

# NEW BOOKS FROM POLAND

JANUSZ GŁOWACKI

STEFAN CHWIN

JACEK DEHNEL

HUBERT KLIMKO-DOBRZANIECKI

WOJCIECH KUCZOK

RADOSŁAW KOBIERSKI

JACEK DUKAJ

JOANNA JODEŁKA

JAROSŁAW MAŚLANEK

MARTA SZAREJKO

MIKOŁAJ ŁOZIŃSKI

EWA SCHLILING

WITOLD SZABŁOWSKI

MARCIN MICHAŁSKI

MACIEJ WASILEWSKI

ELŻBIETA CHEREZIŃSKA

JAROSŁAW MAREK RYMKIEWICZ

ANDRZEJ FRANASZEK

JOANNA OLCZAK-RONIKIER

# THE POLISH BOOK INSTITUTE

**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, Russian and Hebrew.

INSTYTUT KSIĄŻKI



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# **SELECTED BOOK**

# **INSTITUTE PROGRAMMES**

## **©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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# CZESLAW MILOSZ YEAR

2011 marks the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Czeslaw Milosz. Born in Szetejnie, in the heart of the Lithuanian wilderness, he was driven away by the tragic events of the 20th century, living consecutively in Warsaw, Krakow, Paris, and the United States, to return to Poland at the turn of the millennium. He was not only a poet, prose writer, a translator and an essayist read all over the world, but also an extraordinarily insightful observer and witness to the epoch.

The Milosz Year program is made up of new book publications, conferences, discussions, and exhibitions devoted to the poet, organized in Poland and abroad – from Krasnojarsk through Vilnius, Krasnogruda, Krakow, and Paris, to New York and San Francisco. Its culminating point will be the second edition of the **Milosz Festival**, taking place in Krakow (May 9th-15th 2011).

To bring the poet one step closer to an international public and inform them of the approaching Milosz Year events, the Book Institute, coordinator of the Milosz Year in Poland, set the **[www.milosz365.eu](http://www.milosz365.eu)** web site in English and Russian. This is where you can come for all sorts of information about the planned events and the initiatives for Milosz Year, as well as plenty of information about the Nobel-Prize winner himself – his biography and timeline, a bibliography of his works and their translations, a selection of writing, interpretations of his work, and many interesting photographs from various periods of his life.

We seek to make the Milosz Year an occasion to recall the work of the great poet, and also a chance to reflect more deeply upon the way his literature and biography are entangled with the 20th century. The year when Poland assumes leadership in the European Union will adopt a catch-phrase drawn from Milosz himself: "Native Europe."



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JANUSZ GŁOWACKI (BORN 1938) IS A PLAYWRIGHT, PROSE WRITER, COLUMNIST, AND AUTHOR OF SCREENPLAYS. HIS WORKS HAVE BEEN TRANSLATED INTO FIFTEEN LANGUAGES. HE LIVES IN NEW YORK CITY.



Photo: Robert Renk

## Good Night, Jerzy

Is Janusz Głowacki's new book a fictionalized story about Jerzy Kosiński? An answer in the affirmative would be the simplest of possible answers, but it would also be misleading, because *Good Night, Jerzy* is a complicated, multi-layered, and fragmentary novel. Although, of course, the figure of Kosiński has been placed in the main thread, the fictional axis of the text is the story of the work of the narrator – a fictional *alter ego* for Głowacki – on a screenplay about the author of *The Painted Bird* for a German film producer. The other threads develop around this axis. The narrator shows the reader around contemporary New York, allows him to look behind the scenes of the business of literature in the States, revealing a marketplace of vanities, full of ruthless literary agents and writers chasing after celebrity; he tells the story of the toxic relationship that linked the German producer, his young Russian wife, and Kosiński; and he records the dreams of the main characters ...

Why was it precisely Kosiński who drew Głowacki's attention? Was his goal only and exclusively to recall the figure of the scandalous Polish-Jewish-American writer, who was considered by some an excellent, uncompromising prose writer, by others, a confidence trickster and a habitual liar, who skillfully manipulated people in order to further his career. Yes, and no. Głowacki had contemplated writing about the author of *Being There* much earlier. First he wrote a play on that topic, then he worked on a screenplay for a film, but in the end none of these projects were brought to completion, and fragments from them went into *Good Night, Jerzy*. This time he complet-

ed the story about the title figure Jerzy, although he did it his own way: by multiplying the points of view, by portraying the various, often contradictory opinions about the author of *The Painted Bird*, and yet refraining from unambiguous assessments, from making a definitive statement. Głowacki has created the portrait of a writer, who wrestled with private demons, got lost in the myths he created about himself, and simultaneously made desperate attempts to remain afloat in life and salvage his career.

*Robert Ostaszewski*



# “Perhaps,”

to say about him that’s new?”

We were sitting in comfortable cane armchairs. It was October, in other words, what they call Indian Summer here. Fog was rising from over the Hudson, the ships had already sailed away, and the lights of New Jersey had become less distinct. Roger had put on a little weight lately, but for seventy he looked great. His watery round eyes were attentive, and his lips were in constant motion. He would eat napkins, theater tickets, and parking stubs. There was often quite a lot of trouble on account of this.

“Because we *all* know he told lies,” Raul added. “And it is also obvious that he left almost no literary legacy.”

A fat black tomcat jumped up on Raul’s lap. It nudged him in the stomach, demanding to be petted. And Raul devoted himself completely to the cat, which was in ecstasy, stiffened, raised its tail, and stuck its rear in the air. And when Raul obediently began to scratch it in the vicinity of the tail, it began to whine, more like a dog than a cat.

“He was definitely intelligent, in fact, very much so,” said Roger, affectionately watching the cat’s contortions. “Perhaps even intelligent enough to suspect that the majority of what he wrote was worthless, and that it would fall apart like a house of cards with the slightest breeze.” He leaned toward Raul and blew on the cat’s rear. “And that is why he needed some sort of big final spectacle. Do you remember, Raul? Jerzy often said suicide is the best method for prolonging your life.”

For a moment we all watched what was going on with the black cat. The other three cats were watching him too. They were no longer indifferent; they were starting to stretch and stiffen in their armchairs.

“If that’s so,” I asked, “then why did all of you fall on your knees before him? You wrote that Jerzy was a cross between Beckett and Dostoyevsky, Genet and Kafka.”

“Michael! That’s enough now, enough.” Raul attempted to throw the cat onto the stone floor, but it dug into his pants with its claws. “That’s enough, nigger.”

The cat finally gave up and jumped softly to the floor.

“Look, Roger, blood ... I’m going to have claw tracks again,” Raul complained.

“But why, why?” said Roger, shrugging his shoulders. “My dear boy, go wipe it with hydrogen peroxide, and bring us another bottle.” He smiled at Raul and saw him off with an affectionate gaze. Raul came from San Jose, he was much younger than Roger, and he moved like a domesticated – but, nonetheless, predatory – animal. “Probably because the world lost the ability long ago to distinguish talent from lack of talent, and lies from the truth. Or perhaps for some other reason. Perhaps because America had never seen someone like Jerzy before. That’s why he screwed us. And now, as we hear, Janusz, you intend to shaft him posthumously.”

“Hold on,” I said. “Wait a minute, wait a minute ...”

“Don’t get all offended. Do you remember, Raul, that he smelled funny?”

“Sort of like patchouli,” noted Raul.

“No, no, no. It wasn’t patchouli. Has it ever occurred to you, Janusz, that the soul has a scent? It might smell of goat, or it might smell of roses. It is written that when God created man he breathed His spirit into him through his mouth, but perhaps at that same time the Devil crawled up and breathed *his* spirit into his ass? I have only one request. Show some respect for our intelligence and don’t try to tell us you want to write the truth about him.”

“That’s just it,” Raul interjected. “Remember: the further from the truth, the closer to Jerzy.”

Roger nodded.

“Either way, we wish you success. Of course, a crowd of people will immediately gather to attack you, screaming that they knew him better, and that that wasn’t how it was at all. But that shouldn’t bother you, since you screwed first. But just don’t count on us. Because we aren’t all that certain there’s anyone left in New York, apart from us, who still remembers who Jerzy was in the first place.”

“Well, now you’re exaggerating,” I said.

Raul uncorked another bottle; the three cats joined the black one at our feet and formed a teeming mass of meowing and howling, scratching and biting. The orgy of the castrates was beginning.

The next day the weather turned bad, and it suddenly began to pour. Still, I went to Barnes & Noble, a huge bookstore of several stories on Broadway, across from Lincoln Center, and asked for a book on Kosiński.

“Who? Could you spell the name?” the young salesperson asked me.

I spelled it once, then once again, then again, but now through clenched teeth. He tapped on the computer keyboard, shook his head, and said:

“Nothing here.”

“Nothing?”

“Nothing.”

I sagged, was filled with doubt, and gave up on Jerzy.

*Translated by David Frick*



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**STEFAN CHWIN (BORN 1949) IS A WRITER AND CRITIC, LITERARY HISTORIAN AND PROFESSOR AT GDAŃSK UNIVERSITY. HIS WORK HAS BEEN TRANSLATED INTO TWELVE LANGUAGES.**

## **Fräulein Ferbelin**

This novel is set in Gdańsk at a date that is not specified, but it must be the early twentieth century, in the era when the city was part of Prussia and was called Danzig, though many of the themes refer to earlier or later times. We can also identify Chwin's fictional Danzig with a provincial colony in the days of the Roman Empire – this Danzig is headed by Chief Procurator Hammels, a latter-day Pontius Pilate. This is because the plot of *Fräulein Ferbelin* centres on the idea of the second coming of Christ and the consequences of this event. In this novel the Messiah is a character whom the local population call the Teacher from Neustadt. A man called Kurt Niemand has just come to Pomerania from Neustadt; starting off as a shipyard worker, he has been campaigning for workers' rights, becoming a spokesman for the oppressed and later a preacher and healer. Maria Ferbelin, the other main character in the novel, is one of the people who listen to the Teacher's sermons, which he preaches in the evenings at the city's tollgates. The Master, as Maria calls him, heals her father, and soon she and the remarkable preacher are united by passionate love. In the daytime Maria gives private lessons to Helmut, the son of Procurator Hammels, and then spends the nights with her lover. The turning point in this fantastic story is a bomb attack at Danzig station. Lots of people are killed, and it is imperative to expose the culprit. As a tribune of the people, the Master is a dangerous individual in the eyes of the secular and spiritual authorities (in this case the Catholic hierarchy), and makes the ideal scapegoat. From this point on, the events in the novel concur with what happened in Jerusalem two thousand years earlier (the capture of the

Master, his interrogation before the Danzig Sanhedrin, presided over by the local bishop, and so on). Working as she does at the Procurator's house each day and as someone who has his trust, Maria undertakes a sophisticated rescue operation in the name of love for the Master. Thanks to her cleverness and determination, ultimately the Teacher from Neustadt will not be crucified. *Fräulein Ferbelin* is an unusual novel of ideas – a dynamic plot with elements of fantasy interwoven with profound ethical discourse.

*Dariusz Nowacki*



# A few

days later when Maria saw Sophie Horstmayer at Rastawiecki's cafe on Hundegasse, where they sometimes arranged to meet for cheesecake, Sophie already had far more information about the man whom Maria had met at Martens' cafe, and whom plenty of people in Danzig were calling the Teacher from Neustadt. According to what she had heard in town, this man – as the latest news revealed – was really called Kurt Niemand, and for some time he had been employed as a worker in the tracers' department at the shipyard. Frau Heller's husband, Ludwig, had met him a few times at the second slipway, where the hull of the cruiser *Radhorst* was standing under pine-plank scaffolding, as he and a couple of workers were walking towards the tracers' department building, where the white lines of the templates were drawn onto metal sheets and smelted casts, to prepare the steel sections of ships for further processing.

Only when it came to a clash with Engineer Erdmann had people started saying more about the tracer from Neustadt, but even then it crossed very few minds that the worker focused on the task of drawing white lines on reddish sheets of steel plating and the tall man in the long, open coat who could be seen in the evenings at the top of Saint Gertrude's bastion, were one and the same person.

According to what Sophie had to say, Engineer Erdmann was the manager of the tracers' department, where Kurt Niemand worked. A graduate of the Technische Hochschule, Erdmann had a crew cut and a blonde moustache, and always wore a long, dark corduroy jacket secured by a leather belt with an Estonian buckle. Calm and collected, in his shiny knee-boots, he ran the department energetically, and since he clearly had organisational skills, as even his enemies admitted, he enjoyed the respect of his superiors, though the workmen subordinate to him did not always have similar feelings for him.

In fact, as Frau Heller's husband had told Sophie, Engineer Erdmann regarded the workmen as so many grains of sand that could be shovelled about from place to place. To his mind, each grain could be replaced by another. Not so Herr Schichau. He uttered the name of the shipyard owner, Johann Wilhelm Schichau, with deep respect, and even genuine devotion. "There are millions of you", Erdmann's cold look seemed to say to the workmen, as they drew the templates in white paint onto sheets of reddish metal in the department he ran. "Each of you could be swapped for someone else, but what about Herr Schichau? There is only one Herr Schichau on this Earth. He is the bedrock on which the Danzig shipyard stands. You men only think about one thing: how to do the least work and how to earn the most money. But Herr Schichau never sleeps, because he is busy running the shipyard day and night."

A couple of weeks earlier – the whole shipyard was talking about it – Engineer Erdmann had come up with an idea that met with the approval of not just his immediate superiors. Anyone wanting to find work at the Kaiserliche Werft Danzig had to go through a series of tests. Formerly, employment on the cranes and slipways had been decided on a first-come, first-served basis at the admissions office, according to the age-old maxim that the early bird catches the worm, but now everything would be determined by carefully testing the quality of the person trying to get a job. Hundreds of volunteers would crowd outside the shipyard gates on Hanzaplatz, flocking there from remote parts of the city from dawn onwards, but only a few of them could be sure of being taken on. So Engineer Erdmann introduced the principle of sifting this human material through a fine sieve, convincing his superiors that only the best, strong, healthy men should have the right to a job.

And so they set aside a large hall at the shipyard management buildings on Werftgasse, decorated with a portrait of the Kaiser; here the job candidates solved logical puzzles on special forms, arranged coloured geometrical shapes and children's building blocks into complicated patterns that were meant to testify to their intelligence and replied to questions from a doctor and a police superintendent. Thanks to all this, the shipyard authorities could identify their true merits, crucial – as Engineer Erdmann stressed – for work on the slipways, gantries and cranes.

While the city regarded unemployment as a plague, Engineer Erdmann saw it as a blessing. He treated workers who were desperately in search of jobs like raw material, from which he could pick and choose to his heart's content. Out of this human refuse, which kept multiplying unchecked in the workers' districts of Ohra, Schidlitz, Neu Schortland and Brosen, you had to pick the real diamonds, and the rest could go to hell. The police kept a tight rein on this filthy sea of heads, calves and arms, into which Erdmann the fisherman had cast his net.

Some of the jobs at the shipyard demanded not just mental and manual agility, but also physical strength, so it was necessary to check whether the volunteers waiting at the gate had that sort of strength. For example, the workmen who specialised in bashing red-hot rivets into holes drilled in thick metal had to have muscles of steel to raise easily overhead the large, long-handled hammers used to strike the hot iron and join the relevant sections of the ship together. So Engineer Erdmann introduced an extra test into his series, which daily drew numerous master craftsmen, engineers and inspectors into the hall with the Kaiser's portrait on the wall. The men eager for jobs at the shipyard were handed leather gloves studded with iron hobnails, and then, stripped to the waist, these residents of workers' estates trying for jobs on the slipways stood facing each other in a specially marked-out enclosure sprinkled with sawdust, and fought to the first blood. The one who beat his rival by knocking him off his feet onto the sawdust-strewn floor got a job at the shipyard. Some of the imperial inspectors did in fact protest that the new method of selecting the workforce was barbaric, but in the end everyone began to see that this new way of separating the wheat from the chaff had unquestionable merits that far outweighed its flaws.

Yet the hardest test awaited those who would have to work at heights. Outside the management building on Werftgasse a soapy pillar was erected, a mast of pine fifteen metres high; a shelf was fitted to the top of it, on which lay an employment contract. Engineer Erdmann had convinced the management that all those who wanted to work on the cranes and gantries had to demonstrate resistance to a fear of heights and the physical agility of a monkey, because anyone who was going to work in a crane cabin, which hangs several dozen metres above the ground, should have far greater than average skills. So the candidates for the gantries and cranes climbed the pillar, desperately digging their fingernails into the soapy wood, but many of them only got halfway before sliding back down and dropping out at this stage, even though they had completed the rest of the tests successfully. Anyone who climbed to the top of the soapy pillar and brought down the employment contract was taken on, but anyone who came slithering down went flying out of the gate amid gales of laughter, and fell into the black abyss of joblessness.

*Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones*



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**JACEK DEHNEL (BORN 1980) IS A POET, NOVELIST, PAINTER, TRANSLATOR AND EXPERT ON ENGLISH POETRY. HE HAS WON MANY PRIZES AND IS UNANIMOUSLY REGARDED AS ONE OF THE MOST TALENTED WRITERS OF THE YOUNGER GENERATION.**

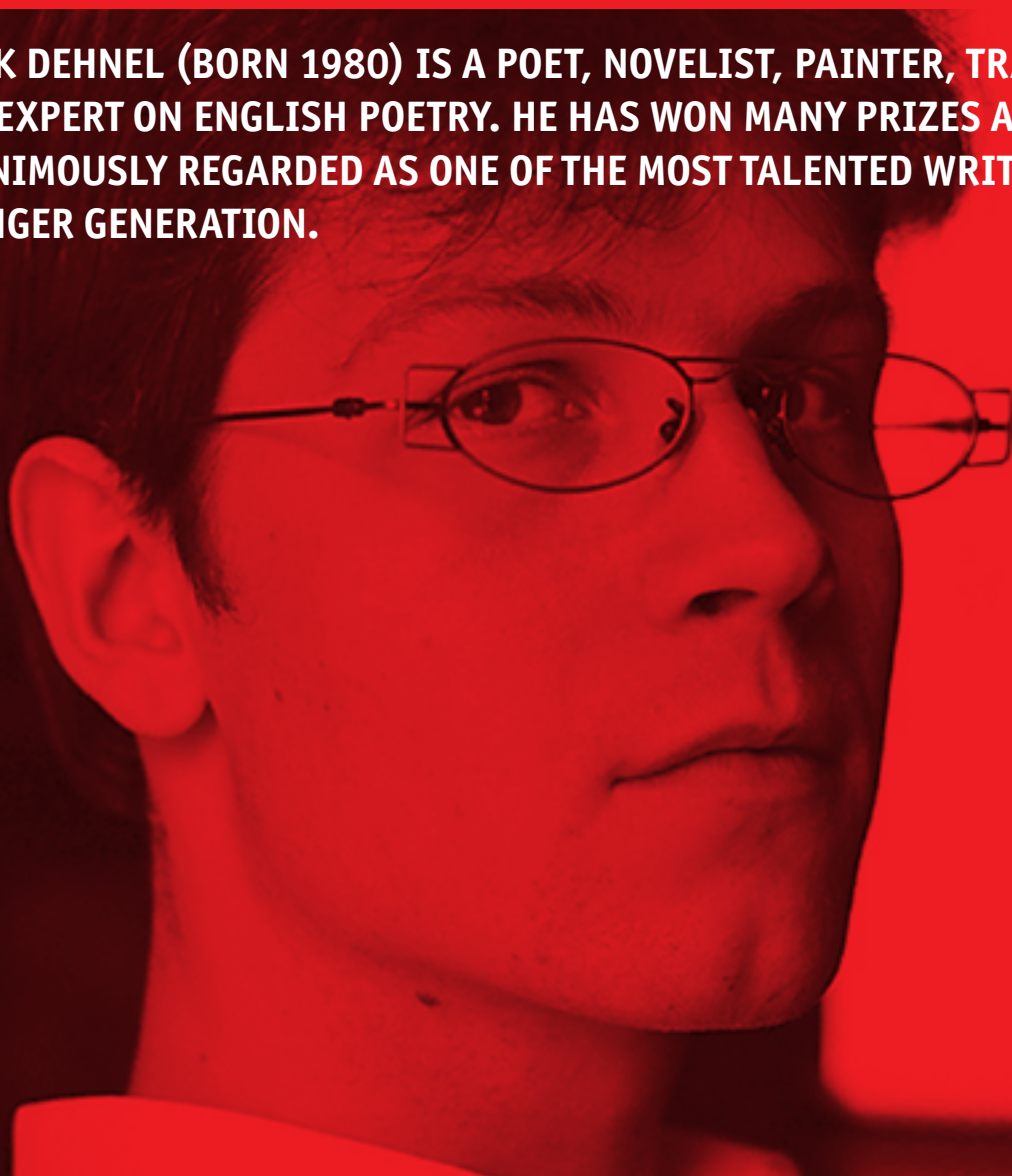


Photo: Emilian Śnarski

## **Saturn: Black Paintings from the Lives of the Men in the Goya Family**

*Saturn* is a brilliant novel, full of knotty issues and combining several forms of story-telling. At the basic level it is a modern biographical novel about the life and work of Francisco Goya. At the same time, an equally important character in the story is a person whom the modern world has never heard about, the great painter's only son, Javier. From a certain point a third male figure appears on the scene as well, Javier's son and Francisco's grandson Mariano. So literary invention is the dominant factor in *Saturn*, loosely linked to facts that can be found in the available biographies of Goya and studies of his era. The next conventional element is the family novel, revolving around an Oedipal bond and the drama of failed paternity. *Saturn* is also the universal tale of an artist, occasionally shifting into an essay about art. The book includes a number of literary descriptions of paintings which interrupt the narrative, on the one hand acting as a counterpoint, while on the other providing comment on the events occurring within the story. All these conventional elements and concentrations of meaning converge on a single point – they all emerge from an attempt to understand Goya's most mysterious works, the series of frescoes known as the Black Paintings. As he explains in the afterword, Jacek Dehnel has assumed that the real author of these works was Goya's son, Javier, who after his father's death encoded

his family history into the Black Paintings and found a way to express his extremely difficult relationship with his monster of a father – a despot, lecher and habitual liar. In other words, in the pictorial images presented in these paintings, such as *Saturn Devouring One of His Children*, Javier himself is meant to be that child. Why he has been "devoured" by his powerful, despotic father is not at all clear. Dehnel conducts an inquiry into this case. One of the most interesting leads is the discovery that Goya had a stormy homosexual affair. Perhaps his unsuccessful son, a depressive who isolates himself from life's amusements, does not allow the artist to leave his homo-erotic identity entirely in the past. This is just one of many hypotheses. There are plenty of riddles of this kind here, and Dehnel does not offer any straightforward thoughts or diagnoses: the family hell at the artist's home is not presented in any way as the price paid for artistic fulfilment. The portrait of Goya, as a genius and a monster, is far from unambiguous, which should perhaps be seen as the greatest merit of this novel.

