
A JOURNEY THROUGH POLISH LITERATURE

European Literature

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Henryk Sienkiewicz (1905), Władysław Reymont (1924), Czesław Miłosz (1980), Wisława Szymborska (1996). How many of you know these four authors and know what they have in common, besides their nationalities? The four of them were awarded a Nobel Prize but nevertheless remain little known outside of Poland. How many of you can give the name of, at least, one Polish contemporary author? These examples, among many others, prove that Polish literature remains unknown despite it being a big part of European literature.

To start my presentation, I'd like you to have a look on this quotation by Czesław Miłosz who wrote, among other, a book about the History of Polish Literature (*The History of Polish Literature*, Berkeley, 1969). In his work, he wrote "*Polish literature focused more on drama and the poetic expression of the self than on fiction (which dominated the English-speaking world). The reasons find their roots on the historical circumstances of the nation.*"

Over a first phase, it thus seems important to start out with a broad overview of the general history of Polish literature throughout the ages before we can understand what happened during the 20th century, and fully understand the main references to the previous time periods which we can find today. In Polish literature, historical problems have always been an essential characteristic. One can notice that Polish literature has always been torn between its social duties and literary obligations. With this in mind, it is possible for me to offer you the promised journey through my national literature.

So, Polish literary periods roughly correspond to the great European literary movements. There *are* some temporal differences but Polish literature is in line with the European movements. Literature evolved with the political events which shook the country's life, the successive divisions and changes in the other European countries. We will therefore see how the literary fact has evolved.

Let us start this journey from as far as we can, that is to say Pagan Literature. There is little left about Polish literature from before the time of Christianization of the country in 966. Pagan literature was spoken, but it was never written down and translated into Latin and therefore died. One of the first Polish texts is considered to be the masterpiece by **Gallus Anonymus**, a foreign monk who accompanied King Boleslaw on his trip from Hungary to Poland, entitled *Cronica et gesta ducum sive principum Polonorum* (The Acts of the Princes of the Polish people). The first texts written in a common version of the Polish language were strongly influenced by the sacred Latin literature. They include *Bogurodzica* (God's mother), a hymn to the glory of Virgin Mary, written down in the 15th century although it was already popular at least a century earlier. *Bogurodzica* was used as a national anthem.

The arrival of the Renaissance (1500-1620) influenced the Polish language which was eventually accepted as equal to Latin. Polish culture and art were prosperous under the reign of Jagellon and many foreign poets and authors settled in Poland, bringing along new literary trends. Although Poland has touched Renaissance later in comparison to other countries, it was the golden age of Polish literature. The first generation of writers who were influenced by the Italian humanists wrote in Latin. Many Polish authors also went to study abroad and Krakow's university became a centre where new ideas and trends came to life. Authors, such as **Mikołaj Rej** and **Jan Kochanowski** laid the foundations of the literary Polish language as well as modern Polish grammar. **Mikołaj Rej Nagłowice** became famous for combining aspects of the Middle-Ages and the Renaissance. Self-taught, he was the first Polish and most widely read author of his time, being known as "the father of Polish literature".

Then, in comparison with other European countries, the Baroque period began early in Poland. The Polish Baroque's literature began in 1620 and ended in 1764. It was influenced by the great democratisation of the Jesuits school, which offered an education based on Latin classics. The study of poetry demanded a practical knowledge of poetry writing in both Latin and Polish. This led to the increase of poets.

After Renaissance, the second major period in Polish literature is Enlightenment. The Polish Age of Enlightenment began around 1770 and reached its apotheosis during the second half of the 18th century under the reign of the last king of Poland, Stanisław August Poniatowski. The new king (a protégé of the Great Catherine of Russia) undertook reforms and the Polish Age of Enlightenment gradually turned **nationalist**. Its decline started out with the third and last division of Poland in 1795, followed by the political, cultural and economic destruction of the country, which led to the Great Emigration (La Grande Emigration), that of Polish elites. The Age of Enlightenment ended in 1822 and was replaced by Romanticism, both in Poland and abroad. Literary developments included the development of the tragedy, the introduction of the novel, the publication of the first Polish dictionary, and in poetry, the introduction of "dumy" (ballads).

