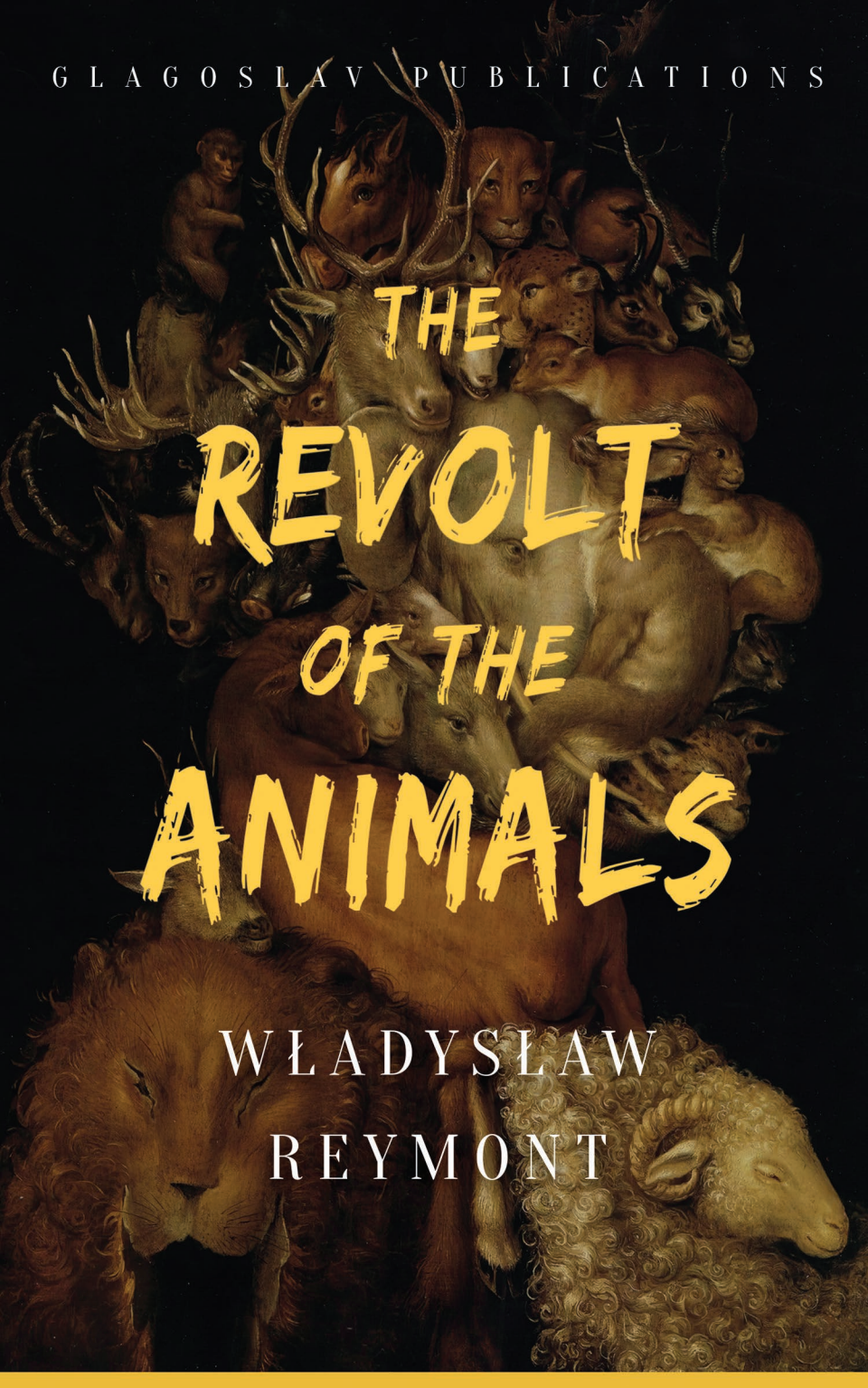


GLAGOSLAV PUBLICATIONS



THE  
REVOLT  
OF THE  
ANIMALS

WŁADYSŁAW  
REYMONT



WŁADYSŁAW  
REYMONT

THE  
REVOLT  
OF THE  
ANIMALS

PUBLICATION SUBSIDIZED BY  
THE POLISH BOOK INSTITUTE

THE ©POLAND  
TRANSLATION  
PROGRAM

BOOK INSTITUTE



©POLAND

# THE REVOLT OF THE ANIMALS

*A Fable*

by Władysław Stanisław Reymont

Translated from the Polish and introduced by  
Charles S. Kraszewski

First published in the Polish as *Bunt* in 1924

This book has been published with the support of  
the ©POLAND Translation Program

Introduction © 2022, Charles S. Kraszewski

Proofreading by Richard Coombes

Cover image:  
'Earth' by Giuseppe Arcimboldo (1566)

© 2022, Glagoslav Publications

Book cover and interior book design by Max Mendor

[www.glagoslav.com](http://www.glagoslav.com)

ISBN: 978-1-914337-38-3

First published in English by Glagoslav Publications in November 2022

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

This book is in copyright. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior permission in writing of the publisher, nor be otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published without a similar condition, including this condition, being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

WŁADYSŁAW  
REYMONT

*THE*  
**REVOLT**  
*OF THE*  
**ANIMALS**

TRANSLATED FROM THE POLISH AND INTRODUCED  
BY CHARLES S. KRASZEWSKI

GLAGOSLAV PUBLICATIONS



# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: 'OH, THE HUMANITY. ON WŁADYSŁAW REYMONT'S <i>REVOLT OF THE ANIMALS</i> ' BY CHARLES S. KRASZEWSKI . . . . .	7
 <i>REVOLT OF THE ANIMALS</i>	
PART I . . . . .	50
PART II . . . . .	200
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	266
ABOUT THE AUTHOR . . . . .	268
ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR . . . . .	269



WŁADYSŁAW REYMONT  
(1867 - 1925)



# OH, THE HUMANITY. ON WŁADYSŁAW REYMONT'S *REVOLT OF THE ANIMALS*

Charles S. Kraszewski

## POLAND'S ORWELL

The second of Poland's six Nobel laureates in literature, Władysław Stanisław Reymont (1867–1925), is not an unknown quantity outside of his homeland. Translations of *The Peasants* [Chłopi, 1904–1909], which won him the Nobel in 1924, and his earlier *Promised Land* [Ziemia obiecana, 1899] have been available in English since 1925 and 1927, at least.<sup>1</sup> The same cannot be said for his last novel, *The Revolt of the Animals* [Bunt, 1924]. Besides its serialisation in the year of his death, there have only been three editions of the novel in book form printed in Poland: the 1924 edition of the pre-war firm of Gebethner and Wolff, that of 1934, brought out in Warsaw by the 'Wydawnictwo Tygodnika Ilustrowanego' [Illustrated Weekly Publications], and, most recently, that of Wimana (Gdańsk: 2018).

The timeframe is eloquent: two printings (or three, if the periodical serialisation is counted) before the Second

.....

<sup>1</sup> By Knopf in New York, both works translated by M.H. Dziewicki.

World War, which put an end to the independence of the resurrected Second Polish Republic, and one in 2018 — two decades after the resumption of Polish independence and the crumbling of Soviet hegemony in East-Central Europe. For, as the editors of the 2018 printing note on their flyleaf:

The novel is the Author's personal reflection on the Russian revolution, and a critique of its ideology. Although he looked with distaste on unfettered capitalism, a distaste he expressed in his *Promised Land*, the results of falling into the other extreme terrified him. On this earth, all Utopias will remain unrealised ideals. Despite the best initial intentions, every attempt at imposing Utopia, especially through revolution, will end in the same fashion: in the deaths of hundreds, thousands, even millions of mostly innocent victims. It's no wonder that throughout the years of the Polish People's Republic, Reymont's *Revolt* remained on the index of forbidden titles.<sup>2</sup>

The novel, which Reymont subtitles *baśń* — a fable, or fairy story — centres on Rex: a powerful, mastiff-like dog, raised on a manor, who, after outliving his use and being brutally expelled from his human Eden by the family following his master's death, arrives at the revolutionary idea of leading the animals out of human bondage. He will take them on a trek far to the east, inspired by the songs of the cranes that wax lyrical about a paradisiacal land where human foot has

.....  
<sup>2</sup> Władysław St. Reymont, *Bunt* (Gdańsk: Wimana, 2018), rear leaf.

never trod, where the pastures abound with fat grasses and sparkle with pure springs of water. How this will play out, the reader will see in due time. However, the very concept of an animal fable — a poetic genre known since antiquity — turned to a consideration of socialist revolution and totalitarianism cannot help but call to the reader's mind a more famous novel, also subtitled 'a fable' — George Orwell's biting brilliant *Animal Farm* (1945). With rather disarming forthrightness, the editors at Wimana are quick to point this out, a few lines farther down from the above citation: '*The Revolt* preceded by more than twenty years the publication of G. Orwell's *Animal Farm*. Perhaps, if not for that blacklisting, it might have become a worldwide best-seller of its genre.' The cynical reader might well ask why no translator reached for *The Revolt* in the fifteen years of relative peace and prosperity following the initial publication of the novel, before the Nazi/Soviet invasion of Poland in September 1939 put paid to all such secondary concerns in the country as literature; why a full English translation is only now appearing, nearly an entire century after the book's first appearance, whereas Orwell's novel was translated into Polish almost immediately after the publication of the English original, at the end of 1946, in paper-scarce London.<sup>3</sup>

.....

<sup>3</sup> George Orwell, *Folwark zwierzęcy*, trans. Teresa Jeleńska (London: The League of Poles Abroad, 1946). As far as 1984 is concerned, the first printed version in Polish was the translation by Juliusz Mieroszewski, published in 1953 by *Kultura* in Paris. However, as Beata Dorosz notes in her article 'George Orwell's 1984: The Polish Chapter in Light of the PIASA Archives,' *The Polish Review*, Vol. 61, No.

