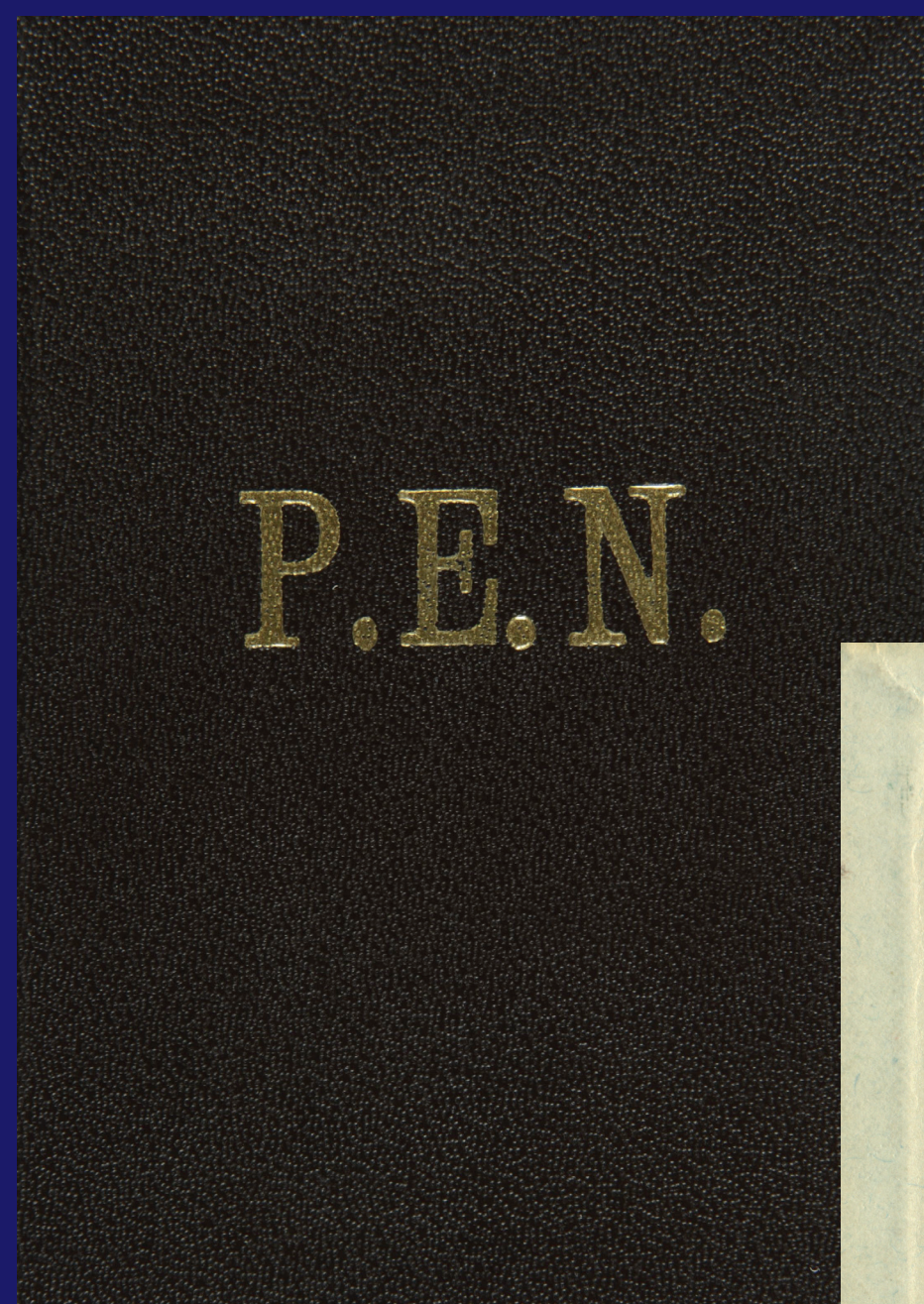


100

STULECIE
POLSKIEGO
PEN CLUBU

100 YEARS OF THE POLISH PEN CLUB

THE PEN CHARTER



Polish PEN Club membership card



Membership card of Władysław Bartoszewski, one of the presidents of the Polish PEN Club. Zofia and Władysław Bartoszewski Archive, Ossoliński National Institute in Wrocław

Literature knows no frontiers and must remain common currency among people in spite of political or international upheavals.

In all circumstances, and particularly in time of war, works of art, the patrimony of humanity at large, should be left untouched by national or political passion.

Members of PEN should at all times use what influence they have in favour of good understanding and mutual respect between nations and people; they pledge themselves to do their utmost to dispel all hatreds and to champion the ideal of one humanity living in peace and equality in one world.

PEN stands for the principle of unhampered transmission of thought within each nation and between all nations, and members pledge themselves to oppose any form of suppression of freedom of expression in the country and community to which they belong, as well as throughout the world wherever this is possible. PEN declares for a free press and opposes arbitrary censorship in time of peace. It believes that the necessary advance of the world towards a more highly organised political and economic order renders a free criticism of governments, administrations and institutions imperative. And since freedom implies voluntary restraint, members pledge themselves to oppose such evils of a free press as mendacious publication, deliberate falsehood and distortion of facts for political and personal ends.

BEGINNINGS OF THE POLISH PEN CLUB



The first president of the Polish PEN Club,
Stefan Żeromski.
First quarter of the 20th century.
National Library, Warsaw

A page of the weekly *Wiadomości Literackie*
(January 1925) with an article on the initiative
of establishing the Polish PEN Club

The international association of writers named the PEN Club was established in 1921 in London. Its origins lay in the experiences of the First World War and the need felt by writers to establish a fellowship of intellectuals. The Polish branch of the International PEN Club was created at the turn of 1924 and 1925 under the name of Polski Klub Literacki (literally: Polish Literary Club). Its founders included Emil Breiter, Bolesław Gorczyński, Wacław Grubiński, Juliusz Kaden-Bandrowski, Stefan Krzywoszewski, Jan Lechoń, Jan Lorentowicz, Bronisława Neufeldówna, Eugeniusz Popoff, Józef Relidzyński, Leopold Staff, and Stefan Żeromski.

The first president of the Polish PEN Club was its founder, Stefan Żeromski. This is how he introduced it in the weekly *Wiadomości Literackie* in December 1924: “I have received many letters with requests to establish a Polish branch. We must do it. It will be one of our windows on Europe.” Here’s how the press covered the resolutions taken at the writers’ meeting on setting up the new branch: “The prospective club should unite all literary associations in Poland and, being a branch of the central office in London, make a connection between Polish and international writers. As a representative organisation which unites all literary fractions, it should be apolitical. Through systematic work, it will become a platform for promoting Poland’s name abroad (...) to which, the proper management of the translations of Polish authors into foreign languages will contribute above all.”

The formal inauguration of the Polish PEN Club was held on 12 June 1925 at Warsaw’s Royal Castle, in the presence of the President of the Republic of Poland and the two speakers of the Polish Parliament.

THE 1920s

Report from a dinner hosted by the Polish PEN Club in honour of its honorary member, Waclaw Sieroszewski. Among the guests is Marshal Józef Piłsudski. *Wiadomości Literackie*, 1927, no. 9



Reception in honour of Thomas Mann during his visit to Warsaw on the invitation of the Polish PEN Club. In the photo: J. Kaden-Bandrowski, K. Wierzyński, J. Lechoń, F. Goettel, J. Tuwim. Warszawa, 1927. National Digital Archive

After the death of Żeromski in November of 1925, Polish PEN Club's presidency was briefly assumed by Jan Lorentowicz (1925–26). His successor was Ferdynand Goettel (1926–33) whose term of office was a period of building solid organisational foundations for the Polish PEN Club, which by then had already become an important force in the country's literary life.

In the 1920s, Polish delegates participated in three PEN International Congresses: in Paris (1925), Brussels (1927), and Oslo (1928). During the Paris Congress Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński and Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz placed special emphasis on the question of literary translations and proposed drawing up a list of books most worthy of translation, along with a register of competent translators.

