

THE POLISH LECTURE SERIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA, 2017-18

BY KYRILL KUNAKHOVICH



A packed house

During the academic year 2017-18, UVA's Center for Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies organized four events as part of the Polish Lecture Series at UVA. In the Fall semester, we welcomed Dr. Łukasz Michalski, director of the State Publishing Institute in Warsaw, who spoke about "Polish Culture under Nazism and Stalinism: Cultural Losses of 1939-1956." Dr. Michalski's talk attracted a standing-room-only crowd of students, professors, and community members. We were especially honored by the presence of two special guests from the American Institute of Polish Culture: Lady Blanka Rosenstiel, AIPC's founder and benefactor of the Polish Lecture Series, as well as Dr. Michel Pawlowski, AIPC's Chair for Polish Studies.

In the Spring semester, the Series featured three talks by leading American historians of Poland, all on the theme of Protest and Resistance. Dr. Kathryn Ciancia, Assistant Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, delivered the first talk, "Between Empire and Nation-State: Poland's Eastern Borderlands and the Interwar World." Dr. Ciancia is a board member of the Polish Studies Association, the leading professional organization for scholars of Poland in the US. Her presentation focused on Volhynia, a region currently divided between Poland, Ukraine, and

Belarus, to explore how the Polish Second Republic sought to consolidate a national identity after gaining independence.

Later in February, UVA welcomed Dr. Marci Shore, Associate Professor of History at Yale University. Dr. Shore is the author of numerous articles and books, including *Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw Generation's Life and Death in Marxism, 1918-1968*, the winner of the 2007 Kulczynski/Orbis Book Prize in Polish Studies. At UVA, she spoke about "The Solidarity of the Shaken': Poland, Ukraine, and the Metaphysics of Revolution." Her talk demonstrated the enduring legacy of Poland's centuries-long fight for freedom and self-determination. As Dr. Shore showed, the democratic protests in Ukraine in 2014 were heavily inspired by Poland's peaceful revolution in 1989. The packed audience included John R. Davis, Jr., US ambassador to Poland from 1988 to 1990.

This year's final speaker was Dr. Padraic Kenney, Professor of History and International Studies at Indiana University. Dr. Kenney is a past president of the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies, the preeminent academic organization in the field. He is also the author of six books about Polish history, including *Rebuilding Poland: Workers and Communists, 1945-50*, which won the Kulczynski/Orbis prize in 1998. Dr. Kenney's talk drew on his most recent book, *Dance in Chains: Political Imprisonment in the Modern World* (Oxford University Press, 2017). Entitled "A Community Behind Bars: Prisoners in Polish Politics," it discussed the experience of political imprisonment in Poland from the 19th century to the present day.

The Polish Lecture Series at UVA continues to enjoy wide popularity, with average attendance of 35-40 guests per talk. It is an invaluable resource for our students, who called the talks "fascinating," "compelling," and "enlightening." The Series has become well known and well respected across the University, with co-sponsorship from the Corcoran Department of History and the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures. It is also a tremendous asset for Charlottesville's Polish community: one community member wrote to say that it was "really an intellectual feast." As always, we remain grateful to Lady Blanka for making the Series possible, and look forward to a new slate of stimulating talks next year.



Dr. Padraic Kenney



Dr. Kathryn Ciancia



Prof. Dariusz Tolczyk, Dr. Lukasz Michalski, Lady Blanka Rosenstiel, Dr. Michel Pawlowski, Ms. Karen Nuelle

TIME FOR REPARATION TO POLAND

BY DR. MICHEL S. PAWLOWSKI

On October 17, 2017, Dr. Lukasz Michalski, Director of the State Publishing Institute in Warsaw, Poland presented a lecture entitled, "Polish Culture Under Nazism and Stalinism: Cultural Losses of 1939-1958" as part of the Blanka Rosenstiel Lecture Series at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. Dr. Michalski gave a riveting presentation to a standing room only crowd of students and faculty of UVA. He addressed a well thought out campaign of conspiratorial multiple crimes against civilization and humanity.