One might say, 'because *Animal Farm* is a better book.' There is no riposte that I, the translator, or anyone intimately acquainted with literature, can make to that. But: are there really better and worse books? Is Evgeny Zamyatin's *We* 'better' than *1984*? Or is *1984* better than Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*? Is there any sense to saying that Roger Waters' magnificent reworking of the Orwellian theme on Pink Floyd's *Animals* (1977) is 'better' than Ray Davies' cheeky and hopelessly idyllic 'Animal Farm' from the *Village Green Preservation Society* (1968)? One may prefer The Kinks to Pink Floyd, or vice versa; Orwell to Reymont, or Reymont to Orwell, but do rankings of 'better' and 'worse' apply in art? Is Raphael a 'better' painter than David Hockney? Is Picasso's photographically naturalistic *First Communion* (1906) better, or worse, than his *Portrait of Dora Maar* (1937) which plays havoc with perspective and colour? Perhaps it's best to set aside all such evaluative comparisons, and approach all artworks, including these two books, on their own ground. What was the author trying to do? Did he succeed?

Polish critics, both before and after the war, were none too effusive in their praise of the final fruit of their Nobel-winner's pen. In 1938, writing in *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Waclaw Borowy spares but one descriptive sentence to the novel, telling enough in its avoidance of assessment. He calls it 'a sort of contemporary *Roman du*

.....  
4 (2016), pp. 57-66, it was the poet Jan Lechoń who first made a radio-play translation of the novel, which was aired by the Voice of America in November, 1949, and hence within a year of the printing of the original English text.

*Renart*, in which [Reymont] attempted to picture the tangle of present social ideas.<sup>4</sup> In 1926 (and thus just two years after its publication), Roman Dyboski, translator and professor of English literature at the Jagiellonian University, saw the genesis of *The Revolt* in the context of contemporary history: the Polish-Soviet War of 1919–1921, in which the victorious Polish Army under the command of Józef Piłsudski stymied Soviet attempts at exporting communism to the west ‘over the corpse of white Poland.’<sup>5</sup> Dyboski writes:

Reymont deals with the monstrous phenomenon of Bolshivism under the allegorical guise of a story of revolt in the animal world (*The Revolt*). This suggests to the literary specialist an interesting comparison with the Latin poem of the medieval English poet John Gower on the great peasant revolt of 1381 (*Vox Clamantis*), but it is in itself too full of the natural excitement of the Poles over the terrible things happening next door to them, to claim attention as a lasting literary reflection of the great political drama enacted before our eyes.<sup>6</sup>

.....  
<sup>4</sup> Waclaw Borowy, ‘Reymont,’ *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. XVI, No. 47 (January 1938), p. 443.

<sup>5</sup> So proclaimed Soviet General Mikhail Tukhachevsky (who not long after suffered an ignominious defeat at the gates of Warsaw, which led to the ultimate Polish victory): ‘To the West! Over the corpse of White Poland lies the road to world-wide conflagration.’ Citation from Norman Davies, *God’s Playground: A History of Poland*, Vol. II: ‘1795 to the Present’ (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 396.

<sup>6</sup> R. Dyboski, ‘Żeromski and Reymont,’ *The Slavonic Review*, Vol. IV, No. 12 (March 1926), pp. 560–561.

It is something like the writer's mind caught *in flagranti*, Dyboski seems to imply, and if Ezra Pound's definition of literature as 'news that stays news' is to be accepted, Reymont's *Revolt of the Animals* was, a mere five years after the Polish-Soviet War, as dead a letter as the newspaper reports of the military campaigns yellowing away in the archives. Closer to our own day and age, Jerzy Kwiatkowski, a literary historian specialising in the interwar period, expressed his assessment of the novel in terms reflective of the prevailing political climate of the Communist People's Republic of Poland. Speaking of the novel in the context of 'science fiction,' which often in the twenties 'constituted a satire on and warning against the "materialisation" of the new, post-war society and — a Communist takeover,' he writes:

Reymont's *Revolt* (1924) has the same aims. It is a sharp pamphlet directed against the revolution, conceived as an 'animal fable,' with a catastrophist tone in the spirit of Florian Znaniecki's writings. [...] *The Revolt* strikes the reader with its bluntness, its concrete nature, its artistic consistency. Still and all, it is a satire; it is shallow and luridly exaggerated. The tastelessness of its idea (presenting the 'revolt of the masses' as a revolt of beasts) blew up in the author's face, as it limits the possibilities of analysing the phenomena it condemns.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Jerzy Kwiatkowski, *Literatura dwudziestolecia* [Interwar Literature] (Warsaw: PWN, 1990), p. 206. I am far from suggesting that Professor Kwiatkowski (1927–1986) was towing the party line here. As an insurgent who fought for his country in the Warsaw Uprising, he had more familiarity with Soviet perfidy than Reymont, who lived

This assessment seems harsh, indeed. For even if *The Revolt of the Animals* is intended as a ‘warning against a Communist takeover,’ and if Reymont is decidedly opposed to Rex’s revolution — any revolution — he does not demonise the animals or their leader. Rather, he shows just as much sympathy and understanding to them and for their just grievances as he does to the peasants and workers which populate his earlier, more famous books. It is hard to read a passage descriptive of man’s viciousness, such as we find in the first chapter of the book, when Rex climbs onto the porch to visit with an old friend:

‘Rex, Rex!’ the parrot screeched in joy from her golden hoop.

‘I was looking for you,’ he growled, climbing up on a chair, as he used to do. They had been friends for a long time. She fluttered down on the armrest and, flapping her wings, began to tell him all sorts of news in her squawking voice. But before he got a chance to confide in her, the dachshunds rushed in, baying, and behind them, the lady of the house, the little master with his blunderbuss, and a whole mob in their train.

‘Run, run!’ gasped the parrot in terror.

.....  
in a time when Poland successfully resisted Communist incursions from the east. However, like all writers of all political stripes in Communist-controlled Poland, in his publications, Kwiatkowski had to choose his words carefully. He died before his country regained its independence, and the above assessment appears unchanged in the newest edition of his book (PWN: 2012, p. 248). It would have been interesting to see if he would have altered his wording, had he lived into the present era.

It was too late. The furious woman rushed over at him and screeched:

‘Out! Out! Out of my sight, you filthy thing! You bloody mutt! Out!’ And right then he felt the teeth of the dachshunds sink into his legs, while painful thumps rained down on his back.

Frenzied with insult and pain, he grabbed the wretched little dogs and tore at them mercilessly, paying heed to nothing now, neither screams nor jets of water nor thrashing staves.

‘Run! Run, Rex, run!’ the parrot continued to screech.

At last, he tore away from the attacking mob and, with a lionlike leap, cleared the terrace and landed on the lawn. But before he made it to the thicket a shot rang out, and something like a hot handful of gravel bit into his left flank. The cruel impact was such that he was thrown headlong, but soon, gathering together what strength he had left, he leapt amongst the low firs. A second shot boomed. Tiny branches rained down upon him, like dead, green tears. He waited no longer, but, crawling through the parkland back into the yard, near the barns, he squeezed into a kennel, where he fell down, fainting with pain.

Even harder to read is this passage, a little later on when, harassed and whipped, and frenzied with anger at the animals’ treatment at the hands of his former protectors, the budding canine revolutionary witnesses a particularly chilling episode of human sadism:



A bloodcurdling cry was then heard, and they saw the donkey run up in panic to throw himself on the dung-hill.

‘The master’s whelp’s splashed him with boiling water! It all but took off his skin.’

With a horrid, mournful bellow, the donkey rolled in the cool muck, while a pack of boys, with the young master at their head, ran up to continue their fun, pelting the beast with stones and knocking at his legs with staves.

One would have to be heartless not to be moved to anger and pity at such a scene. And most people, I venture, in reading Thomas Hardy’s heartbreaking lyric ‘The Mongrel,’ in which a man deceives his dog into leaping into the harbour during a strong undertow, drowning the beast to save a few pence in taxes, are full of understanding when, at last, the dog realises what his ‘god’ has in mind for him:

Just ere his sinking what does one see  
Break on the face of that devotee?  
A wakening to the treachery  
    He had loved with love so blind?  
The faith that had shone in that mongrel’s eye  
That his owner would save him by and by  
Turned to much like a curse as he sank to die,  
    And a loathing of mankind.<sup>8</sup>

.....  
<sup>8</sup> Thomas Hardy, ‘The Mongrel,’ pp. 25-32. From Thomas Hardy, *The Complete Poems* (New York: MacMillan, 1982). The poem

Yet when we come across cruelty, we call it ‘bestial.’ When we hear of a horrific atrocity, we exclaim ‘That’s inhuman!’ How wrong we are. To paraphrase Hardy’s American acolyte, Robinson Jeffers, there’s nothing *more human* than gratuitous cruelty and sadism. Animals do no such things. Whether or not Reymont would agree with the philosophy of Inhumanism that the great Californian worked up over his half century or so of poetic creativity we’ll never know. However, *The Revolt of the Animals* is no flat essay, no B-western with black and white hats to identify the villains and the heroes. If — in the context of the novel — Reymont takes the side of man’s society against the revolutionary hordes of the hoofed and horned, it is not that he is blind to the wickedness of humanity. Consider the one human being judged worthy by the animals of accompanying them on their trek — the cast-off, bastard waif Dummy (no given name is mentioned; his nickname — *Niemowa* — is derived from his speech impediment). No one knows how he showed up one day, as a baby, on the kitchen stoop of the manor; the hard charity of the toffs was such as to make us wonder if it mightn’t have been better not to take him in at all, but rather to expose him, as in the bad old days of the ancient Greeks, than to feed him just enough to keep body and soul together, to beat him, to make fun of him, to treat him like one of the animals (remember the donkey?) who are his only friends. There is a telling scene in the second half of the novel, when, poking through the smoky ruins

.....  
was originally published in the collection *Winter Words in Various Moods and Metres* (1928).

of a town abandoned by its human inhabitants after the passage of the angry sea of animals, Dummy finds himself in a smashed toy store:

Ranging around the store with his eyes, he suddenly shivered in holy fear — as if he'd stumbled in front of an altar. There was a large wardrobe set with reflective glass panes, and on its shelves there were dolls of different sizes and costumes. There were bears, ruddy ones and white ones, horses, jumping-jacks and, besides these, piles of swords, guns, drums, horns, and thousands of other wondrous things that he was seeing for the first time. He blessed himself and rubbed his eyes, unable to believe this great good fortune. He devoured all these miracles with feverish eyes, breathless and afraid lest it all dissolve like the mist. He stood there gaping, moved to the core, astonished, tears flowing down his cheeks.

