

Dr. Leszek Szymanski writes:

The anthology "**Contemporary Writers of Poland**" selected by Danuta Blaszak, the editor of magazine "City of Writers" and a poet herself, presents to the English language reader the significant writers mostly poets of the generation which arrived after the Nobel Prize winners Wislawa Szymborska and Czeslaw Milosz. The presentation is in an elegant graphical form, and the book cover has been created by a well-known artist Agnieszka Herman.

The book reflects the contemporary image of Poland as if caught by camera of poetic vision. Of the numerous ways of conveying the picture of Poland this one is the most permanent and effective. The difficult and time consuming editorial labor produced excellent result.

Adam Lizakowski commences the anthology, but it contains other poets living in the USA such as Anna Frajlich (my favorite poetess), Wlodzimierz Holsztynski, Danuta Kosk-Kosicka, Aleksandra Boehm, Eliza Mahoney, Janusz Ihnatowicz, and Danuta Blaszak herself.

The pioneer achievement in this anthology is the presentation of those Polish poets who wrote in Poland in times when the country was separated from the West. Its inhabitants had no opportunity to acquaint themselves with the English language poetry, having examples of the Soviet poetry shown to them for emulation instead. Their significant achievements had been never before translated to English.

It must be acknowledged that the Polish poets living in the USA supported the anthology by the excellent translation of poetry by their colleagues. For instance Danuta Ruminski translated the famous "Erotic for the successor" by Bohdan Urbanowski, and the folklore poetry of Eli Galoch, the poetess unfortunately little known to "Polonia".

All the translations are excellent, but I was especially impressed by Barbara Voit's rendition of Rev. Jan Twardowski's poem "Let's hurry to love people". Twardowski, a friend of young poets in his last days

"hurried" to sign his permission for the publication of that poem in the anthology. That was his farewell to "Polonia" and welcome to the English speaking world.

Barbara Voit also translated works of Jerzy Czajkowski and Marta Berowska. Berowska originated a new style of poetry writing as if cyclical chapters of a novel. Czajkowski and Berowska are specially sensitive to the political and social responsibilities. They represent the best traditions of the Polish great and dramatic poetry of the "three bards".

Who is a Polish Poet? Poles in Poland. Poles abroad. Polish Jews who had to leave Poland in 1968. Barbara Volt had translated a beautiful poem of Teresa Kaczorowska entitled "Other Polish Poets".

Reading the poetry from the book one feels and sees the vivid pictures from Poland. The metaphors are taken mostly from the nature. The imaginative loops seem correct and reasonable. Ex.: The Polish nature in "Krubinski Garden" and wild herbs in a Hospital in Stanislaw Kesik's poems translated by Lila Latus; or Narew River in the poem by Stanislaw Stanik in its wonderful image of willows bowing to water. We see the harmonious unity of man with the nature and the love of native land in poems by Maria Duszka. In the striking poem of Ewa Kaczmarczyk the moon also falls from the sky, not only the stars.

A characteristic topic of Polish poetry is the celebration of Christmas Eve the most important Polish holiday when nobody can stay alone. One can find the Christmas topics in many Polish poems by poets Alexander Nawrocki, Bohdan Urbankowski, and Danuta Ruminski.

The Anthology contains a few poems honoring mothers. Anna Tomaszewska begins her poem with

*"My mother feels the smell of earth
keeps talking about".*

Danuta Ruminski's poem "The essence of Mother's magnolia" is another example.

In Poland, there is an acute awareness of the past history and tradition which is evident in the poetry. There are poems about suffering under the Soviet inspired regime, and about the exile in Russia, especially Siberia. The memories of ww2 are permeating the imagery. Barbara Osuchowska writes about the soldiers and the stone which had hit Goliath. Jerzy Czajkowski feels like the great bards of the past. He feels the overbearing responsibility for the fate of the nation “with the face of clown”.

Poland is not the only own backyard. There is the acute feeling of unity of the world, of being a part of the whole. Lidia Kosk writing about her travels combines the Polish affairs with that of the wide world. Barbara Kobos-Kaminska concerns herself with the Tsunami in Dec. 2004.

Despite of the years of isolation during communism the Poles did not forget they were a part of the Western culture. Adam Lizakowski while in the Whitman's tradition moves freely writing about typical Polish matters, and poetry of Czeslaw Milosz. The other poets also stress their participation in the common history of the world and its culture. Ihnatowicz calls his poem "Polish Niobe of 1939". Maria Berowska, in her cycle of poetry, is inspired by the history of Austria.

There is not much to criticize about this anthology. The richness it presents may overwhelm the reader who is not accustomed to the Polish contemporary poetry. But that can be corrected easily by reading in small doses which would create great effects.

I recommend that book heartily

Leszek Szymanski