

# THE SARMATIAN REVIEW

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## Good Show, Bad Show



“The Angel” from the theatrical genre of *szopka*, a creation of Polish folk artists further developed by theater professionals. A fragment of the *szopka* performance given in Buffalo, NY in 2004 by Polish artists from Białystok. Photo by Mark F. Tattenbaum.

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### Our Take

## Politkovskaia murder, or the concert of nations

The October 2006 murder of the Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaia generated a tone of subdued indignation in the American and European media. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and *Le Monde* gave it a few sideshow articles that soon disappeared from their homepages. The Moscow online [gazeta.ru](http://gazeta.ru) removed mentions of Politkovskaia the very day following her funeral. Our own media reported President Bush's appeal for investigation, answered by President Putin's chilling assertion that an "objective" investigation would be forthcoming.

Why so little indignation and attention spent on Politkovskaia in Russia and abroad? Whence the restrained tone with which the Western media and politicians condemned the murder? In the post-Soviet and terrorist-ridden world, the superpowers seem to be looking backward to the nineteenth century when great empires ruled the world and the rest of humanity acquiesced after countless failed uprisings.

After the First World War there came an era of democracy broken by the rise of Nazism. After the

Second World War, apart from the communist menace that made first-world countries uncomfortable (not to speak of the plight of Eastern and Central Europe under Soviet military domination), democracy surged forward with more and more rights gained by more and more minorities in the noncommunist world. The twentieth century granted suffrage to women. It gave American blacks a taste of real equality, and it liberated many Asian and Latin American countries from dictatorial regimes. After the fall of communism Eastern and Central Europe gained an opportunity, in Boris Yeltsin's words, to "grab as much freedom as they could." All of them did—except, as Khodorkovsky's imprisonment and Politkovskaia's murder have illustrated, the Russian Federation.

The fact that the Russians took the path of make-believe democracy says a great deal about the Russian political culture, but it may also be an indication of Russian political brilliance exemplified by President Vladimir Putin. Putin's evil brilliance lies in the understanding that powerful countries are once again poised to rule the world. The Russo-German alliance on energy defies the spirit of the European Union, whose founders envisaged a united European front on major political and economic problems arising within the Union. Now Russia wants Germany to be its energy distributor and watchdog in the EU. This puts the EU out of whack, as countries such as Poland are left out of the planned gas pipeline to run along the bottom of the Baltic Sea. Have the world leaders forgotten that it is crucial to the equilibrium of Europe to guarantee stability and liberty in non-Germanic Central Europe? The answer may be yes.

(continued on Page 1279)

## The *Sarmatian Review* Index

### **Poles are not the only ones considering emigration**

Percentage of British citizens who have considered moving abroad: 54 percent.

Percentage of British citizens who want to emigrate “in the near future”: 13 percent, or double the number asked the question in 2003.

Percentage of British youth who said they wanted to live abroad: 25 percent.

Reasons for emigration: a better quality of life, better weather, and a feeling that the UK is too expensive.

Countries to which the British want to emigrate: Australia, Spain, Canada, New Zealand, and the U.S.

Actual number of people who emigrated in 2004: 350,000.

Source: July 2006 poll commissioned by BBC, as reported by BBC News, <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/5237236.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/5237236.stm)>, as of 2 August 2006.

Number of British citizens who live overseas at least part of the year: 14 million.

Source: Minister Lord Triesman, BBC News, <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/5237236.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/5237236.stm)>, as of 2 August 2006.

### **Agricultural land prices in Poland**

Average price of one hectare (2.2 acres) of agricultural land in Poland in 2006: 10,500 Zł, or 2,500 euro (equivalent to the price of land in Sweden two years ago).

Source: *Rzeczpospolita*, 8 July 2006.

### **List of Poles who made the ultimate sacrifice in Iraq from mid-2003 to mid-2006**

Pvt. 1st class Krystian Andrzejczak

Pvt. 1st class Roman Góralczyk

Warrant officer 1st class Paweł Jelonek

Capt. Jacek Kostecki

Warrant officer 2nd class Marek Krajewski

Corp. 1st class Tomasz Krygiel

Maj. Hieronim Kupczyk

Pvt. Sylwester Kutrzyk

2nd lieutenant Piotr Mazurek

Pvt. 1st class Grzegorz Nosek

2nd lieutenant Daniel Rożyński

Pvt. 1st class Grzegorz Rusinek

Corp. Marcin Rutkowski

Capt. Sławomir Stróżak

Warrant officer Karol Szlązak

Pvt. 1st class Gerard Wasilewski

Pvt. 1st class Andrzej Zielke

Former GROM operator unit JW 2305—name unidentified

Former GROM operator unit JW 2305—name unidentified

Waldemar Milewicz (civilian—journalist)

Mounyra Beouamrane (civilian—journalist).

Source: [www.freerepublic.com/~lizol](http://www.freerepublic.com/~lizol), as of September 1, 2006.

### **Birthrates and childless households in EU in 2005**

Average birthrate in EU per 1,000 inhabitants: 10.5.

Five lowest birthrates in EU: Germany, 8.6; Latvia, 8.8; Lithuania, 8.9; Slovenia, 9.0; Poland, 9.3.

Percentage of households with no children: Finland, 76 percent; Germany, 75 percent; Denmark, 74 percent; Austria, 70 percent; Netherlands, 69 percent. EU average: 67 percent.

Source: Eurostat, as reported by Jeffrey Fleischman in *Los Angeles Times*, 14 September 2006.

### **That famous Dutch spirit of religious tolerance**

Years during which it was illegal for any church building in Amsterdam to be used for Catholic worship: 1581–1785.

Source: Thomas Basil, “Contrasts in Christendom: Red Lights in Amsterdam, Neon in Malta,” *New Oxford Review*, vol. LXXIII, no. 9 (October 2006), 35.

### Great powers and human rights

Number of racist attacks in the Russian Federation during the first six months of 2006: over 100.

Number of deaths of victims: 18.

Source: Sova Human Rights Center, as reported by Jonas Bernstein in *Russia Reform Monitor*, no. 1387 (10 July 2006).

Number of documented lynchings in the United States between 1882–1930: 2,805.

Number of whites among the victims: several hundred.

Source: Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of the Lynchings of African-Americans in the American South, 1882–1930* (Univ. of Illinois Press, 1995).

### A vignette of Polish losses, or the price of colonialism to the colonized

Number of Polish medieval parchment documents found by an American soldier in a destroyed German train in 1945: 11.

Content of documents: administrative acts of Polish kings including a permit to build a hospital issued by King Władysław Łokietek (1260–1333).

Reason the issue has recently resurfaced: the documents were returned to Poland.

Source: Michał Jankowski in *Donosy*, no. 4265 (1 September 2006).

### Bribery in Russia

Percentage of Russians who have admitted to paying bribes: 50 percent.

Bribe giving by age: 53 percent of people under 25, and 61–64 percent of people ages 25–44 have given bribes.

Bribe takers by profession: paramedics (51 percent), traffic cops (31 percent), education workers (20 percent), regular policemen (16 percent), draft board officials (7 percent).

Source: All-Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion (BTSIOM), as reported by *Russia Reform Monitor* of the American Foreign Policy Council, no. 1388 (23 June 2006).

### Internet news

Number of email messages sent each day worldwide in 2006: 50 billion, of which 88 percent are junk and 1 percent are virus-infected.

Number of available Internet addresses in 2006: 4 billion (based on 16-bit numbers).

Planned number of Internet addresses: 340,282,366,920,938,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000, or 340 undecillion, 282 decillion, 366 ninillion, 920 octillion, 938 septillion (based on 32-bit numbers).

Software said to be the first to be compatible with the new system: Vista of Microsoft Windows, to be released in 2007.

Source: Jonathan Richards in *The Times* of London, 15 July 2006.

### Internet use in Germany

Percentage of Germans who use the Internet regularly: 58 percent.

Percentage of young Germans who use the Internet: 90 percent.

Percentage of senior citizens who use the Internet: 33 percent.

Source: *Deutsche Welle*, as reported by UPI, 5 August 2006.

### A revolutionary blows up monument, or history repeats itself in Russia

Name of tsar whose monument was blown up by a “leftist extremist” in 2006: Nicholas II.

Name of Russian who blew up the monument: Andrei Gubkin.

Length of sentence Gubkin received from the Moscow court in August 2006: 19 years.

Source: UPI (Moscow), 31 August 2006.

### Catholic facts and figures

Net decline in the number of Catholics in the United States between 2005–2006: 300,000 persons.

Net decline in the number of students in Catholic high schools in the same period: 13,000.

Net decline in the number of students enrolled in religious education programs: 204,000.

Net decline in the number of students at Catholic colleges and universities: 9,000.

Number of times a picture of Archbishop Daniel DiNardo, head of the Galveston-Houston Diocese, appeared in the July 21, 2006 issue of *Texas Catholic Herald* (total number of pages: 28): nine.

Number of articles in which Archbishop DiNardo’s name is mentioned: nine, including two authored by him, in English and Spanish.

Name of president and publisher of the *Texas Catholic Herald*: Archbishop Daniel DiNardo.

Source: *Texas Catholic Herald*, 21 July 2006.



## A Good Show Traditional and Nontraditional Puppet Theater in Poland

Interview with Paweł Chomczyk and Dagmara Sowa

Interviewer: Mark F. Tattenbaum

### Introduction

In November 2005, Paweł Chomczyk, Dagmara Sowa, and several shipping crates arrived at JFK Airport in New York City. In one of the crates were twenty-one handcrafted puppets designed by Wiesław Jurkowski and constructed by Zbigniew Romanyk, Małgorzata Roman, Helena Popławska, and Teresa Czerniawska, all faculty members and master puppet builders of the Puppetry Department at the Aleksander Zelwerowicz Theater Academy in Warsaw, Białystok campus. The crates also contained a magnificent *Szopka* (pronounced: *Shopka*), created by Marek Szyszko of the Białystok campus. The *Szopka* is a puppet creche based on Renaissance architecture of the city of Kraków, Poland. During their month-long engagement, Paweł and Dagmara performed their recreation of the original Polish *Szopka* in different venues across western New York state. Their journey and performances were made possible by the support of the Polish Cultural Foundation of Western New York, presided by Professor Kazimierz Braun; Department of Theater and Dance of the State University of New York at Buffalo, chaired by Professor Robert Knopf; and The State University of New York at Buffalo's Office of International Education, headed by Professor and Vice Provost Stephen Dunnett. The donors in Białystok were the Theater Academy and the city of Białystok. Paweł and Dagmara also conducted workshops for students at the university and elsewhere.

Originally *Szopka* was a traditional Polish Nativity play performed with puppets. It morphed into a genre all its own, with puppets performing on a stage resembling a cathedral with three playing levels. The text for the American performances was freely adapted from Polish folk texts by J. Krupski, J. Czerniak, and J. Lewański. In the interview Paweł and Dagmara describe their work and its history, and discuss the new cutting-edge puppetry they have utilized in Europe at international theater and puppetry festivals. The members of the *Kompania Doomsday* include Martin Bartnikowski, Paweł Chomczyk, Ewa Gajewska, Adam Jakuc, Agnieszka Możejko, Urszula Raczowska, Anna Rakowska, Karol Smaczny, and Dagmara Sowa. The director is Michael Vogel.

This interview was conducted on 4 December 2005. (MFT)

**MARK F. TATTENBAUM:** What is the history of *Szopka* as an art form?

**PAWEŁ CHOMCZYK:** There are several theories about *Szopka*; you would have to look into history books for details but an abbreviated story is as follows. The *Szopka* has its roots in medieval Poland, in the thirteenth century, to be exact. It probably developed from a Christmas *tableau* representing visitors to Jesus's manger in Bethlehem. Another conjecture is that it developed from the altar *tableau*. It had three levels: the first representing heaven, the second representing earth, and the third representing hell. As time went on, *Szopka* performances drew on other religions themes and the figures themselves became mobile, as the puppet masters learned to manipulate them. Eventually the range of *Szopka* themes began to include secular topics as well.

**DAGMARA SOWA:** These included political topics, satire, and animal fables. The Church authorities took note.

**PCH:** And somewhere in the eighteenth century the bishops began to forbid this type of activity in churches.

**MFT:** Yes, the Church took a similar course of action in medieval times, when churchmen used short plays to educate the faithful about Christ's Passion and related religious topics. These plays were similar to what we today call the Stations of the Cross. Over time, lay people became involved in these plays and the stories drifted away from the liturgy of the Church toward secularism. As a result, the plays and their players were banished from churches into the streets.

