

# A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising

*Miron Bia?oszewski*

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## A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising Miron Bia?oszewski

This book is both a work of memory and a work about memory. Miron Bialoszewski (1922-83), the great avant-garde Polish poet, memorializes the doomed uprising of the Polish population against their Nazi masters which began on August 1, 1944, and was eventually abandoned on October 2, 1944, with the physical destruction of Warsaw, street by street and house by house, and the slaughter of 200,000 civilians.

## A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising Details


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Author : Miron Bia?oszewski

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## From Reader Review A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising for online ebook

### Thomas says

Right from the very first page this bleak yet poetic memoir is written in a startling bare way that pays little head to style or literary form and even less to the conventions of memoir and journalistic writing. Bialoszewski's text is written as a stream of consciousness, very very conscious of what he is doing although it seems at times to be confused and rambling. Too many books are typecast as works dealing with that ephemeral of themes - memory. A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising really does strip down the process of remembering to the words and thoughts that permit and create the act. There are no dates, no times, no diary entries and no certainties. The haze of memory and history is heavy over this journey into the past.

It takes a bit of getting used to but Bialoszewski's writing is eventually quite satisfying and effective. Not if you want a clear, historical break down of the events of the uprising. Not if you want to know facts or figures. Not if you want a story told clear from the start of the uprising till the end. But if you want to know, just a little, how it felt to be there and live through then Bialoszewski does an admirable job of transporting you there. He doesn't try to judge or explain. He barely comments on events at large. It is a very impressionistic trip through events that are impossible for us to imagine otherwise.

The description is very sensual and tactile. He concentrates on the little things that create the whole. On the sounds, smells, sights and frictions of his experience. One moment sticks in my head: in the sewer putting his hand through the slime in the wall and realising his environment in a way that hadn't yet occurred to him. The guns and the bombs are onomatopoeically portrayed, like a very serious comic strip. It's memory as it is formed, as it springs to mind, all the objects and the dust that clutter the mind's ability to recall. As such the account is very personal and authentic; exact these qualities make it sometimes hard to read and somehow impersonal for the reader.

Just as it is an act of remembering, Bialoszewski weaves in those things forgotten. He is not ashamed to go back on himself, to leave at tangents, to admit he has forgotten something. His memoir is his healing, recovering act as well. Well outside the cannon of literature, Bialoszewski shows how simply language and honesty of expression can create valuable and interesting work, a challenge to the often too carefully constructed and well thought out literature of our era. 6

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### Patty Climbs says

Kiedy czyta?am t? ksi??k? je?dzi?am do pracy przez Powi?le. Wyobra?a?am sobie, gdzie móg? sta? ten dom na Rybakach...

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### Anna says

Miron Bia?oszewski wrote a relayions from the Warsaw Uprising in form of a diary. Rather good book, but if you read that in school, re-read that.

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## Hadrian says

Disorienting memoir of the time of the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, with moments taken from before and after.

I say "disorienting" because there's seldom any understanding or reaction of what goes on. Białoszewski does write in his own emotional reactions of events, he describes them. He is meticulous in his detail, but the detail is all about rushing, confusion, never understanding where the battle is coming from or where to go next. No one person can understand the course of the uprising as it happens.

The Uprising itself, sketched out, stretches between August and October 1944. It was not the first rebellion against the German occupation, that was the Ghetto Uprising in 1943. And even so, the fight is isolated, desperate, and life somehow continues amid the background of the city's total destruction. Białoszewski chronicles the struggle to survive - where will the food come from? And yet he remembers so much that the months of conflict stretch on, interminable, without any seeming end. It is a personal account, but he does not let his own feelings intrude on it too much. The war and bombing is of chaos, without plan or reason, and the author survives, somehow. Hundreds of thousands are dead, but he's still alive, somehow. Miron doubts many things, especially his own memory. But he's still here. That's enough.

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## Anna says

Czytałam nocami. Myślałam dniami.

Najbardziej utkwiło we mnie to wzdrowanie kanałami. Ten ranny na plecach. I to że powtarzały się te Wolskie sprawy. Cały czas. I to że latały "szafy" i "krowy" i kule i samoloty...i ludzie. I to że wtedy, w 1920, nie chcieli, a teraz chcieli, żeby przyszli. Bolszewicy. No i upadek. Bo jednak trzeba było. A nie ma Warszawy. Nie ma Warszawiaków.

Bardzo polecam to Powstanie z perspektywy młodego Mirona!

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## Micebyliz says

a remarkable memoir in that it makes you tense in a way that others who recorded these events do not. There is constant running and scattering, constant bombings and shootings. I felt my jaw tighten. There are short sentences and poetry and singing. There are descriptions of the sewers. The gray poles and the dust and the pipes of basements. Lists of streets and buildings that have been destroyed. Eventually, the whole city is destroyed, it is all rubble.

