



JAN POLKOWSKI

GŁOSY / VOICES

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JAN POLKOWSKI

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of the Republic
of Poland.**

GŁOSY / VOICES

by Jan Polkowski

Translated from the Polish by Charles S. Kraszewski

with an afterword by Józef Maria Ruszar

Edited by Aeddan Shaw and Magdalena Filipczuk

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GŁOSY / VOICES

* * *

Szkwał. W zimnej koszuli idę wzdłuż zatoki.
Kim byłem? Ziarenkiem piasku pod stopą rybitwy
kapitanem fregaty w czapce po stryju Władku
sercem szybkich jaskółek z kratkowanego papieru
specem od gry w nożyka i Wyścig Pokoju
wiecznym utrapieniem mojej biednej mamy
bo zamiast ministrantury wolałem mecze w nogę.
Trudno wyliczyć wszystkie magiczne wcielenia.
Zasypiając czułem jak przy skroni wiruje poduszka
Ziemi a w głowie tną kosmos milknące
gwiazdy. Życie. Szesnaście ogromnych lat.
Przebiegały tak lekko, że zapominałem oddychać
a kiedy ochłonałem przyszedł dzień odczytania.

W tym dniu moje życie trwało tylko godzinę.
O czwartej trzydzieści obudziłem się w bloku.
A do piątej czterdzieści otwierał się los.
Poznałem ludzką podłość, pragnienia
i tajemnice czystej, mądrej wolności.
Burzliwą przyjaźń z Żeromskim zakończyłem kłótnią.
Przed kolegami ukryłem jak zabrzmiało we mnie
przekleństwo zdania Norwida *Czemu cieniu odjeżdżasz...*
Ściągnąłem od Leonarda schemat lekkich skrzydeł.
Nie uciekłem daleko. Zostałem niewolnikiem
lunatycznych spacerów z Dorotą córką spawacza
ze Stoczni Marynarki Wojennej i Afrodyty Zimnych Mórz
uwięzionej w bezkształtnej sukience z bistoru.
Tak, zostałem ojcem, czy dobrym doprawdy nie wiem.

* * *

Squall. In a cold shirt I walk along the bay.
Who was I? A grain of sand beneath a tern's foot
a frigate captain wearing Uncle Władek's cap
the heart of swift swallows made of notepad paper
an expert in mumbly-peg and the Race of Peace
the eternal thorn in my poor mother's side
who preferred soccer match to Sunday Mass.
It's hard to sum up all the magical incarnations.
Falling asleep I felt beneath my temple
the pillow of the world spin, stars
fading away slicing through the cosmos in my head.
Life. Sixteen immense years.
They passed so softly I forgot to breathe
and when I cooled down came the day of reckoning.

On that day my life lasted one hour only.
At four thirty I woke up in the flat
and destiny was open till five forty.
I came to know the human villainy of desire
and the secrets of pure wise freedom.
My stormy friendship with Żeromski ended in a quarrel.
Before my friends I hid the inner swelling
of Norwid's cursing words *O Shade why art thou departing...*
From Leonardo I copied a diagram of filmy wings.
I didn't get far. I became enslaved
to moonlight walks with Dorota the daughter
of a welder from the Military Shipyards
and Aphrodite of the Cold Seas
imprisoned in a shapeless crimplene dress.
And so I became a father a good one? I really don't know.

Dzieci nie pamiętam lub boję się wspomnieć
ich lniane zadziorne stópki i słowa jak skóra świata.
Uczyłem się starości. Bóg pojawiał się, znikał.
Z wysokich słów schodził Chrystus bym wątpił
i dotykał. Podróże? Do Krakowa i na rowerze
za miasto przez nieprzebyty gąszcz słodkich sierpniowych obietnic.
Tym razem żyłem uważnie hamując obroty Ziemi
by czuć jak stygną w zmierzchu piaszczyste ścieżki czasu.

