

# Zygmunt Tyszkiewicz

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## Acknowledgment

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## acknowledgment

*Countess Karolina Lanckorońska, an art historian, of an ancient and noble Polish family, established The Lanckoroński Foundation in 1967. For many years The Lanckoroński Foundation has been granting funds to Polish causes. Editors of Art and Philosophy ("Sztuka i Filozofia") offer their gratitude to Zygmunt Tyszkiewicz, the President of the Lanckoroński Foundation and the Board of the Foundation for their assistance with publishing the special issue of the journal. Without their support it would not be possible.*

### **Karolina Lanckorońska**

Not until the year 2000 did Karolina Lanckorońska, then aged 102, give permission for her war memoirs, written in 1945, to be published in Poland, where they had an immediate success and won a prestigious prize. Beautifully translated by the late Noël Clark and with a thoughtful and moving preface by Eva Hoffman, the book is now available in English. It is a gripping page-turner and a testament to the human capacity for evil and for transcending it. Its subject is the suffering of the Polish people and the dismemberment of their nation.

Lanckorońska's account is factual, almost journalistic, relating all that she saw and experienced. It begins with the invasion by the Soviet Russian army of Lwów (now Lviv in Ukraine), then a major Polish city, where Karolina was Professor of Fine Art at the university.

She escapes to Cracow in Nazi controlled Poland. There she works openly for the Red Cross and for its Polish Committee, (tolerated by the German occupiers), which distributes food, medicines and blankets to prisoners held in German-run gaols. This work allows her to tour extensively throughout Nazi-occupied southern Poland, gathering information which she passes to the clandestine Polish Home Army of which she is a secret member.

Inevitably, the Germans suspect her. She is arrested in May 1942, and interrogated by the Gestapo chief in Stanisławów, Hans Krüger. He cannot understand how Lanckorońska whose mother was a German aristocrat, could remain loyal to Poland. Krüger does his best to break her and loses control of himself when she stands firm. He boasts that it was on his orders that some 25 Lviv University professors, all former colleagues of Karolina, had been brutally murdered after the Germans attacked the Soviet occupiers of that city. Karolina knows that Krüger would never have confessed to this crime if he did not intend shortly to put her to death.

What Krüger does not know is that influential people, among whom the Italian Royal Family and the head of the International Red Cross will plead to Himmler on her behalf. Furthermore, Walter Kutschmann, a senior member of the SS who hates Krüger, gets Karolina to write her account of the latter's confession and sends it to the Gestapo high command in Berlin, resulting in

Krüger's arrest and trial, not for murder of course, but for informing a Polish prisoner of Nazi responsibility for that crime.

Karolina's life is spared, but she is sent to Ravensbrück concentration camp in Germany. Her account of life in this camp is a tribute to the ability of human beings to survive even the most horrendous treatment. It is also a stark reminder of how, in our modern and supposedly civilised society, man's cruelty to man can know no bounds. Her character sketches of prison inmates and guards from diverse countries and backgrounds are a memorable aspect of the book.

Karolina is fortunate in that she has an iron constitution which helps her survive starvation and stave-off fatal disease. She is sustained by deep religious faith and a love of literature and of the arts. She gives lectures on Michelangelo and on the Renaissance to fellow prisoners. She comforts the so-called "Rabbits", young women used by Gestapo doctors for foul, unethical medical experiments. She reminds herself that Germany, despite the brutality of the Nazis, had produced great authors, artists and composers. She firmly believes in the ultimate triumph of good over evil.

After her release from the camp, Karolina admitted to a priest that all through the war, when reciting the Lord's Prayer, she could not bring herself to say the words "as we forgive those who trespass against us", because she could not forgive the German and Russian invaders of Poland, and did not wish to lie to God. The priest replied "Do not worry. We all did that".

As the last surviving member of the Lanckoroński family, Karolina was sole heir to their great fortune, held mainly in Austria and therefore not lost to the Communists after the war. She could have settled into a life of luxury. Instead, she lived modestly in Rome and used her money to create the Lanckoroński Foundation. She devoted the whole of her long life to the promotion and defence of Polish culture and assistance to Poles in need. The Foundation continues this work. Her large collection of paintings, among which two splendid Rembrandts, she donated to the Polish nation in 1994. They can be seen at the Royal Castle in Warsaw and in the Wawel Museum in Cracow.

*Zygmunt Tyszkiewicz,  
President, Lanckoroński Foundation*

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