

New
Books
from
Poland

2024

BOOK INSTITUTE



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Poland

2024



Introduction

On behalf of the Polish Book Institute, we are pleased to present our new catalogue featuring the latest Polish prose. Here you'll find a set of outstanding books, which according to the experts whom we invited to help us compile it, are the best publications to have appeared in Poland in 2023 and 2024.

You'll find great variety in terms of style, subject matter and genre, which makes it impossible to place each of these books in the same category. But all of them, including the most experimental in form or those that go deep into local history, have one vital characteristic – in every case, they have an individual, personal or special story to tell, which is presented in a way that's accessible for people rooted in another language and another culture. In other words, these books do not just belong to Polish literature but to world literature too – they can cross its borders easily, without losing their linguistic and cultural distinctiveness in the process.

Here you will find stories about:

- rebellion against an enforced political and social reality, and also an alternative form of life that provides a source of solid resistance;
- love, loss, memory and a sense of guilt that have a profound effect on how one relates to oneself and others;
- a future challenge that has to be met if the world is to go on existing;
- a past history that determines the lives of successive generations and maps out their destiny;
- how to be reconciled with the past and how to reshape it in order to stop it from haunting us, and to free the youngest generation from its lethal grip;
- some minor, seemingly insignificant experiences that push individuals or entire communities down the branch lines of time, where only a sham existence is possible;
- the need for understanding between generations as a way of enabling them not only to share reality but also to co-create it;
- crossing boundaries, both external and internal;
- the sources of various forms of hate, which many people express as a way of communicating with the world;
- institutions that were supposed to help the weakest and neediest but turned out to be part of the system of oppression;

- the shame we run away from, and how in trying to break free of our own family or environment we merely deepen the individual and collective crisis.

It would take a long time to list all the major themes that appear in the publications featured here, but the primary quality that determines their excellence is their unique and original way of presenting the experience in question, the sensitivity and inventiveness of each individual author (their open-mindedness, as well as their capacity to be attentive and inquiring), and the inimitable yet also inclusive nature of the language used in these works. Thanks to the books we have chosen – each individually and taken as a whole – the worlds in which we live and function become easier to understand, and as a result more capacious and more hospitable.

And that's exactly what the latest Polish prose is like.

Grzegorz Jankowicz
Director of the Book Institute

Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones

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The Body of the Steelworks

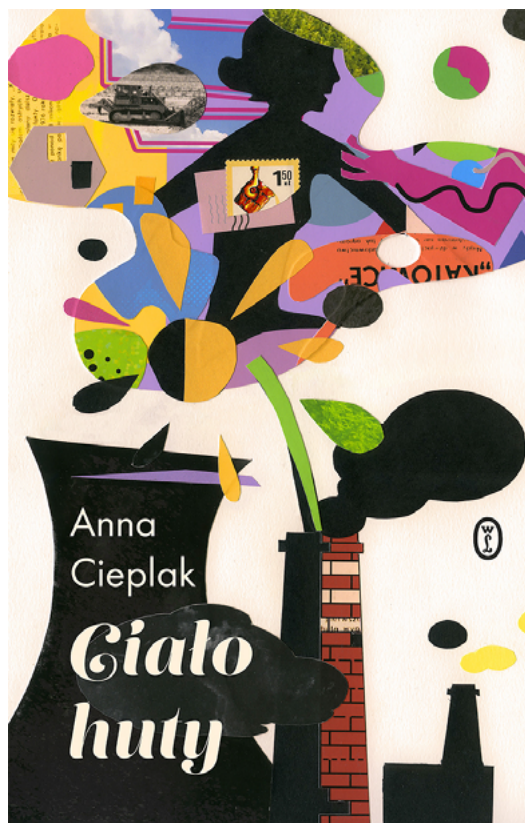
A literary mosaic in which the past intersects with the personal, social and ecological struggles of the heroine, who is looking for meaning and justice

The Body of the Steelworks is an ambitious novel about the materiality of modernity. The author approaches this materiality from the perspectives of production, ecology and gender, and sets her work in a specific context: the action starts in the 1970s, when the construction of the Katowice Steelworks, a huge metallurgical plant in southern Poland, begins.

Cieplak narrates her industrial epic from the point of view of two generations. The first took part in the construction and starting up of the factory, while members of the second work far away from the steelworks. What unites them is their refusal to agree to the belittling of the role of the body in modern history. Those of the older generation felt they were participating in a historic advancement of their country and society. They believed that industrialisation would liberate matter, transforming destruction into energy. Those of the younger generation judge the steelworks not in terms of productivity but in terms of social value. They look to the body of the steelworks for ideas to avoid the inequalities of the past. One dark page in the history of the plant was the forcing of women into sex and into keeping the rapes secret – but the daughters of those female factory workers belong to a culture where instances of harassment are reported immediately. Human violence against the ecosystem also ceases to be invisible. In other words, the second generation is looking for social and ecological justice – but it's not able to connect individual stories into a new whole.

The Body of the Steelworks argues that if the new generation wants to make the world differently, it has to tell the story of modernisation anew.

Przemysław Czapliński
Translated by Eliza Marciniak



Winner of numerous literary awards

Anna Cieplak
Ciało huty [The Body of the Steelworks]

Publisher: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2023
ISBN: 978-83-08-08127-3
Number of pages: 344

Rights: Joanna Dąbrowska
j.dabrowska@wydawnictwoliterackie.pl

Rights sold to: Spain

Book excerpt



© Mateusz Skwarczek

Anna Cieplak (b. 1988) is a writer, urban activist, cultural project coordinator and the winner of numerous awards, as well as one of the most distinctive authors of her generation. She has won the Witold Gombrowicz Literary Prize and the Conrad Award for the best debut, among other prizes, in addition to having been nominated for the Gdynia Literary Prize, the Polityka Passport Award, the Nike Literary Award and the European Union Prize for Literature. In 2016, her novel *Clean It Up* served as the basis for the film *Love Tasting*. Critics have praised Cieplak for reviving the tradition of young-adult “issue” novels in the spirit of Krystyna Siesicka and for portraying contemporary social realities. When asked about her creative method by journalists from Wirtualna Polska, she explained: “I am close to the things I write about. They concern me directly, and I have written a story about people whose characteristics seemed interesting and familiar to me.”

Two Motion Novels

A contemporary twist on the road novel tradition

Mateusz Górniak's latest book is a duology of intertwined mini-novels, both focusing on the theme of motion. In the first – titled *Chata, taka z drewna* [A Cottage of the Wooden Kind] – we follow our unnamed Hero on his journey through adolescence and early adulthood. This narrative sprint through life allows the author to swiftly (though not superficially!) examine issues related to work, mental health, romantic relationships and the need to escape everyday life. The second mini-novel – *Nomadka* [The Nomad Girl] – represents the reverse of *A Cottage of the Wooden Kind*. This unhurried tale of a day in the life of the protagonist, who has not a penny to her name, gives off the warmth of the relationships it portrays, full of reciprocity and help, but also hidden trauma.

Górniak is the most distinct young voice of contemporary Polish prose. He is unafraid to write about the present day, simultaneously avoiding the temporary topics doomed to ephemerality. Drawing on the road novel tradition, the book *Two Motion Novels* explores by turns (both content- and composition-wise) acceleration and standstill. One can see the significance of cinematic influences in this work, present not only in direct references, but also through the inventive positioning of the narrative lens. This concern with multiple media does not result in pretentiousness, however. Górniak brilliantly captures the dynamic nature of speech and remains most interested in the everyday. As such, he avoids hermeticism, while his prose can be appreciated by critics and readers alike.

Zuzanna Sala
Translated by Dawid Mobolaji



Nominated for the Gdynia
Literary Prize

Mateusz Górnika
Dwie powieści ruchu [Two Motion
Novels]

Publisher: Filtry, 2023
ISBN: 978-83-967433-3-6
Number of pages: 192

Rights: Ewa Wieleżyńska
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Book excerpt



© Maksymilian Lawera

Mateusz Górnika (b. 1996) is a prose writer, playwright, essayist and editor, sometimes referred to as “the biggest name of the Polish internet”. His work has been staged at the National Stary Theatre in Kraków, the Soho Theatre in Warsaw as well as the Jerzy Szaniawski Drama Theatre in Wałbrzych. He has also collaborated on plays at Nowy Teatr in Warsaw. His prose debut, *Trash Story* (2022), was nominated for the Nike Literary Award and the Gdynia Literary Prize. His latest book, *Dwie powieści ruchu* [Two Motion Novels] (2023), was awarded the 2023 Kraków UNESCO City of Literature Prize. He described his writing for the website Popmoderna.pl as follows: “I’d like to trigger a debate on humour. And on tenderness [...] with Tokarczuk [author of *The Tender Narrator*]. On the whole, I think that having literary antagonists is a generative thing.”

The End

A granddaughter tells the story her grandmother left unsaid

The main protagonist of Marta Hermanowicz's debut novel is the thirty-six-year-old Malwina. Some time ago she left her family home located in a small town and now – the year is 2018 – she returns there upon hearing that her grandma is dying. Coming back home is the trigger for a stream of bad memories about her lonely, unhappy childhood. Malwina insists that from a very early age she dreamt the dreams of her grandmother, who had gone through really hard times during World War II. First, together with her family, she was displaced by the Soviets and sent to Siberia, where she went through the hell of a labour camp and survived by a sheer miracle. Not all of her relatives were as lucky as she was, some of them died. The trauma was never expressed – neither by Malwina's grandmother, nor by her mother. The protagonist reconstructs those memories on her own, introducing herself as a dream catcher. Her motivation is two-fold. First, Malwina makes a claim for memory, wants to pay her respects to the suffering of her ancestors. Second and more importantly, she points to the source of the misery that she herself has suffered in her childhood and younger years. Not much changed when she became a grown-up woman: we meet Malwina as a person in a serious crisis, fearful, neurotic, seeing the world only in dark colours. Throughout the novel, the line "It's all grandma's fault" returns like a chorus.