'O dear Jesus, how pretty!' he sobbed out in a voice thick with ineffable joy.

Do we need any further proof of man's evil? It takes a revolution of the animals to introduce a child to toys. At the risk of citing something out of context, Robinson Jeffers once said 'I'd sooner, except the penalties, kill a man than a hawk.'<sup>9</sup> Yep. You got that right.

.....

<sup>9</sup> Robinson Jeffers, 'Hurt Hawks,' II: 1. In Robinson Jeffers, *Selected Poetry* (New York: Random House, 1959). The poem was first collected in *Cawdor and Other Poems* (1928).

I may as well come clean.

It may be no surprise to you, but I'm a little inhuman myself.

I don't eat animals.

I wasn't always like this. Like most humans, I grew up eating *Fleisch* (I'm using the German word consciously here). I remember — as an adult already — laughing at an advert of a New York steakhouse which featured nothing but a knife and the (witty, I thought, at the time) caption *Horrifying vegetarians for over fifty years*. Little did I know that, before long, I would be among the horrified.

Most people who stop eating meat, after being raised on it, will have a story explaining when, and why, it came about. Mine has nothing of the dramatic about it at all. It was at the Norfolk Zoo. They had a section called 'The Virginia Farmyard,' or something like that. It was a place where all the animals domesticated by man were featured. It didn't occur to me at the time, but, actually, I was wandering amidst all of the animals you find on the farm in Orwell's novel, or on the manor grounds of Reymont's. At one point, I walked into the sty. There was a low wooden barrier — a few horizontal planks nailed onto posts — beyond which slept the hugest pig I'd ever seen. This hog was immense. I bet if I stretched out next to it (no, I didn't!) he wouldn't be much shorter than me, and I'm over six feet. I don't quite know why — it wasn't a *mystical* experience — but as I leant there on that low barrier, gazing down at that gigantic porcine shape, I was mesmerised. And suddenly I said, *Why would I want to eat you? Why would I want to kill you, and eat you?* It wasn't a petting zoo; the pig was not

turning somersaults or nuzzling up for a treat or pushing his huge head close to be scratched; he was asleep. Maybe it was just that vulnerability of his, lying there on his side, his huge, barrel chest inflating and deflating with each breath, his ear twitching away a fly... the sound of a sudden snore so similar to mine (I'm told) when sleeping on the beach I suddenly grunt against my palate... It was a living creature. A mammal. An intelligent creature. And I'm going to put it to death — a rather cruel death, in the case of what some people call with flippancy 'the other white meat' — just so I can lay some bacon across a patty of ground *Fleisch* cut from another mammal sacrificed to that god my stomach? Nope. And from that time forward, I stopped eating meat. I'll eat fish, but not mammals. No, thank you.

There's some hypocrisy in this, I suppose. From one perspective, you might say I'm not only inhuman, I'm unnatural. Reymont would probably think so, as I'm about to show you.

I was writing the above lines on a hot, sunny afternoon, on a sandy beach in south Florida, looking out from time to time at the turquoise waters of the Atlantic. Suddenly, the water began to crackle with a swath of tiny plops — as if a pinpoint cartoon cloud had suddenly let loose a downpour some ten yards long by five yards wide. It was mullet and other small fry, leaping desperately out of their element, just to plunge back down and then, turning my gaze to the right, I saw why: three or four long dark shadows just under the surface of the water, with dorsal fins resembling those of sharks — tarpon, patiently swimming northward, gathering an early lunch. And then, one of those huge brown pelicans — beautiful

birds — hovered above the water to make one of their dramatic plunges after another living creature, soon to be just dead, fresh, *Fleisch*. And finally — was Somebody trying to tell me something? — there went a hawk, winging his way to a perch somewhere in the direction of Collins, with a silvery fish in his claws, tail still sweeping left and right — What else was he supposed to do? Reymont, or you, reader, might ask. And of course you're right.

I'm not an imbecile. But I bet it's not only me who looks away from the screen when the wolves finally catch up with the sick buffalo. How can David Attenborough describe that so calmly and mellifluously? And I know it's heretical, but I've never been a big fan of the Old Testament. All that blood. All that *animal* blood spilled on altars, sprinkled on the people, daubed on door jambs. Don't even get me started on Abraham and Isaac. But if there's one part of the Bible I do like, it would be Isaiah. For example:

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb: and the leopard shall lie down with the kid: the calf and the lion, and the sheep shall abide together, and a little child shall lead them. The calf and the bear shall feed: their young ones shall rest together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp: and the weaned child shall thrust his hand into the den of the basilisk. They shall not hurt, nor shall they kill in all my holy mountain, for the earth is filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the covering waters of the sea. [...] The wolf and the lamb shall feed together; the lion and the ox shall eat straw; and dust shall be the

serpent's food: they shall not hurt nor kill in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord.<sup>10</sup>

Sure, but that's *God's holy mountain*, not Florida. Yet, isn't this how we'd all like it to be? Some of the most moving parts of *Animal Farm* are when everybody — every species — runs off in solidarity to help the popular Boxer:

About half the animals on the farm rushed out to the knoll where the windmill stood. There lay Boxer, between the shafts of the cart, his neck stretched out, unable even to raise his head. His eyes were glazed, his sides matted with sweat. A thin stream of blood had trickled out of his mouth. Clover dropped to her knees at his side.

'Boxer!' she cried, 'how are you?'

'It is my lung,' said Boxer in a weak voice. 'It does not matter. I think you will be able to finish the windmill without me. There is a pretty good store of stone accumulated. I had only another month to go in any case. To tell you the truth, I had been looking forward to my retirement. And perhaps, as Benjamin is growing old too, they will let him retire at the same time and be a companion to me.'

'We must get help at once,' said Clover. 'Run, somebody, and tell Squealer what has happened.'

All the other animals immediately raced back to the farmhouse to give Squealer the news. Only Clover re-

.....

<sup>10</sup> Isaiah 11:6-9; 65:25.

mained, and Benjamin who lay down at Boxer's side, and, without speaking, kept the flies off him with his long tail.<sup>11</sup>

And again the objections: 'Where's the realism in that? This is a novel! Remember what your dog did when he caught that woodchuck and gave it a good shake? And the way foxes will bring back live prey for the kits to "play" with until they learn how to kill? What does St Robinson Jeffers have to say about that? And the bird-feeder out back? How the cowbirds chase off the sparrows and the jays the cowbirds, the squirrels the chipmunks and...'

And that's exactly the point. If there is a programmatic novel here, it's not *The Revolt of the Animals*, it's *Animal Farm*. As splendid as that novel is, it is *only* a thinly-cloaked commentary on human society. The animals — except for the central committee of the pigs and their NKVD cadre of dogs — get on well with one another, as the great majority of the duped citizens of people's democracies will, all the while the big shots get fat, never having to ration. Towards the end of the novel, the pigs begin taking on human airs to such an extent, that the *hoi polloi* gathered at the window during the summit-banquet of the chiefs of (renamed) Manor Farm and their human neighbours, looking in at the feast 'from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; [already found it] impossible to say which was which.'<sup>12</sup>

.....

<sup>11</sup> George Orwell, *Animal Farm / 1984* (New York: Harcourt, 2003), p. 71.

<sup>12</sup> Orwell, *Animal Farm*, p. 84.



In *The Revolt*, whatever its metaphorical content, animals are animals. They don't read, they don't build windmills or brew beer, and — what is conceptually even more interesting — they *act* like animals: children of a nature proverbially, and truly, red in tooth and claw:

Like an oak buffeted by a strong wind, the bear swayed this way and that, torn from all sides by the fangs of the frenzied horde. He gave no thought to escape, defending himself with the valour of despair, but he could now feel the teeth sunk deep inside him. His sides were torn, as were his thighs; his ribs broken from falling to the earth again and again, yet he always spun to his feet with the last remnants of his strength, covered in wounds and tattered, the blood pumping out of him, his eyes clouding over in death — but he fought on to the bitter end. Suddenly, in a flash, when the bear had risen to his feet for the last time, Rex threw himself at his throat. Both tumbled to the earth and the rest of the pack piled on. They whirled in a tangled ball of claws, heads, horrible wounds and howling, tumbling over the turf from one side to the other, spurting blood, striking against tree, bush and stone, marking their furious progress with the bodies of the slaughtered and gravely wounded.

There is no reason for Rex and the dogs to kill the bear, who had been merely crossing a clearing with others of his kind. But you might say there is: they are acting exactly as a pack of wild dogs would act in a situation like this. Rex, the domesticated animal gone feral, who was castigated by the

wild creatures earlier in the book for his heedless slaughter of animals at what — according to the ‘rules of the wild’ — were inappropriate times, here performs a — natural — feat that is recognised by all: he has knocked off the king of the woods, the predator at the very top of the food chain, and from now on, he will be recognised by all as the successor monarch. The king is dead; long live the bloody king.

