

New
Books
from
Poland

POETRY

2024

BOOK INSTITUTE



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2024



Introduction

The last several years were exceptionally fortunate ones for Polish poetry. Several hundred volumes of poetry appear in Poland annually, and at least sixty percent of these are worth special note. The experts we invited to consider this year's crop have chosen thirteen publications from those brought out in 2023, among which are to be found eleven new collections, as well as two by no longer living female poets.

On the following pages, the reader will find short presentations of books by authors of both sexes representing different generations, and, above all, quite varied ways of thinking about language and poetry. For some of them, the poem is one facet of our complicated communications network, in which it plays the role of a node that concentrates within itself what in the moment of its emergence was most interesting, most unique, most universal, or perhaps most suspect. Others think of the verse as an individual being, autonomous to a degree, which, of course, is differentiated from other beings, both living and inert, but is not to be found outside of reality, yet rather inhabits it along with them. There are also such poets who treat the verse as a type of social and political critique. The aim of this last group is not only to uncover to our eyes areas of individual and collective thoughtlessness, ideological blindness, such as prevents us from grasping the mechanisms responsible for injustice both local and universal, but also to actually transform the parameters of our existence. For a certain group of poets, both female and male, the poem is above all to take hold of individual experience and express it – whether that be emotionally, historically or culturally. Here we shall also find books that explore questions of identity: what it means to be a man or a woman, as well as generational and geographical questions. Some subject the language to extreme experiments, which result in new possibilities – not only of speech and writing, but also of existence in a world among other beings. Others reduce the word to its most basic level, at which multisignificance cedes its place to a seductive straightforwardness, which may also be subversive, as it may be only an apparent simplicity.

The books that present the creativity of poetesses no longer with us – Zuzanna Ginczanka and Anna Świrszczyńska – are deeply inspiring. The greatness of these two women authors is beyond discussion. At the same time, their poems, which deal with complicated questions of identity, painful experiences both social and historical, and extend the borders of language, making it more voluminous and elastic, continue to elude formulae proposed by critics and historians of literature.

It is my deep conviction that, despite their deep roots in both former and contemporary currents of the Polish language, the volumes of poetry chosen by us are able to enter the streams of other languages through adequate translations, releasing their life-giving energy in these new linguistic areas.

Grzegorz Jankowicz
Director of the Polish Book Institute

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A Selection of Stand-ups

These poems, which are supposed to make you laugh, pierce you through and through. Indeed, they do double-duty. A consternation arises, which sensitises and teaches something.

Smiling through tears, laughing at one's own suffering – these are the first slogans that come to the mind of the reader of Justyna Bargielska's new collection of verse, entitled *A Selection of Stand-ups*. One comes away with the sensation of the poem being treated as a gag, a cabaret monologue, and it's actually therapy, a manner of dealing with depression. The word "selection" also indicates that the author has chosen a particular strategy to speak of herself and the world, a manner of taking advantage of poetry in the ongoing process of the illness of life. In this sense, poetry helps her to endure while at the same time offering a pattern of endurance to others, showing how one can "bravely" deal with suffering, abandonment, loneliness. Most frequently, the lonely woman can't handle things – and this constitutes the strength and truth of these poems. The reader soon begins to take her side, as he or she also sometimes feels helpless in the face of the unknown powers that decide his or her fate. Bargielska is familiar with that most oppressive power: the lack of love. With humour, she speaks of what it's like when someone ceases to love you, refuses to acknowledge the time spent together, refuses to recognise children had together. And so such poems would never have arisen if not for the shock, the experience of abandonment. The narrative voice in these poems is disoriented, struggling to reorganise her life, to create some system that would bind together its senses and significances. The narrator laughs, and at the same time weeps. She reaches for psychotropic medicines, seeks healing through psychiatry, but even that is not capable of returning to her a sense of security. One reads this book with a lump in the throat, even though one's lips again and again burst wide in laughter.

Karol Maliszewski
Translated by Charles S. Kraszewski



Nominated for the Silesius Wrocław Poetry Award

Justyna Bargielska
Wybór stand-upów [A Selection of Stand-ups]

Publisher: Biuro Literackie, 2023
 ISBN: 978-83-67706-18-6
 Number of pages: 40

Rights: Jakub Jakubik
jjakubik@biuroliterackie.pl

Book excerpt



© Martyna Niećko

Justyna Bargielska (b. 1977) is a poet and columnist for the magazines *Znak* and *Ruch Muzyczny*. Her work is distinguished by an original style, black humour and an unconventional approach to narration. She brought out her first collection of poems, *Dating Sessions*, in 2003. She has twice won the Gdynia Literary Prize, for her collection *Dwa fiaty* [Two Fiats] (2009) and then for her prose debut, *Obsoletki* (2010), which was also nominated for the Polityka Passport Award. Other nominations include: *Bach for my baby* (2012) for the Wisława Szymborska Poetry Award; *Dziecko z darów* [Child of Alms] (2019) for the Silesius Wrocław Poetry Award, and *Małe lisy* [Little Foxes] (2013) for the Nike Literary Award. Her most recent book of poetry, *Wybór stand-upów* [A Selection of Stand-ups] (2023), brought her another nomination for the Silesius Award. Her poetry has been translated into many languages, including English, German and Spanish.

