Radical Thoughts

Witold Gombrowicz’s Lasting Legacy
Our Take—Guest Editorial

A View from Europe Denying Its Own Past

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D are we use the big words? Compromises in essential matters cannot be achieved. Peace between good and evil cannot be arranged. A common European home cannot be erected if Europe’s heritage is denied. Attempts to deny it weaken the European identity and threaten the unity of our continent.

The outline of European integration has been flawed from the beginning. The founding fathers of the European Union mistakenly placed in the center of attention economic and political matters instead of spiritual and moral ones. They wagered that economic growth and prosperity, the rule of law and parliamentary democracy, would provide sufficient links for the Europeans to feel that they are part of a common enterprise. However, when European integration began to transcend economic matters and embraced other areas of social life, the missing balance between economic and political issues on the one hand and fundamental values on the other became more and more obvious. This happened in Maastricht in 1992 and in Amsterdam in 1997.

Only in Nice (2002) did the German Christian Democrats attempt a more decisive step. In the German-language preamble to the Charter of Fundamental Rights, one encounters an appeal to the “spiritual, religious, and moral heritage of the EU (the charter’s texts in other languages worded it as “the spiritual and moral heritage of the EU”). Five years later the Berlin declaration (allegedly the new foundation for European unity and a compass of future integration) studiously forgets to mention religious heritage.

The Berlin Declaration’s implicit denial of the assumption of the transcendent dimension of man in all of European history makes it alien to that history.

To put it bluntly, a manifesto of relativism was signed in Berlin. The sources of the declaration that was accepted there go back not merely to the left-liberal ideology of political correctness that dominates EU discourse, or to the Enlightenment-based ideological proclamations. Careful reading of the declaration sends us back to the thought of the Greek Sophists of twenty-five centuries ago.

The first sentence of the first chapter resonates with the European humanistic tradition and seems to be universally acceptable, yet in our view it contains the gist of the problem of which it is an example. It states: “In the European Union we put to practice our common ideals: for us, the central point of reference is man” (“Für uns steht der Mensch im Mittelpunkt”). This statement is not accompanied by any reference to the transcendent world, and therefore it is a striking repetition of the formula first articulated by Protagoras of Thrace.
**Sarmatian Review Data**

**Russian self-image**
Percentage of Russians who do not consider themselves Europeans: 71 percent. 
Percentage of Russians who consider the European Union a threat to Russia: 45 percent. 
Percentage of Russians who consider Russianness to be *sui generis*, and are convinced that Russia must go its own separate way: 75 percent. 
Source: A 2007 opinion poll conducted by the Levada Analytical Center, as reported by the *Times* (*timesofmalta.com*), 6 February 2007.

**Language situation in Ukraine**
Percentage of inhabitants of Ukraine who speak only Ukrainian: 40 percent. 
Percentage of inhabitants of Ukraine who speak only Russian: 40 percent. 
Percentage of those who speak both languages: 20 percent. 
Source: Taras Kuzio in *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, vol. 4, no. 28 (8 February 2007).

**Money and German pride**
Number of local currencies that are circulating in various regions of Germany: 16. 
Number of businesses that accept local currency (called Urrstromtaler) in the city of Magdeburg (Saxony-Anhalt province): 200. 
Official status of local currencies in EU: illegal. 

**German attitudes toward the Polish state**
Percentage of Germans who consider Silesia and the Polish part of former East Prussia (Warmia and Masuria) to be German: 24 percent. 
Percentage of Germans who disagree with the decision of the German government to abandon claims to Warmia, Masuria, and Silesia: 25 percent. 
Source: *Der Spiegel* poll, as reported by *Rzeczpospolita*, 20 February 2007.

**Polish Catholic clergy and the Soviet-imposed secret police**
Names of prominent bishops and cardinals who refused to collaborate with the secret police in spite of threats: 
Cardinal Franciszek Macharski of Kraków; Cardinal Andrzej Maria Deskur of Rome; Bishop Tadeusz Rakoczy of Bielsko-Żywiec; retired Bishop Waclaw Świerzawski of Sandomierz; Bishop Jan Szkodoń of Kraków; Bishop Kazimierz Nycz of Kołobrzeg-Koszalin. 
Names of bishops and priests who allegedly collaborated with the secret police: Archbishop Juliusz Paetz (previously accused of sexual molestation of clerics); Bishop Wiktor Skworec of Tarnów; Bishop Kazimierz Górny of Rzeszów; Rev. Waclaw Cedro; Rev. Saduś (no first name available); Rev. Janusz Bielański, former pastor of the Wawel Cathedral; Rev. Mieczysław Mąciński, longtime collaborator of Tygodnik Powszechny; Rev. Miroslaw Drozdek of the Krzeptówki parish near Zakopane; Rev. Mieczystw Łukaszczyk; Rev. O. Stoch. 

**Women under communism**
Number of biographies of women who were political prisoners in Soviet-occupied Poland between 1945–1958, assembled by Professor Barbara Otwinowska in her two-volume study of the subject: 750. 
Number of names of female political prisoners she collected from various sources: 3,000. 
Estimated total number of female political prisoners in Soviet-occupied Poland from 1945 to 1958: 5,000-6,000. 
Typical fate of pregnant women who were political prisoners: Stefania Zarzycka, arrested in 1945 while pregnant and tortured in the Lublin prison, died after giving birth to a daughter. The daughter spent the first two years of her life in prison and was then sent to a state-run “children’s home.” In 1956, after many years of claiming parenthood, her father managed to get her out of the “children’s home.” 

**Poles in Ireland**
The estimated number of Poles living in Ireland in 2007: 150,000 to 300,000. 
Are terms of donors’ bequests to American universities honored?
Amount of money Charles and Marie Robertson gave Princeton University in 1961: 35 million dollars.
Terms of donation: to fund programs at the Woodrow Wilson School that would train students to serve in the federal government, particularly in foreign relations.
Value of the original gift in 2007: 850 million dollars, or 7 percent of Princeton University’s endowment.
Ways to siphon off the money from the Wilson School, suggested in a 1999 memo by political science professor Larry Bartels to Princeton President Harold Shapiro: “Joint appointments. . . to subsidize the recruitment and retention of . . . faculty in the Politics Department.”
Amount of money Princeton spent outside the Wilson School (as stated by a former Harvard finance official): 100 million dollars.
Stated intention of Mr. and Mrs. Robertson’s son Bill, upon learning of these and other details on the use of his parents’ money: “We want the money removed from Princeton.”
Amount of money Texas billionaire Lee Bass withdrew from Yale University when the university refused to honor his request for approving professors hired for a Western civilization curriculum he helped endow: 20 million dollars.

Earnings of American men in their thirties go down in comparison to their fathers
Median amount of money men in their thirties made in 2005: 35,000 dollars, or 12 percent less than men in 1974, adjusted for inflation.

Poles and the European Union
Percentage of Poles pleased by Poland’s membership in EU in 2004 and 2007, respectively: 51 percent and 73 percent (an increase of 22 percent).
Percentage of Poles dissatisfied with EU membership: 5 percent.
Percentage of Poles indifferent regarding EU membership: 17 percent.
Source: OBOP opinion poll, as reported by Michal Jankowski in Donosy, no. 4446 (31 May 2007).

Germans continue to emigrate
Number of Germans who emigrated from Germany in 2006: 155,290.
Source: Federal Statistics Office in Germany, as reported by UPI (Berlin), 1 June 2007.

German emigration to Poland
Number of German citizens who emigrated to Poland in 2000–2006: 71,711.
Presumed reasons for emigration: desire to regain property lost after the Second World War or during emigration to Germany in the 1970s and ’80s.

A new cold war/arms race with Russia?
Location where the Russian government intends to build a new port for nuclear submarines: the village of Vilyuchinsk on the Kamchatka Peninsula.
Names of the first three submarines (the first already completed): Yurii Dolgorukii, Vladimir Monomakh, and Aleksandr Nevskii.
Significance of these names: semilegendary leaders of Russian and Ukrainian history dating back to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.
Number and size of nuclear submarines to be stationed at Vilyuchinsk by 2017: eight; each of them 170 meters long.
Equipment: each submarine will have 12 ballistic missiles of the Bulava type, 10 nuclear warheads per missile, with a range of 5,000 miles.
Russian military expert Vadim Solovyov’s opinion expressed to Justyna Prus: “We shall have new rockets with nuclear warheads, new ports, new submarines. Soon the United States will be surrounded by them.”

Political opinion polls in Poland in July 2007
Platforma Obywatelska [opposition party offering no clear alternatives] 31 percent, Prawo i Sprawiedliwość [the ruling party] 30 percent, LiD [a new leftist group] 18 percent, Samoobrona 8 percent, Liga Polskich Rodzin and Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, 5 percent each.
Source: Michał Jankowski in Donosy, no. 4474 (11 July 2007).
Rituals at the Limits of Literature
A New Reading of Witold Gombrowicz’s *Cosmos*

George Gasyna

In 1965 just as the problem of inscribing the emerging “postmodern” subject was beginning to enthral literary critics,[1] Witold Gombrowicz, then living in exile in southern France, was applying the final touches to his last novel, *Cosmos* (1966). Advancing far beyond Gombrowicz’s earlier confrontations with his émigré vicissitudes and his role as Poland’s antibard, *Cosmos* is something of a narrative to end all narratives, the “*kropka nad i*” [dot over the i] that completed his poetics by paradoxically returning him to the subject matter of youth and to the seductions of the form-chaos dialectic (Gombrowicz 2000b, 164) that had been explored in such works as his 1937 debut novel *Ferdydurke* and *Pornografia* (1960). Because the dominant thematic of this novel is the problem of modern self-inscription, the often-noted sentiment of metaphysical horror with which the narrative opens is swiftly transferred onto the ontological plane. In other words, the desire to get to know the world and its mysteries is coupled with a coming-into-being of an alternative mode of perception that the narrator forges as both his agency and his anxiety about what he is witnessing escalate. In so doing, the text attempts to delineate a possible other world by confirming the impossibility of ordering *this* world. The basic movement, then, is akin to Michel Foucault’s elaboration of interstitial or heterotopic discourse: an alternative mode of seeing that is semiotically fraught right up to its epistemologically transgressive limits. The narrative makes it obvious that this discovery is made both by chance and obviously not by chance, since the event has been preinscribed textually, and *Cosmos* is a work of fiction. Without the find being made, there would be no story to tell. This suggests, in turn, that the metatext, the discourse of narratorial construction, constantly foregrounds its own constructedness in a manner that makes the authorial interference quite impossible to ignore.

