

**NEW  
BOOKS**

**DIRECTLY**

**FROM  
POLAND**

IK

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

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

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

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

**THE FOUR SEASONS OF THE BOOK FESTIVAL** is the biggest Polish literary festival and takes place in several Polish cities simultaneously. The festival has four parts: Poetry Season (February), POPLIT (April), Prose Season (October), and Non-Fiction Season (November). Foreign guests have included Jonathan Carroll, Eduardo Mendoza, Boris Akunin, Alexandra Marinina, Michel Faber, Dubravka Ugrešić, Paulo Lins, Neil Gaiman, Etgar Keret, Jeffery Deaver and many others.

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

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

## ©POLAND TRANSLATION PROGRAMME

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

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

The Programme may cover:

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

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

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

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<b>PAGE</b>	<b>AUTHOR</b>	<b>TITLE</b>
4	<b>Jacek Hugo-Bader</b>	White Fever
6	<b>Kazimierz Orłoś</b>	The Vacationer from the Spit
8	<b>Jacek Dukaj</b>	The Plunderer's Daughter
10	<b>Stefan Chwin</b>	Diary for Adults
12	<b>Henryk Grynberg</b>	Continuation
14	<b>Jacek Dehnel</b>	Balzaciennes
16	<b>Joanna Bator</b>	Sandy Hill
18	<b>Daniel Odija</b>	Don't Let It Be A Dream
20	<b>Wojciech Chmielewski</b>	The Razor
22	<b>Dorota Zańko</b>	Tales from a Photocopier
24	<b>Teresa Oleś-Owczarkowa</b>	Rauska
26	<b>Anda Rottenberg</b>	There You Are
28	<b>Joanna Tokarska-Bakir</b>	Legends About Blood
30	<b>Marcin Wroński</b>	Commissioner Maciejewski: Cinema Venus
32	<b>Anthology</b>	Girls' Bedtime Fairytales
34	<b>Eustachy Ryłski</b>	After Breakfast
36	<b>Portraits of Ryszard Kapuściński</b>	
38	<b>Wisława Szymborska</b>	Here
39	<b>Herbert Year</b>	
42	<b>Publishers' Addresses</b>	

# CONTENTS



Photo: Julia Pychatowa

Jacek Hugo-Bader (born 1957) is a Polish journalist and features writer, associated since 1990 with the leading daily paper, *Gazeta Wyborcza*.

Jacek Hugo-Bader's book was inspired by some unusual godfathers, two Soviet reporters for *Komsomolskaya Pravda* called Mikhail Hvastunov and Sergei Gushchev, who over fifty years ago outlined their vision of Russia in the twenty-first century. Some of their fantasies – the ones relating to technological progress – have come true. However, most of their ideas about the future now belong among all the fairytales about a communist paradise on Earth. The modern Russia that Hugo-Bader presents is certainly no idyll. His aim is to demonstrate some of the social and economic results of totalitarian oppression and isolation from the rest of the world.

Hugo-Bader is the type of reporter who "goes the whole way", gets in everywhere, gets on with everyone, and has to experience just about everything at first hand. To get to know Lake Baikal he crosses it by kayak, and to get the full picture of the state of Russia's roads he travels several thousand kilometres by jeep. But what interests him most of all are the people: he talks to former hippies and modern-day rappers, spends several days in disguise with the homeless, investigates a community living in the taiga that has almost died out because of alcoholism, and meets with a group of people who are HIV positive. He also goes to a commune for followers of "one of the six Russian Christs". These are the only "happy Russians" he encounters during his travels – all the other characters in this book are straight out of the pages of Dostoyevsky.

The lively style of his writing, which includes reportage and conversations, merely highlights the drama of the incidents

he describes and the tragedy of the people he portrays. It is hard not to sympathise with them, yet it is also hard not to notice that most of them bear their fate with humility. Hugo-Bader is an extremely intelligent and sensitive observer, so he manages to fathom the mysteries of the Russian soul, spots the contradictions in the characters of the people he meets, and in the end he finds an answer to the question of why they agree to such an existence. His diagnosis does not contain a shadow of insincerity or superiority, such as we might expect from an outsider who comes from what is now another world, even though it was once so close – from a country that has largely shaken off the trauma of communism. Will Russia and its former component parts ever manage to do that? There is not much evidence to say they will.

As Ryszard Kapuściński used to do, Jacek Hugo-Bader "gives a voice to the poor", thus nurturing the finest traditions of Polish reportage. This genre remains the true pride of our literature.

Marta Mizuro

## A DREAM

In March 1957, perhaps on the ninth at one in the afternoon, because Saturdays were when the science department of *Komsomolskaya Pravda* newspaper held its weekly meetings, two reporters were given an unusual assignment by the editor-in-chief. (That day and at that time, on the polished wooden floorboards between the kitchen and the bedroom in my grandmother's flat at 62 Warszawska Street in Sochaczewo, I unexpectedly made my entrance into the world).

"We must tell our readers about the future," said the editor-in-chief. "Describe what life in the Soviet Union will be like fifty years from now, let's say at the time of the ninetieth anniversary of the Great Socialist October Revolution."

That meant in 2007.

The book written by Mikhail Hvastunov and Sergei Gushchev, the journalists working for *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, is called *Reporting from the Twenty-First Century*. The authors wrote that we would use electronic brains on a daily basis (nowadays we call them computers), miniature transmitting and receiving stations (mobile phones) and "biblio-transmission" (i.e. the Internet), open cars from a distance (with remote control), take photographs with an electric camera (digital) and watch satellite television on flat screens.

They wrote about it at a time when in the house where I was born there was not even a black-and-white television set, a toilet or a phone to call the doctor.

Hvastunov and Gushchev spent most of their time in the Moscow laboratories of the USSR Academy of Sciences, but after that they travelled into the future in their minds, setting off on a journey to Siberia in the year 2007 in a wonderful jet aeroplane.

I decided to give myself a fiftieth birthday present, which was to travel with this book right across Russia, from Moscow to Vladivostok. But I wouldn't take the plane like Hvastunov and Gushchev. I'd already been there several times by train.

Good God!, I thought – here was my one chance to repeat the exploits of Kowalski – American mechanised warrior, demigod and lone voyager, the last heroic soul on this planet, for whom speed meant freedom. That's how he was described in *Vanishing Point*, the famous American film that in the 1970s was the rebel manifesto of my generation. Finally here was a chance to make a dream of my youth come true, and just like him drive alone across the entire continent, except that mine was two and a half times bigger than America, there was no road beyond Chita, and I was insisting on going in winter. I absolutely had to get a taste of it in Siberia.

"In winter? If you're not home for Christmas, don't bother coming home at all," said my wife, and I know she wasn't joking.

Damn! That meant I'd have to hurry up. Just like Kowalski! Except I was hurrying for Christmas, while he had made a bet for a fix of speed. And he had a Dodge Challenger 1970 with a 4.4 litre engine that did 250 kilometres per hour.

## A SPONSOR

All travellers have had problems with them, not excluding Columbus, Amundsen, Livingstone and Nansen.

The head of the features department said there was no way he'd send me abroad for several months, because I'd eat up the travel budget for the entire department.

So I personally called and sent written proposals for cooperation to the marketing directors of the Polish firms representing car corporations that I found in the phone book. I told them I needed money and a car, arguing that they could get no better advertisement than for it to survive the journey to the other end of Europe and Asia with me, across the whole of Russia from Warsaw to Vladivostok.

Toyota, Nissan, Honda, Hyundai, Suzuki, Subaru, Mitsubishi, KIA, all the Asian makes, and also Volvo didn't even reply to my invitation. I didn't call the French firms, Fiat or Ford, because my brother, who knows about cars, said he wouldn't let me go in a car starting with an "F". BMW, Mercedes and Land Rover had no "free vehicle capacity". Jeep was prepared to give me a car, but without any money. The only company to agree to all my conditions was Kulczyk Tradex, importer of Audis, VWs and Porsches.

They were offering a powerful, luxury SUV, the Audi Q7. Four-wheel drive, a 4.2 litre petrol engine, 350 hp, from nought to a hun-

dred in seven seconds, maximum speed 240 kilometres per hour – two and a half tons of bourgeois excess for 350,000 zlotys. In my mind's eye I imagined driving up to the shop at the run-down "Ilyich's Dream" collective farm for some beer and chatting to the local lads about life.