One of the main poets during the Polish Age of Enlightenment was **Ignacy Krasicki** (1735–1801). Nicknamed "the Prince of Poets" or the Polish **La Fontaine**, he is the author of *The Adventures of Nicolas Doswiadczynski* (*Mikołaja Doświadczyńskiego przypadki*), very first novel written in Polish. He was also a translator of French and Greek. Another important author from that time was **Jan Potocki** (1761–1815), a Pole of noble birth. An Egyptologist, linguist and explorer, his travelling memoirs made him very famous in Poland and across Europe where he is first and foremost known for his novel, *Le Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse*. This period offers a good ground for Polish Romanticism to develop. But the period is rapidly overlapped by the political context.

Because of the different divisions decided by the neighbouring empires and which put an end to the existence of the sovereign Polish state in 1795, Polish Romanticism, contrary to Romanticism in other European nations, largely became a movement for **independence** which expressed the ideals and ways of life of the Poles under foreign occupation. The Romanticism period in Poland ends with the Uprising from January 1863, public executions by the Russians and deportations in Siberia.

Polish Romanticism's literature found its roots in two distinct waves, both defined by insurrections: the first one from about 1820 to 1832, ending with the Uprising in November 1830, and the second one between 1832 and 1864, which gave birth to Polish Positivism.

During the first wave, the Polish Romantics were heavily under the influence of other European Romantics. Their art introduced emotionalism and imagination, folklore, the country's life, as well as the propagation of independence ideals. The best-known author from that period is certainly: **Adam Mickiewicz**. During the second wave, after the Uprising from January, many Polish Romantics worked abroad, often banned on Polish ground by the occupying power. Their work was then dominated by the ideals of liberty and struggle to find back the sovereignty lost in their country. Elements of mysticism became more important. It's at that time that the idea of *poet-wieszcz* (le barde de nation) was developed. The *wieszcz* functioned as the spiritual leader for repressed people. The most remarkable poet among the main Romantic bards acclaimed throughout the two waves was **Adam Mickiewicz**. The two other national poets carrying the same title were: **Juliusz Słowacki** and **Zygmunt Krasiński**.

After the failed January **1864** uprising against Russian occupation, the new wave of Polish positivism began to advise scepticism and reason. **This new period is called Positivism**. The questions raised by the "positivist" authors revolved around the so-called "organic work" which demanded the establishing of equal rights for all members of society; the assimilation of the Jewish minority in Poland; and the defence of the Polish population in the areas governed by the Germans of Poland against the *Kulturkampf* and their violent moving. The authors were about to teach the public about constructive patriotism, which allowed Polish society to function as a completely integrated *social organism* without taking into account external circumstances. This period lasted until the turn of the 20th century and the emergence of the Young Poland movement. The modernist wave in visual arts, literature and music, known as the Young Poland movement, appeared in 1890 and marked the return of independent Poland. The movement found its roots in two concepts. The first stage was characterized by a strong aesthetic opposition to its predecessor's ideals (that is, the promotion of the *organic work* against foreign occupation). Following this first belief of Young Poland, artists believed in decadence, symbolism and conflict between human values and civilization. Among the authors who followed this trend, one can name Kazimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer, Stanisław Przybyszewski and Jan Kasprówicz. This ideology emerged with the socio-political disruptions which shook up Europe, such as the 1905 Revolution against Tsar Nicholas II of Russia, the Norwegian independence, or the Moroccan Crisis among others. It is a continuity of Romanticism, and therefore quite logically called neo-Romanticism. Artists and authors alike covered a wild variety of themes: the meaning of the personal mission of a Pole, as in texts by Stefan Żeromski, the condemnation of social inequality in texts by Władysław Reymont and Gabriela Zapolska. As for Stanisław Wyspiański, he worked on themes such as the criticism of Polish society and revolutionary history