Dariusz Nowacki

**Javier:**

I came into the world on Disappointment Street. Only when I was eight or ten years old did I hear, while hiding in the pantry, our cook telling the knife grinder where that name came from: long ago four handsome *majos* were chasing a beautiful girl, running down our street, right here, just under the windows of our house, which wasn't even standing yet, past the front of the shop selling perfumes and gold pendants which hadn't opened yet and where old Don Feliciano wasn't working yet because he hadn't even been born yet; and this girl came running, oh how she ran, and those *majos* were chasing after her, oh how they chased her, until they caught her; and in their ardour they tore off whole pieces of her clothing, ripped off her mantilla and the shawl she held across her face – and then they stood rooted to the spot, for there beneath the silks and satins they saw putrid flesh, the skull of a corpse coated in dry skin, the yellow teeth grinning. As they scattered in all directions, in seconds the body had turned to dust, all the ribbons and flounces too, and from then on the place was known as Disappointment Street. So said the cook, holding her sides – as I saw through the keyhole in the pantry door – brawny, ruddy, illuminated by a stream of sparks, as the knife grinder, who didn't know the story because he came from somewhere outside Madrid, set a succession of knives and scissors to his spinning stone, nodding and muttering between one rasp of metal and the next. But my father – even if he didn't actually say it, didn't actually spit it out with the other insults he hurled at me – always believed, I am utterly convinced of this, that the street was so named because I, Javier, was born in a house that stood on it, in a small upstairs chamber within the apartment of portraitist and deputy director of the Santa Bárbara Royal Tapestry Workshop, soon to be royal painter, Francisco Goya y Lucientes.

**Francisco:**

When Javier was born, still on Calle de Desengaño, the older children were no longer alive; neither the first born, Antonio, nor Eusebio, nor little Vincente, nor Francisco, nor Hermengilda; not even her name could help Maria de Pilar, the name by which we commended her to the care of our Lady of Saragossa. I never told Javier this – for in those days I tried not to pamper the children, but to bring up my son to be a real man, not like now, when my heart has gone soft and I have been made into a teary old pantaloon, deaf as a post to boot, which is a great help in bearing the children's shrieks – and so: I never told Javier this, but when La Pepa gave birth to him and was lying in bed, exhausted, strands of black hair stuck to her sweating brow as the light falling from the window cast a great stain across it, as if of lead white, I rushed into the city and cried to all whom I knew and all whom I did not that there was no finer sight in Madrid than this boy. After him we went on trying, fearing that he too would not stay with us for long; my dear departed wife, Josefa Bayeu, or simply La Pepa, if she were not dressing, was lying in bed – either in labour, or, if she had miscarried, with yet another haemorrhage. Once I even tried to count up, and it had happened twenty times. But, unfortunately, only Javier survived. Unfortunately only, and unfortunately Javier.

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**Javier:**

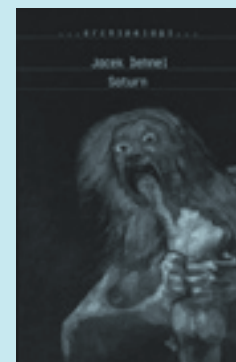
Life's good to him over there, in France. They tell me everything here. There he sits, a widower far from his wife's grave, satisfied, the old fox, the well-fed badger, the grizzled grouse, painting trite inanities, miniatures on ivory, doing nice little drawings; Leocadia makes him food, takes care of him and cuts his apples into quarters, in person, because he doesn't like the taste of the ones the servant prepares, and then she gives herself to anyone who happens along – there's no lack of opportunity in Bordeaux; apparently lately it's some German, who doesn't even know she isn't as *weiss* as she looks. Rosario, sorry, I mean Little Ladybird – he never calls her anything but "Little Ladybird" – sits beside him and they "create together". In a single flourish he draws something – not necessarily an image that is suitable for a little girl of her age, even if she is the daughter of a harlot and has seen a thing or two – and she crudely tries to repeat it. A curved line where it should be straight, a straight line where it should be curved, but above all a boring line. Boring, monotonous, charmless. Then the old man takes another sheet and – I can just see it, I can see it – muttering something incomprehensible to himself, just as he always has done, and if not always, then at least since he went deaf, in a single gesture turns a piece of paper into a banknote: a witch flying with a skipping rope, an old cuckold and his young wifelet (it never occurs to him that he's portraying himself), or a condemned man being garrotted; in short, a perfect drawing,

for which I'd at once have several buyers. And he gives it to that little brat. Blinking, fidgeting beside him on her chair, smiling now and then, she sticks out her little lizard tongue, surely inherited from her mother, and "shades it in", in other words she scrawls her dull strokes all over the folds of cloth, pieces of background, and clouds of hair, while the old man says "lighter", "darker", "lighter". And so, eagerly working away in league with each other, they change banknotes into scribbles good for nothing but rolling paper for tobacco.

**Francisco:**

Life's good to me over here in France, but it's bad to me here in old age. When the sunlight is strong – though not as strong as in Madrid – I can see better, and then I get down to some painting. I no longer have the strength for large canvases, in any case I can hardly move at all. There's a young fellow here who escaped from Spain, de Brugada; he spends a lot of time with us and takes me for walks, and has even learned how to talk to me – not as before, when he wrote on scraps of paper that I found hard to decipher, but using his hands, according to Father Bonet's system. The day before yesterday I told him off for waving his paws about, as if he wanted to tell the whole neighbourhood that not only can old Goya hardly drag his pins along, but he's also deaf, deaf, deaf as a post, deaf as a stone, a brush, a doorknob, deaf as a bundle of old rags that moves by black magic. I must stink of piss, for I have an ailing bladder, but I can't smell it myself, I haven't my old sense of smell that could sniff out a juicy quim coming down the street... I can just see how others grimace when I come too near, but as they don't want to cause me grief they hide their scowls, which is even more humiliating. I wear three pairs of spectacles. Three pairs of spectacles on one big snout. Not the biggest one at that. My sight is failing me, and so are my hands. I am lacking in everything – except willpower.

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HUBERT KLIMKO-DOBRZANIECKI (BORN 1967) WRITES FICTION AND HAS PUBLISHED SIX BOOKS TO DATE. AFTER TEN YEARS LIVING IN ICELAND, HE NOW LIVES NEAR VIENNA.



Photo : Gunnar

## Bornholm, Bornholm

Hubert Klimko-Dobrzaniecki, who until now has made a name for himself as the author of excellent short stories and novellas, has now penned a novel with a wider-ranging storyline. The result is extremely interesting. The plot of *Bornholm*, *Bornholm* occurs on two levels. One storyline tells the tale of a German called Horst Bartlik, a thoroughly ordinary biology teacher, who during the Second World War is sent to a unit stationed in Bornholm. The second is set in the recent past and consists of monologues spoken by a man who is telling his mother, who is in a coma, everything that he has never dared to tell her before. What connects them?

Despite appearances, a lot of things. During the war Bartlik had an affair with a Danish woman who fell pregnant. He is the grandfather of the man reciting the monologues, who has no idea about him. Both of them have problems with women. The German is dominated by his frigid wife. He does not love her, and living with her is a trial for him, but he stays because of the children. Only while on service in Bornholm does he discover his own masculinity and inner strength. The Danish man spends his whole life trying to break free of the toxic influence of his possessive mother, who has brought him up on her own and wants to control everything he does. He does his best to create a complete and happy family, but suffers endless defeats.

Once again Klimko-Dobrzaniecki tells a story about people who are struggling with life and who cannot find a place for themselves, or build lasting relationships with those closest to them that are based on sound principles; they are lonely, unhappy people, quivering with suppressed emotions. This

writer is a gifted storyteller, so the tales of both his main characters are very absorbing. All the more since Klimko-Dobrzaniecki presents them in his typical bitter-sweet style, softening the dark mood of the story with humour and irony.

*Robert Ostaszewski*

# You've

always been worried about my health. Mothers must have an instinct to want to go on protecting something they carried inside them for nine months. They want to protect it even when that protection is not necessary. I think I've had a moderate share of illness, I mean I haven't been ill too often. You must have thought I wasn't ill often enough, and maybe that's why you kept trying to murder me. Because in those days I thought you were killing me with all those unnecessary, extra medicines. The doctor never prescribed them, did he? Once he told me to sweat it out, not to get out of bed and to drink a lot. But you jolted the cupping glasses... You scalded me very badly that time. You never apologised, though you must have known you'd hurt me. But you were too proud to apologise. You've never apologised to anyone, the word sorry has never existed. Why can't some people say sorry? Why do they wipe that word from their minds? Do you remember how I went about with huge blisters on my back? Of course you do. You played the sympathetic nurse. You told me not to lean back against the chair too far or my blisters would burst and it'd hurt even more.

Only once they had burst were you happy, because those holes in my back had to be dressed. And the cracking scabs were the limit. Lastly there was some nice cream to rub on, and you were thrilled. "Oh, how beautifully it has healed," you say, "you can hardly see a thing". You lead me by the hand to the big mirror in the hall, tell me to turn around and stand still. You run into the bathroom to fetch your round mirror in the green frame, and you press it into my palm. "Look!" you say, angling it so that the reflection takes in my back, and at the same time so that I can easily turn my eyes towards the smaller mirror. So I look, and it makes me want to cry, because my back resembles a coarse blanket covered in brown spots.

And as for all those pills and vitamins – that was the ultimate. You come into my little bedroom. In one hand you're holding a mug of milk. The other is clenched. Then you sit at the foot of my bed and open it. I can see some round coloured things that have stuck to each other, but they're not sweets. None of those round things is sweet. Quite the opposite. They're bitter. I know, because one time I bit into them and had to go and be sick. You sit there with that glass of milk and that coloured poison, and you look into my terrified eyes and ask: "One after another, or all at once?" Then I reply that I'll swallow them all. I open my mouth and you shove in the pills and tell me to swallow them. And I do it, though I can feel most of them getting stuck in my throat and I can tell I'm about to stop breathing. But seeing my eyes are starting to water, you prudently hand me the mug of milk. I don't choke. It all goes sailing down into my stomach, and then you kiss me goodnight and leave; shortly after I feel a terrible burning, which sooner or later is sure to pass. Yes, when I stop burning, I'll go to sleep. I'll wake up very healthy, because once again you've stuffed all those wholesome pills into me. For years to come you'll go on experimenting with my health. All in good faith, I know. You did everything for me in good faith. You know what? I'll tell you something, because now I can. Now it won't hurt either you, or me. I couldn't bear those pills any more, I felt as if eventually my stomach would explode in the night, or it'd swell up so badly that I'd change into an enormous balloon and rise up, bed and all, first glide over our orchard, then over the neighbours' houses until I ended up above the beach. Then the wind will send me west. I'll leave our island. You'll wake up in the morning and be struck with horror, because neither I nor my bed will be there in my little room, and you'll start running about the orchard in a panic. In the end you'll trip on a mole hill and fall over. A mole will emerge from the hill and point his big, spade-like paw to show you the way. You'll go there and see the redcurrant bushes in front of you. They'll have gigantic fruits, the size of plums. You'll be amazed, but you'll pick one of the mutant currants and cram it into your mouth. You'll feel yourself gag, because the fruit will taste like a medicine factory, and you know why? Now you're sure to guess or you already know. It's all the same to me, so I'll tell you anyway. One day you made a mistake. You know, Mum, when you brought me that mug of milk for the umpteenth time in a row with your hand full of pills and watched me swallowing them nicely, you trusted they weren't ending up under my tongue, I wasn't hiding them, I was a good boy and a good son. You gained confidence in me, and one day you started leaving the mug of milk and the pills on my bedside table. And then you'd just come in for the empty mug and ask if I'd swallowed the pills. I used to lie and nod my head. Feeling that you'd done your duty with regard to your only child, you'd pick up the empty mug and put out the light. I used to drop the pills behind the bed. I knew you cleaned

our house on Saturdays, so on Friday afternoon, when you'd gone shopping, I'd pick up all the medicine from behind the bed – there'd be a pretty good collection – go into the garden and bury it under the currant bushes. I'll tell you, Mum, I did it with real satisfaction, because I knew you were poisoning me, though I'm sure you did it out of love. That balloon almost came true, didn't it? It's amazing how childish dreams and fantasies actually can be realised, their fears too, because you remember what started happening to those bushes. You were astonished at the way they began to wilt and wither. I can still see you in the orchard. I'm sitting on the windowsill again. And you're standing next to them, examining them carefully. You're touching the leaves, turning them over like coins. You can't think where this disease has come from – everything around them is growing nicely, going green and producing fruit. But these poor bushes are dying. Then you call me and show me, saying: "Look son, the same thing would happen to you if you were stubborn and didn't take your medicine. Just take a good look at these bushes." You stroke my head and hold me tight. "These bushes are dying because they've caught some terrible illness. If you didn't regularly take the pills I give you, you might end up like these currants too. You might wither and die. And then I don't know what I'd do. You're everything to me."

*Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones*



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**WOJCIECH KUCZOK (BORN 1972) IS A NOVELIST, POET, FILM CRITIC AND DRAMATIST AS WELL AS A POTHOLER. HIS NOVEL MUCK WON THE 2004 NIKE AWARD, POLAND'S TOP LITERARY PRIZE.**

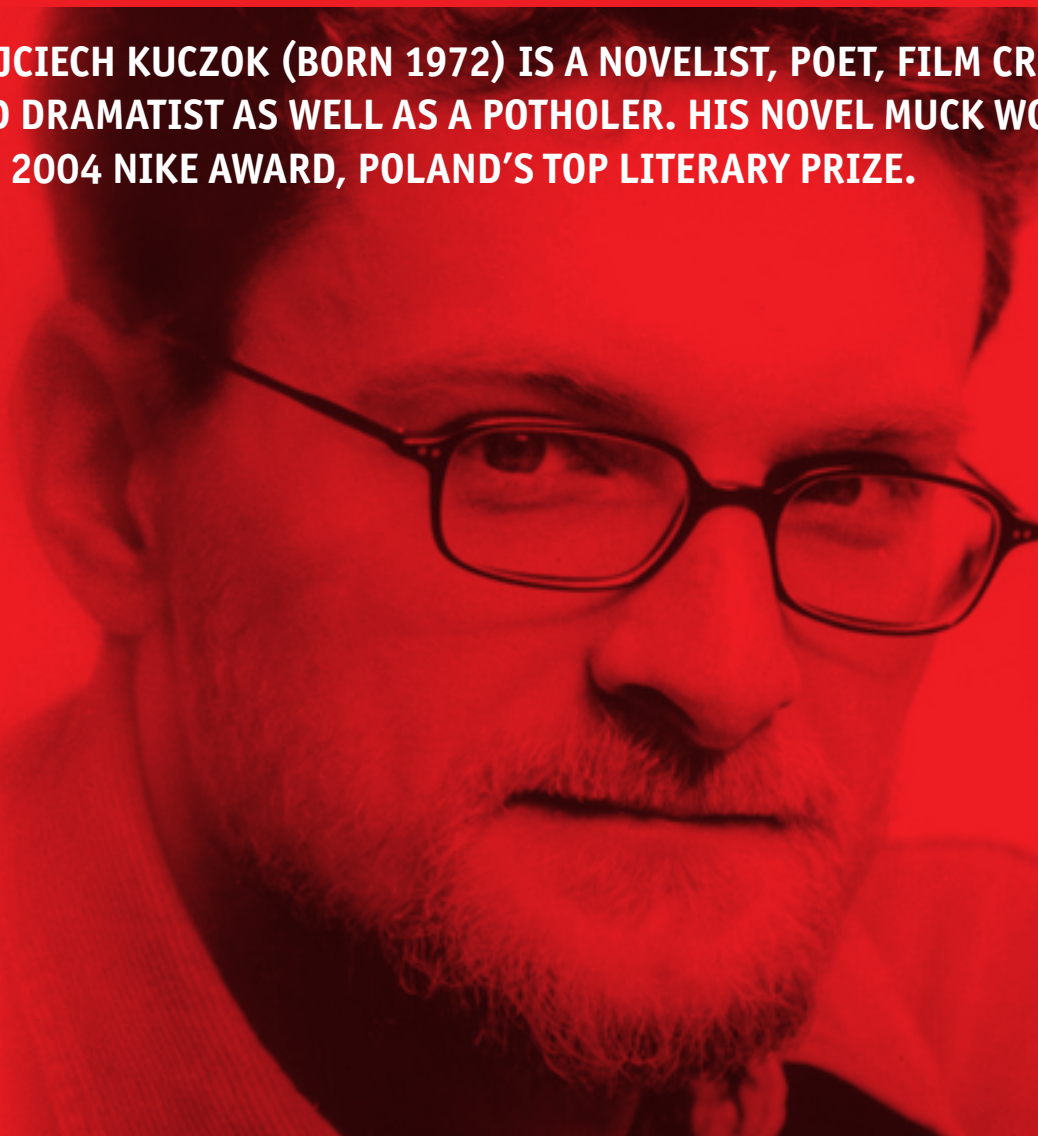


Photo : Elżbieta Lempp

## Conspiracies: Adventures in the Tatras

*Conspiracies* is a set of five short stories all connected by the Tatra Mountains and by their main character. In the first story we see him as a ten-year-old boy who is disappointed by his father's idea of going on a family trip to the mountains, because the World Cup soccer championships are on, and the television at their mountain chalet has poor reception. In the final story the hero is twenty-eight, an experienced mountaineer and potholer by now, and finally has a hope of reciprocity from the beautiful highland girl he has been in love with since childhood. It looks like there's going to be a happy ending, but none of it is entirely problem-free.

*Conspiracies* is actually a paraphrase of *Muck*, Kuczok's best known and most depressing novel, in which a father stands between his child and the world like a cruel sentry, forbidding any joy, interfering in his private life and destroying the child's self-confidence.

*Conspiracies* repeats the entire structure – the father is still trying to mould his son, but gives way when he encounters resistance; he does not use violence, so there is no need to fight a Freudian domination battle against him. Moreover, during one of their later hikes the son manages to get through to his father. Both of them find a temporary homeland in the mountains, in other words a place where they can live by choice, not because they are doomed to. And at the end of the story the boy's long-lasting love gets a chance of coming true in a permanent relationship – so perhaps the horror

story had to be told first before he could win the right to a happy ending. But the happiness comes from another plotline too, to do with the resistance put up by reality in the guise of the highland men, who are willing to host tourists, but who are aggressive towards anyone wanting to marry one of "their" women and settle permanently among them. They cannot be won round with gifts or dominated by force, so the main character has to trick them – partly by charming and partly by cheating them.

This kicks off a perverse tale about a city dweller who, thanks to commitment, knowledge of the mountains and a talent for pretending, manages to steal the local people's most precious possession without disturbing their pride and without losing his own identity. He is also accepted as an outsider who is "one of us". In this strange "adopted alien" the highlanders gain someone invaluable – an inventive fellow who revives their folklore, which is close to extinction, losing the battle against vodka and avarice. Into this world whose culture is dying, the main character brings life: by inventing a local beast, he upholds the legend of the region's unique quality, and spins a yarn about good relations between people and nature.

Przemysław Czapliński

# Membership

in the climbing club didn't particularly appeal to me either; I hadn't escaped to the mountains just to commune and associate, and I was all too familiar with the true nature of these gangs, who met in a hired basement every Thursday to witter on about things to do with statutes, discipline, training and so on. Climbing-club meetings are above all an opportunity to create rules, structures and hierarchies, and for the old boys to drone on about how their health, their obesity or their wives no longer let them achieve their climbing aims; unable to climb mountains, they seek respect and esteem for their position within the structures and hierarchies which they themselves create. They soon started to view me as a pest, because I wasn't eager either to paint the club's toilet door, or to swill beer on Thursday evenings, on top of which I went climbing in inaccessible terrain – I never recorded my climbs in the expeditions log to avoid leaving written evidence of having been in forbidden zones; to add insult to injury, by climbing without safety precautions, I was sowing corruption among the trainees.