—————

*People were captivated by your performance. They were laughing and reacting to it in a variety of ways. You have resurrected a theater art form and brought it to a group of people who have never seen it before.*

—————

**PCH:** In the case of *Szopka* performances, people apparently were going to church not to pray but to be amused. From the Church's point of view, this was wrong. You do not go to church to have fun. However, banishment to the streets did not stop the tradition of this type of performance. A demand for it developed, especially during the Christmas season. The actors would go from house to house with a portable stage. This brings me to a technical explanation. There are several different types of *Szopka*. There is a mechanical type, or a wind-up type, that does not involve the stage. The mechanical *Szopka* has small figures that repeat the same movements. There is also the *Szopka* that uses puppets or actors on the stage. When you hear the word

*Szopka* or *Jasętka* in Polish, they may mean either a mechanical *Szopka*, or a particular type of theater activity performed by either puppets or living actors. There is also the third type of *Szopka* involving a mechanical stage, carried by people who sing Christmas carols.

**MFT:** Is the mechanical *Szopka* similar to the Swiss clock?

**PCH:** Yes, indeed. And here are some illustrations from the 1800s that depict the carolers carrying a portable stage [*he shows the interviewer the pictures*].

**MFT:** So it was an actual piece of scenography! And they carried it on their shoulders.

**DS:** Yes, including the puppets. Singing was also involved.

**MFT:** Were they carolers and musicians, or were they puppeteers, or both?

**PCH:** Sometimes it was both. Sometimes it was just to present the *Szopka* as an art object, with some figures that were not movable; sometimes there were puppets; and at other times, living actors playing angels, devils, or the Three Kings.

**MFT:** What about the costume of the horse and rider from Krakow?

**PCH:** You are speaking about *Lajkonik*, which is the specialty of the Krakow region.

**MFT:** So it is not connected to the Nativity stories?

**PCH:** It can actually be part of the Nativity. The last time we were in Rochester I saw that they had a Cracovian *Szopka*; this is the kind of *Szopka* typical of Kraków because it is connected to a Kraków story and to many buildings in that city. When we saw this *Szopka* in a church in Rochester, there were some figures standing inside it. There was an angel, the Virgin Mary, Joseph, and infant Jesus. In front of the *Szopka* was *Lajkonik*, or the man on a horse. But *Lajkonik* has a different history.

**MFT:** So he can be a part of *Szopka*?

**PCH:** Yes, but only in Kraków.

**MFT:** The character I am referring to is an actor dressed in a period costume from Kraków; he is riding a horse, so part of his costume is a horse. . . . But let us go back to the 1800s; we have carolers performing with and without puppets, with the *Szopka* behind them.

**PCH:** Yes, most of the texts used by carolers came from the oral tradition.

**DS:** Passed from generation to generation.

**PCH:** As a spoken word, but then . . .

**DS:** They began to be reduced to writing.

**PCH:** Yes, in Krupski's or Cherniak's works you can find *Szopka* scripts that are actually compilations of

folk texts. Our compilation is based on the works of these authors.

**MFT:** They were written in Old Polish?

**PCH:** Yes, they are all poems and sound a bit archaic.

**MFT:** So the original text was in verse?

**DS:** Yes, it is poetic and yet simple.

**PCH:** *Szopka* is also connected to the puppet tradition that originates in humorous shows and political satire.

**MFT:** So you used written texts to work out a script for your current performances. When were these folk tales transcribed?

**DS:** Sometime in the late nineteenth century.

**MFT:** I have heard that the *Szopkas* are not widely performed anymore?

**PCH:** You are right, it is a tradition in decline. However, sometimes *Szopkas* are taken up by the professional theater troupes.

**DS:** At Christmastime every puppet theater group in Poland offers shows related to *Szopka*, but a really traditional *Szopka* is rare because of societal drift toward recorded music and standardized characters. *Szopka* is more of an improvisation. Each performance is different.

**MFT:** In your performance you provide your own music.

**PCH:** Yes, and we use lights and a computer. These accessories are not portable, and in winter we could not use them if we went from house to house, as the traditional *Szopka* performers had done. Our show is meant to be performed on a theater stage.

**MFT:** So you are rescuing an old tradition. Your work is to bring that old tradition to people who have never seen it, like here in America.

**PCH:** Yes, and it does not happen very often that a small group of performers presents a *Szopka* that can be played out in diverse places and countries. We are quite different from the improvised *Szopkas* used in Christmas caroling, when kids go from house to house. That *Szopka* is made of cardboard and poorly constructed, it is meant to last for that evening only and earn the carolers some money. The tradition that we are presenting is much more serious and elaborate. And one more thing: Polish puppetry has a certain traditional technique called the stick puppet technique. We occasionally use it in our *Szopka* performances. The puppets are operated from below with a stick.

**MFT:** This is what you have also called the rod puppets?

**PCH:** Yes.

**MFT:** After seeing the performance I can say that both of you use that technique very well.

**PCH:** Thank you! That is part of our desire to do something very different. That is why we started the *Szopka* Project.

**MFT:** Did you see *Szopka* when you were a young girl?

**DS:** No.

**PCH:** I do not remember any such thing either.

**DS:** I lived in a small town that did not have a puppet theater. I do not remember anyone carrying the *Szopka* from house to house.

**PCH:** I do remember the carolers going from house to house, with an improvised *Szopka* of poor quality. I kept these images in my mind, but I never associated them with puppet performances. When we started our puppet activity at school, we gradually became more aware of the tradition and its history.

**MFT:** So you discovered it in school?

**PCH:** Yes, we took classes in the history of the puppet theater, and *Szopka* was part of it. We also took classes in the rod puppet technique. Sometimes we worked in the old Polish tradition, and at other times we did contemporary work. One semester was dedicated to Monty Python's Flying Circus recreated with the help of rod puppets.

**MFT:** What kind of school did you attend?

**PCH:** I did my undergraduate work at the University of Białystok and majored in theater. I grew up in Białystok and once saw a puppet theater in my childhood. I decided that I must learn more about theater, and I enrolled in graduate school of the Drama Academy in Białystok.

**MFT:** The Puppetry Department of the Aleksander Zelwerowicz Theater Academy in Warsaw, the Białystok branch?

**PCH:** Yes, I received my Master of Fine Arts there.

**DS:** I come from a small town in the south of Poland. When I was in secondary school I went to the drama theater in Kraków a couple of times. I did not know puppet theater at all. I did know that I wanted to be on stage and work in the theater. After receiving my undergraduate degree I tried to get a job at the drama theater but was not accepted. Then I went to a little puppet theater near Katowice. I spent one year there and then I enrolled in the drama school. During that year I participated in an international puppetry festival and I saw many performances from around the world. My eyes were opened and I knew what I wanted to do on the stage.

**MFT:** It certainly shows. I know the rod puppets have only a limited range of motion, yet you make them come alive.

**PCH:** The puppets that we use in our *Szopka* performance have swinging parts, primarily hands and shoulders. Many rod puppets do not have any movable or swinging parts at all. Working with them provides a good training, because with these puppets you can only work with rhythms, with different speeds, and with different kinds of composition on the stage. You have to be very clear and precise. When you have several characters on the stage at one time, you have to give them unique characteristics.

**MFT:** I could see that when you had three guild members on the stage. Even though you used a special device so that you could move all three of them, each had his own individual movements and personality.

**PCH:** One thing that helps us is the visual characteristics of each puppet. Each and every puppet is different. Each and every puppet has its own range of movements, as they are made from different materials and their costumes are made from different fabrics. When you have twenty or so of those puppets, you have to be awake and listen to what the puppets are trying to tell you.

**MFT:** And each puppet has a different voice.

**PCH:** Yes, and you have to watch them. It is not a matter of trying to make each and every character very original; it is a matter of making every character reliable and truthful.

**MFT:** The same is true in ordinary acting, where you are searching for the truth as well.

**PCH:** Yes, but with puppets shortcuts are possible. In normal acting, according to the Strasburg Method, you have to go through a thought process. Puppets do not have to do that.

**MFT:** Still, you are acting; each puppet is different and has its own signature. The simple vocal intonations are so very effective. For instance, when the three shepherds were searching for Bethlehem.

**PCH:** They were speaking to the Devil disguised as angel. The Devil was trying to mislead them, so that they would go in the wrong direction.

**MFT:** It was so simple. "Bethlehem?" "UhUh!"

**PCH:** Yes. I think that if you add too much, the work loses its clarity. We wanted it to be as simple as possible.

**DS:** In the beginning we thought that it was too simple. We were our own directors and wondered if it was perhaps too naive. But we finally decided that *Szopka* looks like this, it is traditional and we like it.

**MFT:** After sitting behind the stage at the SUNY-Buffalo's theater and listening to the audience respond, one realizes that your performance is far from trivial. The majority of the audience did not understand Polish,

yet the response was overwhelming.

**PCH:** The fact that so many did not speak Polish and yet understood the performance provided us with a great deal of energy.

**MFT:** People were captivated by your performance. They were laughing and reacting to it in a variety of ways. You have resurrected a theater art form and brought it to a group of people who had never seen it before.

**PCH:** We are doing something very traditional and do not want to change it.

**DS:** We are very happy for this; it is an investment in our heritage and culture.

**MFT:** Students were fascinated by the fact that you compose your own music.

**PCH:** Yes, it preserves the medieval character of the performance.

**MFT:** Were you surprised by the reaction of the audience?

**PCH:** To be completely honest, I did not expect this kind of response from non-Polish speaking viewers. It was very gratifying. Theater is a form of art that happens between spectators and actors. Whenever we “make theater,” we are thinking about people who will watch it. It was hard to imagine that people here, on the other side of the ocean, would be so generous in their response.

**MFT:** It was a genuinely heartfelt appreciation of your work. The next day in class, my students who did not attend were very sorry that they had missed the performance. Turning to new work: in Germany your theater company, The Doomsday Theater Company, performed an adaptation of Oscar Wilde’s *Salomé*. That performance included both puppets and actors. Would you like to talk about that?

**PCH:** Well, that is a completely different story.

**MFT:** It also involves puppets, but they are the most unusual puppets I have ever seen.

**PCH:** With *Szopka* we had just little problems in putting together the performance. Sometimes when you are working within a traditional form, you do not feel so creative. The *Salome* performance was like going into the open sea, or trying to find one’s way in a dark room.

**DS:** It was great because it created a big space in which one could play and do anything.

**MFT:** Yes, and the puppets you operated in *Salome* were not small rod puppets. You also employed masks in that performance. What interested me about it was that you took ancient art forms and transformed them for a new use in theater.

**PCH:** I have not met many true artists in my life. Our director [the director of the *Salome* performance], Michael Vogel, is one. He is trying to find the truthful way of expressing things. We were given the freedom of improvisation and he was directing us in this improvisation. It might seem as if all the things we had done on the stage came exclusively from within us, but of course that is an illusion, because the director was always there, orchestrating us, suggesting ideas to us, and pushing us a little bit more in one direction or another. I think that several times we surprised him as well. His way of putting this puzzle together was to search for solutions that really work with *Salome*. This puppet [Salome] was a very original one, but we could not really explain how that happened.

**MFT:** Tell us how the performance came about.

**PCH:** Our performance was based on Oscar Wilde’s text, which in turn goes back to the Biblical story. Salome is the daughter of Herod and the stepdaughter of Herod Antipas. There is Jokanaan, or St. John the Baptist, who is imprisoned in the dungeon. He is a prophet, and Herod Antipas is afraid of him because he speaks in a strange way about strange things. Jokanaan prophesies that something tragic will happen to the king and queen who do not listen to the voice of God. Hearing the voice of Jokanaan, Salome orders one of the soldiers to bring him to her so she can meet him. She falls in love with him and wants to touch him, and wants him to pay attention to her. He refuses each of her requests, which makes her all the more desirous of him. She states that no matter what she will kiss his mouth. Jokanaan is returned to the dungeon as Herod arrives for a party. Herod wants Salome to dance for him, over the objections of his wife. Herod promises her anything if she will dance for him. Salome agrees, and after her dance she demands the head of Jokanaan. Herod pleads with her to ask for something else, but Salome will not relent in her demand. Jokanaan is beheaded, and his severed head is brought to her. Salome kisses the head and announces that she has kissed his mouth, and that the power of passion is stronger than the power of death.