Poland's history and culture were significantly impacted due to the events of World War II when the country was invaded from the West by Germany (September 1, 1939) and shortly after by the U.S.S.R. from the East (September 17, 1939). Poland was then divided into two occupied zones under three different administrations, and in less than three months, Poland was incorporated into the Soviet Union.

Dr. Michalski pointed out that it is estimated between 6 million to 7.5 million citizens of Poland were casualties of World War II alone. What is specifically missing to date are records from the Soviet Union of Polish citizens lost or decimated during the War and its aftermath. If one were to compare this data with the U.S. population,

it reflects 0.35% of the U.S. population, however, this figure alone reflects an impact on over 13% of the Polish population during World War II.

To understand the real significance of this decimation of the Polish population, one has to examine the direct targeting of specific elements of the Polish population to crush the culture, history and national identity of the people by both the Germans and the Russians. By 1945, the following were targeted as the best and brightest of Polish people who were systematically eliminated: 39% physicians, 33% teachers, 26% lawyers, 28% priests, and 30% researchers.

This was meant to deal a cultural and historical blow to the identify of the Polish people and nation - a travesty and a systematically planned genocide. This is a crime for which both Germany and Russia need to be exposed on the international stage; a reprehensible war crime that demands retribution from both of these countries. Poland was essentially beheaded because of the loss of her elite.

The total national losses are not fully estimated today. There should be consideration given to reinstitute reparations from both German and Russian atrocities committed on Polish land. For example,

out of 957 historical buildings, 782 were destroyed. This equals 77% completely destroyed with all their cultural and historical material. Out of an estimated 50 million of all library resources, over 35 million, or 70%, were destroyed. More than 2,800 paintings by the European Masters were destroyed or stolen, over 11,000 Polish paintings destroyed or stolen, and 1,500 sculptures lost. In addition, over 15 million old and extremely rare books and documents were destroyed or stolen - 75,000+ manuscripts (including medieval ones), 22,000+ old printings, 25,000+ old maps, and 300,000+ graphic materials.

The above figures do not include irreplaceable musical instruments that the Germans burned or stole that include, just from Warsaw alone, about 500 grand pianos, musical libraries, priceless antiques, and melody/musical equipment. Untold numismatic collections of coins, paper money and medals were also destroyed or stolen. Over 26,000 school libraries and over 1,000 academic institution libraries were destroyed.

This was a massive criminal assault on Polish history and culture...a war on civilization. This deliberate act of cultural destruction did not stop after the war but continued during communist oppression until at least 1948 when the Russian Army withdrew from Poland.

During the years of 1944 through 1945, the cities that were the most important Polish centers of culture were Vilno, Poznan, Warsaw, Cracow, and Lvov. The cultural centers of Vilno and Lvov were lost, and the city of Gdansk was given to Germany. Poland was catastrophically changed to a country with a shattered infrastructure. This was a deliberate plan to crush and destroy cultural development.

Information is one of the four elements of national power. It is very important to understand that the destruction of culture was implemented through information warfare by nationalizing all of the bigger and more visible elements of a totalitarian society:

- » Press, magazines, publishing houses;
- » Galleries and museums;
- » Concert halls, philharmonic orchestras, professional orchestras, opera and ballet houses;
- » Artistic and public schools and academic systems at all levels;
- » Live theatre and movie theatres; and
- » Live multimedia broadcasting.

In essence, the State now maintained 100% control of all media, schools and universities, and nationalization of all books and libraries was an important means of deculturalization. The totalitarian society forced official styles in literature and “surrealism” in all arts. There was full control of employment by the State so that if you did not conform to the new cultural norm, you became a forced unemployed citizen where, as a result, you died of hunger or disease. This totalitarian oppression was depicted in Andrzej Wajda’s last film, *Afterimage*.

There was an imposed censorship on everything. The Communist Party made all decisions on all cultural life matters and an agreement from them was needed for anything, anywhere, at any time. They oversaw emigration policy so that there was forced migration in some instances where individuals did not conform to Party standards. Not only was publishing closely screened, but exhibitions and compositions, with the exception of the Catholic Church who were limited to events in small halls.

