



Polish Literature

(GAINED, NOT LOST)

IN TRANSLATION

By

Ewa Bronowicz



ZBIGNIEW HERBERT

Elegy for the Departure (Elegia na odejście)

Translated by John Carpenter and Bogdana Carpenter

The Ecco Press, 1999. 144pp. \$16.92

Emotional Detachment

Czeslaw Milosz called Zbigniew Herbert “a poet of historical irony.” This irony in Herbert’s world provides the poet with a perfect outpost from which, slightly removed but still capable of feeling, he is free to express everything from melancholy about the past and the Second World War followed by Communism to hope about the future and humanity in general. If Herbert is not nearly as well known to the American audience as are his fellow poets, Czeslaw Milosz and Wislawa Szymborska, may stem from the fact that he, unlike the other two, is not a Nobel laureate, or because he is sometimes accused of detachment; but he equally deserves being called one of the greatest poets of the twentieth century.

Zbigniew Herbert (1924-1998) was fifteen when the Second World War began. His experience of the war, and later of the long Communist regime, strongly registered in the young writer’s mind. Since Herbert refused to write propaganda, his debut as a poet came late—in 1956, with the end of Stalinism—yet his talent was noticed immediately. During the Solidarity years, Herbert’s writings became the symbol of freedom, of political and cultural resistance. He has won many literary awards and in 2007 was posthumously awarded with the Order of the White Eagle by President Lech Kaczynski.

Elegy for the Departure is a collection of poems published in 1990. The historical irony Milosz refers to is scattered all across the pages, where it informs, reminds, and sometimes surprises the reader. In “Mr Cogito’s Adventures with Music,” the title character and one of Herbert’s signature creations, falls out of love with music for no apparent reason. As the poet explains, “the orbit of things was what changed/ the field of gravity/ and with it/ Mr Cogito’s/ inner axis.” The world, it seems, is full of events that control our life but that cannot be controlled. That’s why Mr Cogito “valued concrete objects,” things he could hold on to that would not cause “fire.” In another poem, titled “A Small Heart,” the narrator, presumably a soldier, talks about a bullet he fired during the war that “went around the globe and hit him in the back.” A man, driven by the, often cruel, force of history, has no other choice but to regret his actions, even if his memory outgrows his heart. A “small heart” is still more, and better, than no heart. In Herbert’s universe, such an emotional foundation persists, and can even give way to hope. And it is perhaps hope, which is inherently subjective and capricious, that is most dreaded. In “Prayer of Old Men,” the narrator asks God to transform men into heavenly dogs if they cannot be angels. “But do not allow/ the insatiable darkness of your altars/ to consume us/ tell us one thing/ that we will return.” This return—to innocence, childhood, or pre-war existence—has to be possible in some form, even if coming after death. To bear suffering with no light at the end of the tunnel would be unbearable. Life is suffering, but also a fight to remain human, to not give up one’s heart. Like the snake, from another poem in the collection, that used to, perhaps, be an eagle, a snake that “carries its home/ dark/ uncertain,” but a home nevertheless. To stay away from Herbert because of his detached style is to also stay away from the humanity that stems from it, slowly but surely.

Any questions or comments for Ewa...

You can contact her by visiting her website: www.literatka-nyc.com

★ FRATERNAL LIFE INSURANCE ★

FIFTEEN & TWENTY-YEAR ENDOWMENTS; THREE, FIVE AND TWENTY-PAYMENT PLANS; JUVENILE & ADULT TERM; SINGLE PREMIUM PAYMENT PLAN; LIFE PAID-UP AT 65 AND LONG TERM CARE.

Benefits include Script Save Prescription Card – Scholarships and Achievement Awards to High School Seniors.

The Association of the Sons of Poland



Now in our second century of service to Polonia!

