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Polish Narratives

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Sarmatian Review Data

Higher education and debt in America in 2013

Average student debt for seniors graduating from colleges and universities with loans in 2012: $26,000.
Average tuition, room and board at four-year colleges: $22,000 a year, up from $9,000 a year (adjusted for inflation) in 1980–81.
Median family income in 2012: $50,000, compared to $46,000 in 1980 (adjusted for inflation).
Total student debt in 2012: around 1 trillion dollars, or more than total credit-card debt in that year.
Average interest charged by Federal Reserve in lending money to banks: 0.75 percent.
Interest charged on Stafford loans, or government-sponsored student loans: 6.8 percent.

Source: "Student Debt and the Crushing of the American Dream," *New York Times* (blog), 12 May 2013 (accessed on the same day).

Bureaucracy under Prime Minister Tusk's government

Number of deputy ministers in the government of Prime Minister Donald Tusk: 91.
Ministry in which the number of deputy ministers is the highest: Ministry of Finance under Jan Vincent Rostowski. It has nine deputy ministers.
Ranking of Poland in EU from the standpoint of number of deputy ministers: number two, after Croatia and before Romania.
Number of deputy ministers in Germany (twice the size of Poland and seven times the GDP of Poland): 51.

Source: "Biurokracja w Polsce: Premierowi do rządzenia potrzeba 91 wiceministrów," <forsal.pl> 07/02/2013 (accessed on the same day).

Polish Prime Minister Tusk's party in numbers

Number of members in good standing of Platforma Obywatelska (Civic Platform), Prime Minister Donald Tusk's party that is generally considered to represent city dwellers with higher level of education: 43,000.
Percentage of Civic Platform members who answered the question about their formal education in a poll conducted in September 2013: 70 percent.
Of those who answered, the numer of people who admitted to having only primary education: 14,100 persons, or nearly 50 percent of all active members who revealed their educational status.
Number of people who left Platforma Obywatelska in 2012–2013: 7,000, or nearly 20 percent.

Source: Renata Grochal, "Partia Tuska w liczbach," *Gazeta Wyborcza,* 17 September 2013.

Was poverty under Soviet communism a byproduct or a goal? The economy in Soviet-occupied Poland (1945–1989)

Infant mortality rate in Poland in 1985: twice that of western Europe.
Percentage of people between 19–24 who attended college in Soviet-occupied Poland: 10 percent.
In 1989, percentage of ecologically polluted land: 11 percent, with 33 percent of the population affected.
Amount of Polish coal sent to the USSR between 1945–1953 at 10 percent of the world price: 54,000,000 tons (worth $630,000,000 in 1950s US dollars).
Number of Poles and Germans expelled from their original domicile and forced to move west: 9 milion Poles and 3 million Germans (these figures concern territory taken away from Poland in the east and territory given to Poland in the west in 1945).
Treatment of farmers who refused to join collective farms betweeen 1948–1956: they were sentenced for years to labor camps, prisons, or punitive military units.
One of the ways of enriching the USSR at Polish expense in 1945–1989: Poles bought technology in the West for Western currency and were obliged to sell it to the USSR for the so-called "transfer roubles" worthless outside the USSR.

Source: Janusz Kaliński, *Gospodarka w PRL* (Warsaw: IPN, 2012).

How many books are needed to portray a president?

Number of published books about President John F. Kennedy: 40,000.

Source: Jill Abramson, *New York Times,* 22 October 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/27/books/review/the-elusive-president.html?hp> (accessed 22 October 2013).

Emigration from Poland

Number of persons who emigrated from Poland (when Poland joined the EU in 2004) as of December 2012: 2,100,000, or the largerst emigration in Polish history and the largest group of migrants from a European country in the twenty-first century.

Number of people who emigrated between 2010–2012: 130,000.

Unemployment in Poland in 2013: 14 percent.

Countries in which the emigrants settle: Germany (40 percent), Great Britain (23 percent), Holland (12 percent), and Norway (9 percent).

Percentage of Poles in Poland aged 25–34 who live with parents, mainly because they cannot afford to rent or buy their own apartment: 44 percent.

Source: *Rzeczpospolita,* 7 October 2013; <Polskatimes.pl>, 8 October 2013 (accessed 16 October 2013).

Emigration from the Russian Federation

Number of people who left Russia between 2002–2012: two million.

Number of entrepreneurs in the Russian Federation subjected to criminal prosecution: three million.

Source: Mikhail Khodorkovsky (an inmate at Penal Colony No. 7 in Karelia), "Ten Years a Prisoner," *New York Times,* 24 October 2013 (accessed 24 October 2013).

Financial institutions in Poland

Estimated amount of profits that foreign banks with branches in Poland transfer out of the country each year: 15 billion dollars.

Amount of money for which the postcommunist government sold Polish banks to foreign owners: 25 billion dollars.

Estimated value of Polish banks undersold to the larger foreign banks: 200 billion dollars.

Pattern of economic development seen in Poland: a copy of the development imposed on African countries by foreign financial institutions.

Source: Professor Witold Kieżun, former United Nations economist who spent several years working for the UN in Africa, interviewed by *wSieci,* 20 October 2013 <http://www.wsieci.pl/nie-o-taka-polske-walczylem-pnews-482.html> (accessed 22 October 2013).

Homicide rates in Poland and environs in 2011

Intentional homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants in Poland, Germany, the Russian Federation, and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe in 2011 (or the most recent available data): Poland, 1.2; Russian Federation, 9.7; Lithuania, 6.4; Slovakia, 1.2; Czech Republic, 0.8; Ukraine, 4.3 (for 2010); Belarus, 4.9 (for 2009); Germany, 0.8.

Average for the world: 6.9.

Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2012 study <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/search.html?q=homicides> (accessed 2 November 2013).

U.S. National Security Agency in figures

Number of NSA employees and NSA budget under President Obama: 35,000 and $11 billion.

Percentage of the budget going to private contractors: 70 percent.

Source: Tom Engelhardt, "US digs a security black hole," *Asia Times,* 14 November 2013 <atimes.com> (accessed 14 November 2013).

Higher education in Poland in numbers

Number of institutions of higher education in Poland in 2011/2012: 460, of which 328 are private.

Number of students: 1,764,000, of which 520,000 studied at private schools.

Number of academic teachers: 16,000 (includes both professors and lecturers).

Source: Andrzej Gelberg, <wpolityce.pl>, 3 November 2013 (accessed 3 November 2013).

Polish students win a competition for a Mars rover

Place of Polish Martian rovers in the 2013 international student competition University Rover Challenge held annually at the Mars Desert Research Station outside of Hanksville, Utah: number one (Hyperion from Białystok Polytechnic) and two (Scorpio from Wrocław Polytechnic). In addition, the Białystok team received the score of 493 out of 500, the highest ever.

Prizes: the winning team receives transportation, lodging and admission for five individuals to present their rover at the Annual International Mars Society Convention, as well as cash prizes.

Source: "Polish Students Design Best Mars Rover of 2013," *TechNews Daily* <http://www.technewsdaily.com/18234-best-student-rover-2013-urc.html> (accessed 19 August 2013).

Anticommunism as a Paradigm of Thinking

On the Works of Józef Mackiewicz

Katarzyna Bałżewska

ABSTRACT
This article presents the views of the twentieth-century Polish writer and journalist Józef Mackiewicz (1902–1985). His perspicacity concerning communist ideology and practice is reflected in his analysis of Soviet propaganda and the Communist Party's apparatus of power. The article shows how Mackiewicz lays bare the weaknesses and antihumanist face of the USSR, and how he unraveled the paradoxes of communist rule in the context of issues related to the functioning of enslaved societies. The article also deals with Mackiewicz's controversial criticism of dissident movements and the policies of Western powers toward the Eastern Bloc.

Who was Mackiewicz, and what makes him stand out from other anticommunist authors? Mackiewicz was a novelist and author of unique reports and political dissertations: for forty-five years he was absent from public awareness in Poland because there was no place for the likes of him in times of communist oppression. In communist times his works were available only in small-run editions from émigré publishers, or in the tiny "secondary circulation" (*drugi obieg*). Mackiewicz wrote uncompromisingly of uncomfortable facts that were not supposed to be talked about directly; even today they are often absent from public discussion. Thus the author of texts on the structure of Soviet tyranny, one blessed with a great talent to connect and draw conclusions from facts, became a widely unknown writer.

One's first encounter with Mackiewicz can evoke a mixed reaction. It is not without reason that he is often called controversial, a word that includes feelings of astonishment and disbelief that probably recur in his readers. There is no doubt that the author's views and the vision of communism he has articulated can generate discussion, but a polemic with Mackiewicz would not be easy. Even though some of his opinions seem extreme to us today, his key diagnoses of the communist system are painfully relevant. His works are full of a rare passion that reflect the feelings of a man fully convinced of being right, but at the same time not attempting to force anyone into accepting his claims. In his books we find not only a clearly negative judgment about the inhumanity of the communist system, but also an enormous amount of information, facts and opinions subjected to logical analysis, and discerning interpretation. Confronting this material is likely to lead to reassessment of our knowledge and established views on the history of twentieth-century totalitarianism.

> **Take away from men the time-tested significance of words and you will get them into the state of mental paralysis.**
>
> ***Józef Mackiewicz***

I would like to emphasize that it was never Mackiewicz's intent to cause any kind of scandal or quarrel. In one of her letters Mackiewicz's wife, Barbara Toporska, wrote that "a writer is responsible not only for what he writes about but also for what he conceals."[1] Mackiewicz never tried to conceal anything; the primary goal of his texts is to discern the facts and then talk openly about them. He saw this as his duty not only as an intellectual, but also as an ordinary free person.

THE COMMUNIST "ROAD TO NOWHERE"

In the foreword to the collection of texts and stories *Fakty, przyroda i ludzie*, Toporska recalls:

> During the Polish-German-American conferences that Józef participated in, there was a custom that members introduce themselves. When it was his turn, he declared: "Józef Mackiewicz. Occupation: author. Nationality: anticommunist. Views:

NOTES

[1] Kazimierz Orłoś, "Józef Mackiewicz w świetle listów rodzinnych" in *Zmagania z historią. Życie i twórczość Józefa Mackiewicza i Barbary Toporskiej. Materiały z konferencji w Muzeum Polskim w Rapperswilu z cyklu "Duchowe źródła nowej Europy," Rapperswil, 26–28 września 2006 r.*, ed. Nina Kozłowska and Małgorzata Ptasińska (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2011), 44.

counter-revolutionist. Country of origin: Eastern Europe."[2]

This peculiar manner of self-presentation may confuse a reader unfamiliar with Mackiewicz's works, but the author never joked about matters of real importance. This self-description reflects a remarkably strong personality. The author of the *Road to Nowhere* cannot be identified with any "reactionary" ideology. His biography and almost all of his creative legacy can be summed up in one word: anticommunism. The prefix *anti* should not only be underlined but also given a new shade of meaning because the author's attitude, though bearing traces of a total negation, grew into a universal and critical reflection on what were in his view the most important and tragic events of the twentieth century.

