

The consequences of such a wanton collage of omissions are visible in the narrative of the last chapter written by Piotr Wrobel. He deals with the postcommunist period. In his generally balanced and well informed description of the most important political events in Poland between 1989 and 2004, there appear striking mistakes such as calling Porozumienie Centrum “Wałęsa’s party” in 1992 elections (283). Porozumienie Centrum was formed by the brothers Kaczyński and at that time, it was already in open conflict with Lech Wałęsa. The chapter also displays a fundamental misunderstanding of the “affirmative action” concept, as used in Terry Martin’s book on the Soviet nationality policies (272). Calling Tadeusz Mazowiecki “a lifelong dissident” (280) marks another historical error that erases Mazowiecki’s role as the right hand of Bolesław Piasecki’s Stalinist pseudo-Catholic PAX organisation, and then several years spent by Mazowiecki in the Sejm as an MP of the communist state under Władysław Gomułka. And what to do with a statement on page 302 where Jarosław Kaczyński is wrongly identified as the new and popular minister of justice in Jerzy Buzek’s government (it was *Lech* Kaczyński that was a member of the Buzek government, and this nomination was an important step in his bid for presidency five years later). A key question that has not been answered in the last chapter is the one formulated in the introduction by Daniel Stone: what was “the contributions that Communists made to Polish democracy?” (17). Professor Stone deplores the fact that Andrzej Paczkowski and other authors of the volume “disregarded” these contributions (which he apparently assesses as positive). He suggests that without the communists there would have been no “universal education” and no “opportunities for peasants and workers” in Poland (16). This absurd suggestion, reminiscent of the worst years of communist propaganda, was rejected by Polish youth and workers when a crushing majority of Polish citizens rebelled against the communist system in 1956, 1968, 1970, and 1980.

Thus a disregard for the negative consequences of communist rule in post-1989 Poland cripples the analysis presented by Piotr Wrobel in the last chapter. It is hardly possible to analyze the real problems of Polish democracy after 1989 without paying attention to the phenomenon of postcommunism and political capitalism honeycombed with corruption introduced into the reemerging democratic institutions; the key study here is Jadwiga Staniszkis’s *Post-Communism: the Emerging Enigma* (1999). It is hardly possible not

to mention the influence of the former totalitarian political police and of the informal groups and lobbies that insinuated themselves into the new political parties; an important study here is Maria Łoś and Andrzej Zybortowicz, *Privatizing the Police State: The Case of Poland* (2000). It is hardly advisable to ignore completely the perspective offered by postcolonial studies while dealing with the “new democracy” on the former empire’s periphery (see, for example, studies by Ewa Thompson or Jan Kieniewicz).

Of course it is possible to ignore all these aspects of the postcommunist state, but the consequences are harmful. These consequences are illustrated by a statement toward the end of the last chapter, where the Catholic Church is portrayed as one of the most important obstacles on the way of Polish society towards “mature” democracy. Piotr Wrobel states the following: “the Church was considerably strengthened. . . by the policies of General Jaruzelski who granted various favors to the Catholics” (312). In a book where there is not one mention of the numerous priests killed under the Jaruzelski regime because of their engagement in the fight for civil liberties such a statement sounds grotesque. This kind of statement negates the realities of communism and its disastrous heritage. The interpretation of reality offered in this chapter falsifies the real problems and facts of history, and makes mockery of the Polish struggle for liberty on the one hand, and Polish piety on the other. It is greatly to be regretted that such a bizarre ending is given to this volume, otherwise interesting and informative.▲

## Adam Mickiewicz

### The Life of a Romantic

**By Roman Koropecykj.** Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press ([www.cornellpress.cornell.edu](http://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu)), 2008. xvii+ 549 pages. Bibliography, index. ISBN 978-0-8014-4471-5. Hardcover. \$45.00.

## David Goldfarb

**I**t is remarkable that in the history of Polish studies in the English-speaking world we have waited until 2008 for a basic, modern, standard, book-length biography of Poland’s major national poet, a staple of any curriculum in Polish literature and a central figure in any history of Polish literature. We also understand how daunting this task would be for any literary biographer at this late date, in confronting the mountain

of scholarship on Mickiewicz in Polish and in various other languages. Roman Koropecyjk has been climbing that mountain for a good many years now, and *Adam Mickiewicz: The Life of a Romantic* is a marvelous testament to his dedication, thoroughness, and excellent scholarship.

