

took him as far afield as England where before Henry VIII he sought to establish an alliance with the island nation against the double threats of the Turks and the Teutonic Knights. Dantiscus carried on a lively correspondence with Erasmus, who dedicated his translation of Basil of Caesarea's *De Spiritu Sancto* to his friend and kept a bust of the Polish humanist in his study.

The second issue that comes to the fore is the study of toleration and irenicism. The contributors to this volume consciously push our understanding of this phenomenon both chronologically and geographically. Gergely Schreiber-Kovács examines the famous 1573 Warsaw Confederation, and muses over the possible connections to Transylvania where the religious acts of the diets of Torda mirrored what would occur a few years later along the Vistula. Dariusz Bryćko considers the irenic activities of the Polish Calvinist Daniel Kałaj (d. 1681). While in exile Kałaj wrote the intriguing text *A Friendly Dialogue between an Evangelical Minister and a Roman Catholic Priest* (Gdańsk, 1671), which illustrates that irenic tendencies still existed in the Polish Calvinist community as late as the second half of the seventeenth century. Finally, the philosopher Steffen Huber returns to a classic source, Frycz Modrzewski's *Sylvae*, to work through the tangled skeins of these complicated treatises that spoke to the issue of religious toleration. These papers point to the vitality of the debate that Tazbir's early work helped stimulate. In closing two final texts should be highlighted that are important contributions to this ever-changing scholarly debate. Wojciech Kriegeisen's *Stosunki wyznaniowe w relacjach państwo-kościół między reformacją a oświeceniem (Rzesza Niemiecka, Niderlandy Północne, Rzeczpospolita polsko-litewska)* (Warsaw, 2010) examines toleration in a broader European context, primarily from a political and social perspective. This work will be an important starting place for future discussions on this theme in Polish historiography in particular. In the Anglophone world Magda Teter has now published two monographs on Christian-Jewish relations in the early modern era. Her most recent work, *Sinners on Trial: Jews and Sacrilege after the Reformation* (Cambridge, MA, 2011) works very carefully through sets of court records and explores the tension and violence that existed between these two communities in the Commonwealth. In sum, *Reformacja w dawnej Rzeczypospolitej i jej europejskie konteksty* highlights a significant research agenda for the next generation of scholars. Essays are accessible to an Anglophone audience since they are written either in English or appended with a short English summary.▲

Stone Upon Stone

By Wiesław Myśliwski. Translated by Bill Johnston. New York: Archipelago Books (www.archipelagobooks.org), 2010. 534 pages. ISBN 978-0-9826246-2-3. Paperback.

Dorothy Z. Baker

Stone Upon Stone is an interestingly untidy novel whose tensions, confusions, lacunae, and contradictions conspire magically to communicate the mystery of being human in this world. The narrative does not purport to deliver truth. Rather, it illustrates the path of an earnest man who takes wild pleasure in the many joys of life and knows how to withstand its unrelenting pain. This man is Szymek Pietruszka, born between the wars to peasant parents, whose main ambition at the end of his life is building a family tomb, placing stone upon stone to immortalize a life that is no more.

Stone Upon Stone is a rush of stories, this being one of the productively disordered aspects of the novel. One tale is barely finished when the next begins. Appearing to lack any design, the narrative is fashioned anecdote upon anecdote, stone heaped upon stone. In this respect the novel's structure mimics a life, the shape of which is often discerned only at its close. *Stone Upon Stone*'s seemingly naive structure also suggests the immediacy and veracity of Szymek's voice. His tales are artless because he is artless. Szymek Pietruszka commands an epic memory of his peasant family, their village life, his brawls and romances, days in the army and then in the resistance, a brief career in the new socialist bureaucracy, and his return to the family farm. Raw, elegant, humiliating, proud, sensual, and brash, these richly detailed accounts are not reined by chronology or theme. They express only the unbridled memory of their teller.

