48 new books from POLAND

Fall 2008

The Book Institute is a national cultural institution established by the Polish Ministry of Culture. It has been in operation in Kraków 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 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, Neil Gaiman, Etgar Keret, Jeffery Deaver 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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Jerzy Pilch
MARCH, POLONIA

Photo: Olga Majrowska

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The time: the first decade of the twenty-first century. The place: Poland. Yet these are not fixed coordinates, because nothing in this novel is certain, aside from the moment when the narrator goes out on the eve of his 52nd birthday intending to meet a new woman. He does not achieve his goal, but instead finds himself at an immense party thrown by Benjamin Infamus, who under martial law was the reviled spokesman of the communist authorities, and is now immensely rich. The parties held at his mansion are the subject of legendary stories told all around Poland.

The attraction of Infamus's home is an attraction to depravity. When people cross the threshold of his mansion they lose their identity. They are left with ritual disputes, which are all the fiercer for being utterly unproductive. The disputes take place above cellars in which the host has assembled a museum of the 20th century, including wax figures of Polish writers, world leaders and local communists. There are the skulls of victims of the Katyń massacre, the death masks of some famous people, women's lingerie and soccer strips of all the teams in the world. The heart of the subterranean part of the mansion, the most closely guarded place, is a special room occupied by a secret martyr—an unidentified dead or half-dead victim of history. Whoever he is, he functions in everyone's awareness as a reproach and at the same time as a human relic.

March, Polonia is a sort of diagnosis of groups that seek to monopolize the right to formulate communal ideas. In a phantasmagorical vision we see two camps at odds with one another: in one, all the old representatives of historical conflict are turned into museum exhibits; in the other, anachronistic nationalist-Catholic notions provide support for theatrical preparations for a massacre. Both sides "have stopped believing that there are normal people living in Poland, and so they manufacture artificial conflicts and make-believe solutions. Out of this confusion a perfidious apocalypse is born: the nationalists need Infamus's debauchery in order to set up their holiness in opposition to it, while the postmodern side requires the moral outrage of the patriots, because without it they cannot attain the gratification that arises from transgressing national commandments. It is no surprise, then, that in the closing scenes the narrator climbs into a carriage and leaves the country.

Przemysław Czapliński

Jerzy Pilch (born 1952) is a novelist and journalist, one of the best known contemporary Polish authors.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Spirit of Storytelling, Amen. On the eve of my fifty-second birthday I decided that the following day I would meet a new woman. This thought had been rattling around in my brain for a long time, but it had only gradually been assuming its definitive key.

I was not undertaking a frivolity; this was neither a game not a wager. I was not giving myself an easy task–my serious and ambitious intention was, within the next twenty-four hours, to meet, get to know, and seduce an intelligent, slim girl just shy of thirty years old and at least six feet in height.

I wanted to offer myself an intensive birthday present and I wanted to test whether I could afford to offer myself an intensive birthday present. On the surface I was in good shape, but I felt that the monster dwelling inside of me was beginning to die. People still regarded me as a rogue, but in essence I was relying on reputation alone. Appearances to the contrary, cynicism was never my strong suit; the irony and instrumental nature of my stories about women had once served to conceal the wrongs I did them. Now, I used the remnants of cynicism, the remains of irony and a show of instrumentalism to mask my despair and my longing.

For at least a year I had been prey to evil forebodings; my heart palpitated, and transcendency made itself felt ever more distinctly. I sought respite in writing my memoirs and listening to music. The memoirs soothed my nerves temporarily, but without any side-effects; music provided lengthy and profound relief, but with horrendous side-effects: the emptiness after *The Magic Flute* can be unbearable, and the withdrawal symptoms after overdosing on a Gluck aria is beyond endurance. Despite this, I was irresistibly drawn to that highest of art forms, I was drawn to listen the way I was once drawn to drink. This attraction was reflected in my love life, in which musical muses predominated.

At the time I was torn between a ballet dancer entering on a great career, an opera singer already embarked on a great career, and a violinist with a colorful past who was giving up on a great career.

Aside from this, it goes without saying that I put in calls to all kinds of women, and seduced models and waitresses and high school students; on the pretext of learning foreign languages I organized perpetual auditions of female teachers; I was dangerously intimate with an appetizingly rounded medical student; I was fond of conversations with a petite specialist in English-language literature who was entirely not my type; I was unable to resist the magnetic charms of a raven-haired genius at punctuation I had met completely by chance; I was waiting for a certain ever so young hired worker to return from Dublin (to her I spent a fortune on telephone calls); a sprinter who had once been famous and with whom I had had a spicy romance in 1999 lived close by and still constituted a considerable temptation; my thoughts often returned to Majka (a tall, willowy brunette) and Magda (a large-boned, squat albino), both of whom had visited me the previous summer and were as hot for me as they were for each other; I was entirely seriously considering marriage with a certain Estonian millionairess; I did not eschew street sluts; and I still had the impulsive feeling, thus intensifying my sense of chaos, that the most important encounter of all was still ahead of me.

Nevertheless, the opera singer, the ballet dancer and the violinist were the three pillars of my confusion. My relationship with the singer (whom the critics dubbed the Angelic Larynx) was the longest lasting, the most intense, and the most complicated. The ballet dancer had only been around for a short time; aside from orgasm, she was closed off to all human emotions. The violinist had only just appeared on the scene and the charm she exuded was divine. She did not exactly belong in the realm of profound emotions, but the shadow between her breasts when she wore a low-cut dress had the might of a major social movement.

Of the three of them she was the oldest, the most beautiful, and the craziest. She was well over forty, with a sepia-hued complexion, crisp features, and the figure of a fitness trainer. At times she seemed most intelligent person on earth; at others it was plain as day that she didn't get a thing.

She claimed she had the gift of the Holy Spirit and could read the minds of other people; she had a psychotherapist whom she exhausted mentally during excruciating sessions. Five days a week she would eat only wheat germ. On Tues-

days and Thursdays she went to the gym; on weekends she stayed in bed, drank Gorzka Żołądkowa vodka straight from the bottle and ate like a pig.

Over the telephone she would talk indescribable filth; she wrote shockingly pornographic text messages and sent e-mails filled with all kinds of depravity. Yet for weeks on end she wouldn't even let herself be kissed.

To top it all she adored Japanese restaurants and would only meet me there. The simplest trip to the movies, the theater, a concert, or for a walk—in her case this was out of the question. She always wriggled out of it, saying she had no time, though when it came down to it, it wasn't clear what she actually did. For at least a year she hadn't performed and hadn't practiced, she was not expanding her repertoire, she had no rehearsals and she didn't give lessons. She was married, but had been separated for years; even if she had matters of common interest with her separated husband, they were not time-consuming ones. But one way or the other, I had limited options: It was a choice between text messages, e-mail, or Japanese restaurants.

I carried on our correspondence enthusiastically; Japanese restaurants I hated with every fiber of my being. Even if I'd known how to eat with chopsticks I still would not have been able to: My hands shake like John Paul II's towards the end of his life.

With one trembling hand I would push things around on my plate, and with the other grope the violinist under the table. "What you're doing is very nice, your excellency," she would say, "but I'm not ready yet. My therapist says I'm not yet ready." I would wipe my sushi-stained fingers gently on her thong and withdraw my hand.

We would part with a studied but not forced coolness; I would swear to myself I'd never go out with her again and would not get in touch. A few days later, my phone would light up with a text message dripping with every erotic bodily fluid imaginable; an hour later I'd write back, and a week later I'd be sitting in the Japanese restaurant, raw fish stuck in my craw.

Translated by Bill Johnston

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Photo: Elżbieta Lempp

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Paweł Huelle is undoubtedly one of Poland's best contemporary novelists, as his latest collection of short stories confirms. In some of them we find a continuation of topics that have featured before in his work, such as the history of the Mennonite congregation that settled in Żuławy, and whose traditions and culture were brought to an end by the Second World War. However, most of the stories take up new themes. They are not, as in Huelle's previous work, almost exclusively related to the city of Gdańsk. This time his protagonists set off into various parts of the world: to the island of Öland, to Zurich, New York, the Sahara and so on. Thus their reality becomes much larger, though even so most of the plots take the reader to the neighbourhood of Huelle's native city, which, like a wind-rose, focuses various human fortunes. At the centre of these stories is human fate regarded like a hieroglyph, because the author looks for meaning in it, some structural crowning point, but what he usually finds is a mystery, an unexpected or quite absurd coincidence. Joachim von Kotwitz, the descendant of a Pomeranian Junker family, is tired and disgusted by nationalist conflicts in his own home land and devotes his life and property to the search for a mythical "primordial language", common to all people. But having reached the Sahara he falls into the hands of Berber robbers (*Abulafia*). The hero of *Franz Carl Weber* unexpectedly inherits a large sum of money from his father, but on a journey to Zurich to collect his golden fleece, instead of behaving like a millionaire, he tries to make the dreams of his childhood and youth come true, involving an electric railway and a romantic adventure with a woman he met by chance and who is mad with disappointed love.

Thus in Huelle's work the hieroglyph of life has no unambiguous solution – the hero stares at its declensions like the recommendations of the Chinese Book of Changes, which gives foggy answers requiring further interpretation, though perhaps it is not so much about understanding the meaning of events as merely – in the words of the mysterious Doctor Cheng – "liberating oneself from thought and accepting reality".

Jerzy Jarzębski

Paweł Huelle (born 1957) is one of the most popular modern Polish novelists, whose work has been published in more than fifteen foreign languages.

The trams and buses weren't running any more, so there was a terrible crush in the local train. There was no other way to reach the centre of Gdańsk, and of course that was where everyone wanted to go, to the main station, from where it only took seven minutes to get to the shipyard gates. And either in a whisper or in a lowered tone everyone really was talking about the same thing: so far they're not shooting yet! But they're sure to start, there can be no doubt, the only question is when? I too could remember that December, exactly ten years ago: my father and I had gone up to the loft to listen for noises from the city centre through the open mansard window. The frosty air carried the boom of single shots, ambulance sirens and the rumble of tanks. The glow of fire shone red over the city. Now and then a helicopter appeared in the gloomy expanse behind it, firing flares, and then, in the brief flash of light, we could clearly hear two or three bursts of heavy machine-gun fire. There were moments when all these noises stopped, and we thought we could hear the shouts of the crowd repeatedly rising and falling.

"Just remember," my father had said as we made our way down two floors to our flat, "this is the beginning of their end." Naturally when he said "their" he wasn't thinking of the workers. A few days later I saw the burned-down Party headquarters from the tram window, once the curfew had been lifted. At the Hucisko crossroads, right by the tram stop, I found a shipyard helmet flattened like a matchbox. The stench of burning and teargas was everywhere. The food price hikes had been withdrawn and people were hurriedly doing their Christmas shopping. Just as hurriedly the portraits of the leaders who had been ejected from their posts were being removed from all the classrooms at my school. Our art teacher turned a blind eye as we burned them on a big pyre next to the school dump. Cyrankiewicz took far longer to burn than Gomułka, maybe because his pictures were on worse paper. At home in the evenings it was the only thing people talked about: how the workers had sung the Internationale before the Gdansk committee, how they had been shot at in Gdynia, how those arrested had been tortured, how those killed had been buried on the quiet with the help of secret agents, how the Soviet warships were anchored off our city, and how on television the new Party secretary was promising the whole nation peace, prosperity and justice.

It was all running through my memory like a long forgotten black-and-white film from childhood. Now, as the crowd of sweaty people poured from the train onto the platform and headed in the hot August sun towards the shipyard gates, it was hard to imagine anyone wanting to shoot at this colourful motley of locals, tourists and holidaymakers, and certainly not in daylight in full view of the foreign journalists' cameras. Apart from the obvious advantage of summer over winter there was another, much more profound difference. This time the workers had shut themselves inside the shipyard rather than coming out onto the streets, and it was the street that was coming to them, bringing food, money and information all the time. At the shipyard gates, alongside bouquets of flowers and a Polish flag someone had hung a portrait of the Pope. The communiqués read over a loudspeaker sounded like a litany: factories all over Poland were joining the strike literally by the hour. The plaster Lenin in the shipyard conference hall was having to watch patiently as the demand was formulated: yes, we want a pay rise, but more than that we want to have our own, completely independent trade unions.

"So far it's like a picnic," I heard Fredek's voice behind me, "but I wonder how it'll end?"

"If they're going to crush them," I said, turning to face him, and saw he had come on his bike, "they'll only do it at night, when there's no one here."

"Maybe so," said Fredek, who didn't look worried, "but first they'll have to force the gates with a tank. Then fetch them out from every corner of the shipyard. With a bit of passive resistance that'll take hours. But what if the lads set off a few acetylene cylinders? Or get on board a ship and cut the hawsers?" At last we had reached the fence right next to the gates and Fredek had parked his bike, leaning it against the wire netting. "Besides, there's one more thing too," he said, pointing at the portrait of the Pope. "We've got him, and that's better than the troops!"

"I'd rather rely on a few dozen striking factories. And the ones that are ready to join in."

"Well, it's actually happening," said Fredek; he took out a packet of Sport cigarettes and we lit up. "It's a real revolution, can't you see?"

Like this we passed the quarter hours, smoking and chatting, that was all. More and more delegations were being let through the gates, greeted with applause. Communiqués, committee resolutions, poems and prayers came pouring from the loudspeaker non-stop. And the mood of the endless rally intensified when a worker wearing an armband appeared from inside the gates: hands black with printer's ink, he threw leaflets into the rippling crowd. Not a single scrap of paper was left on the ground. Everyone wanted his own copy of the bulletin that the censor hadn't vandalised in advance, if only as a souvenir.

"Not a bad duplicator," reckoned Fredek, "but they're using too much ink, they haven't got the experience yet."

"If only they'd read it out on the radio too," I joked, "to the whole country, don't you think?"

"We haven't got the radio yet," said Fredek, having a serious thought. "But have you got a bike?"

"No," I replied, "but you must have heard what they said," – I pointed at the loudspeaker. "At the committee's request the railway workers aren't going to stop the trains. So the city won't be paralysed."

"That's not what I meant," said Fredek dismissively. "What do I care about the railway? I'm thinking of the bicycle express!"

And that was how, from Fredek's simple idea, my own August revolution began. Next day I called at the shop on Holy Ghost Street.

"They're selling like hot cakes," said the salesman, smiling. "Or rather we're sold out already – there's just that one left." He pointed to a dark corner of the shop. "Rather a clunky import from Big Brother, and I haven't got any spare inner tubes for it."

Minutes later I was riding from Holy Ghost Street into Tkacka Street on a heavy but sturdy Ukraina bike, resistant to frost, cobblestones, rain, sun, sand and puddles. It had a very solid basket, a set of keys in a small box under the saddle, a dynamo and lights. Only the bell didn't work, as if something inside its simple mechanism was welded together, but it didn't matter. I rode slowly past the Arsenal building, the theatre, the market hall and the Academy of Sciences library, aware that the seat was a bit hard and would give me trouble unless I covered it with an old beret or a towel in the traditional way.

"Good heavens!" groaned Fredek when we met that evening on the corner of Łagiewniki Street. "It's an armoured train instead of the cavalry! A propos, did you listen to Radio Free Europe yesterday? The Russkies are making noises about manoeuvres, saying they're hurrying them up and things like that. Do you think they'll invade?"

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Photo: Maciej Zienkiewicz/Agencja Gazeta

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The hero of the novel *That's All* is a mature, embittered writer called Marek Torm. At one time he was a great literary star, author of eleven novels that were greatly admired and were published in huge print-runs. His run of good luck ended with the change of regime in 1989. Torm suffered a creative crisis, did not publish anything for a long time, and was quickly forgotten. He is convinced that in today's literary culture the only writers with a chance of fame and recognition are those who are capable of causing a sensation (best of all a sex scandal) that the gutter press will write about, and that will attract the interest of television. He hopes that as the result of a shocking event his books will be reissued and a renewal of interest in him will follow, so he decides to videotape his own suicide. He plans to make a pitiful farewell speech to the camera and then shoot himself in the head with a pistol. For this purpose he travels from Warsaw to Krakow, the scene of his happy youth, when he enjoyed literary success and lots of amorous conquests. He moves into a flat that his publisher has provided for him as a convenient place to work. The narrative of *That's All* is the frustrated writer's monologue, and develops in two directions. On the present time-scale it is about the last three days preceding the suicide, which Torm spends on his own, drinking vodka and brooding on the past. The broadest layer is formed by these reflections – a sequence of digressive recollections and score-settling. Here the main feature, characterised by radical misogyny, is his effort to square accounts with the women in his life; into the foreground emerges the painful and at the same time extremely ironical balance sheet of his marriage. There are plenty of hints within the story to invalidate the reality of his declaration on the matter. Perhaps here we are dealing with a refined literary joke, a fiction within fiction, a morose as well as comical fantasy on the condition of the modern artist.

Dariusz Nowacki

Janusz Anderman (born 1949) is a novelist and author of film scripts, stage and radio plays, as well as a translator of Czech literature.

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I have come to this city to kill myself in a spectacular way. I have decided to make an impression by shooting myself, because I want to survive. My shocking death, which is sure to be well publicised, will give my books a new lease of life for years to come: they will be sought out and read, connoisseurs of literature will heedfully pass the beads of my words through their fingers, and sentimental female students of Polish will write dissertations on those forgotten works. Maybe doctoral theses will appear, and I'll get onto the school reading lists? They're sure to feature in the textbooks for a long time yet, and in popular studies I'll be defined as a doomed writer. It sounds pretentious, but beautiful.

I haven't written a book for years. At one time, in the days of the old regime, my name was on everybody's lips. Torm, my atypical, easy-to-remember surname, meant a lot in literature. It was respected and highly acclaimed. In the course of eleven years I published eleven novels. The publishers sought me out, and at every historical moment I knew how to operate with a refined efficiency that allowed me to maintain the love of my readers, the recognition of the literary milieu and a certain neutrality on the part of the authorities. On my part this demanded various tactical moves, but it wasn't all that hard. I only had to act in advance, sometimes to foresee events and political trends, and to sense the moment when it was best to hide in the shadows.

At first the critics wrote that I was the hope of literature, later that the hope had been fulfilled, and one day one of them defined me as an outstanding writer.

After the fall of the regime I wrote two more novels, but for the first time ever my instincts let me down. Above all I published them at the wrong moment. I should have waited a few years, and only then reminded people about myself. I hurried, and that was a disastrous move. In fact the print-runs were still enormous, but the market was flooded with books by émigré writers that were bought out of curiosity, and third-rate Western romances, translated in a few nights by gangs of students hired by the publishers; each one got about a dozen pages to translate, and the resulting books went straight to press and reached the bookshops in attractive, gilded covers with embossed lettering never seen here before.

In this tidal wave my novels drowned. On top of that, in those stormy times, interest in literature soon began to wane. Colour weeklies and monthlies appeared and disappeared, new television channels came into being, and the screens were populated by a large crowd of heroes from countless soap operas; not much time had passed, but no one had the urge or the time to read books any more. A few years later the situation had improved and stabilised a bit, but I was already regarded as an author who brought substantial losses.

I experienced the first humiliation in my life as a writer when I saw my novel on sale at the Hala Koszykowa covered market. Hundreds of titles had been stuffed into plastic containers without any discrimination. The only difference was the prices, written on pieces of cardboard. I spotted myself in the box marked with the lowest price. I rapidly left that graveyard, because I was terrified that one of the numerous shoppers might recognise my face.

I immediately called the publisher and informed him that I was terminating our agreement. He couldn't understand why.

"I don't understand, Mr Torm," he said.

"Why not? What's so bloody difficult about it? My book at the Hala Koszykowa? In a box? Like some bloody carrots or something? Like potatoes?"

"You don't understand the new times. It's nothing to do with me, it's the wholesaler who took several hundred copies in one go and failed to get rid of them in the bookshops. But we had to send most of the print-run that I couldn't foist on the wholesalers to be pulped."

That was a word I had never heard before.

"Bloody hell, is it like in Hitler's time already? Like the Stalin era? In that case maybe it'd be simpler to just burn books on pyres?"

"You don't understand reality," said the publisher calmly, and then suddenly he lost his temper. "Do you bloody well know what it costs to keep printed books in a warehouse?

The cost exceeds the value of the books! Who's going to cover those expenses? Me, perhaps? Well, fuck that!" shouted this hitherto subtle connoisseur of the classics, and without answering I hung up.

And after that, for years on end I have failed to write a single novel.

Now I have come to this city to kill myself in a spectacular way, and by doing so to force the readers, critics and historians of literature to bring my old novels back to life.

The laying of this plan was triggered by a chance encounter at the Book Fair, to which, out of old habit, I went.

The place where I'm going to shoot myself is the dream location. It is a high clock tower, adjoining the publishing house building. To climb up it, you have to go into the publisher's vestibule, make your way into a gloomy little courtyard and turn right, into a doorway. Then all you have to do is surmount eighty-two concrete steps. On the right off the final landing there's an entrance to an area from which I think you can go higher, up to where the clockwork is housed. On the left there's a door into the publisher's service flat. You enter a long corridor, off which there is a toilet. Through another door the corridor continues. Three doors lead off it into a kitchen, a bathroom and a living room, from which you go through into a bedroom. In the main room, directly opposite a three-winged bow window, stands a large table, at which I am supposed to be writing a book, but I won't be needing it. I will be making use of one of the two armchairs and a small round table. There's other stuff here, but it's of no use to me. There are three cupboards with lockers and bookshelves. In one of them, behind some small glass doors there's a photo from years ago, printed off and glued to a piece of cardboard. It shows this same building with the clock tower; the hands are stuck at twelve thirty-three. In the photograph there's a curtain or drape hanging in the central part of my three-winged window. The caption reads: "Chamber of Commerce and Industry". There's no way of telling when the building was photographed, because I don't recognise the vehicles at the foot of it. Two of them are droshkies. But the three with their backs facing? Droshkies too, with their hoods up? Or maybe the first taxicabs? More like droshkies, because the wheel rims are extremely narrow. So maybe the picture dates from the beginning of the century. It doesn't matter.

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Inga Iwasiów
BAMBINO

Photo: Marta Eloy Cichocka

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Bambino is a story about people and a place, or rather places. One of them is the Bambino snack bar, where the four main characters meet. Another is the whole of Szczecin and the surrounding area, a city that has been badly churned up by history, to which people from various parts of Poland made their way after the war. We follow the fortunes of the four heroes from before the war up to 1980. Marysia was born into a large family in the south-eastern borderlands (now Ukraine). After the war, she and her entire family were repatriated to Poland, where they were given a home in a Pomeranian village. She was the only one who managed to get away to the city, where she became a nurse. There she met Janek (and married him), a bastard from a village near Poznań who was abandoned by his mother and later tried to get his own back for years of humiliation by choosing to work for the security service, which ultimately led to the collapse of their marriage. Anna comes from Gorlice, which she left to escape an overly strict mother and a stepfather who didn't care about her. She had a hard time finishing her studies, and got married late in life, purely for practical reasons, to a merchant navy captain who is older than her. Ula is a German by origin, and is the only one of the main characters to have been born in Szczecin. Because of the war, she almost entirely lost contact with her family, which meant that she has stayed in the city, trying to live like an ordinary Pole. Her not very ardent relationship with Stefan, a Jew who survived the Holocaust and the only man she has ever wanted to be with, was cut cruelly short by history, as Stefan was forced to leave the country in 1968.

Iwasiów sketches the life stories of actual people, which are firmly set in their socio-historical background, but which also come together to form a single model of human fate: that of people who are crippled, battling in vain with the traumas and painful memories of the past which ultimately cause all of them to suffer defeat, miss their opportunities in life and feel unfulfilled, or simply unhappy. *Bambino* is first and foremost about the painful consequences of being uprooted and having one's identity shaken. It is a sort of family-and-city saga that gives the reader a better understanding of Poland and the Poles, and also of himself.

Robert Ostaszewski

Inga Iwasiów (born 1963) is a writer, literary critic and professor of literature at the University of Szczecin.

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Maria carries it inside her, I swear. An image of the journey, but not only. Something that happened in the course of it. Something left far behind her. Like all the others, she has this something inside her, the threads run together, the genes, they intersect, various things can arise from this combination, and I want to find out who they are – perhaps it is actually my story, but it could just as well be not mine or anyone else's. I want to rummage in the pictures, carbon copies and waste paper. There's nothing to hold on to, no album, no diary, no central concept, apart from need. There are just disconnected stories instead, whatever someone has made up about himself. About the person he is. And a life, quite simply, his or whoever's, past and continuing. That's all we have on the subject. Centrifugal motion, stealing up from behind, the same thing but with no prospect of the same thing. The mother of all such lost illusions – that's Maria.

I'm starting with Maria, because her name attracts me. All women are called EveMaria. This one all the more so, as if she were made out of her name straight off from the start, more than Eve, naturally, less marked out, or chosen from the crowd, but then no one ever promised her that. No one did, in naming the girl, yet that's just what she longs for, to be designated. Thoughtlessly giving a girl that name is a way of tempting and inviting fate. It means she is marked out for sure, but let us not forget that Maria is a common name in this situation. It is sure to be the name of every third heroine whose life began in the circumstances that interest me, the ones I regard as a part of the image of the journey. Quite simply, our grannies often had that name. I've got nothing to be proud of, because we'll see what happens to those names and to them further on. They were only brought here in 1957. They were brought here. They were brought by train, but first someone gave permission, issued documents and stamped their decision on them. First came their and those people's hesitation, the decision was just about to be made, but then the hand was withdrawn, the circle turned, and they went on standing by the same fence. Until that final moment. And it wasn't at all funny or heroic in those – of course, nowadays we say "cattle" trucks.

But everyone travelled in them – what could they expect? It was still just after the war. All the transport had been used up, the saloon cars had been used for something else, to transport important people who took important decisions, even the fourth-class carriages, carriages of every class. So what did the people and all their things end up packing into? And what sort of – who, where – cattle did it carry? What did "cattle" mean at the time when those railway trucks left German, usually German factories? Russian, Soviet factories worked to a different track gauge, and thus a different axle size, which could, which did serve many sentimental, symbolic arguments. Thus emphasising, repeating the fact that they travelled in cattle… Each one of them, each woman and each man, once travelled on some sort of train to a city, then further on, to a bigger city. If we compare what else "cattle" starts to mean. They too had taken their decision, a decision that could not be regarded as fully independent. In fact it can't really be called a decision. Yes, that should be the starting point – it can't be called a decision. The decision starts later on, it can be added onto events. They burn your house down, they come and take your crops again, and there aren't even any potatoes; nor has there been work for a long time, no work as such (maybe there never actually was work as such; yes indeed, at one time there was even work as a sign of the fact that you exist); the kitchen garden's been torn up to the last cucumber, at school the children are being taught to forget their own language (at least that's what's being said, because no one's really sure they're not teaching them the language, which is another delicate matter, the right language for the future); the neighbour opposite must have said something to her NKVD lover – she's got a grudge about some old stuff, some slander perhaps, and the neighbour on the left keeps saying louder and louder that it's strange. Maybe she resents their youth – they come home from dances, but she's not with the guy she fancied. Whereas that girl… of course she's with the guy she fancied… The usual issues, whether village or suburban, everyone's familiar with them, everyone experiences them, though they soon have no idea what they're about, they only mean something from a suitable distance.

The fact that they weren't taken east is strange. The fact that they weren't taken away from here is strange. The fact that they don't know what they want is strange. The fact that they're just sitting here is strange. The fact that… No one knows best what's better. What language to use. For what reason they should be taken away. If only someone would take a liking to their farm. Reasons are always for some reason. So for years they've been waiting for a decision, and they have to decide for themselves who they're more like. Which grandfather to hide, and which to put on show. Which grandfather could provide an alibi, or prove valuable.

Although both of them, and going back, the great-grandfathers, branching off into the almost mythical past – and let's mention the mythical great-great grandmothers too; they always knew how to borrow, flour or language – in other words it's the grandparents who usually prove to be decisive, the bedrock of the ages examined in retrospect, even when they are legendarily silent, because in silence there should have been thought, but in fact there was plain autism, basic, the most basic stupidity, every few generations, or in side lines interlaced with a talent for telling stories, which like a bad gene make for worse survival, because someone who talks can condemn himself. For the memory of sons and grandsons, these autistic and these eloquent grandparents are inarguably the most important, and for the daughters Daddy is… well, well! What a guy he was. We don't know why, or what exactly Daddy did, we just accept this knowledge from past generations – who the father was and who the mother was. And so do they, the past, not especially cherished in a rural or suburban area, suddenly brought into the light of day. We learn language from our mothers, but what could they tell us in those cottages with the low ceilings and the souvenir print of the Virgin Mary of somewhere-or-other? What could they have said? I'd rather not hear those tales.

A faded photo of great-grandmother with great-grandfather, stiff poses, and there in the background, in yellow-stained sepia, we can see the poverty. Through the yellow-stained sepia the poverty, or rather the mouldiness of that neighbourhood covered in lush greenery, is even more visible. The mouldiness of this life. The poverty of the neighbourhood and the people, their charm undoubtedly belongs to the past, as they pose for the photograph, but we should assume it may always have been doubtful. Because of poverty, which adds nothing good to figures or features. Charm might show in the children, and so people often say: 'Just like Daddy', or 'That's Mummy when she was young'. But in the basic issue there is nothing to hide, there is nothing to say about tradition. Apart from the tradition of a bowl of porridge.

Translated by Antonia Lloyd- Jones

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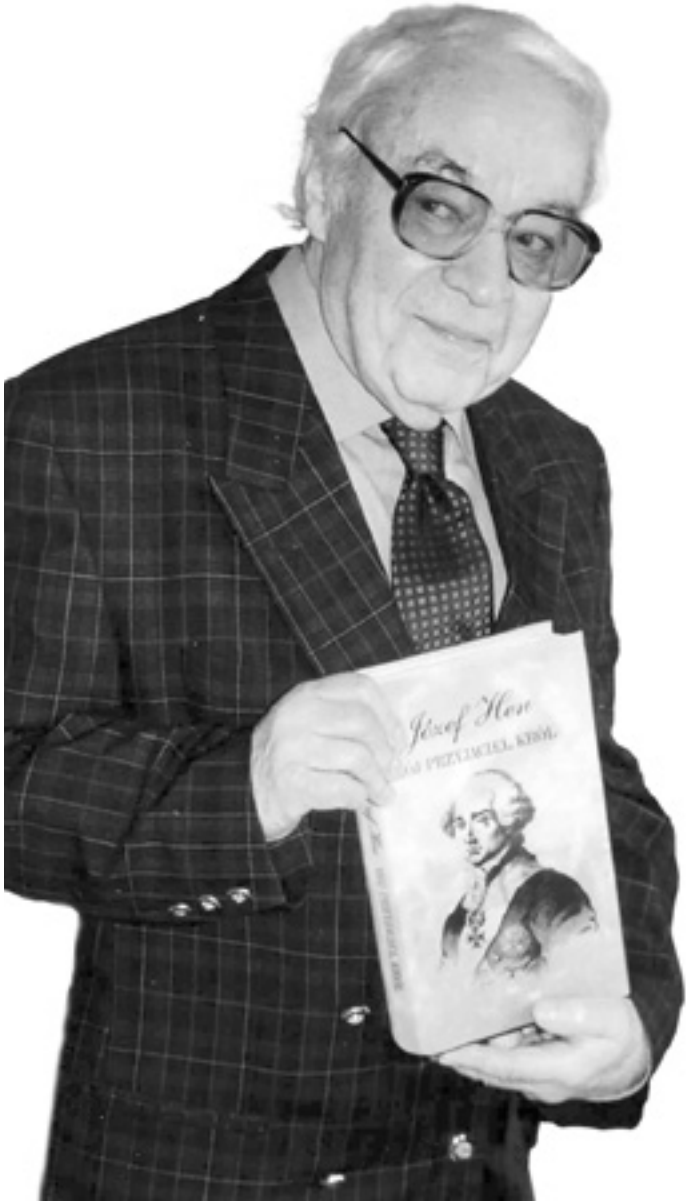

Józef Hen THE PING-PONG PLAYER

Photo: Magdalena Słysz

The Ping-Pong Player is a popular novel that does not avoid satirical and romantic themes. It is based on the true story of the massacre in Jedwabne, a small town in north-eastern Poland, where in July 1941, at the instigation of the Germans, the Polish residents murdered their Jewish neighbours. The book is set in 2001. Mike Murphy, a retired judge who used to live in the town, arrives from America for a ceremony to unveil a monument commemorating the victims. In those days, as a teenager, he failed to save the life of his Jewish friend, with whom he used to play ping-pong with a passion. Some of the perpetrators of the massacre are still living in the town. The history of the occupation is judged in various ways by its present-day citizens. Years on, conversations with the witnesses, the culprits and accessories to the pogrom, their sons and daughters, with new residents as well as with people who have come from abroad for the ceremony, provide the opportunity for a bitter reckoning with the past. Time and again murky secrets to do with the pogrom are revealed, and time and again the murky side of human nature comes to the fore. The history of the twentieth century, especially the history of this bit of Europe, is a tragi-farce, says the hero of the novel. The graveyard where the victims lie will indeed by tidied up, but the former criminals and their descendants are still exercising their authority here. Life goes on in the town undefeated: romantic liaisons and new friendships are being made, radical conversations are even being held, but the fairy-tale happy ending is merely superficial. Coming to terms with the past is a parody, the criminals remain unpunished, the secret of our deeds unfathomed. Some consciences are stirred, and there are people of good will living alongside the callous culprits, but above it all rises the raving of the local idiot, who, brainwashed by the anti-Semitic propaganda of the right-wing press, regards the ceremony taking place in the town as a Jewish plot aimed at swindling massive compensation out of Poland.

Marek Zaleski

Józef Hen (born 1923) is a novelist, biographer, essayist and screenwriter, with a keen following in Poland and abroad. His works have been translated into eighteen languages.

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He was waiting for them in front of the house – just as the journalist had described him, tall and wiry, Gerwazy without the moustache, with several days' grey stubble on his face. They introduced themselves to each other, and went across to the orchard, under the branches of the fruit trees. Would you like something to drink, he asked them. Some kvass? No thank you, we've had something, in any case Judge Murphy hasn't the time.

"Mr Stefan," Ania encouraged him. "Please tell the judge about your orchard."

"These are cherries… you see? And those ones over there are apple trees. Some of the flowers were killed by the frost, some survived. You see, Sir, they used to grow at the Ehrlichs' place."

Mike stared at the red of a tractor standing among the trees as some hens fluttered onto it and started pecking – they must have found some scattered grain.

"I was friendly with Zygmuś Ehrlich," he said at last. "The boy Waldek shot."

"Yes, I know. So what was he like, the young Ehrlich? I don't remember him." After a pause he added: "Just his sister, Mirka."

"How did the trees get here?"

"I dug them up from their orchard and brought them home."

"Snopek let you do that?"

"He wasn't in charge here yet. There was a period with no owners, you could say, so the trees would have gone wild. I rescued them."

"You profited by it."

"A tree has a right to live. That's what it's for."

It would have been too simple to say: doesn't a man have a right to live? Trite. Then Mr Stefan admitted: "Yes, I profited."

"And do you have a cat?"

"I've got two. Why do you ask?"

"You probably know. Because Kaźko Butrym…"

"He won't come here," said the fruit farmer gloomily.

"How do you know? He's a madman."

"Even a madman knows where he'll get a beating."

They went into the flat. There was a large table and some chairs. By the wall there was a grandfather clock at a standstill – a quarter past nine. When did it stop moving at that time? And why didn't this lonely man get it going again? Mike pointed at the clock and asked:

"Theirs?"

"No. It was the Wolfowiczes'. I got to their place and said they had to go, that Kostek had given orders, you know the one, Waldek's father, it was him, and Wolfowicz said to me: 'Take it, Stefan, take it, I'd prefer you to take it.' "

"Why did he prefer you to?" The man spread his hands.

"I don't know. Maybe he sensed there was no satisfaction in me. I don't know," he repeated. "He gave me a wristwatch too, saying 'Take it, why should anyone else take it?' "

"Where is the watch?"

"I gave it to my son."

"For his first communion?"

"Yes…"

"Did he know whose watch it was?"

"No, how should he? He may have guessed later on." He looked sad. "I haven't seen my son for a very long time. Maybe he threw it in the river."

