38 new books from POLAND

Fall 2007

The Book Institute is a national cultural institution established by the Polish Ministry of Culture. It has been in operation in Krakow since January 2004. In 2006 the Warsaw section of the Institute came into being. The basic aims of the Institute's activities are to encourage reading and popularise books in Poland, and also to promote Polish literature worldwide. These aims are achieved by:

- publicising the best Polish books and their authors
- organising educational events focusing on the advantages to be gained from the habit of reading books
- the "We Read Here!" reading promotion programme
- the Translators' Collegium
- the © POLAND translation Programme
- seminars for publishers
- the Four Seasons of the Book seasonal literary festival
- presenting Polish literature abroad
- an information centre for children's books
- providing foreign audiences with access to information on Polish books and the Polish publishing market
- running www.bookinstitute.pl, the biggest Internet site dedicated to information on Polish literature

THE BOOK INSTITUTE

The Book Institute organises literary programmes for Polish presentations at Polish and international book fairs, appearances by Polish writers at literary festivals and, as part of its work to promote Polish culture worldwide, issues catalogues on the latest publications entitled "NEW BOOKS FROM POLAND", runs study and training events, organises meetings and seminars for translators of Polish literature, awards the annual TRANSATLANTIC PRIZE for the best promoter of Polish literature abroad, and maintains regular contact with translators.

THE WE READ HERE! programme is a series of activities designed to promote reading and is aimed at schools, libraries and NGOs, including educational programmes, promotion of contemporary Polish literature among young people, producing and publishing the LITERARY ATLAS OF POLAND and running READING CLUBS. The programme is supplemented by the Four Seasons of the Book Festival.

THE FOUR SEASONS OF THE BOOK FESTIVAL is the biggest Polish literary festival and takes place in several Polish cities simultaneously. The festival has four parts: Poetry Season (February), POPLIT (April), Prose Season (October), and Crime Season (November). Foreign guests have included Jonathan Caroll, Eduardo Mendoza, Boris Akunin, Alexandra Marinina, Michel Faber, V.S. Naipaul, Paulo Lins and many others.

The aim of the © POLAND TRANSLATION PROGRAMME is to support Polish literature in translation into foreign languages and to increase its presence on foreign book markets. The Programme has been running since 1999, and to date it has awarded over 600 grants. In particular it covers belles-lettres and essays, works of what is broadly described as the humanities (with a special focus on books about Polish history, culture and literature), books for children and young people, and non-fiction. The grants cover the cost of translation from Polish into the relevant foreign language and the purchase of foreign rights.

www.bookinstitute.pl is a source of information on current literary events in Poland and more, presenting new and forthcoming titles and providing regular reviews. It also includes biographical information on over 100 contemporary Polish authors, information on over 500 books, extracts from them, critical essays and publishers' addresses – everything there is to know about Polish books, in Polish, English and German.

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Olga Tokarczuk
RUNNERS

Photo: Danuta Węgiel

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Olga Tokarczuk's new book is like a collection of longer, shorter and extremely brief stories, but in fact it forms a carefully thought-out whole and is very artfully constructed. The theme of the stories is a way of life that involves non-stop travelling. A traveller is someone who agrees to a lack of continuity in his reception of the world, to its disintegration into lots of pieces that are not necessarily logically connected. So this fragmentation also affects the structure of the narrative, which includes a multiplicity of plots that at first sight seem entirely separate. But in fact these stories have some common features, firstly to do with loss, defect and handicap, and secondly descending into the innermost recesses of the human body, techniques for making and preserving anatomical specimens, or simply the plastination of corpses.

On the one hand the book goes into the writer's personal story, into her private "I am", which serves as the title for two pieces at the beginning and end of the collection. On the other it is deeply immersed in the history of man and (especially Greek) mythology, devoted to considering the phenomena of life and death. Two concepts of time clash here: the circular notion of eternal returns typical of myths and religion, and the progressive notion typical of human life as it runs towards mystery and death, where there is a lack of belief in the constant motion of eternal returns to soothe existential fears. This book does not offer any easy answers to the difficult questions, and at every step we come up against a mystery that is impossible to disentangle. Instead of answers, here we can observe the amazing reflections and correspondences between various phenomena (e.g. all sorts of versions of "entering the labyrinth", losses, pilgrimages, floods of water or blood that inundate the world or the body, diverse aspects of the problem of defending the body's dignity). This version of the world's recurrence is accessible to us, offering a faint hope that it might be reasonable and ordered. The author gives us nothing more in the form of a logical, solid plot, but just provides some singular "points of reference" such as the mysterious Greek concept of *kairos*, which recurs a few times in various stories included in the book.

This is a very intelligent work by a mature author – perhaps the best book that Olga Tokarczuk has written so far.

Jerzy Jarzębski

Olga Tokarczuk (born 1962) is a novelist and essayist whose novels have been translated into 18 languages.

My parents weren't an entirely settled tribe. They moved from one place to another many times before finally stopping for longer at a provincial school far from a proper road or a railway station. Travelling became just crossing the county boundary, a trip into town. Shopping, handing in documents at the local council office, ever the same hairdresser on the marketplace by the town hall, in the same gown, laundered and bleached to no effect because the customers' hair dyes left calligraphic stains on it, like Chinese characters. Mama would have her hair dyed while my father waited for her in the Nowa café, at one of the two little tables set outside. He'd read the local paper, where the most interesting thing was always the crime section, with reports about cellars being robbed of plum jam and pickled gherkins.

And there were those tourist holiday of theirs, timid outings in a Skoda packed to the ceiling. Long in the preparation, they were planned in the evenings in early spring when the snow had only just gone but the ground had not yet recovered; they had to wait until it would finally yield its flesh to the plough and hoe, until it would let itself be fertilised, after which it would take up all their time from dawn to dusk.

They belonged to a generation that drove about with a camping trailer, pulling a substitute home along behind them. They took a gas stove, some small folding tables and chairs, a plastic rope and wooden pegs for hanging out the washing during stopovers, waterproof plastic tablecloths and a camping picnic set, with coloured plastic plates, spoons, knifes and forks, salt cellars and glasses.

Somewhere on the road, at one of the flea markets he and my mother were especially fond of visiting (whenever they were not busy taking photos of each other in front of churches and monuments) my father bought an army kettle made of copper, a container with a tube in the middle, into which you put a handful of twigs and then lit it. And even though he could use the electricity at the campsites he used to boil water in this pot, pouring out smoke and making a mess. He would kneel over the hot device, proudly listening to the boiling water bubbling inside, then pour it over the tea bags like a real nomad.

They'd get well settled in at the purpose-made places, at the campsites, where they always kept company with people like themselves, having chats with the neighbours over the socks hung out to dry on the guy ropes. They worked out the routes for their journeys with the help of a guidebook, making a careful note of the attractions. Before midday there was bathing in the sea or a lake, and in the afternoon an outing to the ancient sites finishing with supper – almost always out of a jar: goulash, rissoles or meatballs in tomato sauce, so they only had to boil some pasta or rice. They were endlessly saving money, saying the zloty is weak, it's the world's smallest penny, looking for places where they could plug into the electricity, then reluctantly packing up to move onwards, without ever leaving the metaphysical orbit of home. They were not real travellers because they only went away in order to return home. And they came back with relief, with a sense of having done their duty. They came back to collect piles of letters and bills from the sideboard, do a great big wash and bore their yawning friends to death showing them their photos – this is us in Carcasonne and here's my wife in front of the Acropolis.

Then for a whole year they'd live a settled life, that strange life when at daybreak you go back to what you left off in the evening, where your clothes are imbued with the smell of your own flat and your feet tread a tireless path on the carpet.

That's not for me. I obviously lack a gene that means that as soon as you stop still in one place for any length of time you start to put down roots. I have tried many times, but my roots have always been too shallow and I've been overturned by the slightest gust of wind. I've never been able to germinate, I'm simply devoid of that plant capacity. I don't draw sap from the ground, I'm an anti-Antaeus. My energy comes from motion – from the shaking of buses, the roar of aeroplanes, or the rocking of ferries and trains.

I am conveniently small and compact. I have a small, undemanding stomach, powerful lungs, a solid belly and strong arm muscles. I don't take any medicine, I don't wear glasses and I don't use hormones. I cut my hair with a trimmer once every three months, I hardly use any cosmetics. My teeth are sound, not very straight perhaps, but they're all there, with

just one old filling, in the left lower number six. My liver's fine. My pancreas is fine. My left and right kidneys are in excellent condition. My aorta is fine. My bladder is all right. Haemoglobin – 12.7. White blood cells – 4.5. Haematocrit – 41.6. Platelets – 228. Cholesterol – 204. Creatinine – 1.0. Bilirubin – 4.2, and so on. My IQ – if you believe in that – is 121; adequate. I have a particularly well developed spatial imagination, almost eidetic, whereas I have poor lateralisation. Personality profile – not constant, maybe untrustworthy. Age – mental. Gender – grammatical. I prefer to buy paperback books so I can leave them on the platform for others to read with no regrets. I don't collect anything.

I did graduate, but in fact I have never learned a profession, which I greatly regret; my great-grandfather was a weaver, he would whiten the woven cloth by spreading it out on the hillside, setting it out in the burning rays of the sun. Interweaving the warp and the weft would suit me very well, but there's no such thing as a portable loom, and weaving is a craft for settled people. I do knit on journeys. Unfortunately, lately some airlines have banned taking knitting needles and crochet hooks on board. As I said, I have never learned a trade, yet despite what my parents were always telling me I have managed to get by, taking various jobs along the way without ever sliding to the bottom.

Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones

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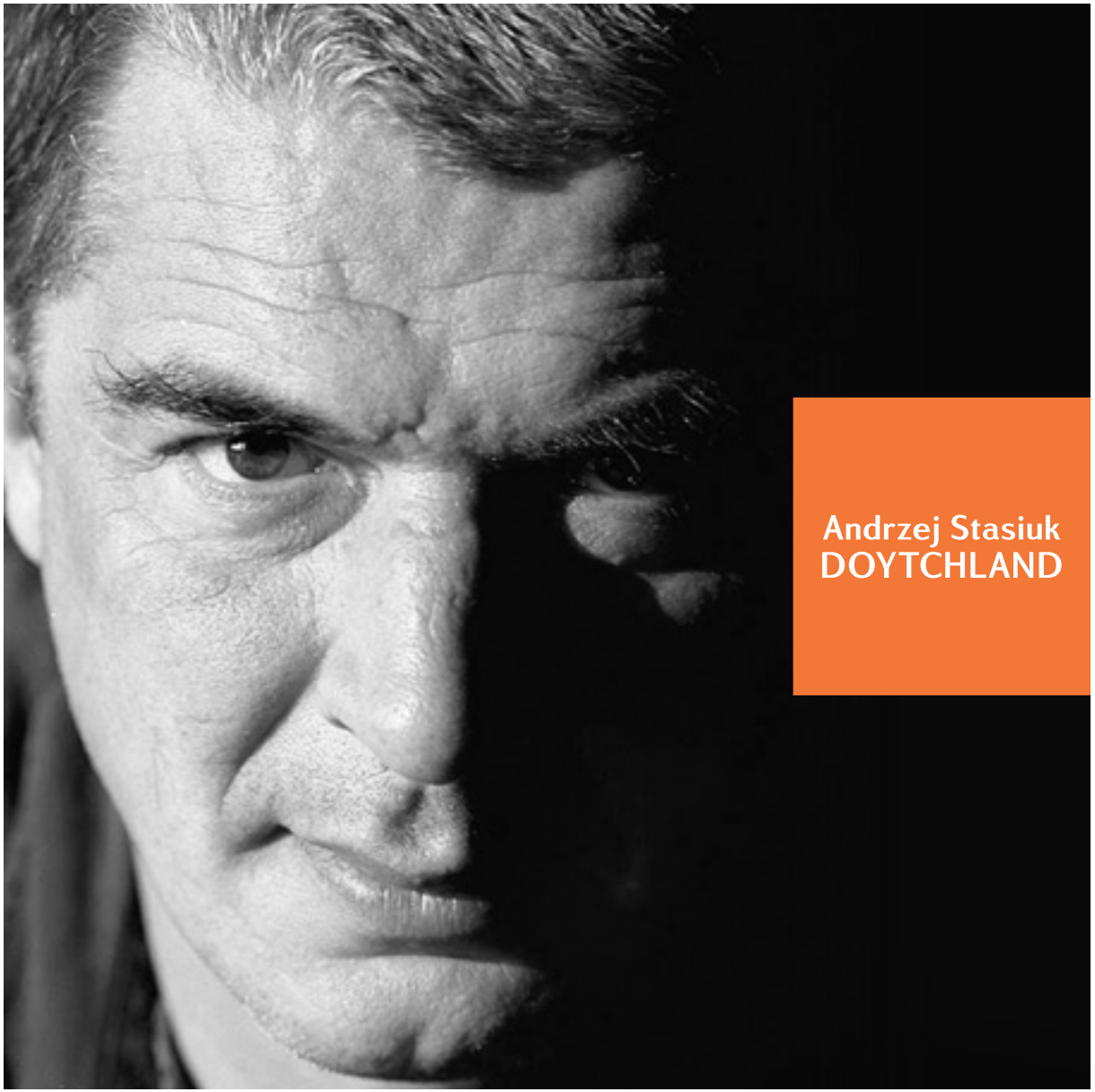

Photo: Piotr Janowski AG

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The basis for this slim, funny, yet at the same time wistful volume is a simple one: for over ten years now, as a writer Andrzej Stasiuk has been making book tours of German-speaking countries. He gives a reading, answers questions, goes back to his hotel, then the next morning he gets on the train, travels to the next event, gives a reading, answers questions, goes back to his hotel...

Mistakes can be made with dates and places; the thinking, though, remains truer. Not necessarily true, but certainly less mistaken. For this reason *Doytchland* is more a record of impressions and reflections than a travel book.

On the basis of these reflections Stasiuk sets in order the cultural map of Europe, orienting the continent according to its own centre. Yet he does everything he can to ensure that after all these years of travelling, his homeland remains his original godforsaken country. He does not idealize Poland—well, perhaps a little.

His book is a kind of survival guide for all those who have experienced something similar—that is to say, a radical confrontation between their home country's pri-mitiveness and an alien modernity. This is an experiment from the domain of personality psychology rather than that of geography. As the author says: "Travelling to Germany is psychoanalysis".

In order not to "become German," in other words to become a believer in the superiority of Western over Eastern culture, it is first necessary to look at Germany as a country to which one travels for the earnings. There, there is money, work, conditions and so on; here, in Poland aka Romania, there are people to talk to, to be among, to share experiences with. Secondly, one needs to view poverty as an authentic relationship between people and things. In the world of poverty matters are different: here there are old, used Western cars, here people are capable of using objects no longer usable and they do not judge one another according to their belongings, because they understand that all objects are borrowed and transitory. Aside from that one has to long for something, and if we long for Poland aka Romania, then clearly no Bavaria or Westphalia is going to assuage our longing.

But Stasiuk occasionally winks at us and says that this text about the "Gypsies of unified Europe" is nothing but a coded note to a Western audience.

Przemysław Czapliński

Andrzej Stasiuk (born 1960) is a novelist, essayist and literary critic. His works have been translated into almost every European language.

How do you like that. We're back on politics, when I'd really hoped to avoid it. Recently there's been a greater emphasis on the political in Poland. Those in power are the kind who think there's no life outside of politics. Of course, for them there really isn't. They're supposedly ever so smart and brave, but when they were meant to go to Germany one of them was so afraid he got the runs. I think it was the president. "A stomach disorder" was how they announced it to the people on TV and in the papers. Luckily the way things work is that those involved in politics will soon be gone, while we, the people, will remain, because the people do not get the runs at the slightest sign of trouble. In any case I'd like to point out that though I'm a Pole, a different kind of people than those from the surveys show up at the readings I give there. There have only been a couple of times when someone stood up and asked melodramatically: "When are your homosexuals finally going to have equal rights?" At such times I replied just as melodramatically: "That day is close." Or they would ask: "When are you finally going to stop stealing our cars?" Then I answered in accordance with my own conviction: "I doubt that'll happen soon." I mean, we're hardly going to start stealing Russian cars. But those were isolated incidents. In most cases my audience was interested in literature. They came to listen and afterwards they didn't ask any questions about homosexuality, feminism or whatever. They didn't even ask about Jedwabne. They really listened to the text. They listened to see how the thoughts of someone foreign sounded in their language, while I wondered to what extent those thoughts could be their own. I wondered whether the German language brought me closer to them or moved me further away, whether in German my words and ideas were as odd and unfamiliar as my country, or whether quite the opposite was the case. They would sit quiet and motionless for up to an hour on end. In their listening there was something uncompromising, something definitive. Here this was no laughing matter. It was here that Luther translated the Bible. The word in Germany is a serious thing. Who knows, maybe I was even infected by this gravity? Maybe I began to take what I had written more seriously, the more so because in German it was a quarter longer again. In Freiburg I had to be a little careful with my Slavic nonchalance, while in Friedrichshafen I needed to rein in my self-irony a tad. In some places there were tickets. All of them, these people from cities, towns, some even from the country, women and men, old and young, were coming in order to learn something, to acquire some knowledge, to form an opinion. It was entirely possible they were coming to check I wasn't lying. Or to see whether my humanity resembled their humanity. Or to fulfill a need for contact with what is different. We gazed at one another with an interest in which there was also uncertainty. For many of them, maybe even the majority, I was the first Pole they had ever seen in their lives. And in addition, I was neither an agricultural labourer, nor a construction worker, nor one of those mythical car thieves stealing beamers and mercs and taking them east. They were my first Germans too. After all, the only Germans I know are my readers. I know a few others, but they're not Germans, they're just friends and acquaintances. Aside from my readers I've never known any. That is, of course, if you don't count train passengers and travellers at stations and airports. Them I've seen more often than my readers, and more of them, but we knew little about one another. I had the advantage that I knew who they were, whereas they did not know who I was. They might have suspected I was not one of them, that I was for example a rather tall Turk, but they couldn't guess who I really was. I, on the other hand, looked at them and I knew: you're Germans. All of them, almost all those in the trains and at the stations. I possessed that basic, fundamental knowledge about them that they could not possess about me. I felt like a spy. I observed them, thought about them, and, when the mood took me, I even made notes. I delved into their Germanness. On a silver Intercity train from Dortmund to Berlin I sipped Jim Beam, scribbled in my notebook, looked out at the green plains and the wooded hills of Harz, and was able to reflect to my heart's content on Germanness. On the way from Heilbronn to Frankfurt I can reflect on all this in the space-age car of the Intercity train and at the same time watch the passengers pulling their suitcases on little wheels and intently studying

the electronic place numbers in search of their reserved seats. They move cautiously with heads tipped comically back. Sometimes I half-close my eyes and see their blurry outlines standing there. If the seat next to me isn't reserved I put some of my things on it, because I don't want anyone to sit there. I have no desire to be close to them. I want their figures to mingle with my own thoughts, with my memories of uncle's cars and my grandmother's stories: how she was just about to die, she was already standing against the wall, but for some reason the officer had second thoughts, put his revolver away and walked off. I want to superimpose on this, all the rushing landscape with its tapering spires on the horizon and the indistinct images of old towns with red rooftops, I want all this to combine together and turn into some comprehensible picture: my grandmother standing against the wall of her own house, the silver Intercity train, Axel with a thermos of coffee at the Dresden train station, Klaus Kinski in *Fitzcarraldo*, Bruno S. in *Stroszek*, bread exchanged for warm, freshly drawn milk, five hundred thousand used VW Golfs on the Polish roads, the Battle of Grunwald, old people in Poland repeating mechanically, "I'm telling you, under the Germans there was order," graffiti on the walls in my local town: "If Hitler were alive there'd be work," and in addition to all that, "Meine liebe Augustin" and "Death is a master from Germany..."

Translated by Bill Johnston

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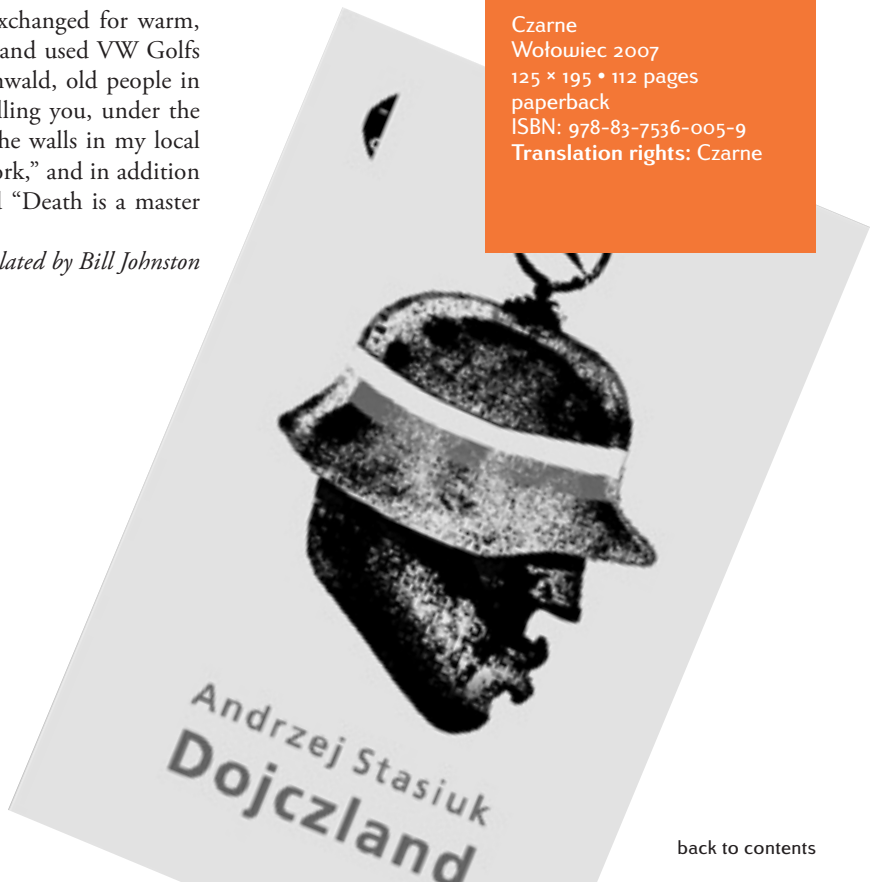

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Photo: private

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It's 1957 and we're in Ciechocinek, a run-down Polish spa. The local dentist, Wanda, receives two pieces of news, one bad and one good. She finds out that she is terminally ill and, at the same time, that her beloved brother, Fabian, is returning from Britain, where he ended up after serving in General Anders' army. Fabian comes back home at the height of the thaw, the political détente that ensued after Stalin's death. The decision to return isn't a happy one, as seeing his sister means facing up to the recent past and the loss of his loved ones during the war. Only brother and sister survived. Wanda is still in mourning, but Fabian fends it off. A king of swing, he seeks consolation in what he has always loved – music. And in Wanda, to whom he had been close and who had been the star of her brother's band before the war. One would have thought it impossible to put a band together in this small town, so devoid of any hope. But a miracle occurs and a number of musicians offer their services to Fabian. They include the local policeman, Stypa; the doctor at the sanatorium, Vogt; and the beautiful English teacher, Modesta. When even Wanda overcomes her scepticism, it really looks as though a miracle can happen. And continue – as long as the authorities allow it to.

Włodzimierz Kowalewski (born 1956) is a writer and essayist who has won numerous literary awards. *The Eccentrics* is his fifth novel.

For Kowalewski, the story of setting up a jazz band isn't only an opportunity to reconstruct the Polish reality of the late 1950s, but also to recall the atmosphere of the pre-war period. Reichmann, the former lodger at the Ciechocinek boarding house and a writer of song lyrics, becomes the chief representative of this era. He appears in the book thanks to a diary Fabian finds. But the living protagonists also recall the spirit of their own youth. These 'exorcisms' allow them to forget what they've been through and rediscover their zest for life.

The Eccentrics gives us an unusually stylish and excellently documented picture of the era it describes. It doesn't only convey the state of mind at the time, but also everyday reality, from language through to clothing. Above all, though, it pays homage to art as the best medicine for trauma and a sense of hopelessness.

Marta Mizuro

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The further they went inland, the more snow lay around. They sped down a narrow and nearly empty road flanked by leafless trees, only occasionally passing a cart with a driver bundled up in a sheepskin coat perched on top, a cumbersome lorry or a blue 'Krasula' bus, grey in the gloom of the day and trailing clouds of exhaust fumes like a curtain. The Vauxhall bounded forward through the sparse, rural landscape. The ponds were not yet frozen over; around them there were clusters of willow, fields covered by a thin layer of snow, and the odd peasant cottage. In the villages they saw pigs in rack wagons and kids biting into huge loaves of bread as they walked along; in the small towns there was mud and cobble stones, with queues before the shops selling meat and kielbasa. Between news bulletins and 'Farming Today', the radio played folk dances and then Ciukszy, a mandolin ensemble, Wichar's dance orchestra and singers – Hanna Rek, Kurtycz, Koterbska.

"Last night must have cost you a packet, mister. Especially after you ordered that champagne. As sour as gherkin juice", said Modesta, grimacing.

"Champagne?! That was sparkling wine, that's all. I'd never even heard of the brand".

"You must have forked out a thousand, for sure".

"It might be more soon. Look".

In a neighbourhood completely devoid of life, two police officers stood next to a motorcycle with a sidecar that was stuck in a snowbank. The first looked like one of those church wardens responsible for snuffing out the candles, tall and with a hooked nose, while the other had a bandaged throat. Both waved their stop signs. Fabian pulled over. The one with the hooked nose walked around the car and knocked on Modesta's window.

"Driving licence, identity card, car documents, travel permit!" he recited as she wound down the window. He bent over and attempted to put his head into the car, catching his helmet on the roof in the process. He started, his features contorting with amazement.

"Err, where's the steering wheel then? How are you driving this car, citizen?"

"Hey Zygmuś, it's an English car – everything's back to front", croaked out the one with the bandages, before Modesta had even got as far as opening her mouth.

"English? English? In that case, get out, at once!" he commanded, straightening his shoulder bag. He took another turn around the car, mincing like a geisha, and came to a stop in front of Fabian. Gesticulating, he began talking slowly and loudly, enunciating each syllable and almost shouting:

"Pl-ease ge-et o-ut of the…"

Fabian got out.

"Do you speak Polish?" asked the policeman, relieved.

"Pretty well. After all, it would be stupid to go into action from scratch in a foreign language…"

The policeman forgot about the documents, absorbed by the Vauxhall. He looked around inside, flicked the switches, checked to see if the seats were comfortable, and then whistled in admiration.

"Look, Winiek", he said excitedly to his bandaged-up colleague, as he tugged at the gear lever. "Even the gear stick is on the left. Hey mister, how do you manage on our Polish roads? Can't be easy, huh?"

"It's child's play", said Fabian. "You just have to get used to the fact that left is right and right is left".

"Right is left and left is right. Child's play", repeated the policeman, as if he understood.

Then they stopped even trying to check anything. They told one joke after the other and enquired about the engine, how powerful it was, its maximum speed, about driving in England and where he'd been. Then they advised him to switch on his lights, on account of the weather, handed back his documents and saluted politely.

