NEW BOOKS FROM POLAND

ANDRZEJ STASIUK

TOMASZ RÓŻYCKI

KRZYSZTOF VARGA

MARIAN PILOT

MARIUSZ SIENIEWICZ

KAZIMIERZ ORŁOŚ

ADAM WIEDEMANN

OLGA TOKARCZUK

MARIUSZ WILK

JACEK HUGO-BADER

MAŁGORZATA SZEJNERT

JERZY HASZCZYŃSKI

MARIUSZ ZAWADZKI

EWA WINNICKA

KATARZYNA SURMIAK-DOMAŃSKA

PIOTR RYPSON

FILIP SPRINGER

MARTA GUZOWSKA

MARCIN WROŃSKI

THE POLISH BOOK INSTITUTE

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» the Translators' Collegium
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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 1 300 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.

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INSTYTUT KSIĄŻKI

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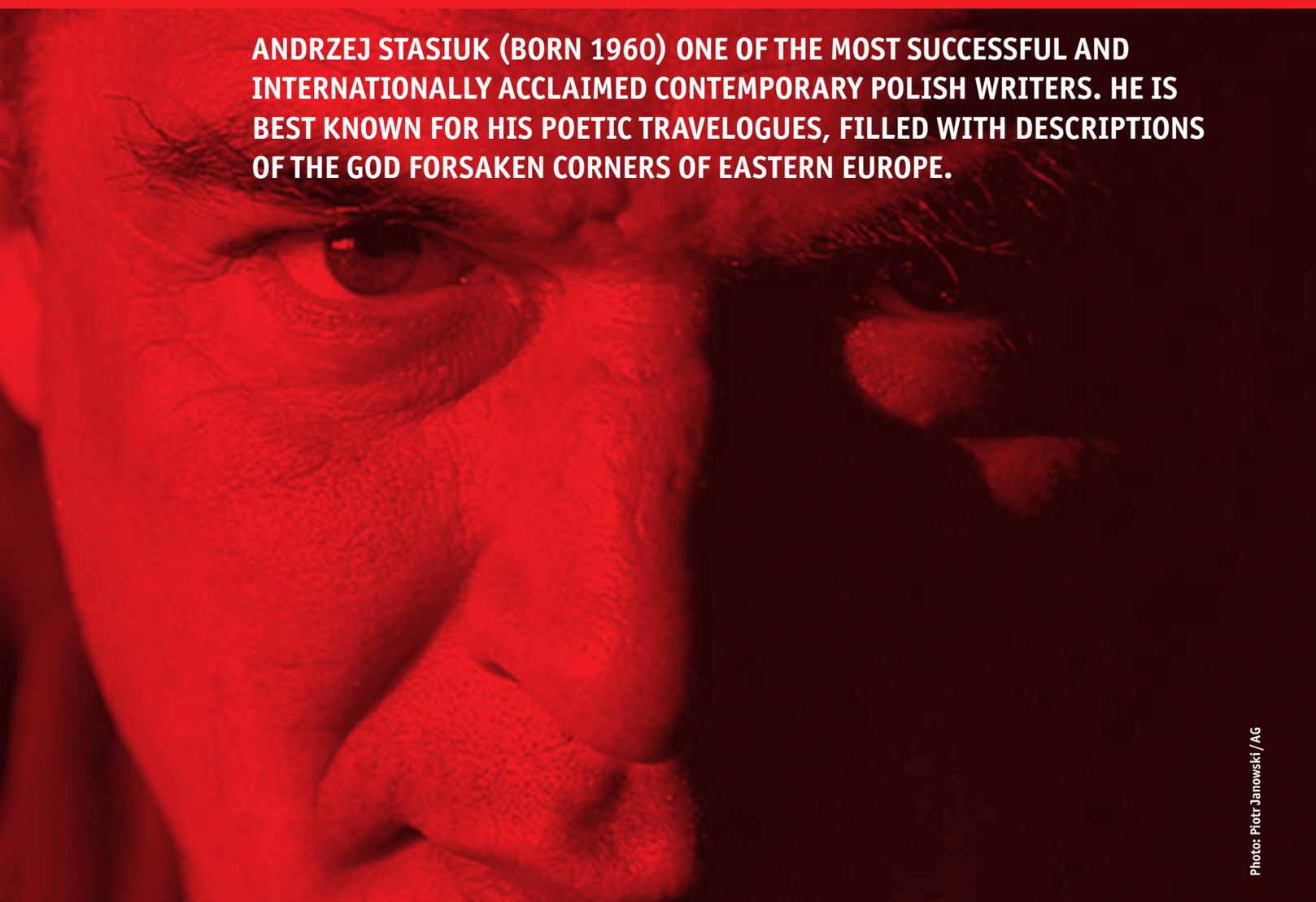

ANDRZEJ STASIUK (BORN 1960) ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL AND INTERNATIONALLY ACCLAIMED CONTEMPORARY POLISH WRITERS. HE IS BEST KNOWN FOR HIS POETIC TRAVELOGUES, FILLED WITH DESCRIPTIONS OF THE GOD FORSAKEN CORNERS OF EASTERN EUROPE.

Photo: Piotr Janowski / AG

Grochów

Andrzej Stasiuk's latest publication consists of four sketches in prose – works that are neither short stories nor pictures. Not particularly extensive, lacking in any clear plot, revolving around people that are not particularly sympathetic. In sum: there's not a lot happening here.

The protagonists of these pieces are taken from real life, and not embellished for literature's sake: a gal, a dog, a writer, and one of Stasiuk's childhood friends. What they have in common is that they have died. In sum: again, not a lot.

At the same time, this not a lot – this loose, digressive narrative style, in which non-obligating description suddenly becomes modest event – creates a dazzling and profound, if very free, philosophical tale, in which a sustained reflection on absence becomes a kind of portrait of life itself. We alternate between questions relating to death and passages saturated with the senses. This interweaving of nothingness, on the one hand, with appearances, colors, and scents, on the other, is so intense that *Grochów* might also be called a melancholy essay on sight, touch, and smell.

For Stasiuk, life is an ephemeral substance that strives to persist. This striving is in vain, because *nothing* always shines through life. At times that nothing takes the form of spirits that, in appearing, tear through the tightly woven fabric of our existence. At other times, nothing reveals itself in the eyes of a dog. At other times, the narrator is witness to nothing while the bodies of those close to him, tormented by illnesses and old age, are transformed into objects – foreign to those that inhabit them and foreign to those that observe them. But at times nothing appears with no warning. And when nothing betrays no sign of itself, life loses meaning.

This is why Stasiuk doesn't look for meaning, and doesn't ask questions about an overriding order. He knows that the overriding order of life is dying. He knows that life double-crosses always and everyone. That the narrative that all of us attempt to impose upon our existence will sooner or later will come undone. There is no point, then, in designing overly cohesive stories. The answer to the fundamental inexpressibility of life is an inexpressibility of the story – a digressive course, an incessant changing of topics, a kind of shunting of narration.

Przemysław Czapliński
Translated by Jennifer Croft

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Down Garwolińska to the end, then hang a right onto Makowska along the railroad tracks toward Olszynka. Sometimes all the way to the roundhouse. The street looked like a village road; on hot days it would be lined with guys sitting and drinking. Branches of fruit trees reached over the fences. If it was otherwise, let someone put me right. In early spring there'd be the scent of burned grass mixed with the smell of creosote. The sun would be warming the bushes and the railroad ties. It was here that the city ended. Beyond lay the kingdom of trains, weeds, and allotment gardens. In the spring the vegetation would burst suddenly and unrestrainedly into life, it would survive through the summer and fall amid the exhalations of railroads and industry, then collapse under its own weight. Only the toughest plants endured. Thorn-apple, hemp. They would stick out from the snow all winter long, till in the spring they were covered with fresh green leaves.

This was where the end was. The city came to a halt in mid-stride, as if over an abyss, like it had run out of breath or been stunned at the sight of that expanse of clay pits, dog runs, tin huts, railroad lines, and all the crappy wonders that went along with it. Everything broke off, and something entirely new began. Szklanych Domów Street was the last shore of the city. Beyond there were low, dark, spreading waters dotted with heavenly or diabolic islands, shipwrecks, stray scraps of the city's firm land, the broken, jumbled floe of industry and recreation.

The guys along Makowska had rolled up their pant legs. Their skinny shinbones gleamed white in the sunshine. It was the end of April. Apple and cherry blossom scattered onto their shoulders. They belonged to the working classes. They stared to the north, toward the far edge of the railroad cutting, where the embankment rose higher and the crawling trains grew close and distinct like children's toys in the the golden light of spring. Some were headed directly for the world capital of the proletariat. The part of the city that lay in that direction was called Utrata or "loss."

And so in fact it was. We'd go there to appease our own melancholy. To nurture in ourselves a vague sense of bereavement. Some of us at least. In any case me. Makowska was like the coast of a sea. All you had to do was go out there and imagine what was beyond the horizon. Especially in early spring, when the heated air quivered above the flattened reddish grasses. But that's always how it is in places where there are train tracks. You can't tear your eyes away from the two silver filaments running away into infinity. They're magnetized, and our longing chases after them like a piece of iron, all the way to the end of the world.

It's quite possible that those guys with their bottles of Królewskie beer, their bottles of wine that happened to be called *Kwiat Jabłoni* or Apple Blossom, their bottles of Stołowa vodka – that they too were staring into the depths of infinity. They were sitting on the shore of their own life, gazing into the distance. Yet it never occurred to them to rise to their feet and head out. They were too grown up, too masculine, too proletarian. They would get up at dusk and return to the depths of the neighborhood. The gray brick four-story apartment buildings has no elevators, so they would trudge up the stairs through all the human smells. That powerful yet indefinable aura made itself felt the moment you entered the building. A thousand cheap dinners, cabbage, minced meat, tomato soup, shoes left by the door, hot dusty light bulbs, the acrid note of burning gas, the taut compressed atmosphere of cramped apartments filled to the brim with possessions. It was the smell of people who spend their days and their nights together.

When they slid you into the crematorium I already knew I would want to describe all this. Because there was nothing else I could do. The crematorium, the interior, the cart, all recalled the factory where our fathers worked. Then later where we worked too. It all took place behind a glass screen, but I could smell the heated steel shavings, the sparks scattering from the corundum disks, the oil; the scent of all the different shops, the forges, the temper mill, the rolling press. Though it was all happening behind a glass screen. When the bellows that would heat the flame to over a thousand degrees started working, it became like a smelting works. Even the green tiles on the walls were reminiscent of the changing room with those awful metal lockers where your working clothes became impregnated with a oily dampness. I hated the moment just before six when you had to change into your dark blue coverall. It was heavy from the factory air. Heavy and cold. Almost like metal. I didn't put it on so much as slide into it in disgust. It needed several minutes to take on the heat of the body. The greasy feel of the insides of the pockets. Metal filings. Now I remember, the material wasn't dark blue but gray. Gray like everything else around, with the greenish casings of the Soviet machinery, the grimy window panes, and the floor with its wooden tiles black from oil and filth. Whatever the time of day or year, all the various shops were filled with a wintry light. Even when it was hot. For instance in the forge by the electric furnaces. Or in the temper mill, where the bright orange metal was dipped in its bath of oil. There too a cold gray light prevailed. That was the life of our fathers. And we were supposed to repeat it, since it was ready and waiting for us and nothing else needed to be done. Walking from the bus stop, in the early morning, with a crowd of other men I'd pass through the factory gate as if I were entering my own destiny. You can look at it that way, though at the time neither you nor I had any idea what destiny was. *A simple twist of fate…* But the feel of the coverall was like the inside of someone else's cold skin. The men on Makowska were like our fathers, but it never occurred to us to sit down alongside them. We would walk on, beyond the reach of their gaze. Across the tracks and the scrub, across more embankments, so we could watch trains speeding away into the depths of the landscape, to East Station, Central Station, or to Vladivostok. Because it was resolved from the very beginning that we would betray our fathers. Because we wanted to get as far away as possible. Because we didn't want to wake up before dawn. Because it seemed to us that that was what freedom looked like. Because we were traitors.

Translated by Bill Johnston

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6 / TOMASZ RÓŻYCKI

TOMASZ RÓŻYCKI (BORN 1970) IS A POET, ESSAYIST, AND TRANSLATOR FROM FRENCH. HE IS THE AUTHOR OF SEVEN VOLUMES OF POETRY, AMONG THEM THE WIDELY RECOGNIZED MOCK EPIC POEM *TWELVE STATIONS* (2004). HE WAS BORN AND STILL LIVES IN OPOLE.

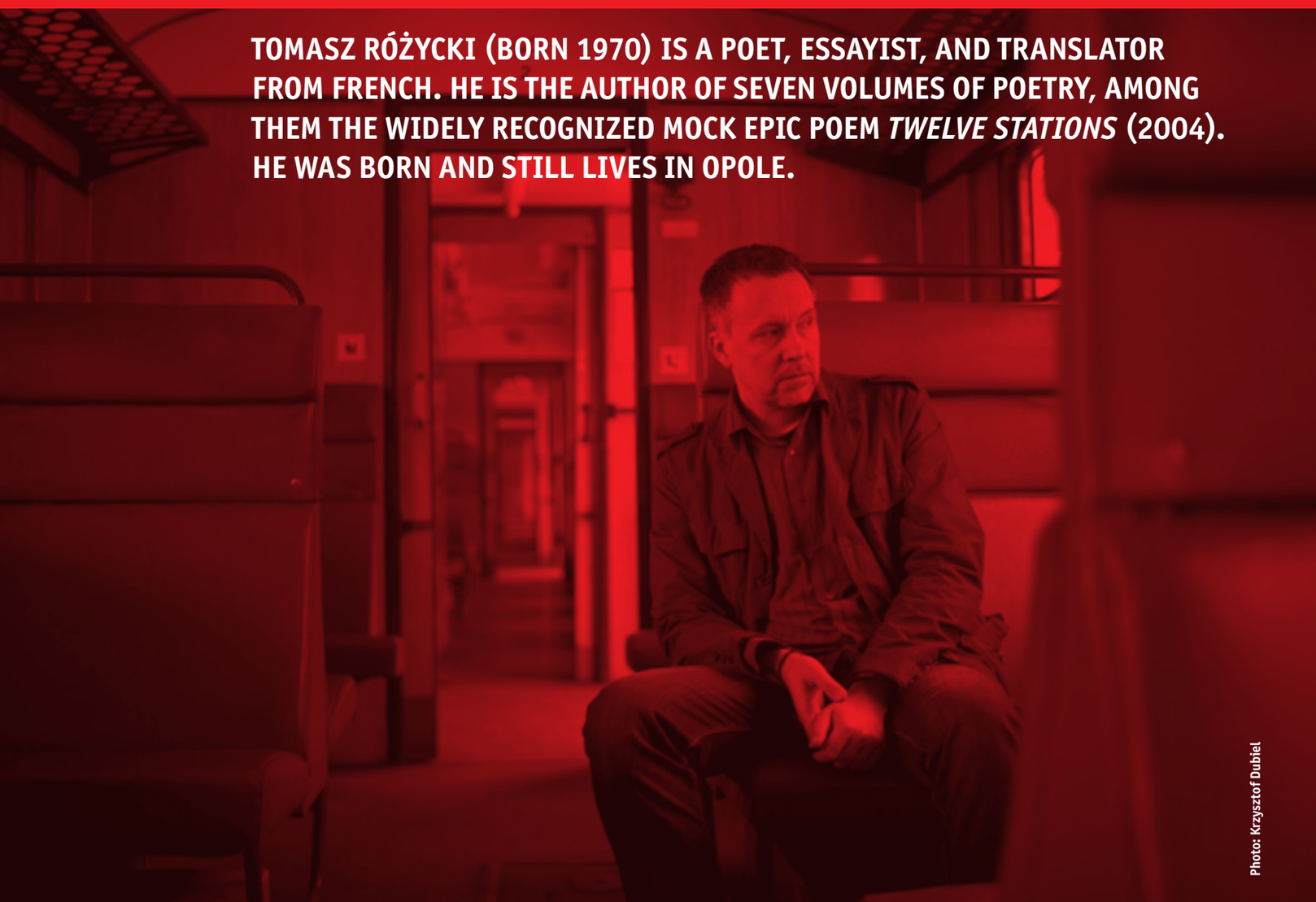

Photo: Krzysztof Dubiel

Bestiary

Bestiary is the late debut novel by an acclaimed poet, one of the most interesting authors of his generation. The book uses a highly original prose style – a dense, literary vision full of metaphoric meaning that is hard to "translate" into discursive language. Here the nameless main character wakes up in the middle of a July night in a strange apartment. It is no secret that he has overdone it with drinking. Disoriented and somewhat delirious, he wants to go home, where his wife and kids are waiting for him. But this trivial action is transformed into a mysterious, phantasmagoric journey – not so much through the city, in which the contours of Opole are recognizable, as through the intricacies and mists of memory. It is as much the main character's individual memory, the memory of a family over an indeterminate span of time, as it is the memory of a place, that is, a city that itself is made up of many historical layers (strata of history and culture) resembling a palimpsest.

It is difficult to speak of plot here. But if it came down to reconstructing one in the most general outline, it would look like this: first the main character – levitating above the city – finds the apartment occupied by his great grandmother Apolonia, who gives him a key that has to be delivered to her sisters (as almost all of the themes in *Bestiary*, the key takes on a metaphoric meaning). Then Uncle Jan appears, and our hero takes a strange journey with him through an underground city. His uncle forecasts a flood, which quickly becomes a connecting theme for fantastical events. He tries to explain the meaning of the great flood in turn to another relative – a paternal uncle. It has to do with a fundamental purification – maybe of history, or maybe of the present. It is unclear. Other events of the novel (unending meanderings through the labyrinth of cellars and underground channels, meetings with relatives or their ghosts) also elude a stable meaning. In any case, the flood indeed occurs, and the ark built by the uncle in order to rescue the family sinks, although the finale is not gory. The hero finally comes out of his dream, even if it may only be from an exercise of the imagination. Nothing here is resolved in the end. However, what is certain is that Różycki stays true to his earlier themes and obsessions, introducing us to subjects that we know, to some extent, from his luminous poems. Of course, this is not to say that *Bestiary* is secondary to his regard for the poetic experience, but rather that it compliments it perfectly.

Dariusz Nowacki

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My uncle, standing in the middle of the room and looking straight ahead with a sparkling, barely conscious gaze, raised his finger and gestured for me to follow him. He turned on the light in the next room, and an unusual sight met my eyes: in the corner by the window was a rumpled bed with tangled sheets, twisted and disheveled like a strange flower. The rest of the room was lined from floor to ceiling with shelves on which there were loads of clear and opaque bottles, tightly packed together one after another like fine wines aging in someone's cellar in anticipation of good times. The number of bottles, often mildewed and dusty but also shiny and clean, was amazing. Made by some specialist to store a whole collection of wines, the shelves took up three walls and reached so high that the uppermost bottles were lost, now out of sight. A ladder attached to the shelves could facilitate the host's access to the remotest regions of drunkenness. But when I looked closer, I noticed that the bottles, though each of a slightly different shape and color – and there were among them those for vodka, for milk, for orangeade, for beer, for oil and vinegar, for wine and cognac, whiskey, grappa, liqueurs, for champagne and bourbon, for port and Malaga, for port wine and advocaat, for Becherovka bitters, Żubrówka vodka, rowanberry vodka, honeyed vodka, for mineral water, for quince tinctures, for honey, calvados, for Rakia and for moonshine, for pepper-flavored vodka and caramel-flavored vodka, hooch and Żołądkowa vodka, for juice, for cider, for kvass and for cream, for plum vodka and rum, for Pálinka brandy and for spirits, for limoncello and amaretto, Armagnac and Bergerac, for wormwood liqueur, for absinthe and for Coca-Cola, for sake and for rice wine, for arrack, for punch, grog and Goldwasser, for gin, for spiced liqueur, anisette, raspberry liqueur, cherry liqueur, for pastis and ouzo, dogwood fruit tincture, for brandy, for Malibu Rum, for pear liqueur, walnut liqueur, for ratafia, for tequila, grape brandy, for rotgut, for schnapps, for cherry brandy, for sangria and vermouth, for CioCioSan vermouth and Martini vermouth, for Campari and for koumiss, malt beer, porter, as well for Muscat, Riesling, Bordeaux, for Burgundy and Tokaj, for Rhine wine, Mosel, Cabernet, Sauternes, for Retsina, for Madeira, lager, Budweiser, aquavit, firewater, for Dom Perignon, for Eau de Cologne, for birch water, cucumber water, for syrup, for castor oil, for formalin, iodine, and for atropine, for boric acid, for formic water, for glycerin and for ethanol, for Herbavit, for kefir, for holy water from Lourdes, for essential oil, for clemastine syrup and aldehyde – all of the bottles were unfortunately empty. All were empty, but each had been stoppered with any old cork, or stuffed with a twisted up rag or piece of paper, or sealed with red wax, except for a few on the lowest shelves – these rested open in their places.

My uncle took one of the dusty green wine bottles that had been stuffed with a rolled up colored rag and lifted it to the light. I could see through the tarnished, fairy-tale, seaweed colored glass a little bulbous flame spreading. Inside there was nothing. My uncle motioned with his finger for me to be silent, and then slowly he uncorked the bottle and brought its slender neck to my ear. First I heard a hum, something like a faint but rising sigh, the distant muffled buzz of a swarm of bees. The hum grew, and after a moment I could pick out separate sounds, rustling, shuffling, scraping. Then from this chasm, as from the sea, isolated noises began to emerge, voices approaching from afar, the pounding of feet running up stairs, the creaking of a door opening, something clanging, the resounding blows of hammer, the cries of children running excitedly around in circles, the sharp reproachful voice of a woman. Then the clinking of dishes, the ring of cutlery, some kind of humming and rustling, an angry male voice muttering, and once again the knocking of a hammer nailing something together. I also heard something like the whirring of an engine, a hum coming from a nearby street, a radio playing a tune from fifty years ago. *"When I receive your letters, I can hear your dear voice,"* and something else also in Russian, which I wasn't able to hear through the clanging and the knocking. Slowly everything came to an end in silence, the moaning ceased, the singing molecules subsided.

My uncle opened another bottle, small and thick. A faint smell, bland yet sweet, some kind of flower, an herb? A meadow? If a flower, then withered. The hum, which was escaping from the bottle, began to turn slowly into birdsong and something like the rustling of wind in branches. Birds chirping and whistling from time to time somewhere amidst the branches, slow steps on a gravel path. And after a moment something else, something from the center, from within the voices, like a hushed muffled sobbing. Then it seemed to me that there were noises of a train station, a crowd, the shouts of men and women, the cries of children, laughter, the whistle of steam engines, the chugging of locomotives, the clatter of boxcar wheels, the audible noise of animals, the clucking of chickens and the neighing of horses, the hubbub of conversation and the yelling of an argument, curses, the shuffling of many feet. Finally the mighty clanging, the shouting of goodbyes and then the hush, and within it slowly at first and then faster and faster the rumble of the wheels on the track.

