

But I was the romantic, and I thank you for your purifying words, and for your purifying vision. Twenty years later I stand corrected, if not entirely purified. That romanticism can be a deadly sickness, yet is the answer to highlight only the twisted and the perverted, the odd creations of monstrous human fate that fascinate you as a jaded Mandarin, the fallen priests that hold center stage? Bonzais are beautiful because they are tortured. Must we surrender heart and deny the hope of simple goodness, the beauty yes of children with their garlands for Our Lady, the dead son raised and returned to his widowed mother? Must all our spiritual lives be focused on getting Judas into Heaven?

I think of the last of our Bojary, those Polish-speaking Lithuanians whose hero was Piłsudski, who in the 1980s were singing songs of Piłsudski's Legion when the Soviet village doctor was not around. The last son of that race greeted me in my grandfather's home when I was last there. A handsome blonde youth—his family had the features of Kościuszko, the high upper lip, the turned-up nose—he would sit at the huge cross at the village's edge—you know them well, or at least remember them—and ask Jesus why his three best friends were killed in Afghanistan. He was a good soldier, *pije pije i płacze*, not *ruski* at all in the end, but a *poljak* from a noble race, ground into the dust by history. *Ostatni Mazur, ostatni Bojar*. . . Buried at our church whose belfry the Swedes burnt, near the road where Napoleon's Grande Armée passed on its way to winter.

And so I too hope for that apokatastasis you believe in, when all the forms are restored, those forms you so beautifully articulate. I love your understanding of Robinson Jeffers, and though you would never quite admit it (why do you have to be such a tough guy?) your love for your native land. *Gute Nacht, Gute Nacht, bis Alles wacht*. . .

But I am puzzled that you should have begrudged a child of the shattered immigrant East Coast the profound joy of discovering that he was also the grandchild of that same ancestral world you carried in your bosom across half the planet. I look forward to meeting you on that morning when “the fog rises early.” I will not demand any explanation, and we will not need vodka (though you might apologize to my mother for riding that ferris wheel while she was standing at Appell). Meanwhile, I remember you at the altar *quia laetificat juventutem meam*. ▲

The Origins of Modern Polish Democracy

Edited by M. B. B. Biskupski, James S. Pula, and Piotr J. Wrobel (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2010). xvii + 351 pages. ISBN 13-978-0-8314-1892-5. Index, bibliography. Paper.

Andrzej Nowak

Poland is not infrequently identified as a “new democracy” in American and Western European publications. Is democracy in Poland after 1989 really a *creatio ex nihilo* or a purely imported good? Is it “new” in comparison to the period of communist rule (1944–1989), or a new phenomenon in Polish history in general? Any serious publication answering these questions seems to be worth both praise and attention: praise for dealing with a subject so vital and important to both Poland and Europe, and attention to the way it deals with the subject.

The Origins of Modern Polish Democracy is this kind of publication. A collection of essays written by the prominent Polish and American historians is announced by the publisher as “the only single-volume English-language history of modern democratic thought and parliamentary systems [in Poland].” Actually, it continues the historical narrative of Polish democratic thought presented in an earlier volume, *Polish Democratic Thought from the Renaissance to the Great Emigration*, published twenty years earlier and edited by the same scholars who prepared *The Origins of Modern Polish Democracy*: M. B. B. Biskupski and James S. Pula. The new volume, with a change in its title (as compared with the first one), suggests not just a chronological continuation, but also a slightly different perspective. The origins of modern Polish democracy obviously are not formed exclusively by Polish democratic thought, but also by practices (and sometimes malpractices) of modern political systems from 1863 till 2005. Are they covered with equal attention in the new volume? We shall return to this question later. First, it is necessary to comment in some detail on the contributions to the volume.