**“Mickiewicz’s political program, if one can call it that,” Koropecyjk argues, “was nothing less, nor more, than an articulation of a revolutionist imagination, a product of affect rather than political reasoning, an arational, intuitive politics of one.”**

Acknowledging the Romantic proposition that the *persona* of the artist is a creation unto itself, and in the interest of keeping this volume to a modest (considering the subject) 560 pages, Koropecyjk maintains a sharp focus on the life as the object of study and interpretation, rather than accepting a particular version of “the life” as fact and using it to interpret Mickiewicz’s poetry and other creative work. He also makes few claims beyond those that can be demonstrated directly by reference to well-documented sources such as letters, diaries, accounts of contemporaries, and occasionally literary works, thereby avoiding getting too caught up in such ideological quagmires as the question of Mickiewicz’s Jewish ancestry (4, 288, 450). Of course, it is not possible to discuss the life of a poet without addressing the poetry to the extent that it illuminates the life—such as the way that the characterization of the hero of *Konrad Wallenrod* marks a key moment in the evolution of Mickiewicz’s self-conception as a poet (97), or the way the poetry illuminates the era—such as a reading of the “Ode to Youth” as an expression of the essence of Polish Romanticism (22–24), or demonstrating the unpopularity of Mickiewicz’s most popular work, *Pan Tadeusz*, in its own day (219). A student of Mickiewicz wishing to draw connections between a particular work and the bard’s personal experience can begin to explore such associations from references in the biography, the index of Mickiewicz’s works (542–43), and Koropecyjk’s precise and extensive documentation, but in this study issues of the poet’s work are always subservient to the life.

One feature that might be useful in a future edition of the biography would be a basic chronology of a few pages, the kind usually included in the Norton Critical Editions of literary works, listing the key events in Mickiewicz’s life, his travels that trace the state of the

Polish exile community in Europe (185–88), and the dates of his major works.

If the biography has an overarching narrative theme, it is Koropecyjk’s attention to Mickiewicz’s “intuitive openness to the supernatural” (28) that can be seen as his poetic inspiration—the belief in the divine source of improvisation (92)—and perhaps the origin of his ill-fated attempts at politics and his encounter with Towianism. On the latter issues, Koropecyjk at times reveals a sense of exasperation at his subject and sympathy for the more practical politics of Prince Adam Czartoryski’s camp at the Hôtel Lambert, for whom Towiański was an embarrassment and who pitied Mickiewicz for his tendency toward mysticism (291) and messianism, which coalesced as a spiritual-political ideology during his lectures at the Sorbonne in 1841 (277). Mickiewicz eventually distanced himself from Towiański, but had a relapse as he prepared to embark from Rome in 1848 with his First Polish Detachment. Koropecyjk describes this group as “a little band of misfits” (388–89) who “‘marched’ by train and carriage and on foot. . . ‘bivouacking’ in hotels” (391), attempting to distinguish where he can between Mickiewicz’s characterization of the detachment and the “bare facts” (390) insofar as they are discernible. “Mickiewicz’s political program, if one can call it that,” Koropecyjk argues, “was nothing less, nor more, than an articulation of a revolutionist imagination, a product of affect rather than political reasoning, an arational, intuitive politics of one” (414).

Another important thread in the biography is the idea that for Mickiewicz poetry is a substitute for loss (130), and that the construction of his life likely reflected a measure of guilt about being less than fully engaged in the cause of Polish freedom at crucial moments when he might have entered the fray. For instance, in his discussion of Mickiewicz’s travels around the uprising of 1831, Koropecyjk notes that he seems to be tarrying along the way to Warsaw, becoming desperate at missed opportunities to travel, ultimately feeling stuck in Poznań as Warsaw fell in September 1831 (ch. 4–5). Koropecyjk leaves the cause of this delay unresolved because there is no real evidence on that question, but he sees a “cycle of guilt and atonement” (218) as a recurring theme in works such as “The Pilgrim’s Litany” (205), in letters that Mickiewicz wrote during the composition of *Pan Tadeusz* (204), and in *Forefather’s Eve*, part III (218).

