

Writing the Polish Diaspora

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Maps and Shadows--A Novel about the Poles Taken to Siberia

I do a number of presentations each year about what happened to my Polish parents during World War II. I talk about how they and so many other Poles were put on trains and sent to work in the slave labor and concentration camps in Germany. I also talk about the Poles who were left behind, the brutal conditions they lived under during the war. Invariably, during the Q & A sessions after these presentations, someone from the audience will rise and say, "I never knew this happened."

I have been hearing this for years.



Aquila Polonica is a relatively new publishing house that is trying to do something about this problem. This press specializes in books about the Polish experience in World War II. They have published a number of outstanding books in recent years: the award-winning *The Mermaid and the Messerschmitt: War Through a Woman's Eyes, 1939-1940*, *The Ice Road: An Epic Journey from the Stalinist Labor Camps to Freedom*, and *303 Squadron: The Legendary Battle of Britain Fighter Squadron*. Each of these books has endeavored to tell a part of the largely unknown story of what it was like for Poles in the Second World War.

To this list, the press now adds its first novel, *Maps and Shadows* by the poet Krysia Jopek. Ms. Jopek's novel tells the story of what happened to the 1.5 million innocent Poles who were deported to forced labor camps in Siberia after the Soviets occupied eastern Poland at the beginning of the war. were taken over by the Soviets.

Focusing on the real experiences of her own family, she follows a mother, a father, a sister and two brothers from Poland to Siberia and beyond, writing of the brutal transport of the

Poles to Siberia, the years at hard labor there, and the hardships they experienced as they were eventually released by the Soviets to find their own way to freedom and security.

Ms. Jopek's narrative combines her own gift for lyricism with a straightforward narrative style that demands you keep reading. Telling her story from the points of view of four of the family members, she is able to give us a deep sense of what the experience was like for men and women, soldiers and poets, the old and the young.

Here are some of the opening passages in the novel. They are in the voice of Helcia, the daughter of the family and a poet:

Everyone has a story.

Some stories are difficult to believe, though true. Other accurate, yet dull. Some difficult to tell--apart from the others. One story often spills into another, echoes, diverges before crossing trajectories again. The skeins once separated, can fray. To isolate the variable can unthread the most composed, even the most vain.

This is my story and my younger brother Henryk's story. My mother Zofia's and my father Andrzej's. My youngest brother Jozef doesn't speak of these places. Somehow his memories were lost.

A story of war, shifting boundaries, alliances and ideologies. A story of mid-twentieth-century ice and burning sun.

Posted by [John Guzłowski](#) at 8:14 AM

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