The next bottle contained the sounds of a ringing tram and a song chanted by someone, then the noises of a market, the hubbub and happy banter. Another contained within it a prayer, yet another the squeals of children, the sounds of a Laundromat, a printing shop, a store, a church, a cobbler's workshop, the voice of someone talking about his own childhood in a language that seemed foreign yet perfectly understandable, the sounds of some kind of adventure, school, vacation, work, war, events both funny and horrible, a voice talking about children, about parents, friends, uncles and aunts, about holidays and customs, from time to time singing a song, but never the whole thing, only a recollected fragment, or reciting an extract from a poem memorized in school, voices intermingling and overlapping, and soon the air was screaming with a thousand voices and sounds, but all in a single sigh, in what is enclosed in a moment like a heavy lid on a trunk. "Do you hear it?" my uncle cried, "I have it all here, the entire archive locked within bottles, understand? I've collected my whole life, my whole life. Twenty years of trudging around with bottles. Ha!" His face looked menacing.

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8 / KRZYSZTOF VARGA

KRZYSZTOF VARGA (BORN 1968) IS A WRITER AND JOURNALIST. HE HAS PUBLISHED ELEVEN WORKS OF FICTION, INCLUDING MOST RECENTLY *TERRAZZO TOMBSTONE* (2007) AND *INDEPENDENCE AVENUE* (2010).

Photo: Krzysztof Dubiel

Sawdust

The central character and narrator of *Sawdust* is fifty-year-old Piotr Augustyn, the commercial representative of a Warsaw corporation who travels non-stop all over the country. The novel takes the form of Augustyn's monologue, something like a general confession, a final reckoning with life, a balance-sheet of profit and loss, although the former is actually out of the question. For in every regard this man's life is unsuccessful, marked by numerous failures, disappointments and humiliations; the unfortunate, rather ludicrous travelling salesman shows his dislike for everyone and everything. He curses his parents for failing to give him a happy childhood, and his avaricious wife who was disappointed by her husband and divorced him years ago, and silently badmouths his fellow passengers on the train (Augustyn does his thinking on the journey from Warsaw to Wrocław). He despises his colleagues from the parent corporation as well as the employees of other firms with whom he is always meeting; he hates successful people and losers, snobbish young people and trendy creative types. This list could go on ad infinitum – Augustyn is an utterly frustrated man, permanently filled with bile. The unlikable – to put it mildly – travelling salesman has only one positive feature – he is a great fan and expert on ancient music. But even this trait turns against him, because he feels isolated from the modern world, which he doesn't understand or accept; he regards today's Poland (the story is set in 2011) as a country which is badly run in every respect, and the citizens who populate it as wretches just like himself, but incomparably more hypocritical. And here we find *Sawdust*'s greatest merit – it is clearly a thorough send-up of the modern era. The sawdust of the title is not just the miserable stuff that fills Augustyn's soul and defines his consciousness, but also, or maybe above all – according to Varga – it is what public life is made of. "Sawdust" means the universal lack of authenticity, the omnipresent hypocrisy and tackiness, the dumbing-down, the envy and rampant cynicism, every kind of intellectual rubbish. Of course he gives us an image that has been deliberately exaggerated and made into a caricature, but it is powerfully persuasive. The final scene of the novel, in which a crime occurs that doesn't actually have a motive, can be read as a curious reminder. Varga tries to convince us that sociopathy and habitual hatred of one's neighbours is not just a state of mind, but also a criminal predisposition.

Dariusz Nowacki

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I am a redundancy salesman, whose work involves travelling about Poland, meeting with strangers whom I have no desire to meet, and spending time with them – which costs a calculable sum, but brings no advantage at all – before returning to Warsaw or going on to some other place, nearer or further away. I am a professional pilgrim, who is paid for making a piecework pilgrimage, who gets money for the hundreds of kilometres he travels almost every day. I make my pilgrimage about Poland, and it is the worst penance that can possibly be inflicted on anyone, but it becomes understandable when you consider the fact that the person who inflicted it had heard my confession beforehand. ...

I think that during my, to put it rather grandly, professional career I have been to about a hundred cities, naturally middle-sized ones for the most part; this year I have been to thirty-six of them, which averages out at three cities a month, but as ever with statistics, that obscures rather than clarifies the situation – after all, there are several cities that I visit several times a year, and it's probably no surprise that these are the biggest ones, the Polish metropolises, within this country's capacities, of course.

I know exactly where I have been and how many times, because I have it all written down in a special hard-backed notebook, which I fill in scrupulously: date of departure and return, city, hotel. I keep this record not for sentimental reasons, of course, but for accounting purposes – I invoice for my journeys, which means I am reimbursed the cost of my train tickets (unfortunately only for second-class travel, but on InterCity trains, which doesn't really make much difference, because they always run late anyway), and for hotels, naturally never better than three-star. This notebook full of dates and columns of figures is the story of my life. ...

I don't write down my expenses for food in the notebook, because I pay for my own meals (and so I buy average food at an average price), or entertainment, which usually means coffee at a café, usually in a chain, a Coffee Heaven, a Starbucks or something like that; my clients prefer to meet at those chain cafés, because they think it gives them prestige, apart from which they know I'm going to pay, and it's always better when someone stands us a coffee at Starbucks than at Marie's Café, for example.

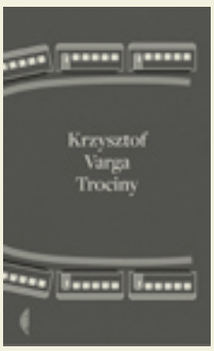
They feel more professional at the chain cafés; it's not even that the servings of coffee are bigger, in a bigger cup, and instead of a tired woman with her roots showing who brings the mugs without much enthusiasm, they're called to the counter by smart young staff members; the point is that the customer feels more professional in there – any loser with a paper cup of latte who's pretending to be in a hurry makes a more professional impression. All the people with whom I do business arrange to meet me in that sort of place; the paper cup of latte promotes them from a nobody to a nobody plus, on top of which they're hoping to be seen by someone they know, who is there at the same time to meet with another travelling salesman just like me. How many of these stuck-up lads and vapid lasses I've seen in the course of my travels, rushing along the street with paper cup in hand as if in a great hurry to get somewhere, heading for incredibly important meetings, sending out a message to all and sundry that says: I am an urban professional, I have no time for anything except my work, I only meet with people of the same status, I'm not interested in people who aren't in a hurry and don't drink coffee with frothy milk bought at the place where I always buy my coffee (though every time I feel like bursting into tears when it comes to paying the bill). The one consolation for the lasses is that they only spend money on water and coffee, as far as nourishment goes (to give it rather an inflated name), and some of them spend it on menthol cigarettes as well, though increasingly rarely. All of them without exception are slender, balancing their pale bodies on the edge of emaciation; their compensation for the constant battle against their own bodies is to be unpleasant – during my countless meetings I have never met a likeable female client, they are all stand-offish and don't even bother to hide their disgust at having to meet, if only for their work, with a fifty-year-old man who is somewhat overweight and has a bald patch that is broadening the fields of its dominion.

At the chain cafés there is wireless Internet, and my clients always come with laptops; during our meetings they are quick to switch them on, although there's never the slightest reason to do so, but as their laptops are always in stand-by mode, all it takes is a single click and I see a look of satisfaction appear on their faces, which quickly changes into pretend concentration.

I offer them a cigarette, they offer me a cigarette, I look at their documents, they look at mine, ultimately it's about adding a signature, though not always, so there's no need to bring a laptop at all, the details have been established in advance, by electronic means; I don't use a laptop at meetings, I only need one in the evening, in the privacy of my hotel room, as I listen to the sounds of the street and the whisper of the wind, to check my mail and send headquarters an account of our firm's latest marvellous triumph.

So there we sit with our cups of latte, spend a while looking through the documents in silence and then sign them, though not always – sometimes it just involves showing each other proposals, then I make them an offer, which they pick up, like a registered letter at the post office, and take back to their bosses, in other words the people with the real decision-making power; in fact I am a plain old carrier pigeon, not a white one however, but a grey street pigeon. The people with whom I meet do not usually have any power, they are common-or-garden messengers, gofers, errand boys who run from one chain café to the next and have meetings with people like me on behalf of their employers, though of course they try to give me the impression that something depends on them, they do their best to pout, to look sullen, to spread their threadbare peacock tails from which their bosses have already ripped out almost all the feathers. Nothing depends on them, nor does anything depend on me, it's all fake moves, plus the fact that they are always younger than me, they're each about twenty-something, at most thirty, they really could be my children, they've only just started to drag themselves to the top; they think one day they'll get there, but I know they won't, I know they'll get stuck for years on a narrow ledge of rock, and will cling onto it tightly in order to survive.

Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones



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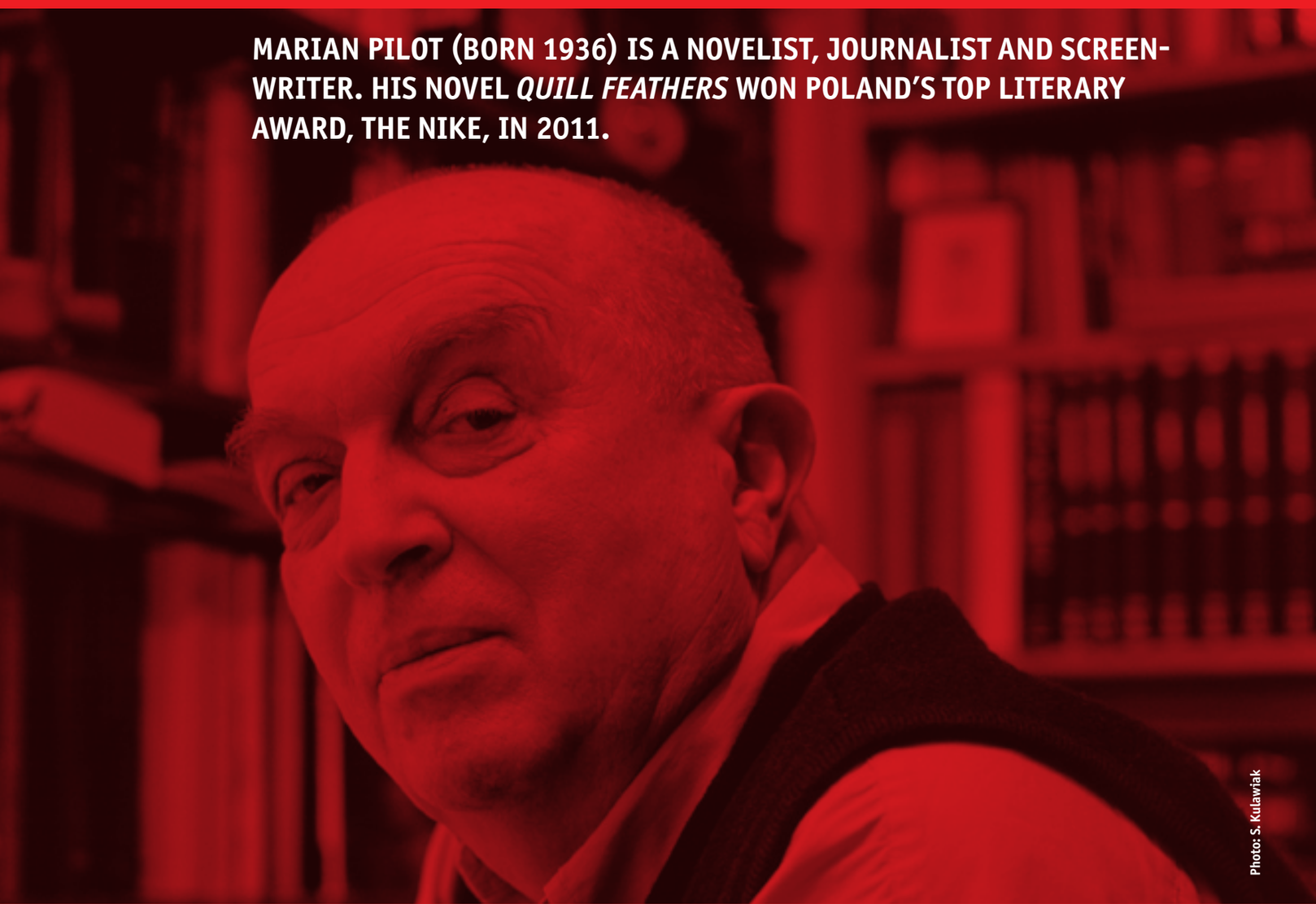
10 / MARIAN PILOT



MARIAN PILOT (BORN 1936) IS A NOVELIST, JOURNALIST AND SCREENWRITER. HIS NOVEL *QUILL FEATHERS* WON POLAND'S TOP LITERARY AWARD, THE NIKE, IN 2011.

Photo: S. Kulawiak

Quill Feathers

The action of *Quill Feathers* is set in the countryside in the early 1950s, but the main story is framed by a present-day time-scale, in which the father of an acclaimed writer lies dying. The father is a simple, illiterate peasant; moved by the old man's demise, the son decides to tell the tale of his stormy life, as if in his name, as his deputy. The story begins at the point when the authorities launch a campaign against illiteracy. The main character is a small boy at the time; his father is an indigent peasant, thief and trouble-maker, who smashes up the school house and destroys the blackboard used to teach the alphabet. He is branded "an enemy of the people" and sent to a secret police prison. Since time immemorial rural society has held the attitude that it is better to be illiterate ("everyone knew it was better not to write – to be sure not to sign something stupid one day"). But there is also a superstition alive and well in the village which says the written word is capable of moving mountains. At his mother's insistence the boy, who can barely form letters, writes lopsided messages to the authorities, asking for his father's release. When the old Dog (we only learn the father's real name on the penultimate page) comes home a few years later, the son is convinced that his written intervention was the deciding factor.

The major events and motifs in *Quill Feathers* have a symbolic dimension. In a folder belonging to the father who has just back from prison, there are two objects: a pair of glasses and a newspaper cutting containing a socialist-realist story. The boy puts on the glasses – the symbol of an intellectual – and immediately gains visual acuity. As soon as he has read the socialist-realist story he decides to become a writer. Word by word, he will copy out the text he has found in the newspaper and send it out into the world. But the most important symbolic object in the book is a fountain pen which his father deliberately steals from an office for the would-be writer (who for now is still a little boy at his first school). At a future date, when the young Dog is at high school, the secret policeman recruiting him as an informer tells him to write the truth with the stolen pen. And so it turns out the central character has written not just elegant prose, linguistically as fancy as the quill feathers of the title, but he has also written shameful denunciations as an informer for the secret police. Marian Pilot's novel is about the power and the curse of the written word, about faith in words and the consequences of being intoxicated by that faith.

Dariusz Nowacki

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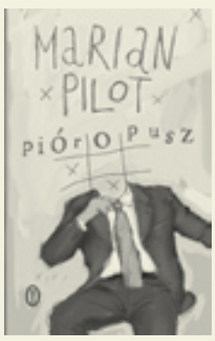
Why did the father head along the main road up the hill towards Pogwizdów, the court wanted to know. Surely it's better for a lame man to shuffle down a hill than to scramble up one? From the father's statements it emerged that he'd headed for Pogwizdów because he meant to climb a windmill with the blackboard he'd pinched from the school. Why on earth would a lame man climb up a windmill? What did he want to do up there? What did he need the school blackboard for up a windmill? The prosecutor ranted away and shook his fist. The father spouted whatever came into his head. He was going to jump down from the windmill with the blackboard. Jump down from the windmill? To kill himself? Commit suicide? No, he had no intention of killing himself, he said in denial. I wanted to wing it down from there! Wing it down? asked the court. In other words the defendant wanted to fly? On a school blackboard? (The court did not believe it.) The father said nothing, so the judge boomed at him: Well? Well? The father ummed and erred. Then the prosecutor asked if the father had wanted to disseminate enemy propaganda from the windmill. The father said no, he hadn't.

Those were long-ago, poor and quiet times. The father strode down the middle of the highway – it was still gravel-topped in those days – because the cows weren't on their way back from pasture yet, the market in Ostrzeszów was only due to be held the next day, on Thursday, so there weren't any carts on the road (no one drove a car yet then, just the authorities rarely), and not even the most sluggish old biddies had set off for the October service yet, so the father carried himself and his blackboard the width of the entire roadway, from one ditch to the other. The whole way up the hill towards Pogwizdów, he kept up his merry mood, like the best man or the toastmaster whose duty it is to shout, lead the singing and turn somersets just to put the wedding fraternity in a jolly mood, to make them feel elated and merry. He was all on his own (said the witnesses), but he was making merry for ten, as if he were proper tipsy or had eaten on the insane root. He was alone, but he had the blackboard at his side, and was rejoicing along with it, tossing it in the air – spinning, twirling and whirling, the blackboard went soaring, then bucked and reared in mid air as it fell. Never to the ground – the father made sure of that; hobbling nimbly, he ran up and caught the board in his outspread arms. Shouting lustily (what had he been so very pleased about, the court asked him; because never before had he succeeded in pinching something like that, the shameless thief confided in the judges), he waved the blackboard about like a banner. Then he placed it on his head again and gambolled all down the highway trying to find his balance – now jumping up, now squatting down, twisting his neck, then instantly racing in pursuit of the board as it kept slipping off his cranium. Zig-zagging, circling, almost overturning and almost spraining a foot, as doggedly as ever the father kept aiming for the windmill on the hill. He only ceased his frolicking at the sight of the pauper Józek Chlewus, who was turning his cart full of potatoes, harnessed to his two thin cows Ruby and Bessie, off the Korpysy road and onto the Mikstat. It seemed the father had been watching out for Józek Chlewus all the time, and not the windmill (so it now appeared), and was looking for this Józek and his cows. And now he removed the blackboard from his head and used it to bow low to the cowman. And it's a good thing the father happened upon the pauper's cows in harness, for horses would have shied at the sight of that big blackboard and bolted, while the cows just tossed their heads and raised their tails; before they could run amok, Józek Chlewus managed to bar their way, grab hold of the shaft, brace it, slow the cart and avert a misfortune. From his post he rounded on the father: "You'll startle my bairns!" The father began to laugh in reply and, balancing the board on the splayed fingers of one hand, just as a waiter holds a tray full of plates, with the other he seized hold of a cart post, jumped up and sat himself on the cart, laying the board next to him on a heap of taters. By this means once again driving the court into total dismay and confusion; in no way could it understand why somebody who is flamboyantly striding up the highway towards a windmill standing on a hill should jump without a second thought onto an ox cart which is rolling down that road – in completely the opposite direction! Józek Chlewus fell victim to the suspicions of the prosecutor, who flatly refused to believe he wasn't in league with the blackboard pilferer; he began to spit blood on hearing that in the course of the drive, the pilferer sitting on the cart did not exchange a single word with the man driving the team. That prosecutor foamed, dribbled and frothed, fulminating, demanding divine retribution and revolutionary class justice in one fell swoop, and calling for the support of a firing squad in his struggle against vile reaction in the person of the crude liar and perjurer, Chlewus. To his good or bad fortune, the wretched, hounded, terrified Józek Chlewus was incapable of stammering anything but the truth, and the truth was that at the time, with his shoulder glued to a cart post, Józek had been trying with all his might to stop his beggarly cart as it rolled down the hill faster and faster, rattling and rumbling dreadfully; meanwhile he was also tugging at the chain tied to the horns of Bessie, the leading cow, doing his best to rein her in, for the animals were racing ahead like crazy.

Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones



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12 / MARIUSZ SIENIEWICZ

MARIUSZ SIENIEWICZ (BORN 1972) IS A NOVELIST AND COLUMNIST, REGARDED AS ONE OF THE MOST TALENTED WRITERS OF THE YOUNGER GENERATION. HIS MOST RECENT BOOKS ARE REBELLION (2007) AND CITY OF GLASS ELEPHANTS (2010).

Photo: private

Sleeping Beauty's Confession

In his latest novel, Mariusz Sieniewicz – one of the most important names in the generation of Polish writers born in the 1970's – remains within the range of topics that interest him the most. The main topic of the freshly published *Sleeping Beauty's Confession* is the deconstruction of cultural identity – national and local – that also resounded in previous books like *Fourth Heaven* and *We Don't Serve Jewish Women*.

The heroine of this novel, which is divided into three parts, is also its narrator, a thirty-eight-year-old woman named Emi, a single woman who keeps getting involved in toxic relationships with men. On top of that, Emi suffers from narcolepsy, as a result of which she falls asleep several times a day. She dreams about far-fetched things, although one motif keeps recurring: suicide. Yet something is always getting in the way of Emi committing it. At a certain point Svietka appears, an enigmatic Belorussian woman claiming to be Emi's sister. The pursuit of a new man begins, Lovemuffin. Lovemuffin is a special kind of man, though he represents many different subcategories: the narcissist, the guy suffering from depression, and the fanatical patriot...

The world of *Sleeping Beauty's Confession* alternates between sleep and waking, and this effect is enhanced by Sieniewicz's satirical, parodic style. Beneath what is superficially a somewhat absurd fairy tale, the writer takes a critical look at the reality of contemporary Poland (there are also references to the 1980's in the background) – with its culturally inscribed expectations with regard to gender roles (represented, among others, by the eponymous Sleeping Beauty), as well as things like virtual communication over the internet. Sieniewicz employs linguistic cliches for this, in order to wrest it from its armor of gravitas and show the absurdity of an incapacitating culture as he proceeds through his unique story. This is the expressive voice of a forty-year-old novelist, satirical and critical of Polishness and modernity.

Marcin Wilk

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Although you couldn't say that Emi's current lover was a confirmed bachelor who sees the world as one big birthday cake and gets a hard-on that is not only in his head at the sound of the word "me." To that kind of guy Emila could only be one of a number of candles that the bachelor would blow out once he had thought up his wish. Long ago, when Emila read Gombrowicz's diaries, she understood instantly that their first page was a kind of single people's constitution. Enamored of a confirmed bachelor, a woman must arrange the rhythm of her week according to the following system: Monday – Him; Tuesday – Him; Wednesday and Thursday – Him and him; Over the Weekend – Him, his, with him, to him, and about him. All the prepositions of bachelorhood.

This led Emila to a conclusion of apocalyptic proportions, namely, that humanity is under threat of a cataclysm of unprecedented scale, worse than any jihad. That cataclysm is "Selfism." Because there will come a day when only single people will be left on earth. From all corners there will extend an ecstatic: "Me, for me, and about me all the way!" Single people asking to be adored in vain and not finding an audience will then begin to fight with one another. And one bachelor will raise his hand against his own bachelor brother. And they will crush one another with a song of "me" on their lips. They will shoot at each other from around corners; they will strike each other openly with canes and poles. And the earth will be awash in brotherly blood. And a war such as the world has never seen before will be unleashed. A war between identical one-man armies. There will be millions of these armies. Emila just hopes she doesn't live to see the bloody consequences of selfism.

With her bridegroom-to-be things are quite different. He is always within arm's reach. In the night and in the middle of the day, even during Sunday mass, her lover can arouse a mysterious onrush of pleasure that Emila cannot and does not wish to resist: the caress, the hot breath, the light, unhurried exploration of her breasts and hips. If Emila wants to be alone, he waits patiently in the kitchen or the dining room. He also has his moments of quiet. Every three or four days or so he lies on his back by the bed and cradles his little black bag in his arms.

