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Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Życie na Pograniczach: Zbigniew Anthony Kruszewski. Biografia* by Beata Halicka

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a rather frustrating publication history of Gombrowicz's works in Europe. Jean-Pierre Salgas, the French expert in Gombrowicz, tells the story of the writer's friendship with Bruno Schulz and comments on Gombrowicz's view on Jewish identity. Allen J. Kuharski, one of the best connoisseurs of Gombrowicz's theater, provides a fascinating history of Gombrowicz's presence in the Polish theater. His brilliant conclusion explains a somewhat surprising decrease of the Gombrowicz's performances after the collapse of communism: "Gombrowicz was always ready to provoke discomfort, and after seemingly winning the battle in contemporary Poland the next significant chapter for his work in the theater may ironically require finding a profoundly insecure place to flourish" (p. 249).

Gombrowicz in Transnational Context establishes an attractive agora for a debate on this underrated writer. It also invites readers to search for "insecure places" that create a true transnational homeland for Gombrowicz.

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Beata Halicka, *Życie na Pograniczach: Zbigniew Anthony Kruszewski. Biografia*. [Life in the borderlands: Zbigniew Anthony Kruszewski, a biography] (Warsaw: Instytut Historii Nauki im. Ludwika i Aleksandra Birkenmajerów PAN, Towarzystwo Naukowe Warszawskie, 2019). 429 pp. ISBN 978-83-7545-935-7.

Zbigniew Kruszewski has been a vital force in American Polonia since his arrival in the United States in 1952. The grandson of Antoni Grabowski, Esperanto's greatest popularizer, Kruszewski was born on June 27, 1928. Brought up in the egalitarian-universalist tradition of his grandfather, he fought in the Warsaw Uprising as a scout and runner. A POW at German camps and an uhlán in General Anders' army in Italy, he moved to Britain under the Polish Resettlement Act of 1946 and to the United States as a Displaced Person. In Chicago, Kruszewski worked with the Polish American Congress (PAC) and graduated from the University of Chicago in political science. In 1959, he made a historic trip to communist Poland, where he studied the demographic and developmental processes in the Oder-Neisse border region. His 1972 book, *The Oder-Neisse Boundary and Poland's Modernization: The Socioeconomic and Political Impact*, contributed arguments in favor of Polish permanent sovereignty there. Since 1968, a professor at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), he cofounded UTEP's Cross-Cultural Southwest Ethnic Study Center (1971) and in 1976 the, now global, Association for Borderlands Studies. In 1992, he was elected PAC's vice president and served in this capacity for another nine years. Throughout his life, he has endeavored to cross and build bridges, an imperative which was inflected with anti-racist sentiment once he moved southwest.

Beata Halicka's biography of Kruszewski, *Życie na Pograniczach* (Life in the borderlands) reveals all of the above and much more. The book came out as

part of the *Fontes Rerum ad Historiam Scientiae Spectantium* series of the Polish Academy of Sciences. As part of these “resources to the history of sciences,” the publication contributes to the history of Polish diaspora in America, the history of the Warsaw Uprising, and the history of borderlands in Western Poland and the southwestern United States.

The author, Beata Halicka, is a professor at the Institute of Eastern Studies, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. An expert in Eastern European borderlands, Halicka was a guest lecturer at UTEP in 2016. There, she met Professor Kruszewski in his eighty-eighth year. By mid-2019, the book had been penned and printed. The speed with which Halicka did extensive research, interviews, and presented a finished manuscript which Kruszewski approved with only minor corrections inspires awe. It proves her commitment to the subject, which, it must be stated, never turns into adulation. Nuancing and sometimes distancing herself from her hero, the author does more than tell (his)story. She sends an urgent humanistic message for our anxious times.

In Kruszewski’s life, moral stance, and hybrid identity, Halicka finds perfect icons for her call to dialog across difference. The egalitarian axiological tradition of Kruszewski’s granddad is evoked time and again. Two scenes frame the book. The opening is set in 1933, when the five-year-old Zbyszek unveils a commemorative plaque to the grandfather at Hoża Street. The book ends in 2017, when Zbigniew speaks at a Warsaw rally against the Far Right’s usurpation of the uprising’s symbolism. When police protected the National Radical Front (ONR) instead of the peaceful rally, Kruszewski said: “Before the War, I witnessed looking from my balcony how every week the ONR would break the storefronts and destroyed Jewish property. . . . You have no idea how big a stain has ONR been on Polish history and how hard it has been for us emigrants to defend Poland’s image.” The frame forms the ethical and poetic arch of the narrative.

Halicka’s introduction helps understand her intentions. She says that the current public debate’s instrumentalization of selected elements of history as well as the dominant emphasis on heroic wartime martyrdom (which limits a given protagonist’s life to a few war and postwar years) result in removing from view the larger perspective, truncating the complexity of historical consciousness and in belying the range of historical events. Patriotism, she states, has many individual incarnations and pathos does not have to be its eternal double. Neither does it have to be bound to a single national identity. In the era of flag-waving, Kruszewski stands as a humble yet powerful model of another patriotism, one which combines dedication to Poland, good relations with the world, and promotion of Polish culture with an interest in the multicultural American society and border regions. We bear witness to a life lived as part of the great tradition of cosmopolitan patriotism. In other words, this is a tale of another form of intelligence, one based on multiple belongings, which maintains a plurifocality of perspectives. That is why Halicka calls Kruszewski the “Man of the Borderlands” in both literal and metaphoric senses.

