

**NEW  
BOOKS**

**DIRECTLY**

**FROM  
POLAND**

IK

S/N:

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

- » publicising the best Polish books and their authors
- » organising educational events focusing on the advantages to be gained from the habit of reading books
- » the Translators' Collegium
- » the © POLAND Translation Programme
- » seminars for publishers
- » presenting Polish literature abroad
- » an information centre for children's books
- » providing foreign audiences with access to information on Polish books and the Polish publishing market
- » running **www.bookinstitute.pl**, the biggest Internet site dedicated to information on Polish literature

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

The 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 800 grants. In particular it covers belles-lettres and essays, works of what is broadly described as the humanities (with a special focus on books about Polish history, culture and literature), books for children and young people, and non-fiction. The grants cover the cost of translation from Polish into the relevant foreign language and the purchase of foreign rights.

**www.bookinstitute.pl** is a source of information on current literary events in Poland and more, presenting new and forthcoming titles and providing regular reviews. It also includes biographical information on over 100 contemporary Polish authors, information on over 900 books, extracts from them, critical essays and publishers' addresses – everything there is to know about Polish books in Polish, English, German and Hebrew.

INSTYTUT KSIĄŻKI



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## ©POLAND TRANSLATION PROGRAMME

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

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

The Programme may cover:

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

## SAMPLE TRANSLATIONS ©POLAND

Financing is given for 20 pages of a translation (1,800 characters per page). The translator submits an application, including: the motivation for choosing the applicable book, the plan of action, his/her bibliography, information concerning the translation costs.

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

## "KOLEGIUM TŁUMACZY" TRANSLATORS' PROGRAMME

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

## THE TRANSATLANTIC PRIZE

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

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<b>PAGE</b>	<b>AUTHOR</b>	<b>TITLE</b>
4	<b>Olga Tokarczuk</b>	Drive Your Plough Over the Bones of the Dead
6	<b>Daniel Odija</b>	Chronicle of the Dead
8	<b>Joanna Bator</b>	Cloudalia
10	<b>Piotr Paziński</b>	The Boarding House
12	<b>Krzysztof Varga</b>	Independence Avenue
14	<b>Sylvia Chutnik</b>	Diddums
16	<b>Marian Pankowski</b>	The Bondage and Fortune of Adam Poręba
18	<b>Małgorzata Rejmer</b>	Toxaemia
20	<b>Kazimierz Kutz</b>	The Fifth Point of the Compass
22	<b>Agnieszka Drotkiewicz</b>	Now
24	<b>Jacek Dukaj</b>	The Crow
26	<b>Grażyna Plebanek</b>	Illegal Liaisons
28	<b>Wojciech Albiński</b>	Achtung! Banditen!
30	<b>Antonina Żabińska</b>	People and Animals
32	<b>Piotr Kalwas</b>	Home
34	<b>Jan Subart</b>	The Merchant of Memories, or the Battle of Poets
36	<b>Twenty Years of the New Poland in Reportage</b>	
38	<b>Artur Domostawski</b>	Kapuściński non-fiction
40	<b>Jan Skórzyński</b>	Splinter
41	<b>Janusz Degler</b>	A Multiple Portrait of Witkacy
42	<b>Poetry</b>	
46	<b>Publishers' Addresses</b>	



Photo: Wojciech Wojtkiewicz

Olga Tokarczuk (born 1962) is a novelist and essayist, the most popular and most frequently translated Polish female author; her books have now been published in more than twenty languages.

Olga Tokarczuk's new novel has caused a good deal of consternation among Polish readers, for several reasons. Firstly, she has shocked the public by suddenly turning to popular literature, in other words she has chosen the crime genre. Secondly, she has created a narrator and central character in one person that it is hard to regard purely as a medium through whom the author is demonstrating her own view of the world. Thirdly, she has called her novel a "metaphysical thriller", implying that this is not just a run-of-the-mill flirtation with commercial fiction.

*Drive Your Plough Over the Bones of the Dead* is the story of Janina Duszejko, a retired engineer, who earns extra money as a teacher. She is a great animal lover, and an even greater admirer of the work of William Blake, whose views she tries to apply to a modern mentality. It is the English poet who "answers" for her philosophy of life. Buried up the ears in his ordered world of Great Values, the woman is unable to come to terms with the wobbly morality of the twenty-first century. So she treats the series of peculiar murders that occur in Kotlina Kłodzka, where the action is set, as a punishment deserved by demoralised people. Tracks found at the crime scenes imply that the perpetrators of the murders could be animals, taking revenge for human cruelty. All the victims were involved in hunting.

Naturally, Tokarczuk does not limit herself to building up an intrigue and offering clues designed to help the reader solve the crime puzzle. She sets her thriller in the superbly depicted

real world of provincial Poland. She portrays the society that lives there, contrasting typical local bigwigs with a small band of outsiders headed by Duszejko, resulting in lots of comical effects. As events unfold, the comedy gives way to tragedy, linked with the gradual collapse of the heroine's personality. For all her unconventionality, she is closer to the tradition of the crime novel than she seems at first sight. What is unconventional in this novel is the top quality language and the original – even by world standards – ecological sub-text.

Marta Mizuro  
Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones

**WE** got home late, and in a stew. Matoga didn't say a word on the return journey. I drove the Samurai via short cuts, down tracks full of potholes, and I enjoyed the way it kept throwing us from door to door as it jumped one puddle after another. We said goodbye with a curt "See you".

I stood in the dark, empty kitchen and sensed that I was just about to be seized by the same thing as usual – weeping. So I thought it would be best if I stopped thinking and did something. To this end I sat down at the table and wrote the following letter:

To the Police

As I have not received an answer to my previous letter, although according to law every public office in the country is obliged to respond within a period of fourteen days, I am forced to repeat my explanations concerning the recent, highly tragic incidents in our district, and in so doing to present certain observations that cast light on the mysterious deaths of the Police Chief and of Wnętrzak, owner of the fox farm.

Although it looks like an accident while performing the dangerous job of a policeman, or perhaps an unfortunate coincidence, one should ask however if the Police has established: WHAT WAS THE VICTIM DOING AT THAT TIME IN THAT PLACE? Are there any known motives, because to many people, including the undersigned, it seems extremely odd. Moreover, the undersigned was there on the spot, and found (which might be important to the Police) a vast number of Animal tracks, especially the marks of roe deer hooves. It looked as if the deceased had been lured out of his car and led into the undergrowth, beneath which the fatal well was hidden. It is highly possible that the Deer he persecuted inflicted summary justice.

The situation of the next victim looks similar, although it will not be possible to find evidence of tracks after such a long time. However, the dramatic course of events can be explained by the form of his death. Here we have a situation that is easy to imagine, where the victim is enticed into the bushes, into a spot where snares are usually set. There he falls into the trap and is deprived of his life (as to how, that should yet be investigated).

At the same time I wish to appeal to the gentlemen of the Police not to shy away from the very idea that the perpetrators of the above-mentioned tragic incidents might be Animals. I have prepared some information that casts a little light on these matters; for it is a long time since we have had cases of crimes committed by these creatures.

I must start with the Bible, in which it is clearly stated that if an Ox kills a woman or a man, it should be stoned to death. Saint Bernard excommunicated a swarm of Bees, whose buzzing prevented him from working. Bees also had to answer for the death of a Man from Worms in the year 846. The local parliament condemned them to death by suffocation. In 1394 in France some Pigs killed and ate a child. The Sow was sentenced to hang, but her six children were spared, taking their young age into consideration. In 1639 in France, a court in Dijon sentenced a Horse for killing a Man. There have been cases not only of Murder, but also of crimes against nature. Thus in Basel in 1471 there was a lawsuit against a Hen, which laid strangely colourful eggs. It was condemned to death by burning, for being in cahoots with the devil. Here I must add my own comment, that intellectual limitation and human cruelty know no bounds.

The most famous trial took place in France, in 1521. It was the trial of some Rats, which had been causing a lot of destruction. They were summoned to court by the townsfolk and were appointed a public defence counsel, who proved to be a quick-witted lawyer called Bartolomeo Chassenée. When his clients failed to appear at the first hearing, Chassenée petitioned for a deferment, testifying that they lived in great dispersal, on top of which many dangers lay in wait for them on the way to the court. He even appealed to the court to provide a guarantee that Cats belonging to the plaintiffs would not do the defendants any harm on their way to the hearing. Unfortunately, the court could not give such a guarantee, so the case was postponed several times more. Finally, after an ardent speech by their defence counsel, the Rats were acquitted.

In 1659 in Italy the owners of vineyards destroyed by Caterpillars submitted a document to them with a summons to court. Pieces of paper with the wording of the summons were nailed to trees in the area, so the Caterpillars might become acquainted with the indictment.

In citing these recognised historical facts, I demand that my Suppositions and Conjectures be treated seriously. They demonstrate that similar thinking has occurred in European jurisdiction before, and that they can be taken as a precedent.

At the same time I petition for the Deer and other eventual Animal Culprits to go unpunished, because their alleged deed was a reaction to the cruel and soulless conduct of the victims, whom my thorough investigations have shown to be active hunters.

Yours faithfully,  
Duszejko

First thing next morning I drove to the post office. I wanted the letter to be sent registered, as then I would have proof of posting. However, it all seemed a little pointless, because the Police station is situated bang opposite the post office, on the other side of the street.

As I emerged, a taxi stopped in front of me and the Dentist leaned out of it. When he drinks, he has himself taken to various places by taxi, spending all the money he will earn from pulling teeth.

"Hey, Mrs Duszeńko," he cried. He had a red face and the look in his eyes was blurred.

"Duszejko," I corrected him.

"The day of vengeance is nigh. The regiments of hell are closing in," he shouted, and waved at me through the window. Then the taxi set off with a squeal of tyres and headed for Kudowa.

*Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones*



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Photo: Kamil Gubata

Daniel Odija (born 1974) is a novelist and journalist, known for describing the consequences of the social and economic transition in Poland. His work has been translated into French, German and Ukrainian.

*Chronicle of the Dead* is the best, most important book that Daniel Odija has written. It is brave, interesting, wide-ranging and intriguing.

The story is set in a Polish city known as "the Paris of the North" – once attractive, well cared for and stable, but now going through a tough time. The city is on the coast, and is at a dramatic moment in its history. Up until the collapse of socialism, local life was propped up by four pillars. These were: closeness to nature, the adequacy of the Polish collective identity, the limited influence of socialism on city life, and provincialism experienced as a lack of influence on politics.

But Polish history since 1989 has symbolically distanced the city from the sea. The sea was always the citizens' mainstay, providing them with a livelihood, and also acting as a reminder that all living things consume other living things. Now, however, the city is losing its port character; the harder it tries to be a tourist site, the more it changes nature into "an attraction". However, "tourist nature" is ignorant of the struggle for existence, and refuses to recognise cruelty or frenzied consumption. Thus the true properties of nature have been disowned, and as in any classic case of rejection, they return to the collective consciousness in the guise of horror. A rumour spreads among the citizens that carp from a suburban pond are feeding on corpses, meaning that anyone who eats them will himself become a cannibal; a new species of extremely predatory seagulls is exterminated by urban services, as if to stress that a rupture with nature has taken place.

The citizens have let themselves in for a similar horror by eradicating the memory of a past that is not Polish. Instead of the reality of day-to-day pre-war German life, the city's residents remember or imagine the threats of the Hitler era: war, rape, killing and the mass murder of the Jews.

And finally – capitalism and politics. Formerly, the city had been developing at its own gentle pace, and socialist economic absurdities had been mitigated by its small-town atmosphere. The advent of capitalism and democracy causes an outbreak of panic among the citizens: they think of politicians as a cross between people and rats, while capitalism seems to them a voracious system that blows up old buildings and erects foreign supermarkets in their place.

The four pillars – nature, the past, the economy and authority – remain uncompromisingly in the collective imagination. Odija's book is really about the failure of the social imagination in conflict with a new reality. The value of *Chronicle* lies in a skilful exposé of the hidden life of a community – its unconscious fears and delusions.

*Przemysław Czapliński*  
Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones

**THE** train made one last stop on the outskirts of the capital, where several people got on board. The musicians did as Mateusz had said and were silent, which surprised him a bit, as he had long since ceased to be leader of the band. And then they started playing quietly, together, without running off into any solo improvisations. Light, refreshing swing from the 1940s – it couldn't have been further from the avant-garde. Outside, the electric railway wires rippled fluently, as the poles supporting them drew up in bar-lines. Cable couplings plaited sharps and flats, which kept trying to suggest something. Yet Mateusz insisted on the journey running to a rhythmic phrase, to a simple metre without any unexpected leaps of the imagination. But however hard he tried, unsettling shadows started appearing on the stove rippling outside the window, small clouds of dust, like spots on an eye, or a record of strange whispers.

The train emerged from a dense forest and fell into the open arms of flat fields. The uniform brown of the earth split itself from the clouded sky in an even line. The monotony of the landscape was varied by solitary cars. Like in a slowed-down film, they were gliding across the fields along narrow highways lined in files of old poplars. Now and then clusters of buildings appeared, gone grey with damp and not fitting the surroundings. Clean, well-tended farms also showed up, wrapped in warm copses of spruce and beech trees, which broadened out into dark-green woods. And later on there were fields again – and so on, by turns.

When on the right-hand side the thin thread of a river shone forth, they knew the train was approaching Kostyń. First it would pass the German window works and the Dutch chip factory. Later it would flash between the one-family cottages and start to brake at the height of the supermarkets, insidiously built at the very heart of the city. There were no longer any small shops with products piled on top of each other. There was no sales assistant behind a counter, who would enthuse about yesterday's match or ask after your family. None of the local gossip or the latest jokes. Now, to buy a bottle of beer, you had to stand in a queue at the check-out, with no opportunity for a chat about the weather, because the customer behind you was in a rush: faster, faster. One of the ten sales girls, tired and irritated, would silently bash out the price and toss an automatic: "Please come again", but you didn't fancy coming back at all.

The people in the compartment were waking up. Soon the old, German-era station would start to scare them with its rusty pillars that could hardly hold up the leaky roof.

## KOSTYŃ

There are lots of bridges in Kostyń – ten made of concrete, two of iron and one of wood. Not so long ago the fifth regiment of German hussars was riding across them. For centuries, from the fall of the last Pomeranian rulers until the Second World War, the city belonged to the Germans. Once, perhaps a bit prematurely, it was known as the Paris of the North, probably because of the layout of the streets, which radiated out from at least ten roundabouts.

Before the war the city was full of small Secession tenements, but after the Russian invasion nothing was left but rubble and the ruins of churches. Only a few dozen not so beautiful houses held out in the city centre, too solid to be destroyed. The German barracks also survived the attack, to be changed into a school of fishery, and so did the von Blankensee family mansion, where the Russian command was stationed. From a mixture of three races, Poles, Lithuanians and Ukrainians, after the war a new man was born, who rebuilt the destroyed city, learned to catch fish and keep some sort of order. But he never rivalled the Germans in the precision of his plans for the construction of the city. Now there were ugly fillings made of glass and metal grinning among the tenements, and the square housing blocks did not even try to imitate the old town. The marketplace, renamed Red Army Square in the communist era, was spiced up with the city's one and only lopsided cinema, which looked like a roughly hewn rock. Luckily, the parks were still there, with their old trees and expansive lawns, toning down the peculiar mixture of old German and post-communist architecture. And there were the bridges.

They weren't very long, because the river they arched their spines above was not among the widest, but instead it was a thin, winding

thread that did not rise much from its source and was still easily swimmable at its mouth. Set into the city like an oesophagus, it fell into the cold stomach of the sea.

Salty winds blew off the water, bringing tears to your eyes. It was because of the sea that there was a subtle taste of fish on your lips. It was also the reason why in Kostyń none of the trees was ever still. Even if the whole world held its breath, here something was always breathing, and there was no such thing as silence – murmuring, constant murmuring, and birds, above all harshly squawking seagulls.

The salt water had lapped against the shores of Kostyń since time began. It was always stealing the beach, causing a need to bring down stones and concrete blocks to strengthen the shore. A thick pipe had also been installed along the beach, into which special barges pumped sand collected from the seabed. After that, the pipe spat the sand out at people's feet, so they could have somewhere to sunbathe, which they did for two months in the year at most, because the season was short. "Too short", complained the local businessmen, shop owners and souvenir traders.

The jagged, violent breath of the sea beat against the buttresses marking the entrance to the small port where the cutters nested. Wooden cockleshells steadily rose and fell. Steel stays creaked. Yellow paint came peeling off the hulls, lifeless flakes of it floating on the water like fallen leaves, as the fishermen waited patiently for the storm to end.

And when the wind dropped, the monotonous expanse of water let the mind imagine that man can step beyond his own borders. But even the calmest sea kept washing away grains of sand, which swam into its dark entrails without shouting or protesting, and man could never be sure he was treading on solid ground.

*Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones*



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Photo: Krzysztof Łukasiewicz

Joanna Bator (b.1968) writer, journalist, university lecturer. *Sandy Hill* is soon to appear in Hungarian and German translations.

In 2009 Joanna Bator's *Sandy Hill* was published – an extraordinary novel about the birth and fall of socialist society where the principle of sameness reigned. *Cloudalia*, a continuation of that story, describes a world where life blossoms thanks to differences.

*Sandy Hill* ended with a scene in which Dominika Chmura (Cloud), freshly graduated from secondary school, is in a car accident. Dominika is the incarnation of otherness: Jewish and Russian blood runs through her, she has chosen a lesbian for a friend and, on top of that, has an affair with a young priest. After the accident Dominika spends months in a hospital in Germany – first in a coma, then in rehabilitation. On leaving the hospital she decides not to return to Poland. From now on she wanders the earth, prompted by a vague desire to roam. In Germany she works in a tinned fruit factory; in the USA she is employed as a reader reading books to an elderly woman; in England she serves drinks in a restaurant. Everywhere she meets people, offering a simple yet unusual gift – readiness to listen to someone else's story. When she arrives in a new place people think they already know her. When she departs she leaves behind a kindly longing.

The novel, though, is not carried by chronology but by the rules of a saga. Characters, however, appear not because they belong to the family but because of fortuitous meetings. The novel has, therefore, the structure of a genealogical bush – an entanglement more like gossip than a chronicle. The narrator, like a medium, passes the voice over to various storytellers:

someone's story takes us back to the beginning of the 19th century when Napoleon rode across Poland and Black Venus was brought to Paris from Africa to be shown as a curiosity in salons and circuses; someone else tells the story of life in Kamieńsko, a small Polish village where, before the second world war, two strange spinsters known as Aunties Tea kept Napoleon's chamber pot; we hear the complaints of Dominika's mother, a widow, slowly gathering strength to introduce changes into her life. People's fates, like branches, touch momentarily so as to go in different directions, then unexpectedly they join. These meanderings of the genealogical bush show that no-one is a separate story and that nobody has merely one place ascribed to them on earth.

Przemysław Czapliński  
Translated by Danusia Stok

**GRAŻYNKA** goes to the forest which starts beyond the strip of fields several times a month. You can see the forest from her window, a dark navy-blue, ragged line of trees on a hill. Nobody in the entire village of Mehrholtz does that apart from her because nobody really knows to whom the forest belongs, and there was once a feud over it which has not been resolved to this day. The forest is surrounded on every side by cultivated, decent fields which have owners, while it belongs to nobody and only one path leads to it from Grażynka and Hans Kalthöffer's house.

