

Wańkowicz Revisited

“Wańkowicz niedoczytany” (Wańkowicz Revisited) was the title of a conference devoted to the works of Melchior Wańkowicz, which was held on October 15–16, 2024. It was organized by the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, the University of Łódź, the University of Silesia in Katowice and the University of Wrocław. The 50th anniversary of the author’s death served as an inspiration for the event.

The initiators of the event – Urszula Glensk, Jan Galant, Zbigniew Kopeć, Beata Nowacka, Grzegorz Nowak, Magdalena Wasąg and Aleksandra Ziółkowska-Boehm – surmised that the works of Wańkowicz merit rereading. His body of work demands a multifaceted reflection and new literary approaches which include contemporary research perspectives. The invitation letter to the conference prompted to seek answers to questions such as: how did Wańkowicz manage to describe the turbulent events of the twentieth century? What was his impact on the development of non-fiction literature? How did he shape his career both as a writer and a publisher? Additionally, discussions on his biography, autobiographical writing, life choices and personality, as well as his archive and the political repressions he experienced, were encouraged. This issue of the *Porównania* journal comprises articles authored in most part by the participants of the conference. The thematic concerns of the articles are briefly outlined below.

Magdalena Piechota in *Between the Feminine and the Masculine. Images of Family and Relations in “Szczenięce lata” (The Young Days) by Melchior*



Wańkowicz considers the setting of that memoiristic narrative. She emphasizes the author's mythologizing approach to childhood and youthhood spent in Eastern Borderlands – a historical region of the Second Polish Republic – by analyzing two distinct models of upbringing in two contrasting residences: the matriarchal Nowotrzeby estate located near the city of Kaunas and the Kałużyce manor in the Minsk Governorate.

Piotr Głuszkowski in *"Opierzona rewolucja" (Fledged Revolution) – Reality and Fiction in a Reportage on the Soviet Union by Melchior Wańkowicz* analyzes a short text which was the result of the author's short stay in the USSR in 1993. In the text, Wańkowicz seeks to tackle the stereotypes regarding the Soviet Union by focusing on the role of the individual in a socialist society.

Mikołaj Paczkowski in *Reporter in Tourist's Array. First Voyage of the Transatlantic "Batory" Liner through the Eyes of Melchior Wańkowicz* follows the author's twofold activity – as a journalist and a tourist – by analyzing his account of the liner's 1936 maiden voyage from the Italian Monfalcone shipyard to the city of Gdynia.

In Magdalena Wasąg's article titled "[...] a Wonderfully Secretive Life, Pulsating with some Otherworldly Meaning,"¹ *Melchior Wańkowicz and Birds*, the titular birds are presented as bearers of universal values. The author starts with Wańkowicz's experiences during his youth in the Borderlands and ventures into a broader context – to the region of Polesia and, subsequently, to his bird-watching in America.

Wańkowicz's reflections – regarding the nobility and its social role in the Eastern Borderlands – from *Szczenięce lata* and a series of reportages published in "Kurier Poranny" (Morning Courier) under the title *Znowu siejemy w Polsce B* (Again We Seed in Poland "B") are examined by Zbigniew Kopeć in *Wańkowicz, Nobility, Borderlands and Country*.

The subject of nobility and its socio-political role in the context of multiethnic regions of the Borderlands is also tackled by Urszula Glensk in her article *Eastern Borderlands – Dream and Utopia. On the Unpublished Book by Melchior Wańkowicz*. She presents the origins and the history of the series of reportages *Znowu siejemy w Polsce B* which were printed in 1937–1938.

Paweł Tomczok in his *Disciplines of Industrialization. On the "Scattered" "Sztafeta" (Relay) by Melchior Wańkowicz* analyzes the discourse on economic history in Wańkowicz's last pre-war reportage *Sztafeta* whose main topic was, among others, the Central Industrial District.

1 "[...] cudownie skryte, pulsujące jakimś odmiennym sensem życie."

