

East Central Europe in Exile
Volume 2: Transatlantic Identities

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Edited by

Anna Mazurkiewicz

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This book first published 2013

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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Cover image Kuryer Polski editorial office in the Herold building at 435 Broadway Street, Milwaukee;
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ISBN (10): 1-4438-4891-3, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-4891-6

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project:

East Central Europe in Exile:
Patterns of Transatlantic Migrations

was made possible by the support of the



and of the following Organizations

University of Gdańsk

City of Gdynia

Port Authority of Gdańsk S.A.

INTRODUCTION¹

The idea of analysing east central European transatlantic migrations by assembling scholars from both sending and receiving countries followed from discussions in the Department of Contemporary History at the University of Gdańsk, Poland. While researching American attitudes towards Poland in terms of the complex fate of the post-World War II exiles, we found that from the American perspective the countries between Germany and Russia remained to a large extent a *terra incognita*, dominated by the Soviets who flagrantly violated the international wartime agreements. The American government therefore considered the *area*, not a particular country, to be a single problem called: “eastern Europe.” Despite the obvious differences in the east central European wartime experience, there were many similarities in its historical encounters with foreign domination and struggles for freedom that paved the way for interethnic cooperation. While examining the Cold War émigré activities, we learned that there was much more to the story of east central Europe in exile than just the practical goal of lobbying western governments for liberation of the region. We found patterns in political leaders’ biographies, forms of political alignments in exile, acculturation problems and divisions between the exiles and “ethnics”, as well as many layers of regional cooperation (political internationals, federalist organizations). Establishing cooperation with scholars from other central European countries and the U.S. in order to see a broader picture seemed indispensable.

With the help of the Visegrad Fund Project Partners—Slavomír Michálek, the Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava, Francis Raška (Charles University in Prague), Magdolna Báráth (the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security in Budapest)—we decided to organize a conference at the University of Gdańsk, Poland.

The response to our Call for Papers was truly impressive. Scholars from as many as thirteen countries came to Gdańsk to discuss east central

¹ This is a copy of an introduction originally printed in volume 1: *Transatlantic Migrations of the East Central Europe in Exile* series. It’s being reprinted here for those readers who decided to begin reading from volume 2. While each of the volumes can function independently, they serve the purpose of presenting diversified and multinational perspectives best when read together.

European emigration from the perspective of their disciplines: history, sociology, political science, and literature. The four-day conference: “East Central Europe in Exile: Patterns of Transatlantic Migrations” took place at the Faculty of History at the University of Gdansk from 31 May to 3 June 2012.

The financial support necessary for the organization of this project was provided by the Visegrad Fund (which fosters academic, cultural and scientific cooperation among the four Visegrad countries: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia); the two consecutive Deans of the Faculty of History of the University of Gdańsk—Professor Zbigniew Opacki and Professor Wiesław Długokęcki (devoted to the advancement of the International Graduate Studies Programme in History at the University of Gdańsk); the City of Gdynia (the founder of the Emigration Museum); and the Port of Gdansk Authority S.A. (which supports the cultural and scientific growth of the thousand-year-old city thriving on the Baltic coast). This publication was made possible by the said institutions as well as by the support received from the Pro-rector for Scientific Affairs of the University of Gdańsk—Professor Grzegorz Węgrzyn.

Furthermore, in our effort to foster international collaboration, we enjoyed the support of many cultural and research institutions, for example: the Balassi Institute-Hungarian Cultural Institute in Warsaw, devoted to promotion of the Hungarian heritage and cooperation between Hungary and Poland in the arts and sciences; the Immigration History Research Center at the University of Minnesota, which develops archives and promotes interdisciplinary research on international migration; and the above-mentioned Emigration Museum in Gdynia, which in its scientific and cultural activities transposes the problem of emigration to explore universal experiences of life-changing travels. Moreover, we had the privilege of receiving invaluable assistance from the Museum of the City of Gdynia, the Gdańsk History Museum, and the University of Gdańsk History Graduate Student Association. The Honorary Patronage of the Rector of the University of Gdańsk, the Ambassador of Hungary in Warsaw, and the Voivode of the Province of Pomerania were extended over this event.