Pocisk przedzierał się długo przez szron i stukot szyn
przez ranne zgniecione światła wymieszane z olejem
zabłoconego słońca by wreszcie przebić mi szyję
przez okno trójmiejskiej kolejki.
Cóż, musicie uwierzyć, że wszystko przeżyłem w godzinę
bo przecież nie zmartwychwstałem a wciąż mam szesnaście lat.
Jeśli kłamię i nie spotkało mnie co spotkać przecież musiało
to wierzcie — świat żaden
naprawdę nigdy
nie istniał.

Zastrzelony? (1954-1970?)

I don't remember my children or maybe I'm afraid to
recall their feisty flaxen feet their words like the world's rind.
I learned old age. God appeared vanished.
And Christ came down from high words so I might doubt
and touch. Trips? To Kraków and on bicycle
beyond the city through the dense thickets of sweet
August promises.
This time I was living carefully brake-peddalling the earth's rotations
to feel how they cool down in the dust, the sandy paths of time.

The bullet took a long time splitting the frost the rattle of rails
the crushed light of morning
mixed with the oil of the muddied sun
until it finally pierced my neck
through the window of the Tricity tram.
Well then you must believe it I lived through it all
in that one hour
for I haven't resurrected after all
I'm still always sixteen.
If I'm lying and none of this happened to me
as it must have happened really
believe this then — no world
ever really existed
ever.

Shot dead? (1954-1970?)





* * *

Wierzę, że nie masz do mnie żalu. Oprócz ciebie miałam jeszcze trójkę. Trochę zdziwionego swoim istnieniem Adasia, Józia sprytnego jak dotąd nikt w naszej rodzinie i Asię, małomówny dowód na istnienie dobra. Ojciec zgasł szybko i odtąd po zmroku nie mogłam pozbierać myśli. Praca, kolejki, gotowanie, przerabianie ubrań. Z dorosłych na dzieci ze starszych na młodsze. Wydawało mi się, że nigdy nie zasnę, że tylko zastygam z żelazkiem, igłą i naparstkiem, ciastem na makaron przygnieciona odłamkiem serca. Chciałam umrzeć ze wstydu, że żyję. Z nieustępliwej miłości i ze strachu przed twoim rozrzuconym bezładnie cieniem. Teraz dobijam osiemdziesiątki więc czas byś mi przebaczył. To ja wykarmiłam własnym ciałem te bezkresne szeregi bezradnych dni. I wiem, każdy z nich zabijał cię jeszcze raz synku.

Matka? (1928-2009?)

* * *

I know that you don't blame me. Besides you, I had
three others. Adaś somewhat stunned at his own existence
Józio clever as no one yet in all our family
and Asia who spoke little — proof that goodness exists.
Your father expired quickly and since then I've had trouble
gathering my thoughts in the darkness. Work queues cooking altering
clothes. From adults to children from older to younger.
It seemed that I would never fall asleep just grow cold
needle in hand thimble on finger macaroni dough
pressed flat by a shard of my heart. I wanted to die
from shame that I'm alive. From implacable love from fear
of your sprawled shadow. Now I'm nearing
eighty so I guess it's high time for you to forgive me. It was me
who fed with my own body that endless range of helpless
days. And I know that each one of them killed you over and over again
my son.

Mother? (1928-2009?)

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

Charles S. Kraszewski (born 1962) is a literary translator from Polish, Czech, and Slovak. He is the author of four volumes of original poetry; three in English (*Beast*, *Diet of Nails*, and *Chanameed*) and one in Polish (*Hallo, Sztokholm*). He has also published a satirical novel (*Accomplices, You Ask?*).

LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARIA GĄSECKA

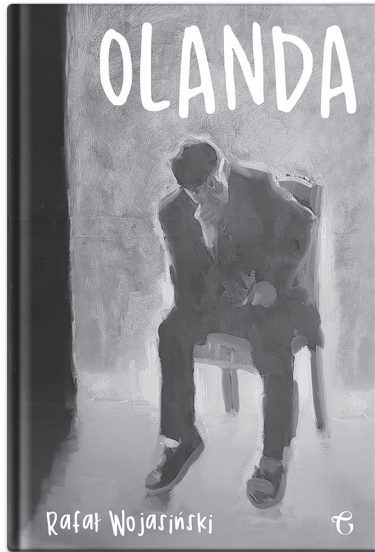
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ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHER

Maria Gąsecka was born in 1982. She is a graduate of the Polish Higher School of Film, Theatre and Television in Łódź and Norwich University of the Arts. She collaborated in such documentary films as *Herman Goering Karierre*, *Ku chwale ojczyzny* [In Praise of the Fatherland], *Czarny czwartek, dlaczego?* [Black Thursday, why?]. She has worked as a cinematic still photographer; she is the author of a series of photographs and exhibits: *Sport Photography* (2006, 2007), *Closer* (2011), *Mute* (2011, 2013), *Gates and Doors — Gdańsk* (2013), *Magic Doors* (2013), *Cool Days on the Baltic Sea* (2014). She curated the one-day no-gallery exhibition *Two Coasts* (2019). She is curator and author of the exhibition, as well as author of the collage *What Created Me* (2021).

Olanda

by Rafał Wojasiński

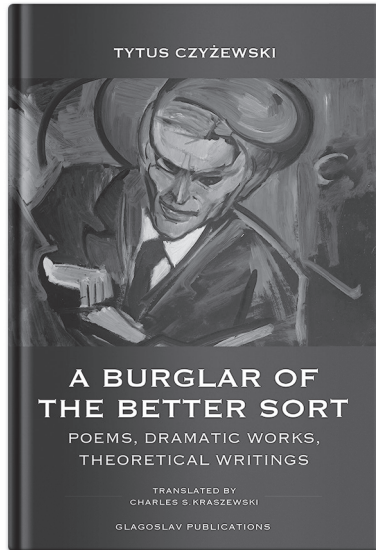


I've been happy since the morning. Delighted, even. Everything seems so splendidly transient to me. That dust, from which thou art and unto which thou shalt return — it tempts me. And that's why I wander about these roads, these woods, among the nearby houses, from which waft the aromas of fried pork chops, chicken soup, fish, diapers, steamed potatoes for the pigs; I lose my eye-sight, and regain it again. I don't know what life is, Ola, but I'm holding on to it. Thus speaks the narrator of Rafał Wojasiński's novel *Olanda*. Awarded the prestigious Marek Nowakowski Prize for 2019, *Olanda* introduces us to a world we glimpse only through the window of our train, as we hurry from one important city to another: a provincial world of dilapidated farmhouses and sagging apartment blocks, overgrown cemeteries and village drunks; a world seemingly abandoned by God — and yet full of the basic human joy of life itself.

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A Burglar of the Better Sort

by Tytus Czyżewski

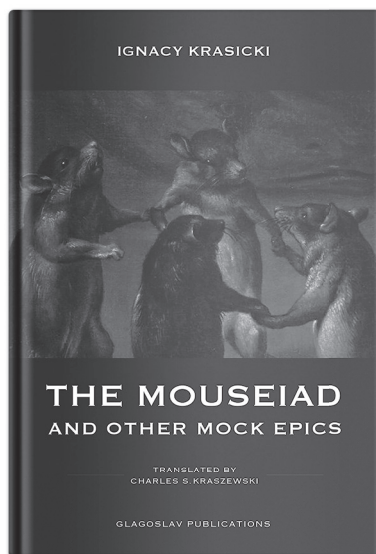


The history of Poland, since the eighteenth century, has been marked by an almost unending struggle for survival. From 1795 through 1945, she was partitioned four times by her stronger neighbours, most of whom were intent on suppressing if not eradicating Polish culture. It is not surprising, then, that much of the great literature written in modern Poland has been politically and patriotically engaged. Yet there is a second current as well, that of authors devoted above all to the craft of literary expression, creating 'art for art's sake,' and not as a didactic national service. Such a poet is Tytus Czyżewski, one of the chief, and most interesting, literary figures of the twentieth century. Growing to maturity in the benign Austrian partition of Poland, and creating most of his works in the twenty-year window of authentic Polish independence stretching between the two world wars, Czyżewski is an avant-garde poet, dramatist and painter who popularised the new approach to poetry established in France by Guillaume Apollinaire, and was to exert a marked influence on such multi-faceted artists as Tadeusz Kantor.