Halicka, however, is not a moralist but a historian first. She places her study within the field of writing on the history of the Polish diaspora and forced migrations, endeavoring to strike a balance between the private history of Kruszewski and the larger contexts of the Grand History. This is especially the case during the war and early emigration years. Kruszewski's life is narrated in chronological order while the narrative's eye oscillates between scales micro and macro. This approach is not without its drawbacks (ineluctable blank spots) but is organic to the subject.

Kruszewski's story reads at once as one of a kind and exemplary, or like that of the Everyman. The effect of the Everyman is a result of the thrownness and contingency the hero finds himself in. At times, his persona becomes a cypher for the epochal *Zeitgeist*, an inadvertent collateral to the whims of Grand History. At the same time, he is an intelligentsia Everyman whose ingenuity (brave escapes, bold voyages), conscious choices (Federalist convictions), and observance of such principles as equality of nations, acceptance of cultural and religious difference, pursuit of knowledge (his only war loot was an encyclopedia) determine the way he faces both chance and choice: with dignity, humor, common sense, unwavering spirit.

Halicka's biography of Kruszewski is an important addition to the history of the great generation of *Kolumbowie* (Columbuses). Many biographical center-points of that generation can be identified in his life. Despite having witnessed countless atrocities, Kruszewski refused to run from these experiences, be imprisoned by them, or let them feed his resentments. Instead, we learn that he turned them into materials for civic engagement: as a Smithsonian guide, board member of the El Paso Holocaust Museum, president of the El Paso ACLU, philanthropist, and so forth.

Eight out of ten chapters discuss the first forty years of Kruszewski's life before he moved to El Paso. The first two chapters are about Kruszewski's family and childhood before and during the war years. Historians will certainly appreciate Kruszewski's problematization of the behavior of members of the Gray Ranks (*Szare Szeregi*). Halicka also contributes to the history of the Warsaw Uprising by uncovering a hitherto unknown episode when Kruszewski was charged with delivering an order behind the enemy lines.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 outline Kruszewski's peregrinations in Europe as a POW, a soldier, and an ambitious student. Such organizations as, among others, Polish University College and *Niepodległość i Demokracja* (NiD; Independence and democracy) are discussed in detail. NiD was critical of pre-World War II Poland and was involved in the European Federal Movement, of which Kruszewski became a member in 1951. The vision of future Europe as a federation deeply impressed itself on Kruszewski's political convictions.

Chapters 6, 7, and 8 narrate Kruszewski's life in Chicago. Here, a treasure trove of resources for Polonia scholars is found: for example, Kruszewski's initial disappointments, conflicts between the pre-World War II and postwar immigrants,

his involvement with the PAC in the capacity of speech writer and advisor to PAC's president Karol Rozmarek, the establishment of the Department of Polish Literature at the University of Chicago, the family history of his wife, Jadwiga June Kruszevska née Sadowska (1932–2015), and her work for the theater *Nasza Reduta*. A chapter narrates Kruszewski's research visit to Poland on the Oder-Neisse. Kruszewski worked tirelessly to promote the permanence of Poland's post–World War II border with Germany. Jan Karski's position in this regard may be an interesting find for his historians.

Kruszewski's temperament pushed him to combine academic work with political and social activism. This is especially true of his El Paso years, which, although Kruszewski spent most of his life there, are compacted in the space of a single, ninth chapter. The chapter is well-documented but, considering Kruszewski's activist inclinations, his motivation to address the problem of discrimination against Mexicans in El Paso, and bearing in mind that his arrival there coincided with the peak of the Chicano/a Movement, it seems that the subject of Kruszewski's relationship with the Chicano/a community deserved a deeper exploration. Although Halicka accounts for the Mexican presence in the Southwest and briefly discusses Chicano/a student activism at UTEP, the larger context of the *Movimiento Chicano/a* remains largely in the shadows. This is so perhaps because Halicka uses only one source on this theme. Thus, for example, the famous Chicano/a organization *Crusade for Justice* is mentioned by name only and no footnote explains its significance. Also, information on the specifics of his Cross-Cultural Southwest Ethnic Study Center's activity only teases curiosity rather than explains it. There are other similar gaps in the study resulting unavoidably from the enormity of Halicka's task; see, for example, Halicka's analysis of Kruszewski's book.

Kruszewski's oral testimony is interspersed throughout the ten chapters of the book. Footnotes abound. The book could probably use reader-friendlier editing and some cuts as the accumulation of information is at times overwhelming. Some sections chronicle Kruszewski's life almost day by day; others make big jumps in time—such as the section on his work at UTEP. The tempo of the book's production may have contributed to many typos. Photography validates the story, but the list of illustrations is missing. The book has a comprehensive bibliography and indexes of names and geographical locations.

Professor Kruszewski entrusted his history to the hands of a meticulous archivist and a skilled writer. The author's concern was to be able to tell Kruszewski's story "appropriately." Despite minor shortcomings, Beata Halicka gives us a compelling tale that, because the text's structure works in perspectival jumps, itself embodies a borderlands territory animated with each reading. In this sense, Halicka found appropriate means.

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