"Would you be angry with him?"

"For that? No, I don't think so. Though a thing is a thing. It has to be respected. But nowadays I wouldn't be surprised."

"What about then?"

"I took the watch, didn't I?"

"Did you say thank you to Mr Wolfowicz?"

"I don't know. Probably not. Maybe I took it as if it was owed to me. For the hard work. Because it was hard labour, like digging a ditch. That Mr Wolfowicz – this might interest you – as we were leaving the house he was muttering something, in Hebrew I think it was. So I ask: what's that you're mumbling? And he said: the Book of Job." The fruit farmer shook his head pensively, and then said: "I got to that years later."

"To the Book of Job?"

"Yes. I've got the Holy Scripture, I have, but the evangelical one."

"And what did you read there?"

"That it ends well. Job started a new family and got rich again."

"But your Job died in the flames, you meant to say?"

"He died in the flames, that's just what I meant to say."

"So there was no point in comparing himself with Job?"

The fruit farmer didn't answer. He just shook his head in his own way, and Mike began to suspect it was a tic he had acquired. He asked:

"Were you at the barn? How did you feel there?" An alarm clock could be heard ticking. The fruit farmer went up to the motionless grandfather clock. He gazed at its frozen face and stammered:

"Dreadful."

He thinks like that now – did he then, as well?

"Did you think: 'What am I doing here?' "

"I can't remember. I probably didn't think anything. My mind was a blank. I remember feeling thirsty."

"So why do you say 'dreadful'?"

"Because I felt that too. Something dreadful.'

"Mr Stefan," said the journalist, "please tell us about Mirka. Listen to this, Judge."

The host sat down at the table and propped his head in his hands.

"Mirka…" he began. "She was older than your friend. She was about nineteen. All ready to get married. A beautiful girl. She wasn't at home, they came for the Ehrlichs, she hid outside town. That was when you took your friend away."

"I was unsuccessful," said Mike.

"Unsuccessful. Waldek was after you, I know. I was going home across the field, tired, I could hardly stand up, when look, there's Mirka running towards me. Her hair's tousled, there are ears of corn in it, her eyes are like a madwoman's. I shout: Hey, girl, where are you going? Hide yourself! And she replies: I want to go to Mama and Zygmuś! It's too late for them, I say, you can save yourself, go back where you came from! And thump, she's on her knees. Mr Stefanek, please shoot me, I beg you, I want to go to Mama! And I say: Have you lost your mind? You can live! What a pity for such a lovely girl!"

"You said it differently," stated Mike without hesitation.

"Well yes, I said it differently, I was a boorish lout. It has sometimes occurred to me that if I had said it more subtly, wisely… And she said: Stefan, I beg you, do it for me, I want to be with Mama. I'm going to die anyway, it's my last request, it matters, and you've got a gun, so shoot."

"Was she crying?"

"I don't think so. I took my pistol from my belt and shot her straight in the heart. So she wouldn't suffer.

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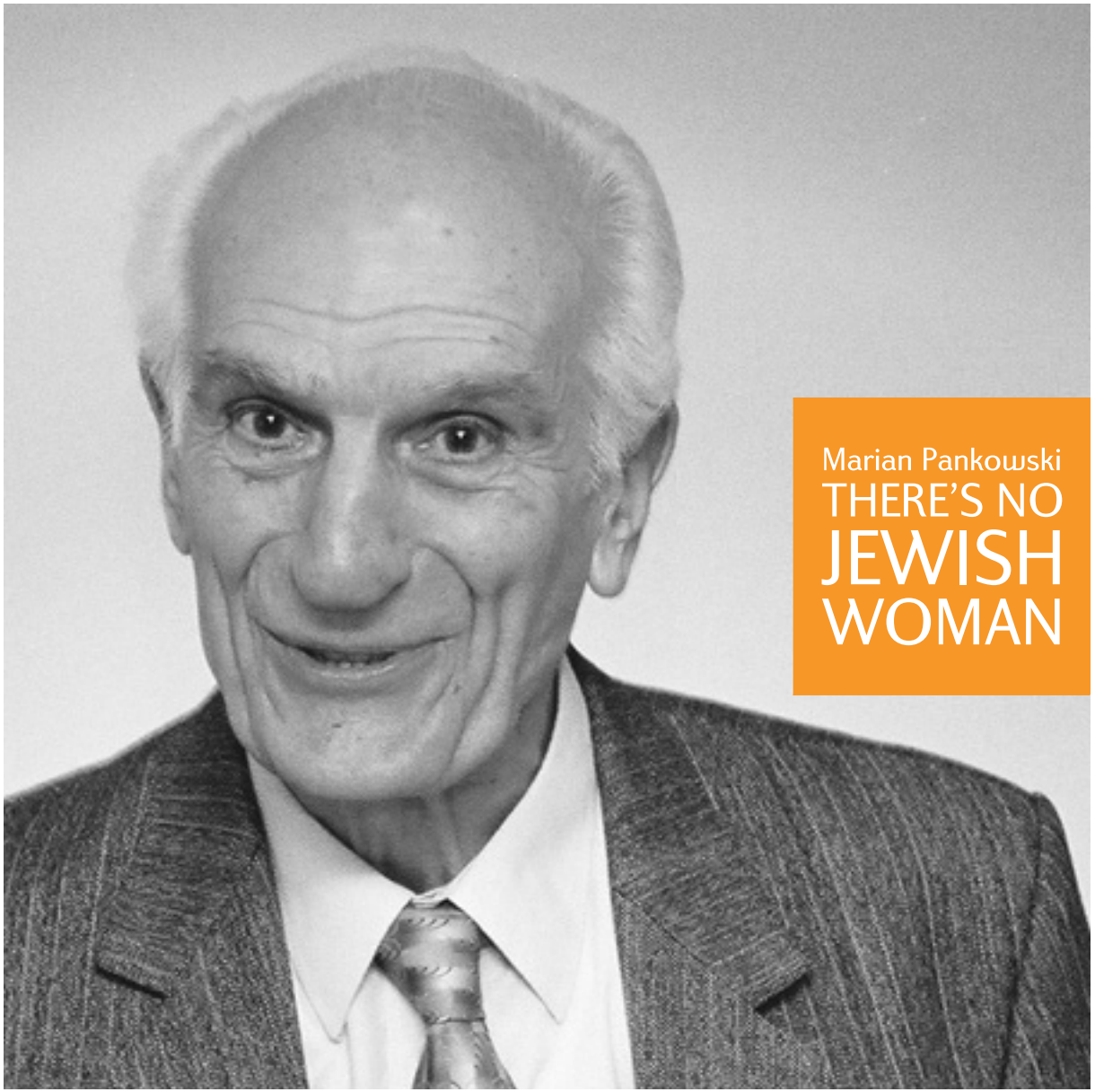

Photo: Patrycja Musiał

Marian Pankowski has lived in Brussels since 1945. He is a novelist, poet and dramatist, the author of "subversive" literature specialising in controversial themes, taboos and hushed-up affairs. His most famous novel, *Rudolf* (1980), which has been translated into many languages, is the story of the friendship between an ageing Polish university professor who is a political émigré and one-time prisoner in a German concentration camp, and a slightly older German brought up on the Vistula, a former soldier in the Wehrmacht who dodged front-line action and is a homosexual. In recent years Pankowski's linguistically innovative and morally daring prose has become the object of fascination for young Polish writers and readers. The Polish gay movement and the young literary left wing regard Pankowski as their guru. His older books are now being reissued and awarded new prizes and distinctions.

This slim volume, *There's No Jewish Woman*, is dedicated to his wife, Regina Pankowska, nee Fern, and the story of the fictional Fajga Oberlender, who escapes from a transport on its way to an extermination camp, is a version of her fortunes during the Nazi occupation. This is prose full of linguistic fireworks, of a lineage that is hard to classify in terms of genre: at times it reads like dramatised scenes fitted with a prologue and an epilogue; in it, dirge and lamentation feature alongside scenes evoked from memory and imagination, and the fictional story is interrupted by the author's digressions. As he often has lately, Pankowski takes up the topic of the war, the occupation and the Holocaust, and does it with a writer's typically offhand manner: "Just then the Lord God was at Castel Gandolfo, playing patience. He hadn't the time to be at Auschwitz." The story of what happened to Fajga during the occupation is one long stream of humiliations, proof of how alien the fate of the Poles and Jews was, but the scenes from her time in America also show how alien she is within the local Jewish society, which is incapable of understanding her wartime experiences.

Marian Pankowski (born 1919) is a poet, novelist, playwright, literary critic, historian of literature and professor emeritus of the Université Libre in Brussels.

Marek Zaleski

Fajga Oberlender,
about what happened.

"It was the end of March. The thaw. The gutters were making a nice noise. The blackbirds were calling each other. The children – I could hear them through the draughty planks of my hut – were playing their first game of hide-and-seek … As if I'd caught their carefree mood, I got up from my bed of straw," – her face wrinkles in embarrassment – "and started to twirl, just like that, to do a sort of dance… And it came back to me how Mama used to sing… I was prancing about, humming" – carried away, she starts singing a Yiddish lullaby, Wigele; she comes to her senses and falls silent.

"What about the children?" Sara Krynitzer reminds her.

"I could hear their shouts, and when they stopped, I thought they'd gone off, gone home… but all the time they were spying on me! Through knotholes in the wood. They ran off to Marek's mother."

A voice off-stage, or
events describe themselves.

"Mama," calls Marek from the doorway, "that Jewish woman who ran away, she didn't run away at all! She's hiding in the hut!"

"She's singing in there," says Jarek.

"And dancing."

"She's cuddling her baby, swinging and dancing…" say the voices of Ania and Manya. "You can hear a lullaby again, just as much as ever."

"Children! What a lot of nonsense!" she flares up. "A fine story you've cooked up, you little fibbers! Be off with you, out of my sight!"

The children have gone outside. They turn left, where the stream is. And no one knows what's dawning in their heads. Neither Baśka, nor her mother; only the author will hear Show-us-your-watch-Jarek shake his head and say:

"Marek… yer mum, what does she mean, we're 'fibbers'?! And that Jewish woman ain't there? I saw her – what about you, Manya?"

"I saw her too."

"Me too," adds Ania sounding scared. Marek agrees.

"I saw her too. Tomorrow we'll show her to Mama and Granny!" And he'll talk to the three little Indians in such a low whisper that not even the author can hear.

As every Saturday, Baśka, in other words Marek's mother, was doing the laundry, while Granny was going shopping. She takes a bag, but first she checks to see she's got some money. And along comes Marek and says:

"Granny… I can go and get the bread and rolls."

"All right, sonny," says Granny, pleasantly surprised. "You know what kind, a half-loaf… and six rolls… Wait, here's some money." She hands him some zloty notes.

Off goes Marek, proud as the frontline soldier storming the enemy in the story told by Mr Bałbecki, whose noble bravery definitely led to victory in the attack he described, during the Austrian offensive in the Balkans… He walks with his head up. A little later his three fellow conspirators join him.

They all go into the bakery together. Mrs Pancake, busy splitting a loaf for two lady customers, smiles at the little gang. It's their turn.

"So what can I get you, children?"

"Half a large loaf and six rolls, please… and also… a small challah." And he drops his crumpled banknote on the counter.

Already on their way out the women have turned around, and one of them is shaking her head at the baker, who is also intrigued by the children's final purchase.

"Is it for you, the challah?"

Silence, as they look at one another. But Marek has a head on his shoulders:

"We want to play at Jews, missus," he says.

The chubby Mrs Pancake snorts with laughter, laughter that is immediately lost in the wrinkles around her mouth, around the word she has at the ready, but that at the last moment she censors.

Fajga's account continued.

Let's go back to Mr and Mrs Hazenlauf's house in Azo-

jville. As if she has already got the better of the tumult of painful associations, Fajga calmly tells her story, as if she were reading Little Orphan Maria and the Dwarves to some sick children.

"I was woken up by those little brats running about and shouting. I get up, go over to my 'secret' door… draw the board aside… and there… on the compacted snow, three paces from the hut, lies a golden brown challah! My God, darling Baśka thought of giving me such a treat! A present to make me weep with gratitude! I nip out and in a quick grab I've got the challah. I haven't yet taken a step towards my hideout, when from behind the hut the children lean out and go:

'Jewish woman!
Jewish woman!
Dirty black like a nasty crow,
By night she steals, by day she lies low,
She poisons the well with paraffin,
She stinks like a rotten onion skin!'

"Just after that comes Baśka's voice, not a voice but a dreadful shriek, so bad that the children go on leaning out as if bewitched.

"'Get home right now! This instant!' " The way she's breathing you can hear the moment when it actually occurred. She looks at her fellow guests. "When it got dark… as if nothing had happened… I got a billycan of hot soup and a slice of bread and lard… I couldn't sleep. The children's rhyme was pounding away in my head – they were overjoyed because they'd hunted down a hungry animal by setting a cunningly chosen bait."

Fajga looks at the Jews from Azojville. Now a sort of sad smile runs across her face:

"Let the author tell what happened next… I wouldn't be capable."

The author picks up the thread of the story.

Once the children have sat down in the kitchen, Baśka waits a while, like a judge whose mere gaze is enough to stir a sense of guilt in the defendants. And now in a voice full of unexpected sweetness she encourages them to accept her version:

"Dear children… you've seen a few too many films… all that running about and shouting by the poor hut… You've thought up a fairytale about a Jewish woman, sure. She appeared, danced, and vanished. Nothing but a bad dream! That's enough of your silly game… Don't forget to say your catechism because Easter's not far off… You'll be singing 'He hangs on the cross' in the children's choir. And now… you can go and play a bit more."

The children haven't budged an inch. They go on sitting there.

Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones

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In September 1939 the Germans appointed Chaim Rumkowski President of the Łódź Judenrat. Rumkowski was a Jewish entrepreneur and an excellent administrator, who rapidly changed the poor, overpopulated Łódź ghetto into a perfectly, if inhumanly organised production zone. The President fought for the survival of the majority, so he always chose the "lesser evil": when the Germans demanded an increase in production, he increased it; when they demanded that the sick be given up for transportation, he gave them up; when they demanded that he hand over children under the age of ten, he handed them over. He reckoned the Jews' economic usefulness was their only bargaining chip, stronger than the Germans' anti-Semitism and their plans for the Holocaust.

So the Łódź ghetto continued to exist when all the other Jewish districts in Poland had long since been annihilated. About ten thousand Jews were saved from it, more than from any other part of Poland. So Rumkowski achieved a lot, though we should never forget at what cost. He forced everyone to do inhuman labour; he was incapable of bridling his own arrogance or resisting the temptation of wealth, and so by exploiting his position he was disloyal to his own people, who were starving to death.

Andrzej Bart's novel is a subtly constructed account of Chaim Rumkowski's trial. All the participants – the judge, the prosecutor, the defence lawyer and the jury – are Jews. By sentence of the court Rumkowski is condemned to "be eternally remembered just as he was" – a puffed-up fool whose vanity made him believe in his own unique qualities and in his mission to save the Jews.

Of course, this trial never actually took place. But Bart has come to the conclusion that everyone who came into contact with Rumkowski, all those who lived in the Łódź ghetto and were sent to Treblinka, have a right to express their view of the President of the Judenrat. As a result, this grotesque trial provides an opportunity to confront memory and to expose the moral ambivalence of the Holocaust era. What counted as betrayal for some of Rumkowski's co-workers proved to be some people's salvation.

Przemysław Czapliński

Andrzej Bart (born 1951) writes fiction, screenplays, and documentary films and is regarded as one of Poland's most interesting post-modernist authors.

"Today I'm going to talk about some sad things. So I hope the new ghetto population will take my words to heart. If the new arrivals refuse or are unable to adapt to the demands of life in the ghetto, I will be forced to find ways to make them conform to our conditions. I cannot allow the achievements of the Sisyphean labour performed in the year-and-a-half of the ghetto's autonomy to be reduced to nothing. I want you never to forget the fact that I have done all I can to avoid the potential for bloodshed, but nevertheless there is always a pointless fight going on against me. No opportunity is ever missed to rile me, if only in monosyllables or whispers. I never imagined that the refugees who came to us and found us in such a terribly difficult situation would deign to show such improbable arrogance and insolence…"

Regina saw pictures of Chaim making his speech on the screen. She had been there at the time and remembered that he hadn't looked as dreadful as he did in these photographs.

"…The newcomers might want to make us their slaves, but we've already had enough of our own pre-war intelligentsia here," Wilski, the prosecutor, was almost shouting. "That particular 'article of the law' is not in force here in the ghetto. Here you have to get down to work that's necessary for the general good, handicrafts and plain physical labour. I fully realise that rather than that prospect you'd prefer a nice afternoon ride in a droshky. But just remember, I won't tolerate this state of affairs!"

Reluctantly she had to admit that he had a lot of acting skill, because he spoke so persuasively that several people started trying to hide behind each other.

"Your Honour," said Bernstein, the defence lawyer, rising from his chair and addressing the judge, "please come to the audience's defence. The prosecutor is alarming them, and they've already been afraid often enough in their lives."

"The prosecutor is merely quoting your client. Please continue…"

"Thank you, your Honour," said Wilski, and began to read in an even more threatening tone: "Here in the ghetto you must knock the idea of court councillors out of your head for once and for all. Brothers and sisters, I admit to being guilty before you. It turns out I have been an incorrigible dreamer. I didn't really have to defend myself against having the Gypsies in the ghetto, it would have been better to put them here, if only about twenty thousand of them, instead of the Jews who have now arrived. Come to your senses! Not even the title of Privy Councillor will protect you from oppression. These days titles do not play any role at all. Many of you have a negative attitude to work. You say to yourselves, 'Why do we have to work when we can live by selling things or on the financial resources we've brought with us?' But I'm going to teach you to work and to behave decently, and above all I'll get you out of the habit of arrogance!"

The room fell silent, but not for long, because the defence lawyer leaped to his feet and exclaimed: "And what is this brilliant performance leading up to? After all these paternal warnings I don't think the jurors can possibly believe the President's intentions were bad. Of course his complexes are evident, and even a desire to get his own back on those people. But wasn't the President right to fear that the reintroduction of Jews from Europe would harm his vision of survival?"

"When a few months later, at the beginning of 1942," said the prosecutor, not hesitating to answer, "the Germans began the transportation to the gas chambers, the first people Rumkowski chose for the ovens were the criminal element and those receiving benefits, and then almost ten thousand new arrivals, including professors, geniuses of the world of scholarship, their wives and children, and thus people who might not have known how to make shoes or hats, but could have been an example for their Łódź brethren."

"We'll come to that," said the judge.

"I'm sorry, your Honour, but I must respond now. The prosecutor has deigned to make a joke. He would want the people doing the hard labour, thanks to whom the ghetto survived, to be sent away from Łódź first, and to spare the educated newcomers. Now I'd like to ask those of you whom fortune has not given the opportunity for an education if in your opinion you should be the first to go to the gas chamber."

"That's enough. Please don't take votes in my court," said the judge firmly. "Please call Doctor Ulrich Schulz from Prague as the next witness."

The elegant elderly man in pince-nez who had been sitting three rows behind Regina squeezed his way to the witness stand. She had never heard of him before, so she was curious to hear what he would say. The judge must have been too, because he pointed at the screen made from a sheet, on which a poster had appeared in German and Hebrew announcing the shooting of Doctor Ulrich Schulz from Prague for trying to resist the police.

"Is this announcement about your execution?"

"I doubt if there was another Ulrich Schulz from Prague in the ghetto."

"Please tell us how this came about."

"It's quite simple, I refused to be transported from the ghetto."

"Why? People weren't told they were going to their death, were they?"

"I just worked it out. If we were being thrown out as unproductive along with the criminals, it made sense to expect a worsening in our situation. And in my view the only situation that could have been worse was death. So I didn't report to the assembly point. The German police found me and tried to drag me there. To get it over with as quickly as possible, I slapped the most senior in rank. So he fired…"

"As we can all see, the report of this incident was signed by Rumkowski." The defence lawyer stood up and pretended to be examining the signature. "Was the President present at this incident?"

"How could he have been? It was just one of his duties to sign all sorts of German announcements."

"So you don't blame him for your death?"

"Not in the least."

"No further questions."

"Thank you, Sir, and please forgive us for bothering you for such a short examination," said the defence lawyer, in God knows whose name.

"I am happy to answer any request." Schulz bowed and headed for the door instead of returning to his seat.

Wilski suddenly remembered something, because he struck his forehead and cried: "Just one more question! You were in the ghetto for just under three months. I know that's not much to form an opinion, but the situation was unusual. In spite of such a brief stay, could you sum up the President's character in some way?"

Schulz considered his answer for quite a while, but finally he made do with just one word, then bowed again and left.

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Wojciech Kuczok
SOMNOLENCE

Photo: Elżbieta Lempp

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The word "somnolence" used in the title of this novel only gives us a rough idea of the state in which the three main characters find themselves. Their collective, though separate submersion in sleep can be described by lots of equivalents: apathy, lethargy, trauma, limbo, depression, crisis, and so on – depending on the case in point.

However, each affliction of the soul that Wojciech Kuczok describes has the same cause: Adam, Róża and Robert are all suffering because they are having to play roles that express not their own, but other people's ambitions. Although they are the only characters in the novel to be mentioned by name, they are stage-prop people: their task is to make their families shine with splendour. This obligation leads them to the edge of despair, and it is at this very moment – the moment of crisis – that we first meet them. Then, along with the author, we follow the process of their emergence from lethargy, which is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, the main characters – a doctor, an actress and a writer – are successful people, so they could be independent. Secondly however, it doesn't look as if they can afford to break free of the slavery of the life models imposed on them, or to make spectacular breaks with the past, present and future, which looks equally hopeless, because in their state of limbo they are losing their essential features: the artists their talents, and the doctor his sense of mission.

Kuczok retains his typical language and way of examining reality, yet he clearly struggles with the role that has been imposed on him. These struggles are reflected in the dilemmas of Robert, who is to some extent the author's literary alter ego, but not just. The crux of the debate with the image of the "expert in exploring suffering" is that the heroes of the novel suffer at their own request – they are victims of unfortunate choices, rather than fate.

It is worth adding that the basis for *Somnolence* was the script for a film produced by Magdalena Piekorz, who also produced *The Welts*, which was based on Kuczok's first novel, *Muck*.

Marta Mizuro

Wojciech Kuczok (born 1972) writes fiction, poetry and screenplays. He is also a film critic, and won the NIKE award for his novel *Muck*. His work has been translated into ten foreign languages.

Róża, the most beautiful face in the city, maybe the most beautiful face in the country, the face of the biggest cosmetics companies, was never good at accounts, she yielded to the randomness of life, feeling safe in it thanks to one categorical, invincible belief: that people are by nature good, maybe just not always unselfish. By improvising life with charm and talent, she had achieved all her aims as if in passing, unintentionally, without any special effort, and that was what had the greatest appeal, that lack of necessity; Róża did not have to be an actress by necessity, she simply felt good in the theatre, especially the classical repertoire; in this asylum of grand style she found an antidote to the plebeian mediocrity of the citizens of the metropolis, to their impoverished, vulgar language, reduced to terms that were useful in the office and in bed; the theatre was a good place to hide from the swarm of spiritually neglected people, and also a noble panacea for her still untamed loneliness. Nor did she make any effort towards a career in the cinema, even less in television – it was cinema and television that made a pitch for her, and she yielded to these adventures out of pure curiosity, cautiously selecting roles to avoid joining in with the horror of common vulgarity; the cinema gave her less pleasure than the theatre, but it paid a better income; as a born improviser Róża never had any savings, out of concern for financial independence she ended the adventure with cinema for an adventure with television, which allowed her to earn more and faster, while ultimately, invited by a huge cosmetics company to lend out her face, she realised that only an adventure with advertising would enable her to have savings despite her total inability to save, and so she became a face in the largest possible format and returned to the theatre. The adventures with television and advertising had made her untamed loneliness start to plague her more than ever before, her strongest ties of friendship were loosening, they were ready to come undone for good, suddenly she felt that even her oldest, tried-and-tested friends and girlfriends since time began were starting to find it difficult to talk to her, it was as if they had suddenly lost the capacity for disinterested conversation, and so Róża decided to go back to the theatre, to the stage community, to hide in the roles of classic heroines who spoke in verse; having spent a bit too long in the environment of television and advertising people, she was longing for the language of the old masters, the television and advertising people used language that was so very reduced, low and devoid of beauty, that for a long time after returning to the theatre Róża spoke only in questions from old plays, off stage too, with the aim of ridding her mind as quickly as possible of the memory of the language of people who were reduced, low and devoid of beauty, she spoke exclusively in quotations from the theatrical canon; her old boyfriends and girlfriends preferred to talk to each other about her eccentricity, exaltation and prima donna deviations rather than actually to her. At roughly this point she started falling asleep more often than usual. The doctor diagnosed overtiredness: it is a favourite diagnosis of patients and doctors, and then rest is prescribed, one of the few medicines that really does taste good, if you don't overdose on it; Róża realised that she should move into the land of non-stage whispers, take care of her so-called inner harmony; her old, not unselfish female friends suggested that she should find herself someone permanent at last, her not unselfish male friends advised the same, but in a more personal way.

Róża had the bad luck that at just that point Mr Husband began his acquaintance with her by proposing. Mr Husband was the first of her thousands of admirers to dare quite simply to introduce himself and ask for her hand, at least it was nice, at least it was interesting, hungry for a new adventure she agreed to let him speak; she was unlucky, because Mr Husband could be convincing. As she listened to his arguments, she sniffed the bouquet he had brought, and could not restrain her laughter, which did not disconcert him at all, Mr Husband was quite an expert on people's reactions, uncontrolled laughter was a well-stamped coin, Mr Husband had luck, which he added to by practising on Róża his perfectly mastered techniques of persuasion, and when he finished, even though it had got late, she had no desire to go home at all, she understood that logic forbade her to accept the proposal, but reason was prompting her not to do it straightaway. After the wedding, ah, after the wedding they

moved into the mountains, where it was healthier, fresher, woodsier, birdier, grassier and streamier.

Let us interrupt this love story, Róża should not lie on the floor for so long, let us allow her to wake up, she really does fall asleep decidedly too often, marriage clearly isn't doing her any good. Mr Husband finally takes notice of the dog barking, as it has run up to his feet now, Mr Husband strokes it, without ceasing to check the accounts, he calls Róża, without a response, he calls again, finally he goes to see if something has happened, he sees her unconscious, she must have suddenly fallen asleep and collapsed, but why, something must have upset her, frightened her, he notices an ankle bracelet in her hand, aha, well of course, an oversight, someone's trying to make his life difficult again; he gently uncurls Róża's fingers, removes the bracelet and hides it in his pocket, only now does he lightly slap her on the face, trying to wake her up, but it's no good, she's asleep, so he puts a pillow under head and says to the whimpering dog:

"So keep an eye on your mistress."

He leaves, mentally returning to what is countable, he will have to make a careful reckoning of the last transactions again, something about it doesn't add up.

"Are you here?"

Oh no, about turn, she has woken up after all, she gets up from the floor looking haggard.

"I was asleep again…"

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Photo: Grzegorz Święcicki

In contrast to this author's other works, *Ostrogski Palace* is not a classic novel. This work is both a book and a scrapbook, in which the writer has included all sorts of texts covering various styles and genres. Three elements intertwine here: reminiscence, essay and the fantastic. The area most expounded concerns matters connected with the author's biography, especially his thoughts concerning heroin addiction. These notes are arranged in the form of a kind of "drug addict's diary". The autobiographical hero backslides every now and then and has no illusions about ever being able to finally break his habit. Tomasz Piątek (as both the narrator and hero of *Ostrogski Palace* is also called) outlines his own special philosophy concerning his habit, tending to believe that drug addiction is in a way encoded in his personality, that it is his spiritual heritage, which he simply cannot get rid of. The book's discourse consists of miniature essays sparkling with digressions and covering such subjects as history, art, theology, and advertising in both theory and practice). Finally, on the creative level, we find minor plots or rather fantasies, whose common denominator are secrets concerning the title's palace, located in Warsaw. Expressing his opinion on many different subjects (from the Decalogue to Beethoven) and richly sprinkling his text with anecdotes and imaginary events, Piątek is the whole time telling us about himself and coming back again and again to issues that he finds of particular interest, namely the conflict between matter and feelings, chaos and order, and above all the prospect of searching for another, alternative life.

Dariusz Nowacki

Tomasz Piątek (born 1974) writer, journalist, columnist, author of numerous novels and the fantasy trilogy.

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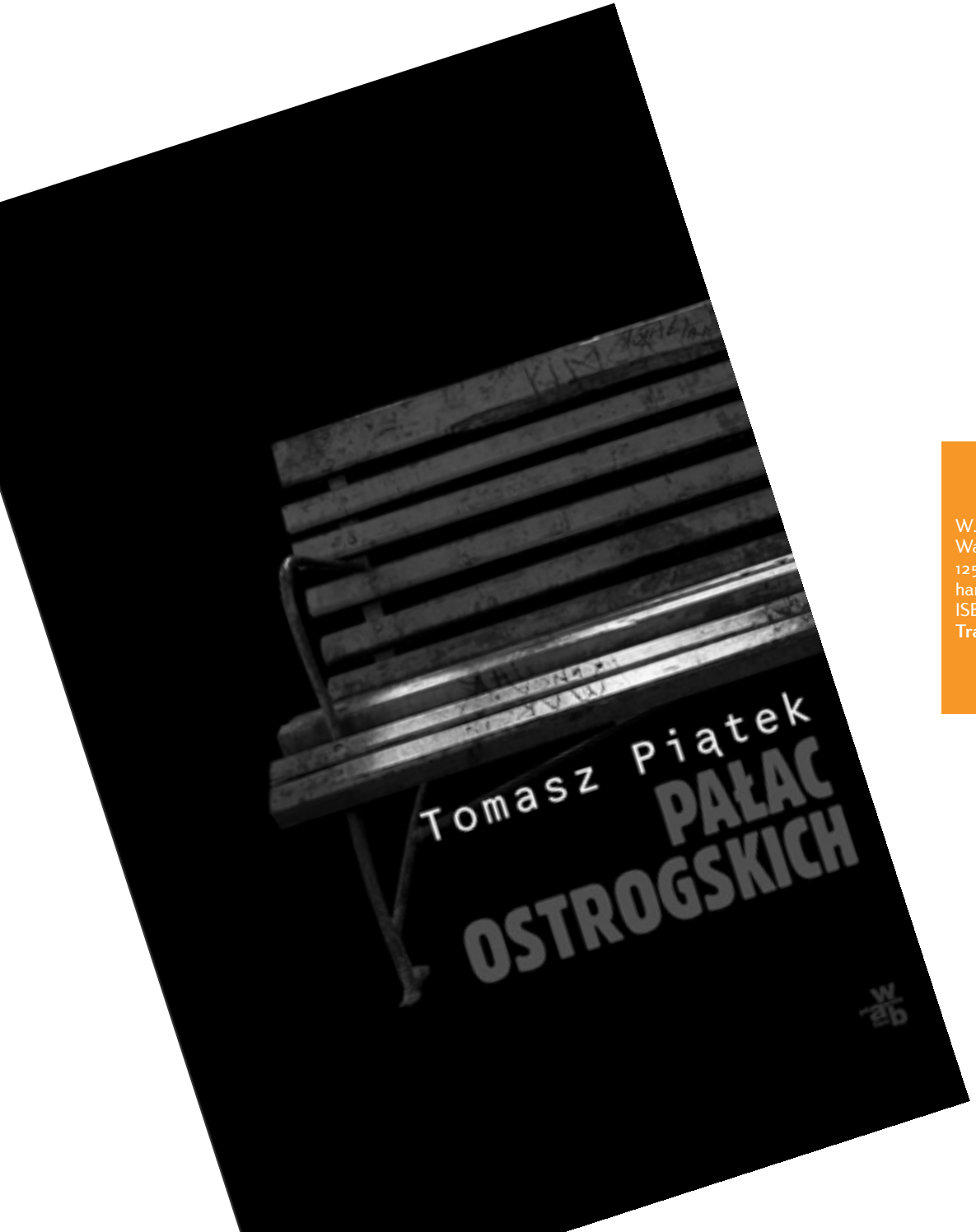
On the one hand, everyone tells you that man has lots of different rights. The gentlemen from the UN and those from the international association of psychologists will tell you that man has the right to life, food, drink, clothes, work, wages, a roof over his head, freedom, love, care and security. But on the other hand, there are those who will tell you that in reality, man has no rights, that no one owes him anything and if he gets anything at all, then he should see it as a favour. The Protestant Martin Luther and the Catholic aristocrat Joseph de Maistre will tell you that. And it will also be said by someone, who de Maistre would consider exceptionally degenerate (even more that that lump of meat in the shape of Luther, born to a cow, as he was described by some sixteenth-century French Catholics, terrified by the Reformation), and so the ultimate monster, i.e. the communist homosexual Pier Paolo Pasolini. And exactly what Pasolini said is: Those fighting for their rights have a certain charm. Those fighting for another's rights have more charm. But those who are unaware that they have any rights at all have the most charm. Anyone aware of his rights is bourgeois. The revolutionary who informs a people of its rights thus falls prey to a tragic paradox – instead of creating autonomous entities voluntarily uniting to freely produce poems or shoes, he creates a gang of petite bourgeoisie just as egotistical and predatory as the great bourgeoisie, but more despicable, due to their smallness and their role as poor seconds. One could say that Pasolini was probably right. Where Communists came to power, they only gave people a few rights, but for all that, as the Communists themselves would say, those powers were to a radical extent broadly conceived. The right to laziness, drunkenness and a specific passive thievery. It's true that in order to ensure this didn't send the population totally over the top, the Communists executed thousands by firing squad and murdered millions of others in Gulags. But that didn't help. Because the result of all that communism was that the petite bourgeoisie overthrew it, creating on the rubble an ideal, downright brilliant (from the satiric point of view) caricature of classic bourgeois capitalism: Eastern European capitalism, supposedly capitalism like any other, but squarer, sharper-edged, more unnatural and forced.

But to return to the main issue: the question of whether people have a right to something or not seems unsolvable. On the one hand, influential humanists and our own compassion (and let's not deceive ourselves, our egoism also) would have us say that people have a whole mass of rights to a whole mass of things. On the other hand wise men, those on the right like de Maistre, those on the left like Pasolini, and those from heaven knows where like Nietzsche, say that people have no rights to anything – and our conscience often tells us likewise when we take a good look at ourselves. At least mine does. Have I the right to expect anything good for myself? I know that I have caused the death of at least several human beings. I recently had a dream: I am delivered a large manila envelope with the inscription "Tomasz Piątek" and inside are thirty odd post-mortem pictures. In the dream I know that these are people who began taking drugs after reading my first novel *Heroin*.

So how does one solve this? I am not talking here about the question of people whom I may have killed, because that is a problem I can no longer solve. No, no, I shall not occupy myself with that. Now I shall occupy myself with an abstract, elevated philosophical problem entitled: Has man any right to anything. You could say, nobly, slyly, that I have no rights to anything, but my nearest and dearest do! I grant them these rights, I grant them every right, and good for them. That is the attitude of the true altruist. And yet this noble attitude (according to the principle: I grant every right to my nearest and dearest, but not myself) is sly, because if I claim this principle to be correct then I also ask it be likewise upheld by all my nearest and dearest. And so, my dear mankind, refuse yourselves all rights and grant them to ME. As one may see, this theoretical philosophical altruism is however somehow consistent with the practical attitude in life of someone who has published a book about the pleasures of taking drugs, without wondering whether he is somehow harming anyone – but rather has pushed such considerations aside, down into the darkest pit of his soul, where the scorpions live.

