated by Christopher A. Zakrzewski

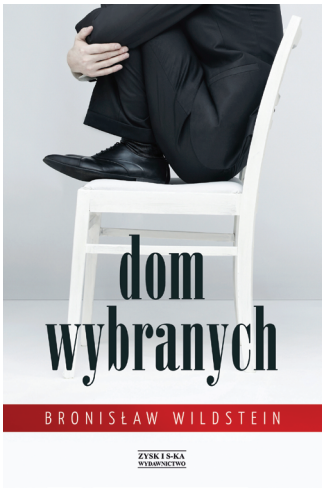
# House of the Chosen

*Dom wybranych* [*House of the Chosen*] is a realistic novel examining the inner workings of the media. It describes an attempt to create a New Man and highlights the degree to which the elites are capable of realizing this goal. The image is all the more terrifying in that the book focuses on the development of apparently innocent entertainment programmes aired on commercial television. As consumers, we normally hold biased political commentary and ideologically driven news reporting to be the greatest danger posed by the media. The politicization of the mass media and the linking of the profit motive to the formation of consumer attitudes are part of a long observed and feared world phenomenon. Wildstein's novel, however, suggests the real danger lies elsewhere. Modern reality shows can be far more effective in advancing an ideology than regular news services. The latter, after all, present an image of the world that the consumer can accept or reject. Viewers recognize unsubtle attempts at indoctrination. They can harden themselves against the news and even stop watching the programme altogether. Creating trends that at first blush have little to do with politics are in this case more effective. It allows the elites to freely and imperceptibly shift the borders of the permissible, while also reaching younger and wider audiences. We can watch live tragedy without having to dwell on the fate of the victims — be they participant or reporter whose personal faults their superiors will exploit in a heartbeat.

*House of the Chosen* reveals much that we already know about the world of the media — the power of money, the primitivization of spectacle, additional motives of the creators of which consumers are basically aware. Wildstein's novel, however, reveals still other dangers. Ultimately, it has been written by an expert in the subject. The novel is a pessimistic look at modernity in the grip of a philosophic crisis, a phenomenon in which financial and political factors are contributing to a profound crisis of values. Television is only the most visible manifestation of this humanistic crisis.

Wildstein's numerous allusions to real events and people give the novel added piquancy; in this way, the fictitious story is rendered more concrete, brought closer to reality. Even consumers who do not follow the world of the media closely can see that though they are dealing with literary fiction, the material going into its construction is essentially real. The technique, aptly called "real invention" by Marek Hłasko, is commonly found in post-war Polish literature. The author's writing skill and ability to get inside the minds of his heroes ensure additional reading pleasure. Thanks to the ambiguities woven into the story, a faint ray of sunshine — hope — shines through the dark clouds of the world of *House of the Chosen*.

Jerzy Kopański
Translated by Christopher A. Zakrzewski

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BRONISŁAW WILDSTEIN

Lacki pushed the red receiver button and ended the call. Janka was polite, she gave him hope, but he has worked in the industry too long to have any illusions. "The programming schedule has been set, maybe in the next..." Everything was clear. The second largest private television station in the country had no offers for him. After his talk with Julek from the public station everything was shaping up into a gloomy scenario. He, one of the biggest television stars, a recipient of all the awards there were in the field, praised and adored, described as "the classic of the modern screen," "in a class of his own," "someone who proves that even television can teach you to think," became superfluous overnight. When he lost his show on ABC, suddenly it turned out that no one had a spot for him. As usual Arski was right. The conversation with Julek only confirmed it.

"Your show was serious. It must've been expensive. And now we are cutting costs. And that seriousness...there's less of a demand for that now. I'd have you in my own station. It's public TV. You'd fit in. Only that, you know, the contracts have been signed or, in any case, agreed on even for the autumn programming schedule. I know you're better than many of those who throw their weight around here. But each one of them represents a deal. Political or personal. Everything's been decided and I can't afford to start a war with them. I will keep my eye out...Maybe next year?"

He couldn't believe it. How was it possible that he, one of the most famous TV personalities in the country, was being taken off, as if he weren't there? Wiped out overnight. Meanwhile a young lady with no idea whatsover about what was going on, was set to take over the most important show on the largest private TV station.

Suddenly he felt like laughing. For the first time in three weeks.

***

"You say you want to return on the old terms..." Kaliski spoke through gritted teeth. Lacki tried to figure out what had changed in the office he used to visit so often.

"On better ones. Financially speaking, at least," he clarified.

The editor of Słowo laughed.

"Let's not discuss money for the time being. Here is the problem: the newspaper is fully staffed, because it has to be. I have people for everything and planned every page. There is no way to go back to how it was.

"It was you who always said that you missed me."

"Well, yeah, but somehow I made up for your absence. Everything's running smoothly. You have to understand."

"It's not like I lost my ability. On the contrary. I've developed. These shows are a real job, but not a big one. If you don't want to...Then I think we have to renegotiate the rate for my columns."

"Exactly, your columns." Kaliski got up and started walking around the office. "I don't know if you've noticed what has taken their place."

"Well, yeah." Lacki struggled to hide his irritation. "Naturally you can't publish a newspaper with blank pages, but I'm coming back in a week."

"And that's the hitch. I don't want this to sound too rude, but I don't foresee a spot for you."

"How so?" Lacki thought that what was happening to him was unreal. Events coalesced into one absurd nightmare. They were turning into a surrealist trap, from which he needed to wake up. "How so? After all, you've

been asking for these columns. It took a while before I agreed."

"That's true, but something has changed."

"What?!"

"You don't know? We all know that you stopped doing the show for ABC.

"Well, so what? I will have more time for the columns."

"Darek, stop behaving like a child." Kaliski sat down opposite me, looking troubled. He was holding his forehead and rubbing his temples with his thumbs. "Your columns were a feature of the television show. People read you because they watched you on TV and liked you. And now..."

"And now they're going to read me because of what I write!"

"God! Darek! Do I have to tell you everything straight? You didn't exert yourself with your columns. They were crib notes for your show. I accepted that. People like it when you lay it out once again for them, without mincing words, what it is that they've watched. But if you don't have a show and they realize that you're not so important then...then whatever you have to say is not enough to force them to follow what you write. Can't you understand a thing as simple as that?

Translated by Piotr Florczyk

The Galicians *shows it's never too late for a debut. An impressive novel by a sixty-year-old journalist.*

Dariusz Nowacki, *Gazeta Wyborcza*

# Stanisław Nowak

(born 1958) – journalist, writer, playwright. At over 900 pages, his debut novel *Galicyanie* [*The Galicians*] took him eight years to write, trying as he did to render faithfully the history of the Central European region of Galicia under Austrian rule. He received the 2017 Warsaw Literary Award for prose for *The Galicians*.

© PAP/Jakub Kamiński

# THE GALICIANS

Stanisław Aleksander Nowak has created a novel remarkably engaged with the broader tradition of the prose of memory – a tradition important not only in Poland, but also in Austria, Hungry and in many other European and non-European countries. Particularly pertinent in this case are the literatures of Hungary and Austria – important frames of references for The Galicians. After all, the main setting in all four section of the novel is a village called Zaborów, located in south-eastern Poland. And if we also consider the fact that the events Nowak narrates span the century between 1812 and 1915, then we will realize that Nowak's readers are also taking a journey into the heart, first of Austria, and then of Austria-Hungary under the Habsburgs. Zaborów lay on the border, after all, belonging – strictly speaking – to that part of the Habsburg state that had been dubbed the Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria. At times Nowak's protagonists operate in the same realities as the characters of Joseph Roth, Péter Nádas and a number of other Central European authors.

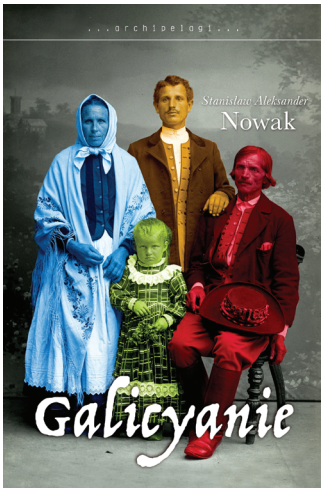
As in the works of these writers, historical memory in Nowak – which demands we not stray too far from the facts – is ultimately overcome by the imagination of the author, which wants stories, myths. His efforts are fuelled by an oath of loyalty to the most local version of his homeland, a pre-rational oath, made in childhood. "I recall vacations in Zaborów, milk straight from the cow, the smell of the wind in the down bedding, dragonflies over the Wisłok.... When I grew up I realized that the people of Zaborów deserved a novel," Nowak writes. The particular warp through which Nowak draws the wefts of his book is the history of one family. The plot begins at the moment Hynek Kończyświat (whose last name means "Worldend"), and it concludes with the death of his great-grandson. In many ways, then, Nowak has written a true saga.

The attentive reader will note, however, that *The Galicians* goes well beyond this tradition. The element of spoken language – the traditional oral story – is too strong in it, undermining the need for the cohesiveness of a family narrative,

disrupting it with saucy anecdotes.. The author constructs his book out of little episodes. Time after time he reminds us that this is precisely how memory works as it preserves individual images and situations – indeed, prioritizing those most colourful. Thereby the composition of the novel attains the structure of a mosaic. If it creates a whole picture, then it must be said that that picture is not only of one family, but rather an entire local community.

This novel thus has epic ambitions. Its author's efforts are aimed at the creation of a panoramic picture of the life of the Galician peasantry. He portrays the entanglement of the Galicians in a bitter and bloody history (he describes both the pogroms against those living on nobles' estates and those against the Jewish population), in feudal laws, rights and customs, but he also shows the inordinately rich world of folk tradition and imagination. The narrator of this story speaks as though from inside the peasants' world. It is because of this that his memory ultimately turns out to be a kind of linguistic memory – an attempt at reminding the contemporary reader of forgotten words or even simply variant pronunciations. There has not been, since the publication of Stanisław Reymont's Peasants, such an interesting effort at creating a peasant epic in all of Polish literature.

Wojciech Kudyba
Translated by Jennifer Croft




STANISŁAW NOWAK
GALICYANIE
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W.A. B.

Rupert Willibald German, or Count Nitsche, was not Polish by blood. By origin and language he was Austrian, and Austrian through and through. He came from a family that lived in the German Austrian country of Tyrol. Zaborów learned of this when one of his friends from the Alps came to pay him a visit—a strapping fellow with long, braided whiskers, big as a behemoth, or perhaps as the Alps themselves.

But the soul of the Count was perfectly Polish. When he heard of the old Polish manor house he up and quit his work and moved right into Zaborów. The longer he lived in the village, the more tied he became to the land. In his earliest days he used to say that he was "of Galician nationality," and then that he was a Polish Austrian, until finally he proclaimed himself a Pole. He renamed himself Nicze (to make his last name look more Polish), and from then on he tried hard to act and talk like the locals.

He had few skills in the national language, although his blunders were sweet, and he did use words from the common, regional tongue. Plain speech, with even a few curse words tossed in, taught to him by local types who would talk to him slowly and clearly, naively assuming that if they just enunciated, slow and understandable-like, a foreigner could cotton on to their yapping. The astonishing thing was that the Count did understand. And so he would turn to the Countess and say things like "git" and even "ain't," which amused the manor's farmhands, who laughed with their eyes only, shaking with silent mirth.

Furthermore the Count really delighted in Zaborów's charms and the fact that the village enjoyed such attractive surroundings. For Zaborów gave one the impression it was the height of happiness on earth. The Count had always had a hankering to live in the country. Not for him were city life and bureaucracy work,

where every day is just the same as the one that came before it. This whole bucolic package spoke volumes to him—peace at long last, rural life, daily walks around the grounds. He liked to wake up early and go out into the fields, particularly during the summertime. He would perform his ablutions in the mornings in his bedroom behind a three-part beechwood screen. As soon as he'd washed up he'd splash himself in the face with some water and neither dry off with a towel nor get dressed, just stick the glazed basin, chipped here and there, underneath his arm and then head into the great outdoors. He'd turn it this way and that and shake out all the water from it onto the still dewy grass. He didn't pour it out onto the flowers because the soap from it would dry them out (only the hollyhock would not be harmed by it). And he'd stand there a while, feeling on his wet skin the watery chill of the breeze, and like that he would dry off. Most of all he loved early May mornings, bracing, promising a scorcher later. He liked to breathe in all that fresh air, look at the hazy old sun, at the apple orchards scattered with white florals, at the lurching tulips and the rainbow-colored bubbles that sometimes came out of the soapy water, striking up and bursting in the branches.

He developed a fondness for dozing off in the reception room, particularly on summer afternoons after luncheons, when the windows and the doors leading out onto the grounds were thrown wide open, and a slight draft would puff up the curtains like they were cherubs' cheeks. Sitting in his French-style armchair, the aristocrat would read up from his book. It was always one and the same book, by the name of Der Diamanten Baum und der verloren gegangene Wald. The count would try and read it, or to tell the truth head on, he'd take it out from the shelf so he could have the enjoyable sensation of drifting off with a book opened up on his chest, and in fact he would be taken quickly by sleep and just nap in his armchair in the midst of reading just exactly as he had intended, with the book splayed out over his lungs.

Around that time the salon would be graced with an appearance from the chicken Dormousy. Scraping her claws along the parquet, wagging her head to and fro, and now and then tilting it out of interest, the hen would make her way inside as carefully as though upon thin ice. Then the other hens would come in after her, all clucking up a storm. They would grow bolder by the second. They would pick at the fringe of the old carpet (said to be imported out of an Ottoman harem), hop up onto the damask sofa and wobble the fauteuil with the crisscrossing legs curved as though suffering from rickets, known as the English disease. The chickens would peck at their reflections in the panes of the étagère, and every now and then they made a big old mess, until finally they'd wake the Count, who would jump up and wave his book at them and say: "Shoo!"

The hens would flap and clatter off the sofas and run back out into the yard, slipping and sliding along on the floor. As he escorted them out, the Count would bend over with his arms outstretched like he was preventing a child from falling. When he would return from the porch he would trip on the carpet, which was somehow so arranged so that everybody stumbled over it, and he would drink his coffee, cold now, from his Delftware cup.

His choice of village had been determined by the face that Count Nicze was a diehard hunter. No sooner had he settled in Zaborów than the manor grew cluttered with an array of hunting implements and trophies. On the walls of the hallway and the chancellery and the study hung forking deer antlers, wild sheep horns, boars' heads stuffed with sawdust, and firearms—rifles, shotguns, handguns—and ammunition pouches, bait made of hares' teeth, as well as a smaller collection of military armaments, primarily of swords, which the flies would readily defile, the most precious of the swords being the Damascus steel, said to be made up of three hundred bands.

Translated by Jennifer Croft

*Reportage like Poland has never seen. Fascinating and terrifying (...). A difficult but mandatory read.*

Monika Frenkiel, *Onet.pl*

# Marcin Mamoń

(born 1968) is a Polish director, journalist, and documentary filmmaker. He has worked in countries embroiled in armed conflicts, such as Syria, Iraq, Ukraine, Chechnya, the Caucasus, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, the Gaza Strip, and Congo (DRC). He has worked with many television stations, including the BBC and Channel 4. His many awards include the Polish Journalists' Association Award and the Grand Prix at the Human-DOC Documentary Film Festival. In 2015 he was taken hostage by the Syrian branch of Al-Qaeda; he describes his experiences in *Wojna braci* [*A Fraternal War*].

© Tomasz Głowacki

**You Have to Be on Your Guard: Marcin Kube interviews Marcin Mamoń**

"I've always preferred spending time with people who were fighting a stronger opponent. That's why I can understand the Jihadists who kidnapped me," says Marcin Mamoń, author of *A Fraternal War*.

