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Ptasznik z Wilna O Józefie Mackiewiczu ***(The Birds man of Wilno)*** By Włodzimierz Bolecki. Kraków: Arcana (www.arcana.pl), 2007. 919 pages. Index of names. ISBN 978-83-89243-19-54-7. Hardcover. In Polish. **Joanna Rostropowicz Clark**

Until the end of his life, writer Józef Mackiewicz (1903–1985) was a target of attacks, first in his native Wilno and, after the Second World War, in émigré circles and inside Poland's borders. Before the outbreak of the war he managed to acquire enemies in every quarter of political opinion through his unorthodox pronouncements concerning the relations between Poland and her neighbors to the east. If his scathing vision of the Soviet Union as the evil empire had few vocal opponents, his positive view of tsarist Russia as a liberal monarchy was generally considered unpatriotic. That Mackiewicz despised Marshal Józef Piłsudski for having been too soft on the Bolsheviks after the 1920 war (in which Mackiewicz participated), and defended the Lithuanians' claims to Wilno/Vilnius offended Poles of virtually all political persuasions.

Only a handful of Polish Lithuanians (or more precisely, Lithuanian Poles), Czesław Miłosz among them (he would remain Mackiewicz's faithful defender) understood the larger perspective of the worldview of the talented reporter for the Wilno newspaper Słowo. Collected in Bunt rojstów (The Rebellion of the Wetlands, 1938), Mackiewicz's essays provide a prophetic assessment of the nations that originally formed the Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania. Mackiewicz warned that Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, and the other Baltic states ought to form a mutually supportive front lest they become annihilated by the utterly criminal Soviet behemoth.

The catastrophe of the joint Nazi-Soviet invasion in September 1939 validated most of Mackiewicz's prognoses. The brutality of the Soviet occupation of Poland's eastern territories and the opportunistic behavior of some of the refugees and local intelligentsia spurred Mackiewicz into reinforced attacks on the communist system and on everyone who collaborated with the Bolshevik regime. Wilno/Vilnius, as we know from its many prominent native sons, was a world of its own where nobody who was anybody could fade into the crowd. An atmosphere of cordiality prevailed: those who crossed pens in the day drank together in the same tavern at night, romanced the same women, borrowed money from each other. Networks of friendship and hostility were difficult to untangle yet could last a lifetime. The war, two wars, had changed the former gentle feuds into mortal battles. Untold numbers perished, and few among the survivors would escape accusations of treason, cowardice, guilt by association, or being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

When the German army pushed the Soviets out of Lithuania in the summer of 1941, Mackiewicz was not alone in initially welcoming the "liberators. "And when the Nazi propaganda apparatus installed in Wilno a Polish-language newspaper, Goniec Codzienny, Mackiewicz contributed three articles for its early editions. Their content was anti-Soviet, but also critical of the Polish government in London, yet public opinion condemned Mackiewicz. With the added rumor that he was on the paper's editorial board, Mackiewicz— together with Czesław Ancerewicz, Goniec's editor in-chief—was tried by the clandestine military court of the Home Army Wilno District and sentenced to death. While the verdict on Ancerewicz was carried out in March 1943, the Commander of the Wilno District, Colonel "Wilk" Krzyżanowski issued, according to several inconsistent sources, an order to postpone the execution of the verdict on Mackiewicz until after the war. Around that time, in May of 1943,

Mackiewicz was approached by the German authorities to participate as a witness in the commission to investigate the murder of Polish officers in the Katyń forest. Mackiewicz turned to the Home Army command in Wilno and Warsaw to receive permission and, 1427 THE SARMATIAN REVIEW September 2008 approval granted, he went. He was then cleared by the Home Army Bureau of Information to have his report from the site of the massacre published in Goniec Codzienny. Yet that clearance, followed by the 1945 "not guilty" verdict of the honorary court of the Union of Polish Journalists in Rome, did not close the tortuous case. What contributed to the steady resurgence of the attacks was Mackiewicz's equally persistent criticism of the Home Army and, after 1956, his fierce disapproval of contacts with dissidents in Poland. He also disapproved of Poland's postwar acquisition of the formerly German territories, of the Polish Catholic bishops' compromises with the Warsaw regime, of John Paul II, of Lech Wałęsa, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Polish anticommunist writer Stefan Kisielewski, novelist Marek Hłasko. Ever unrelenting, he died isolated in Munich in 1985.