Translated by Richard Biały



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Marek Nocny CONTROLLER OF DREAMS

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Controller of Dreams is a subversive adventure story. Its author is hiding behind a pseudonym, but the hand of a master can be detected here—Marek Nocny's attractively written book, aimed primarily at teenage readers, is a story about love and violence. It draws on the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, retold in the age of cyberculture: something like a Polish *Matrix* with anti-globalization elements. The hero, a physics student who goes by the name of Rastaman—a rebel but also a fantasist, a superman and a weakling—descends into Hades in search of Agnieszka, his Eurydice—except that the Hades of today is a modern shopping mall, temple of contemporary culture, place of temptation and the enactment of symbolic violence. It is here that the "True Life" corporation has secretly installed itself. The corporation's goal is to control human minds by selling us what are supposedly our own dreams. It operates ruthlessly. Our hero wages a life-and-death struggle with its executives. *Controller of Dreams* is also a literary game. There are references to Calderón de la Barca and his *Life is a Dream*: Marek Nocny's heroes experiment with dreams, but in fact they are manipulated by the corporation; nevertheless, they manage to find ways to win back their freedom. For in this novel dreams are also an ocean of the unconscious that, like the sea in Lem's *Solaris*, evokes thoughts and desires.

Controller of Dreams is more than just an enjoyable read. It can be read in different sequences and is an excellent example of postmodern literature. Reality and fiction turn out to be indistinguishable; we are constantly dealing with the spinning identities of the main character. Experiments with dreams, chases, escapes, crime stories, literary allusions, the ups and downs of the hero's love life, humor, deeper meanings—all this makes *Controller of Dreams* a book that is not just entertaining but deeply engaging.

Marek Zaleski

Marek Nocny was born in the second half of the 20th century. He works as a writer, though he writes about something else and is well-known under a different name.

"I know some things that you can't get for money. They're called faith, hope, and love."

"I'm short in all three colors," Rastaman interrupted sourly.

"It's a pretty lousy deal, huh? Unless you were playing bridge. Or something else that you've probably never heard of. Shall I continue?"

Rastaman nodded.

"You haven't chosen your cards. You were dealt them and you can't change them. So look carefully at them and think what game they might be good for."

"Have you been looking at my cards?"

The Kid shrugged.

"Strong cards are good, but only in the real. In the dream world you can win something even with weak ones. There you might even become a big fish. Give it a try—it's worth it."

A big fish in the dream world. . .

"I might actually be interested," laughed Rastaman. "It's just that for a long time now I've not had any dreams."

Just how long, he didn't remember. Weeks. To tell the truth, he would really have liked to dream about Agnieszka once in a while. Now, when he had no expectations, a nice dream would been quite sufficient. A nice dream with the overpowering illusion that she was there. Best of all every night. Instead of meetings in the real. Which was impossible.

"You've not had any dreams? That never happens in nature. You have several dreams every night, maybe more. You should say rather that you've lost touch with your dreams. But you can get it back again. It's just a matter of the right technique." Rastaman was so interested he leaned all the way forward and the button of his corduroy shirt caught on the edge of the table.

"A matter of technique. . .Can you say more? Do you use a special device?"

Now the Kid smiled from ear to ear, and something flashed in his mouth. His teeth were wired up in braces. They must have been paid for by Bomber, who would send money for larger expenses. English lessons, remodeling the bathroom, a winter overcoat for the old man. Since he left he'd become a dependable son and brother. A role model for the Kid, whether either of them liked it or not.

"There's no need for any special equipment. Standard issue is all you need. You've gotten into dreams without consciousness. In the morning you wake up in a daze and don't remember anything. It's as if you were partying while you were blacked out."

"That's the best kind of partying."

"We're talking about a better way of dreaming."

How do you like that: a better way of dreaming. Is that ambitious or what?

"This is getting more and more interesting," said Rastaman with a gesture of encouragement—he wound an invisible thread round his hand.

The Kid watched the hand with a blank look, because he didn't know if Rastaman was being serious or the opposite.

"In dreams you can have what you're missing in life," he said eventually in a slightly offended tone, and it looked as if he would now wait to be begged. He took a sip from his glass, looked around and waved to someone. Some guys on skateboards. They waved back. Then the girls with them also waved. And then they were gone, hidden behind other passers-by. The Kid was lost in thought for a moment. But the subject of dreams, his favorite, brought him back.

"Don't think it'll be easy. You need to develop a certain amount of skill. To know how to do things. To begin with, the simplest stuff. First of all, learn how to use reality checks. Because how can you tell that for example you're not dreaming right now? How can you be sure you're really in the mall and not at home in bed?"

"You're joking," said Rastaman unsurely. At this point it was hard to figure out who was playing here and at whose cost. The mall was buzzing with life. Life. Not dreams. There was nothing to think about.

The Kid looked up over his glass.

"Have you never had a dream that fooled you totally? In dreams people are gullible. In the real they don't pay attention. Most of them can't tell the one from the other. They dream when they're awake, and when they're asleep it's the

opposite, they become strangely concrete. If I were you I wouldn't be so certain of anything. Those two poodles in the mall? The easygoing security guards? Have you seen anyone here with a baby in a stroller? You should count your fingers instead. Seriously, count them."

Rastaman was surprised, but he counted his fingers. The nails were chewed. His gaze rested for a moment on the palm of his hand. There, a few hours before he had written something with a pen, because he'd not been able to find a slip of paper in his pockets. Sweet Dreams. They were sleeping pills. The name was as stupid as the girl who'd given them to him. Someone he knew from grade school. Her nickname was Daisy; he'd met her by chance in the subway. It was a mild over-the-counter medication that always worked. She had had trouble sleeping too, but now she took Sweet Dreams. . . And then that lingering, expressive gaze from beneath long eyelashes—it was a scene straight from a TV commercial. He remembered Daisy from long ago, sitting in the front row. Even then she looked like someone from an advertisement. In class she'd always be waving her hand in the air, always knowing everything. In life as well. She had a ready remedy for every problem. Good advice for everyone, always with a note of superiority. Bomber would have remembered her. But the Kid probably didn't know her.

"So?"

"What did you expect? Five fingers."

"That's exactly the point," said the Kid, surreptitiously counting his own. "You should know that in dreams it doesn't usually come out. Your fingers are kind of hazy, unclear. Especially the middle ones. If you keep counting, you'll end up with six or seven. Then you know where you stand. It's a ticklish moment, it's easy to wake up at that moment. You need to know special tricks to make sure your dream stays on track.

"If you manage, you're in control of the situation. You've got a joker up your sleeve; you can trump aces with plain cards. You take everything."

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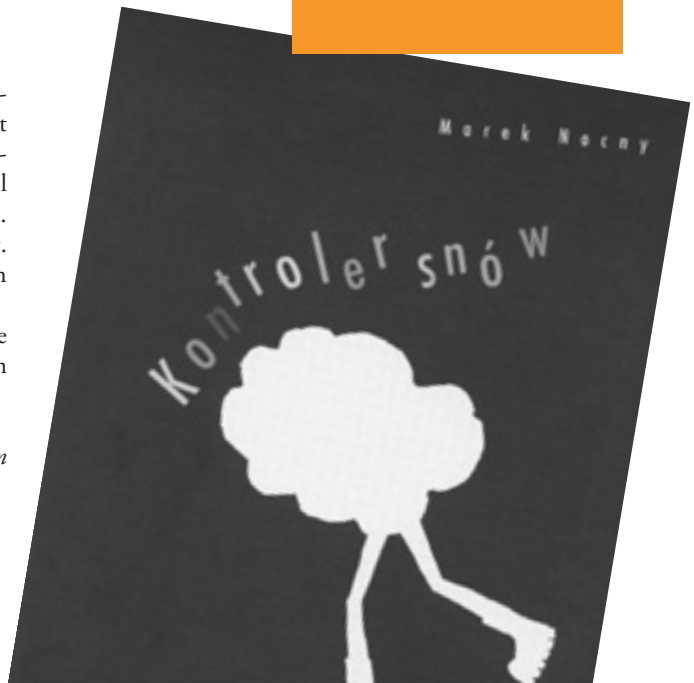

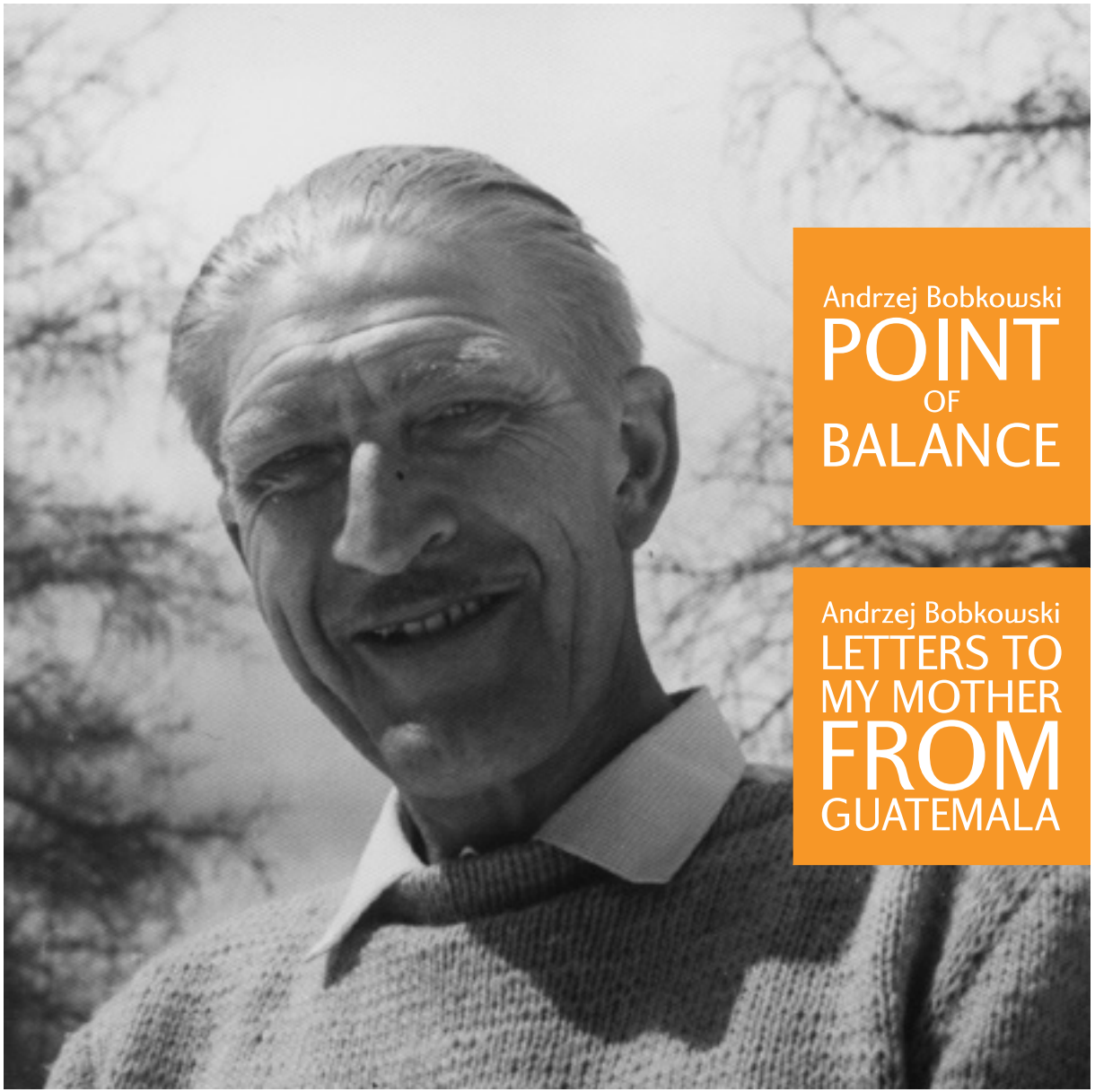

Photo: Institut Littéraire

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Although he died a long time ago, in 1961, Andrzej Bobkowski's writing remains a great adventure for Polish readers and connoisseurs of literature to this day. For many years he was chiefly known for his diary *Sketches in Pen and Ink*, extremely fascinating as evidence of the state of European civilization, yet also bitter in their appraisal of it.

Banned in communist Poland because of his views, only now is Bobkowski gaining his due position: following a Polish edition of *Sketches in Pen and Ink* several collections of his short stories have appeared, and now finally *Point of Balance*, a complete edition of his prose and plays (excluding *Sketches in Pen and Ink*). The action of these works is set in France and Central America, and is often stormy, featuring all manner of sensation, because the part of the world Bobkowski ended up in was far from politically, socially or economically stable, providing a setting for some tough, masculine adventure. But even in places like this, what matters most to Bobkowski are the existential questions, literature and philosophy understood as a personal, moral challenge, and finally love; he keeps on asking about the meaning of life and the world's fate.

Bobkowski was not just an uncommonly talented prose writer. He also wrote letters of superb literary quality, often of great length, to his friends and family, which are now gradually being discovered, edited and published. Several volumes of this correspondence have already appeared – one of the most vital collections includes Bobkowski's letters to Jerzy Giedroyc, editor of the Paris-based periodical *Kultura*. The *Letters to My Mother from Guatemala* are part of this series. Bobkowski's letters are an excellent supplement to his prose, because they give a different, very personal take on the same philosophical and existential issues, and also provide a fascinating account of his adventures. The author of these letters was an expert in life, capable of relishing and describing his sensory and emotional pleasures, but his sense of the profound gravity of existence never left him either, as – in the footsteps of his master, Conrad – he tried to understand and experience it in a just manner.

Jerzy Jarzębski

Andrzej Bobkowski (1913-1961) was one of Poland's leading émigré writers, the author of fiction and essays.

The next day I slept longer, and after waking up I felt quite strange. Something had happened, and I knew it could not be undone. I took a sidelong look at the attaché case in which I had shut the written pages, and felt as if I had shut something live inside it. I even instinctively checked to see that nothing had escaped from it. No, I didn't read it, the someone folded away in that wad of twenty sheets of paper got in my way. I felt impatient, wanting to have it all behind me as soon as possible.

At around eleven Father Andrew landed his seaplane on the lagoon, and as soon as he came down onto the float he started waving a big wrapped bottle of Bacardi at us, shouting that as well as that he had swindled somebody out of a box of real "Partagas" Havana cigars for a dollar a piece. We helped him to moor and drag out a barrel of petrol. He told us that in Yucatan it had already begun to pour regularly, and that in a few days the rains were sure to reach us too. Involuntarily I found myself treating him with respect now, a bit like the way you treat travelling salesmen from large companies.

On the deck, after a short conversation, I stammered, "I wanted to have a little chat with you," took him by the arm and led him into the cabin. There he gave me an inquiring look, and when I nodded, he smiled and sat down on one of the crates. I handed him my essay. There was total silence again, with just the steady sobbing of the gruya birds coming in through the little windows. He pulled a stole from his back pocket and threw it around his neck. You know – a priest's stole against a flowery shirt with short sleeves, tight blue jeans and bare feet… I'm no expert on the liturgy, but I'm afraid he wasn't entirely au fait with it himself. Then everything went on normally. He read, and I stared at his profile, thinking that in that shirt, with his athletic shoulders, he looked like William Holden. Then, quite involuntarily, I brought my text to mind, and I was surprised to find I could remember it almost word for word.

This took almost an hour. He picked up the sheets of paper, ripped them into small shreds and threw them through the window into the water. I got up too. I was completely gutted, shaky, and my point of balance had totally shifted. "It does you good," he said. "A man could get used to it." I nodded. "You know," I went on, "my father used to say that everything is to a large extent a matter of getting used to it. Straight after the war when I wanted to get married he told me: 'So get married – you'll get used to it'." He smiled. "What you just said is correct. What of it? you ask. We don't know. There are people who try to stop smoking, though they never entirely stop. But the point is that they're trying. So why not try? That counts too. We all have to try. Sometimes all that trying produces saints." We went back upstairs.

After a drink on deck he flew off to his lake, wishing us a successful take-off. Well, yes – at any rate I felt much better and – I was already trying not to think about the incident. I tried out the engine, calmed down, and was ready for anything again, just itching for a fight. But for a change my inner buoyancy bothered me, I felt ashamed of it in my own eyes. The remedy seemed to me too simple and too convenient, and I could hear a constant whisper of pride – the pride of a man who has suddenly discovered one day that it is harder and worthier on his own, that nothing is bigger than something. Perhaps. But when I thought it through to the end, when I went back to my experience, it seemed to me that neither of the two paths was harder than the other. Both were identically tough provided you only chose one and followed it unwaveringly. What we tend to go in for is constant skipping from one to the other, putting our own comfort first.

A couple of days later the rains came – an incessant roar, streams of water pouring from the clouds onto the earth, breathtaking. And coolness, at last a bit of real coolness. But as soon as the downpour stopped, usually before noon, and the sun shone through from behind the clouds, the forest belched hot steam. The colours kept changing, almost from one hour to the next. The lagoon filled quickly, and after each night the shore had run further off. During each break in the rains Burt sailed out in our boat to take measurements and get things ready. I gathered up all the bits of junk that we had to leave behind to avoid overloading the plane unnecessarily.

And we did it. That morning will remain in my memory for ever. I was sitting next to Burt. The sky was covered in dirty clouds, but their ceiling was quite high. After a whole night of rain the wind was blowing. When the engines started up and we slowly began to sail in order to position the old tub for take-off, when shortly after we got moving at 2550 revolutions, I came to a standstill. We'd done it. I wouldn't know how to express what was happening inside me during those long seconds. I changed into both engines. First the opposite shore glided towards us faster and faster, I could feel a gentle turn, then the outlines of distant trees and the gently undulating, creamy surface of the water in the lagoon went blurred before my eyes and almost vanished. When we tore free at the last moment, by a millimetre, and the spongy-looking jungle began to flash by low down beneath us, when the surface of the sea spread out below, Burt smiled at me and stuck two thumbs up. Joy. And then all of a sudden Le Chatelier's theorem came to mind, according to which if some extra force acts on a system that is in a state of equilibrium, then the point of balance in that system shifts in the direction in which the impact of that force is being weakened. I started to think about this, because once we were over the sea, amid the steady, healthy drone of the engines, I realised that down there on the lagoon, my entire system had been subject to the effect of some force, against my will, and that my point of balance had definitely shifted. But not in the direction in which its effect had been weakened. And to this day it still bothers me.

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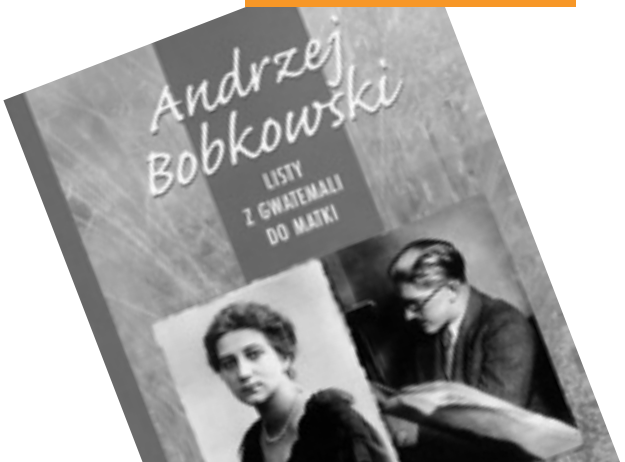

Photo: Krzysztof Opaliński

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The Citizeness is the third part of Manuela Gretkowska's running diary, showing the writer in a rather untypical role, as the founder, and then president of the Women's Party. In describing what goes on behind the scenes of the political scrum, she answers the question of how a writer hit upon this unusual idea, and explains what attracted her to it.

It all began by accident, when a column was withdrawn from a certain newspaper, in which Gretkowska criticised the government of the Kaczyński brothers. She then published an uncompromising statement on the modern situation of "the Polish Mother" in one of the weeklies. It was later reissued in a book called *Manifesto*, in which Gretkowska challenged women to determine their own rights and create their own party. The initiative did not fail to stir a response, and it was immediately obvious that the charismatic author should head the new political force. To those who followed the whole affair from the outside, it looked like a combination of cabaret and a theatrical event. Although thousands of women responded enthusiastically to Gretkowska's initiative, she got no support from any of the formal political forces. Her efforts to be taken seriously were not helped by the fact that in the meantime her new novel was published, which meant that her political venture was seen as nothing but an unusual advertising gimmick.

The Citizeness certainly casts light on the whole so-called scandal, and mainly on the writer herself, who really did take on the role of Don Quixote in a skirt, battling not just against external criticism, but also the friction that arose among her colleagues. She gives a frank account of her struggles with the machinations of politics and with human nature, highlights moments of triumph and doubt, and above all describes the everyday work of the party.

It is worth stressing that although these are the confessions of a person with no experience as a community worker or diplomat, it is hard to regard her as naïve. Manuela Gretkowska is aware of the tragi-comic nature of the ups and downs she experienced and treats them with a fairly large dose of irony, though not enough to make the reader doubt her commitment.

Marta Mizuro

Manuela Gretkowska (born 1964) is a writer and journalist. She has published twelve books to date and her work has been translated into over a dozen languages.

3 December

I'm standing centre stage, more people are arriving, there aren't enough chairs. There are about four hundred people, mostly women of various ages.

"Ms Gretkowska, you've been talking for fifteen minutes now, you've been talking and nothing's happening," an impatient old lady says in surprise.

"We should have been in the Sejm by now, not for a quarter of an hour, but for years," I step it up.

The hall laughs in reply and I carry on: "What's stopping us from being in the Sejm? Where are the restrictions? In our heads." I say why is a party a regular political army, and not a society, like the partisans. I am so sure of the rightness of the arguments and the simplicity of the solutions that the stage becomes a runway for ideas, causes, for me. The boards stretch out and the lights merge towards a shining signpost ahead. I rise above the crowd, I can still see the individual faces. Focused on my words, the eyes lead me on, winking to tell me if I'm going in the right direction. But I can't hear myself any more, I have no idea what I'm about to say. I'm sinking into a trance, I'm afraid of losing consciousness. I put on the brakes and ask for questions. I have no time to think about what has just happened.

Women stand up in the front rows. From Łódź, Olsztyn and Silesia – they introduce themselves. Ever so clean, white ironed blouses, dark blue skirts – they're proper political workers. In a blouse and baggy cords, next to them I look like a rock musician. A political scientist called Iwona and ladies from various organisations come forward. I collect business cards. A girl comes up who wants to be my assistant. I ask her straight out if she's had psychiatric treatment. It's a shock. I explain that it's such tough work that either you don't know what you're taking on, or you don't have a firm enough idea of the reality.

Piotr has been watching the meeting from the balcony.

"God, in their fifties these women have woken up and think they've got some sort of rights," he says, hiding his emotion behind mockery.

Małgosia Marczewska, my would-be coach whom I met at the photo session, tries to sum up:

"You didn't send pieces of paper round the room to record who was there, their details, what they can do. The rest of the meeting was like something out of CIA training school. Before you began, you asked the audience three questions, if they had chairs, if they could hear…. to be perfect it would have been five."

I don't know if Małgosia is joking or being serious. She trains businesses and company directors.

"You have to separate your private life from the party, turn off your phone after meetings," she advises. My mobile, kept in my trouser pocket, has become a sort of kicking, jumping foetus, prodding me in the side. With every day it is making its presence more keenly felt. It wakes me at night and won't give me peace all day.

We go home; the shops are already shut as usual. All that's left is the petrol station, but we haven't the strength to stop and buy bread.

"If this goes on much longer, I won't make it," Piotr capitulates. He was expecting the meeting to produce a committee of new leaders. He was counting on us not being so needed any more.

4 December

We don't talk in the morning, he goes to Łódź for the little one. I run between the phone and the Internet. Not much has changed following the Montownia event. Maybe this evening at Małgosia's on Filtrowa Street… Iwona's coming, the party professional. The Gąsioreks get down to sorting out the e-mails. They have a daughter who's a few months old and are crazy about community work. If just a small percentage, just a fraction of humanity were like them, the world would be paradise.

At noon starvation, I've got nothing in the fridge. Someone asks over the phone: "Has something happened?"

I don't quite get who it is and why he doesn't know what's happened… a mass movement!

"We had an appointment to meet at a restaurant, you were going to appraise the menu for the newspaper…" a voice from a past life reminds me.

I have forgotten a meeting that's written down in my notebook. I have wiped everything that isn't to do with the party from my mind. Unfortunately, that includes paying the bills. As I wait for a taxi to the restaurant, I find some reminders in the mail box. And that's me, for whom filling in the monthly payment slips for the electricity and the phone used to be like the relief of absolution. As if I'd brought Mummy a certificate of morality.

[...]

Małgosia's office on Filtrowa Street, in the Stara Ochota district. A kitchen, wooden stairs, a loft, two large, bright rooms. Cream-coloured walls, expansive rococo chandeliers, the minimum of furniture. The branches of a cherry tree in the garden are pushing their way in at the windows. It's empty, quiet after the hubbub of phone calls. We're waiting for Iwona. I'm not sure she's coming. At the Montownia Centre she gave me her card and promised to help. Finally she's here: shapely and beautiful – an ex-model, a friend of Lidka's.

She knows all about gearing up for political action, and lists the stages for forming a party. We must establish if we're going to accept men.

"Maybe it would be easier without them?" we wonder. "Or to deprive them of the right to vote within our party."

Małgosia is with us, and so is Piotr on the speaker phone.

"That's undemocratic!" Always extremely conciliatory, now he's protesting. "If they're only able to belong and serve disinterestedly, you'll make political eunuchs out of them. Anyway, I don't think you're allowed to found an organisation that discriminates on grounds of race or gender," he calms down. In Iwona's opinion women behave differently on their own, and it's they who have to decide in the end without male assistance. She cites her lecturer, Professor Szlendak from Toruń:

"He's a feminist, but he believes women have encoded behavioural competition – they have always fought each other for access to goods for their children."

"Exactly," I say, "this will be the first behavioural party, but it will fight for the common interests of women and children: health and education. Secondly," I enumerate, "it's not true that women are incapable of working together and just compete. By all means be head of this party, you're the expert, you're a specialist. I'll travel around, talk to people and give interviews. I'm not much of a politician – I don't even wear a watch… I should be at home with Pola by now."

"So buy yourself one." My self-neglect is no problem for Iwona.

"I don't wear one because I don't like to. Or jackets or smart little shoes," I say, describing Iwona's elegant clothes. "You're more suitable, you've got the knowledge…"

"Not now. Once it's all organised."

"When?"

"In... six months," she estimates.

"I'll never survive at this rate."

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Jarosław Maślanek
HASHISHOPINERS

Photo: Katarzyna Skoczyńska-Maślanek

Hashishopiners is a novel about a friendship between two 12-year-old boys – Maksymilian and Wronek. Max's father is a Solidarity activist, and Wronek's father is a militiaman. The scene is 1982, right after the introduction of Martial Law, somewhere in the provinces of Poland – in a small town, which exists purely because of the state weapons factory. The residents of the area are socialist plebs, devoid of any tradition that would allow them to resist the corrosive effects of socialism. Their existence is composed of working "for the state" and drinking after work. Poverty, overpopulation in a small area, and scarce hope or opportunity for a better life…

This kind of reality can lead to only one thing – endless frustration, aversion and hatred. In this world our two protagonists are trying to find a shred of independence and meaning in their village friendship. This is meant to stand in opposition to the creeping disintegration. This is not, however, a good friendship. The emotionally hollowed-out Wronek guarantees Maksymilian adventure, but he is also an alluring swamp: he attracts, immobilizes, sucks in and kills. The boys unconsciously transfer their family problems to their friendship, but they are too immature to build a strong bond in this way and save themselves. With risky desperation and cruelty – at whose bottom lurks their betrayed love – they are ready to commit the stupidest acts.

Their plan is essentially an attempt to rebuild some order in their lives. The boys feel unwanted by their families, the school population and the neighborhood residents, and so they intuitively choose a path that should give them a dignified place in all these social groups. In Maślanek's world, adults succumb to the almost Stalinist fatalism of the statement "Everyone must become a snitch," and so the children choose the cruel path of restorative revenge. They intuitively glean that doling out punishment to a "snitch" will cleanse the whole of reality and bring back order to the social roles. It is astonishing that the reality of the first year of Martial Law shown through the eyes of two boys and their friendship has allowed the author to show more than if we saw the Solidarity activists, strikes or street demonstrations.

Przemysław Czapliński

Jarosław Maślanek (born 1974) is a political science graduate, journalist and co-editor of "Polish Real Estate Market" devoted to market investments.

An End and a Beginning

I couldn't sleep. I lay there covered up, sweaty. I stared at the ceiling, barely visible in the darkness. My arm was burning a bit, the cuts on my face pulsed with pain. I heard my parents talking with Trzynacha. First calmly, then their voices raised higher and higher. The door to my room cracked open and my father peeked inside. A moment later he quietly withdrew.

When I finally fell asleep, I had a strange dream. Wronek and I were sitting in my room, him in the armchair between the desk and the window, me on the chair by the desk, talking about nothing, as usual. I accidentally knock over a cup of tea. The hot water pours onto Wronek, but he doesn't notice. The cup spins about the desktop, falls on the armchair and flies right through my friend. I woke up. It was already light out.

I couldn't stand change, I was frightened of newness. That's why I liked our apartment block, a place I'd known since childhood, with clear boundaries; this was what I linked my earliest memories with. And maybe that's why I was afraid of that dream from the last night of my vacation, from Wednesday to Thursday in the year nineteen eighty-two. Wronek had been with me for a long time, I didn't want to lose him. But nor did I want to draw out this war with Trzynacha. I made my decision, I just had to talk to Wronek.

I heard my friend whistling outside the building. I peeked out the window. Wronek was hiding behind some bushes. He waved and pointed at the cellar. I got the picture. He dashed there, ducking like he was under fire.

I left my room. No parents in sight. I glanced at my watch. Way past twelve. That was some sleep!

I quickly ran to the washroom, had a piss and washed my face. I covered my reflection with my hand. I didn't want to look at myself.

I ran down to the cellar. The chill and musty air chased off the remains of my dream. My head ached a bit. I guess because I'd overslept.

Wronek was waiting downstairs. Standing in the corner, where the light from the bulb couldn't reach the gloom.

"Hey," I said, and got right to the point. "Listen, I don't want to mess with Trzynacha any more. Let's leave him alone. That was fine for vacation, but now we're back in school."

"Too late," he interrupted. I couldn't see if he was smiling, but I got the impression he was.

"What do you mean, too late?"

"Too late to leave him alone." He came toward me.

His clothing was stuck to his body, as if he'd been caught in a bloody downpour. His red hair was all in clumps, with darkening blood clots tangled in.

"What have you done?!" I screamed. I thought my head would split open with pain.

"What we planned to do." His blood-dappled face twisted into a grin.

"No!"

"In his apartment."

He grabbed me by the arm. He led me upstairs. I noticed he had worker's gloves on his hands; they were damp with blood.

I struggled, but he was very strong, like an adult man. He led me to door number thirteen. He pushed it open and dragged me into the kitchen.

Trzynacha was lying on the floor. Wronek knelt by the severed hands. He picked them up, studied them, then tossed them away. He grabbed for the axe with the rusted ornament on the blade.

"I chopped him like that woodcutter taught us, remember?" Standing over the corpse, he raised the axe. "So that you don't cut off what isn't necessary. And not too high up. Remember?" he said, removing his gloves. He ripped them up like Jędrek had and tossed them on the corpse.

I stared at the cadaver of the militiaman like I was hypnotized. He lay on his back. A pencil was gouged into one of his eyes, his right hand was chopped off, his stomach was splayed open, and his guts were all over the floor. A puddle of blood was congealing.

"No more Hashishopiners," said Wronek.

I looked, but I didn't want to see. I tried to close my eyes, but the lids wouldn't shut; I wanted to cover them with my hands, but even they refused to obey.

I started screaming.

"You'll get the whole apartment in here!" Wronek leapt over to me and covered my mouth with his hand. "now they'll all come running, you dick!" He pushed me against the wall and then further, toward the door. Then he opened it and pushed me out into the corridor. There was a stir in the staircase. Piastowa was the first to run toward us, at the head of the information outpost as usual. Behind her I spotted other neighbors, and among them Polepa, the security guard, who should have been at work. They were shouting something, a hubbub grew and echoed in the stairwell. Doors kept swinging open.

"Faster!" yelled Wronek. "You always screw everything up."

Piastowa stood there frozen when she saw Wronek all bloody. Polepa ran past her and into Trzynacha's apartment.

My friend hit me in the back again and I fell into the Wronkiewiczes' apartment. I leaned against the wall and slowly slid down onto the floor. I felt as though someone had put a helmet on my head to protect me from the stimuli of the outside world. Sounds came to me from a distance, I made out images through a thick fog.

I saw Wronek make a barricade, blocking the door; I heard the din going on in the staircase when the neighbors found out what had happened to Trzynacha. But I got the feeling that it all concerned someone else. I plunged deeper and deeper into myself, my consciousness drowsed off. It's only a dream, a nightmare, I'm vanishing.

Wronek was already at the door with father's gun when the first neighbors started pounding.

"Open up!" – that was Polepa. His voice cut through the mayhem in the corridor, the screams, uproar, and even sobbing. "Calm down!" ordered the security guard. And to us: "Boys, open the door. Nothing's going to happen to you."

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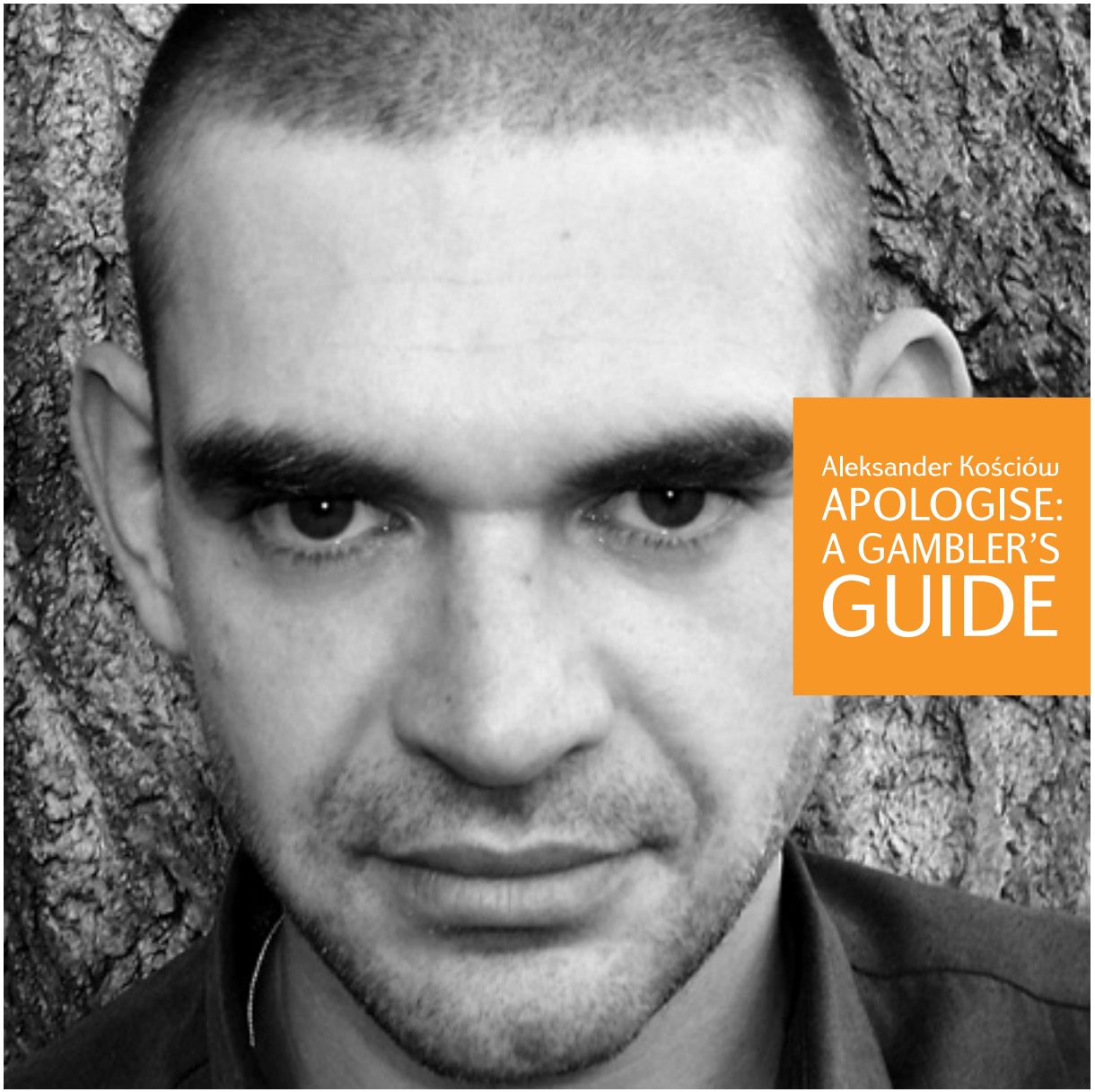

Photo: Robert Morawski

Since giving up his academic career and losing the woman he loved, Błażej has been leading a boring life devoid of entertainment. With every passing year he sinks deeper and deeper into apathy, and even drops his greatest passion, which is mountain climbing. He is sure nothing will change, and maybe he doesn't even want it to. But a chance encounter shifts his fate onto completely different tracks. On his way home from work, he almost runs over a teenage girl called Zuzanna (who insists, however, that she is really called Fix), who has run away from someone. At first it looks as if that someone is Marta, but then it turns out she is not. Błażej also discovers that Marta has come to Warsaw to look for her young son, Szymon, who has gone missing in strange circumstances. On pure impulse, Błażej decides to help the woman with her search, in which Zuzanna is also going to play a major role…

So at first the action of this novel looks fairly straightforward, but that is just an illusion. Aleksander Kościów wouldn't be himself if he didn't suddenly veer off into the realm of his unbridled imagination, which pervades the reader's familiar everyday world. Fix claims she is a sort of superhero who is fighting in a parallel world against a vulture-man, who is also lying in wait for Marta's missing son. At first the adults regard her as a crazy teenager with a hyperactive imagination, but they change their attitude when they find out how easily Fix can lead them to a series of clues left by the missing boy. The narrative is on two levels. The first depicts a "crazy week" in the lives of Błażej and Marta, spent looking for her son. The other describes the wanderings of Dal – who is probably Szymon – in a world like something out of a computer game. As he tells his thrilling, action-packed story, Kościów also poses some important questions: do we really know what sort of world we happen to live in? As we make major life choices, should we necessarily be guided by common sense and reason, or would it be better to trust our intuition? For the adults, looking for Szymon becomes a search for themselves as well; at the end of it they will be slightly different people from at the start.

