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The John Paul II Association of Polish Writers in Chicago: a Report on the Activities in the Years 2006-2013

Religious and Sacred Poetry : An International Quarterly of Religion, Culture and Education 1/3, 161-166

2013

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

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During his two-year stay in America Cyprian Norwid wrote one of the most beautiful hymns of longing:

“ For the country where a piece of bread
Is picked up from the ground with respect
Due to a heavens’ gift...
I am longing, my Lord...”.

The Polish Writers Association of John Pope II (PWA) was founded on 9th July 2006. Maciej Andrzej Zarębski, a guest from Poland and honorary member of the Board of PWA, was present at the first official meeting of the Association.

Members of the Board of PWA in Chicago in the years 2006-2013

The Board of the Polish Writers Association was formed for the term of 2006-2010 and Alina Szymczyk was elected President of the Association, Elżbieta Chojnowska – Vice-President and Władysław Panasiuk – Secretary. Later, Janusz Kopeć and Andrzej Chojnowski were added to the Board as new members. Since February 2010 to March 2012 the PWA was directed by the President –Alina Szymczyk, the Vice-President – Andrzej Chojnowski, the Secretary – Robert Paweł Redliński, the Members – Janusz Kliś and Jan Kamiński, and the Man of Trust – Józef Maciasz Broda.

Since 18th January 2012 to the election of 21st March 2012 the Board consisted of the following persons: President – Alina Szymczyk, Vice-President – Andrzej Chojnowski, Secretary – Anna Konarska, the

Members: Janusz Kliś, Jan Kamiński, Man of Trust – Józef Maciasz Broda.

On 21st March 2012 an election meeting took place and a new board was created: President – Alina Szymczyk, Vice-President – Andrzej Chojnowski, Secretary – Barbara Żukrowska, Financial Secretary – Maria Mili Purymska, Man of Trust – Józef Maciasz Broda, President of the Control Committee – Jan Żółtek, Delegate of ZKP (Związek Klubów Polskich, the Polish Clubs Alliance) – Robert Paweł Redliński.

Members of the Polish Writers Association

On 23rd June 2013 the John Paul II Polish Writers Association included the following members (names given in the alphabetical order; if not written otherwise - the country of residence is the United States of America):

1) Antoni Bosak, 2) Andrzej Chojnowski, 3) Leonard Gogiel, 4) Elżbieta Idziak, 5) Janusz Kliś, 6) Anna Marzena Konarska, 7) Józef Maciasz Broda, 8) Henryk Musa, 9) Władysław Janusz Obara (Poland), 10) Elżbieta Oliwkiewicz-Alen, 11) Bogusław Pacer, 12) Eleonora Przybyło-Trzpit, 13) Maria Mili Purymska, 14) Katarzyna Murawska, 15) Robert Paweł Redliński, 16) Anna Waluś Sikoń, 17) Marianna Maja Soroborska, 18) Ewa Sporna, 19) Grzegorz Stefanek, 20) Alina Szymczyk, 21) Izabela Trzaska-Przybylska, 22) Jan Żółtek, 23) Barbara Żubrowska.

Natalia Poneta Piekarska and Maciej Andrzej Zarębski are the honorary members of the John Paul II Polish Writers Association.

The Jesuits – spiritual guardians of the John Paul II Polish Writers Association

Father Władysław Gryzło SJ became a spiritual guardian of the PWA when it was founded, i.e. in 2006. At the beginning he attended the literary meetings of the poets as a convivial guest. A little later Father Tadeusz Kukułka SJ replaced him as a mentor of the PWA, but shortly afterwards he was called back to join his congregation in Krakow. His replacement was Father Superior Stanisław Czarnecki SJ; at present the spiritual guardian of the Association is Father Jerzy Karpiński SJ.

Secular poets and their spiritual guardians meet, become friends and then have to part when the mentors are transferred to other posts by their religious authorities, but a close connection between the Polish Chicago poets and the Jesuit Society is maintained.

Activities of the John Paul II Polish Writers Association – poetry meetings

Although the location of the Association was the building of the Polish Club Alliance, most meetings took place in the Jesuit Center in Chicago. At the beginning the group consisted only of nine persons, but new members were joining in and were added to the list. They represented various levels of the art of writing. On the one hand, among the members there were experienced writers, but on the other – there were many who were just beginners. The main aim of the Association has been to help all the writers, particularly those that are starting their careers. Evenings of poetry reading, organized by the Association, were getting considerable coverage in local media in Chicago. Many people came to the literary meetings, among them journalists working for the press as well as those working for radio and television, professional writers, people involved in culture and art.

From the beginning the Association supported new writers, providing similar promotion for them regardless of their origin and previous work.

The first poetry volumes were published which brought joy and satisfaction to their authors. Press reviews and interviews in local radio stations were helpful to the writers to reach their readers. Now only a few poets write for their own circles, whereas the members of the PWA write for the whole world making use of the Internet. It is an ambitious challenge, but the number of the readers is growing constantly, and, in fact, no one knows their exact number.

The main force behind the organization has always been Alina Szymczyk, the other authors were only helping her. There were meetings with such writers as, for instance, Krystyna Nowobilaska who spent the best years of her life in Syberia. Each month there are meetings organized for new poets and writers both the local ones from Chicgo, as well as outsiders. (Teresa Kaczorowska, Natalia Piekarska-Poneta).

Not all the members of the PWA are writers and poets and not all the poems meet the requirements for publication, but still the PWA has published and has helped to promote many new names. For some time now the PWA has been organizing workshops conducted by Wladyslaw Panasiuk. Poetry needs patience and time and is not an easy task. Alina Szymczyk, President of the Association, has organized two workshops led by Agnieszka Janik from Wroclaw. All this has been done for the

benefit of the writers as writing requires constant education and improvement of its skills.

The Jesuit Center in Chicago regularly hosts such events as Poets' Spring and Poets' Fall which provide occasions for finding true poetic talents. It also has to be mentioned that the PWA has been supported by the local actors, radio announcers and television. Since 2009 the WPA has its own internet site (www.literaci.org) where you can find the catalogue of the achievements of all the members as well as the news about the activities of the Association.

Joint publications of the PWA

The WPA has been publishing literary almanacs since 2006. The first publication of this kind was devoted to the patron of the Association – John Paul II. Every year the Regional Society in Zagnańsk, the publishing house of Maciej Zarębski who is a traveler, a writer and a regionalist, issues one volume of poetry which includes some members of the WPA among its contributors. (see: bibliography). (...).

Key words: Polish literature abroad, Polish poetry, American poetry, 21st century, Chicago, The John Paul II Association of Polish Writers in Chicago, Poland, USA,

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Information about the Author:

Władysław Panasiuk (born 1950), a former sailor and a fisherman, a Polish poet and a literary critic, living in Chicago (Illinois, the USA), a former secretary of the John Paul II Polish Writers Association in the years 2006-2008. He served an incomplete term of office on the board of the PWA. He published the next poetic books in Polish: *Pod polskim niebem* (Chicago 1993), *Kolce róży* (Chicago 1993), *Sześć jesieni* (Chicago 1994), *Amerykańskie noce* (Chicago 1997), *Dwa życia* (Chicago 2004), a novel entitled *I nie wódź nas na pokuszenie* (Chicago 1996) and a prose book *Piszę, więc żyję* (Zagnańsk 2009).