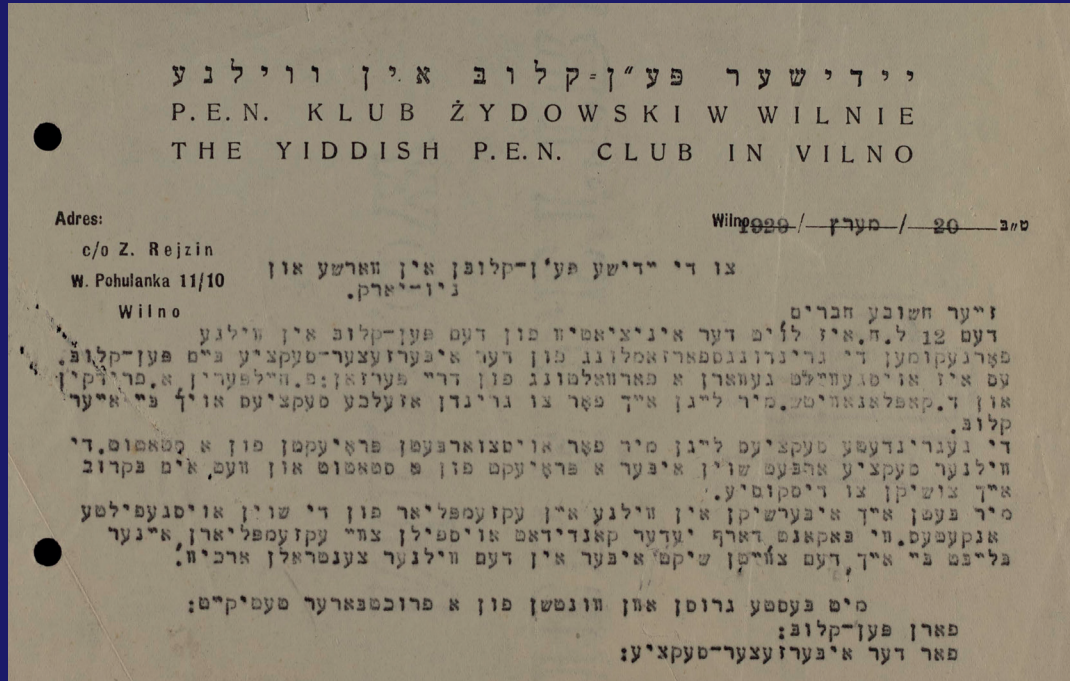
In 1927, Thomas Mann visited Warsaw at the invitation of the Polish PEN Club, becoming its first foreign guest. A reception in his honour was held in the salons of the Europejski Hotel. Responding to the speeches delivered in three languages by the hosts, Mann gave an extended address. Two days later, at a reception of the distinguished guest in one of Warsaw's restaurants, the writer Wilam Horzyca gave a lecture on E.T.A. Hoffman in German. A popular Berlin newspaper *Vossische Zeitung* reported that Mann's visit could become an important moment leading towards easing Polish–German relations and might significantly influence the post-war relations in Europe.

Other important foreign guests of the Polish PEN Club in the 1920s included the Russian émigré poet Konstantin Balmont, Vladimir Mayakovsky, and G.K. Chesterton.

YIDDISH PEN CLUB

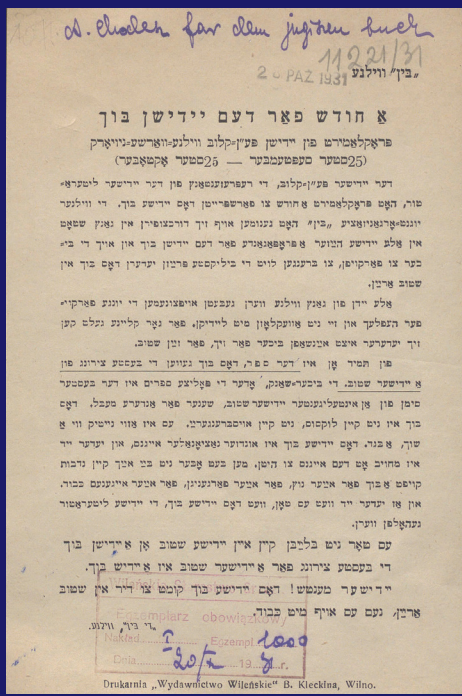
Leaflet promoting Jewish Book Month announced by the Yiddish PEN Club Vilnius-Warsaw-New York, 1931, prepared by the scout organization Bin (Bee). The scouts inform that they will go from door to door selling books at low prices. There are also passages about the importance of books in Jewish culture and the slogan that books are the pride of a Jewish home.

National Library, Warsaw



Letter from the Yiddish PEN Club in Vilnius to centres in New York and Warsaw, informing about the establishment of the Club in Vilnius and encouraging to set up local branches, 1929.

YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York



Drawings by poet and artist Ber Horowitz depicting participants of the 8th International PEN Congress in 1930. From right: the secretary general, followed by representatives of Argentina, France, Romania, China and Estonia. Literarisze Bleter, 4 July 1930, no. 27

P.E.N. Club Żydowski - literally: “P.E.N. Jewish Club” - was launched during the 1927 PEN International Congress in Brussels. The branch was officially founded at the beginning of 1928. Given the particular nature of Yiddish, a language not tied to any single state, the case was subtle from the formal point of view. The Yiddish language and literature were presented for the first time on the international arena at the ground-breaking 1928 PEN Congress in Oslo.

As Warsaw had already housed the Polish centre, Vilnius was selected for the seat of the Yiddish PEN Club, and the philologist Zalman Reisen became its first president. The original board included Joseph Opatoshu and Moyshe Kulbak. The Club soon opened a branch in Warsaw, with the novelist and poet Zusman Segalovitsch. The following branch was established in New York, where the representative was a playwright named David Pinski. In 1932, Sholem Asch was appointed the honourable president of the entire Yiddish PEN Club. The dispersal of Jewish centres reflected the trans-territorial nature of Yiddish literature. Soon the Hebrew PEN Club with a seat in Palestine spun off from the Yiddish branch.

In 1929 the Vilnius PEN Club set up a translation section with the ambition to gather Yiddish translators from all over the world, and published *P.E.N.-Klub Najes* weekly for some time. However, it was the Warsaw branch, headquartered at the Jewish Writers’ and Journalists’ Association that turned out to be the most active in the 1930s. It organised literary meetings, subsidised publications and, from 1937 onwards, endowed an annual award for the best literary transation into Yiddish.

The attempt to reactivate the Yiddish club in Poland after the Second World War, approved of by the president of the Polish PEN Club, proved unsuccessful. Only the New York branch survived the war and continued operation until the 1980s.

PEN Club



DOFINANSOWANO ZE ŚRODKÓW
MINISTERSTWA KULTURY
I DZIEDZICTWA NARODOWEGO



1930



Arthur Lynch and Ferdynand Goetel during the 8th International PEN Congress, 1930. National Digital Archive



President of the Polish PEN Club Ferdynand Goetel (right) with John Galsworthy at the Warsaw railway station, The 8th International PEN Congress, 1930. National Digital Archive



A group of Jewish delegates to the 8th International PEN Congress, among them Michał Weinzeieher and Scholem Asch with the Polish writer Stefania Zahorska, 1930. National Digital Archive

The 8th International Congress of PEN organised in Warsaw in June 1930 gathered over a hundred guests from 27 countries. Poet Kazimierz Wierzyński wrote on this occasion: “The congress of PEN Clubs in Warsaw is (...) a true parade of modern creativity, its intellect and nerves, judgments and impressions. It is an import of the forces determining in the countries they come from the thoughts and feelings experienced by modern and future generations. It is a fellowship of artisans who – expressing the genius of their nations – unite the modern man under the banner of his supreme praise and pride: culture and civilization (...). It is a gathering of the finest human material, their distilled skills, activities, and the will to make the world a better place.”

The inaugural meeting of the Congress was held in the recently opened Assembly Hall of the Polish Parliament. The Congress was opened by the president of Polish PEN Ferdynand Goetel, whilst John Galsworthy responded on behalf of the guests, and one of the addresses was given by the Speaker of the Sejm, Ignacy Daszyński.

The Congress hosted key figures of the international organisation, such as Catherine Amy Dawson Scott, Romain Rolland, Ernst Toller, and Benjamin Crémieux. The welcome note to the participants, as quoted by the journal *Pologne Littéraire*, reads: “Ladies and Gentlemen, you have arrived to a country that above all values freedom, that has offered its best forces to its case, and devoted the works of its greatest masters of the pen and the efforts of its greatest men of action. Having fought for freedom for a hundred years and being now able to grow in freedom, Polish creativity will welcome and honour any effort towards the improvement of human condition and the world’s fate.”