When the Vauxhall's red rear lights had faded at the point where the road ran together with the sky, both men lifted their helmets, wiped the sweat from their foreheads, and flung their stop signs, shoulder bags and belts together with their holsters into the side car.

"Okay, the cabaret's over. Now write me up a detailed account. I want the report on my desk at 8.15 tomorrow, before the morning briefing", barked out the bandaged one tersely.

They pulled up directly before the villa 'Konstancja', where

Modesta was renting a room. It was a boarding house with a bizarre glass pyramid in the middle of its flat roof that stood opposite the Sosnowy park, which was enveloped now by great layers of snow, cotton-wool like. She told him to stop the car some way from the house and wouldn't let him get out, struggling with the suitcase by herself.

"I owe you half of what you spent yesterday", she shouted in farewell.

He took out a squeaky pram from Mrs Bayerowa's shed, where they had kept the cart that used to take guests around the town. He wheeled out two rusty bicycles, and threw a rotting hose and some forks, spades and rakes to one side. He drove the car in and then levered up the bonnet. Groaning and panting, he crawled underneath, turning on a torch. The cover to the oil sump he had ordered from Callender, a metalsmith in Willersley, was still there. Welded to it was the cocoa tin, invisible from beneath, that he had hastily checked for that morning, feeling around under the bonnet in front of the Grand Hotel. He undid six screws and took off the tin cover, dirtying his hands on the oil with which he'd disguised it. Then he straightened up, wiping the metal that looked similar to a turtle shell with some bundled rags, and was finally able to open the tin. He breathed a sigh of relief. Nothing had gone wrong. The contents, wrapped in several plastic bags and fastened with tape, had made the journey unscathed.

Wanda came back from work earlier than usual.

"No! Is that for real?! You didn't even tell me! What a wonderful colour! Beautiful! Sand-coloured! It's absolutely beautiful!" She ran her hand over the Vauxhall's chrome handles. "Two or three years ago they'd have taken it straight away from you. And you didn't even tell me – you're so mean! How could you have kept quiet about it?"

"It was supposed to be a surprise".

"A surprise! And is the young lady you brought here with it a surprise too, little brother?" she asked, winking.

"You already know?"

"Uh huh".

"It's nothing like that. I met her in Gdańsk. Should I have left her behind? Said I wouldn't take her? Why should I? She was on a course, she teaches English at the high school here".

"Aha, that's interesting. I know all the teachers here. They haven't taught English in our school at all for a couple of years. But that must be changing now. Such a young addition to the teaching staff, and, it seems, quite a looker, at least from a distance. Well, well".

Translated by Katya Andrusz

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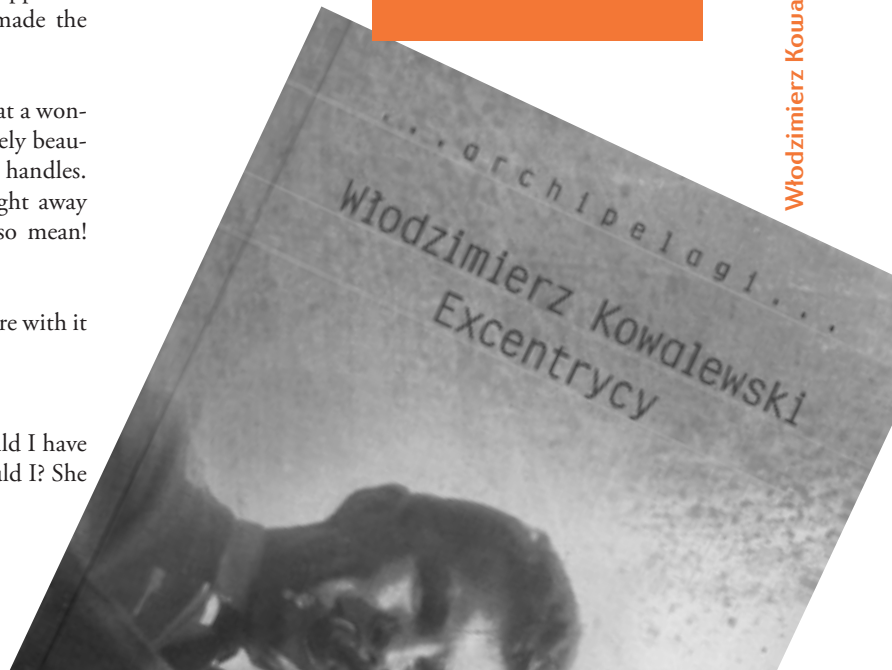

Photo: Elżbieta Lempp

Hermann Daniel Hermes, chairman of the Great Consistory Court, is suddenly dismissed from his post, with no justification and no opportunity for appeal, though he spends the rest of his life seeking them. Hermes' deeds only come to light after his death, when the judges at the supreme court take up the enquiry – the angels. With documents at their disposal that have been amassed from the day the defendant was born, as well as modern surveillance equipment and modern ways of archiving the data, they can screen every last detail of his activities. However, their ruling is burdened by a patent antipathy towards the defendant, and the documents have gaps in them, so it is impossible to interpret them unambiguously. Therefore the judges must find new witnesses, fill in the missing pieces and determine a single, accurate version of the truth about Hermes.

The inquiry into the Hermes case can be compared with the "lustration" process (whereby those who collaborated with the communist authorities in Poland have been exposed under the present government), and the novel itself regarded as a response to contemporary "lustration", the equivalent of a witch-hunt, with all its various distortions and the lack of objectivity that obscures potential doubts about where the blame really lies. Depicting this process in a joking way does not change the real point – the unambiguous judgement of human deeds, suggests Waniek, is bound to end in corrupt practices.

Hermes' life was judged in the era preceding the French Revolution and the anti-monarchist movement it initiated, which led to further social changes. Hermes is a freemason, and also an anti-monarchist and advocate of social change, but he operates under cover. His views and actions reflect the views of many "conspirators" of the time, and also serve the author as an excuse for examining various opposition groups and their influence on politics – in this case Prussian.

Waniek's book combines the qualities of a historical novel of manners and a political treatise as well as a thesis on metaphysical zest. Its great virtue are the portraits of the main characters, both the earthly and the celestial ones, who are very "human" in their vices. Realism and fantasy are also superbly combined here. In an original, highly ironical way, aiming to expose the truth, Waniek approaches a topic that is inspiring twenty-first century thriller writing – the conspiracy theory of history.

Marta Mizuro

Henryk Waniek (born 1942) is a painter, novelist, essayist, art critic, translator and expert on esoteric issues.

TRANSCRIPT

ANGEL:
I shall spare you a lengthy introduction and say at once that I wish to talk about the library. And that this is a confidential matter, so please do not pass on anything that is said here. I merely thank you for coming – I am counting on your help. I know next to nothing about libraries. Naturally, I don't mean bookshelves, catalogues and that whole lifeless arrangement of volumes. That I can imagine. But I would like to hear something about the secrets that never make their way across the library threshold; about the deeper philosophy of those book-filled vaults, which is the reserve of the initiated. And as the Count has opened his eyes, I will ask him first. I do not have to mention the fame of his library. Everyone knows about it, because it contained the world's greatest collection of hymns and anthems. Why exactly anthems?
COUNT:
Forgive me for talking through my teeth. It's the cold that is making something happen to my jaw. Just look how it's trembling. I don't even know how to start. The whole business is so remote and complicated now, all the more since it brought enormous costs, efforts and fears in its wake. A library is a great responsibility. I used to have nightmares about fires, death-watch beetles – in other words monstrous woodworm, known as Anobium punctatum, that eat into the pages of the books, the audacious theft of valuable specimens, and brazen forgeries. I'm reluctant to go back to it, but for you, Counsellor, I will make an exception. Apart from other books that I'll talk of later, collecting songbooks was my grandfather's idea, and became an ancestral tradition. Nowadays everyone thinks an anthem is just a song for the common folk. Those blessed times are long forgotten, when in drawing rooms and temples, on parade grounds and battlefields people sang with the pure intention of changing the human heart and the entire world for the better. Because in my father's day things were already starting to go wrong. There was a deluge of trash building up, the work of forgers, spoiling the original purity of the anthem. Before then no one would ever have been so bold. Anthems were sacred! A Roman warrior would rather die than change a single word of his legion's song. The singing determined the outcome of the battle – victory or defeat. There are numerous references to this in Thucydides, and no doubt Suetonius too. Would so many monasteries have fallen into ruin if they hadn't done something fanciful to their hymns? Just as in countries that have fallen shamefully. The nearer our times, the worse it gets. Anthems were corrupted to suit the needs of the common dance hall. Any old circus had to have its own anthem. And by the Enlightenment era the scandal had reached its apogee. Fashionable, rationalist texts were written to fit the traditional tunes. Somewhere in the Czech lands a secret establishment was founded to manufacture anthems. Smugglers began peddling them at half price. Of course they were devoid of quality. People were shouting themselves hoarse to no effect – no heroism, none of God's grace, not even any plain good cheer. In this situation my library was to become a sort of Noah's Ark, a stronghold restraining the barbarian advance.
ANGEL:
All manner of falsehood would shatter against your library!
COUNT:
Saving the anthem was my top priority from childhood onwards. When I went to school at the age of ten I already had a lot of knowledge of the subject. I was shocked to discover that all my schoolmates and most of the teachers were using songbooks of such dubious value that all our studying was good for nothing. When I told my father, he took me away from there and entrusted my further education to our chaplain, Mayer. He had the great talent of being able to tell sham from truth in an instant. That was what he taught me, until I reached the right age. Then he opened a cupboard for me that had always remained locked. It took more than a key – you also had to say a magic word, makbenak. As he uttered it, the hinges creaked, and what wasn't in there! And all in a perfect state! The best things to have arisen since the world was created, nothing but the jewels of hymnology. Step by step he initiated me into their secrets. One after another they revealed to me the arcana of divine sound.

ANGEL:
I have heard that to the singer the profound power of the anthem can be revealed, leading the soul to a state of enlightenment and opening the way to the mystery of existence. I have also heard that an anthem contains a force that, if used properly, can make the walls of a besieged city crumble or inflame the heart. You mentioned the world's creation, so I shall ask about the legend that says the Creator did nothing, but merely sang seven hymns in turn. Is it in your view possible, as the hymnologists claim, that the universe was made by song alone?
COUNT:
In calling that ancient tradition a legend, you diminish a great truth, though you also touch on the heart of the matter. Our library contained as many as four of those seven hymns. My father purchased them from a merchant from the Levant, who had bought them there from a monastery, where they were stored by Solomon himself. The merchant even promised to provide the remaining three, but he never appeared again. Nonetheless, with only four, we were already in a position to divide the light from the darkness or to create whole new constellations. You are right, Counsellor. The hymn is a tool of the deepest mystery.
ANGEL:
That is just what I wanted to hear. That is what I was expecting.

Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones

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THE ISLAND

Eustachy Rylski

Photo: Świat Książki

For some time now we have known that the strength and beauty of Rylski's writing lie in the main heroes he creates. Each of the four stories in *The Island* features this sort of impeccable composition. These characters are ordinary and unique by turns: the wretched accountant; then (in *The Smell of the Court*) the great, dying émigré writer, made to look like Gombrowicz in general outline; the provincial ninny who is the victim of a holiday romance (*Like Granite*); the eminent, rebel playboy-prince on the threshold – at least until a certain moment – of a career in the Vatican (the title story). Regardless of their social origin or moral and intellectual qualifications, each of these characters is, to use the title of one of Rylski's novels, "a man in the shade", a flawed person, gloomy and disillusioned, having well and truly lost. I do not mean to say that Rylski always uses one and the same character stencil or relies purely on a formula. That is clearly not the case.

The book's careful, well-considered structure is notable. And so the action of all four stories takes place by the sea: the first and third on the Baltic, the second and fourth on the Mediterranean. In the first and third stories the main characters contend with creatures of their own imagination, while in the second and fourth we find the classic set-up, a duel between two opponents. The heroes of two stories die in highly meaningful circumstances expressed in metaphors, and in the other two the denouement is a mysterious exchange of roles. There is more of this sort of symmetry and counterpoint in *The Island*, and all the stories confirm something we have always known – that Rylski's craftsmanship is incredible; here it makes itself felt not just within each individual story, but in the way the whole set is composed.

While beguiling us with meaty plots full of surprises, adding drops of tension and working perfect story-telling bluffs, Rylski also sets up absorbing, confrontational debates. He wants us to admire his fiction-writing flair as well as his playwriting talent, if I can call it that (his brilliant, impressive dialogues). Naturally, in the stories that rely on dialogue there is no question of neglecting the plot. Eustachy Rylski's latest book is a success on all fronts.

Dariusz Nowacki

Eustachy Rylski (born 1944) writes fiction, stage plays and screenplays. After many years of silence, in 2004 he made a successful come-back as a novelist.

A trainee hairdresser from Wągrowiec, intimidated by life, a little heavy with sleep, sweets and the first flush of youth, decided to go on holiday with a girlfriend, at her instigation in fact, to one of the fashionable seaside places.

The resort was on a par with her imagination of the great big world, and so was Sylwek, the handsome thirty-year-old who emanated the smell of success, money, self-confidence and Paco Rabanne cologne.

Sylwek and his pal Hoodie were the kings of life – designer-label clothes, good cigarettes, expensive alcohol, bracelets on their wrists and divine nutriment for every occasion.

Monika was impressed by the boys and the world they revealed to her, so once she'd been picked up on the beach, with no particular intention or even strong feelings, definitely in a moment of boredom or mindless foolery, she eagerly surrendered to the holiday romance.

She was too greedy for happiness, for the showy impunity with which the young men and their mates used life, to restrain her in any way. Pub brawls, daredevil pirouettes on jet skis, hard gambling at the preview casino that had gone rotten before it got ripe, nocturnal car rallies along the small streets of the terrorised town, or finally the foul, suburban language that broke through the thin veneer of pseudo correctness like a poisoned spring did not put the girl off her infatuation.

On the contrary, the more impetus this life gathered, which happened by the day, the more Monika's appetite for it grew. There's no denying that the girl was too young, stupid and insensitive for a moment's reflection to disturb her obsession. All the more since she herself took on a new shine, metamorphosing from a grey mouse into a woman in love, conscious of her own allure.

The resort took on a new shine too, to the girl's eyes becoming Hollywood, Monaco, San Remo, familiar to her from the gossip columns in colour magazines.

She felt a bit like one of their heroines.

But before it had picked up speed for good, the holiday ran to its end, as happens with every bit of good luck.

The lovers parted, Monika back to Wągrowiec, and Sylwek, it goes without saying, to the capital.

They promised to correspond regularly and to visit as often as they could. Monika did not go back to her job, because you don't return from paradise to a provincial hairdressing salon, and from a fairytale prince to the boring customers who don't know what luxury is. What would she have to talk to them about anyway? Conversations were the heart and soul of her work.

She planned to look around for something more suitable. Meanwhile, her time went by on daydreams and letters. She put on a lot of weight from crisps and Coca-Cola, and took some knocks in quarrels with her parents.

Having been outwardly unconfident, cautious and shrinking before, now she made up for it with a greater range of domestic self-reliance than would seem likely from the status of a dependent child. Now, if only for the lack of a job, the dependence grew stronger, but the arbitrarily self-awarded autonomy soon went brown with boorishness.

She wounded her parents with it, regardless of the circumstances.

Open until now and unyieldingly patient, they shut themselves in a silence that sometimes out of boredom, sometimes out of self-driven malice, Monika brutally broke. Not without success, when boorishness clashes with the defencelessness of simple, diligent, responsible people who are shocked by the times and prepared to have feelings in spite of them.

As for the correspondence, it only went in one direction. Monika got no replies to her more and more impatient letters.

There were days when she thought about suicide and days when holiday memories brightened her soul, yet the one and the other flowed in the same stream of feverish euphoria, as if thoughts of life and death led to the same thing.

From time to time, mainly over the telephone, she shared her state of mind with her girlfriend, Ewa, who showed more restraint in her hopes, had not dropped her job, had swapped her holiday romance with Hoodie for intimacy with a rich married man, and was doing well.

Two months went by. The days were getting short and grey. Worse thoughts came to the fore as the better ones retreated.

Her friend encouraged Monika to take action. She shouldn't remain in uncertainty. Why waste life? Either she could say to herself it was past and over, or she couldn't, and she should draw the conclusions from that.

When Monika asked what those conclusions were meant to involve, Ewa began to take action herself. With some difficulty she managed to locate Sylwek's pal and, after keeping Monika in uncertainty for a short while, gave her the directions for her now forgotten summer-time lover.

Hoodie agreed to meet the girl in one of the clubs, which was like a rat's den, not much bigger than one, anyway, full of the spasms of psychodelic music. The place was teeming with dreadful young people, talking in dreadful language about dreadful things, and with his unconcealed hope of screwing her anywhere at all, at the bar, in the toilet, in the car or in the street, Monika thought Hoodie the most dreadful thing of all.

He led her on, conned her, made ironic remarks, ordered beer after beer, didn't answer her questions, or told her things without being asked, but after two hours of this drudgery, which seemed to the girl an eternity, he gave up, wilted, switched off, dictated the address to her and vanished.

As if a spring had unwound in him.

The high-rise block sinking into the slums on the edge of the city did not dispirit the girl when she got there after dark. Nor did the wheezing lift as it struggled up to floor X, because it wasn't lit, nor the squalid flat she entered after ringing the bell at least a dozen times, because only the city gave it any light. Nor even the man who opened the door, nothing but an emaciated, dirty, drugged up, horrified piece of scum, because she didn't recognise him. The shock came when the man spoke.

Because it was Sylwek's voice.

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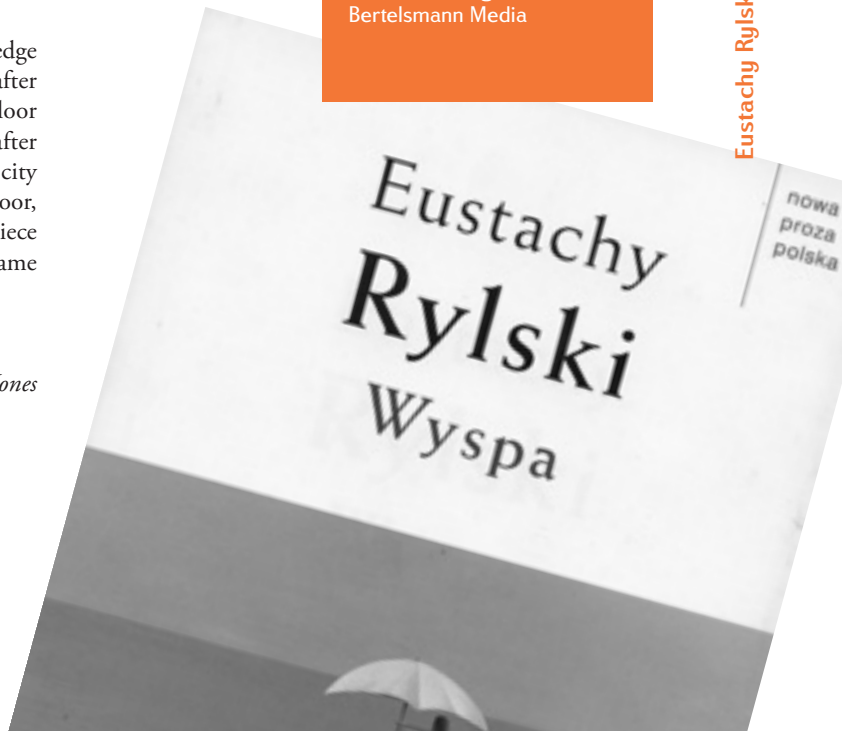

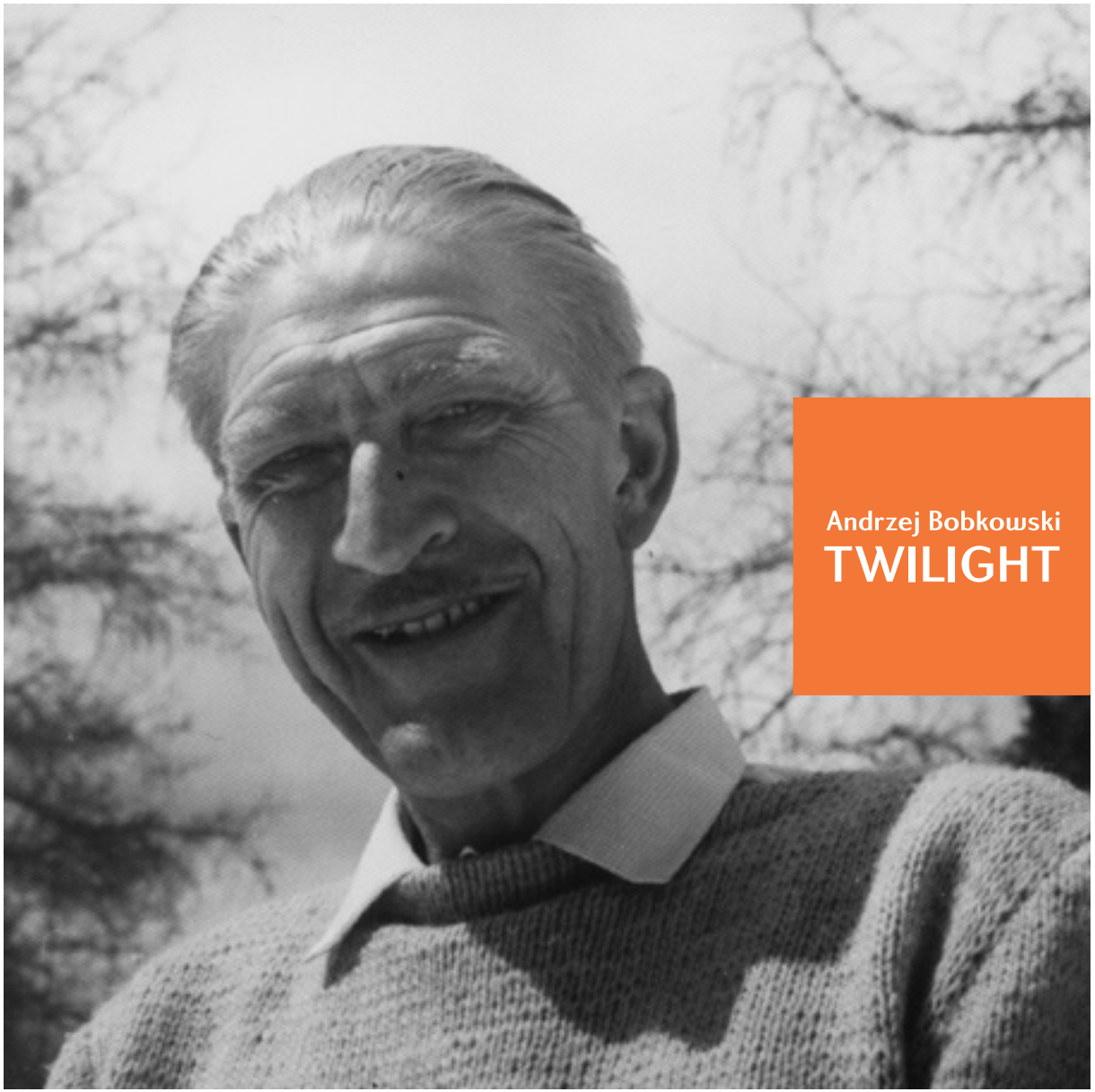

Andrzej Bobkowski

TWILIGHT

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In Polish literature Andrzej Bobkowski is a unique student of Joseph Conrad. This fact can be seen in many of the stories from the volume *Coco de Oro*, but it manifests itself most convincingly in "Alma," a story now included in the collection entitled *Twilight*, and originally written for an anthology called *The Living Conrad*. "Alma" also proves that Józef Czapski was right when, after Bobkowski's premature death, he wrote in "Kultura" that this very "son of Conrad could prove an indispensable companion for many a young Pole dreaming of adventure, of a life without surveillance, without forms of art ruined by the dictates of a decaying ideology, of a life by one's own choice, responsible and full."

And that is indeed what happened. One can only regret that the discovery of Andrzej Bobkowski by young Poles took place so late (at the end of the 1980's and the beginning of the 1990's) and that it happened only for a single generation. The newly published collection of prose pieces *Twilight* serves as a fine introduction to Bobkowski's work, whose highest point, of course, is and will remain his *Sketches in Ink*. But in *Twilight* we find stories that correspond directly to the *Sketches*: a group portrait of the inhabitants of a Parisian apartment building against the backdrop of the French experience of the war; or an excursion, by bicycle naturally, around the south of France immediately after the war.

Andrzej Bobkowski (1917-1961): author of *Sketches in Ink* (1957), regarded as a "hymn of praise to the freedom of the individual."

Another tasty morsel for lovers of literature will be the conversation between Boris Pasternak and the KGB officer coercing him to decline the Nobel Prize. Such a pact with the devil is also described elsewhere by Bobkowski, when he directly addresses writers living behind the iron curtain: "You lived quietly, you had a house, a well-stocked refrigerator, a yard; you had your own climate and landscape, your own countryside, trees, and sky, and at the same time your own continent within you, to which you emigrated when you felt the urge." In this volume there is also a fragment of a novel entitled "Twilight," begun six months before the author's death, in which more than anywhere else he conveyed the entire essence of his individualism, his creative separateness and his uniqueness.

Krzysztof Masłoń

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From the large courtyard you enter up the side stairs. Straight ahead is the broad stone staircase with its blue carpet cascading down from the sixth floor. Ours is a seven-storey wooden corkscrew. The other staircase leads to the big respectable apartments of the real tenants. Ours twists all the way into the attic, rising steeply to the labyrinth of hallways and tiny rooms of us "upstairs folk," as the concierge calls us in her disdainful way. To her we are not tenants. While we, as free people of the Parisian rooftops, do not recognise the tyranny of a cave-dweller from the "loge" on the ground floor.

Jacques, a lively Métro worker, once told her that when he spits from above, her apartment floods. She won't forgive him that. And when she is rinsing down the tiled courtyard in the morning M. de Saint-Esprit, a civil servant, always asks her with a friendly smile: *Ça pousse bien?* The Comte de Farges' Polish maid is too proud to converse with the "caretaker," as befits a Magda who goes by the name of Mademoiselle Madeleine. Not to mention the fact that when the comtesse de Farges is away, Magda takes her place in every respect, apparently not merely eating at the same table as M. le Comte... M. Guillou is a dyer who colours heather, immortelles and other everlasting flowers for wreaths and mantelpiece displays. His little dog, white with coloured patches, always does in the entranceway what he ought to do in the street. The concierge suspects them of being in cahoots, but M. Guillou smiles and murmurs beneath his thick Breton mustache, *Quelle méchante bête*. As he says it, he is most certainly not thinking of his Friquet. With Eliane, a model in the Ardanse fashion house, relations have been severed for years. Eliane organised a coup d'état: she does not receive any correspondence here. Seeking to avoid inspections of her mail, from which it might emerge that wearing gowns at Ardanse's fashion shows is not her only source of income, she has her letters sent poste restante. And so one can often hear Madame la concierge quacking in her inquisitive way at the corner bistro: "She came back this afternoon without having left in the morning," or: "That kind, they get up when they want to take a break." Here war is permanent. But attacks are greeted by Eliane's smile, by that smile of ours from upstairs.

