

details of her brutal treatment by the Germans who interrogated her fifty-seven times (leaving her with permanent physical damage) but were not able to break her. Before, during, and after the war her vocation as a surgical nurse brought help and encouragement to her countrymen for fifty years. The book ends with the moving story of Ossowska's determined and successful effort to save the life of Ida Grinspan, a fifteen-year-old French-Jewish orphan and only child in the Neustadt-Glewe concentration camp.

One final observation should be made here. With the exception of Janusz Krasicki's story, this book is one in which women's voices and actions predominate. During the war years Polish women undertook many difficult tasks to preserve both their families and their nation. Their efforts and perspective are given exposure here in a way that impresses the reader hitherto unfamiliar with their achievements. Ms. Ziolkowska-Boehm is to be congratulated for making their voices heard. Δ

## New Perspectives on Polish Culture

### Personal Encounters, Public Affairs

Edited by Tamara Trojanowska, Artur Płaczkiwicz, Agnieszka Polakowska, and Olga Ponichtera. New York: PIASA Books, 2011. x + 382 pages. Index, Notes on Contributors, Bibliography. ISBN 978-0-940962-73-6. Paperback.

### Robin Davidson

From Professor Tamara Trojanowska's elucidating introduction to the closing essay on literary translation by poet and translator Mira Rosenthal, this collection of essays by eminent Slavic Studies scholars interrogates Poland's struggle with the public/private dynamic as it impacts the identity politics that have haunted the Polish literary imagination for more than two centuries. The collection includes twenty-one essays that bridge three centuries—nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first, address identity formation as it pertains to Polish culture's struggle with modernity, and seek to

revise the old dualism of public and private within the context of the shifting ground of postmodernity. The authors here employ Polish literature as the stage on which a passionate national discourse plays out, moving from the nineteenth-century Romanticism of Adam Mickiewicz and the Polish theater to the transnational imagination of the *O'Hariści*. In her introduction Trojanowska offers a compelling explanation of the rationale underpinning the order in which the essays appear. The book's arc involves two central concerns. The first deals with the increasing tensions among a communal, societal, and individualistic understanding of Polish cultural traditions and is evidenced in the essays appearing in parts 1–3: "Paradigmatic Shifts," "Experiences of the Self," and "New Dynamics." The book's subsequent focus refers specifically to Poland's experience of the extreme historical circumstances of European twentieth-century modernity: this concern is addressed in the remaining two parts—"Memory, Trauma, Mourning" and "Transnational Connections." The essays comprising this section use a range of philosophical and theoretical positions, including discourses in trauma and memory, postcolonial theory, and gender, to reimagine the public/private dynamic.

In the book's initial essay, "What's Love Got to Do with It?: Adam Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve, Part 4* and the Art of Transgressing the Private/Public Divide," Halina Filipowicz reexamines the gap between personal and collective life as it is manifest in the character Gustaw/Konrad. Her argument calls into question a traditional reading of the play and seeks to reinterpret Mickiewicz's intent. In her exploration of Part 4 of *Forefathers' Eve*, Filipowicz makes a particularly astute claim regarding the play's subtitle, *A Poema*, a word that for the nineteenth-century opera reviewer means *libretto*. She asserts that by using this subtitle Mickiewicz implies that *Forefather's Eve* moves fluidly between boundaries, shifting between drama and song, text and performance (what she calls "page and stage"), the private and the public man, in a coexistence where neither is entirely excluded—thus completely recontextualizing how Gustaw and Konrad have

typically been understood. In “Contested Modernity: New Drama in Poland,” Tamara Trojanowska moves this dialogue forward to the twenty-first century. In her close examination of the wave of new young Polish playwrights who have made their debut since the millenium, Trojanowska convincingly argues that the modern Polish stage is the site of intense struggle between a number of binaries that both capture and reconfigure the dichotomy of Polish cultural imagination. Unlike the familiar tensions of “capitalism versus aesthetic modernity” or “modernity versus tradition,” she argues that the new Polish drama exists in a kind of terra incognita, what she calls a “liquefaction of modernity” and describes as a state of ambiguity or teleological uncertainty that results in the shifting ground on which young Polish playwrights are compelled to conceive their creative projects.

The second thematic thread underpinning the collection is best discussed in the context of Ewa Thompson’s essay “Ways of Remembering: The Case of Poland,” a beautifully articulated argument that begins by offering the reader the vocabulary necessary to distinguish among what Thompson calls a *hierarchy of memory* that begins with individual and family memory, moves to communal then collective memory, and may then find closure by consigning past historical traumas to cultural memory. Thompson convincingly makes the case that Poland is bereft of cultural memory, in great part because both collective and communal memories have been delegitimized by external foreign entities. Whether one considers the theatrical performances that staged historical plays reenacting the collective traumas of the Nazi and Soviet eras, or the sites of collective memory such as cemeteries, churches, monuments, and their accompanying traditional rituals, the inability of the Polish people to archive the memory of trauma and move beyond it has been complicated by the fact that for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Poland was silenced by its position as an occupied nation, and has not yet wholly permeated the dominant historical discourse of Western Europe.

