

# New Books from Poland

**2021**

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**I**t is our great pleasure to present to you the next issue of *New Books from Poland* containing this year's most interesting book offerings. As every year, while compiling the catalogue we asked ourselves the question that may sound overly dramatic: does Polish literature have anything interesting, peculiar, or unique to say to the world? Do readers – regardless of their country of origin, or of the language they use in daily conversation, in the privacy of their bedroom, or at a rally – have any reason to get acquainted with the literature written in a Central European country considered by many a gateway between the West and the East?

Writers attempt to name the reality around them. This naming happens in and through language. Thus, even though writers speak of the world so familiar to today's "global readers" (because, as we are told, the world is the same everywhere and the global village is shrinking rapidly), their language, their way of naming things rather than reality itself becomes the contribution of every form of literature to the edifice of human culture.

What would our contribution to this story be?

We would have to start with poetry, the very epitome of naming the world, the quintessence of language. This year's catalogue features three poets: Krzysztof Karasek – the outstanding avant-gardist of the New Wave generation; Father Jerzy Szymik – the philosopher theologian; Wojciech Kass – the youngest of the three, who takes great pains to name the 'happening'.

The concise speech of poetry has a close cousin in the short story. Our writers seem to have a particular affinity for the form. Last year's crop of many excellent short-story collections convinced us to offer a wider assortment. It showcases Paweł Huelle, a master storyteller translated into many languages, Wojciech Kudyba – the winner of the Marek Nowakowski 2021 Literary Prize named after Poland's greatest short story writer – and also A.D. Liskowacki, an experimental writer whose stories surprise with their stylistic polyphony and their unconventional approach to traditional historical matter. Before we get to the novel, let's mention Jarosław Jakubowski, probably the most popular playwright in Poland today. This prolific author of frequently performed plays offers intriguing takes on the universal issues of daily life.

The novel is first and foremost represented by Zyta Rudzka, a fascinating stylist of great linguistic dexterity. Her most recent work tackles the issue of masculinity, so dominant in modern discourse. Maciej Płaza (the 2018 Angelus Central European Award winner), on the other

hand, is seduced by the Hasidic world of the early-20th century southeast Poland in *The Golem*, his latest novel. This outstanding practitioner of accomplished prose ranks among the best, and not just Polish, masters of the craft who care as much about the style of their language as they do about the virtuosity of its substance, with an ear attuned to the melody of its flow. The catalogue also makes room for Wit Szostak's magic realism prose, and for Anna Kańtoch's crime fiction steadily gaining popularity among mystery lovers. With confidence, we present her *Spring of the Missing*, the story that received the top honour in the field of Polish crime fiction, the High Calibre Prize.

As usual, we feature literary journalism, a Polish specialty. We are proud to present the latest achievement of the world-famous reporter, Hanna Krall, along with the works of young, extremely talented authors, Katarzyna Kobylarczyk and Aleksandra Lipczak. We also suggest that you let Tomasz Grzywaczewski's reportage immerse you in the disappearing, flickering world of 'erased borders' through tales of people forced by war into new borderlands.

Last but not least comes the essay – especially the classic Polish socio-political essay, a revised version of the famous work *Solidarity Means a Bond* by Zbigniew Strawowski, the closest disciple of the legendary Fr. Józef Tischner. We also include two works that strongly follow the distinctly Polish way of reflecting on Christianity (books by Justyna Melonowska and Michał Gierycz). Angelika Kuźniak and Łukasz Kozak, on the other hand, offer an anthropological reflection on the rituals associated with death and the vampire character in culture. With literary classics in mind, we bring to your attention Stanisław Rembek, a rather intriguing writer and a classic of Polish military fiction. His excellent novel *In the Field* equals the works of better-known masters such as Babel, and Remarque, while even Hemingway does not seem to be that much ahead of Rembek!

For readers interested in art, we recommend *Asteroid and Wall-Bed* on Polish design, and a stunningly original art book *Andzia* in which unremarkable poems about the adventures of an unruly girl culminate in a surreal macabre, all lavishly illustrated by Przemek „Trust” Truściński.

That's about it. And we hope it's quite a bit.

So, what do we have to offer the „global reader”? A great deal! Try it, see it, and you won't be disappointed!

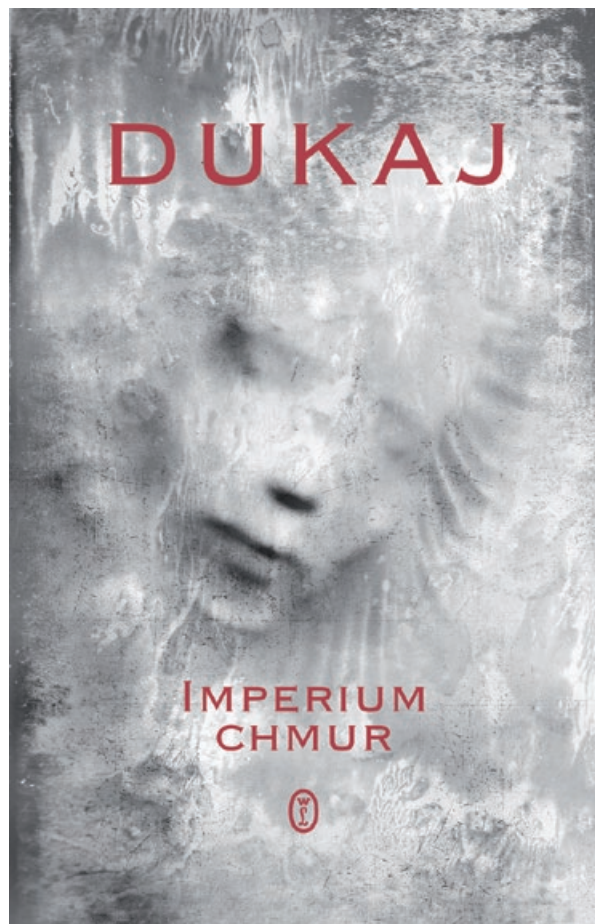
Dariusz Jaworski, Director of The Polish Book Institute  
Prof. Krzysztof Koehler, Deputy Director of The Polish Book Institute

# Empire of the Clouds

**A breathtaking story inspired by Japanese culture and one of the most beloved Polish classics – *The Doll* by Bolesław Prus**

A century and a half ago, the world was already entranced by the beauty of Japan – by its kimonos, swords, kanji. This mostly resulted in appropriation of the culture or imitation without proper understanding: the founding of more 'martial arts schools' or the aping of tea-brewing ceremonies. Incomparably harder was penetrating the sources of Japanese spirituality and creating a work of art that is not simply a clone, but a complement and development. Yet this is precisely what *Empire of the Clouds* is – a novel so powerfully rooted in Japanese aesthetics, sensibility and values that its reception is not easy at first. Making the effort, however, allows the reader to experience the reality of the Meiji era more fully and tangibly.

The intention of Jacek Dukaj, an author with philosophical flair and unbelievable imagination, is not however to create a novel of social criticism whose action takes place in the Far East at the turn of the twentieth century. This is merely the stage set for the first act, against which Dukaj develops a breath-taking plotline. An emissary from a faraway country arrives at the imperial court proposing an alliance based on an unusual invention, while the unfolding of events is seen



through the eyes of a young Japanese woman named Kiyoko. Here the point of departure is one of mankind's perennial dreams – that of a 'metal lighter than air'. Having dared to undertake this experiment in the realm of physics, Dukaj extracts from it every possible consequence for his plot and poetics. He keeps a tight rein on his fantasy, however, thanks to which does not become another piece of cyberpunk science fiction: no, the belle époque persists in its forms and rules, except that high up in the air there 'rotate enormous angular hearts of steel', reproduced multiple times over as if in a picture by Magritte. Out of a single idea, out of a single paradox arise rusty dew, metallic rains and jellyfish blooms floating above the ocean, as well as a sword that hangs over the Valley at a height of ten jō. And yet what remains with us longest after reading is not a vision of a different world order or the beauty of metallic metaphors – but only the idea of a spirituality wherein the boundary between 'I' and 'not-I' has been erased, only tenderness in the face of transience, only a silver shaving of sadness.

Wojciech Stanisławski  
Translated by Ursula Phillips

Mutsumoto is thirty-seven years old according to the traditional counting system of the Land of the Gods. Concubines have born him a son and a daughter; the empress is barren. He has no quarrel with the verdicts of the gods, with the verdicts of fate.

After dusk, surrounded by dozens of policemen, he descends from the road, climbs the mountain passes and hills, and in the silence drenched by sounds of nocturnal bird wings and the croaking of frogs, he marvels at the beauty and cruelty of the mortal world. Composes poetry that none shall ever read.

A journey without end – empty is the mind of the wanderer – a pitcher for the stones of longing.

The court teachers of Rangaku and Rigaku have shown him that there is no war between the principles of Darwin's world and the principles of Confucius's world. Also, Nihon occupies only the place it deserves, and it deserves it because it has fought for it.

In Mutsumoto's dreams, the empire of his son is the most powerful country in the world; his fleets rule the waves, his coin buys up the treasures of European capital cities, his subjects tread firmly the pavements of the white man's empires.

Did Amaterasu not promise that imperial power would reach wherever the Sun's rays reach?

Meanwhile Mutsumoto must complete part of his rōkudai junkō on foot, for the roads of his country are rivers of mud, along which travel is dangerous even in a palanquin.

By the light of the Moon, he reads the Chinese characters of the waka and kanshi poetry received from his spouse; the empress is also a poet. He comes down from the hill. They are already waiting for him.

An emissary from the cabal of the Blessed Proposal has arrived from Europe, from the Land That Does Not Exist, and here, under cover of night, on the fifth day of the eleventh month, not far from the village of Sogaoawa, in the court and government tents placed at intervals in an apricot grove, he has struck a deal with the Minister for Education and Reforms, Mori Arinori.

The emperor takes no part in deals. The emperor does not say anything. No one says anything. No gesture of protocol confirms the emperor's presence.

For years, foreigners have striven unsuccessfully for an audience in Tōkyō. Mutsumoto is the first ruler to have seen a Western barbarian. To have been seen by a Western barbarian.

Like a flame writhing in the wind – the red glow of the Sun goddess in the eyes of tired warriors – the hundred and twenty-second spark in eternity – the face of the tennō in the gloom.

From the purple hands of the emissary, via the hands of the policeman, minister and kinjū courtiers, the massive gift makes its way to the hands of the emperor. It is a metal crane outstretched for flight, two shaku in length, wing to wing. In the light of the torches and lanterns, it gleams with the rough skin of impure steel.

Excerpt translated by Ursula Phillips



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**JACEK  
DUKAJ**  
Born 1974

### *Imperium chmur [Empire of the Clouds]*

**Publisher:** Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2020

ISBN: 978-83-08-07063-5; 288 pages

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

### **Selected works**

*Starość Aksolotla*, 2019

*Po piśmie*, 2019

*Wroniec*, 2009

*Łód*, 2007

*Perfekcyjna niedoskonłość*, 2004

*Inne pieśni*, 2003

*Extensa*, 2002

*Czarne oceany*, 2001

*Aguerre w świecie*, 2001

*Xavras Wyzryn*, 1997

### **Selected awards**

Jerzy Żuławski Literary Award (2008, 2012, 2019)

Janusz A. Zajdel Award (2000, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2007, 2010)

European Union Prize for Literature (2009)

Polityka's Passport Award (2002, 2004, 2008, 2009) – nominations

Nike Literary Award (2008) – nomination

Kościelski Foundation Award (2008)

### **Foreign language translations**

Other works by Dukaj have been published in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Macedonia, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, and Ukraine. The UK and Bosnian editions of *Łód* are in progress.

# Dargin Lake

**A protagonist who has just lost his job and a close friend – in a search of a new beginning**



Chmielewski is often called the bard of Warsaw, its inhabitants, its places, their minor affairs. He is a Varsovian, he feels comfortable in the city, whether downtown or on the outskirts, he's walked across it every which way, he's dropped into bars, listened to conversations – learned and incoherent, meaningful and meaningless, on the train platform, at the bus stop, in the toilet, in crowds of pedestrians, in corporations, at flea markets and in church. He doesn't pick up on or describe great personages. His heroes are always people who don't stand out from the crowd, who noiselessly disappear within it, who remain in the memory of their loved ones, though not always. They exist, but at the end of the day the world wouldn't change without them. Maybe it would only be less bright?

Chmielewski is a nostalgic writer; he's also a writer of the departing world, even when the pages of his stories or novels focus on the here and now. In his prose, nothing happens quickly or abruptly, there are no plot twists that send the reader back to reread the previous page.

Who is the narrator of *Dargin Lake*, Chmielewski's new novel? A mature man, probably closer to 50 than 40. A peculiar man, because that's what you'd call someone

who's never had a girlfriend, lives in the world of music, who spent years as a host on public radio, and passes the rest of his time reading – mainly in German, on account of his education – and in the company of a friend and his group, whom he met on vacation however many years ago. He's a man at a crossroads, who's lost his job and the friend who helped him breathe more deeply, see things more broadly and enter a world at first foreign, but with each month, with each visit to the tavern and each beer drunk, closer and more his own.

This is also a book about changing mores in contemporary Poland. Vodka, beer, unhurried storytelling about what used to be, about where and with whom. Or about why things were just as they were and couldn't be otherwise. Chmielewski's characters have no hierarchies or duties among themselves, no obligations to do anything. The journey to Masuria (the region of the Polish Great Lakes) is just a pretence – with its post-German strand, the trip is a small piece of the story of Warsaw. Tearing oneself away from reality, the city, a small interlude in a life once planned out and now taking its own path.

Wacław HOLEWIŃSKI  
Translated by Sean G. Bye

I pitched my tent right at the water's edge, its entrance facing the surface of the lake, so I could see it at dawn and at sunset. The lake was enormous. At night it murmured, and the cool air penetrated the fabric of the tent and gently touched my face. It made me think of everything that had recently happened in my life, of why I had ended up at Dargin Lake in the first place.

At dawn, the water was lit up by the pale, light-blue sky. The clouds submerged in the water looked like candy floss scattered over the lakebed. The large pine trees under which I'd pitched my tent stood indifferently, since they saw this image of day awakening over the expanse of water every day and in every season.

I would walk out onto the dock and look at the thin line of the opposite shore. Who lived there? Did someone spend their life there peacefully all year long and could they adapt their fate to the waves' rhythmic breaking on the shore?

I would eat my breakfast at a wooden table not far from the water's edge: tea, bread, sausage, cheese. I would wonder if I was still really myself, if maybe I was imitating someone else, although I was doing my best to shut out troublesome thoughts; I wanted to stifle them and that was why I'd stare at the wall of the pine forest, gaze down the sandy path, and after breakfast, dive into the green water.

By the shore, the lake was shallow. I had to get a hundred meters in before the water would cover me completely and I could swim.

I spent most of my time lying in front of my tent. I listened to the waves recounting their "own incomprehensible thing" – those words stuck in my mind from who-knows-where and kept popping up, coming back, despite the efforts I made to try and describe the sounds the lake was making a little differently, or at least in my own way. I have no idea where those words came from. The scent of the water and the pine needles accompanied these unhurried meditations. I definitely wanted to cut myself off from the world for a while. To forget about my friend's too-early death, which held as much meaning to me as the breaking of the little waves on the sandy beach, as the lapping of the water under the dock.

Stretched out on a sleeping pad in front of the tent, I'd look at the lake, but often without seeing the water. I was back in the hallway at the hospital on Banach Street, where the stench of the sick made you immediately want to vomit, and then took you into its possession and held onto you for a long time – like bitter herb vodka with a dash of beer. On a hospital bed in the hallway, an old man, completely naked, was trying to put on a nappy. Without success.

My friend looked awful. His skin had gone grey and the whites of his eyes were completely yellow. He dragged his feet as we walked down the long hallway toward the window at the end. There were chairs there, you could talk. He was reluctant to speak of his illness, and I didn't want to pry. Out the window, there were cars parked on a little square paved with cement hexagons, and further along was a metal chain-link fence and a lawn.

He told me that in the building next door, whose windows he could see from his room, they'd been shooting a porn flick the night before. He said when he was brought to the hospital he'd behaved like an animal, though he didn't remember the details. And that in recent days he'd seen in front of the hospital out the window of his tiny, rented apartment a young woman, who knocked on his window even though he lived on the second floor. Parrots were flying around in the room, that's what he told me, and he stared straight ahead with sad eyes.

But look, he said, suddenly lively, here's a shelf of books, take what you like!

Excerpts translated by Sean G. Bye



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**WOJCIECH  
CHMIELEWSKI**

**Born 1969**

*Jeziro Dargin [Dargin Lake]*

**Publisher:** Czytelnik, Warszawa 2021

ISBN: 978-83-07-03498-0, 224 pages

**Translation rights:** Wojciech Chmielewski,  
wojtus.chmielewski@gmail.com

**Selected books**

*Magiczne światło miasta*, 2019

*Belweder gryzie w rękę*, 2017

*Najlepsza dentystka w Londynie*, 2014

*Kawa u Doroty*, 2010

*Brzytwa*, 2008

*Biały bokser*, 2006

**Selected awards**

Cyprian Kamil Norwid Literary Prize (2018)

Marek Nowakowski Prize (2017)

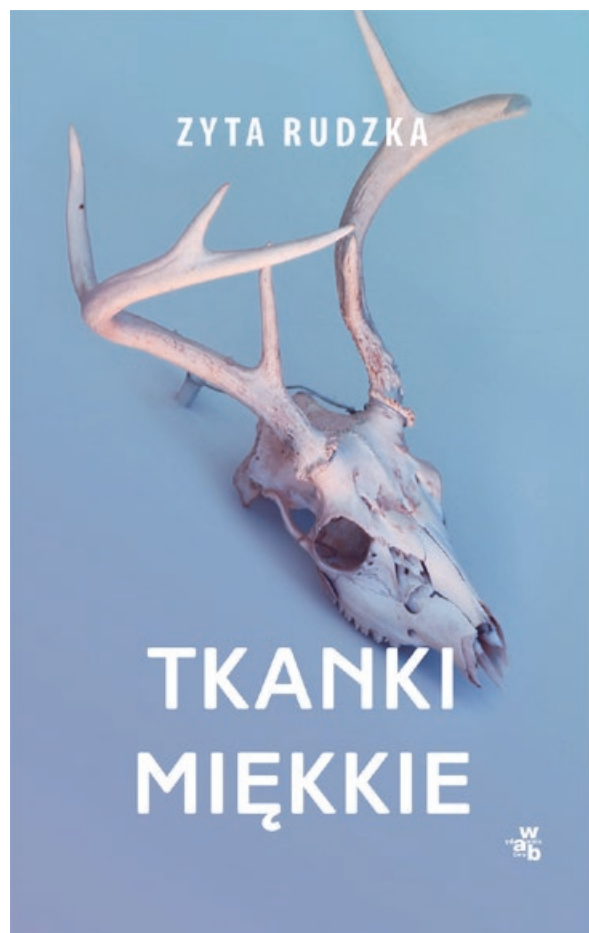
Angelus Central European Literary Award (2011, 2017) – nomination

Józef Mackiewicz Literary Prize (2007) – distinction



# Soft Tissues

**Rudzka depicts the masculine soul with an empathy that's both affectionate and merciless all at once**



**BY THE WINNER OF GDYNIA PRIZE**

**A** novel by a woman about masculinity? Yes, but it's nothing like a feminist manifesto. Zyta Rudzka doesn't criticise men from the standpoint of an oppressed woman, but depicts the masculine soul with an empathy that's both affectionate and merciless all at once. This monologue of a man in late middle age, a man undergoing an endless crisis of masculinity, really only focuses on two themes: his relationship with his wife (with women) and with his father (with men).

The narrator stops loving the most important woman in his life, and starts loving his male progenitor more; his wife is moving away from him mentally and physically, and his father is dying. So his monologue about these relationships gradually changes into an account of loneliness. The "soft tissues" of the title are the sensitive spots in the male identity. Rudzka exposes the feelings that men are afraid to display: weakness, a sense of defeat, dependence on others, and a constant need to be loved. Every thought the central character has and every decision he makes is guided by a quest

for happiness in love and an effort to assimilate death, and as a result the narrative acquires psychological authenticity and philosophical profundity. In this story a man's life is laid bare and deconstructed to reveal its lowest depths and its foundations.

Yet all this occurs within the "soft tissue" of language that shows great wealth, because the other main hero of this novel is talking. In fact Rudzka has written a sort of extended poem in prose, treating each sentence like a separate line of verse. She juxtaposes words on the basis of associations and false etymologies, uses plenty of alliteration and homonyms, and draws cultural allusions. At the same time, never for a moment does she lose touch with a genuinely "masculine" way of talking: brusque, sometimes even brutal, self-ironical and sarcastic. Potential translators will face a hard task, but also a fascinating challenge that will give them the opportunity to show off their linguistic ingenuity.