Upstairs there is no gas and no electricity. There is wind, sun, moon, and stars. The eyes encounter a boundless sea of rooftops. When the weather is good they are calm and blue; when clouds blow in and the wind starts to hammer in violent gusts, they become cold and gray. The rain ruffles their smooth surface and from their crests, like the crests of waves, the gale skims off clouds of spray and hurls it with a crash at the glass-covered skylights above us. The spider's web of the Eiffel Tower is torn to shreds, while Sacré-Cœur, white as a sugarloaf, disappears in the mist. The wind rattles the doors and stalks the hallways; the black metal plates of the chimney covers open their iron breasts and spin impetuously. Then, when the sun comes out once again and dark blue stretches of sky are reflected in the glistening surfaces, there comes a profound and good stillness.

Spring comes sooner here too. Before the displays at Vilmorin's blossom with colourful bags of seeds and La Samaritaine turns into a grand collection of watering cans, rakes, and chicken coops—before schools of saplings begin to sprout twice a week on the Pont au Change, and the sidewalk bristles with a green brush of vegetable and flower seedlings—we can already sense its approach. Each day the bow of the sun bends further, and a soporific fly leaves the window pane on its first wanderings. The twittering of sparrows is different as they bathe in the guttering in water from thawed frost.

Bright days passed here, and calm nights; winters passed and brief springs. The summer sun milled the tin rooftops with its heat, while the autumn cooled them down. For a long time they were pink from the neon lights of Montmartre, the boulevards and Montparnasse. Twenty one salvoes of fireworks burst over them every year in fourteenth of July bouquets after the first war. Then once again there came darkness illuminated by the glow of conflagrations, distant explosions and the stars of flares. The former good-natured smile from upstairs became malicious and subterranean.

On those long evenings M. Guillou would read the New Testament aloud in Latin, mispronouncing words he did not understand. In the processions of his congregation his comrades would admire that Latin of his even more than the beautiful banner of which he had always been so proud.

Now he was running around to some kind of secret meetings and having long consultations with Jacques. M. de Saint-Esprit had become untalkative and often set off for work with a briefcase stuffed with papers. Jacques was visited by groups of young people in windcheaters who clattered on the stairs in their heavy boots. Eliane read the endless *Gone with the Wind* and *Muson*, running downstairs with Magda when the sirens began to wail.

In the depths of the Pigalle metro station fun was had. At times, in the late evening the slender figure of a tall young fellow in very new and ill-fitting clothing could be seen slipping down the long staircase. Magda said she once heard someone speaking with one of them in English. They smiled and Jacques said: "Down there, there are decent people too." There was one language, one meaning of forbidden words.

And then the smile once again became well-meaning when, after a few days of shooting, one August evening GM engines roared on all the streets. M. de Saint-Esprit looked with contempt at his tobacco plantation in packets on the balcony and, stooping over the tricolor, smoked a Lucky. Eliane and Magda chewed gum like hundreds of thousands of the boys in green in their heavy helmets, and used the phrase "O.K." With the pathos of Cyrano de Bergerac, Jacques recounted the story of his battles in the Batignolle neighbourhood and M. Guillou spent his time intently dyeing many flowers for many wreaths. Everyone, even the concierge, wore a friendly smile.

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Photo: Olga Majrowska

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Beginning in 1994, every two or three years Jerzy Pilch has issued a collection of the best of his newspaper and magazine columns. *The Train to Eternal Life* gathers texts that came out between 2002 and 2006. In the note included in this collection we are told that while compiling the present selection, the author deliberately set aside texts on literature and soccer (two of his favourite subjects) since he plans to present these in a separate book.

In *The Train to Eternal Life* there are two dominant themes. The first is that of public affairs broadly understood, concerning current Polish politics and especially the life of political parties, of which Pilch is an ironic observer and commentator. This particular writerly passion could be described bluntly as preying on the gaffes, blunders, and general foolishness of the political class. The second, and, it would seem, more important theme is that of personal issues that are usually connected with the author's nostalgic recollections. It is here that Pilch speaks most about himself, about books and cultural events that have made a particular impression on him and about encounters with extraordinary figures that have been important to him.

Jerzy Pilch is regarded as an unparallelled master of contemporary Polish column writing, an uncommonly shrewd author with a subtle and stylish sense of humour. The texts gathered in *The Train to Eternal Life* show that such a reputation is richly deserved.

Dariusz Nowacki

Jerzy Pilch (born 1952): novelist and columnist, winner of the Nike Prize (2001). He has published over a dozen works of fiction and non-fiction.

The latest manifestation of the sanitary fascism rampant in the land of Poland is the rapidly approaching, media-heralded total ban on cigarette smoking in Intercity trains. Polls conducted on this subject by the railroad company reveal that eighty per cent of travellers are in favour of such a prohibition. For smokers the fact that in this woeful age of healthy (and thus eternal) life, they garner twenty per cent of the vote, is a considerable achievement; yet the healthy majority has, as usual, a crushing preponderance over the sick minority. An addiction, as everyone knows, is a sickness, but it is an ambiguous one, a guilty one, an exception; it is a sickness that, though not infectious in the traditional sense of the word, is in its essence infinitely worse than an infectious one. The stench and smoke emanating from the smoker poisons all those around in the blink of an eye. In a word, this is not a sickness whose victims have any hope of being granted the status or rights of the handicapped. Quite the contrary: the smoker's space is forever being cut back. Proper smoking rooms have long been wiped off the face of the earth and what is left—demeaning "smoking areas" round the back of the can—are also gradually on their way out.

Smoking compartments are to vanish from Intercity passenger cars, and a healthful Soviet-style egalitarianism will be brought into being. Boarding a train from Warsaw to, let's say, Wrocław, for over five hours I will not have a cigarette, I will not expose my hale and hearty fellow creature sitting in the corner to second-hand smoke. He, on the other hand, faced with such a long journey, will fortify himself with slices of bread spread with sweet-smelling lard and a roll with slices of utterly salubrious country sausage, and he will strew the floor with pieces of eggshell from his hard-boiled eggs, and dirty the upholstery with glazing from his doughnuts. And I will sit there telling myself: there is no problem; passive eating is not harmful; so far at least the American scientists have not discovered such a thing; psychological pressure does not count; there is no problem. Out of longing for a cigarette I will issue a pitiful sniff, and my non-smoking, healthy and thus hugely empathetic fellow creature will offer me "the best thing for a cold—a clove of garlic." I'll decline and he'll pop two of them saying, "prevention is better than cure." When he drinks them down with a life-giving Fanta, burps, picks his teeth and prepares to take a nap, when he removes his footwear and stretches his feet relaxedly onto the seat in front of him, it is entirely possible—I will not hide it—that a crisis may ensue. I'll wait till he closes his eyes and then sneak out to the lavatory, where, taking out my cigarettes, I will light up and, fully cognizant of all the regulations I'm contravening, I will inhale desperately for all I'm worth. I have no illusions. After no more than a couple of drags, the pale blue smoke will smite certain sensitive nostrils, my fellow creature will emerge from his slumber and alert the authorities, who will come along and hammer on the door. Five hundred zlotys is what my little frolic with tobacco will cost me.

These are not cheap horror stories I am making up here; every one of you has had journeys of this kind, every one of you has travelled across Poland with a monster in the compartment. If it was not some stupendous gutbucket, it was an innocent child with three Magnum ice creams and a sack of potato chips, if it was not a murderous born storyteller it was some beauty swathed in the sensuous fragrance of Masumi eau de toilette, loyal to the styles and cosmetics of the 1970's. If you were not forced to be a passive witness to their consumption, you were forced to be a passive listener to their usually, as was curiously the case on Polish trains, conspiratorial musings. If they did not cloud the compartment with the vapours of peasant vittles, they fumigated it with cheap Russian perfumes. But for goodness' sake, then there was somewhere to escape to! While there were still smoking compartments, there was someplace to which you could evacuate yourself from those spectres of the Polish railroad!

Smoking compartments (especially those in first class) were not simply ghettoes for smokers. They were havens, they were sanctuaries of tranquility and freedom! Many a time even non-smokers sought refuge in those supposedly contaminated places! Many a time we smokers, seeing panic and death in the eyes of some harried passenger after a mere hour of travel, gathered him to our bosom and, at least till he regained his composure, and often longer, we refrained from smoking! And then afterwards we still were able to travel on

in harmony and concord! From time to time some health freak would pass along the corridor, quickening his pace and holding his nose; he would glance once in our direction and then never look our way again—the suicide compartment was best given a wide berth.

Many years ago I was in the very heart of a certain American state which consisted of a single vast cornfield. In the centre of the cornfield was a large park. In the evenings I would go for a walk there, sit down on a bench, and light a cigarette. From the distant woods runners would emerge; they would come to an abrupt stop when they spotted me, then change their route to run around me in a gigantic arc. They kept so far away I could barely see them, yet in the absolute stillness I could hear them warning one another with panic-stricken cries: *Smoke! Smoke! Smoke!* Never mind which English expression suggested itself to me in response—the main thing was that at such moments I longed for my homeland. Today, as far as this matter is concerned there is not even anywhere I could escape to from my homeland—sanitary fascism is rearing its head everywhere.

Smoking is of course harmful and can result in death, yet the hope of non-smokers that they will live forever is an illusory one. Smoking kills in the way that at one time, for example, absinthe used to kill. But I very much doubt whether the victims of absinthe would be alive and healthy today if they had drunk something else. Even if they had drunk nothing but pure non-carbonated Polish mineral water.

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Janusz Rudnicki
COME ON, LET'S GO

Photo: Krystof Kriz

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The hero of Janusz Rudnicki's new novel comes back from Germany to his hometown of Koźle, but isn't quite sure what to do with himself. Out of boredom he smears his face in black shoe polish, but just then the post lady calls him out onto the stairwell, the door of his flat slams shut and a gas explosion destroys his block. Bad things are happening all over the country anyway, because time and again gas keeps exploding in different places; along with others who have lost the roof over their heads, the hero wanders about Poland and Germany having weird adventures… Rudnicki has thought up a tale consisting of a series of grotesque and absurd situations, sometimes funny, sometimes dreadful. But essentially the book is about extremely serious matters. Once again Rudnicki pits himself against the problem, to borrow a term from Zbigniew Kruszyński, of "relocated people" who have left their country in search of a place of their own but get stuck for ever, as Rudnicki puts it, "in twine", with no roots and no certainty, struggling with an unstable identity. *Come On, Let's Go* is also about Polish-German traumas, about a piece of history that is still stamping its mark on the present day, about executioners who become victims and victims who become executioners. Rudnicki's prose is tragi-comic, disturbing, and stylistically superb. There is no denying few writers are as good at turning a phrase as this one.

Robert Ostaszewski

Janusz Rudnicki (born 1956) is a prose-writer and political emigre whose permanent address is in Hamburg.

I'm surprised by the ring at the door – who the hell?

I open the door. The Post Lady. She's bending over, looking for something in her bag, holding a flower in her mouth. And panting, through the flower she says that,

"That bloody lift's bust again, g'day!"

"G'day,"

I reply, and suddenly she's riveted to the spot, her eyes too. And the flower flies downwards, because her upper and lower lips are further and further apart. What is it? I get a look at her teeth, full of fillings and wire, and think ahead to the door, then the barbed wire, then the goods wagons that will carry me off to the familiar loading ramp, in other words I yield to associations like a passive rag, and that's how my time rushes by – I never get bored, that's something at least. Until finally

"Is it you? "

she asks, because we've already seen each other yesterday, in the stairwell, I introduced myself, because I've come back, and I live on my own, if you please, a single white sail, surface area thirty square metres. I say

"It's me, don't you know me? The white sail…"

"White my foot,"

she says, and at once I remember what I'd forgotten.

"Oh, you mean my face? It's from the gas in the bathroom, just as I was trying to light a cigarette, my wife turned on the hot water in the kitchen."

"You're married?"

she replies, and how surprised she is!

"No,"

say I, even more amazed by my own words. What wife?

"No, no,"

I repeat, I repeat.

"It's a joke, of course, I switched on the water in the kitchen myself, just as I was trying to light a cigarette in the bathroom…"

The sentences go one way, I go another. A blockage in the oesophagus, a stopper, a dam. Her eyes are goggling at me, and mine at her, because I'm just as surprised at myself as she is at me. So there we stand, on either side of the threshold, and the flower that fell.

Until finally she shifts from one foot to the other. They're bothering her, they hurt. Moving her legs sets the rest of her body in motion, she comes to and says

"There's a smell of gas here. I've got a parcel for your neighbour, but your neighbour isn't in, so could you as your neighbour's neighbour take the parcel for the neighbour?"

"Yes, yes, I could, I'll take it."

I have to sign for it, but

"Where? On what?"

She says

"On the wall perhaps?"

I try once, and again on the wall, but the ballpoint won't do it.

"The ink runs out. You have to do it vertically, write, you know? Not horizontally."

I start thinking. The writing split is fantastically simple. I fall into such deep thought that the Post Lady has to wave a hand before my eyes to drag me to the surface.

"Hello! Good day, here I am."

"Vertically, you say?"

"Right."

"Maybe you'd better come inside, because there's no way to do it here, no holding the pen vertically."

"No, no, there must be something…"

She looks around, and I look around, until finally she says

"Just sign quickly, I'll bend over,"

and starts to bend over, to which I say

"Maybe I can bend over, to save you the trouble."

Her eyes go wide again.

"Am I accepting the parcel, or are you? Are you going to sign on your own back?"

she says to me slowly, hesitantly, and stares at me so hard it feels as if someone else were standing facing her, not me.

"OK, then you do the bending over,"

I said, so she bent over, with her back towards me, and just then the Neighbour to the left came out of his flat – when we first greeted each other he told me he still remembered me pissing into the sand pit – so that Neighbour came out, and just then I made such a stupid, leering sort of face, as if

I were stuck up to the ears in the Post Lady, here and now, at which the Neighbour changed into a sort of question mark, at which the Post Lady turned her head towards me, then squealed wildly, seeing me leering, took offence and straightened up, pronto! And the Neighbour's string bag went flying from his hands and the bottles he was returning for the deposit went flying out of the bag, straight onto the ground, and smashed! And the Neighbour couldn't catch his breath, until he did catch it and asks,

"Who are you?"

Then I remember again what I'd forgotten, that I have smeared my face in boot polish, my neck too and my ears, and I say

"Oh, do you mean my face?"

I say

"It's from the gas in the bathroom, just as I was trying to light a cigarette my wife turned on the hot water in the kitchen."

"Are you married?"

replies he, and how surprised he is!

"No, no, it's a joke, of course, I turned on the water in the kitchen myself…"

To which the Post Lady says she's had enough and she's off, she's leaving a notification for the neighbour about the parcel in the door, and she's gone, and the Neighbour? Nothing, he just stands there with his mouth hanging open in amazement, and I'm hypnotised by his fillings, so once again I'm carried away by the train wagons… Ah, what a fine mess we've got! Glass lying on the floor, him standing there, me standing here, maybe I should fetch a brush? And a dustpan? But where from? I haven't got any, I haven't got anything yet, I've only just got back, so he'll fetch them, he jolly well will, there's no question about it, after all it was he that dropped them, but because of me, I say, there's no question about it, he'll fetch them and that's the end of it. So off he went and came back with a big broom, because he didn't have a small one, and a dustpan. And he wants to sweep up. There's no question, I'll do the sweeping, he went to fetch them, now I'll sweep. And I start sweeping. He stands there, and I sweep. I see the flower, the one that fell from the Post Lady's mouth. Sweep up the flower? I've got doubts. I ask,

"Sweep up the flower? It's like shooting a duck and eating it cartridge and all. Will you hold on to it?"

"I will. There's a bit of a smell of gas here. This flower is artificial, it's from Słupnik."

It's the Post Lady's birthday today, and like every year Słupnik puts a flower in his letterbox for her.

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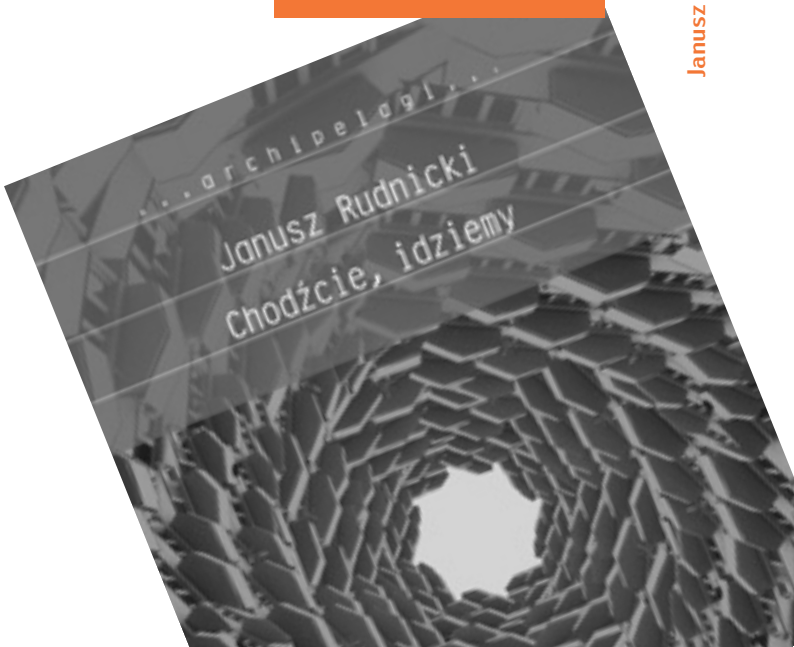

Agata Tuszyńska

EXERCISES IN LOSS

Photo: Agnieszka Herman

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This story really happened: Agata Tuszyńska's book is a profoundly moving document of the sickness and death of her husband. One writes such works with some wariness: should such an intimate experience be so soon revealed before the eyes of the literature-reading public, something so horrible as to be inaccessible to someone from the outside? The author shares the response to these questions with her precursors, a response which is seemingly banal: Write about it, because you are a writer! This reflects the conviction that a writer is someone whose duty it is to put extreme situations on display, and to clothe them in words.

This description of Henryk Dasko's mortal illness is thus a book written for those who will one day find themselves a part of such events, whether as the victim of the disease or one of the victim's nearest and dearest. It is a guidebook through hell, and simultaneously a call to pick up your weapons and fight, to battle for every additional week and month of life. One might ask: does this make any sense, given that the fight is a hopeless one, and lingering on with the disease is asking for suffering and humiliation. To this question the author responds ambiguously, in a very personal fashion. Her view is: you have to fight against everything, even if it means standing up against suggestions made by medical statistics and doctors' experience. This is less about extending life by a few more days than the attempt to close it in a way that is as full and reasonable as possible (Henryk's trip to Poland on the day before his death is insane from the doctor's point of view, but reasonable as a closure to a life). The love story also requires closure, a story which is complete only when it passes through the greatest of trials and which demands the most extreme devotion.

One more thing, Henryk Dasko was a Polish Jew, who was exiled from the country after March 1968. He considered this exile to be his life's greatest tragedy, apart from his fatal disease. Through all his ordeals and sufferings we can observe how Polish culture and literature were incredibly dear to him, how the landscapes and friends of his youth were important to him, how reciting Polish poetry kept his spirits up when he was depressed. This book is thus a subtle, but extraordinarily powerful act of condemnation against those who caused the last great exodus of the Jews from Poland.

Jerzy Jarzębski

Agata Tuszyńska (born 1957) is a poetess, prose-writer, reporter, and literary and theatre historian who has been translated into English and French.

The world of sickness, the empire of sickness. That's how I should describe it. A planet. Sickness as a terra incognita. A temporary place. We always got better. It was others who fell seriously ill and died.

I repeat. We were healthy, and we never wanted to give ourselves the luxury of illness. Now illness is a sentence. It is a suspension of the previous life, maybe of life in general. Sickness is a deprivation, an injury. It stands against US, the power of the will and the power of love.

We belong simultaneously to the world of the healthy and the world of the ill, wrote Susan Sontag. Both visas are stamped in our worldly passports. Some are given the privilege of living on the planet of the healthy. For them, this is natural. That's how it was with us. We visited the country of illness from time to time, but seldom, only out of some obligation, in and out. Left as soon as possible. Every visit, though brief and from a round-trip perspective, seemed a humiliation. Our bodies had refused to serve us. We were tormented by fevers, coughs, rashes and broken extremities. We wanted back. To return to ourselves, to the fatherland of the healthy, where everything is possible.

We never stopped off for long in the country of illness, we didn't have to. We weren't sent or exiled there. We didn't even consider the possibility of a forced emigration to the world of the ill.

Life overgrown with the tissue of the disease. Its barrage destroyed everything. An explosion. Dynamite. No room on the side roads. It blew up our unrealised fates from the inside. And everything we had - we have - became final. There would be no more, not like it was. Travels, clothing, gestures, promises could not be recalled in the same way they had been before the diagnosis. Cohen's "I'm your Man," the Armani tie, the leather seats of the Porsche, Konwicki's book, roller-skating by the lake, yellow tulips, the stupefying lilies by way of greeting, everything else, altered. Not the same taste. The aftertaste of ash.

The hospital became a place where life went on, instead of the place for quick, furtive visits to others that it had been.

Experience had taught me that a sickness was something you pulled through. Here it was different. I still can not (don't want to) accept the diagnosis, accept this difference. We stand up against disease. We believe that it is reversible. Strength of will is supposed to give us the strength to live.

The average size of our brain is 1,400 cubic centimeters (half a litre of milk, and just as much of whisky or cabbage soup?). The brain of a male weighs from 1,250 to 1,750 grams. This makes our most refined organ about one and a half kilos of potatoes, or the same amount of pork-neck? Apparently the heaviest brain recorded to date belonged to Ivan Turgenev, author of Rudin – it weighed over two kilograms.

The tight folds of the brain's surface allows for the largest number of nerve cells to be "packed" into the surface of the brain. Its most important layer is only two to three millimeters thick – the cortex, the main information processing zone, particularly those functions connected with conscious representation. The cortex has a large surface space (like a giant field), but to fit into the skull it has to be compressed, hence the folds and furrows. The most important part of us resembles a crumpled sheet of paper. Each is as unique as the lines on a person's palm.

We went into the operation blind. We didn't want to know too much.

The front part of the brain, i.e. the frontal lobe, occupies about 40% of its entirety and is responsible for the attributes, which characterise us as people. And so here was the headquarters of H.'s ambition and his internal strength, his charm and ability to persuade others. This was also the storehouse of his knowledge in terms of concepts, the part affiliated with language. All this was to remain intact. As were his memories of all types: episodic, semantic, procedural and catalogue.

The panic robbed me of my memory. For weeks I functioned as though under an anaesthetic. Like a paper mari-

onette, moving only because of the necessity of serving the ill. I performed specific actions, tasks and movements, I held conversations, I worked, carried things, changed clothing, purchased, laundered and fed. When the time came, I spoke with the rabbi about the burial, and before that with Uncles Janek and Martin about the money and the mourning services. Did he want to be cremated? Jews weren't cremated. Didn't I know that? No, I didn't know. I knew that he wanted to have a few photographs in the coffin. A coffin, well if there was a coffin then there wouldn' t be ashes. Which photographs, and who would get them copied? The cemetery would be the same one where Ester's parents were buried. I didn't know where they were buried. Ask around. In the north part of the town. With other Jews.

Write it down. Write it down so that you don't lose it. That was Miłosz's advice. Why not lose it? Maybe you have to remember, maybe it's valuable. Or perhaps forgetting will save me? H. doesn't want to go back to that condition, he doesn't want to live through the sickness again. He's doing everything to build his hopes. He's sure that the worst is behind us, that there are no finalities in store. He mocks the diagnoses and statistics. Two years? Why do they give you only the worst prognoses?

How extraordinary does one's strength have to be to believe in the conquering of the unconquerable? Where does H. get it? Not from me anymore. From me he could take only fear.

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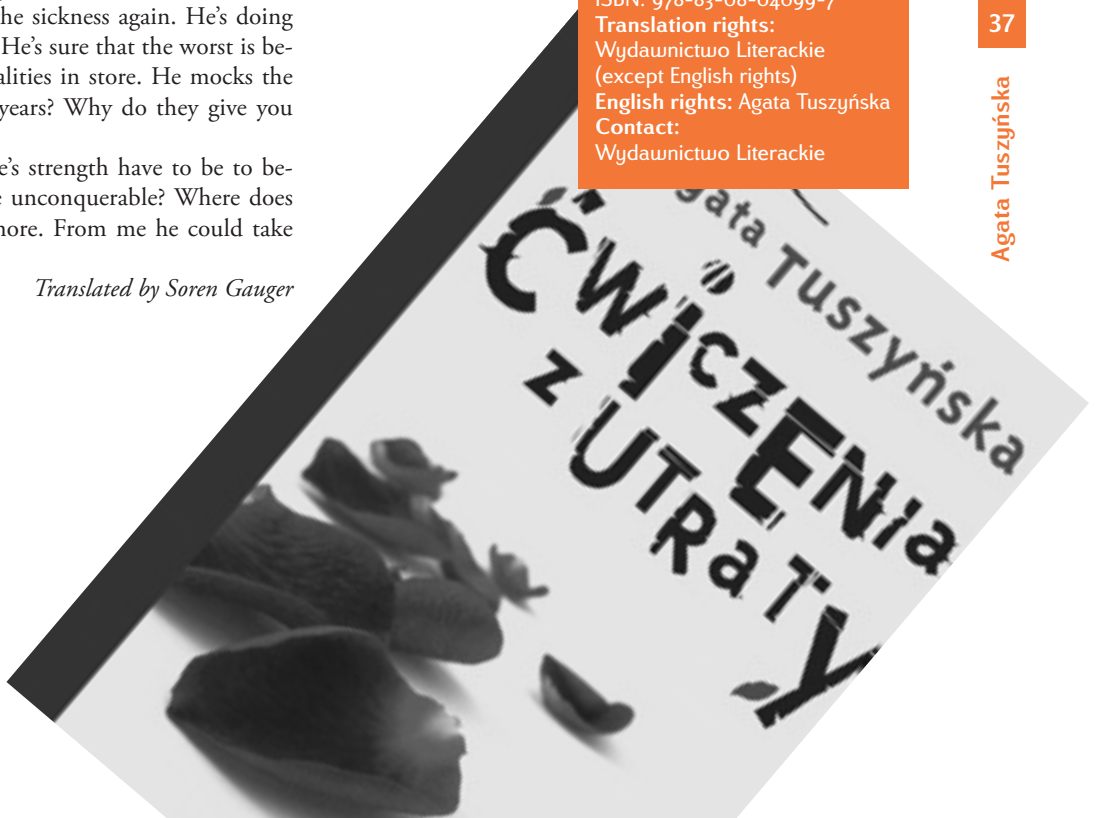

Joanna Rudniańska

BRYGIDA'S KITTEN

Photo: Elżbieta Lempp

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Warsaw, the summer of 1939. 6-year-old Helena lives happily with her parents, the owners of a brewery, and a fairly irresponsible nanny. The little girl's only problem is that she doesn't have any siblings, and so she is pleased to find a stray kitten one day. Although her new playmate is intelligent and knows how to talk, it eventually finds its way to a different little girl, Brygida, a factory-worker's sister. Helena's father does business with the Germans, among others (he has blood ties with them as well), but he also keeps up neighbourly relations with everyone, including the Jews. One of them works in his factory. The outbreak of the war and the anti-Semitic witch-hunt does not destroy these old friendships. And so when some friends of the family are imprisoned in the ghetto, the protagonist's family hurries to help them. Their efforts continue through the whole of the war, and not only involve the people they know. Of course, things are often dangerous and not always effective.

