

Jacek Dehnel interview

Where did you grow up?

In Gdańsk, Poland, then I moved to Warsaw to study in 1999, lived there for 20 years (still consider it to my place on Earth) and recently moved to Berlin.

Studies?

MISH – Interfacultative Individual Humanistic Studies at the Warsaw university, quite a peculiar institution, giving students a broad choice of basically anything taught at the University.

Professional experience?

I have published my first book being 18, in 1999, and since then I worked as a writer and translator (prose, poetry, essays, columns); I have published 5 novels (two of them, “Saturn” and “Krivoklat” were translated into French, the most popular, “Lala”, was translated into 14 languages), 4 vintage crime novels co-written with my husband as Maryla Szymiczekowa, collections of stories, columns and other short forms, 9 books of poems, translations of both prose and poetry. I received some important literary awards (Paszport “Polityki” and Nagroda Fundacji Kościelskich), I have been nominated or shortlisted to others, by books were translated into 16 languages.

Languages spoken for potential interviews? Language you would like to speak or be translated from in round tables, if you cannot do it in English?

Polish and English, both fluently.

Any special diet?

Not really.

Particular relationships with France (any trips? favorite places?, etc.)

I like the cultural richness of France, I am not that fond of Paris though; I have been to writers' residencies in Amiens and in L'Honor de Cos near Toulouse. I had a reading in Bordeaux as large parts of “Saturn” take place there, in Goya's house (my reading was actually in that very building which houses the Instituto Cervantes). My distant ancestors came to Poland as French huguenots, probably from Normandy.

Any interesting information about parents or family?

My mother is a painter, by father is an engineer. When it goes back in time, I have a pretty mixed heritage: Poles, Russians, Germans, French, Ukrainians, Cossacks, Armenians, Lithuanians, Tatars, Yotvingians and Vikings. The deeper I dig, the more I find.

Any particular relationships with a given country (eg trips etc)

I travel quite a lot, both for work and pleasure. I moved to Berlin in 2020 for DAAD artist-in-residence program, together with my husband, and we have decided to stay here because of the political situation in Poland and anti-LGBT campaign run by the Catholic church and the ruling party.

Personal interests?

Collecting old photography. I run and gradually enlarge a website presenting large part of it (over 8,5 thousand of objects: www.awers-rewers.pl)

When and why did you start writing?

I was supposed to be a painter but then, being an avid reader, I started to write on my own, other than for school assignments. Probably being around 15. I treated that as a separate way of expression, always thinking it will be only a hobby. To my surprise, my writing proved to be quite successful, more than my painting, and finally it became my main work and main source of income, making me a professional writer, not a painter.