Special mention must be made of the participation of the Polish American Historical Association (PAHA), the foremost academic association based in the United States devoted to the study and advancement of the history and culture of Polish immigrants in America and their descendants and the Polish diaspora elsewhere in the world. PAHA chose to hold its annual midyear meeting in Gdansk in conjunction with the conference, and numerous PAHA members made presentations and attended sessions.

The conference theme offered an inspiring common ground for studying the history of east central Europe. Poverty, wars, political persecution and intolerance recurrent in the turbulent past of Europe's heartland pushed millions of east Europeans overseas. To examine the nature of their transatlantic migration is to obliterate the classical migration typologies (political / economic, forced / voluntary, temporary / permanent) and analyse the movement of people simultaneously seeking bread and freedom. The conference sessions thus revolved around issues relating to the causes of transatlantic migration, the emigrants' travel and adaptation experiences, assimilation and acculturation processes, the political activities of the émigrés, as well as east central European cultural and artistic manifestations in the Americas.

It must be acknowledged, however, that it's not the first time that such an initiative has been taken. In 1980 a conference of Croatian, Polish, and Hungarian, Slovene and Slovak scholars on north, central, and southern European overseas emigration was held in Bratislava. It ended with a call for a continuation of cooperation. Two more meetings were held: in Kraków (1981), and in Budapest (1984). The latter resulted in the publication of papers on the great peasant transatlantic migration: *Overseas Migration from East-Central and Southeastern Europe 1880–1940* (ed. Julianna Puskás, Budapest: Akadémiai Kiado, 1990). This important collection of “eastern European” essays—constituting the first step in fostering the regional approach and cooperation—necessarily focused mostly on theoretical approaches, i.e. methodology, historiography, models, and generalizations. The volume ends with a call for the continuation of exchanges, and announces an ensuing meeting in Yugoslavia. However, in the post-Communist reality, and most importantly, in light of the wars in Yugoslavia, it had by 1991 become impossible.

Yet another inspiring international perspective on transatlantic migrations was offered by the participants of the Eighth International Economic History Congress in Budapest, which took place in 1982 (Ira A. Glazier and Luigi De Rosa, eds., *Migration across Time and Nations. Population mobility in historical contexts* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1986)). A collection of twenty-two essays dealing primarily with the problems of analysis of migration processes offers a relevant reference point (see section: “The Migration Movements to the United States and Argentina”). A more recent, modern approach signalling new research questions resulted from a year-long colloquium, “Anatomy of Exile”, and the two conferences held in conjunction with it (Peter I. Rose, ed., *The Dispossessed: An Anatomy of Exile* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005)). It discusses both the experience of the

refugees, but also the problems of adjustments, as well as their cultural impact on the host country.

In the 1990s and 2000s, with the new research opportunities available in east central Europe, including the opening of the Communist archives, many more conferences and seminars devoted to the study of transatlantic population movements were organized on both continents. Evidently, the focus of east central European migration research has shifted towards the study of the political emigration, also in a transnational context. Among the many scholarly initiatives at the turn of the century, one finds sessions and panels devoted to issues similar to those discussed in this volume. For example, during the Fifth World Congress of Central and East European Studies, which took place in Warsaw in 1995, scholars addressed the issue of the Communist policy towards the east central European émigrés and ethnic diasporas after the Second World War, emphasizing the need for a comparative perspective (see Adam Walaszek's article in the "Przełład Polonijny" (no. 2, 1996)).

Furthermore, at a round table session during the Eighteenth International Congress of Historical Sciences (27 August–3 September 1995, Montreal 1995) the scholars from six states (Poland, Slovakia, Croatia, and Slovenia, the U.S. and Canada) discussed the transatlantic determinants of the east European struggles for freedom. The discussions, chaired by M. Mark Stolarik (the University of Ottawa, Canada), revolved around the impact of the émigré groups on the creation or resurrection of the states in east central Europe in the twentieth century. A complementary perspective was offered during a 2001 session: "Polish, Hungarian and Czechoslovak Political Emigration and the Origins of the Cold War", held at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies in Washington, D.C. (see the articles by Piotr Stefan Wandycz, István Deák and Igor Lukes in the "Polish Review" (no. 47, 2002)).

