

## POLONISTYKA Z PERSPEKTYWY DALEKOWSCHODNIEJ

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### FROM JAPANESE SCHULZ TO POLISH PARNICKI – AROUND THE YEAR 1974<sup>1</sup>

(THIS ARTICLE WAS TRANSLATED FROM POLISH BY JAKUB WOSIK)

**Keywords:** Polish language, Polish literature, translation, Polish studies, Japan, the Japanese, Bruno Schulz, Teodor Parnicki

**Abstract.** The major works by Bruno Schulz and Witold Gombrowicz were translated into Japanese in the 1960s, mainly by Yukio Kudō. I was enchanted by those Japanese texts to such an extent that I decided to abandon French literature and switch to Polish contemporary literature. In 1974, I came to Poland on a post-graduate fellowship of the Polish government, and I began studies in literature and the Polish language at the Jagiellonian University. During that two-year stay in Krakow, my view of Polish literature changed several times. The phase well established in the Japanese translations I had known ended quickly. Then I began to “hunt” for promising Polish authors not yet present in world literature. I thus discovered the prolific, esoteric and difficult Teodor Parnicki (1908–1988). This essay is my description of my “penetrating” the world of the Polish language at that time.

Władysław Miodunka’s speech delivered on 27<sup>th</sup> April, 2013, in Aachen upon receiving the Polonicus 2013 award was exceptional. Maybe even upsetting for some. In it, he did not mention even once any of his achievements or the latest successes of the domestic domain of the teaching of Polish as a foreign language; instead, he focussed on indicating to the Polish emigrant community the existence

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of foreign Polish specialists who were not Polish emigrants, and presented a few of them, mostly those who had not been his students. Miodunka's speech was filled with courage. That courage is somewhat referred to in the reminiscences of the beginnings of my learning Polish. For the time being, allow me to move back almost half a century.

In the spring of 1967, in Tokyo, there were published, and in a single volume at that<sup>2</sup>, *The Cinnamon Shops* and *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* by Bruno Schulz and *Cosmos* by Witold Gombrowicz. In that same year, *Pornografia* and four short stories from the *Bacacay* collection were published in Japan, though each separately. Three publishing houses and two translators competed to plant the seed of Japanese Gombrowicz studies. The original *Kosmos* in Polish had been published by the Instytut Wydawniczy publishing house just two years earlier, in 1965, while the first translations of the novel into French, English, German, and Italian began appearing as early as 1966. In the following year, the Japanese and the Norwegian translations were published, followed the next year by a Dutch translation, and a year later, i.e. in 1969, a Portuguese one. It all seemed like a race or ripples on water spreading from Paris<sup>3</sup>.

At this point I would like to indicate a fact which is often overlooked: that is that for a long time now the shape of world literature has not replicated the world's geographical map, let alone our everyday geography, i.e. imaginary geography, which it is a complete opposite. In the case of Japanese texts since the end of the 19th century, their connections with the literary texts of Western Europe, Russia and America, and the exchange of texts originating from other cultural groups has progressed so rapidly and to such an extent that the isolation of Cipangu<sup>4</sup> has been permanently lifted within the area of the exchange of information. If there were a map of the world based on the measurements of the speed and volume of flow of literary texts, Japan would have to be placed somewhere in the middle of the Atlantic.

The fact that both in Polish and Japanese, even now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there still survive such terms as “remote” or “distant” when referring to the other country has been the result of various historical, political and economic factors. One of those is caused by the concentric structure of text circulation. What do I mean by that? In many areas of our life it has often been the case that novelties emerged either in Western Europe or North America. Both Poles and the Japanese expect those novelties as they are placed somewhat on the edges of circles with one central point but of different radii. For example, the translations of the global best seller *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* by Thomas Piketty, published in France in August 2013, was published in Japan in early December 2014, and in Poland in

<sup>2</sup> Published by the Kōbunsha publishing house.

<sup>3</sup> More on Gombrowicz's presence in Japan, vide Sekiguchi 2010.

<sup>4</sup> The name given to Japan by Marco Polo (1254–1324) and recorded by Rustichello da Pisa (1272–1300) in *Il Milione* (*Description of the World*, 1298–1299).

March of the following year. That means that it took 15 months for Piketty's book to travel from Paris to Tokyo, and 19 months to Warsaw.