The key point of Mackiewicz's message is that the communist system constitutes "the greatest danger to the world since it began."[3] Mackiewicz's implacability and perseverance in voicing this opinion came not only from personal experience (direct encounters with life under communism), but also from a detailed knowledge of the mechanism of Soviet propaganda that he studied for many years. From the 1920s until his death in 1985, Mackiewicz continued to study and expose the methodology of communism's coercion and the methods fundamental to its destructive force. He dissected the procommunist attitudes of various societies and social groups: intellectual elites, party officials, oppositionists, and ordinary people. He described the communists' plan of gradually gaining power as well as the provocations and other methods they used on the international stage. He commented on the West's lenient attitude toward the dangers of communist totalitarianism, of which the most obvious postwar sign may be the border in the middle of one of the most important European cities, "a wall dividing the meaning of human words, a wall bristling with machine guns" (*TTOP* 194) that served as a symbol of postwar reality and strengthened the myths about Eastern Europe. However, according to Mackiewicz the most terrifying results of the Soviet occupation were the psychological changes in the toughts and actions of ordinary human beings. It was in the sphere of mind and spirit that communism wrought the worst damage. The consequences of this damage in postcommunist countries have yet to be studied and explained in detail; Mackiewicz believed they resist the generally used scholarly and statistical methods.

Mackiewicz's anticommunism should not be seen as a general disapproval of reality; it reflected an authentic and deep concern about the fate of peoples, cultures, and societies under the communist yoke:

> It is not true that Communism [merely] threatens "Western civilization" and "Western culture." It threatens every civilization and culture: Roman, Byzantine, Chinese, Indian, Arab. As the enemy not of nations but of man *tout court,* it is also the enemy of man's God and of all the achievements of humanity. (*TTOP* 185)

The author did not treat communism as a local problem of a "barbaric" Eastern Europe. Stressing the fact that its very idea was born within the parameters of the Western world, Mackiewicz drew attention to a certain discord in the perception of communism by democratic societies in the West, whose familiarity with the subject has been foggy and slogan oriented. While the Soviet Union lasted, it was not uncommon to think of it as a distant, powerful, and dangerous empire. In reality, the life of an ordinary inhabitant of the USSR revolved around the day-to-day fight for survival in the gloomy "world of fiction,"[4] a fight that stripped people of their dignity and pushed spiritual needs and intellectual curiosity aside. The false perception of Soviet power resulted not from ignorance or a lack of information in Western societies, but rather from an inconceivable magnitude of humiliation of the human person

[2] Barbara Toporska, "Fakty, przyroda i ludzie (przedmowa)," in Józef Mackiewicz, *Fakty, przyroda i ludzie* (Londyn: Kontra, 1984), 15.

[3] Józef Mackiewicz, *The Triumph of Provocation*, trans. Jerzy Hauptmann, S. D. Lukac, and Martin Dewhirst, foreword by Jeremy Black (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 200. Henceforth *TTOP* with page number.

[4] This term was used by Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

brought by communist rule. This kind of humiliation cannot be imagined by people who live under noncommunist political systems. Mackiewicz also points out that communist movements and organizations did not trigger a reaction of instinctive disgust in Western European societies. Quite the opposite—it was the firm opposition to those movements that raised revulsion. As years went by, aggressive anticommunism was often replaced by a soft revisionism. Mackiewicz, however, states that one should not attempt to "repair" communism but rather strive to uproot its destructive message.

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According to Mackiewicz, the most terrifying feature of the Soviet occupation was the psychological change in ordinary human beings, in the way they thought and acted.

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Mackiewicz points out that the image of the Soviet Union as a great military power armed to the teeth stands in opposition to the fact that some 90 percent of its population desired its downfall. Thus the Soviet Union must surely have been the weakest great power in history (*TTOP* 207). In fact, the "imperial" image of the Soviet Union deserves a separate analysis. The author of *The Triumph of Provocation* referred to the variously understood aspects of the functioning of the "empire," pointing out that the USSR did not fit the definition of one. For instance, a classic definition of imperial activity is "exploitation of the conquered countries for the benefit of its own country (the metropolis) and its own people" (*TTOP* 199). In this context, Mackiewicz viewed the Soviet Union as a peculiar empire *à rebours*:

> Ordinary Russians within the Soviet Union do not reap benefits from the aims and activities of international communism, but are rather its prime victims, frequently living in worse conditions than people in the allegedly "colonial" countries, namely those who have been conquered by the Communist headquarters in Moscow. (*TTOP* 199–200)

This, of course is debatable, because there are different ways of acquiring satisfaction in life, and Russians enjoyed the prestige of the Moscow-centered empire. One should also note that the more or less oppressive character of communist governments and differences in the standard of living of citizens of communist countries were never the focus of Mackiewicz's attention. The writer was of the opinion that the common denominator in any form of communist rule was the creation of a peculiar "prison of humanity"[5] in which the color of the cage was not of real importance, just as territorial borders of each particular "people's republic"[6] did not matter. According to Mackiewicz any form of communism, whether "Polish," "Romanian," or "Czechoslovakian," deserved the same condemnation, since they were all characterized by the same ability to effectively degrade human beings.[7]

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Mackiewicz points out that the Soviet Union prohibited searching for facts, replacing them with slogans and newspeak.

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In his novel *Road to Nowhere*[8] Mackiewicz superbly captures the atmosphere of these dehumanized times. The last chapters of the novel relate to one of the Soviet authorities' decrees regarding mass detention of people suspected of "demonstrating" their indifference or propagating aversion to bolshevism, or engaging in what was usually described as "counter-revolutionary activities," "agitating," or "spying" (*RTN* 250). Realistic description of

[5] Józef Mackiewicz, "'TRUST' NR 2. Nowy plan zniszczenia antykomunizmu," in *Optymizm nie zastąpi nam Polski* (London: Kontra, 2005), p. 138.

[6] See, for instance, Mackiewicz's views on postwar conflict about borders on the Odra and Nysa (Oder and Neisse) rivers between Poland and Germany. The question of territorial borders and state independence was approached by Mackiewicz mainly in the context of the so-called "state idea" ("idea krajowa"), which means building a multinational state between Russia and Germany that could guarantee security and stability in East Central Europe.

[7] Aldous Huxley and George Orwell were two Western writers who came to conclusions similar to those of Mackiewicz. American diplomat George Kennan represented the view that communism would eventually evolve into a system respectful of human rights.

[8] Józef Mackiewicz, *Road to Nowhere*, trans. Lew Sapieha (London: Collins & Harvill Press, 1963). Henceforth *RTN* with page number.

roundups, which according to NKVD instructions were to be "firm and decisive but not giving rise to noise or causing panic" (*RTN* 237) are preceded by and compared to the job of the catcher of stray dogs. The captured animals usually offer resistance and whine pitifully when a rope loop is placed around their neck and they are shoved into a cramped cage. The sight of a captured, yapping dog raises outrage and protests of the passersby, which is why catching them is carried out at dawn when the city is still asleep and the streets are empty. The roundups of inhabitants of occupied Poland carried out by the Soviets in 1941 were similar to that procedure except that the numbers were incomparably larger:

> They were taken not singly or by the dozen, but thousands at a time; they were taken openly, in view of the whole town. . . . It was not dogs that were being caught, but men. . . . No one protested, no one shouted. . . no one defended himself or tried to free anyone else. . . . no one even complained. . . . Everything had the appearance of being calm and peaceful (*RTN* 309)

The strategy of nonresistance was probably based on a delusive hope of survival. However, the narrative of *Road to Nowhere* does not revolve around the question of "how could it happen." It could happen and did because it was required by Stalin and his willing executioners, and there was no point in looking for logic in the bloody totalitarian rule of the communists who had mastered the use of a massive apparatus of violence. Purges, deportations, detentions, and an almost unbearable psychological terror inscribed in everyday reality under the Soviets were all intended to strengthen the communist regime. Mackiewicz concentrates on showing the methods that made possible the triumph of a "mass hypnosis" of fear and duplicity. This success was achieved due to an enormous propaganda machine in which a significant part was played by the top-down remake of the meaning of words. "Take away from man the original significance of words and you will get the state of mental paralysis" (*RTN* 114), states one of the characters. In *The Triumph of Provocation* the author presents a few of the most striking examples of this semantic manipulation, such as calling aggression "liberation" and slavery "freedom" (*TTOP* 40), not to mention Sovietization described as "structural change" (*TTOP* 133). Countless examples of this propaganda gobbledygook can be culled from various periodicals, daily papers, and books of the period. To my knowledge this rich linguistic material has not yet been analyzed exhaustively.

In *The Triumph of Provocation* the author also strives to overturn a common belief that identifies communist doctrine with internationalism. Mackiewicz points out the fallacy of this statement, giving examples of taking perfidious advantage of nationalistic sentiments in regions subjected to communist rule after the outbreak of the revolution. He especially opposes such methods of fighting for power. In a letter to his sister he wrote:

> I hate nationalism and chauvinism. I have been living among strangers for so long that I had an opportunity to find out that all men are the same, and every narrowness of opinion regarding both nation and [political] party, I see as a cancer on the body of humanity that transforms life into stupor. . . . Whether it is *Deutschland über alles*, or Poland *über alles*, or the Party *über alles* . . . it's all equally disgusting to me.[9]

Like any totalitarianism, communism poisons life by dullness and fear, impeding day-to-day activities and negating the standards of normal existence. However, it is interesting that in spite of the presence of politics, history, and various social issues in Mackiewicz's works, they do not fit into the left, center, or right side of the political spectrum. He points out that the core of twentieth-century totalitarianism is degradation of the individual. We can then say that the anticommunist views of Mackiewicz had their basis in the principle of human liberty and human rights.

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[9] Kazimierz Orłoś, *Józef Mackiewicz w świetle listów rodzinnych,* 47–48. This "sameness" of all people everywhere in the world expressed itself by the wish to live and let live, an attitude not unlike that of the Sarmatian political writers in Poland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The false perception of Soviet power resulted not from ignorance or a lack of information in Western societies, but rather from an inconceivable magnitude of humiliation of the human person brought by communist rule. This kind of humiliation cannot be imagined by people who live under noncommunist political systems.