Recently, growing attention has been devoted to the study of interethnic cooperation and to the observation of the patterns of east central European transatlantic migrations. In 2008, Ieva Zake (*Anti-Communist Minorities in the U.S.: Political Activism of Ethnic Refugees*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) organized a seminar devoted to the study of anti-communism among the various ethnics in the U.S. Two years later, an edited volume devoted to the study of the intelligence uses of the exiles entitled: *Secret weapon or the victims of the Cold War? Central and Eastern European political émigrés* was published in Poland (Lublin: IPN, 2010). It was the result of an international conference organized in Lublin by Sławomir Łukasiewicz, who managed to gather esteemed researchers of political emigration from the east central Europe.

Our volumes, undoubtedly inspired by the above-mentioned collections, are different in scope, character, and offer less specialized, but broader and more complementary perspectives: east central European and American. They are not theoretical studies; they do not examine contemporary migration trends. Neither one repeats the largely quantitative studies on continental and overseas emigration from east central Europe. Furthermore, neither tries to juxtapose east central European experience with that of other nations of the region, say Russia or Germany. It is not the sole fact of a life in exile, but the east central European heritage in transatlantic transition is the essential thread in both volumes.

However, just like our predecessors, we share the conviction that international cooperation of the scholars of various disciplines, who work on east central European overseas migration, should continue. Moreover, we believe it to be of the utmost importance to publish our findings in English, which obviously has become the new *lingua franca*, thus allowing for the extended exchange of ideas and results of research. The list of contributors to our post-conference volumes is a vital sign that the seeds of effective international cooperation are already sprouting.

The two post-conference volumes, published under the same heading: *East Central Europe in Exile*, contain a collection of chapters written by both esteemed, and well-known scholars, as well as young, aspiring researchers whose work brings a fresh, innovative approach to the study of migration. The volumes are not interdisciplinary in their character. Rather, they are multi-disciplinary in that each academic field retains its own methodology and unique vantage point. While some of the texts are based on thorough archival research, some synthesize the current state of research, whereas others—more impressionistic in character—offer inspiration, pointing the reader to new sources and approaches in studying migration.

Altogether, there are thirty-eight chapters in both volumes focusing on the east central European émigré experience in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The very same experience which led to the formation of east central Europe in exile—a powerful ethnic conglomerate of people pushed out of the region by poverty, war, persecution, who maintained their transatlantic links in a variety of forms.

The first volume, *Transatlantic Migrations*, focuses on the reasons for emigration from the lands of east central Europe; from the Baltic to the Adriatic, the intercontinental journey, as well as on the initial adaptation and assimilation processes. It consists of twenty chapters written by scholars from eight different countries, organized into four parts.

The first part may be considered a broad introduction to the two volume series. Based on captivating individual stories presented against historical background, the authors demonstrate reasons for emigration from eastern Europe, look into its changing character, examine the nature of the preserved transatlantic links, and touch upon adaptation processes. Jože Pirjevec opens the section with a broad introduction to the changing nature of south-eastern emigration overseas. The theme of exile ties and activities carried out on behalf of the old country is further expanded in the chapter by Agata Biernat. In the next chapter Harriet Napierkowski describes how international conflicts uproot people from the moving, personal perspective of a single displaced family, which is representative of thousands more in the aftermath of the Second World War. It is followed by an examination of the post-war and anti-communist emigration routes, which in the case of north-eastern Europe often led through Sweden. Arnold Kłoczyński describes both the factors pushing the Poles to leave their homelands, as well as the reasons for their subsequent departure from Sweden to America. The next chapter, by Slavomír Michálek describes the successful attempts to organize help for the cold war refugees—mostly from Czechoslovakia—in the second half of the twentieth century. Béla Nóvé's chapter presents the dramatic plight of underage Hungarians escaping the country during and after the Hungarian Revolution. The first part of the volume concludes with Maja Trochimczyk's study of Polish émigré musicians. The author examines the reasons for their migration overseas, their careers in the adopted homeland, and their new, negotiated identities—émigré, ethnic, or American—thus indicating the essential elements of "Polishness".