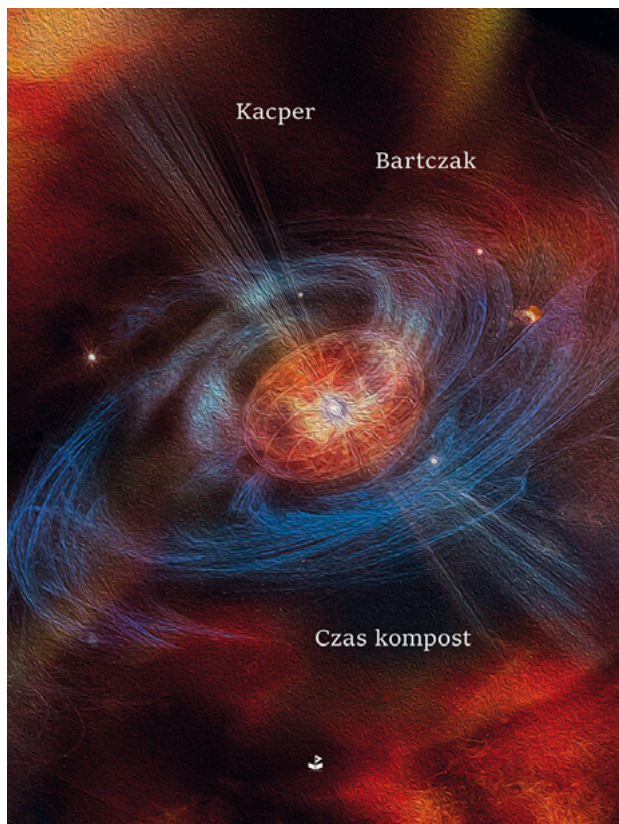
Time Compost

Poetic polemics with the Confessional tradition

Kacper Bartczak is a poet, translator, Americanist, literary scholar and critic. These broad interests also influence his work, which can undoubtedly be described as intellectual, ambitious poetry that dialogues with tradition. *Time Compost* is another book in the author's oeuvre in which two important objects of his interest appear. On the one hand, it is a fascination with the ways in which contemporary verse can refer to artificiality (hence the presence of plastic in Bartczak's poems, connecting him with many contemporary poets of the English language, such as Adam Dickinson), and on the other, attention devoted to the concept of organicity and the criteria of what is considered natural.

In *Time Compost*, the author enters into a polemic with the tradition of American Confessional poetry (including the recent Nobel Prize winner Louise Glück). Through acts of self-creation balancing on the border of confession, he takes part in the debate on the role and function of a poem. Although Bartczak is an author who takes poetry very seriously, seeing it as a laboratory for the most complicated problems of the world and language, his latest volume, broken up by prose poems, is not as dense as his earlier books. In *Time Compost*, the poet navigates the boundary between confession and self-creation, tests the buoyancy of autobiographical language, which adds linearity to his diction and makes the work more accessible. At the same time, Bartczak engages in fundamental disputes unconstrained by locality, exploring at turns both the discreet lyricism and the unnaturalness of poetic language.

Zuzanna Sala
Translated by Mark Tardi



Nominated for the Silesius Wrocław Poetry Award

Kacper Bartczak
Czas kompost [Time Compost]

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ISBN: 978-83-67706-10-0
Number of pages: 68

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jjakubik@biuroliterackie.pl

Book excerpt



© Martyna Niećko

Kacper Bartczak (b. 1972) is a poet, translator, critic and professor of American literature at the University of Łódź, and a two-time Fulbright recipient. He is the author of numerous books, including a monograph devoted to John Ashbery, whose poems he has translated, as well as a collection of essays *Świat nie scalony* [An Unintegrated World] (2009), distinguished with the Literatura na Świecie Award in the New Voice category. He has published eight volumes of poetry. His volume *Wiersze organiczne* [Organic Poems] (2015) was nominated for the Silesius Wrocław Poetry Award and the Gdynia Literary Prize. The poet's latest collection, *Czas kompost* [Time Compost] (2023), brought another nomination for the Silesius Award in 2024. His work is characterised by refined language, complex phonetic and semiotic games, and musical sensitivity.

Against the Cogs, Across the Sands of Thought

Tomasz Bąk might just be the most important voice of the generation born during the period of Poland's transition to liberal democracy. In his new book, he returns to themes and subjects central to his work.

Against the Cogs, Across the Sands of Thought is the eighth book of poems by Tomasz Bąk – an author who, over the years, has arguably managed to achieve the status of the most important voice of his generation (that is, roughly speaking, people born during the period of Poland's transition to democracy). The book sees Bąk return to themes that have been central to his work: the depressing absurdities of life under capitalism; the latter's unstable, crisis-prone nature; bullshit jobs, as well as the kinds of work that still manage to shape the world around us. (The poet's interest in the latter is clear from the very start: the book opens with a motto from Carl Sandburg, who serves throughout as a patron saint of sorts.) Bąk remains an insightful historical materialist: putting the relationship between *storytelling* and *explanation* at the heart of the book, he wants to draw our attention to the fact that today the latter is often omitted in favour of the former, and the fundamental structures that shape the world around us – and which so often remain entirely indifferent to our existence – are often made less clear or less visible by the incessant yarn-spinning. As he writes in the strongly programmatic eponymous poem of the book: “And when I direct my attention to the labour theory of value, / it is not so that I can understand the prices better, / but in order to give the world a form”. Bąk remains interested in the possibility of explaining the world – describing the truths that actually underlie it – rather than writing poems in which his readers will only see the mirror image of themselves.

The poet's voice in *Against the Cogs...* is stern and decisive, but this paradoxically allows for an attitude that is perhaps kinder and gentler than ever. In what might just be the most beautiful poem of the book, Bąk describes the superficially perfect life of an anonymous life coach in a manner that is understanding, even tender, but devoid of any tackiness or pretence.

Marta Koronkiewicz
Translated by Paweł Kaczmarski



Tomasz Bąk

Wbrew zębatkom, po myśli piasku

[Against the Cogs, Across the Sands of Thought]

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Number of pages: 44

Rights: Dawid Borucki

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Book excerpt



© Kinga Wójcik

Tomasz Bąk (b. 1991) is a poet and essayist; his books of poetry include *Kanada* (2011), for which he received the main prize in the Klemens Janicki Competition and was nominated for the Silesius Wrocław Poetry Award in the Best Debut category. His subsequent books were received just as enthusiastically, winning him several nominations for the Gdynia Literary Prize, a nomination for the Wisława Szymborska Poetry Award (*[beep] Generation*, 2017), as well as the Poznań Literary Award for *Utylizacja. Pęta miast* [Reprocessing: Encased by Cities] (2018), and the Literary Award of the Capital City of Warsaw for *O, tu jestem* [Oh, Here I Am] (2021). He was also nominated twice for the main prize of the Jacek Bierezin National Poetry Contest. He is known not just as an insightful listener of everyday life, sensitive to various registers of language, but also as a social commentator and critic.