The psychological truth of *The End* might be questionable, but it would be difficult to deny the novel its artistic truth. The book has been very skilfully written, it ably presents the intertwined time planes (the past and present), various versions of the Polish language are mixed together.

Dariusz Nowacki
Translated by Anna Błasiak

Koniec

Marta Hermanowicz

artrage

Marta Hermanowicz

Koniec [The End]

Publisher: ArtRage, 2024

ISBN: 978-83-67515-70-2

Number of pages: 334

Rights: Piotr Wawrzeńczyk

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Book excerpt



© Marek Straszewski

Marta Hermanowicz (b. 1982) is a writer and journalist. She has won, among other awards, the main prize at the 11th International Short Story Festival (2015) and the “Nic nie jest tym czym jest” competition at the Mountains of Literature Festival (2020). She has written for the magazines *Twórczość*, *Czas Literatary*, *Fabularie* as well as the *Polityka* weekly. Her book *Koniec* [The End] was chosen by critics as one of the most interesting novels of 2024. In an interview for *Więź*, Hermanowicz said that writing is for her a “spiritual search” and that the most amazing thing about creating is that what comes out is something “that one has never even expected of oneself”.

West Farragut Avenue

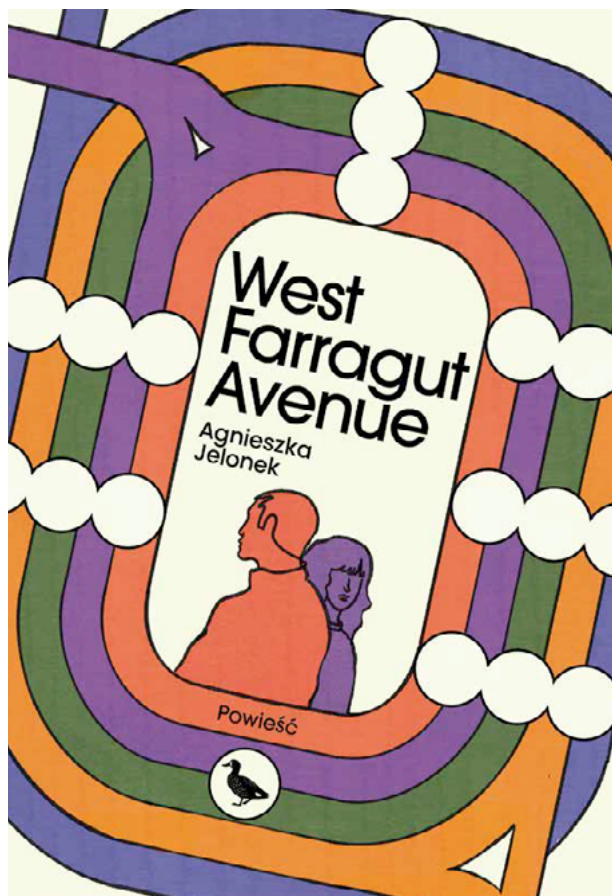
A treacherous memory game

To begin with, this first-person narrative seems to be about romance, love, and yearning for the deceased. The protagonist remembers Shrimp – her first great love, meant to last a lifetime – while simultaneously telling the story of his death and its impact on a group of twenty-year-old friends. Jelonek describes the experience of multiple initiations: entering a relationship and the wider world, as well as confronting the myth of America. All these experiences are strong, cranked up and lived with a vivid intensity arising from her youthful sense of invincibility.

Her recollections of Shrimp soon turn out to serve as a vehicle for recounting the tricks played by memory: their summer spent together in the USA had felt like the most important experience of her life, and she seemed to remember every second, still unable to get away from her memories years later. But memory plays tricks; while promising to take note of everything, it is strongly selective and creates alternative courses of events. From time to time, the forty-year-old protagonist addresses Shrimp – the ever-young, immortalised boyfriend – and tries to piece things together, examine the blanks and settle accounts with herself.

The protagonist's continual battle with grief, her attempts to cut herself off from her youthful experiences and her inability to accept the passing of time as a middle-aged woman turn out to be at the heart of *West Farragut Avenue*. This wonderfully crafted story, both intimate and thematically rich, drunkenly hypnotic yet chiselled, is a painfully rational distillate of memory.

Paulina Małochleb
Translated by Nasim Łuczaj



Agnieszka Jelonek
West Farragut Avenue

Publisher: Cyranka, 2024
ISBN: 978-83-67121-47-7
Number of pages: 160

Rights: Konrad Nowacki
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Book excerpt



© Bartosz Piotrowski

Agnieszka Jelonek (b. 1976) is the author of short stories, novels, TV scripts and the blog *tylkospokojnie.com*. She is the winner of the Henryk Bereza Literary Award and the Literary Award of the City of Radom, and was twice nominated for the Gdynia Literary Prize. She has published reportages and interviews, often concerning works by women, as well as the following books: *Koniec świata, umyj okna* [The World Is Ending, Wash the Windows] (2020), *Trzeba być cicho* [You've Got to Be Quiet] (2022) and *West Farragut Avenue* (2024). Jelonek's works, which critics have described as restrained and eye-opening, touch upon topics related to anxiety disorder. The author herself says she has "a black belt in fighting anxiety".

From Słowacki Street

Routine behaviours take a disturbing turn

From Słowacki Street is the story of a community living in a Warsaw block. Set out in three chapters, and in the spirit of J.G. Ballard's literary philosophy, it constitutes a critique of organised life on a housing estate. Ordinary, monotonous behaviours, casual observations, routine commentaries take a disturbing turn. One inhabitant has a dream about the garage hall catching fire. Some have trouble with huge wasps, others cannot sleep because someone keeps rattling at the door to their apartment. An older woman with a dog sits naked on a bench in the estate, a corpse rots among the rubbish bins. The residents argue, seek enemies outside the boundaries of their block, the atmosphere becomes increasingly absurd and frightening. Events begin to extend beyond social and contemporary contexts. Ultimately, they culminate in various kinds of catastrophe.

Kaczanowski is not a realist, his mini-narrative is a formally brilliant piece, imitating various types of expression. Here we are dealing with the rendition of ways of communication via social media forums, as well as a draft film script. Kaczanowski shows us the camera at work, leading us from the "kitchen" to the scenes being played out. The dystopian character of *From Słowacki Street* emerges not through concrete incidents, however, but rather in the jingles that appear like refrains throughout the entirety of the work. They mercilessly expose the aggression of human behaviours and point out the violence that is constantly present in our lives.

Anna Kałuża

Translated by Anna Zaranko

ADAM KACZANOWSKI
ZE SŁOWACKIEGO



 HA!ART

Adam Kaczanowski
Ze Słowackiego [From Słowacki
Street]

Publisher: Ha!art, 2023
ISBN: 978-83-67713-05-4
Number of pages: 104

Rights: Ha!art
biuro@ha.art.pl

Book excerpt



© Magdalena Rubine

Adam Kaczanowski (b.1976) is a poet, prose-writer and performer, and the author of several poetry collections and prose works. He made his debut in 1994 in the *FA-art* quarterly and *Nowy Nurt*. He has published in magazines such as *brulion*, *Czas Kultury* and *Kresy*. In 2000 he was awarded the Young Art Medal in the literature category. His first novel, *Bez końca* [Without End] (2005), represented Poland in the Festival of the First Novel in Kiel (2006). He is a winner of the Wrocław Silesius Poetry Award (2019) and also of the Wiesław Kazanecki Literary Award, awarded by the Mayor of the City of Białystok (2020). He has been nominated for the Juliusz Upper Silesia Literary Award (2017), the Gdynia Literary Prize (2019) and the Wisława Szymborska Award (2020). His work juggles conventions and genres, creating a grotesque portrait of the present. “I take pieces of reality and shape them to make them look abstract,” he said in an interview with BiblioNETka.

I Have a Hunch

The end of the world? A story born of contemporary fears

The novel's plot plays out in the present day, but some motifs indicate that perhaps it could also be set in the recent past. The chief protagonist, Artur, seems unable to complete his studies – he has already dropped out before, and now is pretending to himself that he is deepening his knowledge of philosophy. He mooches about in a state of limbo, supporting himself via small-scale betting or trading in cryptocurrency. Essentially, he attends only one class – given by a charismatic lecturer who prophesies the inevitable end of civilisation. Under the lecturer's influence, he flees the metropolis (the city is unnamed) and somewhere in the countryside he tries to prepare for the ultimate collapse. He turns into a “prepper”, i.e., he mentally joins the community of those who build shelters, stockpile goods and draw up survival scenarios. In the third, final part of the novel, annihilation comes – it is not entirely clear what causes it; the metropolis made up almost entirely of glass skyscrapers is turned into a ruin.

A key fundamental characteristic of Łukasz Krukowski's debut novel is its gradual build-up of tension. In the first part, we are given a portrait of a contemporary youth who does not know what to do with himself and seems permanently attached to his smartphone or laptop. In the second part, Artur's habitual lethargy turns into paranoia. Finally, the third segment is dominated by apocalyptic imagery. Whether the end of the world has really taken place or is being played out in the head of a tormented hero dependent on benzodiazepine remains a puzzle.