**You describe being abducted, but you don't present yourself as a victim.**

I wanted to avoid having the story of my kidnapping dominate the book. This was not meant to be a sensationalistic report or a shocking prison memoir. I believe that every person is destined to give a testimonial of the truth. I want to talk about a world and about people I've known for twenty years, and not about myself. My work is a show of dissent against the fact that the Muslim world, in its broader understanding, is often distorted in the media.

**Sometimes you even try to defend the actions of your kidnappers.**

I don't sympathize with them, but I am capable of understanding their motives. This is because I was captured by people whom I knew, to some extent. Despite having found myself in circumstances I would never have wanted to be in, I tried to distance myself from the hostage's perspective.

**So what are the motives of the "brothers" in the title?**

This is a closed community of people at war. They are united by three fundamental factors. The first is a sense of freedom. The second is a sense of wrongdoing and a desire for vengeance. The third factor is God and a call for an all-out battle sanctioned by religion. All three factors are joined, the emotions of one trigger the others. Sometimes, unfortunately, they lead to crimes being committed.

**Analyzing those events now, do you know where you made your mistake?**

I always repeat that getting abducted was a failure of mine, and nothing to boast about. It was the outcome of various situations, but there's always that first mistake that crops up. I think it was the point when our travel plans began to suddenly change. That was a signal that something was up. We should have taken a step back.

**When you returned, didn't you think that maybe you shouldn't have gotten so deeply involved?**

The closer I was to that situation, the more I thought like that. Now I'd like to take a step further. Not in terms of the risk, but of going even deeper into that world, instead of just being a Twitter observer.

**What changed for you after the kidnapping?**

I gained some inner peace. Things that had seemed difficult are now more bearable. I gained a sense of distance from many things. Paradoxically, being kidnapped by Al-Nusra helped me make contacts in the world of Islamic warriors. Strange as it may seem, it's often a good place to start a conversation. Because they know me now.

**I get the feeling that you sympathize more with the "brothers" than with the Russians or the Americans, who waged war in the Caucasus and the Near East.**

In my youth I took part in the anti-communist opposition in the Poland, which has meant that I always choose "the other side." In Chechnya the situation has always been clear to me. They are fighting Russia for freedom and independence. As a Pole from the Kresy [historical borderlands – trans.], I see Russia plain and simple, as a dangerous empire that poses a threat to me as well. So inevitably, I side with the Chechens. It's ingrained in me – I prefer spending time with people who are fighting a stronger opponent.

**In the twenty-first century Poland also went to the Near East as an ally of an empire.**

There were situations when, while making a film, I found myself in a Polish Hummer or an American Black Hawk. But I always felt I didn't belong there, and I tried to avoid it. That's why I never wanted to report on Polish military operations in the Near East. I wanted to explore the world of the people fighting against an empire, regardless of whether it was Russia or America. Their motives are simple: they want to survive. And ours? To have more free time and more money.

**The knowledge and awareness we gain through your book is both substantial and limited. What can we do with it?**

Victory comes with the ability to tell between true and false. I once heard a sermon by a priest who said that lying is evil in every religion and culture. But when a person allows himself to be deceived, he also sins. That's why you have to remain on guard. You have to ask questions, double-check, and devote energy to avoid accepting everything you hear as the undeniable truth.

Translated by Soren Gauger

# A FRATERNAL WAR

In *A Fraternal War* Marcin Mamoń tries to understand the motive of the Islamic fighters. Even those who took him hostage and held him captive in Syria for six weeks.

It was December 2015 when the media announced that reporter Marcin Mamoń and cameraman Tomasz Głowacki had been set free. They had been taken hostage in November; the Syrian branch of the Al-Qaeda was behind their abduction. Over a year passed before Marcin Mamoń published *A Fraternal War*, subtitled: *Warriors, Jihadists, Kidnappers*. Yet this is not a diary of a captivity, describing Mamoń's experiences in a Syrian cell. There are such passages, of course, but they are not the chief value of *A Fraternal War*. Significantly, the author does not treat the abduction as a personal attack. This celebrated reporter and documentary filmmaker takes a back seat, using his story as a point of departure for describing today's Jihad.

He met his first Mujahideen in Chechnya in 1995, and spent the next twenty years bringing home films and reportage from the Caucasus and the Near East. He avoided simple dichotomies: the noble West and the evil Islamists. In A Fraternal War he posed himself another difficult task. Instead of trying to prove that reality is as simple as a bomb in the backpack of a suicide terrorist, he shows how complex it really is. Before he gets to the story of his nightmare journey, he sketches a broad map of the Jihad world. He demonstrates the relationships between incidents in the Caucasus – in Chechnya, Georgia, or Azerbaijan – and the terrorist attacks in Western cities. His memory takes him back to his earlier voyages, and he explains the differences between factions of Islam and the ethno-national groups that are its adherents.

When he comes to the tale of the abduction in the second part of the book, he makes himself into neither a hero nor a victim. He shows that abductions work

like a business to finance the Islamists' activities. As we know, however, the abduction of journalists, soldiers, and civilians often ends less happily than it did for Mamoń and Głowacki.

Mamoń is surprisingly empathic toward the people who held him captive. At times we even suspect he has been touched by Stockholm syndrome. This, however, would be a hasty diagnosis. A person who has spent twenty years among Muslim societies will not change his balanced approach because of a single incident, howevermuch he admits that this was a dreadful experience.

Marcin Mamoń has been known more as a filmmaker than as a writer. Nonetheless, he acquits himself splendidly with this material. He has a lucid journalistic style, devoting a great deal of space to history and cultural complexities. This he does with an admirable sense of proportion, not overwhelming the reader with his knowledge. He also avoids introspection – this is not a book about him, he stresses, it is about the "brothers" of the title, who are united by a struggle. Mamoń tries to strip the Jihad of its odium and see it more as a struggle for freedom, and not for religious domination. At the same time, he does not hide the fact that there are a great many Islamic radicals, particularly where old state structures lie in ruins, in large part through the actions of Russia and the West.

Marcin Kube
Translated by Soren Gauger


MARCIN MAMOŃ
WOJNA BRACI. BOJOWNICY, DŻIHADYŚCI, KIDNAPERZY
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WYDAWNICTWO LITERACKIE

A dull thud against the iron door shook the padlock free from its hasp, the grate of the bolt sliding back tore us from our lethargy. The beam of a flashlight illuminated the cell. A few young men with machine guns stood in the doorway. All of them wearing masks. Only one stepped in — the oldest one, it turned out. He spoke faultless English, with a British accent. "One leaves, the other stays," he ordered. Even those few meters we had to walk blindfolded.

The interrogation was a few meters away, in a neighboring empty cell. Inside, the interrogator let me remove the blindfold to see him for the first time. There wasn't much to see. He was wearing a green camouflage ski mask. Only his eyes were visible: they were dark, and surprisingly jovial. The masked man might have been 175 centimeters tall, and was rather plump. Many weeks were to pass before I would see his highly unusual face. We took off our shoes and sat on the dirty mattresses spread over practically the entire floor space.

"I'll tell you what's going on," he began. "You've been kidnapped. We're from the Al-Nusra Front and we do not intend to sell you to another group. There are at least fifteen such groups here who could do you harm. We're only after money, and it's up to your government how much time you'll spend here."

"How much do you want for us?"

"That depends on how important you are."

"And if our government won't pay?"

"They all pay. Always."

"Even the Americans?"

"Of course."

"And the British?"

"Them too."

"What do you know about Poland?"

"Poland I only know from the weather maps."

No government has ever admitted that they have paid ransoms to terrorists, but the French, Spaniards, Italians, and Germans pay, as even John Cantlie has admitted in his YouTube appearances. He was furious that neither the American government nor the British was able to strike a deal with the kidnappers who took him, John Foley, and others hostage. Relatives of the murdered Americans have even said that the government threatened to prosecute if they tried to collect the ransom on their own. They could, however, have been persuaded to say this by the State Department or FBI, so that no one would later accuse the USA of fueling the abduction mechanism and sponsoring terrorism.

The ISIL kidnappers were initially after money. Only later did they suggest exchanging prisoners, knowing all too well that no one on the other side would agree. "The problem was that those weren't typical ransom abductions. The kidnappers were in fact pressing their demands on the governments." (...)

The talk with my interrogator didn't last long, fifteen or twenty minutes at most. He told me who had captured us, and that we were lucky that it was them. I wanted to believe him, but I had no way of verifying his words. He was our only contact to the outside world. He could have told me whatever he pleased. The information that we'd been kidnapped by Al-Qaeda consoled us, however. Even if at one time they had sold Foley, Cantlie, and other hostages to ISIL, that was ages ago. Today they were enemies of the Islamic State. They were fighting for the souls of Muslims in the entire Ummah. They even fired at each other. The Islamic State symbols must have been scratched into the cell walls by ISIL warriors they had taken prisoner.

The interrogator asked what I did for a living and how I had crossed the border; he also asked about the people who had invited us to Syria. We admitted that Hamza had invited us, and that he hadn't picked us up at the border. "And what if Hamza sold you?" The voice fell silent. He waited patiently for an answer... I didn't know what to respond. "No. That's impossible. He's my friend," I replied at length, though I knew my interrogator could have been right. I couldn't stop thinking about that for the days and nights to come. Hamza was my only hope. How to come to terms with the thought that he'd betrayed me, if he was the only one who could get us out of here... The Polish government? Would they pay the ransom? How much time would have to pass before they would conclude we had been abducted? Two weeks? Three? More? Negotiations with terrorists in Syria who considered themselves above the law could take ages. Half a year? A year, maybe two? And if they didn't pay...?

We were well aware that if there was a worst place on Earth to get in trouble or vanish, it was here, in battle-ravaged Syria, controlled by dozens, perhaps even hundreds of warring Jihadist organizations.

Translated by Soren Gauger

*A wonderful, empathetic account of a small country high in the clouds, where the people are joyful, extremely naive, and very poor.*

Jacek Kleyff

# Natasza Goerke

(born 1960) is a novelist, poet, essayist and columnist. In 2003 her collection of short stories, *47 na odlew* [*47 and a Smack in the Face*], was longlisted for the NIKE literary award. Her books have been translated into English and German, and her work has also appeared in the press in those languages.

© Natasza Goerke

## THERE

In the 1990s Natasza Goerke specialized in writing mini short stories, unconventional ones, generally in the spirit of the absurd. At the time she was rightly regarded as one of the more interesting personalities representing the new Polish literature that started to emerge after 1989. Then came a long period of silence, but now she's back with an attractive, extremely personal book about Nepal. This faraway country has come to be highly significant in Goerke's life, and could be described as her second, spiritual homeland. *Tam* [*There*] is her attempt to describe the nature of her fascination with Nepal.

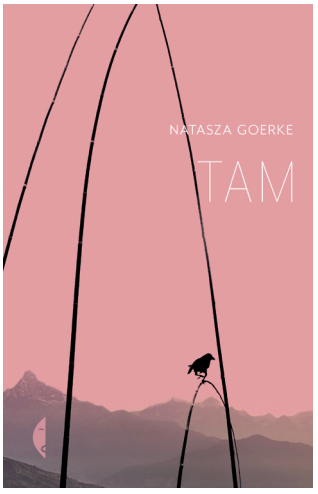
The book is a hybrid text, not exactly a collection of very short essays about the culture, history and everyday life of Nepal, and not exactly a set of impressions and thoughts on this intriguing country. In the foreground we find what Goerke has seen, heard, felt, touched and tasted, and then strained through her own sensitivity, including her subtle linguistic sense ("The Nepalese sit on their beauty like a naked king on a golden throne, trying to make ends meet"). Meanwhile, one of the major themes of this account is transformation, or rather change for the worse. Goerke made her first trip to Nepal in the remote 1980s, when apart from a few mountaineers hardly anybody went there. The old-world, innocent atmosphere she found there has since been destroyed by the tourist industry and a wasteful economy (e.g. intense deforestation). She movingly describes how her favourite country has been devastated in the past thirty years, and how it has been unable to resist the force of global capitalism. She sets this "elegy" – in which she mourns the lost past – within a distinct frame, starting and ending with the catastrophe that struck Nepal in April 2015, when the biggest earthquake for eighty years killed almost nine thousand Nepalis and caused the country to collapse in ruins.

Notably, Goerke's wise, balanced attitude to the "small country in the sky" and its proud, friendly citizens is full of empathy. She doesn't pretend to have dropped her European perspective, or that the world she is revealing has no mysteries for her. In her introduction she notes: "As a whole, Nepal eluded me. It ran off, esca-

ped and totally refused to pose for a group photo." As a result, the portrait she produces is the sum of "fragments, bigger and smaller things, featherweight and heavyweight matters". It's also worth stressing that she is both caring and critical towards the Nepali way of life. Naturally, under the influence of the landscape and some strong sensual experiences she does yield to the mystic quality of the place, but at the same time she never forgets that Nepal is a backward, beleaguered country, and there's nothing at all attractive about its widespread poverty.

Goerke's style is a strong feature of this book – there are plenty of complex, striking sentences, and lots of adjectives and surprising verbal combinations. This is no tourist guidebook, and we also need to accept the fact that Goerke's love of Nepal is extremely intimate, and thus only communicable to a limited degree.

Dariusz Nowacki
Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones




NATASZA GOERKE
TAM
WYDAWNICTWO CZARNE
WOŁOWIEC 2017
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ANDREW NURNBERG ASSOCIATES
WARSAW

Of course I knew Nepal was at the point where tectonic plates meet. One is aware of many dangers here, but perhaps it's simply because there are so many of them that one ignores the risk. In any case, all the elements are dangerous in Nepal. Fire is dangerous – people light fires at their own peril, and each year they transform the mountain slopes into large graveyards. Water, though life-giving, is dangerous – year in, year out, during the Monsoon it breaks the dams, and thousands of Nepalis lose their homes, often their lives as well. The air, at least in the Kathmandu Valley, is dangerous too – the level of pollution is not yet equal to that of Beijing, but without a protective face mask, even the healthiest among us first produces black mucus, and then develops every possible ailment of the throat, sinuses and lungs.

But earth can be the most dangerous element of all, for as my neighbour Krishna says, there's no escaping the earth. Krishna is the owner of a smoothly planed wooden board, on which he sells garlic. He has the name of a god and a knee-length shirt, and although he is fifty, he looks a thousand. He's never heard of tectonic plates, nor does he know how to read and write, but he's quite an expert on the signs the earth emits. The earth had already warned Krishna that something was wrong in March. And not just once – there were three signs. First of all, quite unexpectedly, because it was a sunny day, a mighty gale sprang up, and minutes later it had snapped the steel poles on which some prayer flags were fluttering. A couple of days later, on the dot of noon, the sun disappeared, and a downpour unheard of at that time of year turned the paths and roads into raging torrents. And later yet, this time in the middle of the night, the stars suddenly went pale, and in the pitch-black night, quick as a flash, seven dragons appeared – as ominous as lightning bolts and as dazzling as a portent that makes one close one's eyes. All this had caused a real fright, but had soon sunk into oblivion, for portents only reveal their meaning when they come true. Even though Krishna had spent the next month running about the village warning people, nobody had believed him. And no wonder – who would give credence to the dismal prophecies of an old man, when the March sky is bright blue again, the rhododendrons are in bloom, the young corn is rustling, and the sunshine is deceptively carefree? But Krishna knew his facts. He tipped the garlic into a jute sack,

shielded his two small windows with the only piece of furniture he possessed – a chest of drawers the size of half the room – strengthened the roof of his hut with the wooden board and, muttering prayers to the god Krishna, began to wait.