In Mehrholtz they drive to supermarkets when the need arises, and at most walk to the church or bakery. If they are to go for a walk then it's on special occasions to the park, or in the shopping mall, but not there – to the forest. Such things are impermissible; Grażynka Kalthöffer, born Rozpuch, of Polish and very suspicious parentage, herself is impermissible. There are many in Mehrholtz who would not have let her in if they had had any say. They do, in fact, have a lot to say and do so counting that the weight of collected words will influence the fate of that alien woman. Frau Korn peers from behind her net curtain and later tells others who are interested in the life of their Hans's wife – and there are many such people – that this Polish woman runs around outdoors like an idiot, plunges into the forest, how impudently she plunges into that forest, I wonder why she plunges into the forest? Frau Zorn, whose observation post is next door, knows the answer because she has an answer to everything; no doubt she goes there to let herself go! She lets herself go, that's it, agrees Frau Korn. When this basic fact is agreed upon, Frau Korn's and Frau Zorn's imagination can let itself go following Grażynka who in the forest lets herself go standing up, holding on to a tree, horizontally in the forest grass, savagely, animal-like, and who knows what other foreign ways, the trollop, eine Schlampe, that's what she is. The neighbours won't let Hans's Polish wife be. Doesn't she have enough to do at home? There's work to be done at home, who knows what there might be in a forest which belongs to nobody. And when Grażynka returns from the forest it's with some stray like herself. A cat, a dog, a Black woman. A Black woman, as black as the devil himself, now Frau Korn repeats with delight, now Frau Zorn. She brought a black woman back from the forest with yellow hair, it's not normal; here in Mehrholtz people can tell what's normal and what isn't normal at a glance, and that's how things should be. Frau Zorn sighs, Frau Korn sighs, Hans's should have married a woman from here, his house would be tidier, he'd be fed properly, nutritiously and economically, but now, it's not enough that he has to feed and dress somebody else's kids, but that gadabout instead of sitting on her backside has to run around in the forest. She's in heat not like a wife but like some animal of the female kind, did you see that of late, my dear Frau Korn? I did, indeed, my dear Frau Zorn, assures Frau Korn. Who knows whom she's going to bring home again. Frau Korn and Frau Zorn hope that they're going to be the first to know if only they could be vigilant enough at their posts behind the net curtains. They agree that you can expect anything from Grażynka, their Hans's wife; her eyes are wild, not from these parts, her hair long and dyed. Frau Korn and Frau Zorn believe that a woman of a certain age ought to cut her hair short, dress decently and to keep a proper dog in the farmyard which will bark at strangers before it sees them. And Grażynka? Frau Korn sighs, Frau Zorn sighs. Their Hans's wife keeps strays which get under the feet, mongrel monsters which fawn to everyone. A dog has to be trained! And so many cats you can't count them. Frau Korn and Frau Zorn agree that a cat cannot be trained but if it's not fed it will go hunting so as not to starve to death. Grażynka's neighbours like counting and counted on their Hans's relationship with the Polish woman not surviving the winter, not lasting until autumn. They won't see eye to eye, dear Frau Korn. He'll throw her out, dear Frau Zorn, out to the east together with those kids and tight dresses. Who's seen anything like that? They have never yet seen anything like that, neither Frau Korn nor Frau Zorn, and pretend they don't enjoy looking at something to which they're not accustomed; they stick to their windows like algae and if they could they'd stick to Grażynka herself. There you are! Grażynka's off to the pigsty in the morning dressed as if she were going to a fête, frills, polka dots, half her backside showing.

Frau Korn saw with her own eyes, she could swear, when under the false pretext of borrowing a mower she paid her neighbour a visit soon after he'd brought himself this irritating wife from Poland who did not and does not look like a wife; so she can swear she really did see. Frau Korn has a lot of experience in throwing quick glances which pop into the right place like little golf balls, precise and almost without sound, pop, pop. Then with Frau Zorn they discuss and compare the accurate throws. When they don't have anything new they remember past hits and add new delicacies to them, they turn the triumphs round on their tongues and suck out their sweetness. So Frau Zorn threw her eye at Hans Kalthöffer's pigsty, and nobody's got such a modern one in the vicinity, and in the rectangle of light saw what resembled dance-like movements which should not have been there because a pigsty is not a place for dancing, zum Teufel! It rarely happened that Frau Korn had to improve on her first throw but it was only after her second that she saw that Grażynka was indeed dancing. Unbelievable! She did not hear any music, only the snort-like munching of the pigs which also seemed quite mad to her because, in rhythm with the movements of that Polish woman's backside bound in a red fabric with white polka dots, they were snort-munching to the tune of Makarena. Grażynka was swaying her hips and winding the green hose with which she was washing the floor around herself, or maybe it was a snake because only the powers of hell could incline Frau Korn to dance-like movements, and she almost got a stroke on the spot when she realised that instead of shuddering with horror she was bobbing.

*Translated by Danusia Stok*



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<b>9</b>					



Photo: private

Piotr Paziński (born 1973) belongs to the "third post-Holocaust generation" and is editor-in-chief of the monthly *Midrasz*.

This book from a small publisher has gained considerable popularity and brought the author a prestigious prize from the monthly magazine *Polityka*.

The plot is fairly insubstantial, because all it contains is the description of a one-day visit to a boarding house in a summer holiday place outside Warsaw by a young man who as a small boy often spent time there with his granny, and now encounters several greatly aged guests who remember him as a child. But it is no ordinary boarding house: the residents are Jews who survived the Holocaust, and so everything that occurs here is like a dream about the past, a summoning-up of ghosts, a resurrection of not just people but also events, debates and ideological arguments from long ago. Thus the plot only appears to be simple, but in fact it is set on several time scales and is bursting with typically Jewish anecdotes and parables, because its heroes thrive on the past, which meets up with the present in a sort of concurrent time. Exactly how the old people see the past, like something so close as to be within reach, but also distorted by obsessions or gaps in memory; they are the last living witnesses to the pre-war world of the Polish Jews. The author shows in what form Jewish tradition exists in Poland today. The book has an unusual atmosphere full of warmth and gentle irony, draws sensually rich images, and at the same time shows the diversity of the Jewish heritage: we see it on the one hand as a dialogue between different fates, and on the other as an endless dispute about the ultimate questions, about the existence or non-existence of God, and about

the tasks facing the Jews. This dispute permeates the everyday world and blends with it in a comical way, but gives it meaning even when it is going through drastic changes, and most of the people taking part in the argument are dying. At that point it is taken up by the survivors, who resurrect the dead as partners in the debate.

*Jerzy Jarzębski*  
Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones

**I WANTED** to hear the rattle of shutters and the scrape of windows opening, offering the hope that my neighbours had dropped their vigilance and were willing to show themselves on one of the surplus of balconies, but nothing of the kind occurred, although I waited until noon, savouring the view of the pine trees rusting in the wind.

No one came out, the garden was empty and the windows were shut. Perhaps they had all hidden in the dining hall or the day room, like in the old days, clustered around the broken telly, under the mural depicting the history of the Jews? Maybe that was the place to look for them? And if not there, then where?

In those days it was easy, because there would be a non-stop din in the corridors from first light onwards. Long before breakfast, before they'd got around to burning the porridge in the kitchen, all over the house, everywhere, doors would crash, footsteps thumped and the wooden floor creaked. Mr Abram used to go outside with Mr Chaim to light up the first cigarette of the day. Mrs Hanka would complain that her bones were aching, and screech away at Granny about her sleepless night. Mrs Tecia would be off to fetch the paper. And Mr Leon, wearing a short bathrobe and holding a striped towel, a ginormous brush and a glass for rinsing his teeth, would be rushing to the bathroom to take his health-giving, Siberian, ice-cold shower in peace. Then he and Dr Kahn would do their morning gymnastics. One, two, one two! Dr Kahn used to wave his arms to set the pace. Three, four! Mr Leon's old back would creak in reply. Bend five times, straighten five times, two semi-squats, and a few neck turns to right and left. One, two, three, four five!

The boarding house would be filled with their shouts, growing and brightening as the daylight poured inside from all directions. People would gather in circles by the stairs, on the landing, keenly debating, then they would split up and form new groupings, until they reached the ground floor, where they could sit down comfortably in the beetroot-red armchairs and wait until the dining hall opened. From behind the door came a merry clatter of plates. Through a chink I could see them setting shiny soda water siphons on the little tables, waitresses entering the hall with soup tureens and bowls of cottage cheese and chives. I loved this time when we all sat together under the portraits of the Yiddish classics and started our breakfast. This was our family of adopted uncles and aunties, different from the families immortalised in the group portraits. But I don't even have a single photo of Mr Leon or Mr Abram. And if they were suddenly to pop up in front of me, I'm not sure I'd be able to tell them apart.

I can't remember much more – sometimes almost nothing. My past lies deep inside me, but whenever I try to reach it, I come up against a hollowed-out void, as if I'd been born yesterday, and everything that happened earlier were just a jumble of shadowy images, decaying and scattering into the specks of atoms Mr Leon used to talk about. The throng of these images creates an illusion of memory, and in the same way as a multitude of photographs becomes a substitute for life. I head after them, I seek them out in the dust between the cobblestones on a familiar street and in gaps in the floor. Maybe some enfeebled particles of the old days still survive somewhere, intoxicating and revolting all at once, like the smell of gum Arabic preserved in the crannies of a drawer? And nowadays I know it is from there, from that dining hall that I get my constant feeling of living on an island, of being inadequate or not fitting in. And that the pessimistic awareness that everything passes, is old and devoid of any chance to continue, doomed to become eccentric, degenerated and coated in a rime of grey, stretches its roots right down to that time, when I used to watch Dr Kamińska and Mr Chaim as they took short, laborious steps at the end of the woodland avenue.

Now as I passed the row of doors in the corridor, there they were, one after another, standing to attention like nurses setting off to war, their faces shining with solid layers of oil paint. But there were no number plates, although they were still there when I used to walk past in the evenings, and there would be a draught coming through the open door onto the upper terrace, where I used to meet Mr Jakub, and where Mr Chaim resided, and in summer when it was fine Dr Kahn used to play chess with Mr Abram.

Breakfast time was long over. Or maybe it was dinner time? Could they have eaten without me? No one had rung the bell. I hadn't rung it either. I'm not little any more. It was the final privilege of the youngest guests, of whom there aren't any here now. But is there anyone still left here? Mr Jakub? And the manager. I can't hear the clatter of his typewriter, which means he hasn't reached his office yet. At times he resembles Mr Abram and his diary, especially when he is writing out invoices in his tiny script. Our trusty chronicler – he sits alone and scribbles away, filing index cards and drawing up reports – there will be a stack of useless documents left after him. Doesn't one of the stained-glass panels hang in the corner of his office? A blue Benjamin, the ravenous wolf, the beloved of the Lord. He dwells in safety by Him, Who shelters him all the day long.

The silence in the hall rang out with a groan. As I approached, an echo from the stairs carried the sound of voices in the dining hall. The manager must have gone back to that lot, to finish off his argument with Mr Jakub. Our historical argument, the one we've been conducting since the time of Moses, or maybe since Adam himself. As Mr Abram used to argue with Mr Leon. And Mr Chaim, who always presented every issue from one side as well as the other, carrying on those conversations of his about the exodus from Egypt, and about those who had remained in Warsaw, who had stayed and who had left. We are always leaving some place, never to return, but the difference lies in the fact that if no one had left on that occasion, there wouldn't be any of us at all. I could never understand this gloomy, ruthless logic – for years on end the unavoidability of that choice bothered me. Wouldn't we have been somewhere else, not here, but there? Not today, but... Because wouldn't the molecules, whose dance Mr Leon talked about so much, have one day arranged themselves into our bodies and brains – even if Grandpa and Grandma hadn't left the city after the first September bombardments?

I walked across the dining hall. It was empty. Nothing in here had changed. Beyond the five veranda windows white pillars still held up the gently sloping roof, colourful flowers peeped merrily out of concrete pots, and shoots of yarrow grew between the paving stones. Inside, the serving table still stood underneath the portrait of a Jewish couple. Cleared, only the remains of crumbs were left on the waxed table cloth, and three dried rings marked the spots where our night-time mugs of tea had sat. Further on, behind a glazed door, the ballroom stretched away. I pushed it, but it wouldn't open. Both handles had been tied together with a piece of string. And yet I thought I could hear a conversation coming from in there. A conversation I didn't remember, or could never have heard before. But all I caught was the murmur of voices, some vague, blurred contours of sentences and individual words.

I pressed my face to the crystal-clear glass.

*Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones*



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Photo: Michał Mutor

Krzysztof Varga (born 1968) is a writer and journalist. He has published ten volumes of fiction, including most recently the novel *Terrazzo Tombstone* (2007) and a book of essays on Hungarian topics, *Turul Goulash* (2008).

Independence Avenue – in Polish, Aleja Niepodległości – is the transport artery that links Warsaw’s city centre and its southern districts. It runs through Mokotów, a district that Krystian Apostate, the main character in Varga’s latest novel, rarely leaves. He was born there in 1968, and it is his permanent home. He makes friends with a boy from the neighbourhood called Jakub Fidelis, and they both attend Saint Augustine’s Catholic high school, which is on the street named in the title. This friendship has continued for twenty-five years, and the novel describes the experiences of these two characters, which at first are shared, and later extremely different, because Fidelis is a success – a dancer and celebrity, constantly featured in colour magazines, but Apostate is a failed painter, a conceptual artist who has squandered his talent. While Fidelis enjoys fame and all sorts of luxury, Apostate is stuck in a state of lethargy; his life is limited to drinking beer and rummaging around on pornographic websites.

Yet Varga’s book is not a simple novel of manners. The metaphorical meaning of the name of the Warsaw street is also relevant, because Varga aims to describe the fortunes of the generation that entered adulthood at the start of Polish independence. Varga asks how this freedom has been put to use, especially at the level of the individual. But perhaps even more important is the patronage of the theologian from Hippo – despite the fact that the story is told in the third person, the spirit

of Saint Augustine’s *Confessions* hovers over *Independence Avenue*. Unlike in Augustine, the two different paths trodden by Apostate and Fidelis do not lead to a “new life”. Both of them die in accidents at the age of forty, Krystian in a plane crash and Jakub in his luxury car. The main characters’ meaningful names, as well as some leitmotifs and denouements, all prompt us to regard this story as a modern parable about the mystery of human existence.

Dariusz Nowacki  
Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones

**AND** then he wondered how it had come about that he was no longer young, although he once used to be. Where had all those days, months, and years gone, spent simply on life and nothing more, even if he had felt he were filling them with something more valuable than just life? Krystian's art was for a niche market, and the more he had tried to develop as an artist, the more he had curled up and sunk into deep specialisation and oblivion, perhaps because he wasn't capable of making his own life into even a semblance of art, as Jakub Fidelis had done by making a non-stop performance out of his; Jakub Fidelis' life may have been a circus – it was art *dell'arte* – but it was a form of art. Nobody, meanwhile, got any applause or awards for the art of slowly letting the world go by and forget him. Krystian already knew his five minutes were over long ago. Jakub Fidelis' five minutes had gone on for years, and showed no sign of ending, Krystian realised, not with any malice or envy, but rather with a strange sort of sorrow.

Perhaps my greatest artistic success is that I used to know Jakub Fidelis, the Nation's Number One Dancer, thought Krystian, and in the old days we used to drink beer together, sitting on a bench; we used to share cigarettes, passing each other dog ends smoked down to the filter with the words "don't drag on it, it's still got two puffs left"; at school we sat at the same desk and shared our elevenses, we copied lessons off each other, and when one of us was sick the other went to visit him and reported what he had to learn.

Fidelis no longer drank beer, obviously not because of his elite status, as he had always remained an egalitarian, but in view of the diet required for maintaining a dancer's shape. A glass or two of good red wine couldn't hurt him, but the totemic drinking of beer didn't really come into play – Fidelis' stomach had to be as flat as the earth. As the Earth, on which Fidelis lived and created – created his own legend, a legend that was going to outlive him and become a symbol of free, reborn Poland.

The same thing went for cigarettes, which Fidelis had given up with genuine distress, because for him they had always been a symbol of personal freedom, especially in the days of the advancing anti-nicotine crusade. But there was no alternative – panting and coughing were out of the question, quite apart from the obligatory whiteness of his teeth. The most important thing is motivation, he once said in an interview about giving up smoking. He had strong motivation. Stronger than the fear of lung cancer. Lung cancer had no chance in a clash with dance. Fidelis chose dance.

Krystian had sometimes thought about his own death, about how it might happen, and he was waiting for it, in the hope that it would be like with the second coming of Christ – something that had always been foretold, but that somehow still hadn't happened, and that was apparently going to take place later rather than sooner. Apostate knew of course that he would inevitably die, but sometimes he wondered when and in what circumstances. On the stock exchange of his fears and obsessions sometimes cardiovascular diseases went up, and at other times a car crash suddenly appeared, and then for a change senility and the general collapse of all his internal organs, and then for another change a stroke, as a genetic inheritance from his father. However, none of these speculations featured death as the result of a plane crash – that of course being the popular paradox: hypochondriacs go down with an illness, but not the one they obsessed about; women get married, but not to the men they dreamed of; people win the lottery, but it isn't the winnings they planned for themselves.

So sometimes Krystian thought about death, and was surprised by the people around him, who seemed not to allow themselves to think those kinds of thoughts. The people around him did not take death into consideration. And that kept them alive. They settled the ultimate questions for themselves by reading colour magazines for a zloty each; there on the front page someone had always been killed in a tragic way, but those were such absurd deaths, such curious accidents, such exotic illnesses that they could not have happened to anyone else. Death had passed from the metaphysical sphere into the sphere of entertainment, and that was its greatest victory over life.

Lately, Krystian Apostate was mainly kept alive by his Internet Explorer browser.

Jakub Fidelis was kept alive by dancing and giving interviews.

Kasia Kabotyn was kept alive by her latest new love.

Everyone manages as best he can.

So sometimes Krystian Apostate thought about those rather unpopular ultimate questions and waited. He killed time by waiting for death.

So when was the last time they saw each other? Was it when Jakub had achieved major success as a dancer and was universally recognised as Someone Who Appears On Television? Recognised in shops, in the street, in cafés, in taxis, as the drivers glanced in the rear-view mirror and began their mantra: are you by any chance... and Jakub replied: Yes, I am, but don't tell anyone, ha ha, and winked. Then they'd ask for his autograph, not for themselves of course, but for their wife or daughter, who were great fans of his, and then Fidelis would ask what they're called, and reach into his inside jacket pocket, where quite by chance he just happened to have several photos of himself in a tight leotard, posing gracefully with his legs apart and one hand resting on his hip, the other cast out ahead of him. That hand was pointing to a better future.

The person of Jakub Fidelis had united the Polish nation, as ever divided. So Jakub Fidelis was known to the taxi drivers, the sales assistants at shops on the housing estates, and the check-out girls in the hypermarkets fidgeting in their nappies on uncomfortable little chairs – they too knew him and loved him, and so did the policemen and the criminals; the right-wing and left-wing electorate knew him, and he was even better known to the liberal electors, the believers and the atheists; the professors knew him, and so did the workers – everyone knew him and followed his banner. They respected him, because they knew him; you cannot respect someone you don't know, but if someone is known that means he deserves respect, it means that person means something, that he has achieved that significance of his.

If you want to be respected, then respect yourself, Jakub had said to Krystian the last time they had seen each other. Fidelis was respected, and he didn't have to queue at the bar for a drink – the drink came to him of its own accord, fawning to make Fidelis want to drink it, while Krystian had to wait for his and couldn't bear the waiting, because no barman respected Krystian, surely because Krystian did not respect himself. He had a lot of doubts about himself, interspersed with brief moments of sudden bursts of belief in himself, but this belief was like Polish Catholicism – only on Sundays.

*Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones*



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Photo: Mikolaj Dlugosz

Sylwia Chutnik (born 1979) is a writer, and head of the MaMa Foundation, which works to improve the situation of mothers in Poland. She also works as a guide to Warsaw. She won the Polityka Passport Prize for Literature in 2009.

In recent interviews, Sylwia Chutnik has not concealed the fact that she had no intention of giving her readers a book that would be pleasant to read. From the title character onwards – a baby girl suffering from hydrocephalus, missing limbs, and every possible illness – she never promises her audience the attractions that usually follow from observing the growing or education of a normal child.