So when my mother suggested that I take my father on one of my excursions, I thought it would be pointless, not because I didn't believe in the power of the mountains to transform even the greatest of malcontents into people full of rapture, but because I had serious fears whether we would actually manage to get to any wild areas. Even if the weather let up, my father never would, and he'd poison me by fulminating against the townies for ruining and defiling the Tatras, for dropping litter and making noise, and then causing the mountain rescue servicemen to stress out the chamois and marmots while saving their arses, because a helicopter makes even more noise.

I had no trouble picturing my father walking the trail along the crest of Krzesanica and whining about it being so well trodden, but at the first attempt to turn off the beaten track he'd state that one mustn't deviate from the trail, and what would happen if everyone did that? And if I wanted to take him along a path used by potholers, he'd ask if I had permission to deviate like that. And when for the hundredth time I'd tell him I did, that I'd got up specially that morning and sorted it out with the rangers at the set time for that, although he would in fact follow me, he'd never stop grumbling, asking for instance on what basis they actually issue that sort of permission. And when I told him it was on the basis of being shown a Tatra mountaineer's pass, he'd ask on what basis a mountaineer's pass is issued. And when I told him it was on the basis of having completed a mountaineering course that ended with a theoretical and a practical exam, he'd ask what exactly was required for the theoretical exam. And when I told him that above all knowledge of the topography of the Tatras, he'd go on to ask what else, and when I gave him a detailed programme of all the classes on a rock climbing and mountaineering course, and also a complete list of related topics, he'd ask about the ethics, the candidates' potential, and how you checked whether they were capable of ethical behaviour in extreme situations. I'd tell him there was no way of verifying this capability in a situation that wasn't extreme, and that on the course they were taught how to cope in extreme situations, and how to behave with regard to their partners in such situations, but no one can be sure of complying with this training when he has to save his own arse; that comes out in the wash. Then my father would offer his opinion – he'd stop asking questions and start soliloquising on ethics and morality; and when I pointed out to him that we were off the trail in a national park and that according to ethics, which he happened to be going on about, he shouldn't be making noise, he would reply that he wasn't making noise, he was just talking.

And we'd go another fifty paces or so, until the path came close to a precipice, and then I'd say: "Dad, would you please stop soliloquising?", and then he'd reply that he wasn't soliloquising, he was just talking to me. At home too, whenever we asked him to stop, he never did, replying that he was only talking, he's allowed to talk, isn't he? Once again I'd say to him: "Dad, shut up or I'll do you an injury. Mum told me to give you an extreme experience that will change your life; I reckon the only way to radically change your life is to toss you into the chasm. The probability of your surviving is slender, thanks to which, if you do actually manage to survive, the experience will radically change your life."

So every attempt I made to imagine what it would be like when I took my father into the mountains ended in me flinging him over a precipice, and that's why I wasn't convinced of the wisdom of this idea; that's also why I was already putting up with his blathering more patiently than usual in Aunt Niew-

cyrka's kitchen, when through rain-spotted windowpanes we were looking out at the early-autumn gloom of fog creeping over the house. Auntie made some more tea, White Kuruc said he was going into the cottage, after which he didn't move from the spot, and my father suffered another verbal haemorrhage, from which there was no escape, because this time I had come because of him, specially for his sake, to defrost him, and at the same time to inspire him with something positive, so as long as the ice-cold rain stripped us of any desire to stick our noses out of doors, I had to put up with his endless stream of philistine know-it-all piffle.

"There's nothing to be found in the mountains in this sort of weather. There's no point in being macho. The mountains don't like daredevils. You have to treat the mountains with respect, or fear even. A man who's not afraid of the mountains is not afraid of God. All those cretins tramp about in trainers, showing off to the girlies, and then the mountain rescue servicemen have to risk their lives saving their backsides. Hiking in the mountains is a summer activity; in the Tatras, as soon as summer ends, winter begins, everyone knows there are only two seasons here..."

This time my father was demonstrating his omniscience like an expert "from above the barrier" – that was the local term for tourists who, after "honourably" reaching the shelter at Morskie Oko lake with their families by way of the tarmac road, would lean on the barrier above the lake, and as they took in the view of the nearby peaks, would show off topographical knowledge limited to recognising the shapely spire of Mnich and the ridge of Mięgusze; after that, casting a resentful glance at the youthful calves of the lads who were off for a climb, they would roll out the theory of daredevilry. This involved making malicious comments about every robust-looking individual who went swiftly dashing past, uttered quietly to the family, of course, so they should know that despite appearances real masculinity was not embodied by these jaunty youths toying with death, but by sober-mindedness and reason. Along the way the same phrase would keep being repeated like a refrain: "Do you know what those young pups will look like at my age? They won't look like anything because they won't live that long." My father's great omniscience had a little more variety, because through the obtuse, philistine disgust for anything that was young, courageous, spontaneous or crazy, a deep-seated melancholy sometimes came to the surface; and sometimes, just briefly, some quite inspiring bits and pieces would appear in his verbal diarrhoea.

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**RADOSŁAW KOBIEFSKI (BORN 1971) IS A WRITER, A POET, AND A PHOTOGRAPHER. HE IS THE AUTHOR OF THREE CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED WORKS OF FICTION AS WELL AS FIVE VOLUMES OF POETRY.**

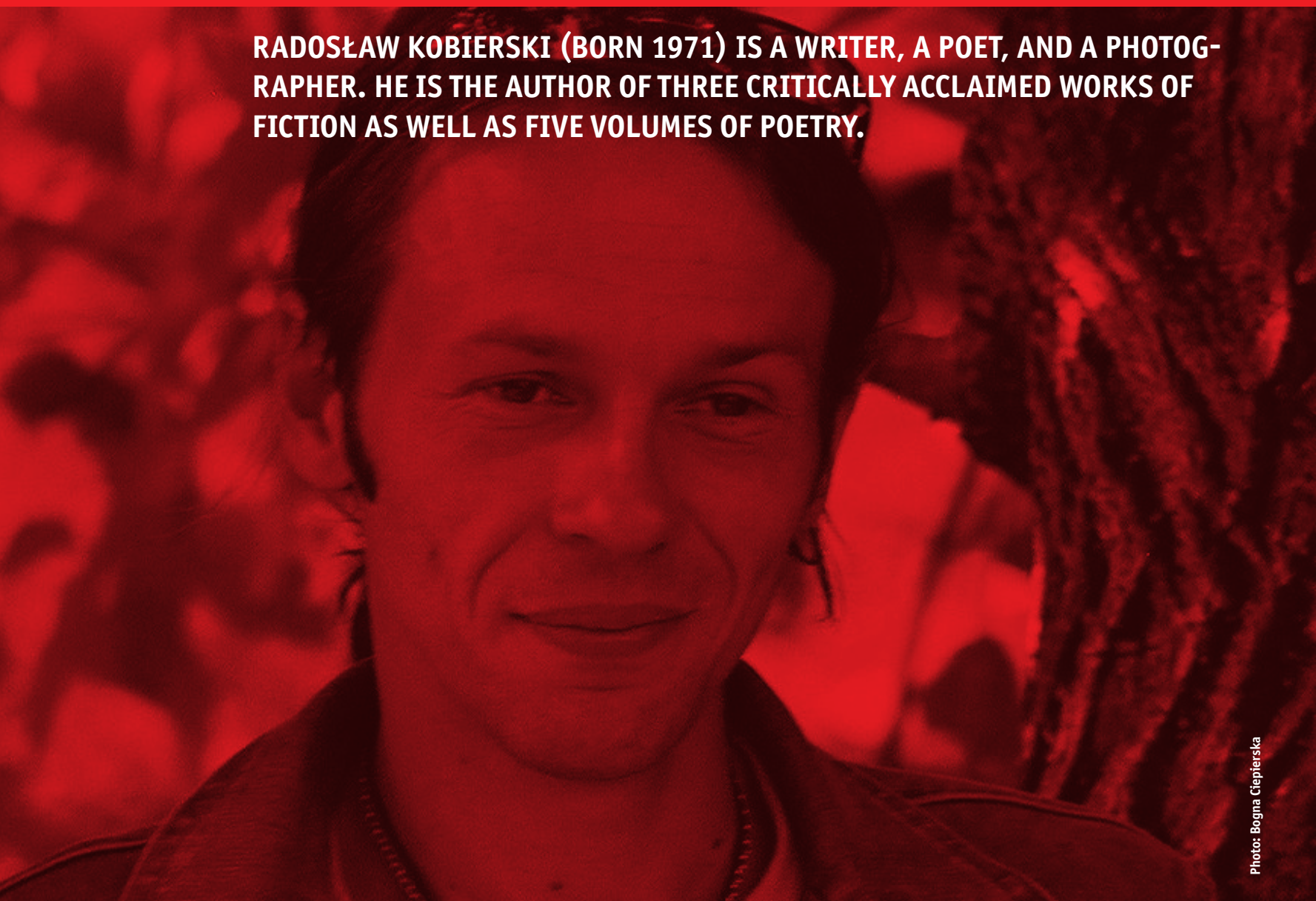


Photo: Bogna Ciepierska

## **The Land of Nod**

*The Land of Nod*, a wide-ranging novel written with an epic sweep, portrays the fates of a few dozen characters, ordinary citizens immersed in everyday life, going about their business. The subject of this story – as grandiloquent as it may sound – is human destiny, life bound by routine. At least up until a certain moment – later on political history cuts into the triviality of ordinary life (the action takes place in the Polish city of Tarnów and the villages surrounding it, in the years between the World Wars, then under Nazi occupation, and finally just after the war). The novel's characters come from all kinds of backgrounds, although people from two of these take priority, namely, the Polish and Jewish residents of the area. But there is also a Ukrainian, and there are Germans, and there is even a Silesian who has settled just outside Tarnów. The novel is peopled by representatives of all classes, of different mentalities, professions, and world-views. The novel is made up of loose, sometimes barely sketched-in episodes. Kobierski has clearly aimed to grasp the quotidian and the ordinary, and to make them sublime. Of course, everything changes in September 1939. The ordered and somewhat sleepy reality of the county of Tarnów is shattered by violence and omnipresent brutality. A metaphysical scandal arises that no one can understand, not even those Jews who are experts on the Talmud. The Land of Nod of the title appears, traditionally located, as we all know, east of Eden, a place of exile and suffering. Social and political history – like everything in this novel – appear in snapshots. It is not them, i.e. historical or social facts, that Kobierski relies on most. In a way, they are meant to illustrate

or confirm some fuller diagnoses of the human condition, and these have been best recorded in the Book known as the Old Testament. The fullest of all emerges at the end of the novel: "Man always wanders in the land of his exile." Kobierski's reconstruction work delights. The world he has depicted is unusually realistic. His characters are made of flesh and blood, and the events of the novel are as moving as if they had really been witnessed by the author. *The Land of Nod* is written in a beautiful language and may be deliberately old-fashioned, isolated from the contemporary trends and fads in literature.

*Dariusz Nowacki*

**Big** automobile race in Tarnów! So the advertisements on the posts and in the local paper announced the sporting event being organized and financed by Sanguszek. The competition was to be accompanied by numerous festivities in town and in Strzelecki Park, including musical performances and magic shows. The Borowicz home was topsy-turvy all day. Thrilled by the prospect of a trip into town, the girls went running around their room, jumping on their bed and their bedcovers, sending clouds of dust and goose down into the air. Tosia caught them with a smile, like butterflies, and set each daughter in turn in front of the mirror.

"How old are you? Just look at yourself! And we've got to be in town in two hours."

And so it began. Hair was combed and braided, faces were washed and dried. Meanwhile things were being baked, kasha was being mixed, and the pan of oil was being watched to make sure it didn't burn. The boys, fortunately, stayed calm, already in full formal wear, scented and groomed: Józio in a navy blue sailor suit, Tadeusz and Wojtek dressed in newly sewn pants of the same material and white shirts that were almost indistinguishable from one another. Tadeusz went to harness the horse, put on its collar, and tightened the ropes while Wojtek showed Józio his notebook from school and began to teach him how to form the letters of the alphabet. Józio patiently guided his pencil from line to line, angling it, straightening it out, and showing the results to his brother with a smile. The letters were unlike any known form of writing, more of a mysterious design, but Wojtek pretended to be amazed, praised Józio and stroked his shaven head.

Paweł and his future son-in-law, Julek Lipko, talked about politics. Paweł liked Julek a lot, because he spoke little but above all was able to listen. Julek was languid, as though his whole life were delayed by several seconds. You had to wait out those several seconds before Julek would react, wake up, and offer a response. Maryśka, on the other hand, was a chatterbox. They would complement each other nicely in life.

Everyone was interested to know more about the events that had been written up so much in the papers. Everyone wondered what streets they would race down, what automobiles would take part in the races. Because the duke had already gotten them all used to seeing newer and newer models, their glistening bodies, the wail of their high-powered engines that wrenched the city out of its quiet, sleepy rhythm much more effectively than the infantry regiment's bugle calls or the shows on Musikplatz, or Sobieski Square. The duke himself in his inevitable great big glasses, in his green plaid breeches and his cap slanted to one side, would cruise down the streets, down alleys, across squares, giving rides to agronomists, administrators, bohemians, and even distant relatives of the Spanish Infanta.

What chaos this caused! People would stop halfway along the road to the store, the cafe, the hotel, listening for that familiar sound, still in the distance. Only the passengers on the tram, as it stubbornly climbed Krakowska Street toward Targowa Street, couldn't hear the whirr of the car approaching from Gumnisko or from Zgłobice. But now the vendors at the Burek Market were ceasing to shout their wares, and on Bernadyńska Street people were slowly starting to move into hallways and shops. Along with his countless other personality quirks, the duke had developed this weakness for motoring, and in particular for driving fast – he was, as well, a terrific driver, but whenever he drove into town, he was like an errant lightning bolt that doesn't know where it's supposed to strike. He took great pleasure in driving onto the hard shoulder, into murky puddles, the standing water left after the heavy rainfall that day and night had trickled down the narrow streets toward Wątok. Fountains of murky rainwater would drench the neat suits and dresses, the overcoats and hats of pedestrians. Interestingly, no one seemed to hold this against the duke, especially the women – they would faint at the very sight of the athletic young master of Gumnisko, handsome as Paris, prince of Troy; he had even rejected the advantages of the Iberian throne promised to him by marrying the Infanta, yet he shone in the society of Tarnów's ladies, which threatened him at every turn with a *mésalliance*.

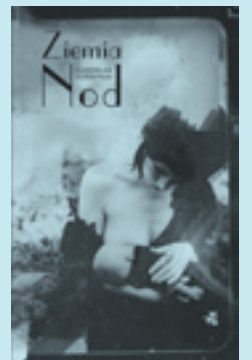
The Jurs were also heading to the festivities. Stanisław Jur, son of Wincenty, newly appointed alderman of Istow, led his slender chestnut mare to the carriage where Janka was already sitting with his mother, waving her parasol in Józio's direction. It had rained all night, but since ten o'clock the sun had reappeared. The meadows glistened and the earth began to give off steam. A fine mist enveloped the clumps of alder trees, the orchards, and the ditches, which looked as though thick spider webs had been cast over them. Marysia handed

Tosia a loaf wrapped in cloth, and the whole family set out for town. They passed the taverns near the grounds of the manor and the church with its new presbytery. Along the way, in the mud, there were fading daisies, rose petals, and dozens of colored ribbons from the processions, which in that anniversary year had gone to Łukowa and the holy icon at Tuchów. The great plane of fields and meadows, crops growing in rows that seemed to stitch the earth together, stretched before them. Tosia, happy, cuddled up to Paweł's powerful shoulder and began to sing Henryk Wars' latest hit from the movie *The Singer of Warsaw*: "Only with you and only for you, my heart dreams of your gaze. Only with you and only for you, for all my living days." Olga and Renia wasted no time joining in.

With a radiant smile, Józio watched out for Dunia's yellow house. He thought of her all the time. He dreamed of her large black eyes and her long braid. She had captured his boyish heart for all time one winter day, in January, when she gave him a raisin cookie for his birthday, along with a tender kiss. He had been standing up to his ankles in snow, freezing, but he still delighted in the memory of that kiss, made real now by the blush that sprang to his cheeks.

They passed Brzozówka and started to come near to Krzyż. The village's houses and brewery were right inside it, somewhat lower down, hidden by clumps of trees and cornfields. The only thing that grew along Starodąbrowska Street was top-heavy, leaning willows. Some of them, hollow as double basses, were rotting from the inside, full of moisture and smelling of fungus. Every spring slender sprouts would shoot out of the swellings, switches covered in catkins and shimmering foliage like commas, setting the stagnant air in motion. In the half-shade of the lane grew canopies of angelica, the little bells of white deadnettle, yellow stoncrop and ivy, all trying to annex the road. But as soon as the first frost set in, all those unsettling colors would fade, the leaves would curl up into little balls and silently fall onto the ground. The trees would wave their naked branches, hoarfrost would settle upon the cobwebs coating their trunks, and the carapaces of dead insects would crunch underfoot. Józio was afraid of those trees. He would imagine that they were enchanted witches, and that they could be brought back to life with some casual gesture, with some simple incantation. He knew how effective willow switches were if you made switches out of them. They caused a short, stinging pain and left thin reddish swellings on your skin.

*Translated by Jennifer Croft*



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**JACEK DUKAJ (BORN 1974) IS ONE OF POLAND'S MOST FASCINATING SCIENCE FICTION WRITERS. HE IS THE FIRST POLISH WINNER OF THE EUROPEAN LITERARY AWARD (2009).**



Photo: Adrian Fichmann / EMG

## **The King of Pain**

The winner of the European Union Prize for Literature in 2009, Jacek Dukaj's impressively thick volume *The King of Pain* consists of eight novella-sized stories. *The King of Pain* is a collection of extremely varied works, and once again confirms Dukaj's place among Polish literature's most eminent creators of alternative realities. Thus, it could be that the tale takes the form of an alternative version of historical events (for example, in *Wormwood* we find an alternative, fantasy version of the Chernobyl disaster and its consequences); or it could be that mankind will wander up some path of technological development (such as biotechnology and genetics in *The King of Pain and the Grasshopper*), and as a result its political and social systems – and even human bodies themselves – will succumb to destruction or total remodelling. Or else the ability of the human mind to cross into a multi-layered virtual reality will become universally accessible (this is the case in several of his stories, e.g. *Line of Resistance*). The collection also includes a tale called *The Eye of the Monster*, which is both an idiosyncratic pastiche and, at the same time, an homage to Stanisław Lem, to whom Dukaj is now Poland's greatest literary heir.

Dukaj gives a penetrating analysis of the effects of technological change. Take for example the title story, in which humankind predominantly develops biotechnology and genetics. This gives rise to a new form of terrorism, for now anyone can cultivate a deadly virus in their garage at home and use it to threaten the state. In the face of such threats, organizations as powerful as the state become defenceless and sink into backwardness, to be re-

placed by a loosely knit conglomeration of small associations, each of which grotesquely masks its true aims with a trivial catchword, such as "beach volleyball". Moreover, Dukaj's extraordinary imagination creates not only original visions of political development, but also of the evolution of the human species brought about by new technology, of ways of perceiving and judging the world and the self through a new kind of subject (the story *School* has an unusual description of the process of redesigning a boy who has been abducted from a South American slum into a cyborg serving the conquest of the galaxy. Dukaj is also able to create strikingly original visions of new and diverse worlds, their landscapes, the beings that inhabit them, and their sometimes disparate physics. The stories contained in *The King of Pain* are unquestionably an example of the exceptional potency of a creative imagination combined with an analytical mind, both of which Dukaj has been utilising to seduce his readers from the very start of his career.

*Jerzy Jarzębski*



**He** was late for the celebration; his child was ill and he stayed at home with his other half. Little Andrzej, his cousin, a living after-image of his childhood. ...

The cousin who was more like a brother. From a time when they both lisped: *couthin, couthin, couth*; only he – from among his many cousins – was to remain as the lifelong brother with no brother. Once upon a time he used to log in as *Qqazn*. ...

They are sitting on the wooden porch. A light bulb sways inside its tin shade, the spring darkness ebbs and flows, insects make their music, a dog rattles its chain. On the far side of the road, someone tries to fire up a wheezing wreck of a car.

It's chilly, so, hot chocolate. As they drink, they nibble at the last few pieces of Michał's cake from the china side plates. Paweł paints fairytale monsters with the smear of chocolate on his plate.

(Dialogue). How are things at home? Same old, same old. Everybody bugging each other. And you? What have you been up to? Ugh, I've had enough of it all. All what? Money, traffic, city life, the gage of madness? Go on, tell me what's been happening.

Nothing's been happening. There's nothing to tell. No stories. Everyday incidents, turning the pages of the calendar, simple as that. Day after day after day after day after day after day after day.

Why are you so down? Is there something wrong? I don't know, Andrzej, it's a cliché, but life has its schedules, for both women and men: such and such a number of years goes by, and then you have to change direction, or you'll wind up on existential fallow ground. The measure for chicks is their fertility; for blokes it's a mid-life crisis. I have it all written out, step-by-step, disco proteo.

What are you talking about, man? How old are you? How old are we? We're still kids.

So what? I feel that leash, that collar around my neck.

Leash?

I never stop counting. It's almost two years' long now.

