

identities. Accordingly, Jarochoowska-de-Kosko pays much attention to all forms of belonging and contribution to the Polish diaspora, dispersed throughout the vast Canadian provinces. She offers numerous insights regarding this diaspora's geographical as well as generational and class-related differences. Dedicating her work to the lives of Polish female immigrants to Canada, she writes about women as different as "country women who settled in Western Canada, 'white collars' who filled the offices of central and eastern cities, and professional women who surprised Canada (and often themselves) with their accomplishments."

Out of the Nest, originally published in Polish and titled *Poza gniazdem* (2006), has had limited circulation in Poland, partly because it was published in Canada. It did not reach English-speaking Canadian scholars either. Hopefully, this skilful translation by Zbigniew Izydorczyk, another Polish-Canadian from the University of Winnipeg, will remedy this. The book offers unique insights into the lives of female immigrants to Canada whose fate, I repeat, was frequently quite different from that of the Polish women who emigrated to the United States. Δ

Between the Brown and the Red

Nationalism, Catholicism, and Communism in 20th-Century Poland: The Politics of Bolesław Piasecki

By **Mikołaj Stanisław Kunicki**. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press. Polish and Polish American series (ohioswallow.com), 2012. xix + 266 pages. Index, bibliography. ISBN 13-978-0-8214-2004-1. Hardcover.

Ewa Thompson

This book deals with the political career of Bolesław Piasecki (1915–1979), a minor politician and activist in Soviet-occupied Poland who gained notoriety as head of a quasi-Catholic organization, PAX. PAX enjoyed considerable privileges in a country where committed

Catholics were marginalized or persecuted, and where Catholic publications were censored or otherwise prevented from freely reaching society. It could publish certain Catholic books when other publishers were forbidden to do so, and was permitted to open bookstores and devotional stores in cities where sales of Catholic devotional items were limited to churches. At the same time, rank-and-file Catholics were aware that PAX was kept on a medium-length leash by the political police and that it was frowned upon by the Church. No bishop has ever belonged to PAX, and the priests who joined were distrusted by their bishops. Writer Marek Nowakowski (b. 1937) stated in a February 2013 interview that the goal of PAX was the destruction of the Catholic Church in Poland.

The author begins with the peregrinations of a group of people in prewar Poland to which Piasecki belonged and whose marginal presence in Polish society manifested itself mostly in numerous regroupings involving changes of the name by which they called themselves. While Kunicki admits that both the Polish Catholic clergy and *Endecja* (right wingers) had "largely ignored" the groups of which Piasecki was part, he seems obsessed with presenting Piasecki as an incipient danger. He states that "as a leader of a small fascist group, Piasecki envisaged Poland as a protototalitarian state" (3). Yet Piasecki was alienated both from the left and from the right; indeed, he served time in the Bereza Kartuska camp for political offenders together with assorted radicals and Marxists. I submit that the terminology coined by the leftward-leaning American scholars does not fit Polish developments.

Piasecki survived the Second World War, but was arrested by the communists and, one assumes, chose collaboration over a painful death. This aspect of Piasecki's choice (fear of a painful death) is ignored in Kunicki's narrative. As a communist collaborator, Piasecki attempted to infiltrate the Catholic Church and its priests via PAX which he created in circumstances that have not been clearly documented. PAX was a tiny organization, and its only visible presence in society was the aforementioned bookstores. As Piasecki's usefulness to the communists

diminished, he fell into obscurity and died a powerless man.

The book is more of an attempt to fit Polish history into the Procrustean bed of a neo-Marxist script than a biography. Having read it, I still do not know what kind of person Piasecki was, what could have motivated him in various stages of his life, or why his son was murdered and the perpetrators have never been caught. The final part of the text is a collection of random comments on unrelated topics, including “Polish nationalism” which the author suggests is dangerous and sinister. Unable to document a connection between Piasecki and a contemporary activist priest named Tadeusz Rydzyk (unlike PAX and its priests, Rydzyk is a priest in good standing in the Catholic Church) the author challenges the intelligence of the reader by simply stating that they are made of the same cloth (185).

The impression of “puffing up” what was in fact marginal is confirmed by the elevation of Piasecki’s prewar publications to the status of milestones in Polish political discourse. In fact, they were brochures of several dozen pages, published by hitherto unknown publishers and not discussed at all in the leading periodicals. They could be compared to publications of a Flat Earth Society. To wit: Piasecki’s *Duch czasów nowych a Ruch Młodych* (The spirit of new times and the Youth Movement) is called a “magnum opus, the foundation of his ideology” (30). In fact, it is a sixty-four-page brochure put out by an unknown publisher named Wilkoszewski. The author calls it “repetitious and convoluted”; if such a short brochure was “repetitious” then it can hardly be credited with presenting a coherent ideology as the author alleges.