And April came, the most beautiful month in the Himalayas, when faith in a better today enters for good into life that has returned to life. I had just come down to Kathmandu from the mountains to meet up with my Ukrainian friend Lesia before she took off. It was sunny, the sky was blue, a Saturday. I left my things at the hotel, caught a taxi in the street and set off – that much I know for sure. Everything that occurred soon after my memory has covered with a blanket, and is only gradually revealing, piece by piece. Maybe one day it will reveal the whole thing. For now all I can remember is that I went by taxi from one end of Kathmandu to the other, from Swayambhunath to Bodhnath, that the air was humid, that it was coming up to noon, and that at some point something started to happen that I had never experienced before: the earth suddenly began to ripple like a water bed, my taxi started spinning like a top, and everything that had been standing collapsed in a few seconds flat – rows of motorbikes parked by the kerbs tumbled like dominoes, shop windows shattered, and one after another plastic water containers fell from the roofs. One of them must have smashed to pieces quite nearby, because the people running past were wet. I had no idea what was happening. If anything occurred to me at the time, it was probably that it was the wind again, another caprice of the weather, and that my driver, who had leaped out of the taxi screaming into a mobile phone, had just gone mad. But things are rarely the way we think they are. It was not the wind.

I remember not so much getting out, as rolling out of the car, and although I was trying to walk, I started to crawl on all fours. I remember some of the houses disintegrating as easily as if they weren't made of bricks but of a child's building blocks, and the steps I had sat down on vibrating, as if I were sitting on a spinning washing machine. I remember the people – like a broken string of beads – reeling along the pavements and roadways, falling down and getting up like on an ice rink, as they rushed in one direction: straight ahead. I remember someone had lost their glasses, I remember gripping my phone in my hands, and my heart thumping in my ears. But I was as calm as the ocean, for beyond the limit of terror there's no fear.

Time had not stopped, just slowed its pace, and though it was happening at lightning speed, everything seemed to last an eternity. Birds huddled on the lawns and on the domes of stupas, and all the shouting and screaming was absorbed by the overwhelming silence, as if it weren't silence but a sponge. And then the silence was cut in half by the wail of ambulance sirens, and instead of birds, helicopters appeared in the sky. That is all I can remember.

Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones

A book revealing new facts about the life of St Maximillian Kolbe, a man who sacrificed his life in Auschwitz for a fellow inmate.

© Jakub Szymczuk *Gość Niedzielny*

## Tomasz P. Terlikowski

(born 1974) – journalist, philosopher, columnist, translator, writer and Catholic campaigner, one of the best known Polish conservatives. He made his debut as a novelist in 2010 with his dystopian *Operacja „Chusta"* [*Operation "Shawl"*]. He is the author of over a dozen books, mostly on mostly on the Church and its history.

# MAXIMILIAN M. KOLBE: A BIOGRAPHY OF A SAINT AND MARTYR

We've grown used to looking at St Maximillian Kolbe from the vantage-point of his martyrdom in the German concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau. Most visual representations of him – usually as a shaven, beardless man in striped prison gear and with an Auschwitz inmate's number – contribute to this image. However, such presentations are in radical contradiction to the orthodox canon which says that saints are to be depicted with apotheosised bodies as inhabitants of the New Jerusalem. According to this rule Father Maximilian should appear in icons bearded and in a friar's habit, with the right attributes for his category of sainthood, two crowns or a medal of the Immaculate Conception.

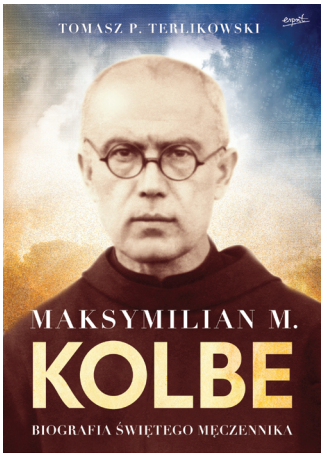
This is the trope which Tomasz Terlikowski adopts in his newest book, which is the first such complete biography of Father Kolbe in Polish. Terlikowski 's public image is that of an ardent polemicist and frequent guest of TV shows, where he engages in verbal duels with his adversaries, but in this book he has shown himself an astute fact-finder who has examined the saint's biography step by step and scrupulously analysed even the tiniest details of his life.

Terlikowski demonstrates that it's impossible to understand the motives which drove father Maximilian to give up his life for a fellow prisoner whom he didn't know and who thanks to Kolbe's self-sacrifice survived the War – unless we acquaint ourselves with his full biography. This is the task which Terlikowski has undertaken, spending years on preliminary research and collecting masses of documentary records on the subject. The result is a book which describes the whole of St. Maximilian's spiritual progress, his mission, achievements and inner life. The picture that emerges is of an extraordinary individual perpetually embarking on tasks which seemed to exceed his potential.

Sickly and tubercular with only one lung, he should have been a permanent resident of sanatoria yet he accomplished gigantic projects, unique on a global scale. He founded the *Militia Immaculatae* (Knights of the Immaculate Conception), an organization with a future membership of millions of Catholics all over the world. When he started a mission in Japan he did not speak Japanese, yet the monastery he founded in Nagasaki is still in operation today. He founded the largest religious house in the world before the Second World War. Niepokalanów, which he established in the middle of nowhere, would one day accommodate over six hundred Franciscans. There he created a media empire where he published the world's most read magazine. He started a radio broadcasting station and experimented with television. His acute sense of the media was far ahead of his times. He knew very well that the pulpit was no longer enough for efficient evangelisation, you needed a microphone. He was a far-sighted visionary, an ingenious strategist, and a resourceful organiser.

As Tomasz Terlikowski observes, none of this would have been possible if it had not been for the deep faith which inspired this charismatic Franciscan. His dogged resilience and determination came from his personal relationship with God, which his biographer describes, disclosing many hitherto unknown details of Maximilian's spiritual life. This is the book's paramount asset – not only do we get to know Maximilian through his deeds and achievements, especially his death as a martyr, but also through what made him tick, impelling him to be perpetually surpassing himself.

Grzegorz Górny
Translated by Danuta Stok




TOMASZ P. TERLIKOWSKI
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WYDAWNICTWO ESPRIT

Fritzsch walked along the rows of prisoners, selecting victims from each... Those prisoners who remained in the lines where the selection had been done could breathe a sigh of relief. But those selected... stepped forward, out of their row. One of the selected, number 5659, Franciszek Gajowniczek, started to despair. "My poor wife and children, they'll be left orphaned," he was to have said. Father Maximilian heard this and... when the selection came to an end, he stepped out of his row, took his cap off and stood to attention in front of Camp Commander Fritzsch.

"What's this Polish Swine want?" asked the SS-man.

"I'm a Polish Catholic priest, and old. I want to die instead of the man with a wife and children," replied the Franciscan, indicating Franciszek Gajowniczek.

The SS-man didn't say anything for a while, but agreed. Though he could have added Father Maximilian to the condemned group without discharging Gajowniczek. Perhaps it was the first miracle the Immaculate Conception wrought in the camp. The paterfamilias returned to his row and the Franciscan took his place.

Why did Father Maximilian do it? Let's start with his own words, according to which his reason was to restore the father to his family. The man, priest, monk believed that this particular family needed a father, a man, and he sacrificed his life for it, acting through his love of families, marriage, the duties of family life. (...)

Or perhaps he simply thought that it was a priest's role to save marriages, families, even at the cost of his own life? (...)

We know little about the circumstances of Father Maximilian Kolbe's cruel death as a martyr. Those who witnessed it died with him. What happened at the time remains a mystery, the words spoken by the Franciscan to comfort the disconsolate remain a mystery, as does his own death locked up in a cell. What we do know, however, leaves us in no doubt the death to which he and nine other human beings were condemned through hatred not only of Christ but of faith in humanity in general, was truly martyr's death.

It started with the "stripping of garments". The prisoners, ordered to strip right down, were deprived of what remained of their human dignity and sense of protection. They were to enter death deprived of even such illusive cover as their striped uniforms. Like Jesus nailed to the cross, they were to die naked. Their place of death was a tight cell with no windows, pallets, source of light or any protection from the cold. As the ten prisoners where led inside, the SS-men cruelly joked: "you'll wither like tulips here."

Death by starvation is one of the worst possible deaths. The body gradually weakens but this in no way lessens its craving to eat or the aggression due to its want of food. Later come apathy, drowsiness, sometimes disturbed vision and perception, and finally – after two to six weeks - death. A cruel, painful death often preceded by loss of consciousness. The suffering was so great that people died cursing.

This time, however, it was different. From Father Kolbe's cell, came the sounds of prayer, of the rosary recited in unison, of hymns to Our Lady, as also of sermons preached by the Franciscan. „I thought I was in church," Bruno Borgowiec, at the time acting as interpreter in the penal block, recalled the atmosphere of prayer. The prayers were so fervent that often the prisoners didn't hear the SS-men enter the block and it was only their yelling that interrupted their prayers. When the doors opened, some of the condemned crawled up to the Germans and begged for food and water. In reply, they received vicious kicks in the stomach which usually ended in death. Meanwhile, Father Kolbe heard confessions during the night, granted absolution, kept watch over the dying:

Father Maximilian's priestly arms become their last confessional where, in a barely audible voice, they confess their sins. "Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned". Absolved in their hour of death, they die while above them resounds a trustful Hail Mary..., "pray for us sinners now and in the hour of our death..." and "eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord". Then he would make a sign of the cross with his thumb on the dead man's forehead and close the motionless eyes of the man starved to death. And that was it.

Right to the last moments of his life Father Maximilian remained a priest, God's messenger to men, preacher of Divine mercy, telling his flock that the Immaculate Conception loved them. In that cell he proved the truth of the words that Niepokalanów wasn't a printing press, a publishing house, or a monastery, but a state of the soul. And that the most important concern of every Knight of the Immaculate Conception shouldn't be the progress of its works but the "progress of God's love in our souls and the constant growing closer to the Sacred Heart of Jesus through the intercession of the Immaculate Conception. The methods have changed but the goal remains the same.

Translated by Danuta Stok

A controversial essay on the jihad and contemporary Europe, by one of the best-known Polish political journalists.

# Paweł Lisicki

(born 1966), writer, essayist, and political journalist. Since 2013 Chief Editor of the weekly magazine *Do Rzeczy*. Prizewinner of the Andrzej Kijowski Award in 1998 for his collection of essays entitled *Doskonałość i nędza* [*Perfection and Misery*]. Received the Knight's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta in 2010. 2016 holder of the Grand Prix for Freedom of Speech, which is awarded by Stowarzyszenie Dziennikarzy Polskich (Polish Journalists' Association), for his book *Krew na naszych rękach?* [*Blood on Our Hands?*].

© Katia Serek

Filip Memches interviews Paweł Lisicki, author of the book *Dżihad i samozagłada Zachodu* [*The Jihad and the Self-Annihilation of the West*]

**In your book on the Jihad and the self-annihilation of the West Pope Francis is one of the main figures standing in the dock. Was it your highly critical appraisal of his pontificate that prompted you to write this book?**

There are several points to note here. The first is something which may be called an Islamic terror wave. It's a question of the scale of the attacks and their frequency of occurrence. Western cities are living in a state of permanent fear. The second point is the heart-rending isolation of Christians on territories occupied by Muslims. Their predicament is being treated in a ritual manner. From time to time you'll hear that they are being persecuted, that they're being killed, but such observations are not making it to the vanguard of public opinion, because more attention is being devoted to other issues, for example ecology. And finally we have the third question – Pope Francis' reaction to this situation. He's behaving in a strange way, because he's stating his position in a way in which it's impossible to tell whether he's defending Christians or taking a stand against Fundamentalism, which, as he claims, is no different regardless of whether it's manifested in its Christian or its Islamic version. Worse still, for some time now the Pope has been advocating a need to open up the borders for Islamic immigrants – as if he couldn't see that their influx will change Europe's cultural identity.

**So what should the Church do in this situation?**

Above all it should not beat about the bush. Here this means not to succumb to political correctness, which says that Islam is a religion of peace and Muslims are not very different from Christians, chiefly as regards ethical doctrine, but religious doctrine as well. The Church should be showing the differences between Christianity and Islam. I'm not asking Pope Francis to launch a new crusade. However, if he were plain-speaking he would of course lend political support to those political leaders who have taken a different stance to Angela Merkel on the question of opening up the borders to Islamic immigrants. He's spoken in the European Parliament, so his views are being heard by politicians.

**But maybe the Pope thinks that playing down the differences between Christianity and Islam will contribute to world peace?**

If so, then we would have to say that the Pope is acting as a spokesman for secular humanism. He should be standing on guard of the deposit of faith, not resorting to an argument used by people who regard religion as a threat to world peace. From the theological point of view life in peace is not more important than religious truth. At any rate, the emphasis being put on the similarities and not the differences between the two religions has failed from the pragmatic point of view as well. Because it doesn't alter the fact that the Koran is full of passages commending the use of aggression on religious grounds. It's no coincidence that it was in the West that the concept of inalienable human dignity emerged, in outcome of the Christian religious tradition, not Islam, which does not recognise this kind of dignity. Islam does not even say that man was created in God's image and likeness. The Muslims coming to Europe bring their own tradition as it really is, not as we would like

to see it. Hence by turning a blind eye to the differences between Christianity and Islam we are putting ourselves at risk of yet another danger.

**A tide of liberal political and cultural change unacceptable both to Christianity and to Islam is rolling across the West. Suffice it to mention 'single-sex marriage.' Perhaps Christianity sees Islam as an ally for this battle?**

Of course we may regard the law of nature as common ground shared by both of these religious traditions. But the problem is the nature of contemporary Christianity. My impression is that we're dealing with a liberalisation of Christianity. So if the alliance you're asking about were to mean seeking deliverance in Islam – because contemporary Christianity is moving away from its own principles – then I say, 'No, thanks.' Because if that were the case, then Islam would soon turn out to be the only religious tradition in Europe representing the basic principles of God's law or the law of nature. It would be a peculiar paradox which I hope we will be able to avoid. And that Christianity will not commit suicide by watering itself down in a sea of secular humanism.

Translated by Teresa Bałuk-Ulewiczowa

# JIHAD AND THE SELF-ANNIHILATION OF THE WEST

Paweł Lisicki's book *Dżihad i samozagłada Zachodu* [Jihad and the Self-Annihilation of the West] lambasts contemporary Europe. It shows how for several years now Europeans have been living in growing fear of the terror that comes from Muslim countries. And it argues that they have themselves to blame for their predicament. The title of this long essay says a lot.

Lisicki breaches the clichéd formulas applied by the political elites and media to the way the current situation in Europe in presented. In his book you won't find the standard narrative served up to the European public. A claim you will often hear or read nowadays is that the source of the violence giving rise to terrorist attacks does not lie in the differences between the religions.

According to this line of reasoning what we are facing is a conflict between tolerance and fanaticism, while the suggestion that it is a clash of the Western civilisation with Islam is treated well-nigh as heresy. Political correctness rules that Muslims are to be held as "Different" and treated on special, better terms, so to present them as a threat to Europe is tantamount to the violation of a taboo.

Lisicki challenges a secular prejudice characteristic of the narrative propagated by Western left-wing and liberal opinion-shapers which has also been affecting Christians on the tidal wave of secularisation. The prejudice in question is "moral maturity," which, according to its advocates, should increase with the advance of history.

If we feel morally mature we consider ourselves better than our forebears because we think of them as occupying a lower rung on the ladder of historical progress, Lisicki argues. There is an obvious conclusion: at a certain stage the differences between Christianity and Islam will cease to antagonise the two religions, as readiness to engage in dialogue will outweigh the need to proselytise.

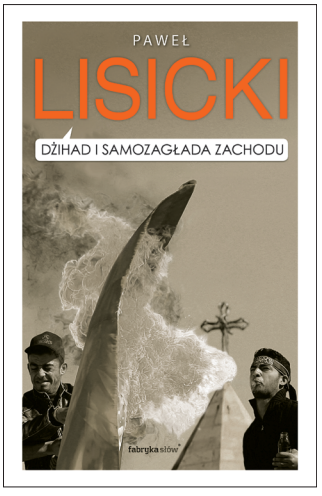
The snag is that moral maturity is an illusion preventing the West from recognising the danger facing it and making it surrender to Islam. In Lisicki's opinion, if today's wars are not as cruel as those in the past, it is certainly not because we are any better. "Blocking the other side's move with the use of weapons of mass destruction is the basis of global peace and stability. Greater social control has put

curbs on violence. Generally accessible opportunities to get rich by legal means has discouraged people from engaging in theft. Covetousness, greed, the thirst for power, and cruelty have not vanished, they have only assumed new forms," we read in the book.