Information in stunning volumes rushes from the centre to the periphery, and there is virtually no communication between peripheries: Tokyo and Warsaw in this case. Despite appearances, "the global web" has practically no effect on the old centralised system, and the English language has not "taken care of" everything. Simply check from which sources and whose correspondents we receive global news each day. AP? AFP? Reuters? BBC? To put it graphically, both Poles and the Japanese stand with their sights always fixed in the same direction, i.e. the West, expecting news to come from there, and never looking at each other. Therefore, it is understandable that they feel the pre-modern distance between each other.

The rapid development of the multilingual universes of Gombrowicz's and Schulz's texts is also a good example of the modern literary geography. Japanese readers found themselves within the areas closest to the centres of the global market where the names of the Poles have become prominent; sometimes the Japanese were even closer to their texts than readers who lived in Poland. Who was actually able to read them in Poland at that time? Schulz was not as marked with his "political fortunes" as Gombrowicz was, yet it seems that in the People's Republic at that time access to the former's texts was quite limited. There had been only two post-war editions of those (1957 and 1964) before the publication of the volume in Japanese. Interestingly enough, by 1998 all Schulz's texts including his letters had been published in Japanese.

Therefore, when I was a teenager, I read Schulz and Gombrowicz. More precisely, I read Japanese texts written by Yukio Kudō (1925–2008) based on the Polish originals. Kudō's texts were superb. I believe that Schulz's works were the best out of all Yukio Kudō's translations. It seems that the translator and the writer fit together well. I also read some works by other Polish writers, but if it had not been for my encounter with Schulz/Kudō's texts, I would not be here today. I make this confession and statement with a particular emphasis.

Throughout my high school years, I learnt French, attending classes three times a week at the Japanese-French Institute. Without a moment's hesitation, I undertook Romance studies, which were quite trendy back then. Yet my bookshelf held, in a prominent place, a large book entitled *Gombrowicz*, edited by Konstanty Jeleński and Dominique de Roux after the writer's death, published in 1971 by Editions de l'Herne. It cost me nearly 5,000 Yen – a major expense for a poor student. The book contained impressive content: texts regarding Gombrowicz written in French. Those were remarks regarding the author of *Fedrydurke* by over fifty intellectuals, e.g.: Fernando Arrabal, Giuseppe Ungaretti, Uwe Johnson, Martin Buber, Lars Gustafsson, Jerzy Kosinski, Günter Grass and more. In general, at that time, in Japanese texts the name Gombrowicz appeared often accompanying writers classified as members of the Nouveau Roman or Le Clézio

groups, or even the hero of our student years: Blanchot. So, it would not had been particularly surprising if someone considered the author of *Trans-Atlantyk* to be French.

Therefore, even though Polish culture was only a hobby of mine, I wanted to learn Polish and I tried to reach the translators of the language. More or less while I was reading the volume published by Editions de l'Herne, I met the couple Risako Uchida (1928–1997) and Shōzo Yoshigami (1928–1996). Both – graduates of Russian studies from Waseda University – had visited Poland for a year (1964/1965), probably as fellows of the Authors' Agency, and became interested in Polish culture. They became superb translators of not only Russian literature, but also Polish literature. At that time, Yukio Kudō was living in Warsaw. I asked Yoshigami how one could learn Polish. There were no Polish textbooks nor dictionaries in Japan. Yoshigami advised me to buy a textbook published abroad. So I bought myself one of those *Teach Yourself* books, published by English Universities Press. It was small, almost a pocketbook. I flipped page after page and... I understood nothing. Some time later, I found a textbook by Yale University: *Beginning Polish*, intended for its students of Slavic courses. It was published in 1973, so it was a new release then. *Beginning Polish* was a good textbook with lots of exercises. Yet it came in handy not then, but many years later when I finally had the chance to learn Polish. I did not expect to, many years later, meet its author in person, i.e. Aleksander Schenker, in New Haven, in that ominous December of 1981.