An example of strict cultural control is evident in the mid-1940s publication of *Tygodnik Powszechny (Catholic Weekly)*. Everyone was fired because it was classified as a rebel publication that did not conform to the Communist norm. Composer Andrzej Panufnik, poet Czeslaw Milosz and filmmaker Andrzej Wajda are examples of targeted artists. The Communists made all decisions on cultural life matters, and artistic events and social activities were delegated to no one. A living, breathing example of George Orwell’s 1984 scenario.

There are hundreds of examples of how State control led to persecutions, such as Labour Party Chairman Jerzy Braun and political activist and journalist, Rev. Jan Piwowarczyk who were imprisoned and persecuted by communist Secret Service officers. Other public figures who were totally banned from any public activity include sociologist Jan Szczepański, poet Zbigniew Herbert, playwright Jerzy Szaniawski, and resistance fighter Zofia Kossak-Szczucka. Historian Pawel Jasienica was reported to the SS, author Stefan Kiselewski was beaten by “unknown perpetrators,” and actor Jerzy Zawieyski and artist Antoni Slonimski died in strange circumstances. They all actively opposed censorship and communist actions.

Polish children were also targeted during Nazi oppression. During World War II, several thousand children were taken away from their families and forced to emigrate from South Poland to Germany where they were educated in the effort to eliminate their cultural roots. Where was and is the world’s outrage against this atrocity? Who were the specific individuals responsible for this?

Another cultural attack during Marshall Law occurred on December 13, 1981 when, for a 24-hour period, all phone lines were purposely put out of service. Over 1 million Polish people were impacted and more than 15,000 citizens were unable to call for an ambulance for medical issues and treatment. Many died or were permanently damaged and suffered long term consequences.

And yet, despite all the horrific acts, the cultural roots and soul of the true Polish people prevailed in the end.


Someone asked the question during the lecture, “Can culture be developed in a totalitarian regime?” The questioner did not understand that a society developed under totalitarianism is a culture that is against something, not for something. It is a culture that prohibits artistic expression in every venue and holds the throat of freedom of expression. *True artistic expression requires freedom*. There is always danger when you have State control of the population and expression in literature, music, and all of the

arts. In a totalitarian society you have no place to run; you are a captured victim.

This was beautifully illustrated in the powerful and masterfully made film *Afterimage* by Oscar-winning Polish director, Andrzej Wajda. It chronicles the life of Wladyslaw Strzeminski, iconoclastic artist and educator, whose work clashed with the Stalinist ideology of postwar Poland, and vividly recounts Strzeminski’s struggles with the darkening skies of totalitarianism. His story serves as an inspiration for all of us seeking the courage and strength to speak truth to power in today’s political climate.

Neither Russia nor Germany have paid reparations to Poland for their iron fisted attack on the Polish people and its culture. In one two month period, the Germans were responsible for the death of over 250,000 Polish people during the Warsaw Uprising. The Russians were positioned on the Eastern edge of the city to provide help to Poland, but they deliberately did nothing to save the citizen during the uprising.

It is important to point out that Dr. Michalski provided data and figures during the lecture which are cited in this article, but these are limited to documents that are, to a large degree, from Germany and whatever was left from the destruction of Polish property during the war. What is also not known is the extent of reports and data available from Russia. These records are not normal State public archives. Who knows what additional horrible atrocities the Communists visited upon Poland are secreted behind lock and key? In-depth research in their archives may be able to give us answers on their policies and decision making during World War II. Russia must open its archives for World War II research on what was done to the institutions, culture and people of Poland. It is time for Russia and Germany to pay reparation to Poland for her lost lands and properties and most of all for people who were killed, deported, tortured, sent to prison and were exposed to cruelty during the WW II and years of Russian occupation.



**POLISH CULTURE UNDER
NAZISM AND STALINISM:
CULTURAL LOSSES OF
1939-1956**

Talk by Dr. Lukasz Michalski
Director of Państwowy Instytut
Wydawniczy (The State Publishing
Institute) Warsaw, Poland

This lecture is made possible by the generosity of Lady Blanka Rosenstiel and the American Institute of Polish Culture.

OCTOBER 17, 2017
5PM-6:30PM
NEW CABELL 309

Co-sponsored by CREES and the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures as part of the UVA Polish Lecture Series.

Michalski Poster