Lisicki refers to the Koran as well as to the work of historians and Orientalists to refute the dreams of a dialogue alleged to ultimately clear away the differences between Christianity and Islam. For the advocates of a multicultural utopia the facts are turning out to be uncomfortable.

Lisicki's book is a brilliantly composed pamphlet which will not leave the reader indifferent. And even if it is oversimplified and unfair in its appraisal of the strategy of opening up to other religions, which the Church adopted after the Second Vatican Council, it will still make Catholics reconsider their ideas on the bounds to dialogue with the heterodox.

Filip Memches
Translated by Teresa Bałuk-Ulewiczowa




PAWEŁ LISICKI
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PAWEŁ LISICKI

November 2014. Six weeks later Islamic attacks would start in Paris, and somewhat earlier yet another video appeared on the Internet showing a masked man slitting the throat of the fellow-man kneeling next to him. A typical scene. A man in black grabs his victim by the hair and draws a knife over his throat. You don't get a clear view of the red blood mixing in with the orange colour of that weird apparel, the costume of those who did not want to adhere to Allah. A month like many before and many later. If we are to trust the statistics, in the course of those thirty days about 200 Christians – maybe a few more, maybe a few less – died for their faith at the hands of Muslims. These are not exact figures, they were collected later. According to the American TV WND, in 2012 1,201 Christians were killed because of their religion, and by 2013 the annual figure had risen to 2,123, so it is easy to calculate the average per month. These statistics were only for deaths where the perpetrators' motive was undeniably hatred of Christianity. Anti-Christian attacks and crimes were committed in a total of 37 Islamic countries, with Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Pakistan, Nigeria, and Sudan at the top of the league for number of incidents. The victims died – and continue to die – in various ways. Sometimes they have their throats slit, sometimes they are shot, some trampled to death by a crowd, some have their houses set on fire. Sometimes the women are raped before they are killed, and their relatives are tortured. Some of the killings are individual murders done on the quiet, others are mass executions, the most notorious of which was done in February 2015, when Muslim terrorists killed 21 Egyptian Copts.

Yet on the last day of November 2014 the world's media were busy reporting on other subjects. Showing neither the terror in the eyes of the innocent victims about to be slaughtered, nor concern for their fate. They were focusing on the visit of the Head of the Roman Catholic Church in Istanbul.

It was all very symbolic. The spiritual leader of the West, which the Pope may be considered to be, travels

to the erstwhile capital of Eastern Christendom to meet top-rank representatives of Islam. Although there is no Muslim counterpart to the Pope, nor a supreme religious authority in Islam, nonetheless the Pope's visit to Turkey could have triggered the idea that it was a singular meeting of two religions, you could say an inter-faith dialogue at the highest possible level. After all, for centuries under Ottoman rule the Grand Mufti of Istanbul was probably the chief religious authority in Islam.

Under the beautiful, soaring dome of Istanbul's magnificent Blue Mosque Pope Francis stood "in silent adoration," as the journalists accompanying him put it. The ceremony must have been impressive; even in the press agency pictures there is a striking elegance and serenity, a kind of majesty about the great hall in this house of prayer. And the two figures clad in white from top to toe, the Pope and his host, with the crowd of diplomats, clergymen, theologians and academics attending them, like a swarm of black crows on a white snowfield. Judging by the facial expressions and gestures, the atmosphere was full of mutual understanding and respect. A sight well worth seeing. As the correspondent of The Observer wrote, "In a gesture designed to highlight his commitment to inter-faith dialogue, Pope Francis conducted a silent prayer alongside a senior Islamic cleric in Istanbul's Blue Mosque . . .. Facing Mecca, Francis bowed his head in prayer for several minutes while standing next to Istanbul's Grand Mufti Rahmi Yaran." Despite the presence of so many observers of all persuasions, I have not managed to hear from them what the Holy Father's prayer entailed. All I learned was that the Pope certainly did not stop at admiring the wonderful architecture and the staggering empty space bedecked by its dome-shaped ceiling. No, his position facing Mecca, a gesture typical for Muslims, suggested that Francis was indeed praying – albeit still in silence – to Allah. What was he saying? What words did he use?

. . . Isn't that what people would generally expect of the Pope today? For him to be nice and friendly? To be able to see things of value beyond the Church and appreciate the good in other religions? You'd want him to be a builder of bridges and a mediator between different cultures, wouldn't you? Yet I'm still worried by the question how the Pope could have worshipped God in such a place. Yes, I'm going to spoil that atmosphere of mutual understanding and say that I can neither understand nor condone such behaviour. I'm not at all convinced that since the Pope was on a religious visit to Turkey he had to pray in a mosque. Had he never heard of the anti-Christian atrocities committed in the name of Allah? Had he not spared a thought to those who paid with their lives and still continue to do so for not wanting to turn to Mecca but instead worship Jesus Christ?

Translated by Teresa Bałuk-Ulewiczowa

*(...) this marks the appearance of a remarkable essay talent, subtle and powerful all at once.*

Andrzej Horubała, *DoRzeczy*

# Marta Kwaśnicka

(born 1981) is a writer, blogger, and a university lecturer. She has written two collections of essays: *Krew z mlekiem* [*Blood in the Milk*] (2014) and *Jadwiga* (2015), as well as two academic monographs. In 2015 she received the Identitas Literary Award and the Four Columns Literary Award for *Blood in the Milk*, as well as a nomination for the Józef Mackiewicz Literary Award. In 2016 she received the Wings of Daedalus National Library Literary Award for *Jadwiga*.

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# JADWIGA

The skeptics claim that the golden age of the essay has come and gone, that even if today's authors were to stand on the shoulders of Montaigne they could not hope to compare to an Edmund Wilson, an Auden, or a Brodski. Be this as it may, there is one field in which the genre continues to hold strong: the biographical essay. For all those weary of the struggle from the family nest, childhood, various stages of the physical and ideological teething process, who want to soar the skies of associations, to write of affiliations and echoes without a tangle of footnotes, for all those who fight for space for associations, couplets, a gentle nod to the memory of another generation or one's own – the essay is for you.

In this net Kwaśnicka has managed to catch Jadwiga, the heiress to the Angevins and Piasts, the Habsburgs and the Bans of Bosnia. In England she would have been the protagonist of Shakespeare's chronicle plays, in France, Maurice Druon would have written about her. In Poland, fate was less kind: the founder of the Jagiellonian University and the negotiator of peace with the Teutons, a woman of flesh and blood, was given a lid of milk-white marble and a stearin garb for her tomb.

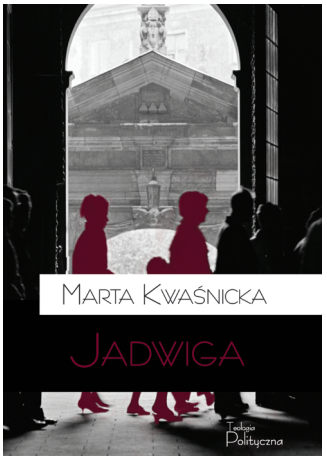
Luckily, Marta Kwaśnicka has not taken the well-worn path of debunking and purging the heroicism from the myth, which would doubtless be the case with more strident authors. She has preferred to take the path of Pygmalion. This is both apt and effective: For why should we strip a saint of her heroism?

Instead, we have a tale of late Medieval spirituality and Krakow fog. Of the sweet challenges that await first-year students – and those which, seven hundred years ago, awaited a girl younger than them, who wielded heavier arms than Joan of Arc's. The latter's task was only (!) to persuade the Dauphin of her vision, lead the army, and perish. As a teenager in a cold, pre-Renaissance castle, Jadwiga had to achieve much more: to accept a fate that was not of her choosing, but which sealed the fate of several kingdoms and peoples – and whose threads, thin and

frayed like the shroud found in her tomb, can be located in our day, when we read press articles about the maneuvers of the Russian fleet in the Baltic. This is not megalomania, it is a weave of causes and effects, delicate and firm as the scale armor that the young queen pulled over her head to rush into battle and receive homage from the Hospodar of Moldavia.

We can read this essay on Jadwiga and search for events that left their mark on Krakow, the University, Poland, Lithuania, and Belarus, savoring the "long duration," that specialty of the fine kitchen of Annales, which stretches like molasses. But one might also prefer to leap into the velvety void (something like a bungee jump or a prayer; something like Jadwiga's journey in the fall of 1384 to a strange city on the misty Vistula) and savor the way the gaps are filled in. These lacunae are there in every Medieval life story; and how could they not be in the tale of a queen who had to reject her betrothed to wed the pagan Prince of Lithuania, who exchanged her jewels for leather and wood replicas to fund churches, psalters, schools, and a university? The Medieval scholar, faced with these gaps, would have industriously pieced together moldy parchments; Marta Kwaśnicka has written an essay.

Wojciech Stanisławski
Translated by Soren Gauger




MARTA KWAŚNICKA
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MARTA KWAŚNICKA

In 1378 two Central European monarchs, Leopold III of Austria and Louis I of Hungary, entered an alliance ratified in a ritual bedding ceremony of their children. Wilhelm and Jadwiga, were still minors at the time but were thereby pledged to marry. The princess was sent to Vienna for two years, where she grew acquainted with the customs of the Habsburg court. She would have surely stayed there longer, were it not for the death of her sister, Catherine. Jadwiga was now heiress to the throne of Hungary, so she was called home. Wilhelm was expected to be her coregent. Educated to be a sovereign, she received a superior education to most princesses. We know that Jadwiga spoke several languages, certainly German and Latin, probably also Czech and Polish. She was taught to respect intellectuals, and to surround herself with them, which is why she later did so in Krakow – a teenager among professors and canons.

The 1378 ceremony did not make Wilhelm Habsburg her lawful husband. This had to be confirmed through consummation, after the husband and wife came of age; it could also be nullified. The party terminating the precontract had to pay a handsome sum to the injured party. This explains the confusion and uproar when Wilhelm came to Krakow in 1385 to rule alongside Jadwiga, who had just assumed the Polish throne. All that was needed was for the couple to consummate the marriage. Then there would have been no turning back.

We can hardly speak of desire or a tragedy of passion. This love – between an eleven-year-old and a boy a

few years her elder, whom she had not seen for ages – must have left her chagrined. The point was only to follow the letter of the law. And so the Prince tried to gain access to Wawel Castle to spend the night with the Queen. Evidently everything happened with her knowledge. He was chased off, but she, still unsure of whom to choose, though more prone to follow the will of her father than the urgings of the Polish lords, even slipped away from Wawel Hill to the Franciscan Monastery to share a dance with Wilhelm. There was undoubtedly some flirtation. There is even a moving legend, first cited by Jan Długosz, that, when Jadwiga was effectively imprisoned in the castle – as the lords of Poland decided it was better to be safe than sorry and eventually locked her in – she tried to break down the door with a battleaxe to get to her betrothed. Nineteenth-century hagiographers loved this story. (...)

I believe that the battleaxe story is entirely the work of hagiographers, eagerly embraced by Długosz – for the lives of the saints are like sermons, they require turning points, moments in which the martyrdom materializes, when a previously rebellious figure says fiat and begins draining his or her bitter cup to the dregs. A whole chain of circumstances is lost here, such as the fact that, at bottom, sainthood – whether we are speaking of a Catholic saint or one of Camus' atheist heroes – is lodged much deeper in mankind. It never manifests itself through hysterical acts. Sainthood is more of a cave-in below the surface, resulting, at most, in an outward shudder. Even more, this "profundity" of spiritual breakthroughs is not reserved for saints and hermits. It might happen that very little occurs in a person's biography – such as the case of Emily Dickinson, who spent most of her time in her room, writing. Perhaps this happens more often to women than to men – their lives are no less dramatic existences, full of tension and tragedy buzzing somewhere beneath; of devils who attack from within, incapable to finding their way to the surface; of the fire that burns in their entrails, though not the slightest flush appears on their skin.

This could be the key to Jadwiga's life: she kept it all inside of her, the struggle occurred in her head, seldom rising to the surface. The Queen's biographers have seldom been conscious of the fact that if rulers are to be true rulers, they never truly belong to themselves, and Jadwiga was undoubtedly raised with this conviction; probably she never truly loved Habsburg, but had grown accustomed to seeing him as her betrothed. She knew him well and was not afraid of him, and she did not know Jagiełło at all. The will of Krakow's lords was not that of her deceased father – and if one thing inclined her to rebel, it was the consciousness that she was being forced to defy Louis' last will once again. A rebellion of this sort, out of fidelity to one's father, would have been noble, even if it was politically disadvantageous in terms of Polish interests. As such, I have no doubt that Jadwiga was protesting. She may have done so childishly, she may have wept, for some time she may have been willing to hear out those counselors who urged her to complete the nuptial formalities with Wilhelm. She may have even made an abortive attempt to flee. She had found herself in the thick of interests and influences like a bird in a net, alone for the very first time, abandoned by even her mother – and so she had to flail, as her instinct for self-preservation commanded. It was only after some time that she learned to confidently forge it into the ability to navigate amid quarreling factions. The decision made in 1385 and 1386 was, surely, hers to only a limited extent. At that point she was more interested in reconciling herself to the fact that her fate had become that of the Kingdom, and that nothing she did from then on would be inconsequential – and this likely took her some time, several months, or perhaps years. One has to mature to wear a crown, and wear it with dignity. A crown is a yoke; Jadwiga was meant to become a center of gravity for the whole kingdom, a lynchpin, an essence in a world that was losing its color and flavor. An individual who would provide a foothold. That is quite different from a drama of an unconsummated love affair. The story of her break-up with Wilhelm was surely more than this. This narrative would have been unthinkable in a world before the falsehoods of Romanticism.

Translated by Soren Gauger

*A book it would make no sense to read in one sitting.*

Joanna M. Kociszewska, *wiara.pl*

# Grzegorz Ryś

(born 1964) – Roman Catholic bishop, essayist, Church historian. Member of the weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny* editorial team, he also writes for several other Catholic periodicals. Author of a large number of essays published in newspapers and several religious ones published as books including [*Jeden, święty, powszechny, apostolski*] *One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic: Drogi światła* [*The Ways of Light*]; and [*Pierwsze jest pierwsze*] *First is Firs*t.

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# THE POWER OF THE WORD

There are at least three reasons why *Moc słowa* [*The Power of the Word*], Bishop Grzegorz Ryś's compilation of commentaries on biblical texts not only stands out from other similar works but deeply deserves to be made available to more than just Polish readers.

Above all, the author manages to achieve something which generally predetermines the popularity of such texts. Bishop Grzegorz Ryś's comments on well-known biblical passages are more than original – he presents them in such a way as to extricate and draw attention to details which generally go unnoticed, are omitted or ignored. Such an approach to the Bible has an exceptionally compelling effect. The reader constantly feels surprised by something which had seemed perfectly familiar, "hackneyed" and, perhaps, obvious. Apparently "tamed" biblical texts become enigmatic and ambiguous. Discovering novelty and depth in what is close and familiar is always greatly satisfying. And it is precisely to such a new discovery of bible texts that the author of *The Power of the Word* draws the reader.