It is behaviour just as natural as that witnessed by Dummy, after his banishment, one winter night, when he sees animals wild from time immemorial doing what comes naturally to them:

He caught sight of some strings of shadows slipping towards the river. At the very front raced a gigantic stag who, pinning back his antlers, flew on with the last of his strength, stumbling more and more until, having reached the steep bank, he paused there and bellowed in despair. The wolves then caught him up and now wild howls of triumph tore the air. But then the stag tumbled down the bank, and with giant leaps reached the marsh, through which he tore with all his might, sinking here and there. He extracted himself again and again and hurled himself with all the might of despair until, at last, he plunged breast-deep through the thin skin of the ice. Before he could clamber out of that, the entire frenzied pack fell upon him. A furious battle ensued. The stag pulled himself out of the mire, defending himself with his antlers, pummelling the wolves with his hooves, and then escaping anew. Falling into the marsh, he fought to the bitter end until at last he fell, torn apart by the fangs.

Curiously enough, Dummy does a very *human* thing. He is filled with pity for the stag. He anthropomorphises the beast, sees a heroism in his fighting to the bitter end, and his heart goes out to the underdog (no pun intended). ‘You bastards!’ he screams toward the pack of wolves, angry at their ganging up against the one animal they naturally prey upon, and he pulls out his revolver and fires into the whirling mass. In short, he does exactly what wildlife photographers and filmmakers do *not* do, as much as it breaks their hearts (I’m sure) — he intervenes, as a human, in the natural processes of the wild. And that is wrong. Just as wrong as Orwell’s pigs’ exploitation of everyone else on the farm, once they learn the ways of man. And so, despite its nature as a political fable, *The Revolt of the Animals* is an eminently realistic work, which shows animals acting like animals, before and after their ‘liberation.’

We will have more to say about Dummy in a moment. He is a character such as we do not find in *Animal Farm*, where men are mentioned, but only in the impersonal terms of the programmatic political metaphor the book is. Jones is the overlord who pushed his workers too far. The farmers on both sides of ‘Animal Farm’ are by turns the demonised mortal enemies of all ‘animalkind,’ and helpful allies in reciprocal parasitism, when a *modus vivendi* is reached with the pigs, who forget the principles of Animalism as soon as it becomes profitable to do so. Dummy is a human observer, who looks at the animals from within, having been accepted by them — later to be cast off.

But he is no hero. Indeed, there are no heroes in this book. It is important that Reymont chooses dogs as his protago-

nists, for thus he plays with our natural sympathy for these friends of ours — by showing them acting cruelly — just like men. ‘He shall be left alone, naked and defenceless, like a puppy torn from the teat and thrown into the ditch,’ Rex exclaims at one point of his triumphant battles against man. Now, this is one more dig of the author’s at the well-known cruelty of man: that the simile would even occur to Rex is proof of how man’s cruel behaviour (drowning ‘unneeded’ litters) was *de rigueur*. But, to return to Dummy, even more chilling is why this old friend of Rex’s will be banished: he was becoming more popular amongst the animals, exhausted as they were at the long march to a happy future which seemed ever farther away, the farther they progressed. It was Dummy who took control of the situation during a sudden, ferocious storm and saved the animals from destruction, something that the animals — including the canines — were unable to do (thus proving man’s natural superiority); even in his ‘treason,’ moving about from herd to herd and urging them to abandon the trek, to return home, Dummy exhibits a reasoning power of logic that is beyond the grasp of the animals. Oddly enough, in this, Dummy, the token human among the animals, shows himself to be a more *natural* creature than Rex and the other true believers. He sees the true lie of the land, whereas Rex and his ‘party’ are chasing chimeras, whether they know it or not. And so, why is Dummy expelled? Because Rex and the others fear him as their rival. He is Trotsky to Rex’s Stalin. His banishment (and eventual death) is politically motivated. For animals to be shown to be imitating humans is one thing. For animals to imitate politicians? I reckon no beast can sink any lower than that!

Dummy — with his ‘bulldog face’ and his speech impediment, which at one and the same time excludes him from human society and thrusts him among the animals, whose ‘speech’ he learns to imitate — is as close as we get to a human hero in this story. But even he is not without blemish. Banished from the animals he had been travelling with, in the dead of winter, Dummy has to fend for himself:

On the next morning, early, camouflaging himself with dry reeds, he sat himself down among the bushes and waited there, patiently, despite the cold that penetrated to the marrow of his bones. Fortunately, his hunch paid off as, just after sunrise, a string of wild ducks appeared and began to descend to the mirror of unfrozen water. Dummy began quacking like an old mallard warning the young of some imminent danger. Some of the startled birds set off again, but the larger portion of them crawled in among the dry grasses — where he was waiting. He flailed at them with his stick and gathered so many with his hands that he could hardly bear them all away to his den.

There are only two ways to read this passage: either as indicative of man’s evil treachery, luring the ducks to a cruel death by deception (something *never* to be found on God’s holy mountain!), or as part of the natural way things are carried out in this world. We eat things only to be eaten ourselves.<sup>13</sup> The only constant is cruelty, exploitation.

.....  
<sup>13</sup> Rafał Wojasiński once told me: ‘We think we’re in charge of

And then there is the case of the execution of the arsonists. In an attempt to stem this flood of animals who threaten their lives, as they both turn upon them in violence and refuse to aid them to till the soil, the desperate humans set fire to the forest in which the herds happen to find themselves. Some of the arsonists — we suppose; are they really responsible for the fire, or just handy examples of collective guilt, being humans? — are captured by the dogs and herded into the clearing to ‘stand trial.’

A few dozen, powerful, brown German Shepherds were chasing before them a group of two-legged creatures who were howling in frenzy.

‘People! Merciful Jesus, they’re people!’ exclaimed Dummy, petrified.

‘The lambs and their mothers cowering in the woods from the fire — perished; the cows with their calves and the sows with their piglets — perished; the mares with their colts — perished. These are the ones that set the fire that consumed them all — and they shot their lightning at us, while we were trying to defend ourselves. A lot of us fell. We demand justice! Vengeance!’ the shepherds wailed darkly.

‘Why didn’t you mete it out yourselves?’ bayed Rex impatiently.

.....  
everything here on earth. We think we’re at the top of the food chain. We’re not. Mould. Mushrooms and mould. You can’t destroy it; we eat it, and it lives on in us; when we die, it consumes us and lives on. Mould. The only immortality there is.’

‘Our orders are to guard and herd. It’s up to you to pronounce judgment, our ruler and master!’

The men, nearly naked and singed by the flames, covered in blood, half conscious, stared dully into the space in front of them, awaiting nothing more than further torment and death.

‘Climb the trees! Escape that way!’ Dummy spluttered, shaken with pity at the sight.

But they seemed not to understand, their eyes sweeping the crowds of animals pressing in close from all sides.

Gimpy raced up, froth on his lips. Saliva was dripping from his mouth, and his eyes sparkled with green flickers.

‘Take care of them as you will,’ Rex commanded.

Gimpy howled a war cry. The shepherds drew to the side, and soon the men were standing in the centre of a cleared space. They began whispering something to one another; their eyes darted all around them, ever more frequently catching onto the great linden trees that grew behind the house. But before they’d taken the decision to race there, the earth began to throb, and a frenzied pack of wolves ran up and threw themselves on them.

Piercing screams rent the air. Moments later, nothing was left but bloody remains.

Who would expect such cruelty of animals? It’s not their being torn apart at the paws of the dogs and wolves that bothers us — isn’t that what wild canines do when they are hungry? It’s the *reserving* of the living creatures until

a verdict is passed — a human trait — and the idea that a public execution serves justice — again, a human trait — that makes one shiver.

This is more than a mere flipping of roles such as we find in Alice Guy-Blanché's rather simplistic silent short *The Dangers of Feminism*. It is a reduction of all forms of life, human and animal alike, to the law of the jungle (which is, by definition, no law at all).

It's easy to see a political message behind all this. The Communist system purports to liberate the working classes from the oppression of the landowners, only to result in a different ruling class of party élite, who continue the repression of the people they purport to represent, perhaps even to a greater degree than the landowners and factory owners did. 'Master, even I, who threw myself against men, am trembling now!' says Gimpy — of all 'people!' — the wolf, cringing before his powerful domesticated cousin for help against the humans decimating the wilderness. Master, he calls Rex, the domesticated wolf in slavery to men? Meet the new boss, same as the old boss, as the song goes.

So much for the ideological thrust of *The Revolt of the Animals*. One of the things we should not overlook is the artism of the novel. Kwiatkowski is spot on when he speaks of its 'artistic consistency;' in this novel, Reymont reveals himself to be a careful and even poetic novelist. One of the aspects of his poetics that cannot be replicated in English translation is deeply rooted in Polish grammar. Not only does Polish make use of grammatical genders — male, female, and neuter — it also distinguishes (trigger warning, O ye genderphobes!) the 'masculine animate' from feminine,



neuter, and even non-human masculine nouns in the plural. Polish, in short, reserves the grammatical ending ‘li’ in past (and some future) tense verbs for male humans, while all other nouns (including animals) use ‘ły.’ It is, therefore, striking to find Reymont constantly using the masculine animate endings in relation to non-humans, such as *wszyscy posnęli* (‘they all fell asleep’), whereas proper Polish usage would be *wszystkie posnęły*. When he describes the wolves disappearing quietly into the underbrush, he writes *Zaszyli się w gąszcze*, where he ought to write *zaszyły się*. If this were Kipling’s *Jungle Book*, with the kind bear Baloo and wise Bagheera the panther, we would assume that the author is ‘ennobling’ the animals by this bestowal of human grammatical tags; in *The Revolt of the Animals* — which does, on occasion, argue for the respect due to non-humans, especially domesticated breeds — the intent seems primarily to be the opposite: the animals, Reymont subtly argues, are no better than that scoundrel man.

