

classified documents which documented for the first time the extent of censorship in “socialist” Poland.

The book closes with a short review of an exhibition held in Katowice on the “Eyes and Ears of ‘Bezpieka’.” The exhibition featured photos, documents, and audiovisual materials showing methods of surveillance used by the security service agents. The book comes with a DVD, a production of a television spectacle portraying the story of a nineteen-year old Inka Siedziakówna. During the war she was a nurse in the Polish Home Army fighting the Germans. After the war she was arrested, brutally interrogated, sentenced to death, and executed in 1946 for refusing to denounce her friends and collaborate with the secret police.

The volume is a remarkable document of the heroism of ordinary people who managed to maintain their integrity in the face of the life-threatening actions of the political police and their agents in Soviet-occupied Poland. ◇

## BOOKS and Movies

*Four Dilemmas: Theory, Criticism, History, Faith. Sketches on the threshold of literary anthropology,* by Dorota Heck. Translated into English by Robert Kielawski. Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka (akademicka@akademicka.pl), 2010. 146 pages. Index and bibliography. ISBN 978-83-7638-004-9. Paper.

This book makes a rare and welcome point: what matters in history is its link to the here and now of human experience, rather than the tropes and period mannerisms used by the writer. Historians such as Hayden White have told us that “historical content” is an illusion and what really matters is the narrative. Professor Heck is of the opposite opinion. She juxtaposes Janusz Krasiński’s tetralogy *Na stracenie* [To be destroyed] that deals with real people who were to be killed by the communists, with Western historians’ theoretical musings on history being essentially a narrative design with no particular content. Professor Heck minces no words: she contests “the pertinence of theory [that] disregards truth as neither knowable nor representable and. . . makes any narrative about the past merely fit into its own theoretical models” (7). She argues against postmodern statements such as the one about “facts aspiring to truth but not constituting it” (17). There is an echo here of Gyorgi Lukacs’s famous dictum that if facts do not fit the theory, to hell with the facts. Professor Heck is very much opposed to the Marxist views that have found a warm welcome in postmodernism.

The focus of the author’s interest is the relation between history, historical memory, and Soviet totalitarianism. Contrary to some Western scholars’ opinion that the Soviets shunned Western intellectual texts, she points out that in the 1980s thinkers like Habermas, Lyotard, and Rorty were translated into Polish because of their relativistic stance. This stance “hindered the review of past decades on ethical grounds” and thus fit into the “general tendency of relativizing judgments” (22). Interestingly, such relativism has never gained currency with regard to German Nazism: it was only Soviet totalitarianism that was indulgently treated. Thus the postmodern writers participated in abandoning the integrity of the subject and promoting the notion of contingency.

The author argues for the intentionality of the work of literature and its connection with the real world. She argues against the subsuming of humanities into the social sciences (a tendency in full bloom at American universities). She is right in pointing out that Polish literary criticism is presently obsessed with seeking topics that have been barely outlined in works of literature, rather than paying attention to what writers try to write about and what lies in plain view. Indeed, writers such as Janusz Krasiński have been underrepresented in academic study precisely for these reasons, yet their books are crucial to the survival of Polish identity and plain morality.

The second dilemma the author deals with is the issue of language, good manners, and decorum in public debates. She points out that in recent times “affiliation with the elite” has legitimized an individual’s competence in literary criticism (59). And not only in literary criticism, one might add—a job at a top university acquired on the basis of notoriety rather than scholarship is a generally familiar example. In Soviet-occupied Poland, claims of being acquainted with top political figures generally helped critics to acquire prestige.

The third dilemma is the mix of the familiar and the alien among Polish war immigrants in Edinburgh, while the fourth has to do with the problem of interpreting anagogic language in religious poetry.