Dariusz Nowacki
Translated by Anna Zaranko



Łukasz Krukowski
Mam przeczucie [I Have a Hunch]

Publisher: Cyranka, 2023
 ISBN: 978-83-67121-22-4
 Number of pages: 156

Rights: Konrad Nowacki
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Book excerpt



© Patryk Wiśniewski

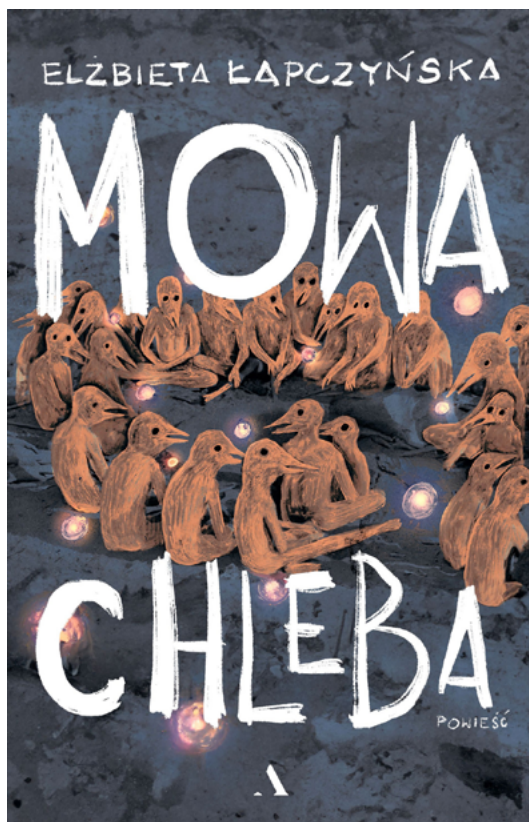
Łukasz Krukowski (b. 2000), a graduate of the University of Warsaw, is a writer and the author of the novel *Mam przeczucie* [I Have a Hunch] (2023). He has also published stories in the convention of horror and “weird fiction”. “I had always wanted to write a novel on the logic of gambling, but when I had a significant part of it, the pandemic began. Then I noticed intuitively that the logic of gambling is linked with the theme of preparing for the end of the world.” This is how he explained the genesis of his latest book to the website Culture.pl. Critics have praised Krukowski’s expressive, mature style and the unusual way that his latest novel addresses philosophical and economic themes.

Bread Speech

The hell of patriarchal biopolitics

This novel takes place in Crăiești, a Transylvanian village whose former barracks have been transformed into an orphanage. The facility is staffed by village women who come down the road every day and cross a moat to reach the nest of evil, as they describe it. To avoid being infected with evil, they must never make eye contact with the orphans, its permanent residents. Children here are fed on pig's milk and human blood, and no one crosses the gates of the orphanage except the employees. The book revolves around the women's lot and daily struggles – with work, with their bodies and the bodies of others. Their portrayal gives us a complete image of the grim determinism of a world where the divide between the enclave of evil and normalised everyday village life turns out to be false, a fact skilfully problematised by the author. Life outside the facility is a real-life fantasy of collectivist social engineering: authoritarian Romania in the 1980s, where the fundamental task was to prop up the birth rate, and as a result orphanages were opened on a mass scale. Here there are no easy differences of landscape, nor unambiguous and rapidly judged characters who might demand a reader's empathy. Suspending the dictates of realism, Łapczyńska disturbs our stereotype of children, women and animals as victims of male perpetrators. In this book, each person experiences and commits some form of violence, fundamentally borne by bodies that are exploited based on the situation, but in keeping with how society categorises them.

Katarzyna Trzeciak
Translated by Sean Gaspar Bye



Elżbieta Łapczyńska
Mowa chleba [Bread Speech]

Publisher: Agora, 2024
 ISBN: 978-83-268-4539-0
 Number of pages: 240

Rights: Magdalena Kosińska
magdalena.kosinska@agora.pl

Book excerpt



© Adrianna Bochenek

Elżbieta Łapczyńska (b. 1987) is a writer. She publishes plays, children's literature and graphic novels, and has also worked as a film director. She was a semifinalist for the Gdynia Drama Award and a finalist in the Papaya Young Directors competition. She also won First Prize in the Szymon Szurmiej Contemporary Jewish Drama International Competition (2021). Her breakthrough came with her debut short story collection, *Bestiariusz nowohucki* [A Nowa Huta Bestiary] (2020), which won the Conrad Award, the Kraków Book of the Month Award, and was longlisted for the Nike Literary Award and the Gdynia Literary Prize. In an interview with *Biuro Literackie*, she admitted she's drawn to "surrealness on the borderline of the possible and the impossible", since in that form "it raises more questions, is more troubling".

Rodeo Roundabout

A novel about a very tense road trip: a journey across America, where freedom and the past intersect with a couple's sparring match

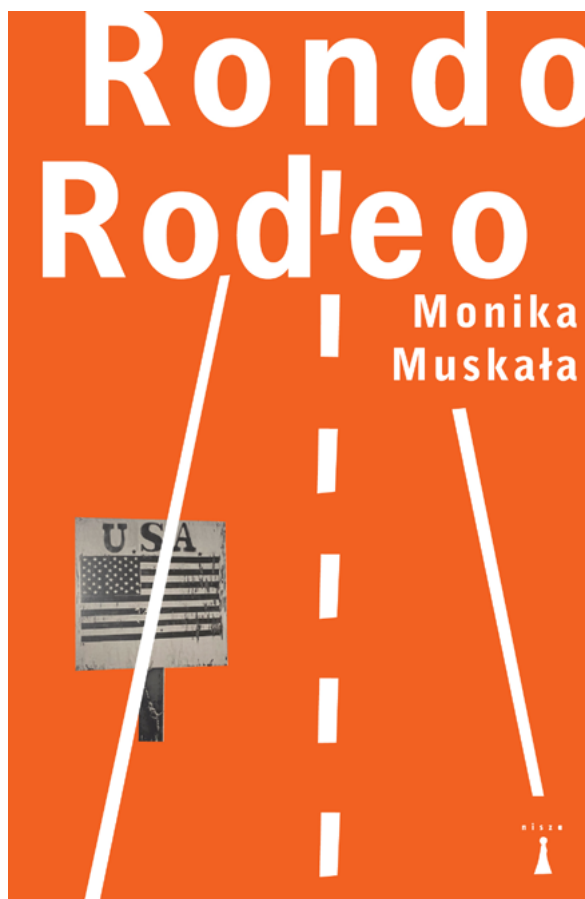
Monika Muskała debuts with a road trip novel and, better yet, one that returns to the roots of the genre; it takes place in an American landscape of ghost towns and flyover states, those places that no one writes about or cares to visit. The road trip and flashbacks to the relationship's past occur simultaneously, as the heroine's gaze shifts between the two timeframes. New challenges bring to mind old problems. These conflicts finally come to a head in Kansas, when infidelity comes to light during a tussle with locals who don't take kindly to outsiders.

Muskała imagines a heroine fully immersed in the world of high culture, something she deems more authentic than real life. Until, that is, a confrontation with a hostile, small town crowd forces her to face the facts. All the novel's characters are brought to shame: their actions and the consequences of those actions can no longer be excused by tropes borrowed from art. So what now? How does the heroine's elevated, aesthetic sense of self fall apart when bested by her husband's tawdry affair?

Rodeo Roundabout describes a struggle with emptiness, a search for meaning, and an attempt to get closer to the real world. Like the works of Jelinek and Bernhardt (Muskała has translated both authors into Polish), it remains unclear if such efforts are warranted, if meaning really does exist somewhere, waiting to be uncovered. Self-narration must be built piece by piece, Muskała seems to tell us. If we choose prefab models, a farce awaits.

Paulina Małochleb

Translated by Jess Jensen Mitchell



Monika Muskała
Rondo Rodeo [Rodeo Roundabout]

Publisher: Nisza, 2024
 ISBN: 978-83-66599-76-5
 Number of pages: 280

Rights: Monika Muskała
ninelshuty@gmail.com

Book excerpt



© Andreas Horvath

Monika Muskała (b. 1966) is a translator, essayist, playwright and the co-author of photography books. Her translations include works by Friedrich Schiller, Frank Wedekind, Ödöna von Horváth, Elfriede Jelinek and Thomas Bernhard. She has been recognised three times by the Federal Chancellery of Austria for her work as a translator, and she received the Karl Dedecius Award in 2019. She was awarded the Juliusz Upper Silesian Literary Award for her essay, “Between Heroes’ Square and Rechnitz: Austrian Reckonings” (2016), and she has been nominated for the Nike Literary Award and the Gdynia Literary Prize. *Rodeo Roundabout* is her debut novel.

The Depths

A story about the past that affects the present

Ishbel Szatrawska breathes new life into writing about people and places marked by the inexorable march of history and by complex experiences that are still not discussed out loud, even after the passage of many years. German place names that after the war become Polish dots on the map. Women who have had to grow up too fast and be strong because they've been gang-raped by soldiers of the Red Army or left alone with their children – since their husbands, fathers and brothers have disappeared and it's not clear if they're still alive. Men told for years that the state and politics guarantee a secure future, yet all the things that come in the wake of war bring only chaos, helplessness and lack of hope. The novel unfolds on two separate planes. The contemporary part centres on a family home and on the discussions between father and daughter about its sale. The youngest member of the family is convinced that the house should remain their property because it contains the memory of what is past. Another important aspect of this contemporary narrative is what is happening along the border between Poland and Belarus; the young woman's partner gets involved in these events as an activist. The other, historical part of the book focuses above all on capturing the atmosphere of the end – a world in the state of collapse, a reality in the throes of the apocalypse. Importantly, this is shown through the tragedies affecting specific people and through everyday life that throws up challenges resulting from touching what is final.

