

The book concludes with Kowalski joining the Polish Army created on Soviet soil with other emaciated political prisoners. In April 1941 the former Polish prisoners entered Persia as free men, to be organized in the fight against Nazi Germany. Severe malnutrition from the Soviet camps would claim the lives of many of these newly freed human beings. The last chapter begins and ends with the symbolic Easter celebration of freedom, held in Pahlevi. But Kowalski's experience with the Polish Army during the critical war years is not described. The book lacks information on the political nature of the amnesty agreement, and even a mention of the entrance of the United States into the war in December 1941. By that time Nazi Germany had invaded the Soviet Union, creating an abrupt about-face and a strange new alliance between a criminal Soviet regime and the West.

The compilation of record on the Polish experience in the Soviet gulags as well as in the Nazi camps is progressing: personal stories of deportation and incarceration of Polish citizens into the Soviet gulag keep appearing and the Katyn massacre has recently been described in an EU document as an act of genocidal proportions. The book under review is thus part of a trend. The author dedicates the work to her father and son, but also to the "memory of the untold millions massacred by Stalin." ◇

## They Said 'No' to the Political Police

*Oni odmówili bezpiece.* Bulletin of the Institute of National Remembrance (Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej), no. 7 (102), July 2009, **edited by Jan M. Ruman**. 115 pages plus DVD. In Polish.

### Agnieszka Gutthy

The July 2009 issue of the *Bulletin* is devoted to remembering and honoring those who refused to cooperate with the "bezpieka." "Bezpieka," or the internal security agency set up by the Soviet-imposed government, operated between 1944–1990 under different names: Committee for Public Security, Office of Security (UB) and, since 1956, Security Service (SB). It was the main organ responsible for political repression in Poland, and was generally feared. It coerced people to denounce and inform on their friends, family, neighbors, and coworkers. Operating in a society hostile to the Soviet-imposed political system,

the security agency tried to control public opinion and extinguish any resistance movements. It recruited informants from the time of the Second World War to the fall of the communist system. Over time the methods of recruitment changed. Although the severity of the consequences of refusal to cooperate with the regime lessened, the coercion never stopped.

Security agents targeted former AK members, teachers, writers, priests, high school and university students, and people regarded with high esteem by Polish society. The Home Army was the dominant Polish resistance movement during the Second World War, loyal to the Polish government-in-exile. After the war it was labeled an enemy of the state and of the new political system in Poland. Its members were arrested, interrogated, tortured, sentenced to years in prison. Members were also offered pardon for cooperating with the regime, and executed in case of refusal. Although the consequences lessened over time, people like Feliks Komornicki, architect and constructor, Edward Serwański, lawyer and historian, Edward Leśniak, one of the editors of the magazine *Znak*, as well as Adam Potyra, Kazimierz Heller, and many others were arrested, interrogated and coerced, unsuccessfully, to collaborate.

The *Bulletin* opens with Jan M. Ruman moderating a discussion between two historians, Wojciech Frazik and Filip Musiał, about the origins and development of the work of national security agents and their coercive methods of infiltrating Polish society. The subsequent twelve articles are the life stories of diverse people—men and women, laymen and clergy—who, in spite of consequences, did not surrender to this coercion. The consequences of their refusal to cooperate with the regime ranged from torture during interrogations, years spent in prison, a death sentence, job loss, or refusal of passport enabling the individual to travel abroad. Each case is described by different historians, and each and every one is well documented. Texts are illustrated by photos, copies of documents, interrogation reports, correspondence, and political cartoons.

One of the articles relates a story of Tomasz Strzyżewski, who worked as a censor in the Kraków Office for Control of the Press, Publications and Public Performances. He fled the country, taking with him to Sweden copies he had made of secret documents and classified papers he had collected and removed from his office. Those documents were later published as the *Black Book of Polish Censorship* (*Czarna księga cenzury PRL*). The volume contains 700 pages of

classified documents which documented for the first time the extent of censorship in “socialist” Poland.