Her lover is not the most talkative person, but in fact that is what Emila likes the most about him. He doesn't bore her, does not stoop to the pearls of wisdom so characteristic of the Lovemuffins, who always possessed knowledge (mused upon in armchairs) of the world, not at all from the Discovery Channel. It normally comes out after lunch. It is a philosophy Emila calls "postprandialism." Postprandialism links "everythingsucksism" with "painintheassism." And just as Cato invariably called for Carthage to be destroyed, so at the end of their wisdom-filled rants there would always appear the holler of: "Thieves! Fuck them all! Is there any beer in the fridge?"

Daddy and dearest Mommy do not oppose their union. They do not even protest when Emil strokes him lustfully, deriving pleasure through her fingertips. And it doesn't even occur to them to torment their daughter with questions about getting engaged or married.

Just once dearest Mommy asked if he wasn't perchance a Finn or a Swede, because his name sounded so funny, so un-Polish. And why was he so teeny tiny – a real-life Tom Thumb. It is true that he never would have made it as a basketball player, but that is actually what enables her to keep him in her grip. Besides, at her age you couldn't allow yourself the luxury of fussiness. The lyrics of the pop song fit her like a glove: "A little guy, a big guy, could be a good husband. A fat guy, a skinny guy, could be a good husband. A bald guy, a bearded guy, could be a good husband..."

And his name? Since it sounded too foreign, she had started calling him Eryk. Her parents completely ignore Eryk. Only sometimes would they appeal to him, quite coldly, for a favor: to make it so they wouldn't have to wait at the outpatient clinic, to correct their gas bill, or to find out how Aunt Krystyna was doing in Germany. Eryk grants all wishes fast as lightning. He is very obliging, and – unlike previous Lovemuffins – would never allow himself a disparaging remark along the lines of "that uppity old bag in that wig of hers, and that holier-than-thou derelict."

Eryk has one other, much more important quality: he totally understands Emi's susceptibility to her illness, which for most Lovemuffins has always turned out to be an insurmountable obstacle. Two or three attacks were always enough for her suitors and lovers to run off in a panic, leaving Emi with their toothbrushes. The only person who got anything out of this was her pops. For the few teeth that remained him, he had accumulated a stock of tootbrushes that would last ufor the rest of his life – his or his teeth's life.

Only Eryk wasn't scared off by the Emilian illness. Although the truth is that looking for a woman without some kind of anomaly is like looking for a needle in a haystack. All of them are afflicted with some sort of little illness and a whole litany of psychological irregularities.

And Emila is no exception. Because, in order: if there are lady alkies and dope addicts, if on any corner you can run into environmental psychopaths, guardians of their husband's bank accounts, champions of fitness and multigrain cereals, if you manage to expose the members of the Secret Cult of Botox and Silicone operating under the cover of the banner of the Cappuccino Lovers Club, if you can see at first glance which one is a slave to *hedone*, which fell into life straight out of her parochial oasis as if it was a hole in the ice, and which is a shark in a skirt, then Emi is...

Emi is *narcoleptic*.

No special diet would help here, nor even Nordic walking. This is why instead of fighting her narcolepsy, Emi just succumbs to it. She lets narcolepsy become not second nature, but first nature. In this way, Emi gets an additional life. In one of them, she is as respectable and smooth as the résumé of a woman applying for an office job. In the other she's sleepy, secretive, covert. The other life is a sort of one-way mirror.

In her moments of dream-like flashbacks and mental breakdowns that cynical defenders of being awake call "passing out," only Eryk tries to bring Emila back to reality. The narcoleptic bout sometimes lasts a minute, sometimes forty-five minutes, but when it passes, Eryk does not ask idiotically what she dreamed about or if he should call an ambulance.

In fact, right now, lying on the edge of the pillow, Eryk starts to hum the theme song from *Never Ending Story*. Emi pretends to be deeply asleep. She stretches out her hand to him and then immediately rolls over. Eryk falls silent, allowing his lover to doze off for a few minutes.

Translated by Jennifer Croft

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14 / KAZIMIERZ ORŁOŚ

KAZIMIERZ ORŁOŚ (BORN 1935) IS A NOVELIST, DRAMATIST, AUTHOR OF RADIO PLAYS AND COLUMNIST. HE HAS PUBLISHED OVER A DOZEN WORKS OF FICTION.

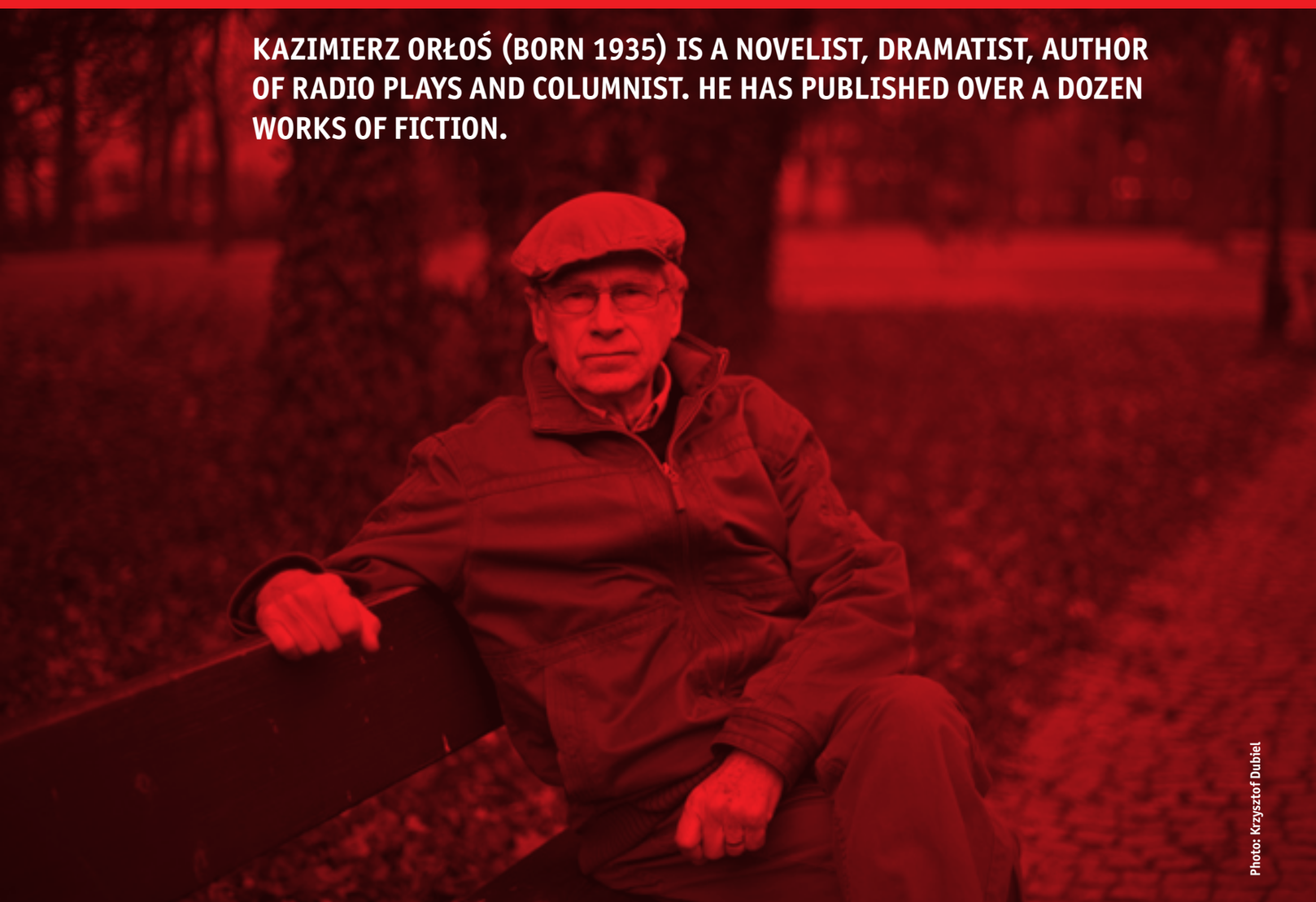

Photo: Krzysztof Dubiel

The House Above the Lyre

The action of *The House Above the Lyre* is set in June 1949. The main character's daughter takes her nine-year-old son away to stay with his grandfather, who was a colonel in the pre-war Polish Army, and whose name is Bronowicz. Having survived the Nazi occupation in a prisoner-of-war camp and returned to Warsaw in 1945, he could no longer communicate with his wife or settle into an office job. So he has decided to go and live on his own in Mazuria, where he has taken over a formerly German farm and is now dedicated to working on the land. His daughter's sudden visit is to do with the arrest by the Security Service of her husband, a Home Army soldier who took part in the Warsaw Uprising. The boy's mother is afraid that if she too is arrested by the communist apparatus of repression, her son will end up in an orphanage. At the centre of the literary drama we find a depiction of the highly complex social relations in the so-called Recovered Territories in the first few years after the war. Gradually the indigenous population is being removed from this area, in other words the Mazurians who generally have a Polish identity, but who speak German and are Evangelicals by faith. People who have been re-settled from the eastern Borderlands of the former Polish Republic are also appearing, and newcomers from central Poland too. The Mazurian land is partly under Soviet occupation, and there are officials representing the new powers-that-be who constantly bully and terrorise the defenceless population. Orłoś's original approach involves doing his best to show human happiness, and above all human decency in defiance of unfortunate, unfair times. The most important role is played by Colonel Bronowicz, a wise and noble man, who imposes high moral standards on his environment, and becomes a friend and authority for the local people (he speaks excellent German) as well as the new settlers. A great love is born between him and a much younger local girl, Urszula, who helps him to keep house, and the colonel's grandson forms a warm friendship not just with Urszula's daughter Zuzi, but also with his local peers. For the boy, the year spent at his grandfather's farm, where he is in close contact with Mazurian nature, is an almost idyllic time. But complications arise – Urszula is expecting Bronowicz's child, although he is still in a formal relationship with the wife he left behind in Warsaw. The story concludes with a credible and not at all obvious happy ending, and *The House Above the Lyre* deserves be called Kazimierz Orłoś's best book to date.

Dariusz Nowacki

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Urszula

and Bronowicz had made love for the first time in May, when the moon was full, a year before Joanna and her son's arrival, and three weeks after the Mazurian girl had moved into the colonel's house. Since that night he had often repeated: "You could be my daughter, Lili". To which Urszula would invariably reply: "It doesn't matter, Mr Bronowicz. If you love someone, right?"

They were sitting in the kitchen after supper. Next door, behind a curtain Zuzi was sleeping. Wasyl wasn't there. They could hear the dogs barking, sometimes Dońka snorting, as she stomped, as Lili would say, by the porch, passing close to the wooden steps. Often at night she would come up to the house from the meadow.

Bronowicz was gazing at Urszula, and she was gazing over his shoulder out of the dark window. That was when he took Lili's hands in his – he reached across the table. Before that they had been chatting as ever: the colonel had been asking questions about life in Gałkowo during the war. About her parents and brothers (she had two, in Soviet captivity.) About her sister who had left for Germany. Urszula's questions were usually about Bronowicz's wife. She was interested to know how old she was, how long they had been married and where they had met. She even asked when and in what words he had proposed to his wife. And did he love Izabela very much? Her questions amused Bronowicz, but he always replied truthfully, although sometimes he used the excuse of not remembering.

Before then he had not thought about her as a woman to make love to, but more as a daughter. Or a girl wronged by life. She had a child, but no husband (he never asked about Zuzi's father). It was true she had attracted his attention from the first moment. It gave him pleasure to look at her, at the way she moved, tall and straight. At the shape of her head and her hair tied in a short plait or with a red ribbon. He liked the scent of her blouse. It smelled of soft soap. And of her skin, as she leaned over to set the plates on the table. Before falling asleep he imagined Urszula sleeping beside him, in the room behind the kitchen. Once it had crossed his mind that this woman was like the sun, suddenly shining forth in his house. Now, in Eastern Prussia, when he was already sixty-two and feeling old.

He even thought about Lili in the evenings when he took Dońka for a gallop around the local fields and roads, when he heard the loud clatter of hoofs on the bridge, and then their soft sound on the sand as he trotted on through the forest, to the lake. He would come back after dark. Sometimes Urszula would be waiting on the porch.

Now her fingers seemed warm to Bronowicz. The tips were a little damp. Behind her fingernails she had thin, dark rims.

"My God, Lili, what beautiful hands you have."

"Really?" She leaned forward and stretched out her arms, resting her elbows on the table top. She didn't seem surprised by the colonel's behaviour. "No one has ever spoken to me like that."

"Like the Lady with an Ermine."

"The lady? *Warum?*"

Bronowicz didn't reply. He carefully placed Lili's hands on the table. "Time for bed, child." He stood up. He came out from behind the bench. He started to walk towards the hall. And to her, to Lili Marleen, as he called her, who was Bronowicz? Was he just a man thanks to whom she could earn a living, help her parents, buy Zuzi a dress? He knew he was as old as her father, but he looked younger. She listened to his voice from dawn to dusk, laughed at his jokes – at that "Lili Marleen", at the way he asked, as he came back from the woodwork shed: "What are they giving us for dinner today?", as sawdust showered onto the table from his hair and beard. When had she started to think about him differently? Was it at the moment when she was throwing the washing into the tub and had picked up the colonel's shirt to nestle her face in it?

That evening she didn't get up – she went on sitting at the table. She kept her elbows resting on the table top. She asked in German: "*Warum?*"

Bronowicz looked around, stopped, then moved away from the door. As he leaned over Lili, he shielded the wall and a bit of the window.

"Do you realise what might happen, girl?"

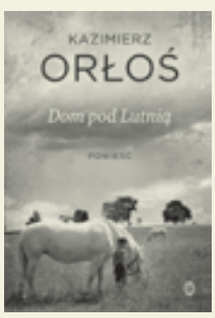
"*Ist das schlimm?*" she asked. "Is it bad?" she repeated in Polish.

Then he took hold of the woman by the arms and raised her up. Pushed away, the bench wobbled, and they both lost their balance for a moment. The flame flickered, reflected in the black window. Holding Urszula with one hand, with the other Bronowicz moved the oil lamp closer and blew out the flame. Only then, in the dark, did he take her more firmly into his arms and kiss her. The room smelled of the extinguished wick. Lying behind the curtain, Zuzi said something in her sleep.

They made love on a wooden bed in the big room. There was a full moon that night, and its bright disc was shining above the roof of the barn. They undressed beneath an open flue. They felt a chill on their faces and arms. Maybe that was why Urszula's breasts seemed cold to Bronowicz? They kissed, treading on the shirt he had tossed to the floor, her blouse that smelled of soft soap, his trousers made of coarse material and her darned brassiere.

Did they hear the dogs barking, or Dońka snorting near the veranda? Or stomping close to the wooden steps?

Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones



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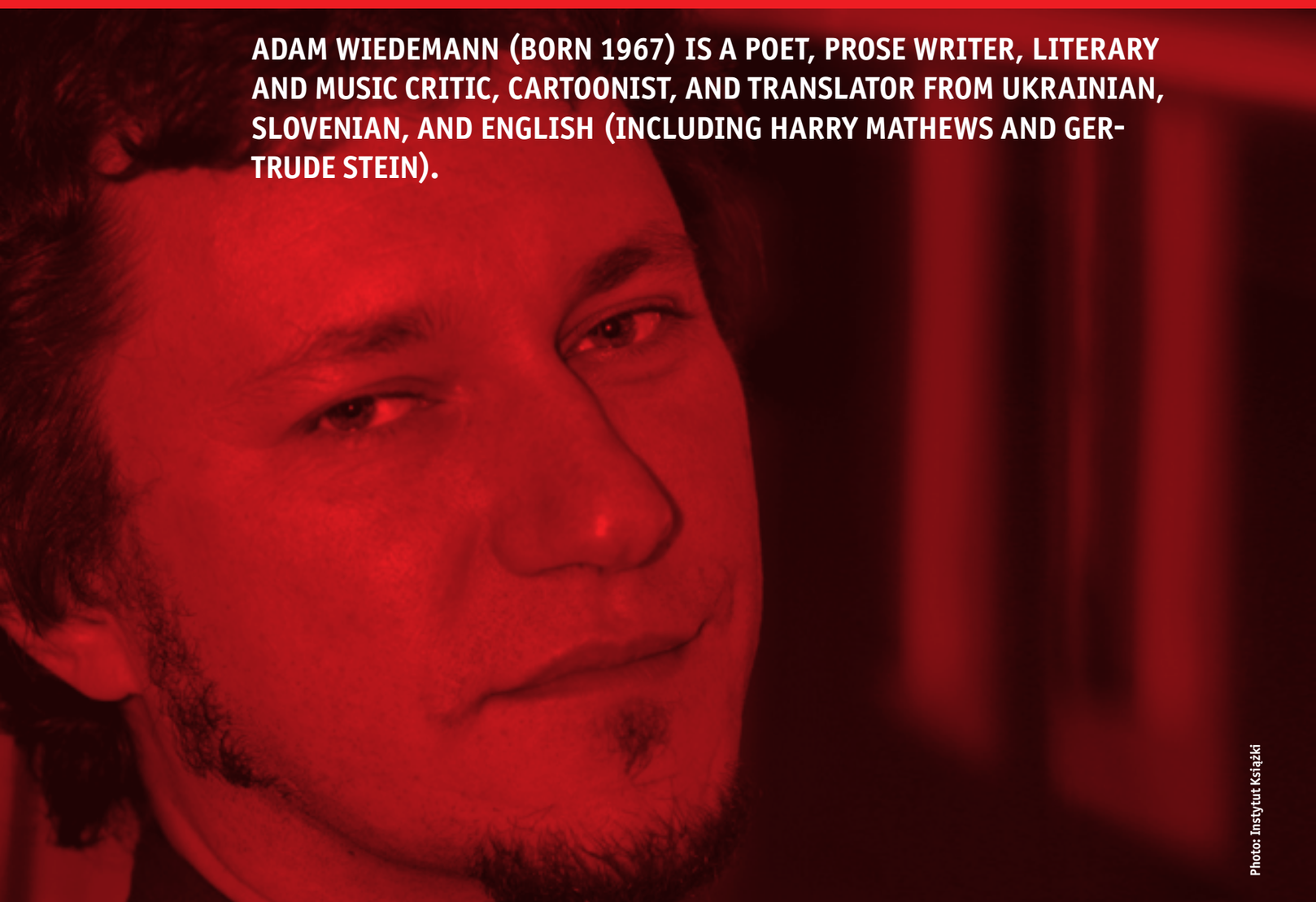
16 / ADAM WIEDEMANN



ADAM WIEDEMANN (BORN 1967) IS A POET, PROSE WRITER, LITERARY AND MUSIC CRITIC, CARTOONIST, AND TRANSLATOR FROM UKRAINIAN, SLOVENIAN, AND ENGLISH (INCLUDING HARRY MATHEWS AND GERTRUDE STEIN).

Photo: Instytut Książki

Stories

Adam Wiedemann, best known for his poetry, returns to prose after a decade-long absence following the publication of his last collection of short stories *Sęk pies brew* [Cinq pièces brèves], making his comeback all the more noteworthy, meaningful and poignant. His new collection contains twenty twenty short stories. Wiedemann feels comfortable in this unpopular Polish literary genre – something for which he should be praised, in light of the current dispiriting convention of inflating a story to the proportions of a novel.

Omitting a few fragments of so-called pastiche character, Wiedemann's stories chronicle what he knows best – his own life. And in telling us about himself – the artist in mid-career, living in uncertain times – he writes with an eloquence and a sense humor that is far from what we typically expect. Wiedemann possesses in his repertoire a tradition – which he draws from – a style of Polish confessional prose developed by Miron Białoszewski. What is worth noting about *Stories* is that what characterizes the selection is not a repertoire of stories from the home front but of games in the outfield – quasi-journalistic pieces about his ventures (the word "happenings" is more fitting) at festivals, fairs and fellowships abroad (which have come to amount to a substantial sum).

What we are confronted with here is a relation of an everyday life made somewhat exotic (especially for a reader outside the literary profession). The writing is aware of common linguistic trappings into which any storytelling is at risk of falling. "You think you're going to experience something, and you may even actually experience it, but then suddenly you realize that you didn't experience anything, and it doesn't bother you at all. It doesn't bother you that you can't remember anything about what you didn't experience and what you experienced. It doesn't bother you even though at the time it seemed you might not experience anything. You experienced it, and you even got something out of it." – writes Wiedemann in his short piece about his writer's residency in Iowa City.

We should be happy that Wiedemann – and his readers, too – are getting so much out of this.

Marcin Sendecki

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You think you're going to experience something, and you may even actually experience it, but then suddenly you realize that you didn't experience anything, and it doesn't bother you at all. It doesn't bother you that you can't remember anything about what you didn't experience and what you experienced. It doesn't bother you even though at the time it seemed you might not experience anything. You experienced it, and you even got something out of it.

I remember some interiors, and some buildings. I remember some people. Those people are not here now, and I can't remember what it was they were afraid of.

Mary woke me up. She brought me an envelope with an ATM card in it. I was expecting something more fabulous and ideally without Mary around, even though Mary was always around. Mary was like a mother to us; she loved us because she had given birth to us, which led to an understandable aversion: who after all would want to be the child of someone like Mary?

And I only wonder if that whole hazy nightmare was a result of her pounding on the door, or if the pounding saved me from even worse peripeteia.

The card was very pretty, and on it were written instructions to do something. I put it away for later; no sense dealing with it now, just out of bed, before the first drink. I left it on the bed and took up with Gertrude Stein, who was lying on the table. It's so hard to imagine Stein writing all of that sober. She wrote it all sober, so they say. A sober one. Respectable. People like that should be loved. I should write to Mother Theresa, I thought.

But I didn't. I translated a few pages from *Useful Knowledge*, up to the point where she clumps together *for, four and fortunately* – it was just too much. It was almost five already. I noticed the card on the bed.

The card gave me three options: to go in person, to email, or to call. I called. A recording picked up, instructed me to do various things, which I did for as long as I could. When I could no longer continue, another voice answered. "Are you a real person?" I asked.

"Yes I am," the voice replied. It told me to do the same things as the recording had. It was all so easy. We said good-bye to each other in an atmosphere of great warmth and congeniality. The voice still exists. I like it. I could have called him again.

We could have met in real time. We could have gone on a date. Could have, could have – but in the end there's no sense losing sleep over it.

I got dressed and went out. The used book store had a copy of *Wars I Have Seen* for $6. I picked it up and headed for the register. "Could I buy this?" I ask.

"I think you could," said the cashier. She was fat. I let out a loud laugh. I paid $6.80 with tax. I headed to the diner that was right next door, the one with the hamburgers. John had told me they have the most authentic hamburgers there and how I should try them at least once.

I sat down and was handed a menu. There was a wide selection of hamburgers. I wanted to order the most ordinary kind, but I ordered one with bacon because it sounded better somehow. And a lemonade; they have lemonade everywhere here, you can just order it without explaining what or how to make it. "Would you like something with your hamburger?" the waiter asked. "Fries?" "It's too soon for a hamburger with fries," I answered, thinking, maybe next time. The waiter went to fetch my hamburger. I pulled out *Wars I Have Seen* and started reading. Gertrude is good for reading in a diner. She's good for reading anywhere; she doesn't use such specialized verbs. The waiter brought me my lemonade. It was huge. Across from me, an old man who was missing an arm sat down. He was either very unhappy or insane. He ordered something and started lamenting his fate, loudly. "Adam, calm down!" the waitress yelled from behind him.