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The Mouseiad and other Mock Epics

by Ignacy Krasicki

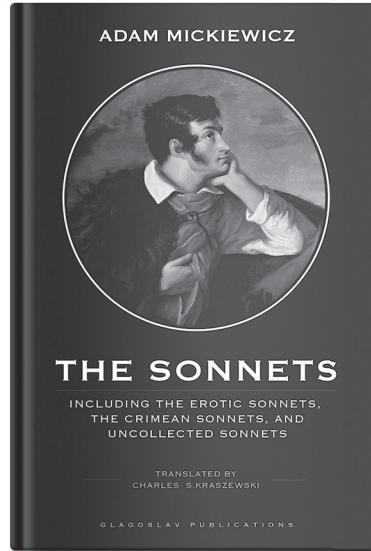


International brigades of mice and rats join forces to defend the rodents of Poland, threatened with extermination at the paws of cats favoured by the ancient ruler King Popiel, a sybaritic, cowardly ruler... The Hag of Discord incites a vicious rivalry between monastic orders, which only the good monks' common devotion to... fortified spirits... is able to allay... The present translation of the mock epics of Poland's greatest figure of the Enlightenment, Ignacy Krasicki, brings together the Mouseiad, the Monachomachia, and the Anti-monachomachia — a tongue-in-cheek 'retraction' of the former work by the author, criticised for so roundly (and effectively) satirising the faults of the Church, of which he himself was a prince. Krasicki towers over all forms of eighteenth-century literature in Poland like Voltaire, Swift, Pope, and LaFontaine all rolled into one. While his fables constitute his most well-known works of poetry, in the words of American comparatist Harold Segel, 'the good bishop's mock-epic poems [...] are the most impressive examples of his literary gifts.' This English translation by Charles S. Kraszewski is rounded off by one of Krasicki's lesser-known works, The Chocim War, the poet's only foray into the genre of the serious, Vergilian epic.

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The Sonnets

by Adam Mickiewicz

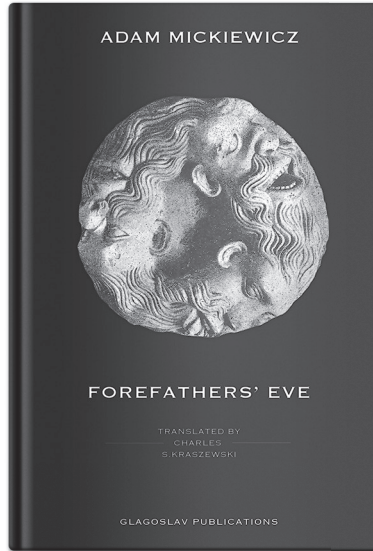


Because the poetry of Adam Mickiewicz is so closely identified with the history of the Polish nation, one often reads him as an institution, rather than a real person. In the *Crimean and Erotic Sonnets* of the national bard, we are presented with the fresh, real, and striking poetry of a living, breathing man of flesh and blood. Mickiewicz proved to be a master of Petrarchan form. His *Erotic Sonnets* chronicle the development of a love affair from its first stirrings to its disillusioning denouement, at times in a bitingly sardonic tone. *The Crimean Sonnets*, a verse account of his journeys through the beautiful Crimean Peninsula, constitute the most perfect cycle of descriptive sonnets since du Bellay. *The Sonnets* of Adam Mickiewicz are given in the original Polish, in facing-page format, with English verse translations by Charles S. Kraszewski. Along with the entirety of the Crimean and Erotic Sonnets, other “loose” sonnets by Mickiewicz are included, which provide the reader with the most comprehensive collection to date of Mickiewicz’s sonneteering. Fronted with a critical introduction, *The Sonnets* of Adam Mickiewicz also contain generous textual notes by the poet and the translator.

