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Around the World in 33 Articles?

Faces of Worldliness (Literatura polska w świecie. Vol. IV. Oblicza światowości.
Ed. Romuald Cudak. Katowice: Uniwersytet Śląski, Wydawnictwo Gnome,
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Scholars of the University of Silesia in Katowice have taken to seek the answer to the question of how exactly Polish literature functions in the world on a professional level by establishing a series of conference meetings devoted to examining the place of Polish literature in the world. The fourth international conference on this subject, entitled *Oblicza światowości (Faces of Worldliness)*, took place in Katowice on 5 to 7 May 2011. The volume, the fourth one in the series, *Oblicza światowości*, published in 2012 collects a selection of papers presented at the conference. The publication consists of 33 peer-reviewed articles which were first presented during the symposium.

In the foreword, the editor of the volume, Romuald Cudak, states that the volume's main purpose is to look at Polish literature through the lens of "worldliness" by which he understands any forms of presence of Polish literature among foreign audiences. In his view, worldliness has three separate meanings which allow for three different interpretative perspectives. The first dimension of worldliness is the presence of Polish literature in foreign contexts; this allows for researching both simple acts of translating Polish works into other languages as well as their more intricate interpretations and signs of their reception on various levels. The second understanding of worldliness revolves around issues of how Polish literature constitutes a part of the world's literature and what it

contributes to the global community of ideas and motifs. Lastly, the worldliness of Polish literature may mean works created outside the country, which ask vital questions about the identity of both the whole nation/country and its individual representatives. According to what the editor has established, the book is divided into three main parts: Polish literature in the world, the world in Polish literature (that is literary contexts and comparative studies) and Polish literature written in the world, i.e. by Polish authors who reside outside the country. It seems then that worldliness has been shown in a very broad spectrum of meanings thus allowing the editors and authors of individual papers to present multiple aspects of the existence of Polish literature in external contexts. As the three parts of the volume correspond with three meanings of “worldliness,” as outlined in the foreword, I would like to present this triple understanding of the volume’s key issue.

Worldliness as presence in the world

The first part, focusing on the presence of Polish literature in the world, is by far the most extensive one and therefore divided further into four sub-parts, namely: the reception of works of individual writers; anthologies; inspirations and influences; and institutionalised circulation of Polish literature. Each of these comprises of several articles presenting views and interpretations from various parts of the world.

I need to state that the analyses of reception of various Polish works and authors throughout the world are probably the most intellectually pleasing part of the whole volume. The authors’ painstaking scrutiny under which they have taken individual authors or particular works and their influences is truly impressive: not only in the sense of how much work it cost—but mainly for the reason that the authors have managed to discover relationships one would never suspect existed. If I was to ask who is expected to be the great Polish writers present on the worldly Parnassus, there is little doubt that the following names constituting our literary canon would be recited: Jan Kochanowski, Ignacy Krasicki, Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki, Henryk Sienkiewicz, Stanisław Wyspiański, Stefan Żeromski—plus our Nobel Prize laureates: Władysław Reymont, Czesław Miłosz, Wisława Szymborska. And then this

list would have to be reconsidered: maybe our more contemporary writers? Stanisław Lem, Witold Gombrowicz, Sławomir Mrożek? . . . And it would still at least partly be wrong for the world has an altogether different view of Polish literature and its value.

