

the head of Medusa. A beautiful, lithe young boy contemplating his trophy, the severed head of the woman monster, held aloft in his hand, his arm outstretched. His mother had heard about the sculpture from her father, his grandfather. He was on his deathbed, talking about his unrealized dreams, the things and places he would have liked to see, the trips he would have liked to take. He must have been not much older than Roman was now. As he gazed at the sculpture he had started telling Nancy the story, but although she listened patiently, she didn't seem particularly interested.

"Mother! Here's an offer. One you can't refuse. As soon as I've seen dad, seen how things are... talked to him... well, as soon as I've done that, I'll take you to Tuscany. To Florence. You've always dreamed of visiting the Uffizi, seeing Cellini's Perseus. And there are some other interesting places to see in Tuscany. Like Siena. I was there just a while ago. Passing through. I'll take you on a week's holiday. One week. I won't take no for an answer."

His mother turned to him and smiled, and for a moment her face, the face of an old woman, was lit up by the smile of a young girl, evoking memories of her as she had been decades ago.

"That's so sweet of you. I'm really very touched. That you thought of me. But you know I won't come. I've seen everything in Florence. I could lead guided tours around the Uffizi. I could write an essay about Cellini's Perseus."

"You know it's not the same."

"Of course it's not the same. And that's why I know it's too late. Everything has its proper time. That seems so obvious to me, it's hard to explain. If you haven't done something when the time was right for it, it's too late: you can never do it. People who rush to realize their unfulfilled dreams – I think they're pathetic, ludicrous. I'm too old to go running around building a store of memories. I will never go to Florence. I'll stay here. Δ



Moved by the Spirit

An Anthology of Polish Religious Poetry

Edited by Adam Czerniawski. Belfast: Lapwing, 2010. ISBN 978-1-907276-51-4. 156 pages. £15.00.

David Craig

For readers unfamiliar with Polish poetry and who thirst for the sacramental, this book is a huge find. A far cry from American Puritanically based poetry—*The Oxford Book of American Poetry* comes to mind—Czerniawski's collection offers a continuously alien (Catholic) spiritual point of view. For Poland, the "good but disordered" Catholic perspective always underscores the innate "God-carrying" value of creation, of people, of the unconscious. Even while our editor tries in some way to emphasize poems that are only nominally or secularly religious, his enterprise fails beautifully. There are no depraved sons of Adam here. Each poet struggles through his "place of passage," to lift from John Paul II, in a wonderful selection of poems that reveal each time what it means to be both Polish and Catholic.

There is one other point worth making before we dig into the poems themselves. One cannot help but note a skewed time line. After offering one sixteenth-century poet and two nineteenth-century poets, the editor then offers nine poets born between 1921 and 1936. While that may seem suspicious, upon closer scrutiny it makes great sense. All nine of those poets experienced both Hitler and Stalin; in fact, the editor, Czerniawski may be the last significant Polish poet who can say that. The idea is a good one since who has experienced the cross like these people. We see that reflected in the poetry, overtly religious or not. True, the divine person of Jesus can become a little more distant during Modernist times of intense suffering, but that is how things always are in our dark nights, whatever our personal situation.

What has lasted here is the Polish spirit; that is what Czerniawski has given us. Every orthodox American Catholic should buy this book. Simply put, it offers what our national poetry is either unable or too bigoted to provide ("the last acceptable prejudice"): authentic Catholic voices. It's no accident, for example, that the only "devoted Catholic" poet acknowledged by the above mentioned Oxford book is Fanny Howe, a poet whose voice falls more in line with traditionally agnostic and political (leftist) verse than it does with the devotedly Catholic. Thomas Merton, surely the most important American Catholic poet in the postmodern period, is not granted any space.

Moved by the Spirit begins with Jan Kochanowski's lamenting ("Tren XVII") the death of his young daughter. Ben Jonson comes to mind, but there is perhaps a deeper sense of the real here: "The Lord's hand touched me,/All joy's gone." Suffering must be borne, lived through; it is not something we can escape via faith. This is the cross, and it is, through the eyes of faith, something we all must bear in one way or another. To his credit, Kochanowski does not try to short-circuit his grief. In fact, he often blames himself, something most fathers would probably do: "Hiding our folly, we flaunt our wits/To dazzle simple souls."

Cyprian Kamil Norwid also offers a breadth of experience. He seems even more overtly religious than Kochanowski, at least given the selections here, but these choices are lovely and deliver life as it comes, not as we would wish it. In praise of the tolerant ruler in "To Emir Abd El Kader in Damascus," the poet is generous and vast. But there's more; there's something apocalyptic in these lines:

His foot is in the rainbow's stirrup,
He rides to Judgment day;
* * *

Then let your tent be broader
Than David's cedar groves;
For of the Magi you were first
To mount your horse upon the hour!