Enough about textbooks. Yoshigami also told me that Professor Shōichi Kimura (1915–1986)<sup>5</sup>, a famous Slavist, was teaching Polish to doctoral candidates of Russian studies of the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (TUFS for short) and at Tokyo University, on an alternating basis: one week at the former, the other at the latter. I attended the classes at TUFS; there were just a few people, only doctoral candidates of Russian studies, who understood Polish texts after merely consulting the dictionary. They were reading with Professor Kimura Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz's short story *Dzień listopadowy*. There I was, an “illegal” unpaying student listening to the class. I sat quietly and understood virtually nothing. Later, another opportunity emerged to encounter Polish. Kazuo Yonekawa (1929–1982), a fourth renowned translator of Polish literature, also offered a public evening Polish course for complete beginners at the private Waseda University, that time for anyone who was interested. I decided to go there, and I was in time for the first class during which the Polish alphabet was discussed. Yonekawa did not use any textbooks and prepared the material himself using a “frame duplicating machine”. However, the obstacle of the language's inflection was too much for me. I attended that class only a few more times. The only thing I can remember from it was Yonekawa's peculiar handwriting, virtually calligraphy, on the blackboard and in the material.

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<sup>5</sup> He visited Poland for a year: 1961/1962.

Kimura and Yoshigami were preparing at that time the first Japanese Polish textbook entitled *Wprowadzenie do języka polskiego*, which was finally published in June 1973. I helped them in developing the index. The four of us, Kimura, Yoshigami, Ibuki the editor, and I, went to a hotel at the foot of Mt. Fuji and we worked there intensively for three days. My only memory of my helping them is that Professor Kimura set, unintentionally, the perfect example of how a true scholar works and how a true gentleman elegantly and efficiently drinks whisky. Despite the fact that the book was referred to as an “introduction”, it was almost exhaustive in terms of the discussion of basic grammatical matters, which is why it can still be treated as one of the best Polish grammar compendia ever written in Japanese.

Before I came to Poland that was basically it: *Teach Yourself, Beginning Polish*, that first Japanese textbook, and a few classes with Kimura and Yonekawa. Frankly speaking, those attempts did not give me much. I experienced almost physiological anxiety when faced with such exotic terms as “palatalisation of a hard consonant” or “masculine personal ending.” Those were obvious for Slavists, but unintelligible for me. In fact, all those translators whom I referenced earlier knew Russian well. They were actually Russian researchers, whereas I after a few months of trying abandoned the study of Russian, this time arguing that Cyrillic was an insurmountable obstacle.

In the spring of 1974, I was preparing for a visit to France. I was supposed to go independently for a junior position in Aix-en-Provence and I even received a certificate issued by the school proving I was accepted. That was when Yoshigami told me: “Mr. Sekiguchi, there will be an examination, you can get a fellowship from the Polish government. For two years. The fellowship would be 2,400 zlotys monthly plus 1,500 zlotys as a lump sum for accommodation. You should try it!” Financially, I would be much better off in Poland than in Provence. Also, the world of Romance scholars was already overpopulated. Had I chosen the career of a French teacher, I could foresee my whole life until its very end: straight as railroad tracks, defensive and probably clichéd. There was no shortage of work of that kind. At that time, knowledge of the French language and culture still guaranteed one’s livelihood. I would write a few books, publish several thin extracts from contemporary French literature for students to buy, I would translate writers less popular than Marguerite Duras and Maurice Blanchot (my idols at that time) as they already had their specialists. In short, I would be just another mass-produced Romance specialist and there would no new area for me to engage in.

Then again, a conversion to Polish literature would be a major risk. Every translator of Polish literature earned their living by teaching Russian or translating something popular in Russian. Yet I did not speak Russian. It was not possible to earn a living in Japan from translating Polish texts. There were no Polish teachers, let alone Polish studies. Nonetheless, the idea of a new area and the prospect of being a pioneer was alluring. Kimura and Yoshigami were already planning to

develop a Polish-Japanese dictionary, and, probably with my helping them in that in mind, they encouraged me to engage in that mad adventure. I did, in fact, later become part of the dictionary's editorial group.

On 10<sup>th</sup> June, 1974 I took a qualifying examination in Tokyo for a post-graduate fellowship of the Polish Ministry of Science, Higher Education and Technology. I think it was only the fourth edition of the recruitment of fellows from Japan under the inter-governmental agreement. Presumably, no one else from Tokyo University had taken that opportunity. I passed the examination and I chose Poland. There occurred a sudden turn in my life – in everything.