Reymont’s skills as a writer are also put on display in the structure of the plot. One of the most dramatic moments in the story occurs when the animals suddenly find themselves in an area that seems to have more in common with Dante’s Hell than any portion of the Eurasian plains:

Suddenly, they butted their heads against an unexpected cliff wall, and many of the broken tumbled into an unexpected abyss. Their road was blocked by black, lazily rolling waters, from which great columns of flame continually rose into the black heavens of asphalt. Some monstrous winged creatures flickered in the bloody

haze. The earth rumbled. The cliffs near the shore were constantly crumbling into piles of rubble. No one gave out as much as a peep. Even the roars of initial terror died off in their astonished throats.

What? Where on earth are we, beneath that asphalt heaven, amidst tongues of fire arising from a black stream, where strange winged creatures flit about? There are conjectures we may make: is this an operating oilfield, such as developed in the eastern reaches of Galicia in the early twentieth century? It is no easy matter to decide, but that is beside the point. The animals are confronted with a dramatic reality that they had never before experienced, and they are thrown for a loop — as are we. The location, and even the reality of the scenery, is not as important as the animals' astonishment, in which Reymont invites us to participate, by thrusting us into a fantastic landscape that we cannot understand. Whatever the reality of the nature may be, such is the reality of their stunned understanding. They *don't* understand — nor do we. It is a masterpiece of poetics.

Dramatic indeed. Yet the journey itself is masterfully handled by the author; it stretches on and on, monotonously, putting the animals' strength to the test by the meagre pastures along the way, and trying their faith by the endless plodding toward a goal that seems ever to recede before them:

The whole trek had now become one indescribable torment. The day was missing, the night was missing; there were no longer any clear demarcations to time, and this

led to ever greater disorder. They slept when they felt like it, and got up when it suited them. Their rest periods became even more frequent and longer. Then, after even consuming moss and miserable lichens to fill their bellies, and slaking their thirst by licking at the frost, they moved on at the tragic pace of the condemned. Whole groups of them preferred to stay behind and just die rather than suffer on like that. Even their hopes guttered inside their breasts, while that monotonous grey, which refused to give an inch, provided the coup de grace to their prospects. On top of it all, time just kept dragging on, and the enforced blindness beat them down. They even began losing their instincts, which had been with them since the beginning of time. Few were they who sensed the falling of night or the coming of dawn. They just went on and on, endlessly, without any idea as to whether it had been days, weeks, or perhaps years that had passed by during this trek of theirs. It seemed an eternity of wandering, with an eternity still ahead of them, an eternity of wandering through this grey, endless grave, hungry, tired to the very death, blind, not quite dead yet, but given over into the power of a horrid, protracted dying. And the merciful day never arrived to shine down upon them a single, pitying ray — not a single one.

The journey goes on for *so long*. It might seem as if Reymont has run out of themes and simply begins repeating himself to fill out pages. But the opposite is true. This poetic novel presents us with an author in complete control of the reader's emotional apprehension of the story. The novel *is*

interminable, and through its interminability Reymont is able to have us participate in the frustration of the animals, their yearning for it to be 'over.' To the reader interested in poetics — bold poetics, considering the fact that this ploy of the author's is based on a planned monotony, which runs the risk of losing the reader (intentional boredom as a literary strategy!) — this characteristic of the novel, which forces us to engage in the animals' suffering, is the apex of Reymont's art, passing over the fact that the interminability underscores the central political theme of the novel: Rex's human-free paradise, no less than Marx's, in which government will wither away and justice reign simply over all, will never arrive.

It is an illusion, one among many in this novel. How many mirages are there to be found here! Following Dummy's banishment for spreading mutiny among the herds, they still continue to see him, leading them, as they break away from Rex's illusion to follow a different sort of unrealisable hope, the return home. Rex, of course, has his illusion; it's flabbergasting to see how this intelligent creature could be so taken in by the songs of the cranes and embellish their poetry into a roadmap to painlessness.

Now, whether or not Reymont was an inveterate enemy of socialist revolutionism and its Leninist-Soviet proponents, who sought to spread its influence westward by a violent invasion of his homeland, it must be pointed out that he is broad-minded enough to recognise the logic of its coming to be. It may not have been the proper answer to the misery of the lower classes, but that misery really existed, indeed. The songs of the cranes soothed Rex when he had

been expelled from his heretofore comfortable life by the cruelty of humans. Then, as an enemy of man, and not his ally, when he looks on 'from outside the system,' as it were, and sees how human cruelty toward animals is the rule, and not the exception, his dreams transform themselves into a programme:

Then, right before the yard along the road he saw the old donkey, his head covered in a hempen sack, being whipped by boys harrying him towards a pit of lime.

'Don't give up! I'll help you!' he barked, carried away with wrath and compassion.

He tore the sack from the animal's head. The donkey, enraged with suffering and emboldened by Rex's aid, threw himself violently at the boys, flailing with his hooves, trampling and wheezing like a rusty gate.

Rex didn't wait to hear his thanks. He slipped into the yard and made his way to Blackie's kennel. The dog, shocked and frightened, didn't even think to forbid him entry. Rex laid out his plans before him. After weighting the matter a long while, the old dog growled:

'Take everyone with you. The men will be apoplectic with fury. After all, everybody's suffering the same misery, whips, and slavery. It's eating away at us all.'

How can we fail to be on the animals' side here? And yet as the trek goes on, and the reality of their situation becomes more and more apparent to the beasts, and the desire to return home begins to shake their faith in Rex, he turns to them with all the fervour that propaganda can provide:

‘Persevere, and once again all the barns filled to bursting, and all the haystacks will be yours. All the fields and meadows! The sun will be yours, and warmth, and the refreshing springs. And you will enjoy cool shade in the hot weather and shelter from the wet, and soft bedding! and no enforced labour, no tax in slavery and blood, no obligation, not even the obligation of gratitude. Comrades, friends, brothers, I guarantee you with all the power of certitude that days of endless good fortune are nigh upon us. I can see them now, I feel them already — they are just beyond these mists. Can you not see the dawn there, still pale, there in the east? The breaking of the dawn has already been foretold by those holy heralds of the coming day...’ he howled with the might of a lion — and was answered by roars similar to the gay thunder of springtime.

Later, they lay down to rest, hungry, it is true, but full of trusting hope.

‘You lied to them like a Jewish mongrel,’ Gimpy snarled, stretching himself out alongside Rex. ‘That was all right for the cattle, but I demand the truth.’

However much Rex’s heart may still in the right place, however much he seriously believes that he is submitting the beasts to such hardship ‘for their own good,’ two things become apparent at this point in the novel. First, some animals are more equal than others, as Orwell puts it. An élite has developed, with the canines at the very apex, and these — with Gimpy as their representative — demand to know the truth, whereas it’s fine (from his perspective) to

keep the ‘horns and hooves’ moving along with a lie — after all, the wolves are still eating their fill... Second, as he goes on from here to state, he knows that Rex knows the truth. Rex is in touch with the cranes who are flying ahead, and knows quite well that it will be more than a day until the sun breaks through, more than ‘a few more suns’ until they reach paradise. Rex, suppressing the truth for the good of his politics, is no longer a Moses; he is a Dzierzhynsky.

From the very beginning of the story, Dummy has befriended Rex, comforted him, and at last he accompanies him, the only human being on the animals’ path away from the human world. The manner in which the novel begins — with both Dummy and Rex taking their ‘stripes’ from the kitchen help — links them in our minds as oppressed beings, who owe the ‘powerful of this world’ nothing, considering their treatment at their hands. However, as with the animals later, Dummy first comes to understand that comradeship in oppression can only last so long. In Dummy’s case, this happens at the very outset of the trek:

You’re stupid if you imagine that people are going to just wave their hand at the loss of their chattel. You were smarter back at the manor. So the beasts have rebelled and now they think that they’ll turn the world upside down. Everybody knows how to eat,’ he said, with another glance at the herds, whose bellies were filled with grain, ‘but not everyone knows how to sow!’

Angry, he got up and made for the way out of the ruins.

‘Stop! Or I’ll have the wolves tear you apart, and carry your carcass back to the manor in pieces.’

Dummy stopped, horror-struck, upon perceiving the terrible anger in the dog’s eyes.

‘Let me go. Was I ever against you?’ And tears sprang to his eyes from the terror.

‘I said my piece. Someday, when we’ve arrived at our destined place, I’ll let you go,’ Rex promised graciously.

‘I’ll die of hunger with you here. I’m not gonna eat grass with cattle!’ he mumbled in contempt.

‘You won’t lack for anything. The dogs’ll take such good care of you, you’ll even fatten up.’

‘Sure! On raw meat and fresh gore! Look — I won’t get far at all on foot anyway.’

‘You’ll ride the stallion from the manor! But now — get out of my sight!’

The command rang in such a severe tone that Dummy, not daring to say anything in reply, sought out a shady space for himself at the wall and tried to go to sleep. But the danger of the situation in which he found himself wouldn’t even let him close his eyes. Sobbing yearningly, wiping his nose on his sleeve, he began to concentrate on clever means of finding a way to freedom.

The tables are turned. Now the dog is in charge, and it is the uppity man who must back down, tail between his legs as it were, out of fear of punishment from the dog, of rather a severe sort at that. As if we needed any more reminders of the fact, Reymont draws the circle closed here: those ‘slaves’



who have escaped have now become the new masters, and the former crown of creation grovels in the dust and seeks... escape. When he does, and reestablishes himself in power, once again the two will change positions, and who was below, will be on top, who was on top, below once again.