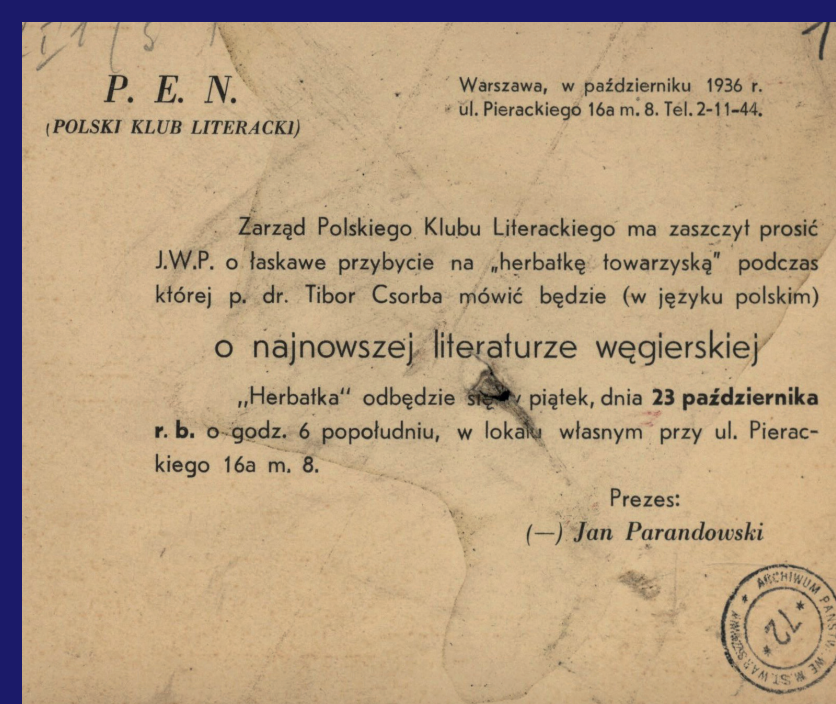
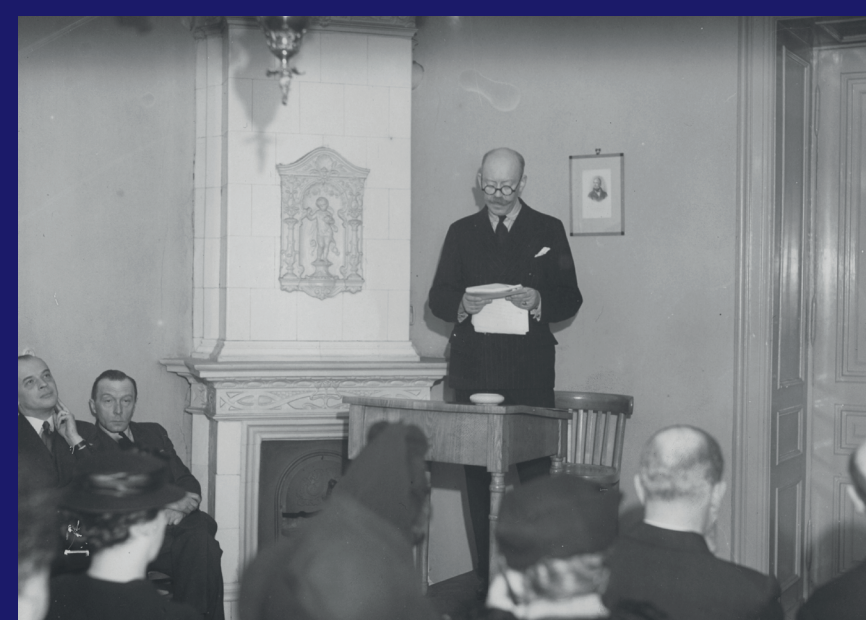
The last three days of Congress were devoted to visiting the country. The guests explored Warsaw and Kraków before the grand finale held in the Pieniny and Tatra mountains, with the official farewell ceremony by the scenic lake Morskie Oko. As John Galsworthy noted in *The Observer*: “The organisation of the Congress in Poland exceeded anything we have witnessed so far.”

THE 1930s



A group of participants at a reception hosted by the Polish PEN Club in honour of Scottish writers. Warsaw, 1932. National Digital Archive

Frank Savery, British Consul in Warsaw at the Polish PEN Club giving a talk on "Impressions from a journey to Greece", 1938. National Digital Archive



An invitation to a literary "five o'clock" organized by the Polish PEN Club, 1936. National Archive in Warsaw, the Korotyński Collection

The 1930s marked the time of intense activities of the Polish PEN Club, both at home and abroad. In 1931, in Brussels, at the invitation of the Belgian PEN, Juliusz Kaden-Bandrowski delivered a lecture on the role of literature in the rapprochement of nations. Polish delegation attended the congresses in Amsterdam (1931), Budapest (1932), Dubrovnik (1933), Edinburgh (1934), Buenos Aires (1936), Paris (1937), and Prague (1938), where the Polish PEN Club was represented by writers Zofia Nałkowska and Maria Kuncewiczowa. Perhaps the most memorable of these was the Paris congress, held in the challenging year 1937, when fascism was gaining ground. Particularly active among several members of the Polish delegation was the writer and journalist Antoni Słonimski, who, before the committee discussing the future of poetry, delivered a speech on poetry in totalitarian countries, stating with great passion that: "The wild tribes inhabiting today's Europe are not just in possession of magnificent machines for murdering people, but also of increasingly precise methods for killing human thought and independence."

The Polish PEN Club made a point of keeping close ties with foreign writers, and hosted such eminent figures as Victor Eftimiu, the president of the Romanian PEN Club (1934), Russian writer Boris Pilniak (1934), and Jo van Ammers-Küller (1937), a world-famous Dutch writer, with nine of her books having been translated into Polish by that time. Invited by the Polish PEN Club, Jules Romains arrived in Poland in 1937, and spent here many days filled with lectures, interviews and social gatherings.

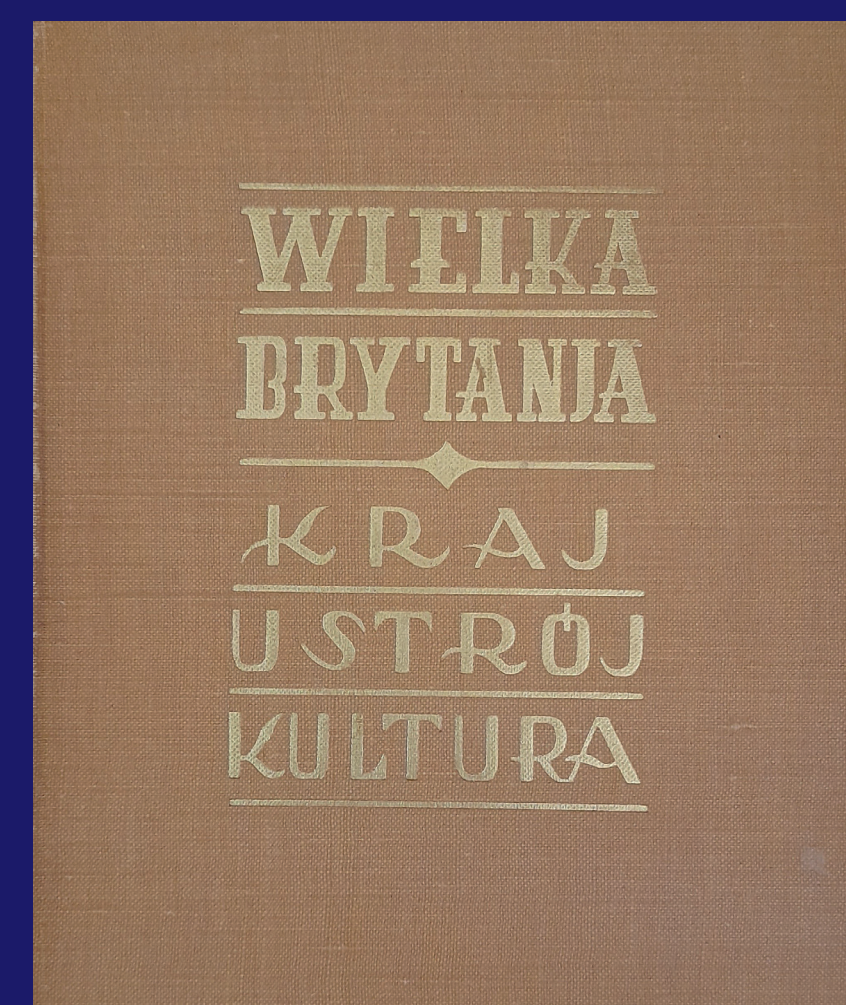
On the eve of the war, in the summer of 1939, representatives of the Polish PEN Club, Jan Parandowski and Juliusz Kaden-Bandrowski, travelled to France. At the French PEN Club, Kaden gave a speech in which he underlined the humanistic foundations of the friendship the Polish and the French had shared for centuries.