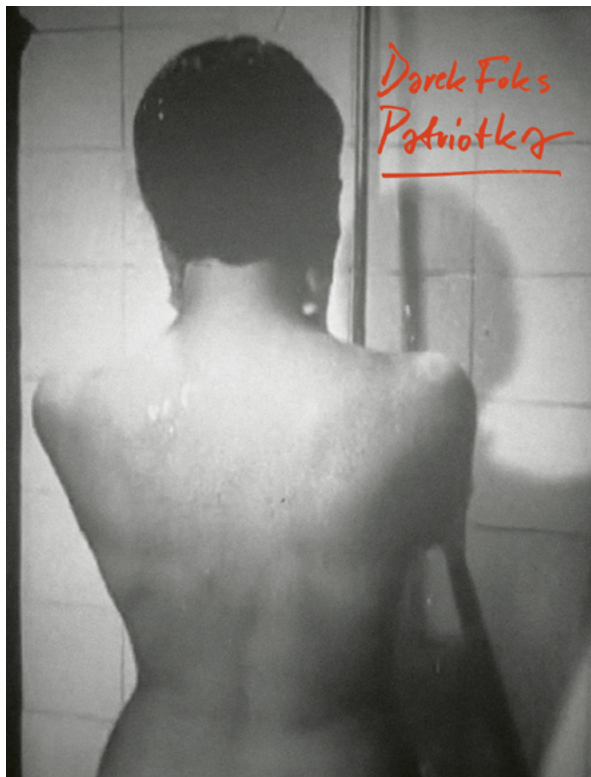
The She-Patriot

One of the most important living poets of the Polish language has written what is at once a collection of exquisitely composed love poems and a perverse statement on history as a type of discourse.

To say that Darek Foks's *The She-Patriot* is a collection of love poems seems both misleading and absolutely true: they are blunt, even vulgar in their eroticism, but still each and every time just undoubtedly *pretty*. Why, then, is it both misleading and true? Because as usual with Foks, to figure out what the author is *really, actually* talking about – through a series of tropes, allegories and mediations – is the main challenge in front of the reader. It cannot be avoided or postponed, but at the same time it offers, as a reward, plenty of readerly satisfaction and much, much more. The stakes are undoubtedly high, as the actual subject turns out to be (as is often the case with Foks) a certain set of issues and problems linked to contemporary discourses of collective historical memory and collective identities. Specific techniques, concepts and narrative devices employed by Foks all contribute to this overarching commentary. The male protagonist, for instance, is consistently portrayed as confident, even overconfident, and possessive; he's always performing a certain type of avarice, using cultural conventions both high- and lowbrow. His behaviour and gestures, however, are supposed to tell us something not about the situation as such, but about their ultimate roots. In this context it seems significant that the fundamental technique employed by Foks in *The She-Patriot* is a reversal, understood in a variety of ways: the poems in the book are often symmetrical or bracketed, contain their own mirror images, or unexpectedly turn any given scenario around.

Foks's new book might ultimately touch on the issues of history, collectivity and convention; however, it is also – and crucially – precisely what it seems to be at first glance: a collection of exceptionally well-written, formally precise, and yes, sometimes vulgar love poems.

Marta Koronkiewicz
Translated by Paweł Kaczmarski



Nominated for the Silesius Wrocław Poetry Award

Darek Foks
Patriotka [The She-Patriot]

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ISBN: 978-83-67433-00-6
Number of pages: 42

Rights: Dawid Borucki
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Book excerpt



© Darek Foks

Darek Foks (b. 1966) is a writer and poet, as well as a visual and film artist. He has worked as an editor for literary journals, including *Literatura na Świecie*. He has been involved in poetry since 1989 and has won, among others, the Silesius Wrocław Poetry Award for lifetime achievement. He was also nominated for the same award for specific collections of poems: *Sigmund Freud Museum* (2010), *Liceum* (2012) and *Wołyń Bourne'a* [Bourne's Volhynia] (2016); he was also nominated for the Nike Literary Award and the Gdynia Literary Prize for *Rozmowy z głuchym psem* [Conversations with a Deaf Dog] (2013). In 2015, he received the bronze Gloria Artis Medal for Merit to Culture. His best-known book, *Co robi łączniczka* [What Is the Messenger Girl Doing] (2005) – co-written with Zbigniew Libera – received numerous awards, prompted a series of exhibitions across the country (inspired by Libera's photomontages), and was reissued in 2022. The website Culture.pl called it “one of the most important books of the Polish culture of the last quarter of a century”.

Poltergeist

Poems of trauma and loss, which help the author deal with mourning. Once more, it's imperative to trust reality, and light, which is on the side of the living.

To look on through the eyes of one's dead friend, to see her often among the living and to continually hear her voice – this, in short, is the content of the newest volume of poetry by Urszula Honek, entitled *Poltergeist*. It would not be much of an exaggeration to classify it as a collection of laments. These poems support the illusion of the continued existence of the absent girl. They do not allow her to pass on, reanimating a life that has already passed away, inscribing the silhouette of the dead woman in the “here and now”. “I want to think of her as living” is transformed into “I’ll write of her as if she were alive”. This particular hyper-sensitivity opens the consciousness to what occurs in the crevasse between life and death, spreading wider this basic, ontological frontier. Sometimes it disappears, and shadowy forms circulate between the worlds, which interpenetrate one another. The narrator observes her sleeping husband, trying to ascertain what side of the border he’s on. Fortunately, he’s still alive. But a shadow of uncertainty falls upon everything. It is this that determines the unusual, metaphysical atmosphere of the poems, which is impregnated by considerations on how the world has changed following the passing of her friend. Something obvious and foreseeable was transformed into a great unknown, a mystery, the wobbly being of which had to be firmed up again. The phrase “since she’s been gone” is repeated again and again, and divides life into two stages. In the first, ghosts were only found in horror films, while in the second, they penetrate reality, become visible, can be found at the reach of one’s hand, and “lights are burning in the house, though no hand has turned them on”. The book ends in prose pieces which deepen the mood of otherworldliness. Their composition allows for a crossing over into a brighter side, a completion of mourning, a farewell to the dead.

Karol Maliszewski
Translated by Charles S. Kraszewski



Author nominated for the International Booker Prize for her collection of short stories

Urszula Honek
Poltergeist

Publisher: Warstwy, 2023
ISBN: 978-83-67186-89-6
Number of pages: 48

Rights: Ireneusz Grin
sekretariat@literatura.wroclaw.pl

Book excerpt



© Dominik Musiałek

Urszula Honek (b. 1987) is a poet and prose writer. She melds a laconic style with sensuality and onirism. She has brought out several tomes of poetry: *Sporysz* [Ergot] (2015), *Pod wezwaniem* [Under the Invocation] (2018), *Zimowanie* [Hibernation] (2021) and *Poltergeist* (2024). She debuted as an author of short stories in 2022 with the volume *Białe noce* [White Nights], which won her the Conrad Prize, the Kościelski Prize, and nominations for the Polityka Passport Award, the International Booker Prize (in the translation of Kate Webster) and the Grand Continent Prize. She was also honoured for her creative work by the UNESCO Kraków City of Literature Award, and has been nominated for the Gdynia Literary Prize and the Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński Orpheus Award.

daughters

A romantic ballad about domestic violence

Kamila Janiak has followed an ambiguous but also consistent path as a poet. From non-linear, angry early volumes (published since 2007), to a diction that is softened but still meticulously navigates difficult emotions. Her latest collection, entitled *daughters*, was published two years after *love*, which tells the story of postpartum depression, and is, in a sense, a continuation of the previous book. However, it is not – contrary to what one might expect – confessional poetry. In her latest volumes, Janiak deals with the experience of motherhood and the institution of the family, but she tries to abstract from the contingency of individual experience. *daughters* is above all a poetic study of domestic violence, not turning its gaze away from the most difficult and brutal images.

