

# How esteemed Prof. Szarota promotes plagiarism

by Voy Le Vitzki

2 September 2016

**The President of the Jury for the prestigious KLIO book award, Prof. Tomasz Szarota, is insisting that a monograph — that is a result of criminal activity and has been withdrawn from distribution — is worthy of this illustrious prize because ... it looked beautiful. In this approach he appears to be supported by the distinguished Polish historian Prof. Henryk Samsonowicz. Would Professors Szarota and Samsonowicz bestow the KLIO Award upon e.g. Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* if this book were printed in a visually attractive form?**

*“A corrupt judge does not carefully search for the truth.” — Horace*

On 7 April 2016, I sent a letter<sup>1</sup> to Prof. Tomasz Szarota who is the President of the Jury for the KLIO Award, the prestigious Polish book distinction also called the Nobel Prize for historians. In my letter, I brought to his attention the matter of the book *The woman in medieval Europe* by Prof. Andrzej Radzimiński. This publication received the KLIO Award in 2012. I pointed out to Prof. Szarota that the author, Prof. Radzimiński, gravely violated copyright law in this monograph.

As an answer, I received a letter dated 18 April 2016 in which Prof. Tomasz Szarota stated that ‘... retracting the award ... cannot be even considered. ...’!

This beautiful monograph is riddled with serious plagiarism according to an article published by Dr Marek Wroński in 2016 in *Academic Forum*, a monthly for Polish academics<sup>2</sup>. The

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<sup>1</sup> Prof. Szarota's and my correspondence, translated into English, are appended to this article.

<sup>2</sup> The case of plagiarism in the book *The woman in medieval Europe* by Prof. Andrzej Radzimiński is described in the article *Time of deceit (or how to lose reputation)*, available at <http://www.bmartin.cc/dissent/documents/Wronski/Wronski1506.pdf>.

book was already two years on the market before it was accidentally discovered that it was a fraud. Among other scandals, Dr Wronski described in his article how in 2012 the prestigious historical book prize, the KLIO Award, was bestowed upon this fraudulent publication written by the then Vice-Chancellor of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Thorn<sup>3</sup>, Prof. Radzimiński. The prize was awarded for the beautiful graphic design of the publication.

The infamous monograph was issued by the Publishing House of the Nicolaus Copernicus University and thus the splendour of this illustrious award and then the unexpected embarrassment fell not just upon the counterfeited book and its cheating author but also upon the unsuspecting publisher. In 2015, it was proved beyond any doubt that the book contained extensive unacknowledged borrowings from other scholarly publications. In May 2015, ex-Vice-Chancellor Prof. Radzimiński was convicted for violating the Polish copyright law. The publisher withdrew the book from distribution.

But the President of the Jury of the KLIO Award, Prof. Szarota, is insisting that the ‘book-phantom’ (obviously the publication is not available for purchase anymore) will retain the Award. Prof. Szarota’s peculiar reasoning is that the prize is for the beautiful graphic design of the book.

By maintaining this stance, the distinguished historian Prof. Szarota is, in fact, indirectly but obviously promoting this fraudulent publication. This utterly appalling and irresponsible attitude is apparently shared by another esteemed scholar, Prof. Henryk Samsonowicz who is also a member of the Jury of the KLIO Award. **It should be remembered that to be awarded the KLIO prize, which is called the Nobel Prize for historians, constitutes a great honour and the prestige of this accolade must not be degraded by conferring it upon the publication which was created through theft of intellectual property and which brazenly violates copyright law.**

And this is not the first time that Prof. Szarota supports plagiarism. In his letter to me dated 18 April 2016, Prof. Szarota mentioned that ‘... Mr. Wroński contacted me many years ago in relation to another “plagiarism matter”. ...’.

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<sup>3</sup> Polish: Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika w Toruniu

Indeed, several years ago Dr Wroński contacted Prof. Szarota to warn him that another book which at that time had received the KLIO Award involved plagiarism. However, this is not the whole story. Similarly to his present appalling approach, Prof. Szarota — who was then also the President of the Jury of the KLIO Award — vigorously opposed the fraudulent publication to be stripped off the KLIO Award. Luckily, one member of the Jury — in protest against such a shocking disregard and violation of academic integrity — declared that he would resign from the Jury if the book retained the prize. Then other members of the Jury also protested and the award was rescinded.

In contrast to Prof. Szarota's appalling stance, the Director of the Publishing House of the University of Nicolaus Copernicus, Prof. Mirosław Strzyżewski views this prize awarded to his organisation not as an achievement but as an awkward, though undeserved, predicament. In his letter to me dated 14 April 2016, Prof. Strzyżewski stated: '... I regret that this book was issued by the Publication House headed by me. At first, there were no indications that publishing this book would result in any problems. However, the resulting consequences are highly unpleasant and embarrassing. ...'.

I would like also to point out that when the convicted plagiarist, Prof. Radziwiński, became the President of the Thorn Academic Society in 2015, Prof. Strzyżewski resigned from its membership. In this action he was joined only by one other professor. The rest of the Society members who all are university professors are apparently happy to have the cheat — who had committed serious scholarly misconduct as well as violated Polish criminal law — as the President of their Society!

