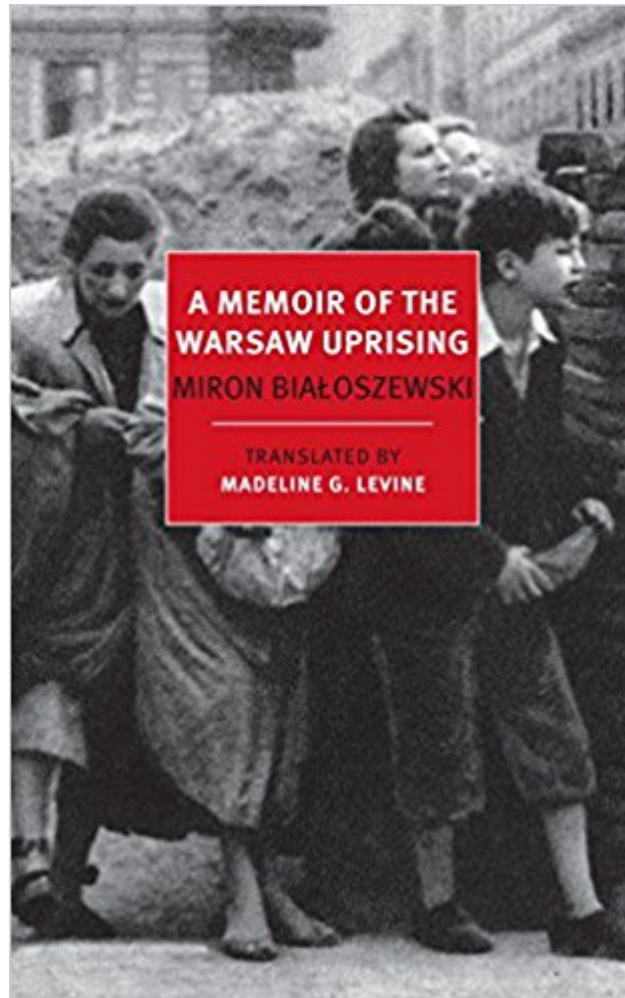




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# A Memoir Of The Warsaw Uprising (New York Review Books Classics)



## Synopsis

On August 1, 1944, Miron Białoszewski, later to gain renown as one of Poland's most innovative poets, went out to run an errand for his mother and ran into history. With Soviet forces on the outskirts of Warsaw, the Polish capital revolted against five years of Nazi occupation, an uprising that began in a spirit of heroic optimism. Sixty-three days later it came to a tragic end. The Nazis suppressed the insurgents ruthlessly, reducing Warsaw to rubble while slaughtering some 200,000 people, mostly through mass executions. The Red Army simply looked on. Białoszewski's blow-by-blow account of the uprising brings it alive in all its desperate urgency. Here we are in the shoes of a young man slipping back and forth under German fire, dodging sniper bullets, collapsing with exhaustion, rescuing the wounded, burying the dead. An indispensable and unforgettable act of witness, *A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising* is also a major work of literature. Białoszewski writes in short, stabbing, splintered, breathless sentences attuned to "the glaring identity of *now*." His pages are full of a white-knuckled poetry that resists the very destruction it records. Madeline G. Levine has extensively revised her 1977 translation, and passages that were unpublishable in Communist Poland have been restored.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Probably the finest book about the insurrection of 1944. . . . Białoszewski's book was about the city and its people; in the course of his narration, the two become

