



# Polish Literature

(GAINED, NOT LOST) IN TRANSLATION

By  
Ewa Bronowicz



**JERZY KOSINSKI**  
**The Devil Tree**  
*Written in English*

206pp. Grove Press, New York. \$12.00

## Surprise: A Tale of a Morally Bankrupt Millionaire

In a bad economy, there is nothing more frustrating than reading a book about a millionaire who inherits his fortune and then complains that he cannot be successful because he has everything. Then again, there is nothing more consoling than reading a book that once again proves money does not bring happiness, especially when money is tight worldwide. In other words, *The Devil Tree* by Jerzy Kosinski, even though first published in 1973, is very contemporary, if not timeless, in what it tries to explore: the power and limitations of money and fame.

And Kosinski certainly knew a lot about both. A recipient of numerous awards, among them the National Book Award and the American Academy of Arts and Letters award in literature, he suffered from depression and other illnesses at the end of his life, and committed suicide on May 3rd 1991, in his New York apartment. Together with his literary characters, he searched for happiness, fulfillment and meaning. Sometimes he found it, in some form, at least for a little while. And sometimes what he found turned out to be more destructive, or self-destructive, than the lack of it.

In *The Devil Tree*, Jonathan Whalen discovers freedom through murdering the last two members of his family. A son of a steel tycoon, he returns to New York after the death of his parents, and lives off his enormous inheritance. He does not work, because he does not need to work. Instead, he is mainly preoccupied with sex, drugs and mind games, which are supposed to, but don't quite, illuminate Whalen with the exploration of the self and others. He is obsessed with Karen, a supermodel and the "perfect symbol of our visual age," who is, to some extent, Whalen's double—desired because of something she has inherited, not earned: her beauty. When Karen finally confesses her love for Whalen, he walks away, either to run away from her destructive power, or because he is afraid of love. Or both.

*The Devil Tree* appears more timely than ever. Whalen despises the moral bankruptcy of the rich, whom he blames for the fall of America. Money empowers and destroys him at the same time. He leads an existence that consists of nothing but luxury, and yet, when he wants to help a homeless man, he cannot because such an act would be "a rich man's caprice." The guilt that Whalen feels for inheriting a fortune is not strong enough to abandon it; or perhaps it is Whalen who is not strong enough to accept it without guilt, and use it to promote selflessness. The rich that surround him are hypocrites, both in life and in business. Killing two of them can, but isn't necessarily, the solution. But if the murder wakes Whalen up to finally face reality—that money can also be good, if used correctly—then he may just manage to bring the devil tree back to what it was, before the devil got entangled in its branches and put a curse on it. If the devil tree is America, then good luck to Whalen.

Any questions or comments for Ewa.... You can contact her by visiting her website: [www.literatka-nyc.com](http://www.literatka-nyc.com)

## Our Polish Children Need You!

Polish Children's Heartline Extends An Invitation To Fundraising Luncheon

By Helen Zapolski

The Polish Children's Heartline began its humanitarian efforts on a small scale beginning in 1985. The objective was to help the children of Poland with congenital heart problems. We are very proud of our accomplishments through the years since our first cry for help went out to the Polish American community. We asked for assistance in procuring the medical and surgical supplies that were to help the doctors perform their life saving surgery so that they could help the children.



Through the efforts of member Adam Prochacki, the Polish Children's Heartline was able to make contact with Prof. Zbigniew Religa, the head of the Silesian Center of Cardiac Surgery in Zabrze, and Dr. Zembala as well as Dr. Moll of Lodz.

Professor Religa had many young doctors studying under him. Today, they are heads of their own hospitals.

Dr. Marian Zembala heads the hospital in Zabrze. Prof. Jacek Moll is Chief Surgeon in the Pediatric Department of the Mothers Hospital in Lodz. Prof. Andrzej Bochenek is a Robotic Surgeon in Katowice but travels all over to do Robotic Surgery. Besides these hospitals we now have included hospitals in Bialystok, Grajewo, Suwalki and Legnice.