Artur Grabowski  
Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones

I washed my hands. My father, a doctor of the most general kind of medicine, held the opinion that a physician should scrub his paws in his consulting room as often as he washes his hands of a woman. To cover his tracks – he never stopped soaping himself, every day of the week and at weekends too. He was frankly surprised that his fingerprints hadn't worn off; I was always spotting his gaze fixed on women's bums – he'd pout, and a grimace of fake disdain would soften his rancour.

I used the hand dryer, positioning my limbs like a sleepwalker. The roar of the machine confirmed the diagnosis – I had just one wish left: to be shut in a sensory deprivation tank.

The world has overtaken me, and that's the defeat I'm proudest of. I prefer to be less firmly hooked up to that cesspit.

Hence penance in the pissoir – it takes me longer and longer, this is life's new sinew.

On the way out I looked at myself in the mirror. If I'd known what I'd see, I'd have given myself an anaesthetic.

I can't wipe the image from my mind. Worse than at Chernobyl. I feel blackened. By thought, deed and neglect. The phrase "dead tired" has ceased to be a metaphor.

Sooner or later old age will burst in on me, but I'm armed to the teeth – I've had implants done. I paid through the nose, I've stuffed an Italian car into my gob. My life has never been all that grand, and that's by design. I like modesty in all things – except for my oral cavity.

I'm careful not to smile too much, or my fine set of teeth outshines the rest and I look like happy plastic. I smoothed my hair.

In recent years I've lost a lot of it. A once magical coiffure has left me with the phoney gesture of combing through an imaginary mane from front to back.

I'm finding it hard to accept my destiny – never again shall I feel the wind in my hair, not even if a cyclone sucked me up. I've heard of toupees and other additions for men. I have no plans to apply them.

I haven't long until retirement, a little more to my demise, but I feel I'm already in the pluperfect tense. I've gained a lot from life, but I've got it the wrong way. And with this insincere unburdening of the soul, but genuine relieving of the bladder, I left the hotel lavatory in a mood as if it were a public toilet at the arse-end of nowhere.

I approached the reception desk and acted out a fictional phone call, rudely castigating the person I was waiting for, supposedly my son.

The employees and other listeners eavesdropped with rising humiliation as I ranted in a stage-whisper, betraying the fact that I'm in the business of cardiac surgery, and for the past twelve hours I've been standing at a table, doing the dirty work on an open heart – the way I described it was truly heart-breaking.

I don't know where I got this need for a false confession. I buttoned myself up all over. I respect decent clothing. No one can accuse me of a lack of breeding when it comes to clothes. I dress tastefully, smartly, not in fashion, but with timeless style. Even in situations that smack of intimacy, when – willing or not – one bares oneself entirely, I've always preferred to keep the top half of my threads on.

Excerpt translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones



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ZYTA  
RUDZKA

Born 1964

***Tkanki miękkie [Soft Tissues]***

**Publisher:** W.A.B./Foksal, Warszawa 2020

ISBN: 9788328064225; 288 pages

**Translation rights:** Foksal, krystyna.kolakowska@gwfoksal.pl

**Selected novels**

*Krótką wymiana ognia*, 2018

*Ślicznotka doktora Josefa*, 2006

*Dziewczyny Bonda*, 2004

*Mykwa*, 1999

*Uczty i głody*, 1995

*Pałac Cezarów*, 1995

**Foreign language translations**

Germany, Switzerland, Russia, Croatia, Bulgaria – in anthologies

**Selected awards**

Literary Award of the Capital City of Warsaw (2021)

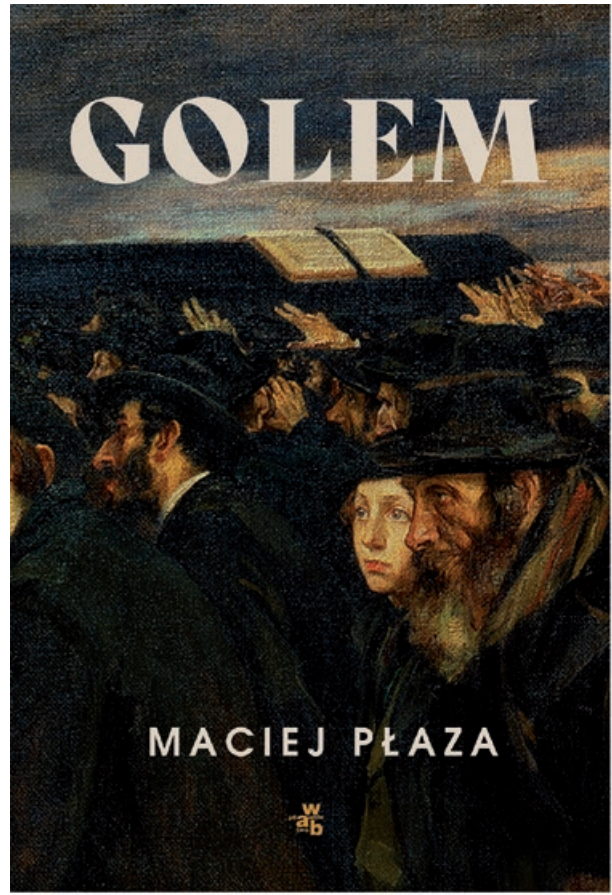
Gdynia Literary Prize (2019)

Nike Literary Award (2019) – finalist

*Soft Tissues* has been named one of the best books of 2020 by „Polityka” and „Książki” magazines.

# The Golem

**A story rooted in cabbalistic tales and sacred scriptures that belong to the Judaic canon**



**BY THE WINNER OF GDYNIA PRIZE & ANGELUS AWARD**

**M**aciej Płaza's novel must be the product of a fascination with a world that no longer exists. It's about a small, closed society of Hassidic Jews, typical of the cultural landscape of Poland in the past, especially the small towns situated within its south-eastern borderlands. In one of these places, early in autumn 1911, a strange man appears, a repulsive-looking vagrant. He'd have been chased away at once, if not for the intervention of the local tzaddik, who recognises the stranger as a holy man, perhaps an envoy of God Himself. So the tzaddik names the stranger Rafael and lets him stay at his manor; the man forms numerous relationships with the residents of the shtetl and becomes familiar with the local conflicts – the ongoing quarrels and those that have occurred in the past. This gives the novel's readers the opportunity to learn about the culture and mores of the Hassidim – they're presented with a sea of knowledge about Hassidic religious practices, established rituals, unusual imperatives

and prohibitions. What makes Płaza's story exceptional is that it is rooted in cabbalistic tales and sacred scriptures that belong to the Judaic canon. For Płaza is most strongly drawn to themes concerning Jewish mysticism, which he endeavours to reinterpret in his own way. In the world of the novel this interest is explored through a debate on the possibility of the Messiah appearing on Earth. There are those who maintain that Rafael is the Messiah. Whereas the eponymous Golem, moulded from clay in the shape of a man, appears towards the end of the story and is also an attempt at reinterpreting this highly familiar figure from Jewish legends. When the Hassidim in the town where Rafael suddenly appears are threatened by a pogrom, the tzaddik and his assistants mould and animate the Golem, who routs the people taking part in the newly launched pogrom. Equilibrium is restored, and not without the involvement of Rafael himself.

Dariusz Nowacki

Translated by Antonia Llyod-Jones

The people watched him trailing along the empty streets, a thin, pale hulk in large boots, as if they'd been pulled off someone bigger, though it wouldn't be easy to find a person that size anywhere else but a circus wagon, in a coat soiled with the mud of roads unknown. He dragged his left leg over the stones and carried a sack on his back, with one hand tucked behind its drawstring. He walked with a limp, but without hesitation – not once did he turn his head to see if he was going the right way, but evidently knew where he was heading, though instead of walking straight to the specific spot he calmly wandered. He passed the Orthodox church, crossed the main market square, and on reaching the small marketplace he halted outside the synagogue that stood there, outside the qahal house, and then beneath the shamash's cottage, as if he were the ragamuffin from the old joke, who when asked if he knows any important local person boasts that he knows the shamash, and the shamash knows the whole town. He turned a circle and finally came to a stop by the pump, where it was even more plain to see what a wreck he was. To drink the water, he didn't lean forwards or squat like a normal person, but suspended his entire body above the pump, stooped, embraced it stiffly and pressed his large, muddy frame against it. He lapped the water from the palm of his hand, though as some had noticed, first he washed it and moved his lips for a while, perhaps muttering a prayer.

The people stared at him from behind their windows and fences. The talk was of why he'd come and who on earth he was. Probably not an itinerant beggar – he didn't have the air of a beggar, and it didn't look as if he were accustomed to asking for anything. Maybe a jobless ne'er-do-well? No, not that either, because his face, though coarse and sallow, was youthfully innocent; in any case, he hadn't walked across the town like a vagrant, he hadn't peeped about curiously to see who had what in their chamber or farmyard, or on their shop sign – he hadn't look around at all. Nor was he a deserter, because he wasn't trying to hide, he didn't fear the eyes of agents or the tongues of informers. And definitely not a goy, because he was dressed the Jewish way, and even though he had no sidelocks and his beard was short, he had kugel written on his face. Perhaps he had come to see the tzaddik, bringing a note pleading for a prayer to the Almighty to restore someone's health, but who would have set out on such a journey overnight? (...) His body was crooked, his skin was the colour of old canvas, just like his sack, his brow was lined with pain, his eyes clouded with lack of sleep and hunger. Across his cheek ran a scar, perhaps a birthmark, perhaps the trace of stitches sewn by the unskilled hand of a barber who'd spurred himself on with a glass of spirit alcohol. He whom God marks out He does not bless, said Reb Arje Szub, but the saintly tzaddik waved a hand to silence him. Reb, asked Reb Jakow Ber – who was adept at reading his

gestures and carrying out the orders they concealed, with many years of training, handing the saintly man his pipe, cane, glass, book, pen, prayer book, tefillin and tallit, and commanding quiet before prayers; Arje only led the singing, as the chief cantor and master of the Hassidic nigunim – Reb, repeated Reb Jakow, who is this fellow, do you know him? For a time the saintly man said nothing, then he nodded inquiringly in the stranger's direction. Where do you come from? asked Jakow. Are you a Hassid? Are you on your way to your tzaddik? Where is he from, where does he live? In Międzybóž, Czarnobyl, Stepań or Ołyka? At these questions the stranger merely goggled; it was plain to see that he couldn't hear a thing. One of the Hassidim clapped without warning by his ear, but the lad didn't even shudder. Suddenly from somewhere far away, possibly from the pastures by the river, came the fierce barking of a dog. The boy tilted his head and listened intently. He's faking, snapped Jakow, but once again the tzaddik ordered silence. The stranger was mumbling something. His lips were almost motionless, and yet he was muttering indistinctly, and after listening for a while the Hassidim caught some familiar words: Wretched am I and dying of the shivers, I have endured Thy wrath, I am falling, Thy fires have run through me, Thy terrors have broken me.

Excerpts translated by Antonia Llyod-Jones

Extended sample translation available at [booksfrompoland.pl](http://booksfrompoland.pl)



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**MACIEJ  
PŁAZA**

Born 1976

#### *Golem [The Golem]*

**Publisher:** W.A.B./Foksal, 2021

ISBN: 978-83-280-8511-4; 320 pages

**Translation rights:** Foksal, [krystyna.kolakowska@gwfoksal.pl](mailto:krystyna.kolakowska@gwfoksal.pl)

#### **Novels published**

*Robinson w Bolechowiu*, 2017

*Skoruń*, 2015

Maciej Płaza is also an award-winning translator from the English language.

#### **Selected awards**

Angelus Central European Literature Award (2018)

Gdynia Literary Prize (2016)

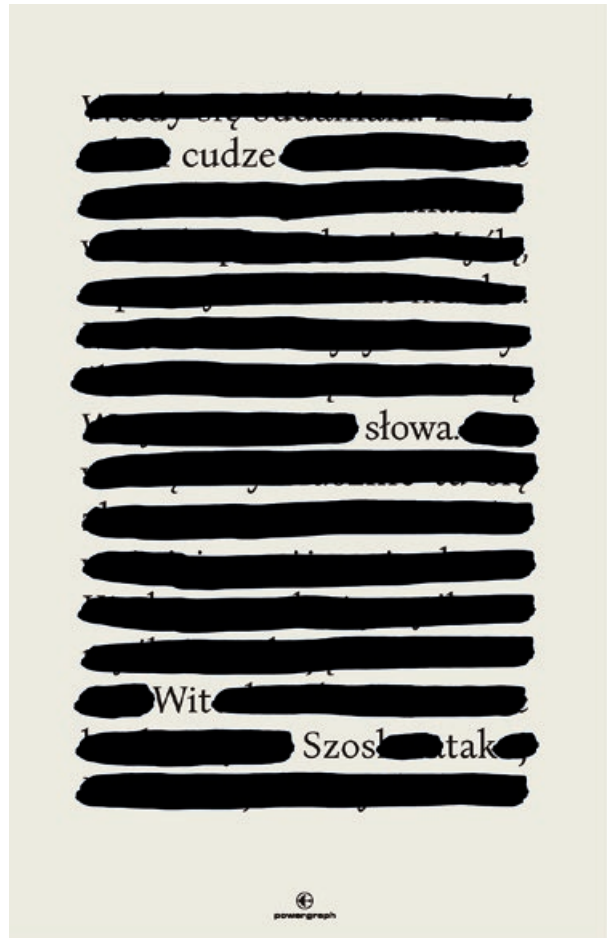
Kościelski Foundation Award (2016)

Nike Literary Award (2016) – nomination

Witold Gombrowicz Literary Prize (2016) – nomination

# Others' Words

**A story about the fundamental unknowability of the world and of other people**



**W**it Szostak has experimented with literary form many times, and he does so again in his new novel, *Others' Words*. The author's way of telling the story of one Benedykt Ryś, once an exceptionally talented philosophy student who abandoned his promising academic career to live life on his own terms, is truly devious. Ryś himself is absent from the book: he has died in a car accident, and the novel consists of the reminiscences of those close to him: his lover and partner, with whom he jointly created a restaurant; his father, who reproaches himself for his coldness; his former professor; fellow students; a close female friend; and, finally, a man whom Ryś knew when they were children. Thus the protagonist is described by others: we see him through the prism of "others' words", which are usually full of praise and regret that his life has been left unfinished. Yet this affectionate perspective is ultimately negated. To not give everything away I can only add that Szostak's book is a story about the fundamental unknowability of the world and of other people, and

also about the fact that our knowledge is always mediated by others' accounts, which might be untruthful or incomplete. Do we live one life or perhaps several different lives? And is a coherent story about any given person possible at all?

Szostak has created a multi-vocal novel: every narrator has his or her own style. Particularly moving (perhaps because they are closest to the author's own life) are the confessions of the father and the story told by the professor – accounts of two men who have been at times harsh with Benedykt and at times loving, but who above all are surprised by his premature demise and their own transience.

It is worth paying attention to Wit Szostak's work and the resolute way in which for many years he has been building his literary universe – and seeing our times through the eyes of an artistically talented philosopher, lecturer, gourmet and wanderer.

Marta Kwaśnicka  
Translated by Eliza Marciniak

If I had known that you'd be gone so soon, son, I would have loved you differently.

But what does that mean: differently? Better, more wisely, more intensely? More patiently? When you were born, I was certain that I would love you always and above all else. And I tried very hard, but then other things would turn out to be more important. So many times you would walk away disappointed. So many times I would fob you off with "a bit later", "tomorrow", "another time" or "go play on your own". Did I look you in the eye in those moments? Did I see your sorrow? Or maybe I was too busy for that too? I could have done so many things better, I could have held back so many words, controlled so many gestures. Why was I not capable of doing that? After all, son, you were the most important.

Things weren't bad between us, were they? I never hit you, I listened to you, and I talked with you, though maybe not enough. But we have no shortage of beautiful memories. I remember us walking through meadows in bloom; it's summer and the grasshoppers are chirping. There are sandwiches in my knapsack and raspberry juice in a heavy glass bottle. We're walking along a narrow path, and I'm telling you about animals and trees, I'm summarising the adventures of Tom Sawyer and stories from the Bible. I'm telling you about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Esau. When I think back to those stories now, what I have in front of my eyes is not the desert where they took place but the meadow and you, walking a few steps in front of me in your sandals, your head bent down. I see you crouching down to pick up a stone, a stick, a tarnished coin. And I'm telling you about the bowl of lentil pottage, about Jacob wrestling with the angel, about Joseph's brothers. I had known those stories for as long as I can remember and felt I could tell them well. I don't know if you were listening or if you were absorbed in searching for treasures. You used to bring so many of them home. Blown fuses, bottle tops, a knife with a rotten handle. You would pick up this or that and ask if you could bring it home, if Mum wouldn't be upset, and I would always say it was fine.

How am I supposed to remember you now? Those who didn't know you for as long surely have an easier time of it. They can quickly think back to your first meeting. So can I. Because of course I remember picking you both up from the maternity ward; I remember the pale blue of the blankets, the smell of the corridor. And you: fragile, defenceless, all bundled up. This is the scene I would like to recall when somebody mentions your name. It would be wonderful if that is what I could remember first.

But another image keeps coming back. For years I have tried to obliterate it, to efface it like a prison tattoo, but in vain. I never asked you about that day, I didn't have the courage; in general, I asked too few questions and

proceeded straight to the answers. I considered myself a wise father who knows everything about his child. And when I did ask about something, it was meaningless. I asked you how things were at school and at the playground, about food and about your classes. Of course these were serious matters – they were the fabric of your daily life – but my questions were not serious. Because I knew the answers in advance and only expected confirmation. They were questions just for the sake of asking questions, to keep the conversation going, faking contact. You didn't like them, and I would bristle at your perfunctory answers. But how were you supposed to answer? Give me a detailed account of every lesson and break at school, repeat every word and describe your friends' every reaction?

I didn't want answers; I knew that everything was fine at school, everything was fine at the playground, everything was fine everywhere. "School is school," you would say, and I would take that for impertinence. But that's exactly how I had answered my own father. Or rather, that's how I would have answered him if he had asked. He didn't ask; he'd wait until I got back from school and say, "You're home? Go bring in some wood." That was all. So in order not to be like my father, I asked, and I was exactly like him. Uninterested.

Excerpt translated by Eliza Marciniak



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WIT  
SZOSTAK

Born 1976

#### *Cudze słowa [Others' Words]*

**Publisher:** Powergraph, Warszawa 2021

ISBN: 9788366178380; 280 pages

**Translation rights:** Powergraph,  
kasia.sienkiewicz-kosik@powergraph.pl

#### **Selected novels**

*Poniewczasie*, 2019

*Wrózenie z wnętrza*, 2015

*Sto dni bez słońca*, 2014

#### **Selected awards**

Krakow UNESCO City of Literature Literary Award (2020)

Polityka's Passport Award (2014) – nomination

Nike Literary Award – nomination (2013)

Jerzy Żuławski Literary Award (2011)

Janusz A. Zajdel Award (2008)

# Collected Works



## War prose by one of the most outstanding Polish writers of the 20th century

Stanisław Rembek (1901-1985) was one of the most outstanding Polish prose writers of the twentieth century. He was also a writer with a tragic biography. He was particularly unlucky: his most important books told of Polish victory over the Bolsheviks in the war of 1920, in which he himself took part as a gunner. For this reason, his works were not reprinted or discussed in communist Poland, while Rembek himself was consigned to the margins of literary life.

It should come as no surprise that the first three volumes of Rembek's *Collected Works* [*Dzieła zebrane*] contain works about the Polish-Bolshevik war: his diary from that time, short stories as well as two novels: *Nagan* [*Nagant Revolver*] and *W polu* [*In the Field*]. The latter – originally published in 1937 – was especially admired by contemporary critics and belongs today to the canon of Polish war literature. The history of a single infantry company, annihilated during a Bolshevik offensive, becomes the pretext for a realistic, indeed cinematic description of the battlefield. At the same time, Rembek provides an

insightful analysis of the phenomenon of modern warfare as well as the mindset of the men fighting in it. In his prose, war is a multifaceted experience seen from the perspective of ordinary soldiers. Its hideous physiology is significant, but above all – its psychology and even its metaphysics, what war does to people's minds and how it affects them. War in Rembek's novels takes the form of a constant emotional response, prompted by a feeling of physical threat, which over time is called courage, fear or heroism. In the Polish-Bolshevik war, the Polish writer also observed the clash of two experiences: the Romantic-chivalric experience and the modern. Hence his images of battle oscillate between pathos and naturalism. Here war is often a killing field, yet sometimes the participants are enchanted by its menacing beauty. In Poland, *In the Field* and other of Rembek's war novels and stories are compared to Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Babel's *Red Cavalry* and Jünger's *Storm of Steel*.

