

## LITERATURE IN TRANSLATION

# Reading Abroad

Visiting Skalny Center poet Piotr Sommer suggests some not-to-be-missed modern Polish literature.

By Kathleen McGarvey

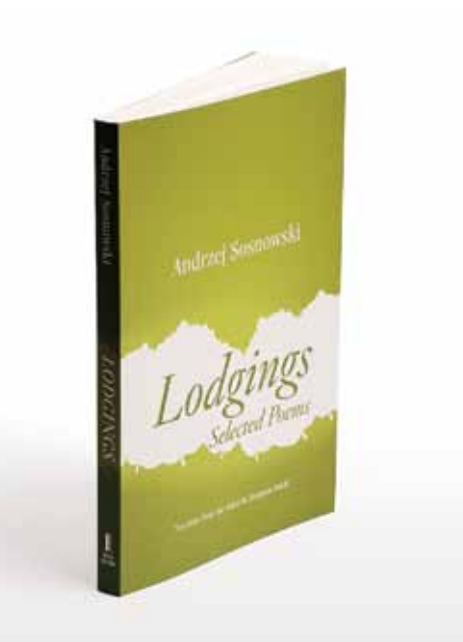
POLISH POET PIOTR SOMMER—EDITOR OF the Warsaw-based international writing magazine *Literatura na Świecie* (*World Literature*)—has been guiding Rochester students on a tour through 20th-century poetry in translation this semester as the Skalny Visiting Professor in the English department, in a new course called Studies in International Literature. The author of a dozen volumes of poetry in Polish, Sommer has also published essays and interviews, translations, and literary anthologies. He returns to Poland in May.

His most recent work available in English is *Continued*, a book of poems published by Wesleyan Press.

Sommer recommends some of his favorite Polish literature available in translation:

- *Cinnamon Shops* and *Sanitarium under the Hour Glass* by Bruno Schulz

“Perhaps the single best prose writer in Polish from the 20th century, Schulz was born in 1892 and killed in 1942 in the Drohobycz Ghetto. Translations of his work are from some 60 years ago. Because he’s such a great writer and stylist, it would be high time to have him translated again—and then again. Many American authors



such as Cynthia Ozick and Philip Roth were inspired by him, as were many writers in other languages. He’s sometimes compared to Franz Kafka, but that comparison may make little sense. Schulz’s writing is terrific prose that has a lot in common with poetry, in the way he treats language. Simply read anything you can put your hands on by Bruno Schulz.”

- *My Century* and *With the Skin: Poems of Aleksander Wat* by Aleksander Wat

“Wat is one of the three or four best Polish poets of the 20th century, and he seems to translate well. He was born in 1900 and died by suicide in 1967. He’s one of the few who’ve been able to connect the existential and the linguistic so phenomenally, and to preserve a light touch, too. Wat began as a Dadaist, and was able to preserve that spirit even in the poems he wrote in the Gulag, where he spent a few years. Poet and fellow Pole Czeslaw Milosz invited Wat to Berkeley in the early 1960s; Miłosz taped his conversations with Wat, a kind of intellectual odyssey, and years after Wat’s death published them as *My Century*. It’s a classic.”

- *Lodgings* by Andrzej Sosnowski

“Sosnowski’s first book translated into English—a collection of 100 poems—will be published in March by Rochester’s own Open Letter press. Generally considered one of the best poets writing in Polish today, Sosnowski’s work is difficult and beautiful. Part of the beauty lies in the way the cryptic quality of the “message” combines with how the language works. He collaborated with his translator in producing this volume, so the result should be really interesting. He’s original himself, and yet, because he’s influential among the younger crowd, his work also shows something “typical” about where some of the new Polish writing is going.”

## ENTREPRENEURSHIP

## Promoting Liber-Tee

FASHION BUSINESS: As an undergraduate economics major, Stephen Macaskill ’11 (KEY) was president of the Young Americans for Liberty group on campus. Now as a KEY student, he’s putting his interest in freedom to work with his Amagi Clothing company. Selling T-shirts that sport slogans such as “Laissez Faire” and “Stand Up for Liberty,” Macaskill hopes to promote liberty through his apparel, whose designs he commissions. He cites Zappos founder Tony Hsieh as a role model, and says, “I’m learning quickly and having a lot of fun doing it.”