A second reason why *The Power of the Word* is important is its literary value. Bishop Grzegorz Ryś writes his meditations in the form of short, self-contained pieces in varied yet always free styles. Sometimes he uses the first person singular, sometimes the passive tense, sometimes he refers to his memories, sometimes the commentary takes on a more objective character, from time to time he recalls events from the far distant past, at others something which took place the day before. The reader almost feels they are encroaching on private notes, peeping into a singular sort of "spiritual journal" or "biblical journal" written not so much for somebody from the outside as for the author himself. Thanks to the seemingly haphazard literary form, the author of *The Power of the Word* has managed to achieve a very interesting effect. He has created a subjective text which, at the same time, is not an expression of a subjective or – as is generally the case in such matters – correct view on everything. Bishop Grzegorz Ryś's texts are personal

but not annoyingly narcissistic. They constitute private notes but don't make the reader uncomfortable through blatant spiritual exhibitionism. The author has succeeded in writing personally while maintaining the high literary standards required by the formal or implied use of first-person narration. Readers are not appalled but, on the contrary, are intrigued by what they have glimpsed.

A third reason why Bishop Grzegorz Ryś's meditations should reach a decidedly broad readership are their size. Since *The Power of the Word* is a compilation of short biblical commentaries, the collection can easily be assimilated by today's readers, accustomed as they are to bite-sized "online" texts.

Janusz Pyda OP
Translated by Danuta Stok


BP GRZEGORZ RYŚ
MOC SŁOWA
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Whom among us doesn't remember Archimedes's cry when he discovered one of the most important laws of physics? What experience (and emotion!) does the cry reflect?! Joy in learning the truth, satisfaction, a sense of meaning in his whole earlier quest (persistent, long unfruitful, at times seemingly hopeless), but also the sense of revelation (!) and therefore sense of bestowal, unexpected (sudden) disclosure of a reality which until then had been veiled in secrecy. The presentiment of a new beginning – that from then on, nothing would be the same, that everything had acquired a new meaning and order – had become clear: at last, I hold the key to understanding the world and the rules hidden therein. Did you know that the same cry is uttered in the Gospels, except in the plural?

'Heurekamen', said Philip to Nathanael (cf. John 1, 45). 'We have found [DISCOVERED!] in Jesus, the son of Joseph of Nazareth, the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote.' He doesn't say it just like that, but shares his discovery. Shares it with the man he had consciously sought, right after having met Jesus. Precisely that: "sought" not only "met" (as we read in most Polish translations). The Greek: heuriskei (Latin: invenit) – he didn't come across him accidentally along the way, moreover he

didn't meet a random stranger. He sought him out! A man he no doubt knew well and with whom he wanted to share the greatest, unparalleled news, a discovery that made him burst with emotion!

He had studied the Scriptures, turned over the pages of the Tora and the Books of Prophets, examined the meanings, sensed the significance of answers hidden within. And, all at once, they revealed themselves to him, entirely anew and powerfully, as the Word fulfilled in the Incarnation, and opened a meaning hitherto unforeseen, not conforming to human criteria or expectations ('Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?' Nathanael asked). A meaning which set everything in order and shed light on it!

It's hard not to ask oneself: does meeting Jesus bring to our lips the cry of Archimedes and Philip? Does it awaken a similar emotion? Does it push us towards those closest to us with whom we feel the need to share our experience of such a defining moment?!

It's worth turning to the verse which opens the pericope. John writes: 'The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me."' (John 1, 43). Here again, he didn't "meet" but "found", "sought". We have here the same word: heuriskei (Latin: invenit). Really it was Jesus who found Philip and not Philip Jesus. The initiative, the first move is clearly Our Lord's. He does it, however, in a way that doesn't deprive man of his subjectivity and creativity, and reciprocity. "The found one" has the feeling that it is he who "has found" the "discovered one" that he has done the discovering"!

Translated by Danuta Stok

*The intermingling of images seemingly belonging to different categories is this poetry's great asset.*

Szymon Babuchowski, *Gość Niedzielny*

*Wojciech Wencel brings poetry face to face with big problems*

Tomasz Burek

© Katarzyna Wencel

# Wojciech Wencel

(born 1972) is a poet, columnist, and the recipient of many literary prizes, including the Kościelski Award, the Józef Mackiewicz Award, the Franciszek Karpiński Award, the Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówa Award, and the Father S. Pasierb Award. In 2014, the listeners of Polish Radio Programme 2 named his *Oda na dzień św. Cecylii* [*Ode for St. Cecilia's Day*] the most important volume of poetry written in Polish in the last quarter-century. He is also the author of the widely discussed volume of poems *Epigonia* [*Epigone*] (2016).

## EPIGONE

In *Epigone*, his tenth and latest collection, Wojciech Wencel, who is also an essayist and literary critic, invokes the ghosts of dead poets and the spirit of Polish poetry, just as he did in his earlier volume *De Profundis*.

Who are these ghosts? Kochanowski, Karpiński, Mickiewicz, Słowacki, and Norwid, the forgotten émigré poets, such as Kazimierz Wierzyński, and Jan Lechoń and Stanisław Baliński, two epigones by choice of the Romantics who strike an exceptionally sympathetic chord with Wencel. Recently deceased poets are represented by Zbigniew Herbert. And living poets include Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz and Aleksander Rybczyński.

Wencel squares up not only with Poland's national literature, but with its history as well. He is also making a more and more committed contribution to the issues now being discussed and debated in Poland. He also cites the names of famous, though not always remembered, heroes and nameless victims. Associating with the departed means that we belong to the same community: we owe our lives to them, and thanks to them our homeland exists because they died for it (and for us), because they wanted to bequeath it to us as the supreme value among the things of this world.

The book's title perversely, even ostentatiously declares a self-diagnosis that's deadly for the poet – "this is nothing new" – as if pre-empting the expected attack by critics, especially the fashionable and progressive ones. And yes, they're ready and more than willing to vivisect Wencel's poems, writing about them with a patronizing smile or even with horror, because how else could you treat such a "necrophiliac-passéist"? And yet there is no imitation in his "epigonism" or passive continuation of obsolete ideas. "Born later I still hear their voices," the poet confesses in the interpretive key poem *The Old Poets* Wencel's poetry is the pathway to understanding, making contact with the old poets, as if his mind and heart were a conduit for the phrases with which they want to speak to us again,

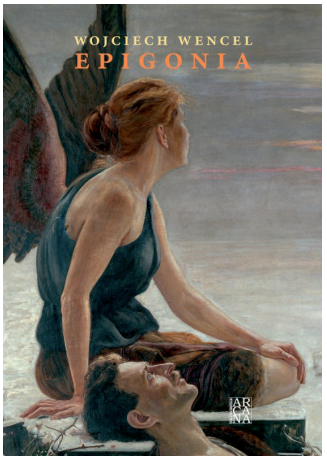
reminding us that they are among us, that their place is here, with us, that they live in us. It is also a testimony to the fact that poetry has a salvific power.

In the twenty-six poems that make up the volume, images from quite distant history and memory, the recent 20th century, and the contemporary times mix together. We get the death of the defenders of freedom: Danuta "Inka" Siedzikówna, a 1946 victim of judicial murder by the Communists; the self-immolation of Ryszard Siwiec at the Warsaw Stadium in protest against the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, *Co powiedział ogień* [*What the Fire Said*]; the disaster of April 10, 2010, when the plane carrying representatives of the Republic of Poland to attend a memorial ceremony in Katyn Forest (Russia), crashed in Smolensk. Words and names symbolizing the past resturn. Some, like the *chorniye voroni* (Russian for „black crows"), have now become obscure and lost their sinister meanings, especially for young people. Black crows were the buses that took Polish POW prisoners to their deaths at the hands of Soviet executioners in the Katyn Forest in the spring of 1940.

There are also questions about the spiritual dimension and meaning of Polish history. Is it really only Polish? After all, the message that emerges from Wencel's poems points to that which is universal and has supported European foundations for centuries: Christianity, with its difficult teachings about the meaning of suffering and love. Life is born of death; hope illuminated by love germinates out of the depths of despair.

"The word dies in order to yield abundant harvest" says Wencel. Maybe Epigone is the way to revive collective memory, which is the focal point of tradition? Wencel's volume of poems isn't a loner's confession, but an attempt to find others who want to follow this path, and who understand or want to understand this "old speech".

Justyna Chłap-Nowakowa
Translated by Piotr Florczyk




WOJCIECH WENCEL
EPIGONIA
WYDAWNICTWO ARCANA
KRAKÓW 2016
155 x 220, 54 PAGES
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WOJCIECH WENCEL

## The Old Poets

Born later I still hear their voices
the old poets whisper shout sing in me
as if they didn't have time to say everything
and for a short while wanted to live longer
on someone else's dime they tussle elbow their way
repeat their own mistakes don't know how to
teach me anything in my body they feel equally
misunderstood defeated alone as in their own
bodies and epochs they are struggling to get through
Siberian pride forests of bitterness citadels of anxiety
carrying a supply of olive oil for those who will come after us
there are days when I manage to free myself from them
step outside myself surrender to the world reach the summit
of the Tower of Babel but the stars melt my eyes there
and the silver-winged angel silences me
that's when I retreat into myself sit down among the old
poets and in the glow of a fleeting lamp I try
to find with them what I have lost with the world:

a common language

## Ars Poetica

A long time ago this was a road of ploughed stones
leading to a manor house a village or a farmstead near the forest
what's left of it breaks off in the fields of wheat
in the air as thick as oil spin the specks of chaff
insects shreds of spider webs

messages race along the wires on the horizon
but I'm out of reach – on the hundred-year-old pavement
I try to take steps that no one will hear
the bark of willows growing wild crumbles in my fingers
like the spine of an old-fashioned book

someday I will bring you here so you can see
how in the evening the giant red sphere of the sun lands
on the edge of the field and everything – the road the fields
the row of willows my sloppy life
– all at once goes darkin a moment become dark

from the glow

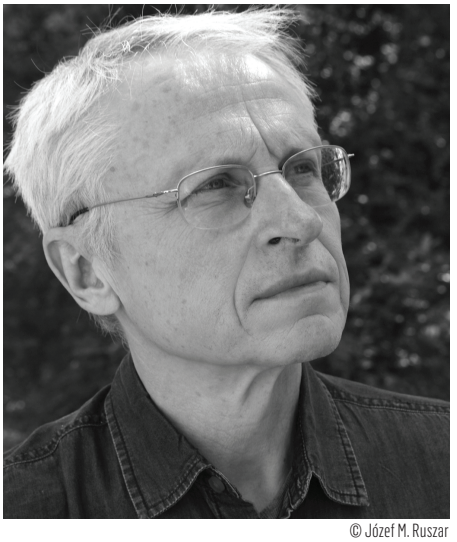
Translated by Piotr Florczyk

*Fragments of poetry, which – I trust deeply – "won't pass when its times pass".*

Prof. Jan Błoński

*In the 21st century Polkowski becomes a poet of conscience, touching the most subtle aspects of human nature, appealing to the deepest layers of human sensitivity, and reaching metaphysical spaces.*

Stanisław Srokowski



© Józef M. Ruszar

# Jan Polkowski

Is one of the most outstanding poets writing in Polish today.

He was born in 1953. He studied Polish literature at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. During the People's Republic era, he published poems and essays exclusively outside the purview of state censorship with underground or émigré presses.

He belongs to a narrow circle of his peers, who since the mid 1970s made an active contribution to creating an anti-Communist and independent opposition movement in Poland. At university he was active in the Student Solidarity Committee (SKS) and served as an editor of the underground Kraków Student Press (KOS). He co-founded a *samizdat* publishing network in Poland. He was a publisher and distributor of literature printed outside the purview of the People's Republic's censorship office. He also published and edited independent magazines, including *Sygnał*, in 1978, which he founded and in 1978 served as its editor. He joined Solidarity in September 1980. He served on the Management Board of Solidarity in the Małopolska Region.

When Martial Law was imposed on December 13, 1981, he was interned and imprisoned in Nowy Wiśnicz and later in Załęże prison. After his release in July 1982, he resumed his underground opposition activities.In 1983 he set up the *samizdat* quarterly *Arka*, serving as its publisher and editor-in-chief until 1990.

Since the restoration of Poland's independence in 1989, he has served as the publisher and editor-in-chief of the daily *Czas Krakowski*, a spokesman for the government of Prime Minister Jan Olszewski; he has been active in the socio-political sphere, performing the duties of chairman of Kraków's municipal development agency, and acting as head of the board of directors of the Polish Information Agency. He has worked for the Polish Mint, the Polish Filmmakers Association, and served on the board of Polish State Television (TVP), as well as an independent expert in social communication and media. He is an expert on trees expert, and has planted a lot of trees. For several years now he has been breeding Dybowski's sika deer.

His poetry has been acknowledge with the conferral of numerous prizes, such as the Kościelski Award (1983), an underground Solidarity distinction (1983), the Barbara Sadowska Award (1987), the Andrzej Kijowski Award (2010), and the Orpheus Poetry Award (2013). He has been decorated with the Knight's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta (2007) and the Cross of Freedom and So-

lidarity (2016), for his activities in the anti-Communist opposition; and with the Officer's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta for his distinguished service to Polish culture.

He has published eleven volumes of poetry. Outside the purview of state censorship: *To nie jest poezja* [*This Is Not Poetry*] (1980), *Oddychaj głęboko* [*Breathe Deeply*] (1981), *Ogień. Z notatek 1982-1983* [*Fire. Notes 1982-1983*] (1983), *Wiersze 1977-1984* [*Poems 1977-1984*] (1986), *Drzewa. Wiersze 1983-1987* [*Trees. Poems 1983-1987*] (1987). And after state censorship has been abolished in Poland: *Elegie z Tymowskich Gór i inne wiersze* [*Elegies from the Tymovsk Mountains and Other Poems*] (1990), *Elegie z Tymowskich Gór 1987-1989* [*Elegies from the Tymovsk Mountains 1987-1989*] (2008), *Cantus* (2009), *Cień* [*Shadow*] (2010), *Głosy* [*Voices*] (2012), *Gorzka godzina* [*The Bitter Hour*] (2015). Several selected volumes have also appeared. The year 2017 saw the publication of *Gdy Bóg się waha* [*When God Hesitates*], which collected nearly all of Polkowski's poetic output.

He has also published a novel, *Ślady krwi. Przypadki Henryka Harsynowicza* [*Traces of Blood. The Cases of Henryk Harsynowicz*] (2013), which belongs in the realist tradition of Polish prose. This classic family saga spans the last few decades, but frequently goes back further, even into the first decades of the twentieth century. Its plot is a blend of the stories of its characters and sensationalistic motifs, forming a disturbing panorama of contemporary Poland and the predicament of its people, afflicted with suffering, marked by fidelity and betrayal, thrown into a vortex of dramatic socio-political change, and confronted with a growing atrophy of its spiritual values and an advancing national amnesia.

In addition, he has published a volume of op-ed essays, *Polska, moja miłość* [*Poland, My Love*], 2014.

Yet above all Polkowski is a poet. For thirty years he has been writing poetry that has given the Polish language the power of aptly applied words astriking a pure, lofthy note which is moving, pround, and necessary.

Paweł Próchniak
Translated by Piotr Florczyk

# WHEN GOD HESITATES

Jan Polkowski holds a unique place in contemporary Polish literature alongside his older colleagues, Herbert, Miłosz, and Różewicz. He debuted in 1977, outside the purview of communist censorship, and was also a co-author of an independent publishing network that helped Polish culture regain its independence. Welcomed enthusiastically by literary critics, Polkowski delighted readers by subtly combining the poetic "I" and the tragic fate of Eastern Europe. His poetry is appreciated for its precise language and sophisticated metaphors. Admiration, astonishment, and rapture for his work arise out the marvelous accuracy of his poetry stemming from his use of an unexpected metaphor. Polkowski's poetic imagery is apposite and conjures up epiphanies: we observe the world, the event, the thought or the feeling captured in their inimitable and unique beauty and truth. The light he gives us lets us see things exactly as they are.

