

for the English-speaking reader, complete with the names of many Polish poets.

The roles of poetry and of a poet in society, as well as the relationship between poetry and ethics are the problems discussed by Czerniawski in the essay “Hamlet or Fortinbras?” The author recalls the times when the word “poet” was a magical word and poets “turned the bread-eaters into angels”—a quote from Juliusz Słowacki (21). According to Czerniawski, poetry should be contemplative and polyphonic, while the poet’s role is to use “non-prescriptive language” (23). A poem should be an autonomous form of art, free from moral and political interference.

In the second chapter of *Firing the Canon*, Czerniawski continues the discussion about translatability of poetry that he began in *Wyspy szczęśliwe*. The author believes that poetry is translatable but only translators who are not just philologists but poets themselves can successfully “recreate the spirit of the original” (49). The uncompromising tone of the essay “Translation of Poetry—Theory and Practice” contrasts with the tone of “Perils of Self-Translation,” a record of the author’s dilemmas around translation of his own poems. Seemingly, Czerniawski, as a bilingual poet and recognized translator of Polish poetry into English, should be an ideal translator of his own verse. Yet the roles of poet and translator can collide. As he confesses, the prospect of self-translation evokes resentment or embarrassment. Although the perspective of expanding the author’s readership is tempting, self-translation inevitably leads to writing in the second language, which involves the risk of disintegration or even a loss of literary identity. Czerniawski concludes that writing in an author’s native language is strongly connected with the nation’s poetic tradition (60).

The character of the third chapter, “Choosing a Favourite Poem or *De Amicitia*,” is also personal, as Czerniawski writes about his friendship with the late Bogdan Czaykowski and Tadeusz Różewicz. Czerniawski values his friendship with Czaykowski in particular. Poets usually compete with each other, but this was not the case in this particular relationship. The essay is not only a valuable record for future biographers of the author and his friends, but also a spectacular, though rather incidental, departure from the methodology popular in literary studies in the West: the analysis of a poem intervenes with autobiography, “a heresy so extreme that it wasn’t even noticed by the priests of New Criticism” (65). In the essay “St Anselm

and I: Ontology, Coincidence and the Fortunate Isles” that focuses on the ontological proof of God’s existence, the author admits that, following Descartes and Wittgenstein, he believes in “non-inferential knowledge guaranteed by the experiencing self” (89).

The fourth and most extensive chapter examines the rivalry between poetry and philosophy, which fight each other “for control of the same territory,” i.e., the area of linguistic expression. This section contains essays that are variations on the relationship between poetry and logic, and poetry and nonverbal forms of art, such as music or painting.

Despite a wide range of topics, the book is internally coherent, clearly composed, and written in a light style with traces of the author’s brilliant sense of humor. The book is Adam Czerniawski’s contribution to the struggle for recognition of Polish poetry in the West, freed from political immediacy and not limited to contemporary poets. As a poet and a philosopher, Czerniawski admits to being a disciple of Plato and and he unfolds his poetic creed in the essays. He contemplates reality and provokes in the reader the need for a philosophical perception of the world and of human nature. The author’s enthusiasm in engaging in this task is the most remarkable feature of this book. **Δ**

## More Books

***Na stracenie*, by Janusz Krasieński.** Białystok: Versus 1992. 314 pages. ISBN 83-7045-026-1. Paper. In Polish.

**T**he best novel to read to acquire an idea of what it was like for Polish Catholics to live in the 1940s, first under German barbarism and then under the Soviet. This third-person, occasionally stream-of-consciousness narrative, recounts the story of an eighteen-year-old survivor of Auschwitz and Dachau who returns to Poland after the liberation of Dachau by American troops. What else could he do and where else could he go? He was a high school student when he was arrested by the Germans and sent to Auschwitz where he was expected to die from exhaustion after working several months for the Reich. He thought he was returning to Poland; instead, he finds himself in a Soviet-run prison.

He wants to be a sailor and goes to Gdańsk to seek employment there amidst the devastation brought about by the Russian and German invaders. He is incautious enough to take some pictures of the port to share with friends. The pictures are found and he is declared to be a traitor and spy. Imprisonment and torture follow. The Golgotha of his interrogations is meticulously described as are the stories of his prison mates, among whom are the best sons of Poland such as Witold Pilecki and teenage AK members. But the most impressive of all is the description of the show trial. It

is painfully real. The methods of “reasoning” employed by “prosecutors” and “judges” at this trial are still employed in many parts of the globe.