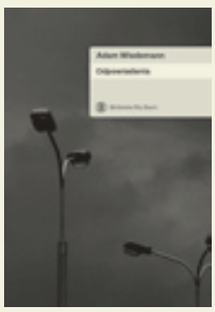
The man with the missing arm calmed down. We got our burgers. My bacon was crispy, my bun well toasted, a delightful meal. "Would you like anything else?" the waiter asked and joined the group of people sitting in the next booth.

"Oh, Adam," they said, "how are you, nice to see you here." I finished my lemonade while reading. Stein was getting better, my lemonade more watered-down.

On my way out I stopped by the cashier. I had $6 in change. My bill came to $6.41 with tax, I pulled out a hundred. "I'll have to give you your change in $5 bills," said the cashier. "So maybe I'll pay with a card," I said and paid with the card, even if I might have liked to use it this first time in a more ceremonious situation. "Here's space for the tip," said the cashier. "Put in whatever you like." "But the tip was included?" I said, confusing tip with tax. "Tax is always included," said the cashier. "Here you can write in a tip for me." I put down 29 cents, to make it even. As I was leaving I realized I should have written 69. Or, no, 59 cents; how did I get so bad at counting?

I walked down the street thinking about tips or else taxes. How you never know just how much you'll have to pay. What do I care about the cashier? What do I care about the waiter? I'll never go there again, is what I was thinking. Two boys jogged past me, one shirtless, very pretty. I walked past him since he had stopped at the light, drops of sweat on his skin, breathing heavily, for free. In a store I was looking for cake. I found organic cookies for $3. The cashier was covered in tattoos; he got tax. Tax is what you give to people who haven't earned it, I thought, although this tax was meant as a tip for the cashier. Everyone here gets tattoos. They turn themselves into text.

Translated by Beatrice Smigasiewicz and W. Martin



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18 / OLGA TOKARCZUK

OLGA TOKARCZUK (BORN 1962) IS POLAND'S WIDEST READ AND HIGHEST ESTEEMED FEMALE AUTHOR. SHE HAS BEEN AWARDED NUMEROUS LITERARY PRIZES AND HAS BEEN TRANSLATED INTO TWENTY-ONE LANGUAGES.

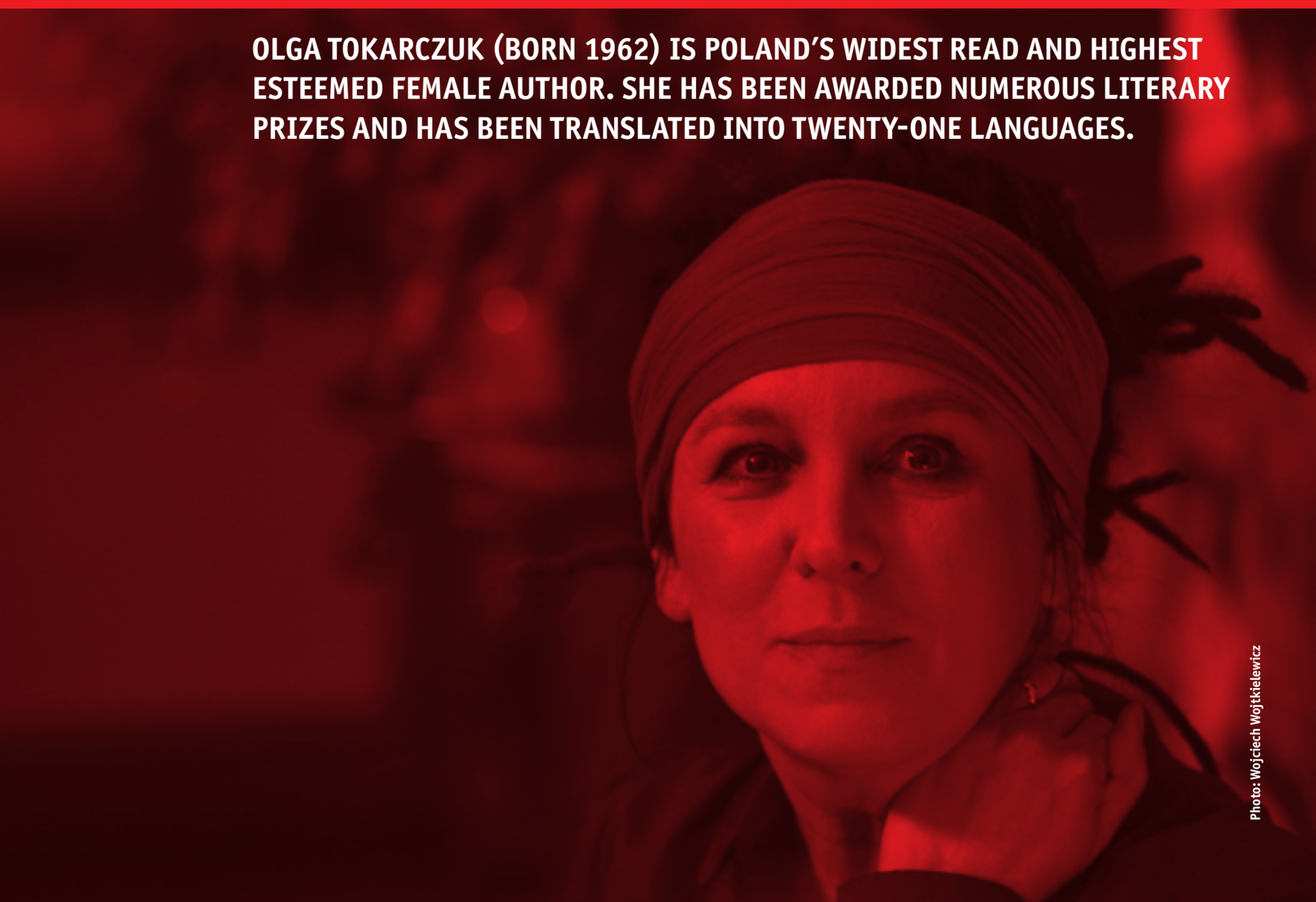

Photo: Wojciech Wojtkielewicz

Bear's Moment

Olga Tokarczuk's latest book is, in a strange way, a sort of whole, despite the fact that it was not written as such. But this collection of articles, prefaces, occasional pieces, thoughts, and humorous feuilletons, unexpectedly becomes an important compendium of the writer's philosophy. It is also a political manifesto. At no time did Tokarczuk ever relinquish the political potential of her writing, set it in opposition to her own creative freedom or to the perfection of her literary style. On the contrary, it is precisely the ability to react to violence, exploitation, lies and propaganda promulgated by those in power, that Tokarczuk considers one of her primary writerly obligations. With just one catch. It is always she herself, in her own language, and according to her own views, that formulates and pronounces the ideas that today connect milieux and generations. The political and the literary are never divided by Tokarczuk.

Tokarczuk often employs the form of extended aphorism, sometimes creating original, linked parables, sometimes comedic entries to a guidebook, like "A Biased Little Guide to Poland for Germans on the Occasion of the Former's Ingress into the European Union." But she gives priority here to "Heterotopias." The piece "How to Think Heterotopia?," wryly subtitled "A Parlor Game," is a clear-cut – and beautifully written – lecture on Olga Tokarczuk's political philosophy. It is not, at its core, a revolutionary work. Its originality lies in the language of Tokarczuk's ideas: "Another world is possible. We would just need to think it up first, and then write it." This is Tokarczuk's credo in its most condensed form. This is Tokarczuk's signature across all of her works. Her heterotopias are worlds questioning down to the heteronormativity stigmatizing sexual minorities; there is also ample space here for sharp opposition to the abuse and eating of animals.

In *Bear's Moment*, Tokarczuk is deathly serious with a dash of humor, fictiveness, play. A radical opponent of nation-based ideology, she is nonetheless able to express wonderfully her own Polishness. Lastly, there is the "Bear's Moment" of the title, a parable about how the enchantment of the world is only possible through the rejection of a monotheistic understanding of the idea of truth. This is a decisively expressed "Yes!" to literature, that "strange and powerful place in between numerous individual truths."

Kazimiera Szczuka

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A Biased Little Guide to Poland for Germans on the Occasion of the Former's Ingress into the European Union

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Location
Not ideal. The great plain between East and West, between two predatory powers, two forces of civilization, reminiscent of a ping pong table. It was a theater of all the great wars – from Napoleon to World War II. The upside of this, on the other hand, is that it's close to everything.

Borders
Quite adaptable. In certain historical periods delimiting a vast territory ranging from the Baltic down to the Black Sea. In others, Poland's borders disappeared altogether. The latest borders were drawn up arbitrarily at Yalta by the three powerhouses of America, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union. Based on this accord, Poland lost Lviv and Vilnius but got Wroclaw and Szczecin. Unclear whether this was good or bad.

Language
Slavic, apparently very difficult on account of the large number of susurrant sounds (the Polish for the phrase "A beetle buzzes in the reeds" suffices as proof: "Chrząszcz brzmi w trzcinie"). It swept across the multicultural Polish state as a lingua franca after the downfall of Latin. While there was no Polish state, it was the sole bearer of shared identity, which is why Poles confer such esteem upon it. The Polish language is, in a way, the homeland of the Polish people. Today over 50 million people speak Polish around the world.

Population
There are nearly 40 million in Poland and around 10 million abroad (see: Emigration). The population is the result of many centuries of ethnic mixing (Ukrainians, Jews, Belorussians, Lithuanians, Germans, Silesians, and even Tatars). It is not true that all Polish mean have mustaches.

Women
There exists a sociological phenomenon not satisfactorily explained thus far that consists in a relatively high percentage of Polish women emigrating and taking foreign husbands, resulting in unofficial little diplomatic outposts. Thus a Pole traveling the world will always come upon compatriots. Perhaps this phenomenon is already being investigated by other states' intelligence agencies.

Religion
Polish Catholicism. A particular shade of Catholicism that values a strong connection with national identity as well as a sense of mission (see: Great Myths) and that also boasts a particularly developed cult of the Virgin Mary. According to the Church, the Mother of God is the irrevocable and only Queen of Poland. Thus the Polish system may be considered a monarchy. 95.8 percent of the adult population of Poland proclaims its membership in the Catholic Church (in Spain it is 94.1 percent, and in Italy 97.1; the censuses do not say what percentage is actually practicing). The state of affairs has been such since the end of the Second World War, when as a result of the war and of geopolitical adjustments (see: Borders) Poland ceased to be a multicultural, multiethnic country.

Art and Culture
Poland has the highest rate of poetifying per capita of anywhere in the world. Around 100,000 people write poems in Poland, including two Nobel laureates, and in addition all of them live in one town, namely, in Krakow.

Education
Poland is fertile breeding ground for scholars, though the overwhelming majority of academics and scientific professionals trained in Poland work beyond its borders, where they contribute to the general good of humanity (see: Emigration). Note that no one in Poland has any doubt with respect to the national identity of Copernicus.

State of the Crisis
This is the default socio-political state for Poles and has been for generations, and they handle it magnificently. There is the fear that any sort of normalization of conditions might lead to social unrest.

National Character
Poles appear at first glance to be gloomy and sometimes give the impression of being arrogant. They can be individualistic, but not eccentric. Often for the sake of peace and quiet they act like conformists, although paradoxically any and every form of rule arouses their suspicions; thus they are born anarchists. Note that they do not enjoy jokes on this subject. Their mood oscillates between delight in themselves and a melancholy feeling of inferiority.

Great Myths
First: Poland is the *antemurale christianitis*, the bulwark of the Christian world. Tied to this is the obligation to defend western civilization from the Barbarians (Hungary and Spain see their roles in a similar manner). Second: two hundred years ago, after having lived long and in very close quarters with Jewish culture, there arose amongst Poles an idea of national messianism. They are thus convinced that they are exceptional and that it is their mission to save the rest of the world, and that national misfortunes are a part of that mission. Poles are known for always turning up to support anyone anywhere in the world any time freedom and independence are under threat. The carrying out of these myths is quite pricey and in general poorly understood by those defended and saved.

Cuisine
Ho-hum, pretty similar to German cuisine. Meals considered typically Polish are Ukrainian barszcz, Russian pierogi, and Jewish-style carp. Worth trying, on the other hand, are dishes made of mushrooms as well as highland cheeses. Poland is one of those very sad places in Europe where grapevines do not grow, which is how its inhabitants came to produce vodka. Lately, though, in conjunction with global warming, the consumption of imported wines has been on the rise. It is not true that Poles drink the most alcohol of anyone in Europe. Statistics show that general alcohol consumption rates are just a little above average.

The Cities
--Warsaw is the Hong Kong of Central Europe. The capital of the country, the seat of its politicians. A frenetic city obsessed with updates, money, success. English vocabulary has made more headway into the Polish language here than anywhere else in Poland. People from the provinces understand very little here. Nice new Old Town.
--Krakow has long preserved its traditional population split: half artists, half philistines. Thanks to this dialectical tension, art and culture blossom here.
--Wrocław was a German town completely destroyed by the Germans and rebuilt and resettled by Poles, primarily from Lviv and surrounding areas.

The Country
Western documentaries about Polish farming show horse-drawn carts with great relish and in prolonged scenes. It is widely suspected that there is some logistical corporation renting them out.

Services to the World
First: the discrete and expert demolition of communism. Second: the introduction into Europe of the custom of drinking coffee and the establishment of the first coffee houses in Vienna. Third: the invention of the American sport of baseball (which even today they pay a considerable amount of attention to), which according to Norman Davies is assumed to be a descendant of a game called "bat" played by Polish immigrants. Fourth: Polish sausage.

What Poland Can Bring to the E.U.
The ability to remain aloft amidst tempests (see: State of the Crisis).
A special talent for finding loopholes in the tax law.
The Białowieża Forest.
Some slight embarrassment.

Translated by Jennifer Croft

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20 / MARIUSZ WILK

MARIUSZ WILK (BORN 1955) IS A NOVELIST, JOURNALIST, TRAVELLER AND DEMOCRATIC OPPOSITION ACTIVIST WHO IN THE LATE 1980S DROPPED POLITICS AND EUROPEAN CIVILISATION TO SETTLE IN THE FAR NORTH OF RUSSIA.

Photo: Piotr Wójcik

As the Geese Fly

The latest part of Mariusz Wilk's *Northern Diary*, titled *As the Geese Fly*, is apparently similar to the previous books in the series, in which Wilk described his travels about the Far North of Russia. Apparently still writing in short, journalistic notes – Wilk would probably use the word "sections" – he tries to encapsulate the experience of physical and intellectual roaming which takes him to the purifying Void, thanks to which he can separate himself from the tumult of ordinary life, to wander deep inside himself, while also unhurriedly contemplating the world around him. Wilk is apparently still using the same unique style, in which words and phrases from the Russian language are mixed with old Polish – and yet *As the Geese Fly* is not typical of his output.

Wilk has become the father of a daughter, Martusza, which, as he puts it, "made my world turn upside down, in other words it stood on its head. Although some of my friends claim it is the other way around – now it is standing on its feet." The child's birth forced the nomadic writer to rethink his strategies for life completely, and to define his aims anew. In fact, he still goes roving just as before, and gives the reader an account of his wanderings. In the new book he describes Petrozavodsk and people connected with this city (*Mirror of Water*), a short trip to Labrador (*Minced Caribou*) and another season spent at his old wooden house on the Onega river (*Beyond the Mirror*), presents more of his favourite authors (chiefly the vagabond-writer Kenneth White, inventor of concepts such as "the intellectual nomad" or "Geopoetics"), and writes about his spiritual revelations. Yet he constantly has the image of his darling daughter at the back of his mind, and the thought that from now on he is following the trail – his path in life – mainly in order to prepare Martusza to take it up as soon as he himself can go no further.

Wilk has changed, and his writing is different too. *As the Geese Fly* is above all a deep and moving account of the joys and cares of late fatherhood.

Robert Ostaszewski

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11 August

Meanwhile the nights are getting dark again, and ever longer. In the morning dense haze (according to Pieter it's *gar*', something burning, coming up from Pudozh) rises over the heated land beyond the Onega. There's a roaring sound from the sky, and every day incredibly forceful storms rampage. Perhaps the earth has had enough and is trying its best to shake us off? Like reindeer shaking off pestilential parasites and flies.

The tremulous state of nature made me peep into Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, although I don't care for disaster novels. The Road is the story of a post-apocalyptic world, through which a father wanders with his small son. We don't know what caused the cataclysm – maybe a nuclear war, maybe a collision between our planet and an asteroid, but it doesn't matter. The world has turned to ashes, the sun doesn't warm it, and there are no birds or animals, or any food at all, so the few people who have survived are hunting each other for meat. I'd have put *The Road* aside quickly if I hadn't been struck by the author's idea that if you are a good father, all that stands between you and death is your child. Something touched me.

Since Martusza was born, I often consider my own journey. My daughter's birth has made me aware of the imminent end. It was a singular sort of awakening, like a Zen master's cane as he strikes the pupil to rouse him from the lethargy of blissful meditation. Someone might object to my writing about the imminent end when I'm only just fifty-five. Well quite, but she has her entire life's journey before her, on which I can only accompany her for a short stretch, if my legs will allow. That is why I was so touched by McCarthy's idea. ...

12 August

Outside the wind is ruffling the poplars, projecting a moving network of leaves onto the wall, as if it were a screen; the sun is twinkling among them, scattering spots of light about the floor. Flashes of it on the ceiling are copying the play of jellyfish in the lake, and even the cradle hanging from a roof beam is swaying to the rhythm of the Onega. The whole house is in a subtle, quivering net of light.

Martusza is almost a year old. Although in fact she is older, as for me, like for the Saami, a person's life starts at the moment of conception, not when he or she emerges from the mother's womb. I remember how we looked at her on the ultrasound picture. She was floating in amniotic fluid, like the cosmic ocean in Tarkovsky's *Solaris*.

Before she was born we were faced with the dilemma of where to live with a small child: in the city, or out here, in a semi-deserted village. Friends advised the city, because there would be a doctor to hand and hot water in the tap, and here, as we know, the roads are not cleared of snow in winter, so God forbid, if something should happen, no ambulance would be able to get here in time. Well, and besides, they asked, how will you cope without running water, in old houses that can't be heated to average room temperature? Where will you do the laundry and bathe the baby?

I never thought about doctors, because if I were to start considering life with Martusza from the idea of hospitals, I'm sure I never would have decided to do that to her. And as for so-called comforts, in other words running water and warm baths, those are conveniences for the parents, and there's no need to use the child as an excuse. On the other hand, there are incomparably more advantages to life in Kondo than in Petrozavodsk. Firstly, peace and quiet, no car alarms to tear the night apart with a piercing howl as they do in the city, no neighbours the other side of the wall. Secondly, here there is nature all around, there's no need to go looking for a park or a riverside to inhale a breath of fresh air – you only have to put the baby in her pram outside the window so that she's within sight, and the sough of the lake and the whisper of the poplars will rock her to sleep. Thirdly, here Martusza will start with life amid beauty, and it is the environment that shapes the mind earliest of all (only after that comes language, and school...), so from the very beginning it matters what she looks at, what she sniffs, touches, and puts in her mouth, whether it is wood, clay and grass, or duralumin, polyethylene and concrete. Here her awareness is being shaped by the open space of a large house, amber spots of light on the floor, a real fire in the stove, the rhythm of nature, the birds singing and odours from outside; there she would be constantly attacked by the jabber of advertisements (oozing from all directions), neon lights and the stink of deodorants and exhaust fumes by turns. Fourthly, here the first flavours she's tasting are those of fresh food straight from the garden, lake and forest, so it's no surprise Martusza adores rye bread baked by her mother and chives which she picks from the vegetable bed herself; whereas in the city she would probably get hooked on some sort of processed baby food... I could go on listing the advantages of life with a child at Kondo for ages, but I'm sure I've convinced the thinking reader by now.

I won't pretend it was easy. The winter gave us a particularly rough ride, although we did prepare for it in advance, by renovating the floor so there wouldn't be a draught coming from the ground, and by insulating the rooms above us so the heat wouldn't escape through the ceiling. Who could have foreseen that once again we'd have the worst winter for a hundred years (the second one this century!), and that we'd be frost-bound with snowdrifts up to our ears, so I'd spend the greater part of each day clearing it away?

Despite the difficulties, it was the most wonderful winter of my life, because everything in it was the first, though for the second time around – the first snow and the first candle flames on the Christmas tree, the first Christmas Eve, the first New Year's Eve and the first New Year's Day. Because although I had once experienced all those things for the first time without realising it, now, by watching Martusza, I could repeat that first time again, with her. For in actual fact, thanks to my daughter, I have begun my life's greatest journey – an expedition to the very start of it all. It's not to do with returning to my own origins by means of a blood relationship – that will come later, when we start to read fairytales together, but now it's more about the beginnings of man in general.

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22 / JACEK HUGO-BADER

JACEK HUGO-BADER (BORN 1957) IS A POLISH JOURNALIST AND FEATURES WRITER. HIS PREVIOUS BOOK, *WHITE FEVER* RECEIVED VERY POSITIVE REVIEWS IN THE UK.