In *Looking Awry*, Slavoj Žižek writes of the nature of narrativity that “the experience of a linear ‘organic’ flow of events is a necessary illusion that masks the fact that it is the ending that retroactively confers the consistency of a whole on the preceding events. What is masked is the radical contingency of the *enchainment*, the fact that at every point things might have turned out otherwise.”[4] In *Cosmos* the descriptions of objects, utterances, possible clues, deformities in appearance, or eccentricities in behavior observed are all subsumed into this kind of *a fortiori* classification. This pursuit is not effected merely out of boredom. Rather, its object is exegetical and hermeneutic; it serves a privileged instrumental truth, that is, finding a solution to the initial riddle. But the resulting textual superabundance, doubling, inversion,
and repetition in the end are nothing but a semiotic flirtation; they do not offer any “readerly” solace. While, as Jarzębski correctly stipulates, the cause of these semiotic experiments is the author himself and this “demiurgic” element is a new source of existential terror for the Gombrowiczian subject, such a solution to the riddle of Cosmos does not satisfy all my questions. This is because the narratological demiurge in the novel, much as the earlier epistemological deviant (for instance in Ivona, Princess of Burgundy or in Pornografia), is in fact a phantasmal Other. To be able to bear the brunt of the possible systems of thought of the Other, to enter into an intersubjective relationship with the Other, is precisely to be textually postmodern. Michel Foucault gestures to this ontological predicament in the Preface to The Order of Things:

This book first arose out of a passage in Borges, out of the laughter that shattered, as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of my thought – our thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography – breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things, and continuing long afterwards to disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old distinction between the Same and the Other. The passage quotes a “certain Chinese encyclopedia” in which it is written that “animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) suckling pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies.” In the wonderment of this taxonomy what transgresses the boundaries of all imagination, of all possible thought, is simply that alphabetical series (a, b, c, d) which links each of those categories to all the others.

I would propose that the locus where the fantastic and the Other from the Chinese encyclopedia meet or coincide is in the immaterial sound of the narrative voice, in the nonplace of language that could be theorized as the space of heterotopia. Cosmos constitutes Gombrowicz’s final episode in the construction of such a symbolic zone.

The Poetics of (Subjective) Failure

What, then, is Gombrowicz’s Cosmos? While stylistically and thematically the work retains something of the aura of the nouveau-roman, especially in the vacillation between objective appearances of objects and phenomena, and our perception and domestication of them, Gombrowicz’s novel is really about the engagement and dissatisfaction with the currents in contemporary literature; it is a postmodern refusal to arrive at any positivist solution to the problems of narrativity and of the subject who is narrating and is becoming narrated. Still, the influences and authorial dialogues that this work reflects require comment. Even though by 1965 the nouveau-roman’s influence was on the wane, the genre represented the kind of narrative Gombrowicz wrote against, while certainly recognizing the technical innovations of its practitioners, Alain Robbe-Grillet in particular. Especially in Eric Mosbacher’s English version of Cosmos, compiled from earlier French and German direct translations, the grammatical structuring of some passages and even the text’s physical appearance on the page tend to give the impression that the author and/or the narrating subject is concerned with the positions and functions of each object or person described, and ultimately with depiction of static forms of being and differences between them.

But while the style of the nouveau-roman may recur as a phantom figure in the text, it is not really substantiated in the architectonics, especially in terms of the linear temporal scheme of Gombrowicz’s novel where, by contrast, the nouveau-roman relishes loop structures, “slices” of time, and logics of circularity. One swiftly realizes that, in fact, each object or person depicted in Cosmos plays an emphatically kinetic and phenomenal role, and is defined specifically by the potentiality of its being, including the promise of meaningful exchange, of creating, sustaining, or defining a series of causal links; indeed a self-sufficient cosmos. Each event, too, potentially fits in in ways to be determined with the greater scheme or logic, the delineation of which constitutes the principal task for the narrator. If the objects are represented apparently as merely “being there,” in succession and in a kind of exposed objectivizing physicality, it is principally because the narrator is interested in and becomes gradually obsessed with their potential for becoming parts in a causal series, and with finding a specific motivating teleology for constructing such a series in the first place. What counts, therefore, is the objects’ possible importance, the sense of their contingency with other things, and finally the politics of their relation to an ultimately occluded and unrepresentable yet forever sought-after totality that, too, is always already subjective. In other words, as readers of this text we
find ourselves consistently propelled forward, toward some end that is analogous to the inevitable and self-sufficient *a,b,c,d,e* procession that so engaged Foucault in his reading of Borges’s Chinese taxonomy.

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*Cosmos . . .* reads like *Robinson Crusoe* for the mind.

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We will thus look in vain in *Cosmos* for subjective involutions of the type inscribed in, for example, Robbe-Grillet’s *Jealousy*, in which the readerly hermeneutic desire for narrative closure is substituted, in effect, by repetition of entire narrative units with subtle differences. [9] Indeed, the textual experience of *Jealousy* deceives one’s expectations of a readerly [lisible] narrative; as Kermode suggests, after Barthes, “The sense in which we, skillfully enough, see through a text [is] frustrated; we are checked at the surface” (Kermode 106). In other words, Robbe-Grillet’s narrator (though in fact the word “narrator” is somewhat inaccurate here) is no Sherlock Holmes. If he were, he would seize on a small observed detail and render a hypothesis, which could explicate and account for all the other details collected and duly noted. With the suspected reality revealed, the story could end with an actual or implied resolution of the characters’ inner conflict: were Franck and A. . . in fact having an affair, thus substantiating the narrator’s jealousy? Did they—or in any event, Franck—in fact perish in a fiery automobile crash? But the narrator in *Jealousy* is not interested in the grounds of knowledge and its objects. He is not ontological in his primary orientation. By contrast, in the Gombrowiczan universe Witold is frankly obsessed with finding a whole, that “thread running through all these things” (Gombrowicz 1985, 86) amid the “oppressive profusion of. . . links and clues” (Gombrowicz 1985, 36). At the same time, as Francesco Cataluccio points out in his preface to Gombrowicz’s *Przewodnik po filozofii w sześć godzin i kwadrans* [A Guide Through Philosophy in Six and a Quarter Hours], any pretense to objectivity, so dear to the *nouveau-romaniers*, is a priori abstracted in this novel: “The objective world does not exist; it is unknowable like the Kantian *noumenon*.* Every individual forms his own reality, but the order imposed on such a reality is highly personal, isolated, private. The order that we impose on the world, according to Gombrowicz, is boundlessly subjective. There are as many worlds as there are subjects who thought them up” (Cataluccio 16–8). This essential textual subjectivity, then, is one reason why the narrator “Witold” feels compelled to go to such great lengths in his investigations of objects and events witnessed: with a mounting desperation as the story progresses (or fails to progress), he is seeking to determine their ontological status and impose on them their proper place in the symbolic and semiotic order of the real. He is conspicuously unsatisfied with simply noting that they do in fact exist and take up space, and then letting the matter rest—even though it causes him utmost fatigue and anxiety to continue his indexing endeavors: “Bylem roztargniony, jakże męcząca ta obfitość wciąż wywalająca nowe osoby, zdarzenia, rzeczy, żeby raz przerwał się ten cały strumień” (Gombrowicz 2001, 95) (“I was distracted. How exhausting was this superabundance and the excess from which new persons, events and things constantly emerged” (Gombrowicz 1985, 109)). This psychic overbearance represents a significant departure from the poetics of the *nouveau roman*, while sharing its rejection of the normative teleology of the bourgeois novel and especially the nineteenth-century realist/positivist narrative. Specifically, *Cosmos* ignores the *nouveau-roman* tendency to disrupt chronology and the hierarchies of events (which then perforce privileges the reader as coconspirator in the task of narrative reconstruction) in favor of recuperating the narrator’s prerogative of ordering the world for the reader, even though the enterprise is doomed to failure.[10] In Mosbacher’s English version the inadvertent *nouveau-romanization* of the text has the unwelcome effect, to my mind, of bluntly countering the logic of the narration by masking the obsessiveness of the narrator’s gaze and desire for ordering, and concealing the weaving chains of linguistic dispersion and association produced by this process. For it is the gaze, in the end, that can be held responsible for making the narrator’s descriptions and repetitions appear patently subjective; that is, for his refusal to restore any sort of narratorial objectivity. This effect, then, represents the opposite of the aesthetics of the *nouveau roman* whose *modus operandi* was the undermining of the Cartesian assumptions behind the bourgeois realist novel, in particular those concerning the inner logics of narrative time and plot teleology, and especially the refusal to provide any further “explanations of the world.” The world, this world of ours, and the objects in it, Robbe-Grillet wrote, are “neither significant nor absurd,” nor for that matter cruel. Rather, the world simply “is” (Robbe-Grillet 1965, 19). Robbe-Grillet’s conceptualization and privileging of *chosisme,*[11] as in the essays in his collection *For a New Novel,* form a philosophical foundation for the “exploration” (Robbe-Grillet 1965, 134) of the *nouveau-roman* genre.
By contrast, what Witold the narrator is desperately searching for is a program of rational explanations for behaviors, in the traditional signification of “rational” as subject to empirical authentication and reification, and of “behaviors” in the sense of helping outline and then maintain a psychological profile of the subject who speaks. Indeed, Gombrowicz allows the narrator to intermittently rise above the world of confusion that surrounds him and his story. This is especially evident at the beginning and end of chapter or section breaks, where he “abstracts” himself from narrative flow to emphasize his precarious grip on the reality he is apprehending, while at the same time leaving little doubt that it is in fact he who is in charge of the retelling. A fine example of this dynamic is found at the beginning of the last chapter. Resigned to recounting the conclusion of the story he has woven thus far, Witold admits that “I shall find it difficult to tell the rest of this story. Incidentally, I am not sure that it is one. Such a continual accumulation and disintegration of things can hardly be called a story” (Gombrowicz 1985, 153). In other words, there is no external referent, no winking authorial presence to which the reader can appeal; that figure is already fully inscribed in the text and shares some of the reader’s frustrations! This metatextual interjection and others like it reinforce Witold’s status as a narrating subject attempting to forge order from what, to him, constitutes an undifferentiated, strange, and vaguely terrifying reality—even though this is an order that nonetheless constantly threatens to descend into chaos again with the accumulation of ubiquitous new details. Cosmos, then, is Witold’s “highly personal, isolated, private” world (Legierski 149–50); it is delineated and focalized by his narratorial gaze and hence self-sufficient. Further, Witold is frankly obsessed with the world and its spectacular phenomena to an extent some may find troubling. As the main textual fabricator, he has as his desperate task to fill the horror of the sidereal void, to tame the existential strangeness of his cosmos. The narrator of Cosmos, in short, is launched on a major metaphysical quest amid growing uncertainty.

It is largely because it is he who is constructing his specular world, responding to the optic and ontological challenge posed by the “blackness,” the “chaos,” and the “perversion” of what he encounters, that Witold-narrator also rises beyond those moralistic readings of the book that make much of his apparent deviations and “seediness.” His narratological mannerisms, such as repetitions, games with analogy, metonymic associations, and play of signs, render his confusion about signs more apparent to the reader. 

A concrete instance of this includes Gombrowicz’s one-word sentences: the most devious of these is the famous free-floating “Berg” and its variations. These phrases function much as their analogues in Samuel Beckett, containing extraordinary ideational force. Moreover, they represent hinges or pivots that give insight into purer—in a sense more amoral and acultural—states of consciousness, so that in the course of reading Cosmos the reader may be surprised that he has ceased to contemplate them as aesthetic objects. They alternate with long lists of occasionally discordant things or objects arranged into series and systems of correspondances (Legierski 151). The musical and rhythmical nature of Gombrowicz’s language, the limpid structures of grammatical play, also gives the readerly effect of a mounting tension, psychological but also erotic, culminating with a moment of jouissance—in part represented by final masturbatory “Berg,” the spectacular and self-sufficient phrase “Lunpolo” of the ultimate paragraph (Gombrowicz 2001, 148).

