



# VINTAGE

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BOOK OF THE MONTH

RECOMMENDATIONS

NEW RELEASES

INTERNATIONAL WRITING

SINGAPORE: MEIRA CHAND

PORTUGAL: MARGARET JULL COSTA

NOTTING HILL: DIANA EVANS

AFRICA: TIM BUTCHER

ARGENTINA: MATIAS NESPOLO &amp; ALAN PAULS

RUSSIA: GERMAN SADULAEV

WORLD: FAVOURITE BOOKS IN TRANSLATION

AFGHANISTAN: ATIQ RAHIMI

WORLD: 'AND OTHER STORIES' - AN INNOVATIVE NEW WAY OF PUBLISHING TRANSLATIONS

AUSTRIA: DANIEL GLATTAUER &amp; JAMIE BULLOCH

CHINA: MURONG XUECUN

SPANISH: 2010 HARVILL SECKER YOUNG TRANSLATOR'S PRIZE

RUSSIA: LUDMILLA ULITSKAYA &amp; LUDMILLA PETRUSHEVSKAYA

RUSSIA: SUSIE NICKLIN

RUSSIA: CHANDLER ON VASILY GROSSMAN

WORLD: BERNARDO ATXAGA FAVOURITE BOOKS

NORWAY: KARL OVE KNAUSGAARD

GERMANY: CHARLOTTE RYLAND

FRANCE: RAPHAËLLE LIEBAERT

## POLAND: AGAINST THE CURRENT



Earlier this month, Tuesday Bhambry won the Harvill Secker Young Translators' Prize for her translation of Maciej Miłkowski's short story 'Tatuaż', which you can read [here](#). As part of her prize, Tuesday travelled to Krakow for the Conrad Festival, Central Europe's largest literary festival.

'Against the Current' (Pod prąd) is the slogan of this year's edition of the annual Conrad Festival in Krakow, the largest international literary festival in Central Europe. The mission was to take a stance against the widespread notion that in our fast-paced and competitive world we cannot afford to read (or produce) literature. The organisers' call to swim 'against the current' also expresses an urge to push against boundaries of literature, traditionally defined in terms of its dominant genres – fiction, poetry and drama. The programme of this weeklong festival celebrated creative non-fiction and reportage as major literary genres. And so it seems that despite their nonconformist credo, the Festival's organisers are *au courant* with the main trends of the literary scene.



Ten days before the Conrad Festival, the Belarusian writer Svetlana Alexievich was announced as the winner of the 2015 Nobel Prize in Literature. And so it happened that the first career journalist to be honoured in this way made her first public appearance as a Nobel Laureate on the first day of the Conrad Festival. A predominantly young audience filled the *auditorium maximum* of the Jagiellonian University (the oldest and highest-ranking university in Poland, if more superlatives were needed). But it wasn't just the grand venue and the unique occasion that fuelled the audience's enthusiasm. When Alexievich took questions from the audience, it was clear that many were deeply familiar with her life and work. This is perhaps unsurprising, as her books have been available in Polish translation for years, while literary reportage enjoys great prestige in Poland, the homeland of Ryszard Kapuściński.

That a recent Nobel Laureate would attract over a thousand people was foreseeable. But were the organisers surprised to see throngs of keen readers, young and old, flocking to hear other writers, Polish and foreign, at the Festival's much smaller regular venue? The 'Mansion Under the Rams' (Pałac Pod Baranami) on Krakow's main square is an architectural palimpsest: two medieval houses, one of which was an inn for ram-keepers and their livestock, were merged in the sixteenth century to form a renaissance Palace; the nineteenth century saw the addition of a resplendent neo-classical interior along with the three now famous rams' heads over the portal; and an art-house cinema has operated in one part of the building since 1969. Here Jan Kochanowski and Mikołaj Rej, founders of Polish as a literary language, are said to have dropped by in the sixteenth century, and in the mid-twentieth century the gothic basement became a performance space for an infamous cabaret.



The Palace's literary significance is palpable, and there is something delightful about its refusal to step into the fully accessible, fully air-conditioned twenty-first century. The ghosts of the dead bards insist that for those who wish to meet Poland's greatest living writers, comfort and

POLAND: ANTONIA LLOYD-JONES

NORWAY: SILJE RIISE NÆSS

INDIA: THE TUSK THAT DID THE DAMAGE

FRANCE: WE LOVE PARIS (BOOKSHOPS) IN THE SPRINGTIME

SPAIN: PUBLISHING JESÚS

INTERNATIONAL: OUR BRAVE NEW WORLD

THE NETHERLANDS: GERBRAND BAKKER

GERMANY: PUBLISHING CLASSICS

NIGERIA: VERNACULAR IS JUST ANOTHER WORD FOR NOTHING LEFT TO LOSE

AUSTRALIA: NICHOLAS SHAKESPEARE

**POLAND: AGAINST THE CURRENT**

READING GUIDES

GIFT PICKER

SHELF HELP

TEN OF THE BEST...

safety are but trivial concerns. And indeed, what are fire regulations in the presence of Olga Tokarczuk, Wiesław Myśliwski or Hanna Krall? On those nights about a hundred fans crowd into a room with 70 seats; people sit on the floor, on the window sills, on the edge of the stage; live audio transmissions in the adjacent room and corridor allow another hundred or so to follow the conversation. Writers still find the energy to sign books and talk to readers. Krakow loves its writers, and writers seem to love Krakow, too.