Are you up to your eyes in mortgage debt?

Paweł stares at Qqazn as if he's crazy.

He gives him a soul-penetrating look. What a *faux pas* – Qqazn is as soulless as the rest of the country bumpkins.

Ha. Quite the opposite, Cousin. A couple of years and it'll be longer than my life expectancy. Free capital. Living the life of Riley.

Now it was Qqazn's turn to stare at an idiot.

Hallelujah and praise the Lord! That's what everybody wants.

A grey curtain hangs between them, an impermeable sheet of plastic. Moths and mosquitoes buzz around their heads, but no thoughts come buzzing past.

In spite of all, Paweł presses on.

Hey Cousin, it's not like that, it really isn't.

Wałęsa mode: It wasn't luxuries of that kind we fought for.

So you'd prefer it the other way around?

Work is a luxury. ...

As for those who don't work, we – those of us who do work – have to keep providing them with content for their lives.

Content: gameplay. ...

At first it was called "spending your free time". But as productivity grew, the free time increased in proportion to working hours. There was a rise in those branches of the economy concerned with providing content for the part of life we call "free time".

So-called entertainment

So-called lifestyle

So-called celebrity (life by proxy)

So-called self-education

So-called sporty lifestyles

So-called charitable work

So-called social work

So-called politics

So-called religion

So-called drugs

Content. A filler. (Content to be content).

After all – you have to do something when you don't have anything to do. (I have a family, Paweł; just you try doing nothing in that situation!)

Don't look backwards, look ahead. YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO NOTHING.

It's hard work – the hardest! – continuously devising and updating a repertoire of meanings of life.

It could be the colour of your top. Perhaps it's a sword with a bonus to your attributes. Or – perhaps it's a metaphysical system. ...

Qqazn finishes his cake and licks his spoon clean. He really is trying to understand.

He digests and digests and digests, until he can digest no more:

You mean that in the evenings you have nobody to talk to.

No, Cousin, no. You open your mouth to speak – and what do you talk about? Just think about it, and be honest.

Do I have enough to last me until the first of the month

Whose turn was it to go shopping

How is your guild getting on

What kind of mischief has your kid been getting up to

They're all sick at work

The club has bought a good goalkeeper

The neighbour's ripped up the pavement

The new taste of sugar

The frost in a constellation

There'll be a new game tomorrow

They've caught a paedophile MP

Or perhaps we'll go on holiday to New Zealand

In this game – splitting up, in the other – everlasting love

You looked so lovely in the green dress, what style is that

A spider bit me during the night

Who'll be the new Bond

And that, that's your content!

That is the meaning of your life.

And now subtract financial fears (they'll disappear). And subtract family (that'll disappear).

From the remainder – what percentage was not produced by us, by me?

Be honest.

Qqazn stares into the night, listens to the sounds of the sleepy village, and cocks his head to one side. ...

No. I'm not buying that, Paweł.

But it's true. THAT'S THE MEANING OF LIFE. That's exactly what drags people from one night to the next, from one weekend to the next.

The content coming from our minds.

Creative people's lifeblood.

Now, perhaps, something has broken through the curtain. Qqazn looks up, then down, up, then down.

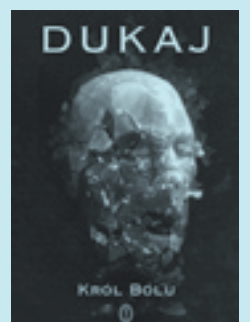
Paweł reads the look in his old friend's eyes: Poor sod. What have they done to you. You have money, but you don't have a life. Sympathy Link +5.

Paweł knows that Qqazn is not capable of understanding more. (On the other side of a Lagrangian point). He hasn't had the kind of life experiences to which he could attach Paweł's words, even the most precisely chosen ones.

And so Paweł keeps them for himself. Staring into the night. (A dog barks, a barn door clatters).

That's the truth, *mon ami*. The future that can't be avoided. You'll get there, too. And if not you, then your children.

Translation by Garry Malloy



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JOANNA JODEŁKA (BORN 1973) IS AN ART HISTORIAN BY TRAINING, BUT HER PASSION IS WRITING FILM SCRIPTS, SONG LYRICS AND CRIME NOVELS.



Photo: Magdalena Adamczewska / Time Machine

## The Rattle

Even though the number of Polish crime novels has increased considerably in the last few years, there have been relatively few stories written by younger female authors. But Joanna Jodełka is one of the most promising women crime writers today. Her first novel *Polychromy*, published in 2009, made a real splash and was very well received by the critics. The author won the prestigious “High Calibre Award” for this book. So what is the essence of Jodełka’s superb prose? Her writing goes beyond the conventions of the genre by skilfully combining an urban crime novel (the city of Poznań is ever-present in her writing) with elements more commonly found in novels about contemporary society or focusing on human psychology.

This combination continues in her second novel *The Rattle*. The main storyline revolves around the trafficking of newborn babies. A young woman wakes from a deep, uneasy slumber to find the baby she was carrying inside her has... disappeared. She cannot remember giving birth — in fact she cannot remember anything about the preceding couple of days. The officer in charge of the investigation suspects she has abandoned her newborn child, or even killed it. He is assisted in his investigation by a lady psychologist, who is reluctant to get involved as she herself has only just begun to recover from the trauma of losing her own child.

*The Rattle* does not actually have a central character. The author constructs her narrative like a mosaic telling the stories of a dozen or so characters (some more to the fore, others less so) all at the same time. As well as those already mentioned the characters include a solicitor who is hen-pecked by

his mother and wife, a depraved alcoholic gynaecologist and a thug who was previously beaten by his mother and now takes it out on other women. In this new novel Jodełka fluidly intertwines the theme of baby trafficking with narratives about highly damaging family interactions, dysfunctional human relationships turning daily life into a living hell, and the problems of parenting. The in-depth psychological portraits of the protagonists contribute to the startlingly evocative portrayal of contemporary society in *The Rattle*.

Saying Jodełka’s book is a superb crime novel does not do it justice. This book is not just for fans of stories that send a shiver up the spine — it’s not just genre fiction. It would be more accurate to say she writes superb prose that has elements of suspense and mystery.

Robert Ostaszewski

**Her** car was warming up now, but that didn't change Weronika Król's feelings about the day ahead. She had no wish to deal with strangled, starved or abandoned newborns, not on a day like today, or any other day.

She didn't have the strength to cope with such nightmare scenarios as five children stuffed into a freezer among the Brussels sprouts or babies pickled in cabbage barrels. She also knew she would not find that strength again in a hurry and she didn't intend to force herself.

There were several possible routes to the city centre from her home in Dąbrówki, once a village on the outskirts of Poznań, but now – she noted – a place to which half of Poznań intended to move. It was a deserted Sunday morning, so she could pick and choose among the routes. She drove past the church in Skórzewo, which had once been able to accommodate all the inhabitants of the surrounding villages, but was now packed out by the inhabitants of the terraced houses nearby. She passed two schools, one more modern than the other. She could have passed yet another school further on, in Poznań itself, and then turned at any point to get across to Grunwaldzka Road, which would take her to her destination. However, by mistake or perhaps guided by a macabre instinct she turned into Owcza Road in order to get to Grunwaldzka Road. It was one of those options she ought not to have chosen.

It's easy to be misled. Patches of woods and fields criss-crossed Owcza Road, so if it were not for the cemetery on the way, the road would have no reminder that its name had changed to Cmentarna – Cemetery Road. In the same fashion the tall pines were unaware their pine cones had long stopped falling to the ground, and instead fell onto the densely packed gravestones of the Juników district.

Weronika Król had not taken this shortcut for a very long time. She had not visited this cemetery at all since the burial of the child she had borne who had lived only a moment. She hadn't even visited on All Saint's Day, when everyone in Poland goes to the cemeteries to pay their respects. That day she had shut herself up at home with some wine and twenty comedy shows rented for the occasion. She hadn't dared to switch on the television because it would have meant partaking of the atmosphere of mourning. She just watched the comedy shows, not laughing very loudly, but not crying either.

But now, driving alongside the cemetery, tears welled up in her eyes. She turned her head away from it, taking care not to crash on the bend. She couldn't calm herself down until she pulled onto Grunwaldzka Road's wide dual carriageway.

"Stop it!" she said to herself, feeling hatred towards the woman flooding through her head, along with her own pain. "A woman who killed her own child," she thought, and the words rang through her head again and again. She would just give an expert opinion about the woman's sanity or her lack thereof – her sanity at the moment of course, as Weronika would only stay a moment – and after that somebody else could deal with it. She had made up her mind that was what she would do.

She turned off Grunwaldzka Road and arrived at Rycerska Road. She hadn't been there for over a year, but it seemed the policeman at the front desk remembered her. He gave her the room number. She found it. She knocked and pushed the door open a little, expecting naturally to find an officer or the person who had phoned her. She was mistaken.

There was no-one in the room. No-one apart from something bundled up in a brownish-grey blanket rocking on a chair, which looked like a frantic pendulum bereft of its clock, which had vanished somewhere. Backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards.

The bundle briefly turned its head towards her. She saw only a pair of huge eyes, terrifyingly huge eyes.

She shut the door.

She closed her eyes, but could not stop herself seeing the rocking eyes, which seemed to lack a face around them, as if rocking alone in the void.

Stunned, she remained in the same position for a moment, propped up against the doorframe.

"Are you Mrs Król?"

"Yes." She was shaken out of her momentary stupor by a thin, pale man, who came out of nowhere and loomed up in front of her. He was of a similar age to her, and he had bags under his eyes and a stretched jumper. The tussled tuft of hair standing up the wrong way at the back of his head, was evidence that he had probably not got up for work as normal, but that work had dragged him out of bed, without asking his opinion, and stood him in an upright position.

"It was me that rang you. I've seen you here a couple of times before, but we haven't had the pleasure of meeting." He smiled slightly, stretching out his hand towards her.

"In these circumstances it's hardly a pleasure," she snapped, cutting him short.

She knew it was possible another such sentence might make him lose his temper and he would not take her on and then she could go. But she did nothing.

"Please carry on," she said, demanding clarification of the un-Sunday-like situation.

"A couple of hours ago the people letting the room to her, to Edyta Skomorowska, that is, heard screaming," explained the policeman in a matter-of-fact tone, avoiding her gaze. "The screaming was terrifying, apparently. They thought she had gone mad and phoned for an ambulance at once. The ambulance service then contacted us. We can't communicate with her. We don't know what happened, we assume it was something bad."

"Do we know whether she actually gave birth?" On her way there she had been wondering whether it was simply a case of delusions, which would explain the absence of a child.

"She did," answered the policeman in a tone of voice that indicated it wasn't the first time he had explained this. "She was taken to Polna Street hospital. The doctor, a decent sort of fellow, confirmed all of that. He was in a hurry, but he was very civil all the same." He glanced at her, but she didn't bat an eyelid, so he continued, "I understand this weather is enough to make a person want to stay indoors, but why should it stop a person going about their business? We had to remove her from Polna because she reacted very badly to being in hospital: there were babies crying and she wanted to rush over to them..."

"When did she give birth?" she said quickly because she didn't want to listen to what he had been going to tell her next.

"Apparently two, maybe three, days ago. The doctor said everything was fine, everything's healing. That's all."

"And what does she say?" asked Weronika, although she was certain there was no chance she would be writing a doctoral thesis on infanticidal mothers.

"She keeps repeating the same thing: someone stole her child, she doesn't remember anything."

"Is she on any medication?"

"Yes, she's on powerful tranquilisers. The drugs tests were negative, but we'll have to wait for the more detailed evaluation. We have several theories. The best-case scenario is she left the child in a hospital, but it can't have been in Poznań, as we've checked that out. A worse scenario is she may have sold the child to someone; we may get evidence of that later. However, it is most likely she killed or abandoned the child. He took hold of the handle, but he didn't intend to open the door yet."

He carried on. "Perhaps she really doesn't remember what happened," he said, "or perhaps she's pretending. Sooner or later it will all become clear, but we called you out to try and find out now."

Weronika registered regret, as well as evident doubt, on the part of the policeman as he spoke these last words.

*Translated by Kasia Beresford*



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JAROSŁAW MAŚLANEK (BORN 1974) IS A JOURNALIST AND THE EDITOR OF A WEEKLY MAGAZINE ON THE INVESTMENT MARKET. IN 2009 HE PUBLISHED HIS FICTION DEBUT, THE NOVEL *HASHISHOPINERS*.

Photo: Katarzyna Skoczyńska-Maślanek

## Apocalypse'89

*Apocalypse'89* is a novel about the downfall of society under capitalism and about the self-destruction of one man in particular. Maślanek leads us from socialism to the free market, showing what sort of man created each system. The perversion of socialism hinged upon the creation of a world in which the masses could derive pleasure from powerlessness. The socialist prison offered its residents the possibility of being content with who they were, which was an opportunity to expend the minimum amount of vital energy. "The added value" of socialism was the collective pleasure of acting out a show called "If Only We Had Our Freedom". The appearance of capitalism was an apocalyptic moment of truth, when no one could hide anymore behind the repressive nature of the old regime. In the world of unlimited possibilities, though, the lives of the characters are rapidly transformed from feverish activity into immobility. Everyone starts out in a state of euphoria, only to fall into a catatonic slump some time afterwards. The initial patterns people followed of "producer, possessor, politician" were not so much careers, and not only fables of freedom, but rather a pathetic imitation that had no real effects in people, nor in accomplishments, nor in society. This is why energy dissipated as it did. Right before our eyes, socialism, which had allowed us to act out our frozen lives, was transformed into capitalism, which demanded that we act dynamically. The first allowed us to save up our vital energy, the second demanded that we waste it all. In this book the first theme is interwoven with the second. It presents the story of a man who, through alcohol, self-neglect and cruelty towards those

closest to him, has ruined his own life. At the bottom of his self-destructive madness lies the idea of total freedom. The hero is testing to see whether independence is really possible in capitalism. Capitalism is after all a problematic time, when anyone can be anything.

In the final moments of the main character's ruin, the connection between the two themes becomes clear. The main character turns out to be a real product of capitalism. Not a businessman, not a "self-made man," but empty being, hollow existence, a man who, in response to the capitalist mandate to consume has consumed himself and squandered everything.

Przemysław Czapliński

# Everyone

was against the commies, but only over vodka. How can you fight the commies while also demanding Saturdays off; do you fight the oppressiveness of the system while also going off on vacation to the factory's holiday house, accepting your First of May gifts, and begging for toilet paper because your ass is red from using torn-up newspaper strips?! They would talk and talk, and complain – bitterly. But was it really that bad for them? Would my father have given up the privileges he had playing in the factory's orchestra, would he have given back the apartment, returned the uniform, thrown back up the liters of free hooch, torn from his guts the kilograms of homemade kielbasa gobbled down at all the official festivities? All my life I heard constantly from you how bad those commies were, how the system destroys people, stifles liberty and freedom of expression and so on. I wonder what you would have said if you had lived a few years longer and instead of getting your nice little retirement pension had gotten fired from the factory instead? You could have done anything, couldn't you? Just like you always wanted. You would have had your liberty. Would you have taken advantage of it to form your own disco polo band? Nobody hires musicians for weddings anymore, they're too expensive. Freedom of choice – you can only be better. Would you be the best fifty-year-old ever who has no job and who only knows how to play the trumpet? Could you handle that? Well, there you go, you old cadaver. And meanwhile I had to try to be the best thirty-year-old ever with a Master's in Marxist-Leninist Economics with Honors and five years of experience sniffing library dust.

At the beginning of 1990 the Archive let me go. I spent the end of winter at home, with my mother going back and forth between Depressingly Calm Mother (DCM) and All-Stifling, Hyperactive Mother (ASHM). By spring it had become ASHM in its full splendor, it was day after day brouhaha, hustle and bustle, visits from Przebieski and Martynka, my mother's old work buddy. And they would try to talk me into joining their shoelace company. As the local Manhattan bazaar was still crawling around on all fours at that point, the conspirators concluded that they would make more money going around the neighboring villages and putting up their stall there. My mother would get up at five a.m., get ready to leave in Przebieski's Żuk van, and wake me up with her babbling over those traveling bags stuffed with their different-colored wares. Meanwhile I didn't want anything to do with their business. I found it embarrassing and shameful. A Master's in Economics selling shoelaces to the villagers at their bazaars?! Forget it, ASHM, forget it, Mr Przebieski, forget it, Martynka!

For the time being I kept busy with the move from my room to the somewhat larger quarters that had been my father's. I threw out all the useless stuff he had left behind that we wouldn't have been able to sell at the bazaar (Przebieski hocked a bunch of his clothes, and someone even bought his old sheets). I took them out to the dumpster and then fifteen minutes later I saw a guy I had worked with at the factory come up on his bike. I knew him by sight, he worked on the floor, I couldn't remember what his name was, but I knew he had been laid off with me and several other hundred people in that first round of cuts. He stopped in front of the dumpster, leaned his bike up against the wall, lit a cigarette, looked around, and when he didn't see anybody in the vicinity, he went up and started to remove all my father's old possessions that I had just thrown out. There was a trailer hooked to his bike, onto which he loaded a moth-eaten sheepskin coat, a blanket with cigarette burns all over it, a stained bedspread, and a metal document case with a broken lock; he hesitated over the winter boots, rejected them, went up to his bike, came back, dug them out again and shoved them underneath the blanket. He pedaled off without looking behind him.

I stood there on the balcony with my back to the empty room, watching the scavenger disappear. The only thing of my father's I had left were books. And memories; not the kind published in the papers that I had lived with for years at the Archive, but real memories, liberated thanks to parting with all that trash. ...

I made my debut at Manhattan in November. It was sleeting, and it didn't get above 40 degrees all day. Przebieski made a space for me that was close to my mother and to Martynka, the only thing in between us with Mrs Maciejowa, who had moved to the bazaar from being behind the counter at a gardening store. She was still trading in seeds, just in worse conditions – without a roof over her head. I dragged two big bags of my father's books to Romaniuk square, mainly history books, about the partisans, about the battles of World

War II, and about the Nazi occupation: for me an inheritance that allowed me to scrape together a few pennies. My mother and Martynka had a little space that was still about twice the size of what I got. It was the first time for both of them to do this in our town, and pretending I had nothing to do with the shoelace-sellers, I laid out my books on top of some newspapers – in the end mine were intellectual wares, trading in which would not discredit me. That was still in the Spartan days, when Manhattan had just started to be Manhattan, and the city center had just been relocated. I quickly learned from my own mistakes and from other people's, and in a week in I had figured out a few tricks of the trade. Don't put anything that might get wet on the ground or on newspapers (I started to lay out the books on torn plastic bags); always keep some plastic on hand to cover your stuff up in case it starts raining or snowing; if possible, don't set up near any kind of depression in the ground, because sooner or later it will collect mud or water; when you need to take a leak, don't trust the guy next to you to watch over your stuff unless it's someone you know really well, and if more than two kids come up, it's because they are definitely going to try to steal something; chase off dogs, because they just get pissed-on mud all over everything with their paws; as for having the appropriate clothing when the weather suddenly changes and it gets cold, there's no need to worry, because God had sent Novy and his so-called "Dead Man's Drops." Thank God for "Dead Man's Drops!"

Novy was actually Nowy, he had just changed the spelling of his name to be more capitalist – he was really Nowakowski, from 4B, the kid who had sold Donald Duck pictures and fake Matchboks cars. Toward the end of the commie days he had founded a mineral water and orangeade business, and now he was coming out with something new – cherry-ade, which was somewhere in between cheap wine and vodka; a bottle would pretty much do you. And in the morning you'd feel like a dead man. But at the bazaar, when it was cold, or chilly, or when you were hungry, or when it was hot and stuffy, and you were in the sun – it hit the spot.

*Translated by Jennifer Croft*



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MARTA SZAREJKO (BORN 1983) IS A JOURNALIST AND EDITOR FOR THE LITERARY MAGAZINE *BLUSZCZ*. *THERE'S NOTHING TO SAY* IS HER FICTIONAL DEBUT.



## There's Nothing To Say

Marta Szarejko's *There's Nothing To Say* falls somewhere in between the genre known as reportage, which has recently burgeoned in Poland, and the genre of fiction. This tale of homeless people, subsisting on the fringes of society and excluded from normal life in the community, is divided up into a series of short tableaux and was inspired by actual meetings, observations and records. The author's achievement lies in her presentation and choice of these images. It is only necessary to highlight this point because the selection and "montage" are so fundamental to the finished work as a whole.

A significant portion of this collection is made up of the naturally configured monologues of its heroes. Often they suffer from a kind of logorrhoea and can't rein in the flow of words. Although this disorder results in the order of their speech being confused and often falling outside the bounds of logic, these people certainly do have something to say. It's just that nobody wants to listen to them. Szarejko willingly takes on the role of confidante to whom these rejected people lay bare their aspirations and everyday problems. They keep to themselves, however, their memories of the past, and the reasons for the downturns in their lives. The author picks out the essence of these incoherent snatches of speech. In doing this she does not try to shock her readers with distressing details - primarily in order to respect the dignity of the people she is portraying - and the resulting portrayals are genuinely moving. But they are not by any means all portrayals of wretchedness: there are many humorous aspects to these stories, particularly in the night shelter scenes. Similarly there is considerable lyricism in the description of two people who have lost everything but find love in the shelter.