In the second part of the first volume, the reader will discover the various aspects of the transatlantic passage from the departure ports, types of vessels, conditions aboard to the difficulties involved in getting to America. Interestingly, the five contributors, from four different countries, describe the intercontinental crossing from different places and perspectives. Taken together, this helps the reader to visualize the various aspects of the international migratory network combining east central Europe with the Americas. This part opens with an examination of the emigrant traffic via the south-eastern European ports. Aleksej Kalc's article focuses on the significance of Trieste, whereas Istvan Kornel Vida's chapter mostly deals with Rijeka (Fiume). While the first one focuses on the volume and economic significance of the passenger traffic, the latter examines the humanitarian side of the transatlantic voyage. Two articles dealing with north-eastern European ports—Gdańsk and Gdynia—complement this perspective. Again, however, both authors adopt quite a

different approach. Whereas Oskar Myszor's detailed study presents the volume of emigrant traffic through the Polish port of Gdynia, Jan Daniuk tells the story of the German emigration from the Free City of Danzig to Brazil. The difficulties faced by the settlers in the Brazilian jungle are further juxtaposed with the care east central European immigrants received in North America. Anne M. Gurnack offers a glimpse of how New York coped with the health-care needs of the scores of immigrants arriving in America via Ellis Island, and what medical services were available to them around the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The third part, "Putting Roots Down", focuses on processes of adaptation and acculturation. M. B. B. Biskupski's article opens the discussion by posing questions on the nature of the transatlantic connection to the "old country". The author observes changes in political consciousness and clearly demonstrates the detachment from the "ancestral Fatherland". Mary Patrice Erdmans looks into the phenomena of "Polishness" in Connecticut over the course of a hundred and forty years. This broad perspective is then confronted with detailed studies of immigrant communities in other parts of the United States. Dorota Praszalowicz's article looks at the complex relations between the Poles and Germans in Milwaukee at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As both above-mentioned authors emphasize the central role of the parish in the ethnic community, their perspectives are complemented by Daniel Černý's case study of the struggle for the preservation of identity by a group of Slovak immigrants, the members of the Slovak Greek Catholic Church in Canada.

The last part of the volume examines immigrant paths towards integration. The authors discuss the east Europeans' entry into various labour markets (mostly in low-skilled jobs) as well as immigrant social mobility and career patterns. Pien Versteegh examines education and the career patterns of the Polish workers in Pennsylvania and compares them with that of the American workers. The American experience is then contrasted with an examination of various perspectives of the social mobility of the Polish immigrants in Europe. Brian McCook presents a detailed study of the education patterns in Great Britain during and after the Second World War. Silvia Dapia's chapter characterizes the socio-political reasons behind Argentina's decision to encourage immigration from east central Europe in the late twentieth century. The volume closes with an article by Małgorzata Patok, who looks into the contemporary relevance of the Polish immigrant stereotype in the West and examines the role it plays in ameliorating integration strategies.

Undoubtedly, this compilation fosters the reader's understanding of the transnational processes affecting the east central European migrants. It proves that patterns in the east central European transatlantic migration are easily discernible, and that seeing our history within the regional context is therefore crucial.

