

of Mickiewicz's masterpiece. The challenge of *Pan Tadeusz* appears to be inexhaustible.

City of Memory

A Bilingual Anthology of Contemporary Polish Poetry

Edited and translated by Michael J. Mikoś.
Introduction by Andrzej Niewiadomski.
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Joanna Rostropowicz Clark

The word “anthology” comes, of course, from the Greek and it means gathering of flowers. The meaning is particularly evocative when applied to anthologies of poetry: no Polish reader needs to be reminded of Julian Tuwim's book of poems *Polish Flowers (Kwiaty polskie)* or Juliusz Słowacki's line “there every flower will tell Zosia poems” (*tam każdy kwiatek powie wiersze Zosi*). And Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* also come to mind. Michael J. Mikoś, a professor of foreign languages and linguistics at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee has for several decades cultivated his devotion to Polish poetry in several bilingual anthologies, indispensable for scholars and readers interested in Poland's literature but unable to read it in the original. They are: *Polish Literature from the Middle Ages to the End of the Eighteenth Century: A Bilingual Anthology*; *The Virgin Mary's Crown: A Bilingual Anthology of Medieval Polish Marian Poetry*; *Polish Romantic Literature: An Anthology*; and *Polish Literature from 1864 to 1918: An Anthology*. In all these impressive volumes Mikoś provided his own translations, a task that is both daring and respectful and, high literary criteria aside, serving its significant purpose. He has continued in this outstanding project with yet another *A Bilingual Anthology of Contemporary Polish Poetry*, and it is a daunting effort.

What makes this latest anthology different, at least from the perspective of its readers in the Polish diaspora, is that here Mikoś introduces works by poets who are not yet known outside

Poland and whose recognition at home may also be limited, especially in comparison with their famous predecessors or the poets who matured in the middle of the past century and have been entered into the canon of not only Polish but world literature. Hence the first major challenge to the author of the anthology: how to choose from a very crowded, ceaselessly growing field of names and their prolific output, in the absence of a general consensus which, in our time, is seldom granted to the living artists. With his commendable knowledge of the evolving panorama of Polish poetry, Mikoś could well follow his own advice—and, while mindful of critical opinions from a variety of aesthetic viewpoints, “[he] focused here,” in the words of Andrzej Niewiadomski's introduction, “not on what is ostensibly the most effective or what the poets themselves advanced to the fore, but rather on a more private, intimate side of their work.” Private and intimate, it seems agreed, are key attributes that contrast the generation of poets who did not experience the Second World War and the worst postwar waves of communist oppression from those who did and had been bound to give witness to the cataclysms suffered by the entire nation. The contrast—if not between the historic background but between individual poets of these consecutive generations—is perhaps more fluid than such generalized distinctions. One would need extreme force to place, for example, Różewicz, Herbert, Hartwig, and Szymborska, within the same bracket. Similarly, the poets anthologized in Mikoś's *City of Memory* would bristle at any attempt to be affixed under a singular banner. Yet in reading them side by side a certain sense of their affinity to each other does emerge. “If we tried—in spite of everything,” Andrzej Niewiadomski writes, “to find a common ground for all of the newest Polish poetry, we would have to talk about a quest for creative freedom.” And further: “It is a poetry of incessant astonishment and distanced analysis of changes (it is not an accident that the title of one anthology published in Great Britain is translated as *Altered State*), and at the same time of escape to autonomous territories, from where more can be seen and where various, sometimes surprising, forms of sensitivity reign.”

Unfettered freedom from a call of variously understood public duty apparently does set roadside traps. The twenty-one poets presented in *City of Memory*—the oldest, Janusz Szuber born in 1947, the youngest, Przemysław Dakowicz, in 1977—seem to all be marked by a sense of belateness, of living *in time suddenly bent*, to borrow a metaphor from Wojciech Bronowicz's (b. 1967) "A Flying Hero." In poem after poem, their themes, their landscapes appear almost uniformly bleak, their horizons devoid of hope. Turning pages, the reader's eye falls on *the knives of streets* that cut a city at dusk opening to *a vast space for dreams about dictatorship* (Marcin Baran, "Before Nighttime"); then, in two moving poems by Przemysław Dakowicz, on lines about his grandfather who as *he falls in the hail of clay bricks / he will see/ units in iron helmets / marching east and west*; and about his grandmothers, one *with the diseased heart and swollen legs*, the other *with the diseased backbone*. In one of my favorite poems here, Mariusz Grzebalski (b. 1969) ends his description of a thunderstorm ("August") with the sadly ironic *This tomato landing / is now our whole reason for existence*. Less ironic is his "Graffiti" about a boy who drowned on the way to church on Christmas night.

