

**POLAND'S
HAPPY POTTER**

a *HANDY GUIDE* to

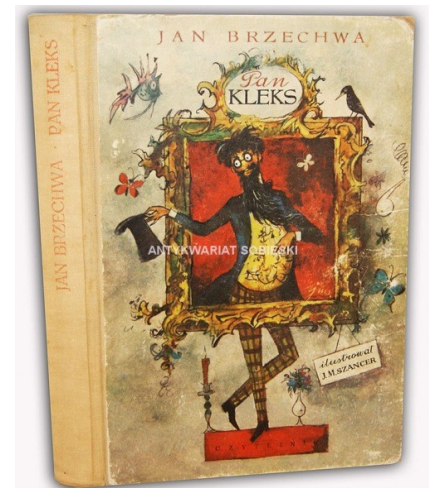
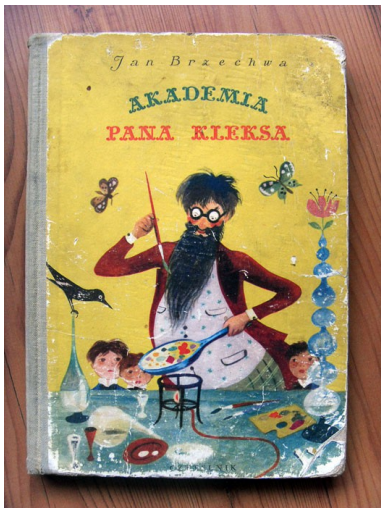
JW Fletching's

**PROFESSOR
INKBLOT'S
ACADEMY
OF WONDERS**

translated from:

Jan Brzechwa's

**AKADEMIA
PANA KLEKSA**



MJ Kazmierski

1946-2020

London, Toronto, Warsaw

POLAND'S HAPPY POTTER – INTRODUCTION

Recent research shows that 74 years on from its publication in 1946 (just one year after the end of World War II), Jan Brzechwa's *Akademia Pana Kleksa (Professor Inkblot's Academy)* remains Poland's best loved book for young readers [[link here](#)]. Featuring a teenage hero sent to study at an academy of magic and wondrous skills, this novel has been published in various world languages, but never before in English. This handy guide to its author, history, characters and translator has been written especially for all those global audiences who have not yet been introduced to Jan Brzechwa's classic trilogy of novels featuring Professor Ambrose Inkblot, and his global adventures across the lands of learning, science, storytelling and of course magic... now it is time to explain why I have changed the author's name from the very Polish sounding **Jan Brzechwa** to the very English sounding **JW Fletching**...

I have now been translating Polish literature for 20 odd years, and in that time seen definite patterns emerge. Polish artists such as Chopin, Lem and Conrad – whose names a) are easy to spell and say and b) do not sound Polish – have broken through and become timeless classics, while those with names more difficult to spell and pronounce (Ginczanka, Głowacki, Mickiewicz, Miłosz, Sienkiewicz, Szymborska, et al) are largely known only to tiny, specialist audiences, even though three of them have won the Nobel Prize for Literature. Olga Tokarczuk's recent (and richly deserved) Nobel prize win has yet to translate into sales success and thus wider popularity, hence we can for the time being say – if Jan Brzechwa was forced to change his name as a young man (reasons for this decision outlined below), Chopin was actually spelled Szopen (try saying that if you're not at all Polish) and even JK Rowling was told by her publisher to drop her first female name and use just her initials to help sell books – and we want this translation of a totally timeless and precious book to reach international audiences, we have to make painful decisions and serious sacrifices... As someone who has devoted his life to exploring, translating, publishing and promoting the Polish language in translation, I have a responsibility to do right by it, even if sometimes this means facing uncomfortable truths.

In 2011, I published Wioletta Grzegorzewska's poems as *Smena's Memory* and the book went largely unnoticed... Numerous times I heard literature experts complain they couldn't pronounce Wioletta's surname, which is why we made the painful decision to change it to the totally short and simple “Greg”. Three years later, an almost identical book (Wioletta Greg's *Finite Formulae and Theories of Chance*) sold in serious numbers and was shortlisted for the Griffin Poetry Prize in Canada (one of the most prestigious in the world).

Now, if we want the world talking about Professor Inkblot and his Academy of Wonders, we must **face facts & run risks** – thus **Jan Brzechwa** (Jan Wiktor Lesman's pen name) becomes **JW Fletching** (Jan Brzechwa's new pen name) – simple!