A systematic narrative of the volume begins with chapters 2–4 that present the formative years of modern Polish politics, still during the partitions, between 1863 and 1918. Both Stanislaus Blejwas who authored chapter 2 on “A Transition toward Popular Participation in Politics, 1863–90” and Robert Blobaum, the author

of chapter 3 on “The Rise of Political Parties” offer not only chronicles of events that conditioned Polish political discourse of the era, but also interesting insights into challenges and paradoxes of these discourses. Blejwas openly proclaims an evident antidemocratic tendency of the Kraków conservatives (“Stańcyzy”); this opinion, however, seems to clash with the more recent uses of the thought of the Kraków historians. When they began to be looked up to as a model for Polish contemporary politics, the latest re-edition of *Teka Stańczyka—Stańczyk’s Portfolio*—was recommended by Adam Michnik, generally associated with nonconservative political trends. On the other hand, Blobaum, who criticizes sharply the ethnic policies of the early National Democrats, indirectly admits that their political effectiveness was one of the main vehicles of modern democratic politics, broadening decisively democratic participation in Polish society against the elitist position of the conservatives (69–70, 78, 85).

For many representatives of the leftist intellectual circles in the opposition movement. . . the main enemy was not communism but the Polish right. . . Friszke’s warning of the “domestic authoritarian tendencies”. . . offers a model of democracy that is devoid of pluralism.

After Włodzimierz Suleja’s short but highly competent presentation of Polish democratic thought during the First World War comes the chapter on “The Rise and Fall of Parliamentary Democracy in Interwar Poland” by Piotr J. Wrobel. Like the three previous chapters written by the leading specialists in contemporary Polish historiography, this text is organized in a competent and balanced way. It enables the author to present accurately a highly complicated picture of the construction of Polish independent democratic politics, as well as social, ethnic, and political conditions which influenced its crisis under Józef Piłsudski’s authoritarian rule.

Among four subsequent chapters only Rafał Habielski (who writes about Polish political emigration between 1939–89) presents democratic thought along with political actions and institutions. The other three authors concentrate almost exclusively on selected aspects of democratic theorizing: in Poland under German and Soviet occupations, 1939–45 (Andrzej Friszke); under communist rule, 1945–69 (Andrzej Paczkowski) and between 1968–89 (Jan Skórzyński). Especially the two chapters dealing with the period of

communist rule seem to lack a perspective from which questions could have been posed concerning the influence of various communist institutions and practices on the prospects of Polish democracy, as well as consequences of the different forms of political opposition and fight for civil and national liberties. All these “post-1939” chapters understate the influence of the imposed Soviet model, as well as terror and propaganda brought with it, on the prospects for democracy in Poland between 1944–1989 and beyond.

Skórzyński and Paczkowski . . . chose to write only about the political thought in the narrow meaning of the term [which leads] to such absurdities as the total silence about the role of Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński who led the fight for human rights for thirty years [yet] is not even mentioned in this book. John Paul II is mentioned only once. . . as an accidental aside.

Sometimes this brings such risky generalizations as the one that ends Andrzej Friszke’s chapter, where the author tries to persuade the reader that “the chief defenders of democratic ideal were the leftist and centrist parties,” and that “a threat to Polish democracy was posed not only by external factors, especially the Soviet Union, but also by powerful domestic authoritarian tendencies” (185). Side by side with such statements it would have been advisable to inform the reader how a large part of the leftist intelligentsia paved the way for totalitarian communist control over Polish society after 1948. And in what way were the “domestic authoritarian tendencies” able to shape the political and social environment in Poland after it had been overwhelmed completely by the communist party and army? Who ruled Poland after 1945? Were it the continuators of the Piłsudskiyte regime and the National Democrats, or Polish communists installed with the decisive power of Soviet tanks and backed intellectually by a substantial part of the leftist intelligentsia? After 1945 the first two groups, the Piłsudskiytes and the National Democrats, were driven underground and most of their active representatives were either physically eliminated or jailed by the communist regime. So much for their “authoritarian tendencies.”