**MFT:** You, the other actors, and the director were able to make your own adaptation of this story.

**PCH:** In the performance we did not use much text. It was more like using the text to create images and scenes representative of moods and feelings in the text. This was not a linear progression from point A to point B, but engaging the spectator in the work of interpretation. This sounds confusing, but I can only express it this way. When I watch the video of our performance, I see



the *tableaux* or pictures of the energy that we tried to place on the stage. To do so, we used what I call “floating characters.”

**MFT:** You said that you did not play a particular character.

**PCH:** Correct. We tried to take care of particular lines. My friend Karol took care of the lines of Herod. I was more into the lines of Jokanaan; Dagmara took care of Salome. This does not mean that we were not able to engage with some other characters. That is why I call them floating characters. We are not bound by character or text. The puppets are helping us in this. They are very focused and truthful. They do not think, they are just there.

**MFT:** And yet the puppets remain constant and anchor you to the text.

**DS:** Yes! Exactly.

**MFT:** How do you feel about the performance, now that you have performed and watched your performance on video? I know you do not like the video because it cannot fully convey the energy of the performance.

**DS:** I am really happy about what I saw on the video. If I were not part of this performance, I know I would have wanted to see it. It has character, and that is a good sign.

**PCH:** You cannot stay neutral. It is a good sign that half of the audience is happy and the other half is going out, glad that it is over. We have had some spectators that have seen it more than ten times.

**MFT:** Now the puppet of Salome is quite large?

**PCH:** Yes, she is about one-half human size and is operated by four or five of us with ropes.

**MFT:** And, as in *Bunraku*, you are onstage with the puppet?

**PCH:** Yes, but we are in costume. As we operate her, we dance with her and she dances with us. The dance is never the same. It is a beautiful performance.

**DS:** Salome dances with each of us and we with her.

**MFT:** This theme of passion and redemption through death is also the subject of another of your recent works?

**DS:** Yes, we took it up in *Until Doomsday*, which premiered on March 6, 2004, in Stuttgart, Germany. This work is based on Wagner’s opera *The Flying Dutchman*, and it uses a large, hand-operated puppet/mask of the Dutchman and the technique of shadow puppets.

**MFT:** The opening sequence of this work features sailors on the deck of a ship, and the sail is operated like a puppet.

**DCH:** Yes, it takes over the stage for a while.

**MFT:** Tell us about the puppet for the Dutchman.

**PCH:** As you can see in the photograph, it is a mask and the puppet is operated by the actor interacting with it.

**MFT:** What I find fascinating is that the puppet is operated in full view of the audience and yet, as in *Bunraku*, it does not matter.

**DS:** Yes, the audience accepts it as another actor, with special qualities.

**MFT:** This is another example of the actor-puppet interaction which I find so fascinating about your work. I want to thank you both for sharing your art and your thoughts on the ever-evolving nature of acting, puppets, and theater.

**PCH:** Thank you.

**DS:** I thank you, Mark; this is my first visit to America, and I have enjoyed performing here. Δ

## Some comments, alas, mostly critical on *The Polish Review* in its fiftieth year of publication

### Bogdan Czaykowski

Anyone who has Polish interests at heart is likely to wish that non-Poles, and especially the influential individuals in countries that have significant clout on the world scene, have at least some knowledge and understanding of things Polish. If a Pole, one need not be rabidly nationalistic or passionately patriotic to have at heart the interest of forty million human beings who identify themselves as Poles. The United States is such a country par excellence, and its attitudes and policies have played a crucial role in recent Polish history, ever since President Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points proclaimed the right to independence for all nations.

The image of a country and its people is shaped in world opinion in a variety of ways. Among them, an important role is played by the quality and outreach of a country’s culture, especially with regard to its creative, scientific, and scholarly achievements. Moreover, if there are academic programs abroad devoted to the study of the country, as well as journals that disseminate knowledge and understanding of its history, contemporary affairs, and culture, these provide special opportunities to perform the ambassadorial

function effectively.

*The Polish Review* advertises itself as “the preeminent English-language quarterly devoted to Poland and Polish culture.” Published by the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences of America, the journal is celebrating fifty years of publication, and the Institute has just brought out a “generous sampling of important articles” titled *Fifty Years of The Polish Review, 1956-2006*. A review of that volume will, no doubt, appear in the pages of *Sarmatian Review* in due course. My purpose is more modest but perhaps of more immediate significance: I want to take a quick look at the two last years of the journal, with the view to initiating a discussion about the extent to which the journal performs the tasks it advertises for itself, and the direction it should take in the future.

If one looks at the table of contents of issue no. 1(2004) as an example, one is truly taken aback. The journal seldom publishes issues devoted to a single topic or author, and it has hardly ever devoted an issue to an important personality in Polish history, politics, or literature. The entire issue no.1(2004) is devoted to Jerzy Kosinski. He was undoubtedly an interesting character and a writer of some stylistic and narrative virtuosity, but he is not a writer of intellectual substance or high artistic merit, and his work hardly belongs to Polish literature. Devoting an entire issue to Kosinski when there is so much that needs to be said, written, publicized, and repeated to move the best of Polish literature into the consciousness of Western readers in even a marginal way is certainly difficult to understand.

Does the explanation lie in the fact that the editor-in-chief of the journal is a specialist in some aspects of the history of Polish-American relations, while the associate editor teaches in an English department at an American university? This may be too simple an explanation. A more likely reason is the fact that, reflecting its institutional affiliation and its immediate context and background, the journal is somewhat biased toward the marginal subject matter that skirts around issues crucial to Polish literature and culture. It seems as if the editors are afraid to touch on issues that might mobilize the interest of their potential readers. Such a bias makes for a gross narrowing of focus; a certain, if one may put it this way, diasporic provincialism. The appeal to the readership of the American academic, intellectual, and creative communities of the vast majority of topics discussed on the pages of *Polish Review* is clearly limited. Who among the Slavists, comparatists, or literary critics on and off campus, is interested in how the FBI investigated the unfortunate

Jan Lechoń, and on what grounds did it decide to consider this principal poetic voice a security risk? Or whether Harold Bloom will add the name of W. S. Kuniczak to the canon of outstanding twentieth-century world writers on the basis of articles published in *Polish Review*? And who cares what Canadian art critics thought about the paintings of Rafał Malczewski? What kind of reader would be interested in perusing past addresses of various presidents of the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences of America?

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***Articles published in Polish Review tend to lie at the margins of Polish discourse. . . . The journal skirts around issues crucial to Polish literature and culture.***

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Perhaps the editors should be reminded that although in 1974 the then-president of the Institute, Dr. John A. Gronouski, advocated “a shift in emphasis ‘inward to America’ by paying more attention to Polonia,” after 1989 such a limitation no longer needs to be a priority. This is not to say that no attention should be paid to the history of Polish Americans or to Polish American writers, but that as a scholarly journal published in English, *Polish Review* should try to appeal to a broader community of scholars in the United States irrespective of their origins, and that it should try to do so at a level that will interest and engage the best minds in the country. This also requires that the contributions that the journal publishes should reflect the issues, debates, and approaches of contemporary scholarly and intellectual discourse. While such discourses are often overtheorized, articles that seem to be completely innocent of modern theory only reinforce the impression that the *Polish Review* is doubly outside the mainstream of contemporary scholarship.

Let me mention two examples. The editors should be commended for publishing two articles on Witold Gombrowicz in a recent issue (*PR*, no. 1/2005), as Gombrowicz is certainly a writer whose intrinsic appeal goes well beyond his Polishness and the interest in him by scholars across the world has been considerable. Yet at least one of the two articles, the one by the associate editor of the journal, is seriously flawed—not because it attempts to be critical of one of Gombrowicz’s novels (arguably his finest, from an artistic point of view), but because the rationale of the critique is blatantly simplistic and reveals a poor understanding of Gombrowicz’s artistic strategies. The author takes Gombrowicz to task for choosing Nazi-occupied Poland as the setting of his “perhaps the most

fatal” work, on the grounds that Gombrowicz did not experience the Nazi occupation firsthand—without asking why this extremely careful and self-conscious writer did so. Because of that unjustified simplification, the critic tries but fails to make up his mind about whether *Pornografia* is, as he puts it a “failed novel or cynical masterpiece.” *Pornografia* is neither a failure nor is it cynical; rather, it brilliantly achieves what its author set out to achieve, and that is partly thanks to the setting and the action in the background of the plotting by its two main characters. To be fair, I should add that the second part of the article shows how perceptive a reader its author can be when he allows himself to interpret rather than offer generalizing comments.

My second example is an article by a scholar from Poland titled “Aleksander Wat’s ‘Leap from Poetry into Politics’” (*PR*, no. 4/2004). The article is certainly valuable, primarily for those who are interested in Wat as a poet and an East European intellectual confronted first with the ideological appeal of communism, and then undergoing the direct experience of communism. But it has two weaknesses—one stylistic, which could have been eliminated by a copyeditor; and the other conceptual. On the level of style, it is disruptive and irritating to the reader who does not know Polish, because it intersperses the English text with Polish phrases before giving their translations in brackets. Here is an example: “Wat’s story of communism is basically a reflection on *niestychanej pospolitości i okrucieństwie pospolitaków* [the unheard-of commonness and cruelty of boors].” The copyeditor surely could have corrected this manner of presenting things, as well as some blatant mistakes of the author’s, or translator’s, English. The conceptual weakness consists in the fact that the author uncritically presents Wat’s idiosyncratic views on the origin and character of communism without any attempt to provide an adequate conceptual framework within which Wat’s views could become more comprehensible. Both features of the article show a failure to take into consideration the fact that the article’s reader is not a Polish national, and not necessarily a Catholic or even a Christian believer, but is instead an American or British academic or student. One can excuse the author for not being aware of this in view of the fact that he is writing from within a Polish context, but it is difficult to excuse the editors for not having a clear conception of the journal’s readership, if it is to fulfill its function.

This article is one of only three or four texts written by scholars from Poland and published in the period

under discussion. One can understand that the editors may feel it their special responsibility to make use of work by scholars of all things Polish who live and teach in the United States. However, as indicated by the content of *Polish Review* over the years, the contributions of English-language scholars (both Polish Americans and others) regarding things Polish are sparse: as stated above, articles published in *Polish Review* tend to lie at the margins of Polish discourse. This surely impoverishes the content and quality of the journal. The richness, variety, and sophistication of Polish academic and intellectual life remains well hidden from the readers of *Polish Review*.

Although the purport of these brief remarks is largely critical, they are not offered in a dismissive or unfriendly spirit. They are a plea and a recommendation to the Institute, the editors, and the editorial board to rethink the issue of what kind of scholarly journal *Polish Review* should be; to make an effort to attract contributions from the pool of the best Polish and non-Polish academics working on Polish subjects at English-language institutions, both in the United States and in other countries such as Great Britain and Canada; and to solicit superior work from Poland itself. Above all, my remarks are a plea to develop a clearer conception of what can be of true interest to academics and intellectuals of English-speaking countries in the fields of Polish culture, contemporary Poland, and the Polish past. ▲

## BOOKS Books and Periodicals Received

*The Collapse of Globalism and the Reinvention of the World*, by John Ralston Saul. Woodstock & New York: The Overlook Press ([www.overlookpress.com](http://www.overlookpress.com)), 2005. 309 pages. Index, notes. ISBN 1-58567-629-2. Hardcover. \$19.77 on Amazon.com.

This book flies in the face of accepted political and economic wisdom. The author sketches out a history of globalization, an economic trend based on the belief in technocracy, consumerism, and technological determinism, as opposed to group identity shaped by centuries of common experience. He argues that “the big solutions of Globalization are just privatized versions of the big government solutions of the post-war period” (85). Saul sees similarities between globalization goals and practices, and those of communism and socialism. As was the case with socialist societies, in a globalized world a small group

of people controls financial empires whose activities are often detrimental to the common good. Saul points out that Walmart's yearly gross earnings, \$250 billion, exceed those of many small and medium-size states. He argues that far from marshaling "the end of history," globalism is about to end, and nation-states will reassert themselves. He also notes a connection between the belief in globalization and American neoconservatism.

The author is not an ideologue, and his critique is not a critique of the West, of capitalism, or of economic markets. Such critiques are often delivered by the educated and radicalized members of third world nations. He simply points out the weaknesses of globalism that, in his opinion, will lead to its demise. He does not say that the opposite of globalization, i.e., reregulation of the economy, reintroduction of state ownership of key industries, or a cessation of money trade (the hedge funds) will bring salvation. He simply resists the easy solutions proposed by free-market economists from Friedrich Hayek to Milton Friedman.