Robert Ostaszewski

Aleksander Kościów (born 1974) is by training a composer and viola player. *Apologise* is his second novel.

The woman sat down on top of her bag, which made her look a bit like a carelessly arranged puppet. Her expressionless gaze was fixed on the pavement ahead of her as she swept locks of hair from her face that immediately fell back into place.

"What's wrong, you ask?" she said quietly, without even raising her head. "It's very simple, Sir. I haven't got any money, I haven't got any bank cards, I have no way of calling anyone who could pay in some wonderful electronic way, it's a sort of nightmare. Of course you don't know why I am here anyway… Why all this is happening to me… I have no idea…."

Błażej got out of the car and squatted in front of her. It was a serious situation, demanding intuition, courtesy, concern and tact – various qualities that he hadn't had anyone to practise on lately.

"You'll do as you wish," he began.

"Everything was in my handbag… Money, bank cards, identity card, driving licence. Fortunately I stuffed my health booklet into my big bag. On the strength of it they made out a sort of provisional document for me at the police so I could get access to my account – one of my banks ought to accept it, but that'll only be tomorrow… Apart from that there was nothing that could be done…" She closed her eyes and shook her head. The tone of her voice had risen dangerously, changing into a plaintive squeak. "I just don't know…"

"I see. For lack of funds you have nowhere to sleep, let's be frank about it, so I'll take you to my house, and I'll spend the night at a friend's – we were going to meet up anyway."

She raised her head, but in the darkness he couldn't read her expression, so he quickly went on:

"I live on my own, so no one's going to bother you. I'll give you the keys, if you'll find that more… In the morning you can leave them with the neighbour. You need to get some rest, and then it'll all work out sooner or later. I'll leave you my mobile phone, so you'll have all my important numbers, including the number of my friend, whom I'm going to call right now, in case you have any suspicions or problems, you'll simply be able to sleep in peace until the morning, and I think that might be the most important thing to do now."

He finished, and breathed out a lot of air, wondering where it had been sitting all this time. The woman didn't reply for quite a while.

"It's one forty," she said at last, and then fell silent again. Błażej nodded, waiting for the continuation. "You are… incredibly kind, Sir. Well, I am in fact, sort of, er… without an alternative, damn and blast it… It's true, I've run out of ideas. It's a complete nightmare."

She hid her face in her hands and stayed in that position for so long that Błażej had to stand up to straighten his legs. There wasn't much nocturnal chill in the air, and the dense, oxygenless humidity was preventing him from gathering his thoughts. He started fanning himself with the city map with the half-torn off cover, and the woman gave him a look, so he handed her the map and reached into the glove compartment for an old newspaper. They sat like that for a while, fanning themselves in silence, but the empty space between them was filled with the whoosh of grains of thought, decisions, various grey-and-white pros and cons passing through their minds.

"You are terribly sweet, Sir…" She raised her head, smiling. "I hope the trouble I've been causing you for several hours…"

"It's no problem. Really."

"By the way I'm Marta," she said, holding out her hand, which was sweaty and wore a silver ring.

"And I'm Błażej," he smiled, returning her handshake, and then selected Mateusz's number.

"Are you going to call now, Sir? It's almost two in the morning."

"First of all, call me Błażej. Secondly, when we were both ten, Mateusz and our mates at the summer camp on the lake put a sleeping-draught in my evening tea, and then during the night they put my bed, with me in it, onto two little boats. I woke up on that catamaran thing with an awful headache in the middle of the lake, in a fog and among all these grebes. I have every right to call him at two in the morning without any fears."

The woman snorted, smiling faintly and looking aside. As he explained the whole thing to Mateusz, she just shook her

head, gazing at Błażej and cramming her involuntary smile into the corners of her mouth to make it smaller in case it were noticed.

"Sorted. They weren't asleep at all. We were going to meet up on their return from Portugal anyway, so it might as well be now."

"Not bad," was all she said, letting him take her bag, which landed on the back seat.

"Well," said Błażej, sitting behind the wheel and handing her a second towel freshly wetted with water. "Time for bed. Tomorrow it'll all be fine."

Marta was dispirited, but nodded in agreement. On the way they stopped at an all-night petrol station. When Błażej came back to the car she said quietly:

"I arrived in Warsaw yesterday. I'm from Krakow. I came because it looks as if my son has gone missing. He's ten years old."

They drove along the empty streets, guided by the play of lights and their phantoms reflected in the windscreen. Błażej was unduly careful at the intersections, looking round several times and seeing to various extra activities, such as spraying the windscreen or checking the slack in the gear stick. Marta leaned her forehead against her own reflection in the car window. It was no longer the direct continuation of the crazy evening with a batty teenage girl pretending to be unconscious and the search for a hotel; not any more.

"He went to camp, he was going to come back by train with all the others, there were fifteen children and three carers. There were some children from Warsaw at the camp too, and he made close friends with a boy called Kuba… My Szymon is a bit odd, a very quiet and introverted child, he doesn't really have any friends, it was clearly very important to him that I allow him to do this grown-up thing, that he'd be in the care of a strange family for two days at his new friend's home, and then they'd put him on the train and I'd pick him up in Krakow. You know, the InterCity from Warsaw to Krakow has no stops on the way, so I was going to meet him at the first stop on his journey, but he wasn't there. Of course I called those people, at first I couldn't get through, no matter, then no one answered, so finally, and it was night by then, I found out he had a ticket, and that Kuba's older sister had taken him right to the train in person. But Szymon never got out of it in Krakow…"

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GESTURES

Photo: Grażyna Samulska

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We have known Ignacy Karpowicz thus far as a prose writer who has specialised in novels about contemporary Poland, filled with the grotesque, irony, and an off-kilter sense of humour (I'm thinking about his novels *Uncool* and *The Miracle*). In his latest book, a novel called *Gestures*, he has completely changed both the tone and the convention – and now he's entirely serious. Along the way he's proven – to mention this up front – that he's an extraordinarily multifaceted writer, one who handles various styles brilliantly. This book contains the notes of a forty-year-old man, mainly detailing the last months of his life, and supplied with a brief gloss (this is also the title of the final chapter) through his high-school love – just about the only woman he's ever loved, and whom he left in her illness back as a teenager. Grzegorz enters "the manly age, the disaster stage" – he may be a sought-after theatre director and scriptwriter, but he can't cope at all with his life. He's tortured by insomnia, agonised by various traumas and phobias, has toxic relationships with those nearest to him, is incapable of building a solid bond with women – in general, he's a powerfully asocial type. His main problem seems to be that he doesn't know how to live – and what for. He explains it thus: "I'm my the child of my parents, obviously, but also of shortage. There was a lack of basic products: meat, sugar, yeast and toilet paper, but also authority figures and role models." Elsewhere he says: "My life seems stripped of content. That's why I'm trying to lend it form." Responding to what daily life offers him, he makes only studied gestures, like an actor in a bad television series (its no accident that the protagonist is an avid watcher of cheap television series at the end of his life). Grzegorz's life changes suddenly – and quite unexpectedly for him – when, bothered by phone calls from his widowed and isolated mother, he decides to visit her in his hometown of Białystok after years of absence. It turns out that his mother is very ill, and Grzegorz stays by her side. He tries to think through and work out his past, to put his own life in order. He won't have much time for it, however – he also finds out that he has cancer. This is a psychologically precise and moving autopsy of a "man in the wake of ordeals." In a word: bracing stuff.

Robert Ostaszewski

Ignacy Karpowicz (born 1976) is a writer, traveller and translator. *Gestures* is his fourth book.

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When

When my brother had to scramble over my outstretched legs, he'd say: "Take out those transplants."

When Mother was afraid of something, she'd start to eat. She was more scared for others than for herself. Before Father's death she was coming up on a hundred.

When Father was in a good mood and had the time, he'd give me a piggy-back ride.

When I was in a good mood, I'd think about spending time with my family and friends.

When Zuza started liking someone, she became mean: just in case.

When I visited Grandma as a student, she wept with joy. She died of dehydration. I didn't come back for the funeral, I was on scholarship abroad.

Mother decided I shouldn't be informed.

When my brother saw his own blood, he fainted.

When Mother saw somebody's blood, she began working very precisely, no panic. She would guide one action into the next with a cold scalpel, making small incisions in the fabric of reality.

When I figured out that I wasn't particularly clever, and only industrious in fits and starts, I wanted to give up working.

When Father died, I thought that my friends had begun to go. I was ashamed: my father was not my friend. Friends can be chosen.

When I visited Kasia in the hospital for the first time, I think that she already knew.

When I look into the future, I see only my parents' graves.

When I look into the past, I see the future.

Glands

Sweat, sebum and milk, saliva, mucus and spleen. These are probably the only things the human body, all tightly packed in itself, can muster up. And the sounds from the vocal cords. Sometimes blood from the nose, or the lungs, in the urine; the elect also have stigmata. And tears, too.

"Who should we invite to your birthday?" Mother asked me again the next day. I'm not sure how to understand this question. Is it automatic (a December stroke)? Unthinking (Mother forgot that I have no friends in Białystok)? Or perhaps spiteful ("My brother" would be the highest-scoring response)?

"Paweł," I reply.

"Paweł," Mother responds, like an echo. A sour echo.

Now in the hospital, over on the other side, having had a flat tire, I decided to think briefly, no more than the recommended dosage. I wouldn't let myself clutch at sentences, to run away with words: I'd stay true to my first and compulsory love—myself. Then, who knows when, soon, I'd force myself to sum things up. I know the contents of the summary. All that's left is the upshot. The upshot I don't know. It's too late for an upshot.

A person can be dismantled in various ways. The most simple one was to just undress him (Spin the bottle, for example). The division into two—soul and body—introduced a somewhat more complicated situation. This somewhat older and more sophisticated undoing, too complex for this world of consumption, designed (to its own detriment, a view I share with Schadenfreunde) by Roman Catholicism, has collapsed, because it required a flexible, scholastic mind. I myself am considering the division into three of man: body, soul and spirit.

The spirit is the most mysterious, it is a obviousness and necessity penetrating every body. The spirit is greater than the person, but is shaped in an individual way. The spirit is invisible. It's like the air, a constant presence. The absence of spirit leads to breathlessness, painful death and an annulment of all rights to a trial: the Heavenly Tribunal won't take you.

The progress of undressing and dismantling in the 20th century: first down to the bikini, then out of hide, then the totalitarianisms made souls go up in smoke, by the millions. The holists triumphed: the masters of intellectual pudding,

the lords of simplification. The soul was driven out of the body. It carried on in sentences, as an object, for example, as an archaic noun. Even soul music records do no more than clutter attics and junk shops.

In addition to my hypochondriac leanings, I showed an inclination towards solipsism. My solipsism, verified by people and events, by bills and the state of my bank account, could not develop to the extent that it brought its bearer relief. Solipsism remained a tempting vision, unattainable and—at times – making me prone to melancholy.

Perhaps the one remnant of my solipsism is the fairly absurd conviction that human bodies not only produce electricity, like two-legged batteries—thought cannot exist without power: a total eclipse is a perfect void, a wasteland where appliances lack ideas—but time, as well. The human body must contain an organ, at thirty-seven years old, an organ that's constantly waiting to be discovered, a gland that produces time. Bodies produce time. The more bodies, the more time. The more time, the less chance of using time. This time gland in my body started to malfunction a little while ago. I didn't notice the moment, if such a moment in fact occurred, when something in time started to be out of whack. It flows in hops, from event to event, it short-circuits like a system that's been running non-stop for weeks: then I just see the blue screen of death—a critical mistake, there's practically no hope of retrieving the data from the RAM drive; amusingly enough, the acronym RAM means memory you have free access to. The world needs resetting. "Reset" is the word that pushed out the older word "reincarnation."

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Jacek Podsiadło

LIFE, AND SPECIFICALLY THE DEATH OF ANGELICA DE SANCÉ

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Why must Jacek Podsiadło always be on the road? It's not that the roads have been already mapped out; it's more that they're just waiting to be gone down. The author of *Life, and Specifically the Death of Angelica de Sancé* sets off not for a meeting with Truth or the Road, although he capitalizes these, but with language. Which is there—and how. And thanks to which an adventure can arise even on the short journey from home to kiosk.

This superb poet and columnist, making his debut here as a writer of fiction, says of his encounter with the Road, language, adventure (and sometimes even Truth), "It ought to be stated up front that our outing has no real goal. It won't even do the writing of a Road Novel any good. The only actual goal it has is a contractual one, which is to pay homage to Egon Bondy. Because when you are supposed to go somewhere, you normally don't know where or why. It's something else entirely when several people set out on a trip together, when those people make up a perfect little pack, and then it turns out that you can go a thousand places, and all of those places are very interesting and alluring."

These are not empty words, because Podsiadło can make everything he sees and hears and tastes enchanting. He not only casts a spell on real things but, against a backdrop of reality, as Jelitko the Spider he spins the web of the unreal, starting with the Spider, who first gets given a name, and who later participates in several of the novel's episodes, alongside Angelica de Sancé, the Rescator, Dracula, the Shaman, and others. The chapters that play with other people's texts (such as the works of Richard Brautigan, often quoted in the book) are proof that Podsiadło is a literary shaman establishing his identity with a superlative degree of expertise. These work perfectly with the illusionistic "exercises" based on reshaping real situations, in the name of poetry or of laughter.

Podsiadło is interested in all paths—the well-trodden, like the Road to Slovakia, to Egon Bondy, and the unfamiliar, explored for the first time. Of these routes, as noted in the book, there are hundreds, and the equally intriguing guide-narrator makes even getting lost on them into an adventure. The whole thing is a journey that has never taken place in Polish literature before.

Marta Mizuro

Jacek Podsiadło (born 1964) is a poet, author of fiction and newspaper columnist who is regarded as one of the leading Polish poets of his generation.

When

death comes, you have to be in the spot it comes to, otherwise it's all for naught

To Dorota Różycka

With the New Year I resolved to start a new life. No more delays. No more iniquities. No more Martinis on the express train to Krakow, when the boredom of the journey is ameliorated by the fine reading of fine literature while one is slightly and elegantly inebriated. No more reading, that's the most important thing. I sat down to write one last farewell poem called "Fantasy."

Fantasy

To Fantasia

I fantasized that one day again

I didn't finish the rest of it, because I couldn't figure out anything that rhymed with "again" besides "a fen," to which I took an immediate disliking. I fantasized that one day again, we would roll into a fen, …? Fantasia and I had never really done much rolling in fens. I soaked the paper I had prepared for my one last farewell poem in water and used the resulting gloop to seal up the window. Which is how "Papier-mâché II" came about. I took the gum out of my mouth and used it to cover up the peephole in the door. I covered up all the ventilation egresses in the kitchen and the bathroom with the first pictures to hand. This reminded me of when Letycja, who was still really little at the time, on seeing her two grandmothers at once had said, "Horrible old egresses." Outside you could hear the first champagne corks and fireworks. I turned off the lights. I turned on all the gas taps, lay down on the kitchen table, and put a dog chain round my hands, because I didn't have any rosary beads. But I did have a dog, a blind dog named Fantasia. No more blind dogs. The hiss of the burners diminished, blending pleasantly with the echoes of shots and cheers coming in from everywhere. When the gunfire and screams reached their apogee, something strange happened. The hiss stopped altogether.

I cleared my throat. Pensively, I rubbed my chin. I got up, turned on the light, and reached for the Christmas edition of the paper. In the box with emergency phone numbers I found the number for the gas company. Despite the dog chain on my hands, I managed to dial it.

"Is this the gas emergency service?"

"Gas it is."

"Happy New Year."

"Gas men always at the ready."

"And thank God for that. And I actually just lost my gas, Mr… Gas Man."

"When?"

"Just now, right at midnight, I think."

"Yeah, we were expecting that."

"What do you mean?"

"The millennium problem."

"The what problem?"

"The millennium. An omen of the end. Do you have a computer?"

"No, I write on a typewriter."

"So go to your typewriter and try to write something. Sorry, the other phone is ringing. Happy New Year."

I went to my typewriter and tried to write, *Life, and Specifically the Death of Angelica de Sancé*. My typewriter wasn't writing—instead of staying on the paper, the letters flew off into the air like a swarm of liberated, feminist flies.

I put on a CD by Marcel Ponseele belting out sonatas on the oboe and bazooka, and instead of him I got Robert Wyatt singing "Yolanda" over and over. I couldn't figure out any way to get the CD to stop. From then on things seemed to snowball, as they say, out of control.

There were snowdrops growing in the refrigerator. The shower kept cutting out on account of phone calls from friends asking how I was feeling this year. The vacuum cleaner threw up all its trash and decided to make babies with the hair dryer. When you flushed the toilet, the water went up and into some pipes going into the ceiling. History books

on the third millennium will end with the words, "And they shat into the reservoir."

My blind dog Fantasia, whom I fetched from the pound a few days later, had got her vision back. Now she could even see the future. She would sit there and read and read about our bizarre era in the history books. The skiers in the Four Jumps Tournament jumped backwards. A disconcerted neighbor complained to me on the steps that his wife, who always had been a good woman before, and opposed to degeneracy, now wanted to be taken from behind, and only from behind.

"That's the world gone topsy-turvy," I said, "I was reading about it in some book. My shower cut out."

"Who cares about the shower, when your own wife only wants to be taken from behind?"

"Then take her from behind," I shrugged.

"What if I can't get a hard-on?"

"Say it as it is. I'm planning on dedicating a documentary story to these extraordinary days, for future generations, as a warning."

"But how, 'I can't get an erection,' like that?"

"Maybe you just drank too much, for New Year's Eve and everything?"

"No. I just got back from the sex doctor in Warsaw. The problem I have is a millennium problem, that's what he said. Are you doing okay with those kinds of things?"

All because of those zeros that suddenly started ending the dates. After every thought and every action there now stands a puffed-up, unavoidable zero. Shoes whose soles have snow melting on them leave a new zero on the floor at every step. A zero takes up the whole bed when I want to go to sleep, an elongated zero looks out at me in the mornings from the mirror while I shave. I have trouble getting to sleep, and I don't feel like shaving, honestly I'm shaving in spite of myself. I'm trying to read the future in the new eyes of my old dog, round like two zeros.

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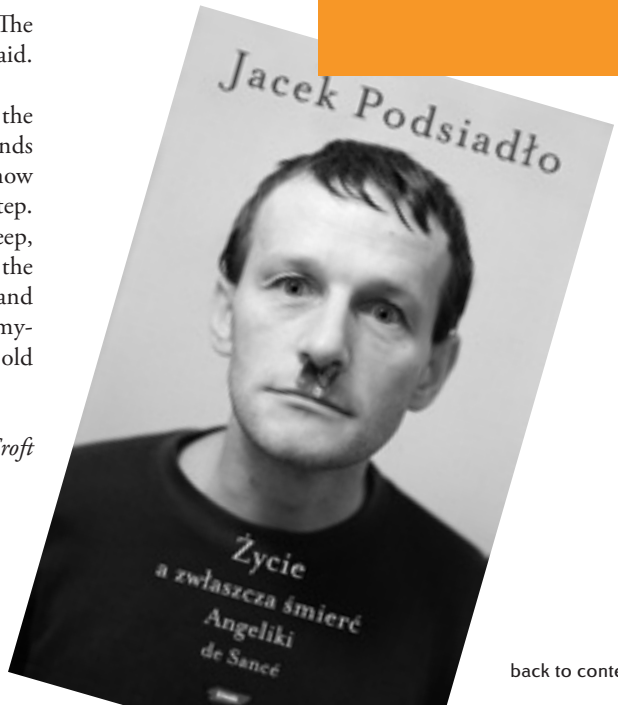

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Photo: Mikołaj Długosz

Each chapter in *A Pocket Book of Women* ('From the Marketplace,' 'Liaison Officers,' 'Rip-Offs,' 'Princesses') begins with a panoramic take, portraying nameless female types and sketches of the conditions in which they live. Next the author zooms in and focuses exclusively on the chosen representative of the 'species' she has carved out. The four main characters, representing different generations—one of them an effeminate man—are connected by the fact that they all live in the same building. So their separate worlds come together into a single reality. If we treat this as the reality of Opaczewska Street in Warsaw, then to use the biologically inspired determiners of Sylwia Chutnik, we may speak of it as an ecosystem and of its residents as representatives of an indigenous species that determines relationships within the system.

If we connect the author's two angles, they remind us of a nature documentary. And yet the chosen types are not representative, they do not reflect any particular model of life, but instead are psychologically intriguing. Chutnik does not approach them as a behaviorist, opting rather for a look into the souls of the people she depicts. Or rather she creates souls for them. She tries to get at why Maryśka has gone mad, why Maria decides to die, why Marian is incapable of having a relationship with a woman, and why the teenage Marysia changes into a terrorist at night-time. Thus she investigates not the social, but rather the individual conditions for each of their life choices. All of the fortunes presented in the book are moving, although Chutnik describes them in a tragi-comic tone. The distance with which she relates to her characters and which is required of a filmmaker focusing on nature do not detract from her enormous sensitivity. It is this sensitivity, alongside the carefully considered conception of this collection of stories and her ability to construct a narrative as well as some credible portraits of a social group and some individuals that set this young author apart. She has not quite come into her own yet, as she is only just beginning to find her voice, but Chutnik is extremely promising and certainly the most fascinating of the twenty-somethings debuting this year.

Marta Mizuro

Sylwia Chutnik (born 1979) graduated in culture and gender studies. She is a social worker and president of the MaMa Foundation, as well as a Warsaw city tour guide.

The Housekeeper

is born a housekeeper and will die a housekeeper. Engaged in the non-stop campaign called 'Cleaning up the World.'

Her life is like the successive segments of a never-ending tapeworm. Thousands of senseless, boring tasks. Having dissolved into jobs that repeat themselves, gestures that repeat themselves, she accepts life exactly as it is. Without irritating spurts of disobedience, existential grudges or distasteful rebellions. DayLaundryCleaningDayNight…

The housekeeper understands that putting up with tasks that keep repeating is what organizes our existence. She can find the throbbing tension in a scrap of reality and perpetuate it. Thanks to this she saves all those ungrateful dalliers who don't make their beds in the mornings, who don't use a separate knife for the butter and never–absolutely never–clean the floor behind the oven.

The housekeeper organizes events and guides them toward a happy ending. Then, without resting, without any laurels to rest on, she moves seamlessly into the next scene. The set is squeezed into several dozen square meters. It features primarily the washing machine, the refrigerator, windows, furniture, and the floor. The housekeeper is also the manager of the family, the famous **Food Mother**. This domestic matriarchy, tied primarily to the provision of sustenance, is a gag in the mouths of women at large. What do you mean, you don't have any power? it says. Here you go, you're real Queens of the Hearth and Home, don't you see?

Real power is that rank-and-file, concealed power, veiled by a pile of plates and the leftovers of fried duck. The woman can plan the meal, the time and the way to serve it. Nobody need offer her any help, she will not reveal the recipe. She toils in the steamy kitchen and gives herself varicose veins from keeping a constant eye on the gas stove. Her reward is eating the leftovers from lunch, licking the plates and chewing the bones. When everyone has gone to sleep, the Food Mother creeps into the tidied kitchen and gently strokes the domestic appliances. Shh, sleep, little ones, your next task awaits you tomorrow. The world is not bad, the housekeeper is not unhappy. Everything in the house has its place, and everyone in the family has his role. Without unnecessary casting calls, the housekeeper gathers up the script from the desk and begins to act it out. Somebody has to do it. It is, of course, true that housekeeping has become industrialized to a large extent, while the mistress of the house is irreplaceable. And the children? They follow in the footsteps of the Kitchen Queen or revolt and move out.

And so our Maria, apart from her household tasks, begins to earn money.

'Some spell's gotten her, take a look at her pupils,' and right away you could see that the girl wasn't suited for the market. Maria gazed into the distance and dreamt of beautiful royal chambers. Meanwhile like that silly hussy Cinderella she was everyone's hired girl. Strands of market conversations fluttered around her head. Spiced up by the salespeople:

'You prick, you've wasted my life.'

'Me? Come on, give me a break.'

And then: 'And I was at that morning mass, I tell you, honey, the priest told such nice stories about the dead and those, you know, politicians.'

Maria tried not to hear the hubbub and the conversations muttered all around her, drawled, yelled and spat out. What she wanted was quiet, a closed convent, Vipassana meditation and for the electricity for the whole market to be shut off. Her mom, matryoshka of the DIY back alley, always spoke in resounding ultimatums to her only daughter. She held the power, and she was capable of being caustic. Like cleaning fluid. She'd say her father didn't beat her often enough, that he'd spoiled her. That she was a lazybones and a hunchback. Her slicked up, unbraided, straggly little bit of hair. If she would just reveal her body a little bit at their stall, because when the boys came up they moved on even faster.

Actually Maria had little to do with the opposite sex. No broken hearts, just old geezers kissing her hand and staring down at her chest. But did actual love actually exist? Wasn't it over there, way far away, back behind the glass on the TV and only in America or in Brazil? A lady comes up

to their stall and says, 'Ma'am, ma'am, give me that teakettle there cause my guy burned the old one up again, damn it all. Looking at them football games, put some water on for some tay and forgot about it. Damn him, what a loser. I keep him around the house to scratch my back when it itches. Forty years of marriage and there you got it!' And then Maria's mother responds with a laugh: 'Yeah and he doesn't scratch any other itch besides your back?'

And Maria lowers her gaze, because she has learned about life at the market. She now knows what a streetwalker is as well as a G Spot. They have *Bravo Girl* lying around at the kiosks with advice columns inside. Strange secret wisdom from the domain of parents' beds: 'Dear Bravo, I'm thirteen years old and have been doing it with my boyfriend for two years now. I'm writing because I don't know if when we kiss with tongues for too long we might have babies later? Your faithful reader.' And the editors reply that you should talk to your mom, your teachers, or your priest about problems related to growing up, and that besides boys like to bite girls' nipples. And then full-color photographs of a couple in a loving embrace and a state of undress.

Maria's imagination is working, but she is incapable of getting excited over loving embraces and the like. Even if something whirls around in her stomach for a moment. Then there is just torpor. She dreams about love, but she doesn't know what she would be supposed to do with it. Arch like an actress? Close her eyes and open her mouth a little ways?

In the evening she asks herself if everybody is actually even cut out for love. Words flutter through Maria's head, and if someone were to accidentally ask her what she was thinking about, she would answer, Am I thinking? Surprised that someone would be suspicious of her and would be wondering. Being social with people, with her friend from school, has always been on impulse and "because you have to". Greet the neighbor lady, answer the customer. Maria can't even fill in the 'Interests' section of the quizzes in the magazine. She's such a grey-haired nobody. With dreams about *The Bold and the Beautiful* or the Polish soap, *The Parsonage*.

Meanwhile Ochota, Maria's neighborhood in Warsaw, is no glistening television show. Here reality is enclosed inside day-to-day tasks that are piously acted out. Being hypnotized in a familiar and safe environment, in comfortable monotony guaranteed that life could be endured, or at least waited out. **The Woman with no Sense** can always take up cleaning, right?

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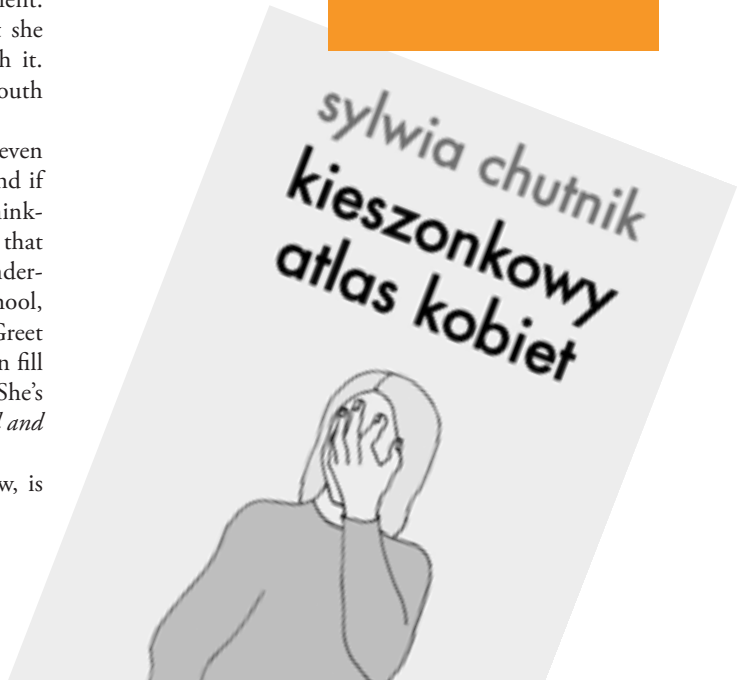

Photo: Dariusz Szurlej

"All this really happened. Only the names have been changed. But not that much," Piotr Milewski announces at the start of his book. In 2006 a Polish reporter is enjoying himself in a New York night club, using illegal substances. He's arrested during a raid on drug dealers and goes to court. He forgoes the trial, however, and signs up for compulsory year-long therapy. This he serves in the company of African Americans and Latinos, most of whom have no hope of reform. During the year described in this literary reportage the author has to try to gain the trust of his companions in woe, to fight the sense of absurdity in his predicament, and meekly serve out his punishment. If he doesn't hold out, he goes to jail.

Year of the Dog is, above all, a novel about alienation. It is the story of a stranger who has to deal with an extreme situation that is both comical and terrifying. The author renders all its aspects in remarkable fashion. He shows he can learn the language and symbolic repertoire of gestures his "brothers" use, and struggles to hide the fact that he is not one of them, and gradually becomes familiar with them. Seeing what the therapists are blind to: that what counts is the people themselves, the people the American system condemns to failure, Milewski realizes that therapy is illusory in nature and that he is one of the few to go through it for disciplinary reasons – because he's found his way there by accident.

Milewski is capable of gaining some distance from himself and the facts he bore witness to, explaining that the "folk culture" he observed would have been hard to make up. He watches these tragicomic episodes, however, with the awareness that he's just a guest, sometimes terrified, and sometimes sincerely amused. He gets a close look at a reality normally presented from the outside, through those that have managed to escape from it. This original book – and not just in terms of Poland – is more proof that life is stranger than literature. But not everyone can take advantage of the twist fate throws them like Piotr Milewski and become a writer. It should also be noted that *Year of the Dog* is Milewski's debut. It is an extremely accomplished one.

Marta Mizuro

Piotr Milewski is a lawyer by education, works as a reporter, and has been an American correspondent for the Polish media since 1992.

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It could very well be that, somewhere, there do exist public defenders who see helping the poor as their moral duty. They content themselves with a small salary for the satisfaction they get from lending a hand to those who are in over their heads. They love those dear to them as they do their own selves. Maybe they live in a place where the sun always shines, where palm and cedar trees gently rock you to sleep, kissed by gusts of playful breeze, and by a table amidst gnawed bones and bunches of grapes, under the firmament of the evening sky, a Greek dances the Zorba dance. Michael Berg was definitely not one of them.

Right off the bat he told me that he had once taken care of important cases in a good legal office, but he'd quit, because he wanted to spend more time with his family. With his family? His shifty, unnaturally sparkling black eyes invariably had bags under them, he had the sad, nervous smile of a well-adjusted alcoholic who had received one kick too many from the older bullies – no indication of a family. Especially since we were meeting at the CB at four in the morning. Curious time of day for a family man. And without missing a beat he was trying to pick up Maja, who had come to give me some spiritual comfort.

I tell Mike that the policemen fell on us like a band of crooks. They saw who was in the car and they thought that I'd gone over to make a purchase. The gang managed to toss the goods out the window, so they nabbed me, because I was standing closest to the bag. When she started to scream, fairly loud, because she'd been set up too, that I was innocent, the policemen let her have it. Incredible! They looked like they'd taken some speed themselves, and no doubt they had. They took the bigger bills from my wallet, then threw my ID, cell phone, and empty wallet into some bushes; she'd had to go after it...

The lawyer nods, but he's not listening. He mixes up the papers, nervously shuffles in some documents from another case that had found their way into his briefcase, finally concludes:

"What's most important here is that you've never been arrested before."

I had been arrested once, of course – in New Jersey, after a gig Armia played with Acid Drinkers, where things had gotten pretty out of hand, but the statute of limitations on that is already up, so I keep quiet, so as not to confuse my defense attorney any further. The hearing lasts two minutes. Judge Mary Sue Fitzgerald – a nice, petite woman in an oversized toga – wants to postpone the proceedings until June twenty-second. Mike prefers the twenty-seventh, though he knows that the quicker I start, the quicker I get finished. For him, however, time is not money.

June 27th, Thursday

It's a terrible feeling, knowing someone can do whatever they want with you, regardless of whether it makes sense or not, and moreover that that someone is sanctioned to give you nine years in prison. Mike dashes into the courtroom like a man possessed, just five minutes before they call out my name. He grits his teeth, gives me the thumbs up, just to show me that everything's tip-top, sits on the front bench for lawyers and the press, and starts doing a crossword puzzle.

"Payotr Melooski!"

I stand before the wooden barricade that divides the spectators' benches from the arena where, on a daily basis, the forces of good and evil collide, in a warlike dance of prosecutors and defendants.

Only then does it occur to me how much the American courtrooms resemble the interiors of our Polish churches. The ones that are bright, smallish, tidy, made of pine wood and plastered walls, where the pastor, preacher and heads of the community yell at the believers every Sunday, raining down fire and brimstone upon their heads, threatening eternal damnation for choosing to wear shorts. On the left, instead of a choir – the jury bench. On the right – tables: an usher who provides various accessories for serving justice, like church incense and bells, as well as a pair of secretaries. In the center – an official, like an altar-boy waiting on Judge Mary Sue Fitzgerald, but instead of folio books open to the requisite page, these are computer print-outs, and the clerk of the court. The judge is hidden behind a massive desk that sits on the podium like a sacrificial table. Over the desk hangs an aluminum inscription: "In God We Trust." On one

side – a policeman who looks like the bass player from The Clash: his belt sports some handcuffs and a sixteen-shooter. The holster's unsnapped, and the gun – as cop fashion seems to dictate – is sticking out a bit further than the rulebook recommends. All the barricade he's standing behind needs is a few lace doilies and a prayer desk.