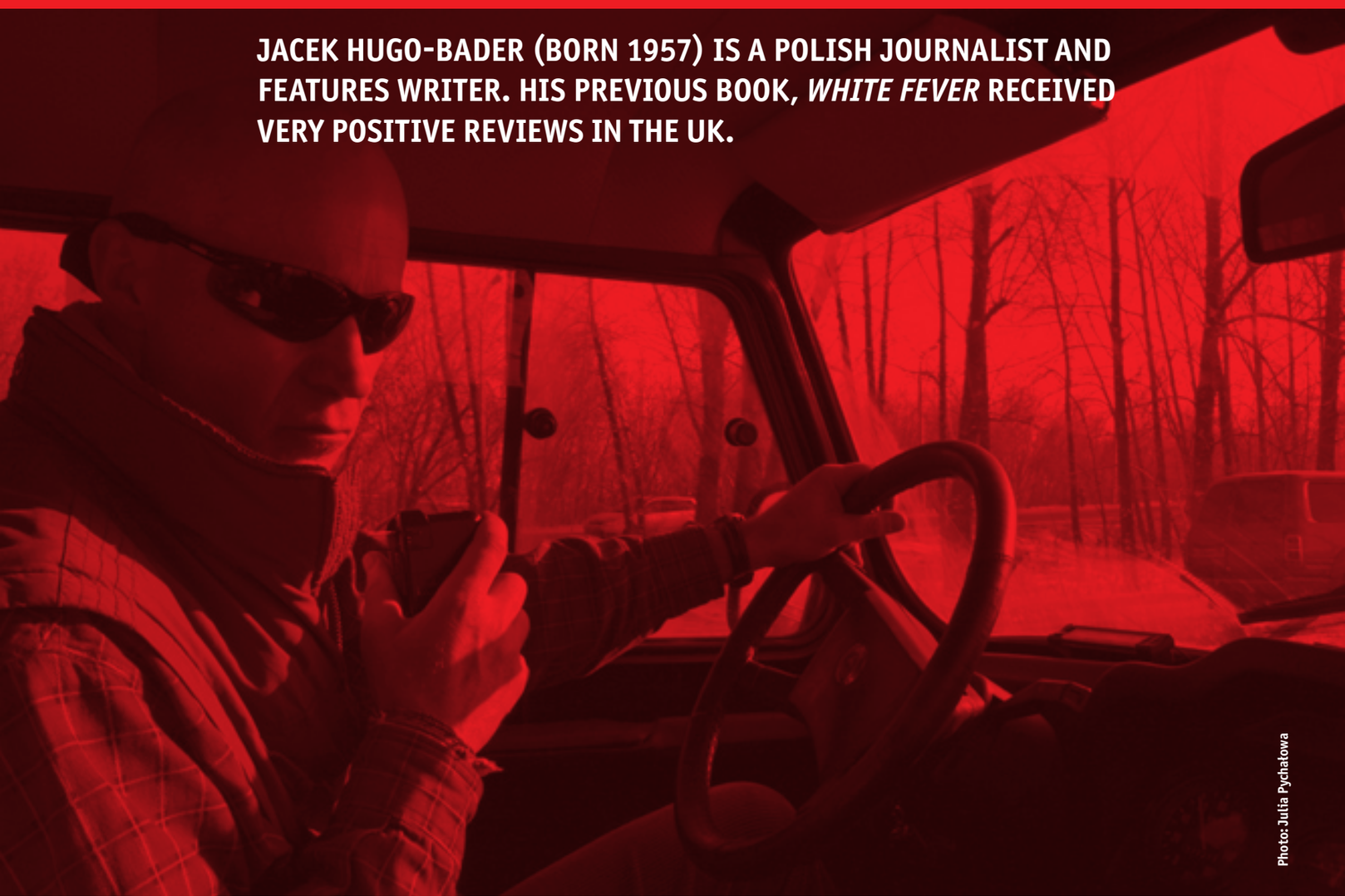

Photo: Julia Pychałowa

Kolyma Diaries

The latest book by Jacek Hugo-Bader – author of *White Fever* and *In a Heavenly Valley Amid Greenery* – is a road story. *Kolyma Diaries* is a collection of writings from a journey the author made along the Kolyma Highway. As he works out himself, the 2025 kilometres that he travelled come to more than two million metres. Two million metres full of experiences, encounters and emotions.

Kolyma is a place of special interest in view of the climate and the grim historical legacy of the Soviet Union. Hugo-Bader refers several times to Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*, and even more often to Varlam Shalamov's *Kolyma Tales*. However, although the communist regime features here and there in Hugo-Bader's accounts, the main heroes of this book are the people, or rather the living creatures, who are capable of surviving the tough conditions there, social, cultural and climatic.

Dima the Chekist (secret police member), who "talks the loudest, swears the coarsest and belches the most. He does everything more revoltingly, more horribly, more disgustingly. He's big, fat and hung over." Seventy-nine-year-old Natasha, daughter of Nikolai Ivanovich Yezhov, "known as Stalin's Iron Fist, the chief commissar of the Soviet secret police, who had on his conscience hundreds of thousands... what am I saying? millions of human lives..." Alexander Basanski, the golden oligarch, who earns his money from "twenty-six kinds of fresh water for a million dollars a year", among other things. Bobik, the dog, "a real bigwig, and a genius to boot, an aristocrat, although he's a mongrel, but he must have had some laika way back in his family tree."

Hugo-Bader's journey goes on for several weeks, and the successive stages of the route give his accounts a steady literary rhythm. The short reports, or rather portraits are woven together with diary entries. Hugo-Bader does not hide behind his main characters – on the contrary, his presence is felt in the text. In this way, as an account of a journalist's efforts to do his job and survive in Russia, *Kolyma Diaries* sets a new standard in the Polish school of contemporary reportage, where the masters are on the one hand Ryszard Kapuściński and on the other Mariusz Wilk.

Marcin Wilk

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23

The aorta, the central nerve of Kolyma was and is the Kolyma Highway, also known as *Trassa*, The Route. And like many of the older residents of Kolyma, I shall write the words "The Highway" and "The Route" with capital letters. Because this road, which runs for more than two thousand kilometres, is paved with human lives, built on bones. And that is not a metaphor. Why isn't there a single old graveyard the entire length of The Route?

Because the dead lie about half a metre below the road surface. Thousands of people. Apart from mining gold, work constructing The Highway was the worst job in Kolyma. Anyone who fell dead by the roadside had his camp rags pulled off him (they would still come in handy), then he was turned face up and covered in the Kolyma soil from which The Route is made.

What I think about the most keenly for the first few days of the journey is how I am to empty my bladder here. I get out of the car, and my mind aches at the thought that I'm pissing on some poor wretch's head.

It could be one of ours – the nineteen-year-old soldier boy from the September campaign, a lad from my native Warsaw who was under my grandfather's command, a lad who never had a girl in his life, and as he was dying of hunger, whispered... Well quite, what could he have said? And now, old cynic that I am, I feel ashamed for writing twaddle like that, only fit for a TV soap opera. But when you're all alone in a shabby hotel at the end of the world and you feel like howling because MS has got you, to occupy your hands and your head you write a diary, and then flowers like these come up. (MS isn't multiple sclerosis, it's memoirist's solitude.)

Construction of The Route begins in 1932, when the Dalstroi trust company is brought into existence. By the end of the decade the road has been dragged to Ust-Nera at kilometre 1007. In the 1940s they extend it to Khandyga on the river Aldan at kilometre 1605. This is the western limit of the trust company. The last stretch, to Yakutsk at kilometre 2025, is completed in the early 1950s, but it's a so-called *zhimovik* – a road that's only fit for use in winter, when the marshland freezes. The entire Kolyma Highway only becomes driveable in summer in the 1990s.

I'm travelling along it in the footsteps of Varlam Tikhonovich Shalamov, with his vast, thousand-page collection of *Kolyma Tales*. This is classic Russian literature, the most shocking, extraordinary picture of prison culture, which Shalamov manages to compress and summarise in three commandments: do not believe, do not be afraid, and never ask for anything. And one more prison-camp virtue, without which you won't survive: know how to steal, starting with your fellow-prisoners' bread. In the camp a man only becomes worse. There everything is always bad, to the very last minute. Shalamov reveals that in the camp God dies too, whereas for Alexander Solzhenitsyn the Gulag is a test of character, from which the prisoner can emerge triumphant.

Shalamov spends eighteen years in the camps, and another two as "free" but with no right to leave (of this time he spends seventeen years in Kolyma). He is released in 1953, after Stalin's death. To the end of his life he remains obsessively loyal to the theme of the camps.

So he is my first, permanent *poputchik* – one of my favourite Russian words. It means a fellow traveller, a man who is on the road (*po puti* in Russian) with you. Literally and metaphorically. The person with whom you travel the same road, in the same train compartment, and the person with whom you agree on political matters, for instance, you are both aspiring towards the same goal. This book is essentially about the people I travelled with, but not only – it is also about the people I met along The Route.

In this part there will be a great deal about drivers. The lorry drivers in Russia are usually called *dalnoboyshchiki*, meaning people on a "distant (*dalno-*) throw (*boy-*)", i.e. a long route. Sometimes they are called *kamazisty*, even if their lorries are not Kamaz trucks, or *ugolshchiki*, if they are transporting coal, because *ugol* means coal. But in Kolyma they had already worked out their own word in the days of the Gulag – here they call the local drivers *trassoviki*, based on the word *Trassa*, i.e. "The Route".

The Route is a very dangerous road, made out of yellowish, Kolyma soil, in which there are more stones than earth. The road has no hard surface, so any heavier-than-usual downpour washes it away, it is cracked and crumbled by permafrost, and in winter life is ruined by vast amounts of snow, and when there isn't much of it, the white asphalt becomes slippery. In summer the problem is horrible yellow dust, which hangs in the air for ages, so cars crash in it as if it were fog. There are a lot of makeshift memorials along the road. Instead of a cross on a stake, the usual thing they hang up here is a broken steering wheel, and instead of stones there are arrangements of tyres or a radiator full of holes.

At many points on the hard shoulder there are the remains of fences designed to hold back snowdrifts. They were woven out of larch twigs by Gulag prisoners. Although The Highway is dangerous to drive along, living on it is safe. There isn't much common crime. Out here, even in the terrible 1990s there was none of *the rekiet* that agonised the whole of Russia, in other words the highway muggings and extortion of protection money for safe passage.

Kolyma goes through its worst times with regard to crime after 1953, when following Stalin's death the camps are emptied and thousands of people are set free, including a lot of criminals, who in spite of their release are not allowed to go back to European Russia for several years more. To be safe in the cities people go about in groups, and the men escort their wives to work, because many of the newly released prisoners haven't seen a woman for years.

At this point a former political prisoner called Ryabokon sets out on The Route, an old soldier from the anarchist Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine led by ataman Nestor Ivanovich Makhno. Shalamov devotes a story to Ryabokon.

The veteran anarchist forms a gang of four men, with whom for over a year he recklessly robs and murders anyone he can. But they argue over the division of the spoils and give each other away. Each of them gets a twenty-five year sentence.

Those days are long gone. Nowadays, every encounter on The Route is a sheer pleasure, and I simply love the roadside bars. There are about fifteen of them between Magadan and Yakutsk. I can sit in them for hours, gazing at those ordinary, genuine, sincere faces, at the people of the taiga dressed in camos, at the drivers with their big hands covered in car oil (machine dirt is not dirt, they say), and the rheumatism-twisted gold hunters. I feel relief that I don't have to look at the red faces of overfed oligarchs, or the bulging eyes of booze-soaked secret-police officers. Finally I hear "please", "thank you", and the woman wiping the floor with a dirty rag at the bar in Lariukova at kilometre 386 even says "sorry" to me. You don't often hear that among the city people, in Magadan.

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24 / MAŁGORZATA SZEJNERT

MAŁGORZATA SZEJNERT (BORN 1936) JOURNALIST, REPORTER, WRITER. ONE OF THE FOUNDERS OF THE LEADING POLISH NEWSPAPER "GAZETA WYBORCZA", WHERE SHE HEADED THE FEATURES SECTION FOR OVER 15 YEARS, EDUCATING AND TRAINING MANY UP-AND-COMING REPORTERS.

Photo: Andrzej Bernat

Zanzibar – Home of the Turtle

The latest adventure of reporter Małgorzata Szejnert starts with an encounter... with a turtle.

Szejnert travelled to Zanzibar to learn to dive. Underwater she chanced upon a green turtle – the king of Zanzibar's coastal waters, yet now very rare. "I saw it lit up by the sun's rays; it looked like golden honeycomb," she later said.

Once out of the water and free of her aqualung, Małgorzata Szejnert sat down at her computer to find out more about green turtles. She found out that turtles live – or rather could live, if it were not for that pest known as *homo sapiens* – up to 170 years. She also discovered that the female turtle lays her eggs on the beach where she herself was born. On that very beach she is more and more commonly confronted with hotels erected by homo sapiens and by concrete which her turtle flippers cannot penetrate.

"The fact that a turtle, which carries its home on its own back, could be homeless, moved me greatly," says Małgorzata Szejnert. Thus the turtle became the leitmotif of this book, which portrays the history of Zanzibar over a period of 170 years too.

It appears that, in the lifespan of a single turtle, humans are capable of concocting a veritable kaleidoscope of events, standpoints, ideologies, wars, revolutions, betrayals and fanaticisms. Małgorzata Szejnert's Zanzibar seethes with remarkable events and characters; it's hard to believe so much happened on one small island. A base slave trader rescues a fervent abolitionist from death; a Polish revolutionary drowns his sorrows in poetry (while acting as French consul); a British explorer leaves this land for the heart of Africa and loses his mind, and then his body is carried by porters for nine months to be interred at Westminster.

Małgorzata Szejnert's Zanzibar encapsulates the world in miniature; all the thorniest issues of the previous two centuries are reflected here. First the struggle for black slaves' rights, then the shadow of emerging imperialism in distant Germany, which in time developed into fascism. Then communism, which turned into a bloody revolution. Finally, modern times and their escalating inequality between rich and poor. With them came the remodelling of the coastline in concrete, thanks to which rich tourists feel at home, but turtles don't have anywhere to lay their eggs. In spite of this hardly anyone seems concerned, apart from one Polish reporter.

Witold Szabłowski

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Cloves: Unguja and Pemba, Zanzibar

Evidence of this nation's slave labour had been removed: the rickshaws had disappeared from the streets of Stone Town and the clove tree buds had gone from the flag of Zanzibar.

Clove flower buds not harvested in time are clearly worthless. But who was to pick them? Before the revolution seasonal migrant workers from the African mainland used to pick them. Now food supply problems on the islands were discouraging them from coming. Another factor that crippled the harvests was the experienced Clove Growers Association coming under state control, so it had little influence on what happened. Working methods went downhill. The easy way out was to gather the buds from the lower branches, leaving those on the upper branches behind. Apparently, in some plantations, forty percent of the flowering stems remained on the trees. The price for cloves set by the government was much lower than world prices, so smuggling the crops onto the African mainland started. The authorities announced that this crime would be punished by the death penalty, but on Unguja and Pemba people had previous experience and understanding of the smuggling trade. Just as slaves were once ferried under cover of the night in small *dhows*, so the nimble, quiet sailing boats now carried cloves westwards, mainly to Kenya, and on the return leg they carried precious consumer goods such as sugar, flour, oil, clothes, toothpaste, soap and matches. Clove smuggling grew to such a prodigious extent that its annual value was assessed in millions of dollars. The government estimated that in 1975 a third of the harvest was smuggled out of Zanzibar.

It's not possible to find data about the number of people executed for this, or whether anyone was executed at all. It is possible nobody paid the ultimate price because the smugglers made so much money they could afford to pay off the watchmen and the courts.

Ajit Singh: Ng'ambo, Zanzibar

Ajit Singh Hoogan had not left Zanzibar, though he certainly must have been considering it as an option. However, he had to keep watch over his house, as *Pretty One* was sufficiently grand to be on the nationalisation list, which was being updated by Ali Sultan Issa, father of Raissa, Fidel, Maotushi and Stalin.

While he was building this house Singh felt God was on his side, so losing it would have been heart wrenching. But that was not the only reason he stayed on the island. The new government intended to completely transform the city of Zanzibar. Up to that point the Arab neighbourhood Stone Town was considered to be the true capital, and Dutton and Singh's previous construction projects *on the other side* had made no difference to this perception.

Although it used the elegant public buildings inherited from its predecessors, Zanzibar's revolutionary government deposed the Arab Stone Town from its throne. The thrust of its investment strategy was directed entirely towards Ng'ambo. Ajit Singh, the designer of the Raha Leo Civic Centre, which had played such an important role during the revolution, was called upon to address some important tasks.

The people of Zanzibar were moving to the city in hope of work and advancement. The graph showing the population of the capital, defined as the whole metropolitan area, shot sharply upwards after 1964. In the decade following the revolution the population of the city doubled; towards the end it exceeded one hundred and twenty-five thousand. Banners promoted the concept of a socialist city, with the most popular slogan of the time being *The revolution is our mother and the Afro-Shirazi Party our father*.

The flagship construction project was called Michenzani.

The historian Abdul Sheriff, a professor at the University of Dar es Salaam and author of many books about Zanzibar, called this project the *crucifixion*.

Today, in the year 2010, you can ascertain how apt this label is by simply downloading a satellite image of the capital to your computer screen. From above, the city looks like an elaborate patchwork of minute rectangles and squares. The left side of the patchwork – Stone Town – is dense, without any trace of tears or unravelling threads. The arms of a huge cross bisect the right side, Ng'ambo, from east to west and north to south. Even on a photograph taken from great altitude it prompts a shiver of anxiety and curiosity. This cross does not make you think of buildings, but brings to mind engineering projects, such as fortifications, canals or possibly air strips.

They are actually houses, or rather apartment blocks. The faint circle at the intersection of the arms of the cross is the basin of an enormous fountain. You cannot see from the aerial photograph that there is no water in the basin, which is full of rubbish and has rusty pipes sticking out of it. In any case, nobody walks up to the cement basin because it is in the middle of a roundabout. Each of the apartment blocks is three hundred metres long and they mostly have six floors. They were built using grey concrete and criss-crossed with external covered walkways. All of these modular buildings are identical, dirty, shabby and cracked; the stairwells and flats are not numbered, so one might well wonder how the thousands of occupants manage to find their own individual flats. These accommodation units have nothing in common with a traditional African family home: they generally consist of two rooms and a kitchen fashioned in concrete. These apartment blocks form endless, desolate vistas, which even now (in 2010) have not been brought to life by the traffic on the streets, or the writing scrawled on the walls with spray cans, or the trade in sofas, easy chairs and pouffes – even though these are arranged the length of the ground floors in parallel lines like alternative, low-rise buildings, but ones which are soft and colourful for a change.

Ajit Singh was not the man responsible for this crucifix. Abeid Karume had turned to planners from the German Democratic Republic for help in redeveloping the capital. The architect Hubert Scholz had been in charge of them. The team put together a plan to build two hundred and twenty-nine buildings, containing almost six thousand flats, to accommodate thirty thousand people. It required the demolition of over five thousand existing houses in Ng'ambo.

In spite of their parental role, the Party and the revolution were not able to carry out Scholz's project in full. The country was too poor. Ng'ambo was not to be transformed completely into a socialist city. Bi Kidude still lives in her small house near Raha Leo and passes the time sitting on the stone steps at the front, smoking one cigarette after another. Sometimes she indulges in chocolates. Sometimes she takes to the bottle. Her health isn't bad and she has kept her singing voice. She claims she would not have survived long in *Berlin*, as she calls the apartment block district.

Garth Andrew Myers, an American professor whose field is urban planning in Africa, believes the huge investment made in Ng'ambo – the largest in the history of Zanzibar City – did not solve its overpopulation problem. It contributed *virtually nothing at all*.

Translated by Kasia Beresford

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26 / JERZY HASZCZYŃSKI

JERZY HASZCZYŃSKI (BORN 1966) IS A REPORTER AND COMMENTATOR ON INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS WHO HEADS THE FOREIGN DEPARTMENT AT *RZECZPOSPOLITA* NEWSPAPER.

Photo: Ryszard Waniek

My Brother Overthrew the Dictator

This is the first Polish book of reportage about the Arab Spring. Haszczyński describes the course of revolutionary events almost as they happen. He explains the situation that led to the overthrow of Tunisian president Ben Ali, the course of the Libyan revolution and the anti-government demonstrations in Morocco. He observes social changes in Iran, but also focuses on the other face of the Arab world, by writing about the Yemeni al-Qaeda, for instance. For the setting of his reports he often chooses places that provide a full picture of how difficult it can be for Muslims and representatives of other religions or ethnicities to coexist. However, he never loses sight of the main hero of these reports – the ordinary man.

For behind the great changes taking place in the Arab world stand the ordinary citizens who have managed to oppose terror and ideology. Hence the main characters in Haszczyński's reportage are almost always fighters – but not the type who are armed to the teeth and overthrow dictatorships, but the sort who demand a peaceful life and a guarantee of their basic rights. Often their actions take on symbolic proportions, or (as in the case of the self-immolation of a street vendor in Tunisia) become the pebble that sets off the landslide of revolution. Each of the heroes of the Arab Spring quickly became an almost legendary figure, which Haszczyński describes in minute detail, although journalistic integrity bids him to subject this image to some demythologising. Their sudden "career" would not have been possible without an explosion of collective zeal, and that usually allows one to turn a blind eye to certain inaccuracies. Haszczyński tracks down these fractures, noting rather ironically that the man who wrote the words of the anthem of the Libyan revolutionaries (which has the meaningful title "We will remain here") has been an émigré in Germany for years, while the events that pushed Mohamed Bouazizi towards his decision to set himself on fire as a protest took a completely different course from the one told on the Tunisian streets. However, in no way does this diminish the achievements of the Arab heroes, but instead the things that aren't fully explained give their heroism a human dimension. And they give this book a place among the best works of reportage, the overriding principle of which is to report with objectivity.

Maciej Robert

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The song of the free Libyans

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This song was being sung by half the country. Radio Free Libya aired it in the breaks between bulletins from the front. It had become the unofficial anthem of the Libyan revolution, but no one was interested in its author.

I heard this song for the first time outside the court building in Benghazi, which had been turned into the revolutionary headquarters. Women in headscarves, the widows, mothers and sisters of victims of the Gaddafi regime, were standing there several rows deep, singing it with such passion that you didn't have to understand Arabic to feel shivers down your spine and tears pricking your eyes. The song, *Savka nabka huna* (We will remain here") later came pouring from cars, houses and cafés. And from telephones – it became the most popular mobile ring tone in the Libyan cities that had been freed from the dictator's control. No one knew anything about the man who wrote it. It was a few days later when a beautiful girl in a brightly coloured headscarf, a volunteer from the revolutionary headquarters, wrote down his name for me in my notebook: Adel el-Mshaiti. She added that he is a doctor, but she had no idea where to find him.

"It's an extremely unusual text for Libya. Here the people are simple, and the song lyrics are simple, poetic even. So much so that it's hard to believe *Savka nabka huna* was written by a doctor," said Marta Trzopek, a Polish Arabist who has been living in Benghazi for many years. She and her husband, Khalifa Hamad Milad, translated the words of the song for me.

There isn't a single word about Muammar Gaddafi in it, but the song is clearly about the country enslaved by him. Abdelsalam Allibi has also been writing about this country for a long time, though not for publication. He has spent twelve of his fifty-three years in prison.

"The charge was political activity, attempting to overthrow the regime. Which was absurd, because none of us students wanted to overthrow Gaddafi in those days, the mid-1970s," said Allibi, a small, wrinkled man, worn out by life. "For Gaddafi everything was political activity. He forbade the creation of parties. He believed that if three discontented people come out onto the street, they're doing it to form a political party."

Despite his imprisonment, some years later Allibi managed to complete his degree. He is a specialist in international law, but for a man with a CV like his there was no work in the legal profession, so he opened a shop in the centre of Benghazi, where he sells bags, ladies' handbags and school backpacks. And in his free time he has been writing an account of the regime which oppressed the Libyans for forty-one years. He hopes that once the revolution has triumphed throughout the country, his work will be published, and will act as a warning for future generations.

"Gaddafi is a very unusual dictator, extremely evil and cruel. He thought he was God. He could do anything, make anyone a rich man or a beggar. He has killed and is killing. He is fighting against the Libyan people's revolution with no regard for the consequences," said Abdelsalam Allibi, adding that shooting at people demonstrating on the streets of Benghazi from anti-aircraft guns made a lot of Gaddafi's supporters open their eyes too.

The worst bloodshed in Benghazi was on the night of 16 to 17 February. That night, ambulances brought hundreds of wounded to the al-Jala hospital. Twenty-eight bodies ended up in the mortuary, including the charred corpses of soldiers who had refused to shoot at the crowd. They were killed by their commanders, and then their bodies were set alight. Fourteen teams of doctors found it hard to keep up with performing the simplest procedures. They had no time to fill in the paperwork, so they wrote on the bodies of the dead and wounded with felt-tip pens. There were so many wounded people that many of them were lying on the floors, which were covered in blood. "There was blood streaming down our plastic aprons too. The hospital wards were filled with the smell of burnt human flesh," said an anaesthetist named Alaa; a week later, when I visited the hospital, he still had six seriously wounded patients in his care. One of them died soon after.