The book closes with a short review of an exhibition held in Katowice on the “Eyes and Ears of ‘*Bezpieka*’.” The exhibition featured photos, documents, and audiovisual materials showing methods of surveillance used by the security service agents. The book comes with a DVD, a production of a television spectacle portraying the story of a nineteen-year old Inka Siedziakówna. During the war she was a nurse in the Polish Home Army fighting the Germans. After the war she was arrested, brutally interrogated, sentenced to death, and executed in 1946 for refusing to denounce her friends and collaborate with the secret police.

The volume is a remarkable document of the heroism of ordinary people who managed to maintain their integrity in the face of the life-threatening actions of the political police and their agents in Soviet-occupied Poland. ♦

## BOOKS and Movies

***Four Dilemmas: Theory, Criticism, History, Faith. Sketches on the threshold of literary anthropology,* by Dorota Heck. Translated into English by Robert Kielawski.** Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka (akademicka@akademicka.pl), 2010. 146 pages. Index and bibliography. ISBN 978-83-7638-004-9. Paper.

This book makes a rare and welcome point: what matters in history is its link to the here and now of human experience, rather than the tropes and period mannerisms used by the writer. Historians such as Hayden White have told us that “historical content” is an illusion and what really matters is the narrative. Professor Heck is of the opposite opinion. She juxtaposes Janusz Krasiński’s tetralogy *Na stracenie* [To be destroyed] that deals with real people who were to be killed by the communists, with Western historians’ theoretical musings on history being essentially a narrative design with no particular content. Professor Heck minces no words: she contests “the pertinence of theory [that] disregards truth as neither knowable nor representable and. . . makes any narrative about the past merely fit into its own theoretical models” (7). She argues against postmodern statements such as the one about “facts aspiring to truth but not constituting it” (17). There is an echo here of Gyorgi Lukacs’s famous dictum that if facts do not fit the theory, to hell with the facts. Professor Heck is very much opposed to the Marxist views that have found a warm welcome in postmodernism.

The focus of the author’s interest is the relation between history, historical memory, and Soviet totalitarianism. Contrary to some Western scholars’ opinion that the Soviets shunned Western intellectual texts, she points out that in the 1980s thinkers like Habermas, Lyotard, and Rorty were translated into Polish because of their relativistic stance. This stance “hindered the review of past decades on ethical grounds” and thus fit into the “general tendency of relativizing judgments” (22). Interestingly, such relativism has never gained currency with regard to German Nazism: it was only Soviet totalitarianism that was indulgently treated. Thus the postmodern writers participated in abandoning the integrity of the subject and promoting the notion of contingency.

The author argues for the intentionality of the work of literature and its connection with the real world. She argues against the subsuming of humanities into the social sciences (a tendency in full bloom at American universities). She is right in pointing out that Polish literary criticism is presently obsessed with seeking topics that have been barely outlined in works of literature, rather than paying attention to what writers try to write about and what lies in plain view. Indeed, writers such as Janusz Krasiński have been underrepresented in academic study precisely for these reasons, yet their books are crucial to the survival of Polish identity and plain morality.

The second dilemma the author deals with is the issue of language, good manners, and decorum in public debates. She points out that in recent times “affiliation with the elite” has legitimized an individual’s competence in literary criticism (59). And not only in literary criticism, one might add—a job at a top university acquired on the basis of notoriety rather than scholarship is a generally familiar example. In Soviet-occupied Poland, claims of being acquainted with top political figures generally helped critics to acquire prestige.

The third dilemma is the mix of the familiar and the alien among Polish war immigrants in Edinburgh, while the fourth has to do with the problem of interpreting anagogic language in religious poetry.

Unfortunately, the book is marred by many little imperfections in translation that destroy the rhythm of the English language and make the book difficult to read and understand. Sometimes it is too frequent usage of “the” or of adverbial participles put in the wrong place, at other times it is the literality of translation that prevents understanding. As any seasoned translator knows, it is often necessary to change sentence structure