The book is a powerful presentation of postwar Polish reality. Why is it not promoted by the Polish consulates and embassies, who find time and money to promote yet another festival of folk art or yet another exhibit of paintings of dubious quality, or yet another tired concert of popular music? Why is the novel available only at a few university libraries in the United States; why is it out of print in Poland? Why has it not been translated into English at the expense of the Polish Cultural Centers abroad for which the Polish taxpayer shells out taxes? (JB)

***Historians and Nationalism: East-Central Europe in the Nineteenth Century*, by Monika Baár.** Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010. xi + 340 pages. ISBN 978-0-19-958118-4. Hardcover.

Five nineteenth-century historians are considered: Joachim Lelewel, Simonas Daukantas, František Palacky, Michály Horváth, and Mihail Kogălniceanu. While one could argue with the author about the relative importance of these five in their respective countries and in Europe generally (except for Palacky and Horváth who undoubtedly deserved inclusion in this book), the fact that such a book has been written outweighs its possible imperfections. The author is of Hungarian background and does not fail to note that non-Germanic Central Europe has usually been excluded from general histories of Europe. Her book brings that part of Europe into focus. Baár’s findings cannot be ignored. She demonstrates that nationalistic historians in Western Europe (especially in Germany and England) matched or surpassed in their nationalism the self-assertive voices of their non-Germanic Central European colleagues. Also, European historians need to realize that the virtues and shortcomings of scholarship in Western Europe were paralleled in non-Germanic Central Europe. The book outlines the mythologies that smaller countries like Lithuania created “for the uplifting of hearts.” Alas, some of these mythologies simply do not correspond to historical facts, but that was the case in Western Europe as well.

***Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe. Wizja, Projekt, Ludzie*, edited by Paulina Dudek and Anna Kowalska.** Warsaw: Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, 2010. 180 pages. ISBN 978-83-927590-2-7. Hardcover. In Polish.

This volume details the development of the Polish Digital Archives mainly through interviews with scholars involved in the process. The most valuable

part of the volume consists of tables showing the usage of digitalized materials in various parts of Poland and the savings accrued thereby. This promotional volume is available online at [www.nac.gov.pl](http://www.nac.gov.pl). We are waiting for a digitalized archive of all Polish dissertations, hopefully in English!

***Jan Kochanowski*, by Piotr Wilczek. Edited by Jan Grzenia.** Katowice: Nomen Omen Publishers ([www.nomen-omen.pl](http://www.nomen-omen.pl)), 2011. 50 + 4 pages. Illustrations. ISBN 978-83-62187-15-7. Electronic edition. In Polish.

This little book by a professor of Polish at the University of Warsaw ably introduces to college and high school students the greatest poet of the Polish Renaissance. It contains the poet’s biography and short discussions of his major works. Technically it is a masterpiece—its graphic solutions are excellent.

***Żeby Polska była Polską. Antologia publicystyki konspiracyjnej Podziemia Narodowego 1939–1950*, edited with an afterword by Marek Jan Chodakiewicz and Wojciech Jerzy Muszyński.** Warsaw: Institute of National Memory, 2010. 1080 pages. Index. ISBN 978-83-7629-212-0. In Polish.

A comprehensive collections of documents from the Polish underground presses maintained in German-occupied Poland and Soviet-occupied Poland during the Second World War and throughout the 1940s, when Soviet terror in Poland was unbounded and when the remnants of the Polish patriotic and educated strata of society were systematically hunted and killed.

***Diariusz drogi spisanej i różnych przypadków pociesznych i żalosnych prowadząc córkę Jerzego Mniszka, Marynę, Dymitrowi Iwanowiczowi w roku 1606*, by Stanisław Niemojewski. Edited by Roman Krzywy.** Warsaw: University of Warsaw Polish Studies Press, 2006. Introduction, index of persons, index of geographical names, appendix, dictionary of Old Polish words. ISBN 83-89663-02-03. Paper.

While the original seventeenth-century manuscript resides in the Ossolineum in Wrocław, its editions (and translations into Russian) have had an interesting history detailed in the Introduction. This is a memoir of the nobleman who accompanied Maryna Mniszek, the so-called False Dmitrii’s fiancée, to Moscow. The memoir abounds in digressions and is a treasure-trove of local color. One imagines that it could become a source for a historical novel.