Helenka grows up and gradually stops letting anything astonish her. She visits the ghetto with her father, she comes in contact with death and with situations of mortal peril, she intuitively senses when there is danger afoot and disdainfully rejects the Polish demonstrations of anti-Semitism she encounters. She communicates the tragedy in her childlike manner: naively, but faithfully, without shying away from the horrible details. A magical element has been introduced into her story, however, in the form of the kitten, who leads Brygida out of the ghetto. The whole story has a postwar epilogue, in which the protagonists' further lives are presented, including a meeting between Helena and Brygida in their old age, and the death of the main protagonist.

Joanna Rudniańska has chosen a fairly seldom-used device, the presentation of the war and the Holocaust from a child's perspective. Not a Jewish child, but a Polish one, who is not directly affected by the mass annihilation, but who bears close witness to it. She is, above all, a witness of silent heroism. The child's perspective the author has taken on serves above all to make this heroism an everyday thing, to present it as a reflex of natural kindness and faith in one's convictions.

Marta Mizuro

Joanna Rudniańska (born 1948) is a mathematician by education who began by writing science-fiction stories for children. She won the international Janusz Korczak Award (1991).

Helena awoke in the middle of the night. The air was stuffy and she felt bad. She heard a horrible trumpeting. And then she recalled that she was in the shelter. And that the trumpeting was the snoring of Grandma Istmanowa, who never laid down, she even spent her nights in the old armchair in the corner of the cellar. It was absolutely dark. Helena stretched out her hand. Stańcia should have been lying on the straw-stuffed mattress. But Stańcia wasn't there. Helena crawled over Stańcia's mattress on all fours and, without getting up, moved that way to the door. It was easier to move in the dark like a dog or a cat, on your hands and knees, like you had four paws. You couldn't stumble or trip, and your head was a better way of feeling for obstacles. Helena only got up when she reached the door. She slowly turned the handle and left the shelter. Only then did she hear the aeroplanes. A hollow rumble that once drew closer, once grew more remote. It was dark out here, too. Helena fell on her four paws again and climbed up some stairs to a small corridor, from which you could get out into the courtyard. She groped for the door and went outside.

Daybreak was probably near, because the sky was much brighter than the gloom down below. Not a single light was on. The moon, which had slipped behind the clouds, was bathing everything in a faint glow. Helena's house and the building next-door were black cliffs. Helena went to her mulberry tree. She could climb up it with her eyes closed. And that's what she did. She only opened her eyes when she was high up. She heard the aeroplanes. They were flying from the direction of the Vistula, four great, heavy birds. They were dropping bombs. Against the backdrop of the clouds lit up by the moon, you could clearly see the tiny packages falling from the aeroplanes' bellies. Helena grew terrified that one of those packages would fall on her, or her house. But she still stared. And the planes were coming closer. Somewhere far off, maybe as far as the Old Town, she could see a red halo. Those are incendiary bombs, don't let them fall on my house, thought Helena.

"Go away! Go Away!" she screamed at the top of her voice.

But the four aeroplanes were slowly getting closer to her courtyard, getting bigger and more terrifying. Helena looked down at her house. It seemed so small next to the tall building. And suddenly she saw someone on the roof. But the aeroplanes were already so close. Then the figure on the roof ran two steps closer. It was Stańcia, Helena recognised her. Stańcia was holding a broom. A bomb fell on the roof. Stańcia drew back and swept the bomb off the roof with one stroke. Then another one fell, and again Stańcia swept it down into the courtyard. One more bomb fell onto the sloping roof of the building and bounced straight onto the roof of Helena's house. Stańcia swept that one down too. Three red-hot bombs lay in the courtyard. The aeroplanes flew off. Stańcia appeared in the courtyard, took a shovelful of sand from the crate standing by the factory and poured it over the bombs. She stared up into the sky and went home. Helena came down from the tree. The courtyard was empty. The sky had turned almost totally bright. Helena saw her father and Kamil. They were standing on the factory roof. Kamil was smoking a cigarette. They chatted while leaning on sticks they held in their hands. Helena ran off home. She went ever-so-softly upstairs, to her room, to her bed. It was so pleasant to hug her head to her pillow and wrap herself up in her own quilt. Mama was right not to go down to the shelter at night. I'd like to do that too, thought Helena. She fell asleep immediately.

In the morning, Helena went into the kitchen just when Stańcia was boiling some milk. Stańcia was staring in suspense at the pot, because the milk was about to boil over at any moment.

"You were on the roof at night. I saw you. Next time I'm going to go on the roof and sweep the bombs too," said Helena.

Stańcia turned to Helena. And just then the milk boiled over. It hissed and poured onto the burning-hot stove rings, and the kitchen filled with an unpleasant smell.

"Oh, darn!" shouted Stańcia and removed the pot. "You must have dreamed it. Me, on the roof? What's come into your head?"

So what really happened? thought Helena. Did I dream it or didn't I? How did it really go? She was afraid to ask her father, because he could have become angry at her for leaving the shelter at night. So she asked Kamil:

"You were on the factory roof last night, right? And what were you doing there? Hitting bombs off the roof? With a stick?"

"That's right. With a hockey stick. I used to play hockey. I was good at it, but I was too short."

That's what Kamil said, but Helena didn't know if he was serious or joking.

A few days later Róża came, Mama's best friend. Helena liked her a lot. She called her by her first name, because that's how Róża liked it. Róża and Mama were the most beautiful in the world. Róża had black hair, and Mama's was gold, and together they looked like princesses from a fairy-tale. But that day Róża seemed different. She didn't even kiss Helena hello. She sat down in the kitchen and took some cigarettes from her purse.

" Róża! You never used to smoke! I always said to Dzidzi that you were my role model!" Stańcia cried.

"What happened? How come you're smoking?" asking Mama, and then took a cigarette from Róża 's pack herself.

"And why are you smoking?" Róża asked gloomily, and smoked some more.

"When did you start smoking?" Mama asked further.

"Since last Saturday. When my house burnt down."

"Oh, God! I didn't know about that either! Your home? On Wilcza Street?"

"I always slept during the air-raids," said Róża. "I hid my head under the quilt and thought the best thing to do would be to fall asleep and wake up when the raid was over. Then nothing bad would happen. There was no way I wanted to go down into the shelter, though my father yelled at me terribly."

"Oh, God! But you live on the top floor, right below the roof!"

"Not any more."

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Mariusz Sieniewicz has already made a name for himself as a writer gifted with an original and unfettered imagination, maybe the only novelist of the younger generation (apart from Jacek Dukaj) capable of creating entirely new worlds in his books. But in his latest novel, *The Rebellion*, he has surpassed himself. He has come up with a peculiar anti-utopia where the fears and problems of the modern world are depicted in an exaggerated form. He describes the "Civilisation of the Great Toddler", where thanks to the terror of youth, health and beauty, old people are persecuted and excluded. Most of the action takes place on an imaginary "old folk's island", where old men being supervised by unisex "goy-birls" (the island operates a bit like a labour camp) have to mummify the corpses of beautiful young people who are to end up in a mausoleum celebrating youth. But the reign of rampant youth is not irrevocable – the desperate old men plan a "geriatric revolution" headed by Błażej Kolumb, who is partly the Saviour of the old and partly someone like Neo out of *The Matrix* (Sieniewicz uses a mixture of references to all sorts of different cultural sources)... This is not the first time Sieniewicz has taken up the issue of the exclusion and marginalisation of entire social groups, and he has also proved before now that it is possible to write about such things in a very different language from the usual style of ideological propaganda. As he writes about an old men's rebellion, there is also a rebellion going on in the language he uses, where lots of different kinds of language come together, including clichés from modern speech alongside poetic metaphors full of symbolism. Almost every sentence of *The Rebellion* gives the reader some linguistic fun. If Witkacy were still alive, I'm sure he'd write like Sieniewicz!

Robert Ostaszewski

Mariusz Sieniewicz (born 1972) is a prose-writer and editorialist who has been translated into German, Lithuanian, Russian, Croatian and Slovenian.

The gigantic building looked like a neo-Renaissance temple carved into a cosmic meteorite. The galactic ore was certainly the best domicile for the sacred thing that lived there. The stone wall was broken up by elongated stained glass windows and the patterned cupola, overgrown here and there in moss and visible from every corner of the island, looked like the armour of a futuristic tortoise. From the upper part of the façade glared the gigantic eye of a mandala. Below it ran an anonymous inscription reading: YOUTH IS ETERNAL ETERNITY ANEW – NO ONE SHALL EVER FORGET IT, AND EVERYONE SHALL KEEP THE FAITH.

Cast-iron gates led inside, with a footbridge cast across three small stone steps, in front of which the trail of platforms ended. Kaktus looked left, then right, pulled on the door handle set high above his head and whispered: "Come and help me, Błażej, for crying out loud! You should be higher up if you're on a higher rung."

"Got a ladder complex, have you?" said Kolumb in revenge.

They pushed. The gates let out a dreadful creak. Brrr… it was just horrible! They were enveloped in icy cold, much worse than in the youthery. All that was missing was a wolf to start howling from over by the fungal graveyard and the shadow of a hand holding a knife to flash across the walls. Kolumb was regretting his curiosity. He could hear organ music. Someone was playing, but the purity and fluency left much to be desired. The sounds kept breaking off, they were flat, cacophonous and irregular. It would be truer to say that someone was only just learning the mysteries of notes, octaves and keys, and failing to find the right key to this most inaccessible of arts.

"Calm down. It's the Great Toddler murdering Bach on the keyboard. The St Matthew Passion," Kaktus was quick with the answer as they went inside the temple, which was drowning in fluorescent light. "Don't be afraid of a thing. He can't hear anything except his own playing and he can't see anything. Sometimes I suspect him of being deaf and blind. Fascist narcissist!"

But Kolumb's face was already providing proof of the theory popular among the philosophers that only the ability to express surprise distinguishes thinking from unthinking minds. His jaw had dropped like a creature aware of his own meagre status, before whom "something" has arisen that is not on a human scale or that surpasses human understanding… Just imagine all at once waxworks displays from the world over, then imagine nothing at all. Mentally embrace all the possible stores and wardrobes on earth with innumerable puppets, dolls and mannequins, then get your mind round nothing but the dust of your own thoughts. Gather into one place by sheer willpower all the secret laboratories where, according to the models of advanced science, a modern homunculus is being cultivated, then have the willpower of a jellyfish.

Because there, on pedestals and platforms, on podiums and plinths, with rods stuck into their crotches, stood mummified bodies. An endless legion of them, young and naked, joined in couples or contemplating monads on their own.

"We've collected all that's best in the history of the past hundred gardens and in present times," declared Kaktus, emitting a dense cloud of steam. "Of course it's the best version according to the Great Toddler and the little laddies. If any of it depended on me I'd have immortalised completely different ones," he advised. "Take a look around if you like. Though the museum isn't finished and it's just being planned for future generations."

Kolumb felt a bit intimidated, because how could you not feel intimidated with the most excellent exhibits from the past staring down at you from their pedestals, which if not for Kolumb's fading memory, could stand as a record of his own past. The dancer Huanita Loslobos made him feel bolder – she was standing there as if someone had cast a spell on her in the middle of a waltz. Vorobyov had come out of it well, he reckoned, and moved onwards. Counting from the door, the first human idols seemed to him quite trivial, unremarkable, and not even the labels said much. There was a "Max Coldwey. DJ. US" holding a gramophone record, an "Otto Schmidt. Designer. D" with his head up, then a "James Peadlow. Snowboarder. GB", holding a crooked board under his arm. But the further he plunged into the world of mummified bodies, heads and hands, frozen in the most fanciful poses,

the more his curiosity and wonder grew and the Pantheon of Immortals seemed to have no end. First he glanced at the label to find out with whom he had the pleasure, then he admired the expert craft of the Youth Workers. All the mummies shone with brilliantly finished skin, a breathtaking play of the muscles, and perfect proportion between the limbs and the torso. With no flaws or wrinkles, the bodies had an alluringly polished smoothness. The oldest ones were no more than thirty gardens in age. The past hundred gardens, though not yet over, must have been an impossibly rich era for youth.

Oh, who was that boy with the body of Apollo the colour of milk chocolate and those playful tassels instead of hair? The label explained that he was "Bob Marley. Musician". He was holding a guitar, which made Kolumb think of the words of an old song: the boy with the guitar, he'd have been my star, tra la la la… After him there was a mummy with disarmingly large eyes – "Kurt Cobain. Musician". And that blonde woman, painted in gold and pink, she must be Miss Mausoleum – "Barbara Handler. Barbie". Next to her, holding his slender hands towards her was "Ken Handler. Ken". What a strange profession to be a "Barbie" or a "Ken".(...)

Kolumb pushed his way past the charms of "Marilyn Monroe" and "Mary Pickford", who were pompously labelled "the world's darlings", and at once came upon a passage that appeared to belong to the wise men of the mausoleum of youth. It started with a naked figure with a painted-on first moustache, "Francis Fukuyama. Last historian of history". The next one, "Michel Houellebecq", had his hands curled for some unknown reason, either to fight or to clap, and there was a net hanging from his wrist. It was also unclear who he wanted to fight or who he wanted to applaud. Was it for the above mentioned last historian in history, or for "Jacques Derrida Postmodernist postmortem" with the beautifully ambiguous face? The third of these was standing a little to one side and was called "Albert Camus". His mood was the hardest to determine. Apart from his nakedness, which said nothing, his vacant eyes, typical of the most ancient statues, expressed an equally vacant sorrow.

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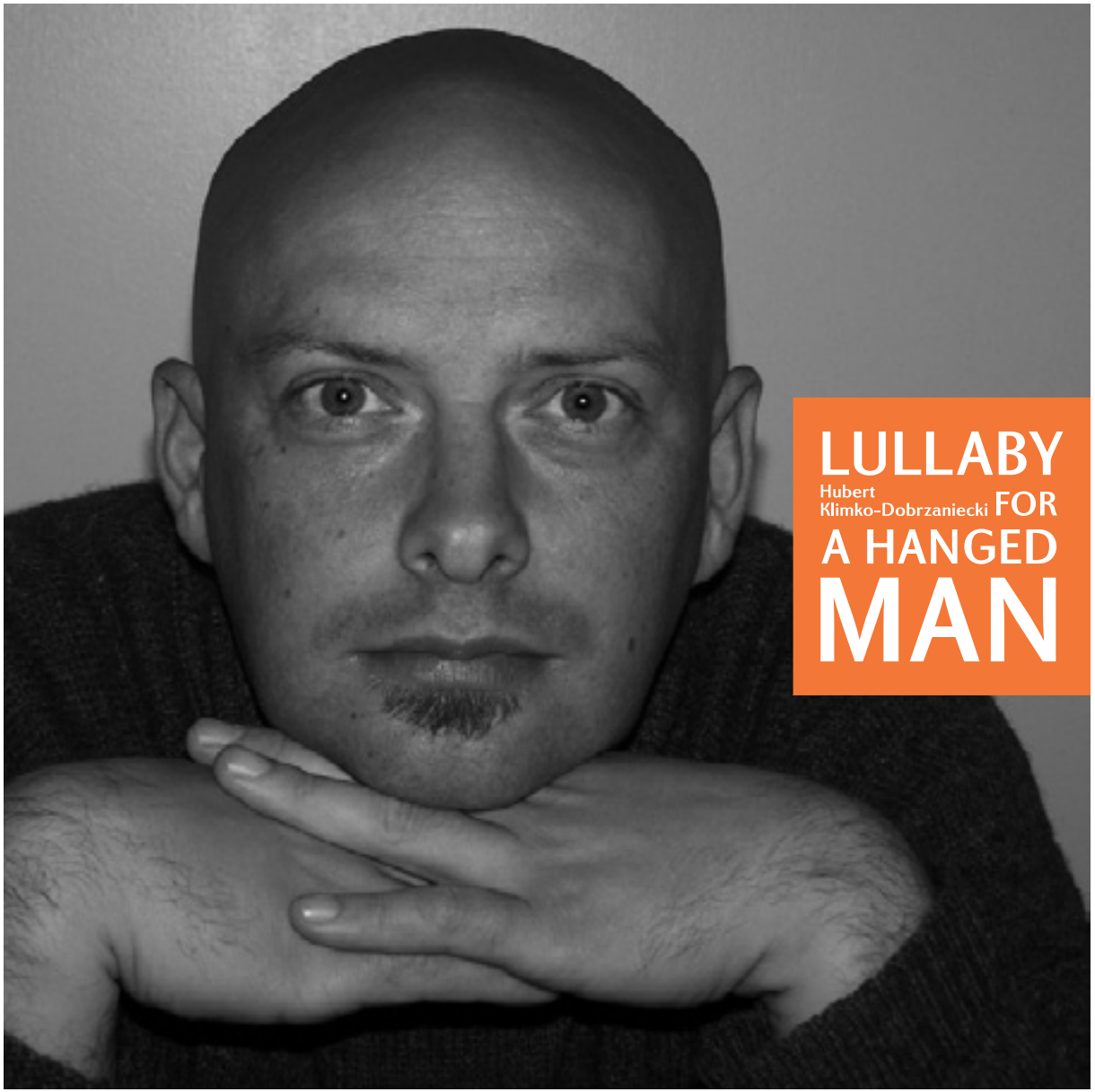

Photo: Gunnar

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Lullaby for a Hanged Man is a short tale about friendship and insanity. The plot of this atmospheric miniature clearly has autobiographical foundations. For ten years, until June 2007 Klimko-Dobrzaniecki lived in Reykjavik, where at first he studied Icelandic philology, then worked within various professions, for the longest time as a nurse in a home for old and mentally handicapped people. He featured some of these experiences in one of the stories included in his double novella *Rosa's House – Krysuvik* which was published last year.

The events described in *Lullaby for a Hanged Man* are a sort of supplement to the earlier story, broadening the range of issues and the cast list. This book includes characters whom we know from *Krysuvik* – the autobiographical narrator, his wife Agnieszka, Boro the eccentric Croat, and the main character, Szymon the musician. *Lullaby...* is a tribute to this friend, who took his own life at an early age. This story is an attempt to comprehend and explain his unusual personality, equally possessed by art and madness. Questions about the reasons for his friend's suicide are extremely subtly formulated here. The narrator does not emphasise the seemingly obvious link between illness and this desperate act. In the world of this mostly realistic tale, deeply rooted in reality, the border between so-called normality and insanity is not so much erased as extremely debatable. Like all the characters in *Lullaby for a Hanged Man*, Szymon was unique, and at the same time ordinary, "one of us". The reason why he killed himself must remain a mystery.

Dariusz Nowacki

Hubert Klimko-Dobrzaniecki (born 1967) has written four works of fiction, three of which were published in 2007.

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At the point where the tangible world ends, the one you can see from a ship or a car, the world that is part of related, but not yet fully recorded history, I am sitting. It is August. An August like any other. It seems similar to the one before, because the ocean smells the same. High tide, low tide, waves, seagulls, wind, rusty container ships on the horizon, the beach and its black volcanic sand, an island, a notice saying at what hours the stone mound and the scrap of grass become a greater whole. Everything seems as before, as if there's nothing missing. Nature is keeping to its eternal rhythm. Sunrise and sunset. Day and night. I breathe, I live, I am, I love, I see. But in this picture of August there's a figure in blue shorts missing. A guy with a checked shirt rolled up and tied in a casual knot above his navel. The scene is missing a man carrying on his shoulders three sculpted hands welded to long threaded metal rods. He was moving through the grey water towards the shore. The ocean was rising, swelling and filling the crescent shape between the end of the peninsula and the shores of a temporary island. Only now can I see with full clarity that it's all an illusion, because every time there's an element missing, like a jigsaw puzzle gradually becoming incomplete. Inimitability; phrases, words, images, notes written on a stave, a way of smoking a cigarette, a chipped beer mug. Inimitability lives, changes into memory, and is passed from generation to generation, distorted, magnified or diminished. Things passed on by word of mouth, my personal dilemma with the Bible… I decided not to wait two hundred years. Maybe the issue with God really did have to remain idle. I have an irresistible need to record the story of a certain friendship, a small snatch of life. Szymon has gone. He is not in the city now. You cannot meet him in the street. That's what I miss most…

A trail left in the clouds, until the moment it disperses or another aeroplane bisects it. A few words spoken in the bus on the route to the centre, a journey by train. We did not meet on the bus, or on a plane or a train. There were no noises, no engine whirring, no wheels rumbling, no rocking or turbulence. The person who introduced us was called Boro, a "released" lunatic who still lived on the ward. Now and then he lost his mind, most often in summer, when everything went green. He had a whole set of pills for greenery. The doctors could see he was all right now and didn't have to be locked up, he just had to take his medicine. Once I thought he was going to grow leaves in my car – any minute now he'd go green. I could see he was sweating, then he reached for the pills and started shouting coming, coming, coming. He shouted that he was turning into a field of moss, then into a great big lawn. I don't really know, but maybe the company of insane people has allowed me to retain normality… Maybe the fact that I had a lawn in my car, a field of moss, a great big cucumber or a water melon protected me from becoming Napoleon or Saint Teresa.

Boro could go on living at the lunatic asylum, although the doctors were putting pressure on him to move out. He was no longer being given food. I used to come and fetch him and take him to Ikea, where they sold the cheapest hot dogs in town. We'd both stuff ourselves with them and drink Fanta. One day he said there was a Pole on the ward, a violinist. He added a few fucks, because he loved swearing in English – he said only when you throw in a few swearwords do you feel alive, and he did it chronically.

In the local psychiatrists' jargon, Szymon was a rabbit out of a hat. A rabbit was a patient who appeared for a while and then disappeared, then appeared again, and so on. Patched up and back to life – hit a depression, back on the ward. Ward, life, life, ward. A rabbit… I told Boro to have a word with the nurse, he'd talk to Szymon and the doctor – maybe we could nip out to Ikea for hot dogs together. And one day Boro, that enormous figure, that human oak tree with no teeth, cast his shadow over a slender figure in wire-rimmed glasses. A shaft of light from the headlamps bounced off his silver frames, and in an instant Boro was like a Slavonic oak struck by lightning, the sort of tree the locals gather round to abandon themselves to magical dancing. The figure in the silver specs walked around him, craning his neck unnaturally to look in the eye of this bit of Croatia, this bit of the mythical forest, this tree, oak and lunatic. Suddenly the senior registrar switched off the ignition and the headlamps went out.

Szymon stopped in the shadow of Boro and looked towards the red Volvo. The doctor got out of the car and asked, “Going to Ikea, right? for hot dogs, isn’t it?” They nodded in agreement and came over to me.

The man who looked like Korczak, Maksymilian Kolbe and Ghandi, hidden behind glasses that in good weather could ignite a corn field or a large barn, introduced himself. “I am Szymon Kuran”. “Very nice to meet you”, I replied. “No, nice to meet you”, he responded, “you just think it’s nice to meet me”. Yes, maybe he was right, maybe it really was only nice for him, and I just thought it was nice for me, as a learned response. I think it’s called being well brought up, a mixture of prohibitions and climatic factors. Szymon was eating a hot dog, I wanted to ask him a question, but Boro pitched in. “So what about the stones?” he lisped. “It’s simple,” I replied. “You have to be like hens or ostriches – they haven’t got any teeth either, and for their digestive processes to work properly they swallow little pebbles that mince up their food like teeth. Surprised by the mental shortcut and the way we picked up this theme in the middle, without making any sense, Szymon listened to my short lecture on gastrology, put his hot dog wrapper down on the table and started laughing quietly, though Boro and I knew it was the continuation of a conversation we hadn’t finished earlier that month about buying false teeth or a small bag of pebbles. Seeing his reaction, Boro finished his sentence the usual way – curtly and in English. “Fuck you”, he said, and polished off his hot dog, pointedly stuffing the big end into his mouth.

Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones

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Photo: Kasia Kobel

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Michał Witkowski's new novel is the latest in Poland's "confessions of a child of the (last) century" series. But the child, as might be expected of the author of *Lubiewo*, is an exceptional one. Hubert, the narrator, is a man of advanced middle age whose chaotic reminiscences are full of flashbacks and sudden shifts in time. But boy does he have something to reminisce about! Hubert is a small-time shark in the criminal underworld of Jaworzno-Szczakowa, a mining town. In the twilight years of communist Poland, he dreams of a better life and, determined to make his fortune at any cost, he launches various legal and illegal but completely cracked business ventures that guarantee a profit.

My remarks above may suggest that Witkowski's story is one of many that deal with the crazy period that ushered communist Poland out and the new, Third Republic, in – about the birth of the free market and about people who made fortunes overnight and lost them just as quickly. It's true that the author of *Lubiewo* paints a colourful picture of the last decades of the past century and is excellent at describing the atmosphere that pervaded at the time. However, it is the figure of Hubert that is most important in the book. Why, then, is it Barbara Radziwiłłówna's name in the title? Because Hubert identifies with this controversial Polish queen of yore and this is the nickname he goes by in his milieu. The narrator of Witkowski's book is something of a dreamer and a free thinker, someone torn by contradictions. He poses as a ruthless mafiosi, but remains 'soft' – sentimental and affectionate and he believes equally strongly in God, auguries and horoscopes. This novel should be read first and foremost as the story of a misfit who desperately attempts to realise his dreams and seeks love, happiness and acceptance.

As in his earlier books, Witkowski makes ample use of camp aesthetics in *Barbara Radziwiłłówna from Jaworzno-Szczakowa*, which can be seen clearly, for example, in the language employed in the novel. The author has 'cooked up' an extraordinary mixture of Silesian dialect, literary language, criminal slang and Old Polish.

Robert Ostaszewski

Michał Witkowski (born 1975) is a writer, columnist, and author of the well-known novel *Lubiewo*, which has been translated into more than ten languages.