One perceives here an attempt to elevate a minor individual to the position of a leading voice, and then saddle Soviet-occupied Poland with an alleged inheritance of intolerance and xenophobia. The author tries to harness Catholicism to his ideological enterprise as well, suggesting that the culprit behind the deplorable Polish proclivity to fascism is the authoritarian structure of the Catholic Church that allows individuals such as Fr. Rydzyk and his radio and television to clamor for public attention (186f.).

Some of Kunicki’s allegations border on disinformation. For instance, he states that a friendly relationship existed between Pope John Paul II and Jerzy Turowicz’s *Tygodnik Powszechny*, a Polish Catholic weekly that gradually moved to the far left in its perception of the Catholic Church and in its advocacy of change in the Church. In fact, after the Round Table Agreement of 1989 (the agreement allowing former communists to retain positions in Polish public life), *Tygodnik Powszechny* distanced itself from Pope John Paul and even tried to avoid publishing the Pope’s letter of April 5, 1995 complaining of *TP*’s lack of loyalty to the Church. The letter was finally published on May 14, 1995, after the issue gained notoriety and public dissatisfaction forced the hand of *TP*’s editor. The Pope wrote: “Excuse my saying so, but the presence of this [anti-Catholic] influence could be felt in *Tygodnik Powszechny* as well. Alas, in those difficult moments the Catholic Church did not find in *TP* the kind of support and defense it could legitimately have expected to find. . . . I write about it with pain.” The relations between Wojtyła and *TP* were never mended, to the point that *TP* refused to send its representative to the papal anniversary celebration organized by the Kraków monthly *Arcana* shortly before the Pope died.

Similarly, the presentation of Jerzy Borejsza as a jovial fellow who fraternized with Catholic intellectuals in Stalinist times is misleading (83–85). Kunicki designates him as a “historian” (36), which is like calling Trotsky or Lenin “historians.” Borejsza wielded the power of life and death over the educated class, and his smiles were not unlike Stalin’s. The two brothers, Borejsza and Różanski, were appointed by the Soviets to dictate in cultural affairs (Borejsza) and to head the political police and prison system (Różanski). The American reader gets no inkling of these dreadful realities as he/she reads of Borejsza’s sociability.

Some statements in this book seem lifted from the books of communist ideologues who have tried to justify the Soviet military takeover of Poland in 1945. On page 54 the author claims that the London government-in-exile “had little connection” to the prewar government of Poland. If so, how did this government maintain

a huge underground network of resistance involving hundreds of thousands of people and eventually order the underground army to start a rising on 1 August 1944? The communists tried to belittle the role of the government-in-exile in order to legitimize breaking off their relations with it and imposing their own, Soviet-created government on Poland. Now Mr. Kunicki confirms their mendacious claim.

Even though they were not related to Piasecki, Kunicki also comments on the events of 1968 in Poland. Such participants in these events as Professor Barbara Fedyszak-Radziejowska (a student at the time) have pointed out that at that time student demonstrations started *independently* of struggles going on inside the communist party between two opposing groups, the Pulavians and the Moczarists. Student demonstrations were in solidarity with two students, Adam Michnik and Henryk Szlajfer, expelled from Warsaw University for ideological reasons. To link these spontaneous demonstrations with the struggles of two communist factions—both of them repulsive to Polish society and both of them deriving from Soviet power—is not supported by facts. The students despised them both. An attempt to present one faction of communists as “good” and the other one as “bad” smacks of Stalinist ways of describing the past when communist parties were purged of their “bad” factions and only the “good” communists remained.

The misrepresentation of facts is so routine in this book that it would take several pages to mention them all. The author foregrounds KOR (Committee for the Defense of Workers numbering at various times from twelve to thirty-eight intellectuals), but hardly mentions ROPCiO (Movement for the Defense of Human Rights numbering at various times from eighteen to several hundred intellectuals and common people). ROPCiO’s publishing and political activities are passed over in silence. The conservative ROPCiO is virtually ignored while KOR is credited with much of the work that ROPCiO did.

This brings me to the problems with Kunicki’s footnotes. Sometimes Kunicki injects allegations into his text and supplies a footnote. Upon consulting the footnote, however, it turns out that it does not support the allegation. For

instance, he states that Cardinal Hlond gave Piasecki 500 dollars to start his quasi-Catholic operations (86) and supplies a footnote to back this up; but upon consultation it turns out that the footnote, referring to a book published in 2008, says the opposite (208). Kunicki suggests that Piasecki romanced one of the bloodiest monsters of the Soviet-run secret police, one Julia Brystygier who specialized in the torture of males by squeezing their private parts into pulp: the footnote, however, states exactly the opposite (210). Quite a few opinions are footnoted as coming from the author’s interview with Andrzej Micewski, a PAX member who died in 2004.

