

POLISH PROFILERS – WHO DISCOVERED THEM AND WHAT THEIR WORK IS ALL ABOUT

Some ten years ago the word ‘ profiler’ – a forensic psychologist working in the police – was almost synonymous with ‘diviner’. Today everyone in Poland has probably heard of profiler Bogdan Lach. However, little is known about the fact that profilers were originally ‘discovered’ and popularised by crime fiction author Katarzyna Bonda.

TEXT Anita Czapryn PHOTO Bartek Syta



In 2005, a young woman entered the Regional Police Headquarters in Katowice. She looked the opposite of serious, with her dreadlocks, hoodie and trainers. For the past couple of months she’d been trying to get hold of profiler Bogdan Lach. At first police officers tried to persuade her that there was no such thing as a profiler. Then it turned out that, although Bogdan Lach did in fact exist, he was very busy as the head of the forensic psychology team, and would not be bothered with such trivialities. Eventually though, they

admitted that a profiler was an operative police officer, and as such they didn’t want a journalist leaking any of their knowledge to the public. Bogdan Lach had already been instrumental in solving some of the most difficult criminal mysteries. Yet he had done practically all of that work after hours. Still, the journalist wouldn’t back down until she’d got her 30-minute interview.

On seeing a young, strangely dressed girl with a peculiar hairstyle, the profiler was rather scornful. “He wasn’t very nice,” laughs

Katarzyna Bonda, former journalist, who's now a rising star of Polish crime fiction. "He may have thought I wanted to attack him, or try to persuade him that a profiler's job was pure guesswork. But I soon proved that I had my facts right. Before I spoke to him I dug through all the literature I could find, mainly from the UK, plus the FBI library. At that time the only thing on profiling available in Poland were publications of the Institute of Forensic Research in Krakow. When Bogdan eventually warmed to me and we began to talk, I knew I was finally in the right place with the right guy. Thirty minutes turned into almost an entire day. As I was returning to Warsaw from Katowice I knew already that the protagonist for my first novel, *The Case of Nina Frank*, would be a profiler. And this was indeed the case: a profiler entered pop culture and began to change our awareness. I was the first journalist to write an article about Polish profilers. There were three of them at the time: the young and ambitious Janek Gołębiowski, who now lectures at the SWPS University in Warsaw, Darek Piotrowski... But Lach was the best. And yes, it's true – I was the one who discovered Bogdan Lach for the media. I claim the right to say that, and I'm not ashamed at all. Being the terrorist that I am, I forced him to appear in my article, explaining that he'd be better off out of the shadows, and that it's worth talking about what he does, so that police officers could learn what profiling was all about, instead of treating him like a conman or clairvoyant – these were the attitudes at the time," recalls Katarzyna Bonda. Many on the force would laugh up their sleeves at the idea of profiling.

Yet even Bonda herself got a hard time from both fellow crime writers and readers when she published her book about superintendent Hubert Meyer, whose real-life model was Lach. "They used to make fun of me, but now they're taking it all back. Even the publisher, who didn't know the word 'profiler', wanted me to change the name for

another. But there's no better Polish equivalent for the job" admits the author. The main character of her latest book, which premieres on 21May, is profiler Sasza Załuska. She will be the first protagonist of the kind in Polish literature, based on a famous British profiler who studied under David Canter – the greatest authority in the profiling world. The word 'profiler' is generally recognised today, although officers in small police units are sometimes scared to call one in – opting for clairvoyants instead. Nevertheless, the stereotypes surrounding the job have been overcome. At one point one could even talk about a profiling boom in Poland: each police headquarters was desperate to have one. Police bosses devised a plan for profilers to train more people from among the ranks of forensic psychologists, but it turned out that not everyone was cut out for the job. Most dropped out and didn't finish the course. They had the required knowledge, and they had served on the force, but you need a special gift for this kind of work. Apart from being painstakingly analytical, it is also quite tedious and mundane. And because it looks fascinating and thrilling on TV, profilers are also expected to work wonders in real life.

Katarzyna Bonda first picked up the scent of a Polish profiler after going to Rawicz in 2004. She was writing a piece about unsolved crimes, and the town had witnessed a murder of a young, beautiful girl. "I went to see her parents, I saw her picture on the cupboard – she seemed like the Polish Laura Palmer from *Twin Peaks*," says the writer. The girl had worked in a grocery store. The murderer entered the shop, demanded money, and, when she refused, stabbed her multiple times with a knife she used to cut bread. He took a handful of coins, got on his bike and rode away. The police looked for him, to no avail, for a long time. At the time DNA research was extremely expensive. Inhabitants of the town that witnessed this macabre crime were

embittered. "I was moved by this story of random death, the collision between the light and dark side of the force. As I was leaving Rawicz I had the feeling I was taking part in an unfinished film," recalls Bonda. Sometime later, in a small article in one of the regional newspapers, she found information that the killer had been caught. She called the police chief to ask how they managed to track him down, as the case had seemed hopeless. "A guy in a black coat came here," the chief replied. "He took the case files to work on them overnight, and I got a few pieces of paper from him in the morning – as soon as I read them, I knew who to look for". Police officers went straight to the house of a 21-year-old man. The girl had been his third victim.

