From the Editor

This issue confronts Polish humanities on many levels, from poetry to the much-contested general interpretations. History is patient of many interpretations, and in spite of their proliferation, new interpretations have to be advanced, if only to avoid being snowed under by ridiculous interpretations offered by ignoramuses. History is always contested, and a neglect to conduct an interpretive dialogue results in a massive imposition of identity on those who live by such neglect. The neglectful groups (nations, ethnic groups, religious groups) are inevitably ghettoized in conditions of the open society. The divergences between their self-interpretation and interpretations imposed by others grow so large that such groups lose their public presence. A generous supply of self-interpretations that are made accessible to others has to be provided in order to avoid such ghettoization.

This issue reminds readers that in modern times, history has become interpretation, often a literary interpretation in a Gramscian fashion, and protests to the contrary will not change the situation. What can bring about change is the tortoise’s persistence; for hares are often enthusiastic but give up when faced with persistence.

This brings us to an interview with W. Martin, guest editor of the issue of *Chicago Review* containing a selection of works of Polish literature written in the 1990s. What a bright point of light in the landscape of Polish Studies in America, and how well it speaks of the vitality of Polish literature. Martin deserves much appreciation for putting together this volume (reviewed in the April 2001 issue of *SR* and still available for purchase). Professor Piotr Wilczek likewise deserves much praise for being the *spiritus movens* behind this interview. Wilczek taught at the University of Chicago and at UIC at the time when the interview was conducted. It is thanks to his initiative that it now appears on our pages.

Indeed, during his three-year tenure at various American universities, Wilczek did more for Polish and non-Germanic Central European Studies in the United States than many a tenured professor over his/her lifetime. He organized conferences, brought together scholars, published articles, suggested areas of research to colleagues and students, supervised or contributed to countless projects. That no permanent U.S. academic position has so far been found for this exceptional scholar speaks volumes about American Polonia’s lack of support for Polish studies and its willingness to let *polonistyka* be defined by those who would drive it to the boundaries of a caricatured marginality.

One should note the various Polish and other non-Germanic Central European organizations that waste time and resources on entertainment and related self-congratulatory activities in their own respective ghettos. In that regard, the Kosciusko Foundation remains a welcome exception.

An analysis of Tomasz Jastrun’s poetry (in Daniel Bourne’s translation) by Professor Leonard Kress reminds us that the personal and the political do mix in Central Europe. The United States is one of the few countries where such a relationship is rare. A point to consider when interpreting works from one of those “tense” countries that cannot afford the ‘relaxed’ atmosphere in which literary creativity is couched in the United States.

Finally, we present a poignant poem by Helen Bajorek MacDonald on her parents’ martyrology. Her family was among the hundreds of thousands of Polish families deported or imprisoned by the Soviets in the Soviet-occupied part of Poland during the years of Soviet-Nazi friendship, 1939–1941. In the January 2001 issue of *SR*, we published her poem on how she lost her mother: when the cattle wagon train stopped for a few minutes at some Russian station, her mother went out to barter clothing for food. The train left before she managed to get back, and her daughter’s last impression of her was her desperate face as she ran behind the train trying to get on board. In this issue, the loss of another deportee is mourned.

The remainder of the issue consists of book reviews representing a variety of points of view and dealing with a variety of books, from scholarly volumes to imaginative literature. This issue has more book reviews than any past issue.
Drug use and AIDS
Estimated number of regular drug abusers in Russia (pop. 145 million) in 2000: nearly five million.
Percentage of 18–30 year olds among all addicts: 60 percent.
Percentage of pre-college teenagers among all addicts: 20 percent.
Source: Russia’s health ministry, as reported by AFP (Moscow), 22 February 2001.
Number of Russians who contracted the HIV virus since 1987: 300,000, or double the previous estimate.
Number of people with HIV in Moscow and Petersburg in 2000: 10 times higher than in 1999.
Source: Russian health officials, as reported by AFP, 11 March 2001.
Percentage of Muscovites who have tried drugs: 10 percent.

Cinema
Number of American-style large movie theaters in Moscow in 2001: 15.
Number of such theaters in the rest of the country including St. Petersburg: approximately the same number.
Average number of films made yearly in postcommunist Russia: 30.
Average number of films made yearly in communist Russia: 150.

Communist legacies
Number of officers of Jewish origin expelled from the army in Soviet-occupied Poland in 1968–1980 because of their Jewish origin and ‘rehabilitated’ in 2001: 1,348.
Source: Polish Defense Minister Bronisław Komorowski, as reported by AFP, 8 March 2001.
Percentage of Russians who believe that Lenin played a positive role in Russian history: 66.7 percent.
Source: ROMIR-Gallup poll in April 2001, as reported by AFP, 22 April 2001.

Soviet Russia’s economic priorities
Percentage of GDP spent on defense and defense-oriented projects in the USSR: 70 percent.
Percentage of Soviet hospitals that did not have hot water or indoor toilets in 1986, the year “Mir” was launched: 30 percent and 35 percent, respectively.
Percentage of Soviet schools that did not have central heating or running water in 1986: 50 percent.

Postcommunist Russia’s priorities
Number of full time technological research scientists in the Russian Federation supported by the state in 2000: 910,000.
Another estimate of full time scientists working in research institutes in the Russian Federation in 2001: 800,000, or down from 2 million in 1990.
Source: Vladimir Strakhov, the head of the United Institute of Terrestrial Physics in Russia, as reported by Interfax and then by Hugh Barnes of AFP, 2 June 2001.
Percentage of Russians who believe that sooner or later, the member countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) will unite into a single state: 56 percent.
Percentage of Russians who support that development: 79 percent.
Source: A poll taken by the Public Opinion Foundation and reported by Interfax on 31 May 2001.

Amount of money General Gennady Troshev (then-commander-in-chief of Russian forces in Chechnya) has offered to anyone who would bring him the head of Shamyl Basayev, one of the leaders of the Chechen partisan war against Russian occupation: one million dollars.

Work ethics
Number of hours per week spent at work in South Korea, the United States, France, and Italy, respectively: 44, 42, 38, 38.
Economy
Amount of money West Germany granted East Germany during the ten years following reunification: $900 billion.
Amount of direct investment Russia and China attracted in 2000: $4.4 billion and $40.8 billion, respectively.
Number of gas stations in Poland (out of 6,000 total) controlled by Poland's leading oil group PKN/Orlen: 2,070.
Percentage of Polish oil refineries owned by Orlen: 66 percent.

Demography
Percentage drop in Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian population between 1989–2001 (according to a census conducted April 5–12, 2001): 5 percent, 11 percent, and 13 percent, respectively.
Source: AFP (Vilnius), 20 April 2001.
Percentage of world population that lives in cities: 50 percent.
Number of immigrants Germany would accept yearly under a proposed new law on immigration: up to 20,000 a year, with another 20,000 slots reserved for workers in high-demand fields such as computer programming and biotechnology, 10,000 slots for young workers and two-year work visa for foreign graduates from German universities.
Number of “green cards” issued in Germany in 2000: 8,000.
Countries set to profit most from the proposed new law: India, Russia and Romania.

Jedwabne
Estimated number of Jews killed during the Jedwabne massacre on 10 July 1941: 200.
Reasons for changing the previous estimate of 1,600 offered by J.T. Gross in his book The Neighbors: evidence found during excavations of the site performed in May 2001.
Number of German 7.92 millimeter Mauser rifle bullets found at the site of the massacre: 89.

Universities
Number of Polish students who took the GMAT test in 2000: 232, with an average score of 504.
Number of students worldwide who took the GMAT test in 2000: 190,291.
Number of Polish students studying at American universities in 1999/2000: 2209, of whom 61 percent were undergraduates and 30 percent graduates.
Source: AUAP email newsletter, 7 April 2001.

Reading habits
Percentage of Poles who read books from time to time: 54 percent.
Percentage of Polish farmers who read books from time to time: 40 percent.
Percentage of Poles who buy books: 41 percent.
Percentage of Poles who read more than 7 books per year: 22 percent, a figure that reportedly has not changed for many years.
Source: Biblioteka Narodowa poll, as reported by Donosy, No. 2974, 14 February 2001.

The Internet
Number of people in Poland who have access to the internet: 4.9 million.
Estimated number of people who use the internet regularly: 75 percent of the above.
Estimated number of private households who have access to the internet: five percent.
Number of students per one school computer in Poland and the United States, respectively: 40 and 5.

Memory
Number of persons sentenced to death by the provincial military courts in Soviet-occupied Poland between 1946–1955: 3,468.
Out of these, the number of confirmed executions: 1,363.
Source: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej [Institute of National Memory], as reported by Donosy, 26 June 2001.
W. Martín in conversation with Alicja Jankowska, Tomasz Krówka, Anastazja Lubecki, Sebastian Szafrański, Tamara Zielińska and Piotr Wilczek

Chicago Review, a highly regarded literary journal published at the University of Chicago, devoted a double issue (46:3&4, Fall 2000) to New Polish Writing: poems, short stories, novel excerpts, reportage, essays, and feuilletons written by Polish writers since 1989. On March 7, 2001, a group of students from the University of Illinois-Chicago met with W. Martín, the guest editor for the issue. The meeting was part of a course on postwar Polish literature taught by Professor Piotr Wilczek. This is the transcript of their conversation.

QUESTION: What are you working on right now?
W. MARTÍN: I’m doing a doctorate in Comparative Literature at the University of Chicago.

Q: Going back, to your first contact with Polish literature, how did you come to Polish literature?
WM: As an undergraduate at the University of Iowa, I took a course on postwar central European poetry with Danny Weissbort, and he had included quite a lot of Polish poets on the syllabus, people like Herbert, Różewicz, Szymborska—these were the first Polish poets I read. Around the same time, Northwestern University Press published the first volume of Gombrowicz’s Diaries, and there was something in there, his anxiety over what he calls “interhuman” deformation and his insistence on the particularity of his own experience, that really struck a chord with me. I had learned German in high school, and lived in West Berlin as an exchange student, and I had always been curious about eastern Europe—my father was a product of the McCarthy era, and I had grown up with a lot of really obvious clichés about eastern Europe that made it seem all the more mysterious. Also, I never felt that my response to writers I really liked was ever adequate, so maybe my decision to learn Polish had something to do with wanting to have a deeper, more real relationship to these writers’ work. I’d already been taking Russian, and decided I didn’t want to learn another “language of empire.” Besides, my grandmother was Polish, she grew up in the Polish neighborhood in New Haven, and although I had not been very close to her before (I am now), there was some kind of conflict in me between the WASP side, my mother’s side, and my father’s side of the family, which was Polish and French Canadian, and I guess it was time for me to find out more about that part of my background.

Q: What was your first major translation from Polish to English?
WM: I have just finished a book of short prose by Natasza Goerke, which is the first book-length translation I’ve done. Otherwise I have translated a few poems, and then some non-literary things for money. I first heard of Natasza’s work through a friend of mine, the editor of an English-language journal in Prague called Trafika. So when I was in Warsaw later on, I looked for her books (there were only two at the time), and found the second one, Księga Paszetów, and I really liked it. So far as I can tell, her work is completely different from that of any other contemporary Polish fiction writer. She’s an inheritor of the wonderful European tradition of short prose, which includes writers like Johann Peter Hebel, Daniil Kharms, and Sławomir Mrożek, and which is often accompanied by an absurdist or grotesque sensibility and, especially in Natasza’s case, a circumspect and playful relationship to narrative itself.