In 1905, **Henryk Sienkiewicz** was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for his patriotic trilogy which inspired a new sense of hope. Without defeating the national saga *Pan Tadeusz*, Sienkiewicz's *Trilogy* plays a great part in the

Polish pantheon. The trilogy is made of: *Par le fer et par le feu* (1883-1884), *le Déluge* (1884-1886) and *Messire Wołodyjowski* (1887-1888). The author meant to contribute to the national Polish construction. As a conclusion to his long *Trilogy*, Sienkiewicz admitted having written in order to “warm up the hearts.” As **Czesław Miłosz** explained, « The mention of a glorious past was supposed to allow the reader to overcome the ordeals of sharing. The old Polish used by Sienkiewicz reminded them of the richness of Polish culture as fought by the Russians. The author also offered a patriotic ideal: the ‘pious Catholic soldier, in good health, with a spirit that was not cluttered up with too many thoughts but endowed with exceptional gifts for fencing, drinking and love.”

The Young Poland movement ended with the start of World War One in August 1914. We are going to ellipsis the period of the First World War and consider it only as a transition even if it is an active period in publishing.

Literature under the Second Polish Republic covered a short period of time, which is nevertheless exceptionally dynamic in the Polish literary conscience. The socio-political reality changed radically with the return to independence. New avant-garde trends emerged. The period spread over twenty years only, was rich with remarkable individuals and witnessed the birth of observers of a changing European civilization, including **Tuwim, Witkacy, Gombrowicz, Miłosz, Dąbrowska** and **Nałkowska**. All of them contributed to the new model of Polish culture in the 20th century.

The two decades of the inter-war period were marked by the fast development of poetry, which was not diminished for the first time since over a century. From 1918 to 1939, the gradual and successive introduction of new ideas resulted in the creation of separate and distinct trends. The first decade of Polish poetry in the inter-war period is clear, constructive and optimistic; in contrast to the second decade, marked by the dark visions of the upcoming war, internal conflicts within the Polish society and the ever-growing pessimism. The whole period is however very rich. All the Polish poets dealt with the concept of liberty with much seriousness and many patriotic works emerged at that time, not to mention a particular variation of a poetic cult to Piłsudski (political leader).

When the Second World War started, during the years of German and Russian occupations of Poland, the entire artistic life was radically compromised. The cultural institutions were lost. The environment was chaotic and the authors scattered: some ended up in concentration camps or penal colonies (or nazi ghettos), others were deported outside the country; some emigrated (**Tuwim, Wierzyński**) while others joined underground Polish resistance movements (**Baczyński, Borowski, Gajcy**). The authors who remained in Poland started reorganizing literary life through conspiracy by organizing conferences, poetry evenings and secret meetings in the authors’ homes. The towns where these meetings took place were often: Warsaw, Kraków and Lwów. The authors also took part in the creation of an underground press (1 500 illegal publications in Poland, 200 of which were devoted to literature). Many fought in the exiled Polish army or confronted the Holocaust in civil life.

This marks somehow the end of the first part of our journey. Second World War marks a turning point in the History of Polish literature. The situation of the country and the development of many genres in literature are making the modern period different from what happened before.