It is Szarejko's sensitive presentation of a medley of emotional tones and viewing the characters from various aspects (although always from close up) which makes her first book transcend the stereotypes of the "ugly, dirty and bad" (as per Ettore Scola's classic film). She makes an effort to see in depth and listen right to the very end, which enables her to portray these people in the fullness of their humanity.

Marta Mizuro

**Don Ivo. Warsaw. Bank Square.**

He said, "I'm called Don Ivo, everything is more difficult when it's cold, cold is more of a bother than the police, that's why I wear a Sicilian coat that is soaked with Sicilian sunlight, that's why I have a hat and a belt for my weapons, my weapons got stolen yesterday, I like the look of you, I have seven sons, four of them carry weapons, I could pass one of them onto you, weapons included, je suis total fou, I know, let me sniff you, nice, what perfume do you wear? You know how it is with women, they can go without washing for three hundred years and still have all the power over men, I don't know why my wife dumped me, why she dumped me the way she did, she just said it was over, she didn't want to talk about it, so I left and I left her everything - the dollars, the flat, everything. I was left with my coat and my hat, I still had some dollars in my pockets, so I gave them away to a homeless person, nothing to say about that, I gave my leather gloves away too. The world is going mad, doesn't matter, I'm part of the Italian mafia and I have to keep hold of that. In the old days a mafioso could just walk into a bank and say he was in a hurry, and everyone knew what that meant. Nowadays the mafioso sleeps out on Marszałkowska Road, but so what? Tomorrow I'll be in Belgrade, if you give me your phone number I'll ring you on Sunday, you'll pick up, and I'll say, "Good morning, little girl, this is Don Ivo calling from Belgrade, how are you?" Not good, little girl, you think it will always be like this, well you're mistaken. Tell me, what colour are your eyes? Mine are brown, of course, naturally, because I'm a mafioso. Here is a list of people things didn't work out for, yes, they were in the mafia, but they betrayed it, other mafiosos had to kill them, read it out loud for me if you speak Italian, yes, Antonio had acid poured on him, no, I'm not on the list, not yet, but read on, you have a nice voice, so what are you doing here in the middle of the night? Remember I'm drunk, but I'm a smart man, I still know how to work out the weight of smoke, you just take the weight of the cigarette butt away from the weight of the cigarette – take me to the cinema, I haven't been to the cinema for a long time."

**Mateusz. Olsztyn. The railway station.**

"Once I had a fiancée, and at that time she was the most beautiful woman in the world, in my eyes, but now you are the most beautiful, marry me, when you become my wife I'll put together a perfume with you as the theme. You can choose the colour of the bottle for it. Those feminine, colourful ones are the prettiest, I think. The choice will be all yours.

Come on, let me take you out for a meal."

**Herta Alhertyna. Warsaw. Wiatraczna roundabout.**

Herta, a Warsaw vagrant, is a kind woman by nature. She wanders around the neighbourhood of Praga wearing brown dresses, carrying a handbag on a chain strap, wearing green eye shadow on her eyelids. Sometimes she likes to jump into a sweat suit. She comes to the canteen for the homeless, brings a jar of pickled cucumbers with her and drinks the pickling liquid. "The world has been turned inside out," says Herta. "I have a second-hand life, but I don't complain, I don't."

For lack of anything better, she sells odds and ends by the roundabout:

Shoes;

Photos of Stalin in scratched photo frames;

Hair grips;

Catholic cards in angry colours.;

Ash trays;

Beads;

Creams;

Sugar bowls;

Books;

Anything.

Her world is laden with the blatantly ugly like the writing of the Turpists. Artificial flowers. Artificial fox furs. Artificial pearls. Smudged mascara. Candy floss. Blotchy skin. Vaccination scars. She only blew up at me once, the time I bought pancakes for her. "I am well-off," she said haughtily, "take it away."

Herta, a Warsaw vagrant, is ill. Her thoughts slosh around her insides. Then there are two Hertas. Only one of them recognises me.

"I don't know how to sort it out," she says. "I have arms from elsewhere and legs from elsewhere, sort of external to me and alien, and I can't control them. Nothing helps. She is an alien, angry Herta. I don't understand her. I can't get rid of her. I think she hates me: she hits me, she takes away all my essentials,

my handbag, my face powder, my cigarettes, everything. There is complete emptiness in my head and all around. I only hear and see her. I don't know how to sort it out. I don't have the strength of will any more."

Bad thoughts, bad words, written down in miniscule writing, left for a future that will never come in which there be no other, alien Herta.

**Dipso. Warsaw. Warsaw Central Station.**

"She really liked me and she loved to dance.

But I know why I didn't have any chance with her: firstly she was pretty, secondly, she was intelligent, she had made something of herself, she wasn't a lowlife half-wit."

**Wolf. Warsaw. Castle Square.**

He is a discontented man. He lives his life feeling he has a constant cause for complaint. Everything is in a bad way and it is only going to get worse. He gives me a meaningful look and expounds his historical conspiracy theory. He gives me to understand that we have known each other a long time, that we have met before and had discussions; that our pessimism wasn't a matter of chance because nothing is down to chance, the very word chance is an illusion; that we already know everything, but he just needs to remind me of it, he needs to make me aware of it all one more time.

They are out there. They are out there, and they see everything, they control everything. They are watching us, they secretly cut our fingernails while we are sleeping, they attach false eyelashes, they stick on tattoos, they drop jars of cheap goulash and jam on our doorsteps. You need to be aware of it: they are out there. If I were you I would have started worrying about it a long time ago, you are young, you are definitely already a target. They will find you no matter where you escape to. You can travel far and wide in clean-cut Europe, but it will be to no avail. We are entering the phase of entropy, you need to understand that, the entropic dust of the city has even settled on your face and in your hair, your eyelashes appear to be crumbling. Everything is in a bad way and it will only get worse. Once things were different. Everything was clear. Good was good and Evil was evil, Good conquered Evil or was defeated, the devil was black, blood was red and that was that. But now? Hell has gone downhill. See how innocent the devil looks now. Like a page boy. He is blue now, with a sheen. Maybe even heavenly blue. The colour of blood is now more pink, goodness is blurred and it is hard to discern.

Look at what young people are like nowadays:

Intelligent: yes.

Hardworking: yes.

Amiable: yes.

But they know nothing about history. "I don't know how things were," they say, and moreover they don't want to know. But I can assure you they are out there, and they are taking advantage of everything.

*Translated by Kasia Beresford*



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MIKOŁAJ ŁOZIŃSKI (BORN 1980) IS A NOVELIST AND PHOTOGRAPHER. IN 2007 HIS NOVEL *REISEFIEBER* WON HIM THE KOŚCIELSKI PRIZE, THE TOP AWARD FOR YOUNG WRITERS IN POLAND.

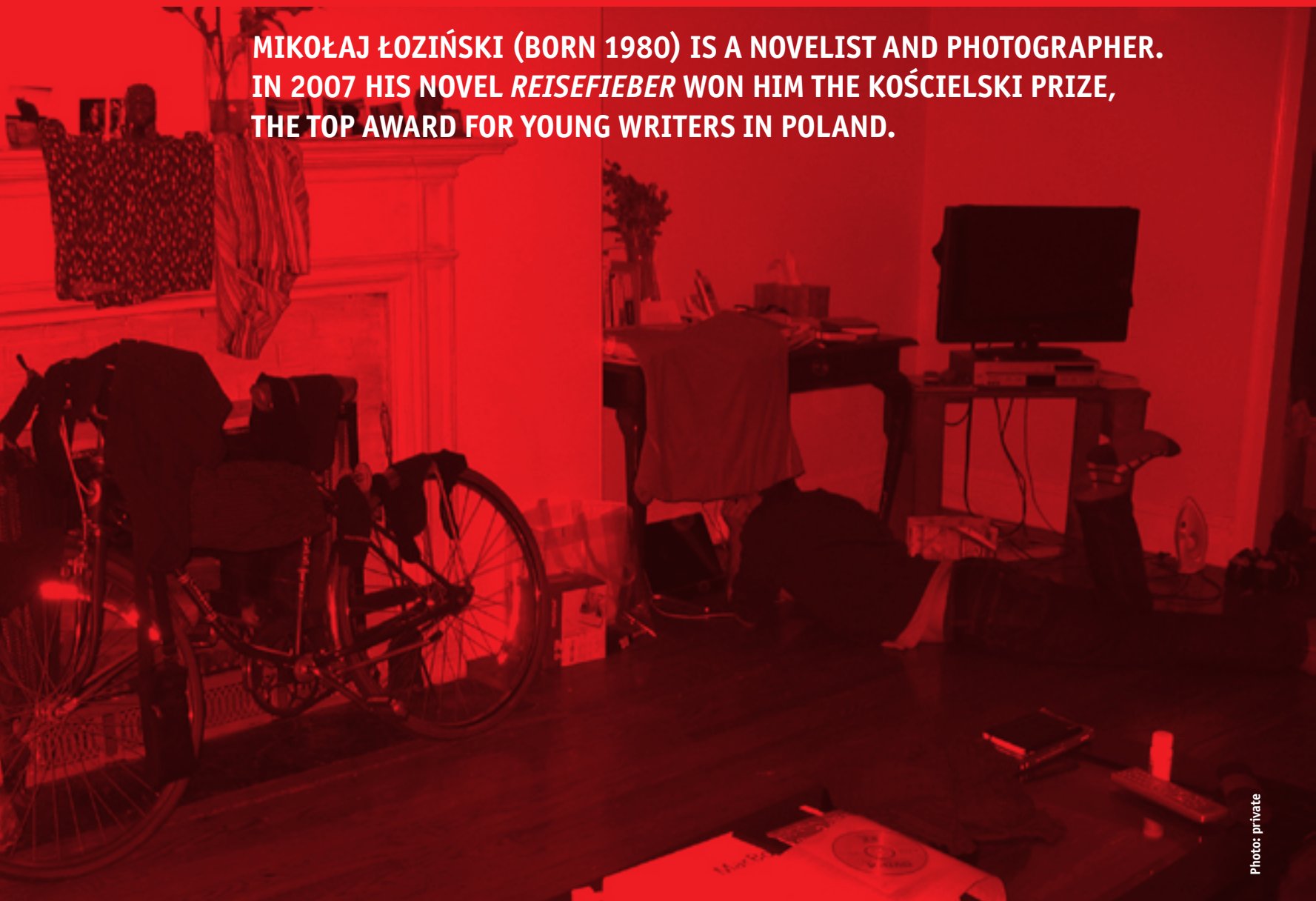


Photo: private

## The Book

The characters in this story do not have names. Instead they are the “father”, “grandfather”, “older brother” or “younger son”, which means they are detached from any specific identity and from the social and political realities vividly depicted in *The Book*, which focus on the post-war situation of Polish Jews in particular. However, the anonymity of the main characters entirely explains the non-personalised title, *The Book*. In choosing this title, Mikołaj Łoziński reminds us that the first story that comes up in any writer’s head is his own family history, and even if (as in this case) it does not end up being his first published work, it will still remain in his mind. It will still be “Book Number One”, the source of his world outlook and values, the set of tools he uses to organise reality.

Although his or her own family history is extremely close to an author, it does not submit to the process of rationalisation at all easily, even if he or she contains it within the tried-and-tested saga genre. But Łoziński does not do this: instead he builds his story out of short episodes, mixes up their chronology, conceals more than he reveals and does not even pretend to have told us everything. He constructs each episode around key words, and these point up randomly chosen objects, concepts or family members. Even the latter can be replaced by somebody else, because families do go in for rotation: thus in these stories another, alternative grandmother or mother appears, who has to be worked in, even if that means making the story more complex. It is already complicated anyway, because of the background it is set against, because of the mixed-up chronology and the large spatial range.

And also because of the large cast of characters, as well as the interference of the main ones in what can or cannot be made public, or what absolutely has to be said in order to get to the heart of the twists and turns in their lives or to show changes in their nature.

In this short book there is more going on between the lines, but what there is forms a picture that is meaningful and moving enough. It is proof that a first story does not need many words, just the right choice of them.

Marta Mizuro



## 8

The phones are always going wrong, so my parents aren't upset when there's no dialling tone. They're at the fortieth birthday party of a female friend from their class at high school. They say they're going downstairs to the phone booth for a moment. They throw on warm jackets. They just want to check if my brother was home, as agreed, before midnight. And if everything's all right with me, because it's the first time they've left me on my own.

But the payphone in the booth is dead too.

Meanwhile my brother is staggering his way home from his first party ever. On the way he's not at all surprised to see soldiers and an armoured car.

Apparently I didn't even wake up when my parents and my brother got home and came into my room, still in their jackets.

## 9

Following my parents' separation in 1983, my grandfather stops calling my dad. He also forbids him to phone him at home.

That's because once a week the editors of the underground Solidarity movement's biggest journal meet at my grandfather's place, and now Dad is living with a French diplomat, whose house is sure to be bugged.

My grandfather's wife makes dinners for the girls on the editorial team. She also prepares food for them to take away in precisely inventoried plastic containers: Chinese soup with jelly mushrooms and soya noodles, ham in dill sauce, peas with baby carrots, meat loaf with kidneys, boiled beef in horseradish sauce, lentils with bacon, apple puree, and yeast cake. She sticks a little card on each container, for example on the beef sirloin coated in mustard: place in the oven at 175°C for 30 mins.

The editorial team are sent food ration coupons by their readers.

Grandfather takes a lively part in the conversations at table. He only sticks to one rule: not to give advice.

"You people know better nowadays," he often says.

Anyway, the editor-in-chief is the daughter of an old comrade of his from the war in Spain.

"I'm sorry," says my grandfather, whenever he inadvertently knocks over a glass of wine, or a sauce boat.

During one of the dinners he has a stroke and is taken away in an ambulance. A few days later he can already walk about and call from a payphone fixed to a shabby wall in the hospital corridor.

"I'm glad we can have a quiet chat at last, son," he says into the receiver.

He's not even bothered by the nice lady's voice that keeps repeating: "Conversation monitored, conversation monitored".

## 10

At night we drive up to a grocery shop. My older brother is driving the Volkswagen Beetle that Dad left him when he went away. I'm sitting in the back with my black-and-white trainers on the seat. I'm not allowed to put them on the floor – it's so rusty the street is showing through it. Nor am I allowed to sit in the front yet.

On my knees I'm holding a specially prepared telephone.

My brother gets out, but he doesn't switch off the engine. He goes up to the padlocked door and is reflected in the dark shop window. He looks around – there's no one coming. At his signal I roll down the window and carefully pass him the phone cable, at the end of which, instead of a jack, there are two pins inserted. He takes it and with great precision he sticks the pins into the wires running down the wall of the building.

Then he comes back to the car. He rolls up the window until the cable is trapped in it, so we can drive off with it at any moment.

"Dial away," he says.

Besides ours, we can also hear the shop's phone as I dial the long, thirteen-figure number from memory.

After four rings my dad picks up the receiver. I tell him that Mum has gone to a feminist camp, and that for a week I'm living at my brother's place. On the eighth floor, in our grandmother's old flat, from where you can see the sweet factory. I tell him how my brother takes me to school on his motorbike each morning. How at breakfast and supper we drink green grape juice and eat toast with Kiri cheese squares. No, don't worry, Dad. We're not paying a fortune for this conversation. When are you flying over from France? You've just got to see where we're phoning you from.

## 11

Dad's phone is cut off a month after his return to Poland. Two weeks before the first free presidential election in 1990.

He has come back to do a television campaign for the incumbent Prime Minister of the first democratic government.

That same week his car is broken into as well. The video cassettes with all the film material are gone from the boot, including the tape ready for tomorrow's broadcast.

He knows they won't have time to film or edit anything else now. On top of that, the next day is a public holiday, the eleventh of November. Around midnight they come up with the idea of replacing the stolen fifteen-minute programme with a message saying: "Some days are solemn enough to call a halt in the political fight. The most dignified way to celebrate them is in silence. National Independence Day is just this kind of holiday."

After one in the morning they drive to the Prime Minister's office to record material for the twelfth and thirteenth of November. During a long election address the Prime Minister keeps taking off his glasses and putting them on again. A few times Dad begs him not to do that, because later on he'll have trouble with the editing.

But that doesn't help at all. Finally Dad loses patience.

"Do you actually want to be president or not?" he asks.

"But you know I don't," says the Prime Minister.

"So why are you standing in the election?"

"You know perfectly well my friends have asked me to."

After the election defeat, my dad's wife and my younger brother arrive. Now they have the same phone number that my grandfather used to have. They throw out my grandfather's old phone with the long, twisted cord and buy a new one – a white, wireless one with an automatic answering machine.

"Son, could you call us? I deliberately won't pick up, and you don't have leave a message. Just listen to my recording and tell me if it's OK."

I call. The answerphone comes on. Dad's voice. *Hello, this is telephone number 22 05 07. Please leave a message after the beeping tone. Thank you. Vous êtes bien au 22 05 07, laissez-nous un message après le bip sonore. Merci.*

I don't leave a message. Shortly after, Dad calls me back.

"Well, son? How do you like it?"

"OK, it's fine."

"But it wasn't quite right, was it? Call again now. Listen to how I've changed it. It doesn't say "after the beeping tone" any more. It just says "after the tone", because everyone knows it's a beeping tone, so you don't have to say that. The same goes for "telephone number" – you don't need that either. Hello, this is 22 05 07, please leave a message after the beeping tone, without beeping, I mean."

A minute later I call again.

"Better, isn't it?"

"Yes, much better."

"You're a lovely boy to help your father. Call just one more time. The last time. The final version. Instead of the number at the beginning, I've recorded our names."

*Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones*



EWA SCHILLING (BORN 1971) MADE HER LITERARY DEBUT WITH THE SHORT STORY COLLECTION *MIRROR*. SINCE THEN SHE HAS PUBLISHED TWO NOVELS. WITH HER COLLECTION *THE EVERYDAY* SHE RETURNS TO WRITING AFTER A FIVE-YEAR BREAK.

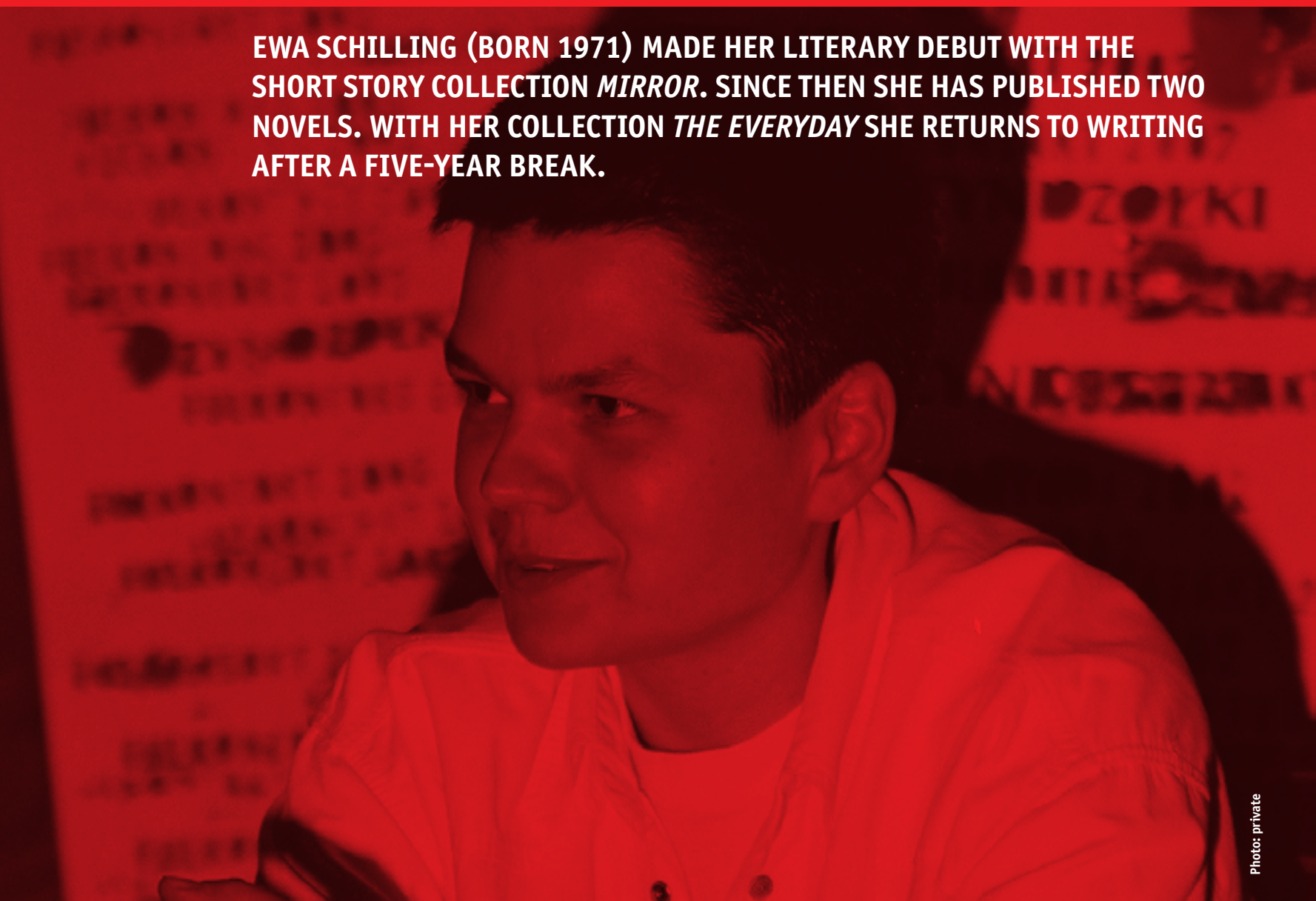


Photo: private

## The Everyday

I am always lamenting that so few collections of short stories are published in Poland, while we have so many writers who are truly perfect for that genre. One of these perfect writers is Ewa Schilling. She did manage to debut with a collection of short stories, but then published two novels, enough to establish herself as the “leading lesbian writer” in Poland.