In 1939, the Polish PEN Club had 155 members – 16 more than at the turn of 1925 and 1926 when its first roll was taken.

THE SECOND WORLD WAR



Information about the pamphlet *Warsaw is perishing!* issued by the Polish PEN Club in exile. *Dziennik Polski i Dziennik Żołnierza* (London) 1944, no. 213



Cover of *Great Britain. Country – System – Culture*, a book published by the Polish PEN Club in Glasgow during World War II

During the Second World War, the Polish PEN Club continued its operations even though its members dispersed and lived in different countries and conditions. Some remained in Poland and actively joined the underground. Ferdynand Goetel, the former president, launched the famous diner for writers and artists at the Warsaw PEN Club headquarters (1940–44). The members who made their way to the West established the PEN Club in exile: first in Paris, where the then president of the PEN Federation, Jules Romain, offered Polish writers hospitality, and after the capitulation of France – in London.

Maria Kuncewiczowa, the vice-president of the Polish PEN Club, was its *spiritus movens*. The Club assigned itself a task of influencing the opinion of the Western world through contacts with British writers, as well as through media and public appearances – one of them during the wartime PEN Congress held at the initiative of the Polish PEN Club in London in 1941. At the congress, Kuncewiczowa made the following appeal: “Our deepest respect and most sincere sympathy go to our colleagues in the countries that have fallen victim to the German invasion. Our thoughts turn to those forced to stop writing, those who have joined underground and guerrilla organisations, and who are made to pay for the independence of their spirit with tortures and imprisonment. Poles, you who have the experience of the bitter century and a half when literature went so far beyond art for the Polish Nation, becoming its moral and political weapon, call out to the writers deprived of their sacrosanct right: hold fast!”

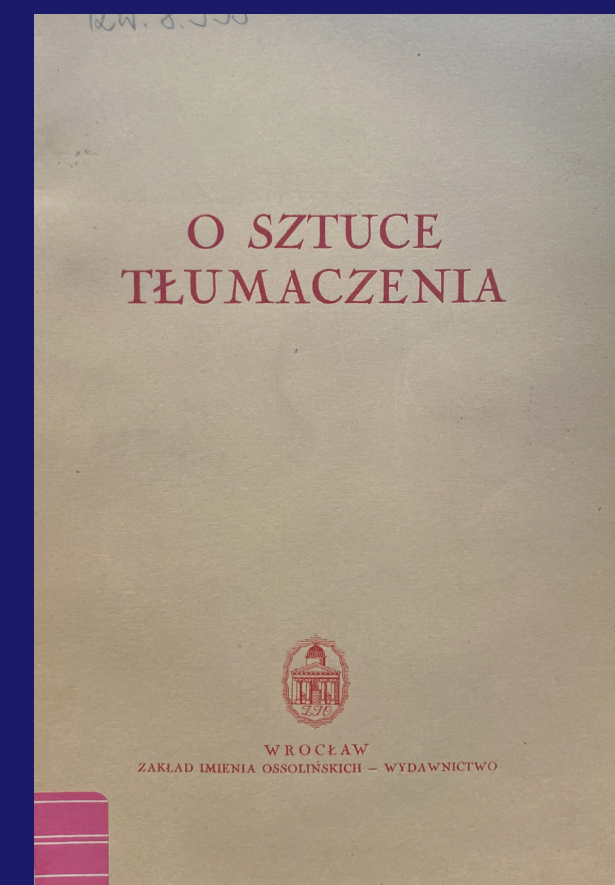
The émigré Polish PEN Club was also very active during the Warsaw Uprising and called on the politicians and people of culture to help the dying city. In March 1945, the Board of the Polish PEN published a resolution in support of the statement of the Polish government-in-exile in London, condemning the decisions of the Yalta Conference that led to the division of Europe into the free world and the Soviet zone of influence.

POETS, ESSAYISTS, NOVELISTS... AND TRANSLATORS!



Cover of the essay collection
On the Art of Translation (1955)
published by the Polish PEN Club.
In 1975 the Polish PEN Club published
Artistic Translation:
On the Art of Translation. Book Two

Jan Parandowski, the president
of the Polish PEN Club presents
Fabijonas Neveravičius with an
award for his Lithuanian translation
of Reymont's *The Peasants*.
Warsaw, 1939. National Digital Archive



The situation of translators and the question of literary translation were among the central interests of the Polish PEN Club that initiated discussions on the role of translations in the literary life and the problem of publishing piracy already in the 1920s. At PEN congresses, Polish delegates raised the question of the prestige of professional translators. As early as in 1929, the Polish branch awarded first prizes for translation. The first recipients were Aniela Zagórska (1929) for her translations of the works of Joseph Conrad, and Paul Cazin (1930) – translator of Polish literature into French awarded for his latest work: the French translation of Adam Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz*. From that time, awards for translators were granted every year for decades.

In 1934, the board of the Polish PEN Club appointed the Translation Quality Committee with an objective to perform critical assessment of published and staged translations. The committee was an opinion-forming body and, in exceptional cases, could even warn authors against individual translators and publishers.

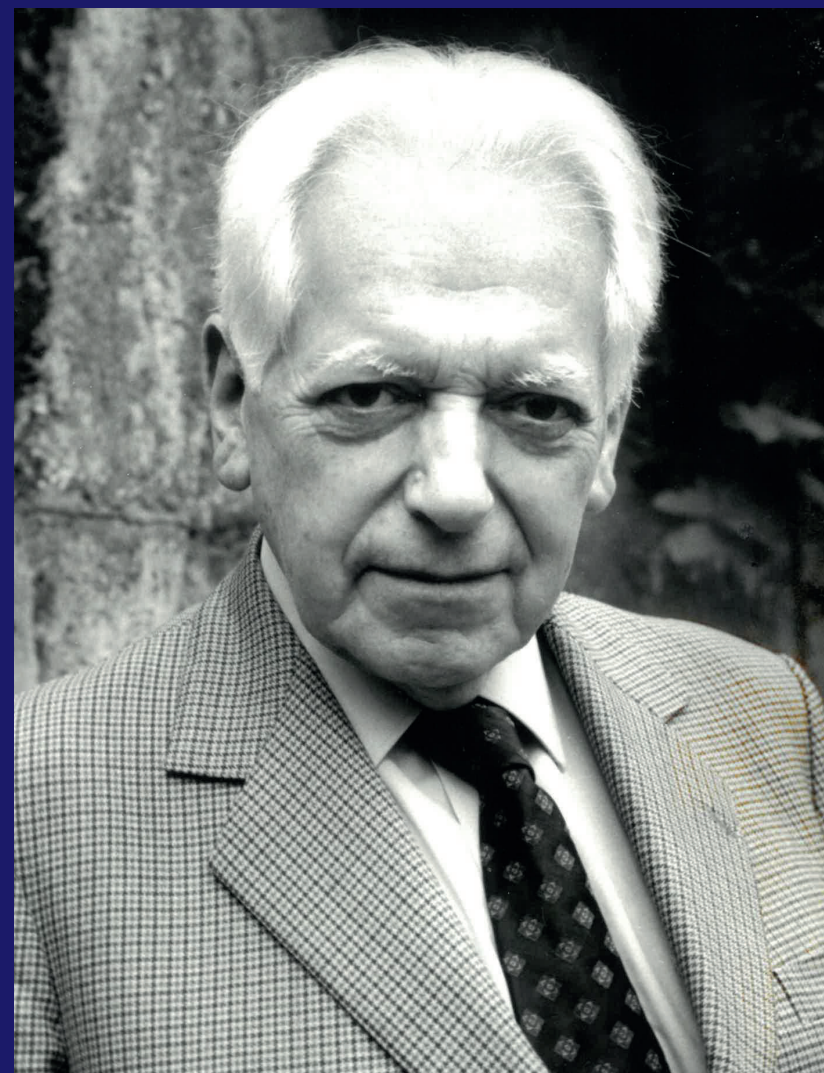
In 1958, the Polish PEN Club organised the First International Meeting of Literary Translators. Held in Warsaw, it gathered several scores of participants from 20 countries and prompted setting up the PEN Club's Translators Section, which operated until 1971.