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Forefathers' Eve

by Adam Mickiewicz



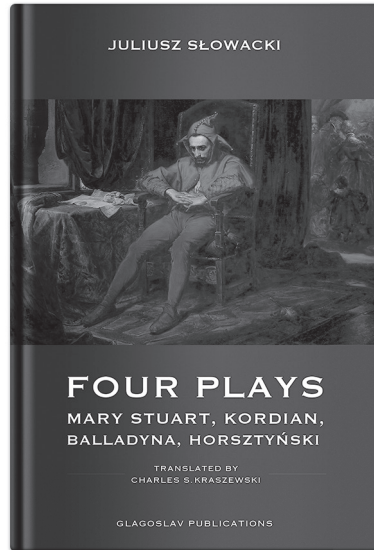
Forefathers' Eve [*Dziady*] is a four-part dramatic work begun circa 1820 and completed in 1832 – with Part I published only after the poet's death, in 1860. The drama's title refers to *Dziady*, an ancient Slavic and Lithuanian feast commemorating the dead. This is the grand work of Polish literature, and it is one that elevates Mickiewicz to a position among the “great Europeans” such as Dante and Goethe.

With its Christian background of the Communion of the Saints, revenant spirits, and the interpenetration of the worlds of time and eternity, *Forefathers' Eve* speaks to men and women of all times and places. While it is a truly Polish work – Polish actors covet the role of Gustaw/Konrad in the same way that Anglophone actors covet that of Hamlet – it is one of the most universal works of literature written during the nineteenth century. It has been compared to Goethe's *Faust* – and rightfully so...

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Four Plays:

Mary Stuart, Kordian, Balladyna, Horsztyński



The dramas in Glagoslav's edition of *Four Plays* include some of the poet's greatest dramatic works, all written before age twenty-five: *Mary Stuart*, *Balladyna* and *Horsztyński* weave carefully crafted motifs from *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in astoundingly original works, and *Kordian* — Słowacki's riposte to Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve*, constitutes the final word in the revolutionary period of Polish Romanticism.

Translated into English by Charles S. Kraszewski, the *Four Plays* of Juliusz Słowacki will be of interest to aficionados of Polish Romanticism, Shakespeare, and theatre in general.

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In December 1970, amid a harsh winter and an even harsher economic situation, the ruling communist regime in Poland chose to drastically raise prices on basic foodstuffs. Just before the Christmas holidays, for example, the price of fish, a staple of the traditional Christmas Eve meal, rose nearly 20%. Frustrated citizens took to the streets to protest, demanding the repeal of the price-hikes. Things took an especially dramatic turn in the northern regions near the Baltic

shore — later, the cradle of the Solidarity movement, which would eventually spark the fall of communism in Poland and throughout Central and Eastern Europe — where the government moved against their citizens with the Militia and the Army. Forty-one Poles were murdered by their own government when militiamen and soldiers opened fire with live rounds on the crowds in Gdańsk, Gdynia, Szczecin and Elbląg. Jan Polkowski's moving poetic cycle *Głosy* [Voices], presented here in its entirety in the English translation of C.S. Kraszewski, is a poetic monument to the dead, their families, and all who were affected by the 'December Events,' as they are sometimes euphemistically referred to. In his afterword to the collection, 'Jan Polkowski's *Voices* — The Antigones of the Baltic Coast,' Józef Maria Ruszar notes that this work, in which Polkowski, as something of a medium, 'enters the skin' of the dead, the survivors, and their families to 'speak from within his narrators,' is something which 'has no counterpart in the literature of Poland — or even that of the world.' In its moving, subtle, yet powerful tribute to those who paid the highest price for the ultimate victory of right over wrong, liberty over oppression, Jan Polkowski's *Voices* takes its rightful place alongside other immortal artistic threnodies, such as Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*, John Hersey's *Hiroshima*, and Henry Górecki's *Symphony III*.

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