Koropecyjk’s postscript examines the creation of the twentieth-century Mickiewicz myth in the reinterment of his body in the Wawel Castle in Kraków. As always,

the argument is clear but understated, made by presenting the evidence rather than by direct assertion. At Mickiewicz's original funeral of 1855, he was regarded by friends and enemies alike as a major cultural figure and an important poet on the world stage, even if they did not all support his political activities or his association with the Towianists. The Mickiewicz of 1890 was domesticated and Catholicized to fit the national narrative of the day, and as a consequence was transformed into a "minor" Slavic figure. There were no official delegations from Russia, Germany, Italy, France, or Switzerland (473), though these were all countries where Mickiewicz had spent time during his life and where he was revered as a major European nationalist and poet.  $\Delta$

## The Collected Prose: 1948–1998

**By Zbigniew Herbert.** New York: Ecco books, 2010. 708 pages. Edited by Alissa Valles. Preface by Charles Simic. Notes. ISBN: 10-0060723823. ISBN: 13-978-0060723828. Hardcover.

### James E. Reid

*The Collected Prose 1948–1998* complements the 2007 publication of Zbigniew Herbert's *Collected Poems 1956–1998*. The prose collection reprints the 1985 English edition of *Barbarian in the Garden* (*Barbarzyńca w ogrodzie*), translated by Michael March and Jarosław Anders in 1965 and originally published in Poland in 1962 after the post-Stalinist thaw that followed Khrushchev's speech denouncing Stalin to the 1956 Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, in the early 1960s Poland was still occupied by a Soviet-installed communist government, operating under its censorship, lies, and fear, and where a life could be destroyed or saved by a scrap of evidence:

*our fear  
is a scrap of paper  
found in a pocket  
"warn Wójcik  
the place on Długa Street is hot"*

Found, of course, during a body search by the occupiers or their quislings. The lines are from "Our Fear" in Herbert's poetry collection *Study of the Object* (1961), published a year before *Barbarian in the Garden*. Now that Herbert's prose and poetry have both been

collected, this type of cross-referencing allows us to follow the arc of his writing career. John and Bogdana Carpenter's fine translations of *Still Life With a Bridle* (*Martwa natura z wędzidłem*, 1991) and *The King of the Ants* (*Król mrówek*, 1999) are also reprinted in this collection. The originality and perceptiveness of Herbert's mind in these three books is still fresh today. A fourth book is also included in a new translation by Alissa Valles: *Labyrinth on the Sea* (*Labirynt nad morzem*, 2000). Some of these essays have been out of print for years, and difficult or impossible to find.

There is an irony in the title *Barbarian in the Garden*. In reality, Herbert writes as a civilized man on leave from a once-rich cultural outpost now occupied by barbarity. He is on leave from a country still recovering from an invasion of the corrupted offspring of German *ostforschung* (research on the East), "research" that scholars bent to Nazi purposes. Post-Stalinist thaw or not, Poland is still living behind the curtain of endemic Soviet oppression. In the gardens to the west, Herbert is a man who drinks deep at the wellsprings of democracy, and from the gifts at Lascaux, Paestum, Arles, and much of the rest of Europe. His relief and critical appreciation is also apparent in *Still Life with Bridle*, in the immediacy of his response to the Dutch masterpieces.

Two small cavils about this important collection. The 1965 translation of *Barbarian in the Garden* contained a significant number of typographical errors. It appears that the copyeditor for *The Collected Prose* did not correct these errors when the original text was scanned and reformatted for this edition. For example, in the opening lines of "Siena," the longest essay in *Barbarian in the Garden*, the phrase "car excrement" has not been corrected to "cat excrement." Although tedious, this kind of editing should have been completed before these errors were reprinted in *The Collected Prose*. In "Memories of Valois" from the same collection, Herbert writes of "putting your face to walls to catch their smells," just one of many references in his prose to the importance of odors in his experience of a place.

One last picayune comment. In a note to the last paragraph of "Among the Dorians," Valles states that Herbert has "slightly misquoted a phrase from Virgil." Given the purposeful and measured flow of the rhythms that conclude this paragraph, it appears that Herbert has deliberately changed *biferique rosaria Paesti* to *biferi rosaria Paesti*, by removing the now unnecessary suffix *que*. Here he follows a long Western literary tradition of taking up the classics and reworking them, so that once again "they spring into presence and stand