However, *Diddums* is not a normal child, but a symbol, a kind of punishment for the sin of her grandparents, who caused the death of a refugees from the Warsaw Uprising by turning them in to the Germans. The punishment falls senselessly upon their daughter, who gives birth to a monster and who takes upon herself all the sufferings of the poor, the lonely, and the rejected. It is these creatures, rejected and suffering through no fault of their own, that the author usually portrays as women. It is they who are tortured by a history constructed by men, a history full of senseless slaughter such as World War II, and within World War II, the Warsaw Uprising. This history has produced patriotic symbolism, has ennobled torment and sacrifice, sacralized the spilling of blood. To a certain extent, the heroine of this novel, *Diddums*'s mother, Danuta, provides a contrast to this symbolism with a symbol of her own – that of the monstrous little girl, representing female downfall and suffering. Toward the end of the book she delivers a pathetic tirade, her own version of the Great Improvisation in *Forefathers' Eve*, the most famous play by Polish Romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz. Mickiewicz's work was an expression of

rebellion against a silent God that had been permitting the enslavement of Poland by its occupants; Danuta demands justice for her torments from the world ruled by men and its institutions. Of course, Danuta's protest comes across as naive, and perhaps even silly (she shouts it at the facade of the courthouse, where she is refused entry because it is a holiday). But the protests of rejected women never reach the right targets, because it is precisely these women that cannot make their way into so-called public discourse, because they do not possess the key, and even when they do protest, they don't really do it the way they are supposed to, nor at the right time. In the last scene of the novel, when *Diddums* the symbol appears on the train tracks, run over by a train, and her severed head rolls onward, the shocked level-crossing watchman simply goes back inside his booth and turns up the television.

Jerzy Jarzębski  
Translated by Jennifer Croft

**THE** door wouldn't budge. She tried once more, then yet again. The wind swirled the heavy drops of rain around and they almost blinded the poor woman. She was getting more and more desperate in her attempts to open the door. If not this door, then surely the next would open. She ran up to a whole series of massive portals and tried to force her way inside. In the end something grated and clicked behind one set of doors and the face of a moustachioed security guard emerged.

"What's your business?"

"Sir, please do let me in. What on earth's going on here? I've travelled for half a day, struggled to find my way around the city, and look what happens, the doors are so heavy, that you can't get in."

"Too right you can't. If you could, then all sorts of people would want to come in to sort something out."

"But I've got proof of payment with me, documents, urgent matters that have been deferred to their detriment for too many years. It's absolutely essential to deal with them. When, if not now? Who else could do it, but me? My daughter is waiting for her mummy, so I have to do it now."

"The courts are closed today, you know. Come on, it's Sunday. Besides we're in the middle of preparing an inventory of the whole building, making a list of all the robes, wigs, toilet rolls and chairs. It was in the papers that the court would be closed for two days to draw up a list of the things inside. Do not disturb!"

Danuta felt as if her head, already soaked by the rain, had been bashed with a heavy instrument. Unbelievable! So much time had passed, the situation was so pressing, yet they were counting screws inside? And it had to be now, just at the time that she arrived after undertaking the journey to the capital for the first time in so many years. They were making a fool of her. It was insulting and outrageous. She didn't give a jot, she was going in.

She quickly stuck the toe of her shoe into the closing gap and jammed the door. The security guard became exasperated and tried to pull the door to, yanking it towards himself with all his strength. Danuta felt a painful grip on her foot, but she didn't step back. No way, she wasn't daft; she knew what was going on here. They probably saw her approaching through the window, got worried and stuck this old idiot out to chase her away. Pity they didn't put up barricades – apparently people from Warsaw can't get enough of them. They sometimes pretend to be at war even if they don't have a real enemy and fortify the major routes with earthworks. For fun, supposedly.

That's the way snobby urbanites treat country people. That's it, they think a daft country bumpkin with chicken feathers still stuck to her shoes has dragged herself up here wanting to wrangle over her boundary dispute. Of course, they've got their own serious crimes to deal with here, criminal networks to unravel, drug rings to deal with.

Screw that! A mother's and child's life is more important than contraband and pimps. Let's end the age of discrimination against people with country ways! Enough's enough.

"Woman, get your clodhoppers out of the doorway or I'll cut them off."

"Cut your own bandy legs off, you so and so. My daughter doesn't have any legs and she gets by. I'm not afraid of becoming a door amputee, I'm not a weed. I don't intend to give way, I'll stand here as long as it takes, I'll wait until my case is reviewed and won and that's final. I'm telling you for once and for all that I'm fed up with being harassed: I've suffered enough because of the neighbours."

The neighbours drop things on her doormat: bits of bread, bits of doughnut, pretzel sticks and chewing gum wrappers. They put tomatoes and plums underneath the doormat. They scribble on the fencing with a green marker pen, they shout "Jews out" in German under her window, they jam up the keyhole of her private letter box with chewing gum and they make the doorbell ring by sticking gum on the push button at the gate. There's more: they feed the birds right next to Danuta's house on purpose, fully aware that birds will be birds – they peck, then digest and let out the rest – in this case on the pavement right outside Danuta's house. That's not all; she suffers from cold sweats and increasingly frequent pains in the veins in the crook of her arm due to her helplessness in the face of

Nazi racism. She's going blind and she'll soon have to wear glasses with a prescription of minus one hundred.

"Well then?" Danuta shouted at the old geezer from the other side of the door. "Do you think I don't know my rights? That I'm just a simple woman from a God forsaken place in the country? Right. Well, so what? According to section 666 subsection kk, I have rights. When is this hellish ordeal going to come to an end? How dare you treat me like this! Furthermore, you have engaged in highly shameful abusive behaviour towards a woman, towards me, while on duty as a security guard and you'll shortly be summoned to court for it. We'll meet again in front of the judge. I'll defend my honour and good name to the last, do you hear me?"

All this time the bloke was trying to dislodge Danuta's foot from the doorway by kicking it and at the same time trying to shut the door. Thoughts flashed through his mind about how incommensurate his earnings were to the effort required to do his job. Why did the all the nutters always turn up on his shift? Maybe there was something about him that attracted the mentally unstable.

Recently some dirty tramp had tried to insist on entering the court precinct with an enormous meat cleaver, saying he had an appointment with some lady lawyer about his future plans on the matrimonial front. Then there was the time a few weeks earlier when this woman arrived for her court case with her dog, a Doberman, which howled from the moment it entered the building. When they tried to quieten the dog down and requested that it be taken out of the building, the woman reacted in an agitated manner. In the end he got bitten by the dog and the stupid woman lay down in the archway of the metal detector while still holding onto the dog's lead and broke the mechanism. They had had to call the police. Not to mention the other occasion when he was bitten, this time by a man who took a run-up and tried to jump over a barrier, which you normally open with a special pass.

The woman was still yattering on. "Listen lady, come on Tuesday, come the day after tomorrow. Since when have government offices and courts been open at the weekend? Come on, lady, for pity's sake. Barging in and demanding to be let inside. Whatever next! Do you think I'm a doorman or something, some sort of keeper of the keys to heaven?"

Taking advantage of a moment's inattention, the old bloke pushed the woman's foot out and slammed the door shut with a thud.

There was thunder, rumbling and bats outside. It had now become wholly apparent that nothing would get sorted out today; not even a bundle of the most authoritative documents in the world, all duly stamped would help. Not even the signature of the Holy Father sealed with an impression of his lips would do the trick. It would be of no significance at all, you could just stick it you know where.

There are matters which just cannot be sorted out, where all an outraged citizen can do is to heave a deep sigh, breathe out heavily and go home.

Dark clouds had completely covered the sky by now, so you couldn't tell whether you were on earth or in hell.

*Translated by Kasia Beresford*



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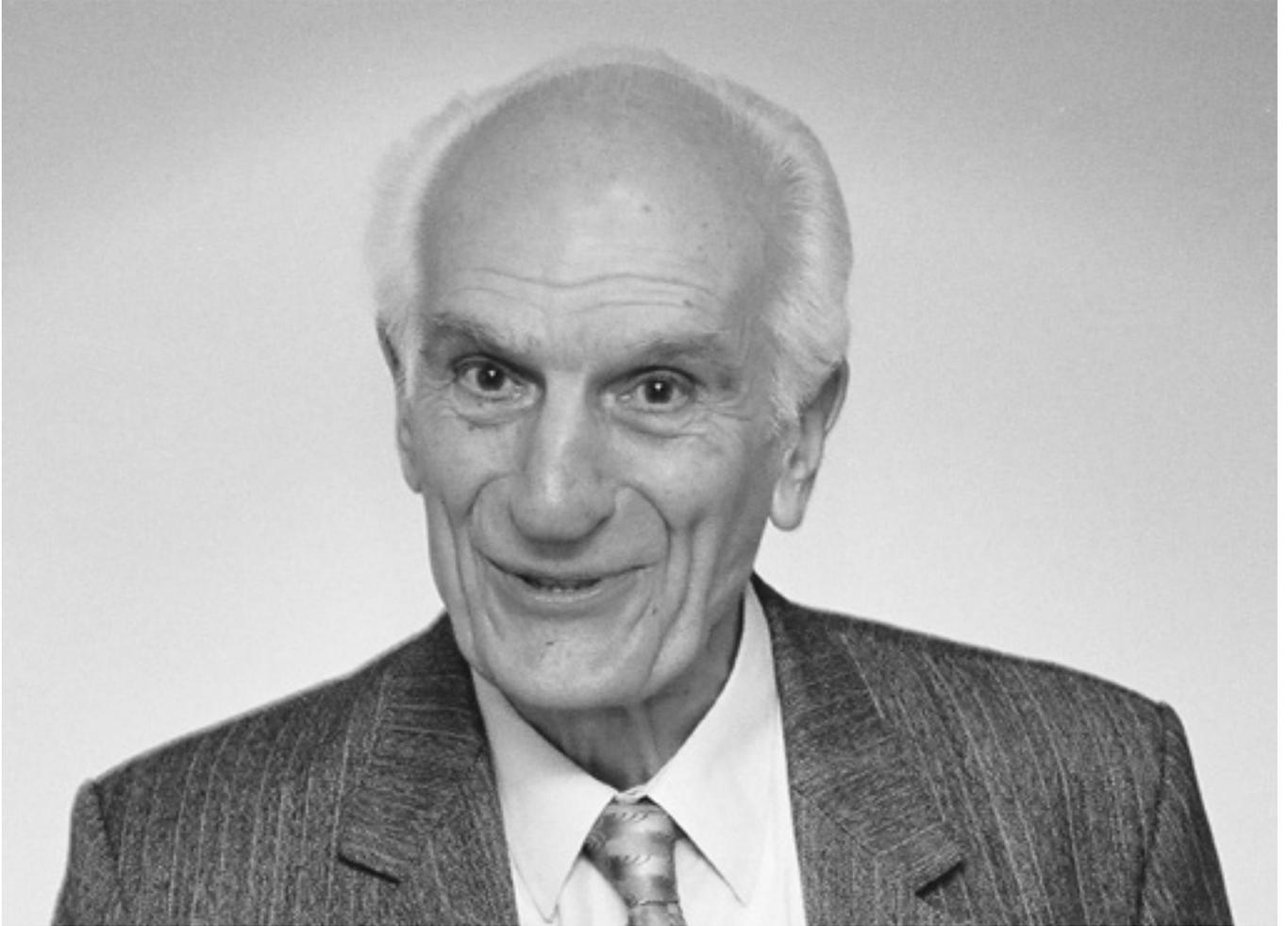


Photo: Patrycja Musiał

Marian Pankowski (born 1919) is a poet, novelist, dramatist, literary critic, literary historian, translator and emeritus professor at the Université Libre in Brussels.

In his work Marian Pankowski very often returns to the idea that the Second World War was the turning point of the twentieth century. It was a moment of compromise for all faiths, beliefs and ideologies. And only the body emerged from this oppression whole.

For the body was the ultimate, though not always the overt aim of military, concentration camp or totalitarian activities. Everything that people tried to do in the first half of the twentieth century can be explained as an attempt to place the collective body of society within the order prescribed by an ideology.

In his latest book Pankowski remains loyal to his instinct, but this time he goes back to the days of the First World War. The novel is set in the Galicia region, in the Small Town, which is a typical rather than a specific place. Just before the First World War, the capable carpenter, Adam Poręba, marries the daughter of the local assessor. Their marital bliss is cut short by mobilisation; before he has even seen battle, Adam ends up in Russian captivity where, partly forced and partly of his own accord, he becomes the lover of the prison camp's female administrator. Meanwhile his wife, Katarzyna, has an affair with Iwaszko, an apprentice carpenter. Some time later, for lack of any news from her husband, she gets a divorce and marries her lover. Several years after the war, when Adam finally shows a sign of life, Katarzyna decides to leave for America with her new husband. Adam goes back to the Small Town and sinks into depression; he does have a short romance with Zosia, who comes to help him at the farm, but gradually the life in him is

fading. One day he dies, sitting in an armchair by the fire, as he hears his Russian lover summoning him to join her.

What exactly is this story about? It is definitely not a revision of history. In this book the events of the early twentieth century are treated irreverently, like an object. Pankowski's main interest can perhaps be defined as a view of collective history through the adventures of the body. So maybe the novel is about the fact that the body wants more. It wants not just pleasure and the warmth of another body, but also the simultaneous experiences of controlling and submitting, seriousness and fun, struggle and ritual. A body like that changes the concepts of "nation", "state", "Pole", and "Ukrainian" into blissful experiences. Man, as Pankowski's tale suggests, is just a body seized by desires, and national identity is just an element of our erotic dreams.

Thus by using erotic language Pankowski turns history upside down.

*Przemysław Czaplński*  
Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones

**AND** back there, in the Small Town, the years were passing too. Michał Iwaszko dropped in at the workshop to borrow the plane less and less often. The key that “Master Poręba” had given him felt over time like the Key of a prison warder... Luckily, from time to time Mrs Poręba invited Iwaszko to dinner, to sort out matters to do with the firm’s final obligations. And once again weeks flew by, months even... And there were more and more matters to be sorted out... The neighbour, an old bachelor called Józek, as good as gold when under the influence... but when he got annoyed... hell’s bells! Get out of his way! So this Józek, he blurted out in the pub, which God knows why was called “The Tight Hole”, that Iwaszko and that woman... you know the one... they...

Katarzyna’s mother – for her father had passed away – made a confession to the priest about her daughter’s drama... “Four years and no news from Russia, from Adam... when they all came home long ago... perhaps he isn’t alive?”

From the confessional the matter passed to the Registry. In the end, Katarzyna became a widow, and Iwaszko’s adultery turned out to be courtship...

In other words, the year 1922 ceased to be the year of clandestine lovers. The wedding was modest, they were administered the sacrament by... the confessor, Father Gorczyca. Indeed there was a small party, but a generous one, for a handful of people, including the priest of course.

It was a year of relief, but also marked the end of the carpenter’s shop. Thanks to his wife’s family connections, Iwaszko got a job at the vinegar works. Barrels and more barrels, but the staves were of oak. After the wedding they lived, now officially, “over the bridge”. Katarzyna was still in her place, but Iwaszko must have been aware of a sort of social advance: the apprentice from Olchowice... sleeping in “Mrs Poręba’s” bed!

The year 1922, let us repeat, passed happily for the couple. Apparently, from time to time, Katarzyna’s sharp voice could be heard. But can you trust the women from the dyeworks, who so copiously polluted the air with dye for rabbit-fur hats? It wasn’t easy for the newly-weds to join in with the Small Town’s daily life. Because just as if it had never happened, Mrs Poręba’s wedding to the apprentice was seen to sanction a misalliance! And was even a betrayal of her soldier husband! All the more since everyone knew Mrs Poręba had started seeing Iwaszko hotfoot before the first snowfall. Luckily some new neighbours appeared. Of the pre-war people, only three were left near the bridge: Mrs Moczajowa the midwife, and the Cucułowskis. They lived in the house abutting the Franciscan hill. They felt sorry for the lonely Katarzyna, and in sympathy, they felt for the young men in wartime too. Mrs Cucułowska liked Iwaszko. A simple fellow, but sincere; in the street he always greeted her with a loud “Ikissyourhand!”, far nicer than a perfunctory “good day”.

Unfortunately, the year was not an entirely happy one. It was the start of autumn, in other words the orchards were heavy with fruit and a whole procession of mushrooms were coming to light, smelling of the roots of the night. Unfortunately, Poręba’s letter arrived from the depths of Russia, as did crows on the apple trees, bringing a scent of snow already, and a green snake appeared on the forest floor.

*Zlatoust, the last day of August 1922*

Dearest wife!

Yesterday a high-up official from Saint Petersburg came to our mine here in the Ural Mountains. He brought us our long-awaited release from tsarist imprisonment! I’m coming home! In ten days the “Lwów train” will pick us up. God willing, I will arrive on 14 September at five in the morning! Every evening I think of you as if I were praying...

When the guard puts out the lamps in the barracks, I long so much to visit a girl called Kasia... I’m on my way... I go outside, and here the night is deep and starless. Should I knock at her dreams? No. Maybe right now she is dreaming of the moon floating in our well... If only an Angel lived here, in the remote Urals, I would borrow his wings... I kiss you, like the time when you laughed and said: “Young dill!” and I said: “No, thyme!”.

Your Adam

A bolt from the blue. They were being questioned by the fate they had only just sworn to. It had rent the forest floor, whence a prisoner of war was emerging with his head bandaged purple. Here he came trailing towards them, with livid marks around his ankles left by the shackles of the Urals.

Run for it!

The coachman put two cases into the carriage. The neighbours heard their escape across the bridge. Before they turned towards the station, Iwaszko said to the coachman: “Just a second,” and waved a hand for him to stop. And he said to Katarzyna: “I’m going to the Cucułowskis, there and back.” Before she could open her mouth he was already knocking at the door.

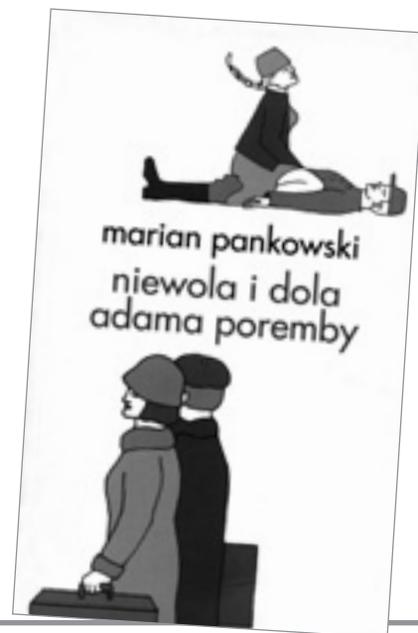
“Come in, it’s not locked...” came Mrs Cucułowska’s voice. He went in, ran across the kitchen and onto the threshold of the main room. They were both still in bed – not even surprised.

“Dear Mr and Mrs Cucułowski... Katarzyna and I... are saying goodbye... We greet you and wish you good health.” And he bowed his head.

“Bon voyage, dear Michał! And good luck in America! Our best wishes go with you and Katarzyna!”

“With all...” his voice caught in his throat, “with all my heart thank you!” He raised his hand, and out he ran.

*Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones*



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MARIAN PANKOWSKI

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Photo: Aleksandra Pavoni/Lampa i Iskra Boża

Małgorzata Rejmer (born 1985) is a post-graduate student at Warsaw University's Institute for Polish Culture, and is also studying psychology and American studies.

Ada, a young physiotherapy student, is forced to care for her deeply depressed father, and starts to betray symptoms of the illness herself. Through no fault of her own, another young student called Anna becomes the object of desire of Tadeusz, an elderly veteran of the Warsaw Uprising. Jan finds his vocation in writing funeral orations for people who are still alive. Longin the tram driver cannot come to terms with the fact that his marriage only keeps going out of habit. Lucyna the pensioner, an eager fan of the conservative Catholic channel, Radio Maryja, is aiming for sainthood. The characters in Małgorzata Rejmer's debut novel all share the same place of residence (one of the oldest, poorest districts in Warsaw), and also the fact that all of them are to some degree sick. They suffer from an incapacity to form normal human relationships, and thus they are condemned to extreme loneliness. When for various reasons they are brought together, their individual diseases merely get worse. Finally it comes to a confrontation between all of them in one single scene, when a tragic accident occurs.

