

Polish people read Korean Nobel Prize winner's prose thanks to Koreanists from the Faculty of Oriental Studies!

This year's Nobel Prize in Literature has been awarded to South Korean writer Han Kang, recognized for her "intense poetic prose that grapples with historical traumas and exposes the fragility of human life." Han Kang was born in 1970 in Gwangju and moved with her family to Seoul ten years later. She graduated in Korean literature from the prestigious Yonsei University. She debuted as a poet in 1993, publishing a series of poems in the Korean magazine "Munhak kwa Sahoe (Literature and Society)," but her main body of work is prose, for which she has been repeatedly awarded in Korea and worldwide.

The novel "The Vegetarian" brought her international fame; its English translation was honored with the Man Booker International Prize in 2016. The Polish translation, done by Dr. Justyna Najbar-Miller and Dr. Choi Jeong In from the University of Warsaw, was released in 2014 by Kwiaty Orientu publishing house and reissued in 2021 by W.A.B. Other novels by Han Kang, such as "*Nadchodzi chłopiec*" (W.A.B, 2020), "*Biała elegia*" (W.A.B, 2022), and "*Nie mówię żegnaj*" (W.A.B, 2024), along with shorter prose works like "*Dziewięć opowieści*" published in the magazine "Opowiadanie" in 2016 and "*Owoce mojej kobiety*" included in the collection "*Mistrzowie opowieści. O kobiecie*" released in 2023 by Wielka Litera publishing house, have also been translated by Dr. Najbar-Miller.

Dr. Najbar-Miller's interest in Han Kang's work was sparked by the latter piece, which she encountered for the first time during her stay in Korea in 2004. It tells the story of a young woman who gradually transforms into an exotic plant. The unconventional plot and original style of this fantastical story motivated the Korean studies scholar to explore, translate, and study more works by this outstanding author.

"Due to the differences between these two languages, literary translation from Korean to Polish is a very challenging task," admits Dr. Najbar-Miller. "Translating Han Kang's works also requires immense dedication. One must carefully analyze the rich vocabulary, infer many things from the context, and constantly consider how to present the Korean cultural elements unfamiliar to Poles so that they do not become a barrier to appreciating the beauty of this prose and the significance of the themes addressed."

It is worth mentioning that in 2014, Han Kang participated in an artistic residency program organized at the Faculty of Oriental Studies at the University of Warsaw, supported by the Arts Council Korea. She spent a total of four months in Poland. During her stay, she delivered lectures for Korean studies students at the University of Warsaw and participated in the International Short Story Festival in Wrocław. The result of her stay in our country is "*Biała elegia*" in which Warsaw, described by the author as the "white city," became the backdrop for reflections on life and death.