

## Popular science summary

"Hey, Dante was not the only one, gentlemen professors! – reminded, or perhaps admonished Julian Tuwim in his poem *Ex Oriente* in 1954, and added: "Not alone the Latins and Greeks – you should taste the Uzbeks!". The author of an (epic?) poem *Polish Flowers* thus supported an important principle of the cultural policy of the Polish People's Republic, according to which, firstly, the heritage of poetry created east of the Iron Curtain was as valuable artistically as the Greco-Roman tradition, thus providing a weapon in the Cold War struggle for political and cultural influence of USSR; and secondly: epic poetry was particularly valuable as the work of the peasant people, handed down orally, and thus truly egalitarian and expressing the vital interests of that class. Something more was also at stake: epic is a genre that accompanies mankind at turning points, serving to preserve the memory of the most important events and traditions for various communities, and representing its ideals in the figure of the epic hero. It is a representation of the world and a projection of the way a community wants to inhabit that world.

The aim of the project is to describe comprehensively the functioning of this genre in twentieth-century Polish literature, considering the context of the political and social changes which occurred in this period on a national, regional, and global scale. The research will include a critical analysis of the discussion about epic in the Polish press during this period, taking into account in particular the reception of works of epic ambition written at the time (such as *Nights and Days* by Maria Dąbrowska and *Stone upon Stone* by Wiesław Myśliwski) as well as translations and paraphrases of pre-modern epics from various parts of the world. The study will also include authors' and translators' self-commentaries and comments on their published texts (introductions, afterwords, titles, subtitles, footnotes, etc.). Interestingly, the authors of modern epics and ancient texts's translations and paraphrases were often the same people, highly involved in the popularization of this genre. The work of several such authors will be examined particularly carefully (Antoni Lange, Józef Wittlin, Robert Stiller, Wanda Markowska).

The analyses and interpretations of their results would apply both traditional literary tools (stylistic and rhetorical analysis, cultural theory of the genre, sociology of literature, etc.) and the latest concepts from the fields of discourse analysis, comparative studies, anthropology of literature and cultural studies. It will enable to reconstruct the history of the epic in modern Polish culture, at the same time filling the gap in the hitherto studies of the genre, which rarely went beyond the Romantic period. That history will be inscribed into global civilization processes such as decolonization and secularization. Both the attempts of Polish-language authors to create "modern sacred texts," as the Italian scholar Franco Moretti called contemporary epic, and the translations of world epics – based on the mythology from outside the circle of Judeo-Christian culture – can be interpreted as activities entangled in the secularization processes which took place in Poland under specific conditions connected with regaining national sovereignty in 1918 after a long break, the bloody course of World War II and the programmatic atheism of the post-war political order. Translations and paraphrases of foundational texts of cultures distant from the Greco-Roman tradition and subjected to its hegemony during the period of colonization are, in turn, entangled in colonial relations and often bear traces of orientalism (as defined by Edward Said) or internationalism in the Soviet spirit (this is the case of Tuwim).

The project will test and nuance the hypothesis that just as Homer's translations founded the beginnings of vernacular Polish language and the creation of *Pan Tadeusz* legitimised the right to self-governance of the Polish-Lithuanian community, so in the era of regained independence the translations of Mesopotamian *Gilgamesh*, Indian *Ramayana* and Persian *Shahname* integrated Poland into the global cultural community. Similar, though significantly altered intention motivated authors of the postwar translations of Georgian *The Knight in a Tiger's Skin* and Armenian *David of Sasun*, as well as those who paraphrased Finnish *Kalevala* or Russian byliny for the needs of children's readers.

By applying to Polish context the latest comparative studies on epic as a transnational genre as well as postcolonial and post-secular perspectives, the project will also contribute to the internationalization of Polish literary studies and to the ongoing process of inscribing the history of Polish literature in the context of world literature.