Marek Kazmierski, translator, editor and publisher

Joseph Campbell and his *Hero With a Thousand Faces*

Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) has become one of the most influential books of our time. Our past, present and futures are all made up of stories which feature characters, and none are more important than the central protagonists we call “heroes”: Campbell researched thousands of years of narratives created and passed down all over the world, discovering some fascinating qualities they had in common (called “archetypes”) which allow us all to relate to tales starring the likes of Odysseus, Achilles, Arachne, Psyche, Icarus, Boudica, Sinbad, Joan of Arc, Hamlet, Jane Eyre, Frodo, Bilbo, Paul Atreides, Luke Skywalker, Ellen Ripley, Sarah Connor, “Neo” Anderson, Harry Potter, Katniss Everdeen and so very many more... following what we now call THE HERO'S JOURNEY, also known as the “monomyth”.

Campbell's book has since influenced films such as *Star Wars*, *Jaws* and *The Matrix*, musicians such as Bob Dylan, Jim Morrison and Jerry Garcia, and of course other books... For example, there is no evidence to suggest JRR Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, published five years after Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, was directly influenced by the earlier book, however... when we look at the narrative of Frodo's great adventure, we see striking similarities with the storytelling structure outlined in Campbell's earlier work.

Great minds do think alike, and Campbell's structure listing of the common elements found in hero stories all across our time and space also clearly fits in with the *Harry Potter* series of books by JK Rowling. These archetypes show that at heart we as human beings really are alike – united by a love of stories which share some essentially common elements, allowing us to bond, to understand one another, to share ideas across linguistic, cultural, historical and time barriers.

Now, what does Joseph Campbell's amazing research and conclusions got to do with a novel written for young readers in Poland and published in 1946 – a mere year after the end of World War Two and three years before *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*???

Let us take a closer look at:

Joseph Campbell's THE HERO'S JOURNEY

JW Fletching (Jan Brzechwa) LIFE STORY

Professor Ambrose Inkblot (Profesor Ambroży Kleks) THE CHARACTER AND THE NOVELS

Adam Notagree (Adaś Niezgodka) THE HERO OF *PROFESSOR INKBLOT'S ACADEMY OF WONDERS*

MJ Kazmierski AUTHOR, TRANSLATOR AND ACTIVIST

Joseph Campbell's THE HERO'S JOURNEY

Joseph Campbell outlined some key stages and events involved in the creation a hero and their story – there are many versions of this list, so this is one I prepared for you earlier:

1. Our Central Protagonist in their Ordinary World
2. The Call to Adventure Comes
3. Rejection or Refusal of the Call
4. Our Central Protagonist Encouraged by Elder Mentor
5. Crossing the First Threshold (into Special World)
6. Meeting Challenges & Assistants
7. Innermost Cave / Labyrinth / Hell
8. Supreme Ordeal - Alive-Dead-Reborn !!!
9. Our Central Protagonist seizes their Destiny
10. The Road Back
11. Resurrection - Our Central Protagonist becomes a Hero
12. Heroic Return with The Prize

Now, let us use this list to map:

The life story of **Jan Brzechwa** aka **JW Fletching**, the author of the trilogy of Professor Inkblot novels.

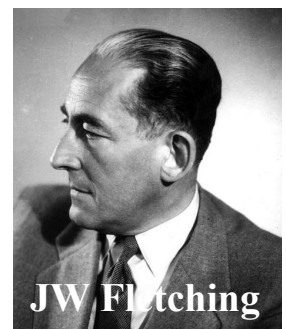
The story of **Professor Inkblot's Academy** and how it came to be written

The story of **MJ Kazmierski**, the author and publisher of this first-ever translation of

The story of **Adam Notagree** and the other characters in the trilogy of novels which begin with

PROFESSOR INKBLOT'S ACADEMY OF WONDERS

Starting, of course, with the inventor and the author of the books before us:



JW Fletching (aka Jan Brzechwa) – Brief Biography of a national hero & global treasure

You might imagine that someone who wrote a book so similar in style and popularity to the Harry Potter series of novels would have been wealthy and free to do whatever he liked with his time.

Alas, although JK Rowling has made and given away billions of dollars, JW Fletching had to work as a lawyer, a poet, head of various organisations and writer of satirical verses in order to make ends meet after World War I, during World War II and in the decades which followed, when Poland was controlled and corrupted by the Soviet Union.