For lack of space, not because they are less exemplary, I cannot quote from all the poets in this alphabetic array. Among them is Wojciech Kudyba (b. 1965), affiliated with various Catholic academic institutions, whose poem "Kowaniec" (*Something that is silence / Something that gives voice*) I pick as a sublime rose to take home. I cannot resist Tomasz Różycki's (b. 1970, Kościelskis prize 2004) "Vaterland" for its one line that should be quoted in the original: *gdzieś w lasach, wśród szwargotów hożych cór Germanii / sowich okrzyków*. All of his poems included here stand out for their passionate irony and formal playfulness, with references to old masters of Polish—he also translates from the French—poetry. The mood darkens as we move to "S," "T," and "W." Andrzej Sosnowski (b. 1959) is a lecturer in American literature at Warsaw University. His very original, somewhat confessional poems may be informed by modern

Anglophone poetry, but are almost apocalyptic in their vision of life's incomprehensibility and futility. Janusz Szuber is too well known to Polish and international readers to need a reminder of the wonders of his achievement, but his poems included here offer little consolation as we encounter *The homeless under a viaduct on beds of newspapers* ("David"), or *Her later history is of a modest clerk / her only son's tuberculosis, life at the brink of poverty* ("A One-Day Princess"). Yet the language of his dazzling attention to the minutiae of reality provides uplifting counterpoint to notes of despair. Marcin Świetlicki (b. 1961, Kościelskis prize 1996) differs from the other poets here in also being an author of crime fiction and a vocalist in popular rock groups. As a poet he has the reputation of a rebel: he is against the primacy of political or ideological rhetoric at the expense of purely personal expression. In his notoriously polemical "Do Jana Polkowskiego" (not included here) he criticizes patriotic pathos in the works of the older, highly acclaimed poet Jan Polkowski (b. 1953, Kościelskis prize 1983), who is represented in *City of Memory* by seven, indeed deeply patriotic, anticommunist poems, several of which contain tributes to Wierzyński, Lechoń, Wat, and Wittlin. In Świetlicki's lyrics the voice of disaffection does sound more post-modern and playful, if *Puddles full of whale oil and blood* ("Jonah") could encourage participation. *Soon / mud will fall down* is the ending line of the short "The Beginning." No less depressive is the voice of Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki (b. 1962) who has often been declared the most original and most recognizable of the poets of the middle-aged and young generations. Among other prestigious awards, he won the Nike prize in 2009, and is the subject of many critical studies pointing to his sources in the borderline of Polish and Ukrainian culture, or to his affinity for Baroque poetry and its motifs of "death, bones, coffin, skeletons," as listed by the critic Krzysztof Karasek. In volume after volume he returns to the subject of his mother's mental illness and death—a clearly defined (unlike elsewhere in this anthology) cause of trauma. A small sample of this magnificently funereal oeuvre in Mikoś's selection testifies to the poet's fame.

The only (why?) woman included, Marzanna Kielar (b. 1963) teaches philosophy at the Department of Education of Christian Theological Academy in Warsaw, and is the author of five volumes of poetry for which she received numerous prizes (Kościelskis 1993) and critical accolades. On the Polish culture portal she is credited with acceptance of existence, tenderness toward the world, and love for those worthy of love. In the garden of one of her untitled poems here *you can see smoke, Father bustling around / rake in hand*. At last, love and eros—both rather absent from poems by her somber male colleagues. Why? Must the personal be so depressed? Has the native soil been depleted of its more wholesome nutrients by the poets who plowed it before? Does memory suffice as a default source of inspiration? Must *mud* fall?

Michael Mikoś's translations are, rake in practised hand, a labor of love, a valiant effort to inform regarding what is happening in Polish poetry today; to help readers in both languages to have their own selection that they can reflect on and—although with melancholy—treasure.

Loose Screws

Nine New Plays from Poland

Edited by Dominika Laster. London: Seagull Books (www.seagullbooks.org), distributed by the University of Chicago Press, 2015. In Performance series edited by Carol Martin. xxxiv + 426 pages. ISBN 978-0-85742-1777. Paperback. \$40.00.

Felicia Hardison Londré

Six different translators deliver nine recent Polish plays to English-language readers, along with a few production photos and an excellent introduction by editor Dominika Laster. For readers, the value of cultural awareness transmitted by these plays is incalculable. What do most Americans know of life in the post-Soviet Eastern Bloc nations? How does Poland simultaneously grapple with its defining history of foreign oppression and with the culture shock of Western influences on its still-new independent nationhood? What is

and has been the role of theater in sustaining or interrogating Polish identity? Given the hoary maxim that all Polish plays are about Poland, readers of these translations may fruitfully ponder what these plays might say to audiences in Poland. However, plays are written to be staged, and that raises a different set of considerations.

The number of productions on American professional theater stages of foreign plays in translation has declined precipitously over the last few decades. We still see Molière, Ibsen, Feydeau, and Chekhov, but only rarely does a new play from abroad find a substantial American theater audience. For those who are open to new plays, the market is flooded by the work of young American playwrights being developed in regional theater workshops or produced by companies devoted to emerging writers. With notable exceptions such as Manhattan's La MaMa and New York Theatre Workshop, there are few professional outlets for contemporary plays of foreign origin. Often it is the enterprising translator, who loved the play enough to wrestle with the text while expecting little return on the effort, who peddles the play to a small independent company or an academic theater. It is heartening that this anthology and a companion volume from Seagull Books, *(A)pollonia: Twenty-first Century Polish Drama and Texts for the Stage*, stimulated a 2013 festival of readings of new Polish plays at New York Theatre Workshop. Moreover, three of these translations had been tested in production at a 2008 festival of post-2000 Polish plays presented by the Polish Cultural Institute at 59E59 Theaters in Manhattan.

The nine plays are grouped into three categories: Past Revisited and Revised, Rehearsing Domesticity, and Unmaking Poland. Most powerfully reexamining the past is a documentary drama collectively created by Teatr Osmeo Dnia (Theater of the Eighth Day), *The Files* (2007), with a performance text excerpted from secret police reports on the Poznań company members' activities. Those files from the 1970s became available in 1998, and the now-mature performers intersperse them with snippets from their own youthful letters and quotations from writers like Solzhenitsyn,