"But who is this guy in the black coat?", Bonda wanted to know. Yet even the police chief didn't know exactly whether he had had a visit from a ' profiler' or a ' provider', he didn't know the word. But he gave her a name: Bogdan Lach. Bonda picked up the trail. She wanted to be the first to get to the profiler. Ten years on, Bogdan Lach is now something of a profiling guru in Poland. Even though there's still no official profiler position in the police force (he's formally a ' legal advisor'), and officers dealing with profiling also perform other tasks, the situation is markedly different. Lach is preparing to publish an academic book on profiling. He trains others and regularly attends seminars abroad. He also published a book with Katarzyna Bonda in 2009 titled *Zbrodnia niedoskonała* (An Imperfect Crime) – a beginner's ABC of profiling for professionals and amateurs alike.

The oldest Polish institution to pride itself on preparing offender profiles based on files of unsolved murder cases is the Institute of Forensic Research. Yet today we know that files are not enough. You can't make an offender's profile without being at the scene of the crime and having the proper photographic or video documentation.

Profiling begins at the crime scene. Police officers – investigators and technicians – collect data for their own purposes, while the profiler pays attention to other things. Profilers are expected to collect evidence on their own and be the first to talk to everyone. They use evidence gathered by police officers, but they practically conduct their own investigation – and should remain independent.

Profiling is a mix of many disciplines: criminology, victimology, forensic medicine and other related fields, including law. Profilers have to have extensive knowledge of all of the above, but also a certain set of skills and an analytical mind. They need to piece together a picture based on non-existent elements. But they need to remember what its purpose is: to limit the number of suspects. Profilers may indicate specific features of the perpetrator's character, establish their sex, age, professional status; they know whether the offender is unemployed, has completed technical or tertiary education. Whether he's married or single, or maybe he's in an open relationship, whether he has children, where he might live (this is called 'geographic profiling'), especially if we're dealing with a serial killer – profilers can establish the location of his safe space and area of operation. They also have to be present during post-mortem examinations. They need to look at the pictures and analyse them multiple times to find the key to the case. The victim's body is an incredibly important element of profiling. The type of injuries indicate the relationship to the perpetrator. The victim and killer are complementary components. Police officers look for blood, sperm, hair, cartridge cases, bullets, murder weapons, etc. Profilers check the same crime scene for behavioural traces. If the victim's face was covered, the profiler will probably draw a conclusion that the victim had known the killer – unless this is a feigned motive. But an offender who knows the victim wants to

maintain the mystery of death, pay a tribute of sorts, even in a brutal crime. He covers the eyes, so that the victim won't look at him.

Bogdan Lach's first profile was handwritten on a squared page and contained 20 words: sex, age bracket, professional status and place of residence – not a specific address, but an approximate location. He discovered the reason for the Rawicz crime: the victim was brave. Had she obeyed the criminal and given him the money he demanded, she'd still be alive. But she stood up to him. A profiler knows that the victim provides the starting point, and the key to finding the perpetrator. This is why the victim's last lifeline is crucial, the *modus operandi* and discovering what went wrong.

One example that shows what profilers look for in a crime scene may be another real-life murder, of a man weighing over 280 lbs – huge, strong, and found three days later in his own home in a pool of blood. Cause of death: stab wounds. His entire life was analysed – he liked his liquor and had a couple of friends he'd fallen out with. Yet the police failed to charge anyone with the murder. At the crime scene, the profiler found a small toy ball for a pet under the wardrobe, with traces of a cat's claw. He began asking technicians about a cat. Was there a cat in the room? They looked at him as if he was a lunatic, but admitted that there must have been one, because they found its fur. "Since it's not here, how did it leave?" the profiler continued. For a police officer

looking for solid evidence, these questions were absurd. Eventually the profiler established that the cat couldn't have left the apartment on its own – the killer must have let it go. What kind of a killer is able to brutally murder a big, strong man, yet take pity on a cat? Contrary to the material gathered by the police, he put forward a hypothesis that the perpetrator could have been a woman. Police officers found her in a completely different part of Poland. She confessed. While she was surprised at how they figured it out, they wanted to know how a woman measuring 4'9" could have done something like that. Her motive? She really wanted to marry him, but he had refused.

There's no need to worry about criminals getting to know the secrets of the trade. There's a whole mass of things the killer can't foresee or control. Even a lack of evidence at a crime scene serves as a trace for a profiler. The criminal cannot outsmart him. After a profiler answers the questions of why and how the victim died, police officers may start investigating *who* did it.

Profilers in Poland currently also accept commissions from private companies. Imagine a company that is being robbed and needs the thief's profile, but would like to keep things quiet. That's a good training ground for profilers – the risk is low, and human life is not at stake. The more often a profiler practices, the better and more detailed the profiles he will prepare.