

prevailing winds, or the culture of endemic passivity and acquiescence that dominates today's respectable ways of thinking. The cotemporary political intelligentsia, a misnomer if ever there were one, have simply chosen not to choose, slavishly embracing whatever reward awaits them for the abdication of their own agency. Tragically, they are unlikely to consider the Warsaw Speech with the urgency and seriousness it demands even if it ultimately serves to defend their freedom, simply because its politics offends their naïve conceits. The rot runs deep: we even witness entire Christian denominations denouncing the defenders of a heritage without which they would not exist, as heretics and sinners, because the necessary defence is seen as a repudiation of a secularized globalist universalism. That this universalism is completely antithetical to traditional Christian theology does not register in their minds because the affirmation of utopian ideas requires the negation of everything that is particular. A logical consequence sees Christian charity deform into Babelist idolatry under the banner of compassion.

This nihilism of modern sophisticates means that their future will naturally be determined by those who have no qualms aggressively occupying the cultural and spiritual vacuum of an emasculated postmodernity and its political and therefore territorial space. What is witnessed in Western Europe, or indeed the United States, is a living testament to the fruit of a "progress" deemed inevitable only to the extent that collective delusion or stupidity is itself inevitable. Unfortunately, delusion and stupidity appears to be an ineradicable blight on the elite leadership of Western nations, rewarded as it appears to be by a system that militates in favor of a collective lowest common denominator. But nothing is inevitable, only thinking makes it so. The triumphs of Brexit, the successful presidential campaign of Donald Trump, and before them the toppling of rebranded postcommunism by Viktor Orbán and Jarosław Kaczyński have shown this beyond doubt. Yet the longer our civilization journeys down its present path, the more uncomfortable will be the solutions to the dilemma it has recklessly strayed into. What

must be remembered is this: solutions are deemed impossible only until the inconceivable is achieved for the first time; and the extent to which solutions are perceived as inconceivable will determine just how much we value what is being lost and how committed we are to reclaim it. President Trump was therefore ominously correct in suggesting that the question we face today is whether or not we as a civilization have the desire or will to survive. The genuine free thinkers of the coming decades will be those who can exercise their moral choice in favor of their posterity without fear of risking their opponent's opprobrium. In other words, those who will take charge of their own future instead of being led along the currents of annihilation, hypnotically chanting the sutras of oblivion and collective self-denial. In his Warsaw Speech Trump drew on the Polish partisan underground's commitment to prevail when declaring that we too will triumph in the face of aggressive barbarism and militant nihilism. Who embodies the future of Europe, Martyn Hett or Michał Cywiński? One of these two held all the right opinions, and is dead. The other is hated by transnational elites, but lives and has inspired a generation. This is where the fault lines of the present war are drawn, and there has never been a more pressing time for men of good will to pick a side. Δ

## LETTERS

### To the Editor:

I wonder if you would permit me to respond to a few of the inaccurate characterizations of my book *A Kaleidoscope of Poland*, which was reviewed in *The Sarmatian Review* by Professor James S. Pula (vol. XXXVI, No. 3, 2042-3).

Despite Professor Pula's claims to the contrary, I do go into quite some detail as to the rationale underlying the choice of headings in the *Kaleidoscope*. The book is a collection of Polish cultural-historical topoi, which any moderately educated person in Poland takes for granted and often uses as a shorthand means of communicating with other Poles, but which are a mystification to a non-Polish visitor to the country. Accordingly, as is explained in the introduction (which I gather Pula did

not read carefully), the *Kaleidoscope* is intended as a kind of cultural decoder for the non-initiated but intellectually curious visitor to Poland, as well as for prospective English-speaking students of Polish history and culture, and I believe it serves that purpose nicely, although inevitably there have been some important political changes in the country in the few years since the book was written that would need to be covered in an updated version.

Professor Pula's method of review seems to be based on making mocking innuendos, to the extent that I am surprised that the book review editor did not intervene in the interests of this journal's reputability. One such professionally irresponsible innuendo is the sneering contention that I limit discussion of World War II to 150 words. World War II actually receives outsized treatment in the *Kaleidoscope*, as is evidenced on almost every page. One wonders to what extent Professor Pula actually read the work he was reviewing. As is stated in the introduction, if I felt a subject could not be satisfactorily encapsulated in around 150 words, the topic was subdivided into separate headings. A look at the index, which I gather Professor Pula did not consult, shows that some sixty (or roughly 15-20%) of the articles in the *Kaleidoscope* deal partly or primarily with World War II. Many other articles, not listed as war-related in the index, deal with the war indirectly, for example, even the very first heading, entitled *Ala ma kota* (Ala has a cat), treating Falski's *Elementarz* (ABC book), the first children's book to be published after the war, with its references to soldiers returning home after the war and to families resettling to the so-called *ziemie odzyskane* (recovered territories). Really, the comment that there is "too much" of World War II in the *Kaleidoscope* would have been an easier criticism to make. The book is absolutely saturated with references to the war and Poland's wartime experiences, from the first article on Ala and her cat to the last one, on Jews in Poland.