Maciej Urbanowski  
Translated by Ursula Phillips

Indeed, all the misfortunes of the 7<sup>th</sup> Company began the day Corporal Górny was killed.

A connection, impenetrable to human logic, seems to exist between certain events, as if the world were a unified mechanism, wherein the movement of even the tiniest particle can cause an unexpected reaction of the whole. Those same couplings that link a train crash to a loose screw in the metal rail, also appear to link it to a hare leaping over the track in front of the train as it hurtles towards annihilation. Every sailor, every airman, every miner, railwayman, fireman or soldier: all brothers in water, air, earth, fire and the animal instinct to fight, in the elements that make up the totality of our being, will always consider it proven that the most trivial deed, bah! careless word uttered at a “wrong moment” in the incomprehensible tangle of chance events that is their life, has a mysterious power to determine the success of their actions, and even the existence of their bodily shell. There are no arguments with which to explain to them that a third cigarette, lit with the same match, cannot influence the direction of a bullet or a photograph affect the efficiency of an aeroplane engine.

For faith is always something other than knowledge, and thought – something other than experience.

In this case too, no sage would have been able to detect a rational connection between Górny’s death and the disasters that began to plague the unit not long afterwards. Because today it can be stated above all, impartially and categorically, that the dead corporal played no distinguished role in the company whatsoever. On no occasion during his lifetime did he display those combat and organisational skills that began to be attributed to him only later. Neither did his aspirations and passions have any influence on the unit’s fate. What is more: None of all those people who so enthusiastically took part in the moving tributes to the dead man had shown any interest in him before his death.

For Górny had lived without drawing attention to himself. The best proof of this was that no one could remember later when he had first appeared in the company. The one certainty was that his vast figure was already showing up at roll-calls and parades in the Łódź barracks, with its calm soft elephantine movements, bright round face fresh as a peach, and absent-minded blue eyes, like those of child roused from sleep on a sunny morning.

He would always arrive last and stand in the line of non-commissioned officers in his slightly too small peaked cap, from under which straight wisps of never combed hair strayed onto his white forehead, in his green ‘Wehrmacht’ tunic with its wide slit over the buttocks, and huge brown boots like stove-pipes reaching high above the knees. The boots were always so highly

polished they looked like new: only their shape as well as dark patches visible here and there on the uppers were clear evidence of their origin with the Prussian Death’s Head Hussars. It never occurred to his superiors to point this out to him, question him or punish him: no conversations with him ever went beyond stereotypical military reports or communications. Perhaps because he was conspicuous by his unusual calm and taciturnity, and taciturn people are able to command respect for their individuality. Another aspect of his personality was his immense mildness. It was this character trait that recruits recognised quickest and best. Punitive drills under his command were simply a pleasant stroll in the moonlight. Whenever he was in charge of sweeping the yard or the street in front of the barracks, cleaning latrines, scrubbing floors or stairs, any man could excuse himself from work, so that in the end the corporal was left only with those who were too stupid to ‘follow’ or were intimidated – which can often happen – by the delicacy of the non-commissioned officer.

Excerpt translated by Ursula Phillips



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**STANISŁAW  
REMBEK**  
(1901-1985)

*Dzieła zebrane [Collected Works]*

**Publisher:** Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 2021

vol. 1: *Dziennik 1920 i okolice. Opowiadania*

ISBN: 978-83-8196-264-3, 425 pages;

vol. 2: *Nagan*

ISBN: 978-83-8196-266-7, 194 pages;

vol. 3: *W polu*

ISBN: 978-83-8196-268-1, 368 pages

6 more volumes will be released.

**Translation rights:** The Estate of Stanisław Rembek, contact via [e.szwagrzyk@piw.pl](mailto:e.szwagrzyk@piw.pl)



## A trend to watch: the rise of the short story

Poland has witnessed a true revival of the form in the recent years. Not only did many interesting collections appear on the market, but they were also wildly diverse stylistically and thematically. Our anthology reflects that diversity: we find stories about the present, the past, and even some disturbing visions of the past here; we find elaborate miniatures and longer stories; we find well-known writers and emerging names.



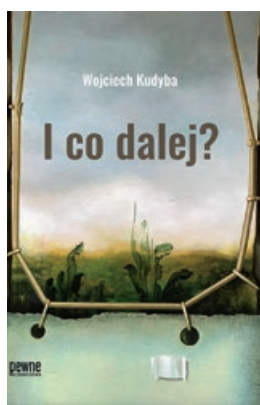
### **Talita**

Here are twelve short stories, where ostensibly opposing elements find a space in common. So, traditional provincial customs and beliefs collide with modernity; miracles co-exist with reality, and death in no way defies life. The unusual stories in *Talita* include: a group of modern-day Kashubians holding an 'empty night' vigil over the dead body of a young girl; a young Jewish woman being turned into an ice statue along with a matzevah tombstone; an oak growing within the grounds of a priory refusing point-blank to be cut down; an ordinary boy befriending the daughter of a gypsy king; and an eight-year-old boy becoming obsessed with his older aunt. In this collection, Pawel Huelle returns to the kind of superb magic realism to be found in his well-known novel, *Who was David Weiser?* These latest stories offer a real adventure in literature that lies on the border of fiction and reality.

**Author:** Pawel Huelle

**Publisher:** Znak; ISBN: 978-83-240-6082-5, 320 pages

**Translation rights:** Znak, bolinska@znak.com.pl; sample translation and full report available



### **And Then What?**

Moving portraits of modern-day Poles, told through five short stories, which reveal the intricacies and complications within people's lives: the story of the single mother left with two children; the multiplicity of voices of mourners at a funeral, where death is depicted as an experience that unites people. There is also a short story about a frail old man, missing his daughter, who has moved abroad. The scenes depicted by Kudyba have been overheard on a bus, on a tram, on a train, on the underground and in the street. The realism and authenticity of the reality in this most recent work by the author of *Pułaski* [*The Pulaskis*] are the book's greatest strengths. The tragic, bitter, yet sublime, fates of ordinary citizens here become a testimony to the heroism of everyday life. The wide range of difficulties with which the characters in *And Then What?* have to contend reflects those modern heroes who struggle with real life.

**Author:** Wojciech Kudyba

**Publisher:** Wydawnictwo Pewne; ISBN: 978-83-63518-49-3, 186 pages

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

Marek Nowakowski Prize for the best short story collection (2021)



### ***Szelma and Other Mundane Stories***

This collection consists of 62 concise, yet highly-reflective short stories. In these empathetic prose miniatures, Elżbieta Isakiewicz has created tales and images with the precision of a journalist-reporter. The short form, which the media, owing to its note-like way of communicating, has made familiar to today's readers, is, however, merely outer apparel. The confusions and tangled threads of interpersonal communication are couched in philosophical reflection. Here, poetry has been turned into micro-fiction. The snapshots of Polish anxiety that we see encapsulated in *Szelma* reveal the universal and current problems of our contemporary world: poverty, childhood, memory, urges, history, pandemics, illness, diversity, power, faith, loneliness, nostalgia... These are just a few of the many threads that, at a given moment, stop us in our tracks and force us to reflect on our journey through this lyrical prose.

**Author:** Elżbieta Isakiewicz

**Publisher:** Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy; ISBN: 978-83-8196-234-6, 144 pages

**Translation rights:** PIW, e.szwagrzyk@piw.pl



### ***Polski Hotel***

Returning to some difficult and painful moments in Polish history, Liskowacki's prose has been symbolically divided into the four seasons that here represent four stages: stormy events taken from real episodes in Polish history. For example, in the year 1863, Poland first had to contend with the need to create an underground state and build the clandestine movements that were tasked with working out how to regain independence and how to fight to retain it. *Hotel Polski* shows a fascinating image of the traditional Polish mind-set. It also raises an intriguing subject: the myth of the Reclaimed Territories (in other words the former German land), while the detailed, literary descriptive writing that we have already encountered in Liskowacki's previous work is a real force in this newest collection of short stories by the author of *Eine kleine* [A Small One].

**Author:** Artur Daniel Liskowacki

**Publisher:** Wydawnictwo Forma; ISBN: 978-83-66759-00-8, 330 pages

**Translation rights:** Wydawnictwo Forma, forma.sc@pro.onet.pl



### ***The Anatomy of a Fracture***

A form of near-future science fiction, these six futuristic parables concern individuals who define themselves through the prism of technology. The array of potential changes following life after isolation covers many areas: new ways of electing a president; hitherto unprecedented methods of influencing voters; an Internet and applications that cause illness; social bubbles; 'fake news'; artificial intelligence. A dystopian and scientific world mingles here with traditional reality. It makes for an interesting patchwork pattern, depicting on the one hand eternal values, and on the other, a modern, high-tech identity. The essential truth about people lies hidden below the surface, where theories and scientific analyses collide with old axioms. Nevertheless, it is the human element that turns out to be more important than mechanical and technical progress. The characters' relationship with technological advances appears at times to reflect their moral compass.

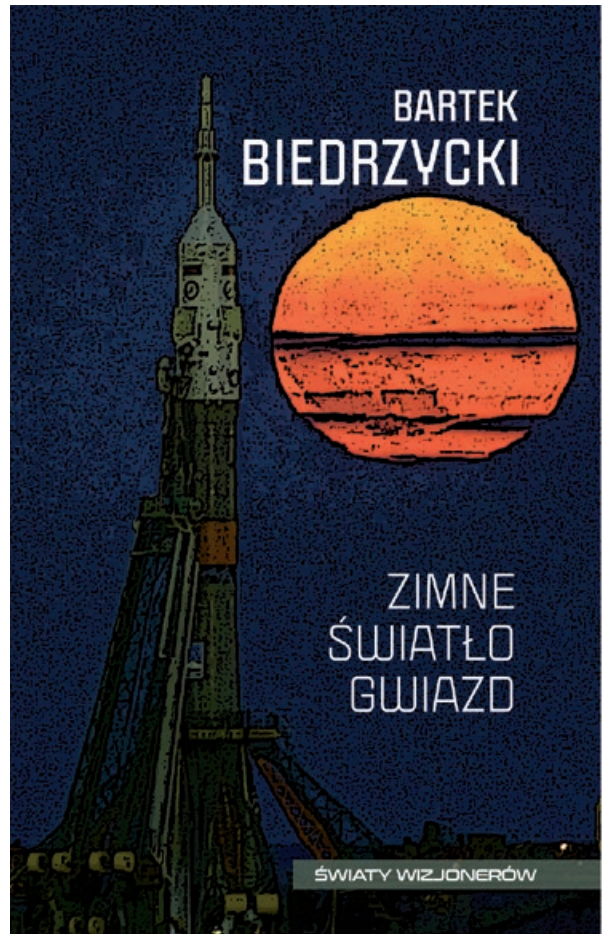
**Author:** Michał Protasiuk

**Publisher:** Wydawnictwo Powergraph; ISBN: 978-83-66178-48-9, 448 pages

**Translation rights:** Powergraph, kasia.sienkiewicz-kosik@powergraph.pl

Texts by Paulina Subocz-Białek  
Translated by Halina Maria Boniszewska

# Cold Light of the Stars



**This tale of space conquest brims with dramatic events and stunning reversals**

**W**orld War II is over, but the situation on the front remains unstable. So opens the novel *Cold Light of the Stars*. The war's aftermath is not the only point where this world diverges from our own. Classified data from the Nazi space programme has been intercepted by Polish forces. In a postwar Europe bisected by the Iron Curtain, the Socialist Bloc enjoys ample freedom, and the emerging field of space exploration is hardly monopolised by the United States or Soviet Union. The men and women of Poland are at the vanguard of the new Space Age.

Biedrzycki's highly original alternative history rides the momentum of two current trends: popular culture's nostalgia for retro fantasy and the 21st century revival of space exploration. *Cold Light of the Stars* tells the story of Galactic Gloria (the first Polish woman in space), her husband Victor and their close friend Jerzy, who are all embroiled in a complex triangle of fierce

attachments. This episodic tale of space conquest brims with dramatic events and stunning reversals. Reminiscent of the Oscar-winning *Gravity*, the novel reveals that the gravest threats lurking in space are not little green aliens but glitchy technology, human error and the vacuum itself – that place where even the loudest scream falls on deaf ears. Yet the novel's heroes are not on a doomsday course. On their side is the headstrong socialist spirit, bravura of youth and idealism of the wild frontier.

English-language readers have Andy Weir's *The Martian*. Biedrzycki, aided by rich supplemental materials (diagrams, illustrations, apocryphal articles from the described period), spins a similar story that is nonetheless rooted in an alternative reality – one that holds great allure today.

Michał Cetnarowski  
Translated by Eliza Rose

The mishaps started all at once. Even before District Secretary Marian Jaworski had composed himself from the scandal awaiting him at the Konstanty Ciolkowski Space Center, Victor Dobrowolski was already snug in his spacesuit. In a matter of hours, he was seated, raring to go, in the pilot's chair of a classified military spacecraft that the Bureau of Engineers had been developing in secrecy since the mid-1970s. Netze-2015 – so went its code name. It was a hideous piece of work known to site personnel as “Slipper” due to its oddly boot-like shape. A shape that, for the moment, was invisible, for Netze was sheathed inside its service structure, mated to a Siren-5B rocket. This formidable body of staggering height was braced by four solid-propellant rockets in radial formation that would propel the ship into the orbit of the Onarna Space Station. From there, a third-stage Siren rocket would set Netze on a Mars-bound course, at which point the spacecraft would manoeuvre on its own fuel. Equipped with sealed hatches designed to carry military surveillance devices, Netze could, in a pinch, double as a rescue vessel so that Dobrowolski could escort Novotko and her crew to low orbit, where they could dock to the International Space Station Europa. Netze's initial acceleration was so great that its effects on the pilot inside would exceed the typical discomforts of liftoff. Success was hardly guaranteed. This is why Dobrowolski, a world-class cosmonaut of the democratic world, second only to Nowicki, had been chosen for mission command.

He was sitting in the Slipper's cabin, listening to the countdown, when he heard a bang. A distorted sound penetrated the cabin, drowning out Flight Control's numerical chant. Victor, alarmed, turned his head inside the helmet of his spacesuit. It sounded like someone was banging right on the vessel's casing. But that was impossible. At least theoretically impossible, for the banging resounded still and was growing louder. And there – yes – some other sound, could it be a woman's voice?

‘Control?’ he spoke tentatively into his headset.

‘Vic?’ came the muffled voice of Maciek Strzępa, communications officer and Vic's old friend. ‘Listen, Vic, you're breaking up...Do you read?’

‘Maciek, hold on, you're not coming through. Something's banging on the hull! Hey, listen!’ Victor craned his head inside the helmet, as if to bring his ear up to the hull.

‘There. Hell, we're live!’ came Maciek's garbled voice.

And at that moment the clamour grew louder. Dobrowolski heard a slam, and a harsh light assailed his eyes. In the haze an image took shape before him, something resembling an angel. ‘Nonsense,’ he thought. ‘There's no such thing.’ But what else could it be? Shadowed

against a radiant block of light was an elegant figure with long, wavy hair.

A block of light? Long hair? But surely, an angel should have wings...

‘Victor, oh hell!’ The angel caught him by the collar. By what collar? *Shit*. Victor raised a gloved hand to his helmet visor and was surprised to find that both glove and helmet had vanished. He blinked. The image before him blurred, as if smeared to one side. Noise rushed in his ears. *Shit, must be the G-force*, he thought in a fog. Hallucinations from the solitude of flight, he resolved. He managed to focus his vision and made out a tangle of dark hair and eyes glinting with anger, fixed dead on him.

‘Victor, what the hell!’ Finally he recognised the owner of those incensed eyes. It was Gloria. His friend from the second year of Flight School, which he had just finished. Yes, only just finished, that's right! They'd sailed through their exams and test flights and pulled it all off. Gorgeous Gloria, who turned the heads of all her male classmates.

‘What... what's going on here?’ he moaned while all around them, the world was spinning like a centrifuge into which their trainers and instructors had thrown them to the mercy of the G-force.

Excerpt translated by Eliza Rose

Extended sample translation available at [booksfrompoland.pl](http://booksfrompoland.pl)



© Alia Biedrzycka

**BARTOSZ  
BIEDRZYCKI**

Born 1978

*Zimne światło gwiazd [Cold Light of the Stars]*

**Publisher:** Wydawnictwo IX, Kraków 2020

ISBN: 9788395861550; 330 pages

**Translation rights:** Bartosz Biedrzycki,  
[godai@gniazdoswiatow.net](mailto:godai@gniazdoswiatow.net)

**Selected works**

*Kotysanka stop*, 2018

*Dworzec Śródmieście*, 2017

*Stacja: Nowy Świat*, 2015

*Kompleks 7215*, 2014

Bartosz Biedrzycki is a fantasy writer, editor and publisher, screenwriter, comic book journalist, and one of the first Polish podcasters.

# Spring of the Missing & Summer of the Lost



**A precisely constructed plot linked not so much by crime as by psychological sensitivity**

## HIGH CALIBRE PRIZE

**A**nna Kańtoch began her career – successfully – with fantasy (she has received numerous awards for her sci-fi and fantasy novels and short stories). Since 2013 she has also been writing crime novels, advancing to be one of the leading Polish authors in that genre. Her new trilogy (of which two have been published so far – *Spring of the Missing* and *Summer of the Lost*) not only consolidates Kańtoch's position on the Polish scene, but also shows this Silesian author is an independent trailblazer.

We meet the main character of this series in *Spring of the Missing* as a retired police officer: Krystyna Lesińska is already over 70. But *Spring...* is no “cozy mystery” and Lesińska herself – caustic, withdrawn, painfully exacting – doesn't have an ounce of Miss Marple in her. A curse hangs over her life: her brother went missing a half century ago in the Tatra Mountains, and someone killed three of his friends on that same trip. This trauma drove Lesińska into police work, but now, years later and quite suddenly, she has the chance to solve the riddle and even to get revenge... The next book, *Summer of the Lost*, takes us back in

time to the late 1990s. Lesińska is still an active police officer and a complicated investigation is underway in the case of the murder of a married couple and their two children in a remote forester's lodge. Investigating this crime becomes a peculiar kind of study of human (un)consciousness: who could be the “I” that ended these people's lives?

Kańtoch constructs the plot with precision, but these novels are linked not so much by crime as by psychological, emotional sensitivity: they're stories about the paradoxes of memory and personality, of loneliness, isolation, fear and families falling apart. Yet Kańtoch approaches these themes differently than the currently fashionable domestic thrillers – she doesn't build an atmosphere of danger, but rather opts for the main character's calm fatalism, seasoned with the fairly cynical misanthropy of a mature woman with no illusions. It's no surprise that *Spring of the Missing* received the prestigious High Calibre Prize for the best Polish crime novel of 2020.

Piotr Kofta

Translated by Sean G. Bye

The next day I made an appointment at the hairdresser's and told pani Zosia to return my hair to its natural grey colour. I went into the store with brown hair and came out with it white as milk. Examining myself later in the mirror I thought I really looked like an old lady. Not a senior citizen or a mature woman or someone of advanced years, just an ordinary old lady whose face was carved with deep furrows. Those furrows had appeared early, even before I turned 50, and used to cause me a great deal of anguish. But now my face had become my ally. I didn't feel like an old lady, but I looked like one and was glad I did, since old ladies aren't so dangerous, no one suspects old ladies, and I already knew I intended to commit a crime.

I saw Jacek for the first time when winter was still in full swing. It was Wednesday, 21 March, the first day of spring, though it was even snowing and raining at the same time. Nevertheless, fed up with sitting at home for ages, I decided to get out my Nordic walking sticks from the cupboard and go out for some exercise. Mud caked on my boots and cold wind blasted in my face as I walked toward Bolina. Theoretically it's a park – at least that's what it says on the sign – but in practice it's more of a... recreation area? I don't know if that's a good way of putting it. There are two sports grounds: one soccer field and one basketball court, a playground for children, a pair of crisscrossing walkways, a restaurant with a garden and a covered area for barbecuing. Of course all this was empty that time of year, the only people I came across were an older lady with her dog and a young woman jogging stubbornly along in thin running gear.

I was making my way back freezing and tired, but in a better mood. The wind had driven away the Silesian smog and for the first time in many days you could breathe freely outside. On the way I stepped into Rabat to buy a coffee, milk and of course the inevitable meatballs in tomato sauce for lunch. That was when I saw him.

