

Florian Smieja

(b. 1925)

Poet, translator, scholar



Florian Smieja is an outstanding expert in Spanish and Latin American literature, as well as poet, essayist and translator.

Born and raised in the western part of Poland annexed by the Third Reich after the 1939 German invasion, Smieja was sent to Germany as a forced labourer at fourteen. Three years later, he escaped to German-occupied Belgium, where he hid until liberated by the First Polish Armoured Division in 1944. Making his way to England, he volunteered for the First Polish Army Corps and served as wireless operator until the end of the German campaign. He resumed his education after the war, gaining a Ph.D. in Spanish studies from King's College, London, in 1962, after which he taught at the School of Slavonic and East European Languages in the University of London, the London School of Economics, and the University of Nottingham. In 1969, Professor Smieja came to Canada to take up a chair at the University of Western Ontario, where he taught until his retirement in 1991.

In the 1950s, he helped form in England a group of Polish poets called Continents, and edited their two journals. He is the author of over a dozen volumes of poetry in Polish, and has translated into Polish a number of books written in Spanish, Portuguese and English, among them works by Garcia Lorca, W. T. Walsh, J. R. Jimenez, M. Azuela and L. Martin-Santos. He has also published a collection of interviews with writers and two volumes of memoirs.

Always interested in promoting cultural life, Professor Smieja was the long-time host of the TV programme *Mosaic London* in London, Ontario, and established the Polish Discussion Club at Western. He has been president of the Ontario Chapter of the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese, and of the Toronto-based Polish Canadian Publishing Fund, for which he was honoured with an award from the Ethnic Journalists' Club. A member of the Polish Writers' Association, he also twice received the prize of the Union of Polish Writers Abroad. Several books dedicated to his rich body of work have appeared in Poland.

Photos from top left clockwise:
• Florian Smieja, professor at the University of Western Ontario • Prof. F. Smieja, host of TV programme *Mosaic London* • Prof. F. Smieja's publications • Polish Discussion Club, London, created by Prof. F. Smieja in 1972
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POLISH SPIRIT