Unfortunately, the book is marred by many little imperfections in translation that destroy the rhythm of the English language and make the book difficult to read and understand. Sometimes it is too frequent usage of “the” or of adverbial participles put in the wrong place, at other times it is the literality of translation that prevents understanding. As any seasoned translator knows, it is often necessary to change sentence structure

completely and delete metaphors that ring hollow in English; this has not been done. The present generation of middle-aged Poles was unable to study abroad and learned English from books only. In contrast, an average university-bound German or Frenchman learns foreign languages from native speakers, often by spending a semester abroad. (SB)

#### OTHER BOOKS AND PERIODICALS RECEIVED

***Nine Days That Changed the World: Pope John Paul II, hosted by Newt and Callista Gingrich*** (www.ninedaysthatchangedtheworld.com). June 2–10, 1979. Citizens United Productions, 2010.

A SR reader suggested that we review this remarkable video hosted by a Republican politician and his wife. It was a timely reminder, since many people have already forgotten the events of thirty years ago, when the triumphant Karol Wojtyła returned to Poland as the Pope of Rome. It was a moment of joy and euphoria for the entire nation. As the narrator points out, one-third of the nation, or some thirteen million people, turned out to greet John Paul II. Poland was the only country in the communist bloc where Catholicism was so vividly demonstrated and so seriously practiced.

Googling the title will direct you to portions of this video on YouTube.

***Podhale. Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej***, nos. 1–2 (108–109), January–February 2010. With a DVD titled “Siła bezsilnych” (Power of the powerless). www.ipn.gov.pl. ISSN 1641-9561.

This issue of the *Bulletin of the Institute of National Remembrance* records the contribution of the Podhale region (north of the Tatra mountains) to Poland’s liberation starting with the formation of Józef Piłsudski’s Legion to which both the smallholders (*górali*) and the local landowners belonged. The legendary First Regiment of Podhale Riflemen created in 1918 consisted of inhabitants of this region. During the Second World War Podhale Underground fought German Nazism on many fronts. After the war, when Poland was militarily occupied by Soviet communists, partisan fighters continued their activities. A partisan detachment nicknamed “Ogień” distinguished itself by exceptional bravery. A monument to Ogień fighters near the railway station in Zakopane is often visited by descendants and admirers, as indicated by the continual presence of dozens of candles at its base.

***Schlonsko (Horní Slezsko, Oberschlesien, Górný Śląsk): Esej o regionie i mieszkańcach***, by Tomasz Kamusella. 2d edition. Zabrze: Narodowa Oficyna

Śląska (41-800 Zabrze, ul. Ślęczka 2 /3), 2006. 147 pages. ISBN 978-83-60540-51-0. Paper.

A determined effort to present the twentieth-century history of Upper Silesia from the point of view of those Upper Silesians who consider themselves members of a separate (Silesian) nationality. This group is trying to gain more autonomy than they have received thus far from the Germans, the Poles, or the Czechs. In that regard they are similar to the Catalans in Spain, Bretons in France, or Welshmen in the United Kingdom. For a variety of reasons, their chances of transcending their present status are small, but in a modern democratic state they deserve the kind of autonomy that has been given to various dialects and groups. In Poland they can be compared to the Kashubians near Gdańsk or the Polish Tatars in Podlasie.

The book contains an interesting interpretation of the activities of Messrs. Czaja and Hupka, two Silesians who emigrated to West Germany from Soviet-occupied Poland. Their activities in BRD, however, have been marred by their inability to distinguish between Poland and its historical ethos, and Soviet-occupied Poland and the inevitable leftovers of the Soviet ethos after half a century of Soviet Russian occupation. While the tradition of the Polish *Res Publica* welcomes diversity and allows different religious and ethnic groups to cultivate their traditions, the Soviet occupier implemented the *divide-et-impera* policy that Messrs. Czajka and Hupka did not understand. They thus turned against Poland rather than against its occupier. Need we say that BRD’s economic prosperity also played a role?

***LI Rocznik Polskiego Towarzystwa Naukowego na Obczyźnie*** (2007/2008) London: PTNO (238-240 King Street, London W6 ORF), 2009, edited by Krzysztof Rowiński. 441 pages. ISBN 1 870027 426. A12.00. In Polish and English.

