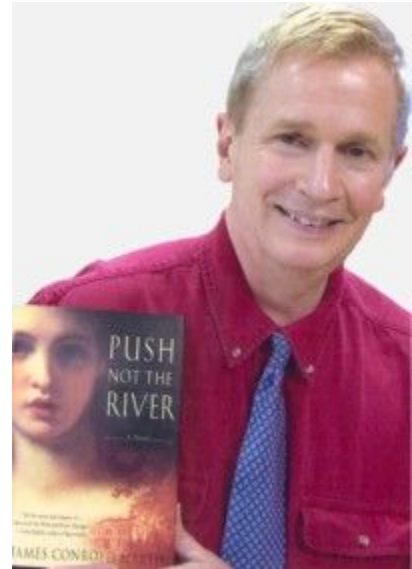


An interview with "Push Not the River" author James Conroyd Martin

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A.S. I have to admit “Push Not the River” is one of the best books I have ever read! The subtitle states that this is a novel inspired by a true story. It is a gripping tale of love and loss, not just on a personal scale, but on a national scale. So I decided to invite the author, Mr. James Conroyd Martin, to tell a bit about this book.



J. Hello, Arleta, I'm happy and honored to be here.

A.S. The main character, a beautiful, teenage girl suddenly loses her parents. This is Anna Berezowska in 18th century Poland. Who is Anna Berezowska?

J. Anna Berezowska was a real person, a countess who was coming of age at the time of the Third of May Constitution in 1791. She lived with her parents in Sochaczew, a town a little east of Warsaw. When both of her parents die unexpectedly, Anna is taken to Halicz in Southern Poland, now the Ukraine, and there she starts a new life with an aunt, uncle, and two cousins, Walter and Zofia. It is then that she begins keeping a diary in which she describes the troubling personal events that confront her, as well as the tumultuous events that confront her beloved Poland. It is Anna's diary that provides the basis for my novel “Push Not the River.”

A.S. Luckily for her, she meets a young count, John Stelnicki, and falls in love with him – happy ending? – oh no, because this young man disappears. Anna is brutally raped, left to die... she survives this ordeal, and later finds herself pregnant.

J. Yes, life becomes far from perfect, and her cousins Walter and Zofia in Halicz are not what they seem to be. Zofia, especially, creates schemes and crises that are harmful to Anna while Walter is a brutish mercenary soldier for Catherine of Russia, a longtime enemy and occupier of Poland.

A.S. Her relatives help her to get married fast, then her new husband wants to kill her. . . she is taken hostage . . . sounds like a horror story. Hey, wait a minute; this is a true story, right?

J. It is true. Although Anna is in love with Count Jan Stelnicki, he disappears, and she is found to be pregnant as a result of the attack. Her well-intentioned Aunt Stella and selfish cousin Zofia counsel her to marry quickly. The husband they have in mind is interested not in Anna, but in her inheritance of land and money. It is not a happy union.

A.S. Please tell, why did you give this title “Push Not the River”?

J. In her diary Anna used quite a bit of folk wisdom and several proverbs. I found this proverb myself and liked it. The full statement is “Push not the river; it will flow of its own accord.” In her life Anna must learn just when to push against events and when not to push.

A.S. Yes, especially for her is to live, or to die. You can classify it as a historical fiction, but what is historical, and what is fiction?

J. Anna wrote only casually of the momentous historical events of the period, so I knew I had to insert the political and social milieu in which she lived. The personal events in the novel are mostly true to the diary. Occasionally, I had to add depth to characters and provide them with their final scenes. But the big moments, like the rape, her cousins' deceit, her husband's attempt on her life and the end of her marriage, a reunion with her true love, and the Russians' massive assault on Warsaw in 1794 which killed some 12,000 innocent citizens, including women and children – are based on true events.

A.S. Empress Catherine the Great of Russia, along with other neighbors, partitioned Poland in the late 18th century. At the time of Anna Berezowska, Europe was in turmoil, and soon wars were conducted by Napoleon of France. Polish people see this time as chance, and it heavily supports Napoleon, when he fights Poland's neighbors.

J. Yes, this is where my second book, "Against a Crimson Sky" comes in. Poles hoped that if they supported Napoleon in his effort to impose an egalitarian Europe, he would help Poland regain its nationhood and independence.

A.S. Napoleon fails . . . not only Poles, but also a Polish woman very close to his heart, Lady Maria Walewska and you placed her in "Crimson Sky."

J. Some say Maria Walewska was Napoleon's great love. She gave him his first son and he probably would have married her, if not for his ambition to create a dynasty by marrying Marie Louise, the daughter of the Emperor of Austria.

A.S. Our heroine Anna is proud and resilient, so she survives... as does Poland, at that time, not literally on the map, but in the hearts of her true sons and daughters . . . again Lady Berezowska fits in perfectly with her patriotic life and brave heart.

J. Yes, Anna's pride, resiliency, and strength are the perfect metaphor for a peaceful Poland forever being invaded by other countries.

A.S. Now I want to know, if you plan to write a 3rd book? We would have a trilogy.

J. Yes, indeed, it will be a trilogy. The third book will take the story to 1829 when Poles staged yet another uprising against its oppressors. It is tentatively titled "The Warsaw Conspiracy."

A.S. The books have been translated into Polish. How have "Nie ponaglaj rzeki" and "Pod purpurowym niebem" been received in Poland?

J. Extremely well. Both books have become bestsellers in Poland.

A.S. I would be very pleased if "Push Not the River" was made into a movie – is this just my dream; do you have any information about that?

J. It will make a wonderful movie! It was optioned for a while, but the producer was unable to obtain the funds. I'm convinced it will happen one day.

A.S. How people can get hold of your two books?

J. The books in English are published by St. Martin's Press and are available at bookstores and at online stores like Amazon or Barnes and Noble or www.thingsPolish.com. If a bookstore doesn't

have them in stock, they can easily order them. The Polish translations should be readily available in Poland and at Polish bookstores in the U.S. and Canada. I should also mention that I have more information and a little video available on my website at www.JamesCMartin.com. I encourage your readers and listeners to visit the site.

A.S. Excellent. Thanks for being my guest and we'll be waiting for "The Warsaw Conspiracy," and maybe, who knows, the movie!

J. Thank you very much, Arleta!