As an example of Witold’s provisional and at best uncertain control over the world he is charged with describing, consider the seemingly innocent opening paragraphs:

I’ll tell you about another, even more curious adventure. . .Sweat, there goes Fuchs, me I’m behind him, trouser-legs, sand, we plod on, plod on, earth, chunks, glitter from shiny pebbles, glare, the heat buzzes, shimmers, everything black in the sunlight, little houses, fences, fields, woods, this road, this march, where from, how, what can you say, to tell the truth I was sick of my father and mother, and my family in general, and besides I wanted to get at least one exam out of the way, and also make a change, get away from it all, go somewhere far away for a while. I left for Zakopane, I’m walking along Krupówki Street, thinking where could I find a cheap little pension when I run into Fuchs, blond, faded red mug, protruding, a glance smeared with apathy, but he was happy to see me, and I was happy too, how are you, what are you doing here, I’m looking for a room, so am I, I’ve got an address—of a small manor-house where it’s cheaper because it’s a long way out, out in the sticks. So on we walk, trouser-legs, sand, the road and the heat, I look down, earth and sand, the shiny pebbles sparkle, one, two, one, two, trouser-legs, heels, sweat, sleepy eyes, tired, I had slept badly in the train, and nothing besides this pacing down below. He stopped.

— Should we rest a moment?
— Is it far now?
— Not far.[16]

The first thing you will notice is how the story rushes forward, with almost no full stops; in fact the first two paragraphs are comprised of just five sentences. The total effect of this preamble, I think, is that of staccato introduction to a traumatic event. It is as though the narrator, in addition to attempting to quickly set the conventional scene, feels anxious to initiate the actual fabula: the flabbergasting and terrifying inability to effect an ordering situation, which soon grows in scope to become synecdochal of a “world.”

If Cosmos represents a metaphysical detective story, i.e., one dealing with the nature of the world as we see it, specifically as the narrator sees it, we also have to wonder about the question of reception: what might the reader’s role be in the intersubjective structures of this text? What kind of dialogic function might be expected of us? Czesław Miłosz once remarked that the action in Cosmos principally concerns the rules governing focalization. In his entry on Gombrowicz in The History of Polish Literature, Milosz suggests that the architectonics of the narrative itself represents one of such particular “series of reasonings,” whose zero point is the urgent need to account for both the hung sparrow and for its discovery (Miłosz 436). The broader point is that this discovery, rooted in contingency because it is purely accidental, soon becomes written into a system—and a system, by definition, must contain some element of coercion.

In contrast to the politicized exiles like Milosz (at least when writing about Polish fellow-travelers of the post-WWII period) or synchonic theorists of power such as (the early, structuralist) Foucault, Gombrowicz does not seem especially preoccupied with either explicating or exposing any dominant authorizing forces at work behind the modern world, and that they create systems of knowledge for their own ends, though for our docile consumption. This process, described as the “intrusion of [the] fantastic into the world of reality,” is “inhuman” for Borges (Borges 16–17). Its very otherness incriminates both the procedures whereby realities as we know them are constructed, and the nature of the transformation of “events” into “facts” by those who wield power, including the power over language. The progressive dominance of power over reality and then eventually over consciousness itself, embodied by “a new knowledge [called Tlön] which, it is conjectured, is the work of a secret society of astronomers, biologists, engineers, metaphysicians, poets, chemists, algebraists” (Borges 7–8), could justly be termed mystical and demonic. The unnamed Borgesian narrator feels that he has a good sense of the true nature of this arcane society and its progression over cultural production:

Around 1944, a person doing research for the newspaper The American (of Nashville, Tennessee), brought to light in a Memphis library the forty volumes of the First Encyclopedia of Tlön. Even today there is a controversy over whether this discovery was accidental or whether it was permitted by the directors of the still nebulous Orbis Tertius. The latter is more likely. . . . The fact is that the international press infinitely proclaimed the “find.” . . . Almost immediately, reality yielded on more than one account. The truth is that it longed to yield. Ten years ago any symmetry with a semblance of order—dialectical materialism, anti-Semitism, Nazism—was sufficient to entrance the minds of men. How could one but submit to Tlön, to the minute and vast evidence of an orderly planet? The contact and the habit of Tlön have disintegrated this world . . . already the teaching of its harmonious history (filled with moving episodes) has wiped out the one which governed in my childhood. (Borges 17–8; my italics)

Borges’s superb parable of totalitarian power transforming the logic of social functioning and forcing the substitution of one past/future couplet for another in ways previously inconceivable predates Cosmos by over a decade. But there is a deep symmetry here with Gombrowicz’s dystopian vision of intersubjectivity: both texts are chiefly concerned with our enchantment with the appearance of “rigor,” and with the dream of a philosophically and semiotically orderly cosmos. Still, I think that on the political as opposed to the ontological register, Gombrowicz would have viewed the largely undetected eruption of discursive influence over intellectual, so key to the poetics of Borges’s text, as self-evident and ultimately deserving only contempt. After all, for Gombrowicz the individual’s job (and especially the intellectual’s) is to resist any such forms of influence, which are as pervasive as they are inevitable.[17]
Interestingly, the narrator of “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius,” confronted by the sober realization that the “world will be Tlön” (Borges 18), capitulates before the force of history. The narrator tells us that “in the still days at the Adrogué hotel” (18), he persists in revising a translation of an obscure work that he knows will never be published because the old languages of the world, “English and French and mere Spanish,” will soon “disappear from the globe” (18). The narrator’s submission to the logic of events may be real; however, his intellectual work takes on the form of active, if futile, resistance. Either way, his mind will not be colonized but that might not, probably will not, be enough to secure his subjective autonomy.

By contrast, Gombrowicz’s engagement with discourses of power and authority, no less averse to colonization by discourse, instead concentrates on one of the corollaries of the techniques of power maintenance. Cosmos surveys the paradoxical pressures that are exerted on an individual who has suddenly been given a temporary reprieve from some of the rules with which civilization holds us; like the heretic, he fashions his own self-reflexive order, or at least tries or is compelled to create (the illusion of) such ritualized space in the epistemological vacuum that ensues, before either chaos or the metadiscourses of power threaten to close in again. Cosmos thus reads like Robinson Crusoe for the mind. It presents an open ideational space to be recolonized and mastered using the self-reflexive discourse of the subject.

While on the topic of the production and the ordering of space, a few words need to be said about the setting of Cosmos since it is the launchpad for the metaphysical quest that follows. Like its more famous Alpine equivalents (Davos, Annecy), the town of Zakopane, qua cultural locus, is all about the promise of difference, of countercultural or avant-gardist artistic form. Central to this aura of difference is the town’s psychogography as a privileged space, historically prized by the national consciousness: Zakopane is the final point on the itinerary from “ordinary” Poland of the plain and the forest to the extraordinary Poland of the mountainous frontier, with the surrounding High Tatra alpine chain forming a headland where one goes to encounter the sublime.[18] As the critic Kazimierz Bartoszyński points out in an essay on Cosmos, “Zakopane has long inspired both the writers of high realist literature and those like Miciński or Witkacy, whose texts veer very far away from that type of realism” (Bartoszyński 153). Indeed, in Cosmos the budding sentimental narrative—let us say, for the sake of schematic convenience, a Bildungsroman—becomes subverted almost immediately, on the second page, with the troublesome hanging sparrow and the sense of “shrinking eccentricity” this fact generates.

Unlike the pieces of evidence in a classic detective story where everything will be accounted for at the end, here the objects of suspicion such as Katasia’s distorted mouth, the needle stuck into the “middle of a table” in her room, (Gombrowicz 1985, 19, 26), or the piece of wood “hanging by a bit of thread” (Gombrowicz 1985, 37), have no semiotic “ownership.” Thus the labyrinth keeps expanding. Discourse, however, like nature, abhors a vacuum, and thus various ideological interventions are soon staged. First, Leo, the paterfamilias, obliquely suggests a positivist solution to the growing mystery at hand. He is the earliest character to bring up one of the Grand Narratives of modernity. “Organization” is Leo’s code for the Grand Narrative of science (Gombrowicz 1985, 46); it stands for the “organizing principle” of the new technocratic cohort, the generation of his bourgeois son-in-law. But when Louis, for his part, proposes “rational organization of the world” to be something that is theoretically possible, Leo immediately rebuffs both the technique and its governing assumptions as “fiddlesticks” (Gombrowicz 1985, 47). In fact, Leo strikes Louis where it hurts, exposing the bleakly formalist element of scientific thought. He challenges Louis to “explain to the immaculate tabula rasa of my mind just how you with your scientific training are going to go about organizing the world, what your objectives and methods are going to be, how you are going to tackle the problem, what model you are going to follow, where and how you are going to begin” (Gombrowicz 1985, 47). So while Leo may be rejecting formalism with an arch Gombrowsiczan curtsy to chłopski rozum (common sense), the common sense of those living close to the land and the seasons, what he is specifically refuting is scientific materialism in favor of a more esoteric set of organizing theses. Instead, Leo’s personal cosmogony is guided by an eclectic pleasure principle, the famous “Berg.” For Witold, on the other hand, while science has the potential for insight beyond mere enumeration and repetition, the problem is that it is a sterile mantra when not spanned by an objective ideational framework. This, in turn, is impossible, if for no other reason than simply because perception is always already subjective.[19] Witold is therefore quite right to mock Fuchs for the latter’s excessive reliance on cataloguing and generating self-reflexive patterns without any analysis.
He actually calls Fuchs an idiot; the id part of “idiot”
is what is important for us to consider, the implication
being that the primary urge of the subject is what governs
the acts of hapless Fuchs (Gombrowicz 1985, 74).

In the end, what imprisons Witold the narrator is his
hyperawareness of the fact that he himself represents a
part of the chaos and as such is destined to keep making
systematic connections: “The word ‘permutations’ used
by Louis suggested all the combinations going on in
my own mind, in fact I was drowning in them at that
moment. The dreadful baffling thing was that I could
never be sure to what extent I was myself the creator
of the permutations. And was it really so strange, after
all, for one mouth to lead to another since everything
always led to something else? There was always
something behind everything” (Gombrowicz 1985, 54–
55, 36). Thus narration itself, as an ex post facto search
for a privileged form to regulate these elements and
surfaces, implies a continual destruction of other,
potential forms and also of alternate modes of seeing.
Therefore, any resulting “cosmos” necessarily excludes
all other possible worlds. Optimistically speaking,
following Foucault’s suggestion, we may at most catch
glimpses of them in those “interstitial” moments in
consciousness that leak out of the intervals between
discourses, words, and things (Foucault xvi).

Witold’s admission of his glimpses of infinite voids
of signification, against which (in his view) humanity
forever mobilizes, represents a key moment of tragic
self-knowledge: “Born as we are out of Chaos, can we
never establish contact with it?” he inquires at one
point. The answer comes swiftly and it is in the
negative: “No sooner do we look at it than order,
pattern, shape is born under our eyes” (Gombrowicz
1985, 31). The implication is clear: the teleological
imperative and, along with it the abject desire for
coherence remains the default mode of consciousness.
At the same time, in Witold’s mind the will to order is
largely what is responsible both for totalitarianisms and
for the social neuroses that characterize modern society.

For Gombrowicz, in the end, postmodern subjectivity
comes down to one of two axes of his dialectical
philosophy of life. The subject can elect to incarnate a
kind of psychoneurotic modernity of the self,
comprising epistemological quests as part of an
inhuman signifying system. But this quest is doomed
to failure more or less from the start precisely because
the system, and nature itself, are inhuman and in the
end unknowable, while the “scientific” and “rational”
models of ordering or managing nature are revealed,
at least here, as reductive, tendentious fictions.