***Literatura polska w Kanadzie. Studia i szkice*, edited by Bożena Szalasta-Rogowska.** Katowice: University

of Silesia Press, 2010. 347 pages. Index of names. ISBN 978-83-60743-40-9. Paper. In Polish.

A collection of several dozen papers on Polish émigré writers who at some point in their career lived in Canada.

*Inne wyzwania. Poezja Bogdana Czaykowskiego i Andrzeja Buszy w perspektywie dwukulturowości*, by Janusz Pasterski. Rzeszów: University of Rzeszów Press, 2011. 360 pages. Bibliography, Index of names, English summary. ISBN 978-83-7338-611-2. Paper. In Polish.

A solid academic tome on two Polish poets born in eastern Poland, victims of Soviet deportations to the gulag. Both were saved by General Anders's evacuation of surviving Polish citizens, arrived in London and moved to Canada where one passed away in 2007 and the other presently lives. Truly an example of multiculturalism, though not in the commonly accepted sense of the term. A review to follow.

## The Polish Operation Stalin's First Genocide of Poles 1937–1938

**Tomasz Sommer**

Below I present an annotated translation of a recently declassified Soviet document written by head of the NKVD Nikolai Yezhov. It details the fate of families and individuals of Polish nationality and mostly Catholic background who were subject to the first wave of repressions in the "Polish Operation," or the systematic killing of every third or fourth person in the USSR's Polish minority from 1937 to 1938. The vast majority of victims were not immigrants to the USSR (as were some enthusiastic Americans who tried to help the Soviets), but rather inhabitants of areas that became the USSR after the October Revolution. At first the Soviet government let them alone. Persecution began when the Soviet system solidified. In the English-speaking world there are no studies detailing the fate of this minority that numbered, by various counts, between 600,000 and one million persons.

The Poles were an uncertain and dangerous element for the Soviet government for three reasons. First, they were not scattered among Russians, Ukrainians, or Lithuanians, but usually lived in densely populated communities that viewed themselves as native to the

land. Second, owing to Poland's political rebirth in 1918, they were suspected of being the fifth column bent on regaining for Poland territories lost after the first partition of 1772. Third, Poles were Catholic, meaning that they were members of an institution considered by atheistic Soviets to be their greatest enemy. From the Soviet standpoint, there was only one truly satisfactory solution to eliminating the Polish danger: physical extermination of the Polish population.

The command to begin liquidating the Poles (Order # 00485) was issued on 9 August 1937.[1] Two days later it was disseminated to NKVD personnel in the entire USSR.[2] To be sure, the murders of Poles took place earlier as well. At the time that the above order was issued they were already in progress. It can be said that the decision of KC WKP(b)'s Political Bureau legitimized the already existing phenomenon and made it into a mass occurrence. The genocide of Poles sanctioned in 1937 was the crowning "achievement" of the depolonization tactic undertaken by Russians in the eighteenth century and carried out by the Soviets as well.

How many victims did this depolonization process claim? According to Nikita V. Petrov and Aleksandr B. Roginskii, the NKVD documents list 111,091 death sentences imposed during the "Polish operation." These death sentences fell under the "state of exception" (not requiring court approval).[3] Rev. Roman Dzwonkowski SAC, a Roman Catholic priest who researched Catholic martyrology in the Soviet Union, writes that "thousands were shot outside of the official 'Polish Operation'—according to some, close to 150,000." [4] According to the Soviet census of January 1937, there were 636,200 Poles living in the Soviet Union in the 1930s.[5] This is almost certainly an undercount. Poles avoided listing their nationality in official documents for the same reason that Jews avoided registering as Jews in German-occupied countries during the Second World War: in both cases persecution was imminent. The actual number of Poles in the USSR in the 1930s was probably between 800,000 and one million persons. The number of Polish victims most likely adds up to a quarter million. The anti-Polish repressions before the Second World War (i.e., the war and postwar deportations of Poles to Soviet prisons and gulags are not included) thus has to be an extraordinarily high figure.[6]

The NKVD was a secretive and criminal organization, but it kept detailed accounts of its crimes. Access to some of these documents is still difficult.[7]