I wish to blame that dangerous turn and my irrational decision on Schulz-Kudō's texts. How would I justify that? Unfortunately, all that comes to mind are trite words like “depth” or “universality”. Actually, I have no intention of revisiting my youthful psychology or engaging in an exegesis of those texts. What matters is that when I read *The Cinnamon Shops* and *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* in Japanese, I sensed a genuine depth of the Language and a solid and strong poetics despite the transposition of translation. It may be true that it was a world of an extremely horizontally limited enclave and reality, some dark geography somewhere deep inside the continent, a grey town, but in the Language there grew a surprising vertically limitless pylon, a cylinder reaching the sky, in which living creatures and inanimate objects floated in air as if in Marc Chagall's paintings. Freedom – only in time and vertically... What language enables the development of such a “deep well”, into which anyone can peer and draw the succulent Word as it is opened for everyone? Those texts require us to think about languages. Since I am not discussing translation theory here, I shall skip Japanese. Allow me to say only this: a language which was able to produce *The Cinnamon Shops* is astonishing. The book forces one to think about Polish as the reason for its own being, as its own body, and source. Despite the fact that Schulz's prose constituted a representative example of a component of world literature which “gains through translation”, as posited by Damrosch (2003, p. 288), it does not allow anyone to forget about its “native” language and, on the contrary, seduces us to make sure we become interested in it. If for “modern” Poles the Polish language is unimaginable without Mickiewicz, then the Polish language opened to the world needs Bruno Schulz forever.

During the interview conducted in English by representatives of the Embassy of the People's Republic of Poland in Tokyo, I said that I definitely wanted to go to Krakow to study at the Jagiellonian University under Professor Jan Błoński. Considering my almost complete lack of knowledge of Polish at that time, I should have first gone for a preparatory Polish course organised at the University of Lodz, into which fellowship holders were regularly accepted. However, I was adamant I wanted to immediately start studying at the Jagiellonian University, and I even received an assurance from the examiner at the Embassy that I will receive Polish lessons in Krakow.

I set off from Tokyo on 17<sup>th</sup> October on a train to Niigata, a city located on the Sea of Japan (in Korean: the Eastern Sea). I stayed there for the night and on the following day I flew Aeroflot to Khabarovsk. A Russian woman from In-turyst gave me a short tour, whilst holding her little boy by the hand, around the grey, cold, and foggy city. She spoke Japanese well. She was friendly yet somewhat doleful. On 19<sup>th</sup> October, I checked into a hotel in downtown Moscow, and on 20<sup>th</sup> October I finally landed in Warsaw. I arrived in Krakow the following day, on 21<sup>st</sup> October 1974. As I indicated earlier, my knowledge of Polish was almost non-existent. I could not say anything in Polish apart from the simple “Dzień dobry.” I tried communicating in English. When I tried to reach the university from the station, a problem arose. I asked people how to get there and they motioned to the tram. With my big suitcase, I stepped onto the tram without a ticket. I caused quite a stir dragging my wheeled suitcase over the Krakow cobbles, because I was making such a noise, because my wheeled case was something of an oddity, and, finally, because I looked different. Passers-by would stop and stare at me.

There was an unpleasant surprise waiting for me at the university: Jan Błński had just left for France, possibly for two years. I had just missed him. What would have happened if I had studied under him as I planned? Where would I be now and what would I be doing? All the what ifs and whys may seem naive, but it is an interesting thought. The absence of the academic advisor I was expecting disappointed me greatly and discouraged me from attending lectures. I did not have a common language with the appointed advisor as the only foreign language he spoke was Russian. I must admit that throughout my fellowship I stayed away from Polish studies, which did not mean, though, that I did not know the university’s lecturers and students; I made quite a few good friends among them. But I used to meet them outside the university, at their homes, cafés, and simply outside – some of the meetings resembled meetings of the underground, which I knew, of course, only from films and literature. Later, in a newspaper someone wrote ironically that the fellowship of a mysterious Japanese in Krakow resembled the studies of Jan Kochanowski in Italy. Well, officially nothing happened. No proof remains. Interestingly enough, there are at IPN [Institute of National Remembrance] files with my name in them, about those meetings, letters exchanged with me, etc.