Ultimately, with Louis’s suicide, they are symbolically
exposed as untenable. Alternatively, the subject can
abandon himself to solipsistic anarchy, in which
obscurantist mysticism reigns, in the style of Leo’s
devotion to his ejaculatory but in the end sterile
Berging. Suspended between such alternatives, that is,
Witold’s paranoiac obsession with the authority of
perception and language, Louis’s naive materialist faith,
and Leo’s atavistic desertion of philosophy in favor of
complacent and decadent abandonment to life’s little
pleasures, does there exist any other viable option for
a philosophy for/of life? It is perhaps this question that
forms the novel’s broadest framing narrative.

When I suggested that Cosmos represents a return to
a semiology of youthful versus complete form, first
encountered in the debut novel Ferdydurke, that
statement was incomplete; now hopefully we can see
why. The topos of the return in Cosmos is predicated
on a dialectic of past-future which in effect legislates
the entire text. In fact, the ostensible point of departure
itself is structurally predetermined to be the site of
failure. The opening passage, introducing the reader
to a twenty-something Witold escaping his own past—
which very clearly signifies family, the Capital, the
cultural hierarchy—reinstates Gombrowicz, and here
I mean the exiled author and not the belletristic
character, in the discourse of a futile domestic past from
which there is only one exit: literal escape (that is,
exile). On the other hand, this saga of personal failure
also contains a blunt critique of the failures of Western
culture. In the depiction of an ontological crisis
occasioned by the dissonant element of the dead
sparrow, Gombrowicz first rejects science and
positivism by hanging, in a moment of pure conceptual
luminosity, its proponent Louis. He then silences
organized religion by penetrating the priest’s mouth
with his metonymic finger, thereby privileging the body
over Logos, and figuratively reproducing the
ascendance of pleasure and the phallus over explication
and over philosophy or philology. Finally, he shows
that decadence, which is pleasure for its own stylistic
sake, is on its own incapable of accounting for the
appearance of irregularity, of chronic subjective doubt,
of the accident, of crisis itself; rather, decadence is their
symptom. I should note here that, though amounting
to masturbation in the case of Leo’s various “Bergs,”
decadence was one of the founding principles of elite
or “high” modernism, as John Carey has recently
demonstrated. [20] Thus the chief narratives that have
propelled the major streams of Western modernity for
over a hundred years are summarily dismissed. The
metaphysics of failure frames the narrative, and it is here that Gombrowicz anticipates those among the postmoderns who have called for a major reconsideration of the foundational narratives of Western civilization. Leo, the precociously modern pleasure seeker and compulsive self-authorizer, may indeed be the author of the final textual spasm, and thus have the last laugh. It is, however, a hollow laugh. This is because reality—brought back violently via the one-word sentence on the last page of the novel (“Lunęlo.”), the moment after which everything would necessarily be different—asserts itself as standing before and greater than all the devices we use in our efforts to grasp and represent it.

Perhaps more importantly, this moment of transcendental clarity, “Lunęlo,” sends the narrator back whence he came: to the beginning of things and texts. We are told that he has returned to Warsaw, the signifying center; he has been restored to the lunch of “chicken and rice” that represents the triumph of the cultural norm, and to “warfare with my father” which symbolizes his longstanding conflict with the paternal order (Gombrowicz 1985, 166). He has come back to the basic configuration of things he had hoped to escape while in Zakopane, where for a time he was both free and compelled by circumstances, by the very mystery of existence, to produce his own script. However, in this flight, eerily echoing the uncanny desire for escape in the opening passages of Gombrowicz’s first novel, the narrator is patently underequipped to forge anything new, aside from a histrionic yearning, fueled by a thirst for (experiential) knowledge but undercut by his abject lack of agency, for a new intersubjective discourse. That novel, Ferdydurke, opened in effect with an existential shiver:

We wtorek obudziłem się o tej porze bezdusznej i nikłej, kiedy właściwie noc się już skończyła, a świat nie zdążył jeszcze zaczęć się na dobre. Zbudzony nagle, chciałem pędzić taksówką na dworzec, zdawało mi się, że wyjeżdżam — dopiero w następnej minucie z biedą rozczarowaniem, że pociąg dla mnie na dworcu nie stoi, nie wybiła żadna godzina. Leżalem w mękowym świetle, a ciało moje bało się nieznośnie, uciskając strachem mego ducha, duch uciskał ciało i każda najdrobniejsza fibra kurczyła się w oczekiwaniu, że nic się nie stanie, nic się nie odmieni, nic nigdy nie nastąpi i cokolwiek by się przedsięwzięło, nie pocznie się nic i nic. (Gombrowicz 2000a, 1)

In Cosmos, on the other hand, Witold possesses the firm certainty that he really exists in space, that he is functioning between concrete temporal markers; on the other hand, he grows increasingly unsure both of the structures he is perceiving and eventually even of the rules that govern perception. However, this loss of horizon, paradoxically, rebounds him back to subjectivity, to being in time, to ipseity, and to existence through language. Though language as a tool is not the prime suspect for Witold, its instrumental use for ordering his particular cosmos foregrounds its susceptibility to the laws of contingency. Language, then, is the law but it is also the adjudicator in the service of the demiurge. Gombrowicz, by that point habituated himself to playing his identity games in between the spaces of languages, cultures, and writings, was as good a judge of language as anyone. When all else began its inevitable representational collapse as at the end of Leo’s triumphant jouissance and his final “Berg,” there was at least language left. Language, and
thought, thus consciousness, thus our essential condition and our “narratological” enchainment as conscious beings: these are perhaps the only realities to which one can remain faithful. However, they need not necessarily avert us from our desires, such as planning to commit a murder:

Uciszył się zupełnie i nic nie było słychać, ja myślałem wróbel Lena patyk Lena kot w usta miód wargi wywiać ściągnąć ścień grudka rysa palec Łudwik krzaki wisić usta Lena sam tam czajnik kot patyk łoś droga Łudwik ksiądz mur kot patyk wróbel kot Łudwik wisi patyk wisi wróbel wisi Łudwik kot powieszę. (Gombrowicz 2001, 148)

He quieted down completely and total silence prevailed. I thought sparrow Lena bit of wood cat in the mouth honey disfigured lip little clump of earth tear in the wallpaper finger Louis Young trees hanging Lena lonely there teapot bit of wood fence road Louis priest wall cat bit of wood sparrow cat Louis hanged bit of wood hanged sparrow hanged Louise cat I’m going to hang. (Gombrowicz 1985, 165–66)

Gombrowicz leaves it to us to complete this ultimate series, “I am going to hang… Lena.” But then, suddenly, comes the masterstroke: “Lunpolo.” The symmetry and the power of reality are re-established; primal cravings are nipped in the bud, the line of desire is stymied.

If there is one thing that can be said with certainty about this astonishing associational chain, it is that if indeed “languageality” represents the conditional space about this astonishing associational chain, it is that if there is one thing that can be said with certainty about this astonishing associational chain, it is that it is antecedent by the imposing of subjectivity and all the struggles involved in its maintenance.

NOTES

2. Foucault xx–xxxi.
3. Jarzębski 32; unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the Polish are mine.
4. Žižek 69; my emphasis.
5. Foucault xv–xvi.
7. A new translation, more faithful to Gombrowicz’s stylistic innovations, is now available. Both are noted in the Works Cited; however, when I wrote this essay the Borchardt version was not yet available so for English-language citations I relied where necessary on the Mosbacher version.
8. See Robbe-Grillet’s essay “On Several Obsolete Notions,” in Robbe-Grillet 1965, 25–47, especially 29–34, on the structures and teleologies of “the story.”
10. See also Gombrowicz 2001, 33, 54, 86.
11. His hope is that his kind of emphatic representation of objects and gestures will help render them “hard, unalterable, eternally present” and help them lose their “instability and their pseudo-mystery, that suspect interiority which Roland Barthes has called ‘the romantic heart of things’” (Robbe-Grillet 1965, 21).
15. Legierski 16–78.
16. My translation of this passage is adapted from Eric Mosbacher and Hamilton’s English version of the text (Gombrowicz 1985, 1).
17. This stance is routinely articulated in the Diaries. As a point of departure to Gombrowicz’s intellectual positions, see Dziennik I, 1953–1956 (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2000). With regard to his suspicions of artistic canons, see 39–43; with regard to forms of collective consciousness, see 45–51 (Catholicism), 135–40 (Marxism), and nationalism, 260–63 and passim; on his critique of Polish literature and the Polish collective national/cultural consciousness, see especially 2–31; on his resistance to existentialism as an alternative form of individual resistance, see 279–97. For further elaborations and dialectical counterdiscourses, see also Diary volumes II and III.
18. Considering the long tradition of suspension of cultural norms that travel to “hotspots” can occasion, we should also note the venerable practice, going back at least to the Romantics, of trips to the mountains in order to partake of extraordinary experiences. For those Poles who could not afford to embark on a grand tour of the Alps, Zakopane and environs provided an authentic if circumscribed alpine headland which guaranteed a geographic paradigm shift.
19. Indeed, the root of the failure of such explanatory metaparadigms as the Grand Narrative of Science is precisely
their inherent dependence on ideology, which for Gombrowicz constitutes a mode of coercion that both masks and attempts to naturalize the drive to implement those mechanisms. See, for example, Gombrowicz 2000b, 145–48.


21. Gombrowicz 2001, 148. In Mosbacher’s translation this phrase is rendered as the unsatisfactory “Suddenly it started raining,” completely obscuring the sheer violence and definitiveness of this moment of “natural” narratological intervention. Rendering “Lunęło” as “Suddenly it started pouring,” Borchardt’s translation is only marginally better at imparting the connotation of an all-encompassing deluge (Gombrowicz 2005, 188).

WORKS CITED


______, Ferdyydurke (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2000).


Legierski, Michał, Modernizm Witolda Gombrowicza (Warsaw: Instytut Badań Literackich, 1999).


The author, a PhD from the University College in London, teaches Russian history at the University of Buenos Aires. His book picks up Edward Said’s notion of Orientalism and argues that the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century liberal bourgeois ideology in France (and in other Western European countries) has “reduced” Russia to an “oriental” country, in a way similar to the “reduction” that took place as a result of the Western monopoly on “Oriental” studies initiated in the nineteenth century. This “Euro-Orientalism” was an Orientalism *avant la lettre*, and in the author’s view it continues to the present day.

Adamovsky argues that the notion of “Eastern Europe” as a research category appeared in France around 1840, and similar notions arose in Germany and Great Britain. In this vein, the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies continues the category of “Orientalization” of Russia and Central/Eastern Europe. It is hard not to applaud Adamovsky for pointing this out. However, Adamovsky conflates Russia and the countries situated between Germany and Russia, calling all of them “Eastern Europe.” He is entirely oblivious to the fundamental European division into Eastern and Western Christianity, and thus sees no fundamental cultural difference between Russia on the one hand, and Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, and Estonia on the other. He also ignores the fact that Russia has created its own discourse that has successfully competed and won over the process of “orientalization.” As Ewa Thompson argued in *Imperial Knowledge*, Russia imposed its discourse on the West while the West was still laboring under the illusion of enmeshing Russia in its own discourse.