This young writer is decidedly interested in the dark side of life. She portrays a world full of repulsive, ugly and bad people who inspire as much disgust as sympathy. The strength of her novel lies in the fact that she gets as close as possible to her characters and brings out the demons lurking inside them, never for a moment losing credibility, though the characters have grotesque features and habits. Just as strong are her sense of humour and her language, which is lyrical, and at

the same time suitable for the viewpoint that she has adopted. Rejmer alludes to the literary style of the grotesque and to distorting "turpism" (a literary trend in Polish poetry based on so-called anti-aestheticism, the cult of ugliness), both of which have been dropped in recent years, though they have a wonderful tradition in Poland. She not only recalls, but also refreshes them, applying them to new socio-political realities. *Toxaemia* has been acclaimed as the most expressive of the young debut novels, and considering the talent and maturity of this young writer we cannot be sure this is just a one-hit wonder.

*Marta Mizuro*

*Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones*

**THE** tram Longin drove was spectacular: aromatic, clean, very EU. Sometimes, as he drove it through Warsaw, Longin imagined himself as a tram driver in France or in Germany. How driving around France he would be reciting Apollinaire. Or driving around Germany reciting Rilke. How do you do, he says to the passenger he sells a ticket to, and it just happens to be none other than Gunter Grass. Or Le Klezio. Or Hokelbet.

Longin says, Mersi, but no. Free ticket, good book. He inclines his head. He drives deeper into the plaster-coated world. No graffiti, no mischief, no filth. People smile at each other; all their teeth are even, and their legs are even. The blind and the lame walk down an even sidewalk.

While here it was all messed up, somehow, all sort of pointless. People went around like gloomy puppet-effigies with their heads on sticks. They were always in such a hurry, but what were they hurrying off to, if they had nothing. Just then, off in the distance, an old lady was racing at a snail's pace down the sidewalk, moving in sluggish spurts, with a cane that looked like a pole. Longin could have cashed in his chips right then and there.

He waited with his chin in his hand.

Go! someone shouted.

Longin waited.

Go, goddammit! shouted the train, in full rebellion.

Longin watched the old lady. She was gasping for breath, seeming close, but still, not close enough. Longin shut the doors.

He went on. One, two, three.

He began to nod off. He was just so tired.

The old ladies all raced, and raced. Then there was one with a trail of bandages hanging around her leg. Longin thought that that was probably the textbook definition of bad luck: your ankle rolls, something slips, something's twisted – and you're disabled, you're stuck. But it's not like anyone cares what he thinks.

His head had dropped down, and he was driving without seeing much or knowing where he was going. His gaze had filmed over like onion in a pan. He rubbed his eyes and looked lively – he had just passed by his own house, his nice, quiet family home where his wonderful wife Alicja, a beautiful wife, right out of Dostoevski, somewhat gloomy, perhaps, somewhat capricious, perhaps, but with a great, expansive heart, a lively nautre, a character of steel. Of course, perhaps all her liveliness was to cover up some sort of grudge against him, some wanting something at her core, some longing for something greater, but Alicja, thought Longin, I can't give you much, I don't have much myself.

And yet, she loved him.

She might still love him.

He was going to ask her that evening. If she still loved him. And what they meant when they used the word love.

Longin nodded his head at this. When he raised it again, he saw him.

A weirdly twisted figure, a hand against the stomach, that ran right onto the tracks. Right underneath the wheels. Longin honked the horn and slammed on the brakes. Groaned. Crossed himself and for a fraction of a second thought of Saint Francis, who was so near, about Alicja, who was so near, about the children, who probably hadn't left home yet.

He heard a bang. And then a weird sound afterwards, sort of like a crunch. The tram jerked like it had run over a log.

This is it, he thought. Braking with his eyes shut, he had the sensation that the blackness under his eyelids was dispersing. A very weird whistling entered into his ears – could that be the wind? He opened his eyes. The windshield was so terribly filthy, and beyond that there was a massive emptiness.

Behind him Longin heard the artillery fire of lots of voices, like a provincial opera booming and thundering. He raced out of his cabin and up to the body, but almost immediately he turned around again. Sobbing, he leaned over and vomited in disgust, fear, and despair. For a moment he felt better. And then he wiped his mouth off and realized that all the really bad stuff was just starting. He looked toward the sky, but the sky was peaceful and merciless.

And there was the terror of sudden silences. And there was a void over the whole sky.

Longin rubbed his face with his handkerchief, blew his nose, exhaled and took a step in the direction of the body. He stepped back again and went to open the passengers' doors.

They all poured out onto the street like bright, foamy sheepskin. Longin watched as some of them discussed and crowded in a frightened cluster, while some of them ran over to the other side to see the corpse.

Oh shit, fuck me, said one of the young guys.

A couple of people took out their cell phones and started recording. Longin ran up to them, wanting to stop them, but right away he realized he wouldn't be able to.

He was waiting for the ambulance, the police, the sentence.

Fate is fate, the words spun around in Longin's head. You can't outrun your fate.

But whether he had thought of this himself, or whether someone else had already thought it, he didn't know.

A man came up to Longin and patted him on the shoulder.

Don't worry, he said. I saw the whole thing, you didn't do anything wrong. And you're not drunk, so they're not going to do anything.

Longin nodded slightly and then went off to the side and cried. Wiping his eyes, he looked on helplessly as the team with the lift spread out around the tram.

The ambulance drove up, and then the TV crews, and right after the TV crews, the police. A girl in a pink blouse with a microphone was fluttering around through the crowd, begging everyone's pardon and collecting eyewitness reports.

Maja Maj, she introduced herself to Longin. I've taken this tram before. Could you please tell us about how you felt when you ran over that man?

Longin took a breath but shook his head and moved off to the side.

He watched the girl walk up to the people with the lift and then, with her hands folded, observe them as they worked. When the tram had been lifted a bit, she squatted down.

Holy shit! she cried. I know that man!

And she leaped back up.

Tadeusz Storocki, she cried, distinguished patriot of the Polish people. Retired. Fought in the Uprising.

And a murmur went through the crowd, and Longin felt his legs give out beneath him.

Great Polish patriot hit and killed by tram, cried out Maja Maj, quickly placing herself before the camera. Great Polish patriot, murmured the crowd.

A man with a mustache came up to Longin.

How could you? said the man. Kill a great Polish insurgent. Like that.

*Translated by Jennifer Croft*



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MAŁGORZATA REJMER

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Photo: Anna Lewańska/AG

Kazimierz Kutz (born 1929) is a well-known film director, screenwriter, essayist, publicist and politician. *The Fifth Point of the Compass* is his literary debut.

Kazimierz Kutz is a man of many talents and interests. Until now he has been most acclaimed for his film-making, but lately he has been making a name for himself as an extremely interesting writer. His first novel is set in Silesia, which is no surprise, as he was born in that region and its problems have always been close to his heart. Without much of a stretch, the book can be regarded as a disguised autobiography, because the narrator – one of the Basista brothers – and the main characters are, like the author, people born at the end of the 1920s in Szopienice.

As the result of a serious accident, Basista suffers paralysis and comes home to his mother in Silesia. He also finds out that two of his close friends have committed suicide. These events prompt him to make a journey into the past. He painstakingly recreates the story of his own life, and of the friends and acquaintances who during the war jointly created something like a self-education group, as he tries to investigate why their fortunes have turned out one way rather than another, and to understand the meaning of the choices they have made. In the novel's meandering narrative full of digressions three main themes stand out: stories about the lives of the narrator and his close friends, anecdotal tales full of local colour about life in Silesia that go way back into the nineteenth century, and thoughts about the history of Silesia and what it is to be a Silesian. Kutz moves elegantly from biographical details that show the multitude of types and life strategies among his compatriots to generalisations that encapsulate their experi-

ences. And he comes to some sad conclusions. In Kutz's view Silesia is the "fifth point of the compass" of the title, a place that both exists, and at the same time does not. During the past hundred plus years this region has functioned within the sphere of all sorts of state bodies, without ever being fully colonised, but without ever gaining any sort of autonomy either. Time and time again, Silesia's terrain has been ploughed up by "history unleashed", complicating the fates of the Silesians. *The Fifth Point of the Compass* is inter alia about how difficult it is to be a Silesian. However, it is not just a veritable mine of knowledge on Silesia, but a universal story about struggling to cope with being different.

Robert Ostaszewski  
Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones

**LUCJAN** and Alojz – what fine people! It was plain to see neither of them had the skills I had learned with age. But my toughening up to life came from my nomadic work. I am an ant adapted to living in a dog kennel. I was helped by my ignorance, because sometimes it pays to know less. Sometimes stupider people are happier – they don't notice things because they don't know about them.

In terms of class I was in the middle: Lucjan was a doctor, Alojz was a worker and I was just a technician. But they were both intellectuals, not in the general sense, not by reason of education or the professions they followed, but by way of life and interests. They lived an intense inner life, not too common round here. By their own effort they had moulded themselves into idealists and, to my mind, as a result they had difficulties in communicating with their own environment. They were incapable of tying their fortunes in with the lives of their brothers, colleagues, parents and grandparents. The world had ceased to agree with them. Though I am not sure if that was really the case. I wasn't here for twenty years, so I do not want to make judgements.

Maybe their heads had gone too far into the clouds and distanced them from their own nation? Maybe they had started to think independently too early, and as a result they had got stuck in a spiritual grind with no way out? After that maybe they were unable to turn off their chosen path, and the resulting individuality they had worked hard to achieve became a source of complications? Who knows? They suppressed everything inside themselves until it came to a head, in other words a crisis, and then all it took was a light breeze or a child's finger to topple them. ...

The example of Albin Lompa eloquently proves that old Lompa should never have asked himself his own question. How many educated heads had chewed over his question but never managed to come up with an answer? For there are questions that have no answers, but they can always be asked. Lompa was, as I see it, a poet manqué, except that he hadn't found the right term to describe himself. He hadn't discovered the paint brush like his friend Ociepka, who was tormented by a similar question. The written word was beyond Lompa's range; he spoke German, because he had been forced to go to a German school for eight years, but for everyday purposes he used the local dialect, and that was enough for him. Whenever he peeped into a Polish book, for the main part he was unable to work out what it was about. All he had left was his own spoken word. Who knows if he'd have been understood if he'd ever gone to Poland with it? I had that experience for myself.

Ociepka had an advantage over him, because instead of relying on earthworms, he relied on dwarfs and fairies. In carbon fossils he had espied the impressions of antediluvian forests and creatures, conjured up all manner of reptiles in his imagination, reached for his brushes and started painting his pagan fantasies. Thanks to this he was able to ward off obsession. He spat out his metaphysical question in the pictures, to his own credit and to the benefit of others. Both of them, Lompa and Ociepka, were haunted people. Their fantasising revealed the beauty of their hyperawareness, in other words the extras residing in each man's noddle. They were innate philosophers: fine ones, because they were free and drained of the sea of parish mediocrity.

With Lucjan and Alojz it was totally different. In the case of my deceased friends we are dealing with people who thought with care, from the first class at primary school, from the first book read in Polish. They entered the world of the written word in Polish, were inculcated with it and had cultivated their own "self" – or something of the kind – that ceased to fit within the lining of their brains, within the anguish of the present day, because it was part of their ill-fitting flesh.

At the point where spirit and flesh came into contact, a tension arose that they had ceased to control. They did not know how to comprehend it. It was as if they had nailed themselves up from the inside and become exiles among their own kind, despite being liked – positively adored by their environment. They did not cut themselves off from people on an everyday basis, which was in any case not possible, because Lucjan was a doctor and Alojz a worker,

as I have already said, but mention again here, so there can be no lack of clarity about whom we are dealing with.

Their situation was not the same as the one described in so many books, where if the hero has a wife, she has cancer, and thanks to these or other trials he ends up in the nick, and then the cancer and the nick mesmerise the reader, because here's this, and there's that, everyone's poor, and then bits of life go by: cancer operations and interrogations by the secret police, or something of the kind, and what's left in the person is a bloody delusion, the hallucination that lies between cancer and the nick. And nothing happens! The heart doesn't even miss a beat. As everyone knows, man's greatest tendency is to yield easily to others, and it comes from the goodness of one's heart. And from selflessness, which lies within each person in a thin layer, like a seam of diamonds deep underground in South Africa. My writing might be different, because it will be holding onto a Silesian banister.

We people in Szopienice, Roździeń and hereabouts come into the world anchored in a tough grind: in steelworks and mines at the point where Germany and Poland meet, within the culture of both this and that side. Lucjan and Alojz carried this stigma inside them, but in contrast to their fathers and mothers, who were educated at German Volksschule, they were the first generation for centuries to get a taste of Polish schooling, Polish history and culture. Before they had got as far as the final year, the war broke out and everything fell back into the same old rut. Soon after German army life swept them away.

Once again the soup was made out of our bones. As the Germans conquered the world, we were made to slog our guts out and were conscripted into the Wehrmacht. Our labour and our lives were the cheapest goods in the Reich. For it has to be understood that Upper Silesia is like a steep downcast between two steep mountains. We were always at the bottom of the abyss. Lucjan and Alojz tried their best to battle their way upwards unaided. We've had so much of it that they wilfully left this world. They're not here any more.

Our geographical position condemned the local people to efforts beyond measure. We became a German colony. Working for yourself always bore little fruit. And that is still the case today. Our labour was always Sisyphean, in other words it never bore fruit. But Sisyphus was thrown into that abyss as a punishment. Why on earth were we?

*Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones*



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Photo: Grzegorz Press

Agnieszka Drotkiewicz (born 1981) is a writer and journalist. She has written three novels, and last year won a grant from the Literarische Colloquium Berlin.

The narrator of Drotkiewicz's novel is Dr Karolina Pogorska, a young academic at the Institute for Culture in Crisis, who talks about her current life. About "now".

Not much is happening in "now": Karolina gives university classes (in which she does not believe), reads books, seeks a partner and looks at her life from the perspective of lack – lack of meaning, faith and company.

She is not entirely alone in this sense of lack. Everyone in the novel is trying to become complete, but they are all depressives who have various ways of filling the gaps in the budget of meaning: the granny has turned to natural medicine, the mother to thrift bordering on meanness, and the daughter to academic study, which is meant to help her to understand what it's all about. The men are similar: the father has taken to filling his life with fictional journeys around the atlas; Szymon, a friend from the Institute, settles for frustrated monologues over the morning paper. Each of them wants to be someone else, while remaining themselves. Each of them wants to be with someone, but at the same time on their own. None of them wants to be lonely, but nor do any of them wish to renounce their right to reclusive autonomy.

Thus we could regard this novel as a record of late-modern melancholy, which causes human company to be as desirable as it is unsettling, existential rituals as sought after as defied, and emancipatory gains as obvious as they are dangerous. For Drotkiewicz's heroine emancipation means being condemned to freedom, the endless necessity of making choices and the

threat of loneliness. Karolina give the impression of living life after life, after clear meaning has expired; she struggles with herself, so she would prefer to share this ordeal with someone else; she fans the heat of passion inside herself, but the fire is hardly enough for her intelligent imagination; she is capable of using lots of concepts to analyze the world, but at the same time regards none of the critical languages as her own. Karolina has the feeling that semiotics and existence – in other words the ability to interpret life and life itself – have irrevocably parted ways. That is why her "now", when good, is always as short as relief, and when bad, is like a week-long migraine.

*Przemysław Czapliński*  
Translated by *Antonia Lloyd-Jones*

**S**o here's the score: a pitch-dark morning, low atmospheric pressure, a small, tidily swept room in the loft, a modestly but neatly dressed girl, and a kettle heating up on a spirit stove. Happy people off to work. I've seen this movie so many times before. But why aren't you here to follow my every move, as I wash and dry my tea cup and porridge bowl, as I sweep up the crumbs and check the windows are properly shut before leaving?

Where are you, you poor thing, and why aren't you here to watch me? Why aren't you watching as I oil the wheels of life? Admit it – I deserve admiration as I heroically get up in the pitch dark to take on this time of day. So why aren't you here to witness my discipline – to be a silent witness, and a little ashamed of your own idleness – why aren't you following my every move, why aren't you painting in the background for the person that I am? You've got to admit I'm the ultimate in courage, I'm all the kettles and espresso machines heating up in the dark, I'm the steam condensing on the windows of the buses taking people from Marki and Czarna Struga to Wileński Station, I'm the sound of footsteps on an icy sidewalk. I'm the beautiful dissident from the Soviet movie, the girl whose one and only dream is to catch up on sleep. I think she was a teacher – like me! She couldn't work professionally, so she had to earn a living doing several part-time jobs as a cleaner and janitor. A wealthy, prominent man fell in love with her and tried to seduce her with beluga caviar. One day, the beautiful dissident decided to get in the limo that was waiting for her, but as soon as her head hit the leather upholstery she instantly fell asleep. And the prominent man found that really moving. So tired, so modest. Just like me! I've seen that movie so many times.

Why aren't you here? My poor thing, my best friend, we were so happy together! Like self-awareness meeting another self-awareness on the road and being amazed how much they're alike. Wasn't that quite precious? Two old maids in exile. Warsaw, Kabaty subway station, the end of the line. Excluded women live outside the city center. We were excluded, and we stood shoulder to shoulder with the excluded. I'd bring you what really mattered from the city's blood stream. So just tell me, we were happy, weren't we? Two old maids skipping rope in the Kabaty wilderness. In the warm, blood-rich placenta of their shared apartment.

But I am alive, you could say that – I am alive, even though to be alive you need an Other. How else can you check up on yourself? Some people internalize necessity and law, but that's so capitalist, so right-wing. Or rather, liberal. I'm me, not Robinson Crusoe. In fact I am a bit of a Robinson Crusoe – you only have to take a look at the neatly pushed back sofa and the sharply folded bedclothes shut away in the closet. I am a bit of a Robinson Crusoe – I'm just about to lock up my nice clean hideout, pull on a hat, gather up my Douglas perfumery shiny carrier bag full of books and leave. I'll take tiny steps along the icy sidewalk on my little hooves. I won't turn around, I won't even look at the Kabaty forest, so tempting in all its lethargy and gloom, steaming with mist. I'll clutch my bag tight, so the falling snow won't wet the shiny surface. The frost will glue up my eyelashes, but I'll keep walking across the Kabaty moon-scape, across the Tesco's parking lot. I'll breathe in the atomized scent of pale buns coming through the frost. I'll keep going to the subway station, passing a lively group of retired folk with walking poles. Every Wednesday at 8 a.m. they rendez-vous here for a field-and-forest walk. Hiking with poles, also known as Nordic Walking, is a pleasant sport, suitable for young people as well as those of advanced age. So which of us is a Robinson Crusoe? I don't think it's me. We were happy together, we really were!

So why aren't you here to shut the door behind me?

When the door isn't open, that means it's shut. Simple, huh? No, it's not quite so simple. I'm not so sure of that. I press down the handle and pull it toward me. I hang on the handle. It's shut. I wait for the elevator. Meanwhile, I check if it's shut, because I could be wrong, couldn't I? I get in the elevator. I take the elevator back up. It's shut. Probably. Maybe. I'm not sure. I hang on the handle. Finally I lie down on the doormat. I haven't the strength. I haven't the strength to take on the thought that I might not have shut the door. Or that I haven't shut myself inside me. I don't know how people can live with such a huge burden of responsibility as shutting the door. I shudder with fear at the thought that I could have had a job

as a storekeeper and had to shut the store at night. All by myself! Yet some people do that. Once I saw a woman shutting up a store selling Isis cosmetics. And she didn't even tug at the handle to check if it was really shut. But shutting yourself inside you is one of the greatest pleasures I know. Being quiet, not feeling any physical need to talk about yourself, or tell everyone: "I don't feel good", or "I've got a headache". Shutting yourself inside you and having no needs. Let's not need ourselves – how wonderful that would be.