In the midst of all that, he wrote three classic novels – *Professor Inkblot's Academy*, *Professor Inkblot's Adventures*, *Professor Inkblot's Triumph* – a truly heroic endeavour by a truly exceptional man: born 15 August 1898 as Jan Wiktor Lesman, JW Fletching had a very colourful upbringing. The first thing to note is that Poland at this time was partitioned by neighbouring empires and did not actually exist on world maps.

Jan's father Aleksander Lesman, a senior railway engineer and manager, was 50 years old when Jan was born – his mother Michalina Lewicka over 30 at the time. It is said that the children of older parents are often raised with greater care and attention paid to their learning, which might be the case here – his grandfather was one Bernard Lesman, a bookseller and publisher, who taught at the Rabbinic School in Warsaw... going some way to explaining how Jan Wiktor Lesman would become a writer... But why the change of surname?

This was a time when life for Jewish communities in Europe was far from easy – Jan was baptised Evangelical Christian, and when his cousin Boleslaw Lesman – also of Jewish origin, but baptised Catholic – became a renowned poet, Boleslaw thought there could not be two famous Lesman poets writing in Polish, so he decided to rename his younger cousin “Brzechwa” (which in English means “Fletching” – the feathered end of an arrow designed to make it fly straight and true). Growing up in the countryside, young Jan loved the trains passing by outside their home windows – his childhood was, as he himself wrote, “Like the stories by Anton Chekhov”. But while his home life might have been a rural idyll, the world was in turmoil. In 1905, Aleksander Lesman took his son to St Petersburg to be operated upon for a medical condition, and moving through this glamorous city they saw fighting and slaughter in the streets... the early beginnings of a revolution which would end centuries of royal rule over Russia.

As Jan's father struggled to make a living in Russian occupied Polish territories, they moved to Kiev in search of work. Alas, life in Kiev was hard for the Lesman family. Jan's best friend Pasza committed suicide at 11 years old, while Jan's most striking memory of this time would be the food – every day the same portions of carrots and minced meatballs, which he came to hate (and which would come back to inspire him in writing *Professor Inkblot's Academy* – Adam Notagree and his hate of groats soup...).

Young Jan made a little money by writing poems ridiculing members of his own family, who then bought the poems from Jan to stop him reading them to others – a sneaky and smart way of making an early income as a poet of humorous verses. For a little while, he attended a mercantile school for young men planning to become salesmen, which he quit soon enough... was this an early inspiration for Professor Inkblot, who always promised never to bore children with his lessons?

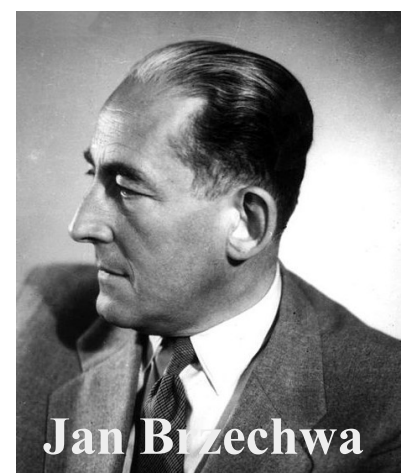
In 1914, World War I broke out and Brzechwa moved to study in St Petersburg where quickly got into trouble and debt from gambling (playing cards would become a lifelong passion), but at 17 he had first poems published, then tried studying medicine and literature... Once the “Great War” was over and Poland once again returned to world maps, in 1918 he travelled to Warsaw (by rail and on foot), helping to disarm German soldiers in the streets of the capital. Although he began studying Law at Warsaw University, when Soviet armies invaded Poland in 1920, he joined the new Polish army and took part in front line battles.

Frostbitten hands, suffered while fighting, forced him to quit the Officer Academy and become a propaganda writer for the Polish Army. In 1920, Jan Brzechwa was promoted to Staff Sergeant and in 1924 completed his law studies. Continuing to write and publish poetry, he married his cousin Maria Sunderland in Saviour's Church in Warsaw, and in 1928 his one and only daughter (Krystyna) was born, but a year later he married Karolina Meyer, the daughter of a wealthy Warsaw businessman. Writing for stage and print, he finally turned his pen to children's poems – *Tańcowała igła z nitką* was published in 1938, the same year as Julian Tuwim's legendary children's poem *Lokomotywa*.

Once World War II broke out, he went into hiding and met Oscar Schindler near Krakow, writing *Ballada o malej księżniczce* about Schindler's beautiful personal secretary:

Lat temu trzysta na pewno / Some three hundred years ago
Byłabyś dumną królową, / You would have been a proud princess, you know
Dumną infantką z Kastylii / A Castilian lady of fine feelings,
O dłoniach bielszych od lilii. / With hands whiter than lilies.