Central to the novel's fruitful uncertainty is its protagonist. Szymek Pietruszka is an unlikely candidate to win our respect, let alone our admiration. By most standards, his life is a failure. No longer a young man, Szymek has no wife and no family. The one girl he hoped to marry betrayed him by aborting his child. He buried his parents alone. Szymek has lost contact with two brothers and cares for another, Michał, who is mute and simpleminded. As a boy Michał was the favored son, so bright that he would have been a priest if the family could have paid for the schooling. We never learn why Michał returns home as a broken man, but

we suspect that the story would be painful to recount and Szymek is loath to speak ill of his brothers. Szymek's legs are maimed, but he works the family farm as best he can, although farming was never his aspiration. His current ambition, the plan to build a family tomb is stalled by lack of money and his own indecision about its design. This is a strangely quixotic venture for an otherwise pragmatic man—especially when he also reveals that his parents' remains are already decomposed, and he is doubtful that his brothers wish to be buried in the country. Szymek Pietruszka's life is thoroughly unremarkable with the exception of his love of life in all its forms, his awareness of the comic aspects of this world, his fragility and his resilience. For this he commands our attention and our admiration.

Szymek Pietruszka is unfailingly kind. Even when he is blunt and critical, he is kind. This quality might be a challenge for a man who inhabits a liminal site between two generations, two worlds, the Second Republic and the People's Republic. He can't invest himself in his parents' Catholicism with what he sees as its irrationalities and thou shalt nots; neither can he adhere to their dogged trust in authority and their place in the world. This is not to say that he has replaced their religion and stable identity with a new philosophy—one that is grander and more flexible, one that permits modern irony. No, he speaks of his mother's devotion to the Virgin with great tenderness and respect. He continues to get his eggs blessed on Holy Saturday. Likewise, he is not blind to the soulless lives of his brothers who have abandoned the country for office jobs, cars, and wives they won't introduce to the family. However, he will not disparage them or the invalid brother he supports. When Szymek's memory leads him to hurtful moments that he cannot reconcile he becomes mute, and his narrative frays.

Consistent with the novel's design of artlessness, Szymek does not interrupt his rush of memory to reflect on his anecdotes. However, without any grand philosophizing on the part of the narrator, the novel is clearly reflective. One of its pieties is the enduring power of the land. Only God is more important than land, Szymek observes with the quick, wry qualification that this is true only if you believe in God. Even when he is away from the land, lying in a hospital bed, his stories center on the land. However, one of the cruelties of the novel is that only those who are broken return to live and labor on the land. As we experience both the pieties and the cruelties of the novel, we are grateful to Wiesław Myśliwski and his Szymek for access to this intensely physical and profoundly human world. ▲

Firing the Canon

Essays Mainly on Poetry

By Adam Czerniawski. London: Salt Publishing, 2010. viii + 217 pages. Notes, Index of Names. ISBN 978-1-84471-483-4. Paper.

Katarzyna Cieplińska

Writing about the canons of modern poetry is a challenge, but writing about poetry and philosophy in a passionate way can be achieved by few authors. Adam Czerniawski, Polish poet and prose writer, dared to undertake the task in his newest collection of essays.

Firing the Canon is an adapted and expanded version of his book *Wyspy szczęśliwe* (2007). It is also a continuation of the discussion started in that Polish-language volume about the role of poetry in the modern world. As critic and scholar, Czerniawski uses reason to persuade the reader that the power of poetic expression is something worth pondering. Although he has lived in Great Britain since 1947, in the essays he writes about his strong ties to the Polish poetic tradition.

The illustration on the cover pictures cannons being fired. The guiding motif of the first chapter is the author's criticism of the canon of Western literature created by Harold Bloom in *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (1994). Bloom included in his canon three contemporary Polish prose writers—Witold Gombrowicz, Stanisław Lem, and Bruno Schulz, and three poets—Zbigniew Herbert, Czesław Miłosz, and Adam Zagajewski, but he omitted all outstanding poets of previous epochs. Czerniawski criticizes the exclusion of Renaissance poets like Jan Kochanowski, Mikołaj Sęp-Szarzyński and Andrzej Morsztyn, especially that “in Bloom's Aristocratic Age there is room even for Campion and Wyatt, alongside Petrarch, Tasso and Camoens. . . . And if Bloom can pack practically the whole of English nineteenth-century poetry into his canon, why are Mickiewicz, Słowacki, and Norwid omitted?” (10). Therefore, Czerniawski accuses Bloom of insufficient knowledge and contrasts Bloom's pitiful arrogance with Al Alvarez's *Faber Book of Modern European Poetry* (1992). In the latter anthology, the selection of poems demonstrates that in Europe today Poland plays quite a role as the homeland of great poets. Finally, Czerniawski sets his own canon of European poetry