A collection of essays written by members of the Polish Scholarly Society Abroad, an institution headquartered in London that dates back to the Second World War when Polish refugees founded it as a meager substitute for Polish scholarly life. Predictably, quite a few obituaries appear in the introductory pages. The entire effort is worth noting as a historical document of persistence and fidelity on the part of Polish war immigrants in London.

***Pamiętnik Kudowski: kwartalnik społeczno-kulturalny***, no. 1 (6), 2010. ISSN 1689-8753.

A cultural quarterly published in the resort town of Kudowa in Lower Silesia. Its editorial and

technical level is so high that it should be included among the best-edited periodicals in Poland. Its content is local: it is oriented toward present and past events of the town of Kudowa and its environs. It appears that Kudowa has become a multicultural town in recent years, from Armenians and Japanese to Jewish and Polish-Ukrainian. The quarterly includes many memoirs and old photographs, as well as reviews of works of art related to Kudowa. The editor of the periodical, Mr. Bronisław Kamiński, presents a broader perspective from time to time. In this issue he writes about the roots of the cultural sphere to which Poland belongs; unsurprisingly, he finds them in “Athens and Jerusalem.”

*When Angels Wept: The Rebirth and Dismemberment of Poland and Her People in the Early Decades of the Twentieth Century*, by Jan S. Prybyła. Tuscon, AZ: Wheatmark (www.wheatmark.com), 2010. xii + 224 pages. Maps, photographs, bibliography, index. ISBN 978-1-60494-325-2. Paper. \$23.94 including shipping from publisher.

This is one of the numerous personal accounts by witnesses to the Polish tragedy in the Second World War, of which we review several in this issue of *SR*. The author, a retired university professor, is the nephew of two main protagonists, Jan and Marta Przybyła who were political prisoners at Auschwitz and perished there during the war. The author identifies them as “Polish”—wrongly in our opinion, since the distinction should have been “Catholic.” At least some of the Jews who perished at Auschwitz were also Polish, yet they are usually identified as Jewish. This lack of sensitivity to common usage indicates the author’s indifference to anything except what he wishes to say. Successful books are usually written with the reader in mind, paying attention to situating the text in the midst of other texts.

The indifference toward the potential reader also manifests itself in the book’s structure. It is neither a first-person memoir nor a novel nor a scholarly account, in spite of the quasi-scholarly apparatus (the two-page bibliography seems marginal rather than carefully selected). The point of view oscillates between these three possibilities in such a way that the book virtually disinvites those potential readers who, at this point in history, are familiar with generalities about the Second World War and do not need to listen to improvised lectures. If the author wanted to include a historical outline, he should have separated it from the main narrative. Apparently he did not feel comfortable relating the tragic fate that befell his family—one of

the millions of Polish Catholic families destroyed by the war. If the author could not withstand the emotional burden of writing about horrible events, he should have devised a literary mode that would have made it possible. As the book stands now, it is a monument to the author’s self-centeredness rather than a useful contribution. ◇

## Fiancée

by Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński (1922–1944)

Standing in the lake, she’s turning her palms up.  
Flowers and butterflies come rising from her hands,  
When under her knees still clouds flow, rushing up,  
And skies rumble fast. Down, to the waves she bends,  
And takes with her hand open, as if a cat whose  
abstinence nods,  
The blue ribbons of water that flex up like cords  
And play softly and vaguely:  
“Enchant us to flowers, lady.” So, she’s turning her  
palms up  
And the drops are rushing high,  
She’s making of them leaves and plum’s autumn rust  
Before they reach the level of her thighs  
They’ll catch the clouds, all evenly rushing fast,  
And she’ll turn up to carry her picture out,  
Not knowing if what she sees or what the water shows  
is real.  
She’s looking into the crystal of air, and sees a far life,  
Dusty tracks she sees and then, a brook’s ordeal,  
Knows still not and she’s waiting. Right then, on the  
shore,  
A gallant knight stops and pulls out the fruit,  
Pale blue, as if skies’ drop; to him she is drawn  
And floats through the air, that hums like a flute.  
And then the woods take them. And only the still life  
of trees  
Stays up in the valley for the lovers to miss.

“*Narzeczona.*” Translated by Rafal Bilski