Jaśniałyby twa uroda / Your beauty would smite
W pałacach albo w ogrodach, / In palaces and gardens alike
I oczy barwy metalu / And eyes the colour of steel
Siałyby lęk w Escorialu. / Sow fear in those weak of will.



Brzechwa spent the rest of the War in Warsaw, working as a gardener, writing more fables and poems for children, purchased by publishers hoping to print them “after the war ends”.

In 1944, he began to write *Akademia Pana Kleksa*, while also penning sketches for theatres which continued performing during the Warsaw Uprising. Once Warsaw was destroyed by the German and Soviet armies, Brzechwa was interned in a detention camp in Piaseczno, then moved on to Lublin and eventually Lodz, working as a literary lawyer once the fighting was over.

In 1946, he married his third wife, Janina Serocka, and 20 books of his children's poetry were published in the first couple of years following the end of World War II. While living in Lodz, waiting for Warsaw to be rebuilt, he wrote for the theatrical cabaret Szopka Polityczna 1945-1946 and more children's literature, including the best-selling trilogy of Professor Inkblot novels, which would in time be turned into theatre performances (1960s until today) and musical feature films (1980s).

Although he died in 1966, his books of children's poems and the Professor Inkblot trilogy of novels continue to sell in huge numbers and be taught in schools all over Poland and beyond.

WHY HAVE I RENAMED THE AUTHOR OF THIS BOOK?

Jan Brzechwa was born named Jan Wiktor Lesman. Now we know why he adopted the pen name Jan Brzechwa, and it is easy to find out online why the author of the Harry Potter novels was forced to drop her female first name to become JK Rowling – I have therefore decided, to help the book reach international audiences, to give Jan Brzechwa a new pen name for the purposes of translation.

By dropping the first name and translating his adopted surname into English, I hope to follow the success of books by the likes of JRR Tolkien and JK Rowling – and so I proudly give you:



JW Fletching's THE HERO'S JOURNEY

Let us now use Joseph Campbell list of key stages and events involved in creating a hero and their story – and map them to the life of JW Fletching:

1. Our Central Protagonist in their Ordinary World – Jan Wiktor Lesman born to hardworking parents without a life of any sort of special privilege, in a country occupied by an enemy force
2. The Call to Adventure Comes – young Jan discovers a passion for writing and adventures
3. Rejection or Refusal of the Call – history and family situation force him to try studying sales, law and army training, leading away from his true calling as an author of songs, poems and fables
4. Our Central Protagonist Encouraged by Elder Mentor – his elder cousin Boleslaw Lesman, his grandfather Bernard, his father Aleksander, his courageous mother Michalina must all have influenced his early development
5. Crossing the First Threshold (into Special World) – following the start of World War I and the end of the Russian Empire, Poland returns to world maps and a new, more democratic Europe is created – Jan Wiktor changes his name from Lesman to Brzechwa (a hero's new name)
6. Meeting Challenges & Assistants – living in various cities, studying different subjects, meeting all sorts of problems and opportunities (gambling, work, war, women) further hone Jan's character
7. Innermost Cave / Labyrinth / Hell – World War II and the experience of surviving the Warsaw Uprising in 1944 (when he did so much writing, including this amazing novel)
8. Supreme Ordeal – surviving the assaults on Poland by both Hitler's Nazi and Stalin's Soviet armies
9. Our Central Protagonist seizes their Destiny – while still working as a lawyer and organiser, JW finally focuses on his writing and becomes an internationally renowned author
10. The Road Back – the rebuilding of Poland, Warsaw and his own life following World War II
11. Resurrection - Our Central Protagonist is recognised as a Hero – a best-selling author at last!
12. Heroic Return with The Prize – his books, featuring hundreds of songs, poems, stories and several novels are the great and priceless Prize JW Fletching secured for us to now treasure and cherish...

Professor Ambrose “Inkblot” Kleks – *Facts, Fictions & Fancies*

Almost everyone in Poland has read the *Professor Inkblot's Academy* trilogy of novels, seeing as they are still on high school curriculum reading lists.

But few know the story of how they came to be written – part one during WWII and the Warsaw Uprising – and how JW Fletching then came to admit they were indeed a reaction to the wars destroying our world in the 20th century, as well as a vision of a much more engaging and enlightened form of creative education.