The second volume is slightly different in scope, for it focuses on the aspect of negotiating new identities acquired in the adopted homeland. The authors contributing to the: *Transatlantic Identities* focus on the preservation of the east central European identity, maintenance of the contacts with the "old country", and activities pursued on behalf of, and for the sake of the abandoned homeland. The first part of the volume opens with a study of east central European cultural activities in the U.S. and the importance of ethnic heritage in the artistic and literary creations. Thomas J. Napierkowski talks about the presence of the exile experience in Polish-American literature. In her chapter, Jelena Šesnić supports his perspective, which discusses Croatian literature as a transculturated discourse. The literary portrayal of immigrants based on semi-autobiographical fiction is focus of in the article by Grażyna J. Kozaczka. It examines the negotiated, or constructed, immigrant identity. Then, Anna D. Jaroszyńska-Kirchmann, using emigrant and exile written exchanges within their communities, looks into the internal development of the Polish political diaspora by analysing the informal communication networks within it. The Czech perspective on intra-diasporic exchanges is then offered by Francis Raška, who describes the debates involving the Czechoslovak intellectual elites. This section of the book closes with Piotr Koprowski's examination of the thoughts on the east central European intellectual identity formulated by a Polish Catholic philosopher during his transatlantic travels.

East central European émigré attitudes towards other ethnic minorities are discussed in the second part of this volume. This section opens with a study of Polish cooperation with other ethnic groups before the American Civil War, written by James S. Pula. It is followed by Piotr Derengowski's article on the Polish opinions about slavery in the Civil War era. Stephen M. Leahy further expands this perspective in his article discussing the relationship between the Polish-Americans and African Americans during this era. Sociologist Ieva Zake's article, concluding this section, offers a comprehensive, synthesizing approach to the problem of the nature of ethnic prejudice.

The third part of the volume focuses on the political manifestations of the émigré overseas. Particular attention is directed towards interethnic cooperation among the east central European exiles during the Cold War.

The section opens with Martin Nekola's article, which focuses on political leadership of the Czech and Slovak exiles. Anna Siwik and Arkadiusz Indraszczyk discuss the interethnic cooperation of the east central European exiles based on their political views, the socialist and agrarian respectively. Anna Mazurkiewicz talks about the united exiles efforts to garner the attention of the United Nations for the cause of liberation of east central Europe. Pauli Heikkilä closes this section of the volume describing the multi-ethnic Assembly of the Captive European Nations as a U.S. based exile organization of noticeable importance in Europe. The last four articles therefore combine east central European exile political activities on both sides of the Atlantic.

The last part of the second volume is devoted to an examination of the link between the Cold War exiles and the intelligence services—both American and Communist—thus exemplifying another transatlantic link. Katalin Kádár Lynn discusses the cooperation of the Hungarian leader—Tibor Eckhardt and Grombach organization, or “the Pond”. Magdolna Báráth supplements this perspective by describing Communist attempts to severely inhibit emigration from Hungary after the revolution of 1956. In keeping with the chronological sequence, the Hungarian case is supported by Patryk Pleskot's study of the Polish intelligence service's surveillance of the Polish diaspora in the 1980s.

Taken together, these eighteen essays present the reader with a panorama of émigré co-operation and conflict in exile. The scholars from eight different countries thus present the results of their most recent research in the field of interethnic interactions of the émigrés which—had it not been for the Gdańsk meeting—would otherwise only appear as part of their national historiographies.

This publication was prepared for readers interested in European, as well as American, history (political, cultural, and economic). Furthermore, as the two-volume set offers diversified perspectives, cutting across disciplines and national borders, it may serve as a background for exciting discussions in academic courses and as an enjoyable inspiration to further research on both sides of the Atlantic.

On behalf of the organizing committee, we would like to thank all of the conference participants, partners and sponsors. We would also like to express gratitude to Ewa Barczyk (Director of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries) and to Daniel Necas (Research Archivist at the Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota) whose personal efforts were instrumental in helping us locate and obtain copies and permissions to use the photographs on the covers. It ought to be recorded that the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee library, represented

at the conference by Director Barczyk, houses the Roman Kwasniewski Photographic Collection, an extensive treasure trove of visual images of the Polish neighbourhood of Milwaukee in its heyday, the early decades of the 20th century. Last but not least, our thanks go to Peter Simon for his assistance in correcting the texts for both volumes.