And apparently, despite the promise I was given in Tokyo, there was no Polish course in Krakow, at least no elementary one, for me, i.e. a person not of Polish descent and without Vietnamese citizenship. Andrzej Spyt, in the 1970s manager of the Centre of Practical Foreign Language Education at the Jagiellonian University, reminisced that in 1965–1971, Polish was taught to students with special invitations from the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on year-long courses affiliated with the Chair of the Polish Language, Jagiellonian University. A group of 60 to 100 people came each year.

Those were the beginnings of organised teaching of Polish to foreigners at the Jagiellonian University. In 1971, the second period in the history of teaching

Polish to foreigners at the university began and “Krakow became the centre of teaching and preparing Polish heritage youth for studying in Poland” (Spyt 1999, p. 27). So, there I was, right in the middle of the second period, which lasted until 1978, the period of “opening the university to the Polish emigrant community” (Spyt 1999, p. 27). Two years prior to my arrival, the Centre for Study of Polish Emigrant Community Problems by the Jagiellonian University was established. In 1973, it was transformed into the Polish Emigrant Community Science and Education Centre, and managed the Centre for the Polish Language for Foreigners. At that time, i.e. in 1973–1977, Władysław Miodunka worked at Toulouse II University – Le Mirail, currently Toulouse University – Jean Jaurès; he became the main initiator of new international Polish studies opened not only for the Polish emigrant community, but also for people outside the “kinship” community. Those four years he spent in France must have shaped Miodunka’s basic views on learning and teaching a foreign language. Maybe as he himself tried to absorb French away from his own world, he came to the conclusion that Polish studies needed to be reformed both as an institution and as a science.

It was then that I, completely distraught, met someone who took pity on me and advised me to attend Polish classes for Polish heritage students. He knew the people at the Polish Emigrant Centre at 27, Straszewskiego St. and he probably arranged for me some unofficial “pass” to the Polish heritage classes. So, I started attending them without paying anything. My colleagues from America, Canada, and Brazil certainly paid for them, but I did not. Most of all, I was not eligible to attend that course as a person without a drop of Polish blood in my veins. (I hope that the matter has expired...). So, in the group I was the “ugly duckling”, but the course participants tolerated my presence. I befriended some of them, especially those from the United States and Australia, and those who did not mind talking in Polish. Thanks to them and in their company I also met Poles: not only students and university staff, but also people unrelated to the academic world. The teachers were kind. I have particularly fond memories of Alicja Danecka, a veteran of the university’s teachers of foreigners. Thanks to her unselfish care and guidance I continued to expand my life in Krakow.

November, my first month there, was hard. One evening, having sat at my desk, I intended to work. I opened a book and... what was happening? All the letters were a blur! Due to stress my eyesight had deteriorated considerably. I was not able to read. I went to the clinic in Kopernika St. The doctor prescribed me glasses – the first pair in my life. At the clinic, I had to explain everything gesturing with my hands. I remember well when I was sitting in a dark hallway waiting for my turn. A nurse holding a piece of paper called out: “Tokima... Tomasz Sekigu... Sekigucki! Mr. Tomasz Sekigucki!” Thus, very quickly, because after only a few weeks, my status got elevated. I also remember the incomprehensible giggling of the nurses going around the surgery, around my chair, with the repeat-

ed word “soft, soft...” Presumably, they meant the sound of Japanese, as at their request I was forced to say something in my native language.

I remained hopeful, though, that eventually a regular course would be organised of which I could be a diligent participant. Additionally, after a few months of learning with the original group, the level was no longer satisfactory to me. As there was no university textbook, teachers used a textbook by the Warsaw-based *Polonicum* (Polonicum Centre for Polish Language and Culture for Foreigners): *Język polski dla cudzoziemców – Podręcznik dla niezaawansowanych* by Teresa Iglíkowska and Lidia Kacprzak. I continued, encouraged by my colleagues, to request the university to organise a course for foreigners not of Polish descent, and finally in the second semester my efforts paid off.

My first “legal” Polish teacher was Danuta Pukas, who having written her master’s thesis under Professor Mieczysław Karaś, the chancellor at that time, started her work at the university on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1974. If I recall correctly, we had classes with her only once a week. I think the level could have been defined as B1. During the classes, we presented our thoughts on a note or press article we had been assigned as homework. The group was very small. Apart from me, there was a French woman and a Russian man, and maybe some time later two more people from one of the so-called Western countries joined the group. I remember a lesson when the young French woman was using the word *wyobraźnia* [imagination] – a word which is not really included in textbooks for non-advanced students. That situation matched my preconception of a typical French inclination to make utterances abstract, and it perfectly illustrated the problem of which words should be included in teaching a foreign language to adults. Just as the French woman wanted by all means to use the noun *wyobraźnia* despite her still low level of competence in Polish, I wanted to talk about Teodor Parnicki. During a Polish course for students not of Polish descent you never know who is sitting in front of the teacher and with what kind of “baggage”...