Q: Have you ever studied Polish?
WM: Yes, I went to Poland in 1989–90 and did a year-long language course at the Jagiellonian, and then did two more summer language courses later on. But no, I have never studied Polish in depth.

Q: How do you translate, then?
WM: Well, the problem with not being a native speaker of the language is that a whole linguistic dimension that is available to native speakers is simply missing. So it is hard to translate when you do not actually know the language you are translating from. I like to think of my translations as having the same relationship to their originals that the caterwaul rehearsed by entirely deaf people has to the natural, heard speech it seeks to reproduce.

Q: What is more difficult to translate, prose or poetry?
WM: It might be better to think of the difference in terms of horizontality and verticality. As a runner, the thing I liked best about living in San Francisco was the hills. Even now, though I have lived in Chicago for three years and really enjoy running along the lakefront, I still dream of running up to the top of Bernal Hill and looking out over the city in all directions, and how wonderfully difficult it was to get to that place. Prose is great for long distances, but poetry is better for the view.

Q: How did you decide to do a Polish project for the Chicago Review?
WM: It was something I had been thinking about for a number of years, and I felt I should do it, although I
also felt that someone more qualified should be doing it, but no one was. Also, I had a particular idea of how it should be done. I wanted better known authors to be included, not only because North American and other English-language readers might be more likely to recognize their names and therefore buy and read the magazine, but because they are obviously representative of Polish literature in a way no one else is, and they are good writers. I was especially interested, however, in presenting other authors, both older and younger, who are not known or not very well known to our readers. I did not want it to be another single-genre anthology or to devote it solely to “high genre” literature, so it was important for me to include things like feuilletons, polemical documents, and especially critical essays and reviews. In this way I thought the issue could be interesting and useful in lots of different ways and for different audiences. We had a couple of different audiences in mind when we were putting it together. Of course we were thinking about general readers, people who might find the issue in the library or bookstore and spend time with it. And then was the Polonist and Slavist audience, people who would be interested in Polish literature, and Eastern and Central European literature in general. And of course I was also curious about what Poles in Poland would think about it. And then there was Chicago Review’s regular readership, which tends to be interested in poetry, and especially a somewhat less visible, avant-garde tradition of poetry in Britain and North America.

Q: How long did it take?

WM: Well, the fact that it happened still surprises me. I never thought that it would not happen, but knowing myself, I was afraid it would not happen on time. I presented the idea to the previous editor shortly after I got back from spending a summer in Kraków in 1999—I had done some work for Polska 2000, a group that was organizing the Polish events at the Frankfurt Book Fair in October, and knew that Poland would be the featured country at the fair, and I felt like it would be a good time to get the special issue out in time for it. I put the project proposal together in February, and we set about soliciting authors, translators, and potential sponsors. People were enormously generous with their time, work, and support. The person who was responsible for actually getting it produced on time was Eirik Steinhoff, who had just taken on the editorship in June. He would call me up pretty much every day and ask if I had taken care of certain things and generally forced me to get things done. Looking back, the months of July and August are a huge blur for me. We worked pretty much non-stop, and I was also working at another job that did not pay very much, so it was a lot of stress. But we did get it completed on time and had a modest presentation for it at the Book Fair, and then a really lovely reading here in Chicago at the Chopin Theatre, with Natasza, the poet Ryszard Krynicki with the translator Clare Cavanagh, and the poet and translator Piotr Sommer. It turned out to be much larger than we planned—we originally wanted it to be no more than 300 pages, but it turned out to be 400 pages. I gladly would have made it larger, though, since there are many people I would like to have included in it. Also, I wish we had had time to proofread it a few more times, since there is a lot of typographic errors in it. But I am pretty glad with how it turned out, generally, and there has been a lot of positive responses to it.

Q: What is the Chicago Review audience? Most people interested in Polish literature know only this one issue of your journal.

WM: It has been around since 1946. One of the editors in the mid-1950s started soliciting a lot of well-known writers and Chicago Review began to publish much stronger material and to be distributed internationally. Since then, it has been one of the most prominent U.S. literary journals. It is run entirely by graduate students, which is sort of unusual, since most journals based at universities have faculty members for editors. In the 1960s and 70s we became known for publishing experimental fiction and prose, and there was also a lot of enthusiasm for publishing special issues. There was an important German issue that came out in 1979, which published a number of well-known German-language authors and critics and was an early venue for work by Paul Celan, who has since become a household name, at least in the households of poets. In the eighties, the journal almost expired due to negligent management, but then was resuscitated in the early nineties. There has been a pretty broad audience for Chicago Review in the nineties, definitely in North America, but also in Great Britain. The journal is distributed to about eight hundred libraries and individual subscribers and it is carried by bookstores in this country. Before this issue there was even one regular subscriber in Poland. . .

Q: Since there is such a high population of Poles in Chicago, what took you so long to publish an issue on Polish literature?

WM: Well, the only connections between Poles in Chicago and Polish literature are that they each have something to do with the Polish language and that some Poles in Chicago may have read Polish literature. Also, I am not aware that Chicago Review has ever been obligated
to represent local ethnic populaces in our editorial policy. I think most literary journals would find that a little restrictive. We did do a special issue on contemporary Indian literature a few years back, but that had nothing to do with the Indians in Chicago, either.

Q: How about publishing this issue in Polish, or a bilingual edition?

WM: What would be the point? In our regular issues we usually do publish translated poems with the original on the facing page. It is a nice gesture, but not for a whole book.

Q: How did it go with translating Chicago Review texts... did you translate 400 pages in four months?

WM: I didn’t.

Q: I mean I know you didn’t, but you and this group of translators. How did it work technically?

WM: I had an idea of some of the authors I wanted to have in it, and we also solicited translators directly for submissions and asked various other people for suggestions. Just as there is a variety of authors represented in the issue, there is a variety of translators with different approaches and experiences. Some of the translations came in perfect shape, others needed to be edited quite rigorously. Some of this was done by Eirik and myself, and some of it was done by Karen Underhill and Kinga Maciejewska, or all of us working in different stages on the same things. For some of the translations there were multiple rewrites.

Q: Did it happen that you did not include a writer because you did not have a translation?

WM: Yes. There were many writers I would have liked to have included but did not have a translation for or time to translate myself. There were also situations where we had a piece that already had been translated, but we just were not satisfied with it and did not include it. For instance, Stanisław Lem. I really wanted to include something by him, and there was a short piece, from a recent collection of essays, that we had available in English translation and we had already contacted the publisher about using it. For a number of reasons, though, we had to keep the issue under four hundred pages, and had to cut a few things, including the Lem piece. Since he is already incredibly well known in English, it was easier to make that decision about him than it would have been with another, less well known writer.

Q: There is no such anthology in English, or even in Polish. So you are like a pioneer, doing something new. Was it your ambition to produce something representative? Like include all important people? What about the criteria?

WM: Well, I think that I have mentioned before why I wanted to include different generations and different genres. The typical approach to anthologization is simply to do everything in one genre. This is useful, but I do not think that that approach is necessarily indicative of what is going on in the culture. I think it is much more interesting to combine different things. We wanted it to be both a magazine and an anthology, and we wanted to explore what had been going on in Poland for the last ten years. I have no illusions about it being representative. Even if it was another four hundred pages thicker, all sorts of people would have been left out. I do not actually understand why this particular issue of Chicago Review should be considered so singular or so radically significant or why I should be considered a “pioneer,” after all, I did not invent the idea, I just implemented it. There are plenty of very competent people out there, people who know Polish literature far better than I do, who no doubt could do an even better job than I have done, and as a matter of fact, no one is stopping them. As for publishing important people: obviously I felt that every piece I selected is important, otherwise I would not have included it. But like I said, there are many other authors I wish I could have included as well. I certainly was not trying to determine in myself, or anywhere else for that matter, some kind of transcendental principle of “importance” that I could then refer to in making my selection. One of the ways we tried to be even more “representative” was by including the essays by Jerzy Jarzębski and Piotr Śliwiński, who discuss a number of authors not included in the issue. I definitely did want to include recent criticism in the issue, because I think it is as important to a literary culture as are the “purer” phenomena of poetry and prose, and both are strong critics and serve to represent two different generations. But I also figured that these essays might be a resource not only for teachers but for publishers as well.

Q: When was the last comprehensive anthology of modern Polish literature published? Thirty years ago? Twenty years ago? I have a feeling that the next anthology will be in thirty years. I have this desire to have a textbook. Of course, this is a different approach. You published an issue of a journal. But on the other hand, it is such a rare opportunity to have any kind of Polish anthology, Polish literature seems to be so marginal here. It is so unusual to have an anthology of Polish literature in English, or also in French, in German. You are a translator from German and know the German market. Is it better in German? German translations of Polish?
WM: The Germans are much better with translations generally. They translate everything. In fact, Karl Dedecius just published this huge anthology of Polish literature, three enormous volumes of Polish writing of the 20th century. It’s remarkable. There’s nothing like it here. Primarily because publishing in America is so commercial, what gets published by the larger houses is largely determined by sales potential, whereas in Germany you still have a tradition of publishing collected works of single authors and things that just need to be made available to a wider audience. You have intelligent people working at publishing houses who understand that translated literature and literature in general generate cultural revenue that cannot be equated with financial gain. Also, you have a very active critical culture, and there are many more significant venues for reviews of new books than we have here. European public spheres are much healthier than whatever it is we take for a public sphere in this country. When I was at the Frankfurt Book Fair in October, I picked up five or six German newspapers that all had big sections devoted to the most recent Polish writing. I cannot imagine that happening here, in part because a much smaller percentage of the population is actually interested in books. For those who do read, I do not think Polish literature is any more marginal in this country than German or French literature. American writers of my generation are as likely to have read Schulz and Szymborska as Grass and Duras. Big names in Polish writing do make it over. And American writers, if they are interested, can go and find Polish writers (provided they have been translated), just as they can go find German writers.

Q: I think that most people like the easy idea of anthologies, because everything is in one book and you do not have to search around. They are for lazy people, I love anthologies.

WM: I love them, too. Somehow they promise an automatic entry to whatever it is that is being anthologized. And the anthology itself is a fascinating literary form on its own terms. In terms of their capacity to represent cultures, though, I think that what would really be great for Polish culture is if the rather unsubstantial notion of the anthology were expanded into the more impressive concept of the publishing program. That way, we could, for example, some day have in English a series of books by twentieth-century Polish critics, like Jarzębski, Głowiński, Sandauer, Wyka, or Irzykowski, that could be read by people who do not know Polish. Or perhaps something more general and more ambitious, like what Continuum Publishers has for German, “The German Library,” which is basically a very extensive publishing list of anthologies of various sorts, like Heine’s Collected Poetry and Prose or Eighteenth-Century German Criticism or German Essays on Music, which are assembled by scholars and are extremely useful in teaching. Something like that would transform Polish studies in the English-speaking world, and it would make the work of Polish writers and thinkers more available to writers and thinkers here. But it probably will not happen, because who on earth would want to invest money in something like that? And even if the money were there, who would do it?