Adel el-Mshaiti was supposed to be working at the al-Jala hospital too, I was told. "But he doesn't. He's in Germany," I finally discovered. And I sent a text message to Berlin, to the *Rzeczpospolita* correspondent, Piotr Jendroszczyk, asking him to go and look for el-Mshaiti. I couldn't call or send an e-mail because for several days the Libyan authorities had been blocking foreign telephone connections and the Internet – not surprisingly. The call to rebel against Gaddafi had gone out on the Internet, and the first news about the murder of civilians had got abroad via mobile phones.

The revolution in Libya was meant to start on 17 February. Several thousand Facebook and Twitter subscribers announced that Libya's "day of rage" would take place that day in Benghazi, in other words anti-Gaddafi demonstrations, modelled on the ones that had earlier led to the overthrow of the leaders in the neighbouring countries, Tunisia and Egypt. And the revolutionaries refer to that date by officially using the name 17 February Revolution. The number seventeen features in many inscriptions and stamps, and decrees issued by the opposition's National Transitional Council end with the formula "Glory to the Blessed Martyrs of the 17 February Revolution". In fact, the rebellion started two days earlier upon news of the arrest of Fathi Terbil, a lawyer for families of victims of the regime, first and foremost those killed at the Abu Salim prison.

Abu Salim is the dictatorship's biggest crime, covered up for a long time. In the course of two days, 28 and 29 June 1996, hundreds of prisoners, mainly political, revolted and were murdered at this penal facility in the capital. There were probably 1200 victims, as that many fewer meals were served at the prison after the suppression of the revolt. The rebels demanded clean clothing, permission for their families to visit, and for their cases to be heard by courts, because most of them had been imprisoned in Abu Salim without charge. As appears from a report by Human Rights Watch, the prisoners' corpses were thrown into a ditch one metre wide, several metres deep and one hundred metres long. The prison guards ordered the prisoners who had survived to remove the watches from the corpses' wrists and to clean the blood off them. The women singing the anthem *Savka nabka huna* in late April outside the court building in Benghazi were holding photographs of their husbands, sons and brothers who had been killed at Abu Salim. Abdelsalam Allibi, who was imprisoned at Abu Salim, also told me about tortures inflicted there, and reproached the West for believing several years ago in the conversion of the former sponsor of terror Muammar Gaddafi, and for not being concerned about the crimes committed at the prison in Tripoli. I finally discovered that Adel el-Mshaiti had also been imprisoned at Abu Salim.

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28 MARIUSZ ZAWADZKI

MARIUSZ ZAWADZKI (BORN 1970) IS A REPORTER AND U.S. CORRESPONDENT FOR *GAZETA WYBORCZA*. BEFORE TAKING UP JOURNALISM, HE WAS A LECTURER IN THE DEPARTMENT OF MATHEMATICS AT WARSAW UNIVERSITY AND A FINANCIAL ANALYST.

Photo: private

Brave New Iraq

Iraq, the Iraq of television news throughout the past decade, is a country where an armed conflict is taking place, an unsafe country, and also – in its way – wild and untamable. But this paltry image is barely even a fraction of the truth of Iraq. Mariusz Zawadzki is well aware of this: he traveled to Iraq multiple times between 2003 and 2009 and is the author of the book *Brave New Iraq*.

First and foremost, Zawadzki tells us, Baghdad was once an incredibly beautiful city. We should keep this in mind especially in the context of the invasion of the Mongols, who, in the eighteenth century, plundered what had been one of the most wondrous capitals of the world while not being able to handle the locals at all. Something similar happened when Iraq – several centuries later – was occupied by the Americans and allied forces. This dispatch of Zawadzki's from Iraq, supported by historical references, is inevitably steeped in experiences of war. In one of the early chapters we read about the arms trade ("There were so many weapons that they became laughably cheap"), and immediately after about kidnappings, forms (often highly partisan) of journalism, Saddam (who "looks great in court"), and even just the cell phones that the locals (and not only the locals) use to snap spontaneous photos of people who have been killed.

Brave New Iraq is an ironic title, because Zawadzki does his best to look at the conflict from all sides. This is why when he wants to blend in with average Iraqis or walk onto a Kurdish militants' base, he can risk the purchase of a missile or dress up as a biblical scholar. Thus this collection of reportage makes up a varied but harmonious account. Historical sketches are interwoven with direct reports, and sometimes even with the features of a thriller. Nourished with a variety of literary genres, *Brave New Iraq* is an extraordinary social, political, and cultural mosaic.

Marcin Wilk

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Jamal was the master of making first contact. He was able to win people over immediately. And so it was this time, too: after a few minutes he and the Colonel were slapping each other on the back and laughing like old friends. The Colonel told us not only all about the Hotel Al-Rasheed, but also about the shooting-down of a Chinook helicopter a week earlier. Sixteen soldiers had died, making it the biggest loss the United States had suffered since the end of the war.

"Helicopters always fly in pairs," explained the Colonel. "They fire flares out to throw off heat-guided missiles. One missile is almost never enough. You choose the helicopter you want to shoot down, usually the back one, and you launch a few missiles. By the time the guys in front get wind of it and turn around, you've got a couple of seconds to get away. If you hit the front one, the back one will make mincemeat out of you before you even know it. To get that Chinook, there were two Russian Strelas that went out, but only one of them hit home. Our people had been lying in wait in a date grove outside Fallujah; the Americans often fly that way to Baghdad."

The Colonel wasn't really a fanatic – in fact, he was more of a cynic. He would complain about Saddam, whose stupidity was at fault for the American invasion, when he didn't even have weapons of mass destruction. He couldn't forgive the Americans, meanwhile, for destroying the state where he had had it so good.

"I was a respected officer, I wanted for nothing. And now because of those two idiots, Saddam and Bush, I'm just some unemployed bum. A lot of people are in the same situation in Fallujah. We have no choice, we have to get rid of the Americans..."

When we finally got down to business, the Colonel did not conceal his disappointment that we still only wanted one of his surface-to-air missiles.

"Alright then, just one it is... But the Russian Strelas are all sold out. All we have are European substitutes."

Like any self-respecting arms dealer, the Colonel tactfully did not inquire what we were planning to do with our missile. The terms of the deal were finalized fast: four hundred dollars for the set, meaning the launcher and the rocket loaded inside it.

"Where would you like it delivered?"

The Colonel boasted that I could name any place in Baghdad, even a hotel room. But we really agreed on Mansoor Square, by the soft drinks stall, in the afternoon.

At the bottom of the document that transformed the Colonel from a respected officer into an unemployed malcontent, you will find the signature of Paul Bremer, American governor of Iraq. On May 23, 2003, he issued the notorious Order Number 2 – on dissolving the Iraqi army and Iraq's intelligence agencies. In one day, four hundred thousand people lost their jobs. They were stripped of their military ranks, and they received only a month's severance pay.

Colonels and generals had it the worst: their retirement benefits were taken from them, and they were prohibited from applying for any employment by the state. They were treated just like the high-ranking members of the Ba'ath Party, dealt with in Order Number 1, issued one week earlier. There was no place for them in the new Iraqi democracy.

Bremer was blamed for having caused all the problems and misfortunes in American Iraq with those two first orders. The governor maintained that Order Number 2 was really just a corroboration of the actual state of affairs: Saddam's army had already dissolved on its own, for all intents and purposes, deserting the battle fields and abandoning the barracks. Army bases were destroyed, equipment plundered, and officers were less than keen on serving their new masters.

A few years later, Bremer stated that he had not acted alone in the making of any decision, and that he had consulted the White House and the Department of Defense on both Orders. Donald Rumsfeld, however, insisted that the decision to dissolve the Iraqi army had not been issued by the Department of Defense. Colin Powell, in turn, stated that he had been stunned to learn about the Order from the newspapers, recalling that it had been established at a secret meeting on March 12, 2003 – a week before the invasion – that the Iraqi army would not be demobilized. In attendance at that meeting were Bush, Rumsfeld, Powell, and the head of the CIA, George Tenet.

President Bush, in conversation with journalist Robert Draper in 2007, asserted that Order Number 2 had shocked him.

"How did you react?" the journalist wanted to know.

"I don't remember. But I must have asked Bremer, 'What happened? Hadn't we agreed on something else?'" said Bush.

And so it is that no one is willing to admit that he was the one that took away the Colonel's job.

At four o'clock that afternoon there was no black Mercedes on Caliph Mansoor Square. On the other hand, the Colonel's mustached comrade was standing by the tobacco stall, mute as usual. He climbed into our car and motioned for us to drive straight ahead. Clearly, despite the morning's openness, our contractors were now taking every precaution.

A few minutes later we saw the black Mercedes in the rear view mirror. The Mustache guided us onto a little side street. We came to a stop, and the Mercedes stopped right behind us. The Colonel got out and opened the trunk. There were linen sacks stretched over both ends of the launcher; he removed them, and we saw it in its full splendor. The gray-green tube was well over a meter long and had a diameter of twenty centimeters. The missile loaded inside seemed to be made of plastic and was somewhat reminiscent of a toy. Together, the launcher and the missile weighed well over ten kilos.

But the Colonel grew impatient. The Mustache had his hand in the pocket of his jellabah, with the outline of a pistol visible inside. There was no more delaying. I paid, and we transferred the missile into Jamal's trunk.

"How did you get through all the American checkpoints along the road from Fallujah?" I asked.

"That's our job," said the Colonel, only now smiling as he had that morning. They got into the Mercedes and drove off.

We suddenly realized that with that missile in our trunk we were a big fat allegory for the American invasion of Iraq. We had come by it easy, but we had totally forgotten to consider what we were going to do with it.

Translated by Jennifer Croft

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30 EWA WINNICKA

EWA WINNICKA IS A JOURNALIST AND REPORTER AND HAS ALSO CO-PRODUCED DOCUMENTARY FILMS. SHE HAS WON THE "GRAND PRESS" PRIZE TWICE, IN 2005 AND 2008, FOR ARTICLES ABOUT SOCIAL ISSUES.

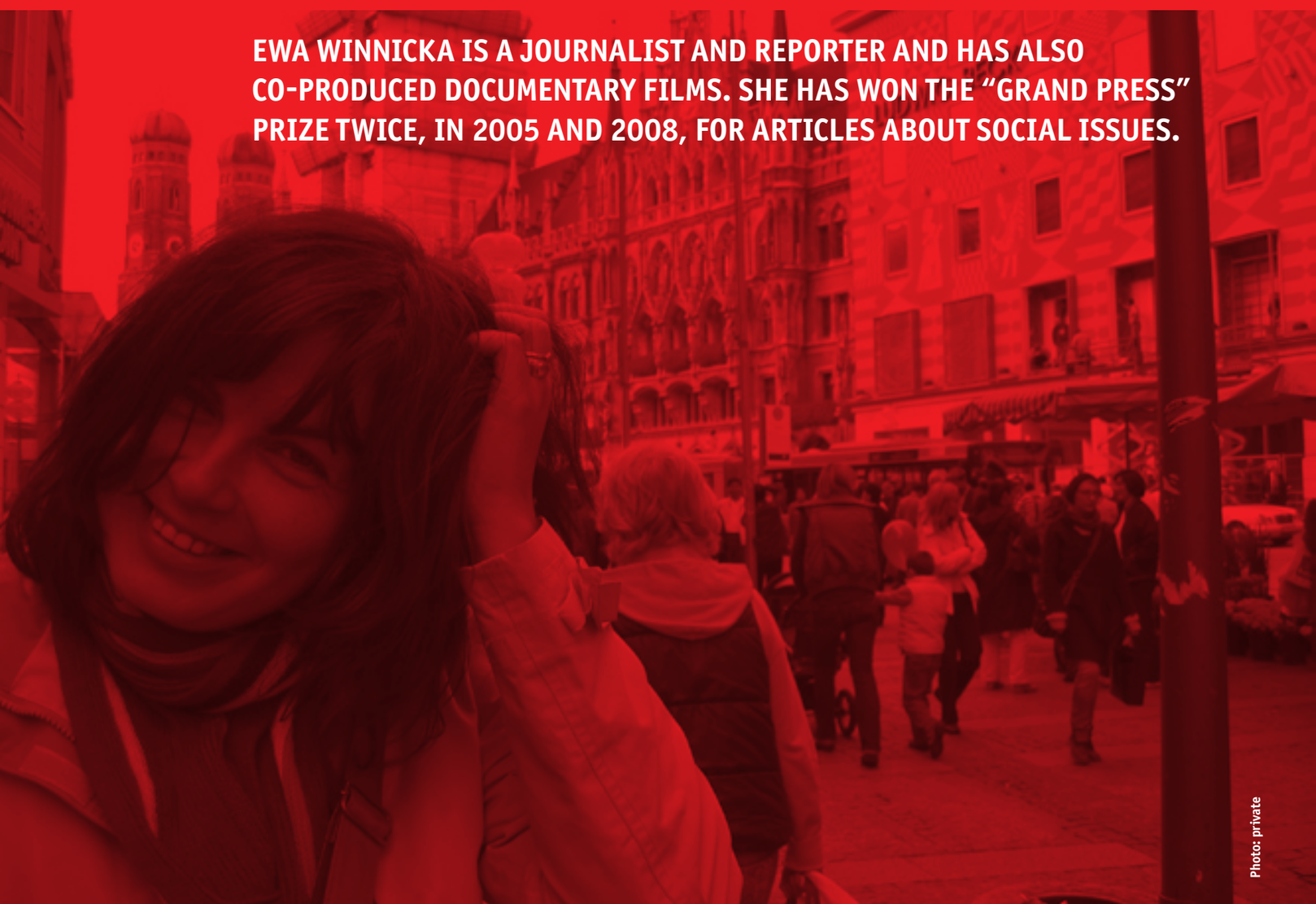

Photo: private

The Londoners

In her introduction, Ewa Winnicka points out that *The Londoners* is not an historical reference book. This may be too hasty an assessment for two reasons. Firstly, her collection of essays takes as its starting point a specific historical situation: the involuntary emigration of almost two hundred thousand Poles to Great Britain between 1939 and 1947. Secondly, Winnicka does re-write history to some extent as she deals with issues of power, treaties and high-level politics in as much as they have an impact on her protagonists' personal stories.

The book opens with a piece entitled "Lost, found, lost" which tells the story of some photographs, found in a skip by an artistically inclined cycle courier. It soon becomes apparent that these remarkable photographs show a group of friends from Poland. For one of the women in the story, who recognises familiar people in the pictures, the set of photos provides a reason to explore her memories of the past. This piece is to some extent representative of *The Londoners* as a whole. Generally Winnicka takes a specific object, event or detail and uses it as a starting point for exploring memories of the past. She seems particularly interested in human relationships, or more accurately the complexity of human relationships. This is evident, for example, in "The story of love in ten phases", which deals with intimate relationships between Polish soldiers and British women during the Second World War. The author also covers subjects such as the life of Lili Pohlmann, who was awarded a Righteous among the Nations medal for her part in taking care of Jewish orphans being transported from Poland to Great Britain.

The Londoners is not just a thoroughly researched collection of articles; it also a narrative about how to reconstruct history. Winnicka looks for historical elements everywhere and in various ways. So in this book we follow fevered email exchanges, we listen to confessions, and sometimes we just observe real life presented in detail, but without explanation, as if we were examining old photos. Her tone is slightly ironic, dispassionate and tranquil, making Winnicka's book an ethereal tale of bringing memories back to life. And so the author shows that history, which naturally has elements of tragedy, does not have to be bitter and focused on martyrdom.

Marcin Wilk

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Lost, found, lost

Brixton, summer 1998

Jean-Marc, a middle-aged cycle courier, cut across Brixton Hill and stopped by a large skip. He thought it looked promising right from the start: there were bits of furniture, scraps of fabric and old newspapers sticking out of the rubble. He saw two vegetable crates containing yellowed photographs. He loaded them onto his courier's bicycle without any hesitation. Waste material, newspapers, old coins and superfluous photos played an important role in Jean-Marc's creative life. He had acquired some fame in north London for his appealing installations composed from the discarded trappings of other people's lives. Unfortunately, for the time being, they didn't make him any money. That evening, he took a look at the photographs. There were little girls in white dresses in a procession in front of some corrugated iron barracks, or dancing in folk costumes. There were elegantly dressed men at formal dinners, parties in people's homes, dances and holidays by the seaside. Several were stamped with JAN MARKIEWICZ, 67 GAYVILLE ROAD, LONDON SW11, 1953. "Eastern European," the conceptual artist said to himself, and carried the crates down to the cellar.

They didn't inspire him at all.

New Cross, 2008

Nicole was an actress, but for the time being she was teaching in a primary school. She was thirty-three and lived in north London, which she found frustrating. "All sense of neighbourliness is long gone," she said, primarily because she didn't know any of her neighbours on the street, except for Maria, a friendly nymphomaniac, who, as you would expect, had no problem being sociable. That afternoon she knocked on the door and let Nicole know that the man living opposite was holding a party for friends from the neighbourhood. The party-giver was called Jean-Marc, and he was a good listener. So Nicole told him her stories, including the one about her mother, a woman who was incapable of putting down roots anywhere, and whose successive husbands Nicole had found less and less likeable. In addition her mother had an insufferable sense of superiority. During her visits to London, she loved to make loud comments about the appearance of people on the bus. She thought she could get away with it because she was speaking in Polish. Until one day, an elderly passenger turned around and asked her to stop because it was disagreeable.

"Your mother is Polish?" asked Jean-Marc, feeling a surge of inspiration.

He carried up the dust-covered boxes. They had been lying in the cellar for ten years.

Geese, 2008

She felt envious. The people in the photographs looked full of life and did not seem interested in nothing but themselves. So at first glance they were better placed in life than she was. She had no idea who they were until she noticed two children dressed up for a school play in one of the photographs, posing for the camera with a man who must have been their proud father. In the foreground there were some geese cut out of a wooden board and equipped with wheels so they could come onto the stage efficiently. She recognised those geese. They came from the theatre hall of the Polish Eagle Club in Balham, home of the Saturday school her mother had sent her to twenty-five years ago. She had performed there using the same scenery. As soon as her mother left England with yet another husband, Nicole stopped speaking Polish and dressing up in the regional costume of Kraków. Nowadays she read about Poles in the papers every day, as they railed against the horde of barbarian invaders, which numbered a million migrants and threatened to flood the labour market. It proved fortunate for her though, as thanks to this multitude of Poles a Polish weekly paper was founded with an office around the corner in New Cross, which could now help Nicole to find out more about the lucky people in the photographs. The paper, *Nowy Czas* ("New Time") published a few of the photographs and an appeal for the photographer's descendants to come forward. As he was buying Polish sausage in Ealing, Mr F. saw the paper and recognised a photo of little Teresa Stołągiewicz in a pair of over-sized knickers, and her sister Aleksandra sitting in a tin bathtub. It was taken by Janek Markiewicz, RIP, a friend, a photographer from Kensington and the father of the little girls in the photograph.

Jan Markiewicz, 1913

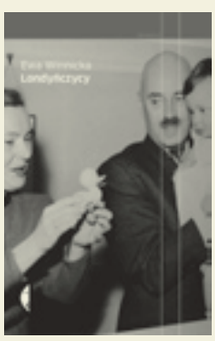
He studied law in Lwów and was an able office worker. In 1938 a Warsaw bank, the Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego, offered him a job on a consultancy basis, and with it came a pay rise. Unfortunately, on 4 September 1914 he was called up and sent to join the infantry. He fought with the Sixth Regiment of the Rifle Division. His unit retreated to the south and he was interned in Romania. Eventually via France and Switzerland he reached Southampton, and then London. He lived in a rented room with five of his army comrades. He went to a dance where he saw Krystyna, a girl he remembered from Lwów. She had just arrived with her mother from a camp in Tanganyika. He fell in love and quickly married her. Krystyna's four brothers also ended up in London, and one of them, a skilled linguist, worked for the British secret service, so he could afford to buy a house before the others. He took in his whole family at Gayville Road. Since his law degree no longer had any value, Jan became a photographer. At the time there were countless Polish marriages, children being born, adults who wanted to celebrate and émigré politicians commemorating important anniversaries. Everyone needed commemorative photographs, so Jan soon became a success.(…) Most Polish families had a "Markiewicz" on their mantelpiece at the time, but he didn't attach any significance to them, he forgot them and mislaid them. In 1949 his daughter Aleksandra was born and then Teresa, less than two years later.

Teresa and Aleksandra, 2011

(…) Both sisters became teachers. They speak Polish with a sing-song accent, using English as a back-up. And so the story goes: their parents started their lives in England with dignity; in any case the city of Lwów as they knew it no longer existed. Daddy didn't tell them whether he was happy or not, and the girls never asked. Their parents led quiet lives amongst their closest Polish friends. There were five of them: Mr Karpeta, Mr Kolenda, Mr Markiewicz, Mr Mossakowski and Mr Wilk. They died in alphabetical order. After Sunday mass they would go to the cafe and talk politics: usually about the *Bad guys* in Moscow. The girls' mother was a sociable person and the politically oriented gatherings after church were not enough for her. She wanted to dance, so their father had snapped away at all those Polish émigré dances and had been bored with them. For dinner they ate soups, borscht and pierogi, and that was what made them different from the English. They were set apart by their surnames, but once the blacks from the Caribbean arrived en masse in England, even their surnames made no impression, so there was peace and harmony.

1965 was the exception. In July helicopters suddenly appeared in the sky and hovered above the rooftops of the houses in their district, and police officers rushed around the gardens. That night they said on TV that Ronnie Biggs had escaped from Wandsworth Prison, only four streets away from their house. The police had been searching around the Markiewicz house for the notorious villain involved in the robbery of the century!

Translated by Kasia Beresford



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32 / KATARZYNA SURMIAK-DOMAŃSKA

KATARZYNA SURMIAK-DOMAŃSKA (BORN 1967) IS A JOURNALIST WHO WRITES MAINLY FEATURE ARTICLES AND INTERVIEWS ON SOCIAL ISSUES, OFTEN ONES THAT ARE ENCUMBERED BY A CULTURAL TABOO.

Photo: Julia Domańska

Marshlet

Esteemed *Gazeta Wyborcza* features writer Katarzyna Surmiak-Domańska has written her best work to date. *Marshlet* is a portrait of the depths of the Polish provinces taken straight from real life, though it has nothing to do with the stereotypical images of Christian piety, or of post-communist pathology and poverty in the wake of regime change. But then "Marshlet" is not your typical village. It's more of a suburb, located near a medium-sized town, a place where the patriarchal model of family relationships appears to have continued unchanged for centuries, while at the same time the outward idyll is interwoven with the murkiest elements of collective life. Marshlet is a bit like the setting of Lars von Trier's film *Dogville*, an eternal place of luxuriantly blooming yards, silence, lies, and violence. The main characters here are an archetypal collection of victims, torturers, judges, and commentators: Mother, Father, Husband, Lover, Mother-in-Law, Friend, Sister-in-Law. Their voices build a multi-dimensional study of social psychology, as obvious and straightforward as it is impenetrable and enigmatic.