As for my encounters with Poles around 1974, those were always accompanied by some kind of shock, for both parties. I appeared to Poles not only as an exotic visitor, but also as a peculiar specimen, being a man from the East who came from the West having read, though not in Polish, almost every major work by Gombrowicz and Schulz, which Poles still had not had the chance to read. People saw in me, for the first time in their lives, a peculiar hybrid, raised and educated based on old Chinese, Japanese, American and European cultures. I usually conclude that I am a mental crossbreed shaped by four civilisations. What shocked me most was the propaganda disinformation and the complete lack of knowledge about Japan and things related to it. That was why I had to spend so much time explaining the country I was from to people. The need was, obviously, the perfect motivation for me to develop my Polish language skills.

Yet, frankly speaking, having arrived in Poland, I said goodbye to Schulz and Gombrowicz. I did, of course, collect their original texts, yet they no longer constituted my goal. They lured me here, to Krakow, and thus their role somewhat ended. It took many years for me to return to them, when I was translating their texts or lecturing about them. That apparent paradox mainly resulted from the fact that the images of Polish literature and culture I had developed in my mind and sensed through Japanese, French and English texts were quickly ousted by new landscapes which I acquired as I “went deeper” into the Polish language. I began, no more determined by the existing world literature, my own searches and discoveries of original Polish texts by poets and writers whom I had not known. I began building the new castle of the mirage named “Polish literature.”

The first work I read as a whole and with huge satisfaction was a thin children’s book by Maria Terlikowska illustrated by Adam Kilian: *Ten z piegami i tamten z nosem* (1974). I bought it on 8<sup>th</sup> November in Wiślna St. On 6<sup>th</sup> January, 1975, I bought *Gramatyka języka polskiego* by Stanisław Szober in an antique shop and I began my struggles with it. I read from cover to cover the forty-page book printed in 1962 in small font as the 4<sup>th</sup> edition, edited by Doroszewski. That grammar compendium was already rather outdated at that time and, as was the case with any other Polish grammar compendium published in Poland, it included incredibly many pages devoted to morphology and relatively few to syntax. At least that was my impression. Despite that it gave me a comprehensive theoretical overview of the language. Being an adult, I needed that kind of understanding of the system and command of its logic.

I worked very hard, in complete isolation from the world outside Poland, no longer talking about the Japanese world but completely immersed in Polish life, living with a Polish family with whom I initially shared no common language. My hosts came from Sosnowiec and had a new three-bedroom apartment with a television in the residential complex near Wawel in Słomiana St. They lived in the living room, they rented the smallest bedroom to a young lady from outside Krakow, and the medium bedroom to me. I watched television with my hosts repeating words and phrases after them like a parrot. That was why for some time I said “tą razą” and “inną razą” instead of “tym razem” and “innym razem” (this time, another time). At some point I corrected my habits, though I did later find in Mickiewicz’s works identical forms to those used by my hosts. That completely cleared their names.

I shared no common language with my hosts not only literally but also figuratively. Apart from some practical aspects of everyday life, we had nothing to talk about. It was true that Mrs Z. asked me many questions about life in Japan. There was no internet back then and television only showed people in Tokyo wearing surgical masks to report on the city’s deadly air. I had to import Japanese women’s magazines to use the images to explain how people lived in the land of geishas and samurais.

Mrs Z. cared for me like a mother (the husband seemed somewhat afraid of me). I would like to mention two true stories, which proved her goodwill, and how the road to Hell is paved with good intentions. It happened at the end of the first semester, i.e. around June, 1975. I was helping a Jagiellonian University lecturer I knew in his correspondence with a well-known Japanese ethnographer by the name of Tokuji Chiba (1916–2001). I was translating a letter from the Japanese scholar to my Polish friend. One day I left home leaving the translation unfinished on my desk. When I returned and wanted to continue my work, I noticed that something, though slightly, changed in my text... To my surprise the Japanese professor's name was "corrected" in red pencil to "Chyba" [*maybe* in Polish]!

