

Introduction

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This monographic issue was inspired by the Year of Tuwim. Among those who accepted the invitation to write texts dedicated to the poet were distinguished scholars familiar with his works, representatives of national and international Polish and Slavic studies departments, as well as other institutions. By providing you with engaging interpretations of Tuwim's works, we wanted this issue to allow you to rethink matters which have always been related to the poet and, simultaneously, present problems so far omitted or unnoticed yet relevant to modern readers and those interested in culture. We also aimed at showing and recapitulating those readings of Julian Tuwim's works which function in the international academic community. This issue is also supposed to be an opportunity to compare various research attitudes, to present the main trends in the reception of the poet's writings; to invite discussion over intriguing aspects of modernist art: over the poet's biography, his creative attitude, his aesthetic and ethical choices, the impact of and interpretational stereotypes surrounding his work. Scholars interpreting the Skamandrite's works were interested in, on the one hand, the questions of identity, acculturation, a close-up and distanced view of the existential aspect of his choices and writings. On the other, they investigated the relevance of his legacy – found in and through the works of other authors – and the very mastery of Tuwim's wording, the brilliant artistic craft he achieved in a series of poetry collections, in children's poems, in a successful fusion with pop culture, in all aspects of his work which we now know there is no need to separate.

These are the two subject ranges which formed, in an unscripted way, from the articles we received; hence the decision to present them in two separate volumes. The current volume contains pieces that focus on the theme of identity, dedicated to existential and ideological aspects of Tuwim's creative biography. It also documents the – often surprising – turbulences in his reception, misunderstandings, conflicts which he created, and still does unexpectedly create through his statements, or his symbolic placement in contemporary scenery, be it back in the forties in Israel, when his manifesto *We, Polish Jews (My, Żydzi polscy)* met with strong criticism, or recently in Lithuania, where an attempt to name a street after the poet ended in a court of law, or now in Poland when the door to Tuwim's legacy is being opened with a postcolonial key, and in the spirit of a totalizing political correctness accusations of propagation of racist content in “Little Black Boy Mambo” are being made against the author.

The strength of this writing lies in the fact that it can be approached without an historical lens, or radiography equipment set precisely for the epoch's contexts. It can be viewed – essentially with no harm to Tuwim himself – after taking a step back, or not; it may be viewed from the inside of that which is the essence of a wide understanding of what “Polishness” is in all its twentieth century entanglements. It can also be viewed from the outside, or in the context of European and world culture. Tuwim's works, his difficult choices and his not always transparent decisions and dilemmas, as well as the turbulence in his contemporary reception have universal significance; they provoke a complex approach along with a comparative one, and comments that are very personal in nature. In essence, the collected writings say much about the trends of contemporary literary exploration, about the need to reach people through writing – to reach the rules and meaning of an exemplary, individualized existence – about the need to search for a real being in the creator, one which does not hide behind its creation, but instead communicates with us through it in a transparent, understandable manner.

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