The book centers on a woman Surmiak-Domańska initially interviewed a few years earlier. Halszka Opfer – the name, like the name of the town, has been changed – is a woman who provoked intense discussion in Poland a few years ago when she published the detailed and extreme confessions of the trauma of the sexual abuse she was subjected to by her own father. In her book, she describes how her mother personally delivered her, at the age of four, to her father's bed. She describes how, growing up, she became her father's lover "by choice," in her eagerness for presents. How her mother remained silent for her entire life, moving through the house like a masked and gloomy shadow. Opfer's book was a big hit in Marshlet, which was also where she lived. She was, to them, "our Halszka," and all of Marshlet's "normal, ordinary people" put their names on a waiting list at the local library in order to gain access to the "unimaginable."

"Our Halszka," of course, is not "ours" at all. She is alien, different and strange. She was, as we learn, always like that, so the locals say. Unexpectedly, *Marshlet* does not invalidate the point of view that would prefer to place the blame on the victim rather than judge "Torturer-Daddy." Instead, Surmiak-Domańska tries to probe it and pit it against other narratives. In this way she manages to capture something very intangible – a sense of the irreversibility of the effects of evil and the fragility of the democratic project to provide protection and therapy, and to give voices to victims.

Kazimiera Szczuka

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Marshlet is not your typical village. There are no cottages or barns here – instead, there are sturdy, multi-story homes with evergreen hedges out front and perfectly trimmed lawns out back. No one raises cattle, the men commute to the closest city every day in their own cars, and the women usually stay and keep house. Although the terrain is marshy, and in some places actually quite boggy, the population is constantly rising, for the area is widely known to be an enclave of peace and quiet in the region of Silesia, with green spaces and fresh air. There is a little inn and a cultural center, and a significant percentage of the village's two thousand inhabitants take advantage of the local library, which is open even on Saturdays.

The Marshlet library has had two big hits over the course of its existence. The first one came out toward the end of the nineties. It was a German work of non-fiction titled *Monika B: I'm Not Your Daughter Anymore*, written by a journalist named Karin Jäckel in close collaboration with the eponymous heroine. In the book, Monika B., a German woman in her thirties, reveals the truth about her childhood – about her father, who raped her regularly for ten years and who permitted his sons to rape her, and about her mother, who turned a blind eye to it all.

There was a waiting list for *Monika* at the Marshlet library; people would later refer to it as the most shocking book they had ever read in their lives. The head of the library recalls a universal sense of solidarity with the girl, while her parents were roundly condemned ("The only thing for people like that is the death penalty"); she remembers, too, comments along the lines of, "How could something like that be possible in the second half of the twentieth century in such a seemingly civilized country as Germany?"

The next big hit struck ten years later. This time, it was a Polish book, called *Torturer-Daddy: A Non-Memoir*, penned by a person named Halszka Opfer.

This book is also a work of non-fiction, and it tells a similar story. The author, now a grown woman, makes a decision to exhume her past. She describes being her father's lover for twenty years. According to her testimony here, he not only would force her to have sex, but would also physically and emotionally abuse her siblings, as well as her mother. For example, he had a habit of "educating" his wife by defecating in her purse or on top of a pile of dirty dishes. She, meanwhile, would bathe Halszka, then just a few years old, wrap her up in a towel, and deliver her to the bed of her husband, discretely retiring to another room once she had done so.

Halszka, as it was known, was also read by just about everyone in Marshlet, and it, too, had a waiting list. It, too, provoked strong reactions. But the general attitude toward the heroine was completely different.

The main difference between the two books – in the considered opinion of the librarian – lies in the fact that Monika B. resides in Germany, and no one in Poland knows her personally. Everyone in the village knows, on the other hand, that Halszka Opfer is the pen name for one of their neighbors, a longtime resident of Marshlet.

I met Halszka Opfer in the winter of 2008, when I conducted an interview with her on *Torturer-Daddy*. Even then I was already less intrigued by the degenerate father than I was by the figure of her mother: a woman implacably negating fact, rationalizing what seems impossible to rationalize, never even for a moment stepping out of her role as Polish mother/good Christian/good housewife. I couldn't imagine how the two women would be able to talk to each other today, now that their oppressor has died, now that there is no one to be afraid of, and hasn't been since the book first came out.

Two years later I went back to Marshlet. I renewed my acquaintance with Halszka and persuaded her to introduce me to her mother. She, in exchange, asked me to carry out a certain delicate mission that is now the linchpin of my story.

When Halszka Opfer's book came out, she received countless declarations of support and admiration. She helped many women, who, thanks to her, came up with the courage to speak out about their own, similar experiences of abuse, while also letting go of the shame and feelings of guilt that tend so effectively to protect the perpetrator. The catch is that for all of these people, Halszka is a figure as safely far removed from them as Monika B., the woman in the German book, is for the residents of Marshlet.

I wanted to find out what effect Halszka's book had had on the people closest to her. Learn how you live with someone on a daily basis who has labelled themselves a victim (*Opfer* means victim in German). Thus I visited not only her mother, but also others in her inner circle, and I asked them to tell me how they see Halszka and her book.

At their request, I give no last names, no real first names, and no other details that might identify them in any way except as family or neighbors. I have preserved the pseudonym Halszka, which is supposed to protect especially her mother and siblings, and for the other members of her family that appear in my book I used the names she herself gave them in *Torturer-Daddy*, as well as in *Retouched Wedding Portrait*, published in 2011. For the remaining people I thought up new names. Nor do I give away the real names of Marshlet or Kormoranow – Halszka's birthplace and the place where her mother, Karolina, still lives. In real life, no one connects Karolina with the name Opfer, nor with any book. Almost certainly not.

Translated by Jennifer Croft

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34 PIOTR RYPSON

PIOTR RYPSON (BORN 1956) IS AN ART CRITIC, HISTORIAN OF ART AND LITERATURE, ESSAYIST, AND SPECIALIST IN THE FIELD OF DIGITAL EDUCATION. HE HAS WRITTEN SIX BOOKS ON THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY POLISH AVANT GARDE.

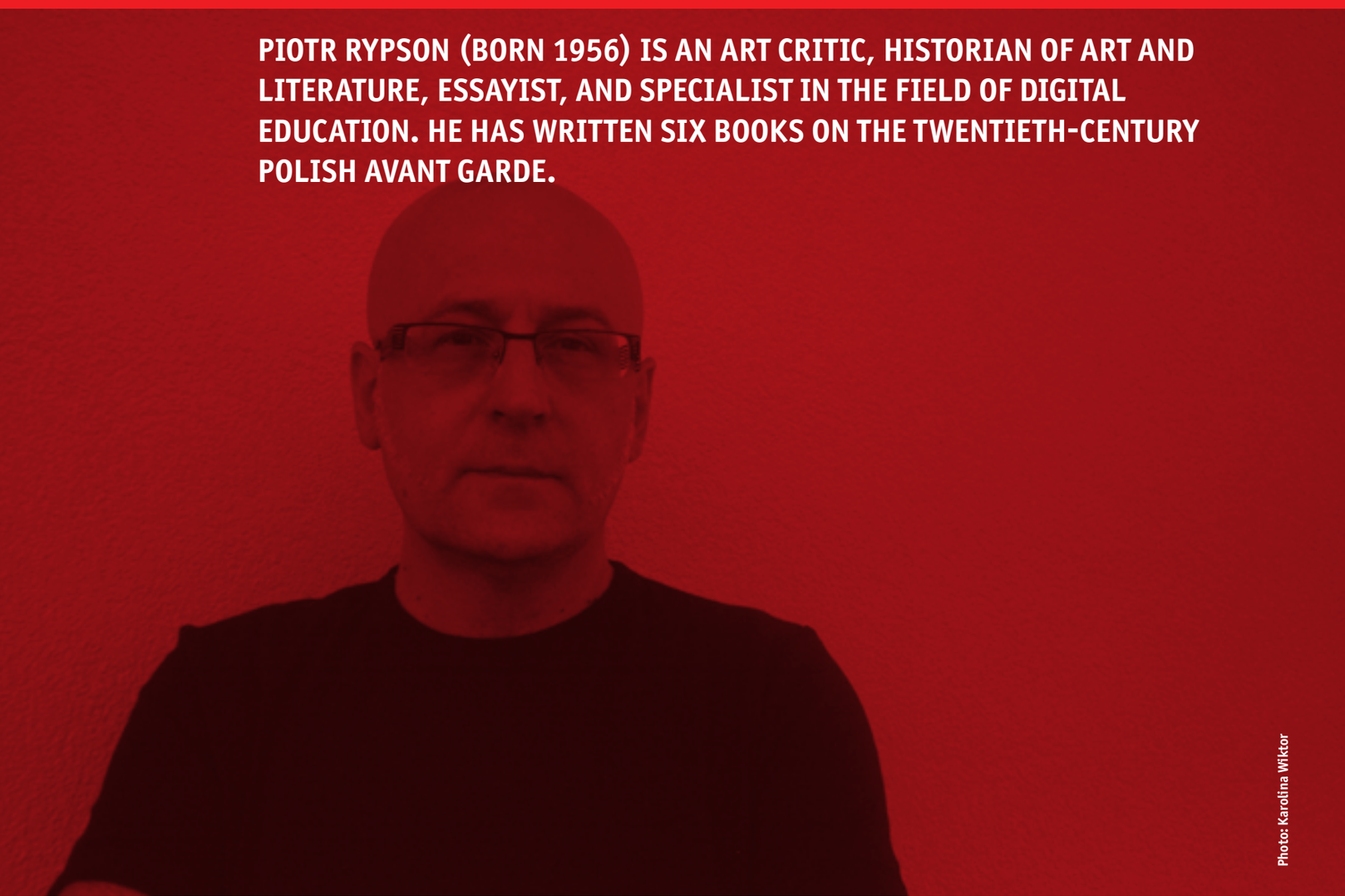

Photo: Karolina Wiktor

Against All Odds. Polish Graphic Design 1919–1949

This is a panorama of the lost world of Polish graphic design in the thirty-year period between 1919 and 1949, outstanding for its innovation and radical ideas. Eminent critic and art historian Piotr Rypson tells the fascinating story of how visual language evolved in Poland as the country entered the modern age, while also providing a portrait of everyday life in the interesting, though sometimes nightmare country that was the Second Republic, the Poland of World War Two and the first few post-war years. The book includes more than a thousand unique illustrations, three hundred graphics and is literally the only collection of its kind.

Against All Odds is a painstakingly reconstructed universe of graphic design – for everything from book covers, posters, flyers, packaging (did you know how pre-war condoms were wrapped?) and periodicals to postage stamps; it reviews all aspects of social, economic and cultural life, from the works of left-wing propagandists to the advertising used by various trades and industries ("Sugar fortifies"!) and on to such amazing curiosities as the photomontage book cover for a collection of poems by Polish fascists. *Against All Odds* also provides a lucid guide to the main currents running through artistic design and documents the creation of the modern age: the experiments of the futurists and the achievements of functionalism and constructivism.

This book finally demolishes the myth about the lack of a Polish tradition in graphic design and proves that it is not in the least limited to nothing but posters. Here today's designers will find inspiration and proof that stunning design solutions are not the sole province of the 21st century, art critics and historians will be provided with an exhaustive and competent reference source, and the foreign reader will discover a previously unknown and exotic body of creativity, while all readers will enjoy this fascinating, lively story of Poland's forgotten but colourful and diverse everyday life in the stormy period between 1919 and 1949.

Translated by Richard Biały

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Sweet with coffee or tea?

Varied were the fashionable cafes and cake shops,
In every epoch in some little room or other
The Warsaw apostle perorated and faithfully
Gathered his followers to a common table.
Stirring a small black one, in a fog of smoke, in an overcoat, in a hat,
He blathered, waffled, mocked and derided, full of animation.

Antoni Słonimski, Ashes and Wind

While it is true to say that Warsaw and Krakow are cities of cafes and cake shops, and almost everyone has a sweet tooth and enjoys good coffee and tea, nonetheless these delights also required advertising, especially during the depression, when the average consumer could afford such delicacies less and less. There was plenty of scope for advertising: the per capita consumption of coffee in Poland amounted to twenty grams, i.e. ten times less than in Germany and thirty-five times less than in Scandinavia. The consumption of tea was lower still, though the disproportions were less. Since 1929 the number of sugar factories and the value of sugar production had also fallen.

For these reasons the largest manufacturers of confectionery – Warsaw's Wedel, Plutos and the Jan Fruziński factory, the the Suchard firm's plant in Grzegórzki outside Krakow, the Piasecki plant in Krakow or the Hazet Sugar and Chocolate Factory in Lvov – vied with each other in the production of colourful advertisements, packaging and "silver and gold tin foils". They were supported by well-known cake shops placing their advertisements in periodicals and local newspapers.

The advertisements addressed to gourmands and lovers of coffee and tea had to have the "right aroma" and so were commissioned from aesthetic graphic artists known for their colourful, appetizing styles. Market leaders turned to the best known artists.

Already in 1919 the large Wedel factory ordered posters from the famous Leonetto Capiello, one of the fathers of modern advertising, who designed the famous figure of a rider on a zebra carrying huge bars of chocolate on his back. The Wedel boy on his zebra also flashed from a neon light atop the building of the company's legendary shop and sped around on vans delivering the company's goods all over the country. Like that of the Blikle cake shops, a better known Wedel trademark was the proprietor's signature.

Wedel's advertisements and posters were designed by Konstanty Sopoćko and Antoni Uniechowski, but above all Tadeusz Gronowski, the king of Polish advertising graphics. Gronowski, a master of line and colour, also worked for the Fruziński and Domański firms and the Włocławek based firm of Ferdynand Bohm, the first in Poland to produce coffee with an admixture of chicory.

For competition from Plutos, a modern advertising brochure was, as we saw earlier, designed by Henryk Berlewi together with Aleksander Wat in the role of copy writer, whereas the firm was generally promoted in a more traditional manner, employing Stanisław Dobrzyński and others, including the oh so ubiquitous Gronowski. In order to attract younger consumers, Wedel and Fuchs also issued special series of photo cards featuring popular actors.

Aromatic rhymed with exotic. Coffee and tea products were advertised by means of idealized, often comically treated and politically most incorrect figures: African negro figures invariably assisted the coffee industry in this respect, while Chinamen, Japanese ladies, Egyptian Sphinxes or Indian elephants stood behind sales of various ranges of tea. The less fancy advertisements of cheaper, popular coffee substitutes – the instant type products of Kneipp, Karo and Enrilo Franck – could be seen on the blank forms of bills and on signboards hung in public places.

The most famous advertising slogan of the twenties was naturally "Sugar fortifies", for which Melchior Wańkowicz received the astronomical fee of five thousand zlotys, which in those economically impoverished years was the equivalent of five hundred dollars, almost twice as much as the President of the Polish Republic's salary. Being a rich and influential organization, the Polish Union of Confectioners could afford such generosity. Polish sugar lost its foreign markets, especially in Germany, as a result of a tariff war and the increase in charges enforced by local producers.

Its marketing efforts therefore concentrated on the domestic market; advertisements and posters with the "fortifying sugar" were commissioned from Kamil Mackiewicz, Henryk Czerny, Mieczysław Berman, Aleksander Rak and other graphic artists and designers. However, this broad advertising campaign proved to be of little effect as the national consumption of sugar continued to fall.

It should be added that at this time the sugar lobby sparked off a campaign (effective this time) to combat importers and "smugglers" of saccharine. "Advertisements pointing out the nutritious advantages of sugar are accompanied by an energetic campaign against the dangerous sugar substitute – saccharine. The rewards have been considerably increased for those who catch anyone redhanded smuggling saccharine. Attempts have been made to attract the participation of boy scouts in tracking down smugglers" – the newspaper *Ziemia Radomska* reported in 1932. The thriller magazine *Tajny Detektyw* [Secret Detective] meanwhile reported further arrests of those sabotaging the sugar industry.

Well, as we all know, one has to take the bitter with the sweet.

Translated by Richard Biały

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36 FILIP SPRINGER

FILIP SPRINGER (BORN 1982) IS A SELF-TAUGHT JOURNALIST WHO HAS BEEN WORKING AS A REPORTER AND PHOTOGRAPHER SINCE 2006. LAST YEAR HE PUBLISHED HIS FIRST BOOK OF REPORTAGE, *MIEDZIANKA. THE STORY OF A DISAPPEARANCE*.

Photo: private

Ill-born

Books and exhibitions such as David Crowley's *Cold War Modern* have shown that the architectural ideology of late modernism were a key front in the ideological war between the two sides of the Iron Curtain. In the countries of the former Soviet bloc that architecture has since ended up on the trash heap of history. The Poles in particular, still fascinated by capitalism, uncritically and with the passion of neophytes, have demolished many reminders of the past. However, upon the ruins of Warsaw's Supersam (which was Poland's first self-service supermarket) and Katowice's Brutalist train station, a younger generation of activists, art historians, artists, and writers has appeared. Successive exhibitions, books, and other publications defend or simply describe the art created under communism, including socialist modernism, which turned out simply to be "ill-born," as Filip Springer's terrific title suggests. With the innocent eye of someone born just seven years before Poland's first free elections, this journalist and photographer examines the relics of the previous era and asserts that "after all, it's good architecture."

Ill-Born is also a photograph album – made up of valuable archival items as well as new photographs by Springer himself – as well as a collection of reportage on these bastard-buildings. These two elements complement each other wonderfully. Beyond the stigmatized constructions themselves, Springer highlights the fates of the architects, thereby presenting the reality of the Polish People's Republic in a rich and nuanced light. Springer investigates what happened to the wartime generation, which, following the victory of communism on Polish territory, sought out a local version of modernity. Particularly fascinating are their games with the authorities. In the Stalinist era, when the historicizing style of socialist realism was being enforced with deadly seriousness, Marek Leykam built an eclectic copy of monuments from the Italian Renaissance for the regime. Buszko and Franta in Katowice received the special blessing of the local Party chief. Jerzy Hryniewiecki publicly mocked the authorities and his superiors, despite which he became the supervisor for most of the important and ambitious projects, pushing them through the appropriate offices thanks to his acquaintances from a German prisoner-of-war camp.

Thus Filip Springer places his emphasis on people, not on architecture. Nevertheless, the lives of the buildings since 1989 also emerge from the pages of this book, in the rebuilding and enclosing of housing estates, in the ruination of their structures by new investments. The question remains open: are these artistically brilliant, modern symbols of the official style of "socialism with a human face" actually inhabitable?

Max Cegielski

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Lord Vader versus the Origin of Truth

Radiating black granite, it appeared rather suddenly on Bracka Street, filling a gap in the southern frontage of Jerozolimskie Avenue. It was 2011, and the scaffolding had just disappeared. People walking by it would stop and raise their heads to take a look. They tended to gaze in silence and then continue on their way a moment later. It was, however, mesmerizing, and they would often turn around to bestow one last glance upon it. Perhaps as they got on their buses or disappeared around the bend they were still thinking about it.

Other nicknames for Lord Vader were the sarcophagus, the coffin, the monolith. In essence: the Dark Side of Power.

It was one of the latest projects designed by Stefan Kuryłowicz. Meanwhile, it was the well-known Likus family, from Krakow, that had decided to build a pitch-black shopping center and office building here. Kuryłowicz's design does interact, with its rounded corners, with the Central Department Store, now universally known as Smyk, or "The Kid." The light modernist sandstone block that is Smyk and the black monolith that is the Kuryłowicz building have opened up a dialogue, an architectural conversation. That's good. Perhaps that was exactly the reason – albeit totally unconscious – that passersby would pause to stare at that blackness.

Darth Vader, however, did not only enthrall. The impenetrable black slab had another quality, as well. It could annihilate. What it had swallowed up, in fact, was its antithesis, its absolute opposite: a cloud of light and air, a gleam. One critic even wrote once that "people that haven't seen it will never understand the origin of truth."

That origin was called the Chemistry Pavilion. It was designed by Jan Bogusławski and Bohdan Gniewiewski, and as of April 11, 2008, it lay in ruins.

Critics could not get over their delight at what had arisen in 1960 at the intersection of Bracka and Nowogrodzka Streets. The location itself had not been chosen at random – Bracka was a natural pedestrian link between Three Crosses Square and the Central Department Store on Jerozolimskie Avenue and, further on, Chmielna Street. It was with a view to urban planning that this break in development and a little square came into being. The Pavilion itself was dominated by asymmetry and light. It was almost entirely glass, resting on finessed buttresses in the shape of the letter V and a concrete shaft that was invisible from the outside. It gave the impression of being entirely made of glass and being held up by some invisible force. Or even by the light that filled up its interior in the evenings. There was simply too much of it, so it escaped out the invisible walls and flooded the neighborhood. From the street, the Chemistry Pavilion looked like a luminous cloud, a supernatural accumulation of energy. It looked like something good. (Darth Vader looks like something bad, although in reality, it isn't.)

For years the Chemistry Pavilion was also attractive for the variety of its available wares, although today we would call them unsophisticated – they'd be deemed below average at any big supermarket. In the boorish era of its birth the Origin of Truth provided goods of man-made materials: bowls and other receptacles, buckets, brushes, tablecloths. Set out in even rows, they were evidence that the national chemical industry produced not only fertilizers with the miraculous properties of rocket fuel.

When the time of lies came to an end, the Origin of Truth fell into disfavor. It was covered up with advertisements, and its neon lights disappeared under a series of banners. The display cases by the entrance were smashed to pieces and then removed in order to make space for cars parking there. A private enterprise took up residence inside it. It became hopelessly dirty and gray. The tenants, who traded places at kaleidoscopic speed, didn't have the time, money, or desire to take care of the building. The Origin of Truth ceased to delight and began to frighten. Something had to be done with it.

In 2001 Krakow's Likus family purchased the plot of land between Nowogrodzka Street, Bracka Street, and Jerozolimskie Avenue. The Pavilion – once ethereal, now derelict – that stood in the middle of it did not interest them in the slightest. They had spent millions on that land, and their investment needed to pay off. So they decided to put in Darth Vader, the embodiment of the Dark Side of Power, a shopping center filled to the brim with luxury goods from the most expensive and most prestigious international brands. It was to be the kind of place Warsaw had never known before.

A clash was inevitable. The first combatants against the Empire were the residents of a nearby apartment building located at 13 Bracka Street. In Stefan Kuryłowicz's design, the facade of the new shopping center, black and almost entirely devoid of windows, was to suddenly come into being twelve-and-a-half meters from their windows and balconies. And that meant a de facto total blackout for the residents of these apartments. The legal battle over the light lasted five years – but ultimately the District and also the Supreme Court of Appeals ruled that the residents' complaints were unfounded and that the building was to be permitted. Asked about the issue by journalists, Stefan Kuryłowicz responded, "I sincerely feel for the residents of 13 Bracka Street, but this is downtown Warsaw. For years there was a hideous parking lot there. This building filled in a gap in development."

The Origin of Truth also stood on this hideous parking lot. Kuryłowicz must have known its value. He was a full professor, and hordes of students converged on his architecture classes at the Warsaw University of Technology.

Despite this, on April 11, 2008, the square would be surrounded by a fence, and the first bulldozers would appear at the Chemistry Pavilion. Its demolition wouldn't take long. Many Warsaw residents only noticed it was gone when it turned out that the secondhand store where they stocked up on cheap clothing was gone, too.