In a while I'll get up and check if I shut the door, then I'll get in the elevator. In a while I'll pass the group of retired folk hiking with poles, if they aren't already deep in the gloomy, steaming Kabaty forest. But for now I'm lying against the apartment door with my face on the rubber mat (yesterday I beat it and scrubbed it with an old toothbrush, but even so I can feel grit on my cheek). In a while the day will proceed according to schedule, but right now I don't have to be productive. Right now I'm lying here, and it even feels rather pleasant.

I live on the fifth floor, the top one. There's snow hitting the sloping loft window. The neighbors to the left have already gone to work, and the child-minder probably won't take the kids for a walk today. So until six p.m. no one's going to come in here, except maybe a lost delivery guy. So maybe, maybe I'll take the day off work? It's so nice just lying in the stairwell, in my coat, all made up and ready to take on the challenges of the modern world, and yet silent, and yet passive, and yet outside of it all. As I lie here, there's nothing bothering me. There are various processes going on in my body, the porridge is being digested, somewhere inside the apartment the cellphone charger I accidentally left plugged in is drawing electricity (it'll have to be paid for), and nine subway stops from here, at the University my students are awarding me points from zero to six for "attitude to the subject", but as I lie here, I couldn't care less.

*Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones*



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Photo: Adrian Fichmann/EMG

Jacek Dukaj (born 1974) is one of the most admired, award-winning writers of the younger generation. He primarily writes science fiction, as well as some fantasy, and is the first Polish winner of the European Literary Award (2009).

*The Crow* is an unusual fable full of violence and cruelty about the kind of martial law that was imposed in Poland in mid-December 1981 until the mid-July 1983. In this period, the country was ruled by the Military Council of National Salvation, known in Polish by its acronym WRON – its similarity to the word *wrona*, meaning “crow”, made it a favourite tool for opposition satire. It is for this reason that Dukaj has chosen the crow to represent a force of evil in this book of the same name.

Although the main character is a small boy, and the work is modelled on stories for children, this is a magical fairytale aimed at adult readers. Who is the Crow of the title? He is a large black bird who kidnaps little Adam’s father. The big bird barges his way into the family’s flat, and then the Corvine Corps take the boy’s other relatives away. Adam has been saved by a neighbour called Mr Concrete. Together, though losing each other several times along the way, they roam the gloomy city in search of Adam’s family. Sometimes the boy flies above the city, carried by the Flier. Adam’s adventures are a grim phantasmagoria. The city is under the control of the iron Bitchbulls (monsters that look like huge dogs), the Evilones (mechanical dragons that wave seven truncheons each) and the Chokermotors (enormous whales that swallow people), at every step there are Snarks and Spykes lying in wait, and the trees and roofs are crowded with nasty big birds ready at any moment to attack the Positionists, also known as the Resistant. In Polish, these names are puns based on recog-

nisable figures and objects associated with the martial law era, such as the zomo riot police and the UB secret agents.

Dukaj’s fable opens with an epigraph taken from Lewis Carroll. And in fact this book has much in common with *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. Firstly, there is a lot of Carrollian linguistic inventiveness here, not just making up words, which is one of the attractions of *The Crow*. There are also some comical rhymes that interrupt the story. Secondly and more importantly, like Alice, Adam wants at any price to get to the bottom of the adults’ mysterious world, naturally in order to expose the rules that govern it. However, the author’s intentions are not entirely clear. *The Crow* not only pitches into the still live debate about martial law, but could also be read as a form of artistic excess specific to Jacek Dukaj. In it we can see an extremely refined literary game, a Dukajan exercise in fantasy and style, but we can also ascribe a wide variety of political meanings to it. Without doubt it is an impressive, important work, not just for aesthetic reasons.

Dariusz Nowacki

Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones

**HE** woke up again. Something terrible was happening in the house, he knew it. The noises had woken him up – but he only recognised them a short time later, as he sat up in bed and rubbed his eyes.

A window pane had broken – what he had heard in his sleep was the smash of glass shattering. Something heavy had fallen to the floor too, and Mummy had screamed in terror. All this had been happening in his parents’ room.

He jumped out from under the duvet and toddled across the hall. Cold air shrouded his feet. He started to sniff again.

The door of his parents’ room was ajar. A light was on in there. The noise hadn’t stopped. Adam recognised Uncle Kazek’s voice. Uncle Kazek was saying some very bad words.

Adam cautiously put his head close to a crack in the door.

In the broken window, on the smashed frame sat a huge Crow, exactly like the one Adam had dreamed about: black, shiny and terrifying.

The Crow spread its wings and shielded the entire wall, from the bookcase to the shelving. In one taloned foot it was clutching Adam’s bleeding father, while with the other it latched on to the windowsill. Raising and violently dropping its metre-long beak, like a sharp, heavy pickaxe, it stabbed Adam’s mother with it. She was trying to save his father by pulling him free, but she couldn’t do it. The huge bird had hit her, and she fell to the floor, screaming with pain.

The Crow opened its beak. It shook some red drops off it and let out an ear-splitting squawk, until the echo went round the estate.

The curtains and blinds flapped in tatters around the Crow. An icy wind gusted fountains of snow into the house. The ceiling light swayed, and the crooked shadow of the Crow went leaping across the faded wallpaper.

Adam rushed to his mother’s aid, but Uncle Kazek caught him by the arm. The boy tried to pull free, shouting.

The Crow turned its black head towards him. Its huge, flat eyes, like coal-black glass, stared at him.

Adam shivered with cold and gripped Uncle Kazek’s pyjamas tightly. The pitch-black eyes must have been emitting invisible rays that paralyse, because Adam couldn’t move a step, either backwards or forwards. The bird’s dead, ice-cold gaze had frozen him to the floor.

“SON!” cawed the Crow.

Bang! went one of the light bulbs as it burst.

Suddenly the Crow folded its wings, tugged at Adam’s unconscious father, took him and plummeted into the night.

It left behind a whirl of black feathers, white snow and strips of paper ripped out of books. Papers, documents and torn-out pages lay scattered all over the room.

Adam and Uncle Kazek rushed to the window. The frosty gale made their eyes water. Adam tried to climb onto the windowsill, but Uncle Kazek held him back, and just pointed to a shadow getting smaller against the night sky, high above the tower block, above the roofs and cranes.

Uncle Kazek and Granny carried Mummy into the other room. Uncle ran off to use the phone, while Granny tried to see to Mummy. The Crow had stabbed her above the heart. A red stain was spreading on her nightdress.

Mummy wasn’t opening her eyes.

Adam stood in the corner and chewed his fingers.

The neighbour who had a phone appeared.

“They’ll be here any moment,” he said.

Granny looked round for the terrified Adam.

“Please take him with you, Mr Concrete.”

Mr Concrete hastily slammed the door of his flat shut. He turned all the locks and put on the chains.

Once he had caught his breath, he cautiously raised the peephole cover and peered through the glass into the staircase.

“They’re coming,” he whispered.

“Who?”

“Them.”

And he put a finger to his lips.

Adam pressed his ear to the door.

First the wind came up the staircase. Shutters and casings banged.

Doormats scraped. Downstairs the door into the staircase slammed. Then the clatter of several pairs of heavy boots rang out: THUMP-THUMP, THUMP-THUMP. They were running, but as if they weren’t in a hurry at all. Floor by floor, ever nearer. Instantly Adam tore his ear from the door. They didn’t stop but ran on up – to Adam’s flat.

Mr Concrete put his finger to his lips again. They heard Granny’s screams. Uncle Kazek was also saying something very loud.

The footsteps starting getting closer again. They were running back down the stairs. THUMP-THUMP, THUMP-THUMP. Once again the staircase door crashed shut downstairs.

And there was silence.

Mr Concrete opened the door and looked outside. Adam nipped past under his arm and was the first to rush upstairs, to his home.

There wasn’t any home left. They had broken, smashed, ripped, tipped up, emptied, shattered, scattered, pierced, wrecked and ruined.

Adam peeped into his little sister’s cot. Empty.

There was no trace of Mummy, Granny or Uncle Kazek either.

All the windows were open or smashed. Wind and snow roared through the ruin.

Mr Concrete and Adam blundered about on clothes, pieces of paper and bits of appliances and furniture.

“Where’s Mummy?”

“They’ve taken them.”

Adam climbed onto the windowsill. Mr Concrete grabbed him by the collar.

On the snow below the block they could see the tracks of enormous dog paws with a deep tread. Next to the dustbins stood a man in a black coat with the five-metre spike of an antenna rising from the top of his skull. He was turning his head in all directions, and the steel spike was drawing circles and eights in the night.

“The Bitchbulls took them,” Mr Concrete grumbled and rumbled, pressing Adam to him with a fat arm. To the boy it sounded as if a cement-mixer had started turning deep in the bald neighbour’s chest.

“They’ve left a Spyke. Watch out, little one, or it’ll see us and tell all to the Crow.”

Adam shuddered.

“It’s c-c-cold.”

They went back to Mr Concrete’s flat.

Mr Concrete made some tea. He poured Something Stronger into his own glass from a bottle. He sipped it and exhaled.

“What’s your name, kid?”

“Adam,” sobbed Adam.

The neighbour held out a whopping great hand for him to shake.

“John Stanley Wenceslas Concrete.”

Adam only just managed to squeeze his thumb and index finger.

“Why have you got such big hands?” he asked.

“With these hands,” boomed Mr Concrete, “with these hands I used to build!”

“What did you build?”

“Houses! Streets! We built factories! Cities!”

“Aha.”

Mr Concrete went back upstairs to fetch some warm clothes for Adam.

*Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones*



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Photo: Katarzyna Krawczyk

Grażyna Plebanek (born 1967) is a journalist and author of four novels. For several years she lived in Sweden, and she now lives in Brussels.

Jonathan and Megi are Poles, but their nicknames are designed to fit the new, global world, where there are no borders, and national identity is becoming a matter of secondary importance. They live in Brussels, where she works as a high-ranking official within the European Union, and he is a writer, who has to take on the domestic chores, including caring for their two small children. But the role of a house-husband is not enough for Jonathan, so he gets himself work as a lecturer on creative writing. Along with his adult students, he plumbs the depths of the emotions, but meanwhile he is unable to cope with his own. And that is thanks to the beautiful journalist Andrea, with whom he is madly in love. While the man gives in to his feelings without thinking about the consequences, for the women this affair is a means to various ends. Andrea longs to have a child, but Megi, who knows what is going on, wants to protect her family and erase the stigma of the betrayal that she herself committed years ago.

In *Illegal Liaisons* Grażyna Plebanek explores a whole range of human relationships. She examines the mores of international society, without omitting the question of discrimination against "new" Europeans and favouritism shown to "old" ones. She also asks what it means today to be a woman and to be a man, and how far both sexes have moved away from the roles ascribed to them by culture, and investigates the connections between literature and life, seeing the former as a tool that can be used to sort out an unstable "self" and restore order to one's value system. Yet her main focus is on explor-

ing the essence of love – immoral love that bonds people who are officially tied to someone else, but who cannot live without each other. Their passion is depicted openly – this is one of very few novels by a Polish female writer in which sex is described without a shadow of prudery. As well as the bold sex scenes, oozing with sensuality, and the superbly constructed portraits of the main characters, the narrative style is also notable. It is dense, while also being entirely devoid of mawkish sentimentality, full of well-aimed irony and equally well chosen poetic tropes. *Illegal Liaisons* is in every respect a challenging novel, not just for Polish literature.

Marta Mizuro

Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones

**AS** he thought about his first meeting with Andrea, Jonathan tried to conjure up the details: the well-kept apartment block which had a stairwell with a stained-glass window, and inside an enormous hallway that ended in a garden. The number of square metres was staggering, as ever in Brussels. Unfortunately, the large reception room looked like a toilet bowl suffering from an attack of dried-on bits of shit, and Jonathan thought how happily he could have scraped off all the knick-knacks and spawn of souvenirs with a piece of wire wool.

He took a glass of champagne from the tray proffered by a waiter and merged into the crowd. The people standing in small groups in the middle of the room were dressed in suits; some of them were in jeans, yet Jonathan sensed there was something wrong with this casual manner of theirs. He was just about to share this observation with Megi, who had come up to him with a glass in her hand, but before he had a chance she had taken him by the arm and steered him towards the nearest group.

“This is my husband, Jonathan,” she presented him.

“Nice to meet you,” said Jonathan, squeezing a thin man’s hand.

“This is Ian – he deals with contacts with the European Parliament for the employers’ association.”

“Very nice...”

“This is my husband, Jonathan. Jonathan, meet Peter. Peter is the spokesperson for...”

“Aha...”

“My name’s Megi, this is my husband Jonathan. We’ve been in Brussels for over a month. No, we haven’t seen the Atomium yet. Jonathan? Have you already met Margit? She’s the deputy spokesperson for...”

“For...?”

“At the European Commission.”

“In the European Commission...”

“From the Commission...”

“Excuse me a moment, I’ve got an urgent call,” said Jonathan, stepping back and reaching into his jacket pocket.

He leaned against a table laid with hors d’oeuvres. Here the social blight hit him. A private apartment and a waiter, people in jeans, but not at their ease, a host with a fish-like handshake and a hostess with a face like one of Cinderella’s sisters. Were these people having fun, or working?

He grabbed a carrot and gave it a quick bite.

“You’re not from the Commission, are you?” he heard an affirmative sounding question.

There was a girl he didn’t know standing next to him.

“I guess that’s plain to see,” she sighed.

She laughed and held out a hand.

“Andrea.”

Much later, he noticed that her hands were different from the rest of her body – they were wide, as if older, which she masked with a careful manicure. At the time he didn’t notice it, because Andrea had only just emerged from the foam of alien people. Tall and slender, she turned to take a canapé. She had small, round buttocks that filled him with a desire to fondle them.

“Don’t worry about these people,” she smiled, pointing at the oscillating human circle. “See the outer layer – they’re all trainees...”

Jonathan peered at some twenty-something-year-olds turned to face the middle of the circle.

“...the ones nearer the centre are the higher-ranking officials. You see the bald guy on the right?”

“With the skull shaped like a missile?”

“He’s sharpening his teeth on the post of ministerial advisor. And the fat one with the muff-like hair is lying in wait for the recently vacated seat of a colleague who’s been promoted to another department.”

“What about the one they’re all looking at?” asked Jonathan, pointing to the middle of the circle, where a tall, thin man with grey hair was standing. The charisma emanating from him could be felt at a distance.

“He’s the Commissioner for Justice, Liberty and Security’s head of office,” smiled Andrea.

“So he’s all those people’s boss?” said Jonathan, confused.

“He’s their god.”

The circle had just started to reshuffle, and the head of office withdrew, pressing the hands that were held out towards him in a farewell gesture.

Andrea glanced at her watch.

“It’s been nice to meet you,” she said.

Jonathan felt a sudden tug inside, a child’s voice, crying: “I want!” Maybe it was because of the trace of a Swedish accent coming through in her almost perfect English?

“What do you do?” he uttered in desperation.

“I work for Swedish television. What about you?”

“I write.”

“Articles?”

“Books.”

“Ooooh!”

Jonathan shoved his hands into his pockets. He loved that sort of reaction. He knew from experience that he should enjoy them to the full, because they usually preceded other, less desirable ones, that started with the question:

“What sort of thing do you write?”

“Fairytale.”

He usually took the “loss of countenance” moment manfully, but this time he added in a non-committal way: “I’ve recently had an offer to run a creative writing course in Brussels.”

“Ooooh!”

“But for financial reasons I really ought to try for a job at the Commission...”

“The course sounds more interesting.”

“You wouldn’t want to know how much they pay.”

“You wouldn’t want to do something you don’t like.”

He glanced at Andrea and saw more of her: brown hair and a lovely shapely mouth.

“Look at that pâté,” she said; reluctantly he shifted his gaze to the table. “Some people really like it.”

“It’s foie gras.”

“I suspect you’d feel like those overfed geese at the Commission.”

He took his eyes off the pâté and looked at her again. A group of officials were making their final promises to call each other, and suddenly he was lost for words. The silence between them thickened.

“Are you...” Jonathan began, but just then someone came and stood beside them.

They both turned around. The Commissioner’s head of office was standing next to them.

“Simon, meet Jonathan,” said Andrea, a professional smile appearing on her face. “Jonathan is a writer and lectures on creative writing. Jonathan, this is Simon...”

The man’s handshake was energetic. Although Jonathan was no expert on male good looks, he could see that this one, though over fifty, put most other men in the shade. And it didn’t have much to do with his high-up position.

“Andrea, time for us to go,” said the man in beautiful English.

“...Simon,” Andrea concluded, “my man.”

*Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones*



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Photo: Jakub Ostalowski

Wojciech Albiński (born 1935) is writer, geodetic surveyor by profession, author of four collections of short stories about Africa to which he emigrated in the mid '60s.

Wojciech Albiński took up writing relatively late in life, at the age of 68, immediately surprising everyone with the maturity of his writing skills; and with his first collection of short stories *Kalahari* he was nominated for the Nike Literature Prize. As it happens he is a writer who continues to surprise; after a series of five books exploring the exotic territories of Africa, he has returned to Poland and the days of his early childhood. These early years coincided with World War 2 which Albiński spent in a little town near Warsaw. His autobiographical story, divided into 29 short episodes, begins in the summer of 1939 with the narrator's, little Wojtek's family, not greatly worried by the spectre of war which hung over Europe, preparing to leave for their holidays. We now know how that summer ended in tragedy but the protagonist, a small child, does not realise what is truly happening around him. He has too short a past to compare bygone happy years with the drama of the present. He nevertheless tries to be a child who treats life as an adventure. Naivety forms a natural protection for Wojtek but the images which he, as a mediator, conveys to the reader do, of course, give rise to horror. One cannot, therefore, remain unaffected by his story about how he managed to escape being shot by an SS-man, or about how a handicapped little girl was saved from a round-up for fun. Equally moving is Albiński's reconstruction of the image of Italian soldiers a few years after the war in 1950, as they return from a prisoner-of-war camp in Russia. Images of the war make up the core of the book although the author also goes back to both an earlier and

a more recent past which stretches to the moment he solves the mystery of how his father, arrested by the Germans, died. The solution is elusive because the now adult narrator admits that his young age had made it impossible for him to get to those who witnessed the passing of the person closest to him.

*Achtung! Banditen!* Is not only an image of the war as seen through the eyes of a child or a record of how he emerged from the trauma and entered another, new communist reality. It is also a book which makes us think about what constitutes memory and about how to rationalise what remains in that memory. And this we do in order to live.

Marta Mizuro  
Translated by Danusia Stok

**“THAT** Herr Hitler allows himself too much...” said grandma, spreading a thick layer of freshly whipped cream over the strawberry cake. “I know those characters... You don’t nip their horns on time and they’ll clamber all over their neighbours.”

Grandma knew about people; she easily recognised what sort of a person they were and their true intentions. She knew when to scare away young men in time whose flirtations did not augur well for her daughters. She even frightened a few of them too soon. Maids she picked according to their decency and neat appearance. And she was never wrong.

Tea was served in the garden; the July afternoon was very hot. The wooden table wobbled and tea spilled from the saucers. The beverage ran down the sides of the cups and I waited for grandma to say: “And how are we supposed to drink it now?” Aunt Urszula, already a young lady, held the table still as I placed stones under its legs.

Like previous summers, we were going on holiday to Swarzewo. The cottage had already been rented from the Kashube, and the two bedrooms and one living room were waiting for us. There was a smell of smoked eel. Aunt Urszula had finished secondary school in Warsaw that year and had been planning this trip to the seaside for a month. She arranged her swimsuits and summer dresses in her suitcase; she took them out in order to iron them again.

“We’re leaving tomorrow at eleven o’clock in the evening,” mother reminded us. “We’ll be in Swarzewo by morning... And we’re taking Urszula as agreed... Can you hear me, mama?”