He was standing by the cool shelf, holding a pack of cheese-and-potato pierogies. I remember he glanced at me and I wanted to give him a sympathetic look, because I thought I'd found a soulmate, yet another older person living on pre-made food. Then I recognised him. It had been 50 years since we'd laid eyes on one another, yet I had no doubts. We all change with time, but amid those changes some of us maintain a certain... constancy. Like Jacek. He was now grey, hunched and wrinkly, but it was still him. His gaze passed over me indifferently on its way to the counter with the fish display. He didn't recognise me, of course not. I knew it had been a long time since I'd looked anything like the plump, dimpled girl he might remember. When I turned 40, the people I knew from college stopped recognising me, and I'd changed even more since then. So I stood there and watched him putting a greasy mackerel into his basket. I situated myself just behind him in the

checkout line, completely forgetting about the coffee and milk, and then I followed him all the way home. He lived at the end of Zamkowa Street in a one-story villa surrounded by a tall iron fence. What was on my mind as I looked at that house? As I stood at the edge of the forest, feeling the drops of drizzle landing on my face, I think nothing had occurred to me yet, I was just amazed that fate had finally thrown us so close together. Only later, on my way home, as I passed the angular 1970s apartment buildings and much older brick *familoki* with chimneys giving off grey smoke, did I realise the obvious truth: Jacek must have been among the wealthiest inhabitants of our eclectic neighbourhood. I had a two-room apartment while he had ended up with a villa. No, this was nothing so primitive as envy, rather a certain... craving for justice.

Excerpt translated by Sean G. Bye

Extended sample translation available at [booksfrompoland.pl](http://booksfrompoland.pl)



© Piotr Kamiński

**ANNA  
KAŃTOCH**  
Born 1976

***Wiosna zaginionych [Spring of the Missing]***

ISBN: 978-83-66335-85-1; 400 pages

***Lato utraconych [Summer of the Lost]***

ISBN: 978-83-66863-10-1; 392 pages

**Publisher:** Marginesy, Warszawa 2020 & 2021

**Translation rights:** Marginesy, [k.rudzka@marginesy.com.pl](mailto:k.rudzka@marginesy.com.pl)

**Books published**

Anna Kańtoch is the author of several fantasy novels, including *Przedksiężycowi* series & *Nina Pankowicz* YA series, as well as short stories collections. Her crime novels include:

*Pokuta*, 2019

*Wiara*, 2017

*Niepełnia*, 2017

*Łaska*, 2016

**Foreign language translations**

Rights for Kańtoch's fantasy books have been sold to Italy, Ukraine and Russia.

**Selected awards**

Wielki Kaliber ["High Calibre"] Prize (2021), Janina Paradowska's distinction in 2018

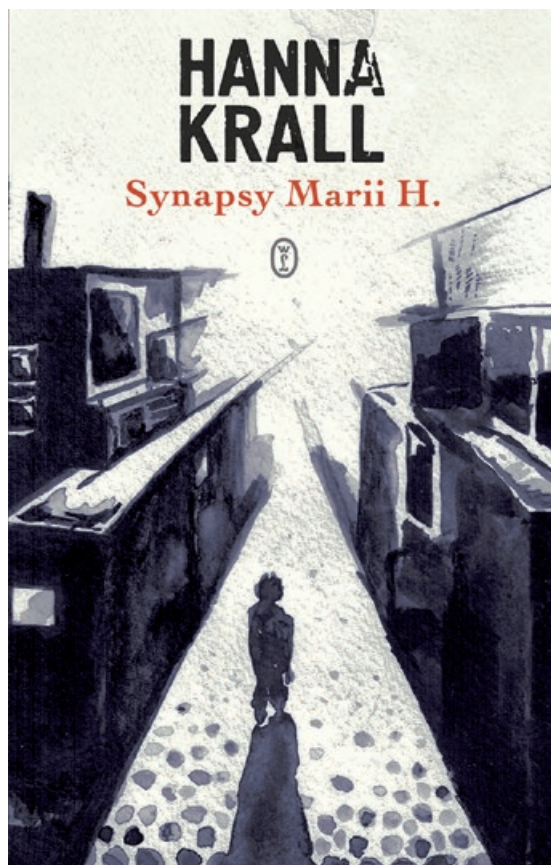
Piła Crime Fiction Festival Award (2017)

Janusz A. Zajdel Award (2009, 2010, 2011, 2014, 2015)

Jerzy Żuławski Literary Award (2013)

# The Synapses of Maria H.

**A story about the bridges that connect the recollection of past events with the perception of current experience**



## BY THE QUEEN OF POLISH LITERARY REPORTAGE

With *The Synapses of Maria H.*, Hanna Krall, the queen of Polish literary reportage, brings us a tale about the present entangled with the past – all told in her distinctive style. “It’s a story,” she contends, “about remembering and not remembering.” The eponymous synapses are the bridges that connect the recollection of past events with the perception of current experience.

The book presents biographical fragments of two women named Maria. The first is a Polish emigrant who has been living for years in the USA; the second is “the mother of her husband.” As dissimilar as the two women seem to be, both possess an incredibly strong instinct for survival.

The first Maria is Maria Twardokęs-Hrabowska, who was an active dissident in communist Poland. She survived internment, emigration, and the subsequent yearning for the familiar, for her homeland. She had to grapple with her own illness, and later with her son’s autism. She is a complex character, sensitive to reality. She’s also someone Krall had written about years earlier, in *Katar sienny* [*Hay Fever*], which went to press in 1981 – but then came martial law and the censor intervened and all extant copies were destroyed.

The second Maria is Maria Hrabowska, mother-in-law of the first Maria, a woman whose life was marked by two horrors. The first she experienced in occupied Warsaw. Despite the passage of years, her recollections of wartime atrocities, of the ghetto, of Umschlagplatz never lost any of their intensity. Even though memory and time can play tricks on us (“the mother of her husband doesn’t remember how her mother died”), traces of the past were not erased. Her second experience of terror came 60 years later, on September 11, 2001, as she was climbing down the stairs of one of the World Trade Center towers. The experiences of that day reminded her of the war: it was “as though I was walking through the Aryan side after leaving the ghetto.”

Reading this book we encounter the stories of these two women, all tangled together: some of the threads are intertwined, others are seemingly independent. But neither has an easy tale to tell.

Łucja Gawkowska  
Translated by Philip Boehm

## She left Poland

for America. She was an emigrant and spent Christmas Eve with other emigrants. They got into an argument about the Krakus ham sold in the Polish deli. Some wanted to protest in front of the store because by selling the imported ham the owners were supporting communism, while others doubted that a picket line would spell the downfall of either communism or Krakus ham. The hosts served *gołąbki* – cabbage rolls – stuffed with kasha and mushrooms from the store. They weren't bad, either, but hardly a match for the ones Hania's father used to make. He was a railway repairman who worked on utility poles fixing power lines. He was also a great cook – especially when it came to cabbage rolls. You wouldn't find any store-bought mushrooms in those! No one had ever heard of such a thing; they would turn their noses up at the very idea. His *gołąbki* had real mushrooms, wild ones he picked himself in the woods near Pogoria. He also made preserves from his own sour cherries – the kind that deserves to be eaten with good bread and good butter. Hania's grandmother made the best butter, she kept it in a tin bucket, in water from the well, but the butter from Tapkowice wasn't bad either. Aunt Hela delivered milk there, and the dairy sold special butter to its suppliers, and Aunt Hela always shared some with the family.

Someone told about a boy from Ligota. By some miracle he obtained a passport. He came to join his father but couldn't get used to America, he was so homesick for Ligota. No wonder – people tend to miss Ligota. Especially the bread. The boy's father looked all over for the bread his son was missing, and eventually found a bakery that was pretty far away: it took two hours to get there. He brought back bread with a dark, crackly crust and a lighter crumb – not entirely white, more like a mix of whole wheat and rye – and the boy was so happy he cried. That American bread looked and smelled and even tasted a little like the bread from Ligota.

## The wind is blowing

bending but not breaking the branches of the trees. This was the time of year her father would sow tomato seeds in the planters. Her son is lost and confused the way he always gets when there's wind. He shouts out loud and slaps his palms against both cheeks, over and over, dozens of times per minute, with all his strength. His fingernails are short but they still cut into his skin here and there. She wipes the blood off his cheeks. She goes back to Rovelli and the mystery of time. Time as traces of memory. Interesting. "We are histories of ourselves, narratives." Very interesting.

Time for her, then, is the story of waiting. In this hospital or that sanatorium, in this plaster cast or the next – waiting for Mother. It is her father's patience as he shows her a new plant. It is the word "autism" she hears from the lips of an American psychiatrist. (That can be treated, isn't that right? – but the doctor shrugs his

shoulders: not really, there's no treatment, nothing to be done. What do you mean – nothing! Her son knows how to read and count, he cleans the bathroom and holds the door for her – and you call that NOTHING?) It is she herself reading about the mystery of time and who just a moment ago wrote that her son is lost and confused. Who wrote the word "son."

Carlo Rovelli explains to her that the brain builds bridges between past and present. The past leaves traces in the synapses, the junctions between the nerve cells. Synapses... Very interesting.

Excerpts translated by Philip Boehm

Extended sample translation available at [booksfrompoland.pl](http://booksfrompoland.pl)



© Krzysztof Dubiel

**HANNA  
KRALL**

Born 1935

### Synapsy Marii H. [*The Synapses of Maria H.*]

**Publisher:** Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2020

ISBN: 978-83-08-07067-3; 128 pages

**Translation rights:** Wydawnictwo Literackie,  
[j.dabrowska@wydawnictwoliterackie.pl](mailto:j.dabrowska@wydawnictwoliterackie.pl)

### Selected works

*Sześć odcieni bieli i inne historie*, 2015

*Biała Maria*, 2011

*Dowody na istnienie*, 1996

*Taniec na cudzym weselu*, 1995

*Hipnoza*, 1989

*Sublokatorka*, 1985

*Zdążyć przed Panem Bogiem [Shielding the Flame]*, 1977

*Na wschód od Arbatu*, 1972

### Foreign language translations

Krall's works have been published in: United Kingdom, USA, Finland, France, Israel, Spain, The Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, Hungary and Italy.

### Selected awards

Literary Award of the Capital City of Warsaw (2017)

Julian Tuwim Literary Award (2014)

Władysław Reymont Literary Prize (2009)

Journalist Laurels of the Polish Journalists' Association (2009)

Angelus Central European Literary Award – nomination (2007)

Herder Prize (2005)

Underground Solidarity Prize (1985)



# The Women of Nowa Huta. Bricks, Gems and Firecrackers

**A fascinating tale of Nowa Huta and its inhabitants**



BY THE WINNER OF R. KAPUSCINSKI AWARD

The history of Nowa Huta began after World War II, when the communist authorities decided to build an enormous metallurgical conglomerate near the bourgeois city of Cracow – for centuries an important centre of the country’s religious, cultural and scientific life, and hence a potential hub of resistance against the regime. Next to it a city for workers was built from the ground up. Carefully planned and constructed within just a few years, today it is considered a gem of urban development. This is because it combines the ideological and aesthetic tenets of Social Realism, Renaissance inspirations and the solid know-how of eminent pre-war Polish architects. Even though not all their plans were completed, even today tourists visit Nowa Huta – now a district of Cracow – to see the famous layout of buildings and streets, and its inhabitants appreciate its well-thought-out infrastructure and greenery.

The book *The Women of Nowa Huta. Bricks, Gems and Firecrackers* introduces us to a range of very different women who have, over the years, built the area, lived there, worked and fought the communist regime. Girls such as Zofia or Helena, who arrived from villages and towns to join the gangs of bricklayers erecting the first of Nowa Huta’s buildings, are examples of the post-war process of emancipation, with its bright

(the social advance of women from disadvantaged families) and dark sides (the brutal displacement of farmers from villages which were razed to the ground so that the district could be built). The life of Jadwiga Beaupré, a representative of the intelligentsia, evokes admiration for the fortitude of a woman for whom the war meant the loss of her husband (murdered in Auschwitz), but also of her son and wealth; however, she still constantly strove to benefit others. As a doctor she worked at a hospital and at a labour camp, and as a conspirator she fought in the Polish resistance. She was the one who established Nowa Huta’s first maternity unit and promoted the idea of childbirth without pain at a time when barely anyone heard about antenatal classes. Other figures in the book include an architect, a director, a bricklayer, a barmaid... The book is enhanced by archival photographs of locations and people.

By collecting all these stories, the highly regarded reporter Katarzyna Kobylarczyk presents both the fascinating tale of the place and a huge part of Poland’s history, while at the same time foregrounding the individual and her universal tribulations.

Agnieszka Urbanowska  
Translated by Marta Dziurosz

Urszula always went to Arkadia in stilettos. Even when it was freezing. That's what she told me, carefully watching to check whether I believe her. Arkadia was the chicest restaurant in Nowa Huta, it was heaven on earth, and Urszula couldn't imagine going to heaven other than in stilettos. And a hat. She sent her photo in that hat to the *Worker Poets* anthology and caused a scandal, because the editor had a different idea of a gantry crane poet from Nowa Huta, simply a different one, definitely not in a black hat with a softly drooping brim, worn at an angle.

In Nowa Huta Urszula lived in cafés. That's what she said. That is, yes, she did have a room at the workers' hostel, but cafés suited her more than hostels. She told me that she'd dance, light as a butterfly, with the handsomest men, and when the clock struck the time for the night shift, she'd spring up to leave.

'You're delightful,' she'd cry, 'but I'm off to the conglomerate!'

'And what's your position there, at that conglomerate?' the men would shout after her.

'The top one, sir, the top position!' she'd shout back.

She'd jump onto a tram and rush to the steelworks, climb the gantry crane in high heels to write opera librettos, ballads and poems, and load ore and magnesite too. As she climbed the ladder, all the moulders would only have eyes for her long legs. That's what she said and it was a superb story.

\* \* \*

Gigant was the first. Gigant was grand.

You went there up the steps, to the first floor, passing two newsagents and an ice-cream place, and marble pillars covered with light blue tiles towered above you. There were palm trees and lounge chairs in the foyers, and further on the main room opened up: shiny floors, mirrors on the walls, stuccoes on the ceiling and square tables at which even 600 people at a time could dine or drink.

Gigant was the first elegant restaurant in Nowa Huta. It was situated at the Department Store at the A-1 estate, and from the start it was obvious that its "aesthetically pleasing and costly furnishings" will have to be protected from "the excesses of unpredictable hooligans". It opened its doors on July 4th, 1952 (in Nowa Huta everything was opened on the July or the October anniversary), so that – following the example of the Soviet Union – the liberation of women from their "kitchen slavery" could begin. At least that was the plan: women will leave pots and pans behind and take up bricks,

drive steam engines, eat in canteens and restaurants, wash clothes in laundries and hand their children over to nurseries and kindergartens. At last, they'll have the time to build socialism.

But Helena Pietrzykowska didn't, for some reason, think about building socialism. She wanted to get out.

Recruiters brought her to Nowa Huta on Friday 13th. It was September 1953, mud and dust, and meadows and fields were still stretching away towards the horizon. She got her first job at the construction site of the conglomerate, her first place to live – at the workers' hostel. She escaped it very soon, lodged with an old lady. She was raring to work. She carried bricks and laid them, but also for a short while, just two weeks. An engineer immediately started hanging around her, a married one, had a crush. When he got too persistent, Helena quit and went straight to Gigant.

Excerpts translated by Marta Dziurosz

Extended sample translation available at [booksfrompoland.pl](http://booksfrompoland.pl)



© Katarzyna Drożdż

**KATARZYNA  
KOBYLARCZYK**

Born 1980

***Kobiety Nowej Huty. Cegły, perły i petardy***  
***[The Women of Nowa Huta. Bricks, Gems and Firecrackers]***

**Publisher:** Mando, Kraków 2021

ISBN: 9788362884674; 272 pages

**Translation rights:** Mando, [m.szczepanska@wydawnictwowam.pl](mailto:m.szczepanska@wydawnictwowam.pl)

#### **Selected works**

*Strup. Hiszpania rozdrapuje rany*, 2020

*Pył z landrynek. Hiszpańskie fiesty*, 2013

*Baśnie z bloku cudów. Reportaże nowohuckie*, 2009

#### **Foreign language translations**

Rights for *Strup* have been sold to Spain and Ukraine.

#### **Selected awards**

Ryszard Kapuscinski Award for the best Polish reportage book (winner in 2020 – for *Strup*, nomination in 2021 – for *Kobiety Nowej Huty*)

# The Erased Borders. In the Footsteps of the Second Polish Republic



**Although time is merciless, some survivors still live in the enclaves of their memories**

**W**iped off the map by the joint German-Soviet aggression in September 1939, Interwar Poland never regained its former territorial shape. However, its 5,529 km border left a permanent mark not only on the European topography, but above all on the minds of the past and present inhabitants of the pre-war borderlands. Today the witnesses of the erased borders are eighty or ninety years old. Although time is merciless, some survivors – miraculously saved from the ravages of war and driven out of their homes in the former Eastern Borderlands – still live in the enclaves of their memories, while others might longingly remember Poland from the doorsteps of their wooden, Belarusian or Ukrainian shacks. Thanks to the author's excellent reporting sense, the story features lively characters with identities shaped by the centuries-old tradition of the territories where languages and cultures met. In addition to venerable seniors, we also hear the voices of their successors

who – though born in a different reality – still live in the shadow of the pre-war border. The local customs and architecture preserved the traces of that border. Terse details and concrete images, like the hands of an elderly woman smoothing out the oilcloth on a tabletop, or a strong local flavour conveyed through colourful setting description, stand out among many narrative techniques that turn Grzywaczewski's reportage into a vivid and potent testimony. This is non-fiction at its best, giving the reader not only a sense of direct participation in the story, but also a chance to appreciate how it was constructed. Showing the mechanisms behind momentous historical events as struggles to move the border posts dividing barnyards produces very authentic images that stay etched in our memory.

Ireneusz Staroń  
Translated by Mirek Lalas

The metal flap with the inscription „Briefe und Zeitung” opens a crack, revealing a slot for the postman to shove in the mail and the newspaper. In a house on the outskirts of Piaszno – once situated a few kilometers from the border, albeit on the German side – a solid wooden door separates the brick porch from the main body of the house. A semicircular window in the house’s sloping roof of ceramic tile looks down on visitors. A red-brick chimney climbs high into the sky. Outside, only the plastic PVC framing indicates that time has not stopped here and that the mail delivered daily to the household is no longer in German. The present owner, Urszula Landowska, takes small steps to cross the living room, pushes a heavy wooden chair away from the wall and slumps into its soft cushion. On the day of her birth in 1938, German border guards strolled around this room. Her father was a staunch communist who put up posters against Hitler in nearby Tuchomie. The locals were rather unimpressed by his views. They held him at gunpoint, threatened to kill him, and beat him up with a stake. The authorities watched his every move and when the war broke out, he got his combat boots from the Wehrmacht and was shipped off to Norway. During his absence, the communists had finally arrived in Kashubia. The old lady fixes her stare on the high-gloss tabletop.

‘Up to that point we lived completely normal lives, as if the war had never broken out. This was Germany. I was seven then, but I remember everything like it was yesterday. End of February 1945, bitter cold. At night, my mother dressed me in the warmest sheepskin coat and told me to climb on the cart because we were running away – first towards Słupsk and then Gdańsk. For three weeks I neither washed nor undressed. In the city we reached the port where a fishing boat was waiting for us. My uncle, my father’s brother, kept rushing us: „Hurry up, quick, before the boat sails away.” And it did sail away. A buzzing filled the air, black dots appeared in the sky, and bombs started to fall all around. Explosions, fire, flames. And thousands of people trying to board the great ship by the pier. Mostly women with babies, or kids my age, and old men. With suitcases, bundles, bags. Screams, panic.’

The woman gently strokes the lace tablecloth, moving the purple orchid closer to the middle. A calendar in Kashubian with photos from the entire region and a heart cut out of paper hang on a dark-brown tile stove standing in the corner. That winter they miraculously managed to board a ship to Germany and reach Bremen via Lübeck.

‘My mother and I were already feeling glad that everything would be fine after we had made it this far when the earth shook at night. Alarm sirens began to wail. The Allies were bombing the Germans. In a cellar, we lived to see the arrival of the English. One of them took my mother’s watch, while another wanted to rape

her but stopped when the three of us kids started to yell hysterically.’

Due to exhaustion and frostbite, Urszula’s dad was taken from Norway to a military hospital where the end of the war found him. As soon as he recovered a little, he located his family in Dortmund thanks to his brother, and they tried to start a new life there. However, in 1947 they returned to Tuchomie to look after their ailing grandmother.