Winter was approaching, but I kept putting off signing a contract with the sponsor. I can sum up the entire philosophy of my work as a journalist in two words: blend in. Merge into the background, don't stand out, don't attract attention, slip through unnoticed, and with my Q7 at the "Ilyich's Dream" collective farm I'd be about as inconspicuous as a Martian. Besides, my way of working is very safe, because it doesn't attract the attention of baddies.

I called the sponsor and told him I'd take the money, but I wouldn't need the car.

That was how we parted ways.

In desperation I went to see my editors-in-chief. I tossed a map on the desk, told them about my dreams, and that I had just got divorced from Dr Kulczyk, and said that if they didn't give me the money, I'd get it from my wife (because she holds the purse strings), but wasn't it a shame for a poor woman to have to sponsor *Gazeta Wyborcza*. And they gave me some cash. However, it wasn't enough for a car, so my wife did have to fork out 25,000 zlotys.

I decided to buy a Russian car with local number plates in Moscow, because then I could quietly make my way to the Pacific Ocean without sticking out like a sore thumb. The only Russian vehicles with four-wheel drive are the Lada Niva – which the local experts say can't be fixed properly beyond the Urals – and the "Lazhik" jeep, which even the tractor driver at any collective farm would be able to repair for me with a hammer, because apparently it's the least complicated car on earth.

## THE KRUZAK

The UAZ-469 (UAZ is the Ulyanovsk Automobile Factory) that I was looking for is known as the Soviet jeep or the Russky "kruzak", because that's what they call all off-road cars, after the Japanese Land Cruiser. They usually just call it a "Ulaz" or a "Lazhik", meaning a tramp, because it goes everywhere. This model has been produced the same way without change since 1972, but they also keep churning out an off-road microbus, known because of its shape as the "bukhanka" – the loaf of bread. Beyond the Urals they call it the "tabletka" – the tablet. It hasn't changed an iota since 1958. Both models weigh two and a half tons each, they have petrol engines of 2.4 litre capacity, four-speed transmission and power of almost 72 hp.

Lazhiks were sold to eighty countries, mainly in the Third World. To this day there are 70,000 of them registered in Poland that remember the Council for Mutual Economic Aid and the Warsaw Pact. In the 1970s the Russians conquered the Sahara in these vehicles and climbed a glacier up Mount Elbrus to a height of 4,200 metres. There are two million Lazhiks on Russia's roads.

"Do you like fiddling with engines?" asked Grisha, when I asked him to help me buy one.

"No, I hate it," I replied sincerely.

"Then you'll get to like it."



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# KAZIMIERZ ORŁOŚ

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## THE VACATIONER FROM THE SPIT

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Kazimierz Orłoś (born 1935) writes fiction, screenplays, radio plays and journalism. He has published over a dozen works of fiction, most recently the short story collections *Wooden Bridges* (2001) and *The Girl On the Porch* (2006).

The plot structure of *The Vacationer from the Spit* is based on a tried and tested idea: as he gradually bids farewell to life, seventy-year-old Józef finds a box full of old letters. Two of them remind him of things that happened over fifty years ago, in particular that once upon a time he chose to ignore the news that he had become a father. At the end of his days he wants to find out what happened to the child and its mother. He sets off for the place where he expects to find them, or gain some sort of information that might act as a starting point for his private investigation. He writes a detailed account of this journey in the form of a letter to his son. This lengthy letter, which makes up the bulk of the book, is not only about his youthful affair and the paternity he never took on. In the first place it is Józef's major confession as he faces up to his unsuccessful life and tries to "explain himself".

The place Józef goes to is the Vistula Spit of the title, and its largest resort, Krynica Morska. It was there that the 17-year-old Józef, on a summer holiday from Warsaw, met a simple local girl, Mirosława, with whom he enjoyed a mutual passion. Józef spends two weeks in the seaside town, conducting his own inquiry, but with no results. He returns to Warsaw empty-handed: Mirosława is no longer alive, and her daughter will never know the truth about her origin. *The Vacationer from the Spit* is a simple, raw tale, told in a matter-of-fact style, terse and wreathed in melancholy and nostalgia. Somehow Józef knows he won't be able to resolve issues from over fifty years ago, and that he can't change or fix or satisfy anything.

In fact he really comes to the Spit to communicate with "the impossible" – with the world of his own youth, with long gone times when he was genuinely happy. He is relying on the fact that some sort of footsteps will have remained in the sand at Krynica. He feeds on these illusions, but they do not improve his mood at all. The past is a closed book, and there's no going back to it. It is not at all clear why Józef is so concerned that his son should know his story. The son is a grown man, unresponsive to this object lesson based on his father's mistakes, which comes far too late. Perhaps Józef is trying to tell him that his marriage to his mother was a failure. Perhaps he is seeking some sort of justification in his son's eyes. At the end of the novel we learn that the son has read his father's letter after his death. Józef's death finally closes the whole issue of the unwanted child and its abandoned mother.

*Dariusz Nowacki*

**AS** I drove, I remembered the familiar bends in the woodland road, behind me and ahead of me. To the spot where the Lagoon was shining behind the trees. I was getting close to my goal. Houses began, on the left and right sides. Driving very slowly, I tried to work out where the Lachowicz's house had been. I remembered that it stood on a hill, on a bend in a sandy track through the village (the tarmac was laid later, probably in the 1960s). I couldn't remember – it all looked different. The houses were different – grey, like concrete bunkers with flat roofs. The ones I saw in my mind's eye had disappeared – redbrick houses, with pantile roofs. I remembered that there was an old oak tree at the bend from where the path ran uphill. It was no longer there, but I noticed a stump and some shoots growing out of it – a bunch of sprigs and some yellowed oak leaves. Higher up, behind some pine trees, stood the house. I saw grey walls. The sky was reflected in the windows of the glazed porch.

I pulled over and got out of the car. I stood for a while by some bent-over trees, breathing in the cold air. It smelled different – the old aromas that I remembered from those days, of pine trees, meadows, sand and chimney smoke, had disappeared. A few dozen metres further on, at the crossroads where the tarmacked road met the track through the forest that led to the sea (we used to run down there every day towards the fishing boats on the beach), I saw a petrol station. There was petrol on the wind. There were cars going by along the busy route, and it smelled of dust and exhaust fumes.

I ran across to the other side of the tarmac and slowly started walking up hill. I remember walking along a narrow pavement, past a chicken-wire fence with some flowerbeds on the other side. There were flowers, vegetables, blackcurrant and gooseberry bushes. I reached a locked gate, with a rusty letter box hanging on it. I stood there for a while, gazing at the altered house: the wooden veranda had gone, and so had the deck above it, from where we used to look down at the meadows and the lagoon. In its place a stone porch with small windows had been built. Concrete steps led to a landing in front of the porch. Then there was a door. Only the pine trees were still the same. Even the withered bough of one of them looked familiar. There was once a swing hanging there, on which Mirka used to swing the twins.

I rang the bell. Inside, a dog started barking. Moments later, when someone opened the door at the top of the steps, the dog – a small mongrel with a curly tail – ran out, yelping. I recoiled instinctively, because it started jumping up at the gate on the other side, barking furiously. In the half-open doorway I saw a woman. She was in a grey skirt and a green sweater. She was wearing a headscarf, something colourful. We were only a few paces apart, but I couldn't hear what she was saying because the dog went on barking non-stop. The woman came down the steps and approached the fence. On her bare feet she had backless slippers, which shuffled as she came down the concrete path. She drove off the dog.

"Good morning," I said. "Is this where Mr and Mrs Lachowicz used to live? Jan and Barbara."

She stared at me for a moment, as if surprised by the question. She looked like an old woman, tired. Wisps of grey hair were escaping from under the headscarf. I noticed her hands – the skin on her palms was red, as if from chilblains. Only her blue eyes were young.

"They did. But they're both dead," she said.

Now the dog was barking from under the currant bushes.

"What about Mirosława, their daughter?"

"My mother's dead too. She died this year, in the spring."

"Oh my God," I said. And after a pause I said it again: "Oh my God."

She looked at me without smiling. I reckoned she had no desire to chat. She won't open the gate, she won't invite me in. I've nothing to wait for. Inside the house a radio was playing loud.