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BOOKS and Periodicals Received


A valuable analysis of what has been happening in Poland in the last several decades of the twentieth century. The author is a sociologist and onetime president of the Rzeszów Pedagogical University, and he stands apart from the rough-and-tumble struggle for political influence; thus, his analysis is not an attempt to present events to the advantage of someone’s political biases,
as is often the case with the Warsaw analysts. At the end of the book, the author rightly cautions Poles against excessive reliance on the state, pointing out that individual initiatives and a self-generated sense of responsibility are essential for the Poles to succeed. The book is dedicated to Mirosław Dzielski, “a philosopher and a man of action,” whose views the author espouses.


A closely structured book on the historical processes accompanying the creation of concepts such as Orient-Occident, Intermarium, East-West; and on the place of Poland in these schemes. The author rightly points out that the Orient-Occident distinction is not culturally equivalent to that between East and West. The former is a product of a long historical process that, in Poland in particular, did not lead to ‘orientalization’ (to use the term in a way consistent with Edward Said’s usage) of the Orient, but rather to a relationship that could be described as an Encounter (Spotkanie). The East-West distinction emerged from the Cold War or, more broadly, from the perceived distinctness of tsarist and communist Russia as a culture that could not be fitted into European molds. The author’s professional knowledge of India adds a unique dimension to his discussion of the Encounter. A most stimulating and worthwhile volume. The author is a professor of history at the University of Warsaw and a former Polish Ambassador to Spain.


This detailed book by a young American PhD is divided into three sections titled, respectively, the interwar period, or the Second Polish Republic (1918–1939); World War II (1939–1945); and the Soviet occupation (1945–1955). It is a solidly documented tome that deals with issues related to the author’s PhD dissertation (to appear in the East European Monograph Series distributed by Columbia University Press).


Jerzy Giedroyć (+1999) was a Polish political strategist who edited the émigré monthly Kultura between 1946–1999. Melchior Wańkowicz was a writer of superior talent who was caught in a situation that usually spells the death of writers: a loss of his natural audience (Poland was Soviet-occupied during most of his life, and émigré existence did not suit Wańkowicz’s temperament.

In addition to the Letters, the tome contains Wańkowicz’s “Klub Trzeciego Miejsca,” a collection of essays and analyses of the Polish situation after World War II; and Giedroyć’s essay on Wańkowicz.

The book has been widely reviewed in Poland, and Aleksandra Ziółkowska-Boehm’s “benedictine work” has been universally praised. Indeed, to select the material and identify hundreds of names takes a person of considerable ability and capacity for work. The volume conveys the flavor and texture of Polish émigré debates, in addition to providing factual information.


This is the last volume of the trilingual (English, Polish, Russian) encyclopedia of Russian culture. Articles are printed alphabetically, and the authors include scholars from Eastern, Central, and Western Europe, as well as the United States. A treasure trove of documented information and analysis. Much recommended for America’s academic libraries.

Between Lvov, New York and Ulysses’s Ithaca: Józef Wittlin—Poet, Essayist, Novelist, edited with an Introduction by Anna Frajlich. Toruń-New York:

A collection of conference essays devoted to one of the finest Polish writers of the twentieth century. Wartime emigration broke Wittlin’s contact with his natural audience in Poland, and his popularity never recovered.


Articles by Bronisław Geremek, Jan Kulakowski, Zdzisław Najder and many others. The volume covers Polish policies concerning Europe, NATO, and the European Union, as well as relations between Poland and the major European countries (the Czech Republic and Slovakia are missing, but Belarus is conspicuously present).

It is regrettable that the translations are not smooth; they should have been checked by a native speaker. The translation of Zdzisław Najder’s essay is particularly rocky: ironically, Najder speaks good English.


A Polish translation of Družnikov’s excellent Russian novel, _Angely na konchike igly_, dealing with Brezhnevite Russia and its nomenklatura. The plot centers around a fictitious daily newspaper (resembling the various _Pravdas_ published in Soviet cities), and its editors and collaborators. Družnikov’s original addition to the art of the novel consists in introducing “personal forms” (anxiety personalne) that citizens had to fill out in Soviet-occupied countries to become eligible to be hired for any position. They had to write about their relatives and reveal various personal secrets. Each character in the novel had to fill out such a form, and the forms are included in the text.

Družnikov resembles Aleksandr Zinoviev, the creator of the expression “homo sovieticus,” but as a novelist he is far superior to Zinoviev. A translation into English would be most welcome.


A fact-laden history of Lithuania from its beginnings to the mid-1990s. Even though the author ostensibly eschews interpretation, his position is strongly pro-Lithuanian.


This is a most unusual book. It begins as a narrative of a native Silesian from a working family; photographs of tough-looking workers and farmers accompany the narrative pages. But the author goes on to meditate on the problems of identity, being, nothingness and ‘has-been-ness’ invoking Heidegger, Kafka, and Nietzsche. Szymutko, who teaches at the University of Silesia, is able to exist in a very simple world of industrial workers one the one hand, and in the world of sophisticated discourse on the other. He presents “the boys from Cimok” who reluctantly entered the world of money and impersonality, career and technological advancement. A very original and absorbing book.


A collection of essays on Polish émigré literature ranging from analyses of writers and poems (Wierzyński, Śmieja), to theorizing about émigré literature and its problems. The author’s easy style creates a very readable book.


A reprint of the famous book on the fate of non-German Central and East European children during and after World War II. Among the brutalities of post-World War II Germany, there were adoptions by German families of Polish children forcibly taken away from their parents in Poland because of their “Aryan” looks and never allowed to return to Poland after the war in spite of their real parents’ attempts to regain the children. The case of Marian Gajewy from Poznan typifies the situation. He was taken away from his parents at age 7, renamed Martin Gawner and given to the Karl Dengler family in Esslingen. Notwithstanding the Polish investigator’s efforts to enable the boy to return to his family, the Denglers hastily adopted the boy in 1946, despite the fact that postwar adoptions of children were prohibited by the Allies in Germany.

Or take the fate of the several hundred Polish Catho-
lic children from the Zamość area who were likewise kidnapped but did not “make it” to Germany because of their insufficiently Aryan looks. They were asked to sit on a stool, were given phenol injections into their chests and then instantly thrown onto a pile of corpses even before they actually died.

Then go on to the descriptions of slow starvation of children in the Jewish ghettos.

It takes strong nerves to read this book. Cruelty to children moved even Ivan Karamazov, and an average person risks an emotional storm after perusing these pages.


A fascinating study by a prolific critic. Professor Lazari is the initiator of a series on “Ideas in Russia” published by the University of Łódź Press (see a review on p. 813). The book under review is part of the series, but it is not included in the three-volume encyclopedia published under the same title. In it, Lazari takes on the concept of pochvennichestvo, or “adherence to the soil,” a utopian Russian ideology related to Russian nationalism and exceptionalism. As is well known, Dostoevsky flirted with the idea of pochvennichestvo at many points in his literary career. Lazari discusses pochvennichestvo and its relation to the concepts of nationality, religion and state in Russia. His documentary materials come mostly from the writings of Fyodor Dostoevsky’s acquaintances and friends.


Narbutt’s commonsensical approach to problems is here present at its best. The book is a selection of essays published in cultural periodicals over the last quarter-century. While one may disagree with Narbutt on specifics, his invariably frank and open tone make his essays into good signposts in any intellectual debate. The wonderful ease of Narbutt’s texts, the atmosphere of relaxation and naturalness that he creates, are rare in today’s intellectual debates shot through with posturing and studded with fanciful terminology that intimidates instead of elucidating. Narbutt never misleads; sometimes, he does not lead far enough. But he does not try to reshape one’s store of knowledge. He merely adds to it. Particularly good is his critique of Jerzy Giedroyc’s political vision in “Ludzie za mgłą” originally published in 1995. In it, Narbutt poke fun at Giedroyc’s dream of ‘westernizing’ Russia with the help of the Polish intelligentsia. He opines that the one thing that could change Russia is physical force, and that Ukraine and Belarus are pathetically weak and unable to resist Russia’s advances in spite of nominal independence.


A collection of poems by one of the acclaimed masters of the Polish language. Rymkiewicz uses simple, not to say childish, language; in that he reminds one of Jan Twardowski. This volume’s content has to do with the passing of time, getting old, coping with an old body. The final section deals with cats. Not quite as good as Zbigniew Herbert, but it does have a rustic charm of its own.


A study of the extreme right wing of the Polish underground in World War II. This group refused to submit to the leadership of the Home Army (Armia Krajowa) structures. Methodologically, the study leaves much to be desired; but it also is a valuable source of information owing to copious footnotes. Muszyński quotes an underground publication Szaniec which printed the following on 16 January 1943: “During the liquidation of the small ghettos in the countryside surrounding the city of Łódź, the following procedure was used by the Germans. The Jews from the local ghettos were taken to the local Catholic churches and locked up there for 48 hours. Then, the Jews were deported, and the local Catholic population was ordered in to view the inside of the church—which was, needless to say, in a sorry state.”


_Push not The River_ is James Conroyd Martin’s first novel. The action takes place in Poland in the late eighteenth century, during the period of dramatic struggle between Poles and their Russian adversaries. The plot centers around a young Countess, Anna Maria Berezowska. The story is told mostly through the
Countess’ diary. Anna evolves from a young and native ‘teen into a strong woman. The story highlights patriotism in Anna and in her Aunt Stella who are supporters of the Constitution passed by the Polish parliament on 3 May 1791. Other nobles side up with Empress Catherine of Russia who does her utmost to destroy the Constitution and prevent the reforms that would strengthen Poland. She wants to see Poland weak. The action is brisk, and Countess Anna loses her relatives in the armed struggle. The story highlights the points of view of four people: Anna, her Aunt Stella, another young countess named Zofia, and a Polish patriot named Jan Stelnicki. The daughter of Countess Stella Gronksa, Zofia is a negative character. Jan Stelnicki, the Gronskis’ country neighbor whom Anna loves, goes away to fight Russian troops under the leadership of General Thaddeus Kosciuszko (who fought for freedom not only in America but also in Poland). Push Not the River is a good read and a good introduction to Central and Eastern European history. (David Buck)

Other Books Received:


A definitive study of several aspects of 16th- and 17th-century Polish literature. A review to follow.


A collection of papers given at a conference on the Union of Lublin (signed in 1569) uniting Poland, Belarus, Ukraine and Lithuania into a single state.


A bibliography listing documents dealing with the Catholic Church in tsarist Russia. The documents are culled from the collections of the various Russian ministries: finance, commerce, communications, agriculture, education, internal affairs. Included also are archival documents from the Senate, the Holy Synod, and Court collections. This bibliography is meant to enable researchers to request the relevant documents from the Russian archives. While summaries are scarce, it can be gleaned from them that the documents deal mostly with the ways and means of curtailing the presence of the Catholic Church in Russia. Together with the Bibliographies published by the Institute of Eastern Affairs in Lublin, Poland (in past issues of SR we reviewed a number of these Bibliographies), this tome provides basic research materials for future historians of Russian attitudes toward Catholicism.