Discussing the acronym "P.E.N.", Jerzy Zagórski, the long-term vice-president of the Polish branch, said: "It was much harder for translators to find their place within the club's nomenclature, and only over time have they managed to gain equal treatment with the authors of original works (...). The letter 'T' has not as yet been added to the name of our organisation, even if it suited many languages (French *traducteur*, English *translator*, Italian *traduttore*, Spanish *traductor*, and even Georgian... *targmani*). And rightly so, because to be considered a real writer, a translator cannot treat their skills mechanically, but as an essayist set out their method, or as a poet or novelist practice or at least attempt to practice their own creative work, before eventually devoting themselves chiefly to translation: a calling no less responsible than the other."

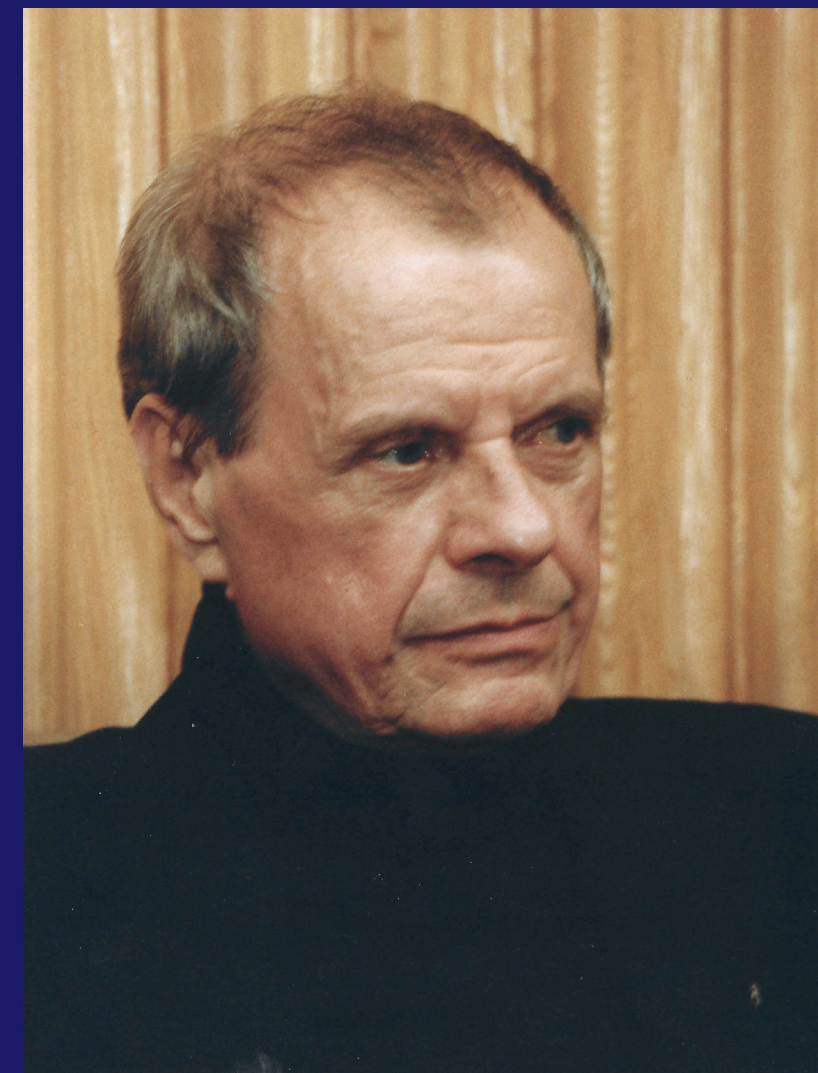
PRESIDENTS OF THE POLISH PEN CLUB



Juliusz Żuławski



Artur Międzyrzecki



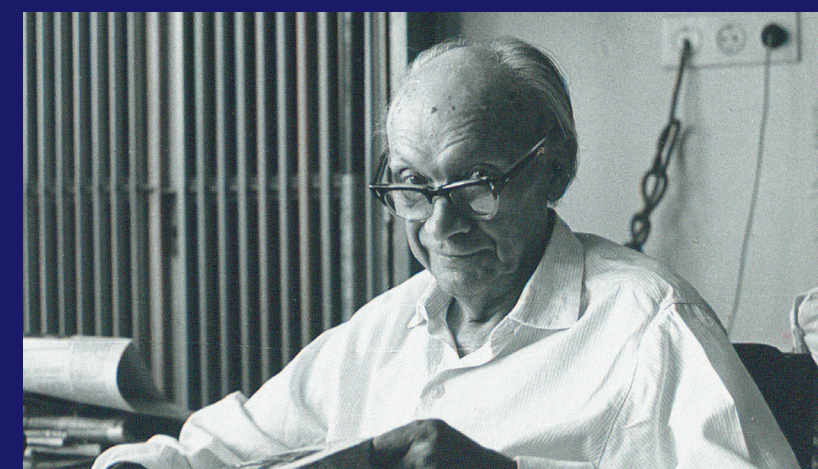
Janusz Maciejewski



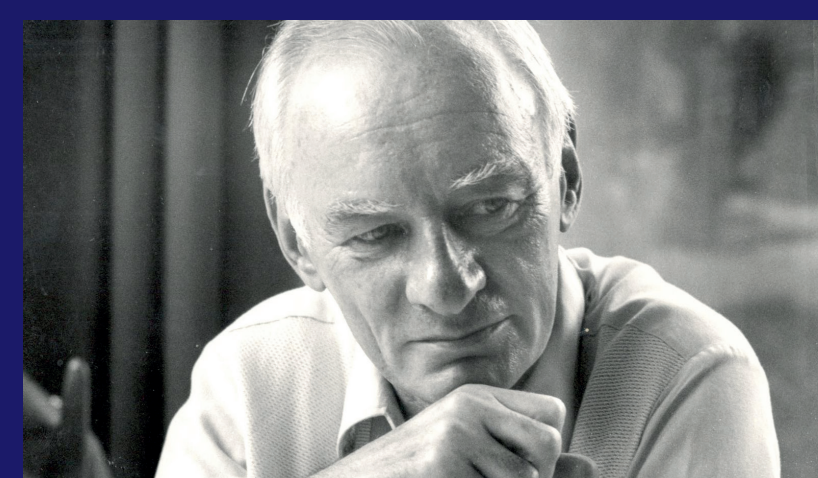
Władysław Bartoszewski



Adam Pomorski



Jan Parandowski



Jacek Bocheński

1925 – Stefan Żeromski
1925–1926 – Jan Lorentowicz
1927–1933 – Ferdynand Goetel
1939–1945 – Maria Kuncewiczowa
(de facto president of the émigré Polish PEN Club)
1933–1978 – Jan Parandowski
1978–1990 – Juliusz Żuławski
1991–1996 – Artur Międzyrzecki
1997–1999 – Jacek Bocheński
1999–2001 – Janusz Maciejewski
2001–2009 – Władysław Bartoszewski
2010–2022 – Adam Pomorski
Since April 2022 – Marek Radziwon

PRIZES AND AWARDS



Presentation of the Parandowski Award to Tadeusz Różewicz. Monika Żeromska and the laureate.
Warsaw, 28 September 1998.
Photo: K. Wojciechowski.
Archive of the Polish PEN Club



Presentation of the Pruszyński Award to Jan Nowak-Jeziorański.
From left: Janusz Maciejewski, the laureate, and Jadwiga Strzelecka.
Warsaw, 10 April 2000,
Photo: W. Szulecki.
Archive of the Polish PEN Club



Presentation of the Jan Strzelecki Award to Jan Karski. The laureate and Jacek Kuroń.
Warsaw, 17 May 2000.
Archive of the Polish PEN Club

The Polish PEN Club honours prominent works in the field of literary translations from and into Polish, and in other fields of literary and editorial work. In his exegesis of the meaning of the Club's name, Jerzy Zagórski explained: "in our language (...) the word *pisarz* (writer) also starts with the letter 'P', and, furthermore, extends to the persons writing for the stage, and opens to ones writing in the domains of film, radio and TV, and for all and any other publishing media that may arise. The letter 'E', apart from essayists, may easily also accommodate editors, and thus our Club welcomes all people from the publishing world who, by their dedication to literature, prove themselves worthy allies of the writers".

