

gathered information on PSL activities abroad, for which he was well rewarded.

Grzegorz Łeszczyński writes about *Jest*, a film by Krzysztof Krauze based on Pope John Paul's pilgrimage to Poland, June 16–23, 1983. The Pope's visit helped rebuild the self-confidence of the Polish nation. *Jest* deals with the inhabitants of Zbrosza Duża who were led by Father Sadłowski on a pilgrimage to Częstochowa to see the Pope and reminisce about their struggles to build a church and parish house in their village. The scenes were filmed in the picturesque meadows and orchards of the Polish countryside. The film took two years to produce and five years to obtain communist officials' permission for screening. It received a number of awards.

Lastly, Andrzej Kaczorowski discusses the Solidarity movement in the Polish countryside in 1980. He points out that the movement was supported by local parishes and bishops, and in many instances churches served as meeting places. Even PAX and the Clubs of Catholic Intelligentsia supported Solidarity. Needless to say, the authorities tried to prevent cooperation between rural and urban Solidarity groups.

This collection of essays belongs to a vital area of historical scholarship. It offers previously unavailable information about activities of Polish farmers under communism. No study of Soviet dealings in East Central Europe can ignore the information it provides. **▲**

They Came to See a Poet

Selected Poems

By Tadeusz Różewicz. London: Anvil Press Poetry, 2011. 3rd ed. revised and enlarged, 283 pages. **Translated and introduced by Adam Czerniawski.** ISBN: 978-0-85646-436-2. Softcover.

James E. Reid

In 1941, when Tadeusz Różewicz was twenty years old, he joined the Polish Home Army and fought the communist occupation of Poland. As the Second World War ended, he also lived through the horrifying revelations about conditions in the Nazi concentration camps in German-occupied Poland, and then saw Stalin's apparatchiks take over Poland. These experiences would be enough to silence lesser writers. In 1973 he wrote about the effect of these experiences when he was a young man: "I felt that something had forever ended for me and for mankind, something that neither religion nor science

nor art had succeeded in protecting" ("Do źródła," *Proza*, Wrocław, 1973, p. 493).

In spite of and because of the effects of what he had seen and heard, Różewicz began to write, eventually publishing over twenty books of poetry. *Anxiety*, his first volume, was published in 1947. It is permeated with the bleakness of someone who has seen his country live through hell on earth, and has returned to write about it. One of his best known poems, "The Survivor" concludes with these blunt lines: *I am twenty-four / led to slaughter / I survived*. The enduring resonance of his poetry is strong enough that almost thirty years later one of Poland's fine poets, Anna Kamieńska, restated his lines: *We were all twenty-four . . . we all survived being led to the slaughter*.

The critical reception of a poet's work often changes over the years. In "*The Survivor*" and *Other Poems*, a bilingual selection of Różewicz's poetry from 1976, translators Magnus J. Krynski and Robert A. Maguire describe him as "the most influential Polish poet of the entire postwar period" (ix). This is high praise for a poet from a country that is renowned for the esteem in which many of its poets, such as Nobel laureates Czesław Miłosz and Wisława Szymborska, are held in the world.

Szymborska and Różewicz are contemporaries, born two years apart. They approach similar concerns in very different ways. Różewicz wrote about a near-death experience and arbitrary survival in "The Survivor" perhaps several years after it happened. The poem presents the bleak, hard, and almost complete hopelessness of what he witnessed. The narrator in Szymborska's "There But for the Grace" also looks back at Poland under German occupation, and at the utterly arbitrary survival of someone the poem's narrator loves. God is absent in both poems, but the poem suggests an intimate hope: *Listen / how fast your heart beats in me*. Some might argue that Szymborska's is a stronger poem, but each poem will touch the reader in a different way, depending on what the reader brings to each poem.

In his introduction to Różewicz's poems in his *Anthology of Postwar Polish Poetry* (1965 and later editions), Czesław Miłosz is hard on the long-lived Różewicz: "His scorn for 'art' is quite programmatic, with all the contradictions such an attitude involves. He is a nihilistic humanitarian, constantly searching for a way out of his negation" (85), an argument Miłosz extends in 1983 in his *Witness of Poetry* (82–83). The reader may tend to agree with Miłosz after reading a poem such as Różewicz's gritty "Fight with an Angel."