And in court as well, salvation awaits those who have the cash. Not for the tithing tray, indulgences, or new robes for the Holy Virgin, but for a really top-notch lawyer. Mike mumbles knowingly, with the slack self-confidence that of a guy who knows how much he's worth. Or who couldn't really give a shit about the rest of the world. He approaches the desk with the prosecutor. "My client... full-time job... service delegation... that's right, that's right, of course..." He comes strutting back from the barricade.

"Let's go into the hall."

We sit up against the wall, on a pine bench. I have two options. First: plead not guilty and await my trial. Because I have a job, I regularly pay my taxes, and I've never served time, it would be pretty hard to make something stick, and so the accusation of trafficking will probably get dismissed. But there are also the test results of the goods that they got from the police laboratory – more than half a gram, which means a "substantial quantity" of crack. And we both know what the legislators think about crack. For possession I get the standard two and a half years, which means I'm in jail for a year and for the rest of the time I'm just on probation. As long as everything goes smoothly...

I listen with terror: it's suicide. Literally, no drama, no exaggeration – suicide. Okay, choice two: I confess to possession – a Class D crime, and I get twelve to eighteen months of mandatory detox.

"But this is no piece of cake, I tell you," Mike says. "Lots of my clients either prefer to spend a year in jail, or they just can't hack the detox after two or three months, and they end up in jail anyway."

I couldn't really get through to him. He was still looking at me like small-time dealer-junkie in denial.

"Fine, I'll confess."

I've had enough. He pulls out some documents he somehow managed to mix up on the way from the judge's desk to the hallway. He separates them out, evens them up, puts them in order, muttering something under his breath. I sign a document saying I give up my right to a trial by jury. And an appeal on the sentence which would have come today, which didn't sound too shocking. I mean, compared to the diagnosis from the Concepcion Troy therapist who checked me out after I was released from arrest. During the interrogation she revealed a cultural gap no less significant than if a well-adjusted American had been evaluating a member of the Zulu tribe.

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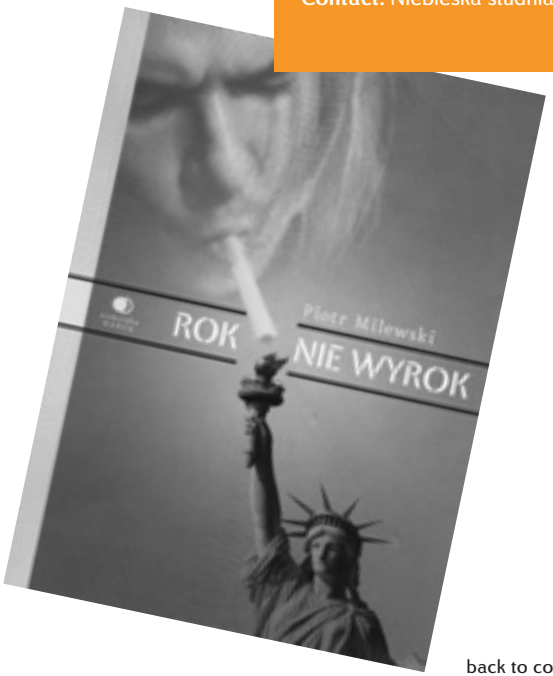

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Photo: Piotr Kaliński

The hero of Jerzy Franczak's book is, like the author, a talented young poet and writer who lives in Krakow. However, Franczak plainly distances himself from his literary character, by putting his existence in ironical parentheses. The main problem for Jurek in *The Fitting Room* is his lack of a defined identity or fixed life plan, because being a writer is a bizarre profession: it condemns him to endless revision of his own life with the help of literary means, telling the story of it, which always means shifting from the realm of reality into the world of fiction, where you don't have to take responsibility for anything, and at any moment people and things can be subjected to correction, revisions that result in caricature, or total annihilation.

Jurek lives among male and female friends who, like him, are struggling with the unreality of the world around them and with the artificiality of the roles they are playing. We could say that they are all stuck in the "fitting room" of the title. There they try on ready-made personality masks, which they keep swapping in a futile search for one that "fits" their faces. All at once this is an existential problem – and an excellent literary game, because the masks are at the same time sets of languages and quotations that are actively used within the milieu of writers and lovers of literature. And so, having found a job at a publisher's for a certain time, Jurek can "re-amend" the text of *The Divine Comedy*, as "amended" by Gombrowicz in his provocative book *On Dante* – thus restoring its former shape.

However, literary games and dressing up in masks are not just for fun: Jurek, his girlfriend and colleagues battle with a genuine hunger for real values and with an inability to really experience the world, and even if *The Fitting Room* makes you think of books in the "banalist" trend, the questions posed in it do not fit in with "banalism" – they are closer to the very old, very serious philosophical question, "how should one live?"

Jerzy Jarzębski

Jerzy Franczak (born 1978) writes poetry and fiction. He is a scholar of literature and doctoral student at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow.

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For whom am I writing these words? It's a little as if I'm talking to myself, or have miraculously divided in two, into me and him – some other me, strangely familiar, like a newscaster. Behind every word there's a "you" hiding, but I can't stop him and ask him for a light. I can only talk about myself, mince about and try on more or less uncomfortable costumes. Form an alliance with those who believe in me. Draw up a different will every single time.

"I leave all my movable and immovable property to the Jutrzenko towel factory in Oświęcim and to the Missionary Priests of Sobibór." A few words scrawled in the dark, and at once my life has meaning. I am saved from disorder, liberated from confusion – everything I do is a sacrifice for humanity.

But humanity is asleep, there is no humanity. All that's left of it are parks full of rat poison, phone booths, empty streets and flats hidden from the light of the Moon behind closed shutters.

It's empty and silent, as if man has not yet been invented.

Time to begin.

As we know, to write the book of your life, first of all you have to be able to write. You have to know what words to use to convince the reader that you existed. "Well all right," you'll say, "what if you forgot about all that for a while and relied on your own memory?" "I can do that," I reply, "but be so kind as to advise me how I'm supposed to describe the nooks and crannies of my room, into which I have pushed my bonneted head? Or galloping down the shady corridor between semi-circles of light? Or my fear, when the darkness, lurking until now between the bars of the bed falls on the bedclothes in heavy, snake-like coils? How can it be that I don't remember the moment when I made my greatest discovery – that I am I? I remember a scene like this: we seem to be walking along the sea. Now and then I raise both feet in the air, and the huge hands I am holding carry me across a puddle or a crack. I admit, I don't know when it was, I don't know where or whether it really did happen, nor do I know if it has any significance.

"What is my earliest memory?" – is that what you wanted to ask? What came first? First of all was my father's departure. That's the earliest memory I can summon up and dress in words. It's hard to say if I actually remember that evening, or convinced myself of it after hearing my mum's accounts of it. It is definitely one of those already fully conscious experiences that I can arrange into a coherent story: a taxi ride at night, yellow streetlights swaying and blurring on the windowpane I'm pressing my brow against, successions of glass doors, airport mezzanines, a terrace leading out to the tarmac – we're standing on the terrace waving at the aeroplanes soaring into the air. I'm feeling sleepy – it's cold – Mum's holding my hand tighter than usual, Dad picks me up with a long inhalation, kisses me on both cheeks and puts me down. I sit on the railing and watch: the plane turns two circles and flies off, getting smaller, disappearing, still winking for a while, until it vanishes among the other stars. In its place a stub of Moon shines brightly – my hand hurts from waving – Mum's fumbling in her bag, looking for tissues.

You'll say that's not much, barely a handful of vague images, blurred and diminished by having been frequently recollected and amended. But I do remember it well: I was convinced Dad was flying to the Moon. "He's gone there to work," said Mum. "So we'll have something to eat." From then on I called the Moon "Canada". When I looked out of the window at night, I felt watched – I imagined Dad was lying in a hammock looking at me from above. But soon I forgot what he looked like. The Moon went on rolling across the sky like a great big eye, still watching me, but differently somehow, I'd say: all by itself, though there was a force behind it, alien and strangely familiar. Another time I thought that shining disc was concealing some funnel-shaped depths, or corridors – I could almost hear a black bowling alley rumbling away behind it! Then I became confident that if I were to open the window, climb up on tip-toes, reach for the Moon and turn it over, I'd see its real, four-sided shape.

It may not surprise you that I had only just started to put letters together when I fell in love with astronomy. It was love at first sight. It began one solitary afternoon, when in search of a lost toy car I wandered into the family library, and

the spine of a big fat book caught my eye. There on the glossy dust jacket sprinkled in stardust was the title, printed in a huge typeface: *The Sky On A Plate*. I took it onto my knees and eagerly leafed through it. I felt a great emotion stirring in me for the very first time. I was thrilled by the disintegration of supernovas, the grand scale of the giant planets girded with rings, the panache of comets wandering paths unknown to anyone, the motley colours of nebular overflows, the polymorphic suspensions fixed in the invariably black *passe-partout*… There was magic in it, a sort of wizardry that instantly took the place of the myth about Dad. Now I can see it like that – at the time it was all a muddle; I didn't even try to understand it, I plumbed the mysteries of spiral galaxies, while Canada shone in at my window, painting the curtains silver as they rippled in the evening silence…

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Leszek Szaruga THE PHOTOGRAPH

Photo: Włodzimierz Wasyluk

Leszek Szaruga follows a trail leading in the same direction as *The Magic Mountain* by Thomas Mann and echoes him by saying that to see past history, we have to step out of its course for a while and stand still; reflections on it also have to be expressed by people of very different views.

Szaruga has adopted Mann's idea. He has set the action of his novel at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and the people he has invited to the debate represent various political options and generations. As they talk for days at a stretch, the gentlemen discuss the key experiences of Polish society from the end of the First World War to the present day. They try to discover a heritage that could be the foundation for today's community. They also seek an answer to the question of whether it is possible to achieve catharsis after everything that happened in the twentieth century. In these conversations the representatives of two different viewpoints clash. One group says that purging the collaborators is necessary, though it should be applied as specifically as possible. The others, in keeping with a view that runs through the entire novel like a leitmotif, say that "any form of existence is blame," so the only purging a person can achieve involves purging himself of the desire for purity. By juxtaposing these two options, Szaruga has placed any kind of political attitude on one side, and a Gnostic solution on the other. On finishing the novel, we realise that he has come down on the side of life, and against politics. Now we are in a period when the nation is going through a phase of disintegration and the disappearance of communal affairs, and thus any sort of community activity is usurpation. Generalisation has become impossible, and in reckoning with the past or judging traitors, as *The Photograph* wants to tell us, each one of us should start with himself, with his own family and closest friends. We should examine the historical details we find there as closely as Szaruga's hero does, spending hours on end in a photographic darkroom – long enough for the detail to stop being the grounds for judgement, and to become a small part of life.

Przemysław Czapliński

Leszek Szaruga (born 1946) is a poet, essayist, novelist, translator of German poetry, and university lecturer.

Only now, during the long, endless conversations with his mother, was he discovering the truth about his father, including the most terrible fact for which he was not prepared, and with which he could not come to terms. It all went back to the POW camp, where during his five years' imprisonment his father was recruited by intelligence officers. He was a particularly tasty morsel because he spoke both German and Russian fluently and with no accent. Russian was the language he spoke at home. His mother, a Greek from Odessa, had never learned to speak Polish.

He knew the story of his grandmother. His father's family had been exiled to Siberia following the January uprising, to Tobolsk, and had returned to Poland after the Bolshevik revolution. The journey took them through Odessa, where his grandfather had fallen in love with the daughter of a Greek merchant, a romantic episode that had ended in them leaving for Poland and settling in the Free City of Danzig. He was sorry he didn't have grandparents, like most of his contemporaries; they had died before he was born. It would have been especially interesting to have known the Greek grandmother, he thought. It was awful, it suddenly occurred to him, but to the very end of her life in that Polish family she couldn't talk in her native language. Though maybe it wasn't quite so bad – after all, Greeks could have turned up in Danzig in those days, Greek businessmen or seafarers.

But thanks to this very fact his father knew Russian, which in his generation was quite rare. And it was knowing Russian that was the reason for his life's great drama. The Polish counter-intelligence officers imprisoned in the camp, watching how events were developing and maintaining contact with the outside world through channels known only to themselves, were getting ready for the future fight against the Soviets. For these very purposes, for intelligence work someone with such superb knowledge of Russian seemed an ideal find. Naturally his father had agreed, in which a large part was played by the patriotic emotions that the prisoners-of-war fuelled in each other. Then came the liberation, the march to Berlin and the return to Poland. In the rapid pace of post-war life he all but forgot about prison-camp matters. He was one of the editors of a music publishing firm that was just being set up. And then one day an envoy turned up from the intelligence to remind him of the commitments he had taken on.

"And he got caught," said his mother. "He got caught, but he wasn't locked up. That was still in Krakow, and a then-famous journalist came to his defence, a bit of a literary type, a very ideological communist even before the war. But they already had something on him, and they caught up with him in Szczecin. It wasn't just about joining the party, I even think the party was meant to be a sort of protective manoeuvre, a façade, a sort of camouflage. They would certainly have preferred to have him be non-party. But it doesn't matter. Suffice it to say they caught him and forced him to cooperate. In fact it was done very subtly, with kid gloves on. There was this security service major, extremely intelligent, brilliant, he even came to our house several times. He didn't even put any special pressure on him, it was just as if he were making light of the whole situation. And then suddenly he became... how can I put it? No, not brutal, that's not the right word. Firm – that's not it either. Maybe inflexible. It was about a man perhaps a little older than us, who had just come out of prison, but who, just like your father, had worked at the local administration earlier on, though in a different department. This matter must have had special significance for them. It was impossible to wriggle out of it. And do you know what he did? Of course, he played out the entire scene as if it were a chance encounter in the street and invited the man home, but he also almost immediately revealed his own part in it to him. I don't think I need to explain to you how risky it was to do that. What happened to the man afterwards I simply don't know. He stayed with us for about a fortnight, and then he disappeared. And they just about left us alone after that, maybe two or three times your father wrote a report on the matter, but it no longer had much significance."

He listened to all this in horror. The thought that for whole years, decades even, his own father had been a secret police informer shocked him. He had come back to the matter over and over again, but either his mother didn't know any more,

or else she felt she shouldn't say any more. One day, however, when they were talking about the post-war years, she went back to the subject once again.

"Those were terrible times. Even today it's hard to understand. Sometimes people even disappeared literally from one moment to the next, and no one dared ask where they had gone. To this day no one knows what happened to them. Yet at the same time among the communists you met people whose acquaintance you could regard as an honour, honest people, morally unblemished, genuinely concerned with helping others, weaker, endangered people. In those days they were afraid too, and it was so terrifying that they were afraid of their own people. They spoke in a sort of code, they communicated in a bizarre language whose meaning no one would be able to decipher nowadays."

He knew how the story continued but he didn't know how the continuation continued. He already knew, or to be precise he already knew a while earlier, that the conversation was about his father, the father who had been a secret informer for the security service. It was not clear to him whether his father had signed some document, a declaration of cooperation or something of the kind, but it was obvious that he hadn't taken any money for it, and it was just about certain he had wriggled out of it rather than actually informed. So it was this time too, as confirmed by the story he heard:

"So I took the risk, and it turned out I did the right thing. I was right too, to be wary of a trap. It was meant to be a trap, except that the man used for it turned out to be my ally. Once we were at his house, almost as soon as we arrived he told me his situation. The secret police had blackmailed him to force him to cooperate. He warned me that he'd have to file a report on our meeting, and so together, really, we worked out what should be in the report. I admit I felt pleasantly at home in that flat. Not for long, though, just under two weeks. A nice, typical intellectual atmosphere, as if still before the war, lots of books, including lots of old German ones. I even found Heine among them."

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Stanisław Górzyński THE COMPOSER

Photo: Ola Sośnicka

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A mediocre musician happens upon the work of an unknown genius, appropriates it, profits off it, and in the meantime does everything he can think of to keep from being found out. In basing his novel on such a premise, Sławomir Górzyński had to take into account the fact that it is not entirely original. And he obviously did, because he respects the standard sequence of events, which can lead to only one outcome: the discovery of the fraud. What matters most is how he adds to the story, and what he wishes to convey here.

In setting *The Composer* within twenty-first century reality, Górzyński aims not simply to examine the crisis of an individual artist but the downfall of classical music in general and to ask whether a new musical universe can be constructed, free from debts to Bach, Mozart, or Chopin. And the author writes both about contemporary music and about the classics with the expertise one would expect from a well-trained, practicing musician He eases the reader into the minds of musicians and overlooks nothing here, starting with the composing process, continuing through to the preparation of the work to be performed and right on to its reception, which he deftly translates into the media responses.

Górzyński's stylistic abilities come through not only in the fictional reviews or the interviews with the protagonist, Gregor Zwaite. The novel also features notes from the turn of the twentieth century, written by a real composer, Wilhelm Corrado Fuchs—although it should be stated that Górzyński approaches the "discovered manuscript" sections of the book rather perversely, as if simply demonstrating that he too is capable of playing with literary conventions. This is not his only departure from an admittedly popular model. And all of the departures speak to the fact that a correspondence between different art forms can be extraordinarily inspiring as well as to the creative potential of artists from different disciplines. *The Composer* itself may not be a whole new planet in the literary universe, but it is certainly a planet worth visiting.

Marta Mizuro

Stanisław Górzyński (born 1962) is a violinist and viola player, as well as a novelist. For many years he has lived in Finland.

I went to Simon del Manio's audition by train. In an empty compartment I compiled my speech on Fuchs: how I had discovered him, how I was working on making his music accessible to the general public. The words and phrases refused to settle in my brain–expressed without conviction, they weren't finding approval.

At the same time, along very different lines, subcutaneous somehow, but clearer, stronger, I thought about Francesca Lammona, about her enchantment at Fuchs' songs. I remembered how people in the industry would say that it was just a hop, skip, and a jump from stage to bed with her. I saw us together, after the audition, in a restaurant. She was undressing me with her eyes, coaxing me towards bold words and deeds with every word, until we were heading upstairs, to the hotel room, where she, humming one of Fuchs' songs, would slowly undress me while I would wait, cool and collected, though thrilled by her body, her voice, and by what we were about to do. I imagined Beatrice finding out about my affair with Francesca, how she would be overcome by jealousy and decide to get me back. Two women fighting over me was much more interesting than putting together a talk on Fuchs.

Del Manio came to fetch me from the station. In the dark leather upholstery of the limousine, he looked me up and down and shook his head.

"It's incredible! I look at you and recognize you and don't recognize you at the same time. Zambardi, who is a really good friend of mine, I'm sure you've heard of Zambardi, he did my… well, yours and mine, Gregor, I hope you don't have anything against me calling you that, anyway as I was saying, Zambardi did us a computological reading. Based on the data I had gotten him. Gregor, do you know what the results were? It's incredible, amazing, fantastic, astonishing. Your future, Gregor, is basically frighteningly full of successes. With just one basic condition. What condition? you're sure to ask. It's very simple, that we combine forces. You and I. What do you think?"

"Mr del Manio, I'm sure we can come to an understanding."

I had heard a little about Zambardi. He was a sort of modern-day guru who told people's fortunes based on computers like astrologers used to do based on the stars. Lots of people, including people in my circle, took his fortune-telling very seriously. I'd heard Ernest Skala, the most versatile and the wealthiest of all of my professional colleagues, decided whether his pieces were going to be just regular songs or the next symphonies based on his readings. Apparently Lammona had once called off a tour of Japan because Zambardi had predicted that during her time in the Land of the Flowering Cherries she would fall ill and lose her voice. I myself was witness to Victor Korplov telling the crowd of people applauding him after a piano recital that he always put together his programs based on Zambardi's advice. There soon arose a branch of pseudo-science called computological reading, and it got plenty of followers, devotees, and shams, but Zambardi was the key name, and he himself had practically become a sort of oracle.

"I think so too, Gregor. Your songs are a goldmine. But what can the discoverer of a goldmine do on his own? Will he slave away like a miner? He has to take on assistants, workers, and of course… someone to run the mine. I'm not a modest man, Gregor, modest men come to nothing. I know my own value, you know yours. Together, you and I, we shall conquer the world with your songs. And Francesca! God almighty! The way she sings! Did you know… Well, we'll get to that later. We're just about there. Just tell me this: do you have something up your sleeve… a bombshell, something that will leave us on our knees at that audition?"

"I do," I laughed. "A real bombshell. Right here." And I pointed at my head.

Del Manio burst out laughing and kept laughing all the way down the corridors of the radio building. He kept repeating, "Right here," and tapping his own head. "Fabulous, fantastic, incredible. Right here, right here. Genius!"

In the recording studio they were having a rehearsal. Francesca Lammona was singing.

It was as if I were hearing the song for the first time, although of course I practically knew the whole thing by heart. I froze, enchanted, by the door, which del Manio shut care-

fully and quietly. The voice is the one instrument that when employed by a master is never out of tune. A singer, if he's one the chosen few, won't mess up a single phrase, because he simply can't! Francesca was one of the chosen few. How miserably unsuitable a background for her voice my computer program had been, on which I had listened to Fuchs' songs for the first time. And even then I had been enchanted. And now!

Her voice swelled abruptly with desire, only to fall into the utmost despair a split second later, robbing herself and her listeners of all hope, and then just when the final defeat seemed inevitable, a spark arose from somewhere, a spark which grew, filling the heart with warmth and light, and its glow grew stronger and stronger, it shot out a great flame of victorious life and headed for the last chord, to fulfillment, when…

"Maestro! How I have looked forward to seeing you!"

Suddenly, still immersed in her voice, with tears in my eyes, I found myself in Francesca's arms. Hugging me and kissing me, not in the least like a brother, she went into raptures over my artistry, my music: "You can't sing this! It's like a prayer! Maestro, you have granted me my lifelong wish. Verdi, Puccini, Mozart, you have surpassed them all. It was you opera was waiting for the whole of the last century. Maestro, I kneel before you, I pay you homage."

I panicked, because she really did kneel before me, and instead of then standing up straight again, she dragged me down to the floor as well. I don't know where the flashes came from, but suddenly the place was teeming with people all around us. I realized that as I was sobbing along with Francesca I was looking right into cameras that had the logos of several big TV stations.

It was only later, over coffee, as I observed Francesca and Simon, that I realized they had planned the whole thing. Well, so what, it had come out. Ultimately…

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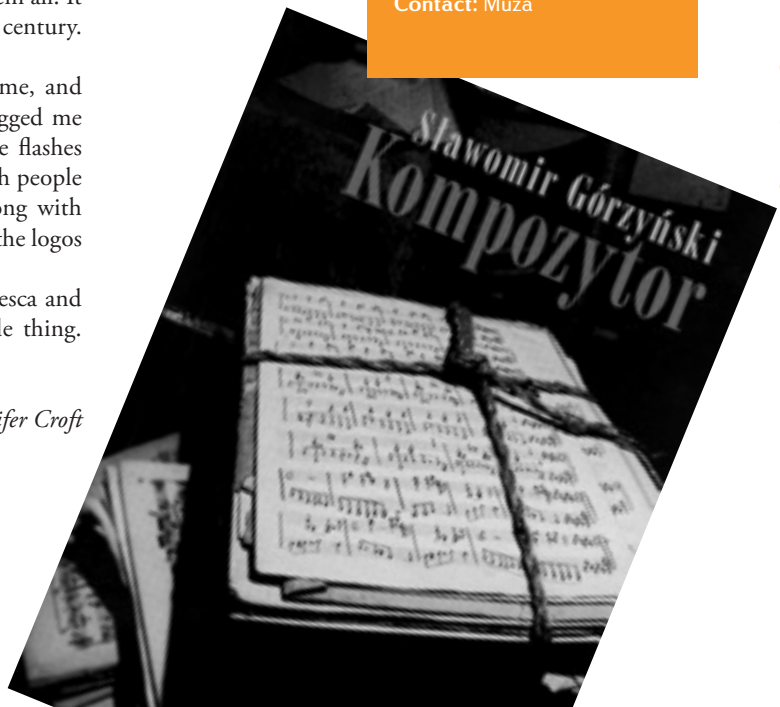

Photo: Barbara Lindenberg

Some authors treat dreams—so to speak—wantonly, as the amusing playthings of the subconscious. Others take them very seriously, with a particular brand of reverence, as signs or signals aiding in the understanding of the world and the self, or as evidence of an encounter with transcendence; this is the case of Krystyna Sakowicz, author of *The Book of Salvaged Dreams*.

In fact it is difficult to define the book, in terms of genre. It is a work bordering on the essay, the esoteric treatise, and prose-poetry. It could not be otherwise, as the author has set herself the goal of guiding the reader through dreams to another dimension of reality, making it possible to look underneath the world's lining and recall the fundamental truths and laws that human beings tend to forget completely in the turmoil of the present. Sakowicz chooses guides who lead her down a winding road through the land of dreams, as distinctive as their dreams were different. She writes about Karen Blixen, who dreamed a fascinating but simultaneously cruel dream of Africa, which allowed her to come to a better understanding of her own desires as well as—perhaps above all—to become a world-famous writer. About Vaslav Nijinsky, the acclaimed dancer from the turn of the twentieth century, whose entire life was a continuous dream about emotion, art, and God—a dream that ultimately drove him mad. Not only about them, but also, among others, about Maria Dąbrowska or Jan Lechoń. Sakowicz introduces their intricate biographies, cites their work heavily, provides commentary, and adds handfuls of descriptions from her own experiences. At times these pieces are moving and striking, as if the author wished to shake her readers.

Sakowicz writes, "The world's dreams contain something the world doesn't want, that it doesn't recognize, doesn't know, doesn't understand, doesn't pay attention to, that it takes lightly or the opposite, and it has no intention of tolerating this." This new book from the author of *After Pain* is really difficult to understand at times, demanding not so much a reading as contemplation. But it is powerful—as powerful as dreams can sometimes be.

Robert Ostaszewski

Krystyna Sakowicz (born 1950) graduated in psychology and is a novelist, essayist and poet.

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Some people are the dreams of this world. They break through reality at various points and times, appear and disappear, leaving behind them a reflex of surprise or a fog. Their life is reminiscent of a play composed according to dream principles. Meanwhile we are cast into shadow by dreams, where figures similar to them keep turning up. Then we say: a nightmare. We say it's only a dream. But those incantations do not change the fact that some people are to us exactly what dreams are, an unsettling lesson in truth. The world's dreams contain something that the world doesn't want, that it doesn't recognize, doesn't know, doesn't understand, doesn't pay attention to, that it takes lightly or the opposite, and it has no intention of tolerating this. As a whole, it can't get rid of anything, remove anything from its premises, as there is nothing beyond the world and everything that is brought into the world is the world itself. This is why there are dreams. Osama bin Laden is the world's dream of revenge. Mother Theresa of charity. The depressed are our dreams of despair. People who live-on garbage heaps are our nightmares of dispensability. We all dream of each other seen right through. Everyone dreams dreams belonging to everyone else, as the limitless space of the world renders the privacy of dreaming impossible. Dreams create fields of meaning that are unknown while awake, where what is distant and close, and what is understandable and incomprehensible remain intimately connected.

Dreaming leads to that unknown and solemn portion of fate before which we all tremble. Vaslav Nijinsky would often tremble "like an aspen leaf." He was a great dancer. He was born in 1889, and in 1919 he became a dream, dying in 1950 and leaving behind a few photographs and three notebooks filled with black script in Russian. Two of them contain a volume entitled "Life," one describes "Death," and there was also supposed to be a Volume of "Feelings," which however it turned out to be impossible to delineate from "Life" and "Death", both are thus a volume of feelings, so that life is life, and death comes unexpectedly. Nijinsky said of the coming of death: "They say I am mad. I thought I was alive. They won't give me any peace. I said to myself I didn't want to live anymore."

Nijinsky's Volumes were released to the world in their full version and without alterations only in 1995. Before they had to be altered, trimmed and distorted, because otherwise no one would have understood them, as people don't trust dancers, especially those who have lost their minds and say they dance like God. Nijinsky wrote in his own hand: he wrote his volumes with a pencil, the stub of a pencil and a penholder with a nib dipped in ink. From the beginning he used to promise himself that he would invent a better fountain pen, and he really did invent it, and in the distant future it would be patented in the real world. The eternal continuity of the fountain pen, the gold of nibs, their keen ends that gnawed and frayed the paper, these he describes numerous times in the volumes. Blue-black Stephens Writing Ink is a cheap ink, but it was with this very ink, these pens, these too-short pencils and this trembling of the hand, which was reminiscent of a much greater, more perfect movement, that the history of life and death and human feelings was recorded. Aspen leaves sit atop long, flat, delicate little hooks of stems, which is why they tremble at the lightest breeze. Trembling is a small movement, but let us simply try to shake more and more, and a great dance will develop out of it. In trembling the outline of a movement lies hidden that for various reasons waits a while to display its true strength. Movement is the language of the body. A language like that does not require sounds or letters. It requires sensation and expansion. It is a feeling in the body, not a mind in the body. But writing is also a movement. There is a lot of feeling in beautiful writing. I want to write in order to explain to people the habits that kill feeling, says Nijinsky. He is a performer who loves every body type and every kind of beauty. He says, "I love feeling, and that is why I am going to write a lot."

Let's imagine, though, that we are writing a volume on feelings, on life and death, on God, people, and infinitely important events, and it gets read as evidence of mental illness, treated as madness. Here begins the nightmare. In this dream, someone is passing judgment. Someone is determining. Declaring that what we are dealing with here are the typical ruminations of the split personality, that this is

schizophrenia and delusions. Nijinsky's *Diary*, in accordance with these judgments, is simply a so-called diary, the work of a madman, erroneous and full of "eccentricity… Formal disturbances of various kinds render it nonsensical. In the dream we would dream of something like this, we would cry the entire time. Nijinsky cries in his soul every couple of pages. 'I can't trust my wife anymore,' he writes, 'as I have begun to feel she wants to give my notebooks to Doctor Frankel so he can examine them. I've hidden them, and I will carry this notebook with me. I will hide all of my notebooks. I'm afraid of people, as I think they will slaughter me'."

In the book lying here, at this moment, unhidden, Pascal Quignard writes, "There are ways of speaking that can cause shaking."

And ways that can wound.

He says he seeks only those thoughts that shake.

If it were possible to read Nijinsky's volumes without any warning of how and by whom they'd been written—and they were written in a rapid script, with a shaking hand that stiffens up again, in small rather than large lettering—it might turn out that their words do make sense, that their sentences are simple, although their thoughts go around in circles and touch upon matters that interest everyone and the entire World: I'm writing about things that interest the entire world, says Nijinsky, and he asks that he be corrected always and in everything. He is an uneducated man, a man that makes mistakes. He learned how to write in two schools in Saint Petersburg, and that should suffice for plain writing about things that interest the entire world, but we all make mistakes, we are not bad people, but we still make mistakes, that can and always ought to be fixed. You cry bitterly because of mistakes that can't be fixed, I cried and cried bitterly, he says, I felt death. He doesn't write memoirs, he writes everything that was and everything that is; he doesn't write well, he writes what comes to him. Reading what got written then demands reciprocity. Some want thoughts that shake and feel movement. It is this movement that makes us reciprocate, that excites us, shakes us, runs away from us and starts over again from the beginning. Thanks to movement we discover that the lines dividing the known from the unknown, outside from inside, dreaming from waking—those lines don't really exist. They are always changing their position, in any case. "I know that all movement is given by God," says Nijinsky, and his last dance describes just a couple of movements, in just a few moving words. "I felt God the whole evening," he says. "He loved me. I loved *him*. We were wedded."

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Krzysztof Lipowski's *Honey and Wax* is post-memory literature, as it tends to be defined at present: the generation of children of victims of the Holocaust, World War Two, concentration camps, gulags, deportation and resettlement returning to the traumatic experiences with which their parents' and grandparents' generations had marked them. *Honey and Wax* is made up of four short stories. All of them are linked to the author's hometown of Puck, which lies on the Bay of Gdańsk. They speak to the dramatic fate of the Polish-German inhabitants of this port town, which was struck hard by the tides of history. "Father's White Shirt" tells of the end of the Polish world in Puck together with the outbreak of war in September 1939. "Caterpillar" is the story of Paul, a resident of Puck, a theology student from Tübingen, mobilised just before the war breaks out and stationed on the Eastern front. "Set in Bronze" is a portrait of Lisa, a young girl who ardently supports nazism in her native Puck, is resettled in Berlin after the war, and lives out the rest of her days in bitterness and solitude. The final story, "Gathering Ashes," is a tale of the author's trip to the town and country of his childhood years, a return he himself finds inexplicable. This is also a would-be variant on the fate of the author, had his family history been different and he'd turned out to be, by history's verdict, a German. Written with meticulous care for historical detail, Lipowski's brilliant literary prose remains free from hatred and bias, pat judgements and moralising. It bears a vision of the end of a world of neighbours, sometimes even Polish-German families, portraits of people who, from one day to the next, became enemies and destroyed each other's lives, sometimes due to instinctive loyalties that turned out to be both false and murderous. The memory of wounds and injuries became for some an intolerable burden, and for others an impulse that spurred them to develop new identities.

Marek Zaleski

Krzysztof Lipowski (born 1961) is a PhD at the University of Gdańsk, and a teacher. *Honey and Wax* is his literary debut.

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Lisa was lying in bed, remembering the poster it all started with. She first saw it in the train station waiting room. The walls of the station building were grey and scratched, and against them the colour poster stood out like a box of sweet chocolates, the best brand on the market. In the poster, a young blue-eyed and blonde-haired girl was dressed all in black, and had a very confident gaze. In that gaze you could see a combination of character and determination. The girl's hand was raised in a victory salute. Lisa often went to the train station to soak in that colour poster, which was a promise of a new life, and encouraged her to join in the gatherings in the most beautiful villa on the bay.

Imagine her surprise when she found that she had the very same profile as the girl in the poster. When she combed her hair up, the delicate outline of her nose was equally distinct. She watched the black-and-white film with Marika Rökk again in the cinema, and now she knew for certain that the female figure in the poster was her. Yes, it was Marika Rökk! It was she who called for everyone to join the ranks of the Bund Deutscher Mädel!

She always remembered the evening when all the girls gathered together on the banks of the bay. They were dressed in white blouses and blue skirts that went down to their knees, they knelt before the swastika flag. They raised their right arm, and touched the flapping cloth with the tips of their fingers. The light of torches trembled upon the faces of those standing, the flags fluttered loudly in the wind from up on their high poles. At a signal from their superior they recited the holy oaths, concluded with a thunderous shout, and then chanted the song of the BDM girls. With a ritual gesture, the superior handed each an object shaped like a brooch – on a dark background there shone a bright cross, made up of four reversed Greek letter T's. That evening, Lisa discovered the joy of singing the new national songs, and wrote down the words to some of them in her private journal.

Now she could walk the main street of our town in her white-and-blue uniform. She bought better bread and more pairs of stockings. She ordered hot water on the coffee-shop patios, into which she poured her own real coffee. Into this she dunked a crumbly pastry she'd sneaked out of the house, baked every Thursday by Cecylia. She did this surreptitiously, so that not even the tiniest crystal of sugar remained on the table.

Anxiously awaiting the summer camp trip to Eastern Prussia, she meanwhile registered for courses on economical housekeeping and home economics. The meetings took place every afternoon, in a converted Jewish house of prayer. In the corner of her room, she took careful care of the bit with the portrait of the leader, who peered out at her every morning and evening from amidst the flowers and candles. She knew she was safe and that the nation needed her; and that she could no longer give in to her old vain impulses. Even the reduced portion of chocolate for the real Germanic Christmas holiday didn't worry her much. She felt like she was now answering to a higher calling.

On Sunday afternoon she left her house for church, as usual. Dressed in her best clothes, she quickly turned right behind her house, keeping out of her mother's sight. She went back to her room through the kitchen door, holding a portrait of the Führer.

Her everyday clothing was very plain, she dressed in a dry, stiff manner. She no longer wore her once-favourite perfumes, not even those cheap French ones that our shops had carried for some time. She still loved the black-and-white Marika Rökk films that were screened in the small cinema hall. Before the show you could buy chocolate candies in the hall. Ever since the cinema owner had received a piano from Horst Wahrsieg (the same instrument that had stood in the finest room of the Health Resort), she didn't have to stand in line for a ticket. She went in with the Wehrmacht soldiers, who had recently been coming in large numbers on leave. After the film, she went for walks toward the Green Bridge.