333 Hackensack St. - Carlstadt, NJ 07072
Tel: (201) 935-2807 - Fax: (201) 935-2752
Website: www.SonsofPoland.org

President, Frank Knurowski • Vice President, Louis J. Gill
Secretary, Dorothy Kostecka-Wieczerek
Treasurer, Wallace Nowosielecki • Chaplain, Rev. Thaddeus Stasik
General Counsel, Walter J. Tencza, Esq.
Medical Examiner, Dr. Adam Lesiczka

DIRECTORS: Dorothy Jaworski, Helen Oranchak, Janet Piscopo, Krzysztof Rybkiewicz, Dayle VanderSande, Henry C. Walentowicz, Esq.

Catholic/Franciscan College Honored for Exemplary Community Service Felician Named To Presidential Honor Roll

Lodi and Rutherford, NJ- For the second consecutive year, the Corporation for National and Community Service has honored Felician College with a place on the President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll for exemplary service efforts and service to America’s communities.

“Felician College is focused on inspiring students to seek the highest good through a love for learning, respect for human dignity, and service to others,” said Felician’s President, Sr. Theresa Mary Martin, CSSF. “Our students volunteer at a variety of service-learning sites throughout New Jersey, including the American Red Cross, Habitat for Humanity, hospitals, soup kitchens, schools, and homeless shelters. We are delighted to once again be included in the Presidential Honor Roll.”

Felician College’s records show that in 2008, 782 students completed more than 14,000 hours of community service, including working in homeless shelters and food pantries; tutoring at-risk students; and working with senior citizens and special needs disabled youth and adults. In addition, Felician students worked with environmental agencies and community and economic development organizations.

Launched in 2006, the Community Service Honor Roll is the highest federal recognition a school can achieve for its commitment to service learning and civic engagement. Honorees for the award were chosen based on a

series of selection factors, including scope and innovation of service projects, percentage of student participation in service activities, incentives for service, and the extent to which the school offers academic service-learning courses.

“In this time of economic distress, we need volunteers more than ever. College students represent an enormous pool of idealism and energy to help tackle some of our toughest challenges,” said

Stephen Goldsmith, vice chair of the board of directors of the Corporation for National and Community Service, which oversees the Honor Roll. “We salute Felician College for making community service a campus priority, and thank the millions of college students who are helping to renew America through service to others.”

The Honor Roll is jointly sponsored by the Corporation, through

(PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 16)

Book Signing of “The Peasant Prince”

ILLINOIS - The Chicago Chapter of the Kosciuszko Foundation and the Polish Museum of America cordially invite you to attend the presentation and signing of the book “*The Peasant Prince*”, written by Mr. Alex Storozynski, prominent American Journalist and recently elected President of the Kosciuszko Foundation of New York. The event will be held on Friday, May 8, 2009, 7:00 pm at The Polish Museum of America, 984 North Milwaukee Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. The Peasant Prince is a biography of Kosciuszko, who Jefferson called “as pure a son of liberty as I have ever known, and of that liberty which is to go to all, and not to the few or rich alone”. The Peasant Prince is the unknown story of Kosciuszko’s life, liberty, and pursuit of tolerance in an era of revolution. For additional information contact Lidia Filus – Chapter President – at 847-698-0250. www.peasantprince.com or www.kosciuszkofoundation.org



WEBPAGE: [HTTP://WWW.CBBCNJ.COM](http://WWW.CBBCNJ.COM)
Laura.Lopiccolo@cbbcnj.com

Laura Lo Piccolo
ASSISTANT VICE PRESIDENT

517 River Drive, Garfield, NJ 07026
FAX
24 Hour Phone/Fax

973-478-6633
973-478-2295
201-587-0175

Felician College

STUDENTS FIRST

Instant Decision Days for Freshmen and Transfers

May 4-9 and June 8-13, 2009

8:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. (Monday – Thursday)
8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (Friday)
9:00 a.m. to 12 p.m. (Saturday)

Kirby Hall, Lodi campus

No appointment necessary ... just stop by with your:

- High school transcripts or GED
- SAT/ACT scores
- College transcripts (transfer students)



Bring this ad and we'll waive the \$30 application fee

For more information:
201.559.6131
admissions@felician.edu
www.felician.edu
262 South Main Street, Lodi, NJ 07644

Scholarships available
Counselors available for interested graduate students
Lodi and Rutherford, NJ

