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# New documentary on Nobel laureate Szymborska



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By AGATA KLAPEK, Associated Press writer - 2 hrs 1 min ago

WARSAW, Poland - A rare documentary about Nobel Prize winning poet Wislawa Szymborska portrays a lively yet distinguished woman who savors the world's contrasts, from 17th-century Dutch painting to boxing.

And, in a bit of unsuspected prescience, it shows a school document from 1937 that saw a classmate declare that she would one day win the Nobel Prize in literature, a feat she accomplished in 1996.

The 70-minute documentary "Sometimes Life is Bearable" by Katarzyna Kolenda-Zaleska, which aired Sunday, is the first time the notoriously media-shy writer has offered such insight into her life and fascinations. She let a crew from Poland's TVN television visit her at home in Krakow and accompany her on travels throughout Europe from Italy to Ireland.

Viewers see Szymborska, 86, enjoying her less-known literary hobby - composing saucy limericks - while visiting places including Moher, Ireland, and Corleone, Sicily.

She is shown visiting art galleries and browsing in small shops for kitschy objects of art for herself and for friends.

But, in a more serious vein, she also explains why, as a young poet in 1953, she mourned the death of Soviet dictator Josef Stalin

"I wrote it. A pity. I regret it," she said, recalling that, at the time, many Polish intellectuals had placed great faith and hope in communism in the aftermath of World War II.

"I didn't do that for career or for money," she said. "That's how I thought then."

In the film, Woody Allen, Czech playwright-turned-president Vaclav Havel and British anthropologist Jane Goodall speak of their appreciation for Szymborska's verse, which deals with the profound or tragic in life through small details of daily existence, laden with empathy that is sometimes veiled in a joke, sometimes in irony.

"She is able to capture the pointlessness and sadness of life, but somehow still be affirmative," Allen said. "She fulfills my definition of what an important artist should be: profound, but always remembering that his obligation is to entertain the reader."

Szymborska's interest in Goodall's work with chimpanzees and her love for animals suggests she draws more fascination from nature than from civilization.

Her distance to the things worldly and distinction is, perhaps, best summarized in the film by a long, drawn-out search in her apartment's many cupboards for the Nobel Prize medal - eventually found buried deep in a distant corner and then placed in a drawer with old souvenirs and medals.

She still refers to the 1.3 million kroner prize - the highest honor for literature there is - as the "Stockholm Tragedy" that upset her life and writing rhythm, creating constant pressure for public appearances and interviews.

In more personal moments, the document details Szymborska's insatiable love of a good prank, too.

Appreciating Johannes Vermeer's masterpiece "The Milkmaid" in Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum, she suddenly jokes, with a gleam in her eye: "Now we take out the knife and cut it out."

But just before she cracked that joke, Szymborska read her poem inspired by the painting, which said that as long as the milkmaid pours the milk, the world does not deserve to end.

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