Thus Adamovsky’s thesis is incorrect with regard to Russia, but he has a point with regard to the countries situated between Germany and Russia. They have been squeezed into the category of “Eastern Europe” even though, properly speaking, they should have been subdivided into Central Europe (countries with Latin cultural roots) and Eastern Europe proper (countries with Byzantine cultural roots). However, Slavists are not interested in that part of the world. They are interested in Russia, and here Adamovsky is, again, confused and confusing. While some scholars in the West (quoted by Adamovsky) may have believed that they “contained” Russia in their orientalizing texts, the Russian side managed to sidestep that obstacle and imposed on the West an image of Russia as an “enigma inside a mystery,” a country that has invented its own philosophy of history.

The unstated premise of Adamovsky’s book is that the liberal discourse of the West has little validity and that Western epistemology (based on Aristotelian logic) is just one of the many epistemologies of equal value in the world. Thus epistemologically incoherent Russian ideologues, who have not been able to create a universally valid argument for the alleged unique value system of their country (from Danilevsky to present-day Russophiles), are implicitly regarded as being on par with those thinkers who have attempted to articulate the kind of reasoning that is valid for all of humankind. Interestingly, Russia took the technological part of the Aristotelian legacy from the West as a matter of course, but it has resisted the humanistic part of the legacy and has claimed a system of thinking all its own. I am afraid that Adamovsky’s book, in spite of the many penetrating points it makes, endorses such illogical ravings rather than contributing to their deconstruction. (Sally Boss)


Like the *Bulletins* of the Institute of National Memory (see p. 1343), this periodical is dedicated to de-communication of Polish and world memory concerning Soviet-occupied Poland and its neighbors. The issue under review contains materials unknown to Western and even Polish historians, as well as a number of articles on topics virtually ignored by Western historians such as the view of Stalin in the Polish press in 1936–1939 or an essay on the possible genealogy of the Sarmatian myth in seventeenth-century Polish historiography. Much more striking is the section of the journal dedicated to the analysis of documents of the political police in Poland, “Za kulisami warszawskiej beazyki” by Bogusław Kopka; an article criticizing the declared comprehensiveness of research concerning the Kielce pogrom (“Postanowienie IPN w sprawie ‘pogromu kieleckiego’”) by Jacek Żurek; an interview with Marek Jan Chodakiewicz on Jan Tomasz Gross’s “cut and paste” method of writing.
history (“O Polakach i Żydach bez retuszu”); documents concerning Wojciech Jaruzelski’s request for Moscow’s help in suppressing Solidarity; and several excellent reviews of books authored by Ewa Kurek, Robert Blobaum, Michel Foucault, Filip Musiał, and others.

The mantra of “no serious student of Polish history...” suggests itself here, however futile its invocation. American historians of Poland seem blind and deaf to the new primary materials coming from Poland concerning the Second World War and the Soviet occupation, the materials that radically contradict recent work of American professors of history. It will take time for this blindness and deafness to be put aside. There is little doubt it will be put aside: the Polish voices are too numerous to be shouted down in ways that have recently been used in regard to tiny Estonia.


Awarded the 2006 AAASS/Orbis Books Prize for Polish Studies, Cooley’s publication on the traditional music of the Podhale region of the Tatra Mountains (as well as related communities in North America) presents an exhaustive musical description and also offers insight into the highlanders’ history and culture. Given the traditional stereotype of the góral as taciturn and suspicious when confronted by outsiders and lowlanders, Cooley has accomplished a remarkable piece of fieldwork. His musical descriptions are supplemented by a narrative of personal interaction with highlanders, first as a folklorist employed by the Illinois Arts Council and later as a researcher in Podhale. After developing a network of personal contacts among highlanders, Cooley was privileged to observe aspects of their community life such as weddings, and funerals. Cooley was finally adopted into the community, something not often experienced by a ceper (pejorative name for “lowlander”), where he performed on violin with local ensembles and interpreted the culture for English-speaking tourists. One particularly valuable aspect of this work is Cooley’s perspective; he is familiar with highlander communities in both North America and Poland.

The text with detailed musical transcriptions is illustrated with the author’s photographs of many of the performances described here. It is accompanied by a CD with forty-seven tracks. Many of the musical transcriptions are accompanied by lyrics in dialect and English translation. There is a detailed index of the audio materials, providing background information on the performers as well as notes on the genres. The CD confirms the observation that the highlander traditionally expresses his true feelings not with flowers or love letters, but through music and dance. Accompanied by the background sounds of conversation at wedding celebrations, church bells, the movement of a horse-drawn cortege down a highland lane, and dirt being shoveled onto a wooden coffin, the CD emotively witnesses the role of music in the highlanders’ daily lives. The major focus here is on a description of the music (including one attempt to fuse traditional góral music with Anglo-Jamaican reggae). Cooley also discusses issues relevant to anthropologists and ethnographers: music as ritual, the definition of “authentic” folk music and culture, and musical responses to globalization.

The szlachta was responsible for the displacement of much of Poland’s native folk culture and its replacement with models from the West. Podhale remains a bastion of archaic music in Poland, although the exact origins of that music remain unclear. There are some gaps in Cooley’s history of the “imagining” of góral identity; e.g., Stanisław Witkiewicz is mentioned only briefly. An examination of the role of music in historically significant religious pilgrimages, ethnographic exhibitions, and nationalist manifestations could shed some light here on modern perceptions of traditional music. Cooley does not discuss the postwar professional folk ensembles Mazowsze and Śląsk, influences significant in shaping contemporary attitudes toward folk music and culture. Only brief references mention Krywań, a popular group performing traditional music primarily on electric instruments, and the controversial musical genre of Disco-Polo. Cooley’s field research preceded the rise to popularity of the Golec Brothers, folk-pop musicians who are not, in fact, from Podhale but from the Beskids near Żywiec. There is no mention of the growing popularity in Podhale of the cimbalm (hammered dulcimer), a defining feature of traditional music in Slovakia, Moravia, and Hungary. All of these influences have relevance, if perhaps not so much for the traditions of Podhale then at least for the manner in which Poles today, both highlanders and lowlanders, are defining traditional music.

Cooley assumes correctly (p. 113) that at góral wedding receptions today the basic melodies associated with the “unveiling” of the bride (cepowiny) are not
from Podhale. In fact, similar melodies (though not sung in góral dialect) can be heard at wedding celebrations elsewhere in Poland. Cooley notes that the adoption of these tunes requires further study, although there is a simple explanation: while it represents an ancient Slavic wedding custom, the “unveiling” ceremony today represents a major carnivalesque entertainment of the wedding reception, involving playful bartering, the exchange of money, and antics steeped in sexual innuendo. Very much a choreographed entertainment, the contemporary ceremony was borrowed, along with its basic melodies, from the Polish lowlands.

Yet this reviewer would not prefer another version of this work in which the details of the musical description were reduced; one hopes that Cooley will continue researching and writing about this music, but perhaps from a more comparative approach. While Cooley notes that, culturally and musically, Podhale represents a continuum linking the other regions of the Carpathians, his readers could benefit from more detailed explanation of that continuum. The great value of Cooley’s study is in the detailed description of the music of Podhale. Cooley also helps to explain some of the contradictions of góral culture. In certain respects such as cultivation of folk costume and culture as well as traditional social and religious attitudes, the highlanders represent Poland’s most conservative regional culture. On the other hand, those same highlanders have also been Poland’s most “rootless” population, periodically willing to pull up stakes and move on to new territories. Cooley points out the strong ties that are maintained, often across generations, not just between blood relations in Podhale and North America but also between unrelated families there with roots in the same highland village. Impressive community centers such as those on the South Side of Chicago, built and maintained by highlanders with roots in the same Podhale village, represent just the latest stage in the historical process of migration and acculturation that began long ago somewhere in the Balkan highlands. It is a tenacious folk that would maintain those traditions and their sense of community across so many generations, and this characteristic suggests that góral music, in one variety or another, will be with us for a long time. Cooley has made an important contribution to our understanding of that phenomenon. (Kevin Hannan)


An innovative book that replaces the outdated terminology of Soviet and post-Soviet studies with the new terminology of colonialism in Europe. A review to follow.

(continued on page 1343)

Other Books Received

The volume consists of several dozen short essays on Witold Gombrowicz [1904–69], a Polish émigré writer, written by other Polish émigrés. The essays consist of answers to questions originally asked by a Polish émigré editor in London. The title may seem appropriate, but the word “émigré” turned out to have a short half-life. It belongs to the previous century; cyberspace has made it obsolete. Still, some of the essays are quite interesting and they say a great deal about their authors.


An excellent argument for the specificity of European civilization in the East. To understand and appreciate this profound argument, one has to accept the idea that European civilization was sui generis and that it produced two models, East and West. The argument goes against the vision of Eastern Europe promoted by Russia (and, occasionally, Germany and national minorities in the area) and widely accepted in American scholarship.


As the title says. An interesting attempt at cultural communication.

The Clash of Moral Nations
Cultural Politics in Piłsudski’s Poland, 1926–1935


Gregor Thum

The fascinating history of interwar Poland has not yet received the scholarly attention it deserves. Besides the fact that many archival documents were destroyed during the Second World War, often through acts of deliberate vandalism by the German occupation forces, the political situation of the People’s Republic did not allow for an unbiased assessment of the Second Republic. From the perspective of official postwar historiography, interwar Poland was presented as a failed state against the backdrop of which the star of communist Poland could shine all the brighter. This black and white picture tends to be turned upside down after the fall of communism: Communist Poland is blamed for everything that went wrong in twentieth-century century Polish history, whereas the Second Republic and her political heroes, Józef Piłsudski above all, serve as the idols of postsocialist Poland.

Studies of the history of interwar Poland are therefore of tremendous importance in creating a clearer picture of these formative years of Polish history. Eva Plach’s book deals with Polish reactions to Piłsudski’s coup d’etat of May 1926 and the ensuing so-called Sanacja regime up to the early 1930s, when the Sanacja discredited itself by imprisoning her political opponents. Plach is not so much interested in the political history of the Sanacja as in the debates triggered by Piłsudski’s claim to lead the Polish nation back onto a healthy political path. Against this backdrop, Plach understands Sanacja as “[a] forum through which different actors of the young state could talk about moral disintegration and moral renewal, about nation and identity, about gender and politics” (16). In order to analyze these discourses and the mood following the events of May 1926, Plach examined an impressive corpus of primary and secondary literature in Polish and English.

Anyone who writes about a clash between two camps has to devote an even share of attention to each side. This rule of fairness has not been followed in this book.

Chapter 1 focuses on the debate within the Polish press on moral reform and spiritual rebirth that immediately followed the coup. Chapter 2 deals with the letters ordinary people wrote to Piłsudski, usually expressing their support for Sanacja and often making suggestions on how to reform the country. Chapter 3 studies the ideas of the Society of Moral Rebirth, a small political organization of leftist and liberal intellectuals in favor of the Sanacja. Chapter 4 examines two pro-Sanacja women’s organizations, both of which promoted the idea that the Polish woman, as in the time of the partitions, has to fulfill a special mission to heal society. Chapter 5 deals with right-wing attacks on the well-known writer and gynecologist Tadeusz Boy Żeleński, who fought against clericalism and nationalism and was an influential advocate of family planning, civil marriage, “free love,” and eugenics.

