

turned his affections to the Steward's daughter. The bride was scarcely young; indeed, she was said to be all of fifty years old. But she was a stout soul, an able housekeeper and suitably dowered; for, apart from the village she stood to inherit, a tidy monetary gift from the Judge had increased the sum of her assets.

As to the third pair, the guests waited in vain. Growing impatient, the Judge dispatched his servants to fetch them. They returned by and by with word that the third bridegroom, the Notary, had lost his wedding ring in the hare course and was even now scouring the meadow for it. As for his lady, she was still at her dresser and, though she was making all due haste with her housemaids doing their best to bear a hand, yet there was not the ghost of a chance she would complete her toilet in time; indeed, she would scarcely have it done this side of four o'clock.

(to be continued in a forthcoming issue)

## Czas niedokonany

### Imperfect(ive) Time

By **Bronisław Wildstein.** Poznań: Wydawnictwo Zysk ([www.zysk.com.pl](http://www.zysk.com.pl)), 2011. 592 pages. ISBN 978-83-7506-797-2. Paper. In Polish.

### Ewa Thompson

**T**his monumental novel may well be what intellectuals in Poland and in the United States have been waiting for: a novel that comprises the Eastern European ALL, that is to say, the times of Stalin and, earlier, of Lenin in Russia; the heady days of Solidarity in Poland; the post-Solidarity disappointments; a pre-Soviet pogrom that put an indelible stamp on the personalities of the Jewish characters; and, perhaps as a bait, the 2008 market crash in the United States.

This is a story of a family whose one branch originated in Pinsk, Belarus, where the family patriarch was a well-respected *tzadik*. This family was killed in a pogrom so brutal that it seems almost unreal to the inhabitants of the twenty-first century, at least in Europe. As a result, one surviving scion of this family joined

the bolsheviks and became a hands-on member of the Cheka, later NKVD. The omniscient narrator minces no words in describing the ritual of Cheka killings where by the end of the day the executioners wade ankle-deep in blood and blown-out human brains.

But this is a sideline. The main plot concerns a Polish family in Soviet-occupied Poland. The father, Benedict Brok, is a grandson of the *tsadik*, but he has long lost his connection to the Chassids. He is a thoroughly secularized member of the Polish intelligentsia. In better times, he might have been writing for a highbrow and gently leftist periodical such as *Wiadomości Literackie* (1924–1939), while at the same time lecturing at a university and frequenting Warsaw's "intelligentsia" cafés. But the times are not gentle: it is the post-World War II period in Poland. One is surrounded by incessant assurances that Sovietism is the new and victorious ideology that will solve all social, moral, economic and political problems. In addition, acquiring an apartment in Poland where 40 percent of housing was destroyed by Germans and Russians, is a Herculean enterprise. Our hero is a hard-core intellectual and not easily fooled, but he surrenders to the sea of arguments around him. His motto is to do as little harm as possible, and possibly do some good. There were party members like this: in fact, they probably were in the majority.

The mother, Susanna Brok, comes from a run-of-the-mill family of the Polish intelligentsia steeped in patriotism and painfully aware of the lack of freedom imposed on Poland by the Red Army. Benedict is likewise aware of it, but chooses a path that has generated countless debates in Poland: going along with the conquerors in order to mollify their influence on society, thereby preventing the most drastic displays of party dictatorship. The mother chooses conspiracy and distribution of samizdat that eventually leads to Solidarity. Toward the end of the novel the reader learns that the father was also an informer for the secret police and tried to protect his wife, of whose activities the said police were well aware.

Susanna is less of an intellectual and more of a person that can be mobilized, persuaded to fight

for all the noble things with which Polish history is so generously loaded. Before and after Solidarity, she is among those who print and distribute illegal literature, and intercede for those unjustly imprisoned. When she herself is locked up and briefly experiences the macabre conditions of a communist political prison, her husband's party connections are put to work and she is freed. She does not know that she owes her freedom to the fact that her husband reports on her.

The ancient tragedy is a contemplation of a calamity that was not caused by purposeful action of the subject. Oedipus did not know that he was marrying his mother. Similarly, Benedict did not ask to be born at the time and place fate assigned to him. *Whoever is without sin, let him throw the first stone.* One of the book's most fascinating motifs is the diary of Benedict's uncle, the one who "chose the bolsheviks." These notes outline for us, one more time, the October Revolution and its aftermath. They have an aura of authenticity that might have come from the author's access to a firsthand account of the events described in the diary.

This sketch does not give full justice to the novel, but it creates a framework within which some of the problems raised in it—and there are many—can be discussed. The novel situates itself at the very heart of what can be described as the problems of postcommunism, not only in Poland and Russia but also in America, which means everywhere. It has the breadth and scale of Solzhenitsyn's panoramas of communism, but surpasses the Russian writer in that Bronisław Wildstein does not throw rationality overboard and offers instead a vision of the world akin to that which the rational ancient Greeks created in the genre of the tragedy. By comparison to the run-of-the-mill novels reviewed weekly in America's popular periodicals, *Unfinished Time* astounds by the weight and scale of issues it probes, including the delicately but decisively posed question of universal morality. Where is its English publisher?



## **Teoria-literatura-dyskurs. Pejzaż postkolonialny Theory—Literature—Discourse Postcolonial Landscape**

By **Dariusz Skórczewski**. Lublin: KUL, 2013. 508 pages. ISBN 978-83-7702-615-1. In Polish.

**Tamara Trojanowska**

**D**ariusz Skórczewski's *Teoria-literatura-dyskurs. Pejzaż postkolonialny* (Theory—Literature—Discourse. Postcolonial Landscape) gathers the fruit of his intellectual engagement with postcolonial studies that began over a decade ago during a three year stay at Rice University in Houston, Texas. Since then, Skórczewski has published extensively on the subject, with many of these essays, often in revised form, finding their rightful place in this 500-page long book, which also includes new texts written specifically for the volume. A shared goal of conceptualizing a broad spectrum of potentialities and challenges of postcolonialism for Polish as well as Central and East European Studies brings cohesion to the project, which paints the postcolonial landscape in all of its complexity while proposing concrete perspective for its ongoing and future exploration. The reiteration of certain conceptualizations and examples that stems from the previously independent existence of some of its component parts is put to good use in this context, providing readers with a map of the author's journey through postcolonial theory that includes both its general trajectory and specific sites of in-depth exploration.

As the title indicates, the study is divided into three parts. In the first section, Skórczewski formulates and explains the theoretical and conceptual framework of his work; in the second, he demonstrates the analytical possibilities of such a framework through a range of case studies of Polish literature from nineteenth century through to the present; in the third part, in turn, he problematizes this framework within both Polish and Anglo-American discursive contexts. The breadth of Skórczewski's theoretical readings, the depth of