In her latest book she doesn’t dispute this label, but nor are all thirteen of the heroines of these stories lesbians, or at least their homosexuality is not stated explicitly. Wanda is the widow of a famous male writer, who upon the death of the husband to whom she has dedicated herself entirely, having given up any aspirations of her own, must now learn to love herself, too. Teenaged Emilia is preparing herself for life without her mother, who is terminally ill, while Bożena, who is expecting a child, simply wonders what would have happened if she had chosen a love affair that would have been more difficult but perhaps more in accordance with her nature. Lastly, Małgorzata, abused as a child by her father, only appears in person at the very end of her story, most of which is reconstructed by her daughter. The other women of this book are ending or beginning relationships that often constitute a challenge to an environment that is ill-disposed to them, including their parents.

Although Schilling does not neglect the Polish social context in which gay people live their lives, the stories simply read like love stories rather than an appeal for tolerance. With intriguing, strong characters, so different from one another that it is often hard to believe they can communicate on

anything at all and transcend the barriers that separate them. But Schilling is able to offset the atmosphere of wonder that surrounds the meetings of “two halves of a whole” with a terse, reporting style completely devoid of sentimentality (though not of lyricism). She designs her fictional situations so evocatively that they completely absorb the reader. Naturally, the same theme runs throughout the collection, but in each part it is presented in a different way. It is mind-boggling to think how many more curious situations Schilling could invent – and this in itself is proof of the scale of her talent.

Marta Mizuro



# Cautiously

she turned on the desk lamp. There was the opened planner and the phone. He preferred to interrupt his work than not pick up the phone; he couldn't stand for her to do it instead of him – he had to be first, he had to be irreplaceable. He couldn't stand cell phones because they died, cutting him off from the world. The planner was totally filled up with messy writing – she flipped through pages starting at the beginning. It was a sizeable aspect of his life: in between the meetings he had scheduled and noted down there was stuff on politics and sports, archeological and astronomical discoveries, and short, hateful descriptions of bestsellers. Little comments on the people he knew, like “WŁ has another girlfriend a quarter of a century younger than he is, how does the son of a bitch do it when he's an idiot, bald, and married?”

She was the only one he hadn't written anything about, which made sense, she didn't call, and she didn't appear in the newspapers, and she was always at arm's reach. And even if Staszek went off to a literary festival or something, he would call from his hotel room in the evenings – to say that he was bored, that these literary events were so stupid, that he wouldn't give a shit about them if it weren't for the fees.

She drew his laptop toward her. She lay her hands on the armrests of the swivel chair, hesitantly, patiently becoming acquainted with its texture, its arches and curves, meeting its chilly surface with the warmth of her body. Staszek loved those kinds of things – the swivel chair, the oak desk, the metal holders for the pens, pencils, and highlighters that he bought by the fistful, hardcover spiral notebooks with color-coded markers on the pages. Before typing up a text on his laptop he would make notes – shorthand, sloppy, indispensable. Usually by the middle of the book he would stop looking at them, but he would always write out the beginning.

A file called “AUTOBIOGRAPHY” came open.

“The dog would lick my face, and I would pet him and pull his tail by turns.” There followed a description of the dog, the room, and his fascination with the prism that stood on a shelf. Parents, friends, school, checking out girls, high school graduation, wife, children. The text broke off with the success of the book *The Back of the Eagle*, which had been published a few months before their first encounter. She took his newest notebook out of the drawer. It had a cherry red and emerald helix on the cover.

“The journalist couldn't believe that someone who had written so convincingly about religious experience could be an atheist. Firstly, that's what writing is. Secondly, I'm really an agnostic, but I don't like to admit to not being sure about things. Atheism sounds better.” She flipped faster through the pages. “I would like reincarnation to exist, but going backwards – I'd like to participate in the Eleusinian mysteries.” Several pages slipped from her fingers. She went back. “Wanda is like that lilac bush – I have good thoughts looking at her. She doesn't bother me all the time about getting a divorce, she keeps her word – a real exception among women. Hell, of course I would get a divorce if I thought it would last five minutes without attracting the attention of the hyenas that are the journalists and my friends. When I was twenty-two, nobody knew me, and Janka was a quiet, gentle creature. Lucyna is hard as a rock, she threatens me with the best lawyers, and she has the backing of the family. The arrangement is clear – she gets half the money, they advertise me well and get me contacts abroad. And they don't put disgusting gossip in the tabloids about my relationship with the secret police or with little girls.”

She had known, really. “Really,” meaning she had been telling herself it wasn't like that. She would be hurt less by a thoughtless dislike of formality than that respect for the way things were that was expressed here so succinctly and emphatically. She had eyes and ears, she could draw her conclusions, but his silence had allowed her to deceive herself.

She looked through the file on his laptop again, for a long while filled with the agreeable rhythm of her breathing and the rain. She placed her middle finger on the backspace button, pressed it down, hard, and watched how sentences disappeared. She could delete the whole text at once, but she wanted to see the process: like developing photography backwards. As if the hair and mouth were disappearing, the facial features getting paler, until the eyes turned into blank space.

She checked to make sure the door was closed – sometimes it came ajar on its own. Staszek would slam it so hard there would be an echo, but all you had to do was pull the handle firmly, pushing it in a little.

Decisively, deliberately, she typed in the capital letters “ME”

Underneath she wrote:

*The neighbor's dog was chained up – I managed to set him free – he came through a hole in the fence and over to our side. I wanted to play with him – he bit me. The neighbor came over – he beat it so bad he killed it. I never ran away.*

She lit a cigarette, waited for a column of ash to appear and then tapped it off on the perfect oak desktop.

*My brother climbed trees – my mother grabbed me by the dress. I drank wine – I kissed a boy – my father called me a whore. I worked – proofreading – bookshops. Always books. I met a few writers – they would write down words – those worked like alcohol, sex, or holy mass. They fascinated me – they took something and turned it into a text. They took everything – and turned it into a text. Men. I agreed – to them turning me – into a text too. It did me harm – I didn't feel it.*

She was sweating slightly. She stubbed out her cigarette and lit another.

*Most of all – I wanted to be fuel for Staszek. He is – energy and dynamism, I am – sucked into the whirlpool, a part of his magic – the co-creator, an indispensable element. I've managed to survive twenty-two years with him.*

*I love the sea – he knows it – we moved to his beloved mountains. I wanted to work – he begged me to quit – he did a dodgy deal for the lowest allowance. He called me his wife to his friends – I couldn't do it. He didn't want to have more children – he was always boasting of the three he had. He was gentle in bed – when he talked about sex – vulgar. If he was ashamed – it was only of that. He repeated incessantly: “I can't stand women who write, they have the complex of men who write.” He would talk about his old lovers. I wanted to be alone – he got upset – he wanted company. He wanted to be alone – I wanted company – he got upset. He was strong – he carried the shopping bags – he chopped wood – he cheered me up – I always believed him. He knew so many things – about the Incas, the Sami – Siberian shamans. When he got sick – he had to have a shot every day. I would nag him as soon as we got up – “show me your stomach,” then he would howl I was hurting him – he didn't want anyone else to do it. He was afraid of dying alone – he made me promise – “I won't die first.”*

Next cigarette.

*I admired him – he did the things I wanted to do. He was the perfect choice for me – with him I couldn't indulge my whims. He protected me perfectly from failure. I never loved him. Or myself.*

She leaned back; her neck was hurting. She could write twice as much, but she was tired. She slammed the laptop shut.

*Translated by Jennifer Croft*



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WITOLD SZABŁOWSKI (BORN 1980) STUDIED POLITICAL SCIENCE IN WARSAW AND ISTANBUL, WORKED FOR CNN TÜRK AND FOR THE POLISH TELEVISION. HE RECEIVED SEVERAL PRIZES FOR HIS WRITING, INCLUDING AN AWARD FROM AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL.

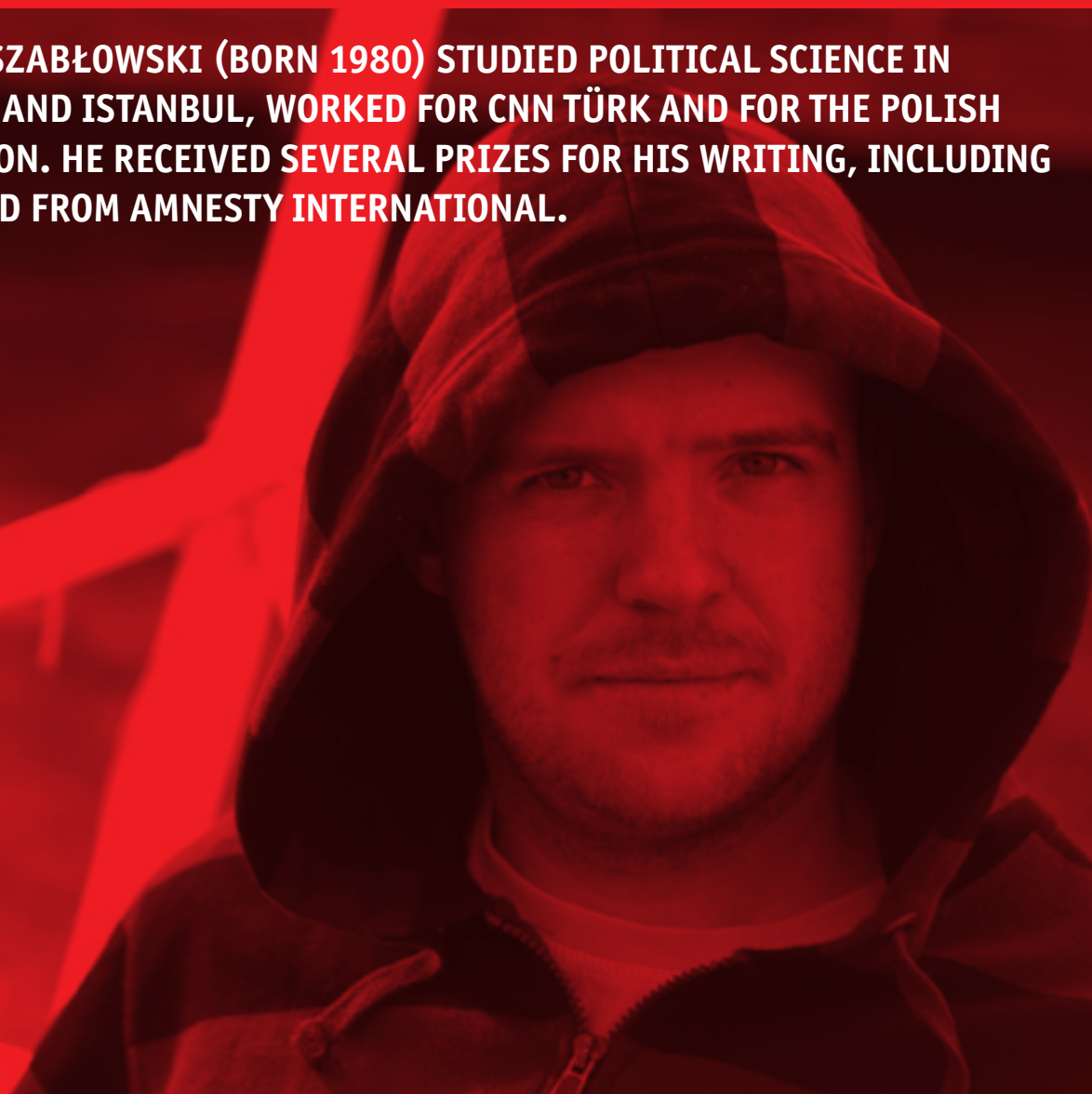


Photo: Albert Zawada / AG

## The Killer from Apricot City

Turkey is a country that remains fairly unfamiliar, and semi-exotic. This is confirmed by Witold Szablowski's interesting collection of reportage, *The Killer from Apricot City*. The reporter mainly went to places that don't feature in the guide books and talked to many Turks from a wide variety of social strata and groups, all with the aim of getting to know the Turkish mentality as best he could. And for a European it is sometimes astonishing, or even shocking. This is clearly evident in the example of relationships between men and women in Turkey, the model for which has been shaped by a combination of old, unwritten laws and the recommendations of Islam, and is based on total domination by the men. The two most horrifying chapters in the book are about the attitude of Turkish men to Turkish women. In the report entitled *It's Out of Love, Sister*, Szablowski writes about the custom of "honour killings". If a woman tarnishes the family honour, the only way to restore it is to kill her. The reporter presents the cases of two women, one accused of betraying her husband, the other raped by a neighbour. The first managed to get away with her life, but the other was stoned to death. In a piece entitled *The Black Girl* Szablowski describes the issue of prostitution. In Turkey it is legal, regarded as an ordinary business, and many men take advantage of the opportunity to pay for sex. But few people mention the sinister side of the business, the hell that the lives of the prostitutes becomes, the fact that young girls and women are sold to brothels by their families, or the rapes, beatings and social ostracism. However, Szablowski does not only and exclusively focus on these more sensational topics and does not present Turkey as a savage country. He points

out the great divide in this nation, which on the one hand is tied to Islamic tradition, and on the other has been trying for several decades to come closer to Europe and to modernise. This is plain to see in what he writes about figures who are important to modern Turkey, such as Naizm Hikmet, one of Turkey's greatest poets, or current Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who has campaigned for Turkey to join the European Union.

*Robert Ostaszewski*

# It's Out of Love, Sister

31

## 1.

Hatice shields her mouth with her hand, as if she's afraid the words will spill out of her. She doesn't want to speak. She has never talked to anyone about those matters. And she has never intended to.

I explain that she's not in any danger.

But it's not about danger. Hatice simply doesn't know how to talk about what she went through.

For how can she talk about her father? Fathers love their daughters the world over.

Hatice's father wanted to kill her.

How can she talk about her mother? A mother should shield her daughter with her own body.

But Hatice's mother shouted at her husband: "When are you finally going to kill that whore?"

How can she talk about her brother, who came to her house with a knife? Or her sister, with whom she had slept in the same bed since childhood, but who didn't warn her?

If her husband Ahmet weren't a strong person, Hatice wouldn't be alive now. We meet at their house. We agree that if they find it impossible to talk, I won't insist.

Hatice receives me wearing Oriental-style harem pants and a headscarf that entirely conceals her hair. Ahmet has a bushy moustache and a checked flannel shirt. They are both twenty-two. They have been together for five years. The marriage, like most in their village, was arranged. But they are very happy.

Their flat consists of two chairs, a sofa bed and a rug on the wall. They haven't yet acquired more. They haven't any children. They live near the market, where you can buy pistachios, water melons, cheese and bread. Ahmet works there, selling honey. They have friends. They have started a new life.

The old one ended four years ago, when Ahmet went into the army. In the meantime, Hatice was to go and live with her aunt. Her aunt is a widow who lives with her son, so it was ideal. In eastern Turkey a woman should not live on her own. It is immoral.

The problem was that a day after Ahmet left, her aunt's second son, Abdullah, knocked at Hatice's door. He shouldn't have done that. Hatice told him to go away.

He went, but a day later he came back. He started tugging at the door handle. "Open up, I'm going to deal with you!" he shouted.

Hatice stood frozen to the spot. She didn't know what to do. Shout? Abdullah would play the innocent. He wouldn't come clean. Tell her aunt? For Allah's sake! No one would believe a woman!

So Hatice held the door shut with all her might and Abdullah gave up. But the next day he decided to take revenge.

## 2.

From above, Diyarbakir looks like a pancake with a few blisters of air bulging up on its surface. Here and there dark brown lumps stick out. As the plane descends, I can see they are stones, scattered here as if they sprang out of the ground.

At the edge of this plain are the blue threads of the Tigris and the Euphrates, which marked the borders of ancient Mesopotamia. This is where the first civilisation was founded. Here the ancients sought the ruins of the Biblical Eden. Very near by, the patriarchs Abraham and Noah were born.

The issues that concern us surely go back to those days. You enter the city through a wall of black brick. The Byzantines built it over a thousand years ago. According to the guidebook, after the Great Wall of China, this is the second most precious in the world. There should be thousands of tourists coming here. But there aren't. Diyarbakir has a bad reputation. It is the capital of a country that doesn't exist – Kurdistan. And of a people who are prepared to take up arms and fight for its right to exist.

Only a few years ago big business used to bypass this city, but since the Kurds have ceased to plant bombs and the army has stopped firing on the neighbouring villages, businessmen have been coming here too. Diyarbakir has a million inhabitants. These days no city in Europe would be ashamed of the main drag. There are modern shops and expensive restaurants. Every month there are more and more of them, because the evil known as consumerism has settled in for good.

Only the old men with the beards of patriarchs take no part in all this. They sit in the shade of the trees outside the mosques and complain. They don't like

televisions, mobile phones, jeans, short skirts, schools or newspapers. They don't like anything that brings confusion into their lives, or anything that tries to change their age-old principles.

## 3.

Each year in eastern Turkey a few dozen young girls are killed. One after another they die in strange or unknown circumstances. They are the victims of honour killings, a tradition that bids the relatives to kill women who stain the family honour.

Ayşe Gökkan, a journalist for Kurdish television, is writing a book about honour killings. "The culture here is based on male dominance. Any resistance has to be punished," she says.

According to Ayşe Figen Zeybek who represents Ka-Mer, an organisation that tries to prevent violence within the family: "This tradition is several thousand years old. It is unwritten and very fluid. Sometimes even marital betrayal can be forgiven. Another time a girl dies because she wants to wear jeans."

"Sorry?"

"Girls die because they want to be independent. In recent years poverty has driven many families out of the villages into Diyarbakir. It's often as if they have come here from the Middle Ages. It's an immense shock, especially for the young girls."

"Meaning?"

"They find themselves in the middle of a global village. Mobile phones, the internet, MTV. They see their peers who can go out of the house without a man to mind them, who can dress nicely instead of wearing a headscarf and harem pants all the time, or who have a boyfriend before getting married. And they want to live like them. Meanwhile, their fathers are bewildered too. Keeping watch over their daughters was easy back in their villages. But in the city, only Allah knows what might enter a girl's head. And the daughter, instead of sitting at home like her mother, grandmother and great-grandmother, comes and says: I want to go to the cinema, I want to go for a walk, I want new shoes. It is usually the best girls who are killed, the most open and brave."

On the day I saw Mesopotamia from the plane, a father killed his daughter in Şanurfa. Why? Because she sent a text message to the radio with best wishes for her boyfriend. Her first name and surname were mentioned. The father believed she had tarnished her virginity.

Two weeks earlier in the town of Silvan a husband killed his wife. He told the family that at the time of their wedding she was not a virgin. Her parents believed that he must have been right.

*Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones*



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# MARCIN MICHALSKI, MACIEJ WASIELEWSKI

MARCIN MICHALSKI (BORN 1982) IS A TEACHER, JOURNALIST AND RUNS A YOUTH SUPPORT GROUP; MACIEJ WASIELEWSKI (BORN 1982) IS A PHD STUDENT IN THE DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM AND POLITICAL SCIENCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW AND A JOURNALIST FOR THE TELEVISION STATION TVN24.



Photo: Marcin Wapniarski

## 88:1. Tales from the Faroe Islands

Two young reporters, Maciej Michalski and Maciej Wasielewski (both born in 1982) made several trips to the Faroe Islands, not only to do some sightseeing on that little archipelago, but also to enter the world of the local Faroese people as deeply as possible, and to get to know their way of life. The result of this “field research” is a collection of reportage as extraordinary as this tiny European country.

The Faroe Islands are a territory of the Kingdom of Denmark with near-total autonomy consisting of eighteen major islands on the Norwegian Sea, inhabited by 50,000 people. Even though they do belong to Europe, the Faroese are at the margins of the global village. The population, which has been shaped by difficult living conditions on these windy, rainy (it rains there over 300 days per year!) and not particularly fertile islands, is very attached to its traditions and has developed into a society that appears to be a real utopia. Family ties and neighborly relations are very important to them, and in a time of universal hurry, they still live at a relaxed pace. Their country is almost entirely free of violence and crime (the last murder on the Faroese Islands occurred in the 1980s). However, as the years pass, increasing tourism and the development of the telecommunications industry has led to a slight degradation of the idyllic world of the Faroese.

Michalski and Wasielewski try to come to terms with the history of the Faroe Islands as well as with the contemporary state of affairs there. They write of distinguished Faroese as well as of ordinary people they encountered on their travels around the islands. For this purpose they use a variety of liter-

ary forms in their book. Their choice of the word “tales” to describe their work is apt. Here the reader will find classic reportage, anecdotes, sections that are closer to fiction than to journalism, and even some playful forms of reportage. To give a couple of examples of their most creative concepts: a description of fish-processing technologies is couched in terms of their visit to a spa for fish, while the story of a Polish woman living for many years on the Faroe Islands and looking after her compatriots who end up there is written in the form of a soap opera script.