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Mackiewicz holds radically negative opinions about the pro-Soviet attitudes of people in high public offices, and is adamantly opposed to any consent to submtting to communist rule. This implacable attitude caused a deluge of allegations and protests, not only from supporters of the government of Soviet-occupied Poland[10] but also from patriotic émigrés and anticommunist opposition. Mackiewicz did not tolerate being only partially anticommunist. He did not approve of the semblance of normality offered to the conquered peoples by the communists, feeling that was a cynical game played by the occupiers with the society. The author's key argument consists in stating that compromises and concessions never lead to any long-term benefits but only strengthen and legitimize the system and postpone its final fall. This is why the author of *The Triumph of Provocation* is so difficult to categorize and why he found few readers. Even those who appreciated his literary talent often tried to debase him by stating that his anticommunism was too radical. Mackiewicz is unbending toward his opponents (and also toward himself); for him it is the substance of a message and not its form that is key to him. Facts are always at the very center of his consideration, since according to him they attest only to truth. This notion became the center of his work:

> I'm all for accuracy, because I think only truth is interesting. But at the same time truth is usually richer, more complex, and more colorful than its contrived alterations. . . . Truth is also generally more shocking and gloomier.[11]

Truth holds a superior place in Mackiewicz's hierarchy of values. The display of historical facts has a particular significance because it is supposed to be not only the foundation of reflection on the past but also, and primarily, an ethical and moral guidepost for contemporaries and future generations. Fighting for the "sovereignty of thought" and the right to express his own opinion, Mackiewicz points out that the Soviet Union prohibited searching for facts, replacing them with slogans and newspeak. He repeatedly returns to this issue in *The Triumph of Provocation* in which he says the following of the Soviet Union:

> All the problems of the world had already been solved by Lenin and it was necessary only to learn answers by heart. Doubt became punishable, and where there is no doubt there can be no reflection and, therefore, no inquiring minds. And so old Russia, famous—perhaps to an exaggerated degree—for its "hair-splitting," was transformed into a collective, repeating mechanically the verses of the Leninist dogma. (*TTOP* 35)

Mackiewicz unceasingly emphasized the differences between prerevolutionary Russia and the Soviet Union. He insisted that these two terms should not be used interchangeably. In that he seems to resemble Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn but, as subsequent parts of this essay will show, he is poles apart from Solzhenitsyn in assessing communism. Asked by Paul, the main character in *Road to Nowhere*, what distinguishes old Russia from the Soviets, Father Seraphim states shortly: "They differ in everything" (*RTN 87*), adding that "The 'Russian soul' personified the spirit of revolt; the 'Soviet soul' is degradingly servile" (*RTN* 88). In this answer one hears echoes of Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Turgenev, who in their works created the mythical image of the rebellious Russian. Mackiewicz is obviously under the influence of this myth. On the other hand, he is aware that the sovereignty of literature under the communist system is especially endangered because the poetic word is a culture-forming element and by manipulating words, the patterns of taste in

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[10] Mackiewicz held that "The Polish People's Republic is not a continuation of the history of Poland but a continuation of the history of 1917 Bolshevik Revolution" (*TTOP* 136). This also pertains to countries annexed to the USRR after the war, as well as to the so-called Soviet satellite states.

[11] Józef Mackiewicz, "Literatura contra faktologia," *Kultura*, no. 7-8 (1973), in: Józef Mackiewicz, *Katyń – zbrodnia bez sądu i kary*, ed. Jacek Trznadel, (Warsaw: Antyk, 1997), 417.

society can be transformed into propaganda tools. The Soviet manipulation of literature, known among other terms as "socialist realism" is one of the many factors contributing to his radical opinion about communist dictatorship.

"I SAW IT WITH MY OWN EYES". PARADOXES OF COMMUNISM IN THE LIGHT OF SOVIET PROPAGANDA

A faithful rendering of Mackiewicz's theses and concepts requires placing them in the context of events in his life that significantly affected his outlook. The first such event was his voluntary participation in the Polish-Soviet war of 1919–1921.[12] This direct encounter by a young man (he was seventeen at the time) with a belligerent bolshevism influenced the rest of his life and his personal choices. During the 1920s Mackiewicz studied natural science and entered an unhappy marriage. In 1923 he began to work on *Słowo*, a newspaper run by his older brother, Stanisław, also a talented writer[13] who in the 1950s became prime minister of the Polish government in exile. Mackiewicz's work as a journalist encouraged a prolonged reflection on bolshevism's spread to the peripheries of Eastern Europe. In the 1930s, in addition to his reporting, Mackiewicz made his literary début.

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[In his famous speech] **Khrushchev didn't mention and could not mention the Katyń victims, because the murdered Polish officers never belonged to the Party, they were never communists. And there has never been a case where communists would consider murdering the opponents of their ideology a crime.**

Józef Mackiewicz

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In the early 1940s the author and his family remained in the part of prewar Poland that is presently a part of the Lithuanian Republic. This territory changed hands several times during the war; it was briefly ruled by Lithuanians, then Germans, and then the Soviets. Under Soviet occupation Mackiewicz worked as a coachman and a lumberjack, witnessing the mental degeneration of people after their encounter with communism. It was this observation and the accompanying experiences that served as the basis for his novel *Road to Nowhere*.

In the second half of 1941 Hitler launched operation Barbarossa. After German troops marched into the part of Eastern Europe that had been seized by the Soviets in 1939, the situation changed dramatically. For a brief period, writing truth about communism became possible. In *Goniec Codzienny* [*Daily Herald*], a Vilnius paper, Mackiewicz published several articles about everyday life under Soviet occupation. In one he wrote:

> If someone would ask me for the shortest definition of the Bolshevist system, I'd say: the state perfectly devoid of public opinion. The state where the concept of citizenship was reduced to the concept of slavery.[14]

Mackiewicz presented the tenets of Soviet political thought in a similarly emotional and sharp tone:

> Their invention is the Lie raised to an umptieth power, guarded by draconian laws, carried on to such an open shamelessness that it becomes overwhelming. There is no place in it for the will of the general public. Yet on every corner and doorstep, in newspapers, books, or calendars, on the radio, every day, every hour they say that everything that takes place in the state is in accordance with the will of the general public. In the Soviet Union an absolute slavery prevails because the citizenry is deprived of elementary civic liberties, of every single one of them. All that is left are dejection, despair, soft whispers, and fear. But it is said from on high that "everybody is happy, free and smiling." And it is not just said on high, every citizen should repeat it as a forced prayer, at work and outside work, at home and in the street. Those who are not glad and smiling will be invited to the NKVD.

[12] The fictional description of the time of the Polish-Soviet war can be found in the novel *Lewa wolna* [1965] (London: Kontra, 1994).

[13] The story of Mackiewicz's older brother deserves a separate essay. In the middle of the 1950s Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz unexpectedly returned from emigration to Poland and began collaboration with the security forces. This move turned out to be his biggest political and personal failure. Józef Mackiewicz maintained no contact with his brother after the war.

[14] Józef Mackiewicz, *Goniec Codzienny* no. 2 (1941) in Jerzy Malewski (Włodzimierz Bolecki), *Wyrok na Józefa Mackiewicza*, (London: Puls, 1991), 51.

> Lies are the base of laws, lies are omnipresent in school books, lies underlie literature, history, poetry, press, everything, including private conversations.
> Nobody is happy within the Soviet system but everybody has to praise it. Day after day . . . 200 million people have to take part in a mental self-flagellation. Here is this peculiar invention, which has not been used by any of the bloodiest tyrants so far.[15]

This commentary, while accurate, has one huge drawback for which the author atoned for the rest of his life. *Goniec Codzienny* was a German propaganda newspaper written in Polish, a *gadzinówka*.[16] Agreeing to publish in the Nazi press raised suspicions among Poles that Mackiewicz collaborated with the enemy. Because of this misunderstanding, officials of the Polish Underground State issued a death sentence; it was eventually withdrawn and the author was cleared of all charges.[17] Despite that, after the war this short episode became the key argument for Mackiewicz's opponents. From then on Mackiewicz had to constantly refute allegations of collaboration with the Nazis.

The whole affair achieved even more publicity because in 1943 the Germans discovered a mass grave of Polish soldiers in Katyń. In spring 1943 Mackiewicz, having received a go-ahead from Polish Underground State officials, arrived at the location of the first exhumation with a group of other journalists and medical personnel from across German-occupied Europe. The evidence that he gathered in the Katyń forest—the narratives of witnesses, letters and documents found in the uniforms of the murdered officers (a crushing majority were murdered by a shot to the back of the head)—indicated that this crime was committed by the Soviets. Further research and an inquiry personally carried out by Mackiewicz[18] resulted in numerous articles and the first book to spell out the truth about Katyń. The traces of the monstrosity that the author saw with his own eyes matched other information about the Soviet system and confirmed for Mackiewicz his earlier opinion of the dark nature of communism. Since then he has often referred to the Katyń massacre in his works.[19]

After the discovery of the missing Polish soldiers' burial sites, Soviet propaganda began a disinformation campaign accusing Nazi Minister of Propaganda Goebbels of spreading false information to media.[20] Stalin himself vehemently denied that his people had committed the Katyń murders, at first maintaining that he ordered to free the officers, then that the prisoners escaped to Manchuria, and eventually that they were captured and killed by the Germans. This last statement became the official Soviet version for the subsequent half century, or as long as the USSR lasted. There was no end to the lies and rumors, but as Mackiewicz points out, confusion and disinformation suited the Soviets best: "The bolsheviks are great psychologists. They know that among a thousand people who repeat a

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15 Ibid.

16 An informal term for Polish-language newspapers published by German or Soviet occupation administration. The funds devoted to publishing this kind of press were called "reptilian funds" (*Reptilienfonds*).

17 The whole affair is described in detail by Bolecki in his book *Wyrok na Józefa Mackiewicza* (London: Puls, 1991).

18 Józef Mackiewicz, "Dymy nad Katyniem" in *Fakty, przyroda i ludzie*; also *The Katyn Wood Murders.*

19 After returning from Katyń, the first thing the author did was give an interview to the aforementioned *Goniec Codzienny*. What was the reason for this controversial decision? In the documentary *Errata do biografii - Józef Mackiewicz,* directed and written by Grzegorz Braun and Robert Kaczmarek (2007), Telewizja Polska, Włodzimierz Odojewski conjectured that Mackiewicz wanted the truth to be known by as many people as possible, and so chose a newspaper with a high circulation rather than a Polish underground leaflet that would reach only patriotic Poles. The translated fragments of the interview ("I saw it with my own eyes") are available at: <http://tylkoprawda.akcja.pl/teksty16a.htm>.

20 It should be added that the Nazis also tried to make use of the Soviet crime in their propaganda, such as by accusing Jews of murdering the Poles at Katyn. See the front page editorial in *Prawda* 19 April 1943, "Pol'skie sotrudniki Gitlera." See also Józef Mackiewicz, *Sprawa mordu katyńskiego. Ta książka była pierwsza* (London: Kontra, 2009).

rumor there may be none who would bother to verify the information."[21]

A secret order signed by the "leader of the Soviet nation" on 5 March 1940 hid the brutal truth: execute. The world was silent, even though intelligence services of the Western powers knew well enough who shot the tens of thousands of deceitfully detained soldiers of the Polish army. It was silent because it did not want to annoy Stalin, who was then an ally of the Allies. In 1949 Mackiewicz wrote:

> Sometimes it does seem as if all human vices–-from the strongest: crime, treachery, duplicity, slander, up to the smallest and shallow: personal ambitions, gossip, and vanity—shook hands over these tombs.[22]

Katyń has become the symbol not only of the pointless death and cruelty of Soviet totalitarianism, but also of the West's diplomatic disgrace in regard to Eastern Europe. It was a crime that for political and diplomatic reasons was not allowed to be mentioned during the entire period of the Cold War. One could say that the postwar order was founded on the Katyń lie, which is why the crime can now serve as a key to understanding some of the tragic turns of twentieth century history. As such, Katyń becomes a suitable subject of political reflection for contemporary democratic societies.

