

Kuc's ambitious project provides a comprehensive view of Polish avant-garde film before 1945, making a solid contribution to the experimental cinema field of studies and showing how illuminating an account based on sources other than realized films can be for early avant-garde cinema.

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Miłosz: A Biography. By Andrzej Franaszek. Ed. and trans. Aleksandra and Michael Parker. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017. 526 pp. Chronology. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Photographs. Maps. \$35.00, hard bound.

doi: 10.1017/slr.2018.153

There must be few biographical subjects as difficult as Czesław Miłosz. Not only was his life marked by historical upheaval and peregrination from babyhood on, but it was also exceptionally long and complex. Andrzej Franaszek's thousand-page biography was published in Polish in 2011, and English-language readers now have a crystal-clear translation. Aleksandra and Michael Parker avoid any sense of strain or idiomatic oddity that might cause estrangement from the original text: amazingly, the book reads as if it were composed in English. Nowhere have the original author or translators cried out for recognition—they agree to let Miłosz himself occupy our attention.

Merely 500-odd pages in length, there are no superfluous details in this book, but it keeps close focus upon the significant events of Miłosz's life. And yet here is also a potential problem. Franaszek enjoys storytelling, and chooses his details with an eye to their evocative potential; in their drive to produce a succinct translation, the Parkers must condense yet further. It is a pleasure, though, to encounter details that add texture to the story: for example, when Miłosz journeys to burnt-out Warsaw in 1945, he locates his old apartment. He finds a few torn, trampled book covers. A copy of *Three Winters*, the volume that first made his name, is found pierced with a bullet hole. Miłosz digs these fragments out of the rubble with no small sense of irony: "It looked a little stupid in the background of the ruins. . . . What was the point in looking for the rest of my books? I felt revulsion at the sight" (234). Revulsion because they had been sullied by the monstrous war, because all the world's masterpieces cannot not stop a tank, because literary connoisseurship seems ludicrous in the face of genocide, or because his personal life had become so thoroughly violated by history? Is the urge to salvage such fragments ultimately rejected, since it will never result in triumphant restoration?

Franaszek does not shy away from issues at the heart of contemporary debates over Miłosz's character. To write a purely laudatory biography would be easier, but he puts several hard questions front and center in his exposition: for instance, in his first American years, working as a well-salaried attaché of the People's Republic of Poland did Miłosz "consciously suppress certain knowledge that came to light in order not to think too much about his own situation, which decades later he would recognize as 'perilous, incredible, illogical, immoral, indescribable'"? (265). How should we judge the will to live in safety and basic comfort? Readers may already know that Miłosz was denounced for cowardice and opportunism. They may not, however, be able to imagine the extraordinary complexity—emotional, political, logistical—attendant upon his dramatic defection from the communist regime in 1951. The Parkers manage to retain a few vivid details that enable us to imagine the prosperous, naïve America

the Miłosz family walked into, in which “just relax” was the mantra of the day, as well as the emotional *sturm und drang* of his time in France (which included frequent thoughts of suicide). There are also fascinating passages describing the situation of his wife, “abandoned” in Washington at the end of her second high-risk pregnancy, begging Czesław not to bring his family any closer to the Communist bloc.

Which brings us to another juicy part: Miłosz’s romantic relationships. Every reader may have a different opinion of his treatment of women, from his cynical early flings to his first love, Jadwiga Waszkiewicz, whom he left (probably after she became pregnant), and then to his first wife (Janina Dłuska), with whom he was not always happy, and finally to his second wife, Carol Thigpen, so different in age and in background (yet the marriage was happy). They are treated admirably, with a sensitive effort neither to reflexively defend nor castigate Miłosz by assuming that these interesting and intelligent women were hapless victims of his egotistical genius. This task involves biographer and translator alike, since individual words may skew readers’ interpretations of such delicate matters. We receive a portrait so carefully nuanced that it deserves attentive reading and re-reading. Nowhere do we feel that our hand has been forced: each reader will come to his or her own conclusions about this exceptionally multi-faceted poet and thinker. This book will interest anyone curious about Miłosz or, indeed, the bloody century to whose history he gave voice.

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“Sailing towards Poland” with Joseph Conrad. By Jean M. Szczypien. American University Studies: Series XIX General Literature, vol. 42. New York: Peter Lang, 2017. 270 pp. Appendix. Bibliography. Index. Photographs. \$94.95, hard bound.

Joseph Conrad’s Polish Soul: Realms of Memory and Self. G.W. Stephen Brodsky. Ed. George Z. Gasyna. Conrad: Eastern and Western Perspectives, vol. 25. Lublin, Poland: Maria Curie-Skłodowska University Press, 2016. 409 pp. Bibliography. Index. \$60.00, hard bound.

doi: 10.1017/slr.2018.154

Though they reach their conclusions in very different fashions, both Jean Szczypien, in “Sailing towards Poland” with Joseph Conrad, and G.W. Stephen Brodsky in *Joseph Conrad’s Polish Soul: Realms of Memory and Self*, agree on a fundamental principle: it is difficult to correctly assess or even understand Conrad’s work without a firm grasp of its Polish contexts. “Conrad’s Polonism is in the very warp and woof of his narratives,” Brodsky writes, before going on note as “deplorable” the Anglo-American critical “neglect of Conrad’s [Schlachta] class culture” (20, 22). Szczypien adopts a similar critical perspective, but pursues an intertextual treasure hunt based upon the notion that Conrad “had secreted part of himself, part of his Polish cultural heritage in [his] pages” (42).

Brodsky begins reviewing Conrad’s critical biography. Though he does not write a conventional narrative of Conrad’s life, it is a fitting way to start, since his approach is informed and shaped by Pierre de Nora’s concept of *Les Lieux de mémoire*, geographic or cultural loci where we “buttress our identities” and archive individual and collective consciousness (303). The result is a series of examinations of, and incursions into Conrad’s life and work in the light of his Polish identity. Brodsky begins from the assertion that one cannot really understand Conrad except by understanding his Polonism, especially his perception of honor in his role as *Schlachcic*. He notes the important role such luminaries as Zdzisław Najder have played towards setting