The poet decides to do something unusual – to harness the aesthetics of the romantic ballad for a story about abuse and oppression. In this way, rhythmic repetitions, the melody of songs and the angst characteristic of folk legends (so prevalent in the tradition to which Janiak refers) become a vehicle for a story about suffering and poverty. The distance that appears as a result of the clash between the magical atmosphere and almost fairy-tale mood imposed by the genre coupled with the naturalistic brutality of the described topic only intensifies the reader's dread. In this sense, *daughters* is a poetic horror, emphasising that the most terrifying things are happening beside us.

Zuzanna Sala
Translated by Mark Tardi



Kamila Janiak
córy [daughters]

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 Number of pages: 64

Rights: Ireneusz Grin
sekretariat@literatura.wroclaw.pl

Book excerpt



© Kamila Janiak

Kamila Janiak (b. 1984) is a poet and vocalist, also known under the pseudonym Daisy Kowalsky, who has performed in bands of various styles, from electro-industrial Das Moon to heavy folk Delira & Kompany. Her poetic work is equally diverse – direct, drawing from punk-rock rebellion, and at the same time being an expression of the author's sensitivity, sometimes melancholic. After her debut volume *Frajerom Śmierć i inne historie* [Death to Suckers and Other Stories] (2007), she published, among others, the books *Zwęglona jantar* [Charred Jantar] (2016), *Wiersze przeciwko ludzkości* [Poems Against Humanity] (2018) – for which she won the Silesius Wrocław Poetry Award and was nominated for the Wisława Szymborska Poetry Award – *zakaz rozmów z osobami nieobecnymi fizycznie* [no talking to physically absent people] (2020), for which she again won the Silesius Award. Her collection of poems, *miłość* [love] (2022), was once again nominated for the two above-mentioned awards, as well as for the Literary Award of the Capital City of Warsaw.

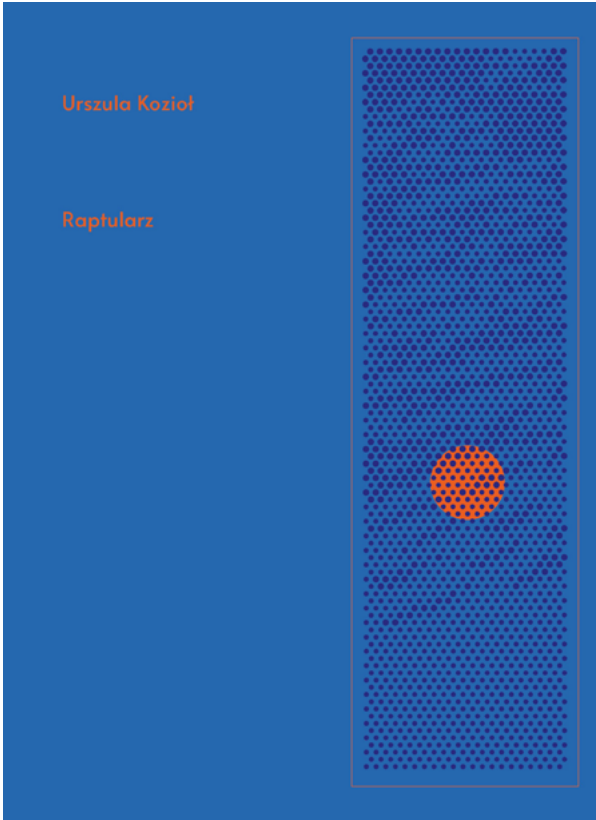
Journal

A summation of the poet's poetic and life journey. A collection of poems that combine the anguish of existence with the delight of the world.

In her ninety-fourth year, Urszula Kozioł remains creatively active. Her new volumes published over the last few years by Wydawnictwo Literackie, such as *Klangor* [Clangour], *Ucieczki* [Escapes], *Znikopis* [Disappearscript], *Momenty* [Moments], have above all been meditations on ageing and non-existence. Each of these poems was written as if it were to be her last. *Journal* is a notebook made up of fragments of her own creativity, a sort of personal anthology in which key moments can be found: her one-poem debut in 1956, following hard upon a political thaw that put an end to the Stalinist period, the politically tense year of 1968, and personal events, such as the death of her husband, which for the poet meant the end of any desire of love or closeness.

A friend of Wisława Szymborska, Kozioł has received many awards for her poetry, including international awards. Her work has been translated into many languages. Always having been curious about the world, she is widely-travelled. Until very recently, she was the literary editor of the Wrocław monthly *Odra*. Her later volumes were written in a very frugal style; the poems are precise, philosophically speaking, but also raw, sometimes even brutal, for example: when she writes of her battles against memory lapses. *Journal* reminds us of the fact that Kozioł introduced a lyricism, folk rhythms and an unforgettable grace in phrasing into the sparse, rational diction of Polish poetry following 1956. Here, too, we find the attempt at writing a final verse, a verse-epistle, which the poet addresses to her "imaginary lover". Written in prose... The last poems of poets often constitute an attempt at superseding their own style. Kozioł has determined to toss nothing away.

Anna Nasiłowska
Translated by Charles S. Kraszewski



Winner of the Odra Magazine
Award 2024 / Nominated for
the Nike Literary Award

Urszula Kozioł
Raptularz [Journal]

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Wydawniczy, 2023
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w.mikolajewska@piw.pl

Book excerpt



© Urszula Kozioł

Urszula Kozioł (b. 1931) is a poet and writer, a representative of the *Współczesność* (Contemporaneity) generation of artists, to which belong such persons essential to Polish culture as Miron Białoszewski, Halina Poświatowska and the film director Andrzej Wajda. She debuted in 1953 in the newspaper *Gazeta Robotnicza* and has also collaborated with the magazines *Odra*, *Tygodnik Kulturalny* and *Poezja*. She has published over twenty volumes of poetry, collections of short stories and journalism, as well as dramatic works. Over the course of her long literary career she has been honoured many times for individual volumes as well as her life's work (for example, the Silesius Wrocław Poetry Award); she has also been presented with many commendations awarded by the Republic of Poland, among which, a gold Gloria Artis Medal for Merit to Culture (2014). Her poems have been translated into English, French, German and Serbian, among others.