During all that time, when the communists were in charge, everyone in Jaworzno-Szczakowa knew that if you wanted to buy vodka before 1pm in the afternoon, you went to Barbara Radziwiłłówna. If you had to buy dollars, sell dollars, roubles, you needed to put something into hock, gold – you went to Radziwiłłówna. Ach, ashrabachramash, like to the holy patron of money! Although in those days, I was still plain Hubert, they hadn't started calling me by the name of that harlot yet. And Barbara Radziwiłłówna had a pawnshop on Jagiellonian (sic!) Street, that's the main road that leads off from the railway station, and near Szczakowa she had a semidetached…beautiful it was, beautiful! Everything was just comme il faut! The building was neat and tidy, so aesthetic. With a garage, well, a semi-garage, and a semi-garden, doors of frosted glass, absolutely de luxe, a wee porch and little columns, and the outside walls were set with the most beautiful mosaics made up of smashed pieces of crockery. Not sixties style though, all over the place, but alternating black and white. You could make different patterns from them, like card faces: diamonds, hearts – or hertz, that's how they say hearts in Silesia would you believe? You could buy the pieces in canteens or factories, the very best pieces I kept at my place. Some were called 'late Hollywood' or 'late Gierek' and the 'all the smashed up stuff' pieces were called 'early'. And the architecture was called 'Polish block'. Even Jaworzno's crème de la crème sits among those blocks, surrounded by little bits of plate. Good morning to you, neighbour, good morning… And the one with the biggest block and the best smashed plates is that guy, you know …

That's the one. I sigh. The one with the dark hair. Daaarrk hair. If you didn't count that market gardener from around our way, who stole a wad from the party committee and built about twenty greenhouses, I was the richest in the whole of Jaworzno. But he had a greengrocer's. And having a greengrocer's in those days didn't mean having a shop with fruit and veg, but with anything going! Bubble gum, sour rye soup in jars (bleh!) – he even sold those flimsy boots you can only wear once. That's what his veg looked like. On Sundays he drove up to church in his Peugeot, in a black fur coat and a shapka from the USSR, so bundled up you could scream! Praise the Lord! He got himself gold teeth and a track suit, oh boy he really had it made! I couldn't concentrate, I played around nervously with my car keys underneath the pew. And what's worse – I offered up sacrilegious prayers to the Ever Virgin Mary to give him cancer! I'm deeply religious, I love God and especially Our Lady. And there I was, praying that he got cancer and that my Auntie Aniela would die! I'm counting on her to leave me something in her will. But he had no respect for God at all! He was in with the mafia all over the place– in the 'Kanty' disco, the 'Retro' bar and the 'Jaworznianka' café. A few years later, he had his dirty mitts in the night clubs and the pole dancing joint by the motorway… Just about the whole of 'Snitch' Street belonged to him, but you tell me, aren't the Jagiellonians something better than those market gardener informers?

I couldn't afford a greengrocer's, but I had an idea! I went to Niewiadow, there was a heatwave, but I go there with this coffee so I can get to see the director. Except that he wanted a ration's worth of breeze blocks, so off I go to the director of the building materials factory, park my Fiat Bambino, go in, hand over more coffee – just to get to see him. It was so hot. And he says fuck off, I haven't got any. But I know someone who used to deal in kids' anoraks, the Bobo label, and I tell him it like it is and then I have some anoraks. Oh wow! My wife'll be pleased! To get those anoraks, though, first of all I had to fix up a bath that had fallen off the back of a lorry. And that's how I finally managed to buy myself a caravan. An N 126, a Fiat Bambino could pull it. It was already the mid-1980s by then. That was when Zdzisława Guca, the presenter on Panorama, said there was going to be a long spell of bad weather and then the Lombard Group sang their 'Telly Weather' song. When she announced on one Panorama programme that winter was approaching, the night was coming, the dark nights of the 1980s were upon us, people began stocking up on soda siphons, caravans, plastic baby baths from the GDR. They collected all this stuff and started building an Ark. To wait things out.

My friends said, hey Hubert, don't tell us you're off on holiday with your caravan to Yugoslavia with all this bad weather

about. Times are so hard and you're taking time off?! Ha ha ha! What holiday, who said anything about a holiday? A food stand! Fo-ood sta-and, do you get it? A third-class catering establishment, so-called minor catering. Toasted sandwiches, chips, hot dogs – nowhere better than Radziwiłłówna's. (Fried onions on yours?) The guiding principle of the toasted sandwich business? Palm people off with old, reused oil, freshen up stale rolls in the toaster, use grated cheese you'd never look at twice yourself, stick in the odd squashed mushroom and pour over watered-down ketchup and – turn it all into real money. (That'll be three-eighty please.) As far as the mushrooms went, well I wasn't all that sure about them myself, but people aren't pigs, they'll eat anything. And with the money, since it wasn't that real in those days and even worse, it could start melting away in front of your very eyes, that wasn't the end of the whole business. The money had to be turned into gold bar as quickly as possible and shut away in closely guarded steel boxes. (What sauce would you like? Garlic, spicy, mild, ketchup, mustard?)

And then rub your hands in glee!

It was only the steel and the gold that could halt the change in value, even if just for a short time. Transferring itself from water and mushrooms via money to metals of a more certain quality. Because value is energy, water: without a conduit, without a cable, the poor thing roams around aimlessly, carried only by its own internal anxiety. A skittery creature, like a teenage boy. And why shouldn't it flow into the safe harbour of our steel box?

Translated by Katya Andrusz

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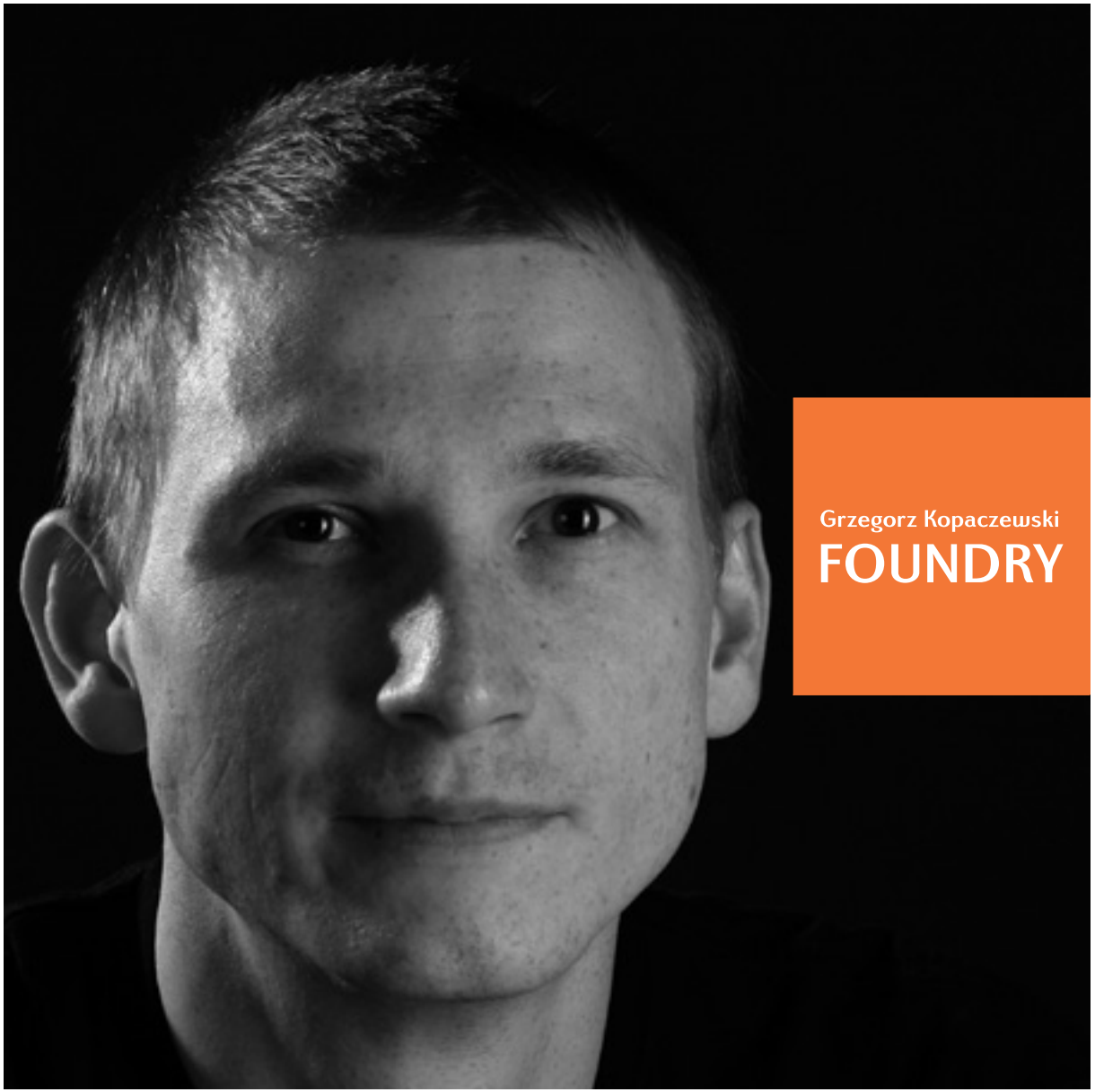

Photo: Johanna Möller

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The year is 2008. A special zone called Huta (Foundry) has become the model district of post-modern Poland, maybe even of Europe. The old industrial areas (based on actual districts of Katowice) have been adapted into elegant condominiums, a gorgeous district inhabited by successful and cultured people, academics and artists. The novel's Huta is a sort of combination between Silicon Valley and Greenwich Village. International state-of-the-art technology concerns have their headquarters here, it's swarming with artistic clubs and galleries. What's more — all the Utopias of the civic society have been realised in Huta, every resident is happy, creative and free from the hell of consumerism. But the fantastical (futuristic) crosses paths with the dystopian here. Huta is also a ghetto, an artificial mini-city fenced off by a high wall and monitored by hundreds of cameras. On the outside remains Upper Silesia, and beyond — the Poland that didn't make the grade.

It is against a backdrop of this sort that we encounter our main protagonist, Tomasz, a young sociology doctoral student who has stumbled onto the trail of a university conspiracy, and later becomes a worker at a mysterious Institute and takes part in special services duels.

Grzegorz Kopaczewski (born 1977) is a prose-writer, the author of two novels.

The social experiment named Huta has its basis in scholarship. Everything started from the philosophical and sociological writings of a contemporary of Hegel's, Kaspar Kuhn, who not only created a narrative to compete with Marx's about the logic of societal development, but also developed the bases of prognostic statistics, indispensable algorithms etc. This is, parenthetically speaking, a fiction within a fiction: on the one hand Kopaczewski has invented Kuhn along with his stormy biography and subversive academic legacy, and on the other — as it turns out in the work's conclusion — the German philosopher is also an invention of the novel's protagonists, brilliant, rebellious and eccentric scholars of the Silesian University. The author of *Foundry* plays splendidly with academic discourse, and the reader along with it. And this is what is best and most unique about this novel.

Dariusz Nowacki

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The move from Chorzów to Huta took two hours. I took my clothes and books in a taxi. Everything I owned fit into the back of an Astro station wagon. In fact, I still don't own any more. I haven't bought anything since then. Possession is unfashionable in Huta. It's bad. Possession is redundant in Huta. What do you need a washing machine for when there's Cleanicum, or a television when there's Teledromat, why should you have dvd's when you've got a card at Casablanka, why get a coffee machine when you live over a Coffeeholic. Why get a car when you live in Huta?

In the evening, when I'd unpacked in my new apartment, a neighbour came knocking. A familiar face. From the meeting. A writer, the social activist who was always badgering Joachim to fill in forms. "Hi," he began shyly, having a suspicious look around. "I'm your neighbour. From across the hall. I wanted to welcome you."

He had two beers with him, one already started. I let him in.

"Like it here in Huta?" You could hear from his first words that he hadn't come to talk about how I was feeling. We sat on the couch. He gave me a beer. It was warm.

"It's okay. And you?"

"Less and less. They keep tightening the screws. They say there's a six-person waiting list for my apartment. People with prizes for films, books and other stuff. But that's bullshit, because we all know that the apartment limit for artists has been reached for this year." My face looked surprised. "Yeah, they have limits for all the desired social groups. I know, because I've got an acquaintance in the district council. They've even given out the scholarships already, so why the scare tactics? Everything is supposedly so open, everything discussed in public, but when it comes down to it they blackmail you. Everything is supposedly open and tolerant, but then what did they build the wall for? Supposed to be a monument that needed to be restored, but everybody knows there used to be a wire fence between here and Załęże, not a wall. And the pedestrian footbridge to Silesia Center? They were afraid that people would start to shop at the mall, because it's cheaper, so they refused to build one. Apparently the residents rejected it by referendum, but what's with this voting by home computer. If somebody hasn't got one, they can't vote. And they couldn't care less if you haven't got one. I had some hard times and had to sell mine. Then they say that I do nothing to improve Huta's image. They're not going to keep some drifter who can't write anything new. I must sound like a drifter, huh?

"No." He sounded like a drifter, looked like a drifter, had a drifter's gestures. "Want to buy some clothes?" He lit a smoke. "All name-brand. They're sending it today. We have similar builds."

He was hunched and skinny, had neither a chest nor an ass. He looked like a drifter.

"Maybe some other time. I've got my move to be thinking about. And my work."

"You got work in Huta?" I nod yes. "Where?"

"At the Historical Institute."

"Their boss is in the council too. You did well." He started to fidget, finally got up. "Okay, time I went. Good to meet you, neighbour. See you."

He left. Without introducing himself. Nor I to him. I had already laid down when he knocked once more. Again with beer. Again warm.

"You know how they fix it so Huta has such good press?" he asked when he had installed himself on the couch.

"No. I haven't wondered."

"They let the television stations in. Or even give apartments to the most popular journalists. Everybody wants to live in Huta. And those television and press louses are even ready to pay for it. And twice as much as the normal residents. Like you or me. Everybody wants to be an artist, or at least live like one. I don't know how artists live, but those guys who pay a couple grand for an apartment must know for sure. Only the ones from the tabloids and the Catholic-nationalist papers don't get apartments. But they still write applications. Their critics go easy on Huta. That shows what direction the district's moving in. And do you know where this Scandinavian month came from?"

"It's Scandinavian month ?

"You haven't heard them nattering on the streets?"

"That's right, I have been hearing more Germanic languages."

"Two months ago they started up new connections from Balice and Pyrzowice Airports to Scandinavia. This fashion for music and films from across the Baltic is no coincidence. Nor is the Strindberg retrospective. Everything in small doses, of course, so that it doesn't devalue. To get the snobs revved up. They even suggested that I write a play. Whose action takes place while some friends are screwing together Ikea furniture."

"Good idea." I even smiled. "And so? Did you write it?"

"Wel-l-l-l..." he started to fidget with his whole body, "I didn't want to at first. Then I thought it could be a good setting. But they started putting on the pressure. Who do they think I am? A scribbler for that ass down the corridor? What's his name?"

"Who?"

"That guy, the last door down on our floor. He sings on television, he's got a big hit now. "I'm Flying up into the Blue Yonder," something like that. Acts in a TV series. Justyna, a friend of mine, says that they rented him his apartment, because the kid badly wanted to be an artist, a real one he said, and they're hitting him up for some serious money to live here, but he likes it. And since he's in that Fakt tabloid almost daily, Huta's getting some free PR. He's a simple kid.

He sat till the can was empty. His griping was un-Huta, his stories were un-Huta, he had an un-Huta pessimism in him.

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Marek Kochan
PLAYGROUND

Photo: private

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Playground is a contemporary novel of manners with a dash of satire. The issues dealt with are male crisis and role reversal in the modern family.

The novel has three main protagonists. Two of these are men who live in their wives' shadows — go-getter women who are consumed by their professional careers. The third man is a playboy and a bachelor, a media star and a chronic womanizer. Each of them is dealing with a male identity crisis in his own way. The third man stages humorous yet pitiful seduction scenes so as to seem a superman. His masculinity is always constructed, always on show. The two "henpecked husbands," in turn, experience female domination in two different ways. One of them is simply a mentally-challenged loser who is wilfully unemployed. Caring for a small child, cleaning and cooking are his responsible chores, which he is barely capable of carrying out. Yet he ought not to aim any higher, given that he has apparently been made for the role of house-husband. The other is a lazy academic, who in spite of his high mental qualifications has not attended to his career in time. He has chosen a comfortable life by the side of his very high-earning wife. After years of floundering about, however, he understands the root of his lifelong mistake. He comes to his senses and finds his place in the world — he becomes a writer.

Kochan avoids moralizing, he doesn't take sides with any of his protagonists, nimbly sidesteps cultural stereotypes, and is a fine observer of the transformations in customs that have taken place over recent years.

Dariusz Nowacki

Marek Kochan (born 1969) is a prose-writer, and author of television scripts and texts for stage.

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NINE. THE FOREMAN WAS SUPPOSED TO BE HERE BY NOW. Kociak had been pacing about the apartment, tapping and measuring for nearly a quarter of an hour already. Who cares that it's bent. Who'll notice, who's going to knock and see if there's plaster underneath or hollow. Come on, who? Father. Yeah, Witek's grandfather will notice right away, he'll knock. What does he care anyway, the apartment's ours, he can keep tabs on his own. It's us who are going to live here. Helenka did the earning, I'll renovate. Keep him out of it. He, Kociak that is, doesn't live just to please his father, he lives for himself. He has his own life to live. About a window or something. He'd get into a squabble about whatever, that energy was being wasted. He'd say that his wife had a look in the evening and said no way, but it would be okay. It was worth a shot, a dignified way out of the whole mess. These are Kociak's thoughts from nine on the dot to nine-oh-five, nine-ten. Even at nine-fifteen he was at the same spot. He'd call Helenka. That he wasn't there, this foreman. Did he call you, maybe? Because he hasn't even got my number. No, don't give it to him. Don't even talk to him. Don't even pick up when he calls. I'll take care of it, I already know how to deal with him. But it's easier said than done. All the more since the foreman won't show up. The anger, on the other hand, does show up, mounting in Kociak between nine-sixteen and twenty to ten, culminating at around half past. What's he thinking, the ass. What did the man think, that Helenka and him were going to wait so long for him? Goes twice for Helenka. When she's got stuff to take care of, business, she's supposed to blow her valuable time waiting for the foreman? The paying customer, imagine. The hatred blazes hotter in Kociak, then, when it's going on ten, it gradually simmers, refines, cools. Finally, it hardens. Just you wait, I'll get you, I'll fix your wagon. He looks through the orders, checks the signatures. A calm, almost jolly Kociak hears the doorbell, it's five past ten. Well, I made it on time, says the self-satisfied foreman. And where's your wife, not around? Okay, you and I'll just take care of things. And so, everything's all ready, I've got the bill here, he hands it over. We'll take care of it, take care of everything, Kociak tells him, smiling. But not today. What's that? Ah yes, you've still got to make some minor repairs. What repairs? You see, Mr., Kociak stares at the bill, and the stamp with the name on it, Mr., yes, I'm not mistaken, Adrian, to my mind it looks quite all right. I saw it during the day, and all in all it passed the test, to my mind. But my wife! My wife, Adrian. Flew into a rage. Came in at two minutes to nine, had a look around, and told me there was no way, everything's botched up, she wouldn't have it. Either they put in whole new windows, she said, or we'll go with a different company, so we lose the deposit, too bad. Someone else'll do a decent job. I only just begged her, Adrian, give them a chance, I said, it's a good team after all, gave it their best shot, they just rushed things a bit, they'll come back and take their time, they'll fix it up. You're lucky you didn't come by earlier. She would've let you have it. Waited till five past then left like a locomotive, and she would've run right over you if you'd crossed paths. You don't know her, she doesn't look it, but she can be a real typhoon, Adrian. She has her own company, in the real estate business, and sometimes she chews out her workers so bad that it's painful to watch. And she knows her stuff. She's a lawyer. Knows how to read a contract. She told me right away that you're just a sub-contractor, and that you've got a deal with a window company. That right, Adrian? Exactly. She said that if something doesn't get done quite right, she'd go to where your bosses are and you wouldn't wriggle out of the damages you caused. Vengeful, that woman is! One time a building contractor did a superstructure design for her client, adapted an attic space, and something wasn't quite right, so she took him to court and showed them expert testimonials saying it would have collapsed, took away his right to practice, and they barred him from the union. Destroyed the man. And she has connections. I'm backing you up right now, but if she goes after you, there won't be a decent company in Warsaw that would hire you later. She'd get addresses from databases and sully your good name everywhere. You could fight it, but what do you need these troubles for, what good are they to you. You're from Plonsk after all, no work at all there, and there's a really big market here. Why take the risk? Better to do your own thing, earn a bit, put away the

money. If she's satisfied, she's sure to even recommend you. For windows, and bigger jobs too. You're thinking, what are we doing this for. We have quite a few places like this for rent. And we'll buy a few more soon. That's how it is with us! A snap of the fingers. That's all I do, I survey renovations, collect money. It's my head that's on the line. And the small repairs is what it's all about. But what does it matter if it's okay by me, when she's not satisfied. I know her, Adrian, I've lived with her five years and I've already learned that it's better to give in, do things her way and then everything goes fine. I hope you never have to come face-to-face with her. Because if she comes back now, woah! I mean, you don't want that, I don't want that, it's in our common interests that we arrange things peacefully. I'll deal with her myself, you just help me out a bit with those repairs, and I'll cover you. Do you know, Adrian, what I got for not keeping track of you guys yesterday? And so, down to business, two things: first the corners, then the fillings. Tear them out, put in new cardboard-plaster plates - what for? Otherwise it just won't do. Today or tomorrow, whenever's good. Because you know, I'm pretty easy-going, as long as I haven't got her on my back, says Kociak.

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Hanna Kowalewska

THE HARLEQUIN MASK

Photo: Agnieszka Herman

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The Harlequin Mask follows *That Summer in Zawrocie* and *Sleeping Serpents' Mountain* as the third in a series of novels by Hanna Kowalewska. All three are linked by the main heroine, Matylda, the cottage in Zawrocie where the action is set, the diary as a narrative form and Matylda's deceased grandmother as the person to whom she addresses her confidences. Each separate part portrays the heroine's ups and downs (mainly romantic ones), but what distinguishes the episodes is that each one features a different issue from the past at the centre of the action. The house in Zawrocie is a sort of catalyst for Matylda's detective tendencies, because clues are hidden there that lead to her family's secrets, and this is also where ghosts from the past "materialise".

One such phantom is Olga, a fellow student and former rival of Matylda's. Olga was involved with Filip "The Nutter", later Matylda's husband. In fact she lost the rivalry, but she was the one and only witness to Filip's tragic death. Ten years after that event, she returns to Poland and provokes the heroine into taking up her next investigation. To find out the truth, Matylda will have to face up to the most traumatic experience in her life. And along the way she must engage in a sado-masochistic game with this woman who hates her. However, time will reveal which of the protagonists is in the worse pain.

Hanna Kowalewska confirms how good she is at building tension and intrigue. She is also an expert on human nature. Thus *The Harlequin Mask* is somewhere between a thriller and a psychological novel.

Marta Mizuro

Hanna Kowalewska (born 1960) writes poetry, poetic prose, novels, short stories, radio plays and dramas.

And then a pretty good weekend began. Olga let herself be persuaded to go on a tour of Warsaw, which she hadn't seen for nearly ten years.

It turned out to be a different city than I had thought. At any rate Olga saw it completely differently from me. Above all it was a city of clubs, pubs, bars, cafés and beer gardens. Every single place we looked at was an interesting joint Olga had to drop into.

Apart from that, this city suddenly turned out to be full of holes, and the holes were after Olga. Every few minutes her heel fell into some crumbling concrete or a crack in the tarmac.

"Europe!' she grumbled, examining the latest scratch on her Italian leather shoes. "What a bloody shambles! It's even worse than under the commies. At least in those days you knew what might happen to you. You were spiritually prepared for it. But now you don't know what to rely on!"

Ten years ago Olga didn't wear high-heeled shoes, flesh-coloured tights and gauzy little dresses. She didn't have dyed hair, long nails coated in bright polish and tons of mascara on her eyelashes. And she didn't move about like Lady Muck, just stomped around the world in solid shoes with thick, flat soles. Why was she now insisting on getting to know the old-new world in heels that were suitable for an office where you sit at a desk for hours on end not far from the boss's room, and on foot as well? What did she want the discomfort and pain for? Why was she set upon tormenting herself so badly? Was she trying to prove to herself and me that this city is no good? Did she really need to bring it down so badly? But why? To elevate her own present life? In Berlin? Elegant? High-heeled?

It didn't all make sense, or at any rate I couldn't see the point. She minced along as I walked beside her at my usual pace, in comfortable shoes, quite a decent shape too. So just like years ago we didn't fit together, though for completely different reasons.

Not just the city, but the whole world was different somehow in Olga's presence. It was raining, though it wasn't supposed to be. Or at least Olga was convinced that day it shouldn't rain. It was meant to be hot again, but it wasn't. Olga went blundering down the cold streets in light things, with goose bumps, freezing, surprised by the sudden cold that chilled her to the marrow. It looked as if she couldn't understand this city any more, or this country or the climate, none of the things that had once been as close to her as they were to me. On top of that she stuck to her guns, as if the city and everything else had to adapt to her imaginings or memories, not she to her surroundings.

Near the Centrum shopping mall, in a small side street – where Olga was looking for a little tea shop that apparently used to be there, but was now refusing to be found – we bumped into Jakub. He was carrying a colourful box under his arm, with a label that told the entire world he is not just a caring, but also a generous dad. A telescope! A present for his son! Well right, what else would have dragged him from his car in the city centre, a place he disliked?

"Jakub? Meaning who?" asked Olga provocatively once we had sat down together under the umbrellas of a little café. "Friend? Colleague? Boyfriend? Lover? Fiancé?"

Jakub was confused for a moment. He himself didn't know what he was to me.

"Friend," I said for him, and he didn't object.

"I don't think he liked that label very much," noted Olga ironically, and at once took out a cigarette, waited for Jakub to give her a light, then began her monologue. "Either he'd like it to be more, or you weren't telling the truth." She had an unbearable manner of speaking in a way that meant someone was always left outside the actual course of the conversation. This time it was Jakub. "Let me guess, lover. But I don't know if past, present or maybe potential."

"Don't worry," I muttered to Jakub. "She's just like that. She thinks provoking people is the simplest way to work them out. That's why she shoots blind."

"Sometimes she gets a hit," replied Jakub, though he knew I didn't like that.

"And thank you very much!" said Olga, laughing triumphantly. "Shall we go on shooting?"

"Stop it!" I objected.

"Just as you wish." For a while she busied herself with her

cigarette smoke. But she didn't stop staring at us.

To put an end to it, I reached for the menu.

"They've got quite a good choice here, especially the teas. Jasmine, tropical, cranberry, ginger, wild strawberry."

"So that's the sort of taste you have these days…" said Olga, taking no notice of my recital. She wasn't concerned that her words, and especially her tone, might offend Jakub. "Because you see…" she turned to him, "Matylda and I haven't seen each other for nearly ten years. Long time, isn't it?" She flicked her ash. Jakub nodded. "I'm re-discovering her again. Everything about her is different. You too are nothing like the guy she was in love with then. Her husband… That sounds strange when you're talking about someone like Matylda."

She looked at him with an ironical smile, wanting to see what impression it would make on him. But Jakub had already assumed a mask of indifference. He blew out smoke and calmly watched the small grey cloud, as if her entire speech did not concern him.

"Ten years?" he asked after a pause, also allowing himself a hint of irony. "Abroad, prison, or mental hospital?"

Olga laughed.

"You've guessed it. You only have to chuck out the 'or'," she said. "But it was worth getting out of there for a while to take a look at you and all this. Not a bad loony bin either. Or a circus on wheels perhaps. Yes, I think that's a better definition. And this one," she pointed at me, "always on a tightrope, with a little umbrella. She used to saunter along it, because she thought the earth's gravity didn't apply to her; now she knows that's not true, but she wants to remember what it felt like to delude herself. Or maybe there's another reason? Maybe she's looking for tightrope walkers in the air? Hell knows. What about you, what do you think?"

