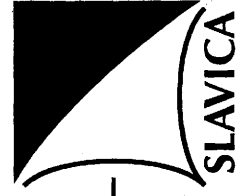


SLAVIC LITERATURE FROM 1918 TO 2000

AN ANTHOLOGY

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- grandmother died the other day
on a journey, all of a sudden...
- The basses will stamp with zest,
a trill will cry in the viola,
and all along the pine forest
the heart will flow with the Vistula,
- a sandy tract it will cover,
it will walk an exile's trail
and in the viola's measure
like a mazurka will wail...
- Too loudly in the old passageway
the pianist lashes the silence:
at our hearts, dear friend far away,
the white keys strike with violence.

Text: Broniewski, Władysław. *Poezje zebrane*. Wydanie krytyczne. 4 vols.
Edited by Feliksa Lichodziejewska. Płock-Toruń: Algo-TNP, 1997, II, 34, 126,
149, 168, 178–79.

Julian Przybóś

(1901–1970)

Julian Przybóś was born into a peasant's family in Gwoźnica Dolna. He attended the village school and then a high school in Rzeszów. In 1920 he volunteered to fight against the Soviet Union and the same year went to study Polish and philosophy at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow. In 1923 he began to work as a high school teacher. In 1925 Przybóś published his first volume of poetry entitled *Screws*, followed by *With Both Hands* (1926). Between 1937 and 1939 he traveled on a scholarship, mostly in France. He spent the years 1941–45 in his native village. After the war he joined the Communist Party, became the first President of the Union of Polish Writers, served as Minister Plenipotentiary of Poland to Switzerland from 1947 to 1951, and then as Director of the Jagiellonian Library (1951–55). He left the Communist Party in 1958, worked for *The Cultural Review*, *Poetry*, and *The Literary Monthly*, and in 1966 was elected vice president of the Polish PEN Club.

One of the most accomplished members of the avant-garde, Przybóś joined the literary group *The Switch*. In his early poems, he praised modern technology and machines, departing from traditional forms of poetic expression. In his later volumes, especially in *A Place on Earth* (1945), Przybóś pondered on the stand of an artist facing the horrors of war.

On the Road

On the road restrained by the horizon, over which
the lines of fields blew through —

Close by — it swelled with hardened clay, as if with pregnancy.

5 It's a mound — that broke silence: Like a deep rumble of nature
it reached me from the expanse.

Where is the most distant, buried wheel of the Earth
covered by the horizon,
the still grave of birth,
from which my body burst forth?

10 I choke on the excess of the world:
I call.

— I walk through clods and ice on the road crushed by wheels.

Notre-Dame

Oh space soaring from a million fingers joined in prayer!

But the Interior brought me down from the spire as if from a hook —
terror.

Scorned and spat at among gargoyles gaping with rain
I know: What I signify alive a step from the columns!
5 Those hewn walls from rocks—like the heads above me
come to life from the sarcophagus.

Who shook that darkness, bent it—
and grasped it?

I know. The crosses weighed down with Jesuses
10 one ought to sharpen into plummets of the ladder builders
and to hit one's will,
aligned with the unfathomable azure,
one's death
from the pointed arch—

15 —there at the keystone of the vault
quivers a closed surge of shafts—

and to endure under the rumble of stones gliding higher and higher
until a sudden turn rolls them down,
unfinished, from the heights
20 into two towers, the torn off bottoms.

Who thought up this precipice and tossed it up high!

From the Tatras

To the memory of a mountain climber who died at Dead Crag¹

I hear:

An unexploded crash of the rocks stones this space.

It's—a scream of water torn off its bed by a cascade
and

5 a thunderous storm of silence.
This world, disturbed by a frightened look,
I'll hush,
but—

I won't contain your death in the granite coffin of the Tatras.

10 It's a screech
of an ice-axe
rough-hewed of echo,
it's only your whole world
shrunk in my fist on the stone-fall;
15 it's—the peak brought down by a violent heartbeat.
For despair—how little of it!
And the terror—mountainous!

How easy
to hold the crag
20 hanging in your hands
and not to fall
when
in your eyes the earth laid bare turns
the landscape upside down,
25 knocking the sky into the precipice!

How quiet
to bury the Dead in the closed fist.

Imperceptibly

...Nameless trees vanished one into another—

War! Perhaps the war will decide without me,
smashing silence into splinters?

5 The world will be fulfilled at once, in a flash!
I tremble as if in a shell hole—inactively.
The battlefield cools off for a long time.

...Stones broke their bounds, freeing the fire imprisoned in their core,
the wind was ignited from them
and carried up
a dark-blue star.

10 ...Nameless stars sank into deserts—

¹ The motto refers to Marzena Skotnicówna, the poet's high-school student and bride-to-be, who fell to her death at Dead Crag on October 6, 1929.

Passing imperceptibly from horizon to horizon

—I cannot contain them in my arms—

having set my lips, I hold back words for such a long time,
until the earth will silence me forever.

Text: Przyboś, Julian. *Sytuacje liryczne. Wybór poezji*. Edited by Edward Balcerzan and Anna Legeżyńska. Wrocław: Ossolineum, Biblioteka Narodowa I 266, 1989, 55, 91–92, 95–96, 100.

Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński

(1905–1953)

Gałczyński was born in Warsaw in the family of a railway employee. In 1914 he was evacuated with his parents to Moscow, where he attended a Polish school until 1918. He studied English and classics at Warsaw University and from 1926 to 1928 did his military service. He joined the poetic group *Kwadryga* and made his literary debut assuming the pose of a bohemian poet and clown. He also used the grotesque to express his catastrophic fantasies, especially in the poem *The End of the World: Visions of St. Ildefons or a Satire on the Universe* (1929). Gałczyński's playful verses of *Folkfair* (1934), depicting the merrymaking of the common people at the fairgrounds, carried a foreboding note about Poland's future. He also indulged in attacking the intelligentsia and the ruling spheres, but was not loath to embrace the ideology of the nationalist right when their support allowed him to publish his *Poetic Works* (1937), which brought him a literary prize in 1938. A collection of lyrical poems, *Noctes Aninenses*, extolling Anin, the village outside Warsaw where he settled in 1936, closed the prewar period of his poetry.

Imprisoned in German camps during the war, Gałczyński wrote nostalgic patriotic poems, e.g., *Mother of God of Stalags*. After his return, he settled in Cracow, where he wrote his whimsical *Enchanted Droshka* (1948), called himself the "Bachhus of democracy," and in the spirit of the new order attacked the embattled intelligentsia, especially in his miniature theater of the absurd called *Little Theater of the Green Goose*. In his next metamorphosis, when he himself was accused of being "a petty bourgeois," Gałczyński adopted the canon of socialist realism, penning a poem lamenting Stalin's death. In the last years of his life he turned to matters of art and poetic vocation, e.g., in his poems *Niobe* (1951) and *Wit Stwosz* (1952), and formulated his poetic testament in the cycle *Songs* (1953).

Journey to Blissful Arabia

A passing breeze blew the whip's crimson ribbons lightly,
stars in the sky like birds in Africa overflow,
horses at a snail's pace, wheels—so-so, staccato,
and the coachman is now drunk and very lonely.

- 5 The carriage is music, the music box throughout,
night around the carriage is happiness at its crest;
soon the moon will fly by in a big silver tempest
and in ditches glowworms, faint lights will whirl about.