Play Camp

Sorrow which is to sing is intertwined here with derision and irony. And what was supposed to sing, chokes and switches to a raw, dry monologue.

Despite starting her new collection *Play Camp* with the momentous motto from Ezra Pound, which eloquently describes an attempt at resistance, Justyna Kulikowska's poems don't "seek praise", they are far from posturing or showing off, instead they focus on the issue at hand and the style. The issue is not obvious – for some it might be freedom, for others – irony, for some others still – a game of quoting and referencing. Kulikowska has created a synthesis of these values, since by speaking about issues of social importance, of things that irritate her, she happily tries on and discards – not without irony – the forms she encountered in culture, in the "play camp" of poetic tradition. This time her poetry is less rebellious, has less fury, and more melancholy and regret. Which does not mean the poet has dropped the contesting element. Quite the opposite, she finds a new, local, "Podlasie melody" for it. She uses its rhythms to talk about killed animals (for example, the chickens used for "Podlasie pâté"), about excluded existences, about women pushed aside to the margins of historical memory, about familiar nationalism and clericalism. The accusatory gist of the poems is highlighted and at the same time – paradoxically – softened by references to Pound, Auden and Williams. From this melting pot, in which she scathingly brings together the embarrassingly folksy with the glamorously European, is the source of a flow of verbal slime, lacking in self-confidence but still strong, even when the author doubts in causative power of yet another "scrappy attempt at description". However, the reader does not doubt, they let themselves be carried away by this "deceptive current" (similar to the current of the Narew River) of the poem, decidedly changing the perspective on the ambiguous, morally questionable modernity.

Karol Maliszewski
Translated by Anna Błasiak



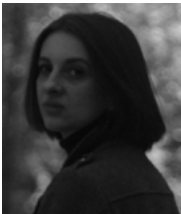
**Winner of the Literary Award
of the Capital City of Warsaw
2024 / Nominated for the
Wrocław Silesius Poetry Award**

Justyna Kulikowska
Obóz zabaw [Play Camp]

Publisher: WBPiCAK, 2023
ISBN: 978-83-67433-04-4
Number of pages: 48

Rights: Dawid Borucki
dawid.borucki@wbp.poznan.pl

Book excerpt



© Irek Bednorz

Justyna Kulikowska (b. 1993) is a poet, author of four poetry collections, popular among readers and enthusiastically received by critics. Her first volume *Hejt i inne bangery* [Hate and Other Bangers] (2018) won the Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna Prize for Best Debut, *Tab_s* (2020) was longlisted for the Nike Literary Award and the Gdynia Literary Prize. A year later she won the Gdynia Literary Prize for *gift. z Podlasia* [gift. from Podlasie] (2021). *Obóz zabaw* [Play Camp] (2023) was nominated for the Poznań Literary Award and the Literary Award of the Capital City of Warsaw. Kulikowska is valued for discussing the rights of marginalised people in her writing.

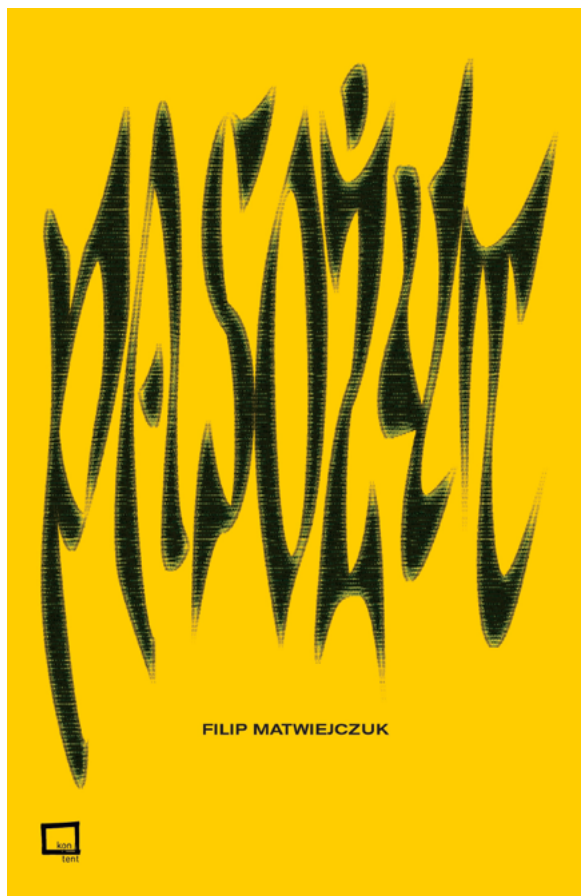
Parasite

In order to pin down a very specific but elusive way of thinking and being – one that remains inextricably linked to the experience of unemployment – Filip Matwiejczuk writes multi-layered and convincingly strange poems.

Filip Matwiejczuk's *Pasożyt* [Parasite] is the second part of an intended trilogy of poetry books describing the process of “achieving mental and financial stability”. Just like the poet's first book, *Różaglon*, the new collection seeks to describe above all a certain way of thinking or being in the world; an abstract way, inherently difficult to pin down, but one characterised by a particular sense of drift – disorganisation, suspension, non-belonging – that for Matwiejczuk is inextricably linked to the experience of unemployment. This central theme or experience is discussed through a series of scenes and short narratives that may seem completely random or disconnected at first; yes, one story sees four protagonists go on a space expedition to a moon made entirely of cheese – but of course, it is not at all about anyone going on a space expedition to a moon made of cheese. Rather, narratives like these are meant to evoke a certain way of thinking, to invoke a set of impressions that constitute the proper subject of the poem.

The book is thus composed of short poems, prose excerpts and quotes, which together form something like a single long poem. It is ostensibly autotelic, but ultimately guides its readers very precisely to that state of being or a way of thinking that the poet is really concerned with; at the end of the day, the focus is not on the meta-literary commentary itself, but on its source or cause. Matwiejczuk develops this highly original and ambitious poetic technique while drawing primarily from Austrian literature, although other possible sources include poets such as Blaise Cendrars.

