

regimes that attacked Poland were vicious agents of paganism and atheism. The Nazis made little secret of their goal of undoing the historical processes of civilization and religion. By driving into the east, really far into the east, to the proverbial origin, the “oriental point” of culture, the processes of civilizational and sacred history would be metaphorically undone. They would be practically undone too, in that what was to follow the smash to the east was a trail of complete destruction and perfidious crime (Stephen J. Tonsor, “*Liebe Hitler*,” *Modern Age*, 40, no. 4, Fall 1998, 406–410).

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As for the “Bolsheviks” (Langer’s preferred term), they wanted to regain the old czarist lands in the west so as to build some shred of legitimacy as a government back home among the Russians. But as Lenin had always made plain, the real goal was western Europe—the Miracle on the Vistula being the only evidence needed to support this view. Poland and Lithuania had for centuries rallied themselves to be the *antemurale christianitatis* that would prevent the center of western Christian civilization from being overrun by ruffians from the East. Thus World War II was a double assault on the stoutest defenses of Christendom. There was a possessed outsider ramming the walls once again, this time assisted by a possessed insider wrecking havoc on those walls from the other side. When it was all over Mephistopheles would just leave, as the swine in the Gospel of Mark and Dostoevsky’s *Possessed*. The pitiable human agents who had been occupied would be left to wither after such an experience.

The question remains of why Poland. Why would *Poland* attract no less than the greatest exertions of—the devil? Here *Mermaid* helps us out quite a bit. There is only a little religion in the book—heroic priests here and there, Masses packed to the gills. Langer herself was a fairly diffident believer, at one point even questioning the communion of the saints. However, the portrait she offers of Polish life at the juncture of the invasions shows that Poland was very dangerous to anyone uninterested in true human progress. Poland was effectively demonstrating that religion and modernity could surge together hand-in-hand. This indeed is the civilizational message of the icons of Polish modernity including the skier-Pope. The radical Enlightenment had insisted that modernity must be a solvent of tradition and religion. Poland, ever more

luminously as time went on to 1939, showed that all these things can coalesce together.

Those determined to vanquish tradition and religion, given modernity were therefore beset with quite a puzzle, quite a challenge, in Poland. It soon came about that Poland’s challenge would be effaced via brutality. But in the course of events Poland reverted to the role of mustard seed, and mountains were moved. Germany, on defeat, rediscovered religion, fixed itself to the Rhine, and in a few decades Jürgen Habermas was paying obeisance to Joseph Ratzinger. Russia is the sadder case, its populace the vehicle abandoned by Mephistopheles, reeling in a brutalized and used state with life expectancy under sixty, the birth-rate far below replacement, and horrid addictions to drink, corruption, and abortion.

Perhaps a new large chapter in Polish history is opening up. The *antemurale christianitatis* may be becoming an obsolete notion. What Russia needs today is the balm of charity, hope, and revivification. Perhaps now is the time for a new vector to power into the east. Over the past several decades, Poland has husbanded considerable resources of holiness, piety, and cheerfulness toward modernity. This is good as far as it goes. We are at a moment in which these resources could be leveraged enormously by dedication to Christian evangelization of the heirs of those seized to perpetrate Katyń. Sacred history, as St. Augustine taught, is necessarily progressive. A very big onus of responsibility may well have recently passed to modern Poland, described so felicitously as on the edge of fulfillment by Rulka Langer seven decades ago. ♦

## Polish Literature from 1918 to 2000

### An Anthology

By Michael J. Mikoś. Bloomington, IN: Slavica, 2008. xiv + 490 pages. Bibliography, photographs. ISBN 978-0-89357-352-2. Hardcover. \$44.95.

### Bożena Karwowska

This volume completes Michael J. Mikoś’s project of a six-volume history and anthology of Polish literature from its beginnings to the end of the second millennium. The tome under review consists of two parts: the first presents the interwar literature (1918–

1939), while the second covers the postwar period from 1945 to 2000. Each section begins with an introduction familiarizing the reader with the historical, cultural, and literary background, and the presented authors are introduced by short biographies and some thoughts about their writings. As a result, readers get a comprehensive and well-rounded overview of Polish literature since 1914, or a good foundation for further studies of the period and its authors.

The task undertaken by the translator and author of the volume was overwhelming, but as he notes in the introduction to the last part of his work, the editor of an anthology has to be prepared to be criticized for the choice of works included and excluded. This is especially true in the case of contemporary literature since the critical processes have not yet established a literary canon respected by interpretive communities and readers alike, and the anthologist's decisions are therefore seen as especially significant and influential. Mikoś's task was further complicated by the problems of translation; his choices regarding the anthology had to take into account the fact that some authors have already been presented to English-speaking readers in representative selections (Czesław Miłosz's and Wisława Szymborska's works are available in translation almost in their entirety), while others are totally absent from the English reader's market. While some writers are present in English through the voice of a single translator (such as Miłosz, who took almost complete control over his translations), others, such as Tadeusz Różewicz or Zbigniew Herbert, had several independent translators. Within the anthology's limited space, it was obviously tempting to exclude or severely limit the presence of authors already well represented in English, and thus prepare an anthology of lesser known Polish writers. This was especially challenging in the case of contemporary poetry that has already evoked considerable interest in the English-speaking world. Poets such as Czesław Miłosz, Zbigniew Herbert, Tadeusz Różewicz, and Wisława Szymborska have been declared by some Anglo-American critics as the leading contemporary writers offering poetry that touches on universally important questions. Mikoś decided to include the most famous and well translated authors, but they are represented only by a limited number of texts, with references to the already available translations of their works in the bibliography. His solution seems correct to me, because it allows him to introduce in the four hundred pages of the anthology over sixty writers represented by some two hundred literary works.