Articles by scholars from various countries and also by Polish academics working in those countries give not only a truly worldly overview of how Polish literature is present in various countries but also provide first-hand information. The subject of how widely “the world” is represented in the volume will also be brought up later in this review. Of course, the name of Czesław Miłosz is present in this part of the volume but one article only is devoted especially to him; moreover, its Bulgarian author, Kalina Bahneva, notes at the very beginning that the spur of translations of Miłosz’s poetry into Bulgarian was a result of the centennial anniversary of the poet’s birth and not his Nobel Prize. And of course, Henryk Sienkiewicz has also got a separate article about his reception (more precisely, of his novel *Quo vadis*)—but in Japan (an eye-opening piece by Koichi Kuyama who describes in detail the history of translations of *Quo vadis* and also how the title phrase became a cliché in the Japanese language).¹ Other than that, we encounter writers such as Bruno Schulz, Witold Gombrowicz, Tadeusz Różewicz, Andrzej Bursa and Jerzy Pietrkiewicz/Peterkiewicz. And while the first trio is not really shocking to the Polish reader, the latter two authors may raise a few eyebrows, albeit for different reasons. Andrzej Bursa—without wishing here to evaluate his poetry in any way—remains a rather unknown poet although he is frequently mentioned in various anthologies of 20th-century poetry; if we were to point out the most influential poets of the last century we would not point to Bursa. Therefore his sole presence in a volume dedicated to the worldliness of Polish literature may come as a surprise as he has never been thought its typical representative. Jerzy Pietrkiewicz (to whom Katarzyna Cieplińska devoted her paper and who also appears as the author of an anthology of Polish poetry in Marta Kaźmierczak’s article), on the other hand, constitutes an even more complicated case as he wrote both in Polish (when he was living in Poland) and English (after his move to London at the outbreak of WWII)

¹ It is an eye-opener as it not only presents the reader with issues involving Sienkiewicz but also provides information on certain traits of Japanese history without which their reception of *Quo vadis* would not be possible.

and whereas his Polish works are available in Poland, not all his English novels have even been translated into Polish yet. And I dare say that Pietrkiewicz is not a part of what we would call the Polish canon.

The ten articles on the reception of various Polish writers and their works reveal also the laborious effort of translators and promoters of Polish culture whose aim is to make it better-known in other countries. One example can be Tymon Terlecki's continuous battle to make Stanisław Wyspiański's theatrical works appreciated in English-speaking countries (a paper written by Andrzej Karcz). The articles also manage to reveal "the true story" behind presenting certain authors to foreign audiences—for example Beata Tarnowska writes about how the poems of the tragically departed Andrzej Bursa made their way into English-speaking literary magazines and anthologies. And because the papers focus mainly on the present day, they are able to show how Polish literature is currently entering other national literatures (see Olesia Nachlik's article on the presence of Polish literary works in Ukrainian culture in the 20th century; the author refers also to 21st-century pieces such as Michał Witkowski's *Lubiewo* and Dorota Masłowska's *Wojna polsko-ruska pod flagą biało-czerwoną* thereby stressing the role of Polish literature in discussing current Ukrainian issues).

There can be, however, one objection to this otherwise really well-prepared part of the volume. The detailed study of translations and the reception of Polish literary works does not provide us with the full picture of how our literature is present in the world. It seems that what we are looking at is a giant map, mainly blank, with but a few spots representing these countries and authors about which we have learnt. And this may leave us with a rather daunting feeling that we know so little—or with an optimistic one: that we are on the verge of finally getting the full picture one day.

Shaping Poland

The following three articles of the first part of the volume present anthologies of Polish literature issued in Great Britain, Bulgaria and Hungary and all of the papers, independently, face—and try to resolve—the same issue: how to anthologise any given literature? What might be of importance in Polish culture and what will appeal to foreign audiences? Or, to ask the same question the

other way round: what do other nations consider significant in Polish literature? Marta Kaźmierczak shows this issue in its acuity when she clashes two volumes of anthologies prepared by two (Polish) authors and two different concepts behind them. The author, by comparing anthologies *Five Centuries of Polish Poetry* prepared by Jerzy Pietrkiewicz/Peterkiewicz and *Selected Masterpieces* translated and edited by Jarek Zawadzki, shows how each and every decision made by the authors—whether it be the selection of texts or the choice of translations—affects the final outcome and the purpose the anthologies may serve. By doing so, Kaźmierczak also questions the validity and accuracy of any attempt of anthologising a national literature.