‘I couldn’t understand what happened here. It was Germany when we left two years earlier and then suddenly it became Poland. But I didn’t speak a word of Polish. Only German, with a little Kashubian. At church, I could only sputter three words, “Jesus”, “Mary”, and “amen”; at school, two: yes and no. Pretending to understand, I nodded my head while the teacher might as well have spoken Indian to me. The cover of the primer showed a doggy with the word “Ace” under it. So, I ran around the village shouting „Ace, Ace!” at every dog. Finally, a shopkeeper explained to me that „Ace” was a dog’s name while “dog” was a proper word for a dog. No one wanted to sit beside me at school because who would share a bench with Adolf?! The kids in the school yard kept calling me that.’

Excerpts translated by Mirek Lalas

Extended sample translation available at [booksfrompoland.pl](http://booksfrompoland.pl)



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**TOMASZ  
GRZYWACZEWSKI**

Born 1986

*Wymazana granica. Śladami II Rzeczypospolitej [The Erased Borders. In the Footsteps of the Second Polish Republic], 2020*

**Publisher:** Wydawnictwo Czarne, Wotowiec 2020

ISBN: 978-83-8191-111-5; 368 pages

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

#### Selected works

*Granice marzeń. O państwach nieuznawanych*, 2018

*Życie i śmierć na Drodze Umarłych*, 2015

*Przez dziki Wschód*, 2012

Grzywaczewski is a journalist, writer and traveller. He is the originator and participant of reporting projects and expeditions. He reported on armed conflicts in Donbass, Kurdistan, and Nagorno-Karabakh. Member of The Explorers Club.

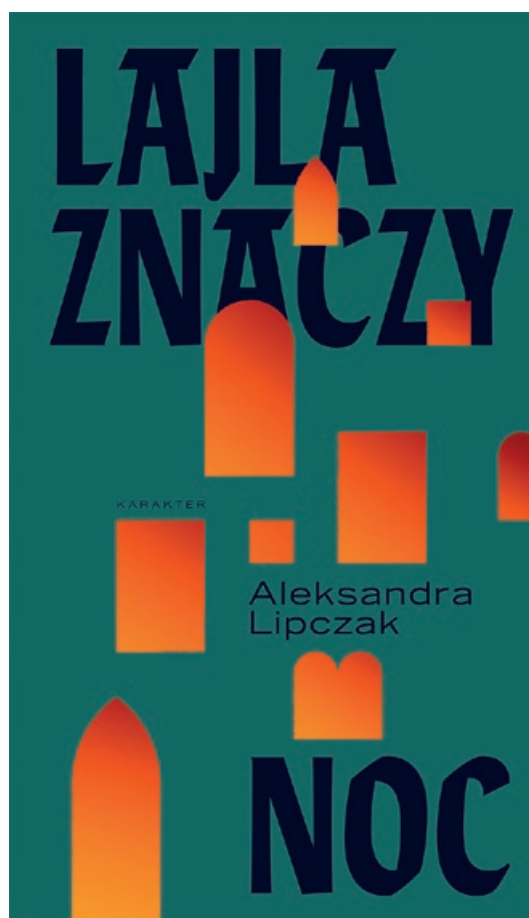
#### Selected awards

The Magellan Award (2012, 2019)

Crystal Cards of Polish Reportage Award (2019)

# Lajla means Night

**A journey through the land known as Al-Andalus, the Spain of Islam, but also of Judaism and Christianity**



**2021 NIKE AWARD FINALIST**

**P**oland may be famous for outstanding reportage, but it's not every day that one comes across books like *Lajla means Night*. Aleksandra Lipczak has pulled off a rare feat: her book is a cross between reportage and essay – writing that grips readers as tightly as the best novels.

Lipczak's *Lajla* takes us on a journey through the land known as Al-Andalus, the Spain of Islam, but also of Judaism and Christianity, showing how over the centuries this wealthy, multicultural medieval heritage has been almost wiped from the Iberian Peninsula. For instance, we learn about the Islamo-Arab roots of modern Spanish pop music that draws its inspiration from flamenco, as well as the Arabic roots of translation studies and the architectural palimpsests that continue to provoke heated debates in Spain, feeding into ongoing discussions around the foundations of Spanish culture. We also discover that troubadours and courtly love, and thereby also

romantic love, would not exist in European literature were it not for Arab slave girls, whose work involved singing and reciting poetry, and often composing it, too. But the strength of Lipczak's writing isn't just down to anecdotes or interesting facts. She doesn't shy away from using bold expressions and talking about, for instance, medieval head-hunters – it's a rare skill for such anachronisms not to jar. In so doing, she showcases brilliant technique and an excellent ear for language, and perhaps above all, the breadth of her knowledge, based on numerous – mostly English and Spanish – sources, and her ability to say as much as possible in just a few sentences. Lipczak writes with singular literary flair that brings to mind brilliant reportage writers like Margo Rejmer and Mariusz Szczygieł. *Lajla Means Night* is a virtuoso work.

Krzysztof Cieślak

Translated by Zosia Krasodomska-Jones

**D**isorientated – that’s how you could describe my state on this January afternoon. The surroundings are rather typical: a half-hour queue to get in, hot in the sun and icy in the shade, the centre of Seville full of britzkas and Madonnas weeping diamond tears. Tapas, churros, oranges. And then this.

The inscription is surprisingly modern, geometric. White and blue tiles, straight lines. Although after my two years of learning Arabic I still remember the alphabet, I wouldn’t be able to decipher the Kufi script, reduced to its abstract essence. But I do know – because I just read it – that the geometric writing says: there is no victor but Allah. It’s the motto of the Nasrids, the last Muslim dynasty in Spain, also written hundreds of times on the walls of Granada’s Alhambra.

I know, too, that when I step through the gate and onto the patio, there will be more Arabic inscriptions, including one that praises “our beloved sultan Badr”. There will also be a verse from the Qur’an on one of the capitals, and all this among Latin inscriptions and symbols of Castile and León. After all, I’m standing in front of a palace built by the Castilian king, Pedro I the Cruel, also known as the Just or the Executor of Justice, the great-great-grandson of Alfonso X the Wise.

‘The most Catholic,’ said the anthropologist José Antonio González Alcantud, about Seville, when I asked him about the former capitals of Al-Andalus. There’s the Seville of indie rock, feminist mobilisation and rebellious neighbourhoods adopting their own currency during the economic crisis. But there’s also another one, not always distinct from the first: a shop selling devotionals, and on display a small wooden figurine of the Virgin Mary that you can dress up in different robes. It encapsulates an entire religious culture that can be described with a plethora of adjectives: ludic, baroque, corporeal, ubiquitous, exaggerated. Catholic. And very Sevillian. Perhaps that’s why I’m surprised to find out that the Alcázar (from the Arabic ‘al-kasr’, castle) – “the longest functioning royal residence in Europe”, as the sign in the courtyard reads – is still the home of the royal couple when they visit Andalusia. In other words, every time Felipe VI and Letizia spend a night in Seville, they walk under an inscription praising Allah, placed there by their distant grandfather – albeit their symbolic one, as he wasn’t a Bourbon as they are. But regardless of his dynasty, he was – as they are – a Catholic, grandson of the heroes of the Reconquista. ‘So why on earth did he build himself a palace with extracts from the Qur’an on the walls?’ I wonder, baffled, in the courtyard of the Alcázar one January afternoon. It’s not the first time I’ve felt like this in this corner of Europe.

Disorientation is a state of mind Spain causes easily. It ought to be visited as part of a bewilderment tour, there should be special maps, one should have to follow the

routes and paths that heighten uncertainty and exacerbate cognitive confusion, intellectual discomposure and a not entirely pleasant itch somewhere at the back of your skull.

One of the points on the map would have to be the city of Teruel in Aragon, for instance. When I woke up in a hostel there one summer, I thought I was in a beehive. It was only when I reached one of the squares in the old town that I realised the noise was people sitting at café tables in the summer morning sun. I remember that surreal sight: people buzzing like a swarm of bees and looming above their heads, a huge minaret decorated in a green and white motif. It was the tower of the city’s fourteenth-century church.

The map of confusion would also have to include Toledo station, which looks more like a Moorish castle than a place where trains bring people to their workplaces every day. Toledo should feature on the map for many reasons, actually. I was again struck by the feeling that I was looking at a visual rebus – something that in no way fits with anything I know and which I can’t, even loosely, classify – in El Tránsito synagogue, which is full of Arabic inscriptions and toothy arches, more closely resembling a mosque. You would also have to add to the list the Chapel of the Holy Cross, with its depiction of Christ Pantocrator added to the arch of a customary Arabic inscription wishing happiness and good fortune.

Excerpt translated by Zosia Krasodomska-Jones



© Gaby Jungeneien

**ALEKSANDRA  
LIPCZAK**

Born 1981

*Lajla znaczy noc [Lajla Means Night]*

**Publisher:** Karakter, Warszawa 2020

ISBN: 978-83-66147-59-1; 272 pages

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

#### Books published

*Ludzie z Placu Stońca*, 2017

Aleksandra Lipczak is a journalist and a reporter. Her texts have been published, among others, in “Polityka” and „Przekrój” magazines, as well as in „Gazeta Wyborcza”.

#### Selected awards

Nike Literary Award – finalist (2021)

Witold Gombrowicz Prize for the best debut – nomination (2018)

Grand Press Award for journalists – nomination (2015)

# Sorochka

## Literary reportage about preparing for death and attempts at planning it

According to Polish folk tradition, the community of family and neighbours would gather in a dead person's house during the night before the funeral. It was called the empty night. The participants would stand around white-covered tables with a crucifix and candles, say the rosary and loudly sing the many stanzas of long mourning songs. There are areas where this tradition is still maintained, and it became Angelika Kuźniak's point of departure for writing the book: affecting literary reportage about preparing for death and attempts at planning it. The author gives space mainly to voices of women from rural communities, who talk about how they want to leave this world. Kuźniak chose a theme which, in our fun-focused civilisation, might seem shocking.

'When Antosiowa told me you wanted to come, I really thought you're an odd bird: what young person wants to talk about death now, and look at burial clothes?' This is how they react, but they gladly speak about how they buried their loved ones and how they want to be buried themselves, who will come to the funeral,

what they will bring, how they imagine the event. The women show the clothes they have prepared, talk about how they've selected them; they bring up anecdotes and funeral customs (knocking the coffin against the door three times when it's being carried out), speak about their life, their family and friends. All this serves to reveal beliefs, superstitions (if a body remains unburied on a Sunday, someone else in the family will die soon), dreams, folk notions about death: a mixture of Catholic teachings and a plethora of traditional beliefs.

The author preserves the original style of the speakers' dialectal expression, and her interlocutors unveil an extraordinary, obscure part of Polish rural culture. The material, gathered over the space of more than ten years, accustoms the reader to death, shows how alien our culture of origin is to us today, and how difficult to understand we find it.



Grzegorz Filip

Translated by Marta Dziurosz

**F**or his coffin, many years before, I weaved him a sorochka. Or shirt, we say. Some say it's for the wedding. Others – that it's for dying. Sorochka from *sorok*: forty jobs to be done about it. Not that you sow flax, uproot it, dry it, scutch it, heckle it. Flax's always been a lot of work. Good thing that flax isn't afraid of frost and you can sow early. Pests won't get at it. We had good soil, so the flax grew tall. When I was little, I would swing on a flax plait, because grandpa dried ropes on a kitchen beam. In Belarus we used to say: "no flax, no life". Though flax itself doesn't have much of a life, a hundred days, if that.

On long autumn evenings neighbours would come to my mother to spin. My mother sat at the spinning wheel too. The spindles whirred and tapped against the floor. You had to have nimble fingers, and a feel in them. My mother was old, but she could spin so thin, I'm telling you, thread like a spiderweb, like a ghost. So even, not even the tiniest knot. And when she made linen, the neighbours would go, 'What linen, incredible, such linen out of flax'. Thick and soft-soft, like silk. They wrapped it around themselves, wondered what to sew. The thinnest was for shirts. For tablecloths, skirts; women embroidered wall hangings. The thicker kind was for runners, sheets. Coarse linen, the worst, rough and scratchy, was for potato sacks. Grandma sewed drawers out of it, but they itched something awful. She often dyed them dark blue, the white ones soon got dirty. You wrapped linen around candles and put them into the hands of a dying person. Old biddies would sit by kerosene lamps hanging from the beams, pale light flickered on the ceiling, and they spun and told stories. Long evenings, nothing to do, at least you had something to listen to. About ghosts, witches. There used to be plenty in the countryside. About the devils that gathered in the old abandoned mill. About the birdlike nocnitsas that prowl about at night. Or strigas with huge claws. If they suspected the dead person will be a striga, they poured sand into the coffin or put in a little bag of poppyseeds, so that he kept busy with counting the seeds, not tormenting people. Are you afraid of ghosts? Eh, you don't want to admit.

Well, and then – it's late, time to go home. If a woman lived nearby, that wasn't too bad. Mother or father took a lamp out front, shone a light, stood there until the door squeaked in the next house. But the ones that

lived far away, Antoś and Ignas – he grew up as tall as a tree – had to walk them.

But... Into the coffin? A rosary! A holy picture! I put it on the sheet! And a handkerchief. A prayer book is a must. I don't have black shoes, but some others will do. Not in colours. Not in white either. And a shawl, a shawl too. So they put it on my head. It looks so beautiful when it hugs the face. Ah! Saint Helena, my patron! There she is! I've prayed to her so much all my life. Even for better crops, she does that too. Maybe that's why our potatoes were always huge, like cobblestones.

Excerpt translated by Marta Dziurosz



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## ANGELIKA KUŹNIAK

Born 1974

### *Soroczka [Sorochka]*

**Publisher:** Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2020

ISBN: 978-83-08-07059-8; 160 pages

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

### Selected works

*Boznańska. Non finito*, 2019

*Krótką historia o długiej miłości*, 2018

*Stryjeńska. Diabli nadal*, 2015

*Czarny aniot. Opowieść o Ewie Demarczyk*, 2015

*Papusza*, 2013

*Marlene*, 2009

### Foreign language translations

Kuźniak's works have been published in Italy, Slovakia and Lithuania

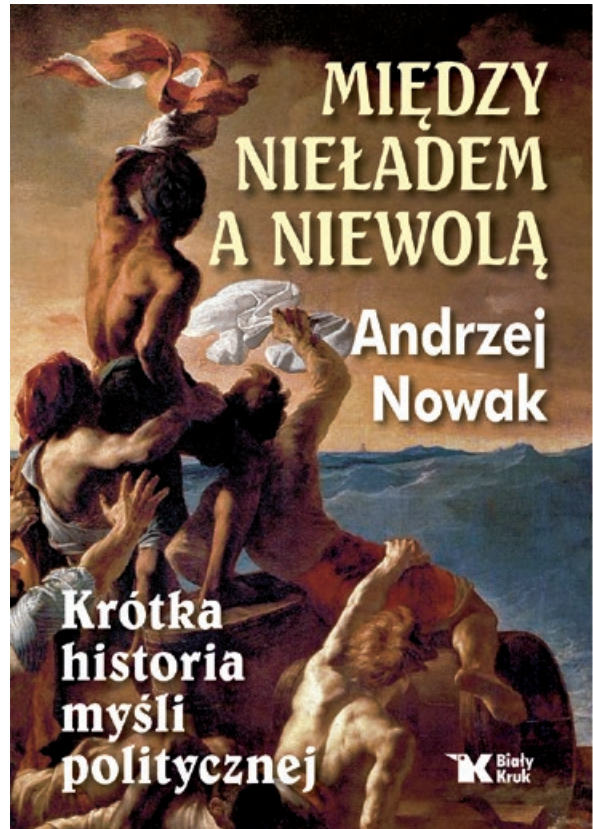
### Selected awards

The Magellan Award (2012, 2019)

Nike Literary Award (2016) – nomination



# Between Disorder and Captivity. A Short History of Political Ideas



**A fascinating journey in time: from antiquity to the 21st century**

Present-day media reports could give rise to a conclusion that politics is a domain of people with no ideals. Meanwhile, inferring such a view from current events obscures a really important aspect of public life. For politics has always been a battleground of arguments about values. And it was significantly influenced by various religious and philosophical trends, as we can learn from Andrzej Nowak's book. The author is an outstanding historian and Sovietologist who specialises in the history of Russian political thought and in Polish-Russian relations. In 2011, he was awarded the title of professor of humanities. He is the head of the Section for the History of Eastern Europe and the Empires of the 19th and 20th Centuries at the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Science, and the head of the Section for the History of Eastern Europe at Jagiellonian University. He has also lectured at many universities outside of Poland, including Harvard, Columbia, Rice, Cambridge, as well as universities in

London, Prague and Tokyo. He is a laureate of many awards. In 2019, he received Poland's highest state distinction – the Order of the White Eagle.

In his book, Andrzej Nowak invokes Aristotle's precept: a human being is a *zoon politikon* (political animal). This means that 'we live among other people, and that we need other people for a good life'. The way we form interpersonal relations shapes people's political character. We can either build order, or various forms of captivity. Hence, of key importance are our answers to the questions about defining the right to life, justice, freedom, etc.

Andrzej Nowak's book is a fascinating journey in time: from antiquity to the 21st century. By exploring various religious doctrines and philosophical concepts, we can better understand the reasons behind the decisions of politicians not only in the past but also today.

Filip Memches  
Translated by Mirek Lalas

The Greek commonwealth fell apart. Disputes over what is good and what is evil split the strongest city-states. Immersed in devastating strife (civil war) between the “aristocrats”, the “democrats”, and the tyrants produced by both factions, the city-states of Greece fell victim to external empires after successive wars fought among themselves for primacy in Hellas. And this is an important lesson for the nations of Europe, for their modern states, and their rabid ideologues – the “drones” who continue to incite civil war.

Macedonia, formed on the periphery of Greek culture, gained control over Greece. After Aristotle’s disciple, Alexander the Great, completed his stunning conquests stretching from the Nile to the Himalayas, a new perspective emerged: we are no longer just a polis, but a cosmopolis. Instead of a tight political community where citizens could meet in the marketplace – the agora – to exchange arguments for the common good, one could now imagine a community for all humans. The new community, however, was no longer ruled by discussions among free citizens, but by imperial decree. The citizens could in no way exercise any influence over the affairs of the cosmopolis. The kingdoms of Alexander and of the Diadochi fighting for his inheritance shifted the importance of the agora to the institution of the royal court that followed the ruler’s military campaigns and revolved around his person. Personality cult – which in the Greek world acquired any real meaning only during Alexander’s reign – precludes citizenship.

In a situation where polis loses its true meaning, people move away from politics even though – let it be said now – politics does not necessarily move away from them. Two philosophical schools reflected this change. Epicurus of Athens (341-271 BC) saw in the new situation not some order, or cosmos, but chaos. There is no order in the world and it cannot be built. Consequently, there is no objective justice and there is no point in wasting our lives searching for it. To enjoy a good life, we must seek a prudent fulfillment of our personal, individual pleasures. Epicurus was by no means an advocate of some debauchery: prudence consists of pushing away the temptation of pleasures that are either unattainable, or at least very difficult to achieve. This helps us to avoid something very unpleasant – constant frustration. A good political system makes this kind of life possible by allowing the necessary connections between the individual and others, and by preventing chaos from growing due to potential clashes between individual pursuits of happiness. We need no moral law for reference aside from agreements on how to avoid getting in each other’s way. Law is a convention whose usefulness we can measure by assuming this point of view. Here we come close to the sources of liberal thought that would unfold gradually in the concepts of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and their successors 1,800 years later.

The teachings of Epicurus that recommended a form of withdrawal into privacy were not, as we have already mentioned, the only reaction to a fundamental change in the conditions of human coexistence in public. Another school of thought was developing along with Epicurean teachings. It was formulated by stoics. Their master, Zeno of Citium (c. 336-264 BC), and his successor, Chrysippus of Soli (c. 280-205 BC), taught in the Athenian Agora at the Stoa Poikile, the painted portico from which the school derived its name. Zeno advanced the notions already present in the pre-Socratic philosophy of nature seeking the primordial principle of world unity in one divine element. Presuming the principle’s existence, Zeno accepted both the unity of nature and its determination by the primordial principle. The vision of the objective order, the cosmos, is based on the unifying principle dictating the law of nature. The law cannot be confined to any specific city-state because it applies to all people. Our task is to find the voice of that law within ourselves. A quote attributed to Zeno states that “the virtue of a happy and harmonious life consists of conducting out actions in accordance with our inner voice and the will of the ruler of the Universe”.