The awards and prizes have for many years been ensconced in the statute of the Polish branch. They are a crucial tool for influencing the public opinion. Some of the awards were short-lived, some others were awarded just once. Nevertheless, the Polish PEN Club has consistently awarded editorial prizes, the Ksawery Pruszyński Award for reportages, short stories and essays, and the Jan Parandowski Award for a lifetime of literary achievement. Its recipients include Zbigniew Herbert, Leszek Kołakowski, Stanisław Lem, Andrzej Wajda, Maria Janion, Ewa Bieńkowska, and Adam Michnik.

POLISH PEN CLUB

UNTIL THE END OF THE 1970s



Edward Said (right) and Andrzej Braun at the Polish PEN Club during an opening of a conference on Joseph Conrad. Warsaw, 4 September 1972.
Photo: D. Łomaczewska. Archive of the Polish PEN Club



Borys Conrad (Joseph Conrad's son) and Jan Parandowski (right) at the Polish PEN Club, 1972.
Photo: D. Łomaczewska. Archive of the Polish PEN Club



An evening celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Polish PEN Club. From left: Paweł Hertz, Jerzy Sito (in the background), Antoni Słonimski. Warsaw, 26 November 1975.
Photo: D. Łomaczewska. Archive of the Polish PEN Club

Receptions, soirées, and balls, frequent in the early history of the Polish PEN Club, became scarce in comparison to regular discussion meetings and literary readings in the post-war era.

In 1946, Jan Parandowski represented the Polish PEN Club at the Congress in Stockholm, and a year later, the first post-war Board of the Polish PEN Club, chaired by Parandowski, could eventually be established. Not all members returned to their homeland after the Nazi German occupation. Some who did not return to Poland, joined the ranks of the Writers in Exile centre, established by decision of the International Congress in Venice (1949) and gathering émigré writers of all nationalities.

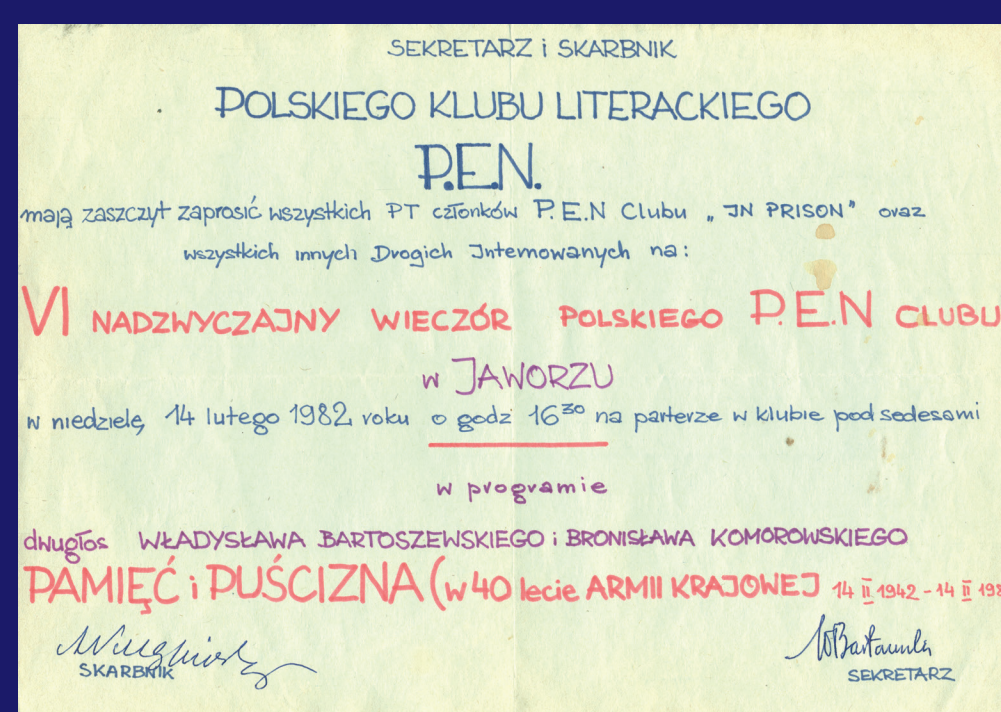
In 1957, the Polish PEN Club gained headquarters in the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw. The policy of passports withholding in the communist Poland reduced the numbers of Polish delegates at international congresses. Nonetheless, the Polish PEN Club became an active centre of intellectual activity in Poland, and the inability to travel abroad was remediated by inviting numerous foreign guests such as Carlo Verdiani, Michel Foucault, Romain Gary, Hans George Gadamer, and Erskine Caldwell.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the Polish PEN Club published ten issues of the French-language yearbook *Bulletin des Livres Nouveaux et Pièces de Théâtre* which, in line with its title, presented and discussed new Polish writing not only by PEN Club members. Moreover, in the 1960s and 1970s, Irena Parandowska initiated the organisation of literary exhibitions devoted to writers' creative process.

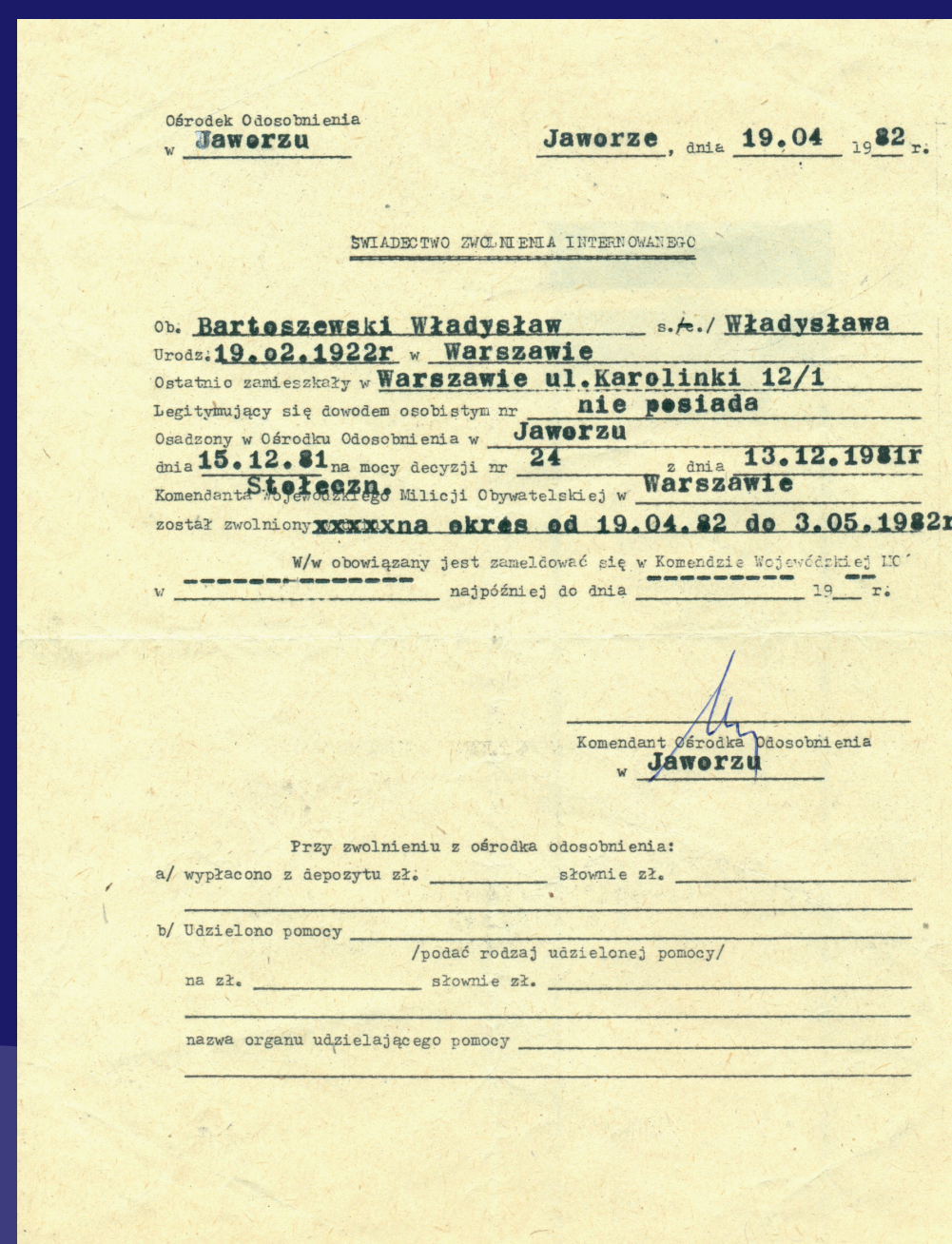
In March 1968, after a student protest rally at the Warsaw University was attacked by the law enforcement forces, the Board of the Polish PEN Club published a resolution whereby it demanded state protection of the students against the brutality of these forces.