Every afternoon, Lisa proudly dressed in the BDM uniform. She was of modest height, but when she walked down the main street to the gathering at the villa on the bay, she stood up straight, and lifted her head majestically above the heads of the pedestrians. She enjoyed this state and her steadily diminishing sense of inferiority. She wanted to forget the powerful jealousy she felt observing the life of the social elite.

She recalled the summer of thirty-nine, when she sneaked glances the wives of Polish officers sitting in the villa gardens under the vault of chestnut trees. She watched them dance the foxtrot to the gramophone records, smoke long cigarettes and drink colourful liqueurs. She spied on the young ladies who wore shimmering, flowing dresses and straw hats with tortoise-shell pins. Lisa liked the major's wife's dress best of all; it was the palest blue, with frills of transparent muslin.

When the gramophone finally fell silent in those final days of August, all you could hear in many rooms was the anxious ringing of telephones and the hurried pitter-patter of female footsteps. A silence reigned in the homes by the bay. Soon, however, the scattered sugar crunched under the soldiers' heavy boots. The Germans invaded with hoopla and self-confidence, the language they spoke had none of the soft Slavic rustle. They sprawled out luxuriantly in the wicker chairs they'd brought from the garden and sought shade from the surprisingly hot September sun. Their faces were clean-shaven and smelled of "Echt Kölnisch Wasser," the insolent smell of the victors. Their loud laughter rang out everywhere, bottles of champagne were popped, bright-celadon liquid splashed forth onto the white tablecloths they'd dug out of wardrobes. On that day the plaque with the white eagle was unscrewed from the front of the building; it fell slowly to the ground, as if to spite the expectations of the drunken Wehrmacht officers. Till finally it hung its head. And thus it stayed for a long while.

A few weeks later the BDM girls diligently collected the scattered sugar, closed the doors of the oak commodes and the wardrobes and the drawers of the night stands. The plasterers and the carpenters were summoned to the villa to deal with the row of holes in the walls across from the windows. They replaced the smashed doors and the parts of the floorboards that couldn't be cleansed of their dun-red stains. A Siemens radio appeared in the room, on the superior's night stand, along with a high, firm bed upholstered with seagrasses. On the walls there was a portrait of a man whose likeness was always decorated with fresh-cut flowers. A large cross with unbecomingly broken arms flapped on a red cloth on the front wall. The girls, obliging as always, quickly introduced cleanliness, discipline, and a new set of good manners, combined with a sense of mission. Their applied knowledge of tiny particles of dust now turned out to be very useful. They made stewed apple drink for the army hospitals, stitched blankets and memorised the new calendar of national holidays. In the fall and winter they brought a roasted grain beverage, similar to coffee, in thermoses to the train station for the soldiers, who warmed their frozen bodies by a coal stove.

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Artur Daniel Liskowacki
TSAPTSARAP

Photo: Michał Niedzielski

*Tsaptsarap** is a set of short stories linked by the same narrator/main character. A middle-aged writer and journalist, in most of the stories he features as the observer of some trivial, ordinary events; he only takes an active part in a few of them. However, he keeps an eye on everyday life, overhearing and grabbing hold of anything he finds meaningful or that might have a certain symbolic or metaphysical significance. Liskowacki places this curious voyeur in three principal locations: a seaside sanatorium, a hospital and some city buses. To some extent these settings determine the subject matter of the stories. The sanatorium and hospital stories are mainly about human attitudes and behaviour, and in *Bus Stories*, as the other set is called, we can detect an aim to produce a collective portrait of the contemporary Polish people. The things the bus passengers say make up a catalogue of the opinions, fears and illusions of the so-called ordinary citizen. It is probably no accident that Liskowacki has given his book the title of one of the *Bus Stories*. The now rather obsolete word "tsaptsarap" is usually associated with cunning theft. The way of thinking that sees modern-day Poland as a country that has been thoroughly plundered is an extremely persistent, universal "folk" stereotype. There are many mistaken myths of this kind that ordinary, simple citizens feed on. However, that does not mean *Tsaptsarap* is a journalistic book. Instead, Liskowacki is interested in tiny scraps of real life, micro-events, the petty dialogues and ordinary situations that no one really notices – no one regards these little specks of life as having any meaning. No one except for the wordsmith, who closely observes the world around him and eavesdrops on it just as closely.

Dariusz Nowacki

Artur Daniel Liskowacki (born 1956) writes fiction, poetry, essays, radio plays and children's books. He is also a newspaper columnist and theatre critic.

* A Russian word coined by Alexander Pushkin, implying "he upped and grabbed it". (Translator's note)

It was just after we joined the Union, maybe even the day after.

I was travelling downhill, past the church, towards the old brickworks, which was nothing but a pile of bricks, and onwards steeply, wildly, along Warcisław Street.

For some reason I felt guilty as soon as I got on board.

Lately people have been staring a bit too hard at the headlines in their newspapers for me to be able to feel guilt-free, or at least punishment-free.

Fortunately people are reading less and less; when they stop reading altogether, especially in public, universal peace will reign.

I was standing next to an old man; white hair with a bald patch, a waistcoat with nine pockets (why do retired people need so many pockets? for bullets, a second wallet, photos of all their grandchildren?), when tappity-tap went his fingernail against the dusty window-pane.

Beyond which a lorry was rolling by, long and really heavy. Pine trunks tied in bundles. They looked as if they'd just been felled. I could almost smell the odours of wood and sun-baked bark.

I could almost hear them creaking on the bend that the vehicle transporting them took too slowly. But not slowly enough to make way for the bus, from which I was watching it.

The old man stopped tapping with his fingernail, as if he were keeping mum.

"It has started," he said at last. And nodded. "It has started."

It wasn't as if he were talking to me, because he hadn't so much as glanced at me the whole time I'd been standing next to his seat, yet I felt called upon to reply. Anyway, what he'd said was already an answer – I simply didn't know the question.

"Yes," I said hesitantly. Too hesitantly for him to be able to ignore it.

He cast a glance over his shoulder, but not in a way that gave me the chance to catch his eye. I didn't instantly realise that was what he wanted. Or rather didn't want – to catch my eye, that is. He just wanted me to see that he was casting a glance in my direction. Quite so.

"Tsap-tsarap," he said, looking at the pine trunks, now visible from the cut-off end. White fields, dead tree rings. He laughed dryly, and coughed. "Tsap-tsarap," he repeated, with strange, almost painful relief, as if he were coughing something up, spitting something out. Something that lay heavy inside.

By now I had guessed why I was guilty – of explaining.

However, the fact that he was sitting and I was standing created an awkward arrangement. He was lower down, but I was no higher, because I was standing to attention. I was staring at the back of his neck, and he at the window. He was looking ahead, thus as if talking to no one, and I was talking to him, bending slightly, and therefore seeming humble.

But I gave it a try.

"So why do you think that…" I hesitated. Maybe that wasn't what he meant? Something, nothing. Nothing of mine.

"Tsap-tsarap," he repeated with an obstinacy that was in fact aimed at me.

"…that someone is taking them away from us. Transporting them out of here," I concluded. "Why do you think that's such a bad thing? Timber normally gets traded. It's traded, and it makes a big profit," I said, wading in deep, flunking the lecture on economics that's spitefully political these days.

He laughed, almost happily now. He still didn't look at me.

And so I couldn't move, though I wanted to go on my way. Leave him alone, Tsaptsarap, with his prophecy-come-true, with his expert's evidence. But then he would have stayed with me all the more. With my stuttering truth about trade, my fanfaronade, all my wise guy's knowledge, my guilt, for all our sins.

"Tsap-tsarap," he said, more quietly somehow, as if he'd forgotten about me.

We passed the viaduct, and went on down the hill, stern, grey apartment houses of the German proletariat, Anders Square, where they sleep on benches and piss in the bushes (red noses on Monte Cassino), Manhattan coming up.

The marketplace, stall to stall, and cops only in pairs now, more like the city defence, less of the offence, not to the city, at any rate, potatoes, beetroots, bananas, shoes by the weight,

bras hung out on a wire fence, second-hand booksellers, amounting to a son's school reading and a faded *Winnetou*, to spread out on the pavement and pick cherries for liqueur.

The lorry loaded with timber was jolting along ahead of us, we were still behind it. If we went straight, we could climb up Piotr Skarga Street, passing Tuwim.

Bring us home wheat from the Polish field, bring us home coffins of Polish pine. Ah, I made myself choke, ah, how true. As if I were the one yearning for that corn in the pine coffin.

"I do understand you," I said in a solemn but placatory tone, "but the world has changed a bit. It seems to you that way."

"Leave the old man alone," said the one behind me, who was closer than I'd reckoned. Smaller than me, with the narrow, hard little face of someone who knows he is in the majority. I took a look around, no one was looking at us.

We slowed down, to turn into the depot, right by the shop. The lorry had evidently chosen the city centre, the long Liberation road.

"What do you mean? I'm just explaining. Do you know why?"

"Leave the old man alone," he repeated, and turned towards the window. But chiefly away from me.

There I stood with my mug open, though my lips were sealed.

"They're taking everything away from us," said the old man. He glanced at me. "Everything."

We stopped, end of the line, everyone off their own way.

I changed onto a tram, and onwards, to the city. I did my things, a few of other people's things, until evening. Wondering at moments for wondering, if Tsaptsarap's eyes were glazed when he glanced at me. I thought they were, and I got the urge to check what he'd seen. I went into the toilet and washed my hands, in order to look in the mirror.

"Tsap-tsarap," I said to myself. "Tsap-tsarap. We take everything away. From everyone. All of us, always."

I couldn't manage a smile. I switched off the light in the toilet, took my toys and went home.

At the stop I checked the departure times. They made sense. I had about fifteen minutes until the express. So I stood and waited.

And just then, coming down the other side of the street, I saw a lorry, moving slowly, as if its wheels were buckled. Its long platform was loaded with pines. There was another one following it. And behind that yet another, and another after that. And another. Right to the very end of the street, all the way to the forest.

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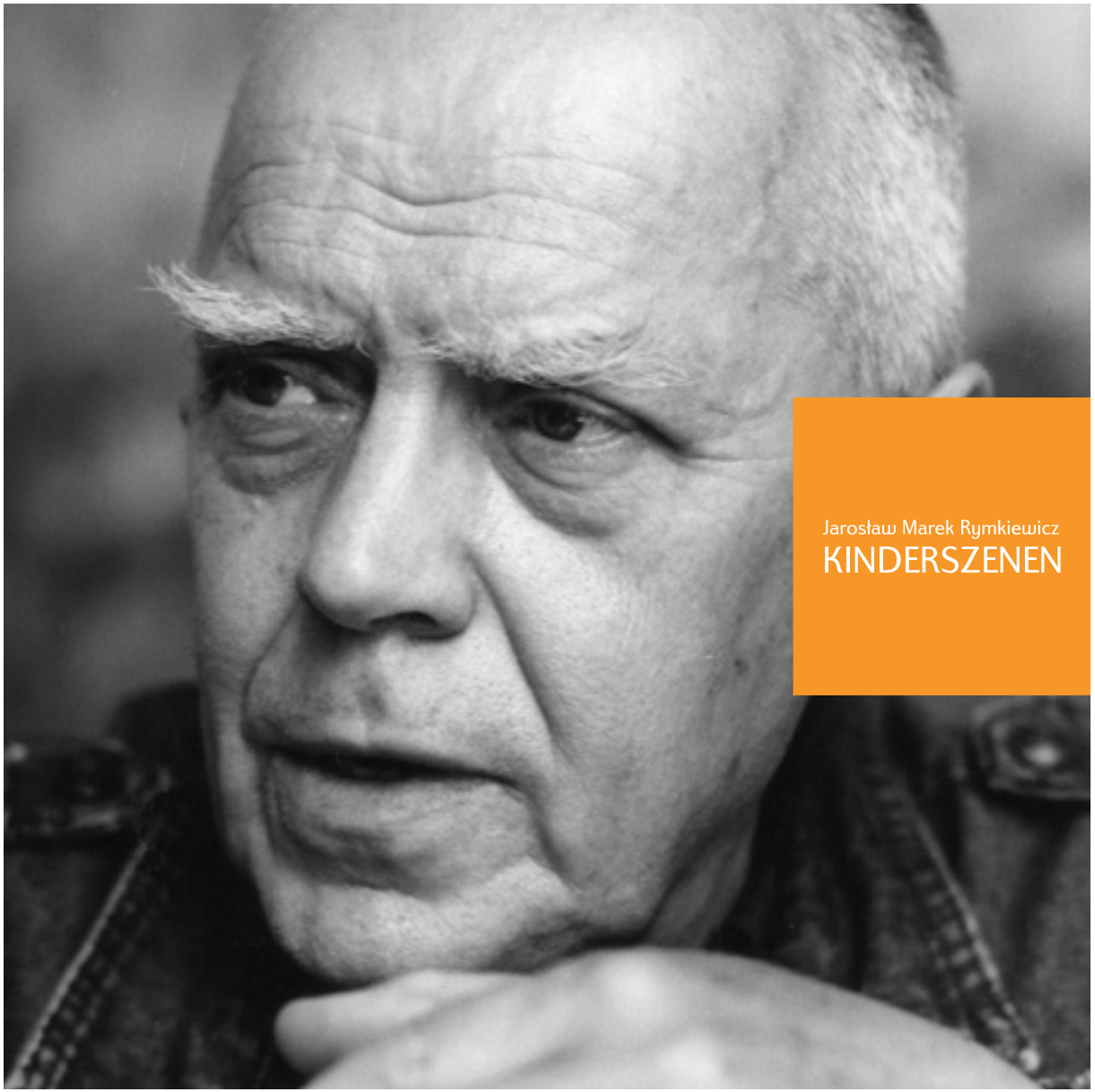

Photo: Elżbieta Lempp

Kinderszenen is a book whose two interwoven themes are the author's childhood experiences, and scenes of slaughter from the Warsaw Uprising, in particular one incredibly bloody incident, caused by a booby-trapped tank that was planted on the insurgents by the Germans. Rymkiewicz describes this event gradually, scene by scene, over the course of the entire book, citing the contradictory accounts of witnesses and enriching it with a series of other scenes of cruelties inflicted on the insurgents by the German troops to stifle the national liberation upsurge.

The child Rymkiewicz was in those days does not know much about the historical events that are going on around him. Most important for him at the time are his encounters with animals – cats, horses, tortoises, crabs, and also the hare from a naturalistic novel by Dygasiński that his mother reads to him. But ultimately the fate of animals is a background for the fate of people and for their senseless deaths. We could say that on the one hand Rymkiewicz perceives the biological aspect of the Polish-German combat, while on the other he is searching at any price for some higher meaning for all this mass death and destruction, finally coming to the conclusion that the rationality of the Uprising emerges from the fact that it was a form of opposition to the German insanity of murdering – the Polish insanity of fighting in defiance of any sort of political or military calculation of forces. Therefore the idea of the Uprising is only defensible when we look at it from the historical viewpoint of long endurance, where this spillage of blood paid off, because, by force of its symbolism, it sustained the Polish will to resist and the desire for independence. Rymkiewicz writes pointedly on principle, and makes judgements that will raise objections. So it is sure to be this time too – not only because of his uncompromising defence of the Warsaw Uprising, but also because of his attitude to the Germans and their role in the history of Poland, today's history too. And so, like all Rymkiewicz's previous books, *Kinderszenen* is sure to prompt a new national, maybe even an international debate.

Jerzy Jarzębski

Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz (born 1935) is a literary critic and historian of literature, essayist, poet, playwright, translator and Polish Academy professor.

There are several versions of the route travelled by the armoured ammunition car on its way from the crossroads of Senatorska Street and Podwale to the spot where Kilińskiego Street runs off Podwale towards Długa Street. According to accounts gathered by Ryszard Bielecki (in his book *"Gustaw"* – *"Harnaś"*) from soldiers in the "Gustaw" battalion who were defending the barricade closing off Podwale from the Castle Square side, at about 4 p.m. two soldiers appeared there with an order to take the vehicle into the heart of the Old Town. General Bór Komorowski went up to the window of the Raczyński palace and saw the ammunition car "at high noon". The account given by Hanna Malewska, a novelist who knows very well what history is and how it should be treated, and thus someone who especially on matters like these is entirely reliable, says that the ammunition car – Malewska defined it as "a small tow-truck" – appeared in the Old Town at noon. "It was noon, silence from the Germans, then all of a sudden Podwale was alive with shouting and cheering… Children, women were surrounding the tank, or rather small tow-truck perhaps, clearly only just captured, and four laughing soldiers were driving it down the street." So the two soldiers who appeared by the barricade on Podwale at 4 p.m. to take the ammunition vehicle away from there and drive it to Kilińskiego Street seem a little doubtful, their time too. The order that the two soldiers cited seems equally, or maybe even more, doubtful – according to Bielecki, the order was not issued in writing, nor is it known who, which commander issued it. Moreover, its content is not known, so nor do we know where and for what purpose the two soldiers were planning to take the ammunition car from next to the barricade. Therefore it seems justified to suppose that it never existed at all, that there might not have been an order. Somehow the fact that the order may or may not have existed didn't bother the soldiers from the "Gustaw" battalion (there were also officers from the "Gustaw" in the vicinity) and they agreed to hand over the vehicle. The barricade was taken down (probably just a small part of it), the two men who had or didn't have the order got into the ammunition car, inspected its interior and drove off along Podwale towards Kapitulna Street. The surnames of two, even three of the soldiers (because there may have been three of them) are known, though not for certain, and so is the pseudonym of one of them. Captain Lucjan Fajer "Ognisty" (meaning "Fiery"), deputy commander and operational officer for the "Gustaw" battalion, claimed that there were several soldiers and that they were from his battalion – "mainly from the 'Little Eagles' motorised company". …However, the route they chose is entirely unclear, because among the many accounts of this matter there are some that either cannot be reconciled with each other, or that it would be very hard to reconcile. Perhaps they could be reconciled somehow if one were to accept that the ammunition car spent a long time touring the streets of the Old Town, moving from place to place, returning to places where it had been earlier, and looking for the place where it should ultimately stand – right by the gate of the house on Kiliński Street. From Lucjan Fajer's book one might conclude ("And so they drove down to Kilińskiego Street") that the ammunition car drove along Podwale towards Kapitulna Street and, quite quickly, without stopping anywhere along the way or turning aside at all, drove into Kilińskiego. But that seems to me very unlikely. On the basis of various insurgent accounts, Ryszard Bielecki presented the ammunition car's journey in an extremely roundabout way, and as having been extremely roundabout. "The little tank drove down Podwale to Kapitulna Street and turned right into Piekarska. Across Zapiecek it drove into the Old Town Marketplace. …From that moment on the armoured car's journey took on the character of a victory parade. …the tank moved from the Marketplace along Nowomiejska. It got to Freta, and there it turned left. The drive went on for quite a long time, because they had to take down several barricades along the way." As one can guess, having turned left into Freta Street, the ammunition car then went (that is, it would have gone, as we do not know if it actually did) along Długa Street towards the main entrance to the Raczyński palace. However, this version too seems rather improbable. But of course anything is possible here. …Let us add to this yet another version of the drive that plainly contradicts the one found in *The March Through Hell*,

and which is given in Antoni Przygoński's book, *The Warsaw Uprising in August 1944*. Namely, this author claimed (on the basis of some accounts whose authors he does not reveal) that the ammunition car did indeed drive along Wąski Dunaj "towards the Old Marketplace," as Father Tomasz Rostworowski advised, but drove "down Wąski Dunaj into Kilińskiego Street" – and that means (or so at least one can suppose) that it drove into Wąski Dunaj from the Old Town Marketplace or from Piwna Street. So if the ammunition car turned from Wąski Dunaj into Kilińskiego or, vice versa, from Podwale into Wąski Dunaj, and did that in order to drive into the Marketplace, then perhaps it couldn't have driven into the Marketplace via Piekarska and Zapiecek. Nor, having turned into Wąski Dunaj, on its way from Castle Square (as it would seem from Captain Fajer's book) could it have driven from Podwale straight into Kilińskiego. All this is extremely unclear, the streets get mixed up, merge into each other, and intersect in a different order – different from the real one. As if it were a journey in a dream. As I'm saying, maybe it was touring, turning back, turning off and going round. Maybe it was going round the barricades, turning off before the barricades, circling around them. Circling darkly around its own death.

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Witold Bereś, Krzysztof Burnetko

MAREK EDELMAN: SIMPLY A LIFE

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The figure of Marek Edelman, the last living leader of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, who following the war was a prominent heart surgeon at a hospital in Łódź, is already known to readers from Hanna Krall's book of interviews, *Keeping Ahead of the Lord God* ("Zdążyć przed Panem Bogiem", 1977). Written by two well-known journalists, *Marek Edelman: Simply A Life* is the latest and fullest biography, produced in close cooperation with Edelman himself, of whom Vaclav Havel once said that for him he is "the embodiment of all that is best in Poland". Thus we have an account of Edelman's Jewish childhood in Warsaw, his youth in the ranks of the Bund – the Jewish Workers' Union, the building of the Jewish Combat Organisation and life in the ghetto, the Ghetto Uprising in April 1943, Edelman's participation in the Warsaw Uprising in August 1944, the years after the war and the fortunes of the Polish Jews who survived the Holocaust. Despite anti-Semitic attacks (the crowning event of which was the witch-hunt that forced his family to emigrate in 1968, and made his own academic progress impossible: for political reasons his post-doctoral thesis was rejected), for sixty years Edelman has been living in Łódź. We read about his work as a cardiologist, but also about his involvement in the democratic opposition movement in Poland, and about the life of a persecuted person under police surveillance. The book shows him as a contributor to the Workers' Defence Committee (KOR) and the underground Solidarity movement, and finally, following Poland's regaining of independence in 1989, as a member of parliament, actively involved not just in Polish affairs, but also an aid organisation for victims of the war in former Yugoslavia, as well as in building a dialogue between Israel and Palestine.

Illustrated with direct quotations from Edelman, his friends and enemies, rich in anecdotes, Bereś and Burnetko's book is not just a fascinating portrait of a twentieth-century hero – a man of great courage, faithful to the memory of his fallen comrades and a tricky character who, as Lech Wałęsa said of him, "does not fit the world of convenience, fine gestures and fancy words". It is also a philosophical debate on a good life, and a panoramic account of the twentieth century.

Marek Zaleski

Marek Edelman (born 1922) legendary leader of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, cardiologist, political activist and social worker.

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Marek Edelman: "Stop making some sort of hero out of me. Who cares how many rifles there were and who fired where. You talk about it so seriously, but we were young people then too, just kids. Do you know how much tomfoolery we had in our heads?"

A few hours after the destruction of the bunker and the death of Anielewicz, it's already evening when Edelman and several other people, including "Celina, " go to check what's happening on Miła Street. They walk through the sea of ruins. At one point a cellar roof gives way under "Celina"… At the last moment Edelman saves her life. Then they find fifteen other people who have survived miraculously, concealed in a hide-out by the door, and from them they learn what has happened in the bunker…

It is one of those moments when he saves someone else's life. Because although he would never like talking about it, everyone knows that he would save "Celina" herself twice more during the Warsaw Uprising.

Unexpectedly – even for himself – at this time he becomes a support for others. He would tell Joanna Szczęsna that he doesn't know why people listened to him, because he wasn't all that serious.

Today he adds: "Well, all right – we were brave. Courageous. But military? If you looked at the Germans, we just weren't in it. So maybe it mattered more that we were guided by some common values."

And friendship was important here too.

Pnina Grynszpan-Frymer would tell Anka Grupińska (in *What Goes Around, Comes Around*) a similar story:

"Marek was the field commander, and the group commander was Jurek Błones. Marek did emergency drills at night to test our readiness. With his watch in his hand he would see how long it took us to be ready to attack. He was very cold and very brave. He was a responsible person, and so in his presence I felt safe.

"During the uprising, after the destruction of the brushmakers' area, we moved from the central ghetto to the bunker at 32 Franciszkańska Street. Marek was the organiser of this move. He ran three groups – my one, which was Hersz Berliński's, Dror Henoch Gutman's, and his own, the Bund one."

When we talk to Pnina in Tel Aviv in the spring of 2008, she supplements her description of that situation:

"Marek was my commander. Literally. It was like this: my then commander suddenly declared that he wanted to be on his own, without us, to go over to the Aryan side. I was devastated. And when I went up to Marek and told him about it, he calmly replied: 'Don't be afraid – I'll be your commander now. And nothing will happen to you. Don't worry…' "

Edelman: "During the Uprising I had a few communists under me as well. Somewhere around the beginning of May they started moaning and groaning that they had too few weapons, and they informed me that they were starting a hunger strike. Go ahead, I said, there's nothing to eat – because there was nothing to eat anyway – you can go on hunger strike. Except that just then some sugar turned up. Someone mixed it with water so everyone could drink some. And there were those two, with their hunger strike. I can't stand rebellion. So I said to my lot: disarm them and bring them here. And they went on saying they wouldn't drink the sugar water. But I had a pistol… And they drank it…"

What a difference compared with the Edelman of the very beginning of the ghetto! Adina Blady-Szwajgier, Inka, will write of earlier times: "It was a lovely July day. This was before the ghetto was closed off. I came to work at the hospital in a very nice, pre-war suit made of crepe. It's important that it was crepe, because that's a material you shouldn't get wet. I went up to the window, and there, outside the building, Marek was watering the lawn. When he saw me, he calmly turned the hose in my direction. I jumped through the window, it was the ground floor, and we started fighting on the lawn."

A few decades after the war, when at his request Paula Sawicka would visit his former girlfriend Stasia in New York and would ask her what he was like then, the answer was, "Ruthless. But we all felt safe in his presence."

Sawicka: "Stasia told me: 'We all relied on him. We sat at home and waited for him to come and bring a can of soup. Otherwise we'd have gone hungry. We didn't have to worry

about a thing, because we knew Marek would sort it all out.' This confession was also incredible because they were all older than Marek."

Stasia, or Ryfka Rozensztajn, as Edelman would note, sang beautifully, she had a lovely voice, she drew well, she had black plaits, and she was his mainstay.

Edelman once told Sawicka that Stasia earned money in the ghetto by painting fancy patterns on umbrella handles. When the amazed Sawicka asked how it was possible to sell such a thing, ("In the ghetto?!") she heard: "What do you mean? You think it never rained in the ghetto?"

So Stasia was Marek Edelman's girlfriend. Though it also looks as if she was with Welweł Rozowski, "Włodek", at the start of the war. In any case, Alina Margolis remembers that Rozowski was known as "Marek's wife's husband". Paula Sawicka: "And Inka told me Marek was known as 'Włodek's wife's husband'."

In a small set of short stories by Alina Margolis, *Ala From the Primer*, there is one called "Shots", describing those days and changing the heroes' surnames. "Pnina, who never went out, made a sort of soup every day out of substitutes. Sometimes there were scraps of horse meat floating in it. She lived with her husband and her boyfriend. I wasn't surprised by that… But I was surprised no one complained, when she left the best bits floating in the thin soup for them."

Edelman: "Stasia was my girl! But even though she taught me everything I knew, I was always in charge! I knew her earlier, when she was a major activist in SKIF [the Socialist Children's Union], and I was just a little brat."

"So how did you come to be the boss?"

"They simply put me in a situation where I had to govern, and then it all becomes unimportant. I was no angel… All because their lives soon came to depend on me. Inka's, Stasia's, and Tosia Goliborska's…. All that sighing is over that … Anyway, it's not important. What matters is that there was the uprising, there was resistance, it lasted for a long time, and the great German army, which had thousands of soldiers, had to spend three weeks fighting two hundred boys. That matters, and not if someone fired from the corner of Niska Street or from the window on Śliska Street… Anyway, there was usually no one firing from anywhere, because there was nothing to do it with.

"Anyway, what could I do? There were lots of those people who thought they had to rely on me. A large number. But not many survived."

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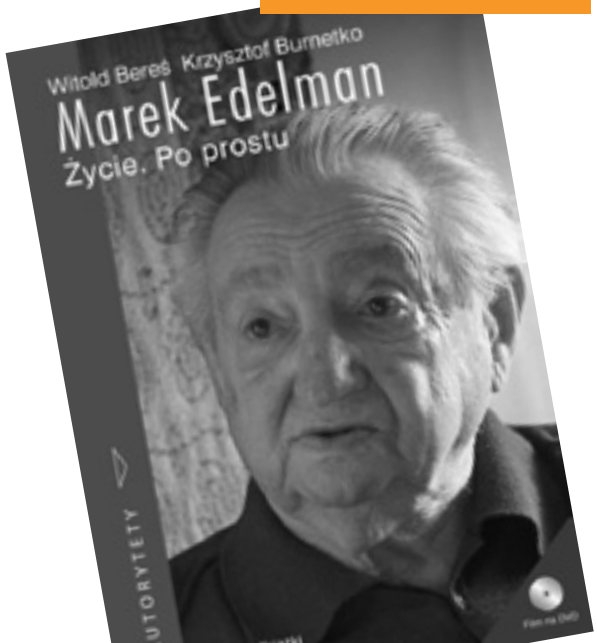

Piotr Kletowski
and Piotr Marecki

ŻUŁAWSKI:
A KRYTYKA POLITYCZNA
GUIDEBOOK
[A FREE-FLOW INTERVIEW]

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Andrzej Żuławski (born 1940) is one of Poland's most controversial film directors. He is also a screenwriter, film critic, columnist, actor and writer.

Although Andrzej Żuławski is approaching seventy, he is still an extremely youthful creative artist, both in temperament and spirit. I say "creative artist", because he is not restricted to a single speciality. He is best known as a director and screenwriter (for 14 films), but personally he rates his books higher (he has published 24 of them). He has also been a film critic, has published poetry, performed as an actor, staged a classical national opera at Warsaw's Wielki Theatre and worked in television. In Poland Żuławski's personality gains an upper-crust dimension from his Parisian education (film studies, political science and philosophy at the Sorbonne), his brilliant family of intellectuals and artists (his father Mirosław was a writer and diplomat, his great-uncle Jerzy Żuławski was a modernist writer and philosopher), his beautiful wives, who are famous actresses (Małgorzata Braunek, and later Sophie Marceau), and now his son Xawery, who is attracting attention in the Warsaw community as a film director too. Andrzej Żuławski is famous for his controversial views and sharp tongue. And so this free-flow interview has the tone of an unrestrained conversation that is bound to turn into an argument quite often, and whose order, imposed by the two interviewers, who are critics and experts on culture, is destroyed by their subject's witty wilfulness. This is a fascinating read. It starts with an attempt to define the media he mainly works in, cinema and literature, but straight after that comes everything – from his childhood to his cultural obsessions (Fyodor Dostoevsky alongside Sam Peckinpah, but not just), from his dramatic experiences in the communist era (he was forced to leave Poland twice and fought a constant battle with the censors), to some fascinating, not always favourable character studies of the famous people he has met along the way. For all his semblances of anarchy, which in fact he exploits with the cynicism of a knowing artist, which in the field of art means causing a shock in the broadest sense of the word, what emerges from this record is the portrait of an artist of decidedly left-wing views (which does not mean he is connected with any party) who is fully conscious of the privileged position he holds in society and who insists on the right to talk about everything he regards as essential and important.

Andrzej Kołodyński

About Kinski

Kinski was a mixture of a total idiot, a cretin, and an incredibly a-cultural, hypersensitive person. Kinski's egomania is just impossible to get your head round. I hired him not because he acted in those spaghetti westerns, in which he did himself in, anyway, but for his incredible face and because he was the first Hamlet in the ruins of Berlin, which I often talk about, because that was how I found out there was such an actor. The first time a German had played Hamlet, in Berlin, in the ruins in 1945, in the theatre. In other words he was an actor with a theatrical past. Anyway, he was of Polish origin.

PK: Yes, from Sopot.

He was called Nakszyński. He was a buffoon, in the literal meaning of the word, but it was so far advanced that it bordered on genius. There are cretins of genius like that. Autistic people, for instance, can do maths like no one on earth, and he could act like no one on earth, being a certain kind of autistic person. Apart from that we mustn't forget a couple of crucial elements – he was a drug addict, so he was never sober in the sense of what we regard as sobriety. He was always on some sort of very major high that increased his natural high even more. Personally I can only say good things about him. I insisted that he act in this film. For that I had to hire an actress with such huge tits, for the two German Herr co-producers. She came in a Rolls-Royce – I describe it in some book or other – she had a spotty mini-skirt that only just covered her pussy, and Mummy at her side. And she was a sweet, innocent little whore, totally cretinous, but very nice, a good person. I agreed for her to act in the film because otherwise they wouldn't let me have Kinski, because Kinski had punched one of the producers in the face for his fascist past, in a bar in Munich. Less was said about the fact that Kinski had a past in the Wehrmacht too, but he did have.

PK: Herzog claims Kinski was even at Stalingrad.

That's very possible, with him absolutely anything was possible – whatever you tell me about him, I'll agree that it's very likely. But let's get back to the point. So why did I manage to get Kinski for the film, though everyone told me he was the Anti-Christ? I let that actress onto the set, those producers' bit of ass. As a gal she was a real wonder. Her tits were quite incredible, six foot high, I won't mention her name. And every evening those German producers watched the scenes with her, and it was all fine, so they agreed to get me Kinski. He acted superbly and was very happy with it, and after that she – the tart of course – didn't appear on screen at all. I just wrote a letter to those producers saying: "Never blackmail a director, because he'll always make a fool of you." She was there, she was even in some scenes, but she's not on screen! The character doesn't exist, it was filmed so she could be cut out! And when at the start of production I said I wanted Kinski I was told: "Have you gone crazy, he might act for free, because no one wants him. He's caused so much trouble everywhere, he's so hated by everyone, in Rome lately he's even stopped acting in those spaghetti westerns, they refuse to have anything to do with him, he's at rock bottom. " And when we called his agent in Rome, who went mad with joy, Kinski called back immediately to say he was on his way, and I said: "Don't come yet, because I don't know if I can pull off this manoeuvre." "No, I'm coming because it's important." "But you haven't read the script." "No, I'm coming." Kinski came, and stayed in this shabby little hotel. He had a very young wife, with whom he later had a child, a tiny little Vietnamese girl. They both took an awful lot of drugs and didn't have the money for a decent hotel. We sorted one out for them where there was water running in the corridor and the crapper, because they didn't have the money for anything else and the producers didn't know if he'd actually be in the film, so they didn't know whether to provide the money for it or not. Because of this he was already grateful before the filming. Apart from that we were quite alike in temperament. It may not be obvious at first glance, but when I get in a rage, I can be really dangerous. In fact, many of the directors I know have something like that about them, where if you tread on the corns of someone like that he can kill. Fabio Testi, who was two heads taller than me and three

times broader in the shoulders, an ex-Commando – I almost killed him. I was saved by Andrzej Jaroszewicz, who tore the top off a little marble table, aimed a blow at Testi with it and said to me: "Don't you worry, I'll kill him." (*Laughter*.) It was when the guy started moaning: "Give me back my eyes!" in such dreadful Italian broken French. "I act with my eyes, where are my eyes in this film, where are the close-ups on my eyes…" I thought I'd kill him, I really did….

So, as Kinski could sense that we both had quite easily explosive temperaments, he saw it as a positive thing between us and behaved in a more than professional way. He was on set an hour before everyone else, he didn't run riot for the shadow of a second. He even tried to make friends with Romy Schneider, who didn't particularly like him. We parted in tears, and then I read in his book of memoirs that he said I was a total cretin and wrote, no, that I was a priest, a sort of sanctimonious moralizer, it says something like that in his memoirs.

PK: He also writes there that he watched the entire film but didn't understand a word of it.

I don't remember that, but I do remember that I was treated like a sanctimonious little priest, the ultimate cretin, and as in that book he does a hatchet job on absolutely everyone, he picks everyone to pieces, he died in great loneliness. That was his general attitude to the world and to everything. I remember his daughter Nasstasja telling me that when she was asked if she'd been sad when she heard her father had died, she replied: "Yes. For two minutes".