Excerpts translated by Mirek Lalas



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**ANDRZEJ  
NOWAK**

Born 1960

*Między nietadem a niewolą. Krótka historia myśli politycznej*

*[Between Disorder and Captivity.*

*A Short History of Political Ideas]*

**Publisher:** Biały Kruk, Kraków 2020

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#### **Selected books**

*Dzieje Polski*, t. 1-4, 2014-2019

*Putin. Źródła imperialnej agresji*, 2014

*Imperiological Studies. A Polish Perspective*, 2011

Andrzej Nowak is the author of 20 books and almost 200 papers published in joint publications and journals.

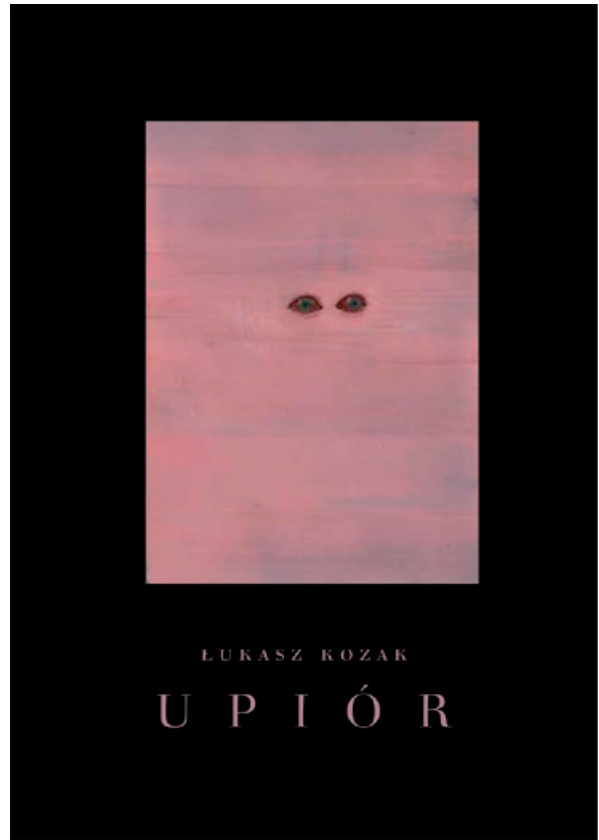
#### **Foreign language translations**

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

#### **Selected awards**

Catholic Publishers’ Association FENIKS (2018)

# Upiór: A Natural History



## A masterful work on the upiórs – the primeval Slavic vampires who have haunted Polish literature and history for centuries

**I**s it possible for a work of literary history to match the allure of a bloodcurdling horror novel? Of course, but under one condition: that it is penned with the brilliant style and staggering erudition with which Łukasz Kozak has written his masterful work on the upiórs – the primeval Slavic vampires who have haunted Polish literature and history for centuries. Drawing from an immense range of archival curiosities and excerpts from the press, Kozak leads us through centuries of Polish history to introduce us to the figure of the upiór. Legendary creatures commingle with those who are only too real and whose macabre deeds exceed the bounds of humanity. *Upiór* begins with early Slavic folk beliefs dating to the Polish nation's origins and ends in the present day with its lingering traces of bygone myths.

With Kozak as our guide, we visit courtrooms where the trials unfolded of criminals so inhuman that they

were declared to be upiórs. We encounter folk methods for combatting supernatural threats that can endanger anyone at any time and in any place, be it a Polish city or the Ukrainian steppe. We are also treated to the author's speculations about the obsession with upiórs that swept over the great bards of Polish Romanticism and its far-reaching influence on Polish culture and spiritual life.

Accompanying the book are fantastic illustrations by the acclaimed Polish painter Aleksandra Waliszewska, whose scintillating images of the demonic and occult capture the upiór-haunted psyche. The inquisitive reader eager to expand their knowledge of Poland's vampire-upiór lore has much to gain from this rich range of source materials compiled and explored by Kozak.

Marceli Szpak

Translated by Eliza Rose

This book you hold in your hands is very different from the one I originally set out to write. I was in the process of collecting sources on Polish folk beliefs for English-language readers (published as *With Stake and Spade: Vampiric Diversity in Poland*). The task ahead was simple, I told myself. It would suffice to translate materials collected by Oskar Kolberg and publish them with Benedykt Joachim Chmielewski's *New Athens* and Franciszek Bohomolec's *Devil...* maybe throw in some ethnographic curios for good measure. At the time, I still saw my subject matter – condescendingly – as a kind of poor man's mythology or folk demonology. After all, this is how historians and ethnologists had framed it for generations. It was my curiosity that set me on a path uncharted by scholars. I started perusing old newspapers, judicial decrees, theological treatises and the marginalised testimonies of Ukrainians and Kaszubians. Only then did it dawn on me that it was *anti*-mythology I was dealing with. This was a record of real events – the lives, deaths, emotions and actions of actual people, flesh and blood. Official history had spurned these people, and scholars had discounted their stories. I finally grasped that the tale I was tracing could not be reduced to “myth” but nevertheless constituted the essential or even only myth of the Slavic people. So I cast aside my academic training and taught myself to listen, patiently and reverently, to the voices of the dead. Thus, *Upiór* was born.

From that point onward, the book took shape during an unusual time. At the onset of the pandemic, I was writing of undead corpses carrying plagues. Right as I was writing a chapter on romantic revolutionaries, social movements erupted worldwide to overturn the status quo. Several days before writing even these words, voices spoke of the “end of history” – a history told in endless refrain, as if out of spite, and always resisting closure. If this book alters how we view our history, even in some small way, then I will feel rewarded for my efforts. For history does not end. The book lies open. It is only our perception and interpretations that change, and this is a process we should face willingly and without fear.

### Buried Superstition

At the dawn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth ceased to exist. It had been the great project of modern political thought: a multicultural federation spanning territories today shared between Poland, Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania. Here, a diverse abundance of ethnic and cultural influences coexisted and intermixed. Poland's loss of sovereignty and figurative demise provoked reactions far from uniform, from armed struggle to expedient reforms to ambivalence or even preference for the new situation and attempts to adapt. This transformation coincided in time with a great wave of triumph and relief shared by the disappearing nation's intellectual elite: a prodi-

gious folk belief had been vanquished, and in its place emerged reason and the radiant knowledge of the Enlightenment (albeit delayed by several decades).

Members of the newly “enlightened” took heart that they had defeated belief in a being more feared than the devil, hell, or even God himself. Believers, nonbelievers, crypto-atheists, deists, followers of Voltaire and Descartes, bishops and ex-Jesuits – all of them grappled with this entity. Now equipped with theoretical tracts, scientific, philosophical and theological arguments, sermons, poems and plays, they derided this superstition and scorned all who clung to it as unenlightened simpletons.

This creature that united the sharpest minds and pens of the Polish Age of Reason was the *upiór*: undead spirits risen from the grave who raided humans and cattle, suffocating them or drinking their blood, spreading plagues and overturning the world order with their very existence. The *upiór* was chaos embodied, and belief in this figure was the bane of theologians and a menace to philosophers.

Excerpts translated by Eliza Rose



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ŁUKASZ  
KOZAK

Born 1981

*Upiór. Historia naturalna* [*Upiór: A Natural History*]

**Publisher:** Fundacja Ewviva L'arte, Warszawa 2020

ISBN: 9788395689574; 320 pages

**Translation rights:** Fundacja Ewviva L'arte,

izabela.a.michalska@gmail.com

#### Books published

*With Stake and Spade. Vampiric Diversity in Poland*, 2020

Łukasz Kozak is a medievalist, media and technology expert, author of many academic and popular texts devoted to Medieval and Early Modern culture, as well as blogger and TEDx speaker. He has worked with many Polish cultural and research institutions on the fields of innovation and new media. He is also the creator of hugely popular Facebook pages *Discarding Images and Stare obrazy ze zwierzętami*.

#### Awards

*Upiór. Historia naturalna* was named the non-fiction book of the year by “Nowa Fantastyka” (2020)

# Solidarity Means a Bond, AD 2021

**Reflections on solidarity –  
understood both as a universal  
experience and as the Polish  
social movement**

Zbigniew Stawrowski's *Solidarity Means a Bond, AD 2021* is a collection of philosophical essays as well as a few conversations with the author. They come from the 1990s, that is, during the period when Poland and all of Central Europe was emerging from Communism. The inspiration, as well as the subject of reflections presented here, are the writings and statements of Pope John Paul II and the Polish philosopher Fr Józef Tischner, two intellectuals and patrons of meditations on freedom wider than the Polish tradition alone. For the author, the first of these is a master of faith, while the second – a master of thought. However, the gratitude he has for these authorities should not be confused with a position of uncritical, prostrate humility before them. Rather, it expresses itself in a creative – sometimes indeed polemical – engagement with problems and themes important to them.

Among these may be found: the relationship between the right to freedom and the obligation of searching for the truth, the sense of an attitude of mercy variously understood in relation to justice, the tension between individualism and community, the nation, the fatherland and patriotism, the philosophy of the



state, and politics. The author courageously takes up contested issues – essential not only from the perspective of Polish destiny, but that of any national community – which sometimes confront the necessity of a difficult reckoning with harmful injustices, and even treason, committed by members of the same.

The theme that binds all of these meditations together is the phenomenon of solidarity – understood both as a universal experience of communities in general, and also in the sense of the Polish social movement 'Solidarność'. A testament to the fervour of the analyses presented in the book that touch upon the unique character of Polish 'Solidarity', as well as the exceptional interpersonal bonds from which the movement emerged (described here in philosophical terms) is the author's allusion to categories of the miraculous: 'Solidarity' as a *sui generis* miracle.

Zbigniew Stawrowski's book allows the reader to perceive the trunk and branches of the tree of thought of these two important 20th-century thinkers. This is valuable, as frequently, only individual branches of said tree (J. Tischner's metaphor) are revealed to our eyes.

Tomasz Garbol

Translated by Charles S. Kraszewski

Exactly ten years have passed from the first printing of my book, *Solidarity Means a Bond*. Józef Tischner's warning, which I cited in the *Introductory Word* to that edition, that 'the moment we forget how important solidarity is, would be the moment of our community's suicide' sounds today like the prophecy of a Cassandra. One may doubt whether in today's divided and conflicted Polish society there remain any traces of some elementary 'us,' a sense of the bond, which gives rise to an ability to thinking and acting in solidarity. As Cyprian Kamil Norwid wrote 150 years ago, 'the Fatherland is a *moral unity*, without which no party can even exist – without which parties are like *bands* or the *polemic camps of nomads*, the fire of which is discord, and the reality the smoke of words.' Has the existence of a community united by basic values, the existence of which we were firmly convinced not too long ago, not become in these latter years an ethical desert, given over as prey to those warring 'bands' and 'polemical camps' – the incarnations of (in the very worse sense of the term) political passions?

In the fever of the current problems, disputes and quarrels with which Poles are antagonised, it is worthwhile to inspect them from a proper distance. The 40th anniversary of the birth of Solidarity encourages us to consider our history in a wider perspective, and to seek its deeper sense, especially as in AD 2020 we are also celebrating the anniversaries of other events essential to our community: the centenary of the Battle of Warsaw, a time at which, despite the deep divisions among them, Poles were able to unite with one another and restrain the Bolshevik tide, and the centenary of the birth of the greatest of our countrymen, Karol Wojtyła. John Paul II was a man burdened with an extraordinary mission, and an extraordinary fardel of duty, without whom it would be difficult to imagine the shape of today's Poland and that of our contemporary world. But he is no longer physically among us, for 15 years now, just like Fr Józef Tischner, the 20th anniversary of whose death also falls this year. It is to Tischner's *Etyka solidarności* [*The Ethics of Solidarity*] that we owe our ability to speak of our community in a manner much wiser and deeper than the game of interests and the struggle for power would allow.

The decade that stretches between the two printings of this book seems an entire epoch. A new generation has grown to adulthood, for whom the 'first Solidarity,' the fall of Communism, and the beginnings of the Third Polish Republic exist only as episodes from long-past history, known only from schoolbooks, which means more or less as much as the regaining of Poland's independence in 1918 or the Warsaw Uprising did for my own. Can the memory of the heritage of Solidarity still function as a foundational myth of our community for young Poles, since the dispute about what that heritage is really based on, and to whom it really belongs, constitutes a constant source of division and conflict, and a weapon used in the same?

These two intellectual and spiritual patrons of Polish Solidarity have also been marked by the passage of time. Their figures grow continually blurry in our memory. What is worse, invoked instrumentally as they are in various narratives, they sometimes take on characteristics that are truly like caricatures.

The person of Fr Józef Tischner is becoming more and more anonymous for many. If he rouses anyone, or is associated by anyone with anything, this usually has to do with politics – for good or evil, depending on the political preferences of the person in question. Who among us, who gladly confess to belonging to a supragenerational 'generation of JPII' and know well what great good fortune we had to have commerce with a saint, could even conceive, a few short years ago, that ideas of 'dewojtylisacja' or 'decanonisation' in his regard would surface in the public forum, and be seriously considered? New narratives, created by ever new epigones of the 'masters of suspicion' are busy at work in an attempt to seize hold of our reason and wipe clean our authentic memory. For this reason it is important that reliable relations concerning what is most essential for our community be written down and recorded by the witnesses of those events, and transmitted to future generations of Poles.

Excerpt translated by Charles S. Kraszewski



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ZBIGNIEW  
STAWROWSKI

Born 1958

*Solidarność znaczy więź, AD 2020*  
[*Solidarity Means a Bond, AD 2020*]

**Publisher:** Instytut Myśli J. Tischnera, PIW, Warszawa 2021  
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#### Books published

*Budowanie na piasku. Szkice o III Rzeczypospolitej*, 2014  
*The Clash of Civilizations or Civil War*, 2013  
*Państwo i prawo w filozofii Hegla*, 1994

Zbigniew Stawrowski is a political philosopher. He works as a professor at the Institute of Political Science at Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University and the Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Co-founder and director of the Institute of Thought of Józef Tischner in Kraków.

# Maccabean Writings. Religion and Struggle

**Melonowska's philosophical work is marked by a relentless nonconformity**

Justyna Melonowska is one of Poland's most interesting intellectuals, one whose philosophical work is marked by a relentless nonconformity. She emerged into the public consciousness as a critic of the anthropology of John Paul II, sparking interest in liberal circles. However, she soon redirected the barb of her criticism toward the liberal identity of contemporary Europe. Her interest in the decadence of Western culture resulted in the book *Pisma machabejskie. Religia i walka* [*Maccabean Writings. Religion and Struggle*], one of the main themes of which is the inability of Euro-American culture to fight for the very principles and values that shaped the West. This failure, Melonowska writes, is linked to the false conviction that instead of fighting for these values, it is enough to simply employ violence against those who consider the battle worth waging. In consequence, beneath the veneer of the anti-violence rhetoric that has gained such popularity in the West, there is a stifling of debate about the actual problems facing Western culture.

Melonowska argues that the belief – once shared throughout the classical West – that it was necessary to fight for the truth, both the internal truth of our



civilization and the struggle with other cultures over the truth that would shape human existence, was a fundamental product of Western thought that has since been lost. The West today is preoccupied with the symbolically, economically, and politically violent imposition of new, ultraliberal social and political models onto the rest of the world – models that would fail, the author maintains, if tested in the fire of true intellectual battle.

Melonowska uses the Maccabean Revolt, a famous chapter in the history of Israel, as a stepping stone for further consideration of the range of actions that could be undertaken – including restoring the capacity for struggle without resorting to savage violence – to reclaim what the writer believes to be the truly universal elements of the West's legacy. In Melonowska's view, classical Europe, unlike its modern successor, was not an ideological monolith, but a culture that lay the groundwork for discussion among divergent strains of thought, from which *good* was subsequently extracted: good society, true religion, and mature liberty.

Tomasz Rowiński  
Translated by Arthur Barys

The history of Europe in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is overshadowed by the discourse of “struggle” (class struggle, the battle of the sexes, the fight for minority rights, the struggle of the colonised against the colonisers, the fight against Islamic terrorism, etc.). Yet the concept itself is not clearly defined, and appears to have led to a number of misunderstandings. The literature on the subject remains sparse, but it does sketch an outline of the discussion. Its axes are formed by two main approaches to the issue of struggle, focused around the categories of aggression and conflict. [...]

The main problem today is that violence is mistaken for struggle, or rather that the two are conflated. The consequences of this error cannot be overstated. Whereas struggle can and ought to be something respectable and even beautiful, violence can never be regarded as such. It is nothing more than the manifestation and exploitation of one entity’s advantage over another. Violence is invariably disproportional; it is an expression of the power of one and the powerlessness of another. Naturally, it can be employed in the service of good (for example, I can use violence to give an unwilling child medicine that is critical to its health). Still, it is justifiable to regard violence with mistrust. While struggle, debate, and conflict are indispensable features of social life and consequences of society’s creative impulses, violence itself is an example of the dark and disgraceful elements of the social realm. One can think of it as a “technique”: the art of exploiting one’s own advantage to strike, hurt, or score against the adversary. In this perspective, violence is a component of struggle, or the method by which struggle is carried out. Outside of this narrow scope – when violence is no longer a means of struggle, but a way to achieve dominance and exercise power – there is a significant difference between the two. This matter warrants careful consideration, especially in twenty-first century Europe, where to mount a struggle against anyone is to invite accusations of violence or the intended use thereof.

Violence is employed by one person against another. Even this simple statement reveals that one entity is clearly less powerful, passive, powerless, or at least not resisting. The other, by contrast, is active and causative. We should note here that it is possible for the weaker side to use violence against the stronger opponent. After all, the latter side may choose not to use its strength, and decide not to actively resist or counterattack. Struggle is different: one struggles with someone over something. It is thus an act that involves some basic solidarity between those engaged in it. The term “negative cooperation” is insufficient here because, as I mentioned previously, it fails to capture the axiological foundations of the covenant binding the adversaries. Struggle, on the other hand, presupposes the existence of truths worth fighting for. Paradoxically, it is there-

fore an alliance formed in pursuit of an idea. It occurs between subjects who are motivated and capable of action, ones whose spiritual worlds are circumscribed and possess their own measures and ideals. Violence is different. It is neither a form of solidarity nor covenant. It is fundamentally egocentric. A person engaged in struggle is guided by the will to determine the truth and by the desire for victory. Here, victory is, above all else, the triumph of the cause one is fighting for. In the case of violence, primacy is placed not on truth, but on demands; not on the desire for victory, but for domination. Struggle is also deeply linked to duty. First, to engage in struggle is (or can be) one’s duty. Second, struggle itself is waged with the goal of understanding the essence of one’s duty.

Excerpts translated by Arthur Barys



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JUSTYNA  
MELONOWSKA

Born 1976

*Pisma machabejskie. Religia i walka*  
[Maccabean Writings. Religion and Struggle]

**Publisher:** Fundacja Augusta hr. Cieszkowskiego, Warszawa 2020  
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**Translation rights:** Fundacja Augusta hr. Cieszkowskiego,  
fundacja@kronos.org.pl

#### Books published

*Ordo amoris, amor ordinis. Emancypacja w konserwatyzmie*, 2018  
*Osob(n)a: kobieta a personalizizm Karola Wojtyły – Jana Pawła II.*  
*Doktryna i rewizja*, 2016

Justyna Melonowska is a psychologist and holds a PHD in philosophy. Member of the European Society of Women in Theological Research. She works at The Maria Grzegorzewska University in Warsaw. Her texts have been published in Polish newspapers and magazines, including “Więź”, “Gazeta Wyborcza”, “Newsweek”, “Tygodnik Powszechny”, and “Christianitas”.



# A Small Praise of Catholicism. Church and Politics in the Late Modern Age



**The inhabitants of Europe support “European values,” yet they each understand this notion in their own way**

**M**onsieur Jourdain, the main character of a comedy by Molière, is surprised to discover that, unbeknownst to himself, he speaks in prose. A similar surprise may be in store for readers of *Mała pochwała katolicyzmu* [*A Small Praise of Catholicism*] when they realise the sheer breadth of contemporary concepts, principles, and Western institutions that are the legacy of Christianity, and which would have never come into being beyond this religion's sphere of influence. Readers may treat these things as self-evident, however, as comparisons to other cultures and civilizations demonstrate, they could not be less obvious. In fact, the Westerners of today inhabit a world that has been thoroughly shaped by the Scripture and tradition of the Church; their very existence is suffused with Christian elements, and they don't even realise it.

