

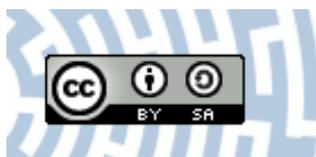


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Foreword

Andrzej Busza's writing unquestionably belongs to one of the strangest phenomena of contemporary Polish literature. This is due not only to the originality and distinctiveness of his universalistic worldview, his easily recognizable poetic diction, or the way he structures his arguments, but also owing to his oddity as a writer, who is bilingual and situated culturally between at least two traditions (the notion of "inbetweenness" fits his case perfectly); as well as his complicated biography, involving several variants and stages of dislocation and exilic experience. Poet, prose writer, translator, critic, historian of English literature, specializing in the life and works of Joseph Conrad – he remains one of the last surviving and, at the same time, one of the more intriguing, writers of the post-1939 emigration.

Born in Kraków in 1938, he left Poland with his family at the outbreak of the Second World War; spent the war years in the Middle East; between 1947 and 1965 he lived and received his education in England (BA Honours in English Language and Literature, followed by an MA in English Literature at University College, London). In 1965 he moved to Canada, having been appointed to the faculty of the University of British Columbia, where he taught in the Department of English and the Programme in Comparative Literature until his retirement in 2004. Earlier, when he was studying in London, he was a member of the editorial board of the literary periodical „Merkuriusz Polski – Życie Akademickie”, which became „Kontynenty – Nowy Merkuriusz”, and finally, „Kontynenty”. He also belonged to the poetic group and cultural milieu, which had formed around this publication. In 1962, he was awarded the Swiss-based Kościelski Foundation Prize for Young Writers. In subsequent years,

he received the Władysław and Nelli Turzański Foundation Award for lifetime achievement (Toronto, 2005), and the Association of Polish Writers Abroad Award for lifetime achievement (London, 2013). He has published eight volumes of poetry, a number of short fictions, and numerous translations of Polish poetry into English (often working together with Bogdan Czaykowski, among others, the poems of Białoszewski, Iwaszkiewicz, Jastrun, Miłosz, and Wierzyński). He is the author of a monograph on Conrad's Polish literary background and of many articles and essays on Conrad.

Andrzej Busza has not been prolific and works in an unhurried way, which in part is the consequence of the complications of having to live between two worlds and two languages, as well as the need to negotiate the exigencies of academic life with his serious commitment to poetry. Busza's early work drew on the tangled and at times traumatic memories of his Middle East childhood; the difficult process of assimilation in the cold climate of an English boarding school; and eventually finding a pleasure dome in literature (especially poetry), and a hothouse in the heady atmosphere of the cultural and political life of the young Polish expatriates. His engagement in things Polish was primarily literary and in due course he started writing poetry in that language, but it did not significantly form his worldview nor generate themes and issues that dominate his writing. The youngest of the Polish "London" poets, from the very beginning he had his own distinct path, with established formal and ethical bearings. He kept off the beaten track of much émigré writing, with its penchant for nostalgia and ideological commitment; he neither challenged its romantic legacy nor contested its dominant myths. He wrote intellectual, tightly structured lyric poems, in a post-avant-garde vein, formally sophisticated, richly imagistic, ironic, and consciously drawing on various traditions. After he left England to take up his teaching position in the English Department in Vancouver, Busza obviously became increasingly immersed in the English language and conversely his contact with "living" Polish diminished to some degree. A year of teaching in France confounded further his language situation. Perhaps on account of this, as well as his greater involvement in academic work, there followed several relatively fallow years as far as poetic creativity was concerned. When he finally emerged from this period of poetic silence, he began to write in English. The character of his poetry changed, becoming more discursive and thematically more wide-ranging; and Busza once again began to publish. And yet, while English had become the primary vehicle of his poetic expression, his virtual reader continues to be in essence

Polish. Most of his recent poetry has appeared either in translation or in bilingual editions. Thus, his poetic activity falls basically into two phases: a Polish one (from his first publications in 1958 until the 1980s) and the more recent English period. Although he has occasionally “switched codes”, and composed a poem in his first language, this has happened rarely, having been prompted by poetic exigencies, when a poem was built around a word or idiom for which there was no equivalent in English.

Bilingualism, cultural polyphony, and a universalist worldview are the hallmarks of Andrzej Busza’s writing. In that respect, it is a reflection of the crisis of modernity and of the perplexing, multifarious experiences of exiles and wanderers of the twentieth and twenty-first century, for whom the only ground of spiritual rootedness remains the great tradition of Mediterranean culture. Hence *Kohelet*-like pessimism, melancholy, and irony constitute additional axiological markers of Busza’s work. The poet and the thinker believes that in our time it is irony that performs a role analogous to catharsis in Ancient Greek Drama. For, as Agata Bielik-Robson writes: “The Greeks to express their experience of undifferentiated oneness had tragedy. While *we* humans of late modernity have irony: a trope, which in the place of more intense ritual experiences, no longer available to us today, gives us almost the same relief”¹. [A Different Modernity. Questions about a Contemporary Formula of Spirituality].

The Monograph is a joint enterprise by literary scholars from the University of Silesia in Katowice and the University of Rzeszów. The articles and studies which make up the book are an attempt to identify, describe and examine the main features of the poetry, prose and Conrad criticism of Andrzej Busza. The authors specialize in Polish expatriate writing and come from many academic institutions in Poland. Some, hailing from Poland as well as from abroad, are also specialists in English and French literature. The variety of approaches and the wide range of issues discussed offer a multifaceted view of Busza’s work: its biographical, literary and cultural contexts; its phases and lines of development; its dominant motifs and specific characteristics.

Although the author of *Scenes from the Life of Laquedem* writes at the end of the sequence with self irony: “we are everywhere and

¹ A. BIELIK-ROBSON: *Inna nowoczesność. Pytania o współczesną formułę duchowości*, s. 211–212.

nowhere”, the hope is that this multiauthor monograph will help to ground the work of Andrzej Busza more firmly in the consciousness and economy of Polish literature of the 20th and 21st centuries.

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