The time period starting after the Second World War goes without a name in the history of Polish literature. Sometimes, it is called “Literature of popular Poland» (Literatura Polski Ludowej), but what is implied through this name is not very positive. Firstly because this name blots out the existence of a Polish literature published abroad and secondly because it is not always possible for literary periods to follow political and historical periods. This period is very different from the previous periods as it was neither political nor historical as was, for instance, Positivism. There is no literary or cultural trend which dominates or sets a general trend. On the contrary, one can observe a great variety

of trends and waves which do not necessarily last long. Many groups of writers took part in the improvement of post war Polish literature, thus joining those who were already active in the inter-war years. Moreover literature was divided between the one published in Poland and the one published abroad, in Polish, by those who left the country. It would be wrong to believe that these two groups are completely different as both of them shared the same literary traditions and were based on a similar ideology: that of the mission and duty of the writer. Authors created with the intention to address the entire cultural Polish society, like **Mickiewicz** and his *Pan Tadeusz*. Actually, there is no reason to separate them as, quite often, to be a writer in Poland led to an agreement with reality, even though the emigrant's choice to leave the country was a way to show his refusal to accept this very reality. Moreover, contrary to common beliefs, it was a very rich period when it comes to literary work. There were more writers, more publications, in part because demands were more varied and readership was increasing. At that time the first detective novels appeared, as well as fantasy and science fiction literature, and radio or TV drama. It became difficult to see the difference between a literary report and a journalistic report. Personal journals or diaries found success when until then they were nothing but a side literary document.

Generally, it is understood that the end of the war marks the beginning of a new literary era. The Socialist Realist years between 1939 and 1956 were an independent set. Then the 1956 events allowed literature to take up its progression, interrupted by the cult for Stalin, and it was from then on that a new era, called "Contemporary literature," began.

Here are some elements which constitute the post-war literature. After WWII, when the country passed under the Soviet control, it did not prevent many migrants and exiles to go back to Poland before the toughest era of Stalinism. Upon their return, many authors tried to recreate the Polish literary scene they once knew, quite often with a feeling of nostalgia for pre-war reality. For instance, **Jerzy Andrzejewski**, author of *Cendres et Diamants*, described the political and moral dilemmas associated with anti-communist resistance in Poland. New prose authors emerged. **Stanisław Dygat** and **Stefan Kisielewski** were drawn to war doomwatch and wrote about their own experiences. Thus Dygat, in his novel entitled *Jezioro Bodenskie (Le lac de Constance)* published in 1946, described his experience in an internment camp for civil workers (he also held French citizenship) near Lake Constance.

The situation got radically worse in 1949-1950 with the introduction of the Stalinist doctrine by the Communist regime, which was opposed to Human rights. Between 1944 and 1956, many authors, fearing for their work, decided to join the process of the sovietization of Polish culture. This attitude somehow participated to the development of **Socialist Realism** which was a political doctrine established in Poland by the Communist government and supported by the Communist regime shortly after the end of the Second World War and the Soviet take-over of the country. It was a relatively short period of time in the history of Polish literature, marked by the fear caused by security forces' power abuse. From January 1949 and until the end of Stalinism, *Socialist realism* was the official cultural policy of the country. Authors and poets had to create works which glorified Joseph Stalin, the Communist doctrine and the Polish Unified Workers Party. Following the death of Stalin, some critics against this literature appeared, but the Socialist Realism policy was maintained until 1956 and the political changes which took place in the Soviet bloc. Some authors, such as **Zbigniew Herbert**, who refused to glorify Communism, withdrew from cultural life. Others saw their names written on a black list. However, most authors and poets obeyed the new cultural and governmental directives and agreed to describe the Popular Republic of Poland as a land of happiness and freedom where its inhabitants lived under the well-wishing protection of the Communist party.

There were two different generations of authors. The first one was made of authors who had made a name for themselves before the Second World War by publishing their work during the inter-war years or during the war. Some of them were passionate about the new order and really believed that Communism was going to help workers, farmers and the poor. It is partly the reason why they joined the Polish Unified Workers Party and became political activists. These authors, who cooperated with the government, had a strong influence on the entire Polish cultural life.

The second generation of authors was that of young authors who were convinced that Communism was a fair social system and who started out believing that as authors and poets, they should convince people of the well-intending foundations of Karl Marx or Vladimir Lenin's ideas. Some of them had a strong local political influence and triggered the concern of other authors because of their zeal and self-confidence. The majority of these writers were quickly forgotten.