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### **Jed Mayer says**

A very challenging read, and while I couldn't follow much of it, I appreciated the many tragic and solemn epiphanies with which it is laced: a rare, strange account of life, death, and endurance during almost unendurably dark times.

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### **jayne says**

Had to read this for school, but it ended it up both suprising and shocking me in ways only war can. Review to come soon

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### **Andrew Davis says**

An eyewitness account of Warsaw Uprising by non-combatant. Fate of civilians, Methodical killings by Latvian and Ukrainian criminals. Continuous bombing by German Luftwaffe. A living hell for innocent civilians.

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### **Tom Wascoe says**

Memoir of the Warsaw uprising of 1944 which resulted in more than 200,000 people killed and the center of Warsaw flattened by the Nazi's. Written 20 years after the uprising, this is clearly not an historical nor chronological work. It is more a stream-of-consciousness memoir. A story of survival but lacking in the horror of the uprising.

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### **Klara says**

Ulubiona licealna lektura.

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### **Mieczysław Kasprzyk says**

Milosz calls Bialoszewski “a poet of dirty staircases” who “questions the communicative function of language, and substitutes for words mumblings and mutterings”. This only becomes obvious when one reads his excellent “A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising” (1970), which, to the unwitting reader, is strange to say the least; he writes as if he is associating ideas or objects with memories and vice-versa. There is a rambling logic to it all made more pertinent when one realises that Bialoszewski took no part in the Rising and thus simply relates his experiences as a passenger, trying to focus on some sense of normality in the cruel surreality of history.

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## **Marta Karpowicz says**

\*lecture\*

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## **Iñaki Tofiño says**

Boring, boring, boring. Did I mention that it was boring? Well, it was. And confusing as well. You get lost within the streets of Warsaw under siege, after the ghetto uprising? Before it? Well, who knows. The author tries to reproduce some sort of stream of consciousness and his readers don't a clue about where he was, who he as with, who was part of his family... At the end of the day, a sad story but a very appealing one.

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## **Dariusz P?ochocki says**

Przynajmniej 1/3 pamie?tnika czyta si? koszmarne, zdania pojedycze, chaos, zaprzeczanie sobie samemu, nadaj? charakter pisania ich podczas zawieruchy Powsta?czej, chocia? w wi?kszosci powsta?y w latach 60. ?wietne metafory z literatury klasycznej, ukazanie ró?nicy mi?dzy Powstaniem na Starym Mie?cie, a w ?rodnie?ciu.

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## **Emily says**

Very difficult to read--I'm afraid I couldn't get all the way through it, but I'll keep trying another time. Bia?oszewski's story is an important one though, and his voice should be heard. The Warsaw Uprising was horrific and this memoir truly reflects that. I hope it reaches a wider American audience in the future.

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## **Manchester Military History Society (MMHS) says**

### **A valuable contribution to the canon of the Warsaw Uprising**

Miron Bia?oszewski's book is not the standard documentary account you would expect. He describes the civilian experience of the Uprising as an observer rather than an active participant despite being of military age at the time.

The Uprising numbers beggar belief. Of a prewar population of 1.3 million, 150,000 civilians and 18,000 underground soldier killed, and this is excluding 400,000 Jews who were sent to their deaths from 1939-43.

The book itself reads more like a stream of thought, rather than a coherent, chronologically accurate history. This makes the account it all the more vivid and compelling as the confusion of events seems to accurately reflect the chaos and confusion of the civilian experience.

A valuable contribution to the paucity of books in English detailing the civilian experience of Warsaw Uprising of 1944.

## Guy says

A certain synchronicity brought me to **A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising** on the tail of **Inside the Head of Bruno Schultz**. The latter book, a fictional account of a brief segment in the life of the Polish author shows Bruno Schultz, in 1938, desperately trying to communicate with the outside world via Thomas Mann. The Germans have yet to arrive in Schultz's hometown of Drohobycz. The novel makes reference to the horrific slaughter committed by the Nazis yet to come, and in Miron Bialoszewski's **A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising**, the slaughter is well underway.

The memoir begins on August 1 1944. Author Bialoszewski was a civilian during the uprising so this is not a military overview of the event but rather the book concentrates on memories which recall the chaotic period. Almost immediately, we know that the author survives:

*I shall be frank recollecting my distant self in small facts, perhaps excessively precise, but there will be only the truth. I am forty-five years old now, twenty-three years have gone by, I am lying here on my couch safe and sound, free, in good health and spirits, it is October, night 1967, Warsaw once again has 1,300,00 inhabitants. I was seventeen years old when I went to bed one day and for the first time in my life heard artillery fire. It was the front. And that was probably September 2, 1939. I was right to be terrified. Five years later the all too familiar Germans were still walking along the streets in their uniforms.*

Bialoszewski tells his story rather as though we are sitting in the same room with him listening to his account. His memories are subject to revision—almost as though he tries to pull the scenes out of the fog and present them to his audience. Sometimes his style is abrupt—staccato, and there's breathlessness to the action.

