

***Complicating the Female Subject: Gender, National Myths and Genre in Polish Women's Inter-War Drama.*** By Joanna Kot. Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016. xx, 268 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$89.00, hard bound.  
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In her monograph, Joanna Kot concentrates on women's drama written between 1930 and 1938. The main aim of the book is to sketch out the positions of women in society (which is seen predominantly through essentialist lenses), and to recognize the possibility of a change offered through the critical reading of literary works. To do so the author selects eight plays, and her main criteria for this selection is that the dramas "focus on women in a non-traditional way" (ix). Two of the authors, Zofia Nałkowska and Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, are fairly well known. The rest of the scrutinized dramas are little known and in this way the book is an utter pioneering work in discovering the women's voice in the history of Polish drama and theatre. Among the better known works are Zofia Nałkowska's *House of Women* (1930), Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska's *Baba-Dziwo* (1938), as well as her *Egipitska pszenica* (1932), and Maria Morozowicz-Szczepkowska's *Sprawa Moniki* (1932), which caused a real theater sensation for her topic of abortion in a kind of *ménage à trois* circumstance. Only the above-mentioned texts have been published, the rest of the authors are almost forgotten. Meanwhile four of the dramas have never been published and exist only as typed manuscript format stored in theatrical archives, which adds credit to Joanna Kot's exceptional research. The further dramas analyzed here are Morozowicz-Szczepkowska's *Silent Power* (1933) and *Walący się dom* (1937), Marcelina Grabowska's *Sprawiedliwość* (1934), and Zofia Rylka's *The Deep at Ziemna* (1938). Joanna Kot's book offers not only the overview of the dramas, their receptions, and the context in which they were staged and performed, but also careful analysis of female characters in their ideological positions, since—as the author explains—the book's ultimate aim is in presenting "women's struggle to find their place, improve their social situation, and discover who they were in inter-War Polish society" (xx). We indeed have a chance to see the remarkable panorama of various characters that try to find their ways in a world constructed and ruled by men, in which women are reduced to the stereotypes of over-emotional, love-centered and domesticated creatures.

Among the most important questions these dramas are wrestling with are: the notion of control over women's bodies within traditional, heteronormative society (though no possible alternative to heteronormativity is ever discussed, while oppressive male-domination is stressed constantly); the notion of repression enabled by patriarchal women; the construction of motherhood as a control weapon intertwined with nationalism; and the overwhelming concept of love and emotionality. Answers as to how to resolve these problems are not offered by either the dramas or by Joanna Kot herself, seeing as the answers are understandably still difficult to arrive at, even for the contemporary readers, many of whom took part in the "black demonstrations" against recent attempts to further tighten the already radically harsh anti-abortion law in Poland. In this way, Joanna Kot's book is a superb cross-reference to the literary history of Polish women, and by delivering this first systematic scrutiny of Polish women's drama this book becomes an important addition to the debate on women's issues.

The significant comparative element of the book needs to be stressed: in background chapters, we learn not only about the Polish interwar generally dramatic situation, but also of the drama produced by women and its reception in other countries, such as Russia, Great Britain, and the United States. Although these contextual chapters could possibly be better fused with the analytical part of the book, they are very noteworthy: the overview of Polish interwar theater and

drama discourses, the biographical background of the authors, the reception and critical estimation of the authors' works. Meanwhile, some parts of the book could be developed further, especially the idea of essentialism and its connection to interwar Polish drama. Kot uses the categorization of essentialism as historical standpoints offered by Elizabeth Grosz, and juxtaposes them against the writers' position, which may be quite problematic since in many cases it feels quite one-dimensional and straightforward. The very notion of essentialism is here based on the binary division between genders, in which emotionality and compassion are inscribed into being a woman. Yet, at the same time, Kot touches upon many of the constructivist ideas of contemporary theory offered, for example, by Judith Butler. This can be explained in the light of the monograph's title, *Complicating the Female Subject*, which "warns" readers that the women's subject—if such exists, and of which the interwar writers were completely certain, hence their essentialist standpoints—needs further complications.

Despite the often overly-careful and thesis-like division of the chapters, as well as the frequently abrupt jumps between the dramas in place of a consistent flow of discourse dissecting the problems, Joanna Kot's book is a thought-provoking elaboration on Polish interwar dramatic execution of women's questions and it will be a valuable source of knowledge for further investigation. This is a timely book, which discusses the mechanisms of women's presence—and the very strategies for the silencing of women's voices by critical reception—as both writers and the characters in literary works.

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**Forefather's Eve.** By Adam Mickiewicz. Trans. Charles S. Kraszewski. London: Glagoslav Publications, 2016. 416 pp. Notes. Bibliography. €30.30, hard bound, \$23.50, paper.

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The challenge of teaching Polish literature via translation has always been one of finding enough quality works in English that are in print, critically informed, and widely available. It is precisely for this reason that the recent publication of Charles S. Kraszewski's translation of Adam Mickiewicz's dramatic masterpiece, *Dziady* (Forefather's Eve), is such welcome news. Kraszewski's effort is a valuable addition to a series of fairly recent translations, including several works by Juliusz Słowacki (*Ballydna*, *Agamemnon's Tomb*, *Beniowski*, *Kordian*) and selected poetry by Cyprian Kamil Norwid (*Poems*). The picture is far from complete, but the addition of these recent works to long-standing translations of Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz* and Zygmunt Krasiński's *Un-Divine Comedy* makes it possible for teachers of Polish literature in English-speaking universities to present a somewhat representative picture of Polish Romantic literature to their students. Add to this the value that such translations offer to non-Polish scholars of world literature and the importance of new works such as this is magnified.

As a translation, Kraszewski's rendition of Mickiewicz's original text is remarkable for a couple of reasons. First and foremost, the decision to publish *Forefather's Eve* in its entirety, including all of its assorted sections, such as the *Widowisko* (The Spectacle), *Upiór* (The Specter), and the *Ustęp* (Fragments), presents as a whole what Mickiewicz originally produced as disjointed pieces over the period 1823–32. This