There was also a small group of authors which included famous and emerging authors who refused to write Socialist realist novels and wished to remain silent. **Zbigniew Herbert** and **Miron Białoszewski** were forbidden to publish anything.

In accordance with the socialist programme, prose came first as far as literary creation was concerned. Until then, poetry did. Socialist realist authors intended to describe ordinary people and their every-day life. War stories suddenly stopped being published, and if war was mentioned, it was mainly to praise Soviet success. The typical plot for socialist realist novels generally took place in a work-related space, hence the name given to these novels: *factory literature* (in Polish: *produkcyjniaki*) or *countryside literature*. Factories, coal mines, construction sites, small towns and villages were typical places. Through these novels, the authors described, though in a naïve fashion, the rebuilding of the country.

The construction of that type of novels was schematic and little complicated. The novel often starts with the description of a factory ruined by the war, where the workers are depressed or corrupted. They have no future. Oftentimes, the individual is introduced as corrupted whereas the group is strong. In this dark context appears the positive hero, young, inexperienced and uneducated but full of energy, respectful of the ambient ideology and desiring to succeed. He is the one who motivates the others. Facing him, there is an ambitious enemy who wants to sabotage his work and the factory. In the end, he is arrested and the young hero can continue his ascent; and, if he's single, he will find love. The villain is usually a political opponent and the member of a hostile social class, such as the middle classes. He is never a criminal, but rather an enemy to the success of the nation. He may be an ex-policeman from before the war, a factory owner or an aristocrat. In some novels, he is a spy for the Americans, French, British or Germans. The "bad one" hates communism and workers. At the end of the novel, he is unmasked and imprisoned.

That type of work allowed propaganda to pass on the illusion that production was the most important element in Stalinist policies. The idea was to demonstrate that in the new socialist world, everyone would find happiness through work. It was the testimony of the birth of a new society. Quite often this factory literature was made of unremarkable stories which intend of being literary documents from a certain time period but the world which they described was more than far from reality. However, some works did stand out from the crowd, notably thanks to a stylistic effort.

In the same vein, countryside novels began to appear. Here, factories are replaced with work on farms. The topics of the change of regime, collectivization and the birth of a new political conscience were tackled. Quite often of poor quality, it never really met with success. However, just like productive literature, some novels came out into the

spotlight. For instance in 1950 *Traktory zdobędą wiosnę* by Witold Zalewski and in 1951, *Uwaga Człowiek* by Józef Kusmierko. The other novels lacked originality and were too poor stylistically speaking.

One thus understands why this style has nothing to do with the great Realism of the 20th century. One thought the novels aimed at workers and peasants had to be written by those who knew them best. In reality, we were far from **Balzac** or **Tolstoj** but one could find some elements borrowed from youth or leisure literature. This reality was never destined to become great literature. Socialist realism did not create a new original style in prose for it was never the objective of the cultural policies led by Communists. Its only goal was to influence literature with propaganda. Socialist realist words are similar to hymns and glorify factories, ships, coal and electricity. The main topic of many, many poems was Joseph Stalin and other communist politicians. Then, from 1956 on, these poems were strongly criticized, which led to the end of yet another wave in literature.

Right after the end of the 1950s, censorship became more and more controlling as far as literature was concerned and many authors were banned from publication. Communist policies regarding publishing were based on the massive popularisation of propaganda literature. Quite often, mediocre literary debuts were favoured over the loss of works by great contemporary authors and great classics of national literature because they were in accordance with the communist ideology. Censorship tried to erase any traces of literature that dealt with the reality of what was going on in the Popular Republic of Poland. However, despite its difficulties, literature embraced a steady development. **Zbigniew Herbert** is one of the major poets, just like **Wisława Szymborska**. Around 1968, the voice of a new generation of poets was heard. They are called *The New Wave* („Nową Falą”).