Bernadetta Darska
Translated by Eliza Marciniak



Nominated for the Nike
Literary Award

Ishbel Szatrawska
Toń [The Depths]

Publisher: Cyranka, 2023
ISBN: 9788367121347
Number of pages: 408

Rights: Konrad Nowacki
konrad@wydawnictwocyranka.pl

Book excerpt



© Bogdan Frymorgen

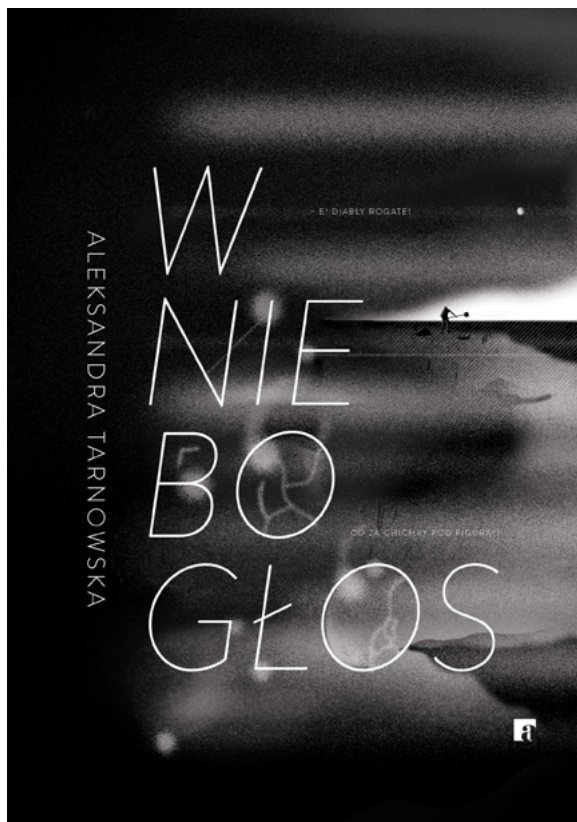
Ishbel Szatrawska (b. 1981) is a playwright, writer and theatre expert. In 2021, she won the playwriting competition organised by the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute. Her first full book, the play *Żywot i śmierć pana Hersha Libkina z Sacramento w stanie Kalifornia* [The Life and Death of Mr Hersh Libkin] (2022), earned her a nomination for the Polityka Passport Award. Her debut novel, *Toń* [The Depths], was published in 2023 and received the Kraków Book of the Month Award. It was also nominated for the Nike Literary Award. Critics have praised Szatrawska's ability to move freely between different narratives and linguistic registers. The writer admits that she enjoys setting "snares for readers". As she told Culture.pl in an interview, "the whole point of creating a text, and of writing in general, lies in its box-like nature and ambiguity. I'm interested in tapping into something primaevial, something very atavistic."

To High Heaven

Music doesn't always soothe the savage beast

This is a novel in which there are no false tones. While music plays an important role in the story, it is also about the smooth implementation of the conventions of a coming-of-age story. The rhythm of the text harmonises with the main character's repeated attempts to become part of a group of people who sing at funerals. His efforts are stretched between desire and a sense of functioning in the space of the influence of something that is not fully understood. The boy is talented – no doubt about it. His loved ones know this, as do those who have heard him sing. At the same time, a disturbing belief is brewing that the singing is not always innocent; that it might have completely unpredictable consequences. The village becomes a reality in which music brings empowerment. Apparently, it also has a causative power. Singing becomes the basis for building a community, the songs collected in a notebook turn out to be a unique archive of the past, and the instrument ceases to be an ordinary object; not only does it enable beauty to be heard, but also created. The performance of funeral songs turns into a declaration of remaining among the living. The result is a coming-of-age novel in which the experience of existence is associated with an acute awareness of dying. Without this far-from-obvious relationship, it is impossible to experience meaning and finality.

Bernadetta Darska
Translated by Kate Webster



A multi-award-winning
debut novel

Aleksandra Tarnowska
Wniebogłos [To High Heaven]

Publisher: ArtRage, 2023
ISBN: 9788367515276
Number of pages: 220

Rights: Piotr Wawrzeniczyk
piotr@literatura.com.pl

Book excerpt



© Aleksandra Tarnowska

Aleksandra Tarnowska (b. 1990) is a writer and editor. She graduated in Polish Studies from the University of Warsaw. She grew up in Staszów, a small town that she misses terribly. Currently, she lives in Gaziantep, Turkey. *Wniebogłos* [To High Heaven] (2023) is her first book. Critics have emphasised the wonderful linguistic style of the story and the fact that, as a contribution to the trend of Polish peasant prose, the novel offers a fresh look at the nature of rural rituals. In May this year, Tarnowska represented Poland at the 22nd European Festival of the First Novel in Kiel. In an interview with *Dwutygodnik* magazine, she said: “I developed the language based on radio interviews. From interviews with folk musicians. From the things they said. [...] I laughed at the sentences. The ones that sounded good to me. What I like most, I don’t know why, is death scenes.”

Here Comes Big Boy

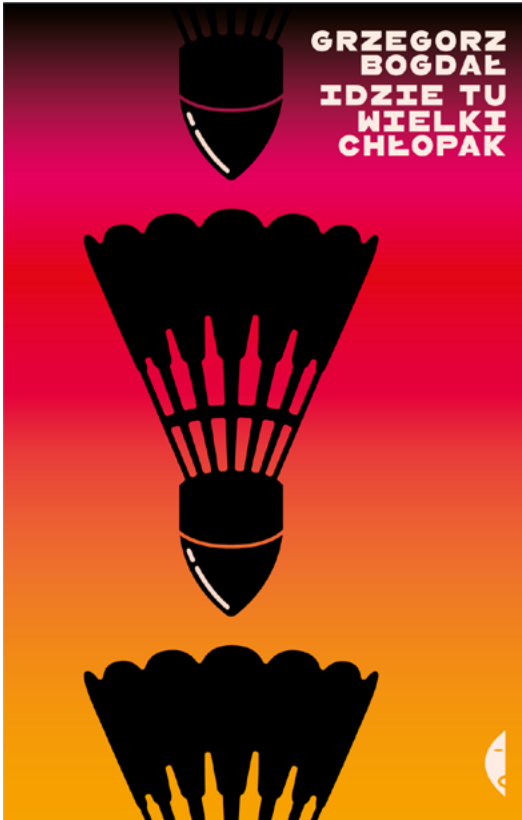
Everyday characters in extraordinary scenarios

What is the literary potential of the world's smallest pony, a man disguised as a squirrel, or a neighbour wearing an astronaut costume? One possibility is to assemble a showcase of peculiarities – to make the ordinary strange by inventing extraordinary characters. But there is another way. One could, on the flipside, make the peculiarities ordinary and set them as the background for perfectly normal, featureless protagonists. This is Grzegorz Bogdał's approach in his second short story collection (after *Floryda* [Florida]) in which he normalises the protagonists not only through their psychological and social traits, but also, most importantly, through the collection's original structure.

Bogdał's characters are thirty-something-year-old men entangled in family relationships as well as the social dynamics of the workplace. They make certain efforts in these relationships (such as Gabriel, who, ahead of a break-up, wants to gift his partner's daughter with the world's smallest pony), but more often than not, they simply give in to their circumstances and the actions of the more charismatic characters. Bogdał sets these men against the backdrop of peripheral landscapes – on woodland hikes, in claustrophobic apartments, on abandoned building sites.

The collection's structure remains the most interesting, however – a meaningful dimension to Bogdał's writing. It splits the titular story into parts with the other narratives placed in between. As we pass from one story to the next, the protagonists' uniqueness is dispelled, and they become similar in their everyday, completely unspectacular failures – similar, too, to the figures found in prose adjacent to Bogdał's, such as that by Denis Johnson, Lucia Berlin or George Saunders.

Katarzyna Trzeciak
Translated by Dawid Mobilaj



An award-winning literary
mastermind

Grzegorz Bogdał

Idzie tu wielki chłopak [Here Comes
Big Boy]

Publisher: Czarne, 2023

ISBN: 978-83-8191-736-0

Number of pages: 200

Rights: Zofia Dimitrijević

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Book excerpt



© Jacek Taran

Grzegorz Bogdał (b. 1984) is a writer of short stories and short screenplays. One of his scripts won the Five Continents International Film Festival Award in Puerto La Cruz (2019). He also writes for cultural magazines (including *Dwutygodnik*, *Pismo*, *Tygodnik Powszechny* and *Znak*). Critics compare his prose to the works of George Saunders and Wells Tower. His debut short story collection *Floryda* [Florida] (2017) was nominated for the Gdynia Literary Prize, the Witold Gombrowicz Literary Award and the Conrad Award. Meanwhile, his latest book – *Idzie tu wielki chłopak* [Here Comes Big Boy] (2023) – received nominations for the Polityka Passport Award, the Capital City of Warsaw Literary Award, the Gdynia Literary Prize and the Empik Discovery Award. Bogdał seeks literature – as he told *Znak* magazine – that “tells an interesting story – and suddenly throws you off balance.”

The Burden of Skin

Confronting life's daily hazards and dreaming of liberty

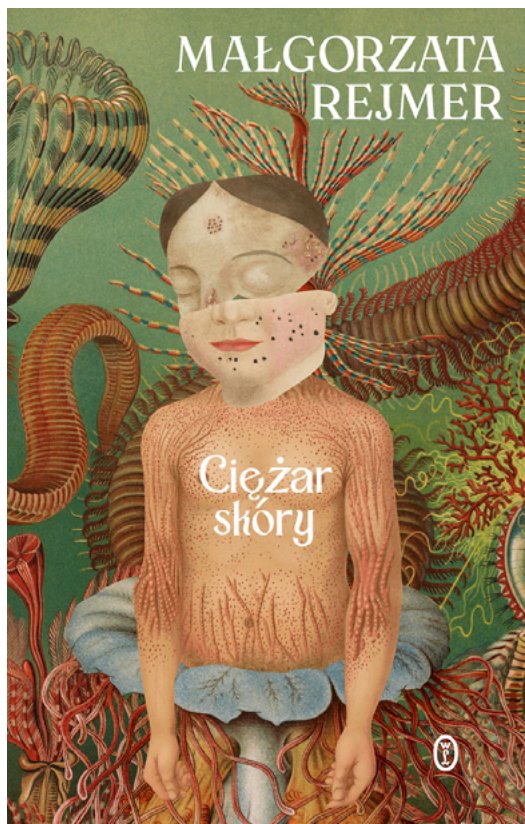
The Burden of Skin is a collection of ten short stories, seven of which are set in Albania, three in Poland, and all ten in the present day.

What these two separate societies have in common, according to Rejmer, is that they are peopled by individuals who have to rely on their own strengths, and thus are dependent on the strength or power of others. They are not protected by institutions, and must also contend with a tradition that normalises violence against women and children. In such a world strength, meaning power, is the key to almost everything – forcing obedience, vengeance and corrupted justice.

