



Polish Literature

(GAINED, NOT LOST)
IN TRANSLATION

By
Ewa Bronowicz



PORTRAIT OF AMERICA

Letters of Henry Sienkiewicz

Translated and edited by Charles Morley

Columbia University Press, New York. 300pp. \$15.00

The Promised Land of America

Henry Sienkiewicz is foremost known as a recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1905, and as the author of his ancient Rome epic "Quo Vadis" as well as the historic and optimistically patriotic "Trilogy." Unfortunately, few people have been acquainted with his "Portrait of America," a wonderfully rich collection of letters which sprang from the writer's journey around America in 1876 when Sienkiewicz was thirty years old. Although not yet a famed fiction writer then, he had earned his reputation as a journalist. He'd decided to go to the New Continent—with an idea of finding the Promised Land and setting a utopian colony with a group of friends—and to record his observations in letters that would be published in *Gazeta Polska*. He arrived in New York in early 1876, traveled extensively across America, and boarded the boat back two years later. America à la Sienkiewicz is beautiful or ugly, depending on the region; it lacks European manners but displays passion for work unheard of in Europe; but ultimately, it is a fascinating collection of sharp, fresh and, perhaps most of all, honest descriptions of America through the eyes of a Pole whose own country was in many ways behind most of Europe due to the process of Russification imposed on Poland by Russia at that time.

Sienkiewicz' first destination was New York. Did he like it? Not quite. He complains about the city's lack of history, saying that the only attractions are hotels and banks. He condones the "muddy, dirty and badly paved" streets, on which "ownerless pigs with battle-scarred ears amble about." He says that instead of good manners New Yorkers display "boorishness," "no refinement," and "crude offensive habits." On top of that, he notes that the only inhabitants of New York are merchants: "Business, business, business, from morning till night, that is all you see, read and hear." Despite the writer's initial disenchantment with the Big Apple, he gradually becomes impressed with the endless energy of the people, their zeal for work, and their enthusiasm for trying out new ideas, ultimately adopting "those which are best."

In fact, the more Sienkiewicz looks at America, the better America looks. The writer praises Chicago, clean and beautifully modern; he loves California where "people smiled at nature and nature smiled at them; and he finds the Santa Ana mountains so idyllic that he stays there for several months, sleeping under the sky, in the company of a squatter, with whom he'd go hunting and discuss the most efficient strategies for killing a bear as well as life in the New Continent.

In addition to detailed accounts of every place Sienkiewicz visited, his letters are filled with numerous comparisons of America to Poland or to Europe in general. "American democracy approaches nearest that ideal society for which we have striven through the ages," he says, and lists a few key reasons for the nation's success over Europe. In France, for example, "democracy is a myth" because a doctor and a common laborer are not equal, but in America they are on the same social ladder because there is no social ladder. Consequently, each type of work is equally respected. Also, since Europeans display a level of sophistication unknown to the Americans, a difference in behavior between a professor and a peasant is immense; in America, on the other hand, a professor and a peasant would act similarly in a social situation, thus promoting unity. Finally, as Sienkiewicz informs us, general education is much "more widespread and evenly distributed" in America.

One of his last letters offers a breathtaking description of Poles immigrating to America from the moment they board the ship in Hamburg to New York only to realize that not only does no one speak their language but also that no one is waiting for them at the dock of the New World, as promised by a fellow agent. Their later fate varies: just as anyone can succeed, anyone can fail. Either way, the writer applauds America for not imposing "Americanism" on anyone, even if Americanism is irresistible.

When Sienkiewicz finally returns to Warsaw, full of such Americanism, he almost immediately writes "Trilogy" with the goal of "strengthening the hearts" of his fellow citizens. As "Trilogy" brings hope to many Polish homes, so should "Portrait of America," in times of America's adulterated image, bring hope to the country itself as the book reminds us that America was, and still is to many, the Promised Land. Or, in Sienkiewicz's words, "Respect and unprecedented passion for work—this is the invincible power of the Yankees, this will assure them a brilliant future and world leadership." And we should not take his words for granted.

— You can write to Ewa, c/o Post Eagle, P.O. Box 2127, Clifton, NJ 07015

National Polish Center Gets Serious About Re-Inventing Itself

By Jane Morse

WASHINGTON, DC — Board members of the National Polish Center (American Center of Polish Culture) rolled up their sleeves and began the hard work of re-inventing the nearly 20-year-old organization. Their goal is to make it more vibrant, responsive and relevant to American Polonia.

Under the leadership of Jack Pinkowski, the newly-elected chairman of the Center, Board members gathered recently at Nova Southeastern University in Davie, Florida for two full days packed with intensive strategic planning sessions. But they had experts to coach them through the process.

Under the guidance of Dr. Tom Land, corporate trainer and assistant vice president for Baptist Hospitals of South Florida, the Board carefully crafted a new mission statement for the Center, which now reads: To enhance economic and cultural cooperation between the United States and Poland and to promote, perpetuate and preserve the appreciation of Polish heritage in America.

The Center's Board worked to develop ideas for programming — both monthly programs for the Center's facility in Washington, D.C. and more ambitious long-term cooperative programs with other Polish organizations around the United States. They resolved to increase funding for the Center, recruit more paid and volunteer staff, enlist corporate sponsors, increase public outreach efforts and improve the Center's web site and newsletter.

Thanks to the lessons learned from marketing executive and professor Dr. Jim Barry, the board will establish a "brand" to make the Center distinctive from other organizations.

Barbara Sterry, executive director for Nova Southeastern University's Office of Grants and Contracts, discussed how to maneuver through the process of requesting grants for the Center and reviewed the Center's program ideas for their "grant worthiness."

"We are determined to reinvigorate the Center with new ideas, new programming and increased funding," said Pinkowski. "We want the Center to live up to its 'national' status by reaching out to Polish Americans and Poles countrywide and spreading the good news about our Polish roots to all Americans."

Polish Artist Agnieszka Opala In NY Exhibition

NEW YORK, NY -The Agora Gallery (530 West 25th Street, Chelsea, New York, NY, 10001) is proud to present Polish artist Agnieszka Opala in *Sublime Sanctum*. Scheduled to run from May 10th through May 30th the collection will feature a captivating selection of Agnieszka Opala's unique work. Opening Reception:

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Front row, Pat Koproski, Jane Morse, Monika Krol, Executive Director; back row, Ben S. Stefanski, II, Vice Chairman, Dr. Julian Kulski, Richard Gabrys, Treasurer, Dr. Jack Pinkowski, Chairman, Ed Rudzinski, Ed Pinkowski, and Al Koproski.

Polish Pottery Has Come To The Allentown, PA Area



Country Kitchen Polish Pottery is a small country store in the Allentown, Pennsylvania area. They have a large selection of pottery which is handmade and hand painted in Poland. Each piece of Polish pottery is a unique work of art. Polish Pottery is extremely durable and created to be used, while many collect it for its beauty.

The store is a family owned and operated business, proudly celebrating its Polish/Slovak heritage. Customer service is always most important. Visit **Country Kitchen Polish Pottery** which is open every Friday and Saturday from 10 am to 5 pm at 70 Old Mill Rd., Barto, PA 19504 or on the web at countrykitchenpolishpottery.com. For additional information or to schedule a personal showing call 215-679-3331. See ad below.

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