Furthermore, I have received correspondence from Mr. Zbigniew Czerwiński who is the Chairman of the Board of the Publishing House *Belona* as well as the President of the Alliance of Historical Book Publishers. The latter organisation is the initiator and is responsible for funding of the KLIO Award. Mr. Czerwiński is also the Secretary of the Jury of the KLIO Award. In his letter dated 18 April 2016, Mr. Czerwiński informed me that at the next meeting of the Jury in October 2016 he will '... undertake appropriate steps ...' to resolve the problem of Prof. Radziwiński's infamous monograph being a recipient of the KLIO Award.

Further in his letter Mr. Czerwiński stated: ‘... It is very important for us to maintain the prestige of our Award. Acknowledging the responsibility for this unpleasant mistake, I would like to point out a mitigating factor that the Jury has to assess about 150 publications each year and thus may not always notice when the principles of publishing integrity are violated in a particular publication ...’.

I fully sympathise with the difficulties faced by the Jury of the KLIO Award. In my letter to Prof. Szarota dated 24 April 2016, I wrote: ‘... Indeed, nobody could have expected that this Vice-Chancellor [of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Thorn] would himself commit such an offence. After all, it was Prof. Radzimiński who during his term 2008–2012 as the Vice-Chancellor, was known for his exemplary vigilance against violation of copyright law ...’.

I further wrote in this letter to Prof. Szarota: ‘... As you stated, the Jury awarded ‘... *the prize for the beautiful graphic design of the book* ...’. Hence, the award was bestowed upon an apple beautiful on the outside but rotten inside ...’.

It should be emphasised that after it had been proved that the book *The woman in medieval Europe* involves plagiarism, it has been withdrawn from distribution. As this monograph has been by now officially retracted, the award went to what is now effectively a ‘book-phantom’.

In my letter of 24 April 2016, I also stressed to Prof. Szarota that: ‘... to be awarded the KLIO Award constitutes a great honour and the prestige of this accolade must not be degraded by conferring it upon a publication which was a result of criminal activity. ...’.

It should be remembered that the Polish criminal code treats violation of copyright law as a criminal offence which is prosecuted *ex officio*.

Since I sent this letter to Prof. Szarota four months ago, I have not received a reply ...

**vlevitzki@gmail.com**

Prof. Tomasz Szarota  
President of Jury  
KLIO Award  
XXX Street, XXX  
XXX Warsaw  
Poland

7/04/2016

**Re: Book titled *The woman in medieval Europe* by Prof. Andrzej Radzimiński**

- 1) *By registered letter to the above address.*
- 2) *By email: [ihpan@ihpan.edu.pl](mailto:ihpan@ihpan.edu.pl)*

Dear Prof. Szarota,

I am writing to you as the President of the Jury of the KLIO Award. In 2012, this prestigious prize was bestowed upon the book *The woman in medieval Europe*, authored by Prof. Andrzej Radzimiński and published by the Publishing House of the University of Nicolaus Copernicus in Thorn [Polish: *Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika w Toruniu*].

Prof. Szarota, I would like to draw your attention to the article titled *Time of deceit (or how to lose reputation)* [Polish: „Jak stracić prestiż”] by Marek Wroński published in the monthly *Academic Forum* in June 2015 - FA 06/2015 (I am enclosing a copy of this article). This article describes violation of copyright law committed by Prof. Radzimiński. Justifying the disciplinary penalty imposed on Prof. Radzimiński in May 2015, the then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Nicolaus Copernicus, Prof. Andrzej Tretyn, addressed Prof. Radzimiński as follows: ***‘In the course of the investigation, it was established that you had committed a disciplinary offence, which is contrary to the duties and ethics of an academic teacher. Specifically, in your book *The woman in medieval Europe*, published by the Nicolaus Copernicus University Publishing House, Thorn 2012, you borrowed, without referencing, excerpts from three works and only listed them in the so-called bibliography. You also appropriated fragments from two other publications and failed***

*to give their sources at all. (...)’.*

The English version of the above mentioned article, titled ‘*Time of deceit (or how to lose reputation)*’, which describes this plagiarism committed by Prof. Radzimiński, has been published on the internet site of Prof. Brian Martin from the University of Wollongong in Australia, at the following address: <http://www.bmartin.cc/dissent/documents/Wronski/Wronski1506.pdf>. This internet site is well known and respected by international academic and research community.

Prof. Szarota, in view of the above evidence I urge you as the President of the Jury of KLIO Award, to retract the prize bestowed upon the book by Prof. Radzimiński as it has been proved that its author violated the principles of academic integrity.

Prof. Szarota, with deep concern I am awaiting your response regarding the above described iniquity and what measures you have undertaken to rectify it.

Yours sincerely

[Signature of Voy Le Vitzki]

Voy Le Vitzki

Ph. +64 XXX XXX XXX

E-mail: [vlevitzki@gmail.com](mailto:vlevitzki@gmail.com)

Postal address:

P.O. Box XXXX

XXX NSW XXXX

Sydney

Australia

Attachment

Copy of the article titled ‘*Time of deceit (or how to lose reputation)*’ [Polish: „Jak stracić prestiż”] by Dr Marek Wroński published in the monthly *Academic Forum* in June 2015 - FA 06/2015.