As far as prose is concerned, **Andrzej Andrzejewski** notably published *Bramy Raju* (*The Doors of Paradise*). He gains popularity thanks to the problems he faces with censorship when he tries, in vain, to publish *Miazga* (*La Pulpe*) and the publication in Paris of *Apelacja*. At the same time, Polish publishing house in Paris, “Kultura,” started publishing texts about life in the Popular Republic of Poland. **Sławomir Mrożek** became very famous thanks to his grotesque tales. Zbigniew Herbert and his essay *Barbarzyńca w ogrodzie* was also acclaimed.

Theatre was strongly linked to poetry and symbolism. It went back to grotesque parables, which allowed authors to pass on deeper messages despite censorship. One of the most important works is *Tango* by **Mrożek**. Mrożek is one of the most world-famous Polish writers. He lived in Paris, in the USA, in Germany and Mexico. In 1996, he returned to Krakow before emigrating from Poland to Nice in France. Mrożek is a complete creator; he moves quite easily from one format of speech to another. He began his career as a caricaturist and a journalist. Even if he was born in Borzęcin, he grew up in Krakow where his father got a job. He spent the war in the country but once it was over, he finished school in Krakow where he also studied, architecture, oriental studies and Art History but none of these fields of study interested him. Nevertheless, he gained popularity thanks to his satirical drawings published in the press. In the 50s, he wrote articles in favour of the regime where he was promoting the “construction of social-realism”. Even if the fascination for the communist regime lasted a really short time, Mrożek never tried to hide it contrary to some other authors writing at the same period. Ask once about his past, Mrożek explained “Being twenty years old, I was ready to accept any ideological proposition without looking into its mouth, as long as there was a revolution ... “Other people like me had once been recruited by the Hitlerjugend... Frustrated, useless and revolted, young people are present in each and every generation, and what they do with their revolt depends only of the context.” In fact, his way from trust into the communist regime to scepticism ending with negation, Mrożek could experience by himself what the social mechanisms are and how they

work. While communism was often disorientating (or at least trying to) writers, in Mrożek's case it strengthened him because, in fact, it led him to see what the strength of the stereotype is.

In the 1970s, literature went through tough times, notably because of the increase in censorship and the poor quality of the works published by the officials. This crisis was progressively fought by unofficial publications and the new generation of young authors. It's in the 1970s that the theme of the countryside and regained lands became important. *Sur les Bords de l'Issa* by **Czesław Miłosz** is extremely popular even if he's not yet back to Poland. Czesław Miłosz represents, at the time, and somehow still today, a symbol of the Polish intellectual culture (as opposed to the popular culture) which survived to the communist wish to see the disappearance of a strong national culture which was the bearer of a national identity as an individual entity in USSR. Abroad, he met success thanks to *Gdzie słońce wschodzi i kędy zapada*. As far as poetry's concerned, **Zbigniew Herbert** famous for *Pan Cogito*, reached popularity. Among the poets from that time, **Wisława Szymborska** is one of the best known. The new books which raised interest were written by **Andrzej Szczypiorski** or **Janusz Głowacki**. The *Rozmowy z katem* (*Conversations avec un bourreau*) by **Kazimierz Moczarski** caused a sensation and were quickly adapted for the stage. Many authors who couldn't seem to get through censorship published their works in unofficial newspapers. **Ryszard Kapuscinski** represented a socio-cultural literature of quality. **Stefan Kisielewski** became the link between the country's literature and that of emigration. He published many works in Paris under the assumed name « Tomasz Stalinski ». He was not the only one who published his work abroad.