The day after the demolition of the Origin of Truth, an article by Jerzy Majewski would appear in the newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*. In it he writes that the case of the Chemistry Pavilion is above all a clash between the most significant names in the history of Polish architecture – on one side, Bogusławski and Gniewiewski, on the other the star nonpareil of free Poland, Stefan Kuryłowicz: "This is also a clash between two ways of thinking about the city. Between a 1960's modernist view, full of free and open spaces, and a post-communist one in which the city grows haphazardly. In the end it is a battle between David and Goliath that – to our great surprise – Goliath turns out to win."

Kuryłowicz's shopping center would be ready in 2011. The gloomy black wall would effectively conceal the world from the residents of the building at 13 Bracka Street. Not a trace remained of the Origin of Truth, that ethereal cloud of light. You might say it had been replaced by darkness.

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38 MARTA GUZOWSKA

MARTA GUZOWSKA IS AN ARCHAEOLOGIST. SHE HAS WORKED AS A MEMBER OF AN EXCAVATION TEAM IN TROY FOR TWELVE YEARS. *POLYXENA* IS THE FIRST PART OF AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL DETECTIVE SERIES WHOSE CENTRAL CHARACTER IS MARIO YBL; THE AUTHOR IS WORKING ON THE NEXT VOLUME.

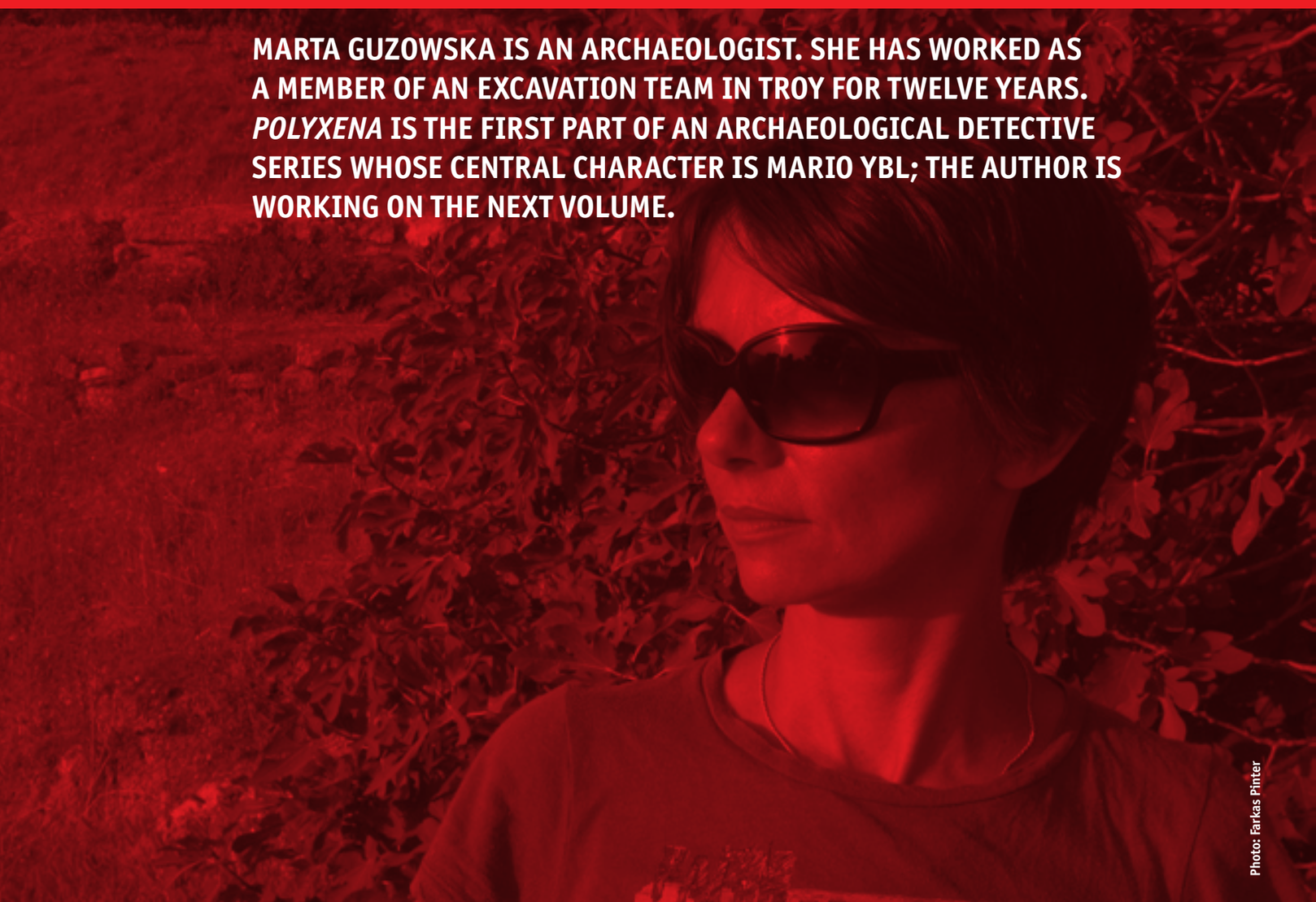

Photo: Farkas Pinter

Polyxena's Victim

Polish crime writing is becoming more and more diverse. While it is still true that retro thrillers and contemporary crime stories predominate, other interesting sub-genres are coming out, as well, like archaeological crime writing, where the settings are excavation sites, and where scientists uncovering the traces of the past assume the role of detectives. Marta Guzowska has chosen this variant of the crime mystery in her debut *Polyxena's Victim* – the first in a series featuring anthropologist Mario Ybl.

The author holds a PhD in Archaeology and for over ten years has been a member of an excavation team among the ruins of ancient Troy. It should come as no surprise, then, that the action is set there. During a scorching summer, an international group of scientists drawn from various areas of specialisation discover an unusual grave containing a woman's remains on a burial ground near Troy. The scientists suspect they've come across an incredible find: the skeleton of the mythological Polyxena. It turns out, however, that the remains are actually quite recent. The experts are not only frustrated, but also terrified: someone has begun to murder the women of Troy, copying the mythological cases.

Guzowska's book is enchanting for two reasons in particular. Firstly, for its beguiling scenery. *Polyxena's Victim* is set in Turkey and is a story about the country today seen through the eyes of a person from Western Europe and written against a background of criminal intrigue. Secondly, the central character and narrator of the story is fascinating. This is the splendid anthropologist Ybl. It's difficult to describe the character succinctly... He is a cross between Adrian Monk, Indiana Jones and Philip Marlowe. A drinker, a buffoon and a cynic, as he describes himself. A man with biting wit and an incredible gift for upsetting people. A conceited type, who always does what wants and doesn't give a damn about the rules. A nyctophobe who overcomes his fear of the dark in the simplest way possible: by drinking himself senseless every night. And finally, a maverick who solves the puzzle of the women's murders on his own initiative, as usual.

Robert Ostaszewski

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If someone tells you archaeology is fascinating, laugh in his face. Interesting is a movie with Indiana Jones or Lara Croft. Lara Croft ones even more so, given the aesthetic value of Angelina Jolie in shorts. Archaeology is dull – so dull it would turn your stomach.

You must be thinking how romantic it must be: an archaeologist stands over an excavation site in his cool duds and watches as each strike of the pickaxe reveals the ruins of a lost civilisation. I'm sorry if this comes as a disappointment to you, but that's pure crap. First of all: you can forget the pickaxe immediately. Most work is done with a small trowel and brush. Do you know how long it takes, in those conditions, to unearth not a whole civilisation but just a stupid broken pot? No? Well, think about it.

Secondly, ladies and gentlemen, lost civilisations don't exist. All of them were discovered, catalogued and labelled long ago. Archaeology is about as romantic as accounting. And the work is similar: it's mainly about writing down hundreds – if not thousands – of numbers. Numbers of layers, numbers of items, numbers of bits of pottery, numbers of who-the-fuck-knows-what-all-else. After that you feed the numbers into databases, you group and analyse them and write a report which has as much romantic in it as the quarterly financial statement you get at your local newsstand.

Besides which it's difficult for a normal person to endure a working day that starts with an alarm at five a.m., i.e. before sunup, and that finishes after midnight with a piss-up, being is filled, furthermore, with endless hours in such searing heat that it ought to be prohibited by the Geneva Convention. I'll just say this much: if any prisoner – whether a political prisoner or just a common criminal – was forced to work in conditions like that, Amnesty International would have stepped in long ago.

Today was just like yesterday, the day before yesterday and each one of the last bloody fourteen days. The sun beat down like an atomic pyre, and the sky – with the colour and weight of liquid lead – hung about two centimetres above my poor old skull. The earth burned my feet through my thick soles. Even the wind didn't bring any relief, just stung my skin and covered my throat in dust.

The trees had turned into rustling skeletons long ago, the river into a muddy channel, and the sea into sludge reeking of seaweed. White ships slid past like wraiths beyond a shimmering curtain of air through the narrows of the Straits of Dardanelles. It wasn't that easy to see from where I'd stopped to get my breath back if they were sailing or marching across the burning fields. A damp haze obscured Bozcaada and the Rabbit Islands. Only in the evening did the setting sun bare its crimson-dripping fangs and the islands' outlines come alive, like camel-hide cut outs on the silk screen of a Turkish shadow play.

When Pola called me in the wee hours of the morning some six months ago, I was, of course, asleep.

"Don't be stupid," she said, "what time is it anyway?"

"Um..."

I tried looking at the alarm clock. I raised an eyelid, and the light from my bedside lamp blinded me.

"Never mind; just listen. There's a burial ground. The bulldozers started digging the foundations for some summer houses and got straight into a grave. Not in Troy proper – ten kilometres away, by the sea. Do you know what that means?"

She paused encouragingly.

"Er..."

I gave up the next attempt at opening my eyes and groped around the bedside table for a glass of water.

"Don't tell me you don't know! It means it might be the Achaeans' burial ground!

"Aha." I muttered.

"The first grave the bulldozer destroyed had an urn in it. A cremation burial. The photographs are a little unclear, but everything suggests it..."

She broke off.

"You do know what I'm talking about, don't you?"

"No."

"You're such an ignorant."

"Pola," I croaked, "you call me in the middle of the night to insult me? Can't you wait until nine?"

"I could. The Achaeans came to Troy to rescue the beautiful Helen. The Trojan War, does that ring a bell?"

"For Christ's sake!"

The glass of water did what all glasses do when you grope around for them: it fell to the floor and shattered into a million pieces.

"Exactly!" the satisfaction was audible in Pola's voice. "Frank's got the permit, and he promised I could head up the entire burial ground section of it. The entire section."

"Sure."

"Do you see what I'm getting at?"

"Of course."

"And you know which Frank, right?"

"Of course."

There was a moment's silence on the line.

"You haven't got a clue, have you? And you're not all that thrilled by any of it. Correct?"

"Yes."

Another moment's silence.

"I'll be needing an anthropologist."

I sat up with my eyes still tightly closed and swung my feet down onto the cold floor. The windows were terribly draughty, and I had never been able to get it together to mend them. I rubbed the stubble on my face and cleared my throat a few times.

"What does this have to do with me?"

"July. Or the beginning of August. And I want you to bring at least two students."

"Pola..."

"And honestly, I'd prefer advanced students, or doctoral students, so that you won't have to stand over them the entire time..."

"Pola..."

I managed to open one eye and glance at the alarm clock. The two red dots between the two and the thirty pulsed in a soporific, hypnotic rhythm.

"Pola. It's half past two. In the morning. January seventh."

She was silent for a moment, and then she said quietly, "I thought you'd be pleased."

Fine, then, I was pleased. Did I have a choice?

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40 MARCIN WROŃSKI

MARCIN WROŃSKI (BORN 1972) IS A WRITER AND COLUMNIST. HE LIVES IN LUBLIN, WHICH IS THE SETTING OF THE RETRO CRIME COMMISSIONER MACIEJEWSKI SERIES. *THE WINGED COFFIN* IS THE FOURTH IN THE SERIES.

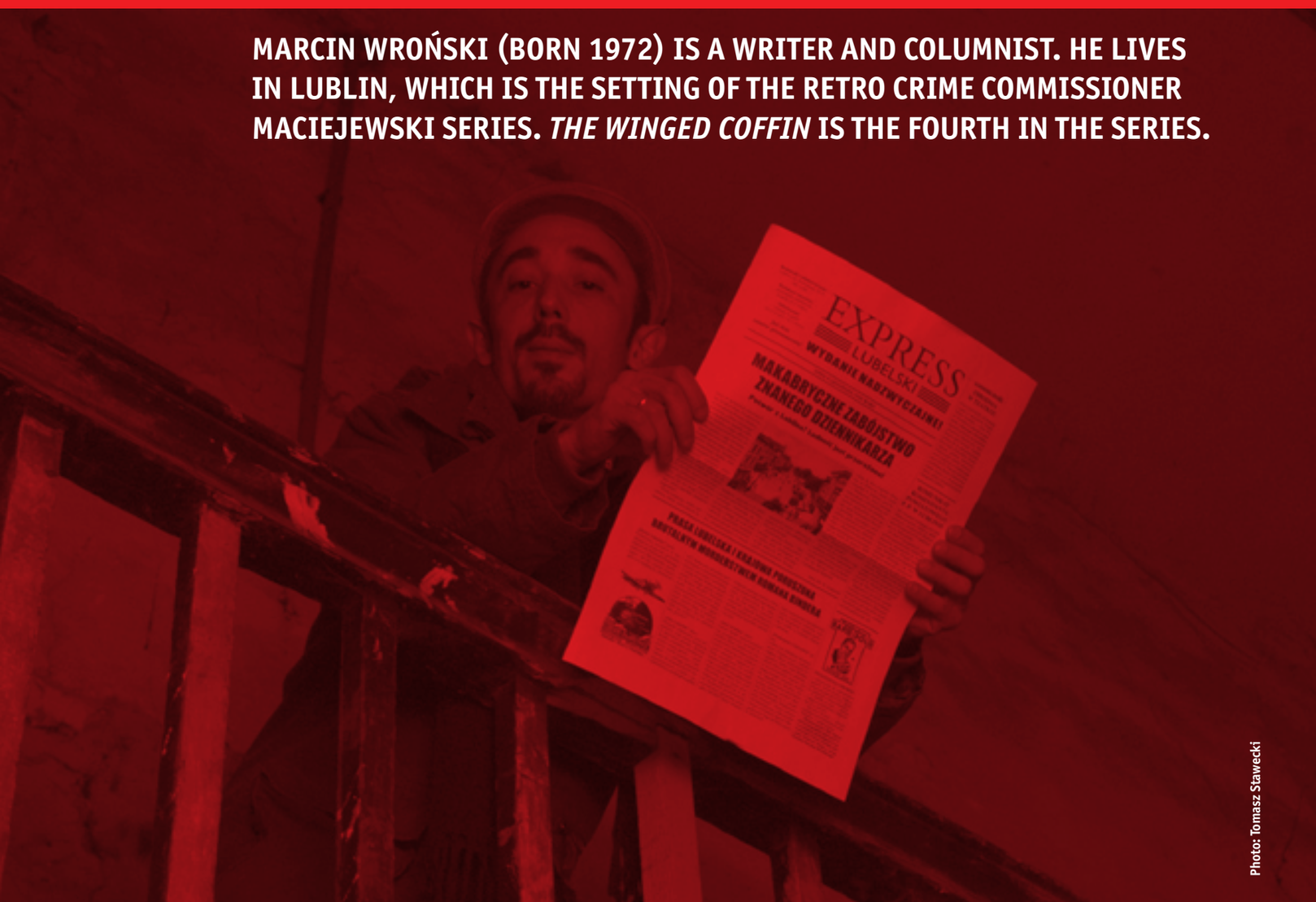

Photo: Tomasz Sławecki

The Winged Coffin

Marcin Wroński's series of novels about Commissioner Zygmunt "Zyga" Maciejewski, is slowly making its way to the top of the Polish crime list and winning the approval not only of literary critics but above all of readers. This is, on the one hand, because the Lublin writer is evolving from book to book, writing ever better prose, and on the other, because each of the novels is different. The action of *The Winged Coffin*, the fourth of the Maciejewski series, runs along two storylines. It is January, 1945, and Maciejewski is rotting in a secret police jail where a demonic major – *nomen omen* – called Gravedigger is trying to break him. One of Zyga's fellow inmates is a man he met during an investigation in 1936. This is the second storyline. A guard hangs himself in the Lublin Airplane Manufacturing Company. The case is apparently simple and clear but Maciejewski is puzzled by the fact that everyone wants the case swiftly closed and, on top of that, military counter-espionage are interested in it. He takes the case into his own hands and, incurring the anger of his superiors, keeps the investigation open. In the end, he stumbles onto the trail of a gang of ingenious drug traffickers.
The history depicted in the novel's narrative is, for Wroński, just as important – if not more so – as the criminal plot. And he does not restrict himself simply to painting a picture of pre-war Lublin, which is admittedly a provincial town, though it is colourful in its multi-cultural nature. Wroński – like other writers of retro crime such as Marek Krajewski and Paweł Jaszczuk – fills in the blank spaces of our history with plenty of detail. And the fact that he applies, in the process, the conventions of the crime novel adds even more flavour to stories about worlds wiped off the surface of the earth by "history set free of its chains."
Wroński has yet another ace in his sleeve: Commissioner Maciejewski is the most clear-cut and intriguing protagonist in Polish crime fiction since Krajewski's Eberhard Mock.

Robert Ostaszewski

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Miss Anna Szpetówna had worked in the municipal library for less than a year but flattered herself that she merely had to glance at whoever entered to know what newspaper they would pick up or which book they would order from the collection. She owed this to her preference for psychological novels (which she willingly spoke about and about which she had even once written a letter to *Literary News*) and detective stories (which she did not talk to anybody about because they were, after all, shameful, even though many of her friends read *The Secret Detective*). She also owed it to her father, a lawyer through whose office many a swindler had passed.

Nevertheless, when that day, just as the library opened in the morning, a scruffy, well-built and no doubt once quite handsome man in a dirty jacket approached her, Miss Anna was presented with a difficult enigma.

"*Winged Poland*, the last two annuals, for a start, and the volume *In Honour of Fallen Pilots*," he said, to her surprise. He rubbed the stubble on his chin and added "Oh, yes, and *Armed Poland* from the beginning of the year," in a tone that was as if he were really saying: "Oh, yeah, lovely, and give me a beer with that, too." After which he signed the register in an unruly hand: Zygmunt Maciejewski, white-collar worker (indicating strength of will, Szeptówna had read somewhere).

He filled in the order slip for the archival annuals as quickly as if he were a daily visitor to the library. He sat down next to the retired professor Dubiel, who had practically made the reading room his second home because, allegedly, he was writing a biography of Łopaciński, the library's founder. Miss Anna had not much liked him ever since he had started to explain to her, in a theatrical whisper, that Łopaciński had not fallen from a britzka by accident, but rather that it had been an attempt on his life by Jewish Communist terrorists. Szeptówna did not have Semitic features; with her dark blonde hair and marvelous, erudite pronunciation, she could easily have passed as a Pole, so the professor probably had not known who he was dealing with. Nonetheless, when the new reader offhandedly pushed aside the professor's notes – which took up a table and a half – and silenced his protests with the glare of a professional murderer, the excited librarian practically dropped an old volume of *The Theatre and Fashionable Life*.

In the meantime, Maciejewski flitted through the volume of *In Honour of Fallen Pilots* at a horrifically American speed. It was as if he were not reading it at all, but instead looking for something between the lines. He seemed mysterious to Miss Szpetówna and all the more interesting. If she could figure him out! . . . Then Maciejewski kept getting bogged down in the articles of *Winged Poland*, which schoolboys devoured just as she did the *Literary News*. His mind would wander. Sometimes fifteen minutes would pass, and he would just hold his pen as if it was a cigarette, without even turning the page. Just a moment, had there been a wedding band on his finger? – the librarian tried to remember.

"Good morning, Miss," a velvet voice tore her from her reverie.

She had not heard the door open! Which is why she now looked, with the foolish expression of a schoolgirl, at the handsome man in an eccentric, colourful tie, hair glistening with brillantine, and a red, runny nose.

"Would you like . . . a newspaper, sir?" she spluttered.

"My dear, I wouldn't dare say what I would *like*." He adjusted his hair with the gesture of a silver screen heartthrob and then sneezed. "In the meantime I just need to have a word with that man." He pointed to Maciejewski, now immersed in his reading.

Miss Anna should have protested – a reading room was, after all, a reading room – but whether it was the narcotic scent of the after-shave, or the animal magnetism of yet another unexpected guest, she simply sat there, without a word, and watched the dandy go and sit on the edge of a chair next to his scruffy friend. He whispered something and slipped him a folded piece of paper. They were like the leader of a Chicago mob with his right-hand man. "I got a gig for you, Tommy Gun. A hit," said the suave younger man confidently. "Okay, Johnny, tomorrow the guy'll be just another stiff," said Maciejewski without a moment's hesitation. But whose name was on the piece of paper? Dubiel's?! Miss Szpetówna giggled quietly at the thought.

Or he was trafficking women! Here another plot came to the librarian's mind. The brillantined pimp and his violent, sadistic partner. His nose had been broken by some rivals in a pimp war but he, covered in blood, strangled them all with his bare hands. In that case, however, their chosen victim could only be her, the only woman in the reading room!

Maciejewski reached into his pocket; there was the rustling of a wrapper. And Miss Szpetówna could not help but smile again because the man who had assumed the proportions of a ruthless criminal in her head had just popped a piece of chocolate into his mouth. Like a little boy!

Before a quarter of an hour had passed, the librarian already had an idea for an electrifying erotic thriller. A gang of thugs kidnap a modern girl who works to satisfy her modest needs but is the daughter of a well-known lawyer. Initially, they want to sell their victim to an international gang trafficking young women from Poland to Argentina but the dandy and gang leader comes up with the idea of demanding ransom from her father. Her father, thanks to his wide range of contacts both among the guardians of the law and in the criminal underworld, sets a police posse and a gang of ruthless criminals after them. "Kill her!" orders the boss when they are trapped, surrounded. "I'd sooner kill you," spits out Zygmunt Maciejewski disdainfully, and in his eyes burns the fire of crime and desire. A fight breaks out between the former partners; an erstwhile clandestine love between the kidnapper and his victim breaks onto the public stage . Together, they run away to Brazil, where . . .

The door quietly squeaked and Miss Szpetówna was forced to tear her thoughts away from her future, bestseller. In front of her stood a uniformed policeman, the strap of his hat beneath his chin, on duty. He saluted.

"I've come to . . ." he cast his eyes around the library. "For that man," he indicated the reader who had instigated Anna's racing criminal thoughts.

He's arresting him! – the librarian could barely conceal her excitement. Unfortunately, the policeman formally saluted the "white-collar worker" and, leaning over, said a few sentences to him. Maciejewski quickly gathered his notes.

"Are you returning them, sir, or shall I put them aside for you?" asked Miss Szpetówna.

"Returning them, thank you." He looked straight at her and it was only her good upbringing which stopped the lawyer's daughter from bursting into laughter, for his mouth was smeared with chocolate.

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