The author of the book, Professor Michał Gierycz, a political philosopher at Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, is interested in the implications that stem from this paradoxical situation. These are twofold: on the one hand, societies have lost the awareness of their spiritual roots; on the other, Christians find themselves living in a world that has suddenly ceased to be theirs, because what was

the norm yesterday has today become bizarre or contemptible. As it turns out, although they all speak the same language, they nevertheless ascribe different meanings to the same words. The inhabitants of Europe, for example, support “European values,” yet they each understand this notion in their own way. This inevitably leads to tensions, ruptures, and conflicts, and necessitates the use of divergent strategies of action. It also raises a question about the future of our communities: are they capable of weathering the storm ahead without a shared axiological basis? The absence of such a bond amid a cacophony of languages resulted in the collapse of the Tower of Babel.

Michał Gierycz analyses the most important areas of this internal conflict within the Western world. These include our understanding of politics, democracy, secularism, morality, equality, and sexuality. The author unveils the hidden intricacies of ostensibly self-evident ideas with such clarity that the reader would be forgiven for feeling, at some point, a bit like Molière's Monsieur Jourdain.

Grzegorz Górny  
Translated by Arthur Barys

**I**t is reasonable, of course, to ask whether praising Catholicism is the appropriate thing to do. To be sure, the critics of the Catholic Church today form an exceptionally audible choir. Nevertheless, the libretto performed by this group, even when it does reference facts, too often resembles a caricature of reality. I therefore propose to set the record straight and restore at least some measure of proportion to the discussion by shedding light onto matters that are overlooked by the critics. In doing so, I have no intention of falling into the opposite extreme, namely, ignoring or negating certain weakness and problems. Even the most casual reader will observe that I do not shy away from problematic issues concerning the Church today, and in fact address them in this introduction. The choice I make is rather one of adopting a particular perspective. Put simply, each of us has a choice between the lens of Aristotle and that of Hobbes. Neither is likely perfect, but the former enables us to seek the truth, while the latter does not, because it distorts, from the very start, our view of humanity and reality. Let us give ourselves a chance, and make an effort to avoid running aground on the shoals of falsehood. One might respond with the question: If there is anything praiseworthy about Catholicism, then why the modesty? Why is this praise “small”? Well, I must preface this book with the disclaimer that it is rather modest in its ambitions. Anyone who has ever heard the words: ‘I absolve you from all your sins, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,’ knows that Christianity is concerned with truly important matters: eternal happiness in God, anticipated by the faithful here on earth, and the transformation of our lives in the manner of Christ himself. I leave the matter of writing a large apology (in the appropriate sense) of the Catholic faith to more competent minds. Here, I concern myself only with the less important “small” issues that are connected to politics. In the end, they are of some relevance to our lives, as well.

In the first part of this book, I attempt to shed light on the fundamental importance of Christianity – and especially Catholicism and its attendant political theory – to those aspects of contemporary politics in which we often eagerly take pride today: rational public debate and civic agency; the democratic rule of law founded on the innate dignity of humans; European integration, which ensures peace and prosperity in Europe and guards our freedom of religion and conscience, etc. In the handful of essays that make up the opening chapters of this book, I wish to share with readers the discoveries I have made in the course of my political analyses. As I studied political phenomena and processes, I discovered – sometimes to my surprise – that fundamental aspects of politics, in the modern sense of the word, are bound to the problem of faith by a fine yet indispensable thread. It follows that they deteriorate in proportion to the degree in which they are deprived of their openness to God. There is significant

evidence that, contrary to what the heralds of “total secularisation” would have us believe, contemporary politics would benefit from a “fashion for Catholicism.” As odd as it might sound, the Church would also stand to benefit from such a trend. Make no mistake: my thesis is not that the Church has abandoned Catholicism. But one can hardly ignore the fact that the problem of paedophilia is closely linked to the problem of denying one’s loyalty to Christ, and that the most attention-grabbing issues in Catholic debates verge – with disturbing frequency – on heresy. George Weigel once wrote, in the context of the 2005 conclave, that ‘the forty-year effort to compel the Catholic Church to bend its doctrine and moral teaching to the pressures of late modernity is over’. He added, with a hint of sarcasm, that some would keep trying, but that they would ‘increasingly be seen as the ecclesiastical equivalent of those soldiers on remote Pacific islands who never got the word that Emperor Hirohito had surrendered in 1945’. Though Weigel’s comment still elicits a smile today, it does so – at least for some people – for different reasons than it did fifteen years ago.

Excerpt translated by Arthur Barys



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**MICHAŁ  
GIERYCZ**

Born 1978

*Mała pochwała katolicyzmu. Kościół i polityka w późnej nowoczesności [A Small Praise of Catholicism. Church and Politics in the Late Modern Age]*

**Publisher:** Fundacja Świętego Mikołaja, Teologia Polityczna, Warszawa 2021

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

#### Selected works

*Europejski spór o człowieka. Studium z antropologii politycznej [European Dispute Over the Concept of Man. A Study in Political Anthropology], 2017*

*Chrześcijaństwo i Unia Europejska. Rola religii w procesie integracji europejskiej, 2008*

#### Foreign language translations

*European Dispute...* has been translated into English.

#### Selected awards

Catholic Publishers’ Association FENIKS Award (2018)

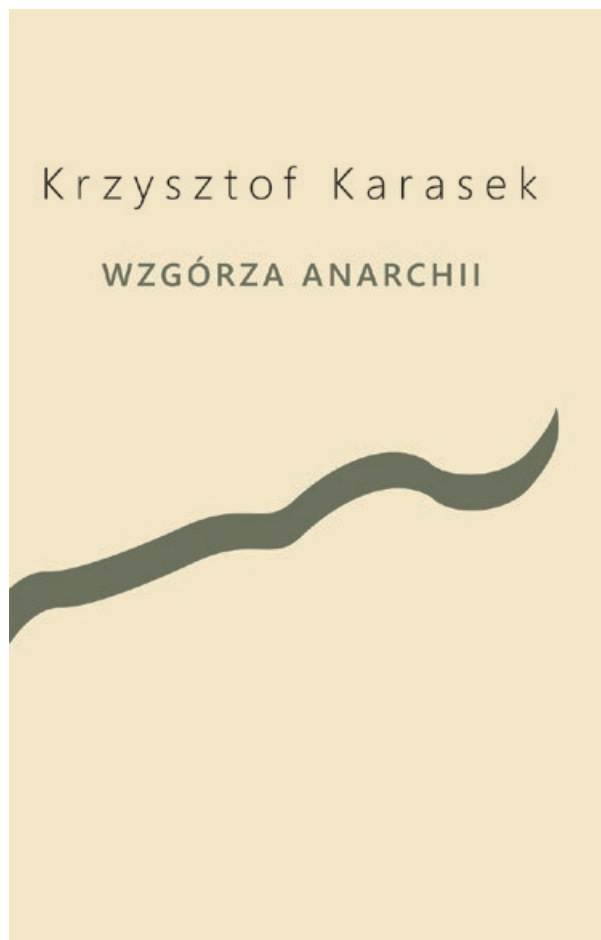
# The Hills of Anarchy

**Avant-garde discourse combined with classical order and lyricism**

Krzysztof Karasek is one of the most preeminent figures in Poland's New Wave generation. He is a poet with a solid classical foundation, but does not fit comfortably into the pigeonholes commonly assigned by contemporary critics. One might even argue that Karasek's work is about the perpetual pursuit of a more voluminous form – a search for answers; a difficult and traumatic quest in defence of a metaphysical fortress.

*Wzgórza anarchii* [*The Hills of Anarchy*] combines avant-garde discourse with classical order and lyricism, romantic visionary imagination with prosaic descriptions of the quotidian. This polyphonic volume cannot be summed up in a single, neat formula: it is the anarchism of the heart permeating the hunger of a "monk in exile."

But is the titular not a subversive antithesis of the book's contents? In the edifice of his thoughts and experiences, the poet works to lend order to his own world. Karasek places a particular emphasis on perfecting his personal perception of poetics. He



poses questions that (one would assume) are better left unasked. Musings on the workings of syntax in the wake of avant-garde experiments, the art of the narrative, and genealogical reflections on the pear-like shape of the sonnet all come together to form Karasek's intellectual order, as do the bawdy wishes he says to his daughter on her wedding day.

Despite its subversive title, *Wzgórza anarchii* is an orderly plain of tidily arranged thoughts comprising reflections borrowed from intellectuals hailing from a broad range of eras and fields: from philosophers and painters to poets, composers, and singers. In this new collection of poems, rich with judicious classicism, the spiritual companions to Krzysztof Karasek's lofty experiences meet, clash, and complement one another, vying for the poet's attention as he speaks to us, the citizens of the "hills of anarchy," in the voice of a sage who longs for order.

Stanisław Dłuski  
Translated by Arthur Barys

## Manifesto

I saw the flowers of a face bloom  
 in the branches of an old age, whole bouquets of the face  
 passing by via the arcade of memory. They appeared  
 for a moment, for a split second, and walked on through me  
 in long processions from childhood  
 till youth, rushing,  
 or stopped in admiration, in awe.  
 Paused for a moment of terror  
 or anger. Ah, to absorb them completely  
 to grasp beauty. Absorb through eyes  
 or mouth, like the Host,  
 before the mind begins its futile work.  
 With a single glance  
 embrace it all, and not wake up  
 for sleep, but for their brilliance.  
 2019

## Kuferlin

*In memory of Janusz Jęczyżyk*

The bread we fed on must have been mad.  
 Someone ate it with confidence at first, then jumped up,  
 shattered on the bridge and fell like a sack  
 full of guilt. Others got stuck in the swampy air,  
 glasses swelling in their hands. We had plenty of bread  
 and that's why we slept through all these battles  
 with our awakening at stake. From whose mouth  
 did we pull out this delayed deposit,  
 which the sea ate as well, greedily, as if it knew  
 that a fast will come quickly, and the earth,  
 is it still fit for the shovel?

*June 2, 2012*

## On the Edge

I have learned to live on the edge,  
 on the edge between the invisible  
 and the visible.  
 I touch objects  
 but they don't belong to me anymore.  
 It's me who belongs to them.  
 Like a blind man I grope  
 their visible and invisible shapes.  
 I don't know if I am a cloud  
 floating by underfoot, or the ground  
 that tramples the cloud.  
 Life passes like a mad cloud  
 that feeds on rain.  
 I know that one day  
 I'll hide under the bed  
 and cry.  
*October 23, 2016*

Translated by Piotr Florczyk



© Marcin Kubiak

## KRZYSZTOF KARASEK

Born 1937

### *Wzgórza anarchii [The Hills of Anarchy]*

**Publisher:** Instytut Mikołowski im. Rafała Wojaczka, Mikołów 2020  
 ISBN: 978-83-65250-67-4; 88 pages

**Translation rights:** Krzysztof Karasek,  
 contact via office@bookinstitute.pl

### Selected poetry collections

*Przyszedł człowiek, żeby chłostać morze*, 2017

*Dziennik rozbitka*, 2012

*Wiatrołomy*, 2011

*Poeta nie spóźnia się na poemat*, 1991

*Trzy poematy*, 1982

*Prywatna historia ludzkości*, 1979

*Godzina jastrzębi*, 1970

Krzysztof Karasek is also the author of novels, as well as essays on literature.

### Foreign language translations

Karasek's poetry collections have been published in Italy and Romania. His poems have also been translated into Dutch, English, French, German, Hungarian, Portuguese, and Spanish and published in anthologies.

### Selected awards

Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński Poetry Prize ORPHEUS (2012; finalist in 2014)

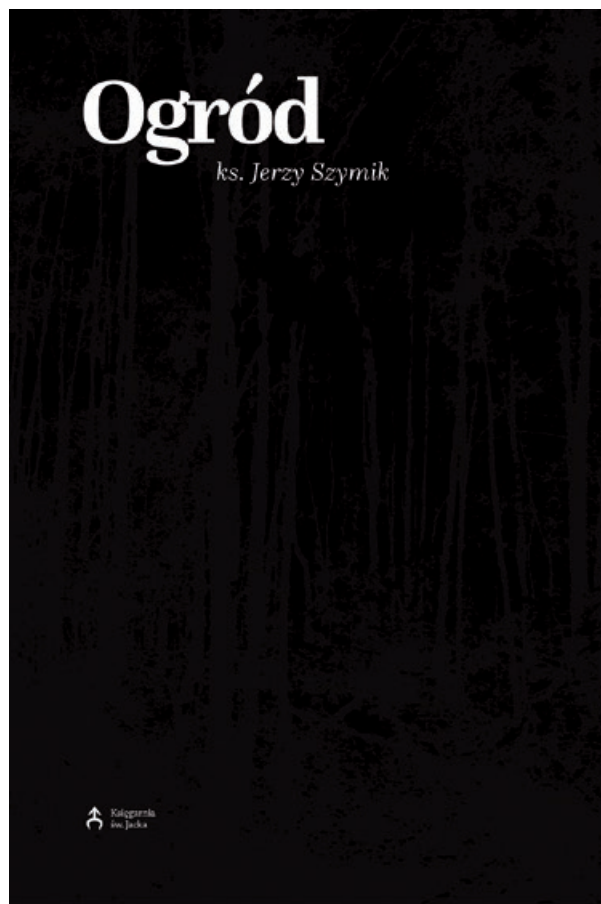
Wisława Szymborska Award – nomination (2013)

Literary Award of the Capital City of Warsaw (2013)

# Garden

## The biblical history of salvation is the fundamental perspective of Szymik's poetry

**T**his is no longer Eden / nor yet Gethsemane. Between Paradise / And the stamping press of sweat and blood' [Już nie w Eden, jeszcze / nie w Getsemani. Między rajem a tłocznią potu / i krwi] – thus, in the collection *The Garden* [*Ogród*] Fr Jerzy Szymik describes his vital coordinates. The biblical history of salvation is the fundamental perspective here, which should not especially surprise us, since the author is a Catholic priest. However, one needs to add from the start that with these poems we are dealing with a poetry that is thoroughly modern. What strikes one most in reading them is the poet's finger on the pulse, or perhaps the trembling, of our contemporary world. The poet is able to create an extraordinarily apt portrait of our reality, with truly surgical precision, plunging his blade – without anaesthesia – there, where the illness plaguing the world demands decisive incisions. And yet at the same time, he fosters with the tenderness of a gardener that which is fragile in us, delicate, in need of protection, beautiful. 'I snip, I spread manure – and I'll uproot / or plant, according to Your will' [*Przycinam, nawożę. Kąszesz – wyrwę. / Chcesz – zasadzę. Powiesz – zrobię*]. With such words from the poem that opens the volume Fr Szymik intimates that, in order to deal with the world, and oneself, one must first listen for the voice of God.



In this book we find the sharply-toned *Letter of a European to Athena Farrokhzad in Answer to Her "Letter to Europe"* [*List Europejczyka do Ateny Farrokhzad w odpowiedzi na jej „List do Europy”*]. His polemics with the author considered to be one of the most important voices of contemporary Swedish poetry clearly shows where the front in the ideological and moral struggles runs, through our continent, and through Poland as well. A polar opposite to this can be found in the tender poems dedicated to the poet's mother, his friends, music, and landscapes that take one's breath away. The poet seems to assure us here that everything is not yet lost: 'So the world turns still, Europe sways, / but we ourselves look not like people / who are tired of it all. Chris / Rea plays on our emotions, oleanders, / slippery, humid, flame and their aroma cries to the heavens' [*Świat więc się kręci, Europa zakręca, / a i my sami nie wyglądamy tu na ludzi, / którzy mieliby wszystkiego dość. Chris / Rea gra na naszych emocjach, oleandry, / śliskie, wilgotne, płoną i pachną wniebogłosy*]. These are verses full of yearning for that love, which – as the poet believes – we will find at the end of our journey.

Szymon Babuchowski  
Translated by Charles S. Kraszewski

## The Garden in Pszów

It was  
at the hour of the southern wind  
wafting over the Moravian Gate  
that I heard the footsteps of the Lord God  
walking about our garden

I know He comes by  
here often, from of old

here on this patch of land  
they used to call my people  
*Matuszki from the Garden*  
more than one's baptismal record  
reads *Zagrodnik* or *Gärtner*

And I know now, Lord, that I am unclothed  
But I am not hiding myself from Your eyes

I hoe and weed, I watch, I linger here,  
according to Your word. You know that well  
for You come by, You pray here.  
I know from Magdalena it's no gardener  
but You.

I snip, I spread manure - and I'll uproot  
or plant, according to Your will.

I am at home. This is no longer Eden  
nor yet Gethsemane. Between Paradise  
and the stamping press of sweat and blood.  
That moment from the prophetic books endures,  
Your promise: the life of the redeemed  
will be like a well-watered garden.

I hear Your footsteps and I live by Your  
prayer; I'm cooled by Your breeze

paradisiacal, olive-scented, Pszowian.  
The tree of knowledge, gnarled trunks, elder.

The shrill whistle of swallow, woodpecker, nightingale.  
My sweat sinks in the earth  
with Your blood.

They ask me ever more frequently:  
was it not you I saw with Him in the garden?

Yes, that was me

*Pszów, 17 January 2020*

### Sara Sampaio

the twenty-four year old body  
of Sara Sampaio  
graces Lisbon in August.  
The body of Sara eight storeys tall  
reigns over the white city  
from the exterior of shopping gallery

cell-phone headquarters  
and the cranes at the Olivais docks,  
exposed to the eyes of all  
like the bodies of thieves in mediaeval pillories  
and stocks or those of heretics during the Spanish reign  
or those of half-naked gladiators on the Roman sands  
of Olissippo. And just like them it arouses desire and awe,  
lewd jeers and indifference by turns. Sara  
Sampaio is the face, breast and thigh of Victoria's  
Secret. Now, on this silver afternoon beneath the banner  
of Sara's body, which lends a patch of shade,  
I'm reading Deutero-Isaiah in my breviary -  
'there is no beauty in Him, nor comeliness  
and we have seen him, and there was no sightliness  
that we should be desirous of Him'  
when a crane pulls up. To paste over the body of Sara  
Sampaio.  
But we're all counting on this - before long, above the  
city  
Ana Delgado's body will reign: the face, breasts and  
thighs of Calzedonia.  
On the far bank of the Tagus, in the heat waves of the  
air above Almada  
stands the statue of Christ the King. Eight storeys tall.  
But He has no comeliness, that we should be desirous  
of Him.

*Lisbon, 2015 - 2018 - 2020*

Translated by Charles S. Kraszewski



© Joanna Pakuza

Father  
**JERZY  
SZYMIK**  
Born 1953

#### *Ogród [Garden]*

**Publisher:** Księgarnia św. Jacka, Katowice 2020

ISBN: 978-83-8099-113-2; 190 pages

**Translation rights:** Księgarnia św. Jacka, joanna.pakuza@ksj.pl

#### **Selected poetry collections**

*Hilasterion*, 2014

*Cierpliwość Boga. 66 wierszy z lat 2003-2006*, 2006

*Śmiech i płacz*, 2000

Father Jerzy Szymik is also the author of many essays and academic dissertations.

#### **Selected awards**

Franciszek Karpiński Literary Award (2017)

Silver Gloria Artis Medal for Merit to Culture (2006)

# Metaf. 20 Poems of Setting

**Kass is a clever poet; he knows the paths to lead the reader down to interesting places**



**W**ojciech Kass is a poet writing from the province. He serves as the director of a museum dedicated to the memory of another poet – Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński, located in Pranie among the Masurian Lake District. This is a charming spot, peaceful, far from the uproar of large centres, although pulsing with activity. The newest volume of Kass's poetry, as the subtitle *20 wierszy o położeniu* [*20 Poems of Setting*] suggests – consists of twenty verses 'set' in particular areas. Areas for humans – areas both municipal and *metaf* (this is the title) – metaphysical...

Sandomierz, the Cities of W. and O., Lake Nidzkie, these are only some of the places mentioned by name (or only partially discovered names). However, the most important 'setting' of the cycle, perhaps, is a totally different one – an interior area, one might say. It is a setting in which the spirit is realised, the spirit of the newcomer and the spirit of the locality itself. There, where we penetrate, we are accompanied by that 'tender emotion / gazing about creation, that

call of mediation' [*czułe poruszanie, / rozglądanie po stworzonym, zew namysłu*] as he states in the poem *Raid* [Łapanka]. We set off in search of the spirit, the domain of which is a dynamic, which slays inanity.

Kass is a clever poet; he knows the paths to lead the reader down to interesting places... He also knows that one cannot provide ready answers (who can?). One may simply point out the route; about the goal of the journey, it's better to keep silent. If in the first verse he writes 'no one ever found that one word / no one knew what happened' [*nikt nie znajdował tego jedyne go słowa, / nikt nie wiedział, co się wydarzyło*] in the second half of the volume he continues with this thought, bringing to an end his summing up of that which is visible, sensible, tangible and audible, with the statement that 'there escaped absolutely / nothing' [*że nie wymykało się / nic*]. And in this 'nothing' there is, after all, everything!