A part from the literature published in Poland one shall not forget about immigration literature between 1939 and 1956. After the beginning of the Second World War, many writers found themselves outside of the country. Very few then thought about emigration as a choice. On the contrary, they see it as a kind of fight against the occupant. That is why this period is called "the literature of fighting Poland." Some poets ended up in France. Then, after France's defeat, the majority of writers migrated to Great Britain. Polish publishing houses worked rather fast, as for instance in London. Other writers ended up in the Soviet Union; some in prison; others in camps. The very important literature of testimonies is a great source of information about these dark times in History. Among the most significant works of the time, one can quote *Inny świat* (1949) by **Gustaw Herling-Grudziński**, or *Wspomnienia starobielskie, Na nieludzkiej ziemi* (1948) by **Józef Czapski**. Other writers managed to reach the United States. Those who accompanied the troops of General Anders during the war got to the Middle East or Italy.

Polish people's choices of countries to migrate to do not always correspond to the political divisions. Some who wished for the independence of Poland decided to stay abroad at the end of the war; others who believed in the socialist doctrine decided to stay in Poland. In 1947, the monthly journal "Kultura" started to come out in Paris. In 1946, the Literary Institute, created in Italy by Jerzy Giedroy, is transferred to Paris. "Kultura" brought together authors who had begun their career during the war. Among the most respected authors published in "Kultura", one can find **Witold Gombrowicz** and **Czesław Miłosz**. **Gustaw Herling-Grudziński** and **Józef Czapski** who became important contributors to the monthly magazine. More than just a literary journal, "Kultura" grew to become a link bringing together Polish emigration against the communist authorities. Up to 1956, among the seminal work published abroad, one can highlight *The Captive Thought* (*Zniewolony umysł*) by **Czesław Miłosz** (1953) and « *The Other World* » (*Inny świat*) by **Gustaw Herling-Grudzinski** (1953).

Today, it is quite difficult to give a large panorama of today Polish literature. What is important is certainly that it is very productive and very rich. Poetry is still very important but there is a large variety of genres and a new generation is already very implicated in the literary world. Once again, the political context had an influence on this renewal of the literature. In the 80s, the main characteristic of the literature is the break with the classic codes of the „literature language” and the fact that this literature is created under the pressure of the political context. Authors are influenced by the changes in the country and are writing directly about them, which means that they had to publish their work in publishing illegally or abroad. The end the decade closes an era in Polish literature which marked by the struggles of the political system. With the fall of communism in Poland the national and immigration literature can become a unique entity. Poetry is dominated by the older generation. **Czeslaw Milosz** become very popular and represents the national and cultural unity. His position in the Polish culture is strengthened in 1980 when he is awarded the Nobel Prize in literature. His poem *Who harmed a simple man* had been read as an allusion to the communist authorities and a sign of support for Solidarnosc. Nevertheless, he is not the only one to be celebrated. Poets such **Zbigniew Herbert**, **Julian Tuwim (mostly his work for children)**, **Wisława Szymborska** and even the younger generation of poets are also appreciated. The other changes concerned also novels, since more and more books, which had been published by the underground press are also popular. An even younger generation called the “rough draft generation” appears. The best way to observe the changes that occurs in contemporary literature is to follow the Nike Award. The **NIKE Literary Award** (*Nagroda Literacka NIKE*) is one of the most prestigious awards for Polish literature. Established in 1997 and funded by *Gazeta Wyborcza*. It is also interesting to observe the translation of polish works.

It is difficult to distinguish a trend in today’s works. **Olga Tokarczuk**, for example, is one of the most critically acclaimed and commercially successful Polish writers of her generation, particularly noted for the mythical tone of her writing. She trained as a psychologist at the University of Warsaw. She has published a collection of poems, novels, as well as several books with shorter prose texts and essays. Her novel *Drive your Plough over the Bones of the Dead* published in 2009 is written in the convention of a detective story with the main character telling the story from her point of view. Janina Duszejko, an old, unattractive woman, excentric in her perception of other humans through astrology, relates a series of deaths in a rural area in Poland. The novel poses questions related with human responsibility for and to the nature and the dangers of personal mythology. On the other hand, we can also quote **Dorota Masłowska**’s works. This young author and journalist was born in 1983. She first appeared on shelves with her debut book *Wojna polsko-ruska pod flagą biało-czerwoną* (translated to English as either *White and Red* in the UK or *Snow White and Russian Red* in the US; literally means *Polish-Russian War under White-Red Flag*). Largely controversial, mostly because of the language seen by many as vulgar, cynical and simple, the book was praised by many intellectuals as innovative and fresh. A notable example of post-modernist literature, her book became a best-seller in Poland. Her second novel *Paw królowej* (*The Queen's Peacock*) did not gain similar popularity, even though it won the NIKE Literary Award in 2006.