So, we have covered already how his childhood and early schooling influenced this series of novels – young Jan loved books and adventures, but hated boring food and even more boring schooling formats – such as the “Bismarck lesson model” where the teacher stands at the front of a class, and students sit at separate desks, facing a blackboard.

What we also now know is that the story of young Prince Matthew (who would then become a cursed starling) and how his homeland was destroyed by wolf armies (chapter two of *Professor Inkblot's Academy / Matthew's Incredible Tale*) was inspired by our author's horrific experiences of witnessing Poland attacked and decimated by Adolf Hitler's armies and their blitzkrieg style of rapid and total destruction.

The main villains in the book – Phillip the barber and his mechanical son, a robot called Aloysius – were both influenced by Adolf Hitler and his vision of a modern, mechanised – mindless and manipulative – humanity.

As he was writing the first novel, JW Fletching could not yet know Hitler's vision of a world dominated by his Nazi regime would soon come to end – something reflected in the next two novels - *Podróże Pana Kleksa & Tryumf Pana Kleksa – Professor Inkblot's Adventures & Professor Inkblot's Triumph*. Hence my nicknaming his genius creation “Poland's Happy Potter” – for the books end in triumph, as did our fight against the Third Reich and the Axis Powers which sought to dominate the world, as well as Soviet style totalitarian Communism, which intended to do the very same.

Some arguments have been put forward that JK Rowling plagiarised ideas for the Harry Potter books from JW Fletching. How she would do this, considering the book has never been published in English before, is a mystery to me. Yes, JW Fletching claimed Hollywood was interested in producing a film adaptation of the Inkblot novels in the 1960s, but no trace remains of the project or the script which he claimed was drafted at the time.

But as the old saying goes – GREAT MINDS THINK ALIKE – Jan Brzechwa's novels draw on many other fables and fairytales from all around the world (Brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Andersen, Middle-Eastern and European fairytales), while Brzechwa himself often said that any time he came across poems that sounded like his (yes, during his lifetime, many other children's writers copied his style, trying to replicate his amazing publishing successes), he felt flattered and pleased, not angry and cheated.

Even Shakespeare took lots of inspiration from ancient stories and plays, thus let us accept the old saying is true – “Good artists borrow, great artists steal”!!!

JK Rowling based her books on traditional Anglo-Saxon, English and European storytelling styles, and the fact that her Harry Potter novels are based around a magic academy is mere superficial similarity to JW Fletching's Professor Inkblot and his Academy.

While Harry Potter studies a very traditional form of magic, using wands and spells, taught by wizards in gowns and pointy hats – Adam Notagree, the central protagonist in the Professor Inkblot novels, attends a school where something much more involving and complex happens.

Professor Inkblot does draw on various magic spells (the “secrets” he learnt while travelling in China), which allow him to enlarge things (only when necessary), to cook food using special paints, to eat glass tiles and sup secret potions, to levitate whenever he feels like it... but so much more than that:

SETTING – Professor Inkblot's Academy is not situated in England or Poland or any other specified country – it is never said or hinted in the book where the story takes place, and so it truly is a universal tale which anyone and everyone all around the world can relate to.

STYLE – the book is not based on Slavonic and Polish lore – it draws inspiration from fables and fairytales from all over the world, be these traditional European legends, stories from the Middle and Far east (Jan Brzechwa was an avid traveller, before and after World War II, and travelled much of the world)

SUBSTANCE – students at Professor Inkblot's Academy do not learn magic spells – they are taught how to use colour (cooking with paints), how to learn practical skills (fixing broken machines and objects), how to learn through play (geography lessons involving soccer played with an inflatable globe) and how to work together (they frequently come to the aid of those in need, alone and in groups – be this rescuing a broken tram or helping fairytale characters when they are in dire straits).

In this way, the lessons we learn by reading Jan Brzechwa's books can very much be of use to us in real life.