The Club's membership stood at 117 in 1958, rose to 153 in 1964, and reached 230 by 1979.

CONSIDERED DORMANT (1981–88)



Handwritten invitation to a meeting organized by members of the Polish PEN Club at the Jaworze internment camp, 14 February 1982. The programme included a conversation between W. Bartoszewski and B. Komorowski on “Memory and Legacy (the 40th anniversary of the Home Army)”. Archive of Zofia and Władysław Bartoszewski, Ossoliński National Institute in Wrocław



The order to 'detain and escort' Władysław Bartoszewski at the day of the Martial Law imposition, 13 December 1981. Archive of Zofia and Władysław Bartoszewski, Ossoliński National Institute in Wrocław



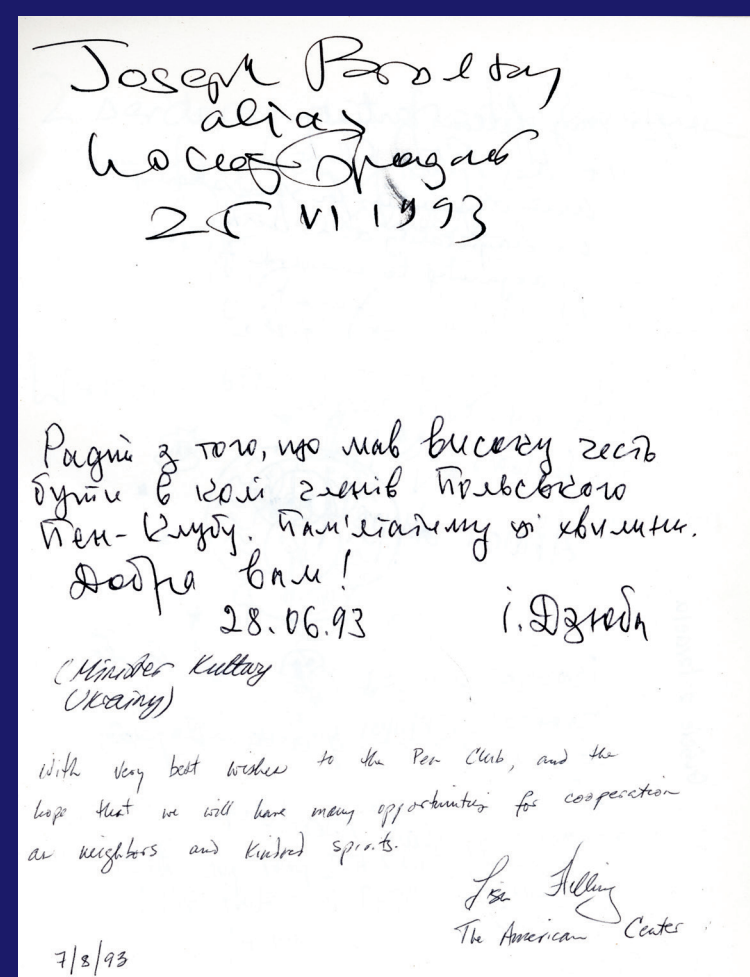
Certificate of Władysław Bartoszewski's release from internment, 19 April 1982. Archive of Zofia and Władysław Bartoszewski, Ossoliński National Institute in Wrocław

In December 1981, the activity of the Polish PEN Club was suspended pursuant to the resolutions of Martial Law in Poland, and its premises taken over by the authorities. The wave of internment swept some active members of the Club to detentions centres: mostly to Jaworze, and later also to Darłówek. Despite challenging conditions, they organised lecture sessions there, and circulated small hand-made leaflets informing about the upcoming meetings of the “internmental PEN Club”. The organisers of these events included the then secretary Władysław Bartoszewski, Andrzej Szczypiorski, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Bronisław Geremek, Andrzej Drawicz, and Wiktor Woroszyński.

PEN centres, notably the English and French ones, offered support by accepting the writers in internment as their honorary members, and sending letters of protest and petitions to the Polish authorities. The president of the International PEN Club, Per Wästberg, visited Poland under Martial Law on a mission to learn the needs of his Polish colleagues. Throughout the Martial Law, foreign PEN centres supported Poland by sending food, clothing, and medication aids. Financial support came from PEN’s Emergency Fund, while the Polish “illegal” Board devoted itself entirely to relief and welfare activities.

In this difficult period, the Polish PEN Club turned to the authorities of PEN International with a request for the Polish branch to be “considered dormant”, as every national branch of PEN may be suspended in this way whenever the authorities prevent its operations or pose a threat to its integrity. The Polish PEN Club remained “dormant” until 1988.

AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY



Joseph Brodsky's entry in the Polish PEN Club guest book, 1993. Archive of the Polish PEN Club



Joseph Brodsky at the Polish PEN Club. Warsaw, 25 June 1993. Photo: W. Szulecki. Archive of the Polish PEN Club



Meeting with Czesław Miłosz. Warsaw, 28 May 1990. From right: Artur Międzyrzecki, Czesław Miłosz. Photo: Z. Pomaski. Archive of the Polish PEN Club



Meeting with Friedrich Dürrenmatt. From right: Jacek Bocheński, Friedrich Dürrenmatt. Warsaw, 8 May 1990. Photo: Z. Pomaski. Archive of the Polish PEN Club

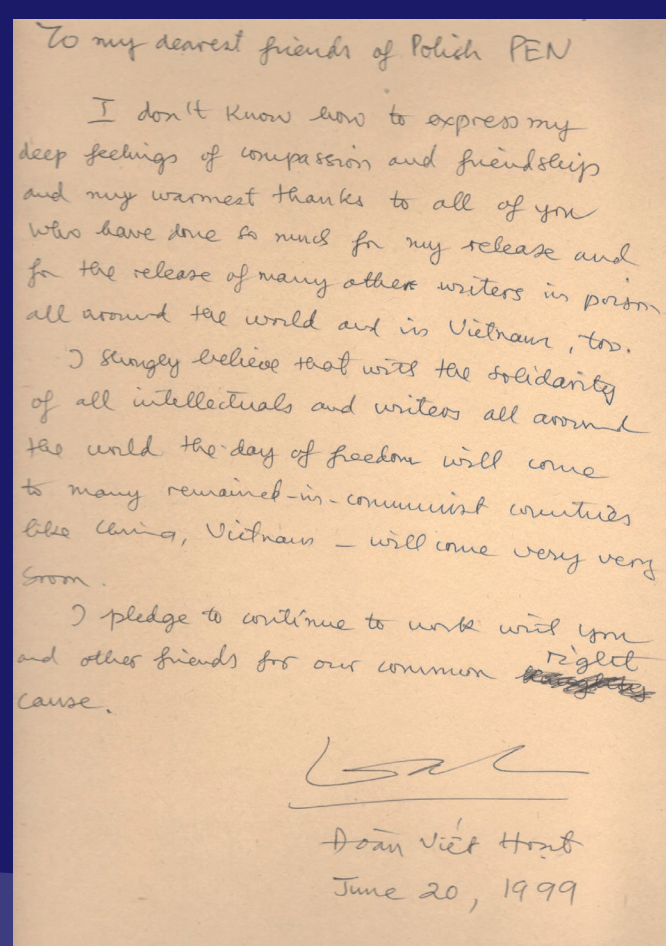
The Polish PEN Club reinstated its activity on 19 September 1988. In 1990, it made its headquarters at the Warsaw's House of Literature. This is where, for over 35 years, the Polish PEN Club has continued the finest traditions of the salon of socially engaged intellectuals. "The successive meetings in defence of civil liberties, human rights, the ethos of intelligence, cultural tradition, and intergenerational bonds; discussing Polish history, language development, threats posed by newspeak, and European integration; as well as soirées dedicated to literature of various other nations including Belarusian, Lithuanian, and Ukrainian, pointed to the most critical issues troubling an increasing number of people gathered around the Polish PEN Club" (Iwona Smolka).