To give a global representation of today literature, we can say that the young generation is a very active in both poetry and prose. Drama is also very popular. But in the late few years one genre is particularly popular mainly because of the success of one of its authors. It is the Reportage. I would like to finish this lecture on this Polish singularity: The Polish School of Reportage and the example of Mariusz Szczygiel’s *Gottland*.

Reportage ("reportaż" in Polish) as a self-sufficient phenomenon which appeared in the 20th century and, in Polish writing, was treated as one of the most interesting "border species" of literature as early as the interwar period. A relationship with the diaries, stories and chronicles popular in the 19th century, enabled its almost immediate escape from the confines of a documentary description of reality. A concentration on the fates of authentic characters, joined with attempts to present them as a generality, turned out to be the narrative technique which would allow a literary diagnosis of the 20th century's tragic events such as the war, the Holocaust, or the totalitarianism.

The development of the "Polish school of reportage" was connected with the events of the Second World War. A different method was chosen by **Zofia Nalkowska** in *Medallions, (Medaliony)* an ascetic recollection of the Holocaust, and **Tadeusz Borowski**, whose tales took place in an extermination camp, and accused the world of treating humans as goods. **Gustaw Herling-Grudziński** used his experiences in the Soviet camps and asked questions about the ethical and religious fundamentals. The Holocaust is always present in the fates of characters described by **Hanna Krall** (*To Steal A March on God, Dancing at Someone Else's Wedding, The Subtenant*), but her books are more than a memoir, they are an attempt to understand the modern world. A similar role is played by the exotic countries in the works of **Ryszard Kapuściński** (*The Emperor, Shah of Shahs, Empire*). Events distant in time, foreign customs, and political revolt - all serve to interpret human existence and make sense of the ever more violent changes in reality. Such a perspective is probably the main reason for the worldwide popularity of these authors.

Today, **Kapuscinski** is considered to be the father of Polish Reportage. Many of his books have been translated into many languages. But a new generation is appearing. In 2009, **Mariusz Szczygiel** published a book called *Gottland*, which gain a lot of popularity in Europe. He, Szczygiel is best-known for his intuitive reportages on the Czech nation and its way of life. He describes them as an optimistic nation, which has clear and optimistic opinions about life, death and about the existence or absence of God. Szczygiel was a former student of the famous writer and journalist **Hanna Krall**, herself connected with **Kapuscinski**. He has been Deputy Editor of *Duzy Format*, a supplement to *Gazeta Wyborcza*, created for the publication of reportages. He received several awards, such: the Prix Amphi from the University of Lille for the best foreign language book released in France in 2008 (*Gottland*), the Europe Book Prize in 2009, Warsaw Literary Premiere Award in 2010, the European Book Prize for best European book of the year in 2009, the Nike Readers' Award in 2007...

Today, the young generation of reporters is mainly composed of journalists working also for *Gazeta Wyborcza* and among them, we can find the names of **Wojciech Jagielski, Jacek Hugo-Bader, Mariusz Szczygiel, Beata Pawlak** or **Wojciech Tochman**. The genre itself has evolved, since it is divided into two tendencies: human interest journalism or investigative journalism.

Investigation. That is surely what defines today's literature. A research of the self, of a polish literary identity carried by young authors who are experiencing another turn out in the national history; the opening of the borders to a new dimension: Europe.