If such be the case, we have a situation of yin and yang here; where can good and evil be found in this ever revolving tale of oppressor and oppressed? Men are cruel, animals become cruel as soon as they free themselves from his tutelage and create a society — as primitive as it may be — that resembles man's in its being governed not by the good, the wise, or the meritorious, but the stronger. The transformation in Dummy's soul when confronted with this fact is striking, all the more so as it is set against his memories of his initial treatment in man's world:

Everyone kicked and injured that clumsy, repellent, ugly creature with his bulldog's mug, his bandy legs, that shock of ruddy fur on a head overlarge for his body — like a balloon; with his arms hanging nearly to the earth like those of an ape; and instead of a voice, that frog-like croaking of his. There was nothing beautiful in him but the striking loveliness of those blue eyes, radiant and wise.

Trampled to the very depths of misery, cast out amongst the animals of the manor yard, he had become attached to them, their brother, as if he had been born of the same flesh and blood. They gladly followed his lead, acknowledging his superiority. It was only now, during this trek, that he had begun to sense the difference between him and them, and even to consider them

foes. He had even begun to look upon Rex with different eyes — those of human cogitation. It was then that the thought of escape really dawned in his mind.

Difference? What difference? Perhaps more importantly, it is *only* a difference. He does not realise that men are better, he only realises that he is a man. When his separation from the animals finally comes about, and he finds himself totally alone, cut off from both human and canine, he begins reminiscing about the past; all the blows and swipes are forgotten, or, at the very least, they have ceased to matter as much as the society of one's own:

He thought of that house, far away, the warm kitchen, the pots bubbling on the hearth, and the aromas that arose from them on the steam. The sobbing shook him ever more painfully, and a wild sorrow squeezed his heart. He began to blame himself bitterly. Why did he join up with the animals? Even in the sties he'd had it better than here. And now he'll die a miserable death. If the wolves don't tear him apart, the cold will do him in. Is there anyone who would take pity on him? [...] Tears began to pulse forth from forgotten depths. God, how happily he would snuggle once more into the dark corner behind the stove on a winter's eve, when the manor kitchen filled with people and voices! Even if he'd take a swipe across the head there for teasing the dogs. For even so, the housekeeper would give him a bone to gnaw on later, some warm milk or even bread and butter. Jesus, and how gay they all were, how they

laughed and teased one another — and the fairy stories that the girl swineherd could tell! And when the housemaids sat down at the distaff and the lady of the manor would look in, there was no end to stories of the most varied sorts. It was then that they'd talk about enchanted princesses and dragons and princes — fearsome things that made your hair stand on end.

It is no coincidence that Reymont constructs the first portion of this citation from tropes that remind us of the Parable of the Prodigal Son. It is, however, an inversion of the Christian narrative, insofar as in leaving home, the Prodigal Son wronged his father, and then squandered his generous patrimony in drunkenness and whoring. He has no right to expect any kind of treatment at the hands of the man he so wronged, initially, and the father's greeting of him (to his 'good' brother's chagrin) is all the more powerful therefore. The Prodigal Son rejected love for self-indulgence, only to learn that love is unconditional. And in Dummy's case? This bastard child (he has no father), committed no arbitrary treason in leaving a community that beat, mocked, indeed hated him. He has no reason to apologise to anyone. His opting for 'his own' is something like the worst American tradition of 'my country, right or wrong.'

At least in that phrase there is the acknowledgement of right and wrong. In Reymont's fable, there is only 'mine' and 'not-mine.'

Speaking of illusions, that of Dummy is his Princess — a life-size doll with a speech mechanism, due to which he believes (following the winter tales of the girls he dreams

of, above) that she is an enchanted princess, and he only needs to find the proper magic word to release her from her spell, at which she will marry him, and he will become a prince (i.e. a person who outranks even his former human persecutors). Passing over the fact that this sort of fairy-tale thinking gives us to understand Dummy as a rather less than fully developed human agent, it is one more testimony to his human nature — his daydreams (one might even say his ‘belief system’) are fully human; animals have no part in it other than that played by the magical black steed who will appear to bear him and his princess off to her father’s castle, once he discovers that magic word.

In a novel in which unbelievable things happen — a concerted rebellion of domestic animals against their human masters, leading to the destruction of the society of the latter — a novel in which animals not only communicate with one another, but make use of something that we would call human speech, Dummy’s sudden ejaculatory prayer in the wilderness hits us with remarkable, because unexpected, power:

‘Save me, little Lord Jesus! And I’ll whittle you a whole shrine! I’ll hang before your altar a singing blackbird in a cage! Save me, Lord!’ he sobbed, making the sign of the Cross again and again.

Had Reymont brought his novel to an end here — with this appeal to the greatest of all Tertium Quids, God, Who surpasses both man and animal, *The Rebellion of the Animals* would have had the same sort of message as another work

dealing with class struggle: Zygmunt Krasiński's *Undivine Comedy*, in which the only possible solution to the irreconcilable claims of Aristocrat and Revolutionary is the Second Coming of Christ. But Reymont goes further. Dummy dies banished, Rex is executed by his own revolutionary hordes as mercilessly as any Robespierre, and the animals continue on until they encounter a manlike creature, which encounter sends them into raptures of joy:

And then, after many, many days of wandering, as if they'd coursed through the world entire, those at the head of the ranks suddenly pulled up short, bellowing, falling prostrate to the earth:

'Man! Our master! Man!'

There at the edge of an impenetrable jungle, beneath the shade of a wide spreading palm tree, sat a family of apes.

The gigantic male, stunned at their sudden arrival, tore himself up to his full height.

At the sight of him, all of the herds fell down in humility and sent up a heaven-shattering roar:

'Be our master! Rule over us! We are your faithful chattel! Don't desert us!'

The novel ends with another circle closing: everything returns to normal. Despite all the promises of progress, the huge river of animality turns back on its course and returns whence it came: with the beasts' natural (though in this case mistaken) acknowledgement of their need of a two-legged master — for their own good. No matter what we think of

the pessimism of this denouement, Reymont proves himself to be, if not the ‘better’ writer, at least the better prophet, than Orwell, who once wrote ‘I am rather glad to have been hit by a bullet because I think it will happen to us all in the near future.’<sup>14</sup> The changes in 1989 and 1990, which Orwell did not predict (who could?!) would have made Władysław Reymont smile, for sure. Marx was proven wrong. If there is any such thing as historical determinism, it is, for better or worse, to be found in our compartmentalisation, our — for lack of a better word — natural inequality. The thing is — we cannot let this fact overcome the imperative of mutual respect.

#### ORWELL AND POLAND

It is rather natural to wish to compare *The Revolt of the Animals* to *Animal Farm*; we have already said a few things about this. Above all, it is important to remember that the books, as similar as they are, have different aims in mind. *Animal Farm* is a satire on the Stalinist system, a roman à clef with an easily decipherable character list, based on real-world personages. *The Revolt of the Animals* is more of a work in anthropology than politics, and a consideration

.....

<sup>14</sup> George Orwell, Letter of 31 July 1937, to Rayner Heppenstall. In George Orwell, *A Life in Letters*, ed. by Peter Davison (New York: WW Norton, 2013), p. 82. In a letter to Francis Westrope dated 15 January 1939, Marrakech, he writes: ‘I suppose the next bit of trouble will be over the Ukraine, so perhaps we may get home just in time to go straight into the concentration camp if we haven’t been sunk by a German submarine on the way.’

of the very idea of idealist utopias — none of which are realisable. Each of the books must be read and appreciated on its own.

Orwell, one of the truly great writers of the twentieth century, unquestionably a peer of Kafka and Borges, is, of course, a well-known quantity in Poland. As previously mentioned, the first Polish version of *Animal Farm*, Teresa Jeleńska's *Folwark zwierzęcy*, was published as early as 1946 by those Poles in London who chose to remain in the west, rather than return to a Communist-dominated 'utopia' such as Orwell foresaw in his two greatest works (the other being 1984). Both of these books, obviously, along with *The Revolt of the Animals*, cut too close to the bone for the Communists to have permitted their publication in the Soviet bloc.

As Orwell was known to the Poles, so Poland was known to Orwell, and his collected letters, already cited in the edition of Peter Davison, provide us with some interesting insights into his personal take on Polish matters.

The first time that Poland is mentioned specifically is found in an extensive letter written to the *Tribune* newspaper towards the end of June, 1945, complaining of the pro-Soviet (and hence anti-Polish) bias of their reporting on the infamous show trial of 'The Sixteen' leaders of the Polish Underground State, kidnapped to Moscow and tried in political fashion, as a direct result of which a full quarter of them lost their lives. With irony, Orwell writes:

Early in the proceedings I formed the opinion that the accused were technically guilty: only, just what were they guilty of? Apparently it was merely doing what

everyone thinks it right to do when his country is occupied by a foreign power — that is, of trying to keep a military force in being, of maintaining communication with the outside world, of committing acts of sabotage and occasionally killing people. In other words, they were accused of trying to preserve the independence of their country against an unelected puppet government, and of remaining obedient to a government which at that time was recognised by the whole world except the U.S.S.R. The Germans during their period of occupation could have brought exactly the same indictment against them, and they would have been equally guilty.

He goes on to accuse the *Tribune* of hypocrisy in lauding the Greek underground army, while — out of political considerations — taking the side of the Russians in the case of the Poles:

To be anti-Polish and pro-Greek is only possible if one sets up a double standard of political morality, one for the U.S.S.R. and the other for the rest of the world [...] With one side of our mouths we cry out that mass deportations, concentration camps, forced labour and suppression of freedom of speech are appalling crimes, while with the other we proclaim that these things are perfectly all right if done by the U.S.S.R.