The first part of the volume also concentrates on the typically comparative studies of the inspirations and influences of Polish writers on foreign authors and these articles present probably the widest spectrum of interests as they allow a glance into the history of Polish literature and show how older works sparked interest in contemporary authors—as Maria Janoszka shows on the example of intertextual relations between Herbert Rosendorfer’s *The Architect of Ruins* and Jan Potocki’s *The Manuscript Found in Saragossa*. Not only is the time span wider than in other articles, we are also shown a much broader area as one of the papers (by Natalia Gendaj) presents how Witold Gombrowicz has been perceived in Argentina—both as a writer and as a potential literary character.

The remaining two papers from the first part of the volume concentrate on the study and teaching of Polish literature in Croatia and Japan. The authors of the articles—as was the case with texts devoted to anthologising Polish literature—independently ask the very same question of how Polish literature should be presented in other countries in order to raise interest and awareness among readers. Đurđica Čilić Škeljo’s and Filip Kozina’s answer is that Polish literature should be taught traditionally, from the point of view of the history of literature and through linking literary works with political and historical issues, for in their opinion, only such courses, albeit slightly anachronistic, let the students truly experience and appreciate Polish literature. Piotr Horbatowski’s answer is somewhat different; although he by no means denies the necessity to teach Polish literature and acknowledges that such a course is demanding for the students, he also points out that contemporary students are no longer interested in typically “academic” pursuits and in order to attract their atten-

tion to Polish literature courses, lecturers must not only provide candidates with knowledge but also make the courses attractive enough for students to be willing to participate in them.

What the multiple authors of this part have certainly managed to convey is that Polish literature indeed is present and recognised throughout the world (which should still those sceptics who deny Polish literature its due place in the world) although possibly not in the way we think it should. The names that appear in the compilation only in part seem obvious to the Polish reader; more often they surprise and astonish us. But all in all, the first part of the volume ends on a rather optimistic note: yes, Polish literature is acknowledged around the world and in multiple ways, sometimes quite unexpectedly.

How the world leaks into Polish literature

The second part of the volume, expressly shorter than the first, focuses on how the issues and phenomena significant for other national literatures also penetrate Polish works. It may actually come as a surprise that the editor of the volume chose to begin it with a vast chapter devoted to the reception of Polish literature and not to start with the influences of “the world” and national literatures on Poland for it is quite obvious that the contacts of Polish literature with the world are not just one-sided. What such distributional choice suggests—given the definition(s) of what worldliness is—is that the primary interest of the editor and individual authors is how Polish literature functions in the world—but since the relationship between the two is mutual, one cannot overlook it and has to give the other part its due place. I consider the decision to resolve the composition of the volume in this way a rather daring one—in a positive sense—as it clearly indicates the academic turn of the whole book.

This fragment of the volume deals with the issue of “the world in Polish literature” and presents two main approaches to the subject. The first one, more pronounced, shows themes and motives common to both Polish literature and other national literatures and aims at their comparative study. And hence there are studies of feminism and women’s literature in contemporary Poland juxtaposed with notions such as *chick lit* in the English-speaking world (the paper by Małgorzata Anna Packalén Parkman), the *topos* of the sea as presented by

Joseph Conrad (by Margreta Grigorova) or the person of St. Francis of Assisi interpreted by G. K. Chesterton and Józef Wittlin (by Katarzyna Szewczyk-Haake). One of the articles proposes a broader view by using photography as a *tertium comparationis* (an article by Martyna Markowska on Henryk Waniek's *Finis Silesiae* and Kjell Westö's *Där vi en gått*). The second approach of the authors shows how "worldliness" becomes a meta-issue in the works of Polish writers, how they created themselves in relation to the world. Beata Nowacka describes this on the example of Melchior Wańkowicz's travel-writing by pointing out his self-creation and the creation of what he experiences. Wańkowicz's name is important not only because of these elements but also as he had become a pioneer of modern Polish travel-writing and to him virtually all contemporary travel writers owe a lot. Nowacka presents therefore how Wańkowicz's worldliness—the experience of the world—has shaped and altered Polish literature.

