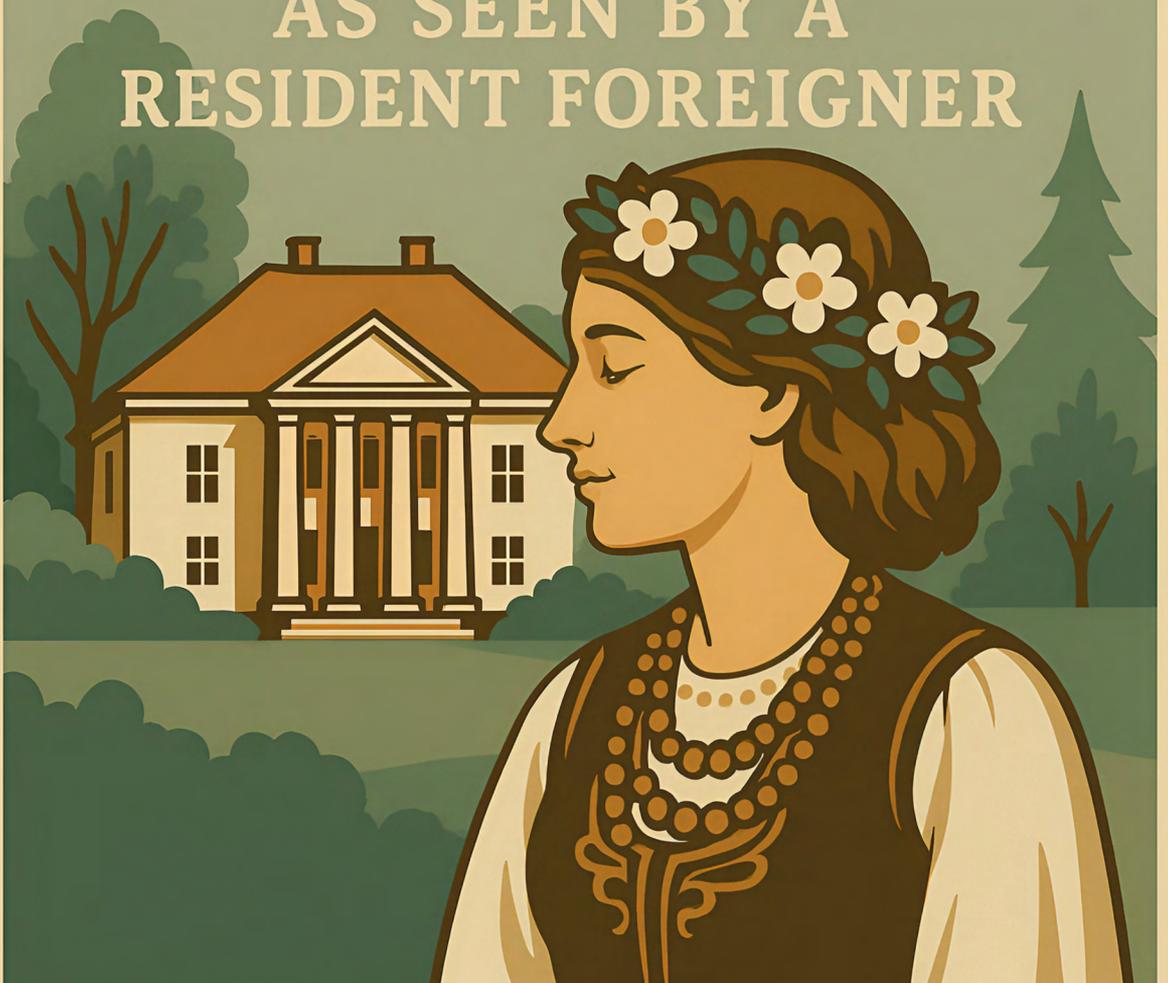


PAUL SUPER
ELEMENTS OF
POLISH
CULTURE

AS SEEN BY A
RESIDENT FOREIGNER



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WYDAWNICTWO
MAREK DEREWIECKI

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PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD

When Paul Super was preparing his book for publication, Poland was a young state, newly reborn after more than a century of foreign partitions. His observations captured a dynamic country, rich in cultural diversity, developing economically and socially, and looking to the future with hope. The author recognized distinct Polish traits across different regions, described the lasting marks of history, architecture, and everyday life, and emphasized Poland's orientation toward the West – both geopolitically and culturally. As a representative of the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association), Super spent fifteen years in Poland and became a careful, sensitive observer of its culture.

Elements of Polish culture as seen by a resident foreigner is a work deeply rooted in the interwar realities – the atmosphere of national rebuilding, educational reform, civic energy, and cultural awakening. Although not an academic study, the book is written with insight and genuine commitment. Super captures what he sees: social phenomena, shared values, behavioral patterns, and national character as revealed through conversations, travels, and daily interactions.

But 1939 changed everything. World War II abruptly halted Poland's development, and the consequences were tragic. Germany and the Soviet Union partitioned the country, and the Polish intelligentsia – scholars, artists, teachers, lawyers, doctors, and civil servants – was systematically exterminated. Crimes such as the Katyn

Massacre, the annihilation of the Jewish community, and the widespread terror of occupation left deep scars on Polish society. The world described by Paul Super — vibrant, creative, full of energy and promise — was largely destroyed or dramatically transformed.

After the war, Poland came under decades of Soviet domination. Although it formally regained its statehood, its sovereignty was severely restricted, and its development stalled under the communist system. Censorship, a centrally planned economy, ideological control, and isolation from the West reshaped the country's social and cultural fabric. Many of the places Super described — Lwów, Wilno, Podolia, Polesia, and other eastern cities — were no longer part of postwar Poland, having been absorbed into the Soviet Union.

Reading this book today, one must remember that it presents Poland before the catastrophe of war and the long period of subjugation that followed. It is a unique historical document, offering a portrait of the country through the eyes of a foreign observer who saw its beauty, values, and striving for growth. The republication of this work offers a moment to reflect not only on what was lost, but also on the enduring strength of a nation that, despite adversity, managed to reclaim its identity, culture, and place in Europe.

Reading this book allows the modern reader to better understand the national traits of the Polish people — traits that remain strongly present in contemporary culture despite the turbulent twentieth century: profound idealism, a deep attachment to freedom, tolerance, individualism, strong religiosity, and a distinctive sense of dignity. It is also an opportunity to grasp the spirit of Polishness — rooted in history, yet still very much alive.

CHAPTER 1.

CULTURAL AREAS

The culture of Poland is found in four geographical distributions. First, an eastern and frontier culture, centred on two foci, Wilno and Lwów, but seen also in numerous towns near old castles and palaces all along Poland's border toward Russia; not, however, Russian in type, but the most eastern extension of true Polish characteristics. That is, in its architecture and manners it is European, Catholic, and Western.

The second cultural belt is composed of the somewhat primitive but well developed and artistic native culture of the Carpathian Mountains which constitute Poland's southern provinces, its western flowering being the costumes, architecture, and whole way of life of the *Górale*, as the mountaineers around Zakopane are called, and its eastern representation the picturesque *Huculi*, of whose houses, clothing, domestic utensils, and native art whole books have been written.

The third and richest cultural area is that connected with the Baltic by the Vistula River. Its southern glory is Cracow, ancient city of the Hanseatic League. Its modern capital is Warsaw. Then beginning with Płock where there is a fine old cathedral come the attractive medieval cities of Toruń, Chełmno, and Grudziądz. Southwest of these lie the province and city of Poznan, older, richer, the very heart and soul of Poland and the Polish people, separated from the sea by its neighbouring maritime province of Polish Pomerania