We hope that the volumes that resulted from our discussions at the University of Gdańsk constitute an important step in the direction of closer international cooperation as well as a clear indication of the critical need for transnational research.

—Anna Mazurkiewicz, Mieczysław Nurek

PART I

TRANSATLANTIC TRANSITIONS

CHAPTER ONE

POLISH AMERICAN LITERATURE: A STORY OF EXILE, EMIGRATION, AND ADAPTATION

THOMAS J. NAPIERKOWSKI

The focus of this volume addresses one of the great migrations of human history—a phenomenon, actually a series of phenomena, in which millions of people left the lands of their birth and relocated in countries thousands of miles from home. Despite the magnitude of this migration, perhaps because of the magnitude, the phenomena are, as yet, inadequately studied and understood. In an effort to correct this situation, scholars from a wide range of disciplines—history, sociology, economics, political science, and others—and on both sides of the Atlantic have renewed their study of these migrations through the prism of their areas of specialization.

It is the primary contention of this chapter that no examination of the phenomena can be complete without a study of the literature which the exiles and immigrants wrote and read. Surely all literature reflects the perspective of those who wrote it and the period in which it appeared. Even when the literature is poorly written or biased, it still provides valuable insights into its authors and its audience. As historian Richard Wunderli has noted, literature—like government documents, economic statistics, ship manifestos, private and official correspondence, and a myriad of others sources—and better than most—is crucial to the proper analysis of a phenomenon, an era, a community. He further comments that in literature we actually hear the voices of the past; indeed, he insists that if we read the literature with intelligence, we not only hear the voices of the subjects of our studies, we can actually “carry on a sort of conversation” with the authors of the literature, with their characters, and, to some degree, with the audiences of the literature. Wunderli concludes his comments with a personal observation:

In any case, literature (i.e. fiction) ironically makes history more ‘real’ than mere historical narrative. When I think of the 18th century, I think of Tom Jones, just as I think of the Pardoner when I think of Late Medieval England and of Uncle Vanya when I think of the decline of Imperial Russia. They are ‘real’ and are inseparable from their ‘history.’ How can we comprehend ‘race’ in America without confronting Bigger Thomas in *Native Son*—or more recently the book and the movie *The Help*?¹

All this notwithstanding, the literature of east-central European immigrants to the United States and Canada has been sorely neglected. Using Polish American immigrant literature as a case in point, this paper outlines the importance of recovering, preserving, critically analysing, and gaining recognition for this literature both in the United States and in Europe. These comments, however, are not intended to be restrictive or parochial. I focus on Polish American literature, but I believe that Polish American literature serves as a good representative model of the literary record of most of the national and ethnic groups addressed at this conference.

As I have reported elsewhere,

The definitive history of Polish American literature has yet to be written; but the general outline of that history is, by now, clear. And what it reveals is a level of literary activity that is in need of better appreciation and wider dissemination both because of its significance and merit and because of its implications for American literature, for the patterns of American cultural production, and for a better knowledge of the Polish identity in America. This is all the more remarkable because it was long assumed that the Polish American community—at least the generations of the *stara emigracja* (old immigration), the peasant immigrants of the period from roughly 1880 to 1920—were virtual illiterates who not only failed to produce literature but who, in their struggle to survive in a new land, took little pleasure in reading, much less in literature.²

Until relatively recently, even some prominent Polish American scholars contributed to such a mistaken impression; and this is perhaps the first important lesson to be gleaned from Polish American literature: a caution that even today a substantial body of immigrant/ethnic American literature—especially literature produced by early waves of immigrants—can go undetected.

¹ Richard Wunderli, e-mail letter to author, 28 February 2012.

² Thomas J. Napierkowski, “Literature, Polish American,” in *The Polish American Encyclopedia*, ed. James Pula (Jefferson, NC: McFarland), 276.