Saul offers a point of view and much information to those who wish to understand the trajectory of world economy and politics in the last half century. He issues an indirect warning to the central and east European states anxious to follow the mighty by embracing the ruthless privatization that has already ruined much of Poland's economy and that of other postcommunist states. He is well aware that agriculture "performs various non-commodity roles" (87) and that application of the rule "the bigger and more efficient should win, the smaller should die" is disastrous for countries with low average incomes.

Saul points out that "the confidence to be uncertain" is a strength rather than a weakness. He defends the right to dissent. He is against the herd of independent minds huddling together at the neocon think tanks that dominate American academia, politics, and economics. Without people like Saul we would descend into a dictatorship of fashion in all these areas. What Saul defends is the "think small" society, a Chestertonian community of responsible people who strive after quality of life instead of GDP or consumerism. The 43/2006 issue of *Europa* (a weekly supplement to *Dziennik*, 28 October 2006, <[www.dziennik.pl/Default.aspx?TabId=208&year=2006&nrx=134&art=294](http://www.dziennik.pl/Default.aspx?TabId=208&year=2006&nrx=134&art=294)>) carries Maciej Nowicki's interview with John Ralston Saul, as well as an article about Saul. (sb)

***How the Catholic Church Built Western Civilization*, by Thomas E. Woods, Jr.** Washington, DC: Regnery Publishers, 2005. 280 pages. Bibliography, index. ISBN 0-89526-038-7. Hardcover. \$29.95 on B&N.

The blunt title may put some fastidious readers off, but read on. Thousands of books that congealed into historical "truth" have falsely attributed society-building capabilities to everyone except the Catholic Church. The author cannot deal with this mountain of texts and he does not attempt to. This is not a polemical treatise; instead, it asserts. In its argument it relies mostly on secondary sources, and it is occasionally disappointing to find that a quote from Voltaire or St. Augustine comes from a book *about* them rather than from the original text. And yet, read on.

Woods presents a compendium of facts about the Middle Ages (they were not "dark"). He rightly credits that period of history with the invention of universities (a glorious achievement of the Catholic Church, one that eventually made modern learning-oriented societies possible); the cultivation of science (impossible without Catholic theology, the author argues—and forget the old canard about Galileo, he was not threatened with execution as university lore has it); the development of architecture and art; the development of international law; free market; and the tradition of helping those in need. Woods states that the dark ages were actually the ages when the Catholic Church was in the forefront of erecting civilizational structures destroyed by the conquerors of Rome in the fifth century. We are reminded of the fact—so well known to Poles, less so to native-born Americans—that destruction is swift, whereas rebuilding takes generations and proceeds in fits and starts. The Middle Ages were a long, laborious period of reintroducing literacy to the elites, and preserving and hand-copying in monasteries the manuscripts that survived the destruction of libraries by the barbarians. It would be worthwhile to direct a PhD dissertation comparing Carolingian Renaissance in the eight and ninth centuries to the Polish Renaissance in the sixteenth century.

The argument concerning science is based on the writings of Catholic philosophers about the nature of God. The author asserts that Christian theology sustained scientific enterprise (81). His argument resembles the lecture given by John Ratzinger (aka Pope Benedict XVI) at Regensburg University on 12 September 2006. The argument states that unlike the gods of many other religions, the Catholic God is not capricious or unpredictable; His very nature is to be rational, and therefore the material universe is rational as well, i.e., predictable. The word "rational" as used here has Hellenistic overtones. Like Ratzinger, Woods considers the marriage of Hellenism and Christianity



to be a New Testament-based development. What is invoked is the Aristotelian-Thomistic (and not the Enlightenment-based) rationality. Only within this *Weltanschauung* can scientists observe the regularities of the material world and perform their experiments. This *Weltanschauung* allows them to be confident that similar conditions and ingredients will produce similar results. If God and reality were inscrutable or unpredictable, they could not have provided the comfortable certainty that an experiment once performed can be performed again, with the same results. Newton's apples always fall down; they never go up. Woods claims that this predictability of the universe is a priceless gift that the scientific world received from the theology of the Catholic Church.

Regarding international law, Woods reminds us of the writings of the sixteenth-century Spanish monks who argued that all human beings, irrespective of their societal status, have certain rights because they are children of God. The monks argued that even non-Christian kings hostile to Christians had the right to rule their dominions. Their right was grounded in what the monks called natural law imprinted by God on all human hearts (or minds, if you prefer). Ergo, the mistreatment of American natives by the *conquistadores* was a grievous injustice and a sin. The only admissible war is the war of self-defense. This idea of the just war was a tremendous step forward in shaping international relations, Woods notes. It brought to bear the idea that unjust wars breach a moral order rather than being a justifiable reaction to an evil deed or to an insult to one's honor. The idea that a moral order transcends the laws of individual nations and does not allow vengeful acts or acts that merely defend one's wounded ego was formulated by Catholic intellectuals who happened to be monks. Eventually institutions such as the United Nations came about because the idea that peoples and rulers had the right to live undisturbed by others began to be taken for granted. This rule was honored more in the breach than in observance, of course; however, it cannot be denied that the world is better off with the idea of a moral order that transcends religions, political systems, and national and period differences. Without it, the Hobbesian and Darwinian idea that the world is basically a jungle where the stronger eat the weaker would be the alternative.

Since the book is not based on primary materials, most scholarly journals will probably not review it; yet it restates many fundamental truths that have been drowned in a sea of postmodern sophistry. It will be of

use to scholars and to educated Americans perplexed by the allure of intelligently formulated ideas that lack foundation or lead nowhere. (sb)

**Literatura polska w teatrze i telewizji w latach 1953–1993**, by Grażyna Pawlak. Warsaw: Instytut Badań Literackich of the Polish Academy of Sciences, 2004. 534 pages. Bibliography, indices of names and titles. ISBN 83-89348-35-7. Paper. In Polish.

In many ways, this is a definitive work on Polish TV theater during the communist period and beyond. It is organized chronologically (the 1950s, '60s, '70s, '80s, and early '90s), and it contains a complete and detailed list of Polish plays staged by state television during that time. The list is again chronological, beginning with Old Polish literature then moving on to Enlightenment literature, Romanticism, Positivism, the Young Poland, literature of the Second Republic (1918–1939), and post-1939 literature. The book is a treasure trove of dates and details; indeed, an encyclopedic work. Apart from bibliographical and historical details, the book provides interpretative essays about the ways the plays were selected, their popularity, the problems encountered in staging plays for the screen, and a host of other issues. A *sine qua non* for those seriously interested in the Polish theater and in twentieth-century TV theater in particular, this is obviously a labor of a lifetime and a genuine contribution to the literature.

**Nowa Okolica Poetów**, nos. 18–19 (2005). Published in Rzeszów, Poland, by the Stanisław Piętaś Society <rene54@op.pl>, or <romek@nop.net.pl>. ISSN 1506-3682. 311 pages + photographs. Paper. In Polish.

This periodical is published in southeastern Poland, a place not known for vigorous literary activity. It is impressive. It brings to mind the *tolstye zhurnaly* in nineteenth-century Russia where prose and poetry, literary criticism, and essay coexisted in mutual tolerance and supplied much reading pleasure to the squirearchy. In *Nowa Okolica* the abundance of poets, many of them well known, is astounding. Many are represented by a single poem, a device that keeps the reader on his/her toes. The essays eschew postmodern approaches without slipping into the primitivism of their Russian antecedents. They speak directly to twenty-first-century men and women about issues of crucial importance to human existence. We particularly liked the essay on Czesław Miłosz's poem "To" by Jarosław Klejnocki; Mark Pawlak's "Treblinka" (translated from German by Janusz Zalewski), a prose poem that is the best brief rendition of the Holocaust in memory; Karol Maliszewski's poetry; Rafał Rżany's

text and photographs; Stefan Miśkiewicz's short story about incest. . . too many to mention. This is truly a periodical for lovers of literature and the printed word. The writers who publish here and their readers will not be honored by their universities for participating in a prestigious enterprise; their reward is the reading itself. Rather than focusing on the study and dissections of texts in light of a theory for the purpose of advancing one's career, *Nowa Okolica* appeals to the desire to read and think that has motivated people for centuries. ***Dreams of Fires: 100 Polish Poems, 1970–1989. Translated and edited by Zbigniew Joachimiak, David Malcolm, and Georgia Scott. Introduction by David Weissbort.*** Salzburg: University of Salzburg (<http://www.poetrysalzburg.com>), 2004. 152 pages. ISBN 3-801993-15-0. Paper.

A very fine collection of poems which, alas, was misplaced by one of our reviewers.

## **Intelligence Cooperation between Poland and Great Britain during World War II The Report of the Anglo-Polish Historical Committee**

**Vol. 1. Edited by Tessa Stirling, Daria Nałęcz, and Tadeusz Dubicki. Foreword by Tony Blair and Marek Belka.** Illustrations, summary, index. London-Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell ([www.info@vmbooks.com](http://www.info@vmbooks.com)), 2005. ISBN 0-85303-656-X. xxiii + 586 pages. Hardcover. £55.00 in Britain, \$75.00 in the United States.

### **Phyllis L. Soybel**

The contributions of intelligence to military victory were formerly seen as secondary at best. Indeed, until recently, scholars saw studies of intelligence activities as popular history and unworthy of serious consideration by academics. Judging by the amount of work that has been produced in the last thirty years, it is clear that this prejudice is steadily eroding. Serious scholarship has emerged to showcase the impact that intelligence activities have had on internal and diplomatic areas.

In the last ten to twenty years, much of this scholarship has examined the role intelligence has played in diplomatic and military relationships. The

trend is to examine cooperative efforts between countries. While the Anglo-American relationship has received the bulk of the scholarship, the cooperative efforts of others have seen less attention. The book under review strives to fill in one of the blanks concerning Great Britain and her allies, in this case Poland, and their intelligence relationship in the Second World War.

It is clear that from the outset this was a daunting task for the committee of editors. There was a tremendous amount of information gleaned from both British and American archival sources, in particular the Public Records Office (PRO) and the National Archives in the U.S. (NARA), as well as outside Polish sources. What was lacking were the documents from the Polish intelligence groups that operated during the war. It became evident that the entire collection was destroyed at the end of the war after being turned over to British intelligence officials. As a result, there are a number of questions raised that, in all likelihood, would have been answered by those now-missing documents. However, what remains still creates a picture of Polish contributions to the war effort that until now have only been credited in the area of code decryption.

This first volume is divided into an introductory section that discusses the methodology of the committee's efforts; a historical section; and then six parts that examine the information gleaned from American, British, and Polish sources. Of these sections, part IV is probably the most difficult to read through, although it offers the greatest amount of information. This section aimed at covering every intelligence station or cell operated by the Poles. The goal was to showcase the continued war effort of the Second Bureau, or the Polish Intelligence organization, making it clear that while Poland may have been under occupation, its spirit was not. Although fascinating in many respects, there are too many short, one-to-four-page chapters. Many of the various countries that these chapters focus on did not require such separate treatment. There were, however, some interesting elements in the chapters, such as the British SIS's habit of handing reports over to Americans, but not identifying them as Polish-generated (354). I would also take issue with the statement by Jan Stanisław Ciechanowski regarding Polish activity in the United States and their treatment by the same. He writes, "The ultimate Allied decision was to hand over Poland to the Soviet Sphere of Influence" (361). While history cannot deny that Poland was lost to the Soviet sphere, it can be argued that there was little the United States

could have done shy of going to war with the Russians, given the military situation in late 1944–early 1945. This is a minor quibble that does not detract from the massive amount of research presented in this book.

The greatest significance of this volume is contained in its last two parts. Part V examines the intelligence activities of the Home Army (originally named *Związek Walki Zbrojnej*, the Union of the Armed Struggle). This work gives a more complete picture of Polish activities conducted literally under the noses of the Nazi authorities during the German occupation of Poland. Too often scholars only consider the partisan activities of civilians, the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in 1943, or the larger uprising in Warsaw in 1944. The fifth part of this volume details the amount of work done by Home Army operatives, and the incredible amount of information these men and women supplied to the Allied side. In his chapter “Home Army Intelligence Activity,” Andrzej Chmielarz points out that “the most important achievement of Home Army Intelligence was the creation of very modern working methods,” which allowed it to supply “military, economic and industrial reports, not only from Poland, but from the immediate rear of the eastern Front and indeed from German territory” (488). Among this important intelligence was information about V-1 and V-2 production at Peenemunde, German troop strength and movements both prior to and during Barbarossa, and information on economic matters and morale issues.