"I used to come here on holiday, as a boy. A very long time ago. It's fifty years now. I knew your grandparents and your mother," I replied after a pause.

Only now did she smile, but at once she said seriously: "Unfortunately they're all dead now."

Behind her, a little girl was standing in the doorway; she might have been ten or twelve. In a sky blue dress. On her thin feet she was

wearing a large pair of trainers that must have been her father's or mother's. She had a mop of fair hair, a bit like an Afro.

"Mummy, Uncle Krzysiek's on the phone!"

"Excuse me," said the woman.

She turned and walked towards the house, shuffling her slippers on the concrete path just as before. Her bare heels shone. For a while I went on waiting at the gate. The door was still ajar. The dog was barking – it had run up to me again. I felt as if the thin girl was looking at me through the gap. She could see an old man in corduroy trousers patched at the knees, an unzipped anorak and a flannel shirt: who was I, what did I want, why was I bothering her mother? White hair, glasses, big nose. I laid a hand on the metal top bar of the gate, which enraged the dog even more, and waited. But the girl's mother didn't come back again.

After two or three minutes I gave up. I slowly started walking down the narrow pavement. The dog went on barking the whole time, seeing me off all the way to the road.

Later on, standing by the car, I gazed at the Lagoon for a while longer. It was grey, like the clouds. Far off in the mist was the other shore. I got into the car and slowly drove away.

Two hours after this conversation I rented a room at the Tourist Centre annex, at the end of the village, far from the Lachowicz's house. It seems I was the only guest. I wanted to be alone for two or three days, to do some thinking.

My dear Jacek, only there in that shabby place – once no doubt a "Workers' Holiday Centre" – at about ten or eleven at night, lying on a hard sofa bed, on a musty blanket, did I realise that the woman I'd been talking to might be my daughter! You see? And the girl on the porch was my granddaughter. Can it be possible?

I lay there staring at the glowing light bulb, a white sphere. I closed my eyes, and saw a red blotch under my eyelids. I opened my eyes – a white sphere. I closed them – a red blotch. Finally I started to doze off. A call from your mother woke me from my semi-slumber – the mobile ringing. Before I left Antoni's we had had a brief chat – I had said I would call that evening. Olga rang first. Of course she was upset and worried – why hadn't I called? I tried to apologise. I said I was by the sea, that I wanted to stop here for a couple of days. To rest.

"What do you want to rest from? You've got a cushy enough life."

"I'll explain it all when I get back," I said several times.

"What do you want to explain?" she said, raising her voice. "Better say it at once!"

And so on, and so on. Lots of unnecessary words. Your mother got more and more upset, and I was helpless. I didn't try to explain what it was about, to search for those few words that would have calmed her down. Once again I couldn't bring myself to be frank.

She was surprised I wasn't spending the night at Antoni's place in Jeziorna. She asked about it several times: "Why not?"

Finally she hung up. For a while I went on listening to the short, repetitive bleeps.

I only fell asleep towards dawn.



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Photo : Adrian Fichmann/EMG

Jacek Dukaj (born 1974) has written several highly imaginative futuristic novels and is regarded as a natural successor to Stanisław Lem. In 2008 he won the prestigious Kościelski Award for promising younger writers.

In Jacek Dukaj's highly varied and copious output we can see two main trends: alternative histories, which includes books where Dukaj creates variations on the theme of historical events (such as his well-known novel *Ice*), and futurology. The novella *The Plunderer's Daughter* belongs to this second trend. In it Dukaj has gone a few decades into the future, but envisages a reality completely different from our own. Krakow, where the action begins, is nothing like its present self. Thanks to a technological leap forward it is now possible to erect gigantic buildings in a very short time, and genetic manipulation means that people can shape their own bodies at will; the development of virtual computer space (which is hard to define without going into lengthy explanations) means that human consciousnesses can function within it both before birth and after death. And that's not all, because in his customary way Dukaj has designed a complete world of the future with great attention to detail.

The main heroine is eighteen-year-old Zuzanna Klajn, who lives in peace and comfort until the day she receives "a package from beyond the grave", a legacy from her long deceased father. The things she inherits and the information she gets imply that her father did not die at all, but went missing, and it has to do with the mysterious activities of the scientific institute he worked for. As she tries to explain the riddle of her father's disappearance, Zuzanna discovers that the institute has found a way to reach a place full of the relics of some an-

cient cosmic civilisations, from where it gets new technologies. Risking her life, Zuzanna finds her way there...

In *The Plunderer's Daughter* Dukaj sets a slightly different tone compared with most of his other books. The plot is not packed with events (he might even seem to be just toying with the conventions of the thriller or of sci-fi); what seems to matter more to him is to wonder which way our civilisation is heading. Could a sudden leap forward lead to its destruction? Could a human being who "rewrites" his own consciousness into a virtual world still remain human? These are some of the questions Dukaj poses in this story.

*Robert Ostaszewski*

**I**T turned out Kamil had bought an allotment in one of the new residential areas, and suddenly they started discussing architecture and the design of the house he was planning to put up there. It was already standing in an L-dream, so they walked through it, changing one detail after another – a door here, this wall at more of an angle, a fireplace there, or maybe better not, maybe an alcove... He had never proposed to her, he had never asked, there hadn't been a conversation of that kind – but now there was a House. Admittedly, KRONic technology made it possible to put it up on a fully equipped site in a single weekend at a lower cost than the price of any car, so a house like that meant less than it used to, just as everything now meant less than in times past – life, death, marriage, a child, all measurable in fractions, a bit of a yes and a bit of a no, it's always reversible, we can give it a try and we can pull out, it's a fractal instead of a straight line, and it doesn't really begin or ever entirely end – but anyway: a House. Zuzanna should have taken fright – she actually expected herself to feel fear and quivering uncertainty, but all she felt was quiet satisfaction.

...  
She started thinking of withdrawing the savings she had been keeping for a flat.

Meanwhile, with May came the summer, a Mediterranean climate and Iberian temperatures. Krakow was overrun with half-naked youth, girls with ample breasts and muscular, suntanned boys; like most cities in the EU and America, it was hard to spot a body over forty years old; nor was anyone trying to. On Thursday afternoons, when the weekend had barely begun, Zuzanna and Kamil would leave the city in Kamil's white BMW Arafat. Half an hour on the motorway and they're in another world; a strong odour of warm straw and fresh manure hangs over the country roads as the BMW jolts along old tarmac and sandy tracks; crooked fences run round grass-covered farmyards and every other cottage is uninhabited – entire villages have died out, there are hens running wild along the roadside verges, and huge butterflies whirling in multicoloured clouds over meadows where storks used to stroll, a by-product of the Carpathian Gene Kabbalists. Very old, very ugly people sit hunched on the steps of little shops and outside small churches; it's too hot for them, they weren't born for such high temperatures, such a sun. A hundred-year-old granny in dark glasses leads a cow on a rusty chain, as the Arafat slowly passes her – “God bless”, “God bless” – but God no longer has anyone to bless here, and even if He wanted to, there'd only be a single way to do it – by speeding up their death. But He doesn't; time in the country has fallen out of synch with time in the city, and the countryside isn't real at all any more – it's a May L-dream, into which they're laboriously plunging in second gear, as waves of shuddering air go hazy along with the road travelled; all this has no right to be real anyway – there's no hard reality about it, all you can do here is sleep, eat, laze around like an animal, make love in a leisurely way and chat about trivia – and that's just what they're going to do, from Thursday to Sunday, at Kamil's granddad's villa with its red tiled roof. When it was built, in Jaruzelski's day, an effort that took the whole clan many years, this two-storey villa was supposed to provide luxury for a large family; now, coarse and squat compared with the elven architecture of the cities, it provides a shady empty space in which to shelter from the sunny empty space. Kamil's granddad emerges from the gloom like an ogre from a cave. He grunts and growls that they've dragged him away from the TV, yet these visits of his grandson's are the old man's only variety, and there's nothing he won't do for Kamil and his “fiancée”. In actual fact they have the entire upstairs to themselves – and the entire area, the fields, woods, streams and rivers, pure as springs and full of fish, the ruins of old communist farms overgrown with picturesque birch trees; they can wander for hours and never meet a living soul, that is, no one with a body under fifty. This is a deserted land, waiting to be discovered again by the next generation – the children of Generation T will run about naked here under the Moon, through the elven woods, orange groves and quiet vineyards, and KRONic tents, lighter than a swallow's nest, will stand on the green hills...