After the war Mackiewicz found himself in London, began publishing novels, and was recognized as a talented novelist. But the topic of Katyń remained his *idée fixe.* Mackiewicz conscientiously watched its postwar fate and the forced silence on both sides of the political divide. One could ask why the period of the so-called thaw, started by Khrushchev, did not reveal the truth about Katyń. Mackiewicz's answer is as simple as it is important: it was because the then First Secretary was mainly critical of Stalin's crimes committed against other communists. In 1962, while analyzing the consecutive political moves of Moscow and the favorable reaction of Western public opinion, Mackiewicz pointed out the following:

> Khrushchev didn't mention and he could not mention the Katyń victims because the murdered Polish officers never belonged to the Party, they were never communists. And there has never been a case where communists would consider murdering the opponents of their ideology a crime. Just the opposite. . . they have always viewed it as a favor done to the Party. With regard to that, the speech Khrushchev delivered at the Twenty-Second Congress did not change either the attitude or the communist morality.[23]

Thus in Mackiewicz's view, Stalinists put on the mask of anti-Stalinists and, with Khrushchev at the lead, confessed mainly to the political purges executed by them against their own comrades. During his alleged self-examination Khrushchev did not say a word about Stalin's greatest crimes, such as the mass murders of civilians during the collectivization and "dekulakization" period. Mackiewicz points out that what Khrushchev condemned most strongly in his speech were the crimes of communists against communists, the trumped-up Moscow trials, and the like. Somehow this escaped the attention of Western admirers of the period of "thaw." Mackiewicz concludes that apart from the ethical aspect of the issue and the unquestionable fact of Stalin's crimes, "the mutual killings among communists" or "murdering the murderers" was actually received by some with a sort of relief.[24] Horrible as this may sound, many people felt a kind of gratitude toward Stalin for executing some of the most notorious communist criminals.[25] For Mackiewicz, Khrushchev's speech provides proof that "the slavery of spirit" and "collective duplicity" were closely related to the communist ideal. Mackiewicz notes that "among the

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[21] Józef Mackiewicz, "Ostrożnie z wiadomościami o Katyniu," *Lwów i Wilno* no. 23 (1947) in Józef Mackiewicz, *Katyń – zbrodnia bez sądu i kary,* p. 267.

[22] Józef Mackiewicz, "Tajemnica szwedzkiego dossier," *Wiadomości* no. 41 (1949) in Józef Mackiewicz, *Katyń – zbrodnia bez sądu i kary,* p. 325.

[23] Józef Mackiewicz, "Dlaczego Chruszczew nie mógł wspomnieć o Katyniu," *Ostatnie Wiadomości* no. 4 (1962) in Józef Mackiewicz, *Katyń – zbrodnia bez sądu i kary,* ed. Jacek Trznadel (Warsaw: Antyk, 1997), p. 398.

[24] Ibid., p. 399.

[25] Ibid., p. 402.

millions of people living in that system who, for thirty years, had compared Stalin to a living deity, nobody is now prepared to stand up and say a word to defend him" (*TTOP* 178). How could this happen? It was because the communist idea included the slavery of spirit and collective duplicity.

After Khrushchev's speech the core of communist ideology remained untouched and undiscussed while the party, after so-called de-Stalinization, carried on with its policy of disinformation. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* was written, as Mackiewicz succinctly puts it, "at the demand"[26] of the First Secretary. It was not a literal demand, of course, but rather that a work of this kind was necessary to keep the party in power. The blame for the evil past could now be pinned on the dead Stalin, even though it was Lenin who was responsible for building from scratch the system of Soviet terror, and it was Lenin's doctrine that formed the statute of the Communist Party that totaled only a few million members yet ruled over a country of nearly three hundred million citizens.

In *The Triumph of Provocation* Mackiewicz points out other paradoxes of the communist regime as reflected in Khrushchev's above-mentioned strategy:

> The mere fact of Communist repression of somebody is not determined by that person's political stance. Hundreds of thousands of the party's most faithful members also fell victim to repression. . . . Communists are usually in the habit of liquidating all those whom they no longer need and who might become an obstacle in the future. . . It allows them endlessly to repeat the same tactics and, as we have seen, in case of dire need, it even allows them to "rehabilitate" those they once liquidated, so as to begin all over again. (*TTOP* 104–105)

It is worth noting that the same could be said about the countless fellow travelers (*poputchiki*) who, in their journalistic or literary work, decided to spread the "revealed truths" of communism and who were usually pushed aside after completing the "tasks" required of them. These things are a bit more clear today than in Mackiewicz's time.

One of the darkest periods of world literature occurred at the turn of the 1940s and 1950s when thousands of sugarcoated poems and stories were written, praising the "unfathomable wisdom" and "humanism" of Stalin, the high officials of the party, and the Bolshevik Revolution. Some of the authors of these texts were distinguished and talented poets, and some were Nobel Prize laureates. This behavior, rather common back then, is now covered by a fog of shame, and serves as sad proof of the untrustworthiness, foolishness, and servility of some men of letters. It also confirms Mackiewicz's opinion that any form of cooperation with the communists leaves a dark mark on the human dignity of the collaborator. To quote the opening sentences of *The Triumph of Provocation*:

> The most characteristic feature of the Communist system is the total enslavement of the human spirit, the subjugation of human thought and of the human intellect. It would appear, therefore, that the greatest enemies of this system should be found not among the workers, peasants . . . and "ordinary" men and women in the street, but in the so-called progressive circles that have traditionally proclaimed to the masses the ideal of free thought and have regarded matters of the spirit as more important than daily bread. Logically, one would have expected that these intellectual circles in all countries would become the avant-garde of the battle against Communism. Nothing of this sort has happened. (*TTOP* 9)

When confronted with the party, the intellectuals almost always faced moral defeat. The party got what it wanted, i.e., the prestige of the intellectuals' voice. Mackiewicz points out the absurdity of the situation in the 1960s when the victims of Stalinism were called "anticommunist" and considered it an insult. They were not in the least ready to denounce their communist beliefs; they blamed Stalin and not communism for what happened. According to Mackiewicz, the communist system put on different masks depending on circumstances: it was called Bolshevism, Leninism, Stalinism, the "thaw," Gomułkism, "peaceful coexistence," or

[26] See: Józef Mackiewicz, "TRUST NR 2. Nowy plan zniszczenia antykomunizmu," p. 77. I refer to this matter later in the article.

even "capitalism." Yet in Mackiewicz's view it remained an absolute evil that had to be opposed with all the might by all the people of good will. One should not attempt to reform or improve it, or try to see some positive elements in it that could prove it was capable of evolving. In Mackiewicz's view, it was wishful thinking to try to tame the USSR because such attempts ignored the core of the problem:

> Communism is above all an enemy to freedom of man. However improved the communist system would be, men cannot be free in it. This is why any fight for "human rights" in communism without at the same time fighting against the communist ideology is hypocrisy.[27]

Accordingly, terms such as "good communism" or "communism with a human face" dangerously falsify the already falsified reality of communism. Recognizing communism's deceitful ability to camouflage itself is the first and necessary step toward understanding it. Mackiewicz preached his beliefs throughout the 1970s without much success. He was greatly disappointed by the fact that the world did not seem to hear his voice. One might say well and good, but what then should have been done? The USSR had atomic weapons and war was out of the question. Mackiewicz's somewhat convoluted answer is summarized below.

Mackiewicz's attitude towards dissidents and "authority figures" in the free world

In 1976 Mackiewicz self-published in Munich a political brochure titled *TRUST No.2: The new plan to destroy anticommunism*[28] in which he researched the reasons behind the negative reception of anticommunist slogans in the West. In his view, the responsibility for this state of affairs lay primarily with the communist center in Moscow whose main objective was to continue being in power, but also with those Westerners who so easily believed Moscow's assurances. In the *Road to Nowhere* one of the characters uses a metaphor to depict the Soviet Union as "a colossus with feet of clay that one could topple over with a single shot" (*RTN* 118). If so, how did it happen that such a creation survived for so long after the war? Mackiewicz had already written the following in 1952:

> All the mistakes the West made regarding the Soviet Union after the war originate from the same source: reckoning with the opinion of the Soviets and endeavoring to soothe them. . . . The Bolsheviks can say absolutely anything they want, and no proof or arguments will be needed.[29]

Mackiewicz laments the fact that the free countries applied their measures and ethical norms to the official image of the area enslaved by communism. In reality, communism involves a complete reversal and negation of universal moral standards. The author also notes that the source of communist tyranny was a psychological factor:

> Unfortunately, very few people realize what sort of clay the [Soviet] feet are made of. The Soviet Union is the least materialistic state in the world. Its whole power rests on making a skillful use of psychology. (*RTN* 118)

Taking this into consideration, even a whisper about a force-based attempt to overthrow communism could be considered a threat to the party. This is why the very word "anticommunism," which raises associations with an open call for the overthrow of the party, was to the regime a particularly distasteful notion that should be instantly eliminated as an unword. According to Mackiewicz, the experienced Soviet propaganda machine found a perfect way of uprooting anticommunist turns of phrase, paradoxically by a partial appropriation of them (see the points below), and also by replacing them with new and inspirational slogans matching the period of the *détente*. Obviously peace rules out war, and so any form of dissatisfaction with communist rule could be channeled into a critique of the system—up to a point, of course. It should be stressed that this

[27] Józef Mackiewicz, "TRUST NR 2. Nowy plan zniszczenia antykomunizmu," 138.

[28] This and other political brochures by Mackiewicz can be found in Józef Mackiewicz, *Optymizm nie zastąpi nam Polski* (London: Kontra, 2005).

[29] Józef Mackiewicz, "Pierwsza bolszewicka książka o Katyniu," *Wiadomości* no. 28 (1952), reprinted in Mackiewicz, *Katyń—zbrodnia bez sądu i kary,* 375.

criticism had to fit clear guidelines and support a mistaken belief in a peaceful evolution of the USSR. What was called progress, internal evolution, or a change for the better in regard to the Soviet Union, in fact meant only a delay of the process of crushing "the clay legs of the colossus."

However, the trustfulness with which the public opinion of the free world has treated these transformations would not amount to much were it not for the activities of a new elite of the émigré opposition that began arriving from the Soviet Union in the 1960s and '70s. Mackiewicz suggests that in the 1970s Moscow decided to experiment with disinformation by sending a group of dissidents to the West, where they were greeted as if they were oracles fit to pronounce on what was happening behind the Iron Curtain. They were not "evil" anticommunists but rather peaceful "critics of the regime."[30] This new-old[31] move of Moscow, reminiscent of the Leninist discourse about democratic societies being "deaf and dumb blind men" (*TTOP* 85), turned out to be a great propaganda success for the Soviet Union.

Mackiewicz's prime examples were Andrei Sakharov, who did not leave the USSR but was allowed to make public statements, and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. He called them the main pillars of the concentrated disinformation offensive. The paradox lay in the fact that the two Nobel laureates "became propagators of the one and only way of 'fighting' communism, which consisted in not using any kind of force or pressure, but waiting for communism's internal evolution."[32] Mackiewicz summarizes the dissidents' message in the following way:[33]

1. They openly speak of the dreary reality of Soviet life and the abysmal human rights record of the Soviet administration
2. They stress evolution and the forthcoming revival of citizens' energy in Soviet society
3. They express and cultivate contempt toward the West
4. The implied conclusion to the dissidents' message is that the communist system must not be overthrown by force and that it is better to wait for the revival of the interior moral powers of Soviet society.[34]

As mentioned before, the first and most prominent of these postulates agreed with the postulates of the opponents of communism. Mackiewicz seemed to be particularly disgusted by points 2 and 4. On the other hand, he was not surprised that in the political constellation of the time it was Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn that gained almost a monopoly on the "truth" about the Soviet Union. After all, it was a top priority for communists to maintain their power, and this could be achieved by means of the peace message of the new emigration. To achieve this purpose even harsh criticism was allowed because it resonated well with the belief in the moral revival of the degenerate system and a rejection of the notion of a real fight against communism. Mackiewicz was puzzled and disappointed that this dissident offensive was received with open arms in the West's intellectual circles, and that the lack of inner coherence in the new oppositionists' message did not raise any polemics or suspicions. He found the discretion with which the West avoided analyzing indications of inconsistency in the overall Soviet dissident movement alarming.[35]

Mackiewicz was not alone in holding these views. Inconsistency and ambivalence in Solzehnitsyn's way of reasoning was likewise noticed by his [Solzhenitsyn's] friend, Dmitri Panin, who commented on it in his essay "Solzhenicyn i dieistvitielnost'" [Solzhenitsyn and reality]:

[30] Józef Mackiewicz, "TRUST NR 2. Nowy plan zniszczenia antykomunizmu," 76.