Part VI contains summaries of the information thus presented. The messages were succinct and informative, but still included important analyses. Daria Nałęcz, the Director General of the Polish State Archives, was too modest when she stated that the Polish contribution to Enigma was the greatest part of their effort (552). Judging from the information contained in this book, it is clear that much more credit is owed to the Poles than has customarily been given. Ms. Nałęcz points out in her summary that of 80,000 reports generated by the Polish stations, over 85 percent were deemed of very high or high quality (557).

As a reviewer, I am left with a number of questions, mostly directed to the Polish authors rather than having to do with a criticism of the work. The case of Colonel Jerzy Iwanov-Szajnowiej is one of those fascinating stories that seems to have been left unfinished. I found myself wondering why he was left to dangle by Secret Intelligence Service (SIS, aka MI-6, or Military Intelligence) and forced to try and escape on his own. Gill Bennett’s summary of the Anglo-Polish cooperative effort in the Middle East makes no mention

of this man who was apparently an important figure in Polish intelligence. I agree with the assessment of Jan Ciechanowski that this case “still calls for many more explanations” (375–376). In addition, given the relative efficiency of the British Intelligence groups, I find it curious that important documents relating to the Polish connection would be destroyed without some documentation as to what they contained. One wonders if some secrets are still being held; at the very least, a more detailed answer is owed to the men and women who risked their lives to work for the Allied intelligence.

Although slow in the middle, this work is a critical contribution, and not only to Anglo-Polish relations. More importantly, it is an essential addition to our knowledge of the Polish effort at home and abroad during the entire course of the Second World War. As an addition to the body of intelligence history, it is important to our understanding of how a government in exile created what appears to be an exemplary intelligence structure, albeit with British funding. This is an essential work for any research library, or for any individual examining intelligence cooperation between nations. ▲

## **Those Who Trespass Against Us One Woman’s War Against the Nazis**

**By Karolina Lanckorońska. Translated by Noel Clark. Preface by Norman Davies, Introduction by Lech Kalinowski and Elżbieta Orman.** London: Pimlico (Division of Random House), 2005. xxix + 339 pages. Photographs, index. ISBN 1-8141-3417-2. Hardcover: £14.99 in U.K. Paper: \$19.49 on Amazon.com.

### **Lora Wildenthal**

**A**s Norman Davies points out in his preface, this memoir offers an unusual perspective on the Nazi war in East Central Europe. First published in Polish in 2001, Karolina Lanckorońska (1898–2002) actually wrote the text in 1945–1946, much closer to the events in question. Lanckorońska’s social position and political commitments repeatedly placed her in situations that were as useful for observing Nazi rule as they were dangerous. Before the Second World War

she was a professor of art history at the Jan Kazimierz University in Lwów/Lviv, the first woman to hold such a post in Poland. She also perceived the war through the eyes of a traditional aristocratic woman, noting that it permitted her to take up again her “great, long-standing interest in nursing, which in my youth had once almost blossomed into a professional pursuit” (247). A countess, she had strong family and historical ties to her home region of eastern Poland (now Ukraine). After Poland’s defeat in 1939 she joined the underground resistance, becoming a member of the Union for Armed Struggle (*Związek Walki Zbrojnej*, ZWZ). In May 1940, fearing deportation or execution at the hands of the Soviets, she fled Lwów, which lay in Soviet-occupied Poland, for German-occupied Poland. Then in 1941, all of Poland was occupied by Germany. In the summer of 1941, Lanckorońska began “above-ground” work for the Main Council for Relief (*Rada Główna Opiekuńcza*, RGO). In this capacity she was responsible for supplying food and medical aid for political prisoners and criminals alike in German-occupied Poland. In the last weeks of 1941 as she traveled for that job to Volhynia Province, east of the General Government, she had her first glimpse of the genocide of the Jews. In May 1942 she herself became a prisoner of the Germans, first in Stanisławów, then from January 1943 in Ravensbrück, the women’s concentration camp north of Berlin. Lanckorońska’s ties through her art history work to influential persons in Italy, and intervention by the Italian royal family and her friend the historian Carl Burckhardt, head of the International Red Cross, shaped her story in an unusual way, sustaining and finally saving her in April 1945.

Lanckorońska had a specific aim in publishing this memoir: to record *Schützstaffel Hauptsturmführer* Hans Krüger’s murder of twenty-five Jan Kazimierz University professors. Krüger’s intemperate indiscretion in telling her of his deed both helped and endangered her between 1942 and 1944, as factions within the SS argued about how to handle him and how to respond to her knowledge of Krüger’s acts. She insisted on serving as a witness in his 1967 trial, but he was never formally charged with those murders since he was already sentenced to multiple life sentences for the murders of over 10,000 Jews.

Lanckorońska had a wider aim as well: to set down a memorial to the courage of Poles in resisting invasion and maintaining their integrity under occupation, in prisons and in concentration camps. In her clear and sometimes truly poetic prose, she gently analyzes

human frailty as well as endurance. This gift for sketching out how ruthless power imposed from above affects relationships among those it subordinates makes her descriptions of occupation and especially of Ravensbrück well worth reading. She herself served as room-leader for a group of prisoners in Ravensbrück, and claims that, as with other positions she held, she sought to use her privileges to benefit the more helpless. The book’s title refers to that part of the Lord’s Prayer that offers forgiveness to “those who trespass against us”; as a serious Christian, she is unsettled by her inability to forgive the Nazis for what she has seen (166).

Lanckorońska offers the American reader an unusual perspective in that, as a Pole, she faced two aggressors in 1939. She encountered the Soviet aggressor first, as eastern Poland was annexed by the Soviet Union. Her descriptions of the Soviet occupation, with its cruel deportations to the Soviet interior, are shocking and powerful. Her account of the Soviets’ privileging of Ukrainians over the formerly dominant Poles is informative, once again displaying her talent at showing the effect of domination on those under it. At that time she and her colleagues believed that a German occupation could not possibly be as bad as the Soviet one. Although they hoped for Germany’s ultimate defeat, they wished that Germany would first crush the Soviet Union (66), and they rejoiced when Operation Barbarossa reunited Poland under German rule (75–76).

At the end of the war, her Polish standpoint highlights another painful development: her sense of betrayal by the Western Allies. Lanckorońska experienced the end of the war in Italy, where she painfully realized that Allied victory meant her exile.

Lanckorońska’s memoir is of interest as a document of nationalism as well. In the introduction by Lech Kalinowski and Elżbieta Orman, she is quoted as answering the question “Polishness—what does it mean?” as follows: “Polishness is for me the awareness of belonging to the Polish nation. I consider we should do everything possible to provide concrete proof of this awareness, though I do not understand the need to analyse it” (xxii). This is a perfect expression of nationalism from the inside—a force that is powerful yet inexplicable to its advocates. The alchemy of a nationalism that Lanckorońska does not want to analyze can make complicated things simple: Poles who are Communists or Nazi collaborators are not genuinely Poles; Ukrainians are deeply unattractive people, but for an exception who proves the rule (157); and Jews



are relatively distant figures to be pitied (99). It adds to the interest of this text that she is describing a critical moment in the forging of Polish national identity. As she herself says, indirectly drawing attention to the crippling political divisions among interwar Poles, “The persecution of *all* Poles aroused in our society something that nobody who experienced that occupation will ever forget—the consciousness of complete unity among the Polish people. . . there was a period of the most intense happiness, when nobody bothered about anybody else’s class origins or party affiliation” (90). In her RGO days, she fostered a vision of overcoming social divisions by offering food to Poles, Jews, and Ukrainians together, and ultimately succeeded in that provision of aid (99). Yet it is also clear that her vision of Poland is deeply Christian (e.g., 90), and does not leave much space for Ukrainians. The memoir is a rich source for examining the nature of nationalist claims.

After her release in April 1945, Lanckorońska joined the Polish Forces still fighting in Italy. She resided in Rome after the war, where she created the Polish Historical Institute to support Polish culture outside of the auspices of state socialist Poland. Her memoir is a powerful document of an unusual and courageous woman. ▲

## The Look at Architecture

**By Witold Rybczynski.** New York: Oxford University Press/The New York Public Library, 2001. 130 pages. Illustrations, index. ISBN 019-513443-5. Hardcover. \$25.00 on Amazon.com.

### George Gasyna

“Commoditie,” “Firmeness,” and “Delight”—with these three terms, borrowed from the seventeenth-century English architect Sir Henry Wotton, Witold Rybczynski sets up the shorthand for this remarkable tour of the achievements and follies of (mainly) modern architecture. Rybczynski, professor of urban studies and real estate at the University of Pennsylvania and one of America’s foremost architectural critics, navigates between these three ideas (which could be rephrased as utilitarian value, structural soundness, and aesthetic integrity) with an intimate, almost elemental ease. Little wonder: his previous studies have journeyed over a vast terrain of subjects architectural, from the domestic *Home: A Short History of an Idea* (1986) through the

utilitarian *One Good Turn: A Natural History of the Screwdriver and the Screw* (2000) to the theoretically polemical *City Life: Urban Expectations in a New World* (1995). In this short work, originally a series of public lectures given at the New York Public Library in late 1990s, Rybczynski restricts his focus to a discussion of architecture as style. Style is set in a dichotomy with “vocabulary,” the latter term embodying the typical establishment view that Rybczynski demolishes with panache: “[I]f architectural style is a language—an analogy that is deeply flawed—it is closer to slang than to grammatical prose. Architectural styles are mutable, unregulated, improvised. Architects break the rules, and invent new ones” (86). In Rybczynski’s use, style must be understood as something greater than a mere metaphor for “convention” or “fashion.” It signifies a set of prescriptions and a mode of living. The thesis to be tested is that despite much theoretical posturing and jargon to the contrary, style—even to the point of flamboyance—is what modern architecture is really all about, with decidedly mixed results.

The main idea guiding his discussion is this: in its negation of the functional in favor of the formal, modernism has rendered a great disservice both to the idea/ideal of the city as a social space and to the notion of architecture as synecdoche of an organic structure. Therefore, modernist architecture is low on *Commoditie*. Enraptured by formal possibility, it works against life. And, insofar as the medium really *was* the message for the modernist masters and, perhaps worse, for their breathless acolytes, the demonstration of this thesis on more modest (read: university) budgets frequently meant, as Rybczynski points out, that the resulting buildings would be compromised from the start by poor construction materials and other shortcuts taken along the way. Thus, more often than not, they also lack *Firmeness*. In its giddy tendentiousness, modern campus architecture is rife with such structures. Rybczynski adduces the Richards Laboratory at Penn as a case of the kind of blatant disregard for the basics of living and working spaces that makes for a failed building, in this case a laboratory space in which excessive fenestration and other formal considerations have defeated the building’s purpose as a place to conduct experiments. My own favorite example of a similar failure is the thirty-year-old brutalist-cubist-quasifigural Robarts Library at the University of Toronto where as a graduate student I once occupied an airless and essentially windowless cubicle.

Postmodernism, much maligned elsewhere, returns in architecture like the proverbial repressed. In their selective, playful, and often parodic engagements with history and even with the discarded forms of earlier modernisms, postmodern architects—Rybczynski cites such practitioners as Frank O. Gehry and Alan Greenberg—have placed a much-needed priority to *Delight* in their work (e.g., the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum, aka “the artichoke” [116-8]) while respecting the premise that buildings are meant to be lived in; that is, they are intended to *serve* not only the spatial but also the emotional and even spiritual needs of those who make daily use of them. Here Rybczynski’s discussion of Vari Hall, the mid-1990s York University Student Center in Toronto (33–35), a solid, multifunctional building in which the volumes achieved and even the materials selected seem to encourage casual “lounging” comportment is particularly germane. The point is clear: works of postmodern architecture frequently incorporate *Commoditie, Firmeness and Delight* as a structural imperative, even in settings that ostensibly call for budgetary realism or functionalist restraint. So it is not the people but rather the buildings that “must do the accommodating,” Rybczynski suggests, concluding that the most successful contemporary ones manage precisely that (35).