"I think you'd have a hard time walking a tightrope in those heels."

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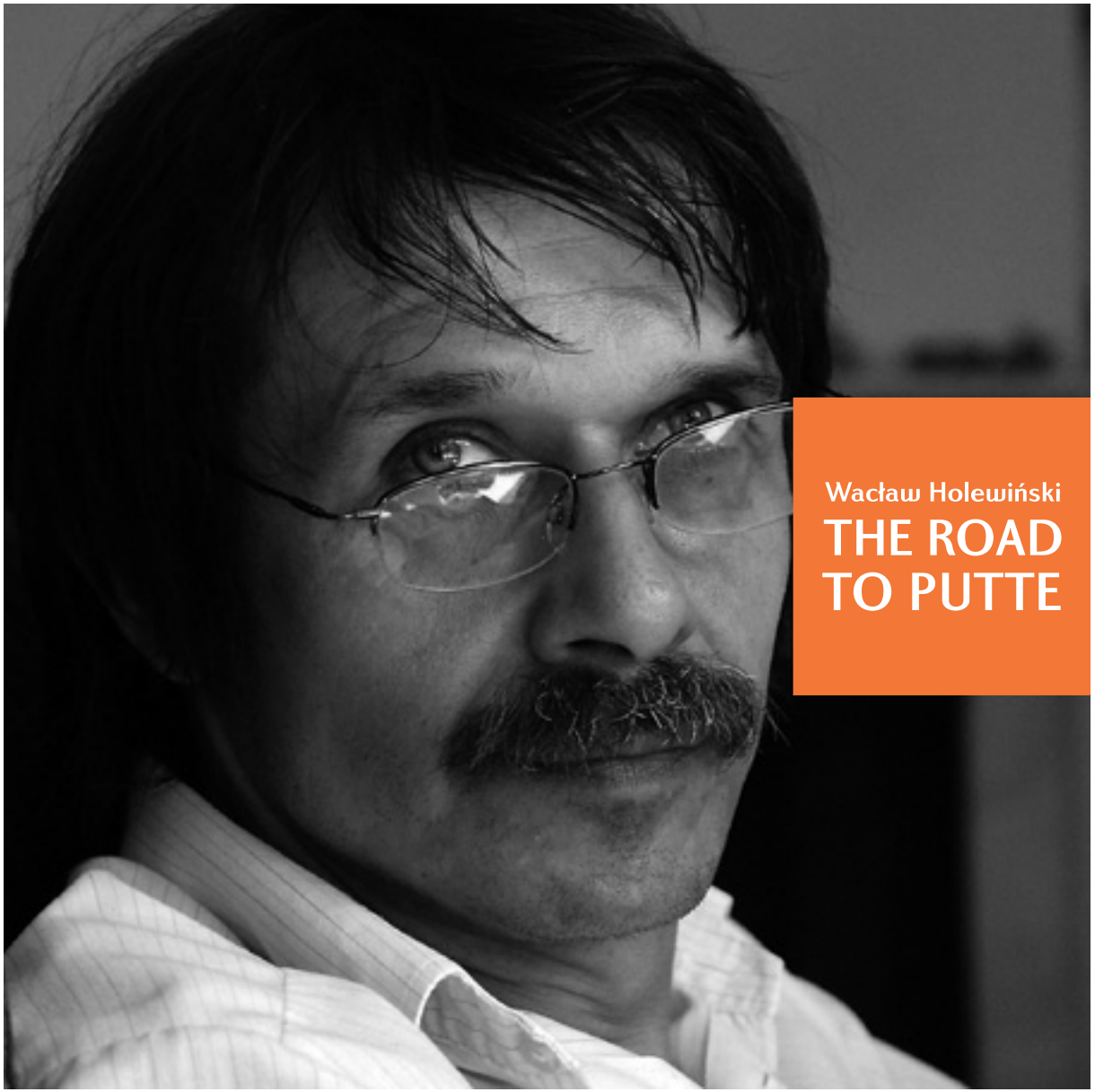

Wacław Holewiński

THE ROAD TO PUTTE

Photo: Włodzimierz Wasyluk

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Not many books like *The Road to Putte* have appeared in Polish literature in recent years. Holewiński has written a fascinating biographical novel about Jacob Jordaens, one of the leading Flemish painters of the Baroque era (he lived from 1593 to 1678). The action begins in the year 1640, when Jordaens is already a mature painter, esteemed and wealthy; he also has a loving wife, successful children and a splendid house. Yet, as is often the case with artists, he is still torn by creative anxieties, has a distinct complex about Rubens, with whom he is always comparing himself, and is unsure whether he is an artistic genius or just a very able craftsman. However, Holewiński's book is not purely and solely the story of the ups and downs of an artist's life, about a workaholic who subordinated everything to his painting. In the background to Jordaens' story the author draws a detailed picture of daily life in seventeenth-century Antwerp, once a highly prosperous, rich commercial centre, later increasingly waning, torn by political and religious conflicts. *The Road to Putte* is also, perhaps primarily, a novel about the pain of transience and coming to terms with death; it is no accident that Holewiński has included the name of the town where Jordaens and his family were buried in the title of the book. For the painter the "road to Putte" was exceptionally painful, because he lived a very long life and had to cope with the death of almost everyone closest to him. However, he never let himself be overwhelmed by despair and was always helped by painting.

Robert Ostaszewski

Wacław Holewiński (born 1956) is a novelist, playwright, publisher and editor.

On the princess' orders the servants nimbly moved the dais aside. What the gathered company now saw most evidently surpassed their expectations.

"Rubens," someone put in from aside.

Someone else began to examine the masterful likeness between the person in the picture and Frederik Hendrik as they still remembered him.

Only Beck, a rich man from The Hague, allowed himself to make a scathing comment: "If this is Rubens, then aren't we lucky we've got our Rembrandt!"

As Jordaens listened to the voices, at first he felt intimidated, then, as the number of compliments grew, he brightened more and more, becoming radiant and confident. Personally he felt there was not enough pulsating rhythm in the picture, not enough of the swagger he had managed to capture in other scenes, in other pictures. But as none of the assembly had noticed that…

"Master," said the princess, taking him by the arm and crossing with him from one end of the huge painting to the other, "if the two remaining pictures are as beautiful… I shall be proud to possess such works."

She ordered wine to be brought. Soon after she raised a toast, but not to him, just to what was to come.

"May this house be able to host artists of your calibre as often as possible in the future."

The sound of breaking glass, caused by the carelessness of one of the ladies, prompted joyful comments.

"A good sign," cried one of the painters, and went straight over to Jordaens to pay him due respect.

The princess left him in his hands, while she spoke for a while with young Jacob. She wanted him to show her what he had accomplished. Then she listened in on the lively conversation of the two other painters, who with expertise, stressing the originality of the colour tone, indicating the thickness of the paint in the bright areas and how it was different, more transparent in the dark ones, gathered around themselves a small crowd of listeners.

Egbertus Kuipt, the painter who was standing there with the creator of all this commotion, was determined to invite Jacob to his studio. He did not paint large scenes, like Jordaens, but, like his distant cousin Gerard ter Borch, tried to depict wealthy townspeople surrounded by their servants on small canvases. He crafted every feather, curtain and lace cuff precisely, hence his admiration for Jacob, who in such a large work as they were viewing not only captured the details, but seemingly effortlessly set his characters in a background, rendered a sense of space, demonstrated an attachment to a painting tradition, wove into it a hint of what was called smooth painting and, by skilfully handling the light, also showed which of the characters was unarguably the more important.

Jacob, who suddenly felt his entire body itching, accepted the invitation and pressed Kuipt's hand. Suddenly he realised he was steaming with agitation and anxiety, a sort of fear. He knew the moment was coming, that others would determine his mastery, but he did not think he could still be quite so dependent on those comments. At any rate, it was a good thing the princess had brought with her to this unannounced viewing people like him, painters, who worked arduously, talented people with a special vision of the world. And he was happy as a child to have their recognition.

Many people came up to congratulate him that day. He believed in their sincerity, and for a while he even felt that no one else, just he… it was pride, however, he realised in almost the same instant, pride, the devil take it!… So he quickly sobered up, and once they had gone, sat down on the dais and stared at length at his own achievements. And when he had done his share of sitting, he seized a brush and hurled it to the floor.

Young Jacob almost wept when he saw his father destroying what others regarded as a masterpiece.

"Why?" he stammered.

"Why?" he repeated his question. "You said this would be my greatest work, remember?" he reminded him of their earlier conversation. "I wouldn't want anyone to think this is all I can do. But don't worry," he continued, maybe trying to console his son. "You can put in for the second canvas. I'll deal with this one myself."

And for the rest of the day he didn't say a word until evening.

He painted as his heart bid him, not as he had planned. He could put the sheets of cardboard aside, he could tear them up and have them burned, they were no longer of any use to him. In fact in its general outline the picture remained the same, but in the figures he captured something no one could have perceived there earlier. Only now were Frederik and Maurits the embodiment of iron will, power and masculine honour, and the woman, the angel suspended above them, ceased to be a decoration, the crowning point, and suddenly became an alluring object of desire, causing one to lick one's lips with lust. She was both a lover and a mother, a saint and a harlot. She was looking into their faces, martial countenances, destined not for her but for the enemy. He knew he had come closer, he hadn't yet reached it, but he had come closer to the region, the place where his imagination merged with what his hand had left on the canvas.

He went up to his son, took him by the hand and led him to the spot where he had been painting. He stood behind him and waited for his reaction. Young Jacob spent a long time scrutinising the changes, and when at last he broke the silence, his words were like a sigh of relief.

"I didn't want to mention it earlier," he told him, without turning round, without looking him in the eye, "I could see how hard you were working. I hoped, I believed you would find a way… Maybe I alone of the company gathered here today knew that no amount of praise would fool you. I do not think the other two will give you any trouble now. I'm just curious to know how the others will react to these changes."

He had no fears about that. Any expert was bound to notice that the modified painting was better than before, that it played not only with the colour, the light, and the arrangement of the figures, but above all that its author had found the key to the situation. Anyone who looked at it must feel that the scene conveyed a vision of the state, that it reflected the social climate and built pride in the achievements of recent years.

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Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie

Lidia Amejko
THE LIVES
OF THE PROJECT-HOUSING
SAINTS

Photo: Danae Ribbitsch

Lidia Amejko's book is a series of responses to the question: How is one to explain the chronic inactivity of the residents of big city apartment blocks? The ones from the sleepy project-housing districts are particularly idle — drunks tied to their local corner stores, housewives glued to their windows and televisions, pensioners cut off from the working rhythm of life. It may be easy to get a handle on their daily rituals, but it is much harder to guess what is going on in their souls. To figure out what issues they discuss, how they perceive their existences or their role in God's grand scheme — if they've been assigned one at all. In forcing them to take action, that is, to consider their own predicaments, the writer draws philosophical meaning from their apparent torpor.

Amejko aims to dignify neither this miniature realism nor the impoverished with soul. The surreal hardships and metaphysical reflections that haunt the various "saints" are pure invention. This invention is comic by nature. The comic element comes in the elevation of these (not only superficially) barren and mindless existences. The combination of materials interwoven to make up the novel creates an even more humorous effect. Amejko draws from the Bible, from the history of philosophy, art and literature, and simultaneously translates all the elements belonging to the sphere of high culture into a kind of biblia pauperum. She uses them so that they become a natural component of this plebeian tale. This is the linguistic stylization of *The Lives of the Project-Housing Saints*.

Both this stylization and the use of an arsenal of high-culture references are employed here with masterly consistency. The seemingly incongruous component parts create an inexpressibly harmonious totality. The foreign, imposed ornaments are, of course, noticeable, but they also melt into the storyline to such an extent that they do not seem out of place. With this integration of discrepancies, Lidia Amejko achieves a result that adherents of realism or reporters aim at through other methods — she ennobles what would seem to be trivial or beneath the attention of a less sensitive observer. The writer laughs at this project-housing microcosm, but her laughter is full of sensitivity and understanding for her protagonists. She distances herself from this world via meta-textual commentary on the text she creates, and yet also dives deep into it, emphasizing that the fiction she creates is more than mere language games.

Marta Mizuro

Lidia Amejko (born 1955) is a fiction-writer and playwright. Her dramas have been translated into English, German, Croatian, Spanish, Italian and Czech.

That's how it's been for years, here in the housing district, that to each of us is granted but one birth and one death.

No more!

Two ends, our lives are given, like the clothes-line for your underwear, and though the stones should shit, the wind should hit and the Project houses split in two - thou art bound to eternity by no more than two ends, O man!

Now obviously, one clothes-line was shorter, and another longer, and upon each line was something different hung - yet TWO knots ever kept us from non-being.

And the end.

Things only ever turned out different for Cyryl. Of course, he was only born ONCE, just like all of us. But then he died - every day! Like one end of the string had snapped and frayed into a thousand threads.

No doubt you're thinking that he might have liked to die, that he was insatiable for this death, that the free rein he showed to the gluttony within was unto excess - that so?

Let me tell you: It was fear of death that drove Cyryl to die each day!

"Ah, what's all the fuss!" you cry. "No secret that to each of us comes fear of death (lest one take to drink), but he who fears need not a saint become! (Only he who shows great courage becomes one - this children are later told in religious instruction.) And thus why place this cowardly nutcase amidst the saints?!"

Shut your face for a minute, dang it, and listen up!

It was hard for Cyryl to be so scared to death of dying, and so he once thought to himself that maybe he'd get used to death a little and die, but just a little bit, just dip in his big toe - 'cause who could know? Maybe see if it's so bad after all?

He got settled on the couch, clicked the remote, so as not to lose sight of his own death, after all: how dumb it would be to die with one eye, and with the other peek at the screen. (Herein, O man, lies the most profound question of the Projects: how to reconcile one's final END with a television series that stretches forth into the INFINITE!)

And thus did Cyryl click, the screen went blue-grey, like a corpse, the glow lingered a moment longer in its tiny cathode soul, and blip! - the television went off.

Thus did Cyryl close his eyes and die.

It wasn't so bad at all!

And the day after contented did he awake, gazing upon the world with joy - after all: whom among us would not after death! Scrambled eggs did he fry with bacon, singing merrily all the while, but when came the evening, the fear descended 'pon him, that mayhaps he forgot something while dying, that... it had all gone too easy, somehow; that... one more time, just in case... he'd have to check!

Thus on the second day, he died.

On the third day he ate his fill, and by evening he was fidgeting again, like a puppy wanting to crap. Then he knew well and good that he wouldn't be waiting for the film after the news, but that he longed once more to lay eyes on the infinite that set this fear upon him.

And thus it went, every day.

Cyryl died, then res-erect-ed himself and made himself some breakfast.

At the start he was even happy, but later he felt dumb, that he was egotistically dying for himself only, without a thought for anyone else! Because as long as this dying business was going so good for him, why not die for someone else, who isn't as practiced as him?

He put up an ad in a shop: "I'll die for free. Orders by telephone: 3452861, Cyryl Damascenski".

First it was Miss Hapiór who called to ask if he might not die for her, because she had so much work before the holidays that she wasn't sure where to start, so you see she had no time for death herself. But she'd be sure to die at some later date, just as soon as she caught her breath. And she'd bake Cyryl some cheesecake in exchange.

Then it was Mr. Kruczek who called, who in the occupation nearly perished one hundredfold and scarcely feared death at all, and now at the very thought of it went pale, trembled and wept without cease. Not butch, not at all. Janina O., the Seamstress, had neatly stitched his path to Oblivion, true enough, and Mr. Kruczek stared into the buttonhole she made night after night, but he was somehow

afraid to go crawling through to the other side. So could Cyryl be so neighbourly as to die for him, and Mr. Kruczek would even fix his sink for him in return.

All kinds of folks came to see him.

Someone came for detox, wanted to start a new life and didn't need death coming in-between; someone else wanted to be at his daughter's wedding, and still others had bought a cheap vacation abroad and were out to avoid a last minute death!

And Cyryl was happy, because now he was dying for others!

And fared he quite well, for each unto him left gifts in gratitude. (How 'bout that then? Feel a little dumb for tearing him to shreds? Just try and find me such a saint, whose devotion to other lives might match that of Cyryl's!)

Only in Heaven was he disapproved of.

The tally kept coming up short: people were dying in the Projects, and Up Above no-one was showing up!

There was a tick in the "Death" rubric under Miss Hapiór, and she was still zipping about the Project like nobody's business, still baking those cheesecakes for people!

"What's up here?" snorted the Lord. "Never happened since the world's been the world. I know, I know, people are crafty and have always wanted to pull one over on death! What they won't come up with: turning their beds round to face the window, changing their names. One guy, Nondum, almost got away with it: there was such a void that there was nothing there to die of, so we had to send him Psychopomp, so as to first suit him up in a proper existence, and then push him through to the other side. And what about that weasel Farrago! Sent him right back from Heaven onto the Earth, he laid it on so thick!"

The Bookkeeper Angel flew down to the Projects to get to the bottom of things. He stopped off at the Jericho, had a quick beer, chatted some people up and got back home quick as a wink!

He went to see Cyryl with some bait up his sleeve: he claimed to want Cyryl to die for him. Cyryl agreed, took his cash, wanted to die for an angel - like it was nothing!

Cyryl's eyes just bulged out, he splutters, wheezes, death sticks in him mid-way, like a bone in the gullet - it will move neither hither nor thither. Whereupon the Angel set handcuffs upon him and brought him unto God's Court.

And thus ended the good times in the Projects, when people stopped dying altogether.

The Lord in his mercy did not even punish Cyryl, he only ordered his soul to return, so that everything in Heaven would tally up.

But Cyryl was rewarded with sanctity, because Heaven had never seen a fellow who'd taken away fear and done so much good for folks!

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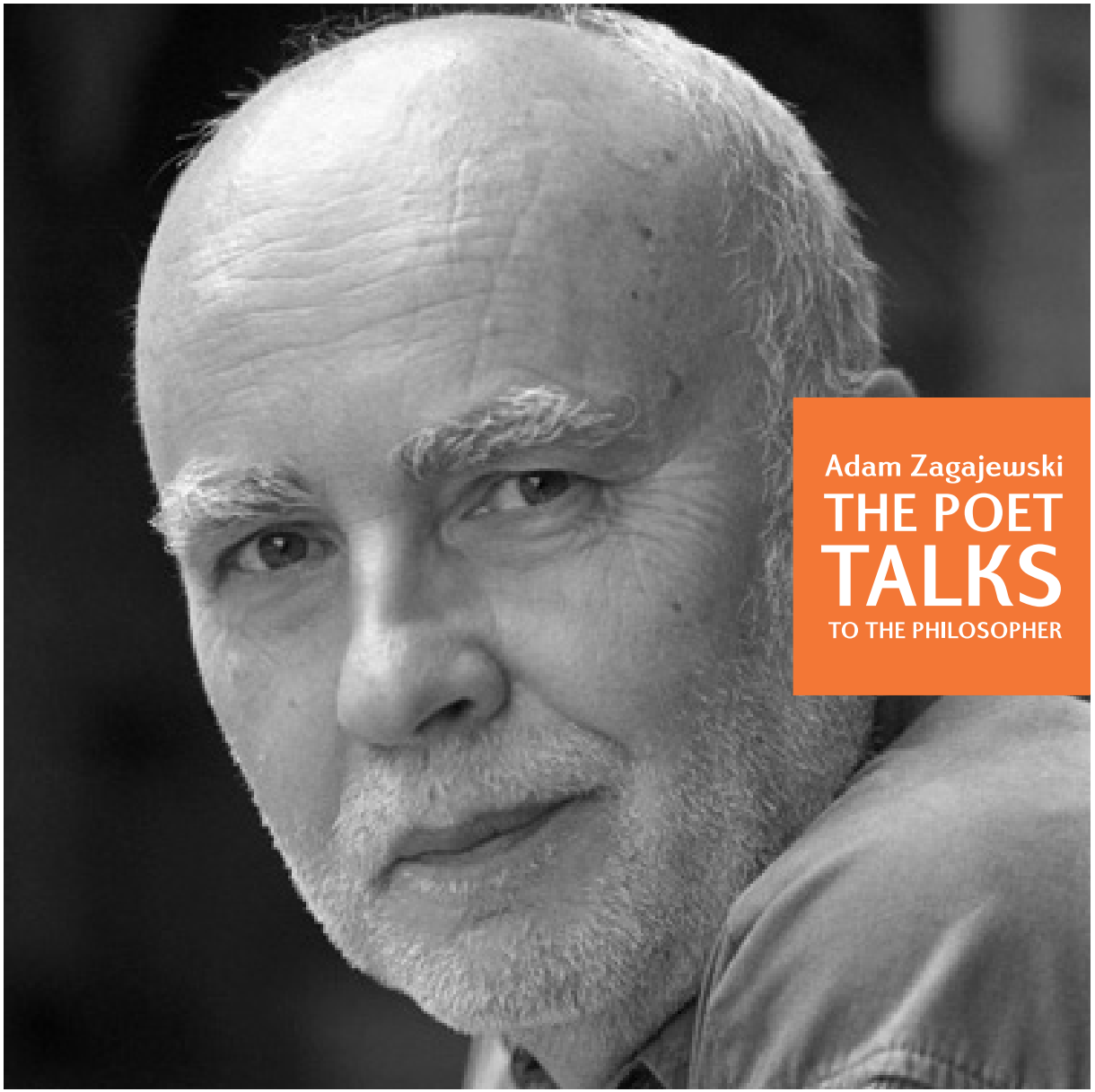

Photo: Danuta Węgiel

Adam Zagajewski's new set of short essays is on the nature of writing, on what links literature with philosophy and history, about himself and others, about Miłosz and Herbert, Gombrowicz and Cioran, Marai and Kertesz. The title, *The Poet Talks to the Philosopher*, is taken from a text about the correspondence of Zbigniew Herbert and Henryk Elzenberg. "It is a very good title for the whole book," writes one delighted reviewer, "because an atmosphere of conversation pervades all the articles in it. They are reports on what Zagajewski has read and considered, a record of what has surprised him or set him thinking. The theme of this conversation is thoughts about writing, mainly about poetry." Zagajewski is curious about poetry which, "in spite of catastrophes, has recorded, and by doing so has also sustained, co-created and co-produced the continuity of our spiritual life – that unremitting contemplation we have inherited from past generations, culminating in the experience of beauty and evil, time and good, transcendence or, for others, nothingness, meditation being something like an everlasting emergency department without which mankind as we know it would be bound to suffer serious injury."

"I don't know what the place that Adam Zagajewski will finally occupy in Polish culture will be called," writes Irena Grudzińska-Gross. "He doesn't fit any formula, though he is a poet and writer from the very centre of Polish and European literary tradition. Multilingual, erudite, in his poems he writes about music and philosophy, about other poets, architecture and art. Yet it is not classical poetry, removed from the modern day; on the contrary, it is relevant to everyday life, and people turn to it at moments of crisis. It brings comfort, as Susan Sontag said of this poetry, though it is not consolatory verse. Zagajewski the poet has no anger or obsession in him, yet he is determined and resolute. Reading him is not a fight, but a sort of conversation that becomes addictive."

Adam Zagajewski (born 1945) is a poet, prose writer and essayist. He has won many prestigious literary awards and his work has been translated into many languages.

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Writing on a computer – does it change anything? Writing with a feather pen, a fountain pen, a pencil… The first typewriters: huge black dinosaurs decorated in gold lettering, nowadays they decorate restaurants or banks. My discovery of the typewriter: my father, an engineer and Polytechnic professor, often used one. Sometimes, when he was working on a book (on technical subjects) or a manual, he asked Mama to help, and she would laboriously write out a text that she couldn't understand at all. I liked to watch her at work – in spectacles, concentrating, she was a different person from usual. But my father pencilled in the mathematical formulae himself, as complex as DNA sequences.

I think writers divide into those who like their own handwriting and those who can't stand it (and also those who have nice writing and those whose writing is ugly – yet these two divisions do not entirely coincide). In any case, I have never liked my own handwriting. As a result, or vice versa, I don't know which is the cause and which is the effect, I have never been fond of the physical activity of writing, covering a page in a black or blue wavy line of script. I have never revelled in blackening the page, as the French put it, and as the eminent essayist Jerzy Stempowski also liked to say. For me, the discovery of my father's typewriter was an epoch-making event. My father agreed to let me practise typing on it from time to time. At first I got on very badly, only using one finger, then two. The metal keys often got hooked together and jammed, so I had to untangle them from these minor disasters. Nevertheless the typewriter seemed to me an extraordinary technical achievement: a system of levers and gears, and perhaps above all the roller covered in a smooth black substance, the essence of which was soft passivity, receiving the blows of the keys, the roller obediently revolving and forcing the sheet of paper to do the same – all this aroused my extreme admiration. This was what mankind had managed to devise in the march of mechanical inventions that had been slowly accumulating over the centuries. And finally towards the end of the nineteenth century this wonderful machine had come into being. The crisp crash of the keys striking the roller was a noble, rhythmical sound. To this day I am convinced, though nothing would seem to confirm this conviction, that the typewriter is a more complex piece of apparatus than the computer. Its impeccable behaviour… The sound of the little bell when it reached the margin – as if you were riding in a sleigh in winter. The chrome-plated, shining levers… The subtle smell of machine oil… Just one thing bothered me: the need to keep cleaning the keys, which gathered dust that stuck to the black ink.

Once I had more or less mastered the art of typing, I soon made another discovery: I had before me not the anaemic wavy line of my own awkward handwriting, but neat, rounded or pointed letters, set out in perfect formation, not treading on each other's heels, but keeping an even distance from each other, like the guard of honour in some small country. These letters, each of which I loved, were a masterpiece of graphic art: it was already virtually a book, in print. In this way the typewriter cast a bridge between the soul and the outside world, between what is most profoundly personal and what is public, and it did so at lightning speed, instantaneously, without the intervention of editors, publishers or literary agents.

Does the computer build a similar bridge too? Yes, of course it does. But at first, paradoxically, the computer's lack of sound irritated me. It was a blessing for those who work at night; one of my friends had to switch to working on a computer many years ago because his neighbours in a Paris apartment house complained about the noise at night. They couldn't sleep.

The clatter of the typewriter informed the entire surroundings that something important was going on here: that here the energy of our inner life was being released and was materialising on white paper. The cannonade of keys striking the paper was a triumphal salvo, the birth of a new sentence (because I often wrote on the typewriter straightaway, even poems – I only wrote their draft versions with a pen, pencil or ball-point) was accompanied by shots, virtual fireworks. Now, when I use a computer, I still proceed the same way: the draft versions of the poem come into being in a notebook or on a piece of paper, and only then do I transfer them to

the screen. And with its typical discretion the computer remains silent, or almost silent. We can hear the gentle tap of the keyboard, but usually only when someone else is writing. In a library or a quiet café (if there are any quiet cafés left) we'll be annoyed by the Morse code of someone else's keyboard, not our own – that one never bothers us. If formerly we had nothing against the march music of a Remington or an Olivetti… To return to the methodology of my writing, usually only in the case of prose – essays – I work on my computer from the start, although as well as that I almost always use the notes I have made in one of those small exercise books that I never leave home without. But the words I write at that moment appear on the bluish-white screen of my iBook.