But again, the same objection as with the first part of the volume can be raised here: we see just a few dots on literature's vast horizon. This part features the only paper that could be defined as "general," giving an overview of the reception of Polish literature (a study of "worldliness" of Polish Nobel Prize laureates and the issue of the Western literary canon written by Michał Kisiel). But what is the clearly striking about this particular piece is the fact that it is placed somewhere in the middle of the whole volume and thus it is not highlighted in any way. And what may be found at least slightly striking, is that the author of this piece is a student (which is underscored in his biographical note) and therefore may hardly seem an appropriate authority to generalise on such a subject. The paper certainly lacks adequate bibliography, mainly to articles that have already dealt with the worldliness of Polish Nobel Prize laureates (for instance a 2006 paper by Bolesław Faron²).

Also—for the lack of generalisation—none of the papers provides an answer to how "the world" is present in Polish literature. The inverted commas are no mistake here: the second part of the volume begins to challenge the reader with the question of what we really mean when we say "the world." The first

² Bolesław Faron. "Wokół polskich Nobli literackich." *Literatura, kultura i język polski w kontekstach i kontaktach światowych. III Kongres Polonistyki Zagranicznej. Poznań 8-11 czerwca 2006 roku*. Ed. Małgorzata Czermińska, Katarzyna Meller and Piotr Fliciński. Poznań: Wyd. Naukowe UAM, 2007.

part seems to have swiftly avoided the issue or to have at least left it as a hidden premise that by “the world” we mean “other national literatures” (or more precisely, the creators thereof) which are synonymous with “other countries.” This synonymy was somehow strengthened by the fact that the organisers of the conference wanted the countries to be represented by people coming from them. The articles in the second part tear this identity apart by putting another piece to the worldly puzzle: Polish literature is shown here against the background of other national literatures but also against the background of the world as a physical, geographical even, experience. It is most clearly visible in the paper on Melchior Wańkiewicz that “the world” becomes disrupted. And it seems that this process of disruption has gone unnoticed so far.

The Polish voice from afar

This issue of what “the world” is comes back again in the third, shortest part of the volume. Six papers that aim at showing literary forms and subjects are taken up by authors of Polish origin living outside Poland. And also, I cannot help but notice, there is yet another purpose in this chapter and it is to familiarise Polish readers with the works (or maybe even names) of these writers—which is not to be diminished. The issue of “the world” comes back here again: this time mainly as a physical place, a geographical feature, a stand from which the authors are speaking.

The position from which writers speak their words is by no means neutral or innocent. Katarzyna Karwowska, whose primary interest is the way in which Polish writers function and are received in Germany, states that the sole presence of a particular writer remains a deeply political issue. She studies this on the example of post-war Germany where the reception of Polish literature has heavily depended on the current political layout between East Germany, West Germany and Poland and later between Poland and united Germany. According to the author, the political setup has so affected the cultural situation that Polish writers in Germany remain virtually invisible and therefore speechless.

There is yet another vital issue tackled by the authors of this part of the volume: collective memory and how it can be altered depending on where the

author stands. Elwira Grossman's paper dedicated to novels written by Ewa/Eva Stachniak³ and Lisa Appignanesi concentrates on the question of a nation's identity and the collective memory of a nation (especially of people of Jewish origin). One might want to ask if this sharpness with which the authors of the analysed novels see the problem of transculturalism is just the effect of their foreign experience. Grossman tries to prove that this is the case by quoting an interview with Ewa Stachniak in which she states that the main stimulant of her writing is the question of where she is from and what world she is coming from. In her article, Grossman confronts collective memory with individual memory and thereby reveals how conventional, irrelevant and incongruous—and probably untrue—the collectiveness of memory really is. There is a faint echo of Douwe Draaisma's ideas in Grossman's paper and the same question: how our memory shapes our identity and to what extent our identity is falsified due to the distortions of our memory.