If this short tome is viewed as a metatextual demonstration of the thesis of the primacy of style, its lucidity and readability are the ultimate proof of its success. Insofar as it engages the non-specialist with its precise and incisive language and well-chosen examples, this work is a notable achievement. Moreover, the talk about style has not compromised substance here, even taking into account the fact that a series of oral lectures originally supported by a significant visual component tend to project a directness of expression that some might mistakenly attribute to intellectual paucity or a lack of analytic depth. The author’s main argument is free from repetition and rhetorical adornment, and thus liberated Rybczynski is able to take us along at a rapid pace as he tests a series of “stylistic” prepositions. The journey takes the reader from one particularly monument-rich street in midtown Manhattan to his beloved University of Pennsylvania campus (the incongruity of the Richards Lab aside), to the sites and *cités* of French modernist interventions such as Le Corbusier’s chapel at Ronchamps and *Cité radieuse* villas. Private homes and their celebrated creators Robert Venturi, Richard Morris Hunt, and Enrique Norten feature prominently,

substantiating the impression that, his discursive engagement with avantgardist gestures and lexicons notwithstanding, Rybczynski is *au fond* mainly interested in architecture as a domestic *and* domesticated space. In this context, the exegesis of architectural style as a direct correlative of broader cultural fashions, along with his potent reading of “the intimate relationship of dress and décor” are of particular value to readers who are specialists in urban studies, as well as to the historians of ideas (17–35).

In its elegant progression from style to fashion to commodity to organic space for living, the book is fascinating. After reading it you will see the city and perhaps the home in which you live from a greatly enriched perspective. For this reason alone, Rybczynski’s slim volume is a delight. Δ

## Amber Necklace of Gdansk

**By Linda Nemeć Foster.** Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001. 72 pages. Paper. \$16.95 on Amazon.com.

### John Guzłowski

**L**et me say this plainly. Every book written by a Polish American poet is an essential book. The primary reason is that there are not very many Polish American poets. Dr. Janusz Zalewski of Florida Gulf Coast University is currently working on a project to identify and translate into Polish the works of Polish American poets; he has identified about fifty poets whose works he has translated and written about for the Polish journal *Nowa Okolica Poetów*. Given the nearly ten million Poles and descendants of Poles who have cast their fortunes upon this shore and now reside here, not that many poets have arisen from this number. The second important reason has to do with the nature of poetry. One of poetry’s elemental functions is to discover and preserve national and/or group identity. If you want to find out about the Greeks, you read Homer. If you want to find out about the English, you read Chaucer or Shakespeare. If you want to find out about the Americans, you read Whitman or William Carlos Williams. If you want to find out about the Poles, you read Miłosz or Szyborska.

And if you want to find out about Polish Americans? I would suggest that you read Linda Nemeć Foster’s *Amber Necklace of Gdansk*. This book is a specimen

of the best kind of poetry written by Polish Americans poets like Phil Boiarski, John Minczeski, or Gary Gildner. Like those fine poets, Foster turns her skills to the task of understanding Polish American identity.

At the heart of *Amber Necklace of Gdansk* is Foster's desire to discover what it means to be Polish American at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and the difficulties in this discovery. From the book's first moving poem "The Awkward Young Girl Approaching You," Foster signals her intent. She wants to discuss what brought Polish Americans here to America, what we have gained from this journey, what we have lost, and why we need to reconnect with what we left behind in Poland. In this poem she describes the dispossessed, the displaced, the Poles who came to America seeking safety or security but in the process lost something essential; the nature of this essential element is hinted at toward the end of this first poem. There Foster describes a momentary encounter with a girl in Katowice, "the grayest city/in the grayest part of the world," that opens up into a moment of epiphany:

And the way her golden feet attempt  
to walk on Katowice's gray and broken  
cobblestones stirs a memory that only  
your dead grandfather could understand:  
wildflowers overrunning the garden, cicadas  
drowning out the factory's nightly lament.  
So much grace in her graceless yellow feet.  
So much of the miraculous in her thin silhouette.

What Ms. Foster momentarily senses, I believe, is her own essential Polishness. She becomes aware in that moment that her American self is built on a self that is Polish to the core. But this awareness is, of course, problematic. The strength and power of her book is the way Foster analyzes this problematic nature of her identity as a Polish American.

She asks all of the questions that the best Polish American writers and thinkers have asked: What did the immigrants lose and gain by coming here, what was Poland like then, what is Poland like now, what is America like, can we understand our immigrant forebears' motives for coming to America, can we understand what they left behind, can we ever find the Poland they left behind, is the Poland of the present even remotely like the Poland they left behind? And finally, she addresses the hardest question: Can any of these questions be answered?

Ms. Foster is relentless in pursuing her answers. She is like an archeologist with a deep understanding of psychology and cultural studies, searching for the

essential bones of her Polish American identity. Like a scientist, she brings tremendous coherence to the search. Her book has an internal order that makes it seem almost like a memoir or a diary. Each of the book's four sections moves us closer to her conclusions with directness and urgency: the first section deals with her growing up in an immigrant neighborhood in the United States, the second describes her journey to Poland, the third talks of what she found in Poland, and the last centers on how her quest effected her.

What she comes to discover, as all Polish Americans who have made the journey back to Poland discover, is how little and yet how much she is connected with her Polish past. I think this is the final lesson of the poem in the collection that moved me the most, "After the War: Purple Flowers Spilling from the Window":

In Poland, the land takes over everything,  
unrelenting in its mission to regenerate  
after the war. Fields overrun sidewalks,  
train stations, street corners. Purple  
flowers spill from the open windows of houses.  
Queen Anne's lace reigns supreme in parking  
lots. Even the dead in cemeteries are affected:  
no neatly trimmed grass here but waves upon  
waves of wild flowers. Blue lupine, saffron,  
black-eyed Susan, chicory. The dead love  
this wildness growing above their bones.  
"Tak, Tak," they whisper in the hush of the wind  
that scatters the soft gossamer of dandelions  
into the waiting air. Yes, yes, take over this place  
that was once lost. Cover it in so much color  
even the clouds, who've seen everything,  
won't know where death lived for so long."

And who can argue with the dead? Not their  
thin ghosts or unborn progeny. Not their  
exile who returns after the war, stands  
bewildered at their graves, hip-deep

in blue-eyed grass, trying to decipher names  
that already belong to the earth.

Foster seems to be saying that, as Polish Americans, we stand eternally on this side of the border between America and Poland, and we can only cross it in our dreams. This may not be enough, but it is all we can hope for. ▲



SR Translation of Documents Series

## The Pogrom of Catholics in Suwałki

### July 12–25, 1945

Jerzy Szejnoch

In July 1945, in the Suwałki-Sejny region of northeastern Poland (the voivodship of Białystok), tens of thousands of Soviet NKVD and Red Army soldiers took part in the hunt for members of the Polish Resistance during the Second World War (*Armia Krajowa*). The operation had gigantic proportions, considering the territory comprised only two counties. The action took place between July 12–19, 1945, with a mop-up ending July 25, in Suwałki and Augustów counties and in parts of Sokółka county. The victims came from some 100 villages and settlements between Sokółka in the south and Wizajny in the north. The number of victims, whose burial site remains unknown, is between 600–800 people. The few “lucky” ones were shot while attempting to escape, and were buried by their relatives and friends. The figure of 600–800 pertains to those whose fate remains a mystery as of July 2005. Where and how they were killed, and where their remains were deposited, is a secret known only to those who issued and executed these terrible orders. The victims included thirty women. The youngest victims were Stanisław Cieślakowski from the village of Białogór and Jan Kulbacki from Płaska. Both were sixteen. The oldest, Jan Markiewicz from Bierzalowice, was 69.

Sources indicate that 45,000 Soviet operatives took part in the operation; part of that force was located on the other side of the Lithuanian border. The Soviet-controlled Polish police (MO and UBP) were also implicated, as were two detachments of the First Prague infantry regiment of the Polish Army, formed under Soviet auspices on Soviet territory and commanded by the Soviet-appointed generals. In his July 1945 report detailing the campaign to “liquidate” the anti-Soviet underground in the Białystok voivodship, the military commander of the Lublin region said the following: “Between 15–25 July 1945, 120 operatives from the First Prague infantry regiment, together with the Belarusan Soviet Front in the Suwałki Region,

liquidated numerous bandit groups. The total of those liquidated or imprisoned was 1,600 persons.” The Internet page maintained by veterans of that army presents matters in a more subdued way: “After the Second World War ended, the division was directed to the Białystok voivodship to stabilize social and economic life there.” [*This Internet page could not be found as of October 2006*. Ed.]

The consecutive stages of this affair were prepared with criminal perfection. Places for detainees were reserved ahead of time in houses, barns, or sheds. Nothing is known about the ways in which interrogations were conducted because no one survived. Apparently all the accused confessed to being guilty of anti-Soviet activity. After Poland regained independence in 1989, those who had lived nearby and survived testified that they heard men howling from pain during interrogations. In the village of Giby, where a large number of people were kept in a livestock shed, those not arrested testified that when the operation was over, they found a bathroom tub filled with bloody water in the house in which prisoners were interrogated. This was an indication that prisoners were revived after torture. The walls of the shed showed traces of inscriptions that had been wiped off. Villager Józef Kucharzewski, who had not been arrested and was sixteen when these events were taking place, testified that for a number of years he kept needles used by torturers for driving under the prisoners’ nails. Apparently forgotten by the torturers, they were left in the shed.

For years, those not arrested lived in indescribable fear. How thoroughly they were intimidated is indicated by the fact that they could not tell which direction the trucks carrying the prisoners drove during the night. The villagers mention all possible directions, yet they lived no further than 40–100 feet from the sheds or barns in which prisoners were kept, and from which they were eventually taken to an unknown location.

The perfection with which this pogrom was executed is astounding. The Nazis also perfected the ways to kill fellow humans, but they have hardly ever managed to kill large numbers in such a way that no witnesses slipped away. For instance, of a hundred Polish Catholics dragged out of their homes in the Wawer suburb of Warsaw in 1939, one escaped and seven survived by pretending to be dead under the pile of corpses. Of the six to eight hundred prisoners from the Suwałki hunt, no one survived. Not one person escaped and no one provided any information. These simple



people did not carry pens or writing paper with them, and they must have been stunned by what happened.

The “hunt” was a taboo subject for many years. One did not talk about it when children were present: they could blab something at school. At the same time, the victims’ families were branded as the families of bandits. The son of one of the victims applied for admission to a university; first person who read his application returned it to him with the advice to remove the personal information. Only after 1956 did some victims’ families begin to make inquiries, writing letters to the Polish Red Cross and to International Red Cross. Others wrote on their voting ballots: “Tell us where our families are buried.”

In 1987, an inhabitant of one of those villages found human remains near the road between Giby and Rygol. The story gained publicity and foreign correspondents arrived. The remains were exhumed, but turned out to be those of the Wehrmacht soldiers. The exhumation prompted the local inhabitants to form a Citizens’ Committee for Search of the Suwałki Region Inhabitants Who Disappeared in July 1945. The Committee collected oral histories and testimonials of relatives and friends of those who disappeared. Poland was still militarily occupied by the Soviet Union at this time, and shortly after the Committee had been formed its members began to experience harassment and attempts at intimidation from the local political police (*Służba Bezpieczeństwa*). In 1989 the second exhumation took place. It confirmed the conclusions of the first one: these were Wehrmacht soldiers and not local villagers. The fate of the Suwałki-area Catholics remains unknown. Rumors have it that their remains were interred in present-day Belarus, in the military fort of Naumowicze near Grodno.

In January 1994 the Polish Embassy in Moscow addressed the Procurator General of the Russian Federation, asking for documents and an inquiry. One year later, an answer came. It contained the following:

*It has been ascertained that due to frequent attacks against soldiers of the Red Army stationed on Polish territory, the General Staff of the Soviet Armed Forces, according to the instructions of the Chief of Staff, worked out a plan to conduct a military operation in the forests of the Augustów region . . . in order to expose and neutralize the anti-Soviet formations of Armia Krajowa. During the operation conducted by the Army of the Third Belarusan Front between 12–19 July 1945, seven thousand Polish and Lithuanian citizens were detained, and a large amount of arms was confiscated. The majority of those detained were*

*let free after showing proper documents. 592 citizens were arrested by the “Smersh” organs of the Belarusan Front. 575 of them were accused of anti-Soviet activity and had to stand trial. The analysis of these matters shows that those arrested were local inhabitants and that they were detained by Soviet forces during the cleansing operation in the forested areas. . . . The above-mentioned Polish citizens were not accused of anything, but those who were guilty underwent trials, and the subsequent fate of those arrested is not known. Signed by the deputy procurator general of the Russian Armed Forces, lieutenant general V. A. Smirnov.*

Historians from the Białystok branch of the Institute of National Memory, who began their own investigation of these matters, are convinced that information about the location of the victims’ remains can only be found in the Moscow or Minsk archives.