In addition to the choice of writers and texts, Professor Mikoś had to make other important decisions. The currently published double volume covers two distinctive periods that differ significantly and have been differently presented to the English-speaking world. I have in mind the interwar period on the one hand, and the post-1945 period on the other. During the first period Polish literature was written almost exclusively in Poland, but after the Second World War it began to include works written by émigrés living on the other side of the Iron Curtain—as well as works written in Soviet-occupied Poland. After 1989 there was a heated discussion in Poland regarding the “unification” of both streams and the implications of such a unification. Mikoś should be complimented for including both currents and for seeing and presenting Polish literature as one.

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Although Professor Mikoś successfully dealt with several dilemmas concerning the selection of texts included in his anthology, the parts introducing Polish literature to the readers seem to be devoid of the perspectives offered by new critical approaches and points of view shared by contemporary critics and scholars in Poland and abroad. The anthologist presents the historical, cultural, and literary facts in a very traditional manner. He expresses the belief that Polish literature is best understood through awareness of the nation's history and international politics, and that such a background provides the appropriate and necessary tools for comprehending literary processes. The background information contained in the introductions is detailed and comprehensive, but the book would benefit from critical essays incorporating, for instance, feminist and postcolonial approaches and ideas. A critically informed discussion of Poland's situation as a multinational state in the interwar period and the presentation of issues connected with Russia's and the Soviet Union's imperial and colonial practices would have made the introductory essays more attuned to the interests of contemporary English-language readers and scholars.

With the current trend to eliminate a second Slavic literature as a required subject of study for PhD candidates at North American universities, and with the closing or combining of Slavic departments with

other European programs, it would be difficult to argue that Mikoś's work provides both students and teachers with a long-overdue academic tool for (no longer widely offered) survey courses in the history of Polish literature. Moreover, though the poems and short prose pieces can be used selectively in various other academic classes, the translated fragments are not suitable as stand-alone teaching materials. This, combined with the availability of works by many major Polish writers in English translation, poses the question of the purpose of the volume and its intended audience. But the academic limitations also mean that the dissemination of Polish literature and the instruction of literary and cultural processes have to be done also outside of colleges and universities, or at least outside of their major programs and courses. Mikoś's work should be warmly welcome for this reason alone. As in any world literature, in Poland there are great writers of international esteem, and there are those of local or limited fame. Great Polish poets, such as for instance Szymborska or Herbert, are quite well known in the West, but not necessarily understood within the context of their own native literary and cultural background. Let me add here that before translating and publishing his own poems, indisputably the most famous Polish poet in the English speaking world, Czesław Miłosz, prepared a selection of contemporary Polish poems that familiarized English-speaking readers with the literary tradition from which he comes. This is exactly what Michael J. Mikoś's impressive anthology continues to do. ◇

## The Church and the Communist Power

**Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej, no. 4(75), April 2007, 116 pages.**

**Joanna Rostropowicz Clark**

Twenty years after the fall of communism we look back at its dark history with a clear vision of the right and the wrong sides in the struggle that ended with the victory of the former. But such clarity was far from common in 1945, at least for the average person. We won and we lost the war. The West betrayed Poland; socialism, though imposed by the Soviets, in our version might work well. The brutality of the regime is appalling but it will ease, and social reforms are beneficial. The new order may be short-lived, or it may last for generations. . . . The only force that held fast to

nonambivalent opposition was the Catholic Church. Its premise, as well as its weapon, was starkly simple: the communist ideology is altogether a lie, proved by its practice. Therefore, the ever-resilient truth of Christianity will persevere.

There were obstacles, of course; the struggle was tough. The regime had all the material power, the Church only the spiritual. There were many victims among the faithful, but also some traitors. That none of the aspects in the history of those struggles should pass from memory is the theme of a discussion and of several articles in this issue of *Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej* (Bulletin of the Institute of National Memory). For the leading article, "Przejście przez Morze Czerwone" (The Red Sea Crossing), the Bulletin's editor, Jan Ruman, invited two historians of twentieth-century Polish Catholicism, professors Jan Żaryn (Institute of National Memory) and Ryszard Terlecki (Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences). They recall a gradual approach in post-World War II Poland of the communist regime toward its goal of full control over the Church's activities and influence. At first, personal persecutions were rare because the first item on the agenda was brutal destruction of armed political resistance. But from 1947 until the so-called "thaw" after Stalin's death in 1953, the Church became the main target. Professors Żaryn and Terlecki discuss delegitimization of all social and charitable organizations affiliated with the Church, the closings of Catholic schools, the much-lamented order to remove crosses from classrooms (I remember!) and hospitals, and of terrorizing parishes and monasteries (the notorious arrest of a group of Jesuits headed by Father Tomasz Rostworowski).

Slight differences of opinion appear in the discussion of Catholic publications. Professor Żaryn's highest praise goes to the openly defiant *Tygodnik Warszawski* (closed in 1949), while the more flexible *Tygodnik Powszechny* whose editors resigned under pressure in 1953 (they were replaced by another set of editors, and the original team regained the publication in 1956), is given a good if guarded review by both discussants. They share scorn for collaborationist *Słowo Powszechne* and *Dziś i Jutro*, a daily and a weekly published by PAX, an organization created by prewar militant nationalist Bolesław Piasecki with the intention of providing a platform for nonadversarial coexistence of the Catholic and communist ideologies, but also to save his neck (his choice was collaboration or death). Although Żaryn and Terlecki admit that the PAX periodicals and its publishing house gave employment