A passage about an anonymous article in Piasecki’s paper *Słowo powszechne* illustrates the author’s ways of arriving at conclusions. According to him, the article “undoubtedly reflected Piasecki’s opinion about the March [1968] events” (153). This judgment is footnoted, but in the footnote we only find a mention of a communication between the author and one Jan Engeldard *forty-five years after the March 1968 events took place* (225). I searched for “Jan Engeldard” in the author’s index and in his bibliography but found nothing. I then went to Google: the sole reference to “Jan Engeldard” was Kunicki’s book. This way of arguing would not stand in court; it should not stand in scholarship either.

The bibliography includes a number of works by hardcore Stalinists such as the aforementioned Borejsza and Adam Schaff, but not the more recent works by Waldemar Chrostowski, Wojciech Roszkowski, or Marek Jan Chodakiewicz. In his assessment of Poland Kunicki depends on works on Poland written by foreign rather than native historians. He assimilates them in the same way in which those locals who served British colonialism in India assimilated the assessments of India by Britishers. The book seems blissfully unaware of Polish realities while subscribing to theories that have remained alien to Polish history.

The author’s assessment (“protofascist”) of prewar Poland appears to be lifted from the assessment of neo-Marxist Western authors whom the author cites in his bibliography. This amounts to a classic neocolonial approach in which weaker nations and states are assigned a

place on the map of the political systems that they do not see themselves as occupying. Polish historians, except for communist ones, do not see prewar Poland as a protofascist state. Kunicki is unable to provide any credible proofs that Poland was in any way evolving in the direction of Nazi Germany, but foreign historians handily impose this label on Poland, thus contributing to the postcolonial pigeonholing of Poland in American scholarship in particular. Kunicki seems a willing participant in this process. Toward the end the author remarks that "Piasecki's memoranda were the products of a profoundly ideological mind operating on the verge of obsession" (169). Unfortunately, the same could be said about Kunicki's book. Δ

Here

By Wisława Szymborska. Bilingual Polish-English, with English translations by Clare Cavanagh and Stanisław Barańczak. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012. 85 pages. ISBN: 978-0547364612. Hardcover. \$22.00.

James E. Reid

Wisława Szymborska, Poland's fifth recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature, passed away in February 2012. Szymborska's poetry was popular in Poland, but she was perhaps not as well known abroad as some of her contemporaries such as Czesław Miłosz, Zbigniew Herbert, or Tadeusz Różewicz. Miłosz received the Nobel; many feel that Herbert should have. Różewicz's *Sobbing Superpower: Selected Poems* (translated by Joanna Trzeciak), was nominated for the prestigious \$65,000 International Griffin Poetry Prize in 2012. How Poland has the ability to produce so many poets of international stature is an engaging question for another essay.

Szymborska's work is often characterized by the modesty we hear in the opening words of her 1996 Nobel speech: "I'm supposed to talk about poetry. I've said very little on the subject, next to nothing, in fact. And whenever I have said anything, I've always had the sneaking suspicion that I'm not very good at it." This is not false

modesty, but the true modesty of an honest and questioning poet facing the necessity of speaking about her poetry before an international audience. Her poetry has an open, graceful, and almost tactile surface that does not quite conceal the range and depths of her concerns. The publishers of the hardcover edition of this book offer an invitation to her inviting tactility. The cover of *Here* has the most welcoming texture of any dust jacket I have touched.

Miłosz introduced many of Szymborska's poems to a wider audience in his 1996 anthology *A Book of Luminous Things: An International Anthology of Poetry*. There he criticized poetry that was excessively abstract, and spoke about the importance of the tangible world for the poet: "I am obviously interested in the visible world, again and again unveiling itself and offering itself to the eye." That Szymborska shares this deep interest in the here and now is obvious in her previous books as well as in *Here*. Her translators, Clare Cavanagh and Stanisław Barańczak, have honored her voice by producing translations that read as clearly as if she had composed these poems in English.

Here (*Tutaj*) was published less than two years before Szymborska died of lung cancer. Her commitment to write with care and good humor about the everyday world and its concerns is again evident in this collection. What is new in *Here* is the extent of her references to death, a topic that Szymborska has treated occasionally in a matter of fact way in her earlier books:

Death? It comes in your sleep,
exactly as it should.

"I'm Working on the World," *Calling Out to Yeti*
[1957]

In the collection of poems in *Here*, she comes at death with a range of approaches, as its approach draws near. She speaks humorously in tongues: "We wax eloquent in unknown tongues, / talking not with just anyone, but with the dead" ("Dreams"). Facing her own mortality and mystified by microorganisms, she finally leaves off trying to understand them with "But the time is short. I write" ("Microcosmos"). Then, after a number of attempts, she finally abandons trying