Friszke’s warning about the “domestic authoritarian tendencies” and “the threat” they presumably posed in 1945 should be assessed side by side with the material presented by Jan Skórzyński in his chapter on the years 1969–89. Skórzyński repeats the thesis that the leftist

intellectual circles formed the only important source of political opposition in that period, but at the same time he acknowledges a certain paradox: for many representatives of these circles the main “threat” or “enemy” were not the communist party but those political tendencies that were to the right of them, even if they would have represented the majority of Polish society. This obsession formed “a model of democracy that was in fact devoid of pluralism,” as Skórzyński observes pointing at the example of Juliusz Mieroszewski, one of the main political thinkers who influenced Polish political thought in the 1970s (241). One could describe such a tendency as antidemocratic and elitist, in the same way in which the Kraków conservatives in 1860s were elitist and afraid of giving voice to the people. Skórzyński tries to soften the problem by suggesting that the socialist-leftist tendencies he describes in his chapter were “shared by the broad and important circles of Polish society” (243). How “broad” were they? This chapter offers no evidence; neither can we find an answer to the question of how to determine which circles in society are *not* “important” from the standpoint of democratic ideals. Is it peasants? Is it workers?

There is no mention of the crucial importance of the first visit of John Paul II to Poland in 1979. . . . The Catholic Church is portrayed as one of the most important obstacles on the way of Polish society towards “mature” democracy.

In order to put history into the frames of a preconceived paradigm, Skórzyński denigrates the differences between the various groups of political opposition (e.g. between KOR and ROPCiO; and he even does not mention KPN), making a profoundly erroneous suggestion that all of them were more or less socialist. This is fundamentally untrue. It would have been valuable to contrast this tendency to minimize nonsocialist opposition with a debate between Andrzej Friszke (who shares the position of Skórzyński) and the late Professor Tomasz Strzembosz, who eloquently spoke on behalf of many nonsocialist groups and forms of opposition that strove for more democracy and fought for human and political rights against the ruling communist party (see T. Strzembosz, “Polacy w PRL: sprzeciw, opozycja, opór,” *Arcana* 5/2000; A. Friszke, “Odpowiedź prof. T. Strzemboszewi” and T. Strzembosz, “Odpowiedź p. doc. A. Friszke,” *Arcana* 2/2001). By far the most important role in this struggle for democracy was played by the Catholic Church and

the “broad and important circles” connected to it. The fact that neither Skórzyński nor Paczkowski chose to focus on the political and social struggle that paved the way to democracy in Poland, and instead chose to write only about the political thought in the narrow meaning of the term leads to such absurdities as, for example, the total silence about the role of Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński who led this fight for human rights for thirty years. Yet he is not even mentioned in this book! John Paul II is mentioned only once, but only as an accidental aside: Skórzyński says that “the general goals of Solidarity were summed up. . . shortly before the arrival of Pope John Paul II in Poland [in 1987]” (264).

Skórzyński denigrates the differences between the various groups of political opposition (e.g. between KOR and ROPCiO). . . making a profoundly erroneous suggestion that they all were more or less socialist. . . . [Solidarity] has not been presented in the book either—probably the greatest lacuna of all.

Is that it? Not a word is said about the highest importance of the public sermons delivered by Karol Cardinal Wojtyła while he was archbishop of Kraków, the sermons delivered on behalf of the persecuted workers and their civil rights—sermons in Nowa Huta, in Piekary Śląskie, on the St. Stanislaus and Corpus Christi feasts. There is no mention of contacts between the so-called democratic opposition and Wojtyła (among others, KOR representatives met clandestinely with Karol Wojtyła in Warsaw in September 1977). There is no mention of the crucial importance of the first visit of John Paul II to Poland in 1979. That visit marked a revival of democratic and civic identity of the Polish masses. And, what is really astounding, there is no mention of the movement for the Free Trade Unions that began in Pomerania and Silesia in 1979, the movement that led to the great experience of Solidarity in 1980–81. The latter has not been presented in the book either—probably the greatest lacuna of all. There was arguably no single more important phenomenon for the development of the experience of democracy than the endless meetings, ballots, and discussions of ten million Solidarity members between August 1980 and December 1981, when General Jaruzelski put a brutal stop to this democratic experiment and the first experience of liberty in Poland since 1944. There is nothing on this subject in the entire volume.

Such omissions seriously distort the history presented in this book.

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), 2008. xvii+ 549 pages. Bibliography, index. ISBN 978-0-8014-4471-5. Hardcover. \$45.00.

David Goldfarb

It 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