Despite recent expansions of the canon of American literature, a recognition that American literature is (and always has been) multilingual and a focus on multiculturalism and diversity, ethnic American literatures—apart from Hispanic American literature, Jewish American literature, and perhaps Irish and Italian American literatures—remain largely ignored in literary histories and in university curricula. And without deliberate effort, usually by scholars of ethnic background, such literatures can not only escape detection, they can be lost. As a result, the first task of any study of ethnic/immigrant literature is to define the very existence and extent of that body of literature—in effect, to establish a bibliography of literary production and, in many cases, to ensure the preservation of that body of work.

In the case of Polish American literature, the ground-breaking efforts of Karen Majewski have achieved the initial phase of this work. In her 2003 book *Traitors and True Poles: Narrating a Polish American Identity, 1880–1939*, Majewski has documented and studied over two hundred Polish-language novels, novellas, short stories, sketches, and anthologies of short fiction penned by and for the *stara emigracja*. Several aspects of her work are especially noteworthy.

Not only is the body of fiction which she has identified larger than most would have expected, but her research points to a body of work still in need of cataloguing. She reports, for example, that if she had broadened her focus beyond fiction with a special emphasis on immigrant identity, her bibliography would have been significantly longer; and she estimates that a bibliography including poetry and drama would be three times as large. She also gives us an idea of the work required to recover this body of work:

While university repositories facilitated the process, it still meant tracking down clues and half-clues about authors and titles buried in Polish language immigrant histories and memoirs, examining the catalogues and reading the shelves of Polish American organizational libraries and archives, sorting through knee-deep papers strewn on the floors of half-abandoned immigrant bookstores, and scanning hundreds of rolls of microfilmed newspapers.³

If the efforts of one determined scholar can recover so impressive a body of work, one can only wonder what a larger and better funded effort might discover.

³ Karen Majewski, *Traitors and True Poles: Narrating a Polish American Identity: 1880–1939* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2003), XIII.

Beyond this, Majewski's critical examination of the prose fiction which she was able to secure reveals a sophisticated level of writing and a complexity of audience response well beyond her expectations. The detective fiction which she examined, for example, provides much more than suspense and actions; it addresses

...the concerns of immigrants at multiple levels, touching simultaneously on personal issues of inheritance and property, on metaphorical concerns about family loyalty and ethnic continuity, and on powerful historical conceptions of a divided Poland betrayed from within, by its allies and its own people.⁴

Not only did the immigrant community generate and support a body of literature of considerable size and scope, it also produced a notable quantity of sophisticated works in response to audience concerns and demands.

Two other points of special significance emerge from Majewski's study. On a purely literary plane, this early Polish American fiction challenges commonly accepted paradigms of immigrant and ethnic American literature by diverging from commonly accepted models. Polish American romance novels of love, for example, treat marriage not as an avenue of assimilation and of the resolution of immigrant and nativist conflicts, but as a vehicle to preserve ethnic identity. In addition, Polish American sagas of immigration, although still chronicling the physical and psychological trauma of emigration as most immigrant literatures do, also hold out the prospect of a return to a free homeland.

Furthermore, the literature uncovered by Majewski obliterates the image of the peasant immigrants held by host-culture writers and by many Poles and, for a long time, by many scholars. Even when sympathetically viewed, these Polish immigrants were generally regarded as "inarticulate, passive, almost primeval, as faceless symbols of a primitive life force and as voiceless victims of social injustice and economic exploitation".⁵ But the characters in these novels and short stories, their authors, and their readers present a different reality. The picture which emerges from the novels and their reception reveals "an active, vibrant, and complex community... and the sound from within was not silence but conversation, argument, laughter".⁶ These are voices and sounds which must be heard and considered as we study east and central Europe's transatlantic patterns of migration.

⁴ Ibid., 64.

⁵ Ibid., 13.

⁶ Ibid.

Early Polish American literature was not limited, however, to prose fiction. Although poetry and drama have not received the attention which Majewski has focused on fiction, several sources, both primary and secondary, document a large and significant body of literary production in these other areas.