Born in Łódź, this Auschwitz survivor resides in Canada. She writes about the life of a small town in Poland before World War II, the town in which a substantial percentage of people spoke Yiddish rather than Polish.


Kołakowski has reached the point where he can write essays and books without footnotes, index or bibliography — and get published by a major publishing house. While we are not afficionados of excessive footnoting, Kołakowski’s casual style is perhaps excessively casual for a tome issued by a university press. As the author explains in the Preface, the book contains essays written at various times and in various languages; he calls them “sermons.” Like Alasdair MacIntyre, Kołakowski seems to realize that consistency is sadly lacking in modern intellectual debates, and concepts derived from incompatible sources are often advanced side by side. But unlike MacIntyre, Kołakowski does not advocate consistency. In fact, he seems to favor “moderation in consistency,” to quote his Preface again. There are essays here on politics, religion, the devil, and “so-called crisis of Christianity.” A professed atheist, Kołakowski serenely says that there is no crisis because Christianity has always been difficult, and there have been few true Christians; besides, Christianity does not really teach one how to behave in each and every situation in life. If you enjoy well written essays which lead to no conclusion, this book is for you.

A collection of fantasies for children and adults. We printed some of them in English translation in 1994.

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**On the Crossroads of Asia and Europe**

*Poems of Tomasz Jastrun*


**Leonard Kress**

It is hard to believe that the fall of communism began almost twenty years ago (at least in Poland), and that those daily news reports gloriously, gloatingly, enthusiastically delineating the unraveling of the already frayed iron curtain have disappeared from American memory. Solidarity and Lech Wałęsa and the Shipyard at Gdańsk. The Velvet Revolution and Vaclav Havel. Gorbachev and *perestroika*. Lithuania, Estonia, Yugoslavia, Moldova, Romania, Hungary—almost an entire century dominated by the tragic and outrageous events in *Mitteleuropa*—and then in flash, almost as total as the nuclear holocaust we all feared, revolution, change, hope, democracy, toasts and cheers.

So many years later, it is surely unfortunate for us that the truly earth-shattering events surrounding these quiet revolutions and dissolutions have been forgotten. Thanks to Daniel Bourne’s resonant and restrained translations, a collection of poetry and prose by Polish poet Tomasz Jastrun, _On the Crossroads of Asia and Europe_, brings that period to life. It recreates it with such force and intensity that this work will surely join the ranks of those witnessing to the disastrous effects that ideas can have on society forced to adopt them. Jastrun wrote these poems in his thirties and early forties. He lacks the gnostic stretch of Czesław Miłosz or the bloodied-earth pathos of Miklos Radnoti, but succeeds in defining the forces that ruled his society after World War II. As Daniel Bourne writes in his translator’s introduction, Jastrun’s poetry is not “mere documentation with linebreaks,” but a poetry that “re-sees history through. . . iconic yet iconoclastic lense[s].” It is “reverential and ironic.”

Tomasz Jastrun is a son of another Polish poet, Mieczysław Jastrun. He was born in 1950, after the Holocaust and the nearly total destruction of his homeland, right smack into a world of shifting borders, displaced persons, and the grip of the Soviet-controlled PZPR (Polish United Workers’ Party). Even that background, though, was not enough to prepare him for his nearly decade-long encounter with the guilt and turpitude of the political establishment in Soviet-occupied Poland during the Solidarity era in the early 1980s. When Solidarity’s breadth and power became so great that the government saw itself in danger, it declared martial law and rounded up and incarcerated many of Solidarity activists, as well as rank-and-file members. The poems in this collection begin with that fateful apocalyptic Sunday (December 13, 1981) when martial law (*stan wojenny* or “state of war” in Polish) was declared. In some poems, Jastrun chooses to focus on the gruesome and fairy tale-like quality of the round up—as though he were reciting something from an unexpurgated Grimm:

All night my son couldn’t sleep
He lay with his eyes wide open.

They will come the more menacing
Because they themselves are miserable
With stars on their foreheads
Carved out of meat and bone

*(Sleeplessness)*

Jastrun describes an eerie and mysterious presence, the mystical nature of absolute power, something all totalitarian governments know and rely on:

In the middle of the night
A girl raced in
Like a flame
She swayed in the doorway
It’s begun

*(The First Night)*

At times the mass arrests, the mass disappearances, appear to be sheer banality, at times pure ritual, and even, in spite of their horrific qualities, oddly beautiful:

I should wake up the Lord God himself
Only I found no door to pound on
But I saw he had left his window
Wide open dark
And through it the snow fell like feathers
From a pillow ripped open by a knife

(Feathers)

There is even a certain identifiable and comforting coziness to the actions taken by the authorities. For the arresting authorities themselves, the special police and the soldiers, seem to be cognizant of their own absurdities and contradictions. There seems to be something beyond irony here—Jastrun seems to be after some new trope capacious enough to contain dualities without one side forcing the other into submission:

Four of them
In the middle of the night
One in uniform
One with a crowbar
Two with smiles

Four angels of communism
In their mouths black tidings from on high

(A Secret Meeting)

As we read further into the collection, the focus switches from the shock and horror of the actual declaration of martial law, to the day-to-day realities of surviving under it. And this daily struggle and suffering—previously under the yoke of foreign powers like the Germans, the Russians, the Austrians, and now, under the Russians and the Soviets—is one of the great themes of the last two hundred years of Polish literature. The act of living (and writing) becomes a moral test—how to avoid collaborating with the enemy, how to keep sight of truth, how to avoid despair, how to keep the language undefiled:

The first day of spring
And life goes on almost normal
The second channel back on radio
And with Frank Sinatra crooning
Life goes on almost normal
There are fewer patrols
Even curfew has its merits
And despite the layers of dialectic
I am still almost always free...

Meanwhile next to a wall in Wujek coal mine
A cross has just sprouted its first buds
But nothing strange in that since it’s March
A month almost free
And between the words
Almost and free
Is this chasm
If you want to jump over
Try plying out head first

(Chasm)

For Jastrun, survival is very much tied up with the notion of avoiding collusion and collaboration. Many of the poems in this section of the book call for vigilance in the face of attempts, on the part of the authorities, to define the struggle. They not only resort to usual spin control, false reports, and outright lies, but go further in their attempt to discredit their opponents. Jastrun’s poetry must be seen within this context of “Modest Proposals,” absurd fudging, staged re-enactments. The authorities know full well that their audience sees through their cynical doings, but they continue nonetheless. Government press officers become their own deconstructing critics, quick
to reveal the instability of language, the constant deform-
ing of meaning, pointing out how words (even their own) ultimately refer to just words and can therefore be used for any sort of manipulation:

Today we take a hike
Though nature
Says a warden we call Liver

A clump of weeds is what he means
And we watch in the sky above us
Christmas Eve blows away

I don’t know what I’d do
If it wasn’t for the special squads
This old lady testifies on TV
We laugh ourselves to tears
Even though we know
The salt will remain long after
The laughter burns off

(The Evening News)

Religion is called in as part of the communist party’s attempt to confuse the people, surely an outrage in a country so heartily Roman Catholic, the homeland of the Pope, a country in which some priests had their own Solidarity. Moreover, in Poland, the church and religion have always been viewed as the opponents of foreign-imposed political authority and at the forefront of the opposition. The banner of the Virgin Mary (often referred to as “The Queen of Poland”) has sometimes been raised in support of national struggle:

They say our Madonna in Żyrandów
Has joined the party
They open her I. D.
To show the photo
And the two scars on her cheek

They say Christ in Białoleżka Prison
Signed an oath of loyalty
On TV they turn the camera
On a pale white sheet
With a red smudge

They say the twelve apostles petitioned
To dissolve Solidarity
Holed up in their office
They break out the mineral water
And only one is sad

(Beasts)

Jastrun, who was active as an editor of a cultural journal in Solidarity, did not go to jail immediately. Since he was not at home when the police came, he initially went into hiding and wasn’t arrested until almost a year later. Before he was released as part of a general amnesty, he described his incarceration. As usual in his poems, the personal and the political collide:

Your father is dying
One official tells me
And I can hear how an IV feeds
The steady drip into one’s last poem
You’re the one killing him he adds

(Interrogation with Map)

So at last
Power is in the hands of the proletariat
Our present goal is a jail ruled by justice
We split up the bread and margarine
Each according to his needs
And during our daily walks
We take a spin on the bare tread of history

(Tread)

Striking, though, is Jastrun’s refusal to bask in the dramatic and romantic possibilities of writing from prison. He deliberately avoids the easy celebrity and martyrdom to be found in the prison letters of, say, Nelson Mandela or Henry David Thoreau during his night in jail, or Mahatma Ghandi’s writing to his daughter, or Eldridge Cleaver to his lawyer. It’s almost as if Jastrun fears that the simple act of writing might constitute some important betrayal:

When they lock me up
I used to say
I’m going to write poems
Well they locked me up
But the words
Just won’t lie down in a line
Everyone here just talks prose
A few simple hard-headed words
Repeated over and over again

(Prose)

Inside prison, Jastrun finds a world where the guffaws of Foucault drown out the girlish giggles of Rousseau:

In cell #12
The medievalist Karol Modzelewski
Has a lecture
On the origins of the Polish State
An audience of tractor mechanics
Tool-cutters
And a meteorologist
Who referees sports on the side...
And the present day like a rabbit
Scampers through a barren field

(The Present Day)

Reading the prison poems of Jastrun, I find it difficult not to feel overwhelmed by a sense that everything here functions to balance the equation—the political equals the personal. This is especially true when it comes to dealing with his father’s death, shortly after his release from prison. Though, of course, the algebra that one studies in Central Europe is much more complex, dragging in or dredging up a third associative property to include in the equation. The political = the personal = the historical:

Then I chip a hole
To the next cell
Some communists from the nineteenth century
Are still serving time
There is so much to tell
But I keep silent
They wouldn’t
Believe me anyway
Their fingers slide the rosary
The hollow seed of the dialectic

(Forty-Eight Hours)

Ultimately, for Jastrun, the struggle is one that cannot be won. Even that grand and resonant phrase, the fall of communism, rings hollow and goes flat—perhaps too much struggle, too much contesting and battling, results in nothing more than another wave of emigration. A repetition of Polish history, the reason for such large and vibrant Polish communities outside of Poland—in Paris and London, in Greenpoint in Brooklyn and Hamtramck in Detroit. The reason why Miłosz lives in Berkeley and Adam Zagajewski lives in Houston—the same reason why Adam Mickiewicz, the author of Pan Tadeusz, lived in Paris and died in Turkey. The price for struggle and victory, much like the price for defeat, is loss, even if that emigration turns out to be an internal journey away from the tragic heart of the struggle:

And in the end they emigrate
Into their lungs their livers their stomachs
They cultivate the taste buds on their tongues
And excite the animals in their bodies

But at some point they return
Changed beyond recognition
Here where the trees grow old
But not necessarily wise

(The Great Emigration)