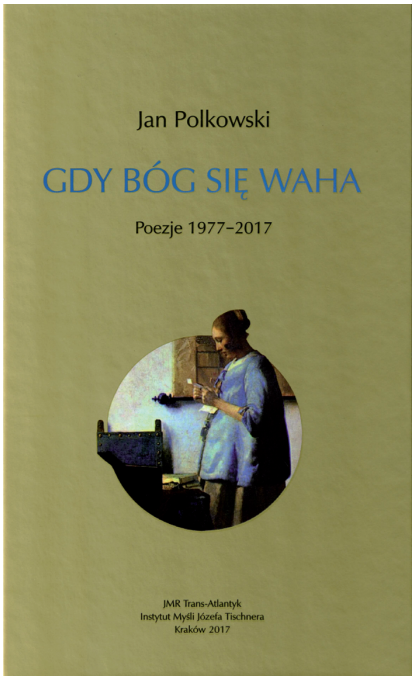
After the restoration of Poland's independence Polkowski fell silent for twenty years. His spectacular return with *Cantus* (2009) was the biggest literary and media event of the year. In times of widespread misgivings about culture, his is

a poetry of difficult optimism. The poet's words, pure and vibrant, exalt man, present the beauty of his dreams and the beauty of nature to which the poet is exceptionally attuned. The beauty of the sensual world is a reference to the cosmic order, and Polkowski's confidence in his choice of words enables him to express his most intimate emotions for his wife and children, his father, and above all his mother – his poems addressed to his mother are among the finest in Polish poetry. Critics and readers alike have been left at a loss for words, astonished to find that even today, in times of total doubt in man, one can speak in a calm and clear language not only about threats and failures, but also about hope. Devoid of naivety, Polkowski's poetry convinces us that – despite the victims – history restores our faith in people's honesty and conscience. His poetry discerns treachery and betrayal, but it also demonstrates powerful manifestations of solidarity and goodness.

A strange power emanates from his poetry – an unprecedented confidence in his own point of view underscored by strong arguments, but without unnecessary bluster and rhetorical raptures. It offers no easy consolation; on the contrary, goodness rarely wins and if it does, it is with great difficulty, at the expense of many victims and sacrifices. Polkowski's poetry does not admit despair, although in the poems written after 2000 there is concern for the deteriorating legacy of European culture, whether held in contempt, ridiculed, or deliberately destroyed in the name of the ideology of nothingness. This motif, in Polish poetry shared by Miłosz, Herbert and Różewicz, stems from a fear that God, exiled from Europe and so often betrayed, has really left us.

It is reasonable to suppose that for our private reading we choose poems that are meaningful for our life, those which, all their charm and deft formal control notwithstanding, accurately communicate a significant existential experience. This is the case with Polkowski's poetry collected in the volume *When God Hesitates*.

Józef Maria Ruszar
Translated by Piotr Florczyk




JAN POLKOWSKI
GDY BÓG SIĘ WAHA. POEZJE 1977-2017
JMR TRANS-ATLANTYK / INSTYTUT
MYŚLI JÓZEFA TISCHNERA
KRAKÓW 2017
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JMR TRANS-ATLANTYK

## Let the Clamour Vanish

Faithfulness is a long story
just one word before libraries burn down
just the start of a thought before a village gets displaced
(fire whispers rapidly) before the trunks and photos burn down
the relatives' dresses and little shoes – just the opening of a mouth.

Unborn children must forget their native speech
the ashes must declare a new name for the city
the rust must compose a festive hymn for the people
and the informer and the web of intrigue sit at the table
and put their sticky lips to cups and bread.

Only then will words slowly travel
laboriously find thin animals
rub themselves in silence against crippled people.

## River

I am younger by more than half a century
I fish with a stick in a millrace.
But I lean forward too much and after a moment of wobbling
I swim and gurgle like an empty bottle thrown in the water.
This short trip comes to an end when my mom screams in horror
and pulls me out onto the shore.
I wake up later at home and carefully touch myself.
I exist – I find a piece of willow bast
stuck firmly to my skin.
Who am I or who do I become when I peel it off?
The one who drowns and who's asleep? The one who dies and wakes up?
The one who sees and the one who despairs?
Newborn I lie in the starched sheets and touch
the past and the future locked inside a piece of dry bark.
For the first time I discover a broken pulse of the interior
darkness and feel the sweet taste
of the universe.

Translated by Piotr Florczyk

*Winner of the 2016 Nike Prize,* Nakarmić kamień [To Feed a Stone] *by Bronka Nowicka is one of those books that can't be ignored.*

Prof. Marian Stala

© Prot Jarnuszkiewicz

# Bronka Nowicka

(born 1974) is a poet, theater and television director. Her graduation film *Tristis* received the best film prize at the 5th European Film Schools Festival in Bologna in 2002. Her literary debut, the collection of poetry, *To Feed a Stone*, was awarded the 2016 Nike Literary Award.

# TO FEED A STONE

In Poland, 2016 was undoubtedly the year of prose poetry. Almost all the most important literary awards went to poets writing in this form: Barbara Klicka, Jakub Kornhauser and Bronka Nowicka. Also worth mentioning are prose poetry volumes published around the same time by Urszula Honek and Marcin Świetlicki. The prose poem – a genre with modernist and early avant-garde roots – seems to have been forgotten recently (it appeared sporadically in the books of the recently deceased Julia Hartwig, Max Jacob's translator), and it likely owes its resurgence to its communicativeness and quasi-narrative character. The loosening of formal constraints is conducive to the free expression of emotions and views, as opposed to the recently fashionable poetic gimmickry.

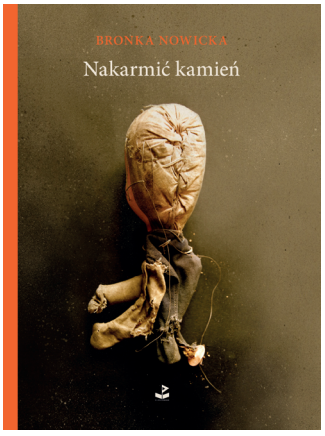
The title of Nowicka's volume, *To Feed a Stone*, refers to the numerous "conversations with a stone" conducted by poets of the older generation (Wisława Szymborska, Zbigniew Herbert, Ryszard Krynicki), but first of all to the title of Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki's book, *Foodstone*. Thus it belongs in the realm of poetry that is as philosophical as it is centered around the family, presenting the world of experiences and traumas of someone coming of age through their interactions with their immediate surroundings.

The protagonist of Nowicka's poetic cycle is a girl accompanied by three women (great-grandmother, grandmother, and mother) and two men (grandfather and father), all of whom are treated like the inhabitants of a "dollhouse," not fully realized as characters, represented by single gestures, statements, sometimes even seen as impersonal parts of the body, which in turn is aided by the animatism of the inanimate world which children are no doubt closer to. Hence the titles of the individual poems are invariably the names of everyday objects; with their help, the author "breaks into" her own (or simply created) memories. The child matures in a state of permanent mythologizing, devising hierarchies that are not compatible with the "adult" world – that's clear. Indeed Nowicka expresses this fact in a very suggestive way, stripping adulthood of its primacy, life of its uniqueness,

and death of its gravity. What happens in these poems is dramatic differently, on another level to the one we're used to. The girl keeps the titular stone – like Demosthenes – under her tongue, "feeding" it reports of her senses and thus making it a device that stores all her resources. Forced to spit it out, she automatically moves to another world, one governed by different rules, and there's no more justification for her observations (unless they enter the poem).

*To Feed a Stone* is a late debut, but it is a debut that's well thought out, written with an insider's knowledge of the craft, consistent and therefore somewhat uniform, although the author compensates for it with the skillful use of fresh metaphors, the ability to arrange poetic situations using "non-poetic" props, and by looking at the world avoiding intellectual tools that hierarchize it. It is a work for those for whom childhood isn't just a "distant paradise," but a bundle of strong emotions and sensations that leave an indelible mark on the psyche.

Adam Wiedemann
Translated by Piotr Florczyk




BRONKA NOWICKA
NAKARMIĆ KAMIEŃ
BIURO LITERACKIE
WROCŁAW 2016
162 x 215, 56 PAGES
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BIURO LITERACKIE

## Comb

"Find a louse, you'll get a coin," says grandpa. He places a twenty-zloty coin and a fine-toothed comb on the plastic tablecloth. A fleshy head: I look at it from above, standing on a stool. The comb plows the skin—wherever it goes, it leaves white scratches, which after a while turn pink. The head bows. Grandpa is napping.
A few days later he has hands of wax. "Go, don't be scared, kiss it," they're nudging me lightly. "Kiss him on the hand." I walk up and kiss it. His skin feels like it isn't there: not warm, not soft. No one lives under it. I could keep the chocolate packaging. I could stop. I took out the box and smelled it, then the candies came back in my head one after the other, like they were real.
The packaging left after grandpa must be buried. But you can keep something of his. "Take what you want."
I want a sweater. "It's sweaty, you sure you want it, this rag?" The sweater washed off of my grandpa hangs on a rope. Still wet it's ironing my grandpa out of itself. I don't want this sweater, not anymore. Without asking if I can, I take a comb. Without asking, so I'm stealing, but I'm not ashamed. There is still my grandpa in it. I take you for myself, comb, in memory.

## Teaspoon

The dead sweeten their tea only when we put teaspoons in their hands and we ourselves spin circles on the bottom of teacups. The sugar crystals pretend to be tornadoes, funnel clouds sit the tea leaves up on roundabouts. They're still spinning after the teaspoons leaning on saucers have cooled. Let there be movement. Let the ant run away across the tablecloth, lugging cake crumbs. We've got to get a wasp above the table. Let something buzz. Let it disarm the silence of this scene until the dead speak in a language that we glue together for them from the thin wrappers of saved words. Until we hide behind their backs and startto speak for them, imagining that they are moving their mouths. Later we will bring their fingers over the plates, break biscuits with them, pick up the crumbs with their fingertips licked by us. Finally, worn out by the weight of the marionettes, we place their hands on our knees, thus letting it be known that here is where both the afternoon snack and the memory end. The dead don't dress themselves. We do it for them. This is the case with combing, shaving, inserting hairpins and cuff links. With feeding the furnace and removing the whistling kettle from the burner. We have to clean their shoes. Lick the stamps for them and mail their letters, which don't reach us. They won't think of something unless we do it for them, so they think of us with our thoughts. Sometimes they sit in the heat wearing gloves and woolen caps. Or in snowcaps—by a frozen river, where we forgot about them last spring. A child leaves her grandpa with a glass of tea. Tomorrow again she will come to sweeten it. And again, until the whole world runs out of sugar.

## Stone

Neither chestnuts thrown in the pockets nor stolen apples weigh down a child like sadness. The work of sadness is to come and be. Nothing more. The rest is up to man—if he takes it up, sadness will fatten like a rolling snowball. It will coat every thought. It's summer now. The child stands in the garden, with mouth open and smoking with her being left speechless by the world. Sadness lies beside. It doesn't melt. It doesn't even sweat. The child knows, somehow she knows: no thing belongs to itself. Not a ring on the abdomen of a bee, nor a fiber of a hemp cord, nor a falling leaf. They are part of everything. How to see everything if all around only things are visible and each one wants to be known? The child feels excitement. It starts in the head, flows down between the legs, tickles, as if someone were touching her with a feather. She touched herself there. She knows: she wants everything. She also knows: she won't have it all without getting to know each thing separately. No one can process such a multitude through the mill of hands and senses. Impossible. A ball of sadness grazes on the frosty word "impossible." The child closes her mouth. She staggers home. On the way there she finds a stone.

Translated by Piotr Florczyk

*After a single page I was under the influence of this powerful narcotic, reading in one go the 577 large-format pages of the rest...*

Czesław Miłosz

# Florian Czarnyszewicz

(1900-1964) – was a writer of prose. Born in Bobruisk, in Poland's erstwhile Eastern Borderlands (now Belarus). In 1924 he emigrated to Argentina. There he wrote all of his novels, the first of which was *Nadberezyńcy* [*People of the Berezyna*] (1942). In this book Czarnyszewicz narrated the dramatic history of the Polish nobility living in the Eastern Borderlands in the early 20th century. Czarnyszewicz's debut delighted many readers, among them Czesław Miłosz.

# PEOPLE OF THE BEREZYNA

Florian Czarnyszewicz's *People of the Berezyna* is one of the most important and beautiful Polish 20th-century novels. "After a single page I was under the influence of this powerful narcotic, reading in one go the 577 large-format pages of the rest," wrote Czesław Miłosz. Józef Czapski called *Berezyna* "a great book" and ranked it alongside *Pan Tadeusz*, which is generally considered the greatest masterpiece of Polish literature. Yet another critic referred to Czarnyszewicz's novel as the *War and Peace* of the Polish Borderlands.

Despite such resounding acclaim, *People of the Berezyna* has only recently attained widespread popularity in Poland. A number of new editions have now been published, meeting with great enthusiasm amongst readers, not to mention astonishment that such a remarkable work fell into near oblivion for decades.

Why was this the case? It may be because *Berezyna* originally came out in 1942, and in Buenos Aires—meaning at the very height of World War II, and very far away from Poland. In addition, Czarnyszewicz was an utterly unknown author at the time. *Berezyna* was his first book, although he was already 42. He had lived in Argentina for a number of years by that point, working in a slaughterhouse, of all places. He was the archetypal outsider working at a vast distance from the literary salons, trends and fads. He humbly referred to himself as a self-seeder—the kind of plant that grows efficiently, without requiring care.

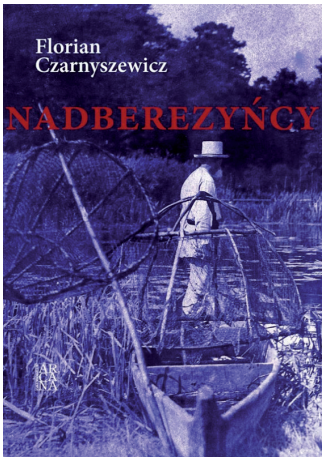
At first Czarnyszewicz planned to write a memoir of his youth. In the end, this memoir metamorphosed into an epic novel set in the period from 1911 to 1919. He depicted in it the grippingly dramatic fate of the eponymous people of the provincial village of Smolarnia, located on the Berezyna River (now in Belarus), who wanted their region returned to Poland, on the restoration of independence in 1918, and worked to achieve this aim.

The people of the Berezyna were a brave and industrious group not to be broken by any catastrophe of history. They were organically linked to the land of their birth, the Catholic faith of their forefathers and their traditions. They believed in a Poland that was both territorially and morally great, fair to its inhabitants, without regard to ethnic or religious background. They were proud of their noble ancestry, though in reality they were closer to the peasants. They lived according to norms characteristic of pre-modern societies. They undertook feats requiring courage, heroism, cunning—even sacrificing their lives. But it was all in vain. In the collision of twentieth-century history and politics their dedication—even their martyrdom—could not save them. This is part of why reading *People of the Berezyna* is such a moving experience.

But the melancholy of Czarnyszewicz's novel is often interwoven with laughter. There are many humorous components to this book. The epic is often intermingled with the pastoral. The more distinct the shadow looming over Smolarnia, auguring its complete demise, the more emphatically the narrator will emphasize the place's Arcadian charms. Essential here is the love with which Czarnyszewicz depicted the lives of the provincial inhabitants of this Berezyna village—their day-to-day routines, what they ate, what they did for fun, their songs, their possessions, their outfits... Nature is depicted in *People* in exquisite terms—powerful, rich, wild, and at the same time in harmony with life in the human settlements along the river. The language of the novel is magnificent. Melchior Wańkowicz noted that "one must relish the music of this language." One can hear in this music the distant past of the world of the provincial nobles, its stories, as well as the wealth of its connections with other cultures.

Without a doubt, *People of the Berezyna* continues the tradition of nineteenth-century historical realism. By the same token, it goes against the prevailing tendency of the twentieth century to proclaim the death of the novel. Czarnyszewicz created what was likely the last truly wonderful epic in Polish literature.