With these whispered words on his lips he undressed Zuzanna as she leaned against a tree at the edge of a shady pine wood. The damp trunk held her spine straight as she narrowed her eyes and

raised her head; the fiery blue sky was blazing down on her through her speechless open mouth as well now. She had to grab onto something, so she dug her fingers into his shoulders, into his sides, pulling him towards her in short jerks between fits of noiseless laughter. ...

In fact the pine tree's rough bark was scratching her back painfully, but Zuzanna was also worried about her necklace – the delicate piece of jewellery could break, caught between their bodies, so she drew it aside, but it kept falling back into place, constantly turning on all its axes, as if seeking a suitable shape to reflect the nature of their passion. She pushed Kamil away and they stepped into the sunlight. Blinking, she glanced over his shoulder, where a new shadow was forming. In the brilliance of midday in May she couldn't see clearly, but now she was sure, so she stopped Kamil, who was pulling her to the ground; with her other hand she seized the amulet swinging between her breasts.

“Look.”

“What?”

“Behind you.”

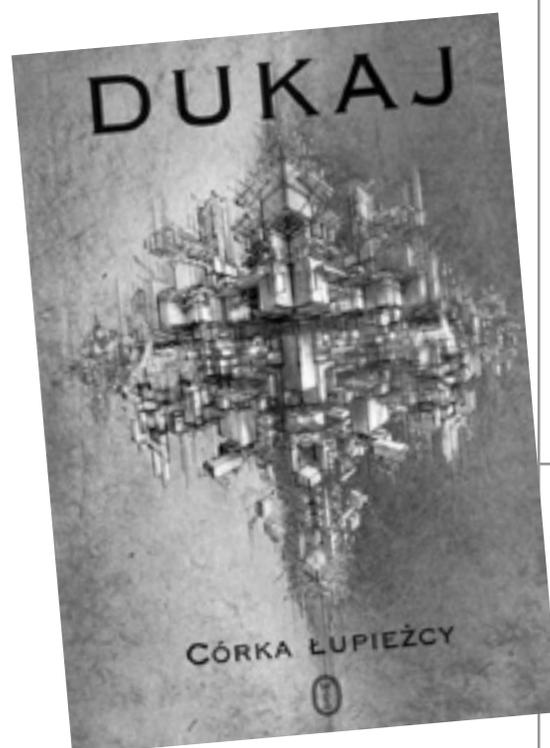
The City had wedged its way in between the woods and the boggy fallow fields left from the communist farm, pushing their space aside and adding its own. Somewhere in the depths of the City a bell was ringing – one mighty beat for dozens of beats of the human heart, and at the first thunderclap Kamil jumped up as if scalded.

“Holy shit!” ...

Without waiting, Zuzanna ran across the meadow towards the City. She was barefoot, and felt the change of surface physically: she was no longer stepping on the warm earth of Małopolska, she had crossed into an alien world. Drrruummmmm! The bell rang for the fifth time. Where was it ringing? She craned her neck. Ten metres above her an airborne stream was flowing by, with red-and-gold creatures shining in the arched current of water – were they fish? She shaded her eyes again. Drrruummmmm! The air trembled, sending waves across the surface of the water bridge, though it made no impression on the creatures.

“Zuza!”

She did not look back.



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Photo: Instytut Książki

Stefan Chwin (born 1949) is a well-known novelist, essayist and historian of literature. He is a professor at the University of Gdańsk. His highly regarded novels include *Death in Danzig* (1995) and *Esther* (1999).

This book is a continuation of *Pages from a Diary*, which appeared a few years ago. Chwin writes it in the familiar literary form of a diary as an intellectual chronicle recording the adventure of life. Biographical elements are the cement that binds it together, but in themselves they are not of major importance, in that Chwin does not weave them into the story of his clashes with other leading literary or academic figures, or with Polish society as a whole.

Chwin talks to the Poles in a way they are not used to, in a country where for all the years of bondage and political oppression a writer's duty was to encourage and raise the spirits. Chwin's main argument is with those who always place responsibility for various national disasters and disgraces on the shoulders of individuals, making them into scapegoats, while accepting the premise that the "simple folk" are blameless. Chwin undermines this myth, fighting for example against the conviction that General Jaruzelski was personally responsible for the state of martial law in Poland, though at the time its introduction was supported by millions of citizens, and was implemented by soldiers with eagles on their caps. There are lots of these provocative revisions of widely held judgements in this book.

Chwin continues to hold a personal dialogue with major figures in Polish and European culture, quarrels with Gombrowicz, argues with Miłosz and Herbert, gives some thought to Szyborska's poetry, and draws a moving portrait of the critic Jan Błosiński just before he withdrew from the public forum as

a result of illness. He also holds these dialogues with people who are less famous, but who are in some way distinctive in their views. Ultimately the whole *Diary for Adults* taps into the element of debate and argument, where some of the recurring figures are ascribed permanent roles. For instance, Chwin's wife is someone who never stops warning him against needlessly annoying public opinion. These arguments and disputes can be fascinating, not just because Chwin knew most of his famous partners personally, but also because he knew how to put truly important questions to them and wasn't satisfied with perfunctory answers. However, the one and only, most important question – about the existence of God – Chwin can only put to world order and himself.

*Jerzy Jarzębski*

# A NIGHTMARE

(In *Międzydroje*, at the Festival of Stars in the Hotel Amber, before an audience of holidaymakers Katarzyna Janowska asked me what nightmares haunt me when I think "Gombrowicz". I replied that several images haunt me.)

It's the end of August 1939. The trans-Atlantic liner *Chrobry* is setting sail from a quay in Gdynia. On the deck is Gombrowicz. He's leaning against the railings with a hand raised, bidding his friends farewell. He's off to Argentina! The ship sails out of the port basin, and beyond the breakwater it turns towards the Hel Peninsula, describes an arc and stops in the middle of Gdańsk Bay. Engine failure. Two tugboats tow it back to the port in Gdynia. The repairs will take several days, says the captain.

Gombrowicz goes back to Warsaw.

A couple of days later war breaks out. German bombs are falling on the city. Over the radio General Umiastowski calls for all the men to leave Warsaw and head east.

Gombrowicz packs his case, goes to the station and runs onto the platform – the train is just about to leave, so he jumps into the last carriage and pushes his way down the crowded corridor, peering into the compartments – yes! here! He goes in, and says good day. Sitting by the window are Witkacy and his lover, Oknińska.

Gombrowicz sits by the door. They travel east together. The train passes bombarded cities and burning villages. A couple of days later they reach a small place in the forest. The place is called Jeziory.

They take up residence in neighbouring cottages. There are hollyhocks in bloom against whitewashed walls. There's a stork's nest on the roof. There are swallows under the thatch. Along the road through the village come soldiers from a defeated Polish army unit. They have torn uniforms, yellow with dust.

Gombrowicz occupies a room at the front. He's tired, so he lies down on the peasant bed and soon falls asleep under his overcoat.

Suddenly he wakes up. He hears tapping on the window, and a shout from outside: "Sir! The artist has killed himself!"

He jumps out of bed, throws on his coat, runs through the village, reaches the forest and runs into a clearing. He sees a man's body lying under an oak tree. There are deep slashes in the wrists. There's a razor lying in the grass, with blood smeared on its shining blade. Next to the man a woman lies unconscious in a blouse that's soaked in blood. The villagers who have come running try to revive her.

Towards evening he takes part in the artist's funeral. He neatly pats down the yellow sand on his grave with a spade. He thrusts a handful of country flowers onto the birchwood cross. He stands for a while in silence. He doesn't pray. Planes with red stars on the fuselage fly low over the village, almost catching on the tops of the pine trees. The radio has just broadcast that the Russian army is invading Poland.

He and Oknińska return to Warsaw, which is now occupied by the Germans.

He is put up at Stawisko, Iwaszkiewicz's house. He hates the herb tea with saccharin, jam made of mashed beetroots and the smell of the carbide lamps that prevents him from sleeping. In the evenings, over a meagre supper he plays the fool before Jarosław and Anna. He makes fun of him for *Zenobia Palmura*. He argues about Sartre. He sneers at Andrzejewski. During the week he works at Nałkowska's. From eleven to five he sells cigarettes in her little shop.