August 1 starts inauspiciously enough with the author being sent, by his mother, to collect bread. People are gathering on the streets and he hears that "they killed two Germans in Ogródowa Street." Tanks are "cruising around," the author hears shooting, "heavier weapons" including cannons, and then people begin cheering: "The uprising," we told each other immediately like everyone else in Warsaw.

In spite of the sounds of machine guns and rocket flares, the general mood is definitely excitement. Civilians join in; barricades are erected. The author, now at a friend's house, has a meal, nonchalantly plays a game and goes to sleep.

*It was raining. Drizzling. It was cold. We could hear machine guns, that rat-a-tat. Nearer burst, then farther off. And rocket flares. Every so often. In the sky. We fell asleep to their noise, I think.*

That short quote is a good example of the author's style as memories flood back. There's a sense that every detail is important. Every incident witnessed must be recorded.

The holiday mood of the uprising continues with intense organization. Partisans "showed up," and "several fronts" are established on the streets. Tanks ride right over the barricades, and the author remembers people "throwing down tables, chairs, wardrobes onto the street" to fortify the barricades. But when furniture proves futile against tanks, concrete is removed from the pavement. Still, in spite of dire signs, the excitement continues. But by the fourth of August, the atmosphere begins to change.

*We ran out into Choldna Street. The street was covered with clouds. Rust colored and dark brown. From*

*bricks, from smoke. When it settled we saw a terrifying transformation. A reddish-gray dust was covering everything. Trees. Leaves. A centimeter thick, I think. And that devastation. One Wache less. But at what a cost. Anyway. Things were already beginning to change. To anxiety. And always for the worse. Visually too. From Zelazna Bram Square, from Bank Square, from Elektoralna Street along our side of Choldna against the wall, people were running and running—women, children, all hunched over, gray, covered with some kind of powder. I remember the sun was setting. Fires were burning. The people ran on and on. A flood of people. From the bombed-out houses. They were fleeing to Wola.*

The atrocities begin...Water and food become critical issues, and at one point in the book an exciting escape via the sewers takes place, yet grim realities set in as the author asks if the Polish will receive help from the outside world: *“perhaps it was worthwhile to defend, to rescue whatever and whomever could be rescued. Maybe at this point someone would smile pityingly.”*

The Warsaw Uprising: August 1, 1944-October 2, 1944 –an important event in the history of WWII for several reasons—is recounted here by someone who lived through it, and this remarkable memoir grants the reader a sense of this event. Miron Bialoszewski (1922-1983), who was just 22 years old when the uprising took place, wrote the memoir more than twenty years after it occurred. The book’s introduction explains the background of the uprising: the Red Army was *“encamped in the working-class suburb of Praga, directly across the river from Warsaw,”* and how the Polish resistance Home Army *“encouraged and directed by the London government in exile [...] initiated the uprising in the capital.”* But as the introduction, by translator Madeline G. Levine, tells us *“the people of Warsaw were left to fight and die by themselves.”* By the time the uprising ended, over 200,000 Poles were dead.

Originally published in 1970. Maps are included at the end of the book.

Translated by Madeline G. Levine

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## **Paulo Santos says**

This is an extraordinary book. I bought in the wonderful bookstore Massolit in Krakow, due to the advice of an enthusiastic young employee that talked lively about lots of Polish books when I asked him what I should read to get to know something of Polish literature. I was not disappointed with this one, hope the others will be as good.

It's a violent book, extremely well written, the Warsaw Uprising in August and September 1944 narrated day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute. One can almost feel one is there, in the middle of the constant bombing, running from shelter to shelter, keeping up the chores of daily life in the most extreme and unreal circumstances. Fortunately, I never experienced war, but this must be like war feels like, and it's horrible. I felt literally tired reading it, all that running from the bombs and the shelling, when short distances of a few blocks in a familiar city became almost insurmountable, when the once familiar streets became unknown territory, the rubble replacing the apartment blocks.

The frantic moment by moment rhythm of the narrative reminded of another book I read recently, about another kind of war, *The City Always Wins*. Both impressed me deeply. War and oppression are indeed a terrible burden of human history, and similar through every epoch. These testimonies are essential reading for anyone who cares, and the capacity of people to endure extreme circumstances never ceases to amaze me.

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## **Polocaine says**

Defenitely PERFECT.

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