In the realm of poetry, the work of recovery and assessment is likely to be even more challenging than it was with fiction, but evidence suggests that the task will be worth the effort. The *Antologia Poezji Polsko-Amerykańskiej* (The Anthology of Polish American Poetry) edited by Tadeusz Mitana and published in 1937 under the auspices of the Polish Arts Club of Chicago is a good indicator of the extent of poetic activity in Polonia before the onset of World War II. Mitana reported that once the Polish Arts Club approved the project, "Poems were solicited through a series of announcements in every Polish newspaper in the United States and Canada, and a great mass of poetry was received".⁷ The final product of this competition was a volume containing 178 poems by 55 poets: 136 of the poems are composed in Polish and 42 in English. Interestingly, about one-third of the poems had been previously published, several in separate collections, but significantly most in a wide range of Polish language newspapers. Among the poets with multiple entries are Walery Fronczak, M.A. Niedźwiecki, Janusz Ostrowski, Victoria Janda (later nominated for a Pulitzer Prize), and, interestingly, Mieczysław Haiman, arguably the leading Polish American scholar of his day.

In his notes to the reader, Mitana rather prophetically proclaims:

*Przyszły historyk poezji polskiej w Ameryce znajdzie obfity materiał do arcyciekawego studium w obfitości zbiorów indywidualnych i w wielkim bogactwie wierszy, rozrzuconych po łamach pism polskich w różnych częściach Stanów.*⁸ (Future historians of Polish poetry in America will find a wealth of material for intriguing study, both in the number of Polish American poets and the great wealth of poetry generated in various Polish publications throughout the United States.)

Even more prophetically, Mitana could have been addressing the conference when he further wrote that the poems in the *Anthology*

...are not only revealing to the understanding hearts of their readers a singular pathos of the process of adjustment, but are also lifting the curtain that for so long has hidden the very nature of the spiritual aspirations of the

⁷ Tadeusz Mitana, ed. *Antologia Poezji Polsko-Amerykańskiej* (Chicago: Polski Klub Artystyczny, 1937), 193.

⁸ Mitana, 7.

Polish people in America. It is no exaggeration to say that between its covers, the *Anthology* gives for the first time, both an insight into the qualities of the Polish mind in America and a cross section of its emotional content.⁹

On a personal note, I might add that as someone who found his way to the study of Polish American literature through African American literature, I have long regarded the *Antologia* as a pioneering effort comparable to *The Book of American Negro Poetry* edited by James Weldon Johnson in 1922, a period when the Black American community was working to gain recognition for its contributions to American literature.

One final comment on poetry: the *Antologia* and the few other studies of Polish American poetry from this era suggest that poetry may have been the preferred literary form of the *stara emigracja*. As I have suggested elsewhere, and on more than one occasion, the personal nature and relative brevity of most lyric poetry might have made it more appealing, manageable, and publishable than fiction or drama. Early in the twentieth century, there were hundreds of Polish-language newspapers and journals in the United States; and many, perhaps most, had poetry columns.

Polish-language drama is well documented but inadequately studied and evaluated, and sorely neglected in scholarly studies of the Polish American community. As early 1890, only a few years into the period of the great migration, Polish literary historian Karol Estreicher authored an essay entitled *Teatr polski za oceanem* (Polish Theatre beyond the Ocean), published both in Europe and America, in which he provides valuable descriptions of performances and documents the vital role of the theatre in Polish immigrant life. Estreicher mentions scores of plays performed in Polish American communities ranging from New York City and Chicago to Winona, Minnesota, providing clear evidence that dramatic productions were not limited to large and culturally privileged centres of Polonia.

Almost half a century later (1937), Natalie Kunka's essay *The Amateur Theatre Among the Poles* focused on the Chicago area and documents a surprisingly large number of dramatic clubs and circles in the city. Kunka records that virtually every Polish Roman Catholic parish in the Chicago had a drama circle, and some more than one; she also identifies several secular dramatic societies. In the course of the article, she also comments on the tenth anniversary of the Alliance of the Polish Literary Dramatic Circles of America, a nation-wide federation of parish and independent dramatic clubs organized to promote friendly relations, support, and cooperation among member groups.

⁹ Ibid., 196.