Introduction

The texts devoted to contemporary Polish literature published in *Colloquia Litteraria* form a certain incisive picture, the theme of which is experience. But this experience is not limited to individual cases.

The authors of these texts have been looking for records of experiences of oppression in the twentieth century and attempts to break away from them, in order to save man. The first shock came with the Great War (1914-1918). It ruined the European social and spiritual order, which turned out to be astonishingly fragile. Then came the time of totalitarianisms and the erosions of deeper layers of tradition.

Artists, as the texts selected show, choose different ways out of the catastrophe. Some follow the destruction in order to overtake it, and others try to rely on firm ground or on things which are foreknown, although they are invisible.

The picture of Polish literature of the twentieth century is dynamic, and not only because it has overflown into the twenty-first century, and the border between them is very fluid. After all, we are still trying to answer the questions asked by authors in the middle of the previous century. We are still discovering forgotten texts, verifying

hierarchies, and creating new interpretations. This dynamics is exciting, and yet we are trying to stabilize it, hence a dream of order, of establishing the canon of texts and phenomena.

The powerful experiences which have been brought by European and global catastrophes, which mankind has brought on itself, are like stones thrown into water, which create rings which touch us together and each of us separately. Every writer and every reader.

There is one more outcome of our interests, our associations and our works: there was an author in the nineteenth century who was strongly tied to tradition, but who sensed the turbulence of modernism. His name is, obviously, Cyprian Norwid. Contemporary Polish poetry often speaks with his language, and Norwid's poetry speaks on its behalf.

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