Marta Koronkiewicz
Translated by Paweł Kaczmarski



Filip Matwiejczuk
Pasożyt [Parasite]

Publisher: Kontent, 2023
ISBN: 978-83-954235-9-8
Number of pages: 68

Rights: Kontent
fundacja@kontent.net.pl

Book excerpt



© Magdalena Noga

Filip Matwiejczuk (b. 1996) is a poet, editor and literary critic associated with magazines such as *Kontent*, *Wizje*, *Mały Format* and *Dwutygodnik*. He received an honourable mention in the Tymoteusz Karpowicz Literary Review Competition. In 2020, he published his first book of poetry, *Różaglon*, for which he received – among others – the Kraków UNESCO City of Literature Award and an honourable mention in the Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna Award. Well received in the poetry scene, *Różaglon* has received numerous accolades as a strong expression of “the current social moods” (according to the *KONTENT* quarterly) that does not retort to played-out patterns and uses a rich imagination.

Out of Reach

Mirka Szychowiak's poems are like little short stories. They relay what one went through and what one remembered. What memory omits and what it keeps, so that it hurts or comforts.

This might be Mirka Szychowiak's saddest poetry collection, but one in which – paradoxically – despair brings hope. The poet, against all odds, believes in the human being and their ability to defy evil. Dark poems are intertwined with light ones and the painful account balance of these reckonings is, I think, positive. From a painful memory one fishes out the fragments that strengthen the feeling of sense, that make the reader more sensitive and set the voice – in effect they make up the human being that the poet describes, the one she – that's her moral claim – wants to see. In the end, these fragments prevail, though they are also balanced with images of human weakness, narrow-mindedness and cruelty. The protagonist is worried that those images increase in number, that they unceremoniously take over the memory and due to that “there is less and less space for beauty and less strength for vendetta”. This book is focused on memory and its work, it answers basic questions: why do we obsessively remember one particular thing (and here another anecdote pops up, another snippet of a story) and not something else, and why that “something else” is often out of reach. Szychowiak is a master of poetic narration which brings an important, formative life event to the fore. And not just from one's own life, but first and foremost from other people's lives, often these are excluded, dismissed, defeated people. Not to compassionately lament or pity them, but to give them a voice, show them from a better perspective, remember what they used to be like before they went down, fell by the wayside, stopped counting in the game. Her poems' seductive power is unclear. They probably lead us to the source of human communality, to some species-specific empathy and high sensitivity. That's the reason for the extraordinary feeling one has after reading this book – it cleanses, forces one to stop, to temporarily smother the tendency to be petty, mean and ill-willed towards others.

Karol Maliszewski
Translated by Anna Błasiak



Mirka Szychowiak
Poza zasięgiem [Out of Reach]

Publisher: Anagram, 2024
 ISBN: 978-83-67261-46-3
 Number of pages: 48

Rights: Anagram
anagram@adres.pl

Book excerpt



© Tomasz Zacharow

Mirka Szychowiak (b. 1956) is a poet and prose writer, nominated, among others, for the Nike Literary Award for her volume *Jeszcze się tu pokręcę* [I'll Stick Around for a Bit] (2010) and the Wisława Szymborska Award for *Uwaga, obiekt monitorowany* [Attention, Under Surveillance] (2020). She won the Grand Prix of the 15th National Poetry Competition in 2010 and the main prize of the 18th National Literary Competition in 2011. Her debut poetry collection was *Człap story* [Waddle Story] (2005) and her debut prose book was the short story collection *Gniazdozbiór* [Nestellation] (2015). In 2015, she was a finalist in the International Short Story Festival.

Garadobedaro

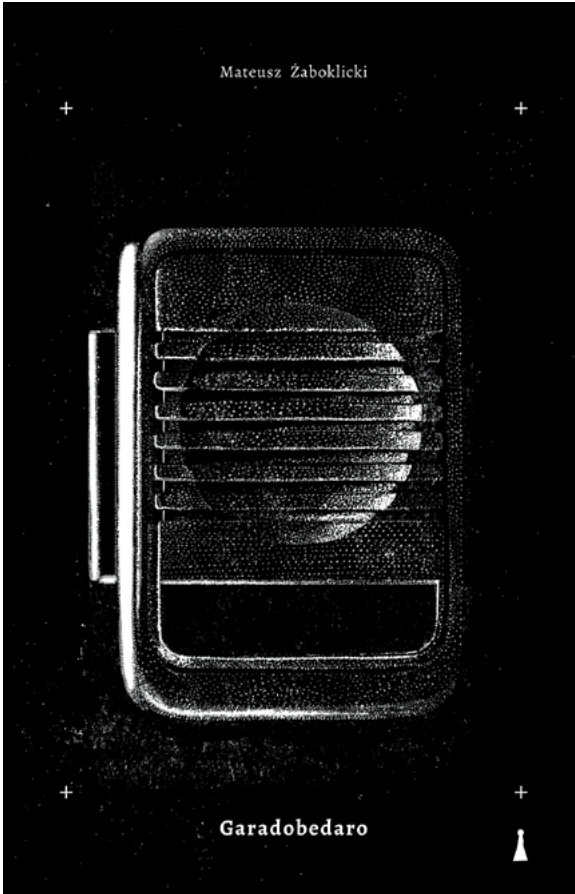
Taking a personal experience of trauma as its starting point, Mateusz Żaboklicki's *Garadobedaro* is ultimately much more interested in more fundamental issues, as it offers a formally stunning meditation on the relationship between memory and narrative.

Mateusz Żaboklicki's *Garadobedaro* is a complex, formally stunning, and genuinely moving book-length poem whose starting point – which is not to say, its actual or only subject – is the death of a father. On a certain superficial level, the book is an attempt at an impossible task, which is the taming of this traumatic experience – not even so much through the narrative itself, but by framing the memories in a poetic form; a kind of reining in of memories through the shape of a concrete poem.

Ultimately, however, Żaboklicki is not that interested in poetry as a possible working through of trauma – a popular and played-out trope. Instead, he offers a more profound reflection on memory and its evasions, on what one actually remembers when one does not want to remember what one remembers in reality. The poet is a vigilant and exceptionally perceptive observer of all the narrative devices we consciously and unconsciously employ when actively tapping into our memories. Even *Garadobedaro*'s brilliant humour contributes to this overarching theme: jokes appear here as a means of hiding or covering up the actual contents of the narrative, and as such are invariably tainted with a kind of horror that is difficult to exactly pin down. Żaboklicki's poems remain moving not *in spite* of their wittiness, but precisely because of it.

The book's conceptual ingenuity and formal precision both stand out; Żaboklicki works mostly with a lengthy, monologue-like form, but weaves into it bits and pieces organised according to specific genres and conversions (the sestina, the pantoum), all the time experimenting with the metre. There is a veritable plethora of intriguing ideas here – and all of them, in a very intentional way, come together to form a single meaningful and moving totality.