CC

1. Prof. Andrzej Tretyn

Vice-Chancellor of the University of Nicolaus Copernicus

rektor@umk.pl

2. Prof. Mirosław Strzyżewski

Director of the Publishing House of the University of Nicolaus Copernicus

mistrzy@umk.pl

3. Mr Zbigniew Czerwiński

Chairman of the Board of the Publishing House *Belona*

biuro@bellona.pl

4. Dr Marek Wroński

*Academic Forum*

marekwro@gmail.com

Warsaw, 18 April 2016

Prof. Tomasz Szarota  
E-mail: ihpan@ihpan.edu.pl

Mr. Voytek Le Vitzki  
E-mail: vlevitzki@gmail.com

Dear Sir,

I received both your email as well as your registered letter. I had to collect the latter from the post office. I was not aware of the article by Mr Marek Wroński in *Academic Forum*. However, Mr. Wroński contacted me many years ago in relation to another ‘plagiarism matter’. Prof. Andrzej Radzimiński’s book *The woman in medieval Europe* did, indeed, receive the ‘Klio’ Award in 2012 but it must be stressed that the category was **graphic design**. For over ten years the Jury has been awarding this prize in four categories: the best writer, the best scholarly monograph, the best publication related to Warsaw, and indeed, the best graphic design. If Prof. Radzimiński’s book received the Award in either of the first two categories, perhaps we might have had to consider retracting it. I draw your attention to the fact that the prize for the beautiful graphic design of the book was bestowed upon the Editor, namely the Publishing House of the University of Nicolaus Copernicus in Thorn [Polish: *Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika w Toruniu*] and not upon the book’s author. In this situation, retracting the award, as suggested by Marek Wroński, cannot be even considered. I have consulted my reply to you with the distinguished medievalist and the Jury member, Prof. Henryk Samsonowicz.

Yours sincerely

[Signature of Prof. Tomasz Szarota]



Prof. Tomasz Szarota  
President of Jury  
KLIO Award

Sydney, 24 April 2016

**Re: Book by Prof. Andrzej Radziwiński *The woman in medieval Europe*.**

*By email: ihpan@ihpan.edu.pl*

Dear Prof. Szarota,

Thank you for your letter.

It is understandable that the Jury of the KLIO Award, headed by you, bestowed this prestigious distinction upon Prof. Andrzej Radziwiński's book *The woman in medieval Europe* - they were not aware that Prof. Radziwiński disgracefully abused research integrity principles. Specifically, the Jury did not know that the book's author violated copyright law in this monograph. Furthermore, Prof. Radziwiński's publication *The woman in medieval Europe* was awarded the KLIO Award in 2012 when Prof. Radziwiński was the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Nicolaus Copernicus in Thorn [Polish: Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika w Toruniu]. Indeed, nobody could have expected that this Vice-Chancellor would himself commit such an offence. After all, it was Prof. Radziwiński who, during his term 2008-2012 as the Vice-Chancellor, was known for his exemplary vigilance against violation of copyright law.

Referring to the offence committed by Prof. Radziwiński and justifying the disciplinary penalty imposed on him in May 2015, the then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Nicolaus Copernicus, Prof. Andrzej Tretyn, addressed Prof. Radziwiński as follows: ***'In the course of the investigation, it was established that you had committed a disciplinary offence, which is contrary to the duties and ethics of an academic teacher. ...'***

Therefore, the following question arises: if the Jury knew that the book by Prof. Radziwiński was plagiarised, would they still have bestowed the KLIO Award upon it? As you stated, the Jury

awarded ‘... *the prize for the beautiful graphic design of the book ...*’. Hence, the award was bestowed upon an apple beautiful on the outside but rotten inside.

It should be emphasised that after it had been proved that the book *The woman in medieval Europe* involved plagiarism, it has been withdrawn from distribution. As this monograph has been by now officially retracted, the KLIO Award went, paradoxically, to what is now a ‘book-phantom’.

Prof. Szarota, to be awarded the KLIO Award constitutes a great honour and the prestige of this accolade must not be degraded by conferring it upon a publication which was a result of criminal activity. Because the Polish criminal code treats violation of copyright law as a criminal offence.

All that remains now is to hope that you, in your distinguished role as the President of the Jury of the KLIO Award, will instigate implementation of appropriate measures to protect the prestige and significance of this great prize. Indeed, it is high time that Poland’s scholarly and scientific research undergoes a major and long overdue reform to address the critical issue of academic plagiarism.

Yours sincerely,

Voy Le Vitzki

Ph. +64 XXX XXX XXX

E-mail: vlevitzki@gmail.com

Postal address:

P.O. Box XXXX

XXX NSW XXXX

Sydney

Australia

CC

Ms Małgorzata Protasiuk

Administration Section

The Tadeusz Manteuffel Institute of History

The Polish Academy of Sciences and Research Council of the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences

mprotasiuk@ihpan.edu.pl