



03.11.1924

Władysław Reymont receives Nobel Prize for Literature

After Poland regained independence, Polish culture, until then partly created in hiding or abroad, began to develop dynamically in the country itself. Key writers of the time included Stefan Żeromski, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, Zofia Nałkowska, Zofia Kossak-Szczucka, Maria Dąbrowska, Melchior Wańkowicz, and Pola Gojawiczyńska. The Polish candidate for the 1924 Nobel Prize for literature was an older-generation writer Władysław Reymont for his novel *The Peasants*. Notably, the Swedish Academy usually needs time to become familiar with translated works of foreign writers yet Polish creators had been promoted in Scandinavia much earlier by a Polish patriot and nun Mother Urszula Ledóchowska (a saint of the Catholic Church).



As for poets, those most important in the interwar Poland were Jan Lechoń, Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, Bolesław Leśmian, Leopold Staff, Kazimiera Hłakowiczówna, Julian Tuwim, Kazimierz Wierzyński, and Czesław Miłosz. Serious works were written at the time as well as light cabaret pieces.



Polish theatres staged plays by Jerzy Szaniawski, Karol Herbert Roztworowski and Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (Witkacy). Thanks to unique theatrical inventions by Leon Schiller, Wilam Horzyca and Juliusz Osterwa theatres became centres of cultural life in the Second Polish Republic.

The cinema was also massively popular, a new form of entertainment for the Poles. In the late 1930s, there were around sixty cinemas in Warsaw alone and around 400 across the country. The names of actors and singers as well as new films were known by both large cities and small towns.

Sport became another entertainment for the masses. Already in 1921, the Polish national soccer squad played its first match ever. They lost 1:2 to Hungary, yet since then emotions evoked by successes and defeats of Polish athletes in various disciplines were shared by crowds of supporters, also via the radio. They, just like actors, were idols of young Poles. Sports clubs were mushrooming and physical education became an important aspect of peoples' upbringing.

In the interwar period, great Polish painters were active, such as: Julian Fałat, Jacek Malczewski, Józef Pankiewicz, Wojciech Kossak, Witkacy, Leon Chwistek, and Władysław Strzemiński. At the world exhibition held in Paris in 1937, the Grand Prix was won by the portrait painter Olga Boznańska. Xawery

Dunikowski was making famous sculptures. Polish and international concert halls were graced by Polish pianists and composers: Karol Szymanowski, Ignacy Paderewski and Artur Rubinstein.

The market for newspapers and journals was very healthy, with nearly 2,700 press titles published on a regular basis in the 1930s. This was important in terms of educating society, in particular as the developing educational sector considerably reduced the number of illiterate Poles. Schooling became mandatory for children aged seven. Vocational training opportunities were created, but the number of universities grew, too. Among Polish scientists, mathematicians were most known (the 'Lviv school of mathematicians,' scientists collaborating with Stefan Banach and Hugo Steinhaus) but also medical researchers (Ludwik Hirsztfeld) and those active in humanities (Bronisław Malinowski, Florian Znaniecki). The interwar period was also a good time for the development of Polish urban planning and architecture. Just like in Western Europe, Polish cities saw structures made of steel (e.g. by Stefan Bryła) and modernism was also developing, leaving behind interesting architecture. The radio also played an important role disseminating culture and science. The Polish radio launched regular broadcasting in 1926, with contributions by eminent Polish writers, actors, singers, composers and scientists.

The Second World War put a stop to one of the most dynamic periods for Polish culture, arts and science ever. Determined to extinguish the Polish intellectual elite, Hitler and Stalin consistently murdered people from that societal stratum from the very start of the war. That policy resulted in a nation without intellectual or spiritual leaders.



Anna Buchner



References:

Translated by Mikołaj Sekrecki,
Proofread by Dr. Ian Copestake