And I feel the hair rise on my neck
Because always in the presence of death
The most frightening thing
Is that practically nothing has taken place

(Nothing)

Whereas other poets might understandably “retire” from public life, back off from the poetry of witness and confrontation, Jastrun is suspicious of those who follow Voltaire’s admonition to tend one’s own garden. Jastrun sees through Voltaire’s easy cynical solution. The pastoral realm—and to feel the full impact of Jastrun’s extreme position, one must truly understand just how much Poles love their gardens, the little fenced-in plots of land with their tiny decorated sheds and neatly arranged gardening tools, their little getaway plots—is just more business as usual:

This retired barber
Is ruthless
As he tends his garden
The soil enriched by the last war
He cuts the veins on the roses
Slaughters aphids
When exhausted he props himself up
On his instruments of torture
To peer through the chain link fence
And eavesdrop
Could the time be ripe
To bring the rest of the world
Under the reach of his hoe

Behind the bars of their own fences
Stand his neighbors
The young the old
Equally greedy and watchful
Pulling out words as well as weeds

(Tending One’s Garden)
On the Crossroads of Asia and Europe also contains a section of Jastrun’s prose written between 1989 and 1997, or after the experiences described in the poems. The prose, mostly occasional pieces that appeared in the Polish émigré press in Paris, serve the collection well as a sort of commentary or afterward. Yet these pieces are not mere glosses on the poems; they show Jastrun at home in a much more expansive and capacious form. And they also reveal his capacity for humor—a sort of Kafka and Orwell mixed with the self-consciousness and self-absorbed self-deprecation of Woody Allen. One piece from the late eighties specifically looks back at the Solidarity era, encapsulating it in a parable worthy of Kafka:

In 1984—not the book but the year—my typewriter was taken during a search of my apartment. But it didn’t happen all at once. Later I even went to retrieve it from Rakowiecki Prison, where it was impounded because the fun-loving, blue-eyed captain in charge of the operation determined that since nothing of importance was found in the search, they must punish me for my perfidious caution by confiscating the tool of my trade.

“I ran you in because you wrote a poem about me,” my guardian angel at the commissariat had said cheerfully. And with these very words I started a new poem. Writing is such a terrible addiction. ("Instruments of Crime")

There is also an endearing and self-effacing quality to Jastrun’s profound witness. He knows that his own suffering is perhaps insignificant when compared to that of others. This is an extension of the anti-Romantic stance of his poems. He is unwilling to make political or personal hay out of his experiences, even though it would be so easy, especially in the West. He’d rather see it as part of a whole struggle, one with true heroes and martyrs, perhaps (and perhaps not), but not him:

But suddenly I feel shame, that the bits and pieces I mention here, my own paltry “martyrology,” could be considered as boasting. I think of the doleful struggles that others have had (especially given the situation with today’s increasingly decomposing “spirit of compromise”), or the fates of those who have to do truly serious jail time. My scrapes with the secret police were not some overwhelming torture. Nevertheless, revulsion remains: my life or an entire year to be spent outside of my own home, and a life spent even longer afterwards living in a house with no real doors, the feelings of weakness and shattered nerves. ("Audience")

Jastrun is also a keen observer of the staying power of the old ways—in spite of debacle of martial law and the junking of the communist system. Even as late as 1991, a decade after the declaration of martial law—and well into the era of the new capitalist Poland with hints of NATO membership and eventual membership in the European Union. He finds that the old “Central European man” continues to exist and debate. Jastrun describes a conference that could have taken place in pre-war Poland or in Soviet-occupied Poland. The Central European nexus of historical bluster and suffering in some peculiar Darwinian survival is what remains, what will always remain:

A meeting of a group of intellectuals from Eastern Europe, Serb, Hungarian, Slovenian, Estonian, Romanian, Russian. Our eastern arithmetic of freedom—helplessness and despair—added, multiplied, divided. In the best shape are the Russians. They get drunk and of course start singing, puffing themselves up like overstuffed balloons, revealing an infrastructure of gold and silver teeth. But there in their baritones no longer appears the might of empire—just dancing hippos in a circus. I don’t know what to think. I mix compassion and liking with scorn, at which this drink we’re drinking goes down particularly hard. I clink shot glasses with the Slovenians. ("Awry")

It is not surprising, then, that Jastrun is so willing to mock the new icons—those new Mickiewiczes and Słowackis and Norwids, the Romantic giants who succored generations of Poles, while at the same time ensuring their addiction to that suffering. But the new ones—are they any different, the new Nobel laureates—Czesław Miłosz and Wisława Szymborska?

The Laureates appeared with an entourage. . . . A woman’s choir dressed in green Robes intoned a song in Latin. Meanwhile, the Laureates were positioned opposite two chairs and then offered as prey to the photographers. In the midst of the countless flashes, in the angelic singing, the two appeared to be heaven’s elect. Szymborska was suffering, wishing she could dematerialize on the spot, while Miłosz scowled with dignity. The scene lasted so frightfully long as to tax even the strongest constitution, but the Laureates survived this trial of the flash and once more elevated on the wings of the choir, they neared the antique table warming with
Here we have it all, the primal scene, the press lording about ready to report judgment, temptation, an angelic choir. The scene degenerates further as the press conference begins, with the two old poets moving around in a state of confusion, trying to decide where each one was supposed to sit, finally tripping over each other. Miłosz’s cane comes crashing down.

Jastrun never loses his grip, though, in the midst of this grand bungling. Just as the reception is about to end, and a waiter hauls in a huge sofa-sized cake, he is struck with a “horrible thought,” but the only thought truly possible given the exigencies that he and his fellow countrymen have lived through—and almost survived:

What if the waiter with the big knife would suddenly tear into our Nobel Laureates and deprive them of life? He would enter literary history, whereas none of the hundreds of uncommonly worthy guests at this most exclusive debate would ever make it there.

So much for Hegel, dialectical materialism, grand historical schemes, even historical memory. Perhaps we would all be better off if we believed in the accidental, the coincidental, the synchronicity of events, the macrocosm reflecting the microcosm, the personal, the intensely personal.

I would be remiss if I did not pay homage to the indispensable role of the translator, Daniel Bourne, in bringing this collection to life. Sometimes a translator is called upon to transform (and even energize and infuse) what would otherwise end up as lank and lifeless writing into poetry capable of capturing the English reader’s attention. And sometimes a translator achieves greater success by stepping aside to let the basic words and their placement on the page have their simple and straightforward say. Bourne strikes a careful middle ground between the rewrite and negative capability. And I think that is because he is no armchair translator, but a poet himself, who lived through world described in Jastrun’s poems. He was living in Warsaw during martial law, sneaking about to meet with various poets and writers and visual artists. And he returned time and again, even spending two years in Warsaw (under a Fulbright Grant) in the mid-eighties to see how the writers and the country were progressing and surviving. So when I say that he, as translator, knows just when to step in and when to hold back, it is because he is painfully aware of the antagonisms, dialectics, batterings between words and in the “silent” interstices between lines. He is able to distinguish between what is left unsaid and the hushed mutterings of the historical and mythological ghosts lurking behind and beyond Jastrun’s often deceptively simple language.

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Writing a Usable Past: Russian Literary Culture, 1917–1937


Maria Rubins

Focusing on Soviet Russian biographical writing between 1917 and 1937, Professor Angela Brintlinger aptly employs the formula of a “usable past,” articulated in a 1918 essay by American critic Van Wyck Brooks. While Brooks’s idea that the past can be used to interpret and understand the present is not particularly original, it epitomizes the quest of Soviet Russian literature to find historical heroes relevant for the contemporary generation. Among Brintlinger’s primary subjects are Vladislav Khodasevich, Iurii Tynianov, and Mikhail Bulgakov who penned fictionalized biographies of prominent Russian and European writers in an attempt to explain the predicament of a creative personality both in the Soviet Union and in émigré communities. Her examination of the texts involves an inquiry into three theoretical problems of the biographical genre: the reader’s pre-existing knowledge, the mechanics of transforming “fact” into “fiction,” and the relationship between biographical and autobiographical material.

Brintlinger begins her discussion with Iurii Tynianov, a scholar-turned-novelist whose main contributions to the genre of biography are his three novels, Kiukhlia, The Death of Vazir-Mukhtar, and Pushkin. The second novel, focusing on Alexander Griboedov’s last days, was published in 1929 and was by far his most successful project. While Tynianov created a truly Soviet book, “scientifically” transforming the past into a lesson for the present, The Death of Vazir-Mukhtar is also innovative in other ways. This “scientific” novel reveals an analogy between the reigns of Nikolai I and Stalin, and it incorporates a great deal of auto-referen-
tial material, especially concerning the compromise both Griboedov and Tynianov made with repressive political regimes. By contrast, the novel Pushkin, which Tynianov had been writing for ten years but left unfinished at the time of his death in 1943, is the least experimental of his works. Tynianov undertook to write about Pushkin in conjunction with the centenary of the poet’s death, a morbid anniversary celebration staged by Stalin with all due pomp in order to claim the best of the pre-revolutionary cultural heritage. The commission was tempting, but the project soon got out of hand because Tynianov became so engrossed in details that he only described the first 21 years of Pushkin’s life.

The centenary of Pushkin’s death was marked by Russian émigré intellectuals with just as much zeal and determination. Delving into the celebrations sponsored by Russians in Paris, Brintlinger reveals Pushkin’s posthumous role in legitimizing the claim of the emigrant community to the title of the sole guardian of Russian cultural heritage. Vladislav Khodasevich, who began his Pushkin studies while still in Russia, promised a biography of the poet by 1937 but delivered only an incomplete, fragmentary text. Despite Pushkin’s significance, his life, according to Brintlinger, did not offer Khodasevich a “usable past.” Khodasevich was unable to present Pushkin as an organically integrated man and poet. He tended to focus more on the poet’s life than his art, emphasizing Pushkin’s baser character traits such as dissipation, slothfulness, rowdiness, and social insecurity.

Gavriil Derzhavin, on the other hand, incarnated a “healthy” balance between life and art for his twentieth-century chronicler. Khodasevich wrote Derzhavin’s biography between 1929 and 1931, seeking to refute Derzhavin’s reputation as a court poet, he built the text around the categories of God, the monarch, and the law, themes equally important for both the biographer and his subject. Khodasevich’s Derzhavin is a public figure and a public poet, an archetypal positive hero. Since Khodasevich himself was a private person and a loner, diametrically opposed to the gambler, carouser, and gourmand Derzhavin, this biography was not inspired by personal identification, but rather conceived as a recipe for cultural regeneration. Khodasevich considered Russian culture to be nearing the end of a cycle that began with Derzhavin, and he strove to create a viable model from the past to inspire his contemporaries to further development.

Brintlinger introduces Mikhail Bulgakov as a writer who turned to the past in a search for his own immortality. He found some “usable past” in the images of Molière and Pushkin, through whose experience Bulgakov filtered his own. The stories of these two writers served as fertile ground to investigate the relationship between artist, king, and ideological establishment. In his novel about Molière, commissioned for the series Zhizn’ zamechatel’nykh liudei, and in the play Kabala sviatosha [a cabal of hypocrites], Bulgakov demonstrates his belief that a king would intervene to protect a playwright from the ideologues who strove to silence him. This cautious optimism is a reflection of Bulgakov’s personal relations with Stalin. By the time he began to collaborate with Vikentii Veresaev on a play about Pushkin, however, any illusions Bulgakov had about benevolent intervention from above were gone. Pushkin is therefore presented as persecuted by society, the secret police, and the tsar himself. Ultimately, through Pushkin, Bulgakov expressed his pessimistic reassessment of the possibilities for artists in the Soviet Union. Among the three authors who wrote about Pushkin in the 1930s, Bulgakov was the only one to complete his task. Sadly, his Pushkin play was banned, as were his works on Molière.

Angela Brintlinger’s book is fascinating, and her approach to biographical writing from the position of the “usable past” is highly original. This perspective has allowed her to penetrate deeper into the psychology of the writers she considers, while correlating individual motives with a larger political agenda that created demand for a particular type of biography. Brintlinger demonstrates that the concept of “usable past” can be successfully applied in other studies of biography and historical fiction.

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**Poland: An Illustrated History**


**Marek Jan Chodakiewicz**

Did you know that the Magna Carta predated the Act of Cenia (safeguarding laws at the expense of the monarch’s power) by thirteen years only? However, Poland’s Neminem Captivabimus preceded England’s Habeas corpus by over 150 years. Easily accessible nuggets of the Polish past come in handy if one teaches, as I do, Western Civilization at a small California col-
lese. The standard textbooks I use are predictably mum on Poland. Their most salient feature is the glorification of the Anglo-Saxon and Germanic traditions as the worthy successors of the Greek and Roman civilizations.

After gliding through Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome, a typical textbook anchors itself firmly in Western Europe. Germany figures prominently in the narrative, but its past is depicted almost exclusively in conjunction with Western European developments: the wars of the Holy Roman Emperors in Italy and France, the feudal fragmentation of the Empire, and religious strife that followed the Protestant Revolution. Nothing on the Drang nach Osten. England and France occupy the central part of the textbook with “Rome” moving in and out of the narrative usually to signal utter corruption of the Papacy and the wickedness of the Catholic Church. “Italy” pops up suddenly for a brief spell during the Renaissance, to disappear again until the 19th century. Spain surfaces for a fleeting moment during the Age of Discovery, to retreat into obscurity soon after, save for the Inquisition, everyone’s favorite whipping boy. Scandinavian countries are mentioned only to the extent that their denizens created havoc in Germany, France, and England, from the Vikings to Gustavus Adolphus. The Balkans and its peoples exist as a background for the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires. Bohemia and Moravia merit but a perfunctory nod thanks to Jan Hus. Slovakia is a part of Hungary which is Austria, unless it hosts Attila the Hun. Russia’s early history is covered in a superficial, Moscow-centered way, reflexively stressing continuities and similarities between Moscow and Kiev and mechanically upholding the former’s spurious claims to “all Russia,” including the Grand Duchy of Lithuania which at any rate is hardly mentioned. Jewish history is largely limited to anti-Jewish violence. Monotheistic Yahweh, the Old Testament, and Moses Maimonides are given a rather short shrift. Poland is practically dismissed in a few pedestrian entries. Hence, along with many other European nations, Poland is one of the best kept secrets of history.

To put it otherwise, standard textbooks on Western Civilization shortchange my students. I have taken steps to remedy the situation. After all, my class is usually their one and only scholarly encounter with the past. (“Western Civ. requirement sucks, but you gotta take it, man, to graduate. And it’s transferable, too.”) Therefore, usually, I set aside two class periods to talk about Central, South-East, and Eastern Europe. I prepare my lectures using Michal Bobrzyński, Barbara Jelavich, Oskar Halecki, George Vernadsky, Meir Balaban, Norman Davies, and others. I find it disruptive however to consult them when I work on my “Western European history” lectures. Lately, instead of leafing through Davies et al., I have been able to pepper my lectures with data handily drawn from Professor Iwo Pogonowski’s Poland: An Illustrated History. His whistle-stop tour of Poland is an indispensable teaching tool. It is also a treasure for quick self-defense and a soothing potion for Polish pride.

Is it inappropriate to juxtapose John Lackland’s fleeting concessions to his lay and spiritual lords with Ladislas III’s solemn promise to preserve “just and noble laws according to the council of bishops and barons?” Is it intolerant to state that, although the Inquisition was introduced into Poland in 1318, the institution remained mostly dormant for the duration of its existence, while anti-Catholic laws are still on the books in England (e.g., a British monarch may not marry a Catholic or become one)? Is it cultural chauvinism to recall that Paweł Włodkowic expounded the basic principles of international law over two hundred years before Hugo Grotius? Is it politically incorrect to reveal that the Constitution Nihil Novi of 1505 extended the franchise to about 10 percent of the population, a feat unmatched elsewhere in Europe until Britain’s reforms of the early 19th century? After all, old Poland was well ahead of its times in democracy, tolerance, and justice. Should we not stress those achievements which are relevant to our liberal democratic society?

And so my lectures are peppered with the occasional “by the way, did you know that at the time in Poland . . .” I know that I sound very self-congratulatory about Poland’s past. It is quite fashionable to confess the sins of our forefathers and apologize for them. But Pogonowski would have none of that. And why not look him up? And he is not the only one. For example, the Polonophile Professor Joseph Rothschild of Columbia University used to lecture on things Polish as if Poland were the center of Western Civilization. Horror of horrors, he was even rather fair to Poland’s Nationalists, while positively gloatting over the Pilsudskites. Pogonowski is rather even-handed on both.

Nonetheless, I’m afraid Norman Davies would frown upon Pogonowski’s insistence that the Slavs (presumably some of them proto-Poles) were already settled in the Central and Eastern European area in the 5th century BC.

Like historian Adam Zamoyski, Professor Pogonowski is a true-blue equestrian Sarmatian. He is also an impatient erudite. Linguistic extrapolations,
scientific discoveries, artistic styles, and scholarly personae abound on the pages of *Poland: An Illustrated History*. We learn that in the middle of the 20th century, “the Polish language had over 100,000 words; of these, about ten percent were in use by an average Pole. Of this ten percent, one-fourth was of Old Slavonic origin.” Pogonowski makes tongue-twisters like Swarożyć (“sfah-ro-zhits”) sound amiable, even if he keeps silent about the dark secrets of this sun deity. *Panie Profesorze*, is it true that maybe human sacrifice was involved? I have no idea but I’m curious. Nonetheless, I bet it is not common knowledge that “the earliest written polyphonic religious music by anonymous Polish composers can be traced back to the 12th century.” Strangely, dudy, or bagpipes, merited transliteration, while gešle (a proto-violin) did not. Pronounce that!

Pogonowski is at his best while covering the Noble Commonwealth of the 16th and 17th centuries. One can just imagine him haranguing his peers in the Sejm, enacting freedom-loving legislation, and disrupting the proceedings with a *liberum veto*. Noble democracy and equality seem to be his favorite topics. “Throughout the huge territory of Poland-Lithuania, every Polish or Polish-Lithuanian noble, no matter how small his holdings, was proclaimed equal to a provincial governor.” Even the common people were alright, in particular when they fought for Poland: “the peasant elite infantry soon became renowned for its patriotism.” Forever enamored of the “winged cavalry” (*husaria*), Pogonowski reminds us that “the 17th century Polish saber became the European and American standard and remained so until World War II.”

Pogonowski’s chirping prose becomes somber when dealing with the downfall of the Commonwealth in the 18th century and its subsequent partitions. Only occasional rays of sunshine shoot through his narrative, while the author regales us with the tales of cultural and scientific achievements of captive Poles. But triumph is overshadowed by tragedy, bloody wars and uprisings. None was more tragic than World War II. For the Poles, it was a war against two enemies: Hitler and Stalin. “Hitler’s Plan East to obliterate Poland and other Slavic countries included the planned genocide of 51,000,000 Slavs in order to open to German colonization the fertile lands between Riga and the Black Sea. The extermination of the Polish intellectual community started from the first days of war. Both the Germans and the Soviets had long lists prepared of those Polish citizens who were to be executed.”

The results were staggering. “6,028,000 or 22.2 percent of Polish citizens were killed by the Germans, including 644,00 in combat; an additional 1,000,000 perished as a result of the deportation of 1,900,000 to the Soviet Union.” These statistics have been recently revised downward to about 3 million Jewish and over 2 million Christian victims (including approximately 500,000 Catholic Poles killed by Soviet communists and their supporters). In any event, Pogonowski correctly reminds us that Poland’s refusal to join Hitler against Stalin in all likelihood saved the Soviet Union and the world from German supremacy.

In his very brief treatment of the post-1989 period, the author takes an exceedingly critical view of the political and economic developments. Unlike most of the contemporary Polish (and Polonian) elite, Pogonowski is a Euro-skeptic. He worries about “the threat of German economic domination.” He also states that “the cultural history of Poland constitutes an uninterrupted and original achievement which, unfortunately, has not been reflected in her political history. However, the spirit of the Polish nation lives on with the knowledge that the Poles have done great things together and have the will to do them again.”

Interrupting my paean, I would like to register a few objections. In his book, Pogonowski advances his pet theory about the quest for oil by the 20th century dictators, by Stalin in particular. In his opinion, Stalin was strongly supportive of the creation of the state of Israel, not because he favored the Jews but because he hoped that such a state would soon pit Israel (and hence the West) against the Arab Muslim world. Although plausible enough, such a theory is yet to be substantiated by a search in the post-Soviet archives. It is not a given that “oil” was behind the alleged secret police anti-Jewish provocation in Kielce in July 1946. The author also impishly indulges in sniping at contemporary cultural icons and institutions. Although I have read the Stalinist verse of Wisława Szymborska, who later won the Nobel price for poetry, I did not know that the venerable Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny* was, so to speak, blessed by the NKVD to commence its operations in March 1945. A tidbit like this does not belong in a short entry of a reference book without footnotes. Is it perhaps because *Poland: An Illustrated History* reads like a telegraphic outline of a much more extensive work still brewing in its author’s brain?

There are a few other critical remarks that can be made about Pogonowski’s book. One of them is the problem of proofreading. In that connection, perhaps Pogonowski should challenge his English editor to a duel. That would be so deliciously Sarmatian. Suing is so—Anglo-Saxon.
Necessary Lies


Andrzej Karcz

Stachniak’s first novel interestingly suggests how people’s lives are sometimes mysteriously linked with historical events, be it recent developments or the more remote happenings of the past. The plot centers around a young Polish woman named Anna, and the time of action is the Solidarity period of Polish history. In 1981, when Solidarity was outlawed by the government of Soviet-occupied Poland, Anna decided to emigrate to Canada. At first, she planned to stay in Canada for the duration of her academic scholarship only, but soon she became enchanted by “Canadian comfort... supermarkets overflowing with food... the glittering lights of Montreal office towers.” Along with Anna’s Canadian enchantment comes her new love for William who teaches music at McGill University. After a brief romance, she decides to divorce her husband Piotr whom she had left in Poland, and marry William. This is the turning point. All that follows is a consequence of Anna’s decision to marry William who turns out to be unfaithful to her.

But the novel’s turning point is also its weakest point, as the reader is presented with little justification for Anna’s decision about divorce and remarriage. Granted, Anna did not like communist Poland, but her marriage to Piotr was a happy one. Why, then, does she divorce him? The detailed descriptions of Anna’s getting to know Piotr, their courtship, romance and marriage are convincingly presented, but her acquaintance with William, who happens to be a German Canadian, seems shallow and a bit too sentimental.

But Necessary Lies is ultimately not about romancing. It is also a deft analysis of individual lives intertwined with history and politics. Anna’s life in Poland is depicted as that of a person submerged in political events. Through Piotr, she became involved in clandestine anti-communist activities. The events of 1968 and 1981 were part of Anna’s biography. Also, Stachniak’s brings to bear events of World War II in Poland and Germany. She presents her characters against the background of war and postwar history of the city of Wroclaw. Anna was born in that city (an autobiographical element, perhaps), and when she meets William, she learns that he is a Canadian born in Germany in 1940, when Wroclaw was still called Breslau and belonged to Nazi Germany. William lived in that city with his mother until the war’s end. In their mutual remembrances, Wroclaw and Breslau turn out to be worlds apart. Anna learns countless stories, among which there are many lies, about that city and its history as present in German memory.

There are also lies in Anna’s life. When William dies suddenly after ten years of marriage, Anna discovers his secret love letters from a German journalist Ursula. She painfully learns that her husband had a love affair that lasted throughout her marriage. This devastating discovery makes Anna go back to Wroclaw and confront her own personal past, and also to confront her late husband’s past by visiting the house in which he lived as a child. She also arranges to meet William’s lover Ursula who resides in Berlin. Anna’s confrontations become powerful history lessons. After ten years of absence, she not only sees her own country as a new Poland liberated from communism, but she also learns about her own family in this new reality. She is able to look into her parents’ past as well (having survived the war, they moved to Wroclaw). She also looks into the past of her late German husband’s family who abandoned the defeated Breslau. She meets a close friend of William’s mother and discovers that his father was a Nazi, while his grandfather was executed by the Nazis. The pieces of the puzzle of the two families’ lives and one city’s war history are being arranged before Anna by fate. Anna’s history lessons become her own scars and wounds, and she very intimately experiences the turmoil of twentieth-century European history.

Necessary Lies is set in Montreal, Wroclaw, Berlin, and Warsaw. These city names, together with the years “1981” and “1991” added to them, serve as titles for individual chapters of this well-constructed novel. One stylistic feature might annoy some readers: the use of Polish and German words or phrases followed by their English equivalents. These multilingual additions detract from readability of the text.

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One of the great bookstores of America
This condensed history of Poland tries to show the impact of the key events of Polish history on contemporary Poland. The chapter titles speak for themselves: “The Place under the Sun, What Place under the Sun?” “Territory,” “Neighbors,” “Nation,” “Immigrants,” “State,” “The Knowledge of the Past,” “Religion,” “Closer to Europe or to the Third World?” “The Communist Attempt to Modernize,” “Is the Past Over?” Included also is a calendar of events in Poland and elsewhere, and suggestions for further reading. The author strives to maintain a post-1989 point of view. His remarks on the two concepts of a nation: as a collection of citizens and as a union of Poles, are particularly interesting. Under the partitions, the notion of Poland as a union of Poles gained ground, and the view of Poland as a “country of citizens” was weakened. The author’s explanation of this development is most useful, because impatient outside observers often do not take these historical circumstances into account.

The author’s thoughts on the Polish Diaspora between the two World Wars are likewise interesting: “The Polish immigrants and Polish enclaves in the world were treated by Poland as a part of the Polish nation. At the same time, different nationalities and minorities living in Poland, with different cultural and religious backgrounds, were not considered part of the Polish nation.” Again, the author explains the reasons for this view, so different from the standard American view on what constitutes nations and states.

In another chapter, “The same people yet not the same,” Kula comments on Soviet-occupied Poland: “The majority of people were subjected to uravniłovka [leveling-out] by all kinds of mechanisms including more or less similar salaries, apartments and furniture. Poverty seemed to disappear, and a casual foreign observer could hardly distinguish between those who flourished under the communist regime and the vast majority who did not. In the later years, the system gave the sons and daughters of farmers and workers an opportunity for education.” True enough: the percentage of farmers’ sons and daughters at universities has dropped dramatically since the arrival of freedom. The book strives for objectivity in looking at the past, and it gives the reader a feeling that stability has finally been achieved in Poland. Kula ends with melancholy remarks about the lack of interest in history among contemporary students. They tend to choose law and economics, he says. But in his view, the Polish youth tend to look toward the future rather than toward the past, and this is a healthy development.

Mapping Flesh with Stone

Helen Bajorek MacDonald

I

They took us;
Tenth of February 1940.

Rude banging at the door
the cold winter night
an executioner’s blade shearing
the innocent from their sleep;
three louse-ridden brutes
eyes cloaked by Red Army caps
guns fixed on father
mother crying:
What did we do?
What do we pack?
afraid to ask:
Where are you taking us?

Fifteen minutes: a quarter of an hour
a lifetime goodbye

Select necessities jammed
into a suitcase; papers, photographs,
pots and potatoes tied in bundles
as much as thunderstruck bodies can carry.

Through the night
shivering muffles weeping mothers
silently smothering babies
protecting them from the frost
and their future.

II

Boxcars.

Dozens of bodies crammed in
clambering for a small space
they might kill to keep.

Days become weeks
clickety-clack
clickety-clack
roles are assigned:
keeper of the days scratches their passing
on the boxcar wall:
women care for the sick, hopelessly watch death;
men remove the dead, when they can;
children pretend not to be hungry;
the old cry, then pray—
everyone prays for food
for warmth;
God fed and warm
and deaf.

III
Even in the dark
Even with weakened eyes
we know where we are:
Siberia
taiga forest swallows lives
a slow ingestion of slaves
cutting, chopping, planing
milking for resin;
- war production -
complicit in Stalin’s assault on the Poles.

IV
We crowded the barracks
like the lice on our evanescent flesh.
Each week they forced us
Naked into a Siberian sauna
primitive and artless:
rocks and stones piled round
as a corral with towering walls
fire blazing at the center
women, men, children, old people
herded in for the killing of lice
filth weeps as pitch from flesh as bodies huddle
shriveled from hunger.

V
One day, the danger of cold meeting hot:
explosive.
Perhaps thinking a full pail of water would give off more
steam
shorten his humiliation
a skeletal man-boy tossed it purposefully
against the heat of the rocks
stones and rocks flew wildly up and throughout
stone opposing skin
a brand of memory.

Letters
Marek Jan Chodakiewicz responds
To begin with, I would like to thank Professor Anna
Cienciala for writing about a collection of communist
underground documents I co-edited. However, since
her review is less than fair, I would like to clarify a
few things.

Most importantly, I reject her charges that the edi-
tors set out to substitute one propaganda stereotype for
another. Rather, we published the documents that hith-
erto had been inaccessible to non-communist schol-
ars. The documents speak for themselves. Admittedly,
they make for a shocking and self-condemnatory read.
After all, had they not been so compromising for the
communists, they would have been made accessible
before 1989. They should be read alongside the earlier
documentary collections and the hagiographical works
at which Mr. Nazarewicz (quoted by Professor
Cienciala) and his comrades excelled. Only in juxta-
position with those earlier works can The Hidden Face
be appreciated for what it is: a corrective to a white
spot of Polish history.

That is not to say that the truth lies in the middle,
between the communist propaganda of yore and our
documentary collection, as Professor Cienciala has
implied. The Hidden Face allows us to reconstruct the
unknown side of the communist underground, the side
that seriously challenges, if not outright negates, the
myths concerning the Polish Workers’ Party (PPR) and
its guerrilla force, the People’s Guard and People’s
Army (GL/AL).

The Hidden Face has received many favorable re-
views in Poland. Poland’s eminent historian, Profes-
sor Tomasz Strzembosz, wrote the following: “In The
Hidden Face, the documents have not been doctored.
They reflect the reality of life in the GL and AL. These
two armed formations have many compromising facts
on their record. . . . The Hidden Face is of course a
selection. . . . The historian, making his choices, often
does not publish documents in their entirety. It is im-
portant to note that this is always marked [in The Hid-
den Face]. The London edition of The AK in docu-
ments also has many lacunae.” (Strzembosz, as quoted
in Piotr Lipiński, “Tajne oblicze: Gwardziści uciekli
w zboże,” Gazeta Wyborcza, 24–26 December 1997,
23). Dr. Cezary Chlebowski has stated that [in The
Hidden Face] “every document brings forth a drama
or is otherwise a rare gem [co dokument, to dramat lub
ratyras],” and he called the editors “the three histori-
cal musketeers” (Cezary Chlebowski, “Oni poderwali
naród do boju,” Tygodnik Solidarność, 2 January 1998,
16). Professor Cienciala thus incorrectly stated that historians glossed over our work.

She seems to agree with our main point when she admits that the minuscule PPR and GL/AL perpetrated deeds of “revolutionary banditry,” killing and robbing Polish independents of the Home Army, the Peasant Battalions, and the National Armed Forces. Nonetheless, in some instances, she seems to rely on Nazarewicz too heavily to appreciate the documentary value of our work.

Such is the case with her treatment of the alleged collaboration between the Nazi security services and the communist underground. The Home Army documents, corroborated partly by communist secret police (UB) interrogation records, strongly suggest that such collusion indeed took place. Professor Cienciala (after Nazarewicz) claims that “the PPR had nothing to do with it.” She seems surprised that in the course of the joint operation the Gestapo failed to catch “the alleged AL raiders.” Well, I would like to ask her to re-read the documents (and not their interpretation by Nazarewicz) to see that in fact “the alleged AL raiders” posed as members of the pro-Nazi collaborationist wing of the Miecz i Pług [Sword and Plough] movement. At least one of the leaders of MiP, Boguslaw Hrynkiewicz, was a triple agent: a PPR infiltrator, an NKVD operative, and a Gestapo informer. Of course, Hrynkiewicz remained a loyal communist. He organized the raid jointly with either the Gestapo or the Abwehr. The Nazis supplied their men and the communists theirs, disguised as “Polish fascists.” Why would the Gestapo want to capture their own collaborators? Indeed, the world of secret services must be even more confusing than the universe of diplomatic intrigue that Professor Cienciala describes so well in her valuable books. At any rate, a soon-to-be-published monograph on the Miecz i Pług movement by Aneta Wojcieszkiewicz should clear the murkiness of the Gestapo-PPR affair.