It is important to note that Plach is passionate about the political role of women in interwar Poland and the importance of gender issues in the debates after 1926. This topic could have been a scholarly gold mine, since we know little about this theme with respect to interwar Poland, and Plach apparently has a lot to tell. Unfortunately, however, she did not make this the book’s principal question but decided instead to deal with the political debates about Poland in general. This leaves us with a book that focuses predominantly on gender issues, yet not designed and labeled as such. The book’s subtitle “Cultural Politics in Pilsudski’s Poland,” on the other hand, is slightly misleading, since we do not read much about cultural politics. Plach views the debates following the May coup as less about political programs and more about symbols and definitions of Polishness and the purpose of the Polish state. Plach argues convincingly that these debates revealed a deep split within Polish society, a “clash of moral nations” deriving from two different “cultural orientations.”

It would have been helpful, though, if she had made a greater effort to clearly define each side instead of simply indicating that the split was between left and right, between the left-liberal supporters of Pilsudski’s Sanacja and the right-nationalist opponents centered
around Roman Dmowski’s National Democrats. Also, the structure of the book does not make it easy to understand the cultural clash. Anyone who writes about a clash between two camps has to devote an even share of attention to each side. However, Plach deals predominantly with the supporters of Piłsudski’s Sanacja and their ideas, whereas the views of their opponents remain in the background. When Plach mentions their attacks on Sanacja she tends to present them as the illegitimate voice of political reaction against the progressive trends of Sanacja, reflecting more the perception of Sanacja itself than the judgment of a neutral analyst. In the end the author seems to be as surprised as Piłsudski’s left-liberal supporters that it was Piłsudski—not his right-wing, chauvinist opponents—who after 1930 established a dictatorship willing to throw its political adversaries into prison. In this context, it is worth mentioning that Adolf Hitler was among Piłsudski’s greatest admirers, and that Sanacja’s language with its focus on “moral rebirth,” the virtues of the officer, and the fight against parliamentarism had as much in common with the rising fascism of its time as did the anti-Semitism and chauvinism of Sanacja’s right-wing opposition.

Plach’s book points out the deep-seated cultural conflicts in the society of interwar Poland, the conflicts that kept haunting the Polish nation long after the end of the Second Republic in 1939. However, the book’s discourse analysis often remains too descriptive. Plach shows how the political debates of the late ’20s and early ’30s focused on vague concepts such as “moral crisis” and “moral rebirth.” She could have taken this as a vantage point to explore, against the backdrop of the history of interwar Poland and a European-wide perception of a cultural crisis after the Great War, what people in Poland actually meant when they talked about this crisis and the need to “heal” the country. The reader, however, is too often left with hazy formulas taken from the Polish press and from diaries and letters of the time without getting a clear idea of what was actually at stake in interwar Poland, and where exactly the supporters and opponents of Sanacja differed. The author should have delved deeper instead of remaining so much on the surface of the debates. Plach admits that her book consists merely of “selected examples” concerning the discourses of interwar Poland, examples that are neither “the only ones” nor “even the most important.” Each chapter “could easily serve as the basis for a more focused study of the period” (163). Modesty is a virtue, but these limitations seem a bit too modest for a book.

### Between Dawn and the Wind


**Janet Tucker**

With the publication of a bilingual edition of Anna Frajlich’s *Between Dawn and the Wind*, readers of English can at last savor the intricate verse of one of postwar Poland’s important poets. Frajlich (aka Anna Frajlich-Zajac) is a writer of exile, born in exile in the Urals and expelled from her Polish home in the wake of postwar anti-Semitism. Her loss of homeland and stability are transposed into a sense of yearning, an awareness of the ephemeral nature of life, and an attempt to use poetry to bring some order into her insecure world.

Regina Grol’s short introduction gives a history of Anna Frajlich’s life, providing a backdrop for the poems. Grol couples her brief biography with an introductory discussion of the poems and concludes with a chronology of Frajlich’s life events, professional and scholarly career, and publications. The poems—comprising seventy lyrics—form the body of the text. They are pierced with nostalgia, an awareness of painful loss translated into poetic beauty.

In *Between Dawn and the Wind*, Regina Grol places the Polish text on the left with the English text on the facing pages. Translations were done well and are accurate, even elegant, with only a very occasional typo (rather than a true error), such as “check” instead of “cheek” on p. 63. But even in such a case, the reader can readily make amends for any minor infelicities in this book. Frajlich “wanders” throughout, never settling anywhere except within the structural confines of her poems. “A z jakiego portu płyną do jakiego” (“From Which Harbor to Which”) shows a deracinated persona drifting, a theme that resonates throughout the collection. In “Kraj utracony” (“The Lost Land”) she specifically links wandering with her Jewish identity and with the homelessness of being a Jew in Eastern Europe—specifically in Poland—during the war and postwar period. “Home” rejects these wanderers, and return is possible only in the context of the dream. Frajlich picks up this theme repeatedly, as in “Emigracja” (“Emigration”) or “Aklimatyzacja” (“Acclimatization”), punctuated by a sense of “forgetting” what the poet actually remembers. **Mother**
as a migrating bird (from “Ptaki,” “Birds”) becomes an imaginary mother (one of many) in “O poezji” (“On Poetry”), and in death she stretches out her hands to a dearly-remembered daughter (“Odchodzi,” “She is Leaving”). Here the poet’s personal history, a sense of being part of one very small family flung to the Urals, back to Poland, and thence to America is captured poignantly in the image of a mother “wading in the dark waters of Lethe” and reaching out to a daughter who cannot help her.

The feeling of loss closely associated with exile and wandering, a loss painfully realized in the figure of a mother now on “the other side,” echoes throughout. This sense is underscored by the wind that scours this volume, blowing helpless human figures from place to place and contributing to a restless energy that electrifies Frajlich’s short, choppy lines, her terse turns of phrase, a downward thrust of her last lines. Not even the peaceful quiet of a lullaby (“Jesienna kółysanka,” “Autumn Lullaby”) can still the sense of being “on the road” in Long Island (in both Polish and the English translation), with only a temporary sense of peace. In “Sala dziecięca w muzeum męczeństwa Yad Vashem w Jerozolimie” (“The Children’s Room in the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem”), Frajlich returns “home” to a cousin’s grave, a “home” attainable only, it seems, in death. Even apparently secure places are undermined: family “exists” as a tombstone. In the “gold and white” of “Jeruzal” (“Jerusalem”) where blood leaves no trace, a French tourist is knifed. Perhaps we may return here to the image of wind as related to a sense of violence that always threatens to disrupt—or actually disrupts—a would-be peaceful world.

Anna Frajlich’s verse strikes a balance between the angst of wandering and a sense of being part of a literary and cultural tradition that provides a degree of constancy in an otherwise unpredictable, untrustworthy, and uprooted world. In “Nad listami Brunona Schulza” (“Musings Over the Letters of Bruno Schulz”) Frajlich remembers the great Schulz but, except for the evocative word “cynamonem” (“cinnamon,” from Schulz’s title Skepty cinamonowe, Cinnamon Shops), it is his moment of death she recalls, not his life; Schulz is evoked with “burned letters,” “buried letters,” and the final German bullet that killed him in Drohobycz. As with other poems in her collection, tragedy and poetry are intimately conjoined. Poetry emerges as the inevitable aesthetic outcome/product of tragedy, and tragedy in turn inspires poetry as an artistic response. The present reader senses that the poet—in a conceit extending back to Romanticism—must suffer in order to write. The Jew as an exile, homeless and constantly on the move, is echoed in the figure of the poet at once “universal” and culturally specific. Artistic creation empowers the artist, enabling him/her to survive. The poet, although homeless and expelled from her native Polish environment, belongs to a community of fellow artists, no matter what their medium. Thus we have not only the aforementioned poem honoring Bruno Schulz but also “Braque—wystawa retrospektywna” (“Braque—A Retrospective”). His wind-tossed canvas marks him as an exile, his world cast to the unreliable elements. Nor is Braque the only artist Frajlich mentions in this light: “Kobiety Renoira” (“Renoir’s Women”), “Georgia O’Keefe,” and “Po wystawie Chagalla” (“Upon seeing Chagall’s Exhibit”) round out this list.

Anna Frajlich’s collection is a most welcome and significant publication, made more accessible by Regina Grol’s bilingual edition. Frajlich’s verse is penetrating and beautiful, a moving testament and capstone to her years of wandering.

Holy Week
A Novel of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising


Joanna Rostropowicz Clark

In The Warsaw Ghetto: the 45th anniversary of the uprising, a book published in Warsaw in 1987, there is a photograph of a partly assembled (no swings) carousel. It stands close to the much taller wall of the Jewish ghetto, marked with bullet holes. In the right foreground corner two German soldiers operate a cannon, aimed at the wall, while two others crouch in the left corner. The street appears to be rather narrow and is empty of any human presence. Absence of smoke over the wall indicates an early stage of the Uprising, Monday or Tuesday of Easter week.

It was near such a spot, on April 20, 1943, that Jan Malecki, the main protagonist of Jerzy Andrzejewski’s novel, ran into Irena Lilien, a beautiful Jewish woman whom he had courted before the war. He had not seen her since the Lilien family, once wealthy and intellectually prominent, began to encounter their first
wartime troubles related to the German occupation. He thought that they would manage, or rather put them out of his thoughts after he met and married Anna, a Catholic who at the time of the story is eight months pregnant. Before he sees Irena Malecki observes a street scene, a curious and excited crowd, and the narrative both follows his eye and provides a seemingly detached commentary that is sustained throughout the entire story. We are told, “Hardly anyone pitied the Jews. The populace was mainly glad that the despised Germans were now beset by a new worry. In the estimation of the average person on the street, the very fact that fighting was taking place with a handful of solitary Jews made the victorious occupiers look ridiculous” (8–9). Then the carousel comes into view. In fact, two carousels, “not yet completely assembled, evidently being readied for the upcoming holiday” and used as a cover for helmeted German soldiers “kneeling on the platform,” their rifles pointed at the wall (9). As indicated by the map of the uprising, this area saw the heaviest fighting during the first three days. Also there, on narrow Bonifraterska Street, the map shows two points where the Polish underground Home Army (Armia Krajowa) and the People’s Guard (Gwardia Ludowa) smuggled weapons to the insurgents. Those who lived in the northern districts of Warsaw of Żoliborz and Bielany needed to pass by that site on their way from the city’s center, as did Andrzejewski with his pregnant wife.

In extreme situations people tend to shed their particularity and behave as members of their primary community. Andrzejewski brilliantly portrays such situations in his fiction; his characters change under pressure but do not quite cease to be themselves, do not become generic. Thus Irena, formerly a—free-spirited and cosmopolitan, charming member of the privileged class of assimilated Polish Jews, becomes an almost stereotypical Jewish woman four years into the war against Jews, bitter and, in the last scene, vengeful. But Andrzejewski fully justifies her harshness. Her parents, abandoned by their prewar friends, have already perished together with the poor and the unassimilated in the ghetto established by Germans, and she has been constantly on the run from various shelters on the “Aryan” side, chased by ubiquitous informers who bring death to those who hide and those who provide hideouts. When we meet her she does not restrain her hatred for all non-Jews, Poles and Germans, since they either participate in the murder—she tells Malecki—or turn away from the victim. Confronted with stark examples of tragedies suffered by the Poles, she is not moved: unlike the Jews, only some are dying among the Poles.