The other incident occurred probably also around the time of that uninvited correction of my text; that event was the reason why I moved out of the Wawel complex to Wola Justowska (31<sup>st</sup> August, 1975). One day, after returning home, I wanted to take a bath and I pulled out a drawer from my underwear case. I stared at it and could not believe my eyes. In the drawer, there was all my underwear, washed and neatly folded. I became almost terrified upon seeing that. I had never asked the hostess for any of that. At that time, there was no word in Polish that would be the equivalent of the English word *privacy*. I made a desperate and futile, it turned out, attempt to find one. I know some would have been lenient with Mrs Z., but I just could not. If only I had been able to have a proper argument in Polish! That was another reason to learn Polish. Incidentally, during my first spring in Krakow, I met a physician, a doctor from the Medical Academy. Mrs L. took me in kindly, and her house from the interwar period, also in Dębniki, became my "day house". Even though I did not live there, I spent many hours there. I felt in her family as a member of the household, and I learnt much from them. It was Mrs L. who was my true Polish mother. As for my new flat by Kościuszko Mound, rented again through the university office, it was a bright room on the second floor in a new, luxurious villa overlooking the mound. The hosts proved exceptionally unpleasant. I do not think I exchanged one word with them within my 11 months spent there. After some time, one of my friends told me that I was living in the flat of a retired employee of the Security Office...

Allow me to return to Mrs Z. So, she was the perfect teacher, like a pool into which you would eagerly throw yourself at the deep end. She was the reality I tried to enter. I have always been a proponent of throwing students in at the deep end, sending them into isolation. There are language teachers who can give that. Those are people who lack in their lives any deep experience of learning a foreign language. They are obviously needed. Especially in the country, the motherland of the language they teach. A "deep end" teacher, a "hard wall" teacher, and, sometimes, a "rampart" teacher – such a teacher also plays an important role: by being a genuine, living component of the reality which produced the language. There is another type of language teacher: a person who has personally experienced the pains of absorbing a new language while being cut off from their homeland; they

know the ordeal of being born for the second time in a different world, if you will. That is a “ferryman” teacher, a “guide” teacher. Such a teacher understands the mind of a learner of a foreign language in a foreign environment. They know the processes and mechanisms behind a student’s work.

I am not in any way evaluating which type of a teacher is better. However, a “wall” teacher may sometimes discourage students. I stated that Mrs Z. was like a mother. Yet we were not in any way related, and, what is more, I was no child, even though my Polish might have been simple. Additionally, there is another issue there: the location where a language is taught. Is it being taught in its natural environment or in an environment detached from the world which has produced it? Polish language taught in Krakow and in Tokyo are two completely different things. For each of those situations, a different textbook and teacher is needed. I have always stressed that fact whenever I had the opportunity. I wonder whether teachers of Polish as a foreign language now understand me better than they did in the past. I am no longer referring to the “prehistoric” times, when I was starting to learn Polish. Teaching Polish abroad to people who did not belong to the Polish emigrant community has, until recently, been a rare and exceptional situation from which it was not worth drawing any conclusions.

As for literature, exactly six months after my arrival in Poland, I managed to reach the works of Teodor Parnicki. I will not discuss my experience with Polish poetry, which was also an important element of my life in Krakow. As for prose, capitalising on my pre-departure good experiences from reading Schulz, Gombrowicz, Iwaszkiewicz, and Andrzejewski, in Krakow I mainly read writers of the interwar period, and I eventually discovered Parnicki. The reading of his novels, e.g.: *Koniec „Zgody Narodów”* and *Słowo i ciało* brought me great pleasure because I was looking for something new and obscure which could enter world literature through my translations. That was a search for pupating world literature before it reached its adult form. I wished to cause that metamorphosis myself. Before that, I had fulfilled that dream to a small extent, by translating some minor works by Jan Parandowski, Leopold Buczkowski and others. Allow me to add that the author of *Nowa baśń* has not yet débuted in Japanese. Before senile dementia eventually seizes my mind, I need to publish at least *Koniec „Zgody Narodów”*. I have been saying that to myself, and others. Either way I wish to declare that from the spring of 1975, a major motivation of mine to learn Polish was the desire to be able to more quickly progress through Parnicki’s labyrinths, which were not only terribly elaborate, but also seemed without end...