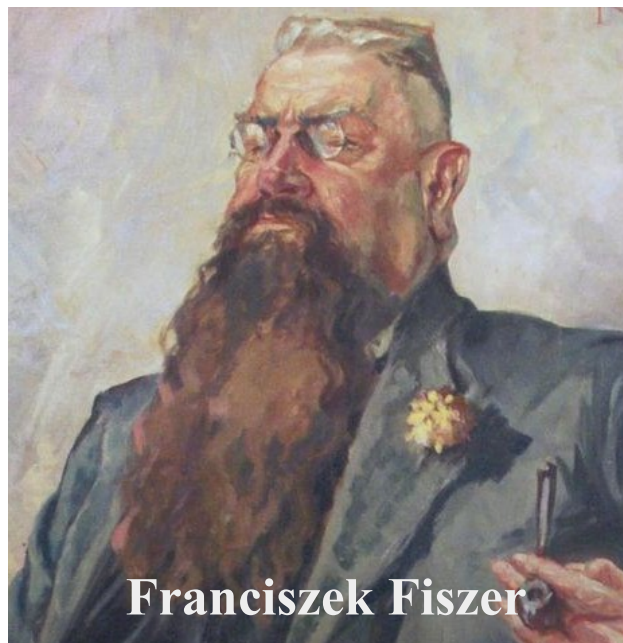
We know Brzechwa saw a lot of himself in Professor Inkblot – a storyteller who inspired children to learn in creative and enjoyable ways – and that he also based his classic character on a chap called Franciszek Fiszer, a legendary Warsaw bon vivant [[wiki link here](#)], whom Brzechwa knew before World War II.

But when I think of the scene where Academy students run around, studying geography by kicking an inflatable globe about the park which surrounds the Academy, I am instantly reminded of a scene in the classic 1989 movie *Dead Poet's Society*, where an inspirational and very much unconventional teacher called John Keating teaches his students (all young men residing at a boarding school) how to enjoy poetry by reciting lines from famous poems while kicking a soccer ball in the schools sports field.

Thus, if great minds really do think alike (and borrow as much as they like from each other to strengthen the stories they have to tell us), let us not split hairs over who influenced whom, who owes debts to whom...

Let us cheer the dramatic life story and genius of Jan Brzechwa aka **JW Fletching**, enjoy the fact that his classic novels will now finally (after 74 years) available to English language readers all over the world...

And, most importantly of all, let us learn from Professor Inkblot, enjoy learning and telling stories, work together to challenge ignorance and villainy wherever it may occur – let us travel the world, paint it in many colours, celebrate our diverse histories, as well as the multi-cultural sources of all the stories we know and tell each other... and never give up, no matter how hard and frightening the going about us gets!



How I came to translate a Long Lost National Treasure *by Marek Kazmierski*

Now, a word about me – the author of this guide, the translator of many Polish poets and authors (Szyborska, Herbert, Mickiewicz, Tuwim, Mlynarski, Zulczyk, Maslowska, et al) – now the translator and publisher of this first ever translation of Poland's best loved young reader novel: when I was a little boy, growing up in Poland ravaged by World War II and communist oppression, there was one book which always inspired me to study hard and explore the world, no matter how poor and miserable our lives were. *Akademia Pana Kleksa = Professor Inkblot's Academy of Wonders* – the story of a young, hapless boy sent to study at a special school of sciences and magic arts ran by a fellow called Professor Ambrose Inkblot – translated into numerous world languages (Bosnian, French, German, Russian, Slovak, Czech, Ukrainian, Spanish and Estonian), this absolutely timeless classic of world children's literature had never before been translated into English... until now.

I discovered the problem was, as is so often the case, money – funding had been secured from the EU to cover the translation of the novel in 2013, but publishers could not afford to produce the actual book – so in the summer of 2018, I flew to Canada to act in my role as a trustee of the Griffin Prize for Poetry, then travelled to Georgian Bay, where I got busy translating Jan Brzechwa's masterpiece, for the sheer love of it.



Twenty seven days later, I landed in Warsaw with the translation completed. Alas, once I got off the plane, the hard drive belt in my laptop snapped and the laptop died.

A week later, the laptop fixed, I developed a terrible fever and ended up in hospital, where I spent the rest of the summer fighting for my life. Diagnosed via spinal tap with viral meningitis and encephalitis, I spent the rest of the year recuperating, which further delayed the process of editing, proofing and publishing my translation... until now!

Adam Notagree's THE HERO'S JOURNEY

Well, now you've met:

The author of our book

The central character / hero of the novel

The man who brought you this first-ever English language translation,

Read the novel *Professor Inkblot's Academy of Wonders* and answer the following question:

Adam Notagree is the other Hero of our book –
does his story follow the twelve points of
Joseph Campbell's The HERO'S JOURNEY?

And if so, how can you map the events in the novel to this dozen unique stages in the formation of each Hero and their destiny:

1. Our Central Protagonist in their Ordinary World
2. The Call to Adventure Comes
3. Rejection or Refusal of the Call
4. Our Central Protagonist Encouraged by Elder Mentor
5. Crossing the First Threshold (into Special World)
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