In his monumental interpretive biography, an expanded version of the previous volume (1991) under the same title—Włodzimierz Bolecki, a distinguished literary critic, mounts a passionate defense of his extraordinary subject. There are two intertwined strands in his advocacy: the critical analysis of all, mostly spurious, evidence against Mackiewicz; and arguments in support of his political philosophy, of high moral ground in his judgments, and of his abhorrence of following the herd of "independent" minds. Bolecki devoted over twenty years to rigorous research of his subject, and the result is a groundbreaking historical work. In writing a meticulous report on the Kafkaesque trial of a literary giant in no position to defend himself, Bolecki ventures into several of the still unexamined areas of Poland's recent history. Conflicts of nationalisms and ideologies, eliminated or exploited by the Soviets, are revealed in Bolecki's narrative through the prism of personal antagonisms, tragic misunderstandings, and bitter reenactments of old battles by their losers. In the history's courthouse Bolecki not only takes Mackiewicz's side on the grounds of the moral inferiority of his prosecutors, but also presents his case as an exemplar of the continuous debate between absolutism and relativism in politics, ethics, and the arts.

A less partisan admirer of the author of *Nie trzeba głośno mówić* (It need Not Be Spoken Loudly, 1942) and Kontra (1957)—books whose compassion for every disregarded victim of the Second World War have no equal in European literature of the period—might treat at least some of Mackiewicz's critics with a modicum of sympathy, because they too were the disregarded victims. Persecuted in Poland, marginalized in exile, those Home Army soldiers had little to live on but their military honor. Veterans as different from one another as Stefan Korboński, Jan Nowak Jeziorański, Andrzej Pomian, and Paweł Jasienica cannot be expected to ignore Mackiewicz's criticism of the Home Army or the Warsaw Uprising; most of all, they could not pass over in silence Mackiewicz's outlandish accusations of the Home Army Command's complicity with the Soviet takeover of Poland. They had to cry "traitor!" Their attacks can now be seen as ill-tempered, even malicious, but not, in Bolecki's words, "bottomless stupid." And Mackiewicz, as Bolecki well documents, was not altogether unprotected. Both editors of the London based journal Wiadomości, Mieczysław Grydzewski and Stefania Kossowska, as well as Jerzy Giedroyć in his monthly Kultura in Paris, tried their best to publish almost everything Mackiewicz submitted—often to the dismay of other contributors. Much as they respected his forthrightness and his talent, they could not always save him from his own self-destructive stubbornness. He would not, for example, accept the Kultura award for his novels because it did not cite his political journalism. He broke with Grydzewski because Wiadomości included in its awards books by writers living in Soviet-occupied Poland, and he parted with Kossowska, on whom he had a platonic crush, because she made cuts in one of his articles.

His relations with Giedroyć, the first publisher of his novels, are particularly revealing of that tangled web of émigré attitudes about the past and the future of Poland, but also of certain tribal sentiments. Giedroyć, like Miłosz, shared Mackiewicz's love of Lithuania and the vision of multinational solidarity against communism. They disagreed about the means, not the goal, but the chasm was unsurmountable. By 1980 Mackiewicz would stand almost alone among the "appeasers," with Radio Free Europe the leading culprit. His funeral in January 1985 was attended by only a handful of mourners.

Bolecki is doubtless right to say that Mackiewicz still matters not only as a great writer, but also as a political visionary. His fearless nonconformism, his moral integrity in always putting principles over self-interest, his solidarity with the abandoned and the conveniently forgotten, are as rare as they are necessary for survival of civilized humanity. One may not agree on every point in Bolecki's argument that history proved Mackiewicz right. Yes, he was right in his unwavering condemnation of the "social beast" of communism, but his consequent downgrading of other "beasts" of his time has to be 1428 September 2008 THE SARMATIAN REVIEW questioned. His wish for independence of the many nations of Central and Eastern Europe did come true, but noncommunist Russia proved him wrong by the tsarist like brutality in Chechnya and elsewhere. And yes, he can be acclaimed as a pioneer of postcolonialism. Also, I agree with Bolecki that Mackiewicz deserves special recognition for his writings about the Gehenna of Wilno's Jews in *Nie trzeba głośno mówić*. My only complaint about *Ptasznik z Wilna* (the title refers to Mackiewicz's love of birds) is the absence of biographical notes. Only a few of the book's historical figures are well known, and brief curricula vitae of all the major historical actors would have been helpful.

As the story of Józef Mackiewicz's trials and tribulations are finally out in the open—due to the remarkable efforts of persons like Włodzimierz Bolecki—some controversies still linger. Kazimierz Orłoś, Mackiewicz's nephew and a writer in his own right, in an interview with Romuald Mieczkowski for New York's Przegląd Polski (19 October 2007), brought up the thorny issue of the scant availability of Mackiewicz's books in present-day Poland. Apparently, Nina Karsow, whose London-based publishing house, Kontra, was willed by Mackiewicz and his wife, Barbara Mackiewiczowa-Toporska, exclusive rights to all his works continues to withhold her permission for any publication of Mackiewicz's writings outside her own imprint, long after the fall of communism in Poland. It may well be the only remaining puzzle in Mackiewicz's legacy.