Both the initial image of Polish literature that I had created in my mind in Tokyo based on non-Polish texts, and the second one, which I began to build in Krakow from Polish texts, were far from the popular textbook version of the perception of Polish literature which existed in Poland. That was completely natural as the previous two images were painted by me solely from the position and for the

benefit of a reader and translator of world literature. In my second year in Krakow, after my unforgettable experience at the première of *Umarła klasa* performed by Teatr Cricot 2 in Krzysztofory, another motivation germinated in me (finally!), i.e. the need to learn about the canonical image of Polish literature and the axioms governing it. That was related to the fact that as I progressed further into the Polish world and came closer to Poles, their emotions and thoughts ceased to be unimportant to me. What was real for Poles became real for me, too. Sometimes our lives got intertwined. I wanted to experience words as Poles did. In fact, I not only wanted to read and experience as Poles did, but also to be able to describe the world according to my own vision. I spoke of that desire 13 years ago in the Leopoldine Hall at the University of Wrocław. As a result, I began to study Polish literature as if I were going to take the Polish Matura examination. In Polish, the dominance of literature is exceptional. The language still remains strongly bound to and dependent on, if you will, the literature. On that entirely personal basis, “my” national Polish literature developed, growing not only as a set of details, but as a living organism through which I began to experience the world.

That was when my first and the longest visit to Poland concluded. One year and nine months experienced extremely intensively. Just after the events later termed as “Czerwiec 1976” [June 1976], on 29<sup>th</sup> July at 9:20, I boarded a train at Krakow Main Station, and I departed for Paris. I thought that I might never be able to return. At the same time, I felt completely satiated.

There are various motivations for learning a foreign language. Every student has their own unique set of desires and learning goals. Sometimes those are hidden, and a teacher will never learn about them. I myself do not confess to everything. As I reminisce about the beginnings of my adventures with Polish, it becomes clear that none of the motivations resulted from my being a Polish researcher, let alone a scholar or a scientist. That is understandable as I was not a Polish researcher. Never in my wildest dreams did I expect that 15 years later a Polish studies centre would form in Japan and that I would be employed there.

Over 40 years “my” Polish literature has been through various phases. It is still developing and transforming. Out of those 40 years, I have spent only 22 as a Polish researcher, a researcher in the institutional meaning. For the last two years I have again been a free, lone trafficker moving between Polish and Japanese texts. I have not forgotten about Parnicki, but I consider my current, more pressing, duties, almost my mission, to publish in Japanese the works of Kochanowski, Mickiewicz, Prus, and Leśmian, and that is what I have been doing. Why? The answer to that question requires a much longer discussion. So, maybe another time.

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*Tokimasa Sekiguchi*

OD JAPOŃSKIEGO SCHULZA DO POLSKIEGO PARNICKIEGO  
– W OKOLICACH ROKU 1974

**Słowa kluczowe:** język polski, literatura polska, przekład, polonistyka, Japonia, Japończyk, Bruno Schulz, Teodor Parnicki

**Streszczenie.** Najważniejsze dzieła Brunona Schultza i Witolda Gombrowicza zostały przetłumaczone na język japoński już w latach 60. XX wieku, głównie przez Yukio Kudō. Zostałem uwiedziony do tego stopnia przez te japońskie teksty, że zdecydowałem się porzucić literaturę francuską na rzecz polskiej literatury współczesnej. W 1974 roku przyjechałem do Polski na staż podyplomowy jako stypendysta rządu polskiego i podjąłem studia w zakresie literatury i języka polskiego na Uniwersytecie Jagiellońskim. Podczas dwuletniego pobytu w Krakowie mój obraz literatury polskiej przechodził różne fazy. Szybko minęła ta, która była ugruntowana na znanych mi wcześniej japońskich przekładach, potem rozpoczęło się moje „polowanie” na obiecujących autorów polskich nieobecnych jeszcze w światowej literaturze. Tak odkryłem pisarza płodnego, ezoterycznego i trudnego – Teodora Parnickiego (1908–1988). Niniejszy esej jest opisem mojego „przedzierania się” przez polszczyznę w owych czasach.