Michalski and Wasielewski show in this book that people in search of exotic places don’t need to travel to distant continents to find them – all you really need to do is look a little more thoroughly around Europe.

*Robert Ostaszewski*

# July 1989, Madrid.

33

The broiling heat at the police station on Plaza Mayor had melted the rubber on Jóhanna's sneakers. The eighteen-year-old Faroese girl, unused to high temperatures, looked like dough being thawed in the oven.

She'd managed to forget about the chocolate ice cream and the flea market, where she had flipped through postcards, stamps, corroded coins with King Juan Carlos on them and books for five pesetas.

She had also visited the Palace of Justice and the Prado. But it wasn't Titian's ruddy orange allegories, Goya's canvases, or even El Greco's *Pentecost* that most moved her. She was looking at Bosch's *Seven Deadly Sins* when she had a nasty revelation: she had lost her passport.

"Alright, now, what is your name, Señorita, and where do you come from?" asked the officer, growing impatient with the deposition, which was dragging on and on. He had just finished his shift, and already had one foot out the door, at home, in a neighborhood on the south side of Madrid, with a bottle of dark Alhambra beer. He shuffled his fingertips anxiously across his typewriter keyboard.

"For the third time, my name is Jóhanna Vang, and I am a tourist from the Faroe Islands!"

"Please do not take me for a fool, Señorita. I have never heard of such a country."

"The Faroe Islands are an autonomous country under Danish jurisdiction. They are located in the triangle between Scotland, Iceland, and Scandinavia," retorted Jóhanna matter-of-factly.

"Show me on the map, Señorita," said the officer, reaching into a drawer and fetching out a map, which he unfolded on his desk.

The officer did not believe a word Jóhanna was telling him. To him she was just another vacation run-away who took the police for fools. Her non-Nordic, Southern looks only made him surer. During her two weeks in Spain Jóhanna had gotten a tan. Her dark eyes and long, raven-black hair she had always had.

"Señorita, you've been searching for your Faroe Islands for long enough," said the officer, still acerbic. "Why don't we give up this charade, and you tell me where you're actually from? Portugal, am I right?"

Jóhanna was overcome by a sense of impotence. She realized that this geopolitical map of Europe from the seventies must have been drawn by dilettantes who hadn't bothered to include the eighteen tiny little dots in the North Atlantic that were the Faroe Islands archipelago. And so, thanks to that sorry oversight, 47,787 Faroese, and 78,563 sheep had simply vanished off the face of the earth. ...

The road from Øravík to Fámjin meanders through the wilderness and looks like a jump rope cast into the moss. For the 110 residents of Fámjin, this is the only real path to civilization. For the thirty-seven people living in Øravík, the road is not quite so important because their village is connected to the main Sumba-Tvøroyri thoroughfare, and if they didn't occasionally need to visit their families in Fámjin or launch their boats, those nine kilometers of smooth asphalt wouldn't concern them in the slightest and might as well lead nowhere. Some insist, in fact, that it does lead nowhere, but a deaf ear is generally turned to that particular piece of wisdom.

In Fámjin even the tourist has things to do: you can feed rucks to a stray dog, wave to the children playing on the bridge, sniff the shabby doors of the fishermen's huts, spend an hour or so photographing the buildings scattered over the sprawling valley, collect some stones from the beach in a bucket, and above all, go to the church to see the most valuable piece of cloth in the country – the original of the national flag, from 1919.<sup>1</sup> According to widespread opinion, the town has the most changeable weather of the entire archipelago.

There are 119 towns on the Faroe Islands. Forty-four of these are accessible by a single road, which means that from the air they look like fallen trees – with the exit roads as flimsy trunks and several dead-end streets as branches. In six other towns, highways are totally unnecessary, because people are concentrated in a single spot on that island and don't need to travel around it at all. Mykines, Nólsoy, Skúvoy, Hestur, Koltur and Stóra Dímun. Clusters of

cottages and homes like jewelry boxes, where at best you can get around on a small tractor, slaloming in between the neighbor's summer house, a shed for fuel oil, and an improvised store, after which you have to go back, because there is nothing further on. On Stóra Dímun and Koltur there are no neighbors, even.

The Faroe Islands: 463 kilometers of public roads, of which nearly forty-two are in nineteen tunnels.

30,453 vehicles.

Our own calculations: forty-four twists and turns on the nine-kilometer trail between Fámjin i Øravík.

A man protests:

"Too many numbers to take in."

And he asks a reasonable question:

"Why are you counting? Does the fact that there are eight florist's and seven liquor stores on the Faroes mean anything other than that there are eight places to buy your girlfriend a bouquet and seven people rush to on Saturdays, what with everyone wanting a little more courage for Saturday nights?"

The Polish edition of Norman Davies' *Europe* includes the fact that the Faroe archipelago is composed of eighty islands. Even if you were to count the massive rocks rising from the ocean – the giant dumpling Tindhólmur, the hairy Kapilina off Nólsoy or the Loch Ness-monster-like Sumbiarsteinnur, even if you were to include ghostly and abandoned Rockall, a point of contention between the Faroe Islands, Great Britain, Iceland, and Ireland – even if you included all of that, the Faroe Islands still wouldn't come up to even half that mistranslated number.

"Well then, why not share the reliable information about the forty-four libraries, three radio stations, and one basketball team?" I say, knocking the ball squarely back into my interlocutor's court. ...

Others joined in with the counting.

Jonhard philologist, co-author of the most comprehensive Faroese-English dictionary (80,000 entries), and owner of Sprotin publishing house:

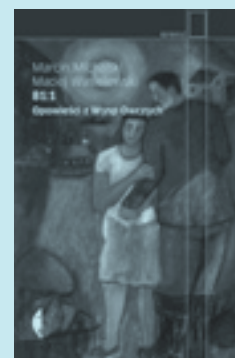
"I looked through the dictionary of synonyms, and it turns out that in Faroese there are about 250 expressions for rain. It's even better for wind – almost 350 words."

Niels Jákup, head of a children's publishing house from Tórshavn: "Not more than ten original Faroese books are produced per year for children and adolescents, which is why we are based on translations. We also publish comic books and a magazine called *The Oarsman*. *Harry Potter* is our most popular publication. We don't import manga. Its educational value is minimal."

Simona from the Faroe Islands Statistical Office: "In 2008, 664 people were born on the island, and 377 died. There were 187 church weddings and seventy-one civil ceremonies. Fifty-two couples got divorced. For more information please look at our website, which we update whenever needed."

Dagur & Vika television news, February 1, 2008, reporter in front of a dark-blue sky and a cutter thrown up onto the concrete at the Skálavík port: "Around fifteen boats were moored here before yesterday's storm. Today most of them are underwater, and as you can see there are two of them left, one of which has been completely destroyed."

Translated by Jennifer Croft



<sup>1</sup> The national flag (*Merkið*) was designed in Copenhagen by Faroese law students Jens Oliver Lisberg, Janus Øssursson and Paul Dahl. The first presentation of the flag took place during Jens Oliver's visit back to his homeland on June 22, 1919, on the occasion of a wedding in the church in Fámjin. On April 25, 1940, fourteen days into the Nazi occupation of Denmark, the flag of the Faroe Islands was recognized by Great Britain, the first state to recognize it. In honor of this event, the Faroese now celebrate April 25 as their National Flag Day.



ELŻBIETA CHEREZIŃSKA (BORN 1972) IS TRAINED IN THEATER. AS A WRITER OF FICTION, SHE SPECIALIZES IN THE MIDDLE AGES. SHE IS THE AUTHOR OF *THE NORTH ROAD*, A NOVEL SET AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF NORWEGIAN HISTORY.

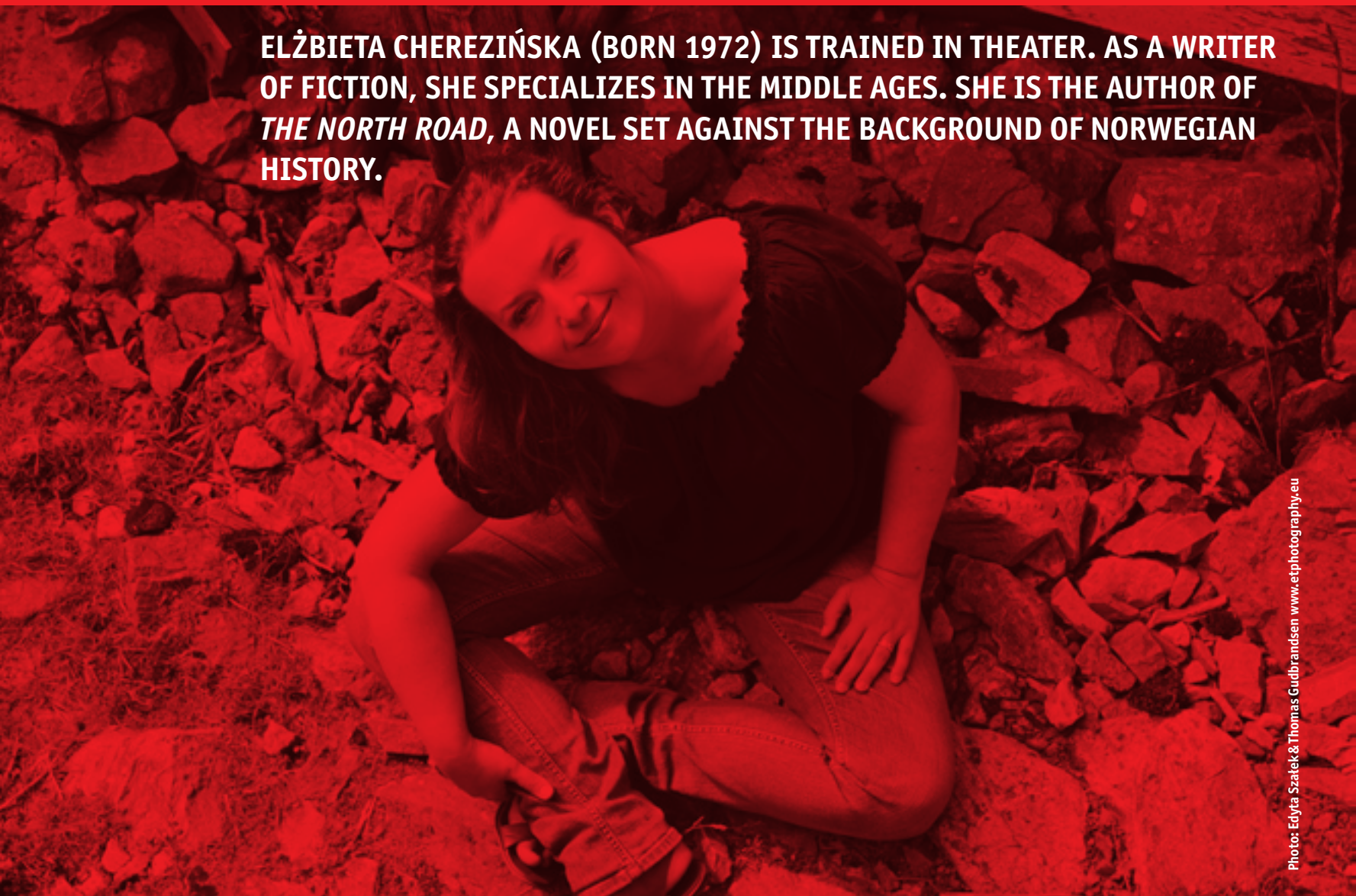


Photo: Edyta Szalek & Thomas Gudbrandsen [www.etphotography.eu](http://www.etphotography.eu)

## Playing Dice

The passage from the first to the second millennium was a period of crucial transformations all across the Old Continent – transformations involving the emergence of the individual Eastern European states, the introduction of Christianity, as well as the first attempt at supranational union by Otto III, Holy Roman Emperor. It is about these very times that Elżbieta Cherezińska, who specializes in this period, has written her novel *Playing Dice*.

The main characters in *Playing Dice* are a young Emperor Otto III and Bolesław, known as the Brave, prince of the Piast Dynasty and later King of Poland. Also appearing in the novel, though only in people's recollections of him, is Saint Wojciech-Adalbert, bishop of Prague, whose death as a martyr on a mission to the Prussians transformed him into much-desired capital in the politics playing out in Europe at the time. In the year 1000 AD an absolutely unprecedented event takes place: Otto III, heir to the Roman Empire, is the first ruler in the history of his country to cross its borders with an aim other than waging war. He heads east, to the soon-to-be-rising star of the European stage, Bolesław. Otto's political aspirations encompass the entire continent. Will he manage to attain them in Gnieźno (then the Polish capital), or will the political victor of the encounter be Bolesław?

It is during the preparations for the Emperor's visit, during the actual visit, and a few years afterwards that the plot of this fascinating novel takes place. It is the story of the friendship between two seasoned politicians, two visionary strategists, two great men. One of them, Otto III, became a world-historical figure, while the other, Bolesław the Brave, should have a lasting place in world history too.

Cherezińska's novel is powerful not just because it convincingly portrays early attempts at forming a kind of union in Europe, and shows how our ancestors' way of thinking was the same as ours in some ways, where national and supranational interests are concerned. The key element in her writing is the genuine passion, the ability to generate a vivid and evocative picture of the era, to present psychologically credible characters, as well as her distance from the grandiloquence that is normally used to talk about watershed historical events. She shows how behind what becomes great history there are truly unusual, extraordinary people, but people who are also full of weaknesses and quirks. All in all, Cherezińska manages to create a story with the palpable atmosphere of a thousand years ago, stylized to fit the needs of the twenty-first century.

Marta Mizuro



**Ever** since the envoys had brought news of the Emperor's arrival, Bolesław's kingdom had been overwhelmed by a state of extreme commotion. Aside from the settlers living within the deepest forests, there was probably no one who did not, in some way or other, participate in the preparations. Workers toiled at the construction of the Gniezno Basilica day and night. The days were still short. As soon as dusk set in, the construction site was full of bonfires and torches. The prince would not allow even the slightest delay. It was good that the winter this year was unusually mild, so that the foundations could be dug as soon as the decision had been taken. Although who knew whether it had really started to thaw or whether the earth had softened from the constant burning of those bonfires. Right now everything looked desperate, but there were four weeks left before the Emperor's visit....

Among his other occupations, Unger had one particular – and unusually delicate – task to handle. He had issued an order for a pair of long tongs, a pair of shears, and a narrow but powerful saw to be made out of pure silver.

"What do you want to cut with them, Sir?" asked the silversmith Unger had commissioned. Unger didn't answer. When the tools were ready, he locked them inside a small box and took them to Poznań. There, during the Sunday mass, he silently consecrated them. And then he put them back inside the box with great solemnity and took them back to Gniezno.

The pyx was placed on Wojciech's tomb three days before the Emperor arrived. Unger supervised the cleaning of the construction site. Pieces of mortar, broken stones, ashes from the workers' bonfires... Unfortunately, after the recent rains the ground inside had softened a lot. Bolesław came at the last minute to look everything over. He frowned as he looked down at his feet.

"This cursed mud! It's not going to dry out in three days. Maybe four? I won't bring Otto here until four days from now... But listen, if it hasn't dried out by then, have this mud gotten rid of somehow. Use something, I don't know, some grass, maybe calamus."

"Or we could make a walkway out of planks."

"Not bad. Not a bad idea! It's just a shame that the trees around here aren't very green. Maybe people would have time to plant a few bushes?" He gestured vaguely toward the stone foundations. "Alright then, Unger, let's quickly get the body over to the new tomb, and then I'll go and fetch Otto!"

"I was just thinking, Bolesław... What if we didn't transfer the body? What if we let him do it? How better could we show our respect to the Emperor than by leaving him the honor of the transferral? If of course it will not hurt you to relinquish the privilege."

"Oh, stop. I will have Wojciech forever. Let Otto transfer him. You're right, my friend, let us give him this honor!"...

A damp, unpleasant wind was blowing from the river. It was misty. Otto pulled in the border of his coat to stop the cold from getting under it in such an unbearable way. The retinue paused. Ziazo's people were searching for the ford; somewhere near here they were supposed to meet the prince. But clearly the place they had reached was not a crossing point, because the horses were sinking into the boggy bed all the way up to their stomachs. Otto gave an impatient sigh. It was not the first time on this trip that he had been unsatisfied with the efficacy of his Italian crew. If it hadn't been so firmly settled in Rome that he was going to take Italians to Boleslaus' country, he would have taken the Margrave Eckehard's people instead. He had more confidence in them.

Suddenly a fully armed man on a horse emerged from the forest. When he stopped in front of them, Otto thought for a moment that it might be Prince Boleslaus himself. But no. Boleslaus had eagle feathers in his basinet, and this man, although he looked a bit like the prince, wore a helmet that was decorated with a plume of black hair from a horse's tail. Without dismounting, he shouted out some sort of question.

"What is he saying?" said the Emperor, looking around for Clemens, who was supposed to serve him as translator.

"His name is Zarad, and he is Boleslaus' envoy. He came to fetch us because he was afraid we would not find the ford."

"Let's follow him, then!" shouted Otto, who was the first to spur on his horse.

"But wait, Emperor!" cried Ziazo, who had ridden up beside him. "How do we know that he is really one of the prince's men?"

"I recognize him," said Otto to the Roman as he rode up next to Zarad. Zarad bowed to the Emperor with a smile.

They just had to cross a small wood, and soon they had reached the spot. A languid pool in the river came into Otto's view. On the other side he saw an army, banners, pennants, and not a single hierarch, no purple, no violet. Zarad spurred his horse down the riverbank and whistled into a small ivory fife. He was answered by similar fifes from the other side of the river. He turned to the emperor and nodded, indicating clearly that he could cross. Otto looked at him attentively and wasn't sure, so Zarad gestured to ask if he wanted him to go first. The emperor agreed. Everything happened so quickly that neither Ziazo nor Clemens had time to ride up to them and protest, and counter the emperor's nonchalance.

Zarad entered the water first, quickly. He then pulled up his horse just as quickly and looked around for Otto. When he saw that the emperor was keeping up with him, he speeded up. The water really was quite shallow, but at a gallop Zarad's horse sent it spraying in all directions. Zarad loved it – his eyes were laughing, but he wasn't sure if the Emperor also enjoyed such games. He moved aside so that his horse would not spray Otto in the face. Just then, from opposite Bolesław entered the water—at a gallop.

Seeing this, Otto spurred on his horse. How quickly he had entered into the mad mood of this unusual greeting! He dashed ahead, looking aside at Zarad. Zarad laughed at the emperor, as the black trail from his helmet swept across his face as he turned! Otto had forgotten that he had never looked backwards, and now he glanced behind him, without slowing down, to see if his retinue was following him. Ha! Just Ziazo and Clemens, he thought—the rest of them were standing there helplessly, not knowing what to do! Zarad saw this too, now, and smiled at the emperor again, as if they had agreed on this break with majesty in advance.

Now Otto was only looking ahead. Prince Boleslaus was galloping straight toward him, the clear splashes of water flying from under his horse's hooves shielding the sight of him. At once Otto remembered how five years before at an encampment at Magdeburg the Slav prince had nearly galloped straight into his tent. He leaned slightly forward toward his horse's neck and drove the animal on! Let's go!

Bolesław reined in his horse and turned around, making the stallion spin on its hind legs. Now they were face to face. The horses snorted at one another. How different the prince felt today! This was not an encampment at Magdeburg; in fact only now did it strike Bolesław that he was hosting the emperor on his own soil! He bowed and said, "Greetings, Otto!"

*Translated by Jennifer Croft*



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Photo: Elżbieta Lempp

## Samuel Zborowski

It all started because of injured pride. In 1574, during the celebrations following the coronation of Henri de Valois as King of Poland, Polish nobleman Samuel Zborowski was insulted, then made a terrible scene and killed a man who happened to be trying to mediate. Samuel Zborowski was banished by decree, and made his way to Stefan Batory's court in Transylvania. Two years later, partly thanks to the efforts of the Zborowski family, Batory became the new Polish king elect. Ignoring the sentence that was still in force, Samuel Zborowski returned to Poland with the king. However, the Zborowski family's hopes were soon disappointed, and they started to plot against the king. In 1584, Samuel marched on Krakow with an armed unit. In this situation, the Royal Chancellor, Jan Zamoyski, gave orders for the decree from 1574 to be enforced: Zborowski was caught, and without being tried for staging a coup d'état, in May 1584 he was beheaded.

Rymkiewicz's book investigates the freedom of the Polish nobility. As presented here, the anarchic freedom of an individual is only justified when exercised in the name of communal freedom. In that case, the individual desire for greater freedom acts as a foundation for the community to have it too. Zborowski is not the victim of his own arrogance and sense of impunity, but the victim of powers that abuse the law and try to limit human liberties. Here Zamoyski and the king are the classic embodiment of politicians who place themselves beyond public control, while Samuel Zborowski is the man who reveals their impunity.