So where exactly is “the world”?

The main purpose of the volume was to present—and possibly try to evaluate and judge—the place of Polish literature in other national literatures. This was done through the key category of “worldliness”; but as I have pointed out above, this notion is not necessarily innocent and transparent. The editor in the foreword presents the reader with three methods of understanding “worldliness” but alas gives no information which will be applied where. As the composition of the volume complies with the division into three types of “worldliness,” the reader is bound to assume the parts will correspond with the definitions. And if this premise is taken for granted, the whole volume “works.” But the three different aspects of “worldliness” may make the reader question the second key concept: Polish literature. For if we have three “worldlinesses,” should we not also have three “Polish literatures” to correspond with? Neither the editor nor any of the authors provides a definition of “Polish literature” and there is no general conclusion of what “Polish literature” really is, how we should perceive

³ As the author of the paper notes, Stachniak uses two different versions of her name according to the language in which her novels are published.

it and who can be considered a “Polish author”—and this seems an essential finding to a volume that is centred around the notion of Polish literature. There are no distinctive characteristics of a “Polish author” given and membership in this circle does not depend either on the language in which a particular writer produces his/her works (Joseph Conrad and Jerzy Pietrkiewicz/Peterkiewicz may be the most pronounced cases) or on the country he/she writes from (the third part of the volume—not to mention the case of Witold Gombrowicz). And if these are not sufficient discriminants, then which? Most probably the author’s own opinion about his/her affiliation but this seems too vague and oblique and somewhat not scientific enough. Hence the volume also challenges the reader with the question of what we really mean by “Polish literature” and what we mean by “in the world”—or even, what we mean by the “presence” of a national literature in the world. For if we cannot discriminate Polish literature and Polish authors from the rest, how do we then present them against “the world”?

Having that considered, one must return to the vital category used throughout the volume and think it through once more. Since we are not really sure, for the authors do not provide us with an explanation of where the borderline between “Polish literature” and “the world” lies, the issue of “worldliness” may slip through our fingers as well. As informative and well-prepared as the volume is, there are still some questions that arise while reading it, especially whether to treat it as a whole, as one planned entirety. The subjects of “Polish literature” and “worldliness” and its definitions have already been tackled in this review (and the latter also by the editor of the volume in the foreword) but there is yet another, not less important, problem with defining key issues and namely: what is “the world” in which Polish literature exists. I have already outlined the issue when discussing “worldliness” but this time I would like to limit the observations to pure geography.

It is pointless to deny that I had approached the volume with certain expectations about what I might find in there, which countries to visit and which names to encounter. And in this respect each paper was an astonishment—and sometimes a revelation. But it is important then to take a step back and see which countries and which national literatures have been considered as “the world”—the background against which we see Polish literature—by the editor and the authors. The main idea of this international conference was

that authors from particular countries would speak of the reception of Polish literature in their national literatures and therefore their representatives of such countries as Bulgaria, Ukraine, Lithuania, Romania, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Finland, Japan. Authors coming from Poland also researched such countries as Argentina, Norway, Great Britain and the USA. It is not difficult to notice that the list of countries hardly covers “the world,” i.e. the globe. Central Europe is mostly represented with but a few trips to Western Europe (e.g. articles by Katarzyna Cieplińska, Andrzej Karcz, Michał Mikoś), and even fewer to other continents. South America is represented by just one article (a paper on the reception of Witold Gombrowicz in Argentina by Natalia Gendaj) and Asia by one as well (a frequently referred to paper on Sienkiewicz’s *Quo vadis* in Japan by Koichi Kuyama.⁴) And while we learn about the works of Teresa Podemska-Abt, a Polish poet living in Australia (in the paper by Magdalena Bąk), we get no information on how Polish literature is perceived there.