Marta Koronkiewicz
Translated by Paweł Kaczmarski



Mateusz Żaboklicki
Garadobedaro

Publisher: Nisza, 2024
ISBN: 978-83-66599-78-9
Number of pages: 68

Rights: Mateusz Żaboklicki
maboklicki@gmail.com

Book excerpt



© Mateusz Żaboklicki

Mateusz Żaboklicki (b. 1991) is a poet and photographer, winner of the Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna Award for Best Debut for his poetry book *Nucić* [Hum] (2021). The draft version of the book won him the Special Prize and Audience Prize at the 25th Jacek Bierezin National Poetry Contest. Since his first book, Żaboklicki has been lauded for his unique language and its ability to make use of various literary traditions. The poet's second book, *Letnisko* [Summerhouse] (2023) was nominated for the Gdynia Literary Prize; here, drawing upon classical forms such as the Polish alexandrine, Żaboklicki substitutes the contemporary allotment for a *Pan Tadeusz*-style manor house of old nobility.

Collected Poems (1931–1944)

Zuzanna Ginczanka is a distinct voice in Polish literature. Her biography could be summed up in three words: a Jew, a woman, a poet.

“Like Atlas I carry my own sky proudly on my shoulders,” Zuzanna Ginczanka writes in her early poem “Joyful Mythology”. This declaration seems to contain the premonition of heroism which will accompany her on her search for her own way.

Collected Poems (1931–1944) is yet another edition of Ginczanka’s poetry put together by the expert on her writing, Izolda Kiec. The book contains all known verse written by Ginczanka, both the lyric poems and satires, presented in chronological order. The edition is enhanced by the addition of recently unearthed, unpublished pieces, as Ginczanka’s output is still in the process of being discovered and therefore her opus remains open. It presents the fascinating pursuit of a native language and her own identity. Ginczanka was born in a Russian-speaking family and her choice of Polish was significant, as was the fact that she craved to become a Polish poet. This gesture of assimilation and emancipation also allowed her to go further – to express herself, as well as the experience of the feminine “I”, in this new language, with a boldly shown biological realm of corporeality. Key in this context is her volume *O centaurach* [About the Centaurs] with references to myths and tradition, the only volume published while Ginczanka was still alive. The feminine “I”, full of vitality, but also melancholy, in time gains a keener historical awareness. In the thickening political atmosphere of the 1930s, Ginczanka creates poems with catastrophic motifs, and later, after the outbreak of war, in 1942, she writes an untitled poem (***) “Non omnis moriar”), full of bitterness, in which she severs the last link to the homeland of her language where she never wanted to feel like a stranger, to be the Other.

Karol Alicznowicz
Translated by Anna Błasiak



Author published in the US,
France and Israel, among others

Zuzanna Ginczanka
Poezje zebrane (1931-1944) [Collected
Poems (1931-1944)]

Publisher: Marginesy, 2019
ISBN: 978-83-66335-41-7
Number of pages: 464

Rights: Anna Rakoczy
a.rakoczy@marginesy.com.pl

Book excerpt

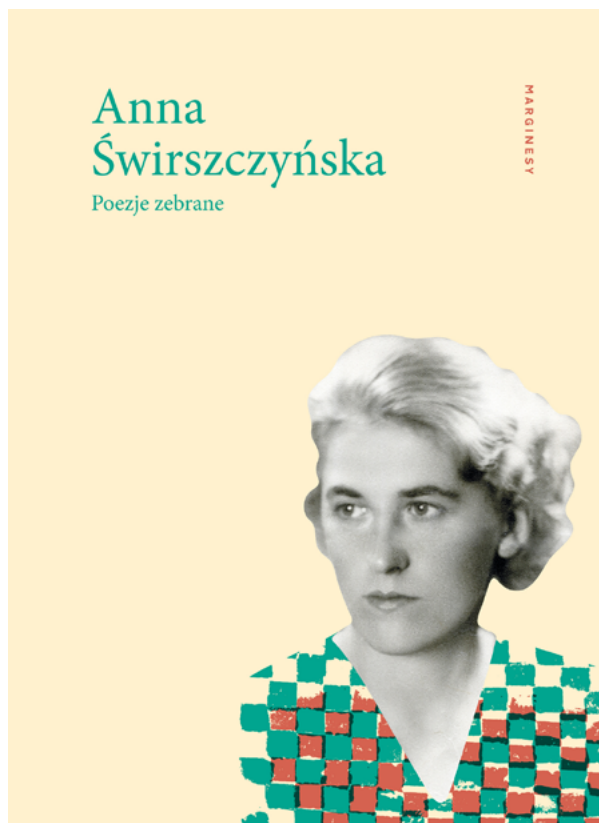
Zuzanna Ginczanka, born Zuzanna Polina Gincburg (1917–1944), was a poet of Jewish origin born in Kyiv, associated with the Skamander literary circle. She was friends with Julian Tuwim, who encouraged her to take up a poetic career. She wrote verse from early childhood and started collaborating with the literary magazine *Wiadomości Literackie* as early as in 1935. *O centaurach* [About the Centaurs] (1936) was her debut collection and the only volume of poetry published in her life. She was shot dead in 1944 in a concentration camp. Her writing – incredibly sensual, full of optimism, bravely discussing themes related to feminism – is continuously met with the interest of both readers and researchers; it also inspires other artists, for example, it provided inspiration for numerous musical interpretations (e.g. by Lena Piękniewska or Szymon Podwin). Ginczanka's poems have been translated, among others, into English and Hebrew.

Collected Poems

Anna Świrszczyńska is considered an innovator of poetic language in Poland. Her talent was noted and appreciated by Czesław Miłosz.

Jestem baba [I Am a Hag], her famous book from 1972, helped change the course of Polish literature and made the author one of its most significant poets. No one had written about female experience so openly and uncompromisingly before. The collection immediately caught the attention of readers and critics surprised by this literary *volte-face*. Świrszczyńska, previously known mainly as a children's author (and less so as a poet and playwright), had not been thought of as belonging among the top-tier authors. Her volume *Collected Poems* allows us to follow the long path she travelled from her debut *Wiersze i proza* [Poems and Prose] to the posthumous collection *Cierpienie i szczęście* [Suffering and Happiness]. The book features all the poems from the volumes published between 1938 and 1985 (and work found among her papers after her death), as well as librettos and song lyrics. The evolution of the poet's style consisted of embracing conciseness and almost completely rejecting figurative speech, while creating a psychologically credible "corporeal" lyrical "I" – a woman speaking about her marital, maternal and sexual experiences, as well as about male violence and oppression in the world of stereotypically perceived gender roles. These themes and subjects, first introduced in the collection *Wiatr* [Wind], then placed front and centre in *Jestem baba* [I Am a Hag], and explored further in the volume *Szczęśliwa jak psi ogon* [Happy as a Dog's Tail], allowed Świrszczyńska's poems to be read in the context of feminism. Her poetic chronicle of the Warsaw Uprising, *Budowałam barykadę* [Building the Barricade], also caused a stir, presenting the traumatic experiences of that time through the eyes of a woman (Świrszczyńska served as a nurse). The poet's last volume, *Cierpienie i szczęście* [Suffering and Happiness], addressed issues such as old age, suffering and happiness. And the very much alive "haggish" corporeality.