The domination of violence means that a human being is in the first and last place skin: strength is measured by one's capacity to affect someone else's body, and weakness by one's incapacity to defend one's own skin. And so in Rejmer's fiction the weak fantasise about getting beyond the confines of their own bodies. But these dreams are not political or legal in nature. Faced with the physical intensity of oppression, her main characters don't think up a better world – it's as if not just the political but also the social imagination had died within them. Their revolt against violence drives them to fantasise about a change of incarnation – they want to become animals, to dissolve in water or disappear in the sunlight. They dream of escaping beyond themselves into something non-human, because they don't believe something human could ever change.

Set within simple situations, these unsettling tales are characterised by economical distribution of the facts, rising tension and action that aims towards the irrevocable.

Przemysław Czapliński
Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones



A widely translated author

Małgorzata Rejmer
Ciężar skóry [The Burden of Skin]

Publisher: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2023
 ISBN: 978-83-08-08326-0
 Number of pages: 192

Rights: Joanna Dąbrowska
j.dabrowska@wydawnictwoliterackie.pl

Book excerpt



© Lukasz Saturczak

Małgorzata Rejmer (b. 1985) is a writer of fiction and reportage. Her first book was the novel *Toksymia* [Toxymia] (2009), which was followed by reportage. Her first work of non-fiction, *Bukareszt. Kurz i krew* [Bucharest: Dust and Blood] (2013) won several prizes including the Newsweek Teresa Torńska Award and the Gryfia Literary Award. It was also longlisted for the Nike Literary Award. This was followed in 2018 by her most successful book to date, *Błoto słodsze niż miód. Głosy komunistycznej Albanii* (translated into English as *Mud Sweeter than Honey: Voices from Communist Albania*), which won awards including the Polityka Passport and the Kościelski Prize. Rejmer is acclaimed by critics for the excellent style of her writing and for the empathy with which she describes the lives of people crushed by the injustices of totalitarianism. Her work has been translated into English, Spanish, Czech, Estonian, Romanian, Serbian and Italian.

Crisps for the Guests

A surreal tale about late capitalism

Natałka Suszczyńska's short stories are filled with an unforced sense of humour and witty phrases. Despite humour being one of the most important narrative tools used by the author, her goals go beyond fun. In her writing, jokes often carry bitter punchlines and moving stories shimmer among hilarious anecdotes.

Crisps for the Guests consists of stories placed within several timelines: from the pandemic lockdown to an undefined future. The futuristic visions are not quite like those known from sci-fi literature, instead they are revealed in lifestyle sayings and casually dropped in dialogues. The biggest problems of contemporary times, such as the climate catastrophe, appear here as the background and the necessary element of the setting, not as the central issue. On the other hand, what the writer is most interested in are human relations, but also the psychological and emotional disorders which the protagonists suffer from as a result of confrontation with the world outside. Obsessions, compulsions, manias and delusions are the driving force of this prose. Suszczyńska uses them not to focus on describing a particular, individual experience, but to say something about the changing world. The author is highly skilful in her craft, fluidly switches between conventions and narrative types, happily draws from the surreal aesthetic and weird fiction tradition, but never does that for its own sake. Weirdness is for Suszczyńska more a method than a goal, which is one of the main advantages of her writing.

Zuzanna Sala
Translated by Anna Błasiak



Natalka Suszczyńska
Chipsy dla gości [Crisps for the
 Guests]

Publisher: Ha!art, 2024
 ISBN: 978-83-67713-33-7
 Number of pages: 192

Rights: Ha!art
biuro@ha.art.pl

Book excerpt



© Lukasz Krajewski

Natalka Suszczyńska (b. 1988) writes short stories. Her debut collection, *Dropie* [Bustards] (2019), was nominated for the Witold Gombrowicz Literary Prize. Her pieces have appeared in many magazines, including *Rita Baum*, *Wakat*, *Elewator*, *Helikopter*, *Fabularie* and the *Girls to the Front* zine. Her second book, *Chipsy dla gości* [Crisps for the Guests] was published in 2024. Critics appreciate the writer's breadth of language and imagination, thanks to which she is able to find magic even within the most trivial situations. She is also good at balancing humour and sadness. "I would prefer to be terrifying than funny," Suszczyńska said on Radio Campus, "but somehow I create jokes."

Soulless Beings: The Forgotten Extermination of the Sick

A harrowing reportage about the fate of psychiatric hospital patients and the inmates of care homes during World War II

The subject of World War II might appear to have been thoroughly exhausted in the literature. However, writers and researchers continue to arise who deepen our knowledge and uncover further shocking facts concerning this period.

The author has turned her attention to the most overlooked group among the victims of World War II – children and adults in psychiatric clinics and care homes.

According to the author's estimates, at least 20,000 patients from psychiatric hospitals and inmates of care homes died during the war. The exact number of victims from this group is impossible to establish due to incomplete, destroyed or lost documentation. The tragic stories of the sick are overlaid with the concepts of eugenics and euthanasia, in which those who could produce offspring with hereditary conditions were deprived of life. The victims were often subjected to medical experimentation and, years after the war, many of the doctors who took part in it have still not been held accountable for their crimes.

This book constitutes a thorough piece of reportage. The author has not only accessed archival sources in the form of acts, minutes of hearings and newspaper articles, but has also discovered witnesses who, though few, preserve the memory of events of more than eighty years ago. *Soulless Beings* sheds new light on a recently discovered, but still not fully understood history.

Katarzyna Wójcik
Translated by Anna Zaranko



Polityka History Prize 2024

Kalina Błażejowska
Bezdużni. Zapomniana zagłada chorych [Soulless Beings: The Forgotten Extermination of the Sick]

Publisher: Czarne, 2024
 ISBN: 978-83-8191-859-6
 Number of pages: 328

Rights: Zofia Dimitrijević
zofia.dimitrijevic@czarne.com.pl

Book excerpt



© Aleksandra Graczyk

Kalina Błażejowska (b. 1987) is a journalist and film expert. She is a graduate of the Jagiellonian University and has worked for the weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny*. Her many prizes, accolades and journalistic nominations include the Newsweek Teresa Torańska Award and the Grand Prix of the Małopolska Journalists' Award. Her biography of the poet Halina Poświatowska, *Uparte Serce* [A Stubborn Heart], was published in 2014. The book was shortlisted for the Gryfia Literary Prize, named Book for Spring by the Poznań Review of New Titles, and was also a Kraków Book of the Month. The author's reportage, *Bezdużni. Zapomniana zagłada chorych* [Soulless Beings: The Forgotten Extermination of the Sick], received the Polityka History Award.

Atlas of Nooks and Crannies

No city is so impenetrable that it can't be occupied by plants

In his own words, Michał Książek wrote *Atlas of Nooks and Crannies* “for everyone who searches for nature in the city”. While it is becoming increasingly difficult to find, especially in hot, polluted terrains covered in concrete, Książek argues that no city is so impenetrable that it can't be occupied by plants. The areas of Warsaw (Świętokrzyska Park, Pole Mokotowskie), Kraków (Planty Park), Łódź (Piotrkowska Street) and other cities that the author studies are inhabited by various seeds, weeds and self-seeding plants, as well as bees, wasps, ants and beetle larvae. Families of birds build their nests in nest boxes, although these can become ecological traps. Insects play a major role in the active exchange of kinetic energy. Well-organised animal and plant communities form around the lindens and other trees that Książek observes. The author's gaze is well attuned to various sizes: mosses and lichens, which he calls “urban coral reefs”, are as important an element of visible nature as large trees or swarms of insects.

However, this is not just a book about how things appear. During his urban wanderings, Książek has the climate and environmental crisis at the forefront of his mind. He writes about drought, heat, plastic, concrete, and the junk food on which the city birds feed. He ridicules the many human practices born of ignorance or reluctance to make unprofitable investments in nature. In doing all this, he describes his experiences in a vivid and colourful way, with daring linguistic invention.

Anna Kałuża
Translated by Kate Webster



A leading environmental book
of recent years

Michał Książek
Atlas dziur i szczelin [Atlas of
Nooks and Crannies]

Publisher: Znak, 2023
ISBN: 978-83-67121-22-4
Number of pages: 156

Rights: Ewa Bolińska-Gostkowska
bolinska@znak.com.pl

Book excerpt



© Jędrzej Molezyk

Michał Książek (b. 1978) is a poet, columnist and reporter. His educational background is in forestry and ornithology. He has written for the magazines *Polityka* and *Twórczość* and is a regular contributor to the magazine *Przekrój*. For his book of reportage *Jakuck. Słownik miejsca* [Yakutsk: The Dictionary of a Place] (2013), he was nominated for the Gdynia Literary Prize, which he won for his next book, *Droga 816* [Highway 816] (2015). He has also received many nominations and awards for his poetry: the volumes *Nauka o ptakach* [The Study of Birds] (2014) (Silesius Poetry Award, nominated for the Nike Literary Award) and *Północny wschód* [Northeast] (2017) (Orfeusz Mazurski Award). His latest book, *Atlas dziur i szczelin* [Atlas of Nooks and Crannies] (2023), which is dedicated to urban nature, won the City of Warsaw Literary Award in the “Book about Warsaw” category.

Peasants: The Story of Our Grandmothers

Emancipation from the peasant home

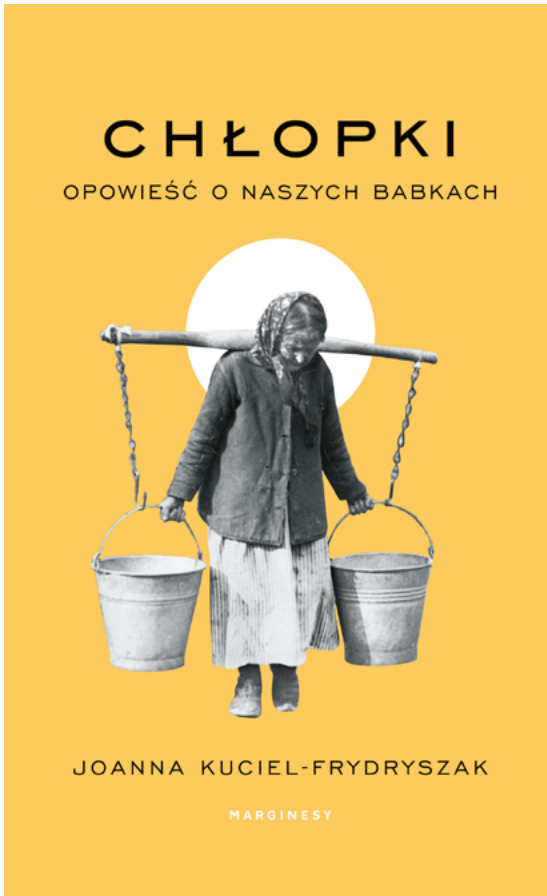
This book presents the history of rural women in twentieth-century Poland – the story of their arduous social advancement, spanning three generations, and of the changes introduced in the village setting by women themselves.