In 1999, at the initiative of its president, Artur Międzyrzecki, the Polish PEN Club organised the 66th International Congress in Warsaw under the motto of *Farewell to the 20th century*. Ryszard Kapuściński, at the time member of the board, remarked that: "Regardless of all the transitions, challenges, and turmoil in the world, the question of culture remains the same, invariable: it is about saving the human with all the potential inner wealth, allowing the human to channel the energies towards goodness, understanding of the other, and the full realisation of humanity".

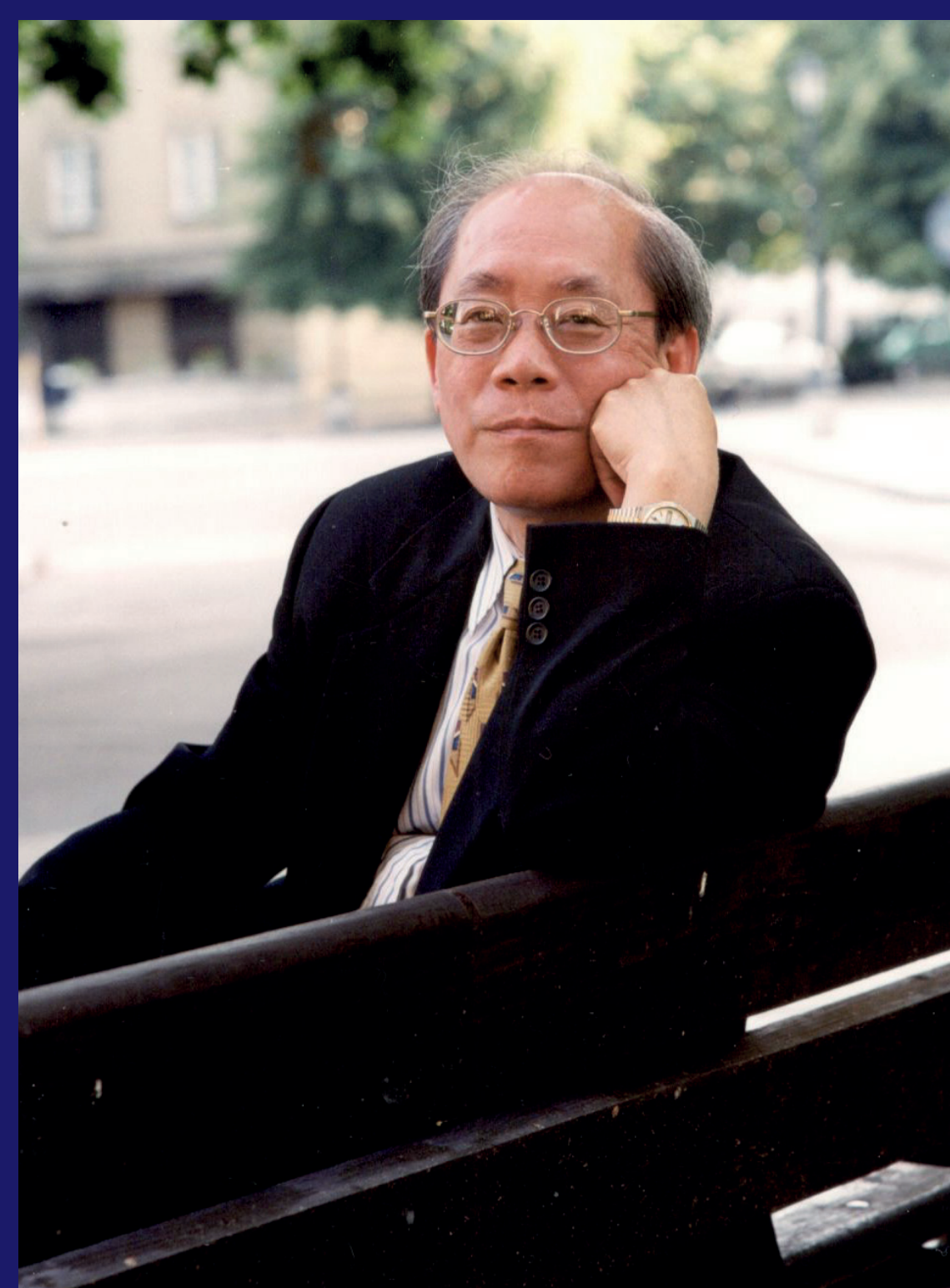
WRITERS IN PRISON COMMITTEE – THE POLISH SECTION



Tran Thi Thuc, wife of Doan Viet Hoat, during a press conference on Vietnamese prisoners. Polish PEN Club, Warsaw, 21 September 1995. Photo: J. Szulecki. Archive of the Polish PEN Club



Doan Viet Hoat entry in the Polish PEN Club guest book, 1999. Archive of the Polish PEN Club



Doan Viet Hoat. Warsaw. 1999. Photo: K. Wojciechowski. Archive of the Polish PEN Club

The PEN International's Writers in Prison Committee (WiPC) was established in London in 1960. Over the years, national committees were appointed in dozens of national branches, in close cooperation with the central office in London. The Polish section was officially accepted by the WiPC in 1991. With translator Anna Trzeciakowska at its helm, the Polish branch provided help to three Vietnamese intellectuals sentenced to long-term prison sentences: Catholic journalist Nguyen Van Tan, Buddhist scientist and poet Dong Van Kha, and poet To Thuy Yen. They were admitted to the Polish PEN Club as honorary members, a fact presented, among others, to the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Polish branch issued letters and appeals concerning the prisoners to the highest Vietnamese authorities, and, in 1992, all three imprisoned intellectuals were freed.

Continuing the support of the adopted Vietnamese members (To Thuy Yen and Nguyen Van Tan soon emigrated to the US), the committee extended its protection over another three imprisoned Vietnamese writers, awarding them with the status of honorary members too. They are Doan Viet Hoat – professor of Buddhist University, Pham Thai Thuy – journalist, and Le Duc Vuong – poet. The Polish branch untiringly informed the public of the prisoners' horrific ordeals. A press conference and petition signing campaigns were organised. After several years worth of effort, Professor Doan Viet Hoat was released in 1998 and arrived as a special guest in Warsaw for the 66th International Congress in 1999.

Every 15 November, PEN celebrates the annual Writer in Prison Day. Every year, on that day, PEN publishes a report on the persecution of writers around the world.

Antoni Słonimski at a reading celebrating his 80th birthday. Słonimski talking to Maria Korniłowicz. Warsaw, 3 November 1975. Photo: D. Łomaczewska. Archive of the Polish PEN Club



At the Polish PEN Club – from left: Wisława Szymborska, Małgorzata Baranowska, Ludmiła Marjańska, 1996. Photo: W. Szulecki. Archive of the Polish PEN Club

„PEN Club by no means does gather all writers, nor does it set itself that goal. What it does seek is to gather those who write all over the world as communities. Following from the above is mutual tolerance based on respect for views whose proclaimers do not renounce mutual respect, and racial, religious and political tolerance. Freedom of thought is the essential condition for mutual understanding. This is how the founders of PEN understood their participation, and this is what their successors endeavour to pursue. The Polish branch has always been faithful to this principle”.

Jerzy Zagórski

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The organisers wish to acknowledge the following people for their assistance with the exhibition or for permission to use the materials: Piotr Bachurzewski, Marcin Barcz, Maria Bereśniewicz, Daniel Biedrzycki, Marta Herling, Michał Komar, Julia Konopka-Żołnierczuk, Piotr Krasnowolski, Natalia Krynicka, Małgorzata Maruszkina, Małgorzata Naimska, Grażyna Pawlak, Anna Piotrowska, Adam Pomorski, Karolina Szymaniak, Maryla Śledzianowska.

Exhibition co-financed by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage.