

houses and translators themselves, the combination consisting of four great “brand names” (Faber and Faber; Farrar, Straus and Giroux; Harvard; Nobel) meant that even the Oxford edition of Czerniawski’s translation, by many experts considered to be better than the work of Barańczak and Heaney, passed almost unnoticed, often barely mentioned in the reviews of the “Harvard-Nobel” team. Under such circumstances, two other translations published later by small Polish publishers and translated by Professor Michael Mikoś of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and by a young Irish translator, Barry Keane, had no chance to be noticed.

The combined efforts and judgments of the translator, the publisher, and the literary critic are each crucial for a translation to achieve success.

Without the four factors of an influential translator, well-known publisher, the recommendation of a respected public intellectual, and enthusiastic reviews in prestigious journals and magazines, even the greatest masterpieces remain unknown in the mainstream market, the way Szyborska’s poems were until 1996, or Kochanowski was for centuries, or as Różewicz remains until this very day. Together with Miłosz—who, remember, had been living in California for much of his life prior to the Nobel, a professor at a prestigious American university—the best known Polish poet is the University of Chicago’s Adam Zagajewski. Rumors have circulated for many years that he has been a serious candidate for a Nobel Prize, especially in 2010 and 2011, based on one of the most reliable sources of information in these matters, the bookmakers’ services (*serwisy bukmacherskie*). Zagajewski has not received the prize yet, but if he ever does we will have a better appreciation of how it came to pass. Professor Clare Cavanagh, his translator into English, should share this success with him. ▲

This lecture was delivered at Cleveland State University on 31 January 2012.

NOTES

[1] Jeremy Hawthorn, “Canon,” in Hawthorn, *A Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory* (London: Edward Arnold 1922, 26 (Hawthorn’s italics); also Paul Lauter, *Canons and Contexts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Herbert Lindenberger, *The History in Literature: On Value, Genre, Institutions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); Andrea Lanoux, *Od narodu do kanonu. Powstawania kanonów polskiego i rosyjskiego romantyzmu w latach 1815-1865* (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2003).

Imperiological Studies

A Polish Perspective

By Andrzej Nowak. Kraków: Societas Vistulana (www.vistulana.pl), 2011. 239 pages. Bibliography. ISBN 978-83-61033-46-2. Hardcover.

Margaret Peacock

Since the partitions of the late eighteenth century, the Polish population has struggled to understand the nature and legacy of empire. In particular, they have wrestled with the pivotal role that Polish perceptions of victimhood have played in shaping national identity. Andrzej Nowak has undertaken a difficult project attempting to chronicle how Polish victimhood has played both a constitutive and a destructive role in shaping Polish identity. He has endeavored to provide a more nuanced understanding of the negotiations of power that have continued over the centuries between the centralizing Russian/Soviet state and those countries that have occupied the vital margins of the empire. In so doing, he has opened the doors for further exploration in the burgeoning field of Imperiology.

Imperiological Studies offers a set of loosely connected chapters that deal with a number of pressing questions in the history of Russo-Polish relations. Little is given in the way of an over-arching argument in the book’s four-page introduction. Instead, the reader is asked to approach each chapter as a self-contained essay. The chapters cover a wide range of topics, some of which are more successful than others. The first chapter, for instance, begins with a lengthy and often seemingly tangential exposition on Euripides’ story on Iphigenia in Tauris. Professor Nowak argues that this ancient narrative can serve as a blueprint for understanding the nature of the Russian imperial relationship with Poland and provides an explanation for what he calls an “anthropology of violence” that has historically shaped Russia’s interactions with its neighbors.