While the context of the letter is the damage that such double-standards do to the Socialist movement, to which Orwell remained attached (although, as he admitted to Stephen



Spender in a letter dated sometime around 15 April 1938, 'I have been very hostile to the C[ommunist] P[arty] since about 1935'), it is no less true that he understood the nefarious nature of Soviet hegemony in East-Central Europe as an objectively evil manifestation that needed to be opposed. It is for this reason that, in his letter of 1 September 1945 to the Russian translator Gleb Struve, in which he mentions a Polish translation proposal of *Animal Farm* arriving on his desk at just about the same time as Struve's letter, he very generously states that 'if translations into the Slav languages were made, I shouldn't want any money out of them myself.' Such undertakings were not business proposals to him, but a manner of ensuring the inculcation of free thought in regions where its political suppression was currently ongoing. We are fortunate to live in a time when no such obstacles are put in the way of publishers, like Glagoslav, who wish to bring out works like Władysław Reymont's *The Revolt of the Animals* for English readers, and I am sure that both he and Orwell would be just as pleased as I am, to acknowledge my debt to the Polish Book Institute, an organisation in independent Poland, who generously support such publications.

*Kraków, 18 August 2021*



# THE REVOLT OF THE ANIMALS

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Władysław Stanisław Reymont** (1867–1925) was a Polish novelist of the realist period (the period of ‘Organic Work,’ as it is known in Poland, for its rejection of revolutionism and its dedication to preserving Polish culture among the three partitions by work among the people), and, especially, the Young Poland period, often equated with ‘Polish Modernism.’ He preferred to work as a labourer than to follow his parents’ wishes into higher education, training as a tailor and labouring on the railroad. His fame as a novelist is based on two works, the epic *Chłopi* [The Peasants, 1902–1908] and *Ziemia obiecana* [The Promised Land, 1897–1898]. In 1924 he received the Nobel Prize in Literature. *Bunt* [The Revolt of the Animals, 1922, 1924], his last major work, was suppressed by the Communist régime of the People’s Republic of Poland on account of its blatant rejection of Marxism and satirising of revolutions.

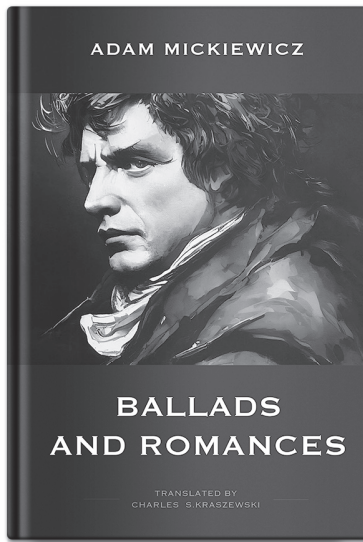
## ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

**Charles S. Kraszewski** is a poet and translator, creative in both English and Polish. He is the author of three volumes of original verse in English (*Diet of Nails; Beast; Chana-meed*); two in Polish (*Hallo, Sztokholm; Skowycik*) and a farcical novel about the end of the world as we know it (*Accomplices, You Ask?*). He translates from Polish, Czech and Slovak into English, and from English and Spanish into Polish. He is a member of the Union of Polish Writers Abroad (London) and of the Association of Polish Writers (SPP, Kraków). In 2022 he was awarded the Gloria Artis medal (III Class) by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Poland.



# THE REVOLT OF THE ANIMALS

by Władysław Stanisław Reymont

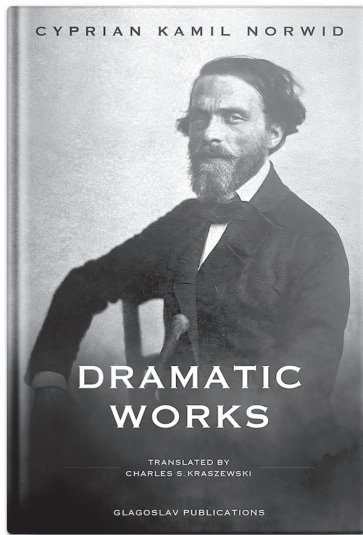


The year 2022 has been designated the Year of Romanticism in Poland. An even two hundred years have passed since the first publication of Adam Mickiewicz's *Ballads and Romances* — a collection of lyrics which has the same significance for Polish literature as Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* has for the English. Poems of love, the supernatural, and the exotic, Mickiewicz's first volume of poetry achieved a level of sublimity that immediately set him at the head of all Polish writers — a position he sustained throughout his life with his lyrical, narrative, dramatic, and epic poetry, and which he continues to hold today. In cooperation with the Polish Cultural Institute of London, Glagoslav brings out an anniversary edition of Mickiewicz's *Ballads and Romances* in the English translation of Charles S. Kraszewski. The collection includes all the poems of the 1822 edition, plus the ballads added shortly before the poet's death to the 1852, Leipzig edition.

Buy it > [www.glagoslav.com](http://www.glagoslav.com)

## DRAMATIC WORKS

by Cyprian Kamil Norwid



‘Perhaps some day I’ll disappear forever,’ muses the master-builder Psymmachus in Cyprian Kamil Norwid’s *Cleopatra and Caesar*, ‘Becoming one with my work...’ Today, exactly two hundred years from the poet’s birth, it is difficult not to hear Norwid speaking through the lips of his character. The greatest poet of the second phase of Polish Romanticism, Norwid, like Gerard Manley Hopkins in England, created a new poetic idiom so ahead of his time, that he virtually ‘disappeared’ from the artistic consciousness of his homeland until his triumphant rediscovery in the twentieth century.

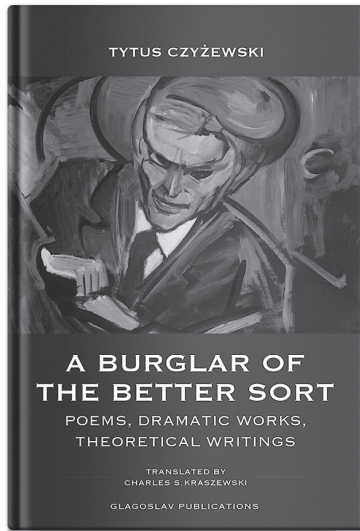
Chiefly lauded for his lyric poetry, Norwid also created a corpus of dramatic works astonishing in their breadth, from the Shakespearean *Cleopatra and Caesar* cited above, through the mystical dramas *Wanda and Krakus, the Unknown Prince...*

Buy it > [www.glagoslav.com](http://www.glagoslav.com)



# A BURGLAR OF THE BETTER SORT

by Tytus Czyżewski

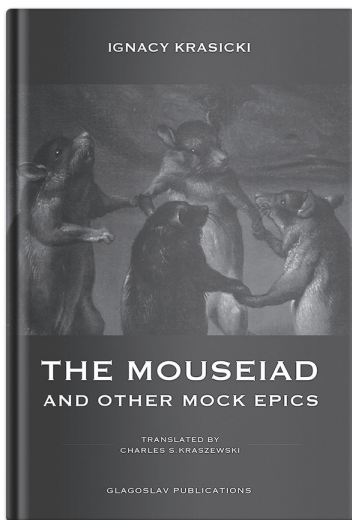


The history of Poland, since the eighteenth century, has been marked by an almost unending struggle for survival. From 1795 through 1945, she was partitioned four times by her stronger neighbours, most of whom were intent on suppressing if not eradicating Polish culture. It is not surprising, then, that 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.

Buy it > [www.glagoslav.com](http://www.glagoslav.com)

# THE MOUSEIAD AND OTHER MOCK EPICS

by Ignacy Krasicki

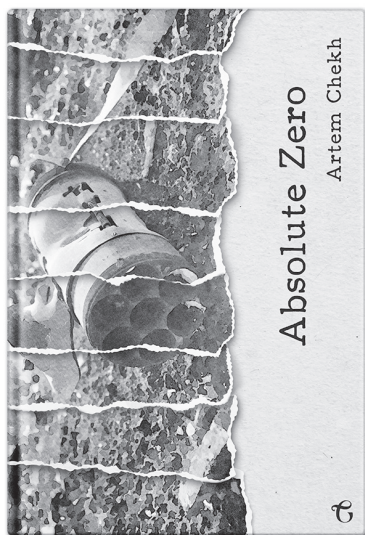


International brigades of mice and rats join forces to defend the rodents of Poland, threatened with extermination at the paws of cats favoured by the ancient ruler King Popiel, a sybaritic, cowardly ruler... The Hag of Discord incites a vicious rivalry between monastic orders, which only the good monks' 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.

Buy it > [www.glagoslav.com](http://www.glagoslav.com)

# ABSOLUTE ZERO

by Artem Chekh



The book is a first person account of a soldier's journey, and is based on Artem Chekh's diary that he wrote while and after his service in the war in Donbas. One of the most important messages the book conveys is that war means pain. Chekh is not showing the reader any heroic combat, focusing instead on the quiet, mundane, and harsh soldier's life. Chekh masterfully selects the most poignant details of this kind of life.

Artem Chekh (1985) is a contemporary Ukrainian writer, author of more than ten books of fiction and essays. *Absolute Zero* (2017), an account of Chekh's service in the army in the war in Donbas, is one of his latest books, for which he became a recipient of several prestigious awards in Ukraine, such as the Joseph Conrad Prize (2019), the Gogol Prize (2018), the Voyin Svitla (2018), and the Litaktsent Prize (2017). This is his first book-length translation into English.