Works of fiction should not be misread as statements of historical fact.

Malecki, his conscience burdened by his previous neglect of the Liliens, acts according to the norms of his social milieu (which nominally he and Irena still share): he controls his irritation and takes her home, fully aware of how dangerous this will be for him, her, and those who shelter her, and how emotionally uncomfortable for himself. In creating Malecki’s character as a close projection of himself, Andrzejewski does not spare him from all the defects of a self-centered, somewhat opportunistic intellectual who wants to avoid trouble above all. His egotism comes under attack not only from Irena but also from his younger brother Julek, a member of the military underground, and even from his saintly wife, as both she and Julek are unreservedly sympathetic to the plight of the Jews. Julek accuses Malecki of minimalizing prewar anti-Semitism in Poland, while Anna doubts if he really knows her true self. And yet, with all his fears and confusion, Malecki does the right thing. He shelters Irena, and when it becomes clear that again she is not safe in his apartment (threatened by a couple of low-class neighbors in solidarity with other tenants), he ventures out to find a new place for her. While on this mission he is killed by members of a renegade ultranationalist faction. In the senseless, but not out of the ordinary, randomness of his death, the artistic power of the story is condensed.

The Polish and Jewish societies had been parallel for centuries, but since the Enlightenment a slow current of assimilation pushed the dividing line toward cultural peripheries. The forced separation of Jews from Poles by the German occupants in order to facilitate the program of genocide rapidly destroyed the vulnerable web of integration within the upper strata of society. Andrzejewski’s choice to introduce only one Jewish protagonist in Holy Week underscores the fact that in the face of the final solution, and in the eyes of the outsider, Poland’s differentiated Jews had become one. Irena’s transformation, preceded by her father’s merging into the death march of other Jews, asserts the absoluteness of the divide. Poles can still sing their Gorzkie Żale (Bitter Lamentations) on Good Friday and prepare for the rites of the Resurrection, while the Jews on that Passover have nowhere to flee their gehenna. But there is also another parallel here, between Poles who sympathize with the Jewish victim
and are willing to help (Anna, Julek and his buddy Wacek, an office clerk Marta), and those who aid the Nazis, either out of greed, ingrained prejudice, or concurrence with racist ideology. The equal numbers in the two groups in the novel is symbolic. Through such symbolism Andrzejewski addresses what he perceives to be the indifference of the majority of Poles; in his view, they hated the Germans but did not pity the Jews. It is at them that Andrzejewski directs his *j'accuse*, using the the historical moment when the smoke over the burning Ghetto still lingered over the rest of Warsaw.

While at work on this story Andrzejewski discussed it with friends, among them Czesław Miłosz and Ryszard Matuszewski, a literary critic. Matuszewski lived near the Andrzejewskis and travelled the same route, and he later insisted that the carousel in Miłosz’s famous poem “Campo di Fiori” was a metaphor, that no carousel was ever set up and certainly could not have been used during or shortly after the Uprising in the area that was destroyed by fire (Tomasz Szarota, “Karuzela na Placu Krasińskich: czy miały się tłumy wesołe?” *Rzeczpospolita*, 28 February 2004). A similar metaphor of racing and ringing chariots appears in a poem “Łuk Tytusa” (The Arch of Titus) by Teofil Lenartowicz, a nineteenth-century Polish poet, and it refers there to the behavior of the Roman crowds at the sight of the martyred Christians at the Colosseum. Miłosz, who was fond of Lenartowicz, most likely remembered that very poem in the spring of 1943.

I mention this predecessor of Miłosz’s “Campo di Fiori” as a caution against misreading works of fiction as statements of historical fact. In his afterword, the translator Oscar Swan admonishes Andrzej Wajda for “tampering with historical reality” (134) in the carousel scene of his film version of *Holy Week*. In that scene Julek and Wacek are using the carousel as a decoy from which they scout the terrain on their assignement to smuggle weapons to the Ghetto; that fictional image does conform with historical documents. Professor Swan applies the same criticism of historical inaccuracy to Andrzejewski in regard to “the entire subplot of Julek and his *gang* [my emphasis, JRC], for which there is scant justification” (134). Although a footnote clarifies this error, the reader is left with the notion that both Andrzejewski and Wajda tried “to soften the depiction of Warsaw’s inhabitants” (134). This is a serious and incorrect imputation.

Different criteria of truth apply to the work of historians and the work of literature. Both yield to interpretation, but while the historian and his critics must strive for verifiability, writers of fiction and their readers rely on their individual notions of plausibility that in turn is susceptible to changing interpretative conventions. In Professor Swan’s interpretation, Andrzejewski’s novel offers a “scathing indictment of Roman Catholicism as practiced by the average Pole, including an implicit criticism of the Church as a source of moral guidance for the people during the war” (141). Such a view makes an unwarranted jump between fictional presentation and historical fact, in addition to disregarding Anna’s profound Catholicism and the importance of her conversation with Irena on the subject of Faith. Although Anna agrees with Irena that evil presently triumphs over goodness, she adds that Faith helps her to be a better person; a pronouncement of Andrzejewski’s own Catholicism. The loss of her father and two brothers in the war cannot be dismissed as the “distractive theme of ‘we Poles suffered too,’” which in Swan’s opinion was “more muted in the novel than in Wajda’s film” (138). There is a powerful scene in the novel in which a nasty little boy, son of the villainous Piotrowskis (Polish equivalent of the American racist “white trash”), pretends to be a crucified Jesus. For Swan this is an example of the novel’s mockery of religious symbols while its poignancy lies in the reversed mockery of crucifiction—not by the New Testament’s Jews, but by Polish scum in 1943 Warsaw. It cannot be denied that the Church in Poland, its clergy severely persecuted, did less badly than elsewhere in providing assistance to the condemned Jews. Monasteries and convents (Anna plans to direct Irena to one of them) collaborated with the Council for Aid to the Jews, Żegota—which Swan seems to confuse with the Home Army, the only such charitable organization in all of the occupied Europe. The above remarks stem from a larger concern about a persistent tendency to lecture Poles about their inadequate repentance for their much-debated complicity in the Holocaust—as if that complicity and belated repentance were not, alas, pertinent to the entire civilized world including the United States. Professor Swan cannot be blamed for his sense of shock engendered by *Holy Week*: such was the intention of its author. He deserves praise for initiating this first publication of *Holy Week* in English, a class project with his University of Pittsburgh students.

Professor John J. Bukowczyk, the editor of the Polish and Polish American Studies Series, writes in the editor’s preface that this publication of the novel “should serve to honor and memorialize its author and
other Poles possessed of the courage and integrity to plumb this dark recess within the otherwise noble heart of their country” (xii). One may add that their courage was often met with resistance, as it would in most countries; the preference is always for heroic rather than self-accusatory narratives. Both Andrzejewski and Miłosz wrote in the rebellious (one might say, postcolonial) spirit of a yet another Pole, Tadeusz Borowski, who advised his fellow writers to approach the subject of war atrocities in a way exemplified in his Auschwitz stories (he was an Auschwitz inmate): “But write that you, you were the ones who did this,” as quoted by Jan Kott in his introduction to Borowski’s This Way to the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen (Penguin, 1976). Few could, even though there was hardly any Polish writer who during the early postwar years did not eulogize the victims of Zagłada (the Polish word for the Holocaust). Various ideological shifts under the communist regime stifled the discourse, historic and artistic, on the issue of Polish-Jewish relations. After the fall of communism it has returned in full force, and with an echo of the same parallelism to which Holy Week so wrenchingly testifies.

An Update and Analysis of the Polish Economy
Richard J. Hunter, Jr. and Leo V. Ryan, C.S.V.

The reforms initiated in the period 1989–1990 under Leszek Balcerowicz, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, introduced a “new economic system” in Poland and involved the removal of price controls, the elimination of subsidies to many Polish industries, the opening of Polish markets to international trade and competition, and the imposition of both monetary and budgetary discipline. Poland is now a member of the European Union, the World Trade Organization, and the OECD; on the political-military side, Poland is a member of NATO and is considered as one of the United States’ main allies in Europe.

Although the economy suffered an initial sharp downturn (in the words of former member of the nomenklatura, Mieczysław Nasiłowski, society reached the “barrier of social endurance”), since 1992 it has enjoyed a period of recovery, with the private sector now accounting for more than seventy percent of Polish GDP. As a result of the adoption of “shock therapy” and sustained economic policies surrounding the privatization of the economy, according to the National Bank of Poland, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into the Polish economy was 14.69 billion dollars in 2006 and was boosted by considerable investments by Japanese investors in the Polish real estate market. In 2006 Bridgestone, Sharp, Toyota, Toshiba, and Orion Electric decided to invest in Poland. Companies with foreign capital involvement are the major source of growth in trade, accounting for more than 60 percent of Poland’s imports (+ 21.5 percent) and exports (+ 19.8 percent). In total, FDI in Poland now stands at 108 billion dollars, amounting to 2,800 dollars per capita. Poland remains as the region’s leader in terms of attracting FDI. According to estimates from the Ministry of the Economy, in 2007 the total value of FDI in Poland will amount to more than 15 billion dollars. Negotiations are underway concerning thirty large investment projects. Current major investors in Poland include: 3M, Basell Orlen, BP, Delphi, Fiat, IBM, IKEA, Lafarge Cement, Matsushita, Metro Group, Motorola, Sanden Mfg., Statoil, Toyota, and Whirlpool. According to the Polish Information and Foreign Investment Agency (PAIiIZ), the main reasons why Poland has been considered as an attractive sight for FDI activities include the following:

**Investment Potential**

- GDP growth three times that of Western Europe
- Ranked 1st in planned investments in Europe
- Ranked 2nd in Europe in FDI Confidence Index
- Ranked 5th in top 10 global investment destinations
- Excellent productivity

**Human Capital**

- 20 million young, highly educated, multilingual people
- 50 percent of the population under 35 years old
- Over 2 million attending higher education structures
- Nationwide network of 427 centers of higher education
- Loyal and hardworking people

**Strategic Location**

- In the heart of continental Europe
- Population of 250 million within a 1000 km radius
- Part of the Trans European Network
- Competitive cost base offers significant location benefits
Large and Growing Domestic Market
° 38 million consumers driving 10 percent annual retail market growth

Investment Incentives
° Over 90 billion euro available for development, infrastructure and human capital
° 14 Special Economic Zones and Technology Parks with incentives

Industrial Services Hub
° Regional/Global Manufacturing and Services Platform
° Ranked 4th globally in terms of attractiveness for R&D investments
° European shared service center

According to the Ernst & Young report, executives placed Poland third in the world when focusing on specific countries within their region of choice for investments. For foreign investors, the center of gravity for investments in Europe is now located between Poland (17 percent) and Germany (16 percent).

The Polish economy may truly be termed as a “mixed” economy. Agriculture accounts for 2.8 percent of GDP (engaging 16.1 percent of the labor force); industry accounts for 31.7 percent (29 percent of the labor force); and services, an amazing 65.5 percent of GDP (or 54.9 percent of the labor force). Poland’s main industries include machine building, iron and steel production, coal mining, chemicals, shipbuilding, glass production, beverages, and textiles. Poland’s GDP grew by 6.2 percent in 2006 and estimates indicate a 7.1 percent growth in 2007. GDP per capita in terms of Purchasing Power Parity stood at 14,400 in 2006, whereas GDP in dollar terms was 8,190 dollars per capita (70th in the world), according to World Bank.