Subsequent chapters examine how Russian elites involved in the imperial project in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries took the lessons that they learned from their work in the western parts of the empire and applied them to the south, and vice versa. He chronicles how Russia had developed an overarching imperial style by the nineteenth century that included turning

local leaders into subordinates of Russian governors and stirring up local insubordination and internal hostilities. In one of the stronger chapters of the book Nowak chronicles the gradual disenfranchisement of Polish elites on the periphery in the 1830s, or in the years surrounding the November Rising, and the repressive measures taken by the tsarist state in the Rising's wake. He then traces the increasing radicalization of these counter-elites on the margins of the empire and argues that they played a vital role in the politicization of the center that would lead eventually to revolution in 1917. In later chapters, Nowak contrasts the idealism of nineteenth-century Polish elites with their Russian counterparts. He argues that the rise of the Russian empire was closely tied to the survival and notoriety of the Russian intelligentsia. Nowak contends that far from maintaining an antagonistic relationship with the tsarist state, the intelligentsia and the Empire frequently found common cause in their shared pursuit of a mythical and uniquely Russian destiny that was rooted in a paternalistic expansionism and widespread xenophobia.

The second part of Nowak's work examines the dual role that Poland has historically played first as a gateway of European culture for Eastern Slavs and second as a "bulwark of Christian Europe" against the "barbarous" East (138). Nowak presents Polish political culture as one devoted to the "tenet of liberty" (142) and supported by the elites of the Commonwealth who unlike their Russian counterparts fought for "freedom against tyranny" (142). Nowak largely refutes contemporary claims of any historical existence of an aggressive Polish foreign policy and argues instead that Commonwealth leaders and elites have historically fought for what he calls a "nationalist international" that would unite subject populations against the despotic monarchs of Central and Eastern Europe. Despite the effective elimination of these elites through the nineteenth century, Nowak chronicles the resurgence of Polish identity through the support of the Catholic Church.

Unfortunately, Nowak's book falls short in a number of crucial ways that mire its potential contribution to the field. First (and most blatantly), given Nowak's record of publication and scholarship, one can only assume that the large number of errors in writing, grammar, and style that can be found on almost every page of this book are attributable to its translation and poor editing. For instance, in his discussion of how the leaders of the Bar Confederation Rising were forgotten

to history, he states, "This was the way how the history of the Confederation was treated—the history of Poland shadowed by Russian domination, where important comparative aspects, elements of significant context might be overlooked" (42). Such cumbersome language pervades the book. Repeatedly, observations that might otherwise have been prescient are lost in basic grammatical errors, fragmented sentences, and strings of phrases and clauses that are incongruous and confusing.

The book also suffers from a lack of overall cohesion, a tendency to digress from the topic at hand, and a meandering sense of organization. Nowak constantly switches from the third to first-person voice, which suggests that this book is more of an opinion piece than a work of historical scholarship. This problem is made more pronounced by Nowak's heavy reliance on secondary sources and a concomitant dearth of archival research. Most problematic, however, is the sense that while Nowak argues on the surface that he is interested in complicating the dominant narrative of victimhood that has defined Polish identity, he nonetheless seems to be supporting that narrative in explicit ways. The most obvious example is the fourth chapter devoted to Edward Hallet Carr's and Richard Pipes' 1950s works on the Russian Revolution. Aside from the fact that this comparison is largely incongruous with the rest of the book, Nowak also valorizes Pipes' interpretation of the Soviet Union as an aggressive and ideological empire. He fails to acknowledge the significant scholarship that has been done since 1954 by historians like Wojciech Mastny, Vladislav Zubok, and Constantine Pleshakov who, unlike Pipes, have had access to archives and have established a far more nuanced understanding of Soviet foreign policy as also motivated by defensive insecurities.

Nowak is at his best when he deals closely with historical figures and movements like Adam Czartoryski and Józef Piłsudski. He also provides a sound analysis of how the socio-cultural divides that we see in Polish society today are rooted in the question of whether or not it still makes sense for Poland to derive its sense of national identity from its perceived victimhood. Nowak's work has in many ways been lost in translation. It is this reader's hope that the book holds together more effectively in its original format. ▲