Roman Bobryk in „Wrzesień żagwiący” (*Scorching September*) by Melchior Wańkowicz *Against the Backdrop of Post-war Memoirs and the Histography of the September Campaign* analyzes a collection of accounts from the beginning of the Second World War recorded by Wańkowicz – he was one of first to describe the USSR’s involvement in the invasion of Poland and its occupation in September 1939.

Jan Galant’s *Cold War America Through the Eyes of a European Writer. “W ślady Kolumba” (In the Footsteps of Columbus)* by Melchior Wańkowicz and “Journey Through America” by Wolfgang Koeppen is a comparative analysis of Wańkowicz’s American trilogy and Koeppen’s reportage. The author seeks to consider how their experience of the Cold War had affected their view of America.

Piotr Weiser in his article “Your Excessive Prophecies Do More Harm than Good.”² *Wańkowicz on Jewish People* presents the reporter’s opinions about the history and customs of Jewish people, which he refers to as a “melisma”. The author puts forth a thesis that, according to Wańkiewicz, the only category that links Jewish people with Poland was (or was sometimes) the jointly inhabited space.

Olga Płaszczewska presents – based on archival materials – the relation between Alfred Jesionowski and the “Rój” (The Hive) Publishing Society along with its founder, Melchior Wańkowicz. She examines a letter concerning the reportage titled *Na tropach Smętka* (On the Trail of Smętek), which Wańkowicz had sent to Jesionowski. The article is titled *Interwar Literary Criticism. An Unknown Letter from Melchior Wańkowicz to Alfred Jesionowski*.

Justyna Szczęsna in the article “Everyone Knows What Wańkowicz Is Like.”³ *What Did Czesław Miłosz, Jerzy Giedroyc and Others Know?* considers Wańkowicz’s place in the Parisian “Kultura” (Culture) magazine. The author analyzes his correspondence with Czesław Miłosz and – through a reading of Maria Dąbrowska’s journals – attempts to examine how Wańkowicz was regarded after his return to Poland.

The thread of Wańkowicz’s correspondence with Giedroyc also appears in Anna Saignes’ text “Pluck These Bastards Feather by Feather Out of Their Rigid Thought...”⁴ *On the Correspondence Between Jerzy Giedroyc and Melchior Wańkowicz (1945–1963)*. The author focuses on the process of crystallization of two concepts of understanding freedom, represented by Wańkowicz and Giedroyc, the editor of “Kultura”. Those concepts – despite having common basis – over time became increasingly opposing.

2 „Wy nadmiarem prorocstwa więcej szkodzicie, niż pomagacie.”

3 „Jaki jest Wańkowicz, to wiemy.”

4 „Po piórku należy skurwysynom wyrwać to oskorupienie...”

Beata Nowicka stays in Wańkowicz's Parisian circle of the "Kultura" magazine. In the article *The Witnesses of the 20th Century. Melchior Wańkowicz – Józef Czapski*, she points to generational similarities in the experiences of the two writers. She analyzes the dynamic of their relationship by focusing on their correspondence.

In the article *How Much of Wańkowicz in Szczygieł?*, Monika Wiszniowska analyzes *Prosto od krowy* (Straight from the Cow) and *Karafka La Fontaine'a* (La Fontaine's Decanter) by Wańkowicz and *Fakty muszą zatańczyć* (The Facts Must Dance) by Mariusz Szczygieł. She notes that Szczygieł's book points to the timeless character of the reflections present in Wańkowicz's theory of reportage.

Katarzyna Krzak-Weiss in *From Stefan Norblin to Mieczysław Berman. Some Remarks on the Covers of Books Published Under the Sign of Three Honeybees* analyzes book designs by Stefan Norblin, Tadeusz Gronowski, Henryk Nowina-Czerny and Mieczysław Berman. She demonstrates that the co-owners of the "Rój" Publishing Society were fully aware of the visual impact of book covers on readers and thus were able to effectively utilize its power.