Professor Cienciala is similarly baffled when she deals with communist guerrillas and the party leader Wladyslaw Gomulka. She worries that “the reader not well versed in Polish history might well wonder if all the GL-AL units were murderous bandits prating on the Polish population, or whether the PPR was just a puppet of Moscow?” The PPR and GL/AL largely eschewed establishing their own clandestine infrastructure in the countryside, because after 1941, they advocated “active struggle.” That strategy rendered a secret net hard to maintain. First, the peasants resented “active struggle” because it caused needless Nazi reprisals. Second, very few Poles were willing to feed the communists who were identified with Poland’s other enemy, the USSR. Third, the peasants were reluctant to feed anyone because most food was confiscated by the Nazis. Therefore most, if not all, communist units had to support themselves by robbing peasants (see e.g. Mariusz Bechta, Rewolucja, Mit, Bandytm: Komunisci na Podlasiu, 1939–1944, Warsaw-Biala Podlaska: Rekonwista-Rachocki i ska, 2000). Robberies obliged the peasants to organize self-defense groups and to turn to the independents for protection. The latter were at the time fighting off the communist assaults on the Polish elite. The answer then is, yes, there were some ideological communists, including NKVD agents, in the ranks of the GL/AL partisans, but there were also bloody revolutionaries devoid of all scruples in their treatment of the Polish population and its traditional elites, including members of the independentist underground. Thus, ideological communists worked hand-in-glove with common bandits. That included Wladyslaw Gomulka, who was well aware of the situation in the countryside as well as of some of the activities of the NKVD within his own ranks.

Gomulka was a curious case, although it is hard to agree with Professor Cienciala that he “was certainly not a puppet.” As Peter Raina stressed in his often overlooked biography of Gomulka, the communist leader was as faithful a Stalinist as Tito, and for a longer period of time. During the war, he was independent only to the extent that the PPR lost radio contact with Moscow. He did his best to follow the Stalinist party line, as he understood it without any proper instructions. He must have done his job well. After all, in 1944 the NKVD dispatched Leon Kasman to replace Gomulka but, after learning the details of the latter apparatchik’s conduct, Stalin judged him obedient enough and allowed him to stay in power. Stalin was not disappointed. In fact, more independentists were killed by the communists during Gomulka’s first reign (1944-1949), than when Stalinism bloomed fully (1949–1956). Initially, after 1944, Gomulka did not elucidate any original policy for Poland. He simply toed the party line that Poland was “a people’s democracy,” a system different from Soviet socialism (a precise description was provided by Stalin’s then-favorite, Evgen Varga, in 1946). Hence, in congruence with Stalin’s wishes, Gomulka promised that there would be no forced collectivization of agriculture. In 1948, tardy to sense that change was afoot in the Kremlin, Gomulka defended Tito, who advocated similar (no
longer orthodox Stalinist) views. According to communist tactic, Gomułka had to be sacrificed as one identified with a “deviationist” party line. He was dismissed and isolated in a comfortable villa. As the recently published documents suggest, Gomułka was persecuted only to the extent that he was served plain bread instead of baguettes with his morning coffee. In 1956, he returned to power preaching his views of the “people’s democracy” party line. What alternative did he have? More orthodox Stalinism which had just been discredited by Khrushchev? True, Gomułka was less of a puppet after 1956, but then the post-Stalin Soviet leadership did not demand as much servility as Stalin did.

There are also several other mistakes in the review. Barykada was not a clandestine political paper of the National Party (SN), but rather a small newsheet of a local military underground cell of the NSZ in Konstancin-Jeziorna near Warsaw. The issue Professor Cienciala quoted with understandable disapproval appeared in March 1944 and not in 1943—see the excellent monograph by Wojciech Jerzy Muszyński, Walce o Wielką Polskę: Propaganda zaplecza politycznego Narodowych Sił Zbrojnych, 1939–1945 (Warsaw-Biała Podlaska: Rekonkwista-Rachocki i ska, 2000).

Finally, Professor Cienciala states that, on the one hand, “the work is valuable in that it demonstrates the communist regime’s deliberate falsification of wartime history in order to bolster its own dubious legitimacy.” But on the other hand, she inexplicably apologizes for the historians responsible for falsifying history. Her favorites are the secret police man Colonel Nazarewicz, the secret police agent Maria Turlejska (“Ksienia”), and the party hack Stanisław Madajczyk. Our documents compromise their “scholarship” unequivocally. After we questioned his integrity, Nazarewicz accused us of “possessing material means of unknown origins,” i.e. of being on the payroll of some secret organization (Ryszard Nazarewicz, “Słowa nienawiści,” Dziś, December 1997, 123). Turlejska and Madajczyk kept silent for the most part. Marcin Zaborski scathingly criticized even the “dissident” work of Turlejska as ignorant at best. To preempt charges against him, Madajczyk, who tended to be so sparse with footnotes that it was sometimes hard to differentiate in his work between his own analysis and that of the unknown experts of the independentist underground, has recently discovered the Holocaust of the Jews. Sure, people do change. But more often they simply change their rhetoric. It seems that a liberal-sounding Stalinist is more palatable to Professor Cienciala than the shooting from the hip right-winger Leszek Żebrowski. She cares neither for the reality of nationhood nor for the combative style of the main editor of our volume. That is fair enough. But is it sufficient reason to rely on an ex-UB Colonel as her interpreter of our collection of PPR and GL/AL documents?

Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, Los Angeles, California

Assessment of a book

I was surprised to read in a review that Barbara Wachowicz’s book Nazwę Cię Kościuszko is “a book for children” (SR, 21/2, April 2001). Does that mean that the book is for those 6, 8, 10 years of age? Nazwę Cię Kościuszko is suitable for students and adults. It is informative and easy to read, and it nicely depicts a popular hero. The book is widely read by people of all age groups in Poland.

Aleksandra Ziółkowska-Boehm, PhD
Wilmington, Delaware

Correction

Professor Anna Cienciala regrets to have misled the SR readers about Svetlana Alliluyeva’s marriage to Kaganovich Jr. (SR, April 2001, p. 798) In fact, she married the son of Stalin’s close collaborator and creator of “Socialist Realism,” Andrei Aleksandrovich Zhdanov (1896-1948).

Announcements and Notes

Kraków’s Adam Mickiewicz Institute promotes translations of Polish works of fiction and nonfiction

In 1998, a foundation was established in Kraków, with a view to promoting Polish culture abroad. A mini-Goethe Institute, really (‘mini’ refers to financial possibilities and not to the wealth of culture represented). The full name of the foundation is the Literary Group of the Adam Mickiewicz Institute. Its address is Villa Decius, 28 Lipca Street, No. 17a, 30-233 Kraków, Poland. Email: villa@polska2000.pl, or plf@polska2000.pl. Web address: <http://www.polska2000.pl>.

The Literary Group’s task is to promote translations. It publishes an English language catalog, organizes exchanges with German and Israeli journalists, and promotes currently published works. So far as we can judge, the Group also assist translators from the Polish. Interested persons might want to contact the Adam Mickiewicz Institute by telephone (48-22-625-4323).
Norman Davies receives the Order of St Michael and St George


The Jerzy Łojek Prize

The organizers of the Warsaw exhibit “Zbrodnie w Majestacie Prawa, 1944–1956” [crimes and the law, 1944–1956] were recipients of this year’s Jerzy Łojek Prize. The Prize was bestowed on them on 12 May 2001 in Warsaw. The Jerzy Łojek Foundation is associated with the Piłsudski Institute in New York, and its founders are Mr. and Mrs. Andrzej and Danuta Cisek. The Warsaw exhibit was put together by the “Jaworzniacy,” a group dedicated to assisting the survivors of political terror in Soviet-occupied Poland during the 1944–1956 period.

Francis Kajencki honored

Col. Francis Kajencki’s book, Thaddeus Kosciuszko: Military Engineer of the American Revolution (1998) was selected by the U.S. Commission on Military History to be included in the annual Bibliographie Internationale d’Histoire Militaire published in Switzerland. About thirty American books are so selected each year. Kajencki is the author of several books, and he is the former President of the Polish American Congress, Texas division. He is presently at work on Casimir Pulaski: Cavalry Commander of the American Revolution. Yes, of course he is a Sarmatian Review subscriber!

A new site on old Polish literature

<http://gimnazjum.com.pl/staropolska> is the address of a Kraków site on literature of the Polish Middle Ages, Renaissance and Baroque. It contains many English translations including those by SR Editorial Advisory Committee members. Worth a visit.

Postage increase and other financial matters

Inclusive of January 2001 issue, we have been mailing the complete printed edition of Sarmatian Review to Poland, surface mail, for $1.45 per issue. In April 2001, the rates changed. Surface rate for single issues of the periodical is no longer available, and the least expensive way to mail SR to Europe is to use the air mail rate at $3.05 per issue (Poland) and $3.20 (England, Germany, Italy).

In effect, mailing rates have increased by 110 percent. This translates into a considerable amount of additional postage. Regrettably, starting with the current issue, we shall have to curtail our complimentary mailings to Poland. Some libraries and individuals will still receive SR but many individuals will not unless a generous donor comes up with the money. Sarmatian Review needs an additional yearly income, and eventually an endowment allowing it to fulfill its mission in the future.

About the Authors

Dave Buck is a sophomore at Marian Catholic High School in Chicago Heights, Illinois.
Marek Jan Chodakiewicz received his doctorate in history from Columbia University in 2001. He teaches at Pierce College in California. In summer 2001, he held a visiting appointment at the University of Virginia.
Alicja Jankowska, Tomasz Krówka, Anastazja Lubecki, Sebastian Szafranśki, Tamara Zielirńska are undergraduate students at the University of Illinois at Chicago.
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Leonard Kress is an Assistant Professor in the Communications/Humanities Department at Owens College in Toledo, Ohio.
Helen Bajorek MacDonald is a poet residing in Canada and a co-organizer of a conference on the Sybiraki, or Poles who survived Soviet deportations to Siberia.
W. Martin is a doctoral student of Comparative Literature at the University of Chicago, fiction editor of Chicago Review, and guest editor of the special issue of Chicago Review (2000, nos. 3–4) devoted to “New Polish Writing (1989–2000).”
Maria Rubins, a recent PhD from Brown University, is a Lecturer in Slavic Studies at Rice University.
Piotr Wilczek is a Visiting Assistant Professor of Polish Literature at the University of Chicago and a Kosciuszko Foundation Teaching Fellow at the University of Illinois-Chicago.
Aleksandra Ziolkowska-Boehm is a Polish journalist and writer.

Fifth Polish Film Festival in Houston

November 2–4, 2001
Angelica Movie Theater Downtown

The Fifth Annual Polish Film Festival in Houston has been established owing to the efforts of Dr. & Mrs. Zbigniew Wojciechowski. Among films planned for this year’s festival are “Przedwiośnie” and “Pharaoh” based on novels by Stefan Żeromski and Bolesław Prus. If all goes well, actor and producer Daniel Olbrychski will also appear. Details at the Forum Polonia site: <http://www.forum-polonia-houston.com/>.
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(original cabaret music to accompany the lecture)

309 Sewall Hall
October 11, 2001 (Thursday)
7:30 PM
Wine-and-cheese reception to follow the lecture.
Professor Harold Segel is a noted specialist on Polish, Jewish, Russian, and German literature and culture. Among his many books are *Turn-Of-The-Century Cabaret: Paris, Barcelona, Berlin, Munich, Vienna, Cracow, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Zurich* (1987), and *Stranger in Our Midst: Images of the Jew in Polish Literature* (1996).

Thank You Note

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