There is no wrestling here with the divine for the blessings of a new name for Jacob, and for the legacy of a nation in the wilderness. What there is takes place in a rubbish dump, and the fight is brutal and messy with blood, saliva and shit. The reader's hopes for uplift may also be dashed after encountering "Dante's Tomb at Ravenna" which opens with no sense of the scale of Dante's accomplishment but with the dismissal: "*Dante / There's nothing here / Look it's empty here*" before the poem continues, and concludes in the same vein. As Różewicz declared in 1965, "I consciously gave up the privileges that accrue to poetry . . . I returned to my rubbish heap" ("Do źródła," 496). This may often be true, but sometimes he puts the trash out and takes another look around.

Różewicz presents a lighter and much less characteristically dark view in his "Tale of Old Women." The poem holds out gentle hope and affection: "*old women / are indestructible / they smile indulgently.*" He also takes up the cause of rehabilitating maligned mothers-in-law with deep appreciation and affection in "Dithyramb in Honor of a Mother-In-Law." I am fortunate to have a kind and thoughtful mother-in-law, and enjoyed this poem. One of his early postwar poems, "But whoever sees . . ." takes a clear-eyed and difficult look at the condition of his own mother who had been broken and devastated by the war and its aftermath. He concludes this moving poem with these tender lines: "oh I would like to bear her upon my heart / and nourish her with sweetness."

As for Miłosz's criticisms, his own translation of Różewicz's "In the Middle of Life" is more sensitive to nuance in English than the Czerniawski or Krynski and Maguire translations. Two of the last poems in Miłosz's recent collection, *New and Collected Poems 1931–2001*, concern Różewicz. "*Unde Mallum*" or "Where does evil come from?" answers Różewicz's question after opening with the address, "*Alas, dear Tadeusz,*" and closing with "*of course, dear Tadeusz.*"

Like many poets, Różewicz is not a writer of rigid consistency in style and content. Even with a number of common themes, his style and concerns changed repeatedly over the decades. As for his own concerns about consistency and his legacy, this prolific poet concludes "The Feeding of Pegasus" with a line that conceals more than it reveals: "poetry is suicide." He acted on his fear of the artistic suicide that sometimes awaits successful writers who are lionized and become the center of the whirl of awards and laurels. He moved

to Gliwice, an industrial town in Silesia, to write far from applause and ceremony.

Poetry may provide clarity of experience and description, while not providing clarity for its interpretation—the latter tension is often central to its power. Is Różewicz "the most influential Polish poet of the entire postwar period"? He is certainly important and influential in a country where there is fierce competition for such words of praise. Whatever his stature when the last laurels are awarded, let us remember, "in 1941, when Tadeusz Różewicz was twenty years old, he joined the Polish Home Army, and fought the Communist occupation of Poland." The mere courage to return from his early experiences and publish poetry about them and then to continue writing, now mostly prose and drama into the twenty-first century, assures him of a place in the crowded pantheon of Polish poets. It is no wonder that readers and poets came to see and read this poet, and will continue to do so. *They Came to See a Poet* is a thoughtful translation of a representative selection from more than twenty books of Tadeusz Różewicz's long and productive career. ▲

MORE BOOKS AND PERIODICALS

Myśl polityczna I Rzeczypospolitej (Political Thought in the First Republic), by **Włodzimierz Bernacki**. Kraków: Arcana (www.arcana.pl), 2011. 430 pages. Bibliography, index of names. ISBN 978-83-60940-10-5. Hardcover. Available from the publisher or from <Merlin.pl>.

A comprehensive critical survey of Polish political writings from Gallus Anonymus (twelfth century) to Józef Wybicki and Seweryn Rzewuski (eighteenth century). The author has done an excellent job placing first- and second-rank writers in dialogue with each other. Apart from the well-known names of Stanisław ze Skarbimierza, Paweł Włodkowic, Jan Ostroróg, Wawrzyniec Goślicki, Wolan, Krzysztof Warszawicki, Andrzej Frycz-Modrzewski, Łukasz Górnicki, Piotr Skarga, Szymon Starowolski, Hugo Kołłontaj, and Stanisław Staszic Bernacki introduces to us the lesser names of Stanisław Zaborowski, Filip Kallimach, Jakub Przyłuski, Samuel Przypkowski, Krzysztof Opaliński, Stanisław Herakliusz Lubomirski, Stanisław Dunin Karwiczki, and others. He shows how the *Res Publica* functioned (the Polish political system comprised elements of the republican and monarchic