Moreover, it is necessary to note that the volume suffers from a common, inherent disease of a lack of post-conference publication: that they never manage to show the reader the panoramic view of any given issue; that they merely suggest and feign a full view while pointing out only a few spots on the horizon. But can it really constitute an objection if it is an innate vice of any such volume? What the whole volume also lacks—and again this seems a flaw of all such compilations—is the lack of bibliography or an index at the end. What also makes it difficult if one wanted to search the quotations or to refer to papers mentioned in the articles, is the lack of references at the end of each piece. To summarise the whole volume, I have to admit that it certainly is really well-prepared and well-edited. The individual papers provide the reader with valuable and reliable information. Surely many of the published articles will be of help to scholars and be an inspiration for further research on given subjects. As for being one cohesive and coherent volume, possessive of a consistent theme and research methods, I am not so sure.

But I would like to end on a laudatory note. There is a tendency to see the “worldliness” of any given literature—for instance Polish literature—as a positive feature, something that the literature and its authors should be striving for.

⁴ I am consciously excluding here the paper by Piotr Horbatowski as it is mainly a proposition how to teach Polish literature in Japan.

Personally, the word “worldly” evokes in me an image of a 19th century English aristocrat who is telling his peers of the many adventures he has encountered in foreign lands, sipping champagne and enjoying the admiration of other old chaps who have not been abroad. “Worldly” may mean a smug, self-satisfied smile of a person who has somewhat unjustified claims to know better. It seems that the authors of the volume have not succumbed to the idea that worldliness, the presence in the wide world, the reverence with which the names of Polish authors are mentioned is something to long for and endeavour. It is but a fact that our literature is present in other cultures and that some Polish works—not necessarily those which we would consider our greatest—have sparked interest among foreign authors. And if it is a fact, it needs to be researched and described. While we may be happy and even slightly proud that our literature is recognized and acclaimed in the world, we still need to look at this recognition in the cold light of the day and be able to analyse it calmly, without going to any extremes. And this volume serves this purpose ideally.

Summary

The aim of this paper is to review the volume on *Faces of Worldliness (Literatura polska w świecie. Tom IV. Oblicza światowości)*. The volume defines the worldliness of Polish in three ways: firstly, as the presence of Polish literature in foreign context; secondly, as the way in which Polish literature constitutes a part of world literature; and thirdly, as works by Polish authors created outside the country. The whole book is composed according to this division into three main parts. The paper shows the main topics and approaches taken up by the authors of the articles and aims at evaluating their concurrence with the chapter’s main ideas. However, although in general the volume should be evaluated as highly informative and well-composed, it certainly lacks a binding idea that would allow to see *Faces of Worldliness* as one cohesive structure. Also, the author points to the fact that some key issues (“the world,” “Polish literature”) remain undefined in the volume.

Key words: comparative literature, world literature, national literature, Polish literature in the world

Dookoła świata w 33 artykułach

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest zrecenzowanie tomu *Literatura polska w świecie*. Tom IV. *Oblicza światowości*. Tom ten definiuje światowość na trzy sposoby: po pierwsze, jest ona rozumiana jako obecność polskiej literatury w zagranicznych kontekstach; po drugie, jako sposób, w jaki polska literatura tworzy część literatury światowej; po trzecie wreszcie, jako utwory polskich autorów pisane za granicą. Artykuł przedstawia główne tematy i koncepcje poszczególnych autorów i stara się ocenić ich zbieżność z ideami poszczególnych części książki. Jednakże – mimo że tom zostaje oceniony jako bogaty w informacje i dobrze skomponowany – zdecydowanie brakuje mu jednej idei wiążącej całość. Autorka zauważa ponadto, że pewne kluczowe pojęcia (np. „świat”, „literatura polska”) nie zostają w tomie zdefiniowane.

Słowa kluczowe: komparatystyka, literatura światowa, literatura narodowa, literatura polska w świecie