interchangeable. • John Carpenter • “A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising is a faithful, antiheroic, and nonpathetic description of disintegration: bombed houses, whole streets, human bodies disintegrate, as do objects of everyday use and human perceptions of the world. • Czesław Miłosz “In a country in which writers were supposed to uphold the moral conscience, Białykowski was the opposite, a champion of insignificance. When the moment came, he filled page after page with details about life amid the rubble • about what it was like to pick dust and debris out of one’s soup, to visit a barber, to attend a Chopin concert with guns and bombs going off all around, or to use a latrine. • Daniel Lazare, Jacobin • “A master of grammatical games, puns, and colloquial speech patterns, this dark-minded, philosophically inclined scrutinizer of the humblest objects of daily life is enjoying more popularity and critical attention a quarter century after his death than during his lifetime. Outside of Poland, he remains best known for his *Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising*. • The Iowa Review • “Białykowski very quickly emerged, surfaced for me as the most exciting and most intriguing Polish writer of what now would be the second half of the century. • Chicago Review • “Białykowski demonstrates that each loss also offers a new way of seeing and something new to see, even if what comes into view is only a greynaked hole. He manages to generate a new form from absence and emptiness as the greynakedhole takes on a life of its own. Seen this way, the world’s inescapable losses generate not only pain, but also creative possibility and even perhaps inexhaustible joy. • Clare Cavanaugh, *Partisan Review* • “This most private author of postwar Polish literature disregards discourses of history so deeply embedded in the Polish literary tradition; rather he focuses on the mundane aspects of the everyday life, usually from an autobiographical perspective and using an overtly colloquial language. Although Białykowski’s works have stirred many discussions, most of these have focused on his treatment of genres and language. • Joanna Nizyńska, professor of Polish, Harvard University • “Poems of Miron Białykowski is the book I hope to one day hold in my hands. A great post-war Polish poet, Białykowski wrote work radically different from that of his contemporaries • Miłosz, Jaskir, Kamieńska, Herbert, and Szymborska • but his poetry was just as powerful and important to the development of the contemporary European lyric.... When I mentioned [him] to Tomasz Alamyński in a recent conversation, Tomasz’s face lit up: Białykowski, when he is

translated and available in English, will cause an explosion in American poetry! One hopes so. Ilya Kaminsky, poetry editor, Words Without Borders

Text: English (translation) Original Language: Polish --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The book is a stirring montage of chaos, destruction, fear, and camaraderie. It is to be skimmed for full effect. There is no real pretense of precise chronology; and that's a good thing. A swirling nightmarish experience has left the young man's head spinning with events. Some of the most touching scenes are of churches and nunneries and monasteries destroyed, but not before they pitched in to help their fellow Poles --even an order of nuns never before outside the convent walls. The images are vivid. It will become a film.

Excellent!

Highly recommend this work, a classic written about 20 years after the experience.

This was originally written in Polish in 1970. Owing to the fact that the author uses somewhat unorganized narrative, the reader of this book may find it difficult to follow it. There is, however, a helpful glossary (pp. 233-234) of Polish-related allusions. Bialoszewski commonly compares the carnage of the Uprising with that of the original German siege of Warsaw in September 1939. For instance: "When on one day--the 23rd, I think--18,000 shells fell on Warsaw. September 25--that was the decisive day--from morning to night, for twelve hours, Warsaw was bombarded." (p. 80). In common with many authors describing the Warsaw Uprising, Bialoszewski elaborates on the deadly weapons which the Germans had--and against which the Poles had no defense. This includes the Nebelwerfer ("roaring cow", "bellowing cow", "wardrobe", etc.). He comments: "I saw apartment houses which had been uprooted by the 'cows', narrow ones, but sometimes four stories high." (pp. 164-165). There were also the giant German artillery pieces: "The 'berthas' were the worst. They were, as far as I can remember, three-quarter ton bombs. Three quarters of a ton isn't too bad. Only it was three quarters of a ton of bomb, and straight from the sky, at a slant. I think that was the decisive factor...I'm talking only about the toll among the cellars." (p. 165) Bialoszewski also discusses the evacuation of Warsaw following the capitulation of the Uprising on October 2, 1944. There was astonishment that so many civilians were still alive. In 1946, after the Uprising and the

war itself, Bialoszewski personally observed the cremated remains of tens of thousands of Polish civilians who had been murdered by the Germans and their collaborators at Wola (p. 35)

Warsaw Uprising from civilians point of view. Everything is in constant motion. Simply great

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