To be born female in the countryside in the first half of the twentieth century was to be born doubly disadvantaged: firstly, because the peasant class was the lowest in the Polish class hierarchy; secondly, because a woman ranked lower than a man.

Essentially, a woman stuck in this situation had, as the author shows, three options in life: stay in the village and accept her role; migrate to the city in search of a better life; or, finally, try to introduce changes to village life. All paths were equally difficult. Even in an urban factory or a bourgeois household, girls were faced with the same structure of feudal dependence that they had known in the villages: the urban “lords” who employed them believed they were also entitled to the female body. In this context, the examples of advance described by the author were first of an economic nature, then educational, but the whole process ended only when the relevant laws were entered into the constitution or legal codes.

Genre-wise, *Peasants* is a mixture of historical reportage based on period documents, a gender-based analysis of the old village setting, and in-depth interviews with the “granddaughters”. This mixture enables the author to create a collective portrait, which has made the book a real hit, with over 300,000 copies sold. With this book, the author has connected separate social classes and distant generations, whose representatives, upon reading the book, have responded: “We too.”

Przemysław Czapliński
Translated by Kate Webster



**A national phenomenon:
over 300,000 copies sold**

Joanna Kuciel-Frydryszak
*Chłopki. Opowieść o naszych
babbach* [Peasants: The Story
of Our Grandmothers]

Publisher: Marginesy, 2023
ISBN: 978-83-67674-31-7
Number of pages: 496

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

Book excerpt



© Dawid Grzelak

Joanna Kuciel-Frydryszak is a journalist and reporter with connections to Lower Silesia. Her book *Służące do wszystkiego* [At Your Service], published in 2018, about the fate of “white slaves”, was a bestseller and garnered nominations for the Polityka Historical Award and the Newsweek Teresa Torńska Award. Her latest book of reportage, *Chłopki. Opowieść o naszych babbach* [Peasants: The Story of Our Grandmothers] (2023), which has sold over 300,000 copies, gained recognition not only from readers, but also from literary critics. In 2023, Kuciel-Frydryszak received the title of Wrocław Woman of the Year in the “Creator” category. The book was nominated for the prestigious Nike Literary Award 2024.

Rivers That Don't Exist

**On European urban rivers destroyed by human beings
– filled in, concreted over, and above all, forgotten**

Most large European cities stand on a river, assuring them quick transport and movement and also a supply of water. Yet there are some cities that cover up their rivers – that have them intermittently or have hidden them in underground channels. This book is a peculiar type of monograph on the rivers that have disappeared from modern maps and the consciousness of locals.

Maciej Robert's essayistic and journalistic inquiries are grounded in his home city of Łódź, which owes its name to the Łódka, a small river, twenty kilometres long, concealed under the city's streets. Many of Łódź's citizens don't even know the river exists, just as people in Lviv forget the Poltva, which has flowed in underground sewers since the nineteenth century.

An equally sad fate met the Rokytka, which flows through Prague, and about which Bohumil Hrabal wrote. The Rokytka, like many other smaller rivers, disappeared under heaps of trash and pollution, which often built up due to folk practices and superstitions, such as drowning effigies or casting into the water objects that collect evil forces.

Maciej Robert's lyrical prose not only wanders on the trail of forgotten rivers annihilated by human beings, but also meanders through European literature. Traces of rivers lost to today's maps still survive in the work of writers like Olga Tokarczuk, Jonathan Swift, Yurii Andrukhovych or Karl-Markus Gauss. Supplementing his literary impressions with hydrological, geological and geographical facts makes Robert's work of reportage an original guidebook to tracking down the mythical rivers of Europe.

Katarzyna Wójcik
Translated by Sean Gaspar Bye



Maciej Robert
Rzeki, których nie ma



Maciej Robert

Rzeki, których nie ma [Rivers That Don't Exist]

Publisher: Czarne, 2023

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Number of pages: 339

Rights: Zofia Dimitrijević

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Book excerpt



© Monika
Marlicka-Robert

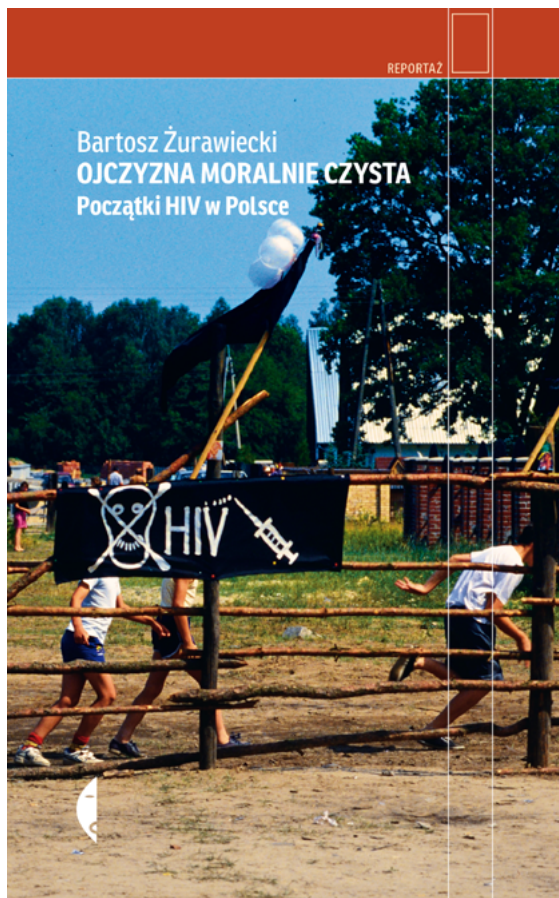
Maciej Robert (b. 1977) is a poet, essayist, film and literary critic, and editor. He is the director of the House of Literature in Łódź. He debuted in 2003 with his volume *Pora deszczu* [Rainy Season], and since then has published eight collections of poetry. He has won the Polish Book Publishing Association Award, been nominated for the Wisława Szymborska Poetry Award and the Václav Burian International Award. In 2013, he was awarded the Jerzy Katarasiński Golden Pen Award for journalism. As a journalist and reviewer he has worked for magazines such as *Polityka*, *Literatura na Świecie* and *Przekrój*. His latest publications are the poetry collection *Skontrum* [Inventory] (2023) and the essay collection *Rzeki, których nie ma* [Rivers That Don't Exist] (2023). His poetry has been translated into over a dozen languages: Arabic, Bulgarian, Croatian, Czech, English, German, Greek, Hebrew, Hungarian, Serbian, Spanish and Ukrainian.

A Country Morally Clean: The Beginnings of HIV in Poland

Filling in historical gaps through reportage: HIV/AIDS in Poland

Bartosz Żurawiecki's book of literary reportage taps into the ongoing trend of revisiting the 1980s in the context of the scary, stigmatising and then-unknown disease. He decides to chronicle the events in Poland, conveying both the country's specificity as well as the universal principles that govern frightened and uninformed people. Hence, we see what is commonly repeated – the belief that the disease came from the US and that it applies to three groups: homosexual men, drug addicts and haemophiliacs. We also see the series of dramatic events reflecting the current mentality and the ease of exclusion. Let us recall a few. We have, for instance, the introduction of martial law and the closing of borders which delayed the virus's arrival in Poland. We have the official downplaying of the dangers at the same time as the stigma and the suspicions around foreigners as carriers. We have the support centres and safe havens as well as the citizen grassroots projects to eliminate the sick from the immediate environment. Żurawiecki shows how unpredictable the consequences can be when knowledge and education are replaced with prejudice and fear. He also lays bare how easily one's supposed concern for personal safety can devolve into actions resembling a lynch mob. By reconstructing the past and attempting a more complete view of it, he not only fills in the gaps of our knowledge but, in a sense, warns us. The story of the beginnings of the HIV epidemic in Poland thus becomes an analysis of society at a trying time.

Bernadetta Darska
Translated by Dawid Mobolaji



Nominated for the Ryszard
Kapuściński Award

Bartosz Żurawiecki
*Ojczyzna moralnie czysta. Początki
HIV w Polsce* [A Country Morally
Clean: The Beginnings of HIV in
Poland]

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Number of pages: 256

Rights: Zofia Dimitrijević
zofia.dimitrijevic@czarne.com.pl

Book excerpt



© Krzysztof Plebankiewicz

Bartosz Żurawiecki (b. 1971) is a film critic, writer and columnist. He holds a degree in Cultural Studies from the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. In the nineties, he started collaborating with the editorial boards of numerous newspapers and magazines, including *Gazeta Wyborcza*, *Przekrój* and *Tygodnik Powszechny*, as well as periodicals writing about film and theatre. He is one of the founders of the Polish organisation Campaign Against Homophobia and has for years involved himself in activism for LGBT rights. He made his prose debut in 2005 with the novel *Trzech panów w łóżku, nie licząc kota. Romans pasywny* [Three Gentlemen in a Bed, Excluding the Cat: A Passive Romance].