In terms of employment, the current unemployment rate stands at 13 percent falling by .7 percent alone in April 2007. While the number of unemployed stood at 1,986,400, since the beginning of 2007 that number has fallen by 322,900. Considering that as recently as 2004 the January unemployment rate was 20.6 percent, the progress on the employment front has been remarkable. Estimates from the Ministry of Finance indicate that by the end of 2008, the unemployment rate may be reduced to 9.9 percent, with the number of the unemployed falling by 1.5 million. Many Poles have recently found lucrative employment in the West—most notably Ireland and the UK.

Are there persistent problems or warning signs in the economy? As with any “normal” country, several problems may be identified in the Polish economy. Improving the account and budget deficits caused by reforms in health care, education, and the pension system remain a priority. Further progress in the area of public finance will depend on the privatization of Poland’s remaining state sector, reducing state employment, reducing corporate and individual taxation, and pursuing continued reforms aimed at easing bureaucratic bottlenecks for entrepreneurs to do business. Will those charged with making difficult decisions be able to meet the challenges of Polish society in the twenty-first century? Time will tell if intercident political squabbles will overwhelm economic policy makers and slow down Poland’s glide-path to success and prosperity.

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No Declaration

James Reid

On the first day they fell from the air.

On the second day strange machines crossed our beds at night, and we told ourselves new dreams in the morning.

On the third day the shitfaced reporters embedded themselves in the slick haunches of the new gods.

On the fourth day it was all so different we could not remember how much it was the same.

On the fifth day a great warship carved the night sea, and its captain awoke from a nightmare of Katyn.

At the end of the first week, at the end of that easy beginning of war, our children greeted the maw of yet another failure of courage by their parents.

The next morning the politicians arose from the smarm of their group hug, unshackled the blindfolded woman, her accomplice who would not shut up, and their children, and dragged them behind the galvanized ripples of the quonset for disposal.

Unable to face themselves, our representatives pretended to be somewhere else to be someone else’s rapists and murderers—and they rapidly inured themselves to the satisfaction of their new memories.

Is no one left to bring us the news?

Books

(continued from page 1335)


A truly significant monthly containing previously unavailable texts about the time of the Soviet military occupation of Poland (1944–89). Can be read on the web at ceeol.com, in PDF format ( alas, the most recent is dated November 2005). A treasure trove of documentation about the functioning of the Soviet system in Central Europe after the Second World War. If your university does not yet subscribe to the Central and East European Library (ceeol.com) offering free access to periodicals such as this one, lobby your academic library for a subscription. The issues are topical. The November 2005 issue is titled “Żydzi w Polsce Ludowej” (Jews in People’s Poland); subsequent issues are titled “Październik ’56,” “1970–1981,” and “Pamiętamy o żołnierzach wyklętych” (We remember the soldiers who fought the communists).

Consider Jan Żaryn’s “Córka marnotrawna, czyli Luna w Laskach,” one of the twelve texts published in the November 2005 issue. Laski near Warsaw is home to a Catholic charity for blind children. Before the Second World War it was administered by the Rev. Władysław Korniłowicz, a priest strongly resembling Karol Wojtyła. After the war it became a center of charitable and intellectual life. The peculiarity of the Franciscan Sisters who managed the place was the presence among them of many converts from Judaism, some of them blind like the children under their care. Among the lay male converts who often visited was Seweryn Ebner, a prominent Polish Jew, whose conversations with the Rev. Marylski were recorded by an unknown secret police collaborator. Laski attracted the attention of the communist secret police because of the atmosphere of spirituality and forgiveness that reigned there: such values must have seemed irritating and offensive to communist rulers. Several agents penetrated the circle of the saintly Sisters. Their reports on priests and nuns are extensively quoted in this article. An entire secret police operation (codenamed “Cobra”) was dedicated to Laski.

The infamous Col. Luna Brystiger, head of the division of the political police investigating the Catholic Church, left the following notes after making the Sisters’ acquaintance: “The clergy help independent farmers and foster dislike of collectivized agriculture . . . It is necessary to limit their access to schools and young people. Whenever possible, one should strive to replace priests by lay catechists, limit the hours of
relational instruction and cut down on the number of nuns. . . We must limit the clergy’s access to public life, restrict their influence to religious ceremonies only, so that they do not enter into conflict with the present political order . . . In the USSR clergy have been tamed—true, they are not Roman Catholics . . . We need further to develop the network of agents and informers among the Polish clergy.” (5)

The issue dedicated to the right-wing heroes of the Polish anti-Nazi and anti-Soviet underground (January-February 2007) is outstanding. On its cover there are the names of soldiers—men born in the late 1920s and early 1930s—who fought communism in the 1940s against all odds. Poland lost this generation of idealistic young people. They lay in their nameless graves throughout the period of Soviet occupation (1945–1989). Only now have some of them received a proper burial and recognition. Survivor Kazimierz Krajewski is quoted as saying that these soldiers remind Poles that the price of freedom is high, and in peaceful times it includes the courage to oppose mispresentations of Central European history that have been advanced both in the United States and Poland.

The March 2007 issue is dedicated to the cultural losses Poland incurred during the German and Soviet invasion during World War II. It is virtually unknown in the English-speaking world that Germans competed with Russians in vandalizing and stealing cultural artifacts in Poland. Already in September 1939 a German organization “Das Ahnenerbe” [The ancestors' Inheritance] robbed and transported to Germany paintings, library collections, and other valuables including even silver candlesticks from churches. Thus a collection of gilded enamels from Limoges (dating back to the twelfth century), Leonardo da Vinci’s “Lady with a Weasel,” paintings by Rembrandt and others, were transported to Germany. Altogether, an estimated 500,000 art objects were either stolen or destroyed by the Germans. Only a fraction were returned after the war. The Russian side had more time to rob and destroy: the Red Army entered the country in 1945 and did not exit until 1991. Here the cash value of the lost art objects is more difficult to provide, because the Soviets robbed and/or destroyed virtually all homes of the Polish nobility numbering in the tens of thousands. Numerous photographs of the destroyed churches and manors accompany the articles. This issue also contains a foundational article on ROPCiO, or Ruch Obrony Praw Człowieka i Obywatela (Movement for the Defense of Human and Citizens’ Rights) that was a key resistance organization in Soviet-occupied Poland. Created in 1977, its goals included Polish independence. It was run mainly by the center-right Catholics. However, personality conflicts weakened this organization, and the creation of Solidarity further marginalized it.

The editors of the Bulletin should see to it that it is placed in the Central and East European Library site in a timely fashion. In the absence of an English translation, at least the Polish originals should be made available to historians around the globe. (jb)

### A View from Europe

(continued from page 1320)

(5th c. BC): “Man is the measure of all things: of things which are, that they are, and of things which are not, that they are not.”

The traditional academic interpretation of Protagoras has been that his goal was not a deification of man. His thesis was that there is no reality per se, and therefore no content to such concepts as the essence of things, substances, ideas, the ultimate cause, or the gods. There is no foundation and no inherent order either in reality or in the human mind; therefore only man can become the measure of all things. However, that measure changes depending on which men are called to provide it. There is no certain knowledge or unassailable principles.

The Berlin declaration carries similar connotations and invokes similar dangers. It contains no reference to God, religion, or values independent of historic time. Can such a declaration be a proper crowning of the history of European humanism over the last twenty-five centuries? Its implicit denial of the assumption of the transcendent dimension of man in all of European history makes it alien to that history. While Protagoras’s relativism has been present throughout that history, it has played a marginal role. By and large, European thought has assumed that human dignity is grounded in such concepts as “soul” and/or “divinity.” In Christianity human beings gained access to dignity through the crucifixion of God/man. Europe was largely built on this idea that has dominated European thinking until a century or two ago. The nineteenth century was particularly destructive to this vision of Europe. In the twentieth century the secularization of Europe was followed by a rise of the theory of superior human beings whose privileged ethnicity or class allowed them to murder tens of millions of undeserving others.

The shock of the Second World War turned many away from that route. For a brief moment, the constitutional tradition of many states began to be reexamined. In 1949 the German nation adopted a constitution whose preamble
spoke of “an awareness of our responsibility before God and man.” This kind of invocatio Dei expressed a belief that political power has limits and that a reference to transcendent values could limit man’s power over other men. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the European elites have again forgotten this lesson of recent history. An intellectual amnesia compels them to reject an experience that always points to the same thing. Without a transcendent foundation it has never been possible to form a long-lasting human community. To create a European Union against the beliefs of Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, Descartes, Leibnitz, Kant, Bergon and so many others amounts to building sand castles. The two antitranscendent attempts in the twentieth century to create a system of values gave existential proof of the futility of such projects. What is the point of trying to erect a third one based on the political and economic rights of man? Is this route not a method of bringing to naught the most important political project of contemporary Europe? Δ

Announcements and Notes

Subscription price increase
Alas, Sarmatian Review has to raise its subscription rates. The present subscription rates barely cover the price of printing and postage. They do not cover office expenses, records maintenance, copyediting fees, web presence, and other expenses necessary for us to deliver a quality publication. There have been several postage increases over the years that we absorbed without raising subscription rates. In fact, our subscription rates remained unchanged for almost twenty years. Therefore, starting with January 1, 2008, we have to raise the rates as follows:

One-year subscription in North America______________________________$21.00 individuals, $28.00 institutions and libraries

One-year subscription overseas______________________________$28.00 individuals, $35.00 institutions and libraries

Prepayment of subscriptions will, of course, be honored. If you pay your 2008 subscription now, the price will remain at $15.00 for individuals regardless of how many years you wish to prepay.

Special Polish issue of Chesterton Review
The Spring/Summer 2007 issue of Chesterton Review is dedicated to Poland. The price of the issue is $25.00 plus postage. Subscription information is available through the Editorial Office at: chestertoninstitute@shu.edu, or by phone at 973-275-2431. Chesterton Review is a Catholic quarterly published by the Chesterton Institute at Seton Hall University.

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Announcements and Notes cont.

Two Nikifor paintings for sale

A Sarmatian Review subscriber wishes to put two Nikifor paintings up for sale. Each painting is priced at $1,000.00. Please contact Sarmatian Review (sarmatianreview@yahoo.com) if interested. Nikifor (1895–1968) was an idiot-savant who painted landscapes in the “naive” style in the streets of Krynica, Poland, for years, until he was “discovered” by an art lover. Nikifor’s painting were recently (May 2007) displayed in the Los Angeles’ Museum of Modern Art. His paintings have been displayed in many other world museums. The New York Museum advertised Nikifor as follows:

KRZYSZTOF KRAUZE’S
My Nikifor
A PORTRAIT OF ONE OF THE WORLD’S MOST REMARKABLE NAIVE PAINTERS

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, Niuta Titus Theater 1, 11 West 53rd Street, New York City

New American publishing house interested in Polish experience in the Second World War

Aquila Polonica is the name of a new publishing enterprise formed by lawyer Terry Tegnazian of Los Angeles, and marketing and web design specialist Stefan Mucha of the United Kingdom. It seeks to make known to the world works of fiction and scholarship dealing with Polish struggle against the double enemy in the Second World War. The launching of this enterprise took place in Los Angeles on 28 April 2007, in the presence of Poland’s First Lady Maria Kaczyńska. See <www.AquilaPolonica.com>.

Thank You Note

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