The Conrad Festival was a major factor in Krakow's anointment as a Unesco City of Literature in 2013, and its organisers now work to ensure sustainable development. To engage the local community, for instance, the programme includes family friendly events on weekends, 'reading lessons' with prominent critics for teenagers every weekday morning, and a creative writing course for senior citizens. Krakow's university students benefit from the rich cultural programme, and universities latch on and create separate events, too. Following his appearance at the Festival, Hooman Majd went to talk to students at the Jagiellonian University's Iranian Studies department. And to spread the Festival's economic impact, bookshops are invited to host smaller events. The Krakow Book Fair also coincides with the Festival, which benefits publishers and the municipality. Keen to cooperate, the City of Krakow recently endowed the annual Conrad Prize which goes to the best literary debut and its publisher. The award ceremony on the Festival's closing night included Jonathan Franzen's lecture 'How to write'. The same ultra-modern conference venue where Franzen spoke had, on the night before, hosted another highlight: the award ceremony of the Wisława Szymborska poetry prize. The gala night was televised across the nation. Poland still loves its poets.

Now in its seventh year, the Conrad Festival is doing well and promises to do even better. It's certainly worth a journey abroad: October is lovely in Poland. Don't worry if you don't speak the language. Many of the events are presented in English or in simultaneous translation. When I asked what hopes the organisers had for future editions of the festival, I was told they were working to include more writers from the Global South. What an excellent way to develop the 'Conrad' theme. And did I mention that almost all events were free to attend? Poland loves its literature lovers.

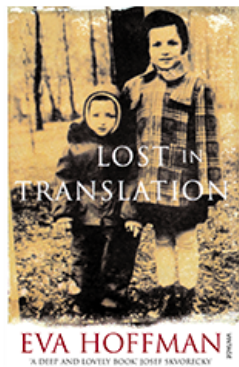
### THE CHILDREN ACT BY IAN MCEWAN



A brilliant, emotionally wrenching new novel from the author of *Atonement* and *Amsterdam* ...

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### Featured Read



Eva Hoffman was one of the judges for this year's Harvill Secker Young Translator's Prize. In 1959, when she was just 13-years-old Eva Hoffman left her home in Cracow, Poland for a new life in America. This personal memoir evokes with deep feeling the sense of uprootedness and exile created by this disruption, something which has been the experience of tens of thousands of people this century.

'It is one of those books, like the very best of travel writing, that hits a newly discovered nerve and takes a few steps further towards civilising the planet' *Guardian*

Inspired by the mention of Ryszard Kapuściński and Svetlana Alexievich our other recommended reads this month feature some of the very best in literary reportage.

Ryszard Kapuściński - *The Emperor*

After the deposition of Haile Selassie in 1974, which ended the ancient rule of the Abyssinian monarchy, Ryszard Kapuscinski travelled to Ethiopia and sought out surviving courtiers to tell their stories. Here, their eloquent and ironic voices depict the lavish, corrupt world they had known - from the rituals, hierarchies and intrigues at court to the vagaries of a ruler who maintained absolute power over his impoverished people. They describe his inexorable downfall as the Ethiopian military approach, strange omens appear in the sky and courtiers vanish, until only the Emperor and his valet remain in the deserted palace, awaiting their fate.

Svetlana Alexievich - *Voices From Chernobyl*

Alexievich is a journalist by trade and won the Nobel Prize for Literature this year. She now

suffers from an immune deficiency developed while researching this book, in which she presents personal accounts of what happened to the people of Belarus after the nuclear reactor accident in 1986, and the fear, anger, and uncertainty that they still live with.

Andrzej Stasiuk -

[On The Road To Babadag](#)

A brilliant and ground-breaking collection of travel narratives from Central and Eastern Europe. Andrzej Stasiuk is a restless and indefatigable traveller. His journeys - by car, train, bus, ferry - take him from his native Poland to small towns and villages with unfamiliar yet evocative names in Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Slovenia, Albania, Moldova and Ukraine. Here is an unfamiliar Europe, grappling with the remnants of the Communist era and the arrival of capitalism and globalisation.

'Where did Moldova end and Transylvania begin,' he wonders, as he is being driven at breakneck speed in a hundred-year-old Audi - loose wires hanging from the dashboard - by a driver in shorts and bare feet, a cross swinging on his chest. And so his journey continues all the way to Babadag, near the shore of the Black Sea, where he sees his first minaret.

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