When the Uprising breaks out, he is in the Old Town. He is visiting his brother. After the first bombardment on Freta Street the houses are on fire on both sides of the road.

During the evacuation of the Old Town he goes down into the sewer via the manhole at Krasiński Square. He and a twenty-year-old boy carry a wounded insurgent to the City Centre. It's dark and stuffy in the sewer. Black filth splashes underfoot. The torchlight jumps across the brick walls. The ceiling is low, so they have to bow their heads. Underneath Krakowskie Przedmieście they start to chat. They talk about the Germans, the American weapons drops, and the front, which has stopped on the Vistula, then about poems from the patriotic papers that make them laugh, and about the poet

Tadeusz Peiper. He guesses the boy is a budding poet. When they emerge from the sewer on Marszałkowska Street, he loses sight of him.

He will never find out that the twenty-year-old boy with whom he carried the wounded insurgent from the Old Town to the City Centre was called Miron Białoszewski. He will soon forget about him.

Later on the Germans run away from Warsaw to escape the front approaching from the east. Into the city come the Russians. He's standing on the pavement in Jerolimskie Avenue. He stares at the huge tanks with red stars as they rattle their way down the cobbled road from Poniatowski Bridge towards the gutted Main Station. He cursorily reads the Polish Committee for National Liberation Manifesto posted on a wall. He has no illusions. The joking's over. Communism is beginning.

He gets put up at Andrzejewski's place. He tries to write something for the weekly paper *Tygodnik Powszechny*, but the editor is reluctant to print it. The tone of the satirical stories he sends in doesn't seem appropriate to the current moment. He looks for work. Schiller sorts something out for him at the theatre. Sometimes he meets Miłosz at Blikle's for coffee, but Miłosz is about to leave for a diplomatic post in Washington, which is not well received. In Szczecin dignitaries of the new regime announce that all writers should be socialist realists. He's afraid of the young writer Borowski, who after returning from Auschwitz is taking people to task. Whenever he sees him on Świętokrzyska Street he crosses the road. He stops writing. He puts the manuscript of a novel he has started about civilians during the Warsaw Uprising away in a cupboard. He tries for a job as a lawyer at a drainage enterprise, but the new regime doesn't trust him.

Then someone informs on him. He is arrested at his flat on Nowy Świat Street. At first he doesn't yet know he's going to be accused of being in touch with Japanese intelligence and of an attempt to overthrow the constitutional regime of People's Poland by force.

He ends up on Rakowiecka Street. He's put in an isolation cell. In the evenings he muses on *Ferdynand* and keeping a distance from Form. He knows he's going to be interrogated by people from the NKVD. He has heard from Jarosław that they know a thing or two. As he waits for his first interrogation, he cannot sleep. He paces the cell until dawn.

Now and then, as he wanders from the iron door to the barred window, he thinks about the story *The Memoir of Stefan Czarniecki*, in which he made fun of the Polish Uhlans, who effectively defended Warsaw against the Soviet army invasion in the memorable year 1920.



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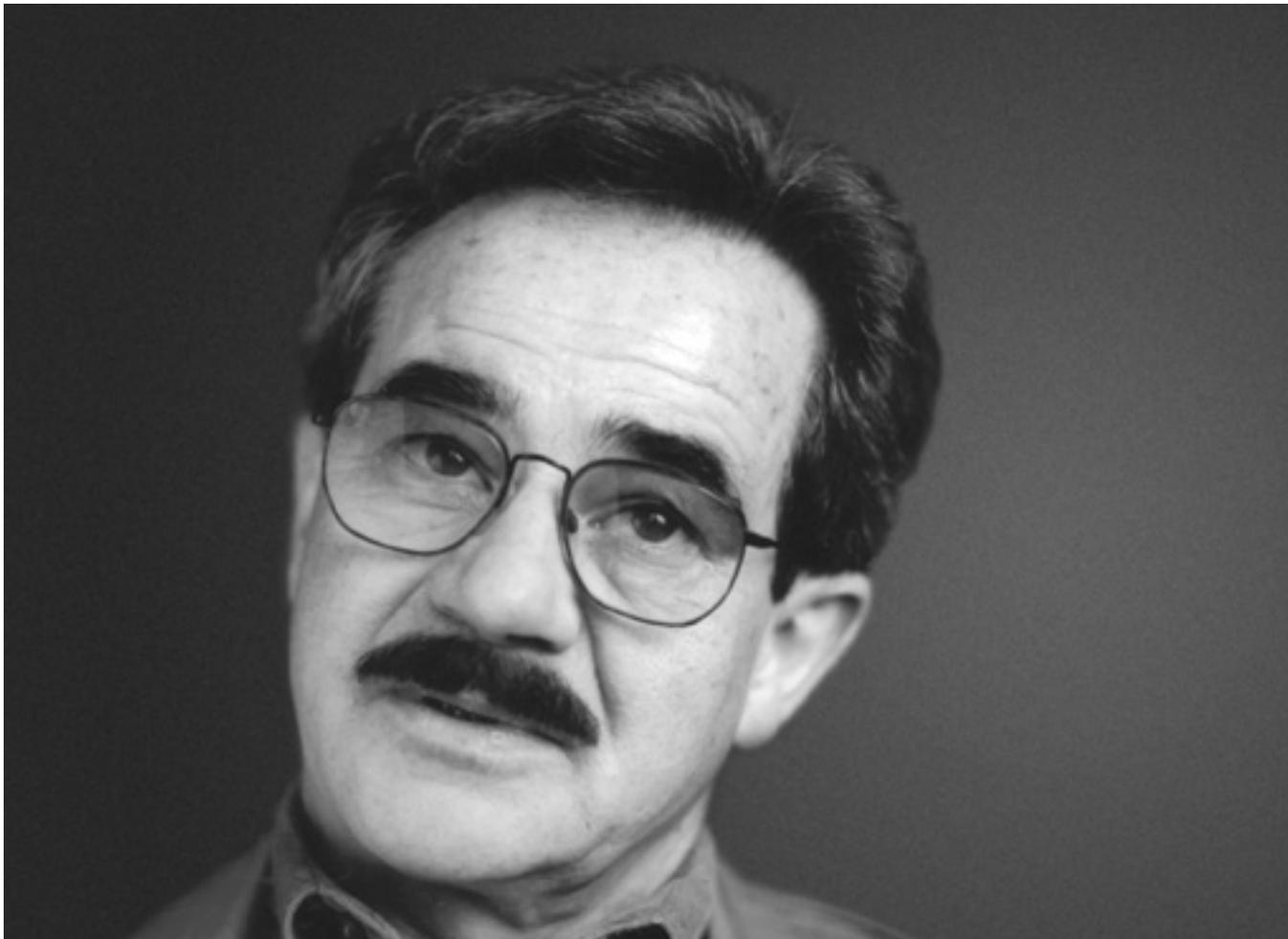


Photo: Elżbieta Lempp

Henryk Grynberg (born 1936) writes fiction, poetry, plays and essays... He has published more than twenty books, in which he has set himself the aim of chronicling the fate of the Polish Jews.

Grynberg's new book consists of a dozen items that cover such a wide range and are so highly varied that they could form two or three separate smaller books. The main element in the book is autobiography made into epic narrative. Grynberg recalls various episodes from his life: his time at a care centre for Jewish children just after the war, the 1950s and his student days, when the secret services tried to persuade him to be an informer, his first love, which conflicted with his sense of identity and memory of the Holocaust, his work at Voice of America (in the 1970s) and his first clashes over political correctness that edited out Polish and Jewish issues, arguments with a German publisher over translation quality, and his efforts at the start of the twenty-first century to obtain his personal file from the archives of the Institute for National Memory, in order to clear his name of a charge of collaboration with the secret services.

Most of the pieces in the book are memoirs, but there are also some digressions: summaries of the papers read at a conference on Jewish culture after the Second World War; the reprint of a lengthy debate in the press that Grynberg initiated, opposing Eli Wiesel's universalization of the Holocaust; and an interview Grynberg did with Susan Sontag.

And finally, as if to add a dash more spice to the existing variety, there's also a short story here, *The Volunteer*, about how at the age of forty, just after getting divorced, the narrator goes to Israel to enlist in the army and take part in a war.