Karol Alichnowicz
Translated by Piotr Florczyk



Anna Świrszczyńska
Poezje zebrane [Collected Poems]

Publisher: Marginesy, 2023
 ISBN: 978-83-67790-98-7
 Number of pages: 928

Rights: Anna Rakoczy
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Book excerpt

Anna Świrszczyńska (1909–1984) was a poet, prose writer and playwright, as well as an editor and author of works for children. Socially engaged, she took part in the Warsaw Uprising as a nurse. She debuted in 1934 when her poem “Południe” [Noon] appeared in the magazine *Wiadomości Literackie* and won the top prize in the Young Poets Competition. In 1936, she self-published her first volume *Wiersze i proza* [Poems and Prose]. Although she remained active in the literary community, it took her twenty years to publish her next book, *Liryki zebrane* [Collected Lyrics]. The volume marked a visible change in her aesthetics, constituting a record of her search for a language to describe her wartime experiences. The 1972 collection *Jestem baba* [I Am a Hag] remains an important point of reference for Polish feminist poetry today. Awarded the Knight’s Cross and the Officer’s Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta, the Commission of National Education Medal, she also received, among other honours, the City of Kraków Award for her work on behalf of the arts. Czesław Miłosz named her among the most outstanding figures of contemporary Polish literature.

The Polish Book Institute

The Polish Book Institute is a national institution established by the Polish Ministry of Culture. It has been open in Kraków since January 2004. The Book Institute's basic aims are to influence the reading public and to popularise books and reading within Poland, as well as to promote Polish literature worldwide. These goals are accomplished through:

- the promotion of the best Polish books and their authors
- the organisation of working visits and residencies for translators and foreign publishers
- increasing the number of translations from Polish into foreign languages with the help of the ©POLAND Translation Programme and Sample Translations ©POLAND
- making information on Polish books and the Polish publishing market accessible to foreign consumers

The Book Institute promotes Polish books by organising literary programmes at international book fairs, appearances by Polish writers at literary festivals, and participating in many other programmes designed to promote Polish culture worldwide. Besides its annual catalogue, *New Books from Poland*, the Book Institute also publishes cultural journals dealing with literature and theatre (*Akcent*, *Dialog*, *Literatura na świecie*, *Nowe Książki*, *Odra*, *Teatr*, *Teatr Lalek*, *Twórczość* and *Topos*).

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Selected Polish Book Institute Programmes:

THE ©POLAND TRANSLATION PROGRAMME

The Book Institute provides financial support for publishers aiming to publish works of Polish literature in foreign-language translations. Since 1999, the ©POLAND Translation Programme has provided over three thousand grants for translations into fifty different languages published in sixty-three countries. The Book Institute can help cover the costs of publishing the following types of works:

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- non-fiction (literary reportage, biography, memoirs, essays)
- historical works (essays and popular history, barring specialist and academic works)
- literature for children and young people
- comics

The financial contribution of the Book Institute is designed to support the publication costs of translation, copyright licensing and printing.

For further information please contact: copyrightpoland@bookinstitute.pl

SAMPLE TRANSLATIONS ©POLAND

The aim of this programme is to encourage translators to present Polish books to foreign publishers. Grants under the programme cover up to twenty pages of translation. The translator must have published a minimum of one translation in book form before submitting an application.

Full information on our programmes, including a list of grants awarded to date and a funding application form, can be found on the Book Institute's website, bookinstitute.pl.

For further information please contact: sample@bookinstitute.pl

THE TRANSATLANTYK PRIZE

This prize has been awarded annually by the Book Institute since 2005 to outstanding ambassadors of Polish literature abroad. It provides a focal point for translators of Polish literature and its promoters (publishers, literary critics, academics and organisers of cultural events). The prize is worth € 10,000. Recent winners:

- 2024 Vera Verdiani, Abel Murcia
2023 Hatif Janabi
2022 Silvano De Fanti

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- 2024 Alissa Valles, for *Firebird* by Zuzanna Ginczanka
2023 Anna Zaranko, for *The Peasants* by Władysław Reymont
2022 Jennifer Croft, for *The Books of Jacob* by Olga Tokarczuk

THE TRANSLATORS' COLLEGIUM

This programme provides study visits for translators of Polish literature. During their residency, which takes place in Kraków or Warsaw, the translators are provided with suitable conditions for their work and assistance with their translations. The college has been active since 2006.

For further information please contact: collegium@bookinstitute.pl

THE WORLD CONGRESS OF TRANSLATORS OF POLISH LITERATURE

Organised every four years since 2005, gathers around two hundred and fifty translators from all over the world. Meetings are arranged with writers, critics and academics. The Congress provides an opportunity to find out more about Polish literature, to meet colleagues from other countries and to exchange information, ideas and opinions.

SEMINARS FOR FOREIGN PUBLISHERS

Since 2006, the Book Institute has invited groups of publishers from various countries to Kraków to show them what Polish literature has to offer. During the study visit they attend meetings with writers, publishers and critics.

New Books from Poland – Poetry
2024

Selected by: Przemysław Czapliński, Bernadetta Darska, Anna Kałuża,
Marta Koronkiewicz, Zofia Król, Anna Nasiłowska, Zuzanna Sala,
Katarzyna Trzeciak

Texts by: Karol Alichnowicz, Marta Koronkiewicz, Karol Maliszewski,
Anna Nasiłowska, Zuzanna Sala

Translated by: Anna Błasiak, Alex Braslavsky, Piotr Florczyk, Paweł
Kaczmarek, Charles S. Kraszewski, Rod Mengham, Mark Tardi

Edited by Jakub Pacześniak
English text edited by Richard Greenhill
Design by Pilar Rojo
Pre-flight process by Andrzej Karlik
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