The Vistula: Biography of a River

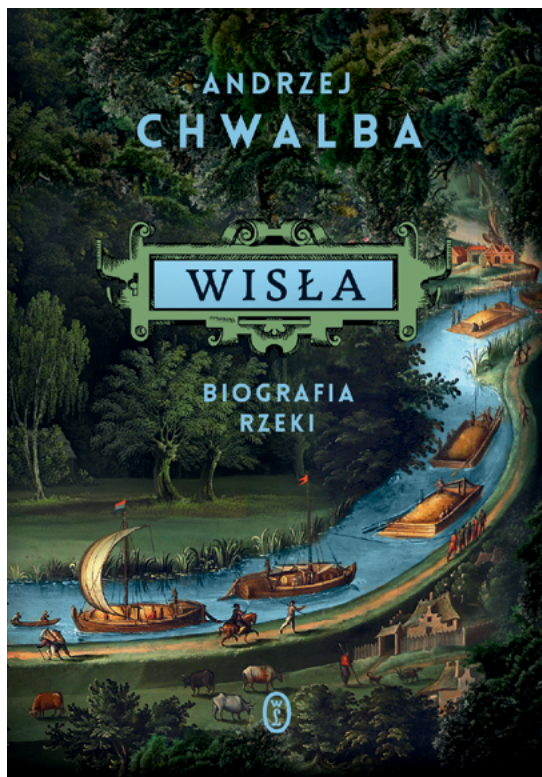
The Vistula: capricious queen of Polish rivers

Can a natural phenomenon such as a river have its own story? Peter Ackroyd's books have demonstrated that it's possible to write biographies not only of people, but also cities (such as Venice and London) and even rivers, such as the Thames. The Vistula, Poland's largest river, has a fascinating history that deserves its own written biography, although its origins are shrouded in the mists of time. Today, it is still a lively river full of surprises. The Vistula's character is capricious – it enjoys changing its course, its ice poses a threat to bridges during particularly harsh winters, and its banks flood dramatically from time to time. Dams and dykes have been constructed on the Vistula to regulate its course, but these efforts haven't entirely eliminated the threat of floods.

Polish poets have often described the Vistula as a young woman with children – her tributaries. Since the Middle Ages, the river has played an influential role in the development of Poland's national identity. Borders have changed, but the Vistula has always remained the natural centre of the country, with major cities developing along it. The river has also played an important role as Poland's economic backbone because of it being used to ship grain to the port in Gdańsk. Almost everyone in Poland knows about the river's shipping history, but not everyone is aware of how much complex economic organisation it required, or that it gave rise to a unique community of "river people" who are guided solely by their own principles.

The author, Andrzej Chwalba, is a historian. Although this book is based on careful research, it was written to be enjoyed by all types of readers. It is a light-hearted, loosely structured tale about the impact of nature on history, the ways in which nature's treasures have been exploited by humanity, and the dangers of industrialisation.

Anna Nasiłowska
Translated by Scotia Gilroy



Andrzej Chwalba
Wisła. Biografia rzeki [The Vistula:
 Biography of a River]

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 ISBN: 978-83-08-08126-6
 Number of pages: 408

Rights: Joanna Dąbrowska
j.dabrowska@wydawnictwoliterackie.pl

Book excerpt



© Janusz Jabłoński

Andrzej Chwalba (b. 1949) is a Polish historian, essayist, populariser of history and retired university lecturer. He has been affiliated with the Jagiellonian University for many years. He is a member of numerous organisations and associations, and he served as vice president of the Polish Historical Society. He has received prestigious awards and distinctions, including the Order of Polonia Restituta, the Jagiellonian Laurel, and a KILO Award. He is the author of highly acclaimed history textbooks and monographs, such as *Historia Polski 1795–1918* [The History of Poland 1795–1918] (2000–2006), *Samobójstwo Europy. Wielka Wojna 1914–1918* [Europe's Suicide: The Great War of 1914–1918] (2014) and *Przegrane zwycięstwo. Wojna polsko-bolszewicka 1918–1920* [A Lost Victory: The Polish-Bolshevik War 1918–1920] (2020). His research interests focus on Polish history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the history of Kraków, both world wars and Polish-Russian relations. Andrzej Chwalba's books have been translated into many languages, including English, German, Russian, Czech and Croatian.

My Beloved and I

A moving story of love between women

My Beloved and I is an autobiography. In Poland, same-sex couples are still unable to formalise their relationship, the inheritance of their property remains unregulated and uncertain, and their bond remains a private fact that can be disputed at any point in time. The story Renata Lis has to tell, of living in a stable and happy relationship with Elżbieta since the mid-1990s, could serve as an argument in the ongoing debate. The author does not, however, use the impassioned language of political debate and firebrand journalism; if she speaks of passion, it is purely romantic.

Renata Lis draws from books by Didier Eribon and Annie Ernaux, and from the wealth of humanist literature on same-sex relationships, but the power of her book lies in her self-analysis. Of herself she writes: born into a family with no cultural ambitions, in a “rough” part of Warsaw. Her breakthrough came with her decision in high school to continue her studies, and then taking seminars with Professor Maria Janion. Yet her greatest turning point was meeting Elżbieta, a person with her own view on many things in life, her feet planted firmly on the ground, never willing to give up. It was an enormous challenge for them to run a small publishing house together, operating in a fragile economy with unclear rules, and with no initial capital to get them off the ground.

Two new bits of information have emerged since this book was published: the publishing house has closed its doors, and Renata and Elżbieta have tied the knot in Denmark.

Anna Nasiłowska

Translated by Soren Gauger



Nominated for the Nike
Literary Award

Renata Lis

Moja ukochana i ja [My Beloved and I]

Publisher: Wydawnictwo Literackie 2023

ISBN: 978-83-08-08108-2

Number of pages: 316

Rights: Joanna Dąbrowska

j.dabrowska@wydawnictwoliterackie.pl

Book excerpt



© Renata Lis

Renata Lis (b. 1970) is a prose writer, journalist and translator (of French and Russian). She graduated in Polish Studies from the University of Warsaw and postgraduate studies in Social Sciences from the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the Polish Academy of Sciences. Her translations have included works by Jean Baudrillard, Gustave Flaubert and Ivan Bunin. Her own books and translations have been nominated for Poland's foremost literary prizes, including the Nike Literary Award.

The River of Childhood

Returning to the land of childhood doesn't have to be a sentimental journey

This book consists of six essays written in a very personal tone. Andrzej Stasiuk takes a trip along the River Bug, which marks the border between Poland and Ukraine and Belarus, and also travels to its source. A small stretch of this river has special significance for Stasiuk, because it flows near the village where he spent his summer holidays as a child. For obvious reasons, it's a "magical land" where not just the beauty of the landscape is enchanting. But Stasiuk doesn't indulge in nostalgic reverie or idealise the "river of childhood". At one point he notes that "horses were released [onto the lovely meadows by the Bug]: a chestnut and a grey, and their names are war and death". Of course he means the war that has been ongoing in Ukraine for the past two-and-a-half years. His expedition to the Bug also made him aware that the eastern borders of today's Poland have been the scene of brutal struggles since time immemorial – the waters of the beautiful, wild river have always been mixed with blood, and its current has carried many a corpse. Nor is it possible to forget that the Nazis established death camps in the east of Poland, at Bełżec and Sobibór. So Stasiuk shows the Polish-Ukrainian borderlands as a region that's to some extent under a curse. He also describes his endeavours on behalf of Ukrainian refugees, and shares thoughts on the Russian aggression.

The book's strongest virtue is its effort to remain ambivalent: the river of childhood is sacred, but at the same time cursed. A return journey to something that's emotionally moving and enchanting is also a trip to something that bears the stamp of death, destruction and danger.

Dariusz Nowacki
Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones



One of Poland's best-known contemporary authors

Andrzej Stasiuk
Rzeka dzieciństwa [The River of Childhood]

Publisher: Czarne, 2024
ISBN: 978-83-8191-889-3
Number of pages: 168

Rights: Zofia Dimitrijević
zofia.dimitrijevic@czarne.com.pl

Book excerpt



© Tomasz Gotfryd

Andrzej Stasiuk (b. 1960) is a novelist, essayist, publisher, dramatist, journalist, one of Poland's best-known contemporary authors. Co-founder with his wife, Monika Sznajderman, of the publishing house Wydawnictwo Czarne, which specialises in central European literature and modern reportage. His debut was the controversial novel *Mury Hebronu* [The Walls of Hebron] (1992), which is set inside a prison. Winner of all Poland's major literary prizes, including the Nike Literary Award for *Jadąc do Babadag*, 2004 (which was published in English translation as *On the Road to Babadag*) and the Gdynia Literary Prize (for *Taksim*, 2009). Co-author of the album *Mickiewicz – Stasiuk – Haydamaky* (2018), recorded with the Ukrainian folk-rock group Haydamaky. His work has been translated into languages including English, French, Japanese and Italian.

The Black Portrait

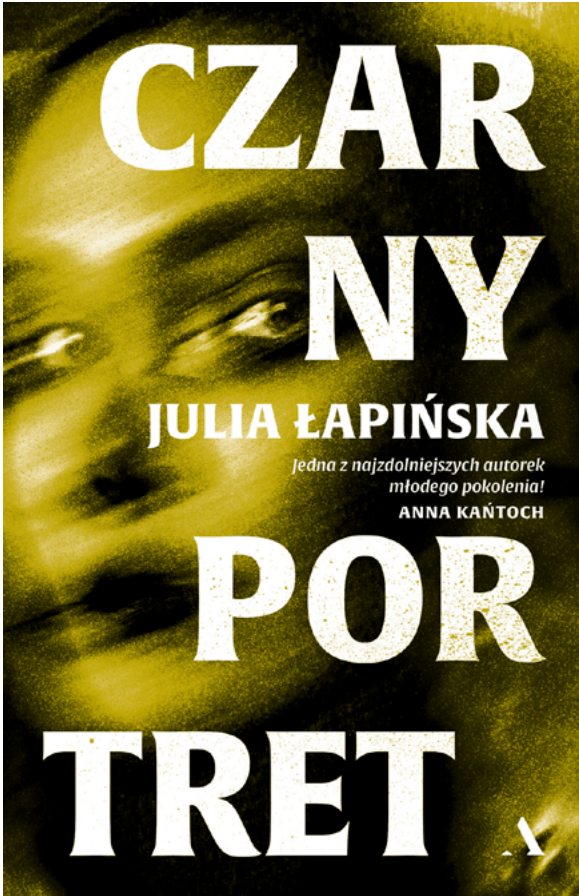
The past unravels as a modern-day crime reveals secrets from World War II

A luxury excursion for seniors financed by an anonymous sponsor. Kuba Krall, former war photographer, takes on the job of documenting the excursion. When one of the participants goes missing and is later found dead, police officer Inga Rojczyk appears at the scene. The two protagonists go back a long way, so they combine forces. A small spa town: on the face of it, peaceful; even idyllic. Not a bit of it. All the loose ends lead to Połczyn Zdrój and its history. A parallel narrative, divided between the contemporary investigation and World War II – when the Lebensborn programme operated out of the former Luisenbad sanatorium – finally comes together as we learn who the killer is. But identifying the murderer isn't all that matters here. It turns out to be equally important to show how enduring are investigations into guilt and punishment when their sources are located in the past. Some paintings that were lost during the war and a book written by the murder victim which may give an account of the dark history of the sanatorium – which is still in operation – become the point of departure. Long-dead passions and animosities are revived. Children inherit difficult information and become entangled in a past over which they have no influence. The children who lived in Luisenbad during the war – it turns out – continue to influence the lives of people living today. The partially concealed truth returns after many years and those that survive are in fact immersed in the past.

