

Polish Center of Wisconsin—March 28, 2023 6:30 PM
A Poetry Talk by Peter Burzyński, PhD

**Waxing Poetic, Waning Philosophical:
The Seemingly Straightforward Poetry of Wisława Szymborska**

Wisława Szymborska was a poet who wrote a poetry for everyone. Her deceptively simple, yet sharp words and imagery pleased even the least poetically inclined readers. For poetry aficionados there were even greater, deeper layers to explore. Behind and in between her lines her poems were as deft and wise as the philosophical poetry of Zbigniew Herbert. These poems were also self-effacing like the sometimes deprecatory, self-aware, and political verse of Czesław Miłosz. Like her equally well-known contemporaries she survived the horrors of war and genocide. During the post-Stalinist thaw, when culture was still subject to heavy-handed, onerous, and arbitrary Soviet-style censorship, Szymborska kept many of her poems “in the drawer.” Truly a “hidden gem” Szymborska had fewer than 200 poems in print when she won Poland’s fourth Nobel prize in literature in 1996. Please join us for a discussion as we approach the work of this “approachable” poet together.



Portrait of Wisława Szymborska, 1984
Photo by: Joanna Helander



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Photograph from September 11

They jumped from the burning floors—
one, two, a few more,
higher, lower.

The photograph halted them in life,
and now keeps them
above the earth toward the earth.

Each is still complete,
with a particular face
and blood well hidden.

There’s enough time
for hair to come loose,
for keys and coins
to fall from pockets.

They’re still within the air’s reach,
within the compass of places
that have just now opened.

I can do only two things for them—
describe this flight
and not add a last line.

Translated by Clare Cavanagh

Wisława Szymborska, “Photograph from
September 11” from *Monologue of a Dog*.
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