[31] Mackiewicz sees common elements between disgorging the 'dissidents' in the 1970s and the disinformation operation "Trust," carried out by the GPU (the State Political Directorate) in the 1920s.

[32] Józef Mackiewicz, "TRUST NR 2. Nowy plan zniszczenia antykomunizmu," 101.

[33] Apart from Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn, Mackiewicz also mentions the activities of such dissidents as Valery Chalidze and Vladimir Maksimov.

[34] Józef Mackiewicz, "TRUST NR 2. Nowy plan zniszczenia antykomunizmu," p. 95. See also *The Triumph of Provocation*, 209–210.

[35] "TRUST NR 2," 113.

> Solzhenitsyn's suggestions turn us away from the fight against the communist regime in the Soviet Union. His tirades—don't lie, confess, self-limit—bring confusion and chaos, they hinder mobilization of significant efforts against the communist model of the world. Sometimes they sound like mockery. . . .The class of communist oppressors can only be thankful to Solzhenitsyn. . . And the West has accepted yet another disinformation testimony.[36]

Thus information of alleged changes in the Soviet Union, spread by the dissidents, agreed with the objectives of Soviet propaganda about "peaceful coexistence." It is important to emphasize, though, that Mackiewicz's allegations concerning Solzhenitsyn cannot be unambiguously accepted.[37] The author arrived at his conclusions on the basis of observations, available texts, interviews, and dissidents' comments—i.e., circumstantial evidence. He did not accuse anyone of conscious cooperation with the communists; rather, he indicated that many people served as cats' paws to Moscow's designs. Mackiewicz liked to challenge authority figures, such as the highly respected Soviet dissidents, because in his view searching for truth usually involves asking uncomfortable questions. He was likewise critical of Radio Free Europe, which he accused of propagating the vision of "communism with a human face."[38]

In the early 1970s Mackiewicz published two books about the policies of the Catholic Church toward communism.[39] He reproached the Vatican for the compromises it had made with the state authorities of the Eastern Bloc. He rejected coming to terms with the communists in any shape or form and believed that the Church's Eastern policy in the times of *détente* had no positive consequences.[40] Mackiewicz was the opposite of a diplomat and felt unconstrained by any social, political, or historical taboos. This allowed him to obstinately state that "the greatest of all possible catastrophes would not be a war for freedom but capitulation to total slavery" (*TTOP* 179). In 1982, however, after the Solidarity period in Poland and during martial law, he expressed an optimistic belief that the time would come when communism would crumble:

> We are all human. The Communists who strive for world domination are only human, too. And errors and miscalculations are human. If they [opposition movements in the Soviet bloc] become widespread, if they slip out of their Communist controllers, the internal upheavals in the Soviet bloc might suddenly change from quantity to quality. Given favorable circumstances outside, they might even lead to the overthrow of Communism. . . . Let us hope that it is still possible for this to happen. (*TTOP* 211)

Mackiewicz did not live to see the long-awaited moment when the oppressed said, "Down with the Soviet rule!" (*TTOP* 211) Nor did he correctly predict the way communism would eventually fail. Maria Szonert referred to this matter in her review of Mackiewicz's book:

> Mackiewicz did not see the resolution of the Cold War — he passed away in 1985. Therefore he cannot give us his explanation of such an unthinkable . . . course of events. Nor can he apologize to all those "Polrealists" whom he consistently attacked and offended for decades for their efforts to bring about the liberation of Eastern Europe through nonmilitary means.[41]

It is doubtful that Mackiewicz would apologize to anyone for his views, for treating the communist system as criminal, and for seeing cooperation with it in any form or shape as sheer

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[36] Quoted from Józef Mackiewicz, "TRUST NR 2. Nowy plan zniszczenia antykomunizmu," pp. 102–106. The translation from Russian into Polish is by Mackiewicz; I translated it into English.

[37] Józef Mackiewicz, „Nierozwiązana zagadka Aleksandra Sołżenicyna.", *Wiadomości* no. 23 (1972), <http://tylkoprawda.akcja.pl/teksty20.html>; Józef Mackiewicz, "Archipelag zbrodni i zagadek," *Wiadomości* no. 13–15 (1974).

[38] Józef Mackiewicz, "Mówi Rozgłośnia Polska Radia Wolna Europa," in *Optymizm nie zastąpi nam Polski.*

[39] *W cieniu krzyża* and *Watykan w cieniu czerwonej gwiazdy*.

[40] In *The Triumph of Provocation* the author asked rhetorically whether the Church was aware that the goal of communism, according to Lenin, was "the destruction of all faith in God." (*TTOP* 201)

[41] Maria Szonert, "The Triumph of Provocation (review)," *The Polish Review* 54, no. 4 (2009), 516.

wickedness. While he lived, he paid a huge price for his intransigency. His legacy consists of providing us with unique information about communism and sketching out a particular ontology of the communist lie. As Jeremy Black notes in the foreword to *The Triumph of Provocation*, Mackiewicz's analyses can help us navigate and interpret other contemporary authoritarian systems and methods of governing, and they often shed light on contemporary international policies toward undemocratic countries. Δ

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History from the Ground up

Terrence O'Keeffe

The Polish Experience through World War II. A Better Day Has Not Come, **by Aleksandra Ziolkowska-Boehm.** Foreword by Neal Pease. Lanham, MD and Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2013. viii + 175 pages. Index, footnotes. ISBN 978-0-7391-7819-5.

While it may seem offensive to quote Josef Stalin on any subject, there is one well-known remark of his that seems apt here: "A single death is a tragedy, a million deaths a statistic." This observation, turned on his own unrestrained power and cavalier attitude about the lives of others, signals him as the lead author of innumerable personal tragedies that generated the dire statistics that are the subject of conventional histories that deal with nations, states, and the relations among them, i.e., history "from the top down." Ziolkowska-Boehm's collection of deeply affecting personal and family narratives returns us to the level where individuals are caught up in historical events that changed their lives forever, and tells us how they experienced them.

The intended spoils of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact were, for the Russians, the eastern half of Poland and the Baltic States. With their military occupation of eastern Poland during late September 1939, Soviet authorities, working through the NKVD, undertook vast "cleansing" operations, including targeted murders, mass killings, and large deportations of Poles whom they considered to be potential oppositionists (the grisly details are described in Timothy Snyder's *Bloodlands*). Though aimed at removing Poland's leadership class from the region, the criteria of "selection" for deportation were gross, doctrinaire, and often arbitrary. During the cattle-car transports and upon arrival at their destinations, death by malnutrition, illness, and exposure to extreme weather was considered "natural" by the authorities. Joanna Synowiec's journeys through this hellish passage are emblematic of thousands of Polish children who were orphaned and used as expendable labor by the Soviets during this terrible period. Her gloomy odyssey – Archangelsk, Uzbekistan, Iran, Mexico, the United States—killed her parents early on, leaving her as the family's responsible "mother" at the age of twelve, unable to prevent the death of one of her two brothers. Her imperative to rescue what could be rescued was so stark that she lost the ability to cry. While she managed to build a decent life in the United States, she never truly recovered from the succession of blows that hammered her during the war years. Her happy memories of a childhood on a prosperous farm near Szemiatówka (today in Belarus) have not vanished, but have been transformed by the nightmare that followed into a constant reminder that such everyday happiness could never be hers again. Hers is a story of irretrievable losses ("A better day has not come").

The longest chapter in this book, "Wartanowicz Family Vineyards in Podole," is an intergenerational saga of an extended family, one branch of which stems from the Armenian immigrations into Poland during the late middle ages. In the nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries the parents of the family branch considered here (Eugeniusz and Teofila and their four sons and one daughter) established large and successful vineyards, orchards, and a manorial estate at Dźwiniacz in the vicinity of Zaleszczyki (now in Ukraine). The family's history and fortunes are told by several of the children and grandchildren of these five siblings, and gathered through family letters, diaries, and conversations with the author. The brief wartime story of Józef Wartanowicz's family records executions by the Gestapo and deaths and dispersions at the hands of the Russians.

The central story of Marian and Krystyna Wartanowicz's family, who owned another family property near Dobropole, comes from Krystyna's diaries and the reminiscences of their daughter nicknamed Anulke. She experienced her tenth through twelfth years as a deportee to Kazakhstan, followed by refugee status in Tehran, Pakistan, and South Africa, where the family chose to settle after reuniting with Marian and a brief English interlude at the end of the war. Fate was kinder to Anulke than to Joanna Synowiec. Anulke's father survived a German POW camp and her mother held the rest of the family together during their exile, demonstrating a fortitude that surprised those who knew her as a diminutive, stylish, and sheltered young woman before the catastrophe. Once again the strong contrast between the prosperous and pleasant conditions of the family before the war and the disruption, misery, and anxiety of the war years is central to personal memories of the era. But the most important thing—an intact family—survived and lived to build new lives in South Africa, England, Canada, and France.

What happened to those who remained behind in Poland, those who were not killed or swept up and deported by either Hitler's or Stalin's minions, is illustrated by the story of Anna and Ewa Bąkowski. Anna was the only daughter among the Wartanowicz siblings, marrying into the Bąkowski family and helping to manage the large agricultural estate Kraśnica near Opoczno in south-central Poland. Her husband, Jerzy Jaxa Bąkowski, was captured by the Russians and murdered as part of the Starobelsk-Kharkov "liquidation." Her daughter Ewa was a young teenager during the WWII years and, along with her mother, played a role in assisting local underground units of the Home Army. This credential in itself was enough to create problems for mother and daughter in the communist state—you could only be anti-Nazi on Russian terms, i.e., with a strong communist Party orientation, a rarity in itself in Poland during the war years; any other form of democratic or political or civil activism made you automatically suspect. Finally resettling in Gdańsk, they had to conceal their "bourgeois origins" in order to avoid punitive actions that would have affected Ewa's educational and employment prospects. Other than vivid prewar memories of Dźwiniacz, Dobropole, and Kraśnica, all links to the family estates were severed for this generation of the Wartanowicz family and their children, never to be reconstituted.

Ewa Bąkowski's cousin, Janusz Krasicki, is at the center of the next family narrative in the book. As a boy of seven he saw his father, Captain Witold Krasicki, an air force pilot, leave for duty on September 3, 1939. His mother received several postcards from her husband while he was in Russian captivity. All communication ceased in spring 1940, when Captain Krasicki was among the 4,000 Polish POWs at the Starobelsk camp executed by the NKVD—one contingent of the many slaughtered by the operation now called the Katyń Forest massacre. The postwar years in Warsaw were as difficult as the war years for his family ("bourgeois origins" again), but Janusz, fascinated by aviation and inspired by his father's career, managed to become a civilian aviator in the face of obstacles created by the regime, becoming a lifelong official of the Aero Club. The story of his love of flying and pulling himself up by his bootstraps is actually a happy one.

"Wanda's life is a dramatic essence of the fates of the war generation. Fate led her through the underground flight in the Home Army, through the Gestapo headquarters in Szucha Street in Warsaw, the Pawiak prison, the camps of Majdanek and Auschwitz—to repressions in the postwar times of Stalin's rule." So begins the biographical sketch of Wanda Ossowska, the last in this collection, with its cautionary title "Let Our Fate Be a Warning to You." The bare facts of this opening sentence are filled in with the

details of her brutal treatment by the Germans who interrogated her fifty-seven times (leaving her with permanent physical damage) but were not able to break her. Before, during, and after the war her vocation as a surgical nurse brought help and encouragement to her countrymen for fifty years. The book ends with the moving story of Ossowska's determined and successful effort to save the life of Ida Grinspan, a fifteen-year-old French-Jewish orphan and only child in the Neustadt-Glewe concentration camp.

One final observation should be made here. With the exception of Janusz Krasicki's story, this book is one in which women's voices and actions predominate. During the war years Polish women undertook many difficult tasks to preserve both their families and their nation. Their efforts and perspective are given exposure here in a way that impresses the reader hitherto unfamiliar with their achievements. Ms. Ziolkowska-Boehm is to be congratulated for making their voices heard. Δ

New Perspectives on Polish Culture

Personal Encounters, Public Affairs

Edited by Tamara Trojanowska, Artur Płaczkiewicz, Agnieszka Polakowska, and Olga Ponichtera. New York: PIASA Books, 2011. x + 382 pages. Index, Notes on Contributors, Bibliography. ISBN 978-0-940962-73-6. Paperback.

Robin Davidson

From Professor Tamara Trojanowska's elucidating introduction to the closing essay on literary translation by poet and translator Mira Rosenthal, this collection of essays by eminent Slavic Studies scholars interrogates Poland's struggle with the public/private dynamic as it impacts the identity politics that have haunted the Polish literary imagination for more than two centuries. The collection includes twenty-one essays that bridge three centuries—nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first, address identity formation as it pertains to Polish culture's struggle with modernity, and seek to revise the old dualism of public and private within the context of the shifting ground of postmodernity. The authors here employ Polish literature as the stage on which a passionate national discourse plays out, moving from the nineteenth-century Romanticism of Adam Mickiewicz and the Polish theater to the transnational imagination of the *O'Hariści*. In her introduction Trojanowska offers a compelling explanation of the rationale underpinning the order in which the essays appear. The book's arc involves two central concerns. The first deals with the increasing tensions among a communal, societal, and individualistic understanding of Polish cultural traditions and is evidenced in the essays appearing in parts 1–3: "Paradigmatic Shifts," "Experiences of the Self," and "New Dynamics." The book's subsequent focus refers specifically to Poland's experience of the extreme historical circumstances of European twentieth-century modernity: this concern is addressed in the remaining two parts—"Memory, Trauma, Mourning" and "Transnational Connections." The essays comprising this section use a range of philosophical and theoretical positions, including discourses in trauma and memory, postcolonial theory, and gender, to reimagine the public/private dynamic.

In the book's initial essay, "What's Love Got to Do with It?: Adam Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve*, *Part 4* and the Art of Transgressing the Private/Public Divide," Halina Filipowicz reexamines the gap between personal and collective life as it is manifest in the character Gustaw/Konrad. Her argument calls into question a traditional reading of the play and seeks to reinterpret Mickiewicz's intent. In her exploration of Part 4 of *Forefathers' Eve*, Filipowicz makes a particularly astute claim regarding the play's subtitle, *A Poema*, a word that for the nineteenth-century opera reviewer means *libretto*. She asserts that by using this subtitle Mickiewicz implies that *Forefather's Eve* moves fluidly between boundaries, shifting between drama and song, text and performance (what she calls "page and stage"), the private and the public man, in a coexistence where neither is entirely excluded—thus completely recontextualizing how Gustaw and Konrad have

typically been understood. In "Contested Modernity: New Drama in Poland," Tamara Trojanowska moves this dialogue forward to the twenty-first century. In her close examination of the wave of new young Polish playwrights who have made their debut since the millenium, Trojanowska convincingly argues that the modern Polish stage is the site of intense struggle between a number of binaries that both capture and reconfigure the dichotomy of Polish cultural imagination. Unlike the familiar tensions of "capitalism versus aesthetic modernity" or "modernity versus tradition," she argues that the new Polish drama exists in a kind of terra incognita, what she calls a "liquefaction of modernity" and describes as a state of ambiguity or teleological uncertainty that results in the shifting ground on which young Polish playwrights are compelled to conceive their creative projects.

The second thematic thread underpinning the collection is best discussed in the context of Ewa Thompson's essay "Ways of Remembering: The Case of Poland," a beautifully articulated argument that begins by offering the reader the vocabulary necessary to distinguish among what Thompson calls a *hierarchy of memory* that begins with individual and family memory, moves to communal then collective memory, and may then find closure by consigning past historical traumas to cultural memory. Thompson convincingly makes the case that Poland is bereft of cultural memory, in great part because both collective and communal memories have been delegitimized by external foreign entities. Whether one considers the theatrical performances that staged historical plays reenacting the collective traumas of the Nazi and Soviet eras, or the sites of collective memory such as cemeteries, churches, monuments, and their accompanying traditional rituals, the inability of the Polish people to archive the memory of trauma and move beyond it has been complicated by the fact that for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Poland was silenced by its position as an occupied nation, and has not yet wholly permeated the dominant historical discourse of Western Europe.

One such means of bringing Polish experience onto a larger global stage is through literary translation, and it is quite fitting that the editors have chosen to conclude this collection with Mira Rosenthal's essay "(Re)Translating the *O'Hariści* into English." Echoing some of the same influences that Trojanowska describes as influencing younger Polish playwrights, Rosenthal examines the *brulion* generation of poets who chose to reject a poetry based in Polish nationalist tradition or in the propagandist forms of Soviet art or in the belief in some telos of history. They opted instead for the shifting ground of late twentieth-century everyday experience and popular culture, and turned to the American poets of the New York School, most notably Frank O'Hara, whose energy for the urban, irreverent wit, and for the place of the ordinary in poetry abounds. One such example is Marcin Świetlicki whose work clearly corresponds with O'Hara's, but Rosenthal deftly complicates this classification when she further discusses such poets as Marcin Baran or Jacek Podsiadło, Marzanna Kielar or Tomasz Różycki, so that we become aware of the vibrant range of work in which younger Polish poets are invested—poetry that does not easily fit into any binary dynamic and that owes much of its transnational presence to the work of literary translators.

One of the most appealing features of this volume is its thirty-seven-page bibliography in which we find sources that include a full complement of texts on Polish literature, literary theory, philosophy, and translation. This comprehensive gathering of texts and their application in the essays that have called on them is a rich gift to the reader who wishes to understand the historical, sociopolitical, philosophical, and literary forces at work in three centuries of Polish literature. As an American with no familial or cultural ties to Poland and who came to Polish culture through its literature (when I fell in love with Polish poetry as I encountered it first, years ago, in English translation), I find *New Perspectives on Polish Culture* a genuinely illuminating volume that brings much-needed attention to those frequently neglected historical and aesthetic concerns of Polish modernity. Trojanowska, Płaczkiewicz, Polakowska, and Ponichtera have included some of the strongest scholars writing on Poland today as a means of bringing to the

reader a lucid reflection on those variables that have shaped the discourses on the public/private dynamic, and the diversity of aesthetic forms and strategies emerging in response to it. The book's scope and tone welcome reading by both scholar and nonscholar alike because this collection offers an authentic, compelling look into the complex shifts in Polish identity as those personal, collective, and cultural transformations have become manifest in the history of its literary artifacts. I would assert that the cumulative effect of these essays and their arrangement here has fulfilled the editorial vision for this volume as opening a new space for intellectual and transnational exchange. Δ

MORE BOOKS

Cztery szkice z przeszłości matematyki. Euler, Cantor, Sierpiński w Moskwie, Dwie Warszawy (Four essays on the history of mathematics: Euler, Cantor, Sierpiński in Moscow, Two Warsaws), **by Jerzy Mioduszewski**. Kraków: Impuls (www.impulsoficyna.com.pl), 2013. 185 pages. ISBN 978-83-7850-280-7. Paper. In Polish.

A distinguished Polish mathematician writes about Leonard Euler, Georg Cantor, Wacław Sierpiński, and many others. But he also writes about himself, his life, his wonderment at encountering mathematics' milestones. Personal stories are interwoven with discoveries in the world of mathematics, while Polish history (a good chunk of recent history witnessed by the author himself) supplies an incisive commentary on the abstract problems of mathematicians. This is a book about those whose mathematical world was shattered by the all-too-real invasion of Western and Eastern barbarians. Put another way, it is a history of Polish mathematics in the twentieth century. We usually remember the fallen soldiers and the Zamość Polish Catholic children taken away from their parents and either gassed or sent to Germany to be raised as Germans, but we forget that every single profession paid a hecatomb in World War Two. Here you will read about those Polish mathematicians who died in their thirties instead of their eighties. Truly a unique chronicle of what one big war can do to a society and its best representatives.

Religion and the Cold War: A Global Perspective, edited by Philip E. Muehlenbeck. Nashville: Vanderbilt Univ. Press (www.VanderbiltUniversityPress.com), 2012. 313 pages. ISBN 978-0-8265-1853-8. Softbound.

Fourteen authors consider religion as a historical factor in the cold war. Countries examined include the United States, Germany, Britain, Korea, Iraq, Ethiopia, the USSR, Bosnia, South Vietnam, Pakistan, and Poland. On Poland, Leszek Murat considers the "institutionalized atheism" demanded of security officers. As guardians of socialism, the UB (political police) were supposed to be ideologically pure, i.e., devoid of religious attachments. They were to be perfect *homini Sovietici,* "[men] averse to responsibility, opportunistic, aggressive toward the weak and loyal towards the strongest, intellectually incapacitated, deprived of dignity, and totally subordinate to the Party" (252). Murat then identifies factors that in practice made it difficult to always strip officers of religion. Recruiting among peasants and workers meant tapping a cohort "raised in the Catholic faith since the cradle" (257). Recruits could not always reconcile the contradiction between the demand for unconditional faith in the rectitude of the party and its own failings, between legal guarantees of religious freedom and its practical suppression. Finally, even party rhetoric was quasi-religious, invoking its "spirit" and "mission," its "sacred duty" to communism, etc. Despite this, the UB still needed its own security bureau to root out religious "degeneracy" in its ranks. A very useful essay on the struggle against religion even among the irreligious. (*John M. Grondelski*)

***Melchior Wańkowicz: Poland's Master of the Written Word,* by Aleksandra Ziolkowska-Boehm.** Trans. By Agnieszka Maria Gernand. Foreword by Charles Kraszewski. Lanham-Boulder: Lexington Books (www.rowman.com), 2013. xiii + 229 pages. Index, bibliography. ISBN 978-0-7391-7590-3. Hardcover.
A biography of a popular Polish writer who is generally considered to be particularly skillful in writing reportages and columns.

(continued on Page 1822)

ERRATA

Jan Twardowski's poem corrected

In September 2013 issue of *Sarmatian Review,* Patrick Corness' translation of Jan Twardowski's "*Carpe diem*" contained several formatting mistakes. The name of the person by whose permission the poem was published in translation was likewise omitted. Below we correct the mistakes.

Carpe diem

Jan Twardowski

Love while we can people are soon gone
leaving empty shoes and unanswered phones
only the trivial drags its bovine hooves
what's important happens so fast it catches us out
the ensuing silence so normal it's unbearable
like innocence born of sheer confusion
thinking of someone who's left us

Don't be sure you've time, for unfounded certainty
robs us of our awareness just as all happiness
comes at once like pathos and humour
like two passions always weaker than one
fleeting as a thrush's song in July
like a slightly harsh sound or a stiff bow
in order to see aright eyes are closed
though being born is a greater risk than dying
yet we still love too little and always too late

Don't write of this too many times rather write it once and for all
and you'll be gentle yet strong like a dolphin

Love while we can people are soon gone
and those who don't go don't always return
and speaking of love you never know
whether the first is the last or the last is the first

Translated by Patrick Corness
Published by kind permission of Dr. Aleksandra Iwanowska

Vladimir Putin's title in 2010

The review of Alexander Etkind's *Remembering Katyn* (*SR,* April 2013) contains one factual error. On p. 1762 the review states that President Lech Kaczyński was "maneuvered out" of the meeting between Prime Minister Donald Tusk and President Vladimir Putin on April 7, 2010. At that time, Putin was prime minister and not president. He later admitted that he and Medvedev came to an agreement to alternate the office of presidency between themselves.

Anna M. Cienciala, University of Kansas

Reading poetry, reading paintings

Joanna Pollakówna and Jacek Sempoliński

Anna Gąsienica-Byrcyn

Natalia Astafiewa, a Warsaw-born Polish-Russian poet and translator who prepared a Russian anthology of Polish women poets titled *Polskije poetessy*, has opined that the twentieth century "belongs" to the extraordinary talented Polish women beginning with Maria Skłodowska-Curie (Nobel Award in Physics, 1903 and Nobel Award in Chemistry, 1911), and ending with Wisława Szymborska (Nobel Prize in Literature, 1996).[1] Joanna Pollakówn (1939–2002), a poet and art historian, is one of these remarkable yet little-known women. Her poems originated in the world of visual arts in which she was immersed as a professional art historian.

Pollakówna studied history of art at Warsaw University and at the Art Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences. By her own admission, contemplating paintings is the greatest joy of her life. She also finds the act of writing about art to be enormously gratifying, even though it requires a different kind of concentration than "mere" contemplation. Her best-known essays on art are contained in the volumes titled *Formists* (*Formiści*), *Clay and Light* (*Glina i światło*), and *Venetian Longings* (*Weneckie tęsknoty*).[2] These can be compared to Zbigniew Herbert's *Barbarian in the Garden* and *The Still Nature with the Bridle,* two books by a master poet that provide the parameters of excellence in writing about art. Czesław Miłosz was so impressed by Pollakówna's collection of essays *Thinking about Paintings* (*Myśląc o obrazach*)

that he spontaneously offered her an award he himself conceived in 1994.[3]

Pollakówna wrote *ekphrases*, or poems about paintings, using language that describes the visual arts. She had notable predecessors. In ancient Greece Simonides maintained that poetry is "spoken painting" and painting is "silent poetry";[4] the same idea reappears in Pollakówna's poems. Her poems are a series of verbal paintings "rephrasing" specific works of art and creating poetic images that correspond to them. She is particularly fond of Jacek Sempoliński (1927–2012), a painter of metaphysical concepts, and she rephrased many of his works. Sempoliński was a representative of two trends in Polish art—the richly sensual Colorism, and Arsenal 55, the anti-social-realist movement that developed in the 1950s in defiance of communist rule in Soviet-occupied Poland.

Pollakówna made her poetic debut at the age of eighteen in the communist-run journal *Nowa Kultura*. She has never been a part of any official poetic group, nor is she a follower of the Polish women poets who preceded her: Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, a master of lyrical poetry and a talented painter of the interwar period; or Halina Poświatowska, a modern poet of erotic verses; or Wisława Szymborska, a poet of irony (Legeżyńska 271). She is not indebted to the three major trends that these three female poets represent: she invented a way of writing all her own and has few followers to date.

She is the author of several collections of poems characterized by references to transcendent reality, as well as by sensuality and sensitivity to the physical beauty of the world. The titles of her poetry volumes remind us of her fascination with the duality of light and darkness or, on a metaphysical level, *sacrum* and *profanum*. In her poems the motif of light is both an attribute of reality (*a gush of light dripping down the leaves/chlust światła skapującego po liściach*) and the hint of a meta-world existing in the metaphysical dimension. In an essay titled "The Alchemy of Light" she writes:

> What is less corporeal than light? Elusive and fleeting for all the senses except eyesight. Because of its spiritual nature, it has always been identified with the divine.

> Cóż jest mniej materialne niż światło? Nieuchwytne dla żadnego ze zmysłów, poza wzrokiem. Dla swojej, w oczywisty sposób duchowej natury od zawsze utożsamiane bywało z boskością albo z emanacją boskości (*Glina i światło,* 19–20).

She then inquires about paint, clay, and the primordial substance, *la materia prima*:

> What is more corporeal than oil paint? Thick, it only cools on the surface, it is velvet-like and gluey under the surface.

> Cóż jest bardziej materialne niż farba olejna? Gęsta i zawiesista, położona grubiej zastyga tylko po wierzchu na długo zachowując pod powierzchnią swoją atłasową lepkość (*Glina i światło,* 19).

The motif of clay and light resonate with the ancient concept of the duality of the corporal and the spiritual. Natural light symbolizes spiritual light; the clay is the physical aspect of human beings. In the poem "On Painting" ("Nad malarstwem") dedicated to Jacek Sempoliński, Pollakówna meditates on the metaphysical meaning of art's contrast of the light and the dark:

This projection – a cut with the light
into space
Is this a question about meaning
about the beginning
or a shadow?
Is this the shade of a colorful thought
where the world
slides and falls on the curve
swarmed by the wind
like a swaying crown of a tree
on the dome of a pitcher?

Ten rzut – wkrojenie się światłem
w przestrzeń
Czy to pytanie o sens
o początek
czy to cień?
Czy to cień myśli barwnej
w której świat
po krzywiźnie się zsuwa i spada
jak po kopule dzbana
rozchwiana korona drzewa
rozmrowiona przez wiatr? (*Powolny pożar,* 15)

Pollakówna and Sempoliński work in two different media, but they seem to follow the same direction. They want to unite all the possibilities of life in a single moment of revelation, linking physical experiences with the spiritual one so that one becomes free from fear, aggression, brutality, constraint, degradation, contempt, impossibility, chaos, and emptiness.[5] Pollakówna and Sempoliński regard their creativity as a natural activity, a part of their normal life. Pollakówna prays for a poem as for a sign that she is truly alive:

Again a prayer for a poem.
For what? For a sign of my life?

Znów modlitwa o wiersz,
O co? O znak życia –
mojego? *(Dziecko-drzewo 3).*

Through their acts of creation they immerse themselves in the current of life and, in Pollakówna's words, transform an ordinary day into a bright one:

to force one's way through oneself
to make shine the subdued rhythm of hours
in a moment

byle przez siebie przedrzeć się
byle w jednym blasku rozjaśnić
godzin matowy rytm *(W cieniu 34).*

Because life passes quickly:

Nothing will save our allotted time
a bunch of lilies of the valley so fragile
like a shade
or the sunset

Nic tego czasu nie ocali
garstka konwalii tak ulotna
jak cień łamliwy
zachód słońca (*Lato szpitalne* 29)

Only through our work can we leave a trace of our existence:

We are what we will mold
with our grasping hand
. . .
adding light
that cannot be created by metal and stone
. . .
so that the shade of the light would soak through time
brushing against us

Tyle z nas ile z siebie pracowitą ręką
. . .
ulepimy mozolnie i dodamy blask
trudno krzesany przez metal i kamień
. . .
żeby się cień światła przesiąkał przez czas
o nas się otarł (*Żwir* 16)

Thus a work of art is seen by Pollakówna as a sacred sign in the brief span of life.

Her poetry is personal and reticent at the same time. Anna Legeżyńska has remarked that Pollakówna tries to transform her life and thoughts into verses as if using an alchemical process, transforming the material of life into the material of art.[6] Her poems touch on the crises of emotions, longing, loss, suffering, pain, death, fragility, limitations, and fleeting time. She tries to retain these sparkles of her existence and comprehend them as providing moments of revelation.

Jacek Sempoliński's paintings are likewise attempts to affix his existence on canvas. They are very personal. He is unable to paint what people are talking about. In his youth Sempoliński painted still nature with pure colors and clear brush strokes. In his seventies he painted the light. His later paintings include those in which narrow parallel splashes of light between the trees are created with thick paint. The light seems to be absorbed by the thick, clay-like paint, expressing a depressed emotional state.

Toward the end of his life Sempoliński created thousands of drawings and paintings in colors of gray, violet, and navy; in these the metaphysical motif is expressed in yet another way. In his works he attempted to create the process of passing from life to death. Life is represented by a modulated and shiny solid in space, while death is a vanishing figure of irregular spots in mixed colors. Sempoliński's wish was to create the flow of time, both the movement and act of the passing of time. His paintings begin with an object or a trace of an object so that one cannot determine what the painting represents without reading its title. Some art critics describe Sempoliński's work (using Delacroix's words) as a "feast for the eyes."

Sempoliński's triptych *Melt: Earth/Metal/Blood* (Wytop: *Ziemia/Metal/Krew*) is typical of the artist's creative process, his spiritual searches, and his presence in the world. According to Pollakówna who discusses the triptych in her essay "Clay and Light," the painter experienced a spiritual transformation as he moved from the dark *melanosis* through yellow *xanthosis* to the red *iosis.* This transmutation took place on the canvas painted with unique strokes of brush and fingers, creating a kind of light emanating from the warm color and shivering cold that form the melt. In this triptych and in other works Sempoliński places pigments of colors in such a way that he creates "geological" layers that transmute light from their dark clay hues. These layers are painted with dark colors overgrown by yellow veins. The rough clots and stains of red and green color evoke the earth, or rather the landscape that comes from within the depths of the earth and from the inside of the artist himself. Heavy clay is contrasted with the light; in this way the artist creates a rendition of the divine light shimmering with warmth. This concentration on light links Sempoliński to the tradition of Titian, Tintoretto, and Jacopo Bassano.

The section titled *The Earth* portrays the burning magma that transforms into a stone as it cools down and turns motionless. The world becomes hard like a rock, dangerous and unfriendly. In it, to use Pollakówna's comment, "pain changes into a monolith," "air becomes a clod," and "consciousness becomes like a stone." However, the earth's depths with its burning magma create shining metal ores. The section titled *Metal* has been painted in dark violet colors with a crimson shade and a silvery shine. The metal comes from the depths of the earth, and it is a gift of power.