But grandma was roaming far away in her thoughts. That Herr Hitler would not leave her in peace.

“I heard his speech in the radio... The tone of his voice does not speak well of him. It’s harsh and full of hatred. Why doesn’t somebody tell him to calm down? Why don’t they take him to task? Show him there are limits? You can go so far and no further!”

“He’s a dictator. He won’t dare to attack. That’s what most of them think at the Ministry...” – my mother repeated what she heard from my father.

Grandma recalled another time. The Great War had only recently spent itself. Victorious armies, full of pride, turning marauders after several defeats. Women with hunting weapons lurking on the thresholds; waiting for the relief troops of the blue brigade.

This melancholy of grandmas, these musings troubled us all a great deal. Nobody dared to reprimand or forbid her to worry unnecessarily. What was grandma thinking about? I had no idea. But her older daughters knew.

In 1914 the Tsar’s authorities ordered the family to evacuate to the east, all the way to Tver. Police constables kept order at the stations and Cossack units galloped across the town in close formation. Letters were still getting to Warsaw and Masses for His Majesty were being celebrated every day.

In Tver the revolution caught the family unawares. Who belonged to the whites, who to the reds? Were the Kirghiz red and the Tadjik white? Or the other way round? Cut down by machine-guns, people and horses fell. White and black keys spilled from pianos thrown out on the pavements.

When everything calmed down, it was the turn of the Committees. The Poles wanted to return to their country so they also formed a Committee. My grandfather stood at its head.

Grandma could not remember whether it was Dzerzhinsky who came to Tver or my grandpa who went for talks in Moscow. Suffice that Dzerzhinsky treated favourably the petition that a train be allocated to the Poles.

Lists were made of those who were being repatriated and the transport was quickly filling. People were coming from distant villages as well as from places of penal servitude and banishment. They begged for the transport to wait for those who were still on their way, that there would somehow be room for everyone. “You are going, you are staying, we’re not taking this family because they’ve got too many children”, somebody had to decide. When the train pulled away, those left at the station ran after it. And then it turned out that if everybody had crammed in a little more there would still have been a few places.

The news of the train’s imminent arrival quickly got around. At god-forsaken stations, in the middle of open fields families camped out, full of hope. People stood on the rail tracks, jumping off at the last moment. My grandpa and a few other countrymen rode in the engine cabin. When they saw groups of women hurrying along, they put a nagan revolver to the engine-driver’s head and ordered him to stop the train. Nobody dared to refuse them a place in the carriage anymore. They got rid of the Russian crew at the transshipping station where they stocked up on water, and from then on drove the train themselves.

Grandma could not remember how long the journey took and what they ate at the time. One morning, when it was still dark, the station stopped at a large station. They could hear the steam engine puffing and carriages being shifted. Some people were banging at the door; the passengers peered outside reluctantly.

The sign on the building announced: “Warsaw East”. They noticed armed posts on the platform and soldiers in unfamiliar uniforms on duty. Somebody asked:

“Just look... Are they eagles on their hats?”

“They certainly are...”

Shouting burst out in the train. Whoever could do so, pushed towards the door.

“Why are you crying, people?” – The soldiers were surprised.

The men hugged them; the women kissed them. And these warriors went from wagon to wagon – everywhere the same thing happened. They could not understand.

“Mama, mama!” called Aunt Urszula. “What’s the matter?”

Grandma roused herself from her reverie.

“I got lost in thought... Do you like the cake? I was worried the cream might have gone off.”

I was glad Aunt Urszula was going on holiday with us. The weather forecast said it would be sunny. The house in Swarzewo was close to the beach and a fishing boat awaited us.

*Translated by Danusia Stok*



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# ANTONINA ŻABIŃSKA

## PEOPLE AND ANIMALS

Antonina Żabińska (1908–1971) was the author of books about animals and wife of the director of Warsaw Zoo from 1929 to 1950. In 1965 she and her husband were both awarded the title "Righteous Among Nations".

*People and Animals* is the story of a place where animals had people's names, and people were disguised with animal nicknames. This place was the Warsaw zoo during the Second World War and the German occupation. Its founder and director, Jan Żabiński, and his wife Antonina, née Erdman, saved about three hundred Jews brought out of the Warsaw ghetto. Until a better refuge could be found for them, they hid them in empty animal cages, underground tunnels and other hiding places, finally in their own villa, which stood within the grounds of the zoo, which had been destroyed by German bombardments in September 1939. Once the surviving animals had been requisitioned, it had been changed into a piggery, a fox farm and allotments. In 1965 the Żabińskis were awarded Yad Vashem's "Righteous Among Nations" medal.

This occupation-era adventure was described by Diane Ackerman in her book, *The Zookeeper's Wife*, which reached number thirteen on the New York Times' list of bestsellers. These memoirs (first published by Mrs Żabińska in 1968) cover the period from 1939 to 1949, and describe the destruction of the zoo, efforts to save it, and finally its post-war rebuilding. They give us an extremely interesting picture of the daily life under occupation of two people who had quite frequent brushes with death and who always carried vials of cyanide on them. The services rendered by the Żabińskis, who had two children, were only a small part of their resistance activities. Their house was an underground contact point and also served as a hiding place for weapons and people involved in the resistance

movement. As a Home Army soldier, Jan Żabiński also fought in the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, was wounded and ended up in German captivity. Antonina remained with the children on the right bank of the River Vistula – the last few months of the war in particular were rich in a series of dramatic episodes, including the time when some SS-men staged the murder of her small son before his mother's eyes. But it was just a joke, and the victim was little Rysio's pet cockerel... As well as stories about people, these memoirs by Mrs Żabińska – who was just as eminent a biologist as her husband, and was a precursor of animal psychology – also include lots of tales about the favourite household pets in this "Noah's Ark", as one of the refugees who hid there, Rachela Auerbach, called the Żabińskis' home. Antonina Żabińska also wrote several children's books, the heroes of which were the creatures in her care.

Marek Zaleski  
Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones

**BY** a strange twist of fate it was thanks to our friendship with the Tenenbaums that we met someone who indirectly and not entirely knowingly helped us to have more regular contact with the ghetto.

The beginning of this story caused me palpitations. One Sunday in the summer of 1941 I saw a German limousine outside our house. Out of the limousine came a German in plain clothes, who rang the doorbell and moments later entered the dining room.

“Does the former director of the zoo live here?”

“That’s right.”

“I am Ziegler. How jolly it is here!” he said, pointing towards the study, where the piano was frantically belting out a couplet from La Belle H el ene, “Au pays cretain”. It was a signal that informed all the “illegal persons” that they should get into their hiding places, because danger was approaching.

“Oh, yes, ours is a musical home... We love Offenbach.”

“A pleasant, but shallow composer,” replied the German. “Though one must admit the Jews are generally very talented.”

We glanced at each other: where was this heading? What did he want?

“You will be surprised,” he began, surely noticing our confusion, “but I have authorisation from Doctor Tenenbaum to inspect the insect collection that is located here.”

Another split second went by, but what a painful one! Something had to be said at once in answer – in a natural way, without giving the man cause to think we were afraid of a subterfuge on his part.

“Yes... Professor Tenenbaum did leave his collections with us when he moved into the ghetto... we have a dry room, central heating... you understand: in a cold, damp place they could be ruined.”

“I know that very well – I myself am an entomologist, though more of an amateur. Here I serve as manager of the Jewish Arbeitsamt. I am being treated by Doctor Tenenbaum, and I often see her husband, the professor... I sometimes take him out of the city by car... he looks for his insects in roadside ditches. He is a very learned man.”

We listened in amazement. Was it provocation? But to what end? He could take away the collections whenever he liked anyway. Irena Tenenbaum, the professor’s daughter, had risked her life to bring them to us. Eight hundred glass cases are impossible to hide. Incidentally, the collections survived: before the Uprising we took them to the museum on Wilcza Street, and in 1946 Miss Tenenbaum bequeathed them to the Zoological Institute... So we invited Ziegler to view the collection.

Once he had got his hands on the exquisitely beautiful beetles and butterflies, the manager of the Arbeitsamt forgot about the world outside.

“Wunderbar! Wunderbar!” he muttered. “What a collection! How much work has gone into it! And now...” he shook his hand, clenching his fingers slightly, and on his pink, smoothly shaven face a look of disgust appeared.

But we were still staring at him in disbelief.

“The doctor asked to be visited... I could perhaps arrange that, but...” he broke off. We guessed what he was thinking: he was taking a risk, it was rather a delicate matter. But Jan instantly took up this very hesitant proposal: it would be truly excellent if Ziegler would take him to the ghetto right now, because he needed to see the Tenenbaums to get advice on how to protect a box of insects that was growing mouldy. And making a deliberately naive face, Jan showed Ziegler his pass into the ghetto, so there would be no doubt he wanted to go there by a legal route. The German’s courtesies would be limited merely to taking him there by limousine. After a moment’s hesitation Ziegler agreed, and they drove off.

Only later did I understand what Jan was thinking. The building on the corner of Leszno and  elazna Streets, where the so-called Arbeitsamt for Jews was housed, had a gateway on the Aryan side. It was permanently shut, but there was no sentry from the Gestapo or the Wehrmacht guarding it. There wasn’t even a Polish policeman posted there; the building’s caretaker simply opened the gate for Arbeitsamt officials who did not want to walk through the ghetto on their way to the office or going home from work. Taking advantage of this lucky coincidence, in other words Ziegler’s company, Jan had decided to do a bit of reconnaissance and find out if this route could

help him to implement a plan he had been mulling over ever since the future fate of the ghetto had become clear to all.

The limousine drove up to the Arbeitsamt, from the Aryan side of course, the chauffeur hooted the horn and a door in the gateway immediately opened. Jan went through it at Ziegler’s side, warmly and lengthily expressing his thanks to him, which elicited a polite response from the slightly surprised Ziegler, though he already had one foot on the first step of the stairs leading to the offices; the caretaker on the other hand spent the whole time watching them both with curiosity. Jan drew this moment out for as long as he could, suddenly getting into insurmountable difficulties in choosing the right German words, putting in Polish words out of the blue, and finally asking the increasingly impatient Ziegler whether in case of further problems with the collections he would be allowed to report to him by this route. Without guessing the meaning of this game, Ziegler agreed and said to the caretaker: “Please let this gentleman in whenever he comes to see me,” after which they went upstairs together, where Ziegler showed Jan the way to his office and the way into the ghetto.

However, Jan did not run off to Orla Street to see the Tenenbaums. He hung around in the dirty Arbeitsamt rooms for a while, among a crowd of down-and-outs; then he went downstairs, and in the gateway on the Aryan side he hailed the caretaker, wanting him to remember him well, and in a confident tone told him to open the door for him.

Two days later Jan hammered on the gate, and in the same tone told the caretaker to let him in, which he did with a humble bow. Naturally, Jan had no business with the manager of the Arbeitsamt, went through a different stairwell, got into the ghetto and visited the Szymons there, to whom he gave a precise account of Ziegler’s visit to us, and asked them what they thought about the German’s unusual behaviour. As he had some very serious dental problems, he had started going to Doctor Leonie Tenenbaum for treatment; so not only had he found himself an excellent dentist, on top of that he had all that long-term care for free. In any case, while possible, we had to take advantage of his entomological zeal.

*Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones*



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Photo: Piotr Zieliński

Piotr Kalwas (born 1963) is a novelist, essayist and TV scriptwriter. In 2008 he decided to emigrate to Egypt and settle permanently in Alexandria with his family.

This is the fifth book written by Kalwas, who is unique in that he is a Polish writer and a Muslim, and it is different from his previous work. *Salaam, Time, The Door* and *Mystic Race* were novels about searching, about journeys through Africa and India, which were also expeditions into his very being, helping to gain self-knowledge. In contrast *Home* is a tale about establishing roots, about adapting to a place. About two years ago Kalwas moved out of Warsaw to base himself permanently in Alexandria in Egypt. It is Alexandria that is the main subject of the novel. So what led the writer to move home? It was his growing disillusionment with the consumerist, increasingly materialistic West. Kalwas has frequently focused on this theme in his writing; in *Home* you can also find some very bitter passages concerning Europe and Poland, but they are not central to this book. I would describe this book as a series of reflections on getting to know a city and growing to be part of it; reflections which have a very individual character and are completely different from the travel writing genre, which has recently been so popular in Polish literature.

So what sets Kalwas's writing apart and how is it different? The author writes: "walking around and looking - that is my work." The point is that he notices things, which are generally missed altogether by other people: he watches a woman, who, for no reason we know of, spends her time standing on the beach day after day; he observes ants wandering along the walls of the mosque; he observes the daily rituals of people living in the neighbourhood; he tries to solve the puzzle of the

mysterious, fluorescent arrows on the wall. In this way he creates his own personal view of Alexandria, the place which he has chosen and come to love. On the other hand, in *Home* the writer takes a very particular point of view, which is largely the result of his own paradoxical situation: he sees himself as a person "from and of many places", yet he tries to settle into one specific place. This leads to him describing the Alexandria of his imagination rather than the real city: roaming around the Egyptian city turns into wandering in time and space as the current reality is interspersed with memories of communist Poland, numerous literary references (for example to the writer Edmond Jabès) and philosophical musings. It is unusual prose, but it is exceptionally beautiful in all its strangeness.

Robert Ostaszewski  
Translated by Kasia Beresford

**I DON'T** remember when I noticed her for the first time. She always stood in the same place, or more or less the same place – on the beach at Silsila, at the start of it, at the point where the water meets the sand not far from the rusty lifeguard's tower. The foam from the waves of the Mediterranean Sea, which finished their journey here, washed around her long legs. She stood motionless staring into the air around her which was shuddering with the heat of the day. She would always be standing up, she hardly moved at all; sometimes she would tilt her head slightly to one side as if wondering about something. She was silent.

Her beach was on the route I would take to walk to the small park opposite the Library. I went there almost every day with Hasan to feed the cats with chocolates and the leftovers from lunch. I shouldn't say "I went", I go there almost every day... I should use the present tense as I still live here and frequent that small park. I sit underneath the palm tree on the stone bench, which is hot from the sun, and throw broken bits of chocolate bar and scraps of meat to the cats.

There was a smile on her face. Maybe it was her smile that caught my attention. I don't know. It was a strange smile, as she was altogether strange – it was so fixed, frozen, as if it were eternal. It made her seem sad. Perhaps it was just the fact that she was always there, motionless, slender, sad, and beautiful.

After a while I would use any old excuse to slip out of the house on my own in the evening, and would go to the beach to watch her. To check if she was still standing there and hadn't gone off somewhere else, to see if she was still displaying her strangeness, her immobility, her existence. I still slip out and go there...

This is still happening all the time, almost daily, for this is where I live. The hot wind swirls around my head. I adore it. The wind is here all the time. It cools me with its heat. It calms me down.

Later still, I started going out at night. I made my way towards the beach at Silsila at a quick, steady pace. It's about two kilometres away from my home. I enjoyed these night-time strolls, when my mind scanned through extremely vivid images of various events from my childhood – I enjoy that most of all. I would get to the low wall separating the beach from the boulevard and, out of breath, I would sit down and look around for her.

She was almost always standing there. She looked even more beautiful in the cold light of the stars and the moon. Oh, how I adored those nights and the early morning walks to Silsila to get a glimpse of her. I would set my alarm clock to wake me about forty minutes before the first prayer. Barely awake, I would wash carefully over the sink to shake off the remnants of my dreams and avoid drowning the small flies, which for some unknown reason always settled on the sink at that early hour. Then, in silence, I would walk at a quick, steady pace along the boulevard, which was almost empty at that hour, with my head full of images from my childhood. I say "in silence" because very often I whisper to myself as I walk. Yet I did not whisper at all on my way to meet her, instead I watched the semi-slumbering sea, seeing myself in the midst of its gentle waves, myself as a boy hanging from the frame for beating carpets in the courtyard, wearing cool sneakers from Czechoslovakia, which my father had brought back for me. I didn't say anything then. I didn't mutter anything under my breath. The sea whispered instead of me. I listened intently. They were strange, distant, insubstantial words - words in Arabic, Greek, Hebrew, Polish...yes, Polish...

Well, she was there all along. She stood motionless with her head tilted to one side. Once, in daytime, I took a camera with me to take her picture, but the moment I put the camera to my eye and saw her sad smile, I realised that it wasn't at all appropriate. That a still, flat photograph would make her lifeless, it would strip her of her beauty. I didn't take the photo, oh no.

Afterwards I would return from the beach along the boulevard, where sometimes Mamdouh, the corn-on-the-cob vendor, would already be setting up his meagre stand. Then I would cross under the boulevard by the subway and immerse myself in the small, narrow, littered streets of my city, which were filled with a hot wind, like tunnels full of warm, calming air: Sharia Orfi next to Abu Rabi's snack bar, where I buy falafel balls that burn my fingers and smoky

aubergine sauce; Sharia Kottahia, and on it my favourite café, The Lantern, where I smoke a water-pipe and drink tea; Sharia Fatma El-Youssef, which has a Christian bakery on the corner, where I buy hot rolls and date pastries from an exceptionally stout baker and where, each time I go, I cannot restrain my childish delight at the picture on the wall of St George killing the dragon with his bloody sword. I go back there, every day, almost every day. Because I live here. This is my city now.

Not far from the bakers, on Bur Said Road, there is a small mosque where I would perform the morning prayer, salat Al-Fajr, on my way back from the beach where she stood. Abu Rabi's and the café were closed at that hour, but the baker was already working. I would buy bread from him and eat it on the way to the mosque. It was the real thing.

The bakery is open now. I am eating bread and it is the real thing. I pray. All this is happening in the present.

My home is very close by. This is where I settled a year ago. This is where I live. In Alexandria.

At the back of my house stands an old, ruined and abandoned villa. Once, as I was passing, I noticed a small plant by the wall; at first I thought it was a weed, but as I looked more carefully I noticed some small green fruits on the branches. They were tomatoes, wild tomatoes. I went home, filled a plastic bottle with water and then went down in the lift and watered the plant with great care. On the wall of the villa, by the entrance, I discerned an inscription in Greek characters, so blurred it was barely visible.

*Translated by Kasia Beresford*



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# JAN SUBART

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## THE MERCHANT OF MEMORIES, OR THE BATTLE OF POETS

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Jan Subart is the pen-name of Stanisław Strasburger, a philosopher of art,  
traveller and culture manager.

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A Polish traveller visits Aqaba and meets Salim, who dreams of going to Russia where his lover, Lyubov, is waiting for him. Another traveller (another? but can we be so sure?) settles in Damascus, learns Arabic and flirts with the local girls. Subart's novel opens as any reportage from the Middle East might, but it soon grows infinitely complicated, with the traveller's identity fracturing, his stories getting entangled in other stories, embellished by overt or covert quotations from literature, both from Arabic and European culture, and the whole thing pervaded by an all-encompassing eroticism. As an impassioned specialist in the Middle East, the author using the pen-name Jan Subart models his plot on intricate, Chinese-box Oriental tales and makes use of their characteristic traits, not only derived from Arab storytelling technique, but also, now and then, from the unique features of Arabic script.

This intricate Oriental stylistic guise does not prevent Subart from weaving quite another tale, outwardly less submissive to the demands of the literary form – namely, the story of the misunderstandings experienced by a European man when he comes in contact with some Arab women. Arab women communicate differently from their European counterparts; the social norms they have to observe are also radically different. Moreover, the Polish traveller soon finds himself facing similar problems in his encounters with local men. The communication hitches seem to result from the relationship between storytelling and reality, which both cultures construe differently; in a sense, therefore, literature is to blame. Hence the dominant

role of literary stylisation in Subart's novel. The action sometimes takes the form of a description of given aspects of Arabic culture by a man who is deeply involved in it; sometimes it changes from culturally reflexive "reportage" on Middle Eastern culture into a magical vision.