Maciej Urbanowski
Translated by Jennifer Croft




FLORIAN CZARNYSZEWICZ
NADBEREZYŃCY
ARCANA
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The old man grew pensive. The woodsman's flattering remarks about his farming and his sons brought to his mind all the difficulties he had had before he'd got things up and running, before he'd finished raising his children. Like a thread coming unspooled, a string of images of his own life ran before his eyes now, going all the way back to the year 1875, the year when he had come from Dnieper Ukraine to this wilderness, now the village of Rogi.

At that time, he had been 37. His children were little—and plentiful. The eldest twins had only just turned 11. Jan, the oldest son, was about as big then as his own son, Staszek was now. Marcin was starting to lose his baby teeth. Władek and Bronik were still wearing short pants, and Hańka, now five years married, was still in nappies. And the two last children, old maids now, hadn't even been born.

In those days, there were still very few fields in these parts. The dense, uncultivated forests stretching for scores of versts brought almost no benefits to humans, aside from hunting, and their owners tried desperately to transform them into arable, profitable fields. They urged and even pleaded with people to build homes in their forests, allowing them to choose, apart from the deepest parts where the animals dwelled, any sites their hearts desired, promising not to collect any fees from new settlers for a period of five years.

In early autumn, right after harvest, Bałaszewicz went through dozens of the several dozen versts of forest and found a spot he liked, here between the creeks, deciding it would be here that he would catch his fish for Fridays, and his wife would have no trouble doing the washing in the creek. The clearing wasn't big enough for a cottage, or even to spread out a tarpaulin; the forests surrounded it on all sides, dense and uncultivated just like now. The nearest field and human settlement was that same village of Nita, at a five-verst remove. Its inhabitants called Bałaszewicz's place between the creeks Rogi, and sometimes ventured there for nuts or bast fibre

Bałaszewicz cleared the area he'd chosen, piling up heap after heap of forest—two dessiatins—and built himself some little shelters and huts, cleared a track to the road that ran three versts away, and between winter and spring he moved in with his whole family and all of their belongings.

Times of hard work and desperate poverty ensued. As long as they still had the cereals they'd brought with them to eat, it wasn't too bad. Then the real hunger came. In the beginning Bałaszewicz was unable to do much with the newly broken ground, which didn't help him too much. He planted potatoes with soot and fertilizer, and they overgrew and sprouted. The buckwheat went the same way: the stems got higher than a man's navel, but the grains went straight to seed. He sowed the barley inopportunely, during a period of rain, and it got drenched and never came out of the ground. He had a good patch, lovely oats for four of the shelters, but one dark night a family of bears came and devoured and demolished and destroyed them. There were still high hopes for the millet, which was doing surprisingly well: tall, stems like rake poles —you could have killed a man with an ear of his oats, if you had hit him in the head. Everyone was pleased and looking forward to its proper maturation. But then after three days of windy rain they saw the stems now standing barren. The millet had all scattered onto the ground and gone to seed.

One cow drowned in a bog in the spring, another had her udder torn off by a lynx and died, too. In the winter, wolves got into the pigsty, and that was the end of the sow.

Spring came, and they hadn't an onion or anything they could have cooked it in. Meanwhile his wife was having one baby after another, as always happens in hard times.

Bałaszewicz could only wring his hands in despair. The people of Nita looked in on them in Rogi every so often, out of curiosity, mocking and scaring them in turn.

"Oh, you stupid Pole!" they'd say. "What were you thinking, where was your head when you decided to settle in the middle of a deep dark forest? Couldn't you have found a better place? Get out now, before you croak here with all your little snot-nosed kids."

Bałaszewicz already regretted his rash undertaking anyway, but it was too late for them to get out. For what did he have that he could use to pay for some new plot of land? What would people say about him and his herd of scrawny, half-naked kids

He gritted his teeth and stayed his course. He decided to fight until the bitter end. He went to his brother-in-law and asked him for seeds, sowing the fields with whatever he could, getting his children to help with felling more of the forest. The second crop was better, and it provided them with bread for almost a whole year. In the autumn, the girls gathered more than 400 pounds of nuts to sell. In the winter he got to making buckets and tubs, and the boys went out to trap weasels and foxes and hunt with axes for ermine. In the spring, they got money for all of it and spent that to raise cattle.

They went deeper and deeper into the forest now, and in a more practical way. All of them were working,

down to the three-year-old, busy as bees, chopping, uprooting, gathering the branches, burning them, getting filthy with smoke and soot.

The arable land increased and produced, and the Bałaszewiczes' stocks of food and other assets increased with it, year after year.

After five years, the landowner looked in on Rogi and praised them for their hard work and set down their rent. It was modest at first—just ten rubles; but each year it rose by three, by five, by ten rubles.

After 19 years, fearing they might apply to take over the rights of the property, the landowner was ready to evict them. But Bałaszewicz talked him out of it. He swore on his honour, on his ancestors, and he also signed a contract saying that neither he nor his sons would ever claim Rogi as their property. So he let them stay. Bałaszewicz was the only one to get such good treatment, as the landowner testified, allowing him to stay on the land he had been renting; this landowner now entrusted them with the land they had been renting from him; from other tenants he accepted neither oaths nor signed declarations, evicting them by force, with the aid of the police, settling new folks in their stead.

Now Rogi was the most prosperous farmstead in the vicinity.

Translated by Jennifer Croft

*Yet another young author [...] to win over French audiences with their first crime novel, which is darker than dark.*

Estelle Lenartowicz, *L'Express*

# Wojciech Chmielarz

(born 1984) – one of the best-respected crime novelists of the younger generation. His works include four crime novels in the Commissioner Mortka series as well as the novel *Wampir* [*Vampire*] (2015). Nominated several times for Poland's most important crime novel award – the High Calibre Prize, which he won in 2015 for the novel *Przejęcie* [*Takeover*].

© Anna Juszkiewicz

## COMMUNITY OF DREAMS

Wojciech Chmielarz is one of today's most outstanding Polish crime novelists. At the same time, he continues to be among the most promising authors, because in each subsequent novel he polishes his technique, daringly takes on unexpected narrative developments, and presents a more complex image of the world.

*Osiedle marzeń* [*Community of Dreams*] is the fourth title in his series starring Commissioner Jakub Mortka. This time, the action takes place in a gated community in Warsaw – by all appearances an oasis of safety and comfort for its residents. Yet when you scratch the surface, the truth of this "community of dreams" turns out to be considerably darker. The book opens with the mysterious death of a female student, which sets off a whole avalanche of unsettling and tragic events as this supposed paradise reveals its hidden face. The safe haven turns out to be a den of exploitation, drug dealing and pimping. Mortka must peer into the darkness of politics, the media, and organized crime to learn the truth of what really happened – a truth which is far from simple, as the case becomes increasingly complex.

We must appreciate how the author deals handily with a large cast of primary and secondary characters with extremely diverse backgrounds. Chmielarz skilfully differentiates their use of language, adding authenticity to the story. He masterfully weaves together the many threads of a plot in which politics is a close neighbour to crime, business, and sordid activities, and hope for a better tomorrow can blind us and lead us astray. This time, Chmielarz has introduced a number of secondary motifs as a subtle pastiche, perhaps meant to underscore the conventionality of the crime genre. It's possible this technique is meant to prevent the reader from being overly preoccupied with solving the mystery of the plot while overlooking Chmielarz's efforts to diagnose the problems in our society and analyse contemporary Polish mores, which is an increasingly important element in his work.

Like nearly every good crime novel, Wojciech Chmielarz's book therefore turns out to be a study of the moral condition of the society it describes. In *Community of Dreams* we see the point at which human capabilities, interests, and – as the name suggests – dreams can degenerate into crime. Chmielarz's analysis deserves our careful attention, as does the artistry he weaves into it to make an attractive and suspenseful story.

Marcin Sendecki
Translated by Sean Gasper Bye


WOJCIECH CHMIELARZ
OSIEDLE MARZEŃ
WYDAWNICTWO CZARNE
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ANDREW NURNBERG ASSOCIATES
WARSAW

It could have been worse.

That thought had been with Piotr Celtycki since early morning. He was still in trouble and he knew it. But as of today, the situation was one hundred percent improved from yesterday. And if nothing changed by evening, he would treat himself to a small glass of good whisky and maybe a halfway decent cigar.

First of all, he had gotten rid of that fucking laptop. No one had even noticed he'd been gone from the gated community for a few hours. Second of all, the girls had done a good job. Well all right, he couldn't be sure of that. But if they'd cracked yesterday, then starting this morning he'd have been sitting in a room with a one-way mirror, answering hundreds of dumb-ass questions, and his phone would be blowing up with missed calls. The fact that nothing like that had happened suggested instead that the girls had been able to keep their mouths shut. And now he'd made an impression: over the last few years no one had treated him seriously. Yesterday's incident changed all that. No one was going to disrespect him anymore. Okay, so this wasn't how he'd imagined his big comeback, but for now the most important thing was that after being on the bottom he was back on top. Finally – the last reason why he thought today would be successful – this morning's phone call. And the single matter-of-fact message. He'd been glad when he heard it. It looked like the nightmare was going to end and everything would go back almost to normal. They'd just have to find a new nanny for the kids. But this time he wouldn't make the same mistake and they'd get someone from outside the gated community.

Which didn't mean everything was going smoothly. The greatest danger of all had turned out to be Magda. She'd held up all day long and he was proud of her. It was almost the same as it used to be. Yesterday evening, after they put the kids to bed, she took her pills, drank a glass of wine and then started staggering around, groaning and making strange noises. For a while she was shaking all over, making him worry she was having a seizure. But when he grabbed her by the arm to lead her back to bed, she shoved him away with unexpected force.

"We're fucked!" she said loudly. Too loudly. She almost started yelling. And the last thing he needed was for the neighbors to think that the night after Zuzanna's killing the Celtyckis had been arguing. The whole community was on high alert. It wouldn't be long before someone decided to call the police.

"Honey..."

"Don't call me that!"

"Fine. We're not fucked at all. Everything will be fine." With each sentence, he took a step toward her. He smiled gently, hoping that would calm her down at least a little. His wife peered at him suspiciously.

"You don't know that. You don't know that now. You can't know that."

"I can." Another step. He had her almost at arm's length, but didn't want to frighten her away. "I can," he repeated and took another step.

She blinked and then looked at him with unexpected sobriety. He recognized it by the expression of contempt contorting her face.

"You can stop sneaking up on me me," she muttered. "I'm going to bed."

"All right, honey."

She walked to the bedroom. He heard her first fall onto the bed, then get up a few seconds later, muttering "shit" under her breath. She came back to the kitchen. She leaned on the door frame. She sniffed.

"Did you sleep with her?" she asked.

"Where did you get an idea like that?"

"Don't you give me your political crap. I'm not one of your voters. If you have any left. Did you sleep with her?'

"No."

Which was true, but he sensed she didn't believe him. She didn't press him though.

"What about one of the others?"

"No."

Which was a lie, but for the moment she believed it.

"Of course not," she muttered. "Out of your league, huh?"

He didn't let himself be provoked. Not this time. No arguments. No words screamed in the heat of the moment which the wrong person might hear. Total composure and control. He poured himself some water. Then, knowing she was still looking at him, he took out and filled a second mug. He gave it to his wife. She took it, only to immediately throw the water in his face.

She walked to the bedroom and two minutes later was asleep. Celtycki wiped the puddle off the floor and lay down on the sofa in the living room. He spent the night there.

Yes, Magda might be a problem. He didn't let her see it, but she threw him off balance. He was afraid she'd do something stupid. And just when everything was starting to work out. He had to show her he was in charge of what was happening. And in charge of her. That above all.

Translated by Sean Gasper Bye

*Jakubowski is one of Poland's most interesting contemporary playwrights.*

Ryszard Klimczak, *Dziennik teatralny*

# Jarosław Jakubowski

(born 1974) is one of Poland's most celebrated contemporary playwrights. His Polish stage premieres have included: *Życie* [*Life*], *Koncert na rożek, bęben i violę* [*A Concert for Horn, Drum, and Viola*], *Wszyscy Święci* [*All the Saints*], *Wieczny kwiecień* [*Eternal April*], and *Człowiek, który nie umiał odejść* [*The Man Who Didn't Know How to Leave*]. His play *Generał* [*The General*], a tale of Wojciech Jaruzelski, won at the 6th R@port Festival of Polish Contemporary Plays in Gdynia in 2011.

© Maciej Rozwadowski

## THE TRUTH AND OTHER DRAMAS

In the "Afterword" to his volume of plays *Prawda i inne dramaty* [*The Truth and Other Dramas*], Jarosław Jakubowski recalls a quote from Witold Gombrowicz's Transatlantic: "I am not so mad as to opine or not to opine something in Our Times." Indeed, Jakubowski seems to be inspired by some ideas that date back to the origins of drama – Aristotle's "improvement" and Shakespeare's "mirror."

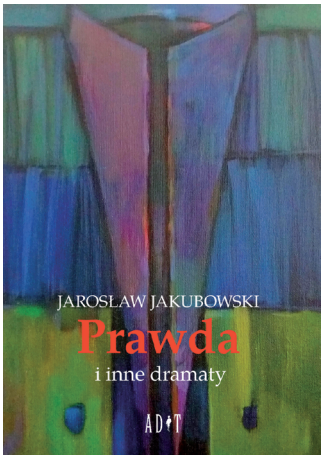
In the first volume of his plays, Jakubowski analyzed the state of civilization in the early twenty-first century, in both a global sense (man after the Copernican Revolution, man taking the place of God, the modernist man) and a local sense (the Poles in transition from real communism to real capitalism). His second volume of dramas is an image of the downtime following these revolutions: an artistic reflection of people left to their own devices, at the mercy of an uncolonized reality, despite the promises modernism made. This is the image of man who was promised divinity and received solitude.

This volume contains eleven dramas, of which three have had stagings and readings. One of these, *Licheń Story*, is a bridge between the previous volume of plays and this one, analyzing the vast popularity of the Licheń Basilica (one of Poland's major twentieth-century socio-cultural phenomena), and entering the mythic and archetypal motifs that organize the philosophy of man in the *Truth* volume. For "Licheń Story" concludes with one of the most important European mythemes of both the beginning and the end – the main protagonist departs, carrying his father on his back, as if seeking a New Rome, like Aeneas leaving as Troy burns. The father and son bond as a motif of profound significance recurs in the volume, signaling the problem of symbolic patricide that modern civilization has committed as one of the playwright's main tropes, seeking answers to the question of the contemporary Nietzschean "last man." This motif returns in various incarnations in several plays, above all in *The Truth*, which gave its name to the volume. It also makes a compelling appearance in *Kosmonauci* [*The Astronauts*], a play that combines Ancient and Futurist motifs to speak of the last human be-

ings lost in outer space, and their inability to create a society, with the recurring motif of the autopilot saying: "Return if possible!" The machine's words are reinforced by the presence of a Chorus, which sings of a labyrinth that "has dug down to the strata of the Father," like some tractor driven by dread and impatience.

Jakubowski writes in the "Afterword": "I hope that in reading or watching my plays, the readers or viewers join the protagonists on a journey into the depths of their minds, into the depths of what they are reluctant or afraid to say out loud. And that they return from this journey a bit wiser, and maybe even better for having taken it?" Aristotle long ago postulated that the drama should "improve the city dweller." Jakubowski has returned to this task, avoiding didacticism, showing the "world and the spirit of the age, their shape and stamp."

Jagoda Hernik Spalińska
Translated by Soren Gauger




JAROSŁAW JAKUBOWSKI
PRAWDA I INNE DRAMATY
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AGENCJA DRAMATU I TEATRU „ADIT"

Paul, John, George, and Ringo on an empty stage. We see the famous steps to Abbey Road studio and the no-less-famous Abbey Road pedestrian crossing.

PAUL: Hey, John.

JOHN: Hey, Paul.

GEORGE: Hey, lads.

PAUL AND JOHN: Hey, George. Hey, Ringo.

RINGO: Hey, John. Hey, Paul. Hey, George.