Bernadetta Darska
Translated by David French

Other titles available in this series:





Julia Łapińska

Czarny portret [The Black Portrait]

Publisher: Agora, 2024

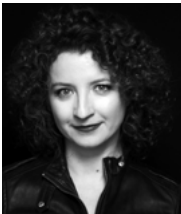
ISBN: 978-83-268-4232-0

Number of pages: 424

Rights: Magdalena Kosińska

magdalena.kosinska@agora.pl

Book excerpt



© Mateusz Skwarczek

Julia Łapińska is a writer, journalist and philosopher, considered one of the most talented Polish authors of crime fiction of the younger generation. Her debut *The Red Lake* (2022) – the first part of the series about photoreporter Kuba Krall – won several awards. It was awarded with the title of Crime Writing Debut of the Year, was selected for the final of the Large Calibre Award and received honourable mentions in the Warsaw Crime Writing and Piła Crime Writing competitions. The series has continued with *Wild Dogs* (2023) and *The Black Portrait* (2024), where – as in her debut – aside from the criminal intrigue, references to historical events play an important role. She also writes short stories and works as a creative writing instructor.

Mistletois

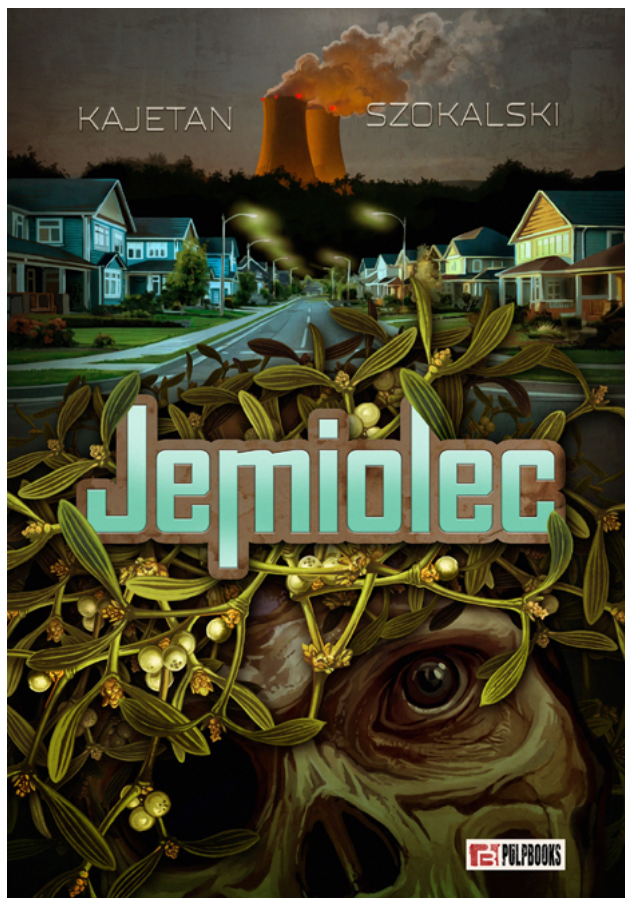
A grotesque crimino-social dystopia

Nature will still surely astonish humankind many times. For example, with the new disease “mistletois” – a mutated version of common mistletoe, which as a result of biological experiments into parasitising trees will transfer to people.

Kajetan Szokalski paints just such a dystopian vision of the near future in his novel whose title comes from the name of the proliferating parasite. The protagonist, Julian Wajgel, a painter of car chassis in the Polish Motor Vehicle Manufacturing Plant, finds himself in a desperate situation: not only are stems of the sinister plant growing on his mother, but the factory where he’s employed is about to downsize. The prime minister comes to the aid of the employees by inviting them to take part in a social experiment in order to compensate them for losing their jobs. They will be generously paid for spending a year in the specially-built luxury village. There’s one condition, however: under no circumstances may they leave the village. The government experiment is concealing a secret, however, and Julian Wajgel is not the conformist he appears to be...

Szokalski’s novel is a literary collage, combining not just classical prose genres such as fantasy, crime and horror, but also styles typical for Polish culture, like the *manufacturing novel* popular during communism about workers from factories and state-owned plants. The narrative form drawing on the grotesque will help the novel find a wide range of readers: from older teens, through young adults, to thirty- and forty-somethings who appreciate accomplished literary writing.

Katarzyna Wójcik
Translated by David French



Winner of Granice.pl's
Fantasy Jury Award

Kajetan Szokalski
Jemiolec [Mistletois]

Publisher: PulpBooks, 2024
ISBN: 978-83-968161-5-3
Number of pages: 296

Rights: Agnieszka Włoka
agnieszka.wloka@pulpbooks.pl

Book excerpt



© Karolina Toczydłowska

Kajetan Szokalski (b. 1993) is the author of prose on the cusp of various genres, mainly crime, fantasy and horror. He made his debut with the short story “Dziury” [Holes] in the quarterly *Strona Czynna*. He publishes on the PulpUp app and in anthologies and literary periodicals. He is the author of two novels: *Klub Białych Zębów* [The White Tooth Club] (2022) and *Jemiolec* [Mistletois] (2024). By profession he is a software tester. Based in Warsaw.

Polish Design Now

Design starts with education

Polish Design Now is a guidebook to the past and future of Polish design. It's not only a presentation of important figures in Polish design, people who have shaped the Polish applied arts environment since 1945, but is also a mine of knowledge about historical contexts as well as European and American design inspirations. Aleksandra Koperda introduces us to the philosophy of design, influential educational institutions, organisations of craftsmen and artists, factories manufacturing ceramic products.

First and foremost, what we will find here are interesting interviews with Polish designers of everyday objects. Koperda talks to, for example, Krystian Kowalski, Szymon Hanczar, Wojciech Mierzwa, Aleksandra Kujawska, Piotr Podziomek, Arkadiusz Szwed. Each of whom create very different designs – most often these are chairs, armchairs and tables, but also vases, porcelain sets, studio glass, jewellery. Equally different are their approaches to designing.

But that's not all: Koperda asks founders of important brands about their industry experience. For example, she talks to Michał Woch, founder of *Vzór*, and Michał Szarko, founder of the *Politura* brand. Both of these brands introduce to the market historical designs which have never been mass-produced. A separate part of Koperda's book is devoted to something she describes as "a different view": when designs heavily gravitate towards art (as is the case of Bartosz Mucha's works) or when the art of design does not materialise in any objects (Jo Jurga).

Anna Kałuża

Translated by Anna Błasiak



Łódź Design Festival's
Must-Have Selection 2024

Aleksandra Koperda
Teraz polski dizajn [Polish Design
Now]

Publisher: Znak, 2023
ISBN: 978-83-240-9417-2
Number of pages: 304

Rights: Ewa Bolińska-Gostkowska
bolinska@znak.com.pl

Book excerpt



© Michał Lichtański

Aleksandra Koperda is an art historian, cultural manager, curator, writer and journalist. She is the author of books on design and industrial design: *Odwiedziny. Rozmowy o dizajnie* [A Visit: Conversations about Design] (2020), *Dizajn miejsc codziennych* [The Design of Everyday Places] (2021) and the latest, *teraz polski dizajn* [Polish Design Now] (2023). In 2016, she started her Hygge Blog, where she publishes articles about interior architecture and design, as well as about designers and artists working in this area. She writes for, among other magazines, *Vogue* and *Architectural Digest*. She lives in Kraków.

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*).

The Polish Book Institute

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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:

- literature: prose, poetry and drama
- works in the humanities, broadly conceived, whether classical or contemporary (with particular regard for books devoted to the culture and literature of Poland)
- 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

THE FOUND IN TRANSLATION AWARD

This award is given to the translator(s) of the finest book-length translation of Polish literature into English published in the previous calendar year. The winner receives a prize of PLN 16,000 and a one-month residency in Kraków. The Book Institute has presented this award in partnership with the Polish Cultural Institutes in London and New York on an annual basis since 2008. Recent winners:

- 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 Krakow 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

2024

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

Texts by: Przemysław Czapliński, Bernadetta Darska, Anna Kałuża,
Paulina Małochleb, Anna Nasiłowska, Dariusz Nowacki, Zuzanna Sala,
Katarzyna Trzeciak, Katarzyna Wójcik

Translated by: Anna Błasiak, Sean Gaspar Bye, David French, Soren
Gauger, Scotia Gilroy, Antonia Lloyd-Jones, Nasim Łuczaj, Eliza
Marciniak, Jess Jensen Mitchell, Dawid Mobilaji, Kate Webster, Anna
Zaranko

Edited by Karolina Makięła
English text edited by Richard Greenhill
Design by Pilar Rojo
Pre-flight process by Andrzej Karlik
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Ministry of Culture and National Heritage
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