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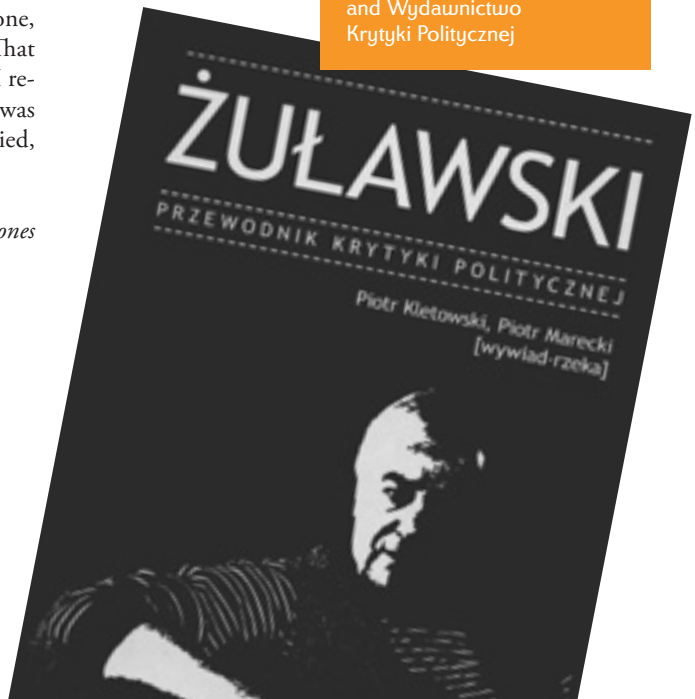

Photo: Michał Mutor

Turul Goulash is a volume of remarkable travel-essay prose devoted to the Hungarians. The choice of this country in particular ought to cause no surprise, because the author has Hungarian blood flowing through his veins. The title of the book refers to one of Hungary's trademark dishes, as do the chapter titles ("Horthy Roast" or "St. Stefan's Salami"). Varga dedicates a great deal of space to descriptions of his visits to restaurants and bars of various types, and the virtues of various dishes, from simple roasted blood sausage served with bread, mustard and marinated vegetables in the meat shops, to more complex fried and steamed delicacies. Moreover, these descriptions of Hungarian cuisine – which is unhealthy, greasy and hard on the stomach – help him to describe the Hungarian soul, smothered in stifling atmosphere and agonized spleen. Varga depicts Hungary as a place where a constant melancholy, nostalgia and sadness reigns; and even sorrow, premonitions of disaster and depression are relished with masochistic glee. The author of *Turul Goulash* sees the cause for this Hungarian mood above all in their complex history, which has brought them so many disasters, in their unfulfilled dreams for a Great Hungary, and in the cultural dissimilarity of the ancient nomads, who drifted into Central Europe from who knows exactly where.

Turul Goulash is indeed a gulash of sorts, with pieces of lots of different things mixed together. Varga has cooked up this literary dish on purpose. He doesn't describe just one Hungarian dish, nor just one period from the country's history; he roams through time and space, recalling events from the distant past, while also writing about the present day (including the grotesque revolt in 2006 directed against premier Gyurcsány), he sings the praises of Budapest, and recalls his journeys to anonymous Hungarian villages, presenting cuisine, culture, customs... Some motifs he quickly abandons, while to others he obsessively returns. He presents his adventure with Hungary and the Hungarians, one that has been going on almost since birth; he writes about the country with a sense of distance, and yet with a raw affection.

Robert Ostaszewski

Krzysztof Varga (born 1968) is a writer, literary critic and journalist. He published his sixth novel last year.

It was only after I had been released from the world of mandatory visits to my father's friends for some time that I finally saw there was more to the world than lecho, stuffed peppers and potato casserole, but also frustration, complexes and incurable, aching, muddled memories. That there was also nostalgia for the times of Notary Miklós Horthy and Comrade János Kádár; ultimately there had to be nostalgia of some kind, because this is what constitutes Hungarian life. I remember that Comrade Kadar's name often cropped up in those conversations, they surely moaned about him, and now they surely moan that he's gone. The Kadar times are nostalgia-breeding, because they were the best of times for Eastern Europe, as well as the worst of times, because it was a period of broken backs and mental handcuffs.

In Budapest every other tea-room is named "Nostalgia": they sell nostalgia candies, and nostalgia covers the walls of houses and the cobblestones of the streets with lichen. This is a sigh of longing for one-time greatness, though the country's last period of actual greatness took place over five hundred years ago, under King Matthias Corvinus, if we don't count the Hungarian soccer team in the fifties and sixties, and the international success of the bands Omega and Lokomotiv G T in the seventies.

Even the weather forecast on the Duna station is nostalgic, covering the "Carpathian Basin," which is the euphemistic name for the whole area inhabited by a Hungarian minority, with a particular emphasis on Transylvania.

In the "Nostalgia" junk shop on Klauzal utca, amid dozens of pepper mills, in a crush of lamps, bottles and soda-pop labels, there is an orderly row of Lenin busts. His towering portrait looms over the store's interior, in a display that also includes a Stalin. In the depths of the store, next to the rack with Soviet military hats with brims as big as pizzas, there are more busts, probably of contemporary manufacture; hard to say if they really came off the assembly line. Lenin heads are in the majority, there are a few Stalins, and even an Adolf Hitler for seven thousand eight hundred forints.

In the Nostalgia cafeteria on the first floor of the market by Lehel Square, the local alcoholics nostalgically sway their heads over their glasses. A beer costs two hundred forints here – half as much as in the downtown bars—and the price evokes the good old days. After all, there are no times apart from the old times, which were certainly better; though no one seems able to really say what this "betterness" consisted of. "Nostalgic trains" depart from the nearby Nyugati station, headed for Esztergom and round the Danube Bend; you can ride the choo-choo seventy kilometers each way, sighing over the one-time splendor.

But the turuls are surely the most nostalgic; these are the mythical Hungarian birds you see wherever you look. On monuments, buildings, military emblems, the backpacks of the nationalist-inclined youth and on the flat chests of girls selling sandwiches and making coffee at the Brunch Bakery on Retek utca off Moscow Square. The turul, a strange cross between an eagle and a goose, is a composite embodiment of Hungarian dreams and complexes.

It claims only one street and one cul-de-sac in all of Budapest. Both the street and the cul-de-sac are at the edge of the second quarter, on the outskirts of town, far from the center. The quarter where you find Turul utca is really a small town unto itself – it is serviced by the city's transit system, but the streets and homes more resemble an overgrown village. Sitting on the patio of the Nancsi Neni Inn on Ordógarok utca, you can feel like you're on some old-world vacation, somewhere far from Budapest, surely in a better past, perhaps before the war, and munching on leg of goose you fall into the mandatory nostalgia.

But while the visiting Budapesters come to Aunt Nancsi's for a celebratory and – naturally – very expensive meal, who stops by the neighboring Turul Street, which has no more than a bus stop and a few houses?

In Budapest, with its twenty-three administrative zones, every street name can appear in every district. There could theoretically be twenty-three Turul Streets, just like there are countless streets and squares named after János Arany, Atilla, Batthyányi, Bem, Kossuth, Petőfi, Rákóczi, and Vörösmarty. Meanwhile, there is only one Turul Street. Despite the fact that you stumble across traces of this bird with every step you take in Hungary.

I became interested in the turul only when, in the mining town of Tatabánya, some sixty kilometers west of Budapest, I saw a proud likeness of the bird that stands on the Buda castle. The bird from the castle walls is known to all who come to the Hungarian capital as tourists, as well as all the city's residents, because it spreads its great wings in the place most thronged by tourists. I remember it from my earliest years, and it has never evoked the slightest flutter of emotion in me, given that there are masses of eagles lifting off of monuments, castles and tombs all across Europe, and raising their proud beaks and sharpening their talons in South America and Africa to boot. Why should one more cause any excitement?

Except that the turul is no ordinary eagle, it's a made-up eagle. This is a fantastical animal that lives in nature; you could make a documentary film for the Animal Planet channel about it, a film in which the turul would swoop over the plains and hunt for mice. This is an altogether separate Hungarian version of the predatory bird, seemingly similar to the eagle, and yet not entirely.

Translated by Soren Gauger

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Andrzej Dybczak
GUGARA

Photo: Tomasz Bielenia

Up till now it was Mariusz Wilk, the author of *On the Trail of the Reindeer*, who was Poland's chief specialist in describing the far outskirts of Russia, places very rarely visited by tourists. A contender for his title has now emerged in the young writer Andrzej Dybczak, who has recently published *Gugara*. Dybczak, an ethnologist by education, has set off for a remote corner of Siberia, to a village that is equally hard to reach and to leave. He lived there and made friends with some of the native people there, the Evenks. While Wilk is very interested in the history and the culture of the places he visits, the author of *Gugara* focuses above all on the present, and the daily lives of the people he observes. Dybczak got to know it inside out, living both in backwater villages and on the taiga, in *chooms*, a special kind of tent, while the reindeer are being fed. The Evenks have stopped half-way between their traditional, ancient way of life, and a modern one. They apparently still live mostly from reindeer breeding (at least those who haven't sold their herds for booze), live in *chooms*, speak their own language, but they can no longer give up the comforts of civilisation for long (meagre though they may be). The history and transformations that were forcibly imposed upon them in the times of the Soviet Union have left a gash in their consciousness and upset their identity. Small wonder, then, that they are speeding towards self-destruction – the youth often die in absurd arguments or try their luck (often without any success) out in the world, while their elders drink themselves blind. There's no accident, perhaps, that two significant scenes are placed at the end of Dybczak's book: a funeral procession and a folk festival. The Evenks will either die out or become a kind of heritage park, where they will repeat the same gestures and behaviour, which they themselves no longer entirely understand – or so the author seems to suggest.

Dybczak writes vividly of these people the world has forgotten, without any illusions, but also with a certain (rather rough) tenderness. Much as he does about the Siberian nature, which has been greatly devastated by man, but which still holds a fascinating raw beauty.

Robert Ostaszewski

Andrzej Dybczak (born 1978) is an ethnologist who has recorded his time in Siberia in a book and a documentary film entitled *Gugara*.

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With eyes squeezed shut, a microphone to his lips and fingers spread in passion, he sang a plaintive song. For the refrain it changed into a solemn hymn, it seemed to lift his modest frame above the wet and glistening planks of the stage. The impression was of a man walking on the surface of a dark lake, tiny and alone, assisted only by the two black microphone-stands and rows of colourful balloons. From the black patent-leather shoes to the fields of blue suit jackets, all were done up with silver stripes, beads shaped in ethnic motifs and ribbons. The blue of the costumes was less vivid when drenched in water, which the cloudy sky and fog poured forth generously, covering the field in Tur with a damp veil. There was an opposite effect for all the accessories covering the blue – the more they were soaked with rain, the more colourful they seemed. Sequin diamonds glistened on wide neckties, as did the bead patterns covering blue ear-flaps. The artist flapped his full lips, like an exotic bird performing a complicated mating ritual against the backdrop of the asbestic sheds scattered about the stage. He surely hadn't noticed that the speakers had blown, because he was still passionately pressing his mouth against the microphone. But his velvety voice reached no further than the first row of the audience, pressed against the high stage, at his feet. He bowed deeply, the piece had ended. An applause that was weak and scattered – like the audience itself – trickled forth, just loud enough to spook the flock of birds perched on the high-voltage wires, making them fly a few meters further on. Soon the applause died out, and the singer began a new number. This time he gestured, tracing smooth arcs and circles in the air, which might have suggested a song about the beauty of his native land. The public listened, straining their ears. Then came a guest appearance by a Yakutsk song star, who had been heard not only all through Russia, but whose record had apparently been a big sales success in France as well. No one needed to be told twice. They stared carefully at the singer's lip-movements, hoping at least in this way to decipher the significance of the pantomime being performed on stage. People stood in small groups, huddled under umbrellas, hoods, or one of the four *chooms* pitched in front of the stage. Sausage, beer and shish-kebabs were being served. Over to the sides there were oilcloth-covered tables set with cans of beer and mountains of meat that steamed in the rain. It was mainly the men that crowded around them, and because a brawl had started a few minutes ago, they were also staffed by the two militiamen guarding the event and one major from the local Army Reserves with an enormous pancake on his head. None of the three had faces you would call severe, in particular the fat major, who'd been on his motorcycle drunkenly searching with us for vodka the night before. We'd finally found some in the bottom drawer of his desk at the Army Reserves Headquarters, under the watchful eye of a portrait of the local hero of the Great War of the Fatherland, Uvachana. He'd apparently crossed the bottom of the Dnieper with a telephone wire clenched between his teeth, thus rescuing his bridgehead that was being pulverised under a hail of artillery. Now they themselves looked as if they could only be saved by large quantities of drinking water. The rest, mainly women and children, took active part in the stage events, giving a lively response to every new performer ringing in International Native Peoples of the World Day, basically an aborigine day, as the major informed me. The Tadzhiks kept to themselves. One of them had perhaps been beaten up just moments before, and so they were rather cautious, looking askance at the corners, where their blond adversaries stood for hours gulping their beer. There was also constant movement at the edge of the field. That was the site of a multi-person outhouse, to which led a crowded, muddy path. Drunks rested on the wet benches with their heads between their legs, with only rainwater-filled plastic cups and crushed beer cans for company. All of this was no more than a backdrop for the stage, however, where the Yakutsk star performed his silent song. His performance began as a duet, aided by the chief of the village of Yesya, the only Yakutsk settlement in Evenkiya. This bungling bureaucrat was a bit nervous, and just when he began singing the speaker was working perfectly, as if out of spite. In effect, there was a tuneless caterwauling in place of the moving operatic song. Then things went much better, until the power outage. There had been many previous performances by local artists, who

enjoyed varying degrees of popularity. The rough-throated songs of the ginger-blond Vysotski clone, for example, were less than successful. He slapped at the strings and croaked:

A man who's never hunted for game
Has wasted all his life...

He could only peg his gaze to the taiga on the hills and dream of the turnout he had in Yakut. But success brought a certain risk. Tired out from straining their ears, the audience started to crack. One of the listeners climbed onto the stage, scattering the bouquets of balloons. He was bursting with desire make his own stage appearance, even bending his knees in an awkward waddle. And so for a short time two acts were going on at once. One professional, dressed up in a costume of marvellous colours; the other spontaneous, in a black leather jacket, sunglasses, and white trainers that were two sizes too big. This diversion, torn kicking and screaming from the abyss of the New Romantic movement, lasted just long enough for the singer to finish the number and bid farewell, and the partisan lost his determination and let himself be led off by one of the co-ordinating women. But the floodgates had opened, as proven by the representatives of the Ukrainian club, who were up next. The audience got more crowded, the wet jackets steamed, and the turf-cum-mud-puddle squelched underfoot. There was another scuffle by the beer table, someone gave someone else a good pounding, and my militiamen had vanished somewhere in the theatre of the events. Meanwhile, three Ukrainian women were singing, flashing their knees and fluttering their mascara-black eyelashes with every sensual tap of their feet. They had long blond braids, enormous breasts and a wealth of plastic flowers carefully wound in their hair, making national wreaths. They stood still and shook their wide hips, and they certainly needed no amplification to light this crowd's fire. The Tadzhiks were the first to cave. One of them, young and handsome, leaped up on stage in a single mighty bound. Grinning in ecstasy, he spread apart his hands, and shooting with his fingers, started shuffling smoothly from one foot to the other. At the same time he pumped his fists and did pirouettes, his ankle-length caftan spinning round with him, sweeping his embroidered sashes. A moment later, the three women found themselves in the middle of a spinning circle of swarthy moustaches. They were in no way thrown off; on the contrary, they tapped their heels all the more, tossed their manes and grinned to reveal their treasuries of golden teeth. In response the circle around them grew even tighter, someone pumped some disco music from the speaker, which suddenly seemed to function. More people began jumping on stage, with the loud pop of exploding balloons: girls with Evenkiya tiaras, leather-jacket clad workmen, a high-heeled shop assistant. The stage was quickly brimming with dancing, tightly-packed figures, totally soaked from the downpour. Where the audience had previously been there was no more than stomped mud, full beer cans and cups. The drunks were dwindling down on the otherwise empty benches.

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Zielona Sowa

Photo: Ryszard Kozik

In the communist era songs were sung about the industrial and urban complex of Nowa Huta. Planned from the ground up and built in record time – not surprisingly, as in those days shock workers earned several hundred percent above the norm – as a symbol of modernity in People's Poland it was praised to the skies. With the fall of the communist regime, Nowa Huta too went into more and more of a decline, gaining a reputation as a lousy, dangerous suburb of Krakow. In recent years this has been changing as efforts are made to revitalise it and attract the tourists who visit Krakow in droves. And also to rebuild something that was never really fully formed – the Nowa Huta identity. Renata Radlowska's book, *Nowa Huta Soap Opera*, serves this purpose to some extent. In a work somewhere in between fiction and documentary, Radłowska presents the life stories of about fifteen people who ended up in Nowa Huta in the 1950s, usually from a wide variety of Małopolska villages, in search of a better life or simply a change. It is no accident that the words "soap opera" appear in the title, because the book tells simple tales about simple people, their struggles to achieve the best possible life, their loves, families, ordinary joys and equally ordinary sorrows, and about how they blend into the landscape of the newly built city. About people who cannot imagine life anywhere but in Nowa Huta, such as the hero of the chapter called "Zbyszek Who Doesn't Travel", and all the others who have remained there by force of inertia. Radłowska describes some unusual people too, such as the fortune-teller in the chapter called "Talia Who Predicts the Future", as well as the drab, ordinary ones, including "Maria the Brick Lady". She writes simply, without unnecessary frills, but at the same time she brings out some intriguing features in each of the characters.

Robert Ostaszewski

Renata Radłowska (born 1973) is a journalist and reporter who lives in the oldest part of Nowa Huta and writes about it and its residents.

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Zbyszek Who Doesn't Travel

"So just go there," they'd say. "Don't play the country bumpkin."

"I'll never go there, not for all the tea in China," he'd reply. And Zbyszek would have got into the Guinness Book of Records as the man who never once went to Krakow in thirty years. Because he had everything he needed in Nowa Huta.

He would certainly have ended up in the record book, or at least his entire family bet he would, if he hadn't finally got over it. And the fact that he did – with horrendous effort – means he has no chance of an entry in the Guinness Book of Records.

Zbyszek, aged seventy, has been in Nowa Huta for half a century; he was a steelworker (to be more precise, a welder at the plant). Three sons, a widower. He lives in the new part of Nowa Huta, but hasn't always been there – when he first arrived in the district in 1955 he was given accommodation at a workers' hostel, later a flat on the steelworkers' estate, and finally, once his family had "evolved" (in other words got bigger, but he loves difficult words), he started looking for a bigger flat.

So why write about Zbigniew, Zbyszek, or "Zbig" as his friends call him? Because he is – or was – a dying breed, like the sabre-toothed tiger and ersatz chocolate.

Back when Nowa Huta was first founded, the young gunsdidn't go into downtown Krakow; they had everything they needed – that is, food, alcohol and physical pleasures (aesthetic ones too) – right there. By the time they had finished building Nowa Huta, when it was celebrating its tenth birthday, the young guns (and those who came to the district for work) still didn't go downtown. Definitely not en masse. They had everything they needed in Nowa Huta: restaurants, cinemas, cafés, large meadows (like the "Błonie" common), arts centres and the People's Theatre. They had everything a separate, independent city has.

"No, well of course I knew people who before coming to Huta had to go and smoke a Sport cigarette on the Market Square downtown, and only then did they come and settle down in Huta," says Zbyszek, getting a buzz off the smoke from his Klubowy cigarette, the "Fine" variety. "But most of us thought we were going to a city that was just outside Krakow and that was going to be bigger than Krakow. Maybe one in four had heard of the historic old buildings of Krakow, the Wawel and the Cloth Hall. And those people went to see those historic sights. But as for the others, they couldn't read, so how could they know? Or they were from villages where there weren't any schools."

Yes, those were the others. But Zbyszek had quite different reasons for never going to the centre of Krakow, not visiting the Old Town for several decades. And the way his life worked out, he didn't have to.

Because Nowa Huta provided him with everything.

It's Very Close to Huta

To reconstruct events, it's autumn 1955. Zbyszek is twenty, he has just informed his parents that he's not going to stay on the farm (anyway, what sort of farm was it once the state had taken away almost all their land? Even the bit with the crapper, so they had to move the crapper nearer to the house). His parents grieve, especially his mother. But his father says: "Mother, don't grieve. You're thirty-eight, we can still try for another child. And this child will be destined from birth to love the land and to be loved by it." (Indeed, his parents did go crazy one night and produced another child, a daughter, who didn't stay on the farm, or even in the country).

To reconstruct events, Zbyszek goes to Nowa Huta from the Niepołomice direction. A man drives him there by horse and cart – it's carrying sacks of flour that Nowa Huta uses to bake bread. On the way they talk.

Man with cart: "Are you from far off?"

Zbyszek: "Well, not from very near here. I've come from near Gorlice. To work in Nowa Huta."

Man with cart: "So what'll you do there?"

Zbyszek: "I don't know. But there's lots of work, so I'll get something somewhere. The army didn't want to take me, but maybe the steelworks will."

Man with cart: "Have you ever been in such a big city before?"

Zbyszek: “Only in Gorlice, once. But now I’m going to build the city, aren’t I?”

Man with cart: “So you’ve never been to Krakow?”

Zbyszek: “Of course not!”

Man with cart: “You should go there now then, it’s very near Huta.”

Zbyszek: “What on earth do I need to go to Krakow for? Don’t you think there are too many people there? And what do they have there that I wouldn’t have already seen? I know about the Wawel from the stories, I can picture it. Anyway, it’s time for the future now, not the past. I’d rather be building the new than looking at the old.”

Man with cart: “Well, can’t argue with that.”

Once in Huta, at first Zbyszek met with disappointment: it isn’t the case that everyone who comes here goes straight off to work at the plant; first he has to take a course. And Zbyszek did that. He became a welder, and got a place to stay in the workers’ hostel. He made friends.

“Michał, Romek, Ziutek, two Staszeks, Mietek, Jurek… Fine lads. We worked together, we lived together and spent our free time together.”

Not in the restaurants at once. First outside the workers’ hostel (in spring and summer) and inside the workers’ hostel (in autumn and winter). After some time, when the first eateries and pubs appeared, Zbyszek moved there. Everyone was thrilled: the city was growing, they finished a new housing district every month. And the baby trees were growing up, so you could spread a rug out under them on warm nights.

Nobody had any need for Krakow.

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Photo: Anna Hatłas

The Invisible Men is a book of reportage essays devoted to the Aborigines. Marczewski is chiefly interested in the socio-cultural condition of the native peoples of Australia today, though he does not shy away from forays into history. To present this condition, the author gets as close to his protagonists as possible, trying to enter their world and affairs. He travels the uninhabited regions of the continent (the Northern Territory in particular), visits the settlements, farms and reservations inhabited by the Aborigines, follows them on the trails they wander, and speaks with social workers, assimilated Aborigines and the white neighbors of the "invisible men" – with anyone who can bear testimony. The nature of this testimony is decided in advance: the native Australians are the victims of the European colonizers, their fate – both in the past and the present – is the shame of the Australian democracy, a great disgrace to which the white people can respond in only one way – they pretend not to see the problem (thus the "invisible men" of the title). Marczewski's gaze is critical but in no way biased. In his view, the hopeless situation of today's Aborigines (unemployment, alcoholism, poverty) is not just a social or political problem; there is also a certain mystery to it. Thus the numerous philosophical and anthropological reflections. *The Invisible Men* is an extremely ambitious book, which goes far beyond the framework of politically-engaged reportage that always sides with the victims.

Dariusz Nowacki

Mateusz Marczewski was born in 1976. He is a reporter and essayist, publishing texts in Polish weekly and daily newspapers.

Tokampini

The phenomenon can't be named, but you can try to record it. You can note down some images that might illuminate something, sketch out some truth. These images are still alive. So that they can serve as illustrations. On the other hand, though – why write about this? It's so obvious: race over race, skin color over skin color. Color is, however, too banal a criterion. It is visible, pushy, distinguishing, and when used as an adjective it immediately becomes an offensive slur. So we need to find a new division: mentality over mentality. This is where it all starts. There's them – the Aborigines – and there's the edge of civilization. Civilization came to them, and must divvy up its land with them. The white people's cities are sprawled out over the hilltops, their cities are in the fertile and shady valleys, in places where it's good to live, to survive the harsh climate. To survive, to sparkle in the night with their flickering lights, their strips of highway, down which cars flash in long red lines left by their tail-lights. Lines like lashes, like scars. And so we have our cities, and they get their Nothing – sun-scorched wastelands. And one more thing: a decades-long and fruitless attempt to break into the other culture, to assimilate it. And that's all there is to the story.

Aborigines are like children. Like abandoned and nameless bastards, who in the city toss a bottle at you for no reason – just to hear the echoes of the breaking glass, for the rain of shards, then to flee and squat in the ruins they've turned their districts into. They stink, they come in packs, like some dark but powerful species that evokes fear and pity all at once. Leave your bike in your front lawn during the night, and they'll steal it under the cover of darkness. Go through the Redfern district of Sydney in the evening. Go to the train station, along the walls, and you'll find they're painted with the color of their rage and rebellion – the Aborigine flag: a horizontal stripe of red, a black one above it, and a yellow circle in the middle. These flags on the walls are the size of houses, flags with the texture of the walls; go over there and they emerge like predators. Suddenly, from out of the darkness. Muggings, rape, police reports. People in Sydney are afraid of that animalistic, that wild... how to put it?... you know... they're just different, frightening somehow... you'd have to live here for longer.

They're like children. Spoiled, dazzled by the colorful face of the world that's come about, settled by order in a tiny village, a "community" patrolled by the local police. Sometimes they live in one designated section of a city, in a district like Redfern in Sydney. There they create their own godforsaken areas. Thus they oppose the city that surrounds them, the shimmering towers of its city, the merry throngs of its inhabitants. The Aborigines' homes in Redfern look like the wreckage after an uprising: smashed-out windows, dark alcoves and cracks in the walls, blowing with scraps of newspapers, the parked cars are just rust-buckets, dominos made out of sheet metal tossed down the sidewalks. And then a bonfire, and a slalom of the ghetto's drunken inhabitants. Someone kicks a soccer ball, someone else screams, the cry reverberates off the anger-painted walls with a metallic echo. The city truly does not exist here. This is some kind of after-effect, the equality of things leveled to the ground.

But this is just one district. I went there and felt uptight, nervous, like I was trapped in a cage with rapacious animals, left to their mercies. There was silence all around, maybe they still hadn't noticed the white guy who'd lost his way. I saw them. They stood in front of a smoldering coking machine, sitting on sofas they'd lugged out from the depths of their houses, dogs lay in the sun, in the sand. The women were heavy-set, the men skinny, filthy and stunned by poverty. Behind them, beyond the park, the silver flares of the city's towers shot up into the heavens, and it seemed impossible that the scene in the foreground was taking place in the center of this beautiful city. Their appearance and the ubiquitous mess were like the villages of Central Australia. I walked through Redfern and told myself: this house is not for you, this place is not yours, the guts of this glittering city will draw you in, you have to run, run, but there's nowhere to go.

Once in Alice Springs I was sitting outside a store, an Australian convenience store for poor folks, I was sitting on the ground, tired out by the heat that melted the morning

frosts. Then they came along. They came in a group, they always come in groups, they're afraid on their own. Two men and women. They had faces taut like Christmas ornaments, enough alcohol in them to set them on fire, eyes like slits, they were scanning the ground for cigarette butts and shuffling bare feet that were hard as rubber. They had dresses on, covered in flowers and holes.

"I saw you sleeping on the hill two days ago in the sun," said one of them. "Where the train goes by."

"I wasn't sleeping on the hill," I said. "I was up north two days ago."

"You can't fool me. I saw you there on the hill. Sleeping in the sun. Come see us today, we're having a celebration. Ask for Marg, that's my name. We're all going to dance."

"I'll see."

I know where they live. On the south edge of town, in the place where the mountain split in two, and in the narrow gap between its ridges there's an exit highway from Alice Springs going south, and the "Ghan" transcontinental tracks. And the River Todd, dry as death in engravings and, in fact, no more than the riverbed, because the river has entirely dried up, although there are regattas every once in a while at the bottom. Running with boats over their shoulders. For the entertainment of the residents of Alice, tired out by the sun, sand and trivialities of daily life.

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Krzysztof Dydo and Agnieszka Dydo

PL 21, THE POLISH POSTER OF THE 21ST CENTURY

[POLISH-ENGLISH EDITION]

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Krzysztof Dydo and his daughter Agnieszka, in an exclusive publication amounting to almost 400 pages with the simple title: "The Polish Poster of the 21st Century", have included 600 reproductions of Polish posters designed between 2001 and 2007, the works of 88 artists representing various generations, styles and schools. This album goes to show that those who predicted the slow death of the artistic poster at the end of the 20th century were false prophets, mistaken in prophesying the death throes of this art form. This book, examining Krakow-based artists, strengthens the belief of those who refused to accept such a gloomy future. There is however one sad exception in this bracing summary of the first decade of the 21st century. Agnieszka Dydo writes about it among other things in her essay on the history of the Polish poster: "... Along with the reform of the socio-political system considerable changes occurred in the way posters were produced and how they functioned. Artistically ambitious movie posters were replaced by American style commercial advertisements..." While her father, in his treatise on modernity, adds: "... We are more critical because we know what we have lost—and I mean by that above all the movie poster. According to the film distributors, the artistic movie poster ceased to fulfil its advertising role or influence the filmgoer's decision on what to go and see, because its artistic values, often based on a rather too-free interpretation, failed as a substitute for reality and the hard facts. I cannot totally agree with such reasoning because I remember well how more than once an excellent artistic poster encouraged me to go and see a film that in fact turned out to be rather poor. However, had it been a photo-based poster, I am not sure whether, as often happens today, I would not have been immediately discouraged..."

So perhaps those cheerless prophets were right in this case. It would seem they were. The artistic poster requires not only an exceptional intellectual predisposition and capable studio skills on the part of its designer, but also it is invariably an unusually labour-consuming art form, one that cannot be executed in haste. It is likewise true that with its mental shorthand and obscure metaphor, so necessary to the task, it cannot help but be beyond some members of the public. On the other hand, anyone who delves into art history knows that various phoenixes have often risen from their ashes, and one might even venture to say that it is these that are the genre's recurring theme. So let's not lose hope—who knows what the third or sixth decade of the 21st century may bring.

Agnieszka and Krzysztof Dydo's book is first and foremost an album that gladdens the heart with its varied and often, in its artistic expression, elaborate reproductions of Polish posters. Its main advantage is that it satisfies both the more experienced and fastidious reader and those who are examining the artistic poster in such a concentration for the first time. On this book's pages we will find historically famous names and reproductions of the works by those who created the Polish tradition of poster art: Teodor Axentowicz, Józef Czajkowski, Edmund Bartłomiejczyk, Witold Chomicz, Tadeusz Gronowski, Tadeusz Trepkowski, Jan Lenica and Roman Cieślewicz... But there will also be no lack of living masters of Polish poster design: Mieczysław Górowski, Roman Kalarus, Piotr Kuce, Władysław Pluta and Lech Majewski... The names of younger- and mid-generation Polish poster designers are also included: Sława Harasymowicz—educated in London and daughter of a prominent Polish poet—as well as Max Skowider, Joanna Remus-Duda and Justyna Czerniakowska...

Agnieszka Dydo, a graduate of the Jagiellonian University's Philosophy Department and at present a student at the School of Fashion Design, develops her aforementioned historical discourse with clarity and precision. This too may be said of her father's text, composed of reflections and observations concerning present-day Polish posters. In both cases, they prove the saying that the more knowledge someone has on the subject of his deliberations, the more clearly and simply is he able to share its secrets.

The historical introduction is not divided into sections, but the author very capably introduces conceptual breaks, which serve the same purpose in the mind of the reader. I counted nine such breaks. These begin with reflections concerning the earliest posters, that is to say advertising placards, and move on to the nineteenth-century birth of the poster's artistic incarnation in Krakow and Lvov.

Other important subjects include that more widely discussed caesura constituted by the International Poster Exhibition organized in 1898 by Jan Wdowiszewski, director of Krakow's Museum of Technology and Industry. Among others showing their works at this event were: Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, George Meunier and Alfons Mucha... The accompanying catalogue, with its introduction by the organizer as well as its theoretical text concerning artistic posters in general, constitutes clear evidence of the fully mature feeling then being experienced, that we were already dealing with yet another new phenomenon of true art. Separate discussion is given over to the beginnings of the Polish poster style just after the First World War, and its rapid development in the nineteen-twenties and thirties.

The second, equally extensive part of this essay concerns the post-war history of the Polish poster—I refer of course to World War II—when it gained international recognition not only as art but also cutting-edge, trend-setting art. After all, the years 1953 to 1965 saw considerable, internationally recognized output by such designers as: Wojciech Zamecznik, Józef Mroszczak, Henryk Tomaszewski, Jan Lenica, Roman Cieśliewicz, Jan Młodożeniec, Waldemar Świerzy and Franciszek Starowieyski, designers whom the world's artistic critics have grouped together under the name the Polish School of Poster. This was above all a "painterly" poster, closest to the heart of Krzysztof Dydo, an expert on the subject, collector and the Polish poster's ambassador at large.

Passing on from the sixties and seventies, which abounded in equally expressive artistic personalities, Agnieszka Dydo comes to the period of "Solidarity", to the time of a democratic and entirely independent Poland. It seemed initially that the change in the socio-economic system would eliminate the artistic poster entirely from our streets. True, the regression of the nineties was visible to the naked eye, but a clearer situation later began to emerge. The masters of Polish poster art slowly began to return from the poster design schools scattered around the world at which they had been teaching. And then we come to the present day, to the first, as yet unfinished decade of the 21st century.

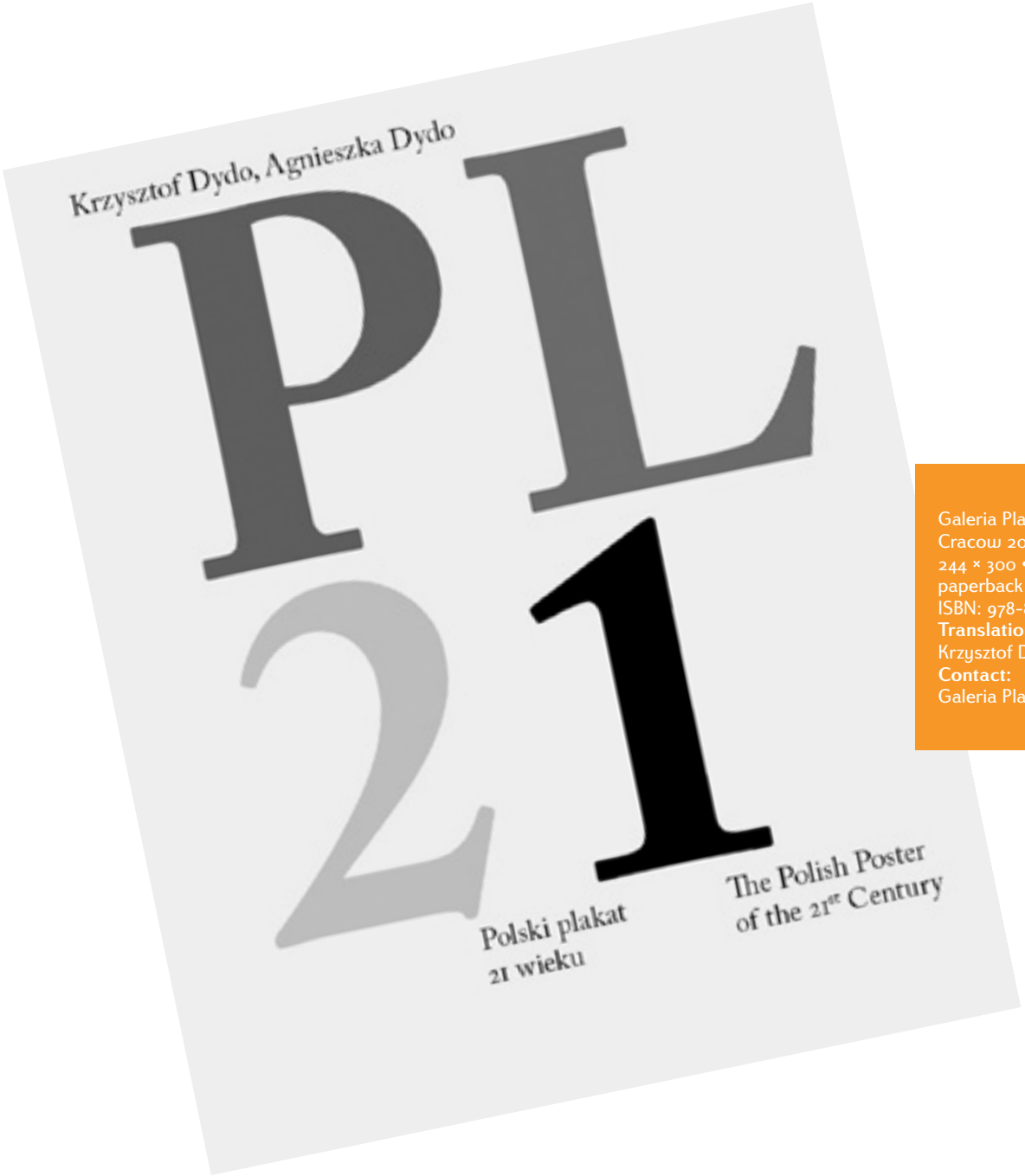
It is precisely this period that is most closely examined in the album published by the Krakow Poster Gallery, which is owned by Krzysztof Dydo, author of the second critical text included in this book, written not only with a certain lightness and enthusiasm, but clearly with a feeling of tenderness for the subject. This is an extremely rare critical attitude. It is however hardly surprising, since Krzysztof Dydo has put together one of the largest collections of Polish posters, is the author of a considerable number of critical texts concerning such works, the publisher of many albums, and a true lover of this form of art.