The third part of Sempoliński's triptych, *Blood,* is violet with strikes of red. The color echoes the artist's personality and life. Of course blood also symbolizes sacrifice and purification. As Eliade has noted, a creative act demands sacrifice—one has to sacrifice to art one's blood and tears.[7] Pollakówna notes all this in her verses:

To repeat the act of God
to force the mush of clay
to scatter a golden sediment

And even more:
from the red soil,
from the white lead
and the scarlet of madder,
to draw gold and the light from the gold.

In the yellowish light
in the golden/dark drizzle

Powtórzyć boską czynność
   breję gliny
   zmusić, by wytrąciła złoty osad.

I jeszcze więcej:
z czerwonawej ziemi.
bieli ołowiu
   szkarłatu marzanny.
   dobywać złoto - i światło ze złota
W żółknącym świetle
w mrocznozłotym świetle (*Skąpa jasność* 25)

In another poem titled "An Interpretation through Colors" and dedicated to Jacek Sempoliński, Pollakówna indicates that the final outcome of the creative act is joy and perhaps salvation:

In these few drops of green and white
there is a salvation of suffering and redness
What? —happiness
. . .
Angels know that
among white and green they forgot
the eternal for one moment.

W tych kilku kropelkach zieleni i bieli
Jest odkupienie męki i czerwieni –
Co? —szczęście
. . .
Wiedzą to anieli
Wśród bieli i zieleni zapomnieli
Na jeden błysk nieśmiertelni. (*Lato szpitalne* 32)

Sempoliński is concerned with form, but for him form is not merely a shape, it is a sphere of meaning that arises from the creative act. A moment occurs that transforms the lack of form into form. It is a brief moment that completes the creative process, and it is often unconscious. Sempoliński is concerned with this final moment.

There are various manifestations of aggression in his works. One of them is expressed through vertical lines and is a form of opposition to the order of things. Sempoliński's aggression has to do with his subconscious feeling that he is not a great painter and makes frequent mistakes. When he feels overwhelmed by mistakes, he throws himself on the canvas with a knife. He tries to free himself from his own captivity. The traces of a knife are visible in his works. He has made dark holes in his canvases at times. Sempoliński's *szamotanie* (a Polish word designating the struggle of a tied-up man) is an integral part of his artistry.

The first impression of Sempoliński's paintings is that they are immersed in darkness. But paradoxically, because of this darkness they better foreground the light. In Sempoliński's works it is often "the light without the light," so to speak. In the poem "Płótno" ("Canvas") by Adam Zagajewski, the poet suggests that the dark painting could change into a coat, a shirt, a flag, or a shroud. A dark canvas can also symbolize the universe and evoke the cold and empty days of depression. It captures the fleeting moment of passing from life to death. In a sense it is liberating, stripped as it is of everything that is fleeting and mortal. As Sempoliński once remarked, darkness shares something with an act of faith, and therefore with light.

The drama of darkness and light in Sempoliński's paintings and Pollakówna's ekphrases creates a subtle relation between these two artists. In Pollakówna the dark color of clay is transformed into the shining rays: "the light emanates from the oil paint" (*Skąpa jasność*) and "the sun breaks through the ash" (*Powolny pożar)*. In Pollakówna's verse Sempoliński's paintings become a luminous combination of rays sounding with colors and rhythms. The paste paint, called clay by the poet, seems to look dark and unclear but it emits fire that is light.

Pollakówna sees the artist as one who listens to the streams of hues and "choruses of colors," to "their blossoming polyphony" and then he/she creates a magical transmutation of light from the dark pigments of paste paint. It is the ancient process of transformation of dark material into the light, of paint into the sublime experience that a work of art can offer, so that a painting, a sculpture, or a poem portrays the spiritual conquest of the artist, his/her metaphysical epiphany. Her verses thus become a metaphysical mirror that reflects rapture, pain, silence, writing, painting, faith, hope, fear, life, and death. The artist wants to "force a piece of clay to radiate golden sediment" (*Skąpa jasność*). The poet's words turn into the "golden beaming dust" offered as her gift to the world.

An awareness of the passage of time is connected not only with the mortal human body but also with inanimate objects: "Even the small objects – safety pins/straps, combs – know the taste of eternity" ("Przecież nawet małe przedmioty – agrafki,/rzemyki, grzebienie – znają smak wieczności"), writes Adam Zagajewski in the poem "Eliade."[8] However, those objects found by archeologists in the dust, soil, and clay are perishable. They vanish with time into oblivion. The same is true of the visual arts: frescoes fade away, mosaics crack, paintings perish and temples are destroyed. The poet asks herself why art remains a magnet in spite of that:

Where does this longing lead us
calling us from the paintings
from the blobs of paint folded
into the dark tenderness of velvet
into someone's robe of plum color
to whose infinite heaven?

Dokąd wzywa ta tęsknota.
co z obrazów na nas woła,
z maźnięć farby ułożonych
w ciemną czułość aksamitu,
w czyjąś szatę barwy śliwek,
w czyjeś niebo nieskończone? (*Skąpa jasność* 8)

Pollakówna tries to allow objects to "express their individuality." Because everything has a light of its own—jewelry, clothes, weapons, houses, woods, mountains, springs, and the ambiance that envelops them—each of the objects invoked by the poet emanates this unique light. Similarly, Sempoliński tries to express the unique emanation that each object exudes, if viewed with sufficient attention. The poet and the painter display an unquenchable desire to cross the line of "Otherness." They also fear losing the ancient art objects that disintegrate

with time, and they treasure the emotions evoked by contact with objects that are distant in time. Pollakówna reminisces with sadness:

That time was not colorless
it had something like
a fragrance of a muddy meadow
like a pain
of being unable to possess
the fleeting of desired objects
from grasping hands

Ten czas nie był bez barwy
miał w sobie
coś z ciepłego błotnego zapachu łąk
coś z męki
nieposiadania
umykania z rąk
przedmiotów upragnionych (*W cieniu* 24)

In the poem "Dust" ("Proch") Pollakówna writes about the fragility of the material world, about objects that perish and about life that turns into dust physically and spiritually:

How oft you lose everything, careless memory!
Buildings, paintings follow me like a grey dust storm
And the dry crumbs of thoughts once encountered settle
And the life I lived crumbles
—That is the dust into which I change.

Jakże ty wszystko trwonisz, niedbała pamięci!
Gmachy, obrazy, w szarawej zamieci
ciągną się za mną jak kurzawa senna.
I wyczytanych myśli pył osiada suchy
i przeżytego życia sypią się okruchy…
—To właśnie proch jest, w który się przemieniam. (*Powolny pożar* 16)

In her last collection of poems titled *You Embraced Me with Coldness* (*Ogarnąłeś mnie chłodem*), which contains Pollakówna's poetic testament, the poet invokes the beauty of the world, especially the light and the life-giving power of the sun. She wants to take a painting with her into the other world, the world of the dead:

Those eyes that try to penetrate Your beauty
cannot absorb it—wasting it awfully.
When you finally shut my eyes into tight darkness
Please leave me one picture to sail together
And let it remain motionless under my dead eyelid
like a marvelously decorated lid of a traveling chest. ("A Prayer for a Picture" in *You Embraced Me with Coldness*)

Te oczy, co wpijają się w piękności Twoje
wchłonąć ich nie umieją – tak strasznie trwonią je.
Gdy mi oczy zatrzaśniesz wreszcie w szczelną ciemność
jeden mi obraz zostaw— niech odpłynie ze mną
i niech trwa nieruchomy, pod martwą powieką
niby skrzyni wyprawnej cudnie zdobne wieko. ("Modlitwa o obraz," *Ogarnąłeś mnie chłodem* 19)

One wonders which painting the poet—and we––would like to take on our journey to eternity. Δ

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Zbigniew Taranienko and Henryk Stażewski, *Rozmowy o malarstwie* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1987).

NOTES

[1] Quoted from Anna Legeżyńska, *Od kochanki do psalmistki. Sylwetki, tematy i konwencje liryki*

kobiecej (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2009), 9.

[2] *Formiści. Studia z historii sztuki,* vol. 14 (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1972); "Glina i światło," *Glina i światło* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 1999), 237–45; *Weneckie tęsknoty. O malarstwie i malarzach renesansu* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo W.A.B., 2003).

[3] *Weneckie tęsknoty, passim.*

[4] Władysław Tatarkiewicz, *Historia Filozofii,* vol. 1 (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1993), 33.

[5] Jacek Sempoliński, *Władztwo i służba. Myśli o sztuce* (Lublin: Drukarnia L – Print, 2001), 357.

[6] Legeżyńska, 270.

[7] Mircea Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 32.

[8] Adam Zagajewski, *Dzikie czereśnie. Wybór wierszy* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 1992), 160.

MORE BOOKS (continued from Page 1815)

***Polish Armies of the Partitions: 1770-94,* by Vincent Rospond.** Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 2013. 48 pages. ISBN 1-84908-855-8.

No. 485 in Osprey's "Men-at-Arms" series, this short and well illustrated book offers brief histories and descriptions of various Polish military units in the final years of the Polish Commonwealth, until the third partition erased Poland from European maps. In 1795 the nascent Polish democracy succumbed to Russian, Prussian, and Austrian authoritarianism, with all the retrograde consequences for European history this would entail even after Poland's recovery of independence 123 years later.

The book begins with a historical summary that includes a map of the country's progressive partition (5); this would have been enhanced if it were in color. This is followed by descriptions of Polish and Lithuanian military in three periods: prior to the first partition; from the first to second partitions; and from the defense of the May 3 Constitution until the end of Polish freedom. Prior to the first partition, we are presented with the Commonwealth's armies and the Bar Confederation. In terms of organization, the Commonwealth was understaffed, with many soldiers "on leave at any given time"; this compelled reliance on "'private armies' of local magnates" (7). The Bar Confederates had "no central organization" (11) or uniforms. A four-page description of Polish and Lithuanian Crown forces between the first and second partitions follows. Finally, there is an extended treatment of the Polish and Lithuanian forces "at the beginning of the 1792 War in Defense of the Constitution" (16), detailing specific cavalry, dragoon, and infantry units. Under "Miscellaneous Crown Troops" (37–38) a short description appears of Kościuszko Insurrection forces (garrison of Kraków, Warsaw militia, Volunteers of 1794). There is also a half page on the "Army of the Targowica Confederation" (43). The book ends with a twenty-eight-item select bibliography that includes both English and Polish sources. Eight full-color plates, more than thirty black-and-white illustrations, and twenty-five tables detailing uniform specifications (especially colors) of various units round out the booklet. Students of militaria and designers of authentic costume reproductions will find this little book useful. The whole series aims at describing "the uniforms, equipment, history and organization of the world's military forces, past and present," with detailed full-color artwork. (*John M. Grondelski*)

***Monsieur Cogito précedé de Inscription et suivi de Rapport de la Ville Assiegée,* by Zbigniew Herbert. Oeuvres poetiques complètes II. Trans. by Brigitte Gautier.** Lille: Le Bruit du temps, 2012. 477 pages. ISBN 9782358-730471. Paper. Bilingual (French/Polish).

This is a complete bilingual edition of Zbigniew Herbert's poetry in French. Handsomely printed with financial help from the Polish Instytut Książki.

***Nature morte avec bride et mors,* by Zbigniew Herbert. Trans. by Therèse Duchy.** Lille: Le Bruit du temps, 2011. 224 pages.

A French translation of *Martwa natura z wędzidłem.*