Buy it > [www.glagoslav.com](http://www.glagoslav.com)

## *Glagoslav Publications Catalogue*

- *The Time of Women* by Elena Chizhova
- *Andrei Tarkovsky: A Life on the Cross* by Lyudmila Boyadzhieva
- *Sin* by Zakhar Prilepin
- *Hardly Ever Otherwise* by Maria Matios
- *Khatyn* by Ales Adamovich
- *The Lost Button* by Irene Rozdobudko
- *Christened with Crosses* by Eduard Kochergin
- *The Vital Needs of the Dead* by Igor Sakhnovsky
- *The Sarabande of Sara's Band* by Larysa Denysenko
- *A Poet and Bin Laden* by Hamid Ismailov
- *Zo Gaat Dat in Rusland* (Dutch Edition) by Maria Konjoekova
- *Kobzar* by Taras Shevchenko
- *The Stone Bridge* by Alexander Terekhov
- *Moryak* by Lee Mandel
- *King Stakh's Wild Hunt* by Uladzimir Karatkevich
- *The Hawks of Peace* by Dmitry Rogozin
- *Harlequin's Costume* by Leonid Yuzefovich
- *Depeche Mode* by Serhii Zhadan
- *Groot Slem en Andere Verhalen* (Dutch Edition) by Leonid Andrejev
- *METRO 2033* (Dutch Edition) by Dmitry Glukhovsky
- *METRO 2034* (Dutch Edition) by Dmitry Glukhovsky
- *A Russian Story* by Eugenia Kononenko
- *Herstories, An Anthology of New Ukrainian Women Prose Writers*
- *The Battle of the Sexes Russian Style* by Nadezhda Ptushkina
- *A Book Without Photographs* by Sergey Shargunov
- *Down Among The Fishes* by Natalka Babina
- *disUNITY* by Anatoly Kudryavitsky
- *Sankya* by Zakhar Prilepin
- *Wolf Messing* by Tatiana Lungin
- *Good Stalin* by Victor Erofejev
- *Solar Plexus* by Rustam Ibragimbekov
- *Don't Call me a Victim!* by Dina Yafasova
- *Poetin* (Dutch Edition) by Chris Hutchins and Alexander Korobko

- *A History of Belarus* by Lubov Bazan
- *Children's Fashion of the Russian Empire* by Alexander Vasiliev
- *Empire of Corruption: The Russian National Pastime* by Vladimir Soloviev
- *Heroes of the 90s: People and Money. The Modern History of Russian Capitalism* by Alexander Solovev, Vladislav Dorofeev and Valeria Bashkirova
- *Fifty Highlights from the Russian Literature* (Dutch Edition) by Maarten Tengbergen
- *Bajesvolk* (Dutch Edition) by Michail Chodorkovsky
- *Dagboek van Keizerin Alexandra* (Dutch Edition)
- *Myths about Russia* by Vladimir Medinskiy
- *Boris Yeltsin: The Decade that Shook the World* by Boris Minaev
- *A Man of Change: A study of the political life of Boris Yeltsin*
- *Sberbank: The Rebirth of Russia's Financial Giant* by Evgeny Karasyuk
- *To Get Ukraine* by Oleksandr Shyshko
- *Asystole* by Oleg Pavlov
- *Gnedich* by Maria Rybakova
- *Marina Tsvetaeva: The Essential Poetry*
- *Multiple Personalities* by Tatyana Shcherbina
- *The Investigator* by Margarita Khemlin
- *The Exile* by Zinaida Tulub
- *Leo Tolstoy: Flight from Paradise* by Pavel Basinsky
- *Moscow in the 1930* by Natalia Gromova
- *Laurus* (Dutch edition) by Evgenij Vodolazkin
- *Prisoner* by Anna Nemzer
- *The Crime of Chernobyl: The Nuclear Goulag* by Wladimir Tchertkoff
- *Alpine Ballad* by Vasil Bykau
- *The Complete Correspondence of Hryhory Skovoroda*
- *The Tale of Aypi* by Ak Welsapar
- *Selected Poems* by Lydia Grigorieva
- *The Fantastic Worlds of Yuri Vynnychuk*
- *The Garden of Divine Songs and Collected Poetry of Hryhory Skovoroda*
- *Adventures in the Slavic Kitchen: A Book of Essays with Recipes* by Igor Klekh
- *Seven Signs of the Lion* by Michael M. Naydan

- *Forefathers' Eve* by Adam Mickiewicz
- *One-Two* by Igor Eliseev
- *Girls, be Good* by Bojan Babić
- *Time of the Octopus* by Anatoly Kucherena
- *The Grand Harmony* by Bohdan Ihor Antonych
- *The Selected Lyric Poetry Of Maksym Rylsky*
- *The Shining Light* by Galymkair Mutanov
- *The Frontier: 28 Contemporary Ukrainian Poets - An Anthology*
- *Acropolis: The Wawel Plays* by Stanisław Wyspiański
- *Contours of the City* by Attyla Mohylny
- *Conversations Before Silence: The Selected Poetry of Oles Ilchenko*
- *The Secret History of my Sojourn in Russia* by Jaroslav Hašek
- *Mirror Sand: An Anthology of Russian Short Poems*
- *Maybe We're Leaving* by Jan Balaban
- *Death of the Snake Catcher* by Ak Welsapar
- *A Brown Man in Russia* by Vijay Menon
- *Hard Times* by Ostap Vyshnia
- *The Flying Dutchman* by Anatoly Kudryavitsky
- *Nikolai Gumilev's Africa* by Nikolai Gumilev
- *Combustions* by Srđan Srdić
- *The Sonnets* by Adam Mickiewicz
- *Dramatic Works* by Zygmunt Krasiński
- *Four Plays* by Juliusz Słowacki
- *Little Zinnobers* by Elena Chizhova
- *We Are Building Capitalism! Moscow in Transition 1992-1997*  
by Robert Stephenson
- *The Nuremberg Trials* by Alexander Zvyagintsev
- *The Hemingway Game* by Evgeni Grishkovets
- *A Flame Out at Sea* by Dmitry Novikov
- *Jesus' Cat* by Grig
- *Want a Baby and Other Plays* by Sergei Tretyakov
- *Mikhail Bulgakov: The Life and Times* by Marietta Chudakova
- *Leonardo's Handwriting* by Dina Rubina
- *A Burglar of the Better Sort* by Tytus Czyżewski
- *The Mouseiad and other Mock Epics* by Ignacy Krasicki
- *Ravens before Noah* by Susanna Harutyunyan

- *An English Queen and Stalingrad* by Natalia Kulishenko
  - *Point Zero* by Narek Malian
  - *Absolute Zero* by Artem Chekh
  - *Olanda* by Rafał Wojasiński
  - *Robinsons* by Aram Pachyan
  - *The Monastery* by Zakhar Prilepin
  - *The Selected Poetry of Bohdan Rubchak: Songs of Love, Songs of Death, Songs of the Moon*
  - *Mebet* by Alexander Grigorenko
  - *The Orchestra* by Vladimir Gonik
  - *Everyday Stories* by Mima Mihajlović
  - *Slavdom* by Ludovít Štúr
  - *The Code of Civilization* by Vyacheslav Nikonov
  - *Where Was the Angel Going?* by Jan Balaban
  - *De Zwarte Kip* (Dutch Edition) by Antoni Pogorelski
  - *Głoty / Voices* by Jan Polkowski
  - *Sergei Tretyakov: A Revolutionary Writer in Stalin's Russia* by Robert Leach
  - *Opstand* (Dutch Edition) by Władysław Reymont
  - *Dramatic Works* by Cyprian Kamil Norwid
  - *Children's First Book of Chess* by Natalie Shevando and Matthew McMillion
  - *Precursor* by Vasyl Shevchuk
  - *The Vow: A Requiem for the Fifties* by Jiří Kratochvíl
  - *De Bibliothecaris* (Dutch edition) by Mikhail Jelizarov
  - *Subterranean Fire* by Natalka Bilotserkivets
  - *Vladimir Vysotsky: Selected Works*
  - *Behind the Silk Curtain* by Gulistan Khamzayeva
  - *The Village Teacher and Other Stories* by Theodore Odrach
  - *Duel* by Borys Antonenko-Davydovych
  - *War Poems* by Alexander Korotko
  - *Ballads and Romances* by Adam Mickiewicz
  - *The Revolt of the Animals* by Władysław Reymont
  - *Liza's Waterfall: The hidden story of a Russian feminist* by Pavel Basinsky
  - *Biography of Sergei Prokofiev* by Igor Vishnevetsky
- More coming . . .

GLAGOSLAV PUBLICATIONS

[www.glagoslav.com](http://www.glagoslav.com)





‘Don’t give up! I’ll help you!’ barks Rex, the hero of Władysław Reymont’s *Revolt of the Animals* (1924), ‘carried away with wrath and compassion’ at the sight of his friend the old donkey with ‘his head covered in a hempen sack, being whipped by boys harrying him towards a pit of lime.’

Who would not be roused to a righteous indignation at the sight of such wanton cruelty, inflicted upon a wise, sentient creature — for the perverse pleasure of man, that ‘crown and lord of all creation,’ to whom dominion over this world was supposedly given by the Lord at the dawn of creation?

Certainly, the beasts of farmyard and field know better than anyone how gentle a master human beings can be, and so it is no surprise when this scene becomes the last straw for our patient, long-suffering quadruped cousins.

‘Take everyone with you,’ says Blackie, who — like most of the other animals on the farm, had remained impervious, up till now, to Rex’s urgings to revolt — ‘everybody’s suffering the same misery, whips, and slavery. It’s eating away at us all.’ Thus begins the animal fable of the Polish Nobel Prize winner (1924), inspired by the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, and the Polish-Soviet War, which had just ended a year before the novel was serialised in 1922.

Banned in Poland during the Communist years and only republished in this century, *The Revolt of the Animals* is now made available to the English readership for the first time in the translation of Charles S. Kraszewski. Comparisons to George Orwell’s later novel *Animal Farm* will naturally arise in the reader’s mind — and often, to the advantage of Reymont.

GLAGOSLAV PUBLICATIONS  
ISBN 978-1-914337-38-3  
LONDON