One such means of bringing Polish experience onto a larger global stage is through literary

translation, and it is quite fitting that the editors have chosen to conclude this collection with Mira Rosenthal’s essay “(Re)Translating the *O’Hariści* into English.” Echoing some of the same influences that Trojanowska describes as influencing younger Polish playwrights, Rosenthal examines the *brulion* generation of poets who chose to reject a poetry based in Polish nationalist tradition or in the propagandist forms of Soviet art or in the belief in some telos of history. They opted instead for the shifting ground of late twentieth-century everyday experience and popular culture, and turned to the American poets of the New York School, most notably Frank O’Hara, whose energy for the urban, irreverent wit, and for the place of the ordinary in poetry abounds. One such example is Marcin Świetlicki whose work clearly corresponds with O’Hara’s, but Rosenthal deftly complicates this classification when she further discusses such poets as Marcin Baran or Jacek Podsiadło, Marzanna Kielar or Tomasz Różycki, so that we become aware of the vibrant range of work in which younger Polish poets are invested—poetry that does not easily fit into any binary dynamic and that owes much of its transnational presence to the work of literary translators.

One of the most appealing features of this volume is its thirty-seven-page bibliography in which we find sources that include a full complement of texts on Polish literature, literary theory, philosophy, and translation. This comprehensive gathering of texts and their application in the essays that have called on them is a rich gift to the reader who wishes to understand the historical, sociopolitical, philosophical, and literary forces at work in three centuries of Polish literature. As an American with no familial or cultural ties to Poland and who came to Polish culture through its literature (when I fell in love with Polish poetry as I encountered it first, years ago, in English translation), I find *New Perspectives on Polish Culture* a genuinely illuminating volume that brings much-needed attention to those frequently neglected historical and aesthetic concerns of Polish modernity. Trojanowska, Płaczekiewicz, Polakowska, and Ponichtera have included some of the strongest scholars writing on Poland today as a means of bringing to the

reader a lucid reflection on those variables that have shaped the discourses on the public/private dynamic, and the diversity of aesthetic forms and strategies emerging in response to it. The book's scope and tone welcome reading by both scholar and nonscholar alike because this collection offers an authentic, compelling look into the complex shifts in Polish identity as those personal, collective, and cultural transformations have become manifest in the history of its literary artifacts. I would assert that the cumulative effect of these essays and their arrangement here has fulfilled the editorial vision for this volume as opening a new space for intellectual and transnational exchange. Δ

### MORE BOOKS

*Cztery szkice z przeszłości matematyki. Euler, Cantor, Sierpiński w Moskwie, Dwie Warszawy* (Four essays on the history of mathematics: Euler, Cantor, Sierpiński in Moscow, Two Warsaws), by **Jerzy Mioduszewski**. Kraków: Impuls ([www.impulsoficyna.com.pl](http://www.impulsoficyna.com.pl)), 2013. 185 pages. ISBN 978-83-7850-280-7. Paper. In Polish.

A distinguished Polish mathematician writes about Leonard Euler, Georg Cantor, Waclaw Sierpiński, and many others. But he also writes about himself, his life, his wonderment at encountering mathematics' milestones. Personal stories are interwoven with discoveries in the world of mathematics, while Polish history (a good chunk of recent history witnessed by the author himself) supplies an incisive commentary on the abstract problems of mathematicians. This is a book about those whose mathematical world was shattered by the all-too-real invasion of Western and Eastern barbarians. Put another way, it is a history of Polish mathematics in the twentieth century. We usually remember the fallen soldiers and the Zamość Polish Catholic children taken away from their parents and either gassed or sent to Germany to be raised as Germans, but we forget that every single profession paid a hecatomb in World War Two. Here you will read about those Polish mathematicians who died in their thirties instead of their eighties. Truly a unique chronicle of what one big war can do to a society and its best representatives.

**Religion and the Cold War: A Global Perspective**, edited by Philip E. Muehlenbeck. Nashville: Vanderbilt Univ. Press ([www.VanderbiltUniversityPress.com](http://www.VanderbiltUniversityPress.com)), 2012. 313 pages. ISBN 978-0-8265-1853-8. Softbound.

Fourteen authors consider religion as a historical factor in the cold war. Countries examined include the United States, Germany, Britain, Korea, Iraq, Ethiopia, the USSR, Bosnia, South Vietnam, Pakistan, and Poland. On Poland, Leszek Murat considers the "institutionalized atheism" demanded of security officers. As guardians of socialism, the UB (political police) were supposed to be ideologically pure, i.e., devoid of religious attachments. They were to be perfect *homini Sovietici*, "[men] averse to responsibility, opportunistic, aggressive toward the weak and loyal towards the strongest, intellectually incapacitated, deprived of dignity, and totally subordinate to the Party" (252). Murat then identifies factors that in practice made it difficult to always strip officers of religion. Recruiting among peasants and workers meant tapping a cohort "raised in the Catholic faith since the cradle" (257). Recruits could not always reconcile the contradiction between the demand for unconditional faith in the rectitude of the party and its own failings, between legal guarantees of religious freedom and its practical suppression. Finally, even party rhetoric was quasi-religious, invoking its "spirit" and "mission," its "sacred duty" to communism, etc. Despite this, the UB still needed its own security bureau to root out religious "degeneracy" in its ranks. A very useful essay on the struggle against religion even among the irreligious. (*John M. Grondelski*)

**Melchior Wańkiewicz: Poland's Master of the Written Word**, by Aleksandra Ziolkowska-Boehm. Trans. By Agnieszka Maria Gernand. Foreword by Charles Kraszewski. Lanham-Boulder: Lexington Books ([www.rowman.com](http://www.rowman.com)), 2013. xiii + 229 pages. Index, bibliography. ISBN 978-0-7391-7590-3. Hardcover.

A biography of a popular Polish writer who is generally considered to be particularly skillful in writing reportages and columns.

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