Jakub Paczeńskiak

Translated by Charles S. Kraszewski

## In the city of W. Early morning

She gets up, deftly slips her panties on –  
 hear how the band snaps on her naked hip?  
 Once more the city is urged by the light  
 groggy, as if struggling to crawl out  
 of a bed warm from two young bodies  
 or a dog's coat, stroked at dawn  
 by the tender fingers of the waitress at the Orpheus.  
 How many doors at this hour close forever,  
 how many people turn their backs in contempt  
 upon the dawn, how many gates are opened  
 wide to a strong draught?  
 At noon the gong of sunlight pushes in here  
 blinding the room becomes, like a pond  
 and what it dreamt up, awakens  
 to stagger drunkenly in search  
 of its own contours, a visible hinge.  
 Shade overtakes the sparrow on the balcony  
 of the neighbour woman wasted thin by dreaming  
 to sink farther away. In what body this brightness,  
 in what shrinkage?  
 You hear the snap of elastic band the rush  
 of blood, you, staring at the flashing bridge  
 over the river?

## That from the dead

She dreamt she went downstairs, opened the doors,  
 that she stepped out into the morning, the bright  
 garden,  
 that on a table near the bower sat a bee-eater,  
 a parrot on the backrest of the wicker chair  
 a corax on a larch branch, that there flew by  
 an oriole dead for ages, that a goldfinch  
 picked at its feathers on an ancient root  
 that other birds, colourful and exotic,  
 hemmed in the garden and sang one after another  
 except for the finch, for it ruffled its wings  
 that it sang what was needful, needful  
 immediately needful in a perfect way  
 that from the dead, that living she finds  
 that the shimmering service, that the pulsing arras,  
 that the flashing satin, that the splash of wonder  
 that the drizzling abundance, that there escaped  
 absolutely  
 nothing.

## There were many such

O water of Lake Nidzkie, my exorcist  
 You doubt, O you of little faith? There were many  
 such  
 and when they were not returning they tossed towels,  
 suits  
 and said: It's fine, it's otherwise  
 but no one ever found that one word  
 no one knew what happened.  
 For all that they brightened in a heretofore unknown  
 order.  
 9 June 2019

Translated by Charles S. Kraszewski



© Anna Bzempko

**WOJCIECH  
KASS**

Born 1964

**Metaf. 20 wierszy o położeniu [Metaf. 20 Poems of Setting]**

**Publisher:** Austeria, Warszawa 2020

ISBN: 978-83-7866-374-4; 56 pages

**Translation rights:** Wojciech Kass, kassandra@poczta.onet.pl

### Selected works

*Objawy*, 2019

*Ufność: trzy poematy*, 2018

*Tak: trzy eseje o poezji*, 2018

*Pocałuj światło. 89 wierszy*, 2016

### Przekłady na języki obce

Selected poems by Wojciech Kass have been translated into English, Bulgarian, Croatian, Czech, French, German, Italian, Lithuanian, Russian, Serbian, Slovenian, and Spanish.

### Selected awards

Gloria Artis Silver Medal for Merit to Culture (2015)

Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna Award for the best poetry debut (2000)

Capital City of Warsaw Award – nomination (2016)



# Hail Barabbas. New plays



## Exposing mechanisms that sentence individuals to isolation, loneliness, insanity or even damnation

**T**his collection of Jarosław Jakubowski's dramatic works presents a wide range of subjects: a forgotten political hero gone mad, the exposure of former communist functionaries, or an eccentric old man bogged down in a murderous routine. But despite this variety, at their core each of these plays is marked by History – in that the personal stories of the protagonists barely constitute a small portion of a larger, less subjective, and more unsparing social or national narrative.

Jakubowski's protagonists hover close to death – they occupy borderland between life and the beyond or have already passed into that world and are called on by the living to give testimony or pass judgement. This summoning of spirits helps reveal the darker side of the human psyche, the gathering place for experiences that have been expelled from memory, including that

of the collective. At the same time, however, certain social mechanisms are exposed that sentence individuals to isolation, loneliness, insanity or even damnation.

The free treatment of figures and events from Polish history helps move them beyond their national context into a more universal, trans-cultural realm. Perhaps precisely such a manner of writing about history – not based on facts but on psychology and enriched with speculations and legends, not avoiding unequivocal opinions no matter how grotesque they might ultimately prove to be – might lead to a mature and mindful discussion of the problem of national identity that is otherwise drowned out by media noise and political clamour.

Katarzyna Wójcik  
Translated by Philip Boehm

## CAST:

The Brunette – a woman from the 24-hour pharmacy  
The Grey-haired man – old, but maybe not so old after all

I

Brunette

It was like a film

only I was in it

That man passed me in the pasta aisle

just as I was looking for something to put in my tomato soup

I don't know if he bumped into me or just walked by very close

but I looked at him and was a little frightened

He didn't seem so threatening himself but his eyes

were like from some other world

and then I heard this shout

it sounded terribly artificial

I remember exactly

YOU HAVE TOO MUCH BLOOD  
SOME NEEDS TO BE LET OUT

and when he came rushing

in my direction

wielding a knife

this guy appeared

right by my side

between the man and me

I'd seen him before

an older ordinary looking guy who used to come to the pharmacy

and stare

He slumped to the floor

just kind of flopped down as though he wanted to rest while the other man raised his knife

and in this weird fake way like out of a bad movie started

jumping up and down and shouting

jumping up and down and shouting

THE SACRIFICE IS COMPLETE

THE SACRIFICE IS COMPLETE

Before they got to him he managed to pull a razor across his neck

slowly this way and that as if he were slicing bread

Meanwhile the other man sat among the scattered packages and cans

leaning against the pasta

holding his stomach

blood flowing through his fingers

He looked at me and that's probably when I started screaming

he raised his bloody hand and motioned me over

I bent down and heard him mumble

WATERCRESS

was that the word

## WATERCRESS?

Then he passed out right away and I never saw him again

Later they told me he had saved my life

he gave his life for me

died that I might live

I heard this all the time

until I was sick of hearing it

I had to play my role

say what they wanted to hear

they needed that sacrifice

they need a sacrifice because they haven't had their fill

they have to see the blood

blood in photos looks like tomato soup

there has to be a lot of blood a whole lot

on the floor on the walls even on the ceiling

splattered on things that never had anything to do with blood

I told them all of that just to be left in peace

the truth is he didn't mean a thing to me

he was nobody and still is

I don't even remember his face

he'd show up at the pharmacy and stare at my tits

Excerpt from *The Incident [Incydent]*, translated by Philip BoehmExtended sample translation available at [booksfrompoland.pl](http://booksfrompoland.pl)

© Filip Kowalkowski

JAROSŁAW  
JAKUBOWSKI

Born 1974

*Witaj Barabaszu. Nowe dramaty [Hail Barabbas. New Plays]*

**Publisher:** Agencja Dramatu i Teatru ADiT, Instytut Literatury,

Warszawa 2020

ISBN: 978-83-60699-47-8; 408 pages

**Translation rights:** Agencja ADiT, [agencja@adit.art.pl](mailto:agencja@adit.art.pl)

**Plays staged***Prawda*, 2017*Magik*, 2017*Wieczny kwiecień*, 2012*Życie*, 2011*Generał*, 2010

Jarosław Jakubowski is also a poet, prose writer, literary critic, and journalist.

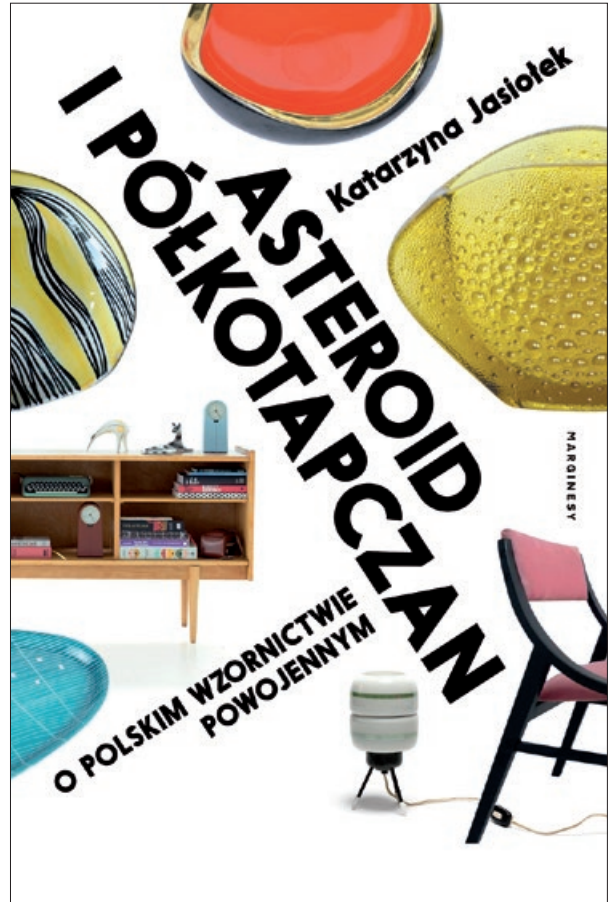
**Selected awards**

Grand Prix, Festival of Contemporary Polish Plays Rapport (2011)

Main Prize, Metaphors of Reality Theatre Festival in Poznań (2012)

# Asteroid and Wall-Bed. Post-War Polish Design

An interesting, richly illustrated tale of designs made in Poland



Industrial design, like clothes and hairstyles, goes through changing trends. Something that was once widely considered innovative and genuinely interesting quite quickly becomes boring and outdated. But – as in fashion – every now and then there comes a wave of popularity for earlier, tried and tested solutions.

Over the last few years, we've witnessed the great comeback of design from the 1950s and 60s. In Poland's case, this era was marked by an additional factor, namely that projects were conceived within the system of a centrally-controlled economy and censorship. The period of the Polish People's Republic didn't foster creative freedom, nonetheless – as the author of this book shows – the fruits of artists' work from this time deserve close attention.

The book is a cross between a richly illustrated album and an interesting tale of designs made in Poland. Jasiołek doesn't present them in chronological order

but tries to show what it was like to work as a designer in a country where everything was in short supply and those shortages had to be constantly concealed. Designers had to demonstrate inventiveness and predict all the potential uses of the furniture, tools or homeware they created. Yet what seems to matter most in this book is the fact that artists never gave in to the temptation to neglect their work. And although manufacturing in communist countries was poor, the quality of industrial design was very high.

Thanks to its clear layout and well-written story, *Asteroid and Wall-Bed* presents readers with items created in Poland in the second half of the 20th century, while also explaining how, by whom and for whom they were designed. As a result, for many people it may serve not just as a source of information but of inspiration as well.

Juliusz Galkowski

Translated by Zosia Krasodomska-Jones

The history of Poland's cult wall-unit begins a little later. In early 1961, the Furniture Industry Association in Poznań and its Union of Polish Fine Artists held a competition: "Furniture for a Small Apartment". In this case, it meant the M-4 flat: two rooms with a small kitchen and entrance hall, intended for four people. The participants' task was to design furniture for the entire flat and to fit within a budget of 15,000 zloty (the average public-sector salary was 1,784 zloty).

Bogusława Kowalska recalls how, when her husband Czesław decided they would take part in the contest, they did not have a concept. In the end, they came up with the idea of the MK, 'meble kasetonowe' ['panel furniture'] – one type of structure used to furnish the entire flat, the elements of which could fit together in any combination like building blocks. The panels were a kind of rectangular shelf mounted at different heights, onto which side panels were screwed. A panel could have open shelves, a door, or adaptors for attaching a fold-out bed, table or desk. The front would be colourful in the children's room, white in the kitchen and more serious in the living room. The shops were short of metal fittings, so Czesław used screws meant for installing toilets, which because of their wing-nuts actually made it possible to assemble the furniture without any tools.

The designers submitted their competition entry at the last minute. To their surprise, the proposal passed the first stage and in July 1961 was selected as one of 10 models to be constructed. The next step was a display at Poznań's "Spring 1962" National Fair, as part of the Second Industrial Design Fair. That was where the competition committee would pick the best entries. Each creator was given an area of the same dimensions as an M-4 apartment, which they were to furnish with their designs. Bogusława describes how Czesław was obliged to go away, leaving her by herself at the stand in Poznań. Looking at her neighbours' classically furnished mock-ups and her own messy pile of pieces, she experienced a moment of doubt. But in the end, without much help, she managed to install the wall-unit.

"Some people discretely tapped their foreheads, making it clear they thought this wasn't furniture. And that's true – it isn't furniture. They're flaps you can screw together to make what you want, not traditional furniture like the stuff that's fashionable again today – and which is, moreover, really beautiful. Of course, it's so nice to sit on chairs at a big table in the middle of the room – it brings a family together. But back then, you couldn't offer that. You had to make use of a very small area. Like in this photo: we're sitting on armchairs; the table is folded out. At night you'd put the table away, then you could lie down and rest. The bar was right under your nose – so you could also have a little tippie before then."

The Kowalskis were surprised to discover that they'd been awarded a first-place distinction (the actual prizes weren't granted because no project kept within the required production costs). The other participants were no less surprised. The exhibition of the MK system at the Poznań Fair was a turning point for the Polish furniture industry.

Bogusława recalls their presentation of the MK system at the Fair as follows: "I borrowed [...] our neighbour, [...] who played the parents' son at the trade fair; the parents were actors. The game was that they'd come into the flat, take off their coats, put the beds away, fold the sheets, open up the tables. And then he'd come in, as if returning from school, he'd take out his books, set up the desk. They showed how you could live there, all day long." A rather unorthodox method, it has to be said, but it did show off all the secrets of the new type of furniture.

"[...] His [Czesław's] idea turned out to be exceptional. It contained a kind of structural joke. It's completely by chance that we were the ones to come up with it and do something totally different to the others – it's a kind of uniform for an apartment, which you could decorate with different buttons, tack on what you wanted. But we didn't win the prize for the idea alone – we also kept within the budget. The estimate only slightly exceeded the guidelines and our design was suitable for cheap production. Incidentally, the factories then had a problem because Kowalski Furniture was actually too cheap when it came to manufacturing, which basically meant you couldn't make any money out of it. A sort of paradox of the socialist economy."

Excerpts translated by Zosia Krasodomka-Jones



© Zuzanna Szamocka

**KATARZYNA  
JASIOŁEK**

Born 1982

*Asteroid i półkotapczan. O polskim wzornictwie powojennym  
[Asteroid and Wall-Bed: Post-War Polish Design]*

**Publisher:** Marginesy, Warszawa 2020

ISBN: 978-83-66335-69-1; 416 pages

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

Katarzyna Jasiołek's texts on design have been published in magazines and catalogues. She runs [heliotropvintage.pl](http://heliotropvintage.pl) blog and podcast, devoted to design, architecture, photography, and fashion.

# Andzia



## Illustrating poems about a disobedient girl, Trust lets his imagination run wild



The heroine of these peculiar, surprising poems written by Bishop Piotr Mańkowski (1866-1933) is a little girl named Andzia. Breaking the rules dictated by adults, Andzia gets pulled into a maelstrom of extraordinary events. Sometimes a poem ends with merely a harmless reprimand, but other times with dismemberment or a lifelong debt. However, each poem's ending is more humorous than gruesome. And the lessons that can be learned from them is that while it is safer to listen to your elders, disobedient children have the most wonderful adventures. The nine poems by Bishop Mańkowski were discovered in Rome in 2007. They were inspired by the work of Heinrich Hoffmann, author of books about 'Shaggy Peter' (original: *Der Struwwelpeter*), who suffered terrible consequences for his unruly behaviour. In *Andzia*, Mańkowski also polemicalises with the moralising works of Stanisław Jachowicz, the most popular Polish fairy tale writer of the 19th century. Although Mańkowski is not always stylistically perfect, his feel for language cannot be denied. The lively

phrasing and regular rhymes make the poems easy to read and quick to memorise. The author's ingenuity is impressive as he leads Andzia from completely mundane situations into the most surprising and absurd regions of experience.

The poems were illustrated by Przemysław 'Trust' Truściński, one of Poland's most talented comic artists from the generation that debuted in the 1990s. In Trust's visual interpretation, Andzia is a brave, determined child similar to Little Nemo from Winsor McCay's famous comics. Just like McCay, Trust lets his imagination run wild – the illustrations sometimes become detached from the text and drift away towards a surreal sequence of associations. However, while Nemo grappled with the oneiric delusions of a child's imagination, Andzia is surrounded by the delightful technological innovations of the interwar period – automobiles, transatlantic planes, radio transmitters and tanks.

Tomasz Pstrągowski  
Translated by Scotia Gilroy



One day Andzia saw a kitten  
walking by and she was smitten!  
As she bent to stroke its fur  
Her aunt began to screech at her,  
“Leave that little cat alone,  
Or it’ll scratch you to the bone!”  
But this warning she ignored  
Because she was a naughty ward.  
The cat swiped at her with its claw  
And then the girl began to bawl.  
The air filled with her frantic screams  
For blood was pouring down in streams.  
Then her auntie’s face grew graver  
While Andzia cursed the cat’s behaviour.

Andzia’s aunt began to scold:  
‘You didn’t heed what you were told!  
You’re to blame for your distress  
And for the blood now on your dress.  
The blame does not lie with the cat  
For it’s a scratcher – you knew that!  
And furthermore, it’s quite a sin  
To curse like that! So don’t begin!  
But for your wound, here’s what we’ll do:  
I’ve got a cure that’s tried and true.  
A good, high-quality band-aid.’  
Which Andzia heard as ‘marmalade’,  
Because her hearing starts to fail  
Whenever Auntie’s scolds prevail.

Through her tears a smile appeared  
And then she said, greatly cheered,  
‘That’s a cure I never doubt!’  
And stuck her little tongue right out.  
But her auntie in a flash  
Put the band-aid on the gash.  
When Andzia saw her auntie’s plan,  
Once again, the tears began.  
‘Now,’ she thought, ‘I’ll never stop  
Until I get a lollipop.’  
But her auntie’s remedies  
Only came from pharmacies.

‘The only cure,’ her auntie quipped,  
‘For naughty kids is to be whipped.’  
A bundle of birch twigs appeared:  
A remedy most greatly feared.

Dear reader! Would you like to know  
The ending of this tale of woe?  
It won’t take long to summarize:  
Andzia was quick to apologize,  
And on her neck the wound soon healed.  
Did her auntie start to yield?  
Yes! Perceiving the remorse,  
She had a change of heart, of course.  
She gave her honey, to be nice.  
And the kitty caught four mice.

Translated by Scotia Gilroy



© Przemysław Truściński

bishop  
**PIOTR  
MAŃKOWSKI**

1866-1933



© Marek Skotarski

**PRZEMYSŁAW  
“TRUST”  
TRUŚCIŃSKI**

Born 1970

*Andzia*

**Publisher:** Timof i Cisi Wspólnicy, Warszawa 2020

ISBN: 978-83-66347-40-3; 152 pages

**Translation rights:** Timof i Cisi Wspólnicy, timof@timof.pl

**Foreign language translations**

Rights to *Andzia* have been sold to France.

Przemysław „Trust” Truściński is one of the most important Polish comic artists and illustrators, as well as the originator and the co-organiser of the first comic conventions and festivals in Poland. He created the Geralt character for the cult game „The Witcher”.

# The Polish Book Institute

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

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

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

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



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Deputy Director of the Book Institute  
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## Selected Polish Book Institute programmes:

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

Since 1999, the ©POLAND Translation Programme has provided more than 2,500 grants for translations into 50 different languages published in 63 countries. The average grant was worth approximately € 3,500.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

For further information please contact:  
Elżbieta Wierzchowska, [e.wierzchowska@bookinstitute.pl](mailto:e.wierzchowska@bookinstitute.pl).

**The Translators' College** – This programme provides study visits for translators of Polish literature. During their residency, which takes place in Cracow or Warsaw, the translators are provided with suitable conditions for their work and assistance with their translations. The college has been active since 2006. By 2020, more than 140 translators from thirty-five countries had already taken part.



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

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

Recent winners:

2021 // Ewa Małachowska-Pasek and Megan Thomas, for *The Career of Nicodemus Dyzma* by Tadeusz Dołęga-Mostowicz

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

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

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

Recent winners:

2021 // Tokimasa Sekiguchi

2020 // Ewa Thompson

2019 // Hendrik Lindepuu

2018 // Antonia Lloyd-Jones

2017 // Lajos Pálfalvi

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

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## **NEW BOOKS FROM POLAND 2021**

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