Perhaps Norwid was being prophetic: what would eventually come surely must have felt like the last days. With Tadeusz Rózewicz we move into the horrible twentieth century. We

see hope fade with the Gestapo here, but it does not disappear. Consider "Chestnut," a poem that yokes childhood innocence with the going off to war:

while God almighty who mixed in
bitterness with the sweetness
hangs on the wall helpless
and badly painted

childhood is like the worn face
on a golden coin that rings
true.

Death seems to have come to every family during the war and the occupations. Leon Zdzisław Stroiński's "Warsaw" ends with the line, "Can you hear more distinctly the heavy rhythmical tread of God's steel-shod boots."

Jan Darowski picks this up idea up. Every Christian must know the cross and suffering; truly, he lets no one off the hook for the Holocaust:

In this conspiracy we were the oldest,
not bound by silence even,
we ate common bread, drank
from self-same rock, their hands touched us,
the blood-drained hands of biblical traitors—

Czerniawski does a great job of delivering scope here. One need not be an expert in Polish literature to feel the change. True, the greats are represented—or at least those with whom outsiders are probably more familiar, Szymborska and Herbert. However, they only serve to add to the vision; they do not dominate.

The editor includes a few of the latter's *Pan Cogito* poems. In his "Thoughts on Hell" we get a delightful truth: artists are not safe here either. Everyone has a life to deliver:

Beelzebub loves art.
* * *

Beelzebub supports art. His artists are guaranteed peace, good food and total isolation from infernal life.

Czerniawski ends the collection with his own work. This kind of thing is often cause for concern since some poets see all previous work as the necessary steps leading to the revelation they alone are privy to. However, our editor does not go there; rather, he includes five poems that like the previous poems, are beautifully

sacramental despite their “secularity.” Again, the Polish soul has its final say. This, fittingly enough, comes across with a sixth poem, “St. Sebastian.” It was written to honor a sixteen-year-old, a young person who experienced “scorched flesh.” Was this in a German Nazi camp or was it a gift from Stalin? It is not clear, but what is clear is that Jesus knows the journey:

While after death Lazarus
Led a quiet life.
At table he and Martha
Served the deathbound Lord.

And so we see it again, a Polish sense of the sacramental. A crucified Lord has made the whole way a holy journey. The pain, the hideousness have all been transformed, made new in its pain.

What would it take for America to deliver something like this, to feel the depths of Christ crucified? Perhaps we got some of that in Stevens after the Second World War when his family began dying off, but more than likely it will come sometime in the future, when our own peculiar brand of secular humanism ends in something more hopeful than a cloaked totalitarianism. Δ

Considerations on the Essence of Man/ Rozważania o istocie człowieka

By Karol Wojtyła (Pope John Paul II). Dual text translated by John Grondelski. Lublin/Rome: Societa Internazionale Tommasco D'Aquino, 2016. 211 pages. ISBN 978-83-60144-92-3.

Jude P. Dougherty

This short work is the result of the discovery of a set of unpublished manuscripts that were under the ownership of Teresa Skawińska. Texts that she kept were preserved in the archives of the John Paul II Institute in Kraków. Ms. Skawińska was the leader of an academic study group to whom Father Wojtyła frequently lectured. At the request of student members of

that group, Fr. Wojtyła prepared written versions of his lectures for dissemination.

The lectures not only reveal much about Wojtyła's own philosophical training and teaching, but are as relevant today as when they were written. His lectures were prepared from what may be called an Aristotelian/Thomistic position. He offered them as an alternative to the Marxist dialectical materialism promoted by the communist regime at the time, and as a rebuttal to Darwin's evolutionary account of man's origin that accompanied it.

Wojtyła's lectures begin with a defense of the first principles of knowing and being from a realist point of view. Things are, and things are what they are (the principle of identity). With that recognition he goes on to say that they are intelligible to the extent that they exist. They have an essence or nature that the human intellect is powerful enough to discern. That essence or nature is not given in the sense report of their existence, but there is more in the sense report than the senses themselves are able to appreciate. It is not the senses but the intellect that grasps the nature of the thing.

The recognition of these basic principles leads Wojtyła to the affirmation that there is such a thing as “human nature.” Man's fate is in great measure the consequence of that nature which determines both his potentialities and his limitations. Wojtyła goes on to give an account of the key Aristotelian doctrines of substance/accident; of change; and of the four causes, i.e., material, formal, efficient (making), and final.

Like any substance, man is composed of form and matter. Like any living thing, man has a soul, a unifying principle that makes the living thing be what it is. Thus we can speak of a vegetative soul, an animal soul, and the human soul. We sometimes speak of man as composed of body and soul, but that is imprecise. We should rather speak of man's immaterial soul and the matter it informs, making him be what he is. “Each of us,” Wojtyła explains, “possesses a certain experiential knowledge of what it means to be a human being through an awareness of our own *I* as well as through comparative observation of other people. That