*Samuel Zborowski* is the last in a three-part saga about the First Polish Republic. The trilogy is significant because from *Hangings* (2007), via

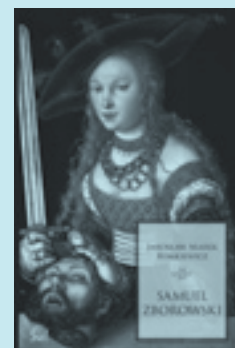
*Kinderszenen* (2008), to this latest book Rymkiewicz has been building exit roads out of postmodernism. Postmodernism created the concept of the end of "the people" as a sovereign entity that chooses its own governments and parliaments; Rymkiewicz contrasts this with the image of "the people" who will owe their subjectivity to permanent readiness to rebel against authority. In reply to the view that meaning is lost and gone, Rymkiewicz tells a story about heroes who make it themselves; in reply to the idea that the national state is lost and gone, he tells a story about a community which, through murder or sacrifice, sanctifies itself and bestows sanctity on the Republic. In writing all this, Rymkiewicz shows that it is possible to override postmodernism – including pluralist culture, tolerance, human rights and the dissolution of any kind of collective subject. Yet in Rymkiewicz's work the road to this new era obliges one to give up caring about one's life or the lives of others.

Przemysław Czapliński

**What** an unfortunate idea! What a fatal decision! Though of course no one decided it – it was simply a dreadful twist of fate. It was bad luck and a desire for wealth that pushed the Polish knights, exporters of grain and ox hides, to the east. In other words, to a place where there was plenty of room for their grain and their oxen. It ended as it was bound to end. It ended – as we can only see clearly now, four centuries later – disastrously. Now we can also see that, if inexorable fate was pushing us somewhere, if we absolutely had to move from our homes at that point, we should have gone not to the east, not to the south-east, but in the opposite direction – to the west. Instead of occupying and civilising the uncultivable steppes, all that endless scrub, a wasteland all the way to Crimea and the Sea of Azov, with farmsteads scattered across the void, we should have occupied and civilised, in our Polish manner, the small Lutheran duchies of the German Reich, the walled cities of the local electors and the rich villages of the local bishops. We should have sought new pastures for the Oleśnickis' sheep on the banks of the Rhine and the Moselle. The sixteenth-century Republic was powerful, and expansion was its natural means of existence. Anything that is powerful, anything that is large, expands, overflows and spreads out – that is what life demands, and if life demands something, there's nothing to be done about it. We have to obey life, we have to obey its mysterious summons. Expansion was probably a necessity and couldn't have been avoided. So, instead of civilising the uncivilised (and uncivilisable) wasteland, we should have civilised another civilisation. Not only would it have been more advantageous for us – the combination of our civilisation with that of the Lutheran and Calvinist dukes and electors – it would also have been in harmony with the direction in which our species has expanded since time immemorial, moving from east to west – that is the only direction it wants to go, not the opposite way. And if it improbably undertakes a journey from west to east, it is painfully punished by fate. Why that is so, no one knows, because that sort of thing can never be known. Maybe snails travel from west to east, maybe birch trees move from north to south. Ask a dendrologist or a snail biologist about that, I'm no expert on those things. I only know about people, and I can see their fate. The mysterious tendency of our species, the mysterious imperative of evolution, encoded into human genes, the mysterious code that was once imprinted (that once imprinted itself) on human life, are what cause our species to migrate from east to west, and only from east to west – it is not capable of migrating successfully from west to east. Mankind's demographic march only goes in one direction. Centuries pass by, and it keeps going in the same direction. But in the early sixteenth century, the Oleśnickis from Oleśnica could not have known about all this. Nor could they have known the most vital fact – that their efforts were in vain, that they would fail to support themselves in the east, that they would never conquer Crimea, and that their Polish civilisation would never manage to civilise (in its Polish manner) the vanquished terrain, because the decision they had made was contrary to the laws of progressive evolution, and their whole idea was contrary to the code that was encoded in life. Nor could they have known that in moving out to the east, marching in that great Polish procession which went in the wrong direction, they were act-

ing to their own disadvantage, and also to Poland's disadvantage. When the Oleśnickis travelled east, the Zborowskis appeared at Oleśnica. They were the owners of Oleśnica for almost a hundred years – as the *Geographical Dictionary of the Polish Kingdom* informs us, at some point towards the end of the sixteenth or at the start of the seventeenth century one of the Zborowskis (we don't know which, but it may have been Jan, son of Piotr) sold Oleśnica to the Lańckoronskis. Why didn't the Zborowskis move away from Oleśnica and from Rytwiany, like the other great families, why didn't they travel east, like so many of their kinsmen and cousins? Weren't they attracted by the idea of settling somewhere on the Dnieper or the Dniester? Or somewhere near the Black Sea coast? They may well have considered something of the kind (perhaps the place in Podolia called Zborów on the River Strypa vaguely bears witness to the fact; it was founded in the sixteenth century and was probably their property for some time), but they never had time to realise these plans, because they were prevented from doing so by Stefan Batory, who resolved to destroy them – and who succeeded.

*Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones*



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ANDRZEJ FRANASZEK (BORN 1971) IS A LITERARY CRITIC WHOSE WORK FOCUSES ON TWENTIETH-CENTURY POLISH POETRY, INCLUDING CZESŁAW MIŁOSZ AND ZBIGNIEW HERBERT.

Photo: Antonia Franaszek-Traczewska

## Czesław Miłosz: A Biography

Andrzej Franaszek's book is fascinating not only because it is the biography of a man who won the Nobel Prize for Literature and who happened also to have quite a dramatic life story, a distinguished poet whose life bridged the early twentieth century and the beginning of this century. This Miłosz biography can be read in several different ways: it is conceived as a guidebook through Miłosz's life, though with a supplementary map of his thought and imagination (a wealth of excerpts from his work, as well as commentary on it), and also information on the flora and fauna found in the Land of Miłosz. It is also, then, the panoramic story of a life in a European place and time that British historian Norman Davies has called "God's playground." Of course the main figure is the poet, shown in all his complications, in his greatness, but with his idiosyncrasies and complexes. His contemporaries are included in this biography, too: his Parisian relative, the esoteric Lithuanian diplomat and poet, Oskar Miłosz, as well as Albert Camus, Albert Einstein, Mary McCarthy, Thomas Merton, Joseph Brodsky and a number of others, Polish and non-Polish friends and chance acquaintances whose lives somehow became intertwined with his, writers and thinkers who were close to him in a literary or philosophical sense or simply fellow men of letters, his wives and lovers – which gives Franaszek multiple occasions to tell a variety of colorful stories and to make sharp, not necessarily fair appraisals. The key locations in the Miłosz geography are highlighted here: the familial Szetejnie in Lithuania, Vilnius, Paris in the first half of the 1930's, prewar Warsaw and the city under Nazi occupation, post-war France in the first years of his exile after he

decided to give up his position as a diplomat for the Polish People's Republic and seek political asylum, France during his work with the Congress for Cultural Freedom and with *Kultura* in Paris, the intellectual center of the Polish émigré community, America – the America of his time in Washington in the service of the Polish People's Republic and the America of California, when he was teaching at Berkeley, as well as the America of New York, when he was already enjoying one literary triumph after the next. And finally Krakow, which he chose as his home from 1992 on. There is a lot of information here about the vicissitudes of Miłosz's life, which raised controversy, giving rise to debates, slander, and accusations. But above all we have here a human, very human portrait of an extremely perceptive intellectual and witness of an epoch, one of the greatest poets of the twentieth century.

*Marek Zaleski*

**“In** November 1980 I was in the Lenin Shipyards in Gdansk if only because it was the most exciting place in the world. I went over to a worker in blue, spattered coveralls and asked him how, in a country where Miłosz’s poems were banned, a line from ‘The Poet Remembers’ had ended up on the monument to the workers killed by the regime. ‘We always knew Miłosz,’ said the worker. It was a moment that would either have delighted, or horrified, Karl Marx,” recollected Richard Lourie. “When I came back from Poland in late November 1980, Miłosz was at Harvard, living in Cambridge. At the door, after the hug, he put the question to me: ‘And Poland?’ For a second it was my Ph. D. orals all over again, Miłosz posing a tough question, his blue eyes sparkling with glee under fox-tail brows. ‘There’s no alienation there,’ I answered. He smiled. I’d passed.”

The story of Polish shipyard workers reciting stanzas of Miłosz sounds like a fairytale today, but there were many extraordinary and beautiful things that happened during the “Solidarity Carnival,” when ten million people joined in protest, repeating Miłosz’s line to Lech Wałęsa, “that crown would fall right down to my ears,” and all-night lines formed not only at the butcher shops, but also at the bookstores. One way or another, in spite of the censors and border control, Miłosz’s books made it into the country during the years of his exile, including in 1970, when the poet sent Zygmunt Hertz a postcard from a town called Poland, located in the state of Maine – the only Poland he had been able to get to up until then.

We must turn again here to Hertz, who among other things came up with all sorts of ways to manage to smuggle into Poland tapes containing recordings of Miłosz’s poems. A letter from 1965 indicates that Cardinal Wyszyński had taken one such package from Rome (...). In January of the following year Polish athletes stuffed a pack of the Paris publication *Kultura* into their luggage, planning to sell them on the black market, and a pleased Hertz informed Miłosz that the highest prices were paid for the issue with his *Treatise on Poetry*. In the second half of the 1960s, Herbert wrote encouragingly, “the youth look to you like a superstar. Really, Czesław, you’ve made a huge splash in Polish poetry, and no prohibitions, no cordons, can do anything about it.” Similar initiation experiences crop up in many readers’ recollections of Miłosz: they get the book from a professor, borrow it for twenty-four hours, it’s been copied by hand, miraculously saved in a second-hand bookshop or a public lending library – perhaps the finest such experience is described by Krzysztof Czyżewski, who would later become the custodian of Miłosz materials in Krasnograd: “it was 1977, or maybe the beginning of 1978. The Workers’ Defence Committee had already been formed. I was in my first year of Polish Literature at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. We were gradually getting used to reading books that had been printed underground, using a xerox machine, on terrible paper, bound with whatever could be found, and that would make our eyes hurt because the type was so small to save on costs. To us these were real treasures. ... We went to classes at the ‘flying university’ held in private apartments. That evening in Jacek Kubiak’s apartment, one of the leaders of the student underground, Ryszard Krynicki came along. Instead of reading his own poems, he started to talk about this Polish émigré poet, whose name many of us heard for the first time that night. He held a book reverently and started to read out the poems, never taking his eyes off it for one moment. We were all waiting impatiently to get our hands on it ourselves and look through it. It was pretty, with a nice green canvas cover, with gold letters stamped across the front: CZESŁAW MIŁOSZ UTWORY POETYCCKIE POEMS.”

Adam Michnik, a decade older than Czyżewski, the happy owner of the volume *The Daylight*, which he had bought in a second-hand bookshop, notes that he and his friends represented the first generation of intelligentsia in the Polish People’s Republic to recognize the intellectual and cultural value of the émigré population without considering that population an anachronism. He was also one of the people who decided that the underground publishing house NOW, whose densely typed publications had fallen into Czyżewski’s hands, would print books by Miłosz. Michnik’s meeting with Miłosz in Paris in the fall of 1976 may have also influenced this decision: “after the third bottle of wine,” recounts Michnik, “I started to recite Miłosz’s poems from memory, highly unusually not stuttering. I knew a lot of them. At some point, to my great surprise, I saw that the poet had tears rolling down his cheeks. Saddened, of course, by this, I stopped, and at that point I heard him say with emotion: ‘I didn’t think young people in Poland knew my poems by heart. I thought I had been excommunicated.’”

The history of the struggles of writers with communist-era censorship often involves microscopic signs in which the initiated were able to decipher subtle changes of course by the authorities, or tension among the top brass. Someone had managed to refer in an article to “the author of *Three Winters*,” someone else had gained permission to stage *As You Like It* in Miłosz’s translation, with his name on the posters, and there were rumors abroad that he was coming back to Poland, then someone managed to get a few of his poems into an anthology, and then finally in 1974 the Pen Club ... was able to award him a prize – for his translations of Polish poetry into English. “What is this? Have I ceased to be demonized? But I understand that it must have been a major effort for the Pen Club ... The only awards they can give are for translation, which shouldn’t be scoffed at,” he commented in a letter to Jerzy Giedroyc. A year later he addressed Błoński in a reflective tone: “If I have this kind of respect in Poland, I need to ask myself why that is, i.e. how much of it is misunderstandings masked by distance .... Because I don’t know, for example, whether the ancestral myths are at work (exile, the West, and those types of things), or whether it’s the collective instinct that never stops searching for characters for national consumption, and among today’s literary figures in Poland there isn’t much fit to be consumed.”

He was only able to level with that collective instinct six years later, during his first visit to Poland in three decades. At this point the authorities were in no position to obstruct him .... June 1981, when – not without delaying and hesitating – Miłosz flew into Warsaw, was a time of great emotion. A year before there had been an assassination attempt on the Polish pope, and two weeks later Cardinal Wyszyński had died. The Party and Solidarity were both constantly testing their strength, although the union activists didn’t realize that lists of people to be arrested had already been drawn up. The country was roiling, and its citizens’ expectations of the poet, or rather, the Poet, with a big “P,” were very high.

*Translated by Jennifer Croft*



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JOANNA OLCZAK-RONIKIER IS AN AUTHOR, SCREENWRITER AND DRAMATIST. HER BIOGRAPHY OF HER OWN FAMILY, *IN THE GARDEN OF MEMORY*, PUBLISHED IN 2001, WON HER POLAND'S TOP LITERARY AWARD, THE NIKE. THE BOOK HAS BEEN TRANSLATED INTO NINE LANGUAGES, AND IN THE UK WAS SHORTLISTED FOR THE JEWISH QUARTERLY WINGATE LITERARY AWARD.



Photo: Instytut Książki

## Korczak: An Attempt at a Biography

Janusz Korczak was the pen-name of Dr Henryk Goldszmit, a paediatrician and author of books about children and for children. As a progressive thinker, he was determined to change the world for the better – not through a change of political regime, but through educational reform. His theory of how to bring up children placed emphasis on considering the child's personal feelings. He founded a home for Jewish orphans, which he ran for many years. The relationships between the children and their carers were regulated by an internal constitution, and as well as its own special hierarchy, the home had a children's council, which had the right to judge (and even punish) the carers for breaking the rules. Sometimes even the doctor was punished. Korczak's system was accused of idealism; although his home was like a miniature version of a better society, his charges were not always well prepared to enter real life. But undoubtedly the system he invented had an influence on the caregiving and educational methods applied in other such institutions.

In 1940 Korczak's orphanage was forced to move into the Warsaw ghetto. Because of hunger, the rapid spread of diseases, the lack of space and the pressure of living under constant threat, the Orphans' Home soon ceased to be a safe refuge. In 1942 Janusz Korczak kept a diary, in which, not without some sarcasm, he described the ruins of his idealism. Yet he never lost his faith in man and in the power of goodness. Around 6 August 1942 he and the children were all taken to the Umschlagplatz, from where the transports left for the death camps; at Treblinka Korczak accompanied the children into the

gas chamber. For many years after the war Korczak was a legendary figure in Poland: it was thought that he could have saved himself, but chose instead to die a heroic death along with the orphans. However, documents that have come to light more recently tell a different story – Korczak never even considered the opportunity of saving himself; though at the limit of his physical strength, he continued to provide for the children's spiritual needs right to the bitter end. All this is described in Joanna Olczak-Ronikier's "attempt at a biography".

Olczak-Ronikier had a personal connection with Janusz Korczak. Her grandfather, Jakub Mortkowicz, who was an acclaimed publisher in the interwar period, published Janusz Korczak's books. As a small child, Joanna Olczak-Ronikier was a patient of Dr Korczak. She tells his life story straightforwardly and with dignity, without concealing the fact that he had a complex personality and suffered from periods of depression and doubt. She also presents the complicated historical period in which he happened to live, his struggles against anti-Semitism and his efforts to carve out his own path amid the many intellectual trends of the era.

Anna Nasiłowska



# Every

story has to start somewhere. This one starts in Hrubieszów, because that is the town where the ancestors of Henryk Goldszmit, generally known as Janusz Korczak, came from. Hrubieszów is in the Lublin administrative district. It is right on the Ukrainian border, picturesquely located on the River Huczwa, or in fact between two of its tributaries. The beauty of the woods, fertile fields and lush meadows is enchanting. There are numerous surviving architectural relics, made of both wood and stone, that recall the times to be described in this chapter. The names of Hrubieszów's streets date from that era, such as Wodna ("Water"), Kościelna ("Church"), Cicha ("Quiet"), Ludna ("Populous"), Szewska ("Tailor's") and Gęsia ("Goose").

Every story has a starting point too. This one starts in the distant past, with a mystery worthy of a terrifying fairytale. In Jewish folk tradition there was a custom that whenever an epidemic of the plague or smallpox erupted in the vicinity and every means of salvation had failed, the man and woman most badly wronged by fate – beggars, cripples, people with no family – were married to each other in the cemetery. After the wedding they were given a dowry by the Jewish community and started a new life, which was supposed to drive away death. Apparently it was an event of this kind that initiated the history of the Goldszmit family. "... All I know about Korczak's remote ancestors is that they were homeless orphans, married to each other at the Jewish cemetery as a propitiatory offering at a time when plague was spreading within the town."<sup>1</sup> Korczak told Maria Czapska about it in the late autumn of 1941 when she visited him at the orphanage's final location on Sienna Street, having made her way into the ghetto on someone else's pass.

The great-grandfather mentioned in the *Diary* was a more tangible figure, though not much is known about him either. While encouraging children to ask questions about their family past, Korczak wrote regretfully in *Mały Przegląd* ("Small Review", a supplement to *Nasz Przegląd* – "Our Review", a journal aimed at the assimilated Jewish intelligentsia):

I have no photographs of my great-grandfather and I never heard much about him. My grandfather told me nothing about him, because he died before I was born. I know very little about my great-grandfather. I do know that he was a glazier in a small town. In those days poor people did not have glass in their windows. My great-grandfather toured the manor houses putting in panes of glass and buying hare skins. I like to think he put in panes of glass to make it bright, and bought skins for sewing fur coats to make it warmer. Sometimes I imagine my old great-granddad walking a very long way from village to village, then sitting down under a tree to rest, or hurrying to be in time for the Sabbath before dark.<sup>2</sup>

Apparently the glazier was called Eliezor Chaim, and he lived in Hrubieszów. Towards the end of the eighteenth century the Jews represented more than half the population of Hrubieszów, while the rest were Catholics and Russian Orthodox. The low tenements and wooden shacks were tightly packed together. The streets were narrow and muddy, and there were a large number of tiny little shops. There were two markets, old and new. In the middle of the markets there were stalls. Here the peasants brought in dairy products, meat and vegetables to sell, and here they equipped themselves with clothing and "elbow goods", in other words footwear, fabrics, household and farm utensils. At the Thursday fair buyers and sellers haggled heatedly over the prices, in Polish, Ukrainian and Yiddish. A Catholic church, a Russian Orthodox church and a synagogue had been part of the landscape for hundreds of years.

It was a shtetl – the Yiddish word for a town – one of those places which, despite being wiped out by the Holocaust, still lead an intensive life in literature and countless memoirs. For some the shtetl is the mainstay of traditional Jewish values, family warmth and the splendour of religious rites – a place where "myths and legends hovered in the air". For others it is a hotbed of backwardness, ignorance and mediaeval superstitions. In these towns the Jewish population lived in its own district, fenced off from their Christian neigh-

bours by an invisible wall of strict religious rules. The Orthodox Jews did not learn the local language, had no social contact with their environment, refused to renounce their traditional costumes and customs, and regarded the Talmud as the one and only source of knowledge. Secular science and interests were forbidden, breaking the Orthodox imperatives and prohibitions was punished by excommunication, which meant exclusion of the guilty party from the community and exile beyond its administrative range. His family would perform a rite of mourning for him, as if he were dead, and when he really did die, he had no right to be buried in the Jewish cemetery. Anyone who was cut off from his environment in this way must have some sinister secrets on his conscience – this attitude was at the root of Jewish misfortune; wherever they settled, they prompted the mistrust and dislike of the local inhabitants. No one understood that the loss of their fatherland and their dispersal about the world made the Jews acutely fearful of falling apart, losing their identity and ceasing to exist as a nation. So they evolved into a religious community, obedient to strict rules which interfered in every area of spiritual, social and family life. For entire centuries, day after day, wherever fate tossed them, they fought a heroic battle to preserve their fidelity to God and to tradition. In other words, to survive. ...

On 22 July 1878 or 1879, on a Monday or perhaps a Tuesday, on a sunny or maybe a rainy day, a child was born to Cecylia and Józef Goldszmit, a little boy who would one day become Janusz Korczak. In keeping with Jewish tradition he was named Hersz after his late grandfather, in the belief that he would inherit his intelligence, talents and virtues. But times had changed, and progressive Jews realised that they needed to Europeanise their names, because Jewish ones sounded ridiculous and made it impossible to be part of Polish society. The traditionalists protested that the change would weaken the memory of their ancestors, so crucial for their race. Mr and Mrs Goldszmit chose a compromise solution: Hersz would be his ceremonial name, but Henryk won out in secular life – though not without opposition.

*Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones*

<sup>1</sup> See Maria Czapska, *Rozważania w gęstniejącym mroku* ("Reflections in thickening gloom"), in *Wspomnienia o Januszu Korczaku* ("Memories of Janusz Korczak"), selected and edited by Ludwika Barczewska and Bolesław Milewicz, introduction by Igor Newerly, second edition, Warsaw 1989, p. 283.

<sup>2</sup> Janusz Korczak, *Prapra... dziadek i prapra... wnuk* ("Great-great... grandfather and great-great... grandson"), *Nasz Przegląd* 1926. No. 9. in *Dziela* ("Works"), Warsaw 2007, Vol. 2, p. 113.

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