This Krakow album is proof that the Polish artistic poster is at the moment in very fine form. The artists examined are still regarded as leading their field. The variety of the artistic attitudes and solutions, including techniques, has increased the possibilities offered by posters in recent years. This is because Polish poster designers have enormous resources at their disposal in the form of a tradition that has brought artistic standards to a very high level.

Agnieszka and Krzysztof Dydo's album comes with brief biographies of all 88 of the designers featured, an alphabetical listing of the same, and a catalogue of the 150 foreign exhibitions where the Polish artistic posters in the Krzysztof Dydo collection have been shown between the years 2001-07. This makes it not only an exhaustive publication, but also one that is in every respect logically compact and clearly laid out, transparent for all its variety, one that may be recommended not only for the connoisseur of poster art, but also for the casual but inquiring reader. The Krakow Poster Gallery, run by Krzysztof Dydo since 1985 at 8-10 Stolarska Street, is visited every year by crowds of foreign poster lovers, who will no doubt now also be departing from Krakow with their next trophy—the latest album published by this gallery, which also features an English language version of the text.

Andrzej Warzecha

Translated by Soren Gauger



Galeria Plakatu Kraków
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Translation rights:
Krzysztof Dydo
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Galeria Plakatu Kraków

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Ewa Toniak SHE-GIANTS. WOMEN AND SOCIAL REALISM

Photo: Ewa Karpf

She-Giants, a richly illustrated, engrossing and brilliantly written collection of essays by art critic and historian Ewa Toniak, is devoted to the women of "social realism," the Polish variant of totalitarian art during the 1948-54 period. The author uses tools of feminist criticism to analyse the depiction of women in both male- and female-created art; she covers the painting, press illustrations (including women's magazines), films, news reels, fashions and theoretical and political discussions of the era. She deals with not only the ideological and political aspect of the representation of the female body in Stalinist art, but also cultural gender constructions in art advocating the values of the socialist myth. Toniak shows the hypocrisy of the contemporaneous representations of the body and "femininity": social realism chanted slogans of emancipation and revolution, it declared equal rights, but in fact advocated a patriarchal vision of culture, promoted gender stereotypes and fostered the further "invisibility" of women's issues, or at best gave women the right to be like men. The author is interested not only in the codification of the male and female bodies in propaganda (i.e. labour foremen), but also ways in which women were made symbolically present in the public space, and the manifestations of female sexuality and female desire (or the essential lack thereof) in the visual culture of the period. She provides contexts not only of Soviet art, but also of the art of the French Revolution and the art of post-romantic modernity, up to post-modern works in which the author has located residua or pastiches of the aesthetic under discussion, or attempts to reshape or reclaim it. Her book features analyses of Katarzyna Kozyra's infamous "Male Bathhouse" (1999) and "Female Bathhouse" (1997) video-installations, as well as works by other "leftist" Polish female artists (Ewa Kulik, Anna Baumgart, Ola Polsiewicz) whose work is often deemed scandalous by the more conservative branch public opinion.

Marek Zaleski

Ewa Toniak is an art historian and critic. She writes about modern art from a feminist perspective and the role of women in the history of art.

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In 1948 the pages of *Moda i Życie Praktyczne [Fashion and Everyday Life]* show that there are two types of existence: women whose activities are limited to the home and being objects of male desire, and workers, the Other sort. But much like in Fangor's paintings, in this transition period (at least until the ordinance of social realism in 1949), these two types, traditional and social-realist, would deconstruct each other. Similarly, the world of politics does not directly force itself upon the readers – and this might be the work of the "discourse of exclusion" – but literally between the lines, in passing, in tips on how to iron a veil or make a cap out of tricot. In January 1948 the historical calendar mixes in another hierarchy and type. The same page features the dates of Lenin's death, and that of Ludwik Solski, an outstanding Polish actor.

It seems to me that the new asexual and gender-shorn feminine ideal – the worker woman – also started her bloodless annexation of women's magazines from the margins. Two years later, she felt right at home there. The "jaded models," as they were called, for example, in an article praising the advantages of the mass production of the Warsaw Clothing Industry Factories ("Mass production can be both lovely and effective"), vanish from the covers and pages of the magazines. There is no room here for fashion understood as the "canon of femininity." The article/advertisement for the latest products of the WCIF is yet another ideological battlefield. "The fashion dictators," we read, "don't care how the working woman dresses and what she looks like; the same goes for the ordinary female office worker or peasant woman. Fashion has served only the rich."

But at the turn of 1948/1949, in a questionnaire addressed to women and entitled *What We Want for the New Year*, there are responses from well-known figures (Professor Eleonora Reicher, and Mieczysława Ćwiklińska, an outstanding artist) and totally anonymous ones (a Warsaw Technical Academy student and a hairdresser) – including a construction worker named Józefa Bąkowa. Amidst the remaining women, posed as if for pre-war photographs, the working woman's face is distinguished by the fact that it does not adopt a pose, it does not transform into an image. A face outside of the canons of femininity and beauty in its anonymous motionlessness, beyond gender categories. Józefa Bąkowa's greatest dream is for her youngest son to make it into the RTPD [The Friends of Children Workers' Association] Orphanage, where her eldest is ("I'd know that the child was being brought up right"). She is the only one of the women surveyed who works at a construction site "along with the men," and does "the same work they do." The magazine does not even correct her rough language. Bąkowa simply "works the site." "Well, and are you up to the job?" the magazine asks (impossible to tell if it's with disbelief or concern). "I am," the woman asks in accordance with our expectations, though her later responses reveal that she'd prefer gentler work. The photograph of Józefa Bąkowa, her age hard to pin down (fulfilling the type criteria), her clothing (overalls) not easy to define, a sad look on her face, leads the procession of the new heroines of the women's magazine. Heroines whose bodies are increasingly concealed, whose faces leave no trace on the memory. Their photographs spread across the pages of the magazine with the monotony of an assembly line. The frills and guipures, the investment in the tailored accessories and the physicality all vanish. The aim of this image "modification" in totalitarianism is the "washing away of tension, to bring the Other to a uniform ideological image." The combined covers only superficially bring women out of the photography studio. Their portraits are taken as bust shots, always from below, their gazes directed upwards, with the regulation trusting smile, illuminated with high-contrast lighting (sun-tanned peasant women, female laborers with monkey-wrenches slung over their shoulders) and students lingering in a timeless Never-Never-Land, they lose their slim waists and slender arms [May 1949], so as to finally [September 1949] appear with their bodies tightly packed in a pair of overalls, their hair combed sleek, with the rebuilt historical sites of Warsaw and the new districts in the background, leaning on their pickaxes like an allegory of work. The de-eroticised and Taylorised female body is complemented in this photograph by Soviet fighter pilot L. Witkowska [L. Vitkovskaya]: tangled in parachute straps, in a helmet and overalls, she is the visual equivalent of the helicopters lifting behind her back: a pilot

and machine all in one. This proletariat cult postulate, some twenty years belated, is illustrated by the July cover of the magazine: “When a machine takes over a farmer’s work ...”. The machine – i.e. the yoke-symbol of collectivisationis the young woman driving the tractor.

Translated by Soren Gauger

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Ewa Toniak
Contact: Korporacja Ha!art

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Krzysztof Tomasik
HOMOBIOGRAPHIES

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Krzysztof Tomasik's book deals with sixteen artists, all top-notch Polish figures: Konopnicka, Rodziewiczówna, Szymanowski, Lechoń, Dąbrowska, Anna and Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, Gombrowicz, Andrzejewski... We have here a fast-paced, brilliantly rendered multiple biography: always maintaining the general outline, yet full of details and concrete facts, recreating the tone of the epoch, describing homes and cafes, detailing meetings and conversations. Gossip, events, successes, tragedies and scandals. In brief: their social and emotional lives. Is it worth reading?

Decidedly so. The basic news that Tomasik has dug out of the closet is simple: they were all sexually different, people who didn't fit into the "normal" narrative. Yet the simple fact of communicating their sexual identity does not establish the virtue of this book. For here we have two absolutely key factors, which are described and interpreted by the author, and which give his book no minor value.

First of all, this is a tale of how others have spoken of the "famous creators of Polish culture." Tomasik analyzes various strategies – silence, euphemisms, assimilation, discipline, blackmail and exclusion – applied against those who are different. Tomasik writes of other lives not as ready-made creations composed of facts, but as a moving text created by the discourses overseeing the closet.

The second thread presents the living strategies of the inhabitants of the closet themselves: how they behaved, how they built their lives, how they related with others, how they formed relationships, and finally – how they spoke of themselves. Tomasik's book thus provides an invaluable analysis of "ways of being." It shows strategies ranging from assimilation, to scandal, to jesting (with despair perhaps lurking underneath). Taking into consideration the intimate notes of his main characters, the author has managed to demonstrate a deadly simple thing: our modernist outsiders tried everything they could to make normal lives for themselves, lives which their "abnormality" could somehow be a part of. Each of them wanted to have a house, a partner, friends and a social life. From this perspective, these "homobiographies" are not biographies of homosexuals, but people. Homo biographies.

Przemysław Czapliński

Krzysztof Tomasik (born 1978) literary critic, journalist, member of the „Krytyka Polityczna" team.

Krzysztof Tomasik
Homobiographies
Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej
Warszawa 2008
145 × 205 • 164 pages
paperback
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Julia Hartwig
FLASHES3

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Flashes3 is a new book by an excellent poet returning once again to the lyrical note form she has used before. "As I was writing *Flashes3* I could immediately feel that this was a completely independent form, that these were not just snippets or ideas for poems, but something else," she says in an interview. So what are "flashes"? They're revelatory moments, aphorisms, quotes from books expressed in the form of the short notes that poets are keen on nowadays. "No, the truth about our age will not be revealed by any epic poem, a *War and Peace* or a profound sociological analysis. Flashes, disconnected words, short sentences – that at most," wrote Czesław Miłosz, an author to whom Hartwig often refers. The notes contained in this book are exercises in amazement and sometimes delight, comments on poetry, on the alchemy of literature, images from memory, bon mots, a diary of books read and quotes from favourite authors, extracts from a personal diary, but sometimes also sentences jotted down from newspapers and given a point by Hartwig, supplied with a poetic commentary. Some of these are gnomic remarks reminiscent of Japanese haikus or the aphorisms of the ancient Greek philosophers, and some are entirely prosaic notes from everyday life, which is however the material for future poems. Sometimes there are bits of poems, though consciously written down in an incomplete, unpolished form. "Masterpieces have thrilled me, but rough drafts have fired my imagination," we read in one of the notes. "Anyone who'd like to know me better can use the flashes to put together an image for himself of the part of my personality that is not revealed in my poems," says Hartwig, adding, "Flashes are traces left by the mind's everyday hustle and bustle, from which poetry tries to emerge onto the soaring path of a poem or a prose poem."

Marek Zaleski

Julia Hartwig (born 1921) is a leading poet, essayist and translator of French literature. She has published more than a dozen volumes of poetry.

Julia Hartwig
Trzecie błyski
Wydawnictwo Sic!
Warsaw 2008
205 × 135 • 132 pages
hardcover
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Translation rights: Julia Hartwig
Contact: Wydawnictwo Sic!

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Bożena Keff

A PI ABOUT A MOTHER AND THE FATHERLAND

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A Piece About a Mother and the Fatherland is a cross between an opera, a tragedy and an oratorio. The mixed voices of the Narrator, Meter and the Chorus tell the life stories of a mother who has survived the Holocaust, and of her daughter, whom the Mother has trapped in her own suffering.

For this reason Bożena Keff's outstanding book can be regarded as a Polish version of Art Spiegelmann's *Maus*. The child-artist's struggle with a powerful historical experience represented by their parents is of key significance to both authors. It is a struggle for their own identity, for the right to get out of the mausoleum of the Holocaust.

The mother in Keff's book is a Holocaust survivor. She lived through it, and so her suffering is without doubt, her sense of her place within history goes without question, her proof of her right to existence is indisputable. She has had a daughter in defiance of oblivion and the Holocaust, so the child, unlike the Mother, has no right to suffer nor to her own separate existence. The daughter seeks her release above all through art. She becomes a poet, for whom "there are no… inexpressible things!" But as the reality that she has to express is a tangle of contradictions, so she turns to contradictory means of expression. However, it all seems half-baked, because the tie between mother and daughter is woven of so many historical and sociological threads that there is always some element of the fabric that eludes any general conception.

Discovering where the permeable boundaries of one's own autonomy are is crucial in view of the epilogue. The mixture of anti-Semitic, patriotic nonsense that appears in it proves that xenophobia is the cement binding the Polish fatherland community together. To construct the fatherland differently you need narratives that express this murky, though strong, connection between patriotism and hatred for what is foreign.

Bożena Keff's book is an example of an unusual expression of hatred for the mother-fatherland. An expression after which no one – whether victims of the Holocaust, victims of the victims of the Holocaust, or advocates of anti-Semitism – can claim the right to hate, and no one can believe that in his hatred he remains innocent

Przemysław Czapliński

Bożena Keff is a poet, writer, essayist and journalist, by education a student of philosophy and Polish studies.

Bożena Keff
Utwór o matce i ojczyźnie
Korporacja Ha!art
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Contact: Korporacja Ha!art

Marzena Broda
THE PEACH'S RIGHT TO THUNDERCLAPS

Marcin Czerkasow
FALSE INVITATIONS

Tadeusz Pióro
ASSORTMENT

Marzena Broda
The Peach's Right to Thunderclaps
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Marzena Broda
and Instytut Mikołowski

Marcin Czerkasow
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Tadeusz Pióro
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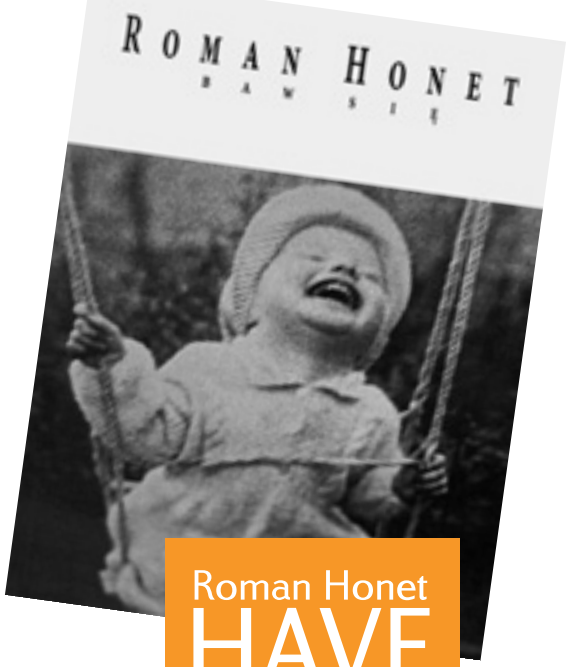

Roman Honet
HAVE FUN

Marcin Sendecki
COMPANIONWAY

Bartosz Konstrat
KONSTRAT'S TREATISES

Roman Honet
have fun
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Marcin Sendecki
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Bartosz Konstrat

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To and Fro

Amongst the many poetic offerings published in the last six months, the new books by Marcin Sendecki, Roman Honet, Tadeusz Pióro, Marzena Broda, Marcin Czerkasow, and Bartosz Konstrat merit particular attention. Each of these volumes is worth a close and careful look: their possibilities, strategies, and range are so diverse that it's hard to believe they could all have been written in a single language.

The Peach's Right to Thunderclaps, by Marzena Broda, who appeared on the scene in the early nineties, betrays her inclination toward intellectually and formally disciplined poetry. The notes that dominate the book are reminiscent of a weather diary: landscapes of nature mingle freely with landscapes of the body. Ultimately the most important issues involve the categories of vision and touch. And everything, or at least a lot of the impressions, narratives, and scenery, takes place somewhere in between the look and the kiss, in the realm of immodesty, sin, transgression. The stylistic gymnastics and the images Broda often employs—of a mirror, of clouds, of ice, the eye, the snow—give us the sensation of a mysterious world of human passions. Broda is at home in the field of elusion, camouflage, and metamorphosis. As she tests the potential of the harmonious, fluent sentence and the elegant metaphor, she lures her readers toward artistic solutions, which, in seemingly balanced, stable, cool phrases, achieve their climax in violent clashes of language. Broda is relying on familiar techniques for attracting the reader's attention: each of her veils fails to extinguish desire, but rather awakens and intensifies it.

Meanwhile, Marcin Czerkasow's debut collection, *False Invitations*, is one of free-standing dialogues, scenes, and motifs. On the one hand, Czerkasow plays with collage, excerpts from dialogues, and the odd meanderings of language, because this gives him the opportunity to use comic-style shorthand, but on the other hand, he doesn't avoid highlighting quite large spaces, where different times and different people cross paths and images multiply. Their absurd humor is impossible to ignore, but they are also poetically decorative, even if the most striking element of these poems is their improvisational fantasy, so that a phrase about the "brittle tin summer" that exploits the potential of stylization for the sentimental, coexists with little stories about a woman whose husband is having an affair with a bat, about a man whose hand has been built into one of the walls of his house, and so on. The world of which Czerkasow speaks reminds his readers of a crystal ball: nothing reaches us from the inside but distorted echoes. So it's hardly surprising that he often thematizes the thread of human interactions via the mediation of letters or the phone, making the phone booth a strategic spot for the subject who is writing. This gives him a sense of invisibility, and the scenes of his poetry are shown as if through a telephoto lens.

Tadeusz Pióro's *Assortment* is an extensive anthology including poems from his first volume which appeared in 1993 to his most recent, published in 2004, with a bonus of several additional new pieces. By way of such a retrospective we can really see Pióro's characteristic rhetorical approach, which would be less clear if we were dealing with the individual collections. Even so, it's fairly surprising that this remarkably up-to-date, avant-garde poet, inspired by authors from the Anglophone world, and who is generally worldly and cosmopolitan, brings about an encounter between characters from folklore, a sort of primitive Slavonicism, and elements of the technological world. That is, industrial scenes, vast urban territories, anonymous interactions, answering machines, and computers are described alongside Skansens, the legend of Wanda, who rejected her German suitor, the Iron Age site at Biskupin, the morning star, ritual bonfires, and so forth. That vision, linking a remote lexicon with the efficient language of the industrial post-neo-man, thus combining an excursion into the archaic with a leap into the future, dominates the collection, although—of course—there is much more to discover in Assortment, too.

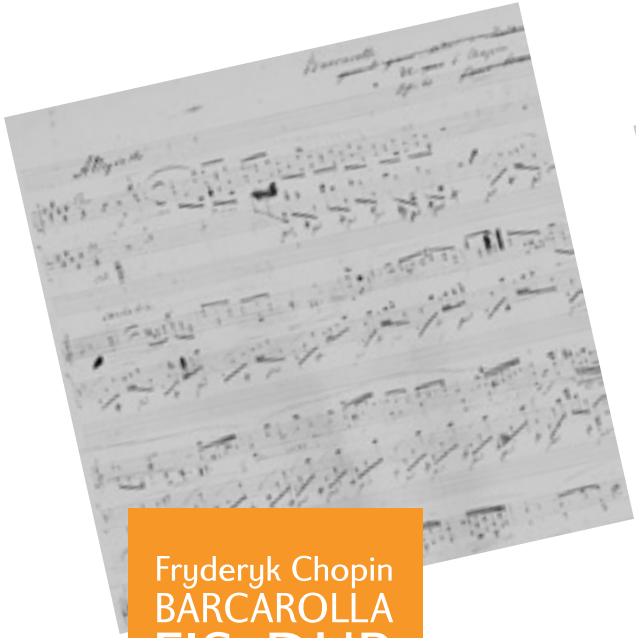
On the other hand, reading the latest book of poetry by Roman Honet, *have fun*—his fourth—we find ourselves in a totally different vision: out in the country, far from the realm of civilization, which would separate us from biology and our ties to nature. Honet describes this terrain as almost wild, untamed, haunted by the spirits of the dead. It is they

that fill out the world of the living, and their recollections, memory and fates condition individual memory: traumatic, dependent on a presentiment of death. This is why the journey Honet constructs for us, filling his poems with images of coffins, cremation ovens and graveyards, stops at two symbolic stations. One is the world of children's imaginations, where the force of death has not yet revealed itself so clearly, even crossing over into the form of the perversely felt luxury of the body, as it provides even more joy than terror. The second station is the world of the observer, unplugged from the workings of human time. The observer happens upon the borders of worlds and feels the pull of what has become immaterial as intensively as possible. This odd band of consciousness, sensitive to the decay and breaking down of life, becomes practically the fundamental experience of the writing subject, and we can track it from Honet's debut volume.

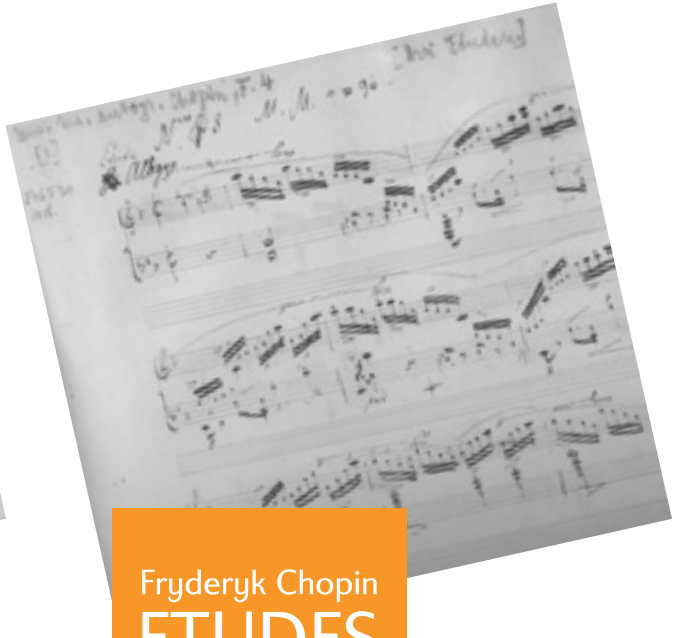
Marcin Sendecki's *Companionway* is best described by referring to art. Its poems are in fact reminiscent of compositions, which, having completely closed structures, are characterized by the shifting of contours. In other words, Sendecki is interested in translocation and various transfers: as what seems to be a stable conjunction of elements (as the simple phrase "Very good milk" would appear to be, from the poem "The District of Oulu") turns into a form that is typical of other compositions (from the end of the same poem: "Be tasty, seize the day"). Sendecki also makes as much use as possible of references to the processes of economic exchange and the flow of meanings, but brings the sound, rhythm, and material nature of the word into the foreground. *Companionway* is, then, a book about the weightlessness of matter and the rippling of noises, as words find fulfillment as a critical function of social reality (it's a book denouncing a world of cheap thrills and the easy exchange of everything for everything else), and expose their own wonderful dysfunctionality, a refined pleasure not destined for everyone.

Bartosz Konstrat, in his second book, *Konstrat's treatises*, preserves the treatise tradition insofar as he attempts to delineate certain spheres of social life and critique them in a somewhat eccentric manner, tending to take detail into account, an insignificant, as if transparent element. He speaks, for example, "of a certain sort of blindness," "of substitute activities," "of fidelity," "of easy songs," while always preserving an excess of foppish mannerism, a tone that is slightly pretentious, and the softness of a song. Even in the descriptions of romantic disappointments and fascination with someone's body, he never surrenders this artificial, theatrical pose: he equips the writing "self" with all the attributes of a tearful, desiring ephebe. He changes registers and switches the conception of the poem, however, the moment—though this is rare—he moves to a more humorous and nonchalant slang. Then the eccentricity of his commentary attains greater leeway, as in his piece on how identity can be determined by something as unexpected as Seagulls' Street, functioning in the poem as a sort of Lacanian "founding word".

Anna Kałuża
Translated by Jennifer Croft



Fryderyk Chopin
BARCAROLLA
FIS-DUR
OP. 60



Fryderyk Chopin
ETUDES
OP. 10

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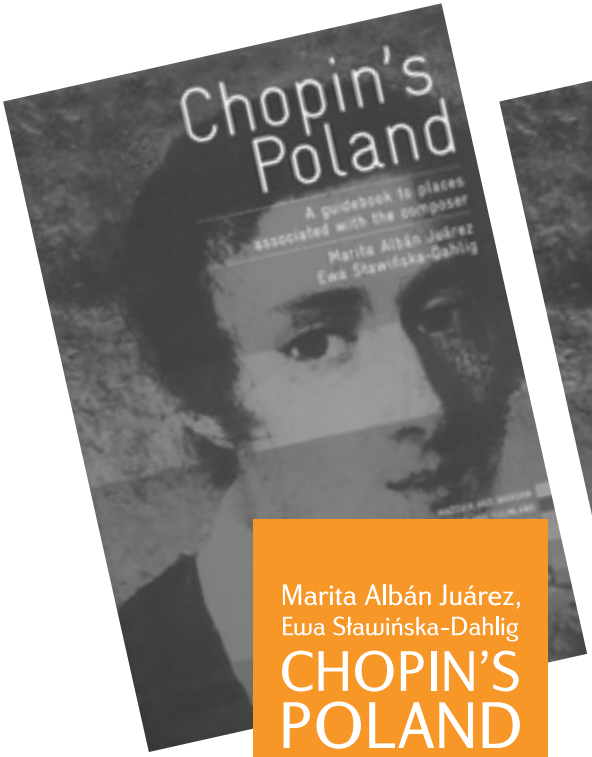

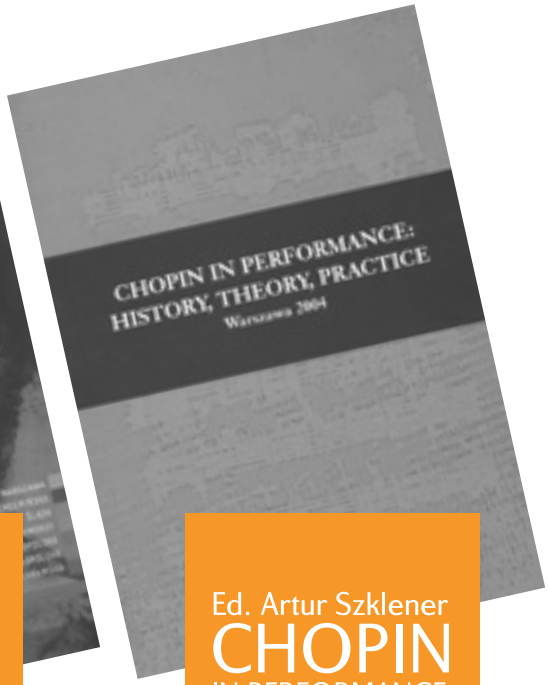

Marita Albán Juárez,
Ewa Sławińska-Dahlig
CHOPIN'S
POLAND

Marita Albán Juárez,
Ewa Sławińska-Dahlig
POLSKA
CHOPINA

Ed. Artur Szklener
CHOPIN
IN PERFORMANCE:
HISTORY, THEORY, PRACTICE

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Ewa Sławińska-Dahlig
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Translation: John Comber

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1 March, 2010 will mark the 200th anniversary of the birth of Frederic Chopin. The year 2010 has thus been declared the Year of Chopin. The preparations for the ceremonies are being co-ordinated by the Fryderyk Chopin Institute, an institution created in 2001 by the Polish Parliament. The Institute's most important tasks include the popularisation of the works of Frederic Chopin, which is why publishing is of special importance to the institute – in generally terms, publications of the famous composer's works and of books devoted to him. Works published by the Fryderyk Chopin Institute are prepared by respected Polish and world academics, as well as writers, making them a valuable source of information for both researchers and ordinary music lovers. Essential to the process is the fact that the authors of these works chiefly use the composer's original manuscripts, accessible in part in the institute's collections.

Care for the preservation and wider access to the manuscripts of the artist's works, now scattered all around the world, yet immeasurably important and valuable for further research on the composer's legacy, was one of the central reasons for the creation of the international "Works of Chopin, Facsimile Edition" academic publishing project. Representatives from Poland, France, Great Britain, Switzerland, Germany and the United States are taking part in this endeavor, and the whole is being co-ordinated by the initiator, the Fryderyk Chopin Institute, in co-operation with Bernardinum Publishers. The aim of the project is to publish all the currently available manuscripts of the composer's works in facsimile form, and to provide them with researchers' commentaries in six languages. This is the first endeavor of its sort in history, and the published set will give the unprecedented opportunity of owning faithful copies of all of Chopin's manuscripts. To date eleven volumes have been published, among them a facsimile of the *Sonata in b minor* op. 58, *Concerto in f minor* op. 21, *Barcarole in F sharp major* op. 60, and a few mazurkas and etudes. Work continues on the following twelve volumes, including a facsimile publication of the *Polonaise in a flat major* op. 53.

Another of the institute's serial publications is the post-conference books, created on the basis of lectures given during the yearly International Chopin Conference organised by the Fryderyk Chopin Institute. These publications, which include English-language translations of the texts, facilitate the presentation and recording of the latest Chopin research conducted by Polish academics. Editions published to date have been devoted to such issues as the language of Chopin – considerations of the universality and regionalism in the composer's works, the language of contemporary musical education and today's reception of Chopin, the inspirations and creative process of Chopin in light of sources, unfinished works, attempts at recreating an Ur-text, various methods of analysing Chopin's texts, and shifts in interpretation of his work, or the role of performance in shaping the musical piece. To date, four volumes have been issued in the series: *Chopin: In Search of a Common Language, Chopin's Work: His Inspirations and Creative Process in the Light of the Sources, Analytical Perspectives on the Music of Chopin and Chopin in Performance: History, Theory, Practice*.

Among the most important independent academic publications published by the Fryderyk Chopin Institute and devoted to Chopin's contexts is the book entitled *Chopin's Poland. A Guidebook to Places Associated with the Composer*, written by Marita Albán Juárez (an historical work) and Ewa Sławińska-Dahlig (contemporary threads and photographic documentation), also available in an English version (trans. John Comber). This is the first book of its kind to appear on the book market, both Polish and world-wide. It describes places in Mazowsze, Wielkopolska and Małopolska where Chopin resided or spent summers, as well as places he merely passed through. Each of the chapters contains both an in-depth description of the circumstances of the composer's stay, and the current state of the given place or site. The most attention is devoted to places affiliated with Chopin in Warsaw, and Chopin routes have also been marked out for strolling. The guide contains reproductions of almost 50 historical illustrations hailing from the early 19th century, 3 maps and around 100 photographs taken specially for the needs of this publication.

Among the upcoming NFCI publications will be a collection of ten essays by Irena Poniatowska. "*In the Sphere of*

the Reception and Resonance of Music: Sketches on Chopin," a book devoted to the reception of Frederic Chopin's works as an aesthetic and theoretical problem. The author also writes about transcriptions of Chopin's mazurkas and the ambiguous interpretation of Chopin's preludes.

An entirely different sort of institute publication is constituted by *The Diaries of Count Fryderyk Skarbek* – the never-before-published complete edition of the memoirs of Count Fryderyk Skarbek (1792-1866), pupil of Mikołaj Chopin and Godfather to Frederic Chopin. The author was one of the great figures in Polish intellectual life in the 19th century. The diaries are published in full, supplemented with manuscripts, and richly illustrated. They also include exhaustive footnotes and short biographies of the persons mentioned. This edition was edited by Piotr Mysłakowski.

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THE ©POLAND TRANSLATION PROGRAM

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The purpose of the Program is to support the translation and publication of Polish literature in other languages.

Preference is given to:
- fiction and essay
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- children and young person's literature
- non-fiction

The Fund may subsidize:
- Up to 100 % of the costs of translation from Polish to other languages
- Up to 100 % of the cost of the acquisition of rights

Applications may be submitted by publishers commissioning the translation of Polish books that they wish to publish (at least 4 months before the publication).

The publisher is required to submit (in 5 copies):
- a completed application form
- a copy of the rights agreement (or a copy of a letter of intention)
- a copy of the contract with the translator (or a copy of a letter of intention)
- a description of the publisher, and a copy of its list of current and forthcoming titles
- a bibliography of the translator's work
- a short explanation of the reasons for the choice of the work in question
- a detailed breakdown of publication costs and distribution plans

Application forms and supporting material should be submitted to the Book Institute.

The aim of the program, addressed to translators of Polish literature, is to promote Polish literature abroad through encouraging translators to present Polish books to foreign publishers.

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- Financing is given for 20 pages of a translation (1,800 characters per page)
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  c) his/her bibliography
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  e) completed application form
- The translator must have published a minimum of one translation in book form prior to having made an application
- It must be the first translation of the book into the given language, and the sample must not have been anywhere previously published

Application forms should be submitted to the Book Institute.

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More information on Polish literature is available on: **www.bookinstitute.pl**

The German-language version of our Catalogue, entitled *Neue Bücher aus Polen. Herbst 2008*, may be ordered from the Book Institute.

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©POLAND TRANSLATION PROGRAMME

The Programme was established in 1999 and was modelled on similar programmes in other countries. Its aim is to increase the number of foreign translations of Polish literature by providing financial support to foreign publishers to pay for translation costs. The Programme is administered by the Kraków-based Book Institute.

Preference is given to works fiction and non-fiction that fall within the humanities category.

The Programme may cover:

- Up to 100 % of the costs of a translation from Polish into a foreign language
- Up to 100 % of the costs of purchasing the publishing rights

The new program of the Book Institute, SAMPLE TRANSLATIONS ©POLAND, started January 1st 2007. Financing is given for 20 pages of a translation (1,800 characters per page). The translator submits an application, including: the motivation for choosing the applicable book, the plan of action, his/her bibliography, information concerning the translation costs.

Full information on the ©POLAND Translation Programme and Sample Translations ©POLAND, including a list of grants awarded to date and a funding application form can be found on the Book Institute's website, www.bookinstitute.pl

"KOLEGIUM TŁUMACZY" TRANSLATORS' PROGRAMME

Based in Kraków, this programme provides study visits for translators of Polish literature and is run jointly with the Jagiellonian University and the Villa Decius. During three- or one-month stays, the translators are provided with suitable conditions for their work and assistance with their translations. They also conduct some classes for students at the Jagiellonian University. Eight candidates are accepted each year, from March to May and from September to November.

THE TRANSATLANTIC PRIZE

The Transatlantic prize is awarded by the Book Institute to outstanding ambassadors of Polish literature abroad. Its aim is to promote Polish literature on the world market and to provide a focal point for translators of Polish literature and its promoters (literary critics, scholars and organisers of cultural events). The prize is awarded annually and is worth € 10,000. The winner is chosen by a special committee including leading literary scholars, organisers of cultural events, translators and the head of the Book Institute. The winners from 2005 were Henryk Berezka, Anders Bodegård, Albrecht Lempp and Ksenia Starosielska.

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