PAUL: Do you remember when we last sat here? On these steps?

You, George, I think you were sitting furthest to the left.

They try to reconstruct how they were sitting in 1969 in front of Abbey Road studios.

GEORGE: Ringo was on the left.

RINGO: Depends how you look at it, George.

JOHN: You, Paul, you were wearing those Japanese thongs.

PAUL: Don't even say the word "Japanese," John.

JOHN: What's your problem with the word "Japanese"?

PAUL: Just the fact that it sounds like "Japanese."

JOHN: Dammit, you're a dead man, Paul.

PAUL: Oh, I'm shaking in my boots.

GEORGE: Settle down, lads. Peace.

JOHN: He started it.

PAUL: You were the one who said I was wearing Japanese thongs.

JOHN: Well, because you were, dammit.

PAUL: OK, John. I don't want a fight. Let's focus here, were you sitting on my left or my right?

JOHN: Were you wearing those Japanese thongs or weren't you?

PAUL: God, John, would you stop it? I think I was sitting on your left.

I mean, from the photographer's perspective, on your right. Or the reverse.

JOHN: You were wearing those fucking Japanese thongs, and then you took them off, because you had the idea of crossing the street barefoot.

RINGO: I can't remember you there at all, Paul. Maybe they patched you into the photograph later?

PAUL: What are you talking about, Ringo? We were sitting right next to each other.

RINGO: I don't know. I just don't recall you being there.

GEORGE: I don't recall you either, Paul.

PAUL: You can't not recall me, because I was there. There you go, I was sitting just like now, between you two.

GEORGE: Sorry, Paul, no good. I don't remember it.

PAUL: And when we held hands, remember that? Come on, just try to remember.

You, John, you lit a fag. Remember?

JOHN: I remember your Japanese thongs.

PAUL: Oh right, the Japanese thongs! I was wearing fucking Japanese thongs.

RINGO : A minute ago you were saying something else.

GEORGE: It doesn't add up, Paul.

Beat.

JOHN: I remember the first time we flew over New York.

I looked down and I saw a strange building near Central Park.

That was the Dakota House. Sixteen years later some jerk shot me in the entrance to that building. Good subject for a song, don't you think?

Mark Chapman appears.

MARK CHAPMAN: Maybe I'm a jerk, but I got famous.

My name and yours are spoken in the same breath.

I love you, John.

The boys shoot at Chapman, who falls dead, but then comes to life moments later.

JOHN: What was I talking about? Oh yes, a good subject for a song. A song about the terror and surprise on my face a moment after that son-of-a-bitch shot me full of lead.

PAUL: John, I don't really think that's necessary.

GEORGE: We might as well sing about my cancer going into remission.

RINGO: Or maybe about the fact that I always felt alone in your company.

JOHN: Has somebody got a fag?

One of the boys gives John a cigarette.

JOHN: Yoko...

PAUL: Oh come on, John.

JOHN: Don't start, Paul. Yoko isn't guilty of anything.

PAUL: We should call her Death.

JOHN: Take that back.

PAUL: Yoko was the death of you, John.

John throws himself on Paul. The other boys struggle to tear them apart.

JOHN: Oh, I'll kill you, Paul!

PAUL: You think I was too harsh? But that's how I see it! You fucked it all up, John!

JOHN: It's you who fucked it all up, Paul!

PAUL: We could have...

GEORGE: Give him a break, Paul.

RINGO: What could we have done, Paul?

PAUL: Oh, you know... we can work it out...

JOHN: Doesn't work anymore. Not here. Nor anywhere else. Nothing works anymore.

PAUL: Wrong, This Is a Story of Satisfaction.

JOHN: Shatisfaction.

(a moment later, as if suddenly recalling something)

Friends, where are we headed?

OTHERS (suddenly remembering) To the very top, Johnny!

JOHN: You mean?

OTHERS To the topmost top of success!

Translated by Soren Gauger

*"Reading" this book with children can be a great starting point for a discussion about animals, nature and the cycle of life.*

Iwona Czyżykowska, *czytając.pl*

# Magdalena Kozieł-Nowak

illustrator of over ten books, e.g. *Miasto nocą* [*The City at Night*], *Wandalia and Baśnie i legendy polskie* [*Polish Fairy Tales and Legends*].

© Magdalena Kozieł-Nowak

## A YEAR IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

*Rok na wsi* [*A Year in the Countryside*] is a collection of illustrations presenting life in the countryside. The book starts by introducing the reader to the main characters running a small agritourism farm – Basia and Piotr, as well as their children Tymek, Maja and Franek. They also have help from Granny Hela and Mr Józek. There are animals too – a horse, Amelia the cow, hens, ducks, geese, turkeys, a pig, Misiek the dog, two cats – Fiona and Benek, bees and so on. Holidaymakers come to the farm, looking for rest away from the hustle and bustle of the city, among the fields and woods. They are also after some healthy foods.

The rhythm of life and work of country people is measured by the seasons, which in the book are divided into particular months. January and February are the strictly winter months. The farmer, apart from carrying out some basic jobs to do with animal care, makes the holidaymakers' stay at the farm more attractive, for example by organising sleigh rides. March and April are months filled with spring chores on the farm (painting, raking etc.), as well as with work in the fields (ploughing and sowing). May and June are illustrated by everyday farm tasks (feeding the animals, mowing the grass, weeding the garden etc.) as well as the first harvest (of fruits, vegetables and hay for animal fodder). Following the months of July, August, September, October and November is a time of further work in the fields (the harvest, digging up potatoes and preparing the fields for the winter rest), as well as smaller tasks (collecting vegetables and fruits, foraging in the woods for mushrooms, getting supplies ready for winter) and some other chores (like tidying up the farmyard).

The book ends with an illustration presenting farm tasks assigned to the month of December, which, apart from everyday house and farmyard chores, also brings preparations for Christmas. It is also the time when children enjoy what winter has to offer.

Children and animals potter around in the background of all the work allocated to particular months. The participation of children makes for an important educational factor, which introduces the reader to the scale of tasks and responsibilities given to children brought up in the countryside.

The book is very colourful, the illustrations of everyday and seasonal countryside tasks are varied and diverse. They familiarize urban readers with the life, work and duties of adults and children living in the countryside.

The last pages of the book present a rich colour palette showing the “harvest of the countryside”. They provide even the youngest reader with a chance to get to know a wide assortment of vegetables and fruits. This can be used in various interactive games.

The book provides a highly worthwhile and beneficial illustrated material presenting life in the countryside, characterized by abundance, and the variety and endlessness of different tasks.

Małgorzata Przybysz-Zaremba
Translated by Anna Hyde


MAGDALENA KOZIEŁ-NOWAK
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NASZA KSIĘGARNIA



*(...) is a beautiful and wise story about childhood friendship.*

Magdalena Kwiatkowska – Gadzińska, *qulturka.pl*

© Dariusz Gorajski

## Roksana Jędrzejewska-Wróbel

(born 1969) – author of several plays and books for children, recipient of many awards, e.g. the "BESTSELLER-ka" Award, the Kornel Makuszyński Award, the IBBY Polish Section Award and the Award for the Best Children's Book of 2009. The cartoon series *Pamiętnik Florki* [*Florka's diary*] is based on Jędrzejewska-Wróbel's books about Florka the shrew.

© Agata Kruszlińska

## Jona Jung

(born 1967) – illustrator and children's writer. She and Roksana Jędrzejewska-Wróbel collaborate on the popular series of books about the adventures of Florka the shrew.

# FLORKA. EMAILS TO CLEMENT

*Florka. Mejle do Klemensa* [*Florka. Emails to Clement*] consists of 23 subjects (one in each chapter) discussed by the main protagonist of the book, Florka the shrew.

The book takes the shape of letters written by Florka to her friend, Clement the hamster, who is in hospital. Sending letters in the form of emails is very popular nowadays and even preschool children sometimes use this form of communication.

In her letters to Clement, Florka – who attends a nursery – relates events that take place at the nursery every day her friend's not there. Each of the subjects is a way of presenting the latest adventures of the likeable Florka, who is highly inquisitive, very interested in the world and an alert observer of everything that goes on around her. The letters are written in a child's language, which helps young readers familiarize themselves with where Clement is, i.e. the hospital, a place that scares, even petrifies many children, and makes them cry. The terminology used in the letters, such as "catheter", "operation", "anaesthesia", "injec-

tion", as well as the discussions and investigations around them, show hospitals in a clear and straightforward way which doesn't elicit fear or worries arising from being alone in a hospital, being separate from one's parents. Florka familiarizes the book's young readers with hospitals, making them come across as friendly places that help children.

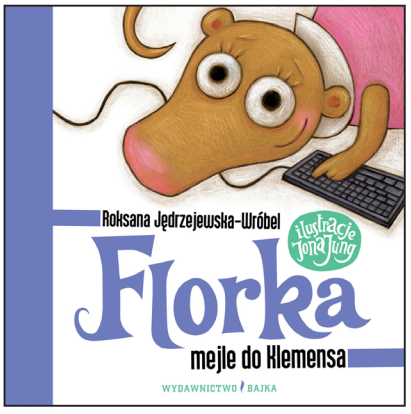
Florka's questions and investigations are very touching. The cases she discusses are "trivial", but at the same time they might shatter a child's world, for example the appearance of a new and not very friendly girl in the nursery or Dad not showing up for a play put on at nursery on Father's Day.

The book communicates in a clear and transparent way and is written in the language of nursery children. It presents important sides of forming and intensifying friendship between children, as well as their ways of perceiving the world around them.

The book's is well written and illustrated by Jona Jung, with contributions by Dorota Koman.

*Florka. Emails to Clement* has been very well received in children's circles.

Małgorzata Przybysz-Zaremba
Translated by Anna Hyde

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Subject: The Frilled Lizard and the stones

9 June, 19:21

Hi, Clement!

I need your help; I have this terrible problem. The day before yesterday I promised Miss Matilda I'd bring my favourite book to nursery. It was my turn for reading. But when I got back home, I was too busy waiting for the tooth which still isn't wobbly. I kept checking in the mirror every now and then to see if it had started. And then I had to look for the little box that Lucian and Lucius had stolen and forgot where they put it. And when I finally remembered about the book, it was already evening, I had to go to bed and then I had to get up early in the morning. Back at the nursery, when Miss Matilda asked me for the book, I felt really embarrassed. After all I made a promise. And then Eulalia shouted: 'She forgot, Miss', which made me even more embarrassed. So I said I hadn't forgotten at all, but I couldn't bring it, because Uncle Guido came for a visit and brought his frilled lizard with him. And the lizard was terribly hungry and ate my favourite book. And all the other books too. Clement, I have no idea why I said it, really. It just came out and then it got worse, because everybody started asking questions about the frilled lizard – what does it look like, can you touch it? And I had to answer even though I've never ever seen a frilled lizard. And you know what? It was nice, because everybody was interested in me and not just in Eulalia the otter. So when Lucia the chinchilla asked if she could come and see the lizard, I said yes. I went home and when I thought that she might actually really come and ask about the lizard, I felt a funny sensation in my tummy. As if I'd swallowed a stone. When Dad called me for dinner, I told him I wasn't hungry. I really wasn't, because of this stone. All I wanted was to sit and draw black circles. When my parents saw it, they asked me if I was ill, by any chance. I decided that it was a very good idea and went straight to bed. And I've been in bed for two days now, but I'm not feeling any better, even though my parents do their best to help me. The moment I think about going back to the nursery the stone in my tummy grows bigger. What do you think, Clement? Perhaps I have the same problem you do? Should I go to the hospital for an operation? Did you have a stone in your tummy? Please reply as soon as possible, because I'm scared.

Kisses-worisses,

Florka

PS I've found out from an encyclopaedia what a frilled lizard looks like. You know what? It doesn't look good.

Subject: Re: The Frilled Lizard and the stones

Hi, Clement!

You were right; it wasn't appendicitis, not even shrew appendicitis or any other kind. Today my parents called for Doctor Owl and that's what she said too. She also said that it seems to be some mysterious illness and that I need to go to hospital. I was glad to hear that, because we would be together. You wrote such nice things about the hospital that I'm not scared of it anymore. But Doctor Owl said no way, because you're in the surgical ward and I'd be in the infectious diseases ward. In an isolation unit! "Ward" and "isolation unit" are even scarier words than "anaesthesia", so I started crying and I told them about the stone in my tummy. That it must weight 100 kilograms or so, and that it's the reason I can't go back to the nursery. Doctor Owl's eyes blinked and she gave me another, very thorough examination. And then she said she suspected there really was a stone in my tummy, an invisible one! And that there's one medicine she always prescribes in such cases. She wrote down the prescription and left. Clement, do you know what the prescription said? "Talk to your parents"! I started crying, because I didn't want to talk at all. But my parents insisted and in the end I told them everything. About the book I'd forgotten, about Uncle Guido who hadn't come at all and about the lizard I'd invented. My parents listened to it all and didn't say anything. You know what, Clement? Very strangely, as soon I finished, the stone got smaller! But only for a second, because when my parents told me that I would have to go to nursery and admit to lying, the stone grew bigger again. So I started crying again and said I wouldn't go in a million years. Mum replied that in that case the stone would stay in my tummy forever. It scared me, but thankfully Dad said if I do go to the nursery and tell the truth it'll disappear right away. So I said yes, but now I'm scared again. Do you think Dad's right? Or is he making it all up, just like I made up the thing about the frilled lizard?

Cheers-stoneers,

Florka

Translated by Anna Hyde

# 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 catalogues of "New Books from Poland".

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


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# Selected Polish Book Institute programmes:

■ **The Translator's College** is a Book Institute program that hosts a group of translators in Krakow every year, providing them an environment for working on translations, as well as meeting with authors and experts. The college has been operating since 2006. By 2016, almost one hundred translators from thirty-four countries had come to Krakow to participate.

■ **The World Congress of Translators of Polish Literature**, which is organized every four years, is the largest event of its kind. To date, there have been four Congresses, each attended by around two hundred and fifty translators from every continent. Over the course of several days, there are meetings with writers, critics, scholars, and various other experts. This truly unique event offers a wonderful opportunity for leading professionals to 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. The winner receives a prize of 16, 000 zloty and a three-month, sponsored residency in Krakow. We have been presenting this award on an annual basis since 2008.

■ **The Transatlantyk Award** is presented every year by the Book Institute to an outstanding ambassador of Polish literature abroad. The winner might be a translator, a publisher, a critic, or someone who organizes cultural events. The award was first presented in 2005 during the Congress of Translators of Polish Literature. The winner receives 10,000 euros, a commemorative diploma, and a statuette crafted by Łukasz Kieferling.

■ **Seminars for Foreign Publishers** – for the past six years the Book Institute has been inviting groups of publishers from various countries to Krakow in order to show them what Polish literature has to offer. We arrange meetings with writers, publishers, and critics – encouraging our guests to publish Polish literature. Six seminars have been held to date.

■ **Sample Translations ©Poland** – the purpose of this programme, aimed at translators of Polish literature, 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.

■ **The ©POLAND Translation Programme** aims to promote Polish literature abroad. The Book Institute financially supports Polish and foreign publishers who would like to publish works of Polish literature outside Poland in foreign-language translations.
Since 1999, the ©POLAND Translation Programme has provided over 2,000 grants for translations into 47 different languages published in 57 countries. The average grant was worth 10,000 zlotys (approx. € 2,500)

The Book Institute can help cover the costs of publishing the following types of works:
- literature – prose, poetry, and dramas;
- works in the humanities, broadly conceived, whether older or contemporary (with particular regard for books devoted to the culture and literature of Poland);
- non-fiction literature (literary reportage, biographies, memoirs, essays);
- historical works (essays and popular history, barring specialist and academic works);
- literature for children and young people;
- comics.

The financial contribution of the Book Institute is designed to support the following publication costs:
- translation;
- copyright license;
- printing.

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

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