We received help from many facets: medical supplies were donated by hospitals, surgical supply and equipment houses, financial assistance was raised primarily through personal contributions and from our fund raising events. Because of the generosity of many benefactors, we were able to answer the plea of the doctors in Poland and provided the medical supplies requested. Thanks to people like Mr. Wnekowicz of DOMA Export Corp. who allowed us the use of warehouse space and didn't charge us for many shipments, so that we were able to ship thousands of packages of needed medical supplies and equipment.

The organization has developed

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## ARTSBEAT

by Staś Kmiec

### America's Got Talent Update

*America's Got Talent* enjoys exploiting stories of people who have come from nothing and somehow make it on their stage. The stories are often compelling, but it is my preference to see actual talent on this show, yet it is surprising when that talent is unfairly diminished.

This year two acts by Polish artists living in the U.S. came on the show, both polished, poised and determined to win the 1 million dollar prize and further their "American dream."

The acrobat hand balancing team of Dariusz Wronski and Jarosław Marciniak of *Duo Design* were sent home early in the 2nd "Las Vegas Verdicts" round by the judges' decision as they narrowed the selection from the national auditions to the Hollywood 40.

Both were shown as silent, yet disappointed. Their act was extremely concentrated, physical and unique and attracted audience attention. The process was cruel – being told they advanced to the next rounds, but not being allowed to perform a second time before they are sent back home?

What happened to *Alizma* – the stunning triplet sister violin act? After an unnecessary grilling from the judges their fate was held in balance. Aleksandra, Izabela, and Monika Okapiec went through a painful result process where they are told that they are talented and beautiful, but that they have a long way to go to perfect their act. They were made to squirm and plead their case; not knowing this scripted scenario was meant to create tension and stress... it is a "reality" show. They were finally told they would proceed to the next round in Hollywood.



The triplets were 6 years old when they started playing violin; they came to the U.S. ten years ago at the age of 15, as foreign exchange students. Their instrumental talent is far above the level of this show, so it is odd to see the judges try to make them doubt their ability. It would seem the combination of their talents with their ethnic slant would make them strong contenders for the finale.

During their next opportunity to perform in the quarter finals, they followed their own strong-willed decision and ignored the requests of the judges. They had received instructions to stick to the violin and not sing. Despite having a pleasant sound and adding an extra aspect to the performance, they should have followed these instructions. As a way to "spice up their act," they appeared in hot pants and midriff tops and with subtle gyrations appeared to have crossed the line with their sexy factor.

*Alizma* did violate a card rule on *America's Got Talent*: if something's working, don't change it. You can improve on it, but don't change it. From immaculately dressed blonde triplets who played gorgeous violin, they transformed to a flesh exposing act with animal print boots. They also - very unwisely - ditched their violins for the first portion of their performance.

"We love being sexy. That's just one of our colors. We love sexy!" one of them said to the judges.

During the results show they did not receive the viewing audience votes to continue in the competition.

Is *America's Got Talent* looking for Americans... with "American" acts to win its coveted prize or is it simply fickle American tastes in talent? With the show's affection towards many strange freak-show acts, I really do not know.

Check out *Alizma's* videos on *YouTube*... they are a force to be reckoned with.

### Exhibition Examines Polish Posters of the Cold War Era

Polish Posters 1945-89, an installation drawn from the Museum's collection of 24 posters from the Cold War era of the Polish Poster School continues at The Museum of Modern Art.

Drawing on a rich tradition in graphic arts, designers like Henryk Tomaszewski, Roman Cieślewicz, Jan Lenica, and Franciszek Starowieyski developed a sophisticated visual language characterized by surreal and expressionist tendencies, a bold use of color, and macabre, often satirical humor.

Polish posters were generally created to promote cultural events, opera, theatre, films and exhibitions. These posters images frequently contained explicit evocations of violence and sexuality and appeared at a time when there was little or no advertising.

The Communist state maintained a strict censorship policy and monopolized the commissioning and distribution of all printed media in that period, yet bureaucratic patrons colluded in turning a blind eye to the oblique but powerful critical commentaries contained in many of the posters.

On view through November 30, 2009 – The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, New York, NY; Philip Johnson Architecture and Design Galleries, third floor. [www.moma.org](http://www.moma.org).

