

Literary and
Cultural Theory



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(Mis)translation and (Mis)interpretation: Polish Literature in the Context of Cross-Cultural Communication

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Europäischer Verlag der Wissenschaften

PREFACE

This collection of essays is devoted to various aspects of the presence of Polish literature and culture in cross-cultural and international contexts. As the title suggests, the essays are about the translation (and mistranslation), as well as the interpretation (and misinterpretation) of literary texts, cultural facts and even social interactions. All examples concentrate on Polish culture vs. British and American cultures.

No general literary or cultural theory is presented in the book. A series of case studies is presented to the reader. The first section of the book, entitled *English into Polish and Polish into English: Five Essays on Literary Translation*, is devoted to five examples of English translations of Polish poetry and Polish translations of English poetry. My intention was to present various problems of literary translation, especially archaization in modern translations of Renaissance poetry, the method of Romantic poetical paraphrase, and the traps of rendering the “easy” language of modern poetry into a foreign language.

The second section of the book is devoted to *Polish Culture in European and American Contexts from the Renaissance to the Twentieth Century*. The first three chapters discuss the issue of “hate speech” and cultural misunderstandings in the context of Reformation polemics, and the problem of pattern poetry, a rare combination of literature and visual arts which has functioned in European culture from ancient times to the present day.

The last five chapters deal with various issues of cross-cultural communication between Poland and America, i. e. the American reception of Old Polish literature, Polish discussion of the literary canon in the context of American debates, the problem of the national identity of “Polish” Nobel prizewinners, images of America in contemporary Polish poetry, and social and cultural misunderstandings between Poles and Americans as presented in a book written by an American author. This concluding review essay is not a serious scholarly treatise, but an attempt to make the reader realize that cultural misunderstandings and misinterpretations exist both in “high culture” and in everyday situations.

The problems of how to translate a John Donne poem into Polish, how to conduct a religious debate and how to communicate with a Pole if you are American exemplify one general problem: how to communicate effectively, despite linguistic, cultural and religious differences, and how to understand and translate the cultural heritage of the past to contemporary readers. I hope that answers to some of these important questions can be found in this book.