*Jerzy Jarzębski*  
*Translated by Agnieszka Pokojska*

**I**N Aqaba, here's how you talk of the first days in Aleppo. I bought maps. I picked up some brochures from the tourist information. I read them a few times over and did the sights one by one, all of them. It was often hot during the day, though it wasn't spring yet. I went to Ma'arrat an-Numan, a small town where the blind Ma'arri was born. Apart from a short trip to Baghdad, that was where he lived all his life. I met the colonel at his grave. It turned out he has family here. They're the ones organising the wedding. I said I'd come. He was glad to hear it. We soon parted, as I was heading for the dead cities. There's no hotel in Ma'arrat. I wanted to be done with the sightseeing before nightfall, to catch the bus back to Aleppo.

The cities that are now dead used to flourish in the Byzantine era. Ancient villas, baths, and temples are all there to this very day. The ruins, veiled in vibrating air, seem full of mysteries. I was surprised there was no one there, looking for them. Hey, you cunning ruins, I've seen through your game! You have to tread your own paths. Despite the heat...

I returned to the dead cities again and again. I patiently dusted the cabinets in the provincial museum, with my eyes watering over the hand-written descriptions of the exhibits. I managed to decipher the writing sometimes, but they were tough times. My face broke out in a rash. My feet burned, as if licked by fire, and my hands were always dirty. Seated in the empty rooms of the museum, the guards kept staring at me as if I was an extra-terrestrial.

Time passed, and somehow the mysteries still eluded me. Dusty old things... Ah! What a relief to be finally out of the museum gates. I started making expeditions. The monastery where Saint Simeon Stylites sat on his pillar, the Byzantine basilicas and the mosques dating back to the first caliphs. Roman bridges and roads, with shepherds yelling at you like one of their wayward rams.

There was also the television in the hotel room. A window onto the world outside. You can always see more there, and better. Excellent job, stylists! With the camera running, ruined patios come alive with the splash of fountains, and lifeless streets look like oases of coolness. Rooms with notices on the doors saying 'Closed for redecorating' magically open. The voiceover politely translates the description, and the exhibits are perfectly lit. Give me my own two feet on a footrest and a familiar stink over somebody else's air any time, no matter how fresh.

The decisive clash took place towards the end of my stay. The silence of things pushed me to explore the everyday again. Does the colonel recite poems to someone else now? Ah, poets, you treacherous creatures! And yet this is what wars should be like. Truth is lost, once it is torn away from the times and the people whose heirloom it is. It tickles the imagination with the purple light of the box standing on the chest of drawers. One morning, I woke up and I felt grateful to the museums for not being just another garish show. I was grateful to the ruins for refusing to gird themselves with a network of multilingual signposts and souvenir shops. As it is, no one is attracted to the past that the local cattle piss on.

I was sorry the provocation had kept me off my guard for so long. I began to talk to the shepherds. The museum guards were always up for a chat too. We managed to communicate somehow, thanks to my decent education in the humanities. I was vaccinated before leaving, complying with the recommendations issued by the national institute of tropical medicine. On the form, I ticked: 'close contact with the locals' and 'stays outside tourist centres'. Oh, and most important of all: 'local means of transportation and accommodation'. That gets you the most vaccines.

Farewell, order, hello, Pandora!

But how? Here it's hot, there's the pipe, my hotel, the smells, the Arab women of the unsurpassed arabesque shapes... No such luck! The elusive forms refused to materialise before my eyes. The maps with captions in the Latin script were no good at all. The winding alleys won't show on right-angled grids, even though azimuth is originally an Arab word.

Speaking of which, I decided to take Arabic lessons.

'Listen,' my teacher told me during the very first lesson, 'all these "take the second turn left", "go straight ahead for a hundred metres" are your own invention. In Arabic, phrases like these sound artificial. Anyway, why would you want to memorise a street map? It's so

much easier to have someone take you. Walking with another person is a pleasure, but describing it is rude. Also, be cautious when asking how far something is. A distance is never measured when you walk alone. Ten minutes in company and ten minutes alone are two very different units.'

I started listening.

You sniffed. You savoured. You love cooking, now don't you? You put it down as your hobby every time you write a CV. Even with the vaccinations, travellers are advised not to eat fresh fruit and vegetables or meat because of a significant risk of bacterial infection of the intestinal tract. What a joke! The street eateries, the sellers in the souk and the vegetable vendors all tempt you with delicious smells. A revelation during a taxi-driver's monologue.

Once I was walking along the street and lo and behold! There they were, dragging the cables behind them, lugging lamps and microphones. The Great Explorers with their cameras. Shoo, go away, you bloody mummifiers! Go on a tour of the cemeteries, you necrophiliacs! I'm getting off at the 'everyday life' stop. A familiar stink in an ancient corner, now that's what I call pleasure!

'Hi, Jan! What are you doing?'

Once again I didn't hear Salim approach me.

'Sorry, I was thinking ...'

'You and your famous thinking. Don't overdo it! What do you get out of it anyway?'

I shrugged.

We reached the beach in silence. In the evenings few people came here, though the sand retained moisture, the air was crisp and smelled of the sea. I liked this spot, so free from the din of the city.

*Translated by Agnieszka Pokojnska*



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# TWENTY YEARS OF THE NEW POLAND IN REPORTAGE

SELECTED AND WITH COMMENTARY  
BY MARIUSZ SZCZYGIEŁ

JACEK ANTCZAK • WOJCIECH BOJANOWSKI  
ANNA FOSTAKOWSKA • EDYTA GIETKA  
JACEK HUGO-BADER • MARCIN KOŁODZIEJCZYK  
TOMASZ KWAŚNIEWSKI • IRENA MORAWSKA  
WŁODZIMIERZ NOWAK • LIDIA OSTAŁOWSKA  
ARTUR PAŁYGA • KAROL PODGÓRSKI  
PAWEŁ PIOTR REŚZKA • PAWEŁ SMOLEŃSKI  
JOANNA SOKOLIŃSKA • GRZEGORZ SROCZYŃSKI  
WOJCIECH STASZEWSKI • KATARZYNA SURMIAK-DOMAŃSKA  
WITOLD SZABŁOWSKI • MARIUSZ SZCZYGIEŁ  
WOJCIECH TOCHMAN • EWA WINNICKA  
JOANNA WOJCIECHOWSKA

In recent years reportage has been without doubt one of the most interesting features of Polish prose, as confirmed by the success, abroad as well as at home, of a series of books by the reportage writers of the middle generation. Further confirmation comes from this anthology, conceived and edited by Mariusz Szczygieł, presenting reportage written in the past two decades since the fall of the communist regime in 1989. The collection includes twenty-six articles by more than twenty leading reporters. In most cases they have been or are journalists working for *Gazeta Wyborcza*, which is no surprise, as that newspaper has developed what is definitely the best reportage department in the country. Szczygieł has used the formula of the topical anthology, juxtaposing articles that describe "where the new Poland began and where it has got to" (*Instead of a Foreword*). He specifies what sort of Poland most interests him: "Not the one we see in the Sejm, or on the front pages of the newspapers". Szczygieł's idea involves showing the past twenty years in Poland mainly through the stories of individuals struggling with the better or worse consequences of the country's changing social, economic and cultural situation. Most of these reports tell the stories of entirely anonymous people, for example a woman whose passion in life is watching television serials (*Dr House: You Can Live Without Love* by Joanna Sokolińska), but the anthology also includes stories that were famous in their day, such as the one about the businessmen who were dragged by a criminal into a spiral of fictional debts, and when driven to extremity decided to mur-

der their persecutors (*The Widow Luiza Goes To See "Debt"*, by Irena Morawska). Each of the reports contains a separate story, but put together they form a sort of collective portrait of both the Poles and contemporary Poland. Szczygieł's anthology also reveals how diversified and different in form the reports can be, and what an interesting and effective tool for describing the world they can be in the hands of these seasoned reporters.

Robert Ostaszewski  
Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones

## UP THE LADDER TO THE CROWN

Poland is Amway's most dynamically developing market in Europe. In short, it's the most dynamic market for dreams and aspirations. Amway does everything to make sure its people have the motivation for a rich life.

The system of distinctions has twelve degrees, from the silver badge via gold, ruby, pearl, emerald, diamond, double and triple diamond, and so on.

The final badge is the Ambassador's Crown, which is success on an international scale. As a token of appreciation, a prize-winning company leader might for example make a speech on stage. There are lots of opportunities, as there are regular mass meetings or seminars.

Alicja Bednarczyk, an ethnology student, is researching the Amway culture and goes to its meetings all over Poland. "The best people can remain on stage alone. Someone introduces them, who talks about them well and at length. The longer the speech, the more important the person."

A Pearl might even be found in Bukowina Tatrzańska, like Mr and Mrs Wójtowicz, and a Ruby even in the village of Koza, like Mr and Mrs Kućko.

## THE COMMUNISTS NEVER DREAMED OF IT

It's November 1995. I have been hired, along with Grażyna Torbicka, a television presenter, to host Amway's biggest annual assembly, Convention '95, at the Congress Hall, for three thousand people. "I'm nervous," I say at the Amway Polska office, "so many people! How do you keep control of such a big crowd?"

"Don't be afraid – just as you move your little finger, so too, will they move," smiles one of the people from the office, moving his little finger.

From the stage, decked out as if for the Oscars, the word "success" will be spoken sixty-five times. It will be said on average every four minutes. According to the script, I myself am to say it nineteen times.

The ladies are in elegant suits, with some of them in party dresses, and the gentlemen are in suits too, some wearing smart bowties. Most of the people are under forty. There are no journalists or television cameras at the Congress Hall – the event is closed to outsiders.

Pitch darkness falls.

Suddenly we can hear drums, and the sound of a choir – it's the sort of music that would lead troops into battle.

White mist spreads through the auditorium.

A laser beam shoots out.

A three-dimensional globe flies past overhead.

The continents are shining.

The women hold their breath. People feel as if the planet whirling above the rows is just about to catch on their heads.

When the Earth vanishes, a message appears in the air, saying: AMWAY. Then I say: "Ladies and Gentlemen, you are heroes!..."

I can hear my own voice but I don't recognise it: there are twenty of me.

Grażyna: "Your work has proved that it's possible to create a new image for the Polish person. That is the virtue of Amway. So what is Amway?"

Me: "It's the expression of a certain idea. An idea that tells the world it doesn't matter who you are or where you're from. You just have to be convinced you can achieve success."

Bravos and cheers of delight. But it seems to be nothing but verbiage.

From gigantic monitors above the stage, suspended at second-floor height, the company leaders make speeches. Life's winners.

On the monitors their faces are as big as the wall of a one-family cottage. Fanfare after fanfare sounds.

I lower my voice: "WHAT IS SUCCESS? IS IT THE FULFILMENT OF ALL YOUR DREAMS? OR A STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT?"

Grażyna: MAYBE IT'S SIMPLY A MOMENT IN YOUR LIFE? A TIME FOR REFLECTION ON THE PAST?"

Then I say a little higher, excitedly: "WHAT CAN SUCCESS BE LIKE? DECISIVE? MAJOR?"

Grażyna, in a festival voice: "SERIOUS? GREAT?" Me loudly: "OR PERHAPS WELL-DESERVED, AND DETERMINED?"

Then I shout: "DO SECTOR A SEE THEMSELVES AS SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE?!!!"

From the audience: "Yeeees!"

Grażyna: "DO SECTOR B SEE THEMSELVES AS SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE?!!!" From the audience: "Yeeees!"

Bravos and whistles of delight. Bravos such as the music festivals in Opole and Sopot have never had. I feel as if I have a strength I never dreamed of. It's not my strength, it's Amway's. The people who were the first Poles to get highest in Amway are going to come on stage – Urszula and Zbigniew Kalinowski from Stargard. They used to be the owners of a photocopying shop that was going bust. They are both thirty years old. Three years ago they told Gazeta they had to have a big enough house for their dog to rest three times while running from one end of it to the other. Now they've got one. They are Diamonds. They drive a red BMW.

Me (from the script): "They have achieved almost everything."

Grażyna: "And they're going even higher." Asked about their next plans, they say: "Most of all we want to be successful people among successful people".

The Kalinowskis get a standing ovation. They speak for forty-five minutes. Zbigniew Kalinowski declares that at Amway he found out how nice it is to be loved. Amway provides this sort of love.

A group called vox sings a song composed for Amway: "Don't be ashamed of your dreams, when a star falls..." The group gets a reception it has never had in its twenty years of existence.

"Stand up," vox encourage the audience. Three thousand people obediently stand up.

"Join hands." At once they join hands and do a wave.

"Give each other a hug." The whole Amway gathering hug each other.

"You know what," says the sound technician fervently, "I worked at the Congress Hall in Gierek's day – I did Party rallies. But the communists would have lacked the imagination for what's happening here today."

"They're going mad like that without vodka," says a lady in an apron in the wings.

Sound guy: "And it's only half-past two!"

People dressed up as Amway products walk about the stage. A man-sized washing powder bows to the audience.

Lady in apron: "Well I never – now they're praying to those powders."

Before the finale there are carefully staged march-pasts, with fanfares, drums and choirs. The best people come down two ramps off the stage and into the auditorium: Ambers, Emeralds, Pearls... almost two hundred people. Teachers, welders, accountants and doctors march by. Every ten seconds their names are read out. For ten seconds the face of each one of them is as big as the wall of a one-family cottage.\*

*Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones*

\* This report was only written because AMWAY invited me as a television presenter (either forgetting, or not knowing I'm a reporter) to host their assembly, which was not open to anyone from outside, at the Congress Hall. As far as I know, since this report was published, the company has demanded a declaration from anyone running an AMWAY event that they will keep everything they saw and heard there confidential.



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Photo: Marek Szczepański

Artur Domosławski (born 1967) is a journalist and publicist. His main areas of interest are Latin America, anti-globalist movements and social conflict. He was a pupil and friend of Ryszard Kapuściński.

This is the first full-length biography of Ryszard Kapuściński, the Polish reporter and master of non-fiction who died three years ago. As one of the mottoes at the start of the book Domosławski has included the following remark made by Gabriel Garcia Marquez to his biographer: "Every man has three lives – public, private and secret". Domosławski aims to do a complete job by describing all three of his subject's lives. He reconstructs Kapuściński's entire professional and personal course: from a small town on the eastern borders of pre-war Poland and wartime wanderings with his parents and younger sister, via the smoke-filled committee rooms of the Stalinist revolution in the 1950s, the corridors of the Central Committee, travels as a reporter in Africa during the collapse of colonialism and Latin America in the era of the military dictators, to worldwide fame and the literary salons of New York, London, Barcelona and Mexico. Domosławski interviewed over a hundred people, including Kapuściński's family, closest friends and colleagues from various places where he worked, his old party comrades, decision-makers of the communist era, and also the heroes of his reports from Africa and Latin America. Following in his subject's tracks, he travelled to Ethiopia, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Angola, Bolivia, Colombia, Mexico, Spain, Canada and the USA. He discovered many unknown, sometimes sensational facts about the life of the famous Polish reporter. With great empathy for Kapuściński, but without avoiding any controversy or difficult truths, Domosławski shows what

a price Kapuściński paid for his fame and greatness. He presents a man who sometimes demonstrates human weakness, lack of confidence and loss of direction, who at the end of his life was raised – as he put it – "onto a pedestal piled with laurel leaves and spontaneous rapture", which often did not go hand in hand with the deep thought that went into his work. In Domosławski's book, Kapuściński comes down from his monument and becomes a human being again, entangled in his own era full of tricky dilemmas and choices. I think Artur Domosławski has some difficult moments ahead of him, as criticism showers down from various directions. He has had the courage to describe not just the smile Kapuściński wore to meet his readers, but the anxieties and weaknesses that he hid behind it. For those who loved and adored Ryszard, there will be too much black in this picture of their idol, and for those who were keen to expose Kapuściński's communist-era involvement, judge and accuse him, there will be too much white.

*Teresa Torańska*  
Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones

**...AT** the newspaper they want him to go to India – but he doesn't know a thing about India. How can he write about India if he doesn't know anything about it? He doesn't even speak English. How is he going to communicate? In Polish? In Russian? How? With whom? A quick dash to the bookshop, the secondhand one, to buy something about India. Do they actually have anything? They might at least have a dictionary, or a map.

When in 1956 the editor-in-chief of *Sztandar Młodych* (meaning “Young People’s Standard”) calls him in and announces: “You’re flying to India”, Kapuściński is twenty-four years old and has plenty of experience as a journalist fighting for socialism, as a reporter covering ZMP (Union of Polish Youth) conferences, writing about the lot of the workers at major industrial plants, and has had a few trips abroad – to Prague, and to youth festivals in Moscow and Berlin, but he knows nothing about the work of a foreign correspondent and even less about the place where he is to go. He is a provincial boy from a modest family of teachers, a novice reporter and activist whom they are sending off to a distant, alien world – without any preparation, without the language and without any refinement.

Why India? Because it’s the thaw; in the Soviet Union they are settling accounts with Stalinism, Moscow’s international policy is changing, and the rulers in the Kremlin are setting some of their doors and windows ajar. The socialist camp is looking out towards the countries of the so-called Third World, which are escaping from colonial dependence on the West. In the era of the Cold War divide, even if they are not red, liberation movements struggling against colonialism are quite often taking up some form of cooperation with Moscow as a rival to the West, and later also with Peking. The newly born countries offer large markets for goods from countries in the Soviet orbit, above all major industrial products such as machinery, fertilizer and weapons. The socialist bloc leaders are paying them official visits, and the heads of those countries are coming to see how progress and socialism are doing in Eastern Europe.

Exactly a year earlier Kapuściński covers Indian leader Jawaharlal Nehru’s visit for *Sztandar Młodych*. “Prime Minister Nehru is a politician fighting for important issues for humanity: for the peaceful co-existence of nations, cooperation and friendship”, he writes in a predictable welcoming article. (Meanwhile, the following joke is doing the rounds: “Why did Nehru come to Poland in his long johns?” – a reference to the tight white trousers he wore. “To show that India is building socialism too.”) Kapuściński is the paper’s natural candidate when someone from the Central Committee Press Office decides that within the scope of friendship between the socialist camp and the Third World, Polish reporters will go abroad and write about the countries of the far South. The future star journalists of their generation set off on their way, including Kazimierz Dziewanowski to Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq; Wiesław Górnicki, also to the Near East and Indonesia; and Wojciech Giełżyński to Morocco. Kapuściński is to go to India.

He misses the biggest revolutionary fever in Poland – he is not there in October 1956, when Soviet intervention is a whisker away, and the time afterwards, when amid cheering crowds Gomułka assumes the post of Party leader. In the coming quarter of a century he will not be a witness to any of the political breakthroughs in Poland – right up to the strikes on the Baltic coast in the summer of 1980, when the Solidarity trade union is born. He will not be there in 1957, when Gomułka closes the weekly paper *Po Prostu* and cracks down on the movement for the renewal of socialism – he will be travelling in China and Japan. During the student protests of March 1968 and two years later, when the Party will bloodily suppress the workers’ protests on the coast, he will be working as a PAP (Polish Press Agency) correspondent in Latin America. In 1976, when once again the Party will use force against the working class, in whose name supposedly it has been exercising government, from week to week he will be writing an account of the war in Angola, and straight after that he will leave for Africa for months on end.

For the young reporter whose horizons are tedious Party confabs, factories in Grudziądz, Kędzierzyń and Nowa Huta, or possibly youth festivals where he can communicate in Polish or in Russian, the trip to Asia is scary, but to a greater degree exciting. Everything on this journey will be large and incredible. The airplane is mas-

sive: a four-engine giant Super-Constellation that flies from Rome to New Delhi and Bombay. The distance to be covered is incredible – eight thousand kilometers! And what a lot of hours in the air – twenty!

Also incredible is the lake of lights that stuns the fledgling globe-trotter when the plane stops to refuel in Cairo. With some surprise he finds that the Egyptians are black and they dress in white – as he writes – “cassocks”. With childlike satisfaction he notes that he has now set foot in Africa – these are the comments and emotional responses of a greenhorn traveler.