Mikołaj Jazdon in the article titled *The Reporter as a Screenwriter and an Actor. Melchior Wańkowicz's Role in the Production of Jerzy Passendorfer's Documentary "Melchior Wańkowicz. Opowieść o bitwie Monte Cassino. Fragmenty wspomnień"* (Melchior Wańkowicz. A Tale of a Battle of Monte Cassino. Recollections, 1971) and *Its Revised Version from 1992*, analyzes the circumstances surrounding the making of the documentary by Jerzy Passendorfer – featuring Wańkowicz – about the Battle of Monte Cassino. He considers the film's distribution, reception, the writer's involvement in the production process, as well as the standpoint of the director himself.

Jacek Nowakowski also tackles the theme of filmmaking in Wańkowicz's body of work in his article *Wańkowicz and the Contemporary War Cinema. "Czerwone maki" (Red Poppies) Directed by Krzysztof Łukasiewicz*. The article is a comparative analysis of Wańkowicz's book about the Battle of Monte Cassino and Krzysztof Łukasiewicz's fiction film *Czerwone maki*. The author concludes that Łukasiewicz's film is devoid of personal and emotional involvement, as well as the imagery present in Wańkowicz's works. Instead, it follows a pattern of other anniversary films.

Barbara Krupa in her article *Melchior Wańkowicz in the Warsaw-Based "Rój" and the New York-Based "Roy". The Image of the Writer Based on Materials from the Roy Publishers Archive* presents lesser-known post-war accounts from former co-owners of the "Rój" Publishing Society. She focuses on the help Wańkowicz had received from Marian and Hanna Kister, as well as from Polish diaspora organizations in the U.S.A. and Canada.

Maciej Łuczak in *The Criminal Trial of Melchior Wańkowicz* describes the prosecution and imprisonment of the writer, as well as the criminal trial

following his signing of the Letter of 34. He analyzes the strategy Wańkowicz had adopted during the judicial proceedings and after his conviction.

Grzegorz Nowak in his article *Melchior Wańkowicz and Censorship. An Analysis Based on "Ziele na kraterze" (Greens on the Crater), "Na tropach Smętka" (On Smętek's Trail) and Excerpts from "Znowu siejemy w Polsce B" (We Sow Again in Poland B)* presents the instruments of preventative censorship – both institutional and editorial – employed against Wańkowicz's works in the period of the Polish People's Republic, as well as its impact on the meaning and reception of his works.

Monika Bednarczuk in her article *Over Wańkowicz's Coffin. The Polish People's Republic and the Censorship of the Death and Funeral of the "Hubalczyzy" (Hubal Partisans) Author* describes the authorities' response to the strong public reaction following Wańkowicz's death and funeral in 1974. Numerous affirmative press statements praising the late author prompted the discontent authorities to prohibit the publication of texts about Wańkowicz or his body of work.

Aleksandra Ziółkowska-Boehm's article *Revisiting Wańkowicz. The Writer's Archive* concludes the considerations of Wańkowicz and his works. As his final collaborator, she has authored numerous works on the life and works of the *Na tropach Smętka* author.

The issue concludes with reviews. Kinga Piotrowiak-Junkiert discusses the article by Dóry Czeferner titled *Kultúrmisszió vagy propaganda? Feminista lapok és olvasóik Bécsben és Budapesten* (Budapest 2021), and Lenka Németh Vítová reviews the book *Tvoření literaturou. Společné dějiny česky a německy psané literatury českých zemí (1760–1920)* edited by Václav Petrbock and Václav Smyčka (Prague 2024).

We are confident that the works published here show Wańkowicz and his body of work from multiple perspectives. These works will serve as an opportunity to see him as a reporter and to gain an insight into his art of reportage. They will allow for a reconstruction of Wańkowicz's views and a better understanding of the world he described – which was not limited to his own neighborhood. They will facilitate analysis of his relationships with other important cultural figures and present a man who was deeply entangled in social life and politics during the times of both the Second Polish Republic and the Polish People's Republic. We hope that this issue of *Porównania*, along with the works collected therein, will figure prominently among other texts on the *Na tropach Smętka* author and will by no means end the discussion on his work but – on the contrary – will only fuel it.

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