On a more trivial note, Pula seemingly objects to a harmless article on *postrzyżyny* (boy's ritual first haircut), discussed in connection with the Piast Kołodziej legend, while claiming that more important cultural terms like *święconka* (Easter basket food) and *gwiazdka* (first star of Christmas Eve) are missing. In fact these particular terms are not missing but, as seems logical to me, they are discussed under *Wielkanoc* (Easter) and *Wigilia* (Christmas Eve), respectively. As to whether *stypa* (wake) is in urgent need of inclusion as an especially noteworthy Polish custom, as Pula insists, I personally doubt it, but I would leave that decision up to my numerous Polish cultural consultants on this project. The related and

more typically Polish funerary customs of *Dziady* (Forefathers' Eve), *Zaduszki* (All Souls' Day), and *Dzień wszystkich świętych* (All-Saints' Day) are covered in some detail, and are also referred to under such headings as *cmentarze* (cemeteries), *cmentarze radzieckie w Polsce* (Soviet cemeteries in Poland), and *dni wolne od pracy* (days off from work).

Another meritless comment of Pula's is that the *Kaleidoscope*'s headings should be in English rather than in Polish (although he himself refers to *postrzyżyny*, *święconka*, *stypa*, etc.). The purpose of the book (again, as is explained in the introduction) is to explicate Polish names, terms, concepts, and so on, that the culturally curious non-Polish longer-stay visitor encounters at every step of his or her being in Poland. A prominent example is the Polish penchant for naming major uprisings after months, which Poles, especially journalists, have a habit of using as labels with no further explanation, assuming that everyone knows that the *powstanie listopadowe* (November Uprising) was the one in 1830–31, not the one in 1863 (which was the *powstanie styczniowe*, or January Uprising). Hence the supplement Timeline of Polish Historical Months, which Professor Pula (a professor of Polish history, no less) professes to find so perplexing. It is true that the month of *czerwiec* (June), as he complains, is doubled up, referring either to the "wydarzenia" (incidents) of 1956 (Poznań) or 1976 (Radom and Warsaw). Maybe Poles should plan their next uprising or "incidents" for the as-yet unused months of *kwiecień* (April) or *luty* (February), to satisfy the professor's sense for orderliness. Obviously, in Poland the national historical nomenclature, including the names of the months, will be encountered and experienced in Polish, not in English. Professor Pula does not give non-Poles much credit for being interested in what terms are used to describe things in the country's native language, or for being able to cope with a hooked *ę* or a barred *ł* (whose sounds are dutifully described in the introduction) when encountered here or there. In any event, what visitor to Poland could reasonably be expected to look up a heading under "Ala has a cat?" (or "Easter food," "boy's ritual haircut," "Forefathers' Eve," etc.): the cultural resonance behind the concepts is inseparable from their Polish designation). The user is provided with an extensive English cross-referencing index if he or she wishes to use it. A majority of the *Kaleidoscope*'s headings are proper names in any case, where the choice of language is not an issue.

The pettiness of Pula's invidious review extends to the introduction's Timeline of Polish History. One

can discuss, yes or no, whether the *powstanie wielkopolskie* (Wielkopolskie Uprising, 1918–1919) deserves equal rank in a schematic listing alongside other, more properly national, uprisings against the broad backdrop of Polish history. Professor Pula thinks that it does, whereas I considered that the *wojna polsko-bolszewicka* (Polish-Bolshevik War, 1919–1921), a contest in which the very existence of the country was at stake, better served as a historical marker of the Polish national period immediately following World War I. It would have been only fair of him to note that, whether or not the Greater Polish Uprising is included in the “Timeline of Polish History” as he would have preferred, the *powstanie wielkopolskie* is not missing from the book, as he insinuates, but is given status as a normal full article, one of six devoted to the various Polish national uprisings known as *powstania*. The *powstanie wielkopolskie* is listed and described yet again on page 317 in the summary of Major Polish National and Regional Uprisings. Exactly the same goes for the supposedly missing, according to him, *powstania śląskie* (the Silesian Uprisings of 1919, 1920, and 1921). They are also both listed in the index. Just how many times, and in how many places do the *powstanie wielkopolskie* and the *powstania śląskie* need to be listed for this reviewer to notice them?

Among other important things omitted from Professor Pula’s review I would like to mention the long, thoughtful, and informative foreword by Adam Zamoyski. I am happy to let the *Kaleidoscope* of Poland speak for itself and stand or fall on its own merits, among which I count the accessible style with which I believe most entries are written. The reviewer seems by temperament to be immune to the humor of many of them. If Pula should ever venture to teach a survey course on Polish history and culture, I think he would be challenged to find a handier and more readable quick reference work for such a course. Besides use as a reference work, the *Kaleidoscope* can just as enjoyably be read page after page, and I think any prospective student of Polish history and culture would greatly profit from doing just that. I encourage readers of *The Sarmatian Review* not to be put off from purchasing or consulting this innovative book on Poland on the basis of the present reviewer’s careless, mean-spirited, and inaccurate characterizations. For a more balanced review of the work under consideration, the reader might want to consult that of Agnieszka Jezyk in the *Slavic and East European Journal* (Vol. 61, No. 1, 148-149).

*Oscar E. Swan, University of Pittsburgh*

### Professor Pula responds:

As Prof. Swan suggests, it may be best for readers to review the work themselves and make their own judgments. I would advise, however, that they consult it free at their local library rather than purchase it for reasons that will be apparent to them on examination.

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