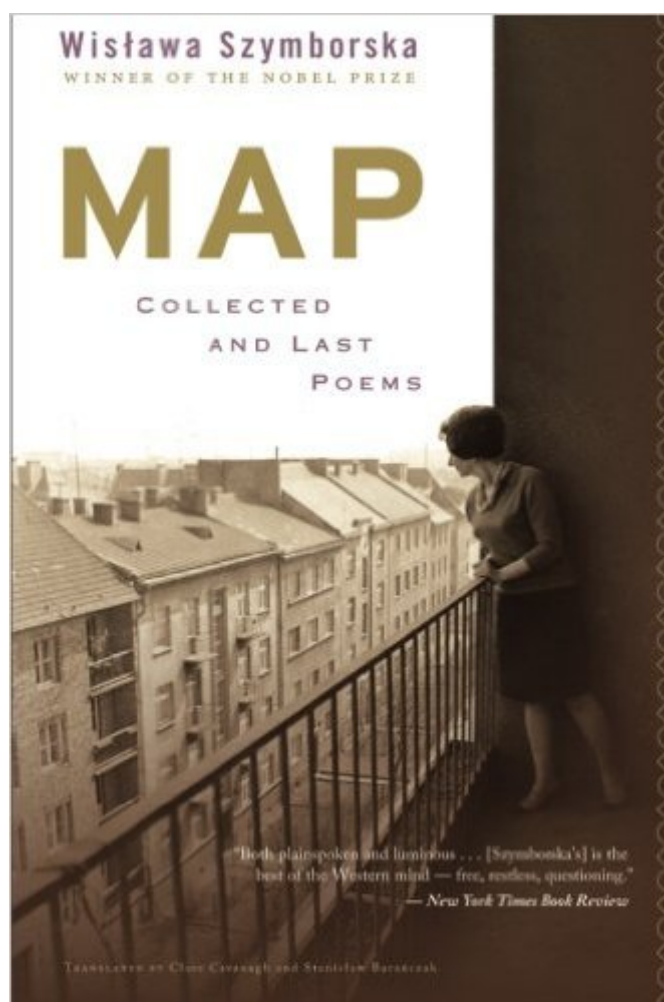


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Map: Collected And Last Poems



Synopsis

“Both plain-spoken and luminous . . . [Szyborska’s] is the best of the Western mind—free, restless, questioning.” *New York Times Book Review* A *New York Times* Editors’ Choice “Vast, intimate, and charged with the warmth of a life fully imagined to the end. There’s no better place for those unfamiliar with her work to begin.” *Vogue* “One of Europe’s greatest poets is also its wisest, wittiest, and most accessible. Nobel Prize winner Wisława Szymborska draws us in with her unexpected, unassuming humor. If you want the world in a nutshell,” a Polish critic remarked, “try Szymborska.” But the world held in these lapidary poems is larger than the one we thought we knew. Edited by her longtime, award-winning translator, Clare Cavanagh, *Map* traces Szymborska’s work until her death in 2012. Of the approximately two hundred fifty poems included here, nearly forty are newly translated; thirteen represent the entirety of the poet’s last Polish collection, *Enough*, never before published in English. *Map* offers Szymborska’s devoted readers a welcome return to her ironic elegance. (The New Yorker). “Her poems offer a restorative wit as playful as it is steely and as humble as it is wise . . . Her wry acceptance of life’s folly remain[s] her strongest weapon against tyranny and bad taste.” *Los Angeles Times Book Review*

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Customer Reviews

It turns out that I already owned a Szymborska anthology, in a bilingual edition from 1981 with translations by Robert A. Maguire, that my father-in-law brought back from Poland. I am ashamed to say I never read it, put off by the cheap Soviet-era printing and a vague sense that the poet would

probably be "important," but not enjoyable. Big mistake! As this new collection proves, Szymborska is thoroughly entertaining throughout, at times even hilarious. Her importance is confirmed by the award of the Nobel Prize in 1996, but it would have long been clear from her themes: love, art, history, life and death, the mystery of existence, and, though with a very subtle touch, the politics of a troubled nation in troubled times. Perhaps because both are Nobel laureates whose work has been celebrated in volumes spanning entire lifetimes, I was also reminded of *THE GREAT ENIGMA* by Tomas Transtr mer, though Szymborska is a less private figure, and her poems are more approachable. Though I do not know a word of Polish, I am lost in admiration for translator Clare Cavanagh, working sometimes with Stanislaw Baranczak, sometimes alone. In an afterword, she notes that she has translated a handful of early poems, plus Szymborska's most recent collection, *ENOUGH* (2012), and each of the ten collections in between, beginning with *CALLING OUT TO YETI* from 1957. So this is essentially the complete collected works -- with the exception of some light verse and a few poems deemed (with the poet's agreement) to be untranslatable. I find myself wondering why this would be, and suspect that these are poems whose wordplay in Polish has no equivalent in English.

Everythingâ€™s mine but just on loan, nothing for memory to hold, though mine as long as I look. These are the first lines of the short poem, "Travel Elegy" -- 37 lines long -- which is about memory, one of Szymborska's recurrent themes. But it is a poet's memory, which remembers details and the details reconstruct historic wholes: events, people and places now long gone. It wasn't all she was but Szymborska was one of the preeminent poets of memory in our modern age. Some of her poems have grand historic dimension -- "Starvation Camp Near Jaslo", for instance. Some are closer to our everyday experience, but no less poignant for that -- "because memory is loss, that's all it is, loss remembered but lost still. There are the phrases! Szymborska coined some of the most apt and unforgettable phrases in modern poetry. She calls Rubens's models "O fatty dishes of love!", compares them "their skinny sisters" in medieval illustrations. ("Rubens's Women") The problem here, of course, is that I'm not reading Szymborska, I'm reading her translator, Clare Cavanagh. The above phrases probably translate literally, or almost so, from the original Polish, but it gets trickier in some of the rhymed poems, "Bodybuilders' Contest", for instance, with these two pairings: The king of is he who preens and wrestles with sinews twisted into monstrous pretzels. An audacious pairing -- "wrestles" with "pretzels" -- and the last two lines: The mammoth fist he raises as he wins tribute to the force of vitamins. I admire it but in Polish, what were the rhyming words? Were

they • and • and • and •?

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