Every year people come to Suwałki and Sejny to honor the memory of those who perished. Among them are representatives of the county offices in Sejny. There streets still bear names such as “22 July Street” [*the date when the Soviet-imposed government issued its manifesto*, Ed.]; Świerczewski Street [*the name of the Soviet general of Polish background who came to Poland with the Soviet army to serve his Moscow masters*, Ed.]; Nowotki and Marchlewskiego Street. The same Marchlewski who waited so impatiently for the defeat of Poles in the Polish-Soviet war in 1920, and the same Nowotko who, before leaving the Soviet Union for Poland as one of the designated rulers of postwar Poland, wrote: “We started the engines and, to say goodbye to our Soviet homeland, we sang the song “*Sziroka strana moia radnaia*” [*one of the most popular Soviet songs*, Ed.].

In the village of Budwiec, hidden deep in the forests of Suwałki county, the wooden barn that witnessed one instance of these arrests is still standing. In 2005 it towered over the miserably poor village at the side of a dirt road. Sixty years ago in July 1945, villager Bolesław Radziewicz was fixing the roof of his barn. The Second World War ended May 9, 1945, and farm repairs were in order. Suddenly a line of soldiers with kalashnikovs at the ready emerged from the forest. They ordered Mr. Radziewicz down and took him with them. “Perhaps, if he did not climb that roof, he would be with us here today,” his brother and sister reflected during an interview. They had witnessed the event from their nearby house. “He was clearly visible from the forest,” they said calmly. Their bitterness and despair

had worn out during years of hardship. Neither then nor now do they know any conceivable reason for their brother's arrest. All they wish is to know where he has been buried. From the neighboring village of Żelwa, village mayor Stanisław Żabicki and forester Józef Cymon were seized.

When the Red Army marched through Poland in 1944–45, there were many reports that the NKVD came in with lists of people to arrest. The arrests and “people hunts” had already started in spring 1945, before the war officially ended.

The orders from the top routinely demanded that the leading and visibly patriotic members of rural society be destroyed. On the level of NKVD operatives in the Suwałki-Sejny region, the apparently random genocide most likely arose out of the necessity to hurry up, the notorious sloppiness of Soviet record keeping, and laziness mixed with fear. It was easier to arrest a man plowing his field than one who fled to the forest and became a partisan. What mattered was numbers: a certain number of people had to be arrested in a given locality, and the NKVD operatives religiously followed the orders regarding the prescribed number of victims. The Soviets disseminated disinformation in order to justify the arrests. A Red Army captain was allegedly killed in a village in Sejny county, and the hunt was a form of revenge. The local people claim that the captain died in a fight over a girl, and they dismiss the fabricated story.

The people in the Suwałki region remember that summer of many years ago, and those who perished during it. In Giby, the village situated at the center of this tragedy, a monument to the victims was recently erected. On a hillside hundreds of large stones were laid, symbolizing the victims of the Soviet-engineered pogrom. On the hilltop stands a large cross made of a single tree trunk. The inscription below reads: “To the inhabitants of these lands, victims of the criminal Stalinist genocide in summer 1945, martyrs for Faith and country—from the Polish people.” ▲

This article, published in *Rzeczpospolita* on 9 July 2005, is based on the author's interviews with inhabitants of the region and on materials gathered by the Institute of National Memory, Białystok branch (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej w Białymstoku, ul. Warsztatowa 1A, 15-637 Białystok, Poland).

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Jerzy Kułak, *The Białystok region, 1944–1945* (Warsaw: Institute of Political Studies, 1998). Summary available at [www.sipa.columbia.edu/ece/kulak1.pdf](http://www.sipa.columbia.edu/ece/kulak1.pdf).

Some primary documents are posted at <http://felsztyn.tripod.com/id21.html>.

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Rare and Forgotten Books—SR Partial Reprint Series

## Dostoevsky on the Irtysh, or the Underbelly of Empire [1859]

**Simon Tokarzewski**

It was still dark. On the grey sky, opal-colored clouds created faint and flowerlike smudges. Little by little, the clouds revealed a hot summer day. The waters of the Irtysh River appeared pink. The rays of light fell onto the endless panorama of the Kyrgyz steppe. The day was going to be sunny and hot.

A breeze blew and joyful murmurs cascaded down the river and the steppe, all the way to the remote nomad village whose herd of horses was grazing nearby. The rocky embankment shone like gold in the morning sun.

Along this embankment marched a group of prisoners from a nearby labor colony. The prison drum woke them up long before dawn, yet no one complained because hot summer nights in the windowless barracks were torture, and even the hardest work in the forest was preferable to the stifling prison air.

Today we were supposed to cut down trees, build walkways, and clear up vegetation in the virgin forest. All this was needed because the governor of western Siberia, Piotr Dimitrievich Gorchakov, wished to make it easier for his guests to find their way in the forest during the hunting party planned for the visiting dignitaries from Petersburg.

With shovels on our shoulders and axes in our hands we marched gaily and steadily.

All of us were merry. Even the guards, usually gloomy and quick to offend, did not swear and did not urge us to go faster, did not threaten us with “a bullet in the head” for the possible attempted escape, and did not check our leg irons to see whether they were tight enough, something they usually did when prisoners were working outside the prison and far away from the fortress of Omsk. The charm of the landscape and

fine air made them temporarily kind, trustful, understanding, and relatively content. In fact, the chief guard ordered the drummer to announce a break long before twelve noon. When this happened, the entire detachment got out of the forest and sat down in small groups.

We Poles sat together, trying as always not to be noticed or attract the other prisoners' attention. In spite of good weather, the prisoners carried inside them tons of hostility, especially toward the "politicals," which all of us Poles were.

Fyodor Dostoevsky and Sergei Durov [1] squatted down by us.

Dostoevsky said in French: "Today for the first time since my arrival in the Omsk prison I can truly breathe. I feel good. I feel as if I were not a prisoner forced to do hard labor, but a free man who chose to take an outing in the country."

Ordinary criminals hated the "politicians" (their word for political prisoners) and mocked us for the fact that we did not commit any crimes but got to jail for God-knows-what, and in addition we were of noble status. When they heard us speak Polish or French, they became especially furious.

However, today Dostoevsky's French was graciously forgiven. Only Sushilov[2] spat in our direction. Looking at us with contempt, he half-screamed and half-sang a peasant song, "Peter strutted in Moscow/ But now he has to weave rope." [3] His singing was followed by his comrades' contemptuous laughter.

Soon the attention was diverted to the *kalashnitsy*, or girls selling *saiki*, the sweet buns. The baking business provided a living for many a woman in Omsk, even though the price was low, only half a kopeck for a good size bun. The prisoners bought them in abundance and ate them on the spot, enjoying the sight of the pretty faces and figures. The girls looked coquettishly at the Don Juans with half-shaven heads, branded foreheads, and hideous leg irons. The bakery girls were a common sight wherever the prisoners worked, whether inside or outside Omsk, in brick-making plants, markets, smithies, or repairing roads in spring or fall, or during afternoon breaks. With their baskets full of baked goods, these girls were always greeted with joy and indecent jokes. Now, too, the prisoners shouted:

"Chekunda! Maryashka! Gavroshka! We have long been waiting for you. Where have you been, you good-for-nothings?"

"We were helping our mothers bake *saiki*," answered the girls.

"You are lying! May the plague get you!"

"See how he swears," retorted the girls with pretended anger, while Chekunda said with seriousness in her voice:

"I'll tell you the truth. It is real truth: from midnight until noon, we were dancing all the time. . ."

"In the Jewish inn," interrupted Sushilov, "at the mangy Elyashka's."

"Hey, you are lying," Chekunda retorted, "not in the inn and not at the Elijah's, but in the general's house where we had a splendid time with the officers."

"All right, let it be the general's," said Sushilov, "the general's indeed! But there are generals and generals. Let me tell you girls, you were dancing with the vagabonds' general and with his officers."

This joke made all the prisoners laugh, and the girls pretended to be offended. Sushilov went on: "See to it that you cows do not cozy up to the politicals!"

"On the contrary, we want to spite you! Your wish is our command!" The girls laughed happily, because their hot cakes were truly selling. These buns, washed down with water from a nearby spring, were lunch for most of us.

Their empty baskets on their heads, the girls were about to go away when the sergeant began to shout at us to go back to work in the forest; but all of a sudden an unusual sight attracted our attention. In the middle of the Irtysh River there appeared a boat decorated with green branches and flowers. A huge, swan-shaped, white boat with purple sails and a flag with an inscription in French, "*Mon plaisir*." Following it was a flotilla of smaller white boats, likewise decorated with flowers and colorful sails. In the boats sat women in light dresses and hats, accompanied by military officers of the highest rank, dressed in the parade uniforms of the Krasnoiarsk regiment.

The current swiftly carried on these beautiful and elegant boats. The oarsmen paddled lightly and the regimental orchestra switched into a *fortissimo*.

The prisoners fell silent and watched. Conversations on the boats were discreet, and the sound of the orchestra was clearly heard mixed with the noise of the Irtysh waves.

"*Freischütz!* Ah! We saw this opera together, Fyodor Mikhailovich," exclaimed Durov turning to Dostoevsky. The latter gave him a melancholy smile and said, "Yes, I remember." They both sighed.

In the meantime the boats came close to us. The prisoners took off their caps and stood at attention. The guards followed suit.

In the first flowery boat, one with the ruby-red sails, there sat General Shramov's wife[4] amid the military

and civilian dignitaries from Petersburg and lesser dignitaries from Omsk. They were seated on benches covered with carpets. On Mrs. Shramov's right sat a Petersburg notable; on her left, Governor Peter Gorchakov. This flotilla adorned with greenery and flowers in the midst of a majestic river, accompanied by an orchestra entertaining free, beautifully dressed, and light-hearted people, unfolded before our eyes as if it were a dream that came to us from too much heat on a hot July day. Slowly it disappeared behind a rock. The melodies from the *Freischütz* became more and more indistinct in the sun-gilded air. Finally we only heard the wind whispering in the old trees.

We went back to the forest to work. But the beautiful vision lingered in the memory of this band of hungry and miserable people, the people enslaved and humiliated by conditions in the labor colony. It stirred up bitterness, envy, and hatred toward those lucky few who sailed on the river a moment earlier.

"The scum of the earth! Petty thieves! They own millions and their bellies are stuffed with food. . . like generals they sleep on goosedown mattresses and get drunk every day like kings! They are not people but sons of bitches!" said the dwarflike, lame, and ugly Skuratov.<sup>[5]</sup> He paused, spat, and turned to us Poles with a contemptuous smile. "Well, how do you like it, you Polish gentlemen?"

The noncommissioned officer, Ivan Matveevich, who supervised the work gang, turned to him and said, "Stop talking! I am telling you, stop!" But his words went unheeded, and so did his urging to work faster (he used the knout unsparingly). The work was being done slowly and lazily. We felt particularly sad and apathetic after seeing those for whose pleasures we labored. We lost our habitual equanimity. The felling of trees seemed like an extremely onerous task, even though it was one of the coveted jobs in the penal colony. Time seemed to drag on unusually slowly, the air became extraordinarily dark and hard to breathe, and the trees seemed to shake as if attacked by evil winds.

That malicious dwarf Skuratov kept screaming so loud that his voice prevailed over the noise of axes and spades: "Hey, mister guard! The day is gone like a candle in the mangy Tobias's story, and you still make us falcons work here?" "Some falcons!" Ivan Matveevich responded. "OK, we are not falcons, but you are not an officer either!" Skuratov's wit was quick, and he knew how to needle Matveevich, who in spite of his modest rank insisted on being treated like an officer.

Skuratov murdered two of his siblings and for that he got a twenty-year sentence. He was usually in excellent spirits. He cherished his position as the prison clown and knew how to make the most gloomy prisoners laugh. Whatever he said met with guffaws. He was proud of it and knew how to turn it to his advantage. The cooks offered him tasty morsels, other prisoners shared their vodka and tobacco with him and even helped him do his share of work, which was often too much for his invalid stature.

As we walked back to the fortress, the sun was already low and it made the Irtysh waters look purple and bloody. Stuffy and humid air blew at us from the Kyrgyz steppes. The wind increased as we approached the town. A small cloud appeared, then another, until the entire horizon became dark and cloudy. The wind became a hurricane.

Along the road to Omsk there stood government sheds in which bricks and horse feed were kept, and where prisoners made bricks and broke large pieces of alabaster. Most of these sheds were already closed for the day, but in one of them, a smithy, work was still going on at full speed. One heard the sounds of powerful hammers and the clanking of iron bars falling on the floor. Bright sparks and heavy smoke came out of the chimney and blended with the dark horizon. Before the smithy stood several carts filled with iron bars. When we passed by, the officer guarding the carts shouted, "Stop!" He needed our muscle to unload the carts. There was no choice: we began to do so.

