

Title: Magic, Devils, and the Power of Darkness in Kashubian Tales and Beliefs.
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Kashubians are an old Slavic group living in the northern part of Poland. Their original homeland extended through the Pomeranian territory from Gdańsk to Szczecin, but with time the process of history moved their territory more and more east of the river Odra. Pomerania has always been a border area between two cultures: Polish and German. For centuries the Kashubian language has survived between those two dominant languages; never studied at schools, pushed into the status of 'second rate' language, spoken at home only by supposedly uneducated people, it has survived in the oral form, creating a rich output of legends, tales, and beliefs. It has been only in the last hundred fifty years that it developed literature in written form, created a professional theatre, standardized the rules of spelling and grammar, entered the school programs in Kashubia in Poland, and became a topic of scientific research. Through the work of Stefan Zaromski, Aleksander Majkowski, Günter Grass the Kashubian region has entered not only Polish but also European literature.

The present paper will examine some of these Kashubian beliefs and how they spilled beyond the folklore and into literature. It will discuss for instance the use of magic to summon or counteract the powers of darkness, the different incarnations of a devil - Smetek being the one who mostly appealed to literary imagination of writers like Aleksander Majkowski or Stefan Zeromski and poets like Aleksander Labuda.

The inexhaustible source of information is the seven-volume Dictionary of Kashubian Dialects compiled over the span of almost ten years, from 1967 to 1976, by a priest, poet and researcher, father Bernard Sychta. It is not just a dictionary of Kashubian words and expressions, but a monumental work containing also descriptions of Kashubian folk customs, proverbs, sayings, songs, tales, and legends.