Does that change anything? Does something change in the very nature of writing by the fact that instead of a quill pen we are using a computer? For someone who had a love of the typewriter in his youth, it certainly changes much less than for those who started with a pen alone, with writing by hand. The general view is that for literature the invention of the computer means a not entirely fortunate increase in production, verbosity, making it too easy to create. Is that true? Perhaps I have observed it wrongly, but it seems to me that – in my case – nothing of the kind happens. (…)

The computer, which as we know is used by writers as if it were a typewriter, and so they do not take advantage of the gigantic potential of this extraordinary piece of equipment, has made their lives easier, especially those who were always losing bits of paper, manuscripts and thoughts. It has eased the journey. After all, it contains a large personal archive. It will complicate the life of archivists, but let the archivists and the policemen worry about that. Does it spoil language, or reduce it to excessive simplification of syntax and intellect? I don't think so. The process of simplifying syntax and intellect began much earlier, before the success of Hemingway's laconic prose; according to Paul Claudel it was in the reign of Louis Philippe in France. And definitely as early as the Renaissance era.

The human spirit, invisible, fragile and invincible all at once, has to work with various materials and technologies, and it copes superbly with their constant evolution. If it can cope with our unreliable bodies, our fingers, old age and illness, rheumatism and neurosis, if it can fall asleep in the evening and wake up in the morning, while roaming God knows where in its dreams – why should it be frightened of a computer?

Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones

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Adam Zagajewski
Contact: Zeszyty Literackie

Marek Bieńczyk
TRANSPARENCY

Photo: Elżbieta Lempp

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What might connect poetry, architecture and the concepts of power over the past two centuries? According to Marek Bieńczyk, it's the idea of transparency. The two-hundred-year history of modernity, which the author sums up and sends on its way, owed its dynamics to a plan to make the world visible. But where is transparency – a modern concept – to come from once modernity is over?

The answer to this question is one of the most interesting themes in Bieńczyk's book as he convinces us that transparency, which has risen to the rank of the only universally accepted ideology, is the illegitimate heir to modernity. While modernisation strove to develop conditions of full control over society, and by this route to achieve perfect organisation, today's transparency is an odd sort of shield protecting the imperfection of our institutions. Parliaments debate before television cameras, major corporations reveal the mechanisms of their own functioning, factories let us watch each stage of production, from the initial components to the finished item on sale. In none of these cases does transparency invite us to improve the rules, nor does it promise to enable any corrections to be made – in the way a government operates, for example, or in the ways animals are processed into food. On the contrary: issues that are set out in public view are simply confirmed in their imperfection. Therefore transparency proves to be a see-through shield protecting the status quo in today's world.

But Marek Bieńczyk does not just make do with an account of changes in political thinking. He covers the history of transparency within European poetry and architecture too, and also how the idea has been applied to ways of organising urban space. And one more thing: if I were tempted to categorise it, I'd say Bieńczyk's book is an existential essay, i.e. it includes the author's personal experience as one of the elements in the actual account and one of the lines of argument. Thus Bieńczyk weaves into his narrative memories (and fabrications) from his own life. As a poet he has always been drawn to the idea of writing a single, transparent sentence that would cover everything, while also being immaterial. However, when his tale runs to its end, the poet-narrator states in a declaration of love that the embodiment of the perfect sentence is a beloved woman.

Przemysław Czapliński

Marek Bieńczyk (born 1956) is a prose-writer, essayist, literary historian and translator from the French.

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I have wanted to write at least a few pages about lucidity and transparency for a long time, for many years. Transparency, I told myself, is summoning me, boring into me like a probe, it's mine. In foreign cities, for dinner I'd choose restaurants with panoramic windows, in the evenings I'd stop outside illuminated shop windows, so my friends began to tease me, buying me glass balls as presents, resulting in quite a collection. Glass became my obsession – I'd go into pet shops to gawp into fish tanks, I'd re-visit museums where the exhibits were displayed behind armoured glass (like the incredible Ötzi in Bolzano, the snow man frozen to the marrow, the prehistoric man found in a glacier with a quiver full of arrows); I preferred to forget about Lenin and Mao Tse Tung in their glass coffins. Whatever text I was working on, I'd automatically dilute the specific sense, the words would escape their meanings, the metaphors would lose the ideas behind them, everything would inevitably tend towards abstraction, and the whiteness would show through from behind the sentences. It's funny to say so, but I liked clear soups, food with gelatine, fish or meat in aspic and other similar delicacies. On the walls in my flat I hung Edward Hopper reproductions, which shone behind the glass like cheap garish pictures.

I liked Hopper, just as other people like their memories – I once had this experience, that's how it used to be; in my fantasies and poems I became the hero of each picture in turn, the guy in the glazed veranda, staring at the limitless horizon, the customer in the café looking through the window at the empty street. Sometimes I wove Olga into these fantasies, but whenever I talked about it, she got annoyed, so I soon fell silent. Of course (as I imagined) above all we were the nighthawks, birds of darkness, night owls, moths after dusk, sitting in glazed bars that emptied at midnight like a nest when spring is over; we'd be sipping drinks with American names, like Bronx or Manhattan, and over the last whisky we'd be left on our own, holding a solemn silence for the life that had departed from there. It filled us like helium; we rose slightly above the earth, above ourselves, winged guardians of the planet, its emissaries in the cosmic night. We felt free and homeless; our community, Olga's and mine, could remain somewhere above the city and not die within its walls, but was spent on roaming aimlessly down the avenues of the sky, the fields by the Vistula, district parks, wherever. *Nighthawks*, Edward Hopper's most famous picture, appeared more and more often on book covers, on postcards, and even on shopping bags from which, replacing the customers' anonymous features, the faces of James Dean and Marlon Brando, and sometimes Marilyn Monroe, stared vacantly into their own solitude. It unnerved and irked me a little, to see my imagination, my dream, my favourite picture of us so banally reproduced and distributed on shiny laminated sheets, turned, along with the Abbey Road cover or a photo of the Chrysler building, into a Gelini jigsaw puzzle available at any supermarket, or written out in stories prompted by the Hopper picture like mushrooms out of forest litter. There was a lot of it, a bit too much, "my" picture appeared too often on book covers and calendars thrown in free with magazines that I still didn't want to buy anyway, but I also went along with this universal fascination; if this was the case, if it was the fount of some unutterable human longing, if it expressed a matrix of dreams common to everyone, then it gained in significance. Though trivialised and stereotyped, it described a desire that could affect anyone, just like hunger. So I was there (I imagined) to take it on my own shoulders, in the name of everyone to illuminate it over the glasses clinking with ice on evenings in July, and over the glasses of grog (what the hell is grog?) as the frost ensnared steam on the windows, drawing it from the mouths of the people going by like white smoke for a new, winter religion.

I knew other people's declamations – so many trembling voices trying to support Hopper's picture on the slender shoulders of poetry, to roll his fragile ball along them. They melted in the shadows of the night, rang out quickly, leaving individual words like the remains of glances. "The cheap scent of gardenia" that Sue Standing could smell on the neck of the woman in the red dress; the "patrons of life" that Samuel Yellen perceived in the whole trio of customers; the news of the latest allied victory that Ira Sadoff could hear from a radio that's not visible in the picture; the scraps

of conversation held at the bar about the war, Hemingway and Fitzgerald that reached the ear of Susan Ludwigson as she wrote her poem, including a list of prosaic details typical of American poetry, the coffee going cold, the four salt cellars on the counter, a car certainly parked nearby, ah, and of course there, at the bar, that's her parents, now they're arguing about the American Dream… All those poems, and more, whole novels (in French and English) derived from the *Nighthawks*, raised on their wings, were touchingly irrelevant, like the Earth seen from the Moon; someone was looking at Phillies café from inside them, at the transparent bulk of it and striving to assimilate the scene; and then he said something, whispered something, told the tale of his own little life, dancing like a moth in the yellow light of the interior. He went on looking; the light beyond the window, a gentle Medusa, held his gaze captive, took over his vision the way the mind can be taken over; there stood the window dividing his words from his ego, as they fell on this side of it and faded away in the darkness.

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Agnieszka Taborska

CONSPIRATORS OF THE IMAGINATION

Photo: Marcin Giżycki

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The essays collected in *Conspirators of the Imagination* do not constitute an actual synthesis of Surrealism. They do, however, emerge from a need to create one. The strangeness of Surrealism, Taborska shows, has long been tamed, yet it is worth remembering that the increase in the ways dimensions of reality can be perceived did not take place from one day to the next – and it is precisely this that the book stresses.

The author recounts the history of the Movement as if by chance – while discussing chosen "Subjects" from the Surrealists' iron repertoire and sketching the "Profiles" of several artists. There is, by no means, any question of a full spectrum of problems and individuals. The author has made her choice not as an objective academic – who aims to exhaust the subject – but as someone who is passionate about the Movement. She places the emphasis on what fascinated her in Surrealism. She writes about her personal contacts with three artists: Leonora Carrington, Gisele Prassinos and Roland Topor. These chapters in themselves bestow a unique value on the book. The author has also come across the work of these writers on a different plane – as a translator – and this intimate contact with the text is also reflected, most originally, in *Conspirators of the Imagination*.

Agnieszka Taborska – author, art historian and translator of French literature (including Philippe Soupault and Roland Topor).

The section entitled "Subjects" treats topics such as the Surrealists' attitude to suicide, love and madness, similar to myths, cities and everyday objects. In every chapter, the author glides smoothly between various forms of art, thus showing that Surrealism did not specialise in any one field. Surrealism was, most likely, the first complex and interdisciplinary Movement. For this reason, any specialist must be acquainted equally well with the history of painting as with the history of literature and film. But also with the history of psychiatry and that of postcards. And Agnieszka Taborska's expertise embraces all these perfectly well.

This book is, above all, a colourful narrative, beautifully told, in which both experts wishing to extend their knowledge and readers who are just commencing their adventure with art, will gladly immerse themselves.

Marta Mizuro

During the last years of silent cinema, Mack Sennett made hundreds of short and feature-length comedies where the heroes-losers hang over a precipice, are caught up in a car chase, miraculously survive an explosion or throw cream cakes at each other. This Surreal, anarchic and dangerous world born of the circus, vaudeville, burlesque, pantomime and comic strip is ruled by timing, surprises and minor catastrophes. Charlie Chaplin, Harold Lloyd, Harry Langdon and Bing Crosby all started with Sennett, and slapstick comedy became the most fashionable trend in the American cinema of the 1920's. The period has left us with thousands of metres of celluloid and a prop: the cake.

The Belgian Noël Godin, alias Georges Pacacz, born 1945, director, writer and actor (known, among other works, for *The Sexual Life of Belgians*), is a lover of the cinema, Surreal poetics and situation comedies. Celebrities on both sides of the Atlantic live in fear of him.

As a student, Godin had already poured a jar of glue over a lecturer who co-operated with the Portuguese dictator, Salazar. In a magazine which he founded himself called "Friends of Film", following the best Surrealist tradition of mystification, he illustrated articles with photographs of his own family. He claimed, for example, that Louis Armstrong, a former cannibal, financed the film *The Vegetables of Good Will* in which Claudia Cardinale appeared as a gigantic endive. Or that Richard Brooks, director of Cat on a Hot Tin Roof admitted to his film being abysmal. Information about a non-existant, blind Thai director, Vivian Pei, and her film *The Lotus Flower Will Never Again Grow on the Edge of Your Island* inspired a certain researcher of Asian cinema to travel to Thailand in order to meet Vivian Pei.

In 1968, Noël Godin hit a professor holding extreme reactionary views with a cream cake. Since then, he has been throwing cakes at particularly pompous personalities from the worlds of culture and politics. His first victim was Marguerite Duras for "abusing intelligence and wisdom in order to feed her own vanity".

Godin does not work alone. He is accompanied in difficult missions by almost thirty people who arrive at the scenes of action wearing long coats under which are hidden cakes. Godin himself sometimes performs in disguise, too. He buys the cakes – baked according to traditional recipes – in modest cake shops, disdaining offers from large companies avid for publicity.

The victims are chosen by members of Cake International. Every offensive is carefully prepared, sometimes with the help of "traitors" who provide the necessary facts, where and when to strike. Thanks to such a betrayal, in 1998 the most talked about coup took place, in Brussels, on one of the richest people in the world, the head of Microsoft, Bill Gates. Thirty smiling Robin Hoods, in units of three, shouted "Pac! Pac!" and charged as he was climbing out of his limousine. Despite five bodyguards and an escort of four motorbikes, four cakes reached their target. Gates was punished "for abusing intelligence and imagination in order to uphold the dull *status quo* of an imperfect world".

Nicolas Sarkozy was hit four times during a visit to Brussels. New attacks are, no doubt, being prepared. The well-known journalist, Alain Beverini, was hit with a cake before the eyes of millions of television viewers as, surrounded by thirty bodyguards, he conductedan interview with the actress Holly Hunter (who played the main role in the film The Piano) in front of a hotel in Cannes.

Godin gets most worked up about the French philosopher and television star, the narcissistic Bernard-Henry Lévy who was once unfortunate enough to claim to be the most talented writer of his generation. Because of this, he had a cake thrown at him seven times, including once when he was on stage at the Cannes Festival. Ever since then, whenever a puppet representing Lévy appears on television, it is silenced by a cascade of cream.

The cakes provoke aggression. After the outrage in Cannes, Godin was kicked by Lévy. Two female members of Cake International were rescued at the last moment by the police as bodyguards tried to plunge their heads down a toilet. Only Godard lived up to the attack. Having a cake thrown at him in Cannes in 1985, he licked the cream off his cigar and praised the tribute paid to silent cinema.

As much as ninety-five percent of the assaults are successful.

Noël Godin has dozens of victims to his name. He dreams of cream bombing the Tours de France and World Football Championships from an aeroplane. His method of fighting against conceit has been adopted by the Patissiers Sans Frontières (Confectioners Without Frontiers). Their many victims include Oscar de la Renta who was dealt a blow, in Portland, with a tofu cake by an activist from a movement protesting against the fur trade. In September 2001, Karl XVI Gustav, King of Sweden, was the victim of a strawberry cake. Several months earlier, an apple cake struck the vice-president of Białystok Bogusław Dębski, the minister of defence Antoni Tokarczuk, and the former deputy prime minister Leszek Balcerowicz. In June 2004, a blueberry cake hit Lech Kaczyński in Warsaw, and a year later, the vice-president of the city Andrzej Urbański. After an assault on the French minister of culture, Philippe Douste-Blazy by one of Godin's associates, the government took the case to court. The assailant was, however, found not guilty after his lawyer explained that throwing cakes was a Belgian tradition.

Laughter, a silly face and an idiotic song help in cake assaults. It is best to show an armed bodyguard that it is only the question of a cake. The cake is not to be thrown but flattened against the victim's face from close-up.

The warriors of Cake International call themselves burlesque terrorists who turn the prose of life into comedy. "This dull world forces us to laugh and do things for a lark. I've always believed that laughter is the best rebellion. What weapon is both the funniest and the most terrible? For thirty years now I've believed it to be a cream cake (…) It's the weapon of the weak and the poor", says Godin.

"For a long time now, I've been an advocate of insulting letters sent, in the Dadaist and Surreal style, by intellectuals so as to burst the balloons of pompous fame. However, if I were to write to Bill Gates, only he would read the letter. I communicate, therefore, using cakes. It's a visual Esperanto, a new form of letter-writing, oozing with cream, which Situationists sent thirty years after the Surrealists."

Formed by 1968, Marx Brothers' films and Bugs Bunny cartoons, the Utopian Godin fights against authority, moral dictates and the law targeted at people. Using symbolic violence, he wounds his victims' *amour propre*, which can afford a good laundering anyway. He acts in the name of *raison d'être*, according to Surreal-anarchist honour.

Translated by Danusia Stok

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Photo: Bianka Rolando

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Bianka Rolando's first collection of stories has been strongly influenced by both her origins and her education. *An Italian Phrasebook* is an attempt to tell the story of an identity defined by four cultural spheres: Polish, Italian, painting and literature.

What is involved here is an impression rather than an autobiographical account, because Rolando rarely talks about herself, resorting to facts from her own life. It is not facts that make up this book, but how Rolando speaks, how she relates to being bilingual and bicultural and how she connects words and images. Each of the eleven texts in the collection was inspired by a selected masterpiece of Italian painting and is supported by graphic and photographic work. The visible and the readable elements are closely connected here.

In effect, the result is an original and intriguing mixture. It includes a contemporary interpretation of the scenes shown in the pictures and an attempt to relate these images to today's mentality; the mentality of those who, as they look at the painting in question, find their own problems in it. Rolando places herself among the potential viewers or those being portrayed: she not only eavesdrops on them, but also listens in on herself.

These "mini images" shimmer with different shades and offer lots of leads to follow up as you read. One of these trails pursues the elements shown in the picture (such as hands or hair), another leads to the cultural assimilation of Biblical motifs, yet another prompts you to follow a word game being played by the author. This game is a sort of reflection of the process of learning and discovering language resources – starting from children's rhymes, proverbs or songs, artfully wound into the narrative.

Although the subject of analysis is extremely important here, another issue that seems just as crucial is the problem of being multi-cultural, as presented by Rolando. She does not focus on the differences, but on the common features, on universal symbols and the cultural roots common to the inhabitants of Europe. *An Italian Phrasebook* is excellent proof of the fact that although language separates us, there are plenty of other planes of understanding – gesture, facial expression or tone of voice.

Marta Mizuro

Bianka Rolando (born 1979) is from a Polish-Italian family. She is a graphic artist by profession and lectures at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts.

The Tugboat

Marta, who smells of detergent (an innate love of cleaning bathrooms) is off to see her sister Maria. She puts on a grey cape. Today she is wearing a blue dress.

Give back your sister's doll, don't pull her hair. It's always the same, she's never to blame because she's younger.

Marta has a small studio flat bought on credit, which is empty. For now there is just a cut-price bed from Ikea in it. She is single. Her thighs are growing together, her breasts only fill her bra in a formal way.

She can't stand her sister. They've never once been shopping together to buy handbags or hideous cheap spotted ballet shoes.

When she was little Maria was always biting her sister. She started it. That's a lie, it was her. They weren't like each other, though some of the family used to joke that they were both as plump as buns.

Their late father, who used to go fishing in a tiny pond (he never caught a single one), talked of his daughters as if they were fine ships. Quite gaga. Nice metaphors, very simple.

Two sailing ships very similar in dimensions can react with equal delay to a tilt of the rudder. They can have a different tendency to turn windward. They can change their properties depending on the force of the wind and the height of the waves.

Maria was always given the more interesting presents (a Hawaiian Barbie with a pony that cast its avid gaze on everyone). She was spoiled and appreciated, the fat seal. Little Orphan Maria. Their hair braided into a single plait. Her teeth were always brown with chocolate. Give this back to her, give that back to her.

Marta is going on a packed bus to see her sister. At each stop a lot of people get on. At each stop there's a hyper-rush. It reaches the loop at the end of the line. From there it's not far to her sister's flat. She chews a hard mint to freshen her breath. Today she wants to talk to her, maybe have a quarrel.

Maria opens the door to her. In her flat they've cut off the power (unpaid electricity bills for March and April). She's sitting in semi-darkness, combing her hair.

Why did they cut off the power? Why are you unemployed? You're completely irresponsible, as ever. Will you be counting on my help for all eternity? Their hands are in motion. They won't fight like little girls at primary school in the playground after lessons. It's just manual navigation. Left hand down, right index finger pointing. Right index finger pointing, left aimed downwards. That's the entire regulations in force on inland waterways supplemented by directives issued by the inland sailing inspectors in Genoa in case of local family conflict.

You are not my sister. I look in the mirror and that's where I see my sister, not here. Here I see nothing but a fat clown who has worn flannel knickers since childhood. You're sure to be wearing them again now. Must you always be so bloody thrifty? You're always reminding me that you got more than me. Do you remember how painfully you used to hit me? You destroyed my Hawaiian Barbie by ripping off her head and biting her fingers. You are night and I am day.

Today's weather. At night it will be much colder than in the daytime. Possible storms with occasional bursts of tears.

I am entirely alone. I am talking to myself. We have never helped each other. When our parents left, you stopped taking any interest in me. I longed for us to go shopping together. We'd have bought ourselves way-out handbags and those hideous cheap spotted ballet shoes.

It's very hard for me now. I need you, because getting a big sailing ship off a sandbank is really difficult. There are usually unfortunate circumstances. If it comes to this sort of situation, you have to summon the help of a tugboat or a lifeboat.

Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones

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Ignacy Karpowicz
THE EMPEROR'S (AND THE BEE'S) NEW FLOWER

Photo: Grażyna Samulska

Karpowicz's first two books, *Uncool and The Miracle*, have already demonstrated that he is an original and highly inventive author. But in *The Emperor's New Flower* he has surpassed himself. In fact it is hard to define this book by genre, as it is a mixture of elements including reportage, fiction, a travel diary and something like a digressive epic prose poem. In his usual perverse way, Karpowicz presents the concrete facts of the narrative he weaves like this: "I fare-dodge my way around digressions…. I'm interested in everything I write about, but at the same time I don't care about anything". He tells the story of his travels in Ethiopia, a poor African country that has had a tough historical experience, and that readers might know about from Ryszard Kapuściński's superb book of reportage, *The Emperor*. In narrative full of digressions that quivers like the air in the African heat, he describes his clash with a foreign culture where whites are treated in a particular way and his struggles with some Kafkaesque bureaucracy, writes about modern Ethiopia and its inhabitants, provides extracts from the country's history, and presents some fascinating ancient sites and landscapes that few Westerners are aware of. And he seasons it all with a large dose of subtle humour and irony, which has just about become his trademark.

If I think about this book, one word invariably comes to mind: "strange". Yes, this is strange prose, but this oddness, mainly of form, has a purpose, or at least I think it has. This is how Karpowicz has tried to assimilate the "strangeness of existence" that struck him as he travelled about Ethiopia.

Robert Ostaszewski

Ignacy Karpowicz (born 1976) writes fiction and translates from English, Spanish and Amharic. He travels in Central America and East Africa, and lives in Costa Rica and Ethiopia.

After a hearty breakfast I decided to venture out on my first walk along the streets of the Ethiopian metropolis. I was also interested in seeing if they'd try to steal something. The increasingly reliable guidebook talked about swarms of children, beggars, conmen, pickpockets and thieves of all kinds. It noted, however, that in the New Flower (which is what Addis Ababa means in Amharic), the city's bark is worse than its bite. Further on it says the most natural reaction to the charms of Addis is to run away as fast as possible. Then comes some good advice on how to do just that.

Full of good faith and the best intentions I get up, pay, and check the tackle securing my theft-proof wallet full of traveller's cheques, money and documents (greatly depleted by the absence of my passport).

Addis is situated at an altitude of some 2,400 metres above sea level, which make it the third capital city in the world measured by elevation above the surface of the seas and oceans. Mr Briggs' guidebook is not the only one. From another book (published by Camerapix) I unearth the following charming description, written at a safe distance from reality or by someone who has been bribed: "Broad, three-lane streets, splendid architecture, wonderful weather and picturesque donkey caravans crossing the boulevards make New Flower a city worth recommending". As if that weren't enough, it mentions a wealth of cosy cafes and patisseries that reminds one of Rome. Of course.

I go outside onto a street called Muniy. It is short and steep. Instead of going up hill I decide to go down. Although the street is short, and to tell the truth, unambiguously single-lane, several people have already managed to ask for money. I vigorously pretend I can't hear them. For the time being the idea of defective hearing works perfectly. No one repeated his request. That is, they did, but only when I came back, so it doesn't count.

I turn right into a street with the familiar name of Wavel. I will come to be capable of naming the streets, but it's of no use. Most of the streets have no signs – the names only appear on maps of the city, and the only people who use them are white tourists, and, a matter on which opinions vary, the Ethiopian post. Another complication is the fact that every one of the more attractive roads or avenues has appropriated the right to two, three, or even more synonyms. These names are generally interchangeable. There would be nothing wrong with this extravagance if everyone knew them all.

Unfortunately… If you get lost, anyone you ask is extremely unlikely to share his topographical knowledge with you. However, if by chance you and the person you have asked are both saying the same thing, there is no cause to rejoice, for several possible reasons. To convey the full drama of the situation, I'll describe the most likely scenarios for someone who's lost. Your addressee doesn't know English, and simply chants what you have just said. Your addressee knows English, but doesn't know what you are talking about, so he does some chanting just to have a bit of a chat. Your addressee knows English and knows what you are talking about, but has no idea where the street you're looking for is, so he does some chanting to avoid offending you. Your addressee knows English, knows what you're talking about, and knows – he promises – how to get there.

You naive tourist! You are not out of trouble at all!

In the best instance your addressee is thinking of the street's third name, which went out of common usage several years ago (but not in the part of town you have ended up in), while you are thinking of the first name, so old that everyone has forgotten it ages ago. If you follow the directions it has just taken you no mean effort to obtain, you are sure to discover some extremely obscure parts of town. And it's really worth it. Your situation will not change greatly – you can't get more lost; you're either lost, or you're not, there's nothing in the middle. Thus spoke Protestant teaching on destiny. As you're so determined to travel, you've got what you wanted – you're travelling to a place where you've not yet been.

Despite appearances, the Ethiopian fondness for creating words and names has deep aesthetic and philosophical motives. You only have to reason the way they do. Some important person thinks up a name. He doesn't usually ask the citizens if they like the new name and if it suits the topo-

graphical reality. He doesn't take the trouble to check what this particular avenue, for instance, was called before, because it must have had some sort of a name – the city abhors a void. So then what? Go along with the official's incompetence just like that? Not on your life! He can call it what he likes from the power of his throne.

Let's stay on this track. It's a safe one – we won't get lost.

So now we've got a name. But the world never stops moving, new buildings keep springing up and old ones keep falling down, the street's alive, it keeps changing its character – sometimes it even gets tarmacked. So then what? Is one single name supposed to describe it for ever?

Nonsense.

You have to change the name, adapt it to the current situation – that's the only way for it to keep up with reality, the only way you can reflect the wealth and sparkle of the universe. That's why the Ethiopians use several names at once. Quite often the names move about. This was once Beautiful Street, but a tower block was put up: and maybe it was beautiful, but it isn't now. Whereas not far from here, they've planted some eucalyptus trees, and they look beautiful, so the street gets called Beautiful. Ah, but the police have failed to guard the eucalyptus trees and they've been cut down for firewood. The eucalyptuses were actually the only pretty thing, so now what's left is Narrow Alley. But not far from here…

In all this linguistic activity there is plenty of scope for emphasising your own individuality. I like the tower block – change the name if you wish, but to me it's still Beautiful Street.

I must admit that at first this world that's constantly being renamed, re-created from scratch and that's as fickle as a rainbow, seemed hostile, the African version of the urban jungle. Later on, however, once I was over the painful process of adapting, I came to like this custom, the confusion and commotion without reservations.

Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones

Państwowy Instytut
Wydawniczy
Warsaw 2007
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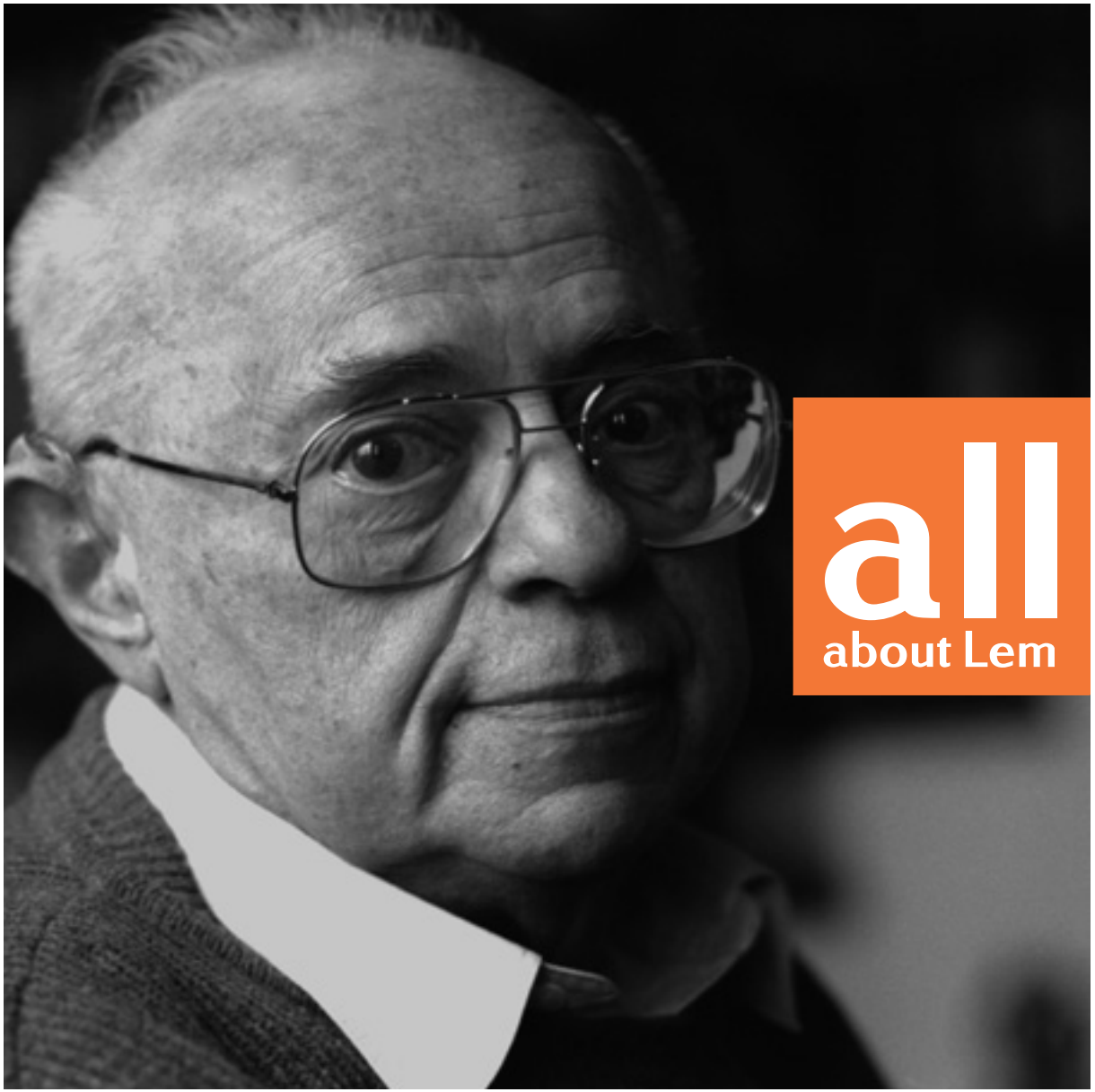
ISBN: 978-83-06-03077-8
Translation rights:
Ignacy Karpowicz
Contact: PIW



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Stanisław Lem (1921-2006) was by training a doctor and theoretical scientist, and by choice a writer, the classic author of science fiction.

Maciej Płaza
On cognition in the works of Stanisław Lem

Wydawnictwo
Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego
Wrocław 2006
150 × 210 • 579 pages
hardcover
ISBN: 83-229-2765-7
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Contact: Wydawnictwo
Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego

Wojciech Orliński
What are sepullers? All about Lem

Znak
Cracow 2007
144 × 205 • 282 pages
paperback
ISBN: 978-83-240-0798-1
Translation rights: Znak

Paweł Majewski
Between animal and machine. Stanisław Lem's technological utopia

Wydawnictwo
Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego
Wrocław 2007
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Paweł Majewski
Contact: Wydawnictwo
Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego

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A year has passed since the death of Stanisław Lem, an extremely popular writer, but not one on whom the national critics have yet lavished too many learned analyses. This situation is gradually changing thanks to some new authors in this speciality.

Let's start with a popular publication, which is a short dictionary of expressions used by Lem or relevant to Lem's writing. Wojciech Orliński's book *What are Sepullers? All About Lem* is written with a light touch and is extremely funny, while also being intelligent and highly competent. Orliński writes for *Gazeta Wyborcza* on literary matters as well as the latest scientific enigmas, and has composed his compendium from terms to do with Lem's work, biography, relatives, friends and enemies, the world presented in his books, the issues and topics they cover, the critics who write about Lem, the film-makers who film his work, and finally the real, earthbound countries that Lem described in his books.

The entries include a lot of entirely serious information about Lem's works, but just like his writing they are also full of humour, as for instance the entry on the "sepullers" mentioned in the title:

SEPULLATOR

Facility serving for sepulling (q.v.).

SEPULLERS

An element that plays a significant role in the Ardryte (q.v.) civilisation of planet Enteropia (q.v.). See "sepullator".

SEPULLING

Activity performed by the Ardrytes (q.v.) of planet Enteropia (q.v.). See "sepullers".

These are the entries Ijon Tichy found in the *Cosmic Encyclopaedia* he borrowed from Professor Tarantoga. Intrigued by the mysterious sepullers (and other attractions of Enteropia, such as *kerdlers* and *octales*), he decided to research the matter first-hand on journey No 14. After arriving on Enteropia Tichy noticed that all the media, advertisements and works of art were full of allusions to sepullers of one kind or another. Out of curiosity he went to a suitable shop and ordered one. But the sales assistant asked him about his wife. "I haven't got one," replied Tichy. "You… haven't… got a wife?" stammered the sales assistant, his face darkening with horror, "… and you want a sepuller? With no wife…?" His attempt to bring up the topic with an Ardryte acquaintance having fun with his family at a night club ended even more badly. "Does not having a wife mean I can't see the sepullers?" asked Tichy. "These words echoed in the silence that abruptly fell. The acquaintance's wife fainted to the floor, he rushed to her side… At that moment three waiters suddenly appeared who took me by the scruff of the neck and threw me into the street…."

Before Orliński's book an extremely interesting academic work appeared, by Maciej Płaza, called *On Cognition in the Works of Stanisław Lem*. Płaza describes Lem's works in four huge chapters: *Lem's structures and strategies, The futurology of empirical sciences, The literary mental experiment, and The fiction of logic or the logic of fiction*. The book analyses the cognitive issues that are a basic problem in Lem's fantasy. One might ask what a fantasist has to do with cognition, but meanwhile Maciej Płaza proves how closely related Lem's scientific and philosophical essays were to his literary works, which acted as a sphere for modelling certain ideas drawn from sociology, cultural studies and technology using the material of fictional stories and literary conventions. In this way forecasting future technologies and human culture was carried on by Lem in something that Płaza calls "a literary mental experiment", and also in the "meta-literature" that he analyses in an extremely interesting way, i.e. Lem's Apocrypha: his reviews and introductions to fictional books. For future scholars of Lem's work Płaza's book will undoubtedly be essential reading.

In the same renowned series as Płaza's book another worthwhile academic essay on Lem's work has also appeared, entitled *Between Animal and Machine – Stanisław Lem's Technological Utopia* by Paweł Majewski. In it the Warsaw academic basically covers just two of Lem's major books of essays, *Dialogues* and *Summa Technologiae*. In the course of his argument, the items he covers include Lem's attitude to cybernetics, the issue of erasing the border between the artificial and the natural, the issue of how cyber-space is constructed and

all its extremely far-reaching contexts. This argument finally leads to Lem's most important theme for Majewski, which is the project for man's auto-evolution, requiring a radical re-shaping of the body or getting rid of it completely in favour of a unique combination of biological and mechanical elements – with the prospect of subjecting the human physiology to total and radical change. Majewski compares this shockingly bold concept with the modern post-human trend, inferring that Lem was its precursor. The book concludes that Lem was a visionary who launched his auto-evolution project in order to annihilate the contradictions that mark the human condition, and liberate us, at the cost of destroying the entire output of culture, from "the terrible effort of being human".

Jerzy Jarzębski
Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones

Julia Hartwig
THANK YOU FOR THE HOSPITALITY

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"From the moment I first arrived in France everything I experienced there had an influence on my path in life, affected my interests, my outlook on the world, my passions and my work," writes Julia Hartwig in her latest book, which, as the title tells us, is a *Thank You for the Hospitality*. A thank-you aimed not so much at specific individuals, though they are very often mentioned too, as much as French culture and civilisation, French literature, and especially poetry, French art, which sixty (!) years ago took under its wing a young scholarship student from distant (or so it seemed) Poland. Julia Hartwig has repaid this "hospitality" truly royally, with superb books about the French poets, translations of Rimbaud, essays on French culture, ancient and modern, and about history, including the difficult, fairly recent period, as proved by the piece in this book entitled "Difficult France", about the occupation-era rift in French society and the intellectual elite's violent post-war turn to the left.

As well as essays, *Thank You for the Hospitality* consists of travel diaries, poems with French themes and translations. She devotes a lot of space to Parisian outsiders, newcomers like herself, who managed to make this exceptional city their own and enrich it through their work, such as Blaise Cendrars, Max Jacob, Henri Michaux or Marcel Duchamp.

For Julia Hartwig, Paris will remain for ever the cultural capital of the world, though it hasn't actually been that since the social revolution of the late 1960s, when London took that title away from it, as New York did later. In the post-war years however things were different, and whatever was born in the Champs Elysées area had an effect on artistic life in the West and East, South and North, no matter whether it was a song, a picture, a theatre show, a film or a book. Indeed, a book: "What is striking about French literature," writes Julia Hartwig, "is the range of scale: the Hugo-style genius of the French spirit and the Rabelaisian bawdiness, de Musset's charm and Apollinaire's thrilling melody, Lautreamont's madness, the inexhaustible passion of Rimbaud's poetry, the latent sensitivity of Reverdy's cubism, the inventiveness of the lyrical paradox in Jacob's work. Old and new, separate and shared, like the root, stem, leaf and flower in one plant."

Krzysztof Masłoń

Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones

Julia Hartwig (born 1921) is a poet, essayist and translator. From 1947 to 1950 she lived in France.

Julia Hartwig
Thank You for the Hospitality
słowo/obraz terytoria
Gdańsk 2007
140 × 220 • 424 pages
paperback
ISBN: 978-83-7453-707-0
Translation rights: słowo/obraz terytoria

Jacek Antczak

REPORTER

CONVERS

WITH HAN

This book goes beyond the reader's expectations. Not just because the main figure is a unique woman, but because what she has to say about her work methods or her approach to life is sometimes surprising. What else does one expect from a great individual. One can be sure that she will not shy away from signalling her subjectivity in the text. Meanwhile, Hanna Krall claims: "I never write about myself in the first person." But "I never write" is not the same as "I don't speak." Dozens of fascinating interviews have been conducted with the reporter. But none of them were the kind of flowing interviews that could serve as a biography.

The ten conversations presented in this book both did and did not take place. Each of them is a collage composed from past interviews. The compiler, Jacek Antczak, literally cut the available texts into separate questions and put them together so that they created a thematic order. The sources of the original conversations have been revealed in the footnotes, of course, but sometimes the questions had to be substituted with others to maintain a logical sequence. The seams here are invisible: the conversations keep to a certain pace and even maintain the climate of a "discussion." But the most important thing is that the elimination of the interlocutors' voices permits Hanna Krall's voice to come to the fore. In the first person.

The conversations have been divided into three parts. In the first, Krall explains what it means for her to be a reporter. In the second, she reveals the secrets of her technique. In the third, finally, she speaks of her relationship with her readers. The interviews are always intriguing: whether she's quoting an anecdote, formulating a generalisation, or confiding in her quandaries. Hanna Krall believes that reportage should not be read strictly as a literature based on facts, but that one should seek out its deeper meaning. Her own, intricate work does indeed inspire this approach, but - as the reporter correctly observes - not many interpreters are successful in analising those texts which defy genre classification. *Reporter* is therefore an invaluable book, both for admirers of the author of *Shielding the Flame*, as well as for those who deal with literary material professionally.

Marta Mizuro
Translated by Soren Gauger

Hanna Krall is an outstanding reporter and writer. She has been translated into English, Czech, Finnish, French, Hebrew, Spanish, Dutch, German, Romanian, Slovak, Swedish, Hungarian and Italian.

Jacek Antczak
Reporter. Conversations with Hanna Krall
Rosner & Wspólnicy
Warsaw 2007
120 × 190 • 168 pages
paperback
ISBN: 978-83-60336-15-1
Translation rights: Rosner & Wspólnicy, Jacek Antczak
Contact: Rosner & Wspólnicy

Ryszard Legutko
A TREATISE ON FREEDOM

The subject of *A Treatise on Freedom by Ryszard Legutko* is freedom – a key concept for philosophy and contemporary social life alike. At the same time, this notion has ceased to be a problem in itself for democratic civilizations. No-one in their right mind questions the ultimate necessity of freedom.

The distribution of freedom, on the other hand, is becoming an increasingly serious problem. "Controversies surrounding the principle of the distribution of freedom turn out to be considerable even when an outside evaluation of the scope of liberty the subjects hold would not seem to justify such conflicts," writes Professor Legutko. "We are dealing with a phenomenon of this sort especially when freedom is rather widely accessible, and every restriction seems shockingly arbitrary, by virtue of this very accessibility."

A Treatise on Freedom gives a survey of classical conceptions of the notion of freedom, from Plato's concept to the liberal one, while foregrounding issues of "negative freedom," upon which everyone currently agrees, though they may also draw attention to the lack of clear criteria for its continuance. The author's reflections on the problem of the relationship between negative freedom and communism would seem to be of particular interest. Legutko undermines the opposition between Soviet totalitarianism and Western liberalism which is repeated like a mantra. Perhaps, he suggests, the total degradation of the human being in communism was a result of an anthropological error that was wrapped up in communism. This system, after all, interfered "in the totality of human existence, in nearly all aspirations and potentialities remaining in a person's disposition."

Ryszard Legutko's book is strongly rooted in Poland's "here and now." This is why it also recalls the "peculiar ideological war" of the early 90's, "where on one side there stood those who radically dismissed heritage and metaphysical arguments as a form of superstition, and, on the other, those who could not imagine the organisation of negative freedom without such historical or metaphysical justifications." Whether or not things have indeed happily ended with an armistice, as the author puts it, one can't be sure, but the proponents of the latter view have doubtless gained the upper hand.

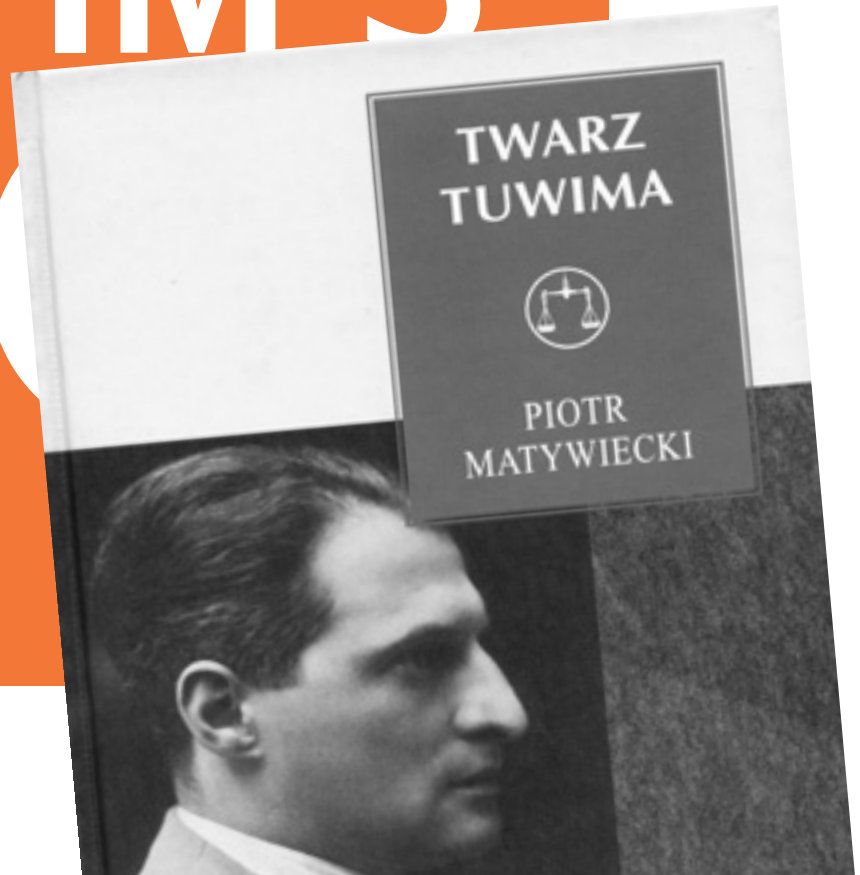
Krzysztof Masłoń
Translated by Soren Gauger

Ryszard Legutko (born 1950) philosopher, a professor of philosophy at the Jagiellonian University.

Ryszard Legutko
A Treatise on Freedom
słowo/obraz terytoria
Gdańsk 2007
140 × 225 • 248 pages
paperback
ISBN: 978-83-7453-763-6
Translation rights: słowo/obraz terytoria

Piotr Matywiecki

TUWIM'S FA



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What is *Tuwim's Face?* Definitely not a biography; elements of Tuwim's life do occupy a major part of the book, but they are not its main feature. Nor is it a monograph on his work, because despite its size it does not resolve all the questions posed by Tuwim, but instead it points them out, and merely presents extracts from Tuwim's literary output. I think the most apt definition for this book is an extended essay, a scholarly report on the author's favourite reading matter and also a short guide to the state of research on Tuwim.

Matywiecki has not opted for the "traditional" chronological approach to the subject, but scatters elements of biography and interpretation throughout the book. His bold method of arranging these topics allows him to cast light on Tuwim's profile from a perspective no one has taken before and to develop a new way of talking about him. In this book the key to the essay is interpretation – the rhythm of reading Tuwim's poems, memoirs and letters gradually builds up to develop a narrative and acts as a substitute here for knowing him personally. For Matywiecki was brought up with a special Tuwim cult. For lack of personal contact and a limited opportunity to "get to know" Tuwim by exploring his work, Matywiecki turns to the words of the poet's friends and relatives, sourcing them from monographs, biographies, interviews, reviews and accounts.

In *Tuwim's Face* he disentangles dense webs of meaning and evokes themes in Tuwim's poetry that have been largely neglected before now – the question of the face, the body, of fate, of identity, Tuwim in the eyes of Lechoń, the issue of melancholy and vitality, the leitmotifs of plants, numbers, mathematics, puppets, religion and the material world. Matywiecki often refers to philosophy, and often interprets Tuwim from the viewpoint of various world attitudes

Tuwim was an alchemist with words. Matywiecki not only writes about the musicality of Tuwim's poems, but tries to maintain a harmonious style of his own, which makes *Tuwim's Face* a pleasure to read.

Izabela Mikrut

Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones

Julian Tuwim (1894-1953) one of the greatest Polish poets of 20th century

Piotr Matywiecki
Tuwim's Face
W.A.B.
Warsaw 2007
142 × 202 • 774 pages
hardcover
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Translation rights: W.A.B.

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Witold M. Orłowski
A CENTURY OF CHAOS.
ALTERNATIVE HISTORIES OF THE 20TH CENTURY

Ewa Majewska
Janek Sowa
THE CAPTIVE MIND 2

Artur Żmijewski
LIVE FLESH.
CONVERSATIONS WITH ARTISTS

Tadeusz Bartoś
Krzysztof Bielawski
PATHS OF FREEDOM

Witold M. Orłowski
Stulecie chaosu. Alternatywne dzieje XX wieku
Open Wydawnictwa Naukowe i Literackie
Warsaw 2006
170 × 240 • 544 pages
paperback
ISBN: 83-85254-86-7
Translation rights: PUENTA Literary Agency
Contact: puenta@vp.pl

Ewa Majewska, Janek Sowa
Zniewolony umysł 2
Korporacja Ha!art
Cracow 2007
125 × 195 • 400 pages
paperback
ISBN 83-89911-61-2
Translation rights: Authors

Artur Żmijewski
Drżące ciała. Rozmowy z artystami
Korporacja Ha!art & Galeria Kronika Ha!art.
Bytom - Cracow 2006
160 × • 365 pages
paperback
ISBN 83-89911-66-3
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Tadeusz Bartoś, Krzysztof Bielawski
Ścieżki wolności
Wydawnictwo Homini
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Contact: Wydawnictwo Homini

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Krystyna Kłosińska MINIATURES. "FEMININE" READING AND WRITING

Izabela Filipiak SPACES OF DIFFERENCE

Max Cegielski DRUNK ON GOD

Rafał Górski NO STATEHOOD. DEMOCRACY PARTICIPATING IN ACTION

Krystyna Kłosińska
Miniatury. Czytanie i pisanie „kobiece”
Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego
Katowice 2006
130 × 205 • 157 pages
paperback
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Izabela Filipiak
Obszary odmienności
słowo/obraz terytoria
Gdańsk 2007
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Max Cegielski
Pijani bogiem
W.A.B.
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Rights sold to: XXX

Rafał Górski
Bez państwa. Demokracje uczestniczące w działaniu
Korporacja Ha!art
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Last year was full of interesting publications devoted to the humanities. This subject's profile has become quite interdisciplinary indeed: it is quite difficult to pigeonhole a given book into clear subject boundaries. This thematic diversity of humanities literature keeps it from having a "target readership," and means that reading contemporary art manifestos also pulls us into debates on social communication and dialogues on politics.

Sometimes this attractive hybridity is part of the book's very structure, such as the seemingly historical work in which the Presidential economics advisor sets up a simulation game, asking what would have happened if Stalin or Hitler had won World War II, if the Bolshevik revolution had never taken place, or if China had not been defeated by Japan… (Witold M. Orłowski, *A Century of Chaos. Alternative Histories of the 20th Century*).

In a word: just because you pick up a book from a particular section does not mean that what you read will be confined to a narrow field, where only the language of a certain discipline is used.

It is with this awareness that we proceed to a brief overview of the books in the humanities from the year gone by. It's best we start off with politics, as the changes signified by the emblem of the "4th Republic" have been reflected in books critical of both the older and the more recent history. Following two balanced studies by the main ideologists of the largest political parties, PO and PiS (Paweł Śpiewak, *The Memory of Communism*, Zdzisław Krasnodębski, *The Democracy of the Outskirts*, both published in 2005 by słowo/obraz terytoria from Gdańsk), the time came for a virulent pamphlet against the "3rd Republic" by renowned journalist Rafał A. Ziemkiewicz (*All Things Michnik. The Inscription of a Disease*. Red Horse 2006). Regardless of the temperament of the writer, they share one premise arising from the "hermeneutics of suspicion" and whose aim is to expose: the first period of Poland's independence is diagnosed as pathology in liberal garb.

Liberalism (and neo-liberalism) is simultaneously exposed by the intellectual left-wing: Krakow's Ha!art publishers have begun a "radical line" series which is meant to speak about society through marginalised voices. We read in the declarations of the series' creators that it represents a "worldview of freedom and a perspective of independent activism." The first volume references Miłosz's The Captive Mind (*The Captive Mind 2*, eds. Ewa Majewska and Janek Sowa), determining the factors that make the mind "captive," from communism to liberalism; and the second volume radicalises this perspective, speaking of a democracy "without politicians" (Rafał Górski, *No Statehood. Democracy Participating in Action*).

The artists' statements collected in Artur Żmijewski's outstanding book are not so distant from this radical opposition to liberal mythology, again published by Ha!art in their radical leftist Political Criticism Series (Artur Żmijewski, *Live Flesh. Conversations with Artists*). Apart from the transcriptions of conversations with visual artists from the "critical art" movement (such as Paweł Althamer, Katarzyna Kozyra and Zbigniew Libera), the book includes numerous intimate testimonials (diary entries, design sketches), and a rich iconography. As Żmijewski writes in his introduction, this whole movement attempts a radical inclusion of art into public debate, treating the artist's statement as a form of discourse.

Voices from the Catholic church make a unique contribution to the Polish dialogue on modernity. An excellent example of this is the collection of conversations with Tadeusz Bartoś, recorded before his departure from the spiritual road (*Paths of Freedom. On Theology, Secularization, Democracy in the Church, Celibacy and...* Krzysztof Bielawski speaks with Tadeusz Bartoś). Taking some distance from the political circumstances of the church, Bartoś also delivers a great praise of theology. Tadeusz Bartoś's statements make for the third great confessions of a Polish priest critically evaluating his own Institution (the previous titles were: *Before God. Andrzej Brzeziecki and Jarosław Makowski speak with Stanisław Obirek*, WAB, Warsaw 2005, as well as Witold Bereś and Krzysztof Burnetko's *A Priest of Courage* [conversations with Father Stanisław Musiał]. Świat Książki 2006).

A few important literary criticism titles have been released in the year gone by, from *Return to the Center* by Przemysław Czapliński (our most perceptive critic of contemporary

literature), a book which traces the market reintegration of literary life after its disintegration in the years immediately following the transformation, through the basic edition of Gombrowicz's *Ferdydurke* edited by Włodzimierz Bolecki –with an almost 600-page critical supplement! – (Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2007) and the critical-feminist essays of Krystyna Kłosińska (Miniatures. *"Feminine" Reading and Writing*), to Maria Janion's post-colonial thoughts on the Polish phantasms of the Slavs (*Remarkable Slavism: Phantasms of Literature*. Wydawnictwo Literackie. Kraków 2006). The Slavic part of Polishness was rejected, and thus became the "uncanny," in the Freudian sense of the word. Wojciech Orliński (a chemist by profession) also makes his appearance as an amateur critical of literary criticism, with a dictionary devoted to Stanisław Lem (*What Are Sepullers? All about Lem*. Znak. Kraków 2007).

We should also make mention of two impressive attempts at biographies reconstructing the fates of forgotten women from a feminist perspective (Grażyna Kubica, *Malinowski's Sisters, or: Modern Women in the Early Twentieth Century*. Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2006; Izabela Filipiak, *Spaces of Difference. On Maria Komornicka*).

To conclude, we should turn our attention to a bit of travel reportage: to the neighboring Czech Republic – for Mariusz Szczygieł's Czech "Captive Mind" of sorts (*Gottland*, Czarne. Wołowiec 2006) – and to remote Pakistan, for Max Cegielski's attempts to establish dialogue with representatives of various streams of Islam (Max Cegielski, *Drunk on God*).

In a word: Polish humanist writing has had an impressive year in terms of the diversity of its scope – from the ancient Slavs to the modern-day Taliban.

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