Memoirs, documentary, polemic, summaries of papers, a story... Despite the extravagant range of genres, this book is essentially a response to one particular myth: the one that questions the unique nature of the Holocaust and the resulting consequences. It is the myth of ostensible universalism, within whose vast recesses anti-Semitism lies hidden. And so the title of the book announces that Grynberg is going to tell us how the anti-Semites continue to try and share responsibility for the Holocaust with the Jews, and how the Jews continue to try and disarm anti-Semitism with moderation and compliance. In response, Henryk Grynberg continues to write about the same thing: he adds details, fills in dates and explains obscure matters to show that the Holocaust cannot be made universal, anti-Semitism should not be mollified with compliance, and that we owe the dead loyalty and accuracy. If the past is not the past, the present is not just the day today. If the past contains death, the present has to absorb this death, and die on a daily basis along with the past.

*Przemysław Czapliński*

**AT** the Jewish school, the teacher used read extracts from the Jewish classics aloud to us, including *Draj matunes* (“The Three Gifts”) by Perec. It was about gifts offered to God. In it, a pious Jew has to pass under the cudgels of a line of Cossacks, and he’s just at the end of the row when he notices they’ve knocked off his yarmulka, so he goes back for it. When he falls lifeless, the angels fly down, seize his yarmulka and carry it off to God, who is extremely pleased with this gift. This fairy tale was different from the Greek myths, which I had read before then, in the way that Judaism was always different from Hellenism, and I never forgot the difference. These Jewish tales made an impression on us, but outside school we only read books about the Wild West – gone yellow, crumbling and falling apart, they came from the lending libraries that had survived the war and were flourishing. You had to sign up for these books in a queue, so we signed up for several libraries all at once. That was our version of television. Izio Ekhajzer read the fastest. He did nothing else, just lay on the couch and read. He also read during classes, under the bench, and told us the stories on the way home from school. With pale eyes and fair hair, he spoke impeccable Polish, but I don’t know where he had survived, because no one asked, and no one said. The Wild West stories, where there was always shooting going on, using both hands too, demanded some lively gesticulation, so the people passing us in the street used to give us mistrustful looks. Once the lady who taught Polish set us an essay on “What books I like reading and why”. We all knew very well what books we were supposed to like and why, but Izio wrote the truth, and the boys began to cry: “Please Miss, please Miss, Ekhajzer has written a brilliant essay!”

“All right, Ekhajzer, read it out.”

Izio stood up and started reading.

“I like books about the Wild West, because they tell us about people who are brave and free, who are completely self-reliant and manage without anybody else’s help. I like them because they’re far more interesting and real than the ones we’re told to read at school...”

“That’s enough!” the teacher interrupted him.

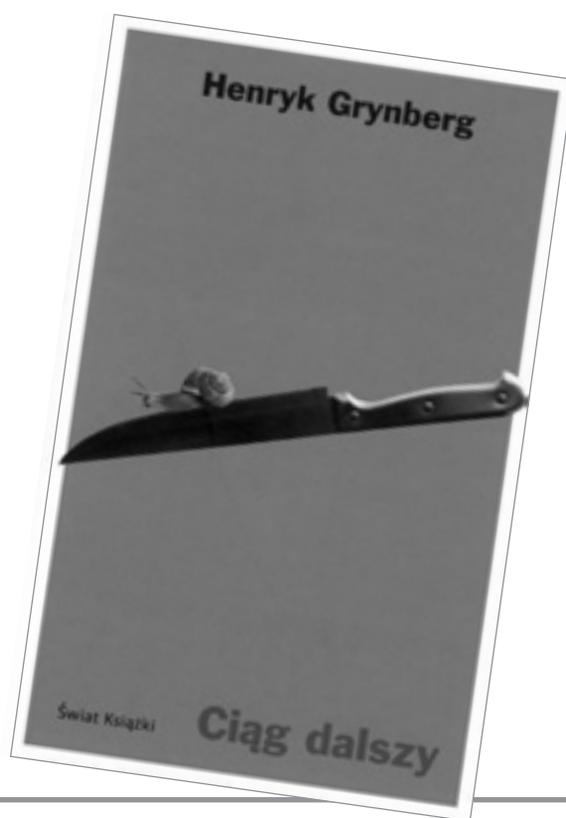
“Let him go on!” cried the class, knowing Izio wasn’t bothered about marks, because his family already had passports and their bags were packed.

In those days we lived at 71 Piotrkowska Street, in a flat at the front with a balcony and cork lino left over from the German tenants, because during the war Piotrkowska Street belonged to the Germans (it was called Adolf Hitler Strasse), and a kitchen with ten hotplates because the Germans had a canteen in this building. I lived there for five long and memorable years, from the ages of thirteen to eighteen. Our girl from the village tried to seduce me there. I’m lying on the couch reading, and she sits down beside me and says, move over. The same thing happened when I was lying in bed and she came to turn out my light. A couple of times I came close to it, but set upon by temptation as well as scruples (which nowadays I can’t understand), at the last moment I backed off, and later regretted it (I still do). As soon as the old folks went out for the evening or for some fun at the Jewish club I used to organise parties in the former German canteen. We danced to the tangos and waltzes played by the Polish Radio orchestra under the able, Jewish baton of Jan Camer, and once the programme was over, we sang “The Lone Concertina” and “*Proshchai, lyubimy gorod*” in Russian – “Farewell, beloved city”, for two or even three parts, because my friends who had come back from Russia were superb at combining Russian music and Jewish musicality. The neighbours used to bang on the ceiling and send the concierge to shut us up, but they never called the militia, because that was the Soviet era. Soviet books, Soviet films, Soviet art, Soviet language. No one used the formal “you” – “panowie” in Polish, because “the *panowie* – the gentlemen – have gone to London”, and if you wanted to emphasise something, you added “*ot co!*” – “and that’s it!”.

At school we had a Polish Youth Union day-room-cum-chapel with Generalissimo Stalin in a gold frame and golden epaulettes. I worshipped him. I was born left-handed, but I was forced to use my right hand, because left-handedness was regarded as a Jewish trait (Jews do everything the wrong way round), so I never learned to draw, but I could draw Stalin without any difficulty. And that was from first sight, as soon as the Soviet officers hung him up on

the wall for us at Dobre. And every time I saw him in the papers. It was always the same half-profile, the eyebrows, the moustache, the upright collar and epaulettes. I got so good at it that I could draw him blindfold. He was my liberator, my saviour, because who if not him? I loved their casual shirts with the stiff shoulder pieces. For me and my mother it was obviously thanks to them we were alive. In Polański’s shocking film about the Jewish pianist who survived the destruction of the ghetto and the whole of Warsaw, what moved me most was the final sequence with the Soviet soldier and his automatic pistol, so authentic that it brought tears to my eyes. I knew every one of their officer and NCO ranks, and the hallmarks of all their weapons. In fact the other boys in Dobre knew them too. Nor could I believe that my contemporary John Shalikhvili – a Georgian born in Poland, whom President Clinton (thinking he’d find favour with the Poles) named his chief of staff – did not know that his father was an officer in the Waffen-SS. The eight-year-old boy, who later followed his father’s and his grandfather’s example and chose a life in officer’s uniform, used to sit on his father’s knee without knowing – he didn’t even ask – what sort of uniform his daddy was wearing.

When there was an appeal for the citizens to decorate their balconies for the First of May, I brought home the golden Stalin from the day-room and hung it out like a holy icon on Corpus Christi. The neighbours, who came to our flat to watch the First of May parade as usual, did not at first know what was hanging from the balustrade, and were a bit surprised when now and then someone in the procession waved a clenched fist at them – that ambiguous communist greeting. Our next-door neighbour was a pre-war engineer who had a French wife. They had no children, just a little French dog, a tiny thing that looked like a miniature fawn and trembled all over – the exact embodiment of what was meant by the phrase “as delicate as a little French dog”. So after Stalin’s appearance on our balcony Mrs Francuzka – “Mrs Frenchwoman”, as everybody called her – started lending me books, such as *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, *Colas Breugnon*, *Captain Fracasse* and *Manon Lescaut*, which began to supplant from my imagination *The Young Guard*, *The Trenches of Stalingrad*, *People of Clean Conscience*, and even a Soviet catechism entitled *How Steel Became Hard*.