His associations and thoughts on landing in India are comically gauche too, including that Columbus tried to reach India and failed, while he, Kapuściński has managed it. He makes the conventional first observations: the traffic moves on the left, following the British example; and he has to mention the sacred cows, which do not obey the rules of the road and walk about the streets with impunity, now with the traffic flow, now against it – and nothing can be done to them because they are sacred.

He gets his first lesson on India in the plane. He sits between an elderly Englishman and an elderly Indian. The Englishman complains that ever since the Indians broke free of colonial dependence they have been limiting the rights of British companies, and by doing so they are making a rope for their own necks.

“Do you know what India’s economy will be like without the British?” asks the Englishman.

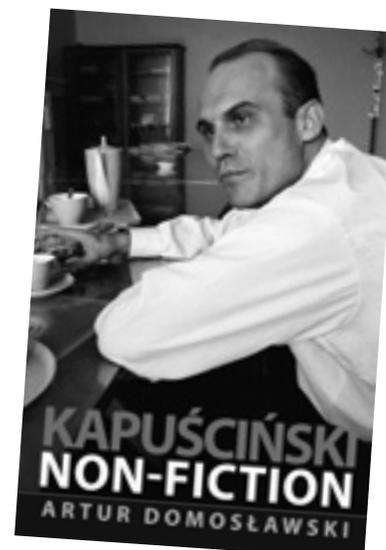
“But we do know what India’s economy was like with the British: universal poverty. The Middle Ages,” the Indian explains to his fellow passenger from Poland. (So understood the reporter who hardly knew any English.)

In New Delhi there is a small, dark airport building. It is night – and he is alone in the Indian darkness. He looks around him, he’s completely lost, he doesn’t know where to go or who to ask for help. Unprepared for the journey, he doesn’t know how to talk in English, and he has no names or addresses in his notebook. Despair! Described like this in *Travels With Herodotus* it sounds romantic.

In fact Kapuściński only stands alone at the airport for a while. Polish Press Agency correspondent Ryszard Frelek comes to fetch him by car. They have met only once before – at a labor camp for prisoners: Kapuściński was going to write a report on it for *Sztandar Młodych* (he never did), and Frelek an account for the Polish Press Agency.

After his first day in New Delhi Kapuściński has just one wish: to go home. He is bothered by the tropical heat and the humidity, tormented by a feeling of loneliness and horrified by the sight of people suffering en masse.

*Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones*



978-83-247-1906-8	ISBN	150 x 228, 606 PAGES, PAPERBACK	ŚWIAT KSIĄŻKI, WARSAW 2010	ŚWIAT KSIĄŻKI	PUBLISHER	39
SPAIN/GALAXIA GUTENBERG, ITALY/FAZI, CZECH REPUBLIC/GALEN			RIGHTS SOLD TO		TRANSLATION RIGHTS	

# JAN SKÓRZYŃSKI SPLINTER

SPLINTER

JAN SKÓRZYŃSKI

Jan Skórzyński (born 1954) is a journalist and historian, author of a modern history of Poland and editor-in-chief of the biographical dictionary, *The Opposition in the Polish People's Republic*.

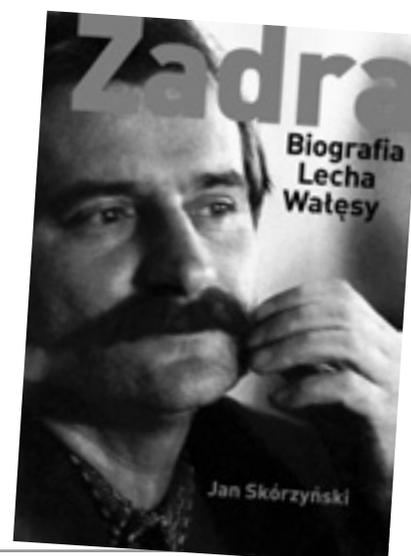
Peasant's son, worker, union boss, leader of the national fight for freedom, president. Lech Wałęsa's CV contains everything needed for the biography of a hero – an indigent childhood, a struggle for existence, participation in the worker's revolt, strikes and prison, the Nobel Peace Prize, the years in opposition, dramatic negotiations with the government, and finally a great victory. But there are also pages in it that are not entirely clear, political manoeuvres and court intrigues, pride and doggedness, conflict with friends and a struggle for power. After 1989, the man who famously remarked: "I'm in favour, and even against" experienced a volatile pendulum of public popularity. The leader of the fight against communism is nowadays attacked by the harbingers of anti-communism, and not long ago he was lower in the public opinion polls than some of the former communist officials.

Nevertheless, at the intellectual level the debate about Wałęsa is not so much about the person or his CV, as the politics associated with his name, the most essential phases of which were marked by the Gdańsk accord, Solidarity's self-limiting revolution, the Round Table agreement, the June elections and the establishment of Tadeusz Mazowiecki's government. The Polish evolutionary road to freedom was, in my opinion, a great success, which brought us democracy, spared any victims and played a decisive part in the fall of European communism. It is natural that dissenters against Lech Wałęsa's moderate line should speak out on this issue too, yet the scale of political emotions expressed in this case is alarming.

In this atmosphere the violent critics and opponents of the Solidarity leader can be heard louder than his supporters. The debate about Lech Wałęsa includes a great many fragmentary

accounts, journalistic opinions and extreme judgements, and far less calm review of the whole of his public resumé. The bibliography of works on the leader of the Polish liberation movement is awash with satires and apologias, but he has not yet had a biography written without prejudice, in which there are more facts than interpretation. In its modest way this book aims to fill at least part of that gap.

*From an Introduction by the Author  
Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones*



40

**PUBLISHER**

SŁOWO/OBRAZ TERYTORIA,  
GDAŃSK 2009

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**ISBN**

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**CONTACT**

SŁOWO/OBRAZ TERYTORIA

# JANUSZ DEGLER

## A MULTIPLE PORTRAIT OF WITKACY

Professor Janusz Degler (born 1938) is an expert on literature and theatre.  
As the leading scholar on the life and work of Witkacy, he has published  
a monumental edition of his collected works.

Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, known as Witkacy, was one of Poland's greatest creative individuals of the twentieth century. A painter, photographer, novelist, playwright, philosopher, essayist, art and literature critic, he was like a volcano constantly erupting with new, original, often eccentric ideas in a huge variety of spheres of avant garde creativity. But Witkacy was also a fascinating personality, a man who spent his youth in the company of the artists and scholars who frequented Zakopane – not just a mountain resort, but also the place where the country's intellectual elite used to meet. Thus Witkacy had eminent, highly unusual friends (such as the composer Karol Szymanowski, with whom he travelled to Italy, or the famous ethnologist Bronisław Malinowski, whom he accompanied on a journey to Ceylon and Australia), and was also a witness to some watershed events on a world scale, above all the outbreak of the Russian revolution, which later had a decisive impact on the shape of his apocalyptic philosophy of history.

Thus Witkacy's life is no less interesting than his work, all the more since parts of it have until recently been shrouded in mystery, especially the period he spent in Russia, which coincided with the First World War and the revolution. So Janusz Degler, the leading modern expert on the writer, has written this book about Witkacy's life. A fat volume, it is not a monograph of the "life and works" kind, but a collection of material for a biography. This includes a comprehensive calendar of Witkacy's life, starting from 1918, and thus omitting his childhood and youth (from 1885 to 1917), followed by a series of texts divided into two blocks, covering firstly various topics relating to Witkacy's friendships and adventures, and then a selection of his letters. An extensive appendix includes a particularly

interesting sketch about Witkacy's time in Russia, enriched with a large collection of documents.

So Degler's book has not been developed into a "storyline" (though some extracts might read like a thriller), but is a collection of material invaluable to any expert on the subject, and also of interest to anyone studying the history of twentieth-century Poland and the artistic circles of the interwar period, right up to the end of the "Second Republic", marked by the invasion of first German and then Soviet troops.

*Jerzy Jarzębski*  
*Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones*



A MULTIPLE PORTRAIT OF WITKACY

JANUSZ DEGLER

41

<b>PUBLISHER</b>	PIW, WARSAW 2009	165 × 235, 560 PAGES, HARDCOVER			
<b>ISBN</b>	978-83-06-03214-7	<b>TRANSLATION RIGHTS</b>	JANUSZ DEGLER	<b>CONTACT</b>	PIW

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**PIOTR MATYWIECKI "Air and Black"**

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**PIOTR MATYWIECKI "Worn-out Covers"**

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**RYSZARD KRYNICKI "Selected Poems"**

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**ADAM ZAGAJEWSKI "Invisible Hand"**

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**JAN POLKOWSKI "Cantus"**

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**JERZY JARNIEWICZ "Make-up"**

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**MARCIN ŚWIETLICKI "Base Impulses"**

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**EUGENIUSZ TKACZYSZYN-DYCKI  
"The Real and Unreal Becomes One Body. 111 Poems"**

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**SZCZEPAN KOPYT "sale sale sale"**

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**JOANNA ROSZAK "Lele"**

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**JUSTYNA BARGIELSKA "Two Fiats"**

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Recent months have brought quite a few interesting poetry volumes, composed both by authors already boasting considerable achievement and those just beginning their literary career.

The prolific authors are represented by Piotr Matywiecki, who published *Air and Black*, shortly followed by a stupendous selection from 1965 to 2009 entitled *Worn-out Covers*. Readers will find here some of his most recognizable characteristics: seriousness, which never turns sour or tragic; investigations into the nature of God (death, evil or faith); references to Jewish history (the Holocaust); as well as the celebration of life. Matywiecki is a poet of the city – Warsaw, to be precise – hence his poems record its transformations, its rhythms and pulse, its inhabitants.

Similar esteem can be claimed for *Selected Poems* by Ryszard Krynicki. The book points once again to this formidable life achievement in poetry. Readers can gain insight into the developments of Krynicki's writing over the last forty years: from lyrical activism to nearly mystic contemplation; from experimental writing anchored in the precision of robust syntax (think the last century interwar avant-garde of Tadeusz Peiper) through linguistically ascetic and radically focused utterances to the casual jottings of travel writing (where journeys are both literal and metaphorical). Krynicki holds on to the belief that poetry gives voice to what is most essential.

Yet another widely recognized author, Adam Zagajewski, assembles and sums up his various experiences in the collection *Invisible Hand*. As usual, he elevates everyday detail and reaches into the past, where he finds symbols that are personally significant. With great care and tenderness he treats his elderly father, who – in his departure – becomes much closer to the poet. The son focuses his memory and attention on his father's withdrawal from life, inching towards another world, penetrating the ultimate mystery. It is exactly these poems about his father, which are in fact poems about love and the passage of time, that secure the originality of Zagajewski's new book.

Jan Polkowski's verse belongs to the same category of high lyrical discourse which seeks to examine basic existential and metaphysical questions. *Cantus*, the first book by Polkowski in twenty years, presents poems which differ enormously from the dominant trend in contemporary Polish poetry. Polkowski specializes in reaching the heights. Ever since the late seventies his verse has depended on placing mundane, ordinary things in the realm of tragedy. In the 1970s the Polish poem was believed to be situated below history, merely registering its presence; its main purpose was to record the truth of everyday experience. Polkowski viewed the contemporary world in terms of its destiny ('the nation chosen for extermination'); he relieved us from realism and offered us the great metaphor of fate. His pathos, which cured the community of the conviction

that its efforts were too modest, was, however, highly idiosyncratic, individual, abstaining from the liturgical celebrations of the motherland.

Even today Polkowski keeps to himself; he does not observe fashion; he does not share prevailing doubts about verse and its ability to express spiritual anxieties. He asks his usual questions about God, the meaning of life, our human position in history, our relations with nature. *Cantus*, therefore, reads as a peculiar catalogue of fundamental issues expressed with exuberance and panache, strongly metaphorical, emphasizing the sensual character of reality.

Equally intriguing is *Make-up* by Jerzy Jarniewicz, where the author touches upon our contemporary dilemmas surrounding the notion of identity. He describes successive stages of face decoration: how it is beautified, made younger, disguised under various masks. The significance of such face decoration consists in challenging the determinism of nature, a struggle that is impossible to win. The poet is fascinated by the advance of death, the traces it leaves on a human being (by aging, which is its particular language) and our fight against it. Readers may be reminded of Faust – his desire our common desire, which urges us to turn time back, to recover our youth. These aspirations are obviously doomed to failure, yet they are crucial. Without them our life would lose its flavour and meaning. Jarniewicz resorts to polyphonic style, erudition and ample quotations to highlight the textual, discursive character of his poems. He shies away from pathos, but encourages small paradoxes and delicate irony.

Marcin Świetlicki, on the contrary, has no such reservations. Reviews of his *Base Impulses*, which appeared in the late autumn of 2009, emphasized the poet's almost polemical stance. He takes the pathologies and peculiarities of Polish intellectual and literary life to task; he points his finger at hypocrisy, greed, and pretensions towards 'special status.' Most of all, Świetlicki argues with fashionable discourses (like feminism or leftism) – not to defend some conservative values, but rather to tease and to demonstrate his dislike of dominant languages. They are always prone to impose roles and tasks on people, including poets. This undesirable propensity undermines the inalienable human right to freedom. Other poems in this collection take up themes traditional in Świetlicki's work: the dialogue with Romantic conceptions of the artist as an individual anguished by his own sensitivity and the insensitivity of the surrounding world; the critique of culture, which prevents the individual from experiencing his existence as authentic; contemplations on the passage of time; and ruthless criticism of the self.

Another poetry book which deserves to be mentioned here is the selection from the work of Eugeniusz Tkacyszyn-Dycki, prepared by another recognized poet, Jacek Gutorow. *The Real and Unreal Becomes One Body. 111 Poems* is not a simple reminder of the poetry which has already been awarded Poland's two most prestigious literary awards, the Nike and Gdynia Prize. It is a new and refreshing arrangement which suggests an original reading; what is more, it contains previously unpublished poems. Through the prism of this selection, Tkacyszyn-Dycki appears to be a poet of several main themes: childhood, mother, illness, death, and language, which is very often directly expressed. Swarming with repetitions, allusions to earlier themes and self-quotations, his poems pulsate with a very specific, obsessive rhythm. They seem to record the author's perseverance, entanglement in his own unchanging thoughts, a depressive inability to overcome his trauma, the wound which cannot and will not heal.

Younger poets have been equally prolific. In my opinion, three volumes merit special attention: Szczepan Kopyt's *sale sale sale*, Joanna Roszak's *Lele* and Justyna Bargielska's *Two Fi-*

*ats*. Kopyt can be associated with the type of poetry that readily engages in social issues – angry, and frequently naming and defining current, topical issues. It is stylistically strong, akin to the poetics of hip-hop in a couple of instances. Roszak specializes in terse but very precise microstudies of the inner and outer landscape. Bargielska's book is exceptional in every respect. Hers is a rare collection of poems unusually alert to the moods of the speaker and, at the same time, so full of linguistic variety, inventiveness and imagination. Love, death, human relationships, loneliness – the poet speaks about her subjects with extreme acuteness. She does not resort to poetic tricks, she is frugal with irony, yet she manages to transcend the banality of basic things and to give them their own, original and credible shape.

Piotr Śliwiński

Translated by Elżbieta Wójcik-Leese

<b>PIOTR MATYWIECKI</b>					
<b>AIR AND BLACK</b>					
<b>PUBLISHER</b>		WYDAWNICTWO LITERACKIE, CRACOW 2009		125 × 200, 84 PAGES, PAPERBACK	
<b>ISBN</b>	978-83-08-04342-4	<b>TRANSLATION RIGHTS</b>	PIOTR MATYWIECKI	<b>CONTACT</b>	WYDAWNICTWO LITERACKIE



<b>PIOTR MATYWIECKI</b>					
<b>WORN-OUT COVERS</b>					
<b>PUBLISHER</b>		BIURO LITERACKIE, WROCLAW 2009		165 × 240, 692 PAGES, PAPERBACK	
<b>ISBN</b>	978-83-62006-24-3	<b>TRANSLATION RIGHTS</b>	PIOTR MATYWIECKI	<b>CONTACT</b>	BIURO LITERACKIE



<b>RYSZARD KRYNICKI</b>					
<b>SELLECTED POEMS</b>					
<b>PUBLISHER</b>		WYDAWNICTWO A5, CRACOW 2009		148 × 210, 416 PAGES, PAPERBACK	
<b>ISBN</b>	978-83-61298-19-9	<b>TRANSLATION RIGHTS</b>	RYSZARD KRYNICKI	<b>CONTACT</b>	WYDAWNICTWO A5



<b>ADAM ZAGAJEWSKI</b>					
<b>INVISIBLE HAND</b>					
<b>PUBLISHER</b>		ZNAK, CRACOW 2009		125 × 195, 80 PAGES, PAPERBACK	
<b>ISBN</b>	978-83-240-1246-6	<b>TRANSLATION RIGHTS</b>	ADAM ZAGAJEWSKI	<b>CONTACT</b>	ZNAK



<b>JAN POLKOWSKI</b>					
<b>CANTUS</b>					
<b>PUBLISHER</b>		WYDAWNICTWO A5, CRACOW 2009		148 × 210, 80 PAGES, PAPERBACK	
<b>ISBN</b>	978-83-61298-20-5	<b>TRANSLATION RIGHTS</b>	JAN POLKOWSKI	<b>CONTACT</b>	WYDAWNICTWO A5



<b>JERZY JARNIEWICZ</b>					
<b>MAKE-UP</b>					
<b>PUBLISHER</b>		BIURO LITERACKIE, WROCLAW 2009		160 × 225, 56 PAGES, PAPERBACK	
<b>ISBN</b>	978-83-62006-48-9	<b>TRANSLATION RIGHTS</b>	JERZY JARNIEWICZ	<b>CONTACT</b>	BIURO LITERACKIE



## MARCIN ŚWIETLICKI

### BASE IMPULSES

<b>PUBLISHER</b>	WYDAWNICTWO EMG, CRACOW 2009	148 × 210, 66 PAGES, PAPERBACK			
<b>ISBN</b>	978-83-925583-6-1	<b>TRANSLATION RIGHTS</b>	MARCIN ŚWIETLICKI	<b>CONTACT</b>	WYDAWNICTWO EMG



## EUGENIUSZ TKACZYSZYN-DYCKI

### THE REAL AND UNREAL BECOMES ONE BODY. 111 POEMS

<b>PUBLISHER</b>	BIURO LITERACKIE, WROCŁAW 2009	160 × 225, 128 PAGES, PAPERBACK			
<b>ISBN</b>	978-83-62006-09-0	<b>TRANSLATION RIGHTS</b>	EUGENIUSZ TKACZYSZYN-DYCKI	<b>CONTACT</b>	BIURO LITERACKIE



## SZCZEPAN KOPYT

### SALE SALE SALE

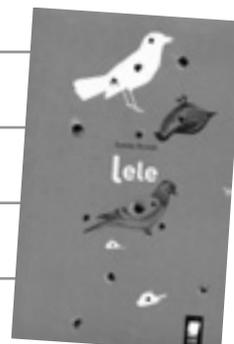
<b>PUBLISHER</b>	WBPIKAK, POZNAŃ 2009	125 × 195, 36 PAGES, PAPERBACK			
<b>ISBN</b>	978-83-60746-35-6	<b>TRANSLATION RIGHTS</b>	SZCZEPAN KOPYT	<b>CONTACT</b>	WBPIKAK



## JOANNA ROSZAK

### LELE

<b>PUBLISHER</b>	WBPIKAK, POZNAŃ 2009	125 × 195, 40 PAGES, PAPERBACK			
<b>ISBN</b>	978-83-60746-52-3	<b>TRANSLATION RIGHTS</b>	JOANNA ROSZAK	<b>CONTACT</b>	WBPIKAK



## JUSTYNA BARGIELSKA

### TWO FIATS

<b>PUBLISHER</b>	WBPIKAK, POZNAŃ 2009	135 × 210, 40 PAGES, PAPERBACK			
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