

Press Release

Warsaw, August 22 2023

TOMAS VENCLOVA

LAUREATE OF THE ZBIGNIEW HERBERT INTERNATIONAL LITERARY AWARD 2023

The Zbigniew Herbert Foundation announced the name of this year's Laureate of the annual Zbigniew Herbert International Literary Award. The honour went to Tomas Venclova, universally regarded as Lithuania's most eminent living poet who, as a Soviet dissident, fought for Lithuanians human rights. The PZU Foundation is the strategic partner of the Zbigniew Herbert International Literary Award 2023.

„Tomas Venclova dedicated his life to literature and the fight against authoritarianism. He is Lithuania's greatest living poet, a leading east European writer and the last link in the chain connecting Herbert, Milosz and Brodski. Venclova, as Ellen Hinsey puts it, «is one of the last poets of a generation of Europe's great tradition»” – commented Edward Hirsch, this year's Jury Chairman. Katarzyna Herbert, Zbigniew Herbert's spouse and the Foundation's founder bearing his name, added: „I am pleased, that this year's prize will be presented to an exceptional poet, who's work my husband knew and admired”. In expressing his gratitude to the Jury for their choice, the Laureate said: „this is a great surprise for me, but above all a great honour to receive an Award, of such an exceptional patron”.

Tomas Venclova is laureate of numerous literary prizes and the recipient of numerous, *honoris causa* doctorates. Czesław Miłosz first brought his poetry to the Polish reader, by publishing a translation of “Winter Dialogue” on the pages of the Paris based *Kultura*. Tomas Venclova's works were subsequently translated by Stanisław Barańczak, Zbigniew Dmitroca, Beata Kalęba, Alina

Kuzborska and Adam Pomorski. Numerous anthologies of his work, essays including a volume of his correspondence with Czesław Miłosz were also published in Polish.

His poems were, amongst others, also translated into English, Chinese, German, Italian, Swedish and Ukrainian.

Tomas Venclova befriended numerous Polish writers, whereas in 1983 he joined the editorial team of *Zeszyty Literackie* a Paris based quarterly émigré publication, in which he published his poems and essays for over three decades. He also translated Polish poems into Lithuanian, including works by Cyprian Kamil Norwid, Zbigniew Herbert, Czesław Miłosz and Wisława Szymborska, as well as a monograph on the work of Aleksander Wat.

Born in Lithuania in 1937, he published his first tome of poetry in the underground press in 1958. He maintained close ties with a circle of dissident-writers in the USSR including Anna Achmatowa, Borys Pasternak and Josif Brodski. In 1977 as a dissident but also founder of the Lithuanian Helsinki Group, he chose an émigrés existence. He moved to the United States, where for many years he lectured on Slavic Literature at Yale University.

Much links Tomas Venclova to Zbigniew Herbert. He not only translated and commented on his poems, which he became familiar with at the very start of his literary career, but also, not unlike Herbert, he alludes to classical history in his works, regarding history and poetry as indivisible one from the other. In his work he stands in opposition to cruelty and injustice. Whilst he does not shun difficult subjects, he does not impose any answers, but rather encourages courageous thought.

The Zbigniew Herbert International Literary Award is a distinction on the literary world stage – primarily in the field of poetry. It has been conferred since 2013, in recognition of outstanding artistic and intellectual achievements, inspired by the values and ideals which Zbigniew Herbert's work exemplifies. Existing Laureates include W.S. Merwin, Charles Simic, Ryszard Krynicki, Lars Gustafsson, Breyten Breytenbach, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Agi Miszol, Durs Grünbein, Yusef Komunyakaa and Marianna Kijanowska.

This year's Laureate was chosen by a jury, composed of poets, essayists, translators and publishers: Krystyna Dąbrowska (Poland), Edward Hirsch (USA), Michael Krüger (Germany), Mercedes Monmany (Spain), and Aleš Šteger (Slovenia).

The Award Presentation Ceremony will be held at the *Teatr Polski* in Warsaw on September 13th 2023. The ceremony will be transmitted live via the Zbigniew Herbert Foundation social media account, both in Polish and English.

Zbigniew Herbert Foundations Partners

The PZU Foundation – Strategic Partner of the Zbigniew Herbert International Literary Award 2023;

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The Adam Mickiewicz Institute – (*Instytut Adama Mickiewicza*);

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Polish Radio – (*Polskie Radio*) – Media Partner.

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For more information about the Zbigniew Herbert International Literary Award go to:

- www.fundacjaherberta.com
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Media Contacts

Emilia Jędrzejczyk, PRIMUM PR, e-mail: e.jedrzejczyk@primum.pl; 607 659 631

Sylwia Olczak, PRIMUM PR, e-mail: s.olczak@primum.pl; 608 072 086