A light rain began to fall. It was not yet dark. The gold and purple sunset was still visible in the west, but on the eastern side the sky was so dark that it seemed to bring night prematurely.

"Obviously the heavens pity us and cry over our bitter fate," said Sergei Durov, who liked pathetic rhetoric and posed as an unjustly treated, or rather mistreated, holy martyr. Soon the rain became a downpour, and it began to hail. We were soaked to the bone and felt grateful to the officer who, having consulted with Matveevich, allowed us to wait out the downpour in the shed.

We entered. Half-naked soldiers were working at a gigantic anvil and bellows. The fire exuded heat which brought to mind the Cyclops' workshop or the entrails of hell. The blacksmiths sang a melancholy song as they worked on the iron.

Then suddenly a shot was heard, and then a second, third, and fourth. Apparently several pistols were fired simultaneously. The officer and Ivan Matveevich jumped up and ran to the door. The shooting continued,



and the soldiers dropped their hammers and ran out. We prisoners followed in spite of possible punishment. As we poured out onto the road we saw an awe-inspiring view. The Irtysh rose up with the storm and the waves were a story high. Just a few hours ago the Irtysh flew quietly and peacefully; now it howled like a legendary monster, spitting out of its mouth fountains of muddy water and foam. The wind made nature scream, it twisted the waves and shook the flowery boats which sailed so proudly at midday. Now they were on their way back to Omsk, and obviously failed to reach safe waters before the storm.

The hurricane tore the flowery garlands and the red sails into pieces. It broke steering wheels and made hay of the sailors' attempt to row to the shore. The boats were trying to get to the land at any price, but the hurricane pushed them back into the river's middle. Two of the boats were tossed around like toys, and they hit each other repeatedly. It seemed that two natural powers, water and hurricane, allied with each other in order to destroy this beautiful flotilla and the carefree and merry people we saw at noon.

When they saw the smithy's light, the hapless sailors began to shoot to turn our attention to them. However, even with the best of intentions we could not help them. We had no ropes and no people skilled in using them. The rain was coming down in sheets, the wind broke down trees all around us, it thundered every few seconds, and lighting blinded people on the shore.

However, as it often happens in summertime, the storm did not last long. When the rain began to subside, the officer ordered his people to unharness the horses and ride to town on horseback in order to bring ropes, boats, people, and other supplies. He ordered the prisoners to stay, intent on using our help during the rescue mission. But the black and disheveled clouds over the Irtysh fled north and soon disappeared altogether. The Irtysh became calm again. Only "the sheep," or plasters of foam floating on smooth waters, testified to the storm that had moved over the river just minutes ago.

Still, the flotilla of leisure ships was by no means safe. The sailors ceaselessly tried to steer the rudderless boats toward us, but they were not successful. The wind was stronger and it pushed the boats toward the deepest and most dangerous part of the river. The women in the boats began to scream in desperation. "Save us, save us!" they shouted, "in the name of God and his miracle-maker St. Nicholas!" "Please be quiet, I beg you," shouted back the officer pointing toward Omsk with a long pole, at the end of which there waved a

white sheet. He wanted them to understand that help would come from Omsk any minute now.

The boat with the bright red sails was in the worst shape of all. This was the boat where the Mrs. General Shramov enjoyed herself with the Omsk dignitaries and Petersburg guests. It was clear that the charming "*Mon plaisir*" had a hole somewhere in her body. She did not move but only heaved slowly, as if undecided whether to sink or not. The sailors were doing something to its sides, apparently trying to patch up the hole. The ladies' dresses were soaking wet, while the men used their hats to pour water out of the boat, trying to keep it steady. They also were throwing out all kinds of objects: carpets which a moment ago covered the seats, baskets, boxes, shawls, umbrellas, ladies' coats. . . . Obviously they tried to lighten the weight of the boat. In vain. The vessel slowly but surely was taking in water and sinking. And there was no sign of the rescuers from Omsk.

In the meantime, other boats were slowly approaching the shore and their salvation. Only the people in the red-colored sailboat were in danger of sinking in the middle of the mighty river.

Suddenly, a gigantic soldier working on "*Mon plaisir*" rose up. He was summoned by General A., who was also in the boat. He approached the general and saluted him. The general issued a short order. The soldier again stood at attention, his huge body straightened up as if on a parade. Then he took off his cap, threw it down, looked up at the sky which was by then cloudlessly blue and pink—crossed himself three times and jumped into the death-bearing waters with the cry "God help me!" "*Mon plaisir*" heaved violently, and then it went up a bit.

The ending was happy. The entire flotilla of boats including "*Mon plaisir*" was saved from sinking or catastrophic damage. To celebrate the happy ending, Prince Gorchakov and Mrs. General Shramov organized an even more splendid hunt than previously planned. The extra splendor was meant to make up for the unpleasant emotion that the Petersburg guests must have experienced during the unfortunate sailing excursion on the Irtysh River.

As for us prisoners, we continued to march out from prison to the forest to clear the brush for the road, make benches from the trees we felled, and use leftover branches to erect shelters meant to shield hunters during bad weather, and bowers where the military brass and their guests could enjoy their dinners.

On the third day after the storm, while we were walking back along the river shore after the day's work,

the guards suddenly stopped and screamed, “Andronik Onoprienko!” Their voices conveyed regret and indescribable fear. They began crossing themselves and murmuring some unintelligible prayer, and moved backward instead of forward. We prisoners also had to stop. “What the hell!” shouted the guard at the end of the convoy. By way of answer, the guard at the front pointed at the ground and repeated in a trembling voice: “Andronik Onoprienko!”

On the wet sand lay a corpse. It was blue, enormous, with eyes wide open. It was the corpse of the soldier who three days ago jumped off “*Mon plaisir*” at the order of his commander. He had obviously hit a whirlpool and drowned.

What struck us Poles was that no one in authority took any interest in that soldier. No one tried to find out whether he reached the shore or not, and no one was looking for his corpse. It so happened that destructive nature turned out to be charitable this time: it returned the body, so that it could be buried in consecrated ground.

“Why are you standing here like oafs? May you drop dead from drinking!” shouted the noncommissioned officer. “Andronik Onoprienko drowned, what’s the big deal? Why did this idiot jump off the boat anyway?”

Skuratov stepped forward and, pushing his cap away from his forehead, said:

“Ivan Matveich, he jumped because he received the order to jump from the general.”

Everyone admired Skuratov for this. We shook our heads with disbelief, and the noncommissioned officer upbraided the hunchback: “You are lying, you Siberian plague!” But the dwarf kept repeating: “I am not lying, Ivan Matveich, I am giving you my honest word! Nevalid and Grishka and other sailors talked about it yesterday, when we were helping them load the damaged boats onto carts. As everybody knows, Andronik Onoprienko was fat as a bull and strong as a bear. He weighed a lot. . . . The general’s boat had a hole in it . . . so the general ordered Onoprienko to jump off the boat to make it lighter. Grishka and Nevalid and other sailors heard the brass talk: ‘Nothing will happen to him, he will just take a bath, and he is probably dirty. . . . We shall give him a bottle of vodka and fifty kopeks when he gets to the shore.’ This is how the generals were talking.”

But the poor Andronik did not make it to the shore, and he missed an opportunity to drink his vodka. Nor did he get his fifty kopeks. He just lost his life.

I felt as if a glacial wind blew at me and froze me to the marrow of my bone. This is how I felt while prisoner Skuratov was telling his tale.

The road to the penal colony took us near the summer military camp to which the now-deceased Andronik belonged. Among the tents made of hemp soldiers moved back and forth finishing up their daily labors, and they sang this song:

“When they tell us to go, we go,  
When they tell us to stand, we stand.  
When they tell us to lie down, we lie down  
And we sleep in the grave, until the order comes.”

Our little Polish contingent: Professor Żochowski, Mirecki, Józik Bogusławski, and myself, walked together. As soon as the sad and depressing singing stopped, Fyodor Dostoevsky caught up with us.

“Did you hear that song, gentlemen? Did you hear? Good for them! The Krasnoiar heroes! Good for them! With such an army one can accomplish miracles! One can win every battle! One can overcome Alexander the Great! One can conquer Constantinople! Place the victorious Russian flags over the Bosphorus and the Hellespont; one can conquer the world!”

He was shouting this in a tone of excitement and admiration for the soldiers, with his face glowing and his eyes on fire. He looked forward proudly, stretching his arms as if he saw some wonderful and bright dream materialize in front of him.

We were approaching the palisade surrounding the fortress in which our prison was located. The guard pulled the bell rope by the gate. It opened with a squeak. The party of prisoners entered the prison. Guards began to count those returning. “One! Two! Three! Four!” they shouted while touching each prisoner’s shoulder with a long stick. After this ritual, they went back to the officers’ quarters, while we went to the kitchen for a meal.

Dostoevsky again stepped forth in front of the Polish group. “What I told you while we were walking on the road must happen! It must!” he repeated with great emphasis. “I am telling you this!”

We did not respond.

▲

## NOTES

1. Along with Fyodor Dostoevsky, Sergei Durov was also a member of the Petrashevsky Circle and was sentenced to hard labor in Siberia. See Tokarzewski’s “*In Siberian Prisons, 1846–1857*,” *Sarmatian Review*, vol. XXV, no. 2, 1117–1126, for further details.

2. A character under that name appears in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *House of the Dead*. In Tokarzewski's story, he is not as mild and meek as Dostoevsky's portrayal.
3. She was governor Gorchakov's mistress and openly flouted her influence over him, as described in Tokarzewski's *In Siberian prisons*.
4. This character also appears in *House of the Dead*, in a prettified form.
5. Skuratov is likewise a character in *House of the Dead*.

Simon Tokarzewski, *Pośród cywilnie umarłych: Obrazki z życia Polaków na Syberyi* [Among the Legally Dead: Pictures from the Lives of Poles in Siberia]. Warsaw: Biblioteka Dzieł Wyborowych, n.d. 129 pages. Hardcover. Pp. 5–27. Translated and annotated by the *Sarmatian Review* staff.

### **Our Take: The concert of nations**

(continued from Page 1254)

The United Nations has been sidelined on too many occasions, its resolutions ignored by the powerful and enforced only when the powerful want to see them enforced. Winston Churchill's infamous division of the world into "giants" and "pygmies" seems to be falling in place again.

To be sure, the great powers today are not the same as a hundred years ago. The rise of the Asian giants, and the assertive voices of some of the mid-size powers like Brazil, Korea, or Japan change the picture somewhat. But it is the trend backward rather than forward that accounts for the relatively scant attention paid to Politkovskaia's murder. Like nineteenth-century revolutionaries, she was an inconvenience to be crushed. The great powers do not blame the Russian government because they are getting ready—or indeed have been more than ready—to engage in liberty-reducing actions within their own borders. They therefore studiously avoid blaming Russia for its brutality, for Russia is poised to join the concert of nations from which its own excesses dislodged it in the early postcommunist era.

While these weighty developments proceed apace, the leaders of Poland seem engrossed in their petty personal fights and starry-eyed visions of EU's and NATO's permanence. On 12 October 2006, *Rzeczpospolita* quoted President Lech Kaczyński as saying that it is inconceivable for Germany to defy the European Union through its policies; it must eventually toe the EU line. Inconceivable? Wake up, President Kaczyński. In the same paper, Polish Trade Minister Piotr Woźniak was quoted as saying that Germany

cannot unilaterally sign an agreement with Russia concerning energy. Cannot? Wake up, Mr. Trade Minister. Donald Tusk, head of the opposition party, keeps raising personal issues concerning his opponents rather than focusing on Poland's interests. Wake up, Mr. Tusk. Poland would do well to observe carefully the behavior of the Czech Republic that has excelled in the practice of national egoism, mindful of the fact that neither Russia nor Germany are play partners in a kindergarten game where everyone is treated fair and square.

Portions of this article were published in *Houston Chronicle* on 21 October 2006.

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Simon Tokarzewski was a Polish social thinker and activist in Russian-occupied Poland. Sentenced twice to slave labor in Siberia by the tsarist authorities, he wrote his *Memoirs* [published in part in the April 2005 (XXV/2) issue of *Sarmatian Review*] upon his return from the first prison term, and his short stories—one of which we have translated for this issue of *SR*—upon returning from the second.

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## Announcements and Notes

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