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Photo: Emilian Snarski

Jacek Dehnel (born 1980) is a poet, translator, novelist and painter. In 2008 the German translation of his novel *Lala* was published, and more translations are under way, into Hebrew, Slovak, Hungarian, Italian, Croat and Lithuanian.

This new set of stories by Jacek Dehnel includes all the features that are already familiar to readers of his novel *Lala*: inter-textual games of post-modern provenance, and a camp mixture of style and elegant phrasing. I think elegance is the key word in describing Dehnel's prose – that is what gives it flavour, even when, as in *Balzaciennes*, he is telling what are essentially "straight stories" (a flamboyant reference to David Lynch's film is quite appropriate for prose that is so full of cultural clues and references). The book consists of four novellas about: the unhappy marriage of the daughter of a rich textiles merchant and a young painter from the self-promoting world of Warsaw celebrities ("Meat Cold Cuts Clothing Textiles"); the small-scale family saga of the landowning Zarębskis, who have trouble making ends meet in the communist era and the new independent Poland ("Tońcia Zarębska"); the tale of a young man who escapes from cheerless reality into the world of old-fashioned style and manners, and makes a living teaching etiquette and good taste ("The Private Tutor's Love"); and the story of the unsuccessful come-back of a third-rate communist-era chanteuse ("The Splendours and Miseries of a Stage Artiste's Life in Her Well-Earned Retirement"). Taking his inspiration from Balzac's *La Comédie Humaine*, Dehnel attempts to depict a sort of cross-section of modern society, except that it is a rather an unusual one. Typically, as he writes about the present day, he says a lot about the past; some of his characters, such as Adrian Hełszyński in "The Private Tutor's Love", are deeply immersed in it, and ignore the modern way

of life. Is this Dehnel's oblique way of judging our "here and now"? Perhaps. However, I think what really counts in his new stories is not so much his correct diagnosis of reality, as his stylistic skill and attention to detail. In short, this is prose for connoisseurs.

*Robert Ostaszewski*

**HALINA** heard the mobile phone ring, and hastened to undo the zips and pockets of her handbag, because for obvious reasons (“Moscow! The Wild East! Thieves and muggings!”) she had hidden it deep down, but as she hadn’t yet got used to all the nooks and crannies of her new bag it took twice as long as with the old one. Finally she answered it.

“Sznurkowski here. Miss Rotter, something’s come up.”

“Oh, hello, I was just about to call you – you know, I realise Moscow is a crowded place, but this hotel...”

“Miss Rotter, dear Miss Rotter, the hotel is a minor detail.”

“...I don’t have to have a suite in the Kremlin, but...”

“Hold on a moment. We’ve got a problem.”

“What problem?”

“With the show. We’ve got a problem with the show.”

“Indeed! Because it’s coming right up! Haven’t they sold any tickets? I did warn you I’m no longer... I was never...”

She almost said “...I was never a singer”, but she bit her tongue.

“The point is this. We employed you...”

“Employed? All along I’ve been told it was an invitation to work together.”

“Let’s not split hairs, Miss Rotter, OK? We’ve been working together, because Kołymski had no dates free.”

“Kołymski?”

“Jarek Kołymski, don’t you know that name? You must do – the homo, I mean gay, glasses, with a sort of slicked-back toupee, tight trousers, real name Żuk, Jarosław Żuk. ‘Portugueeee-se tan-go! Portugueeee-se tan-go! Above there hangs a mango, below the steppe’s in view!’”

“You’re trying to tell me who Kołymski was? I know, everyone knows, he was performing before you... what am I saying? before your parents were born. But what has he got to do with it? What has he got to do with me being in Moscow at the Hotel Proserpina, where the toilets are blocked and there’s a cockroach the size of a sparrow on the wall?”

“Kołymski didn’t have the dates, right? He didn’t. He was going off on a tour of the health spas, mainly Ciechocinek, but also Kołobrzeg, Buska and Polanica Zdrój, where the retired folks are. It’s really well paid, I could organise one for you in the spring...”

“What has Kołymski got to do with it? I’m asking you nicely.”

“Well, he’s cancelled his tour. There was some sort of financial row, I think he quarrelled with the people in Szczawnica, I don’t know exactly what it was about, but it was to do with money... and all those manageresses and women in charge are all in one big conspiracy, so when he cancelled one of their concerts, they teamed up on him, and he had no penalties in his contract for breaking the agreement, so the whole thing’s screwed. It’s on ice. And as you know, he’s incredibly popular in Russia – Kolee-mski, Kolee-mski, they chant, there are posters advertising him everywhere, they’re all pushing and shoving to get in.”

“They were supposed to do that for me too.”

“But not like that, Miss Rotter, not like that. We make a lot of money on Kołymski straight off, on the spot, without any extra work, without having to warm up the information channels...it’s fine. And to the last minute we weren’t sure it’d come off, so we kept you in reserve as well. So this is what we’ll do: you sit tight for a bit longer, a couple of days or so, and I’ll try to arrange something else for you, because we’re giving that date to Kołymski. But now I must fly, good bye.”

And he hung up.

At that point she lost her temper and called him back immediately.

“In reserve?” she screamed. “In reserve? You can keep an NCO in reserve, Dariusz. You made an agreement with me, in fact you persuaded me to agree to all this, you didn’t just make an agreement, you forced one, you organised all this, you told me to take lessons, to come here, to stay in this blasted Hotel Proserpina, and now you’re telling me I’m in reserve?”

“Now now, please don’t get upset...”

“Don’t get upset? What would you do in my place? Do we have an agreement or not?”

“Technically speaking, we don’t. We haven’t signed anything.”

“But the arrangements... it was all discussed in advance. You could have backed out, and not persuaded me to do this in the first place...”

“I could have, but the situation was different then. The Russian side wanted to have someone in reserve as a back-up.”

“In reserve as a back-up! And along came General Kutuzov. I want to know when the concert is, when I’ll get my dress for the show and where the pyrotechnicians will be from, dammit!”

At that moment, as she imagined it, Dariusz Sznurkowski’s true character appeared on his face, everything that lay hidden in his low forehead, his hairy cheeks that reminded her of kiwi fruits, his pimples, that entire phrenological exploding bomb, everything that would destroy him in years to come – oh, she hoped so, how she hoped it would! – destroy his future wife and his future children too, change their evenings into non-stop quarrels, the daughter into a desperate drug addict and the son into a drag queen or something even worse.

“Listen... lady,” he said, “I’ve been kind, because I was poking your granddaughter, but now that’s it, game over, now we’re going to be frank and open. You had a chance? You did. On your own responsibility? Too right. Kołymski turned up, so now you’ve got no chance. Do you really think we’re going to bend over backwards just to promote some old bag no one remembers, some commie-era nineteen-sixties has-been, as one wise guy put it? Hello – this is Planet Earth, this is reality calling! Time to retire, Granny, time for a pair of slippers and a cup of herbal bloody tea.”

And then there was just the dialling tone, and here, beneath St Basil’s fairytale Cathedral, looking like a cake topped with colourful icing served up on Putin’s great table, Halina Rotter realised that she’d been absolutely right the very first day when she’d wanted to throw Dariusz Sznurkowski, stage impresario, out of the door.

She had agreed to his proposal, but not because she was avid for fame or wanted to stand in the spotlights again, amid sprays of sparks designed by Austrian pyrotechnicians, surrounded by supple dancers from Vladivostok tensing their muscles under tight leather costumes; of course she had always enjoyed taking a bow on stage, signing autographs and giving people pleasure with what to her mind she did best, which was singing. But she had learned to live without that, she didn’t expect to get heaps of letters, to be carried shoulder high, bathed in Russian champagne or awarded a Gold Disc on live TV (with a break for a yoghurt ad). But there was something else, something greater she was hoping for: her life, which could still be improved and set on a better path. With nicer furniture, an annual autumn trip to a warm country and long summer walks along the Polish coast between Sopot and Oksywie. Did she want youth? She wasn’t that naïve, but as for some illusion of youth, why not? An affair with an attractive director who’s been around the block, or a distinguished professor, a little flirting at the occasional banquet, maybe a bit of a face-lift, just a tiny one. But mainly she wanted to feel that she had found her place in life and was creating something that would remain, something more lasting than invoices for buying and selling countless blocks of pine and oak. Concert tours, Austrian pyrotechnicians and crowds of Russians chanting “Rot-tier, Rot-tier,” would just be a minor extra – the point was a sense of fulfilment.



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Photo: Krzysztof Łukasiewicz

Joanna Bator (born 1968) is a writer, journalist and university teacher. Her publications include the novel *A Woman* (2002), a book of reportage called *The Japanese Fan* (2004) and a book of academic essays on feminist theory.

The Polish title of this novel, *Piaskowa Góra* – which means “Sandy Hill” – is the name of the prefabricated housing estate in Wałbrzych where the story is set. In the early 1970s a miner called Stefan Chmura and his wife Jadzia come to live in the biggest block of flats at Sandy Hill. In 1972 their daughter Dominika is born. The novel is a detailed account of the lives and fortunes of these characters, and of Stefan and Jadzia’s mothers (Dominika’s grandmothers, whose names are Halina and Zofia). The earliest events described in *Sandy Hill* go back to the pre-Second World War era, and the latest are set in the present day. With an impressive epic sweep, Bator’s novel works on several levels. On the one hand it is a panoramic novel, which reconstructs the social history of communist Poland in an extremely credible yet also critical way. On the other, the story is told in the form of a family saga, presenting the individual, small-scale dramas of ordinary, simple people. Finally, from yet another angle *Sandy Hill* focuses on women, not just because the main characters are the four women mentioned above (the daughter, her mother and her two grandmothers), but also because Bator concentrates on the desires, longings and fears of women from three different generations and depicts their notions of personal happiness. She confronts this last aspect with all the brutality and crudeness of so-called real life. The most shocking fate is that of Dominika, whom we follow from her birth through her school years up to a youthful affair with a priest, a relationship that ends in disaster, although afterwards the heroine picks herself up and becomes

stronger. Nothing is left out of the other three portraits too. The women’s ups and downs are imaginatively described, especially their tangled relationships with men, and also what their inner life consists of, though it would be better to call it their fantasy life, full of daydreams and magic spells. Notably, the author has adopted an ambiguous attitude to her characters. She sympathises with them, but at the same time she does not spare them any nastiness, commenting sarcastically on their unwise actions or trashy ideas about what constitutes a good life. The novel is written in an ironic tone, with striking language – a mixture of naïve, coarse speech and the style of the smooth, controlled narrative. Thus the remarks the characters utter are blended with the voice of the hyper-conscious, sneering narrator. This creates a sort of detachment, as if the writer is trying to establish her position half way between empathy and derision.

Dariusz Nowacki

**JADZIA** Chmura is heavily pregnant and is not bearing it well, because it's hard to bear something you can't stop bearing. For the first four months she spends half the day throwing up, which can happen again at any other time the instant she smells burning. All it takes is an innocent little match to ignite the dormant volcano in her guts, and at once Jadzia erupts through her nose and mouth. The smell of vinegar helps, though only briefly, so Jadzia opens the bottle and sniffs it, but as soon as she puts it down she rushes off to the bathroom again.

But it's impossible to vomit out the cause of the vomiting, so after four months Jadzia gives in and starts to eat; now her body devours food with just as much ardour as it brought it up. Jadzia guzzles buns with strawberry jam sent by her mother from Zalesie, and tinned sardines, even drinking the oil, finally licking the tin clean like a cat and cutting her tongue on the sharp edges. She devours salted herrings and pickled gherkins, sugar lumps and smoked pork fat, soft-centred toffees and black pudding. Stefan eats with a hand shielding his plate for fear Jadzia is just about to swipe something from him, and at night she waddles into the kitchen and eats up whatever's left. She plunges her hand in a clay pot of plum jam, breaks through the sugar crust into the soft, wet substance and licks it off her hand, cleaning each finger and scooping specks of sweetness from under her fingernails. She feels as if there's something inside her that keeps demanding more and more, it's a hunger that isn't her hunger, so she can't control it. Her large breasts are drooping, and the skin on her buttocks and thighs is starting to lose its smooth texture, so now it looks like a lumpy quilt – there's more in Jadzia than it can accommodate. She can see in the bathroom mirror that her bottom looks like orange peel. She has rarely seen an orange, but she can remember what they look like. In Wałbrzych no one thinks of orange-peel bottoms as a malady yet, and no one has ever heard the word cellulite. She's put on weight, say the neighbours, and so have they, or they're going to. As a heavyweight pregnant woman she has special privileges in queues and on buses, people let her through and make way for her, although she hardly fits in the seats vacated for her, and is afraid of getting wedged in for good and all.

The women she knows from Szczawienko who have been pregnant before tell Jadzia, the novice, about their labour, during which they were in danger of death at every moment, of being torn to shreds or split in half, and only extraordinary luck and great stamina kept them alive. Every story is full of pain, terror and blood quite beyond the imagination of the war veterans, who had trenches, bayonets, and as a last resort the opportunity to desert at their disposal. The bidding on childbirth stories involves beating the previous offer with more dreadful pain and a bigger perineal incision. The ones that aren't cut split crosswise (the least of your worries) or lengthways, as if the woman were being torn apart by horses, and then there's a gaping wound from navel to tailbone, into which they splash iodine by the bucket load without any anaesthetic. As Jadzia listens, she can feel the hole between her legs tying itself in a knot, and now she's got two belly buttons. She sleeps alone on the couch and avoids Stefan, who keeps a couple of German porn mags in the bathroom for consolation, hidden under the bathtub. Jadzia counts the days according to the date set for her by Doctor Lipka, and thinks that if it's a girl she'll call it Dominika or Paulina. Those are the nicest names in the calendar, and it's hard to decide which one she prefers. When she gives birth in January, she'll make the final choice. She doesn't think about having a boy, because it doesn't seem possible for her to have someone of the opposite sex in her belly. It's all the same, says Stefan, as long as it's healthy.

The delivery, due according to Doctor Lipka on the seventeenth of January, came prematurely and at a bad moment, when Jadzia got up during Christmas Eve dinner to help herself to more herrings in sour cream. No one in the apartment block has a phone, it's a long way from Szczawienko to the hospital, and everywhere is waist-deep in snow. Jadzia falls over, knocked for six by the first wave of pain, which is only a foretaste of what a woman who's expecting can expect before she pushes her expectation out into the world and loses it. So the holy trio set off for the phone booth, because none of them wants to remain alone at home, least of all Jadzia. Her feet are so swollen she has to go in Stefan's galoshes, six sizes too big,

and only her old spring coat fits over her swollen belly. Halina pulls a fake leopard-skin hat on her head and they're off. Jadzia heaves along the path trodden in the snow under a sky as hard as ice; this winter the birds keep crashing into it, causing their hearts to burst; Jadzia's haemorrhoids are bursting too, and so are the blisters on her heels. She goes flying face first into a snowdrift where Stefan's shoe will remain until the spring. On both sides of the road there are blocks of flats where the doors are shut and the curtains are drawn, with Christmas tree lights twinkling merrily through them. Jadzia squats down and howls, and onto the snow a few pink drops of blood and two tears drip out of her. Halina thumps on the door of Zenon Kowalski, the man who owns the laundry mangle, and who's also got a Warszawa car, but it's no good, there's no petrol and he's drunk – he would help, if circumstances hadn't conspired against him. A sledge! There's an old wooden sledge leaning against the wall – maybe the good people will lend it to them to drag the heavy Jadzia, half barefoot and pregnant. Halina knocks on the ground floor window, but the good people at table can't have heard, because they've started singing carols, and of course you can't blame them, though God willing, they'll get what's coming to them. The sledge changes owner illegally. With Halina and Stefan harnessed to it and Jadzia seated astride, the sacred sleigh glides across Szczawienko, picking up speed as sparks fly from under the runners and soar into the air, knocking icicles off the roofs and zooming over the high tension wires that are growling with the cold like dogs. Like a cloud of snow, with frozen eyelashes and eyebrows, Jadzia leans back, closes her eyes, loses the second shoe and stares at Stefan, thinking if only he was the Magnate off the telly, if only he was a Foreigner, maybe it would all seem more romantic and it wouldn't hurt so much. There's a pool of urine gleaming in the phone booth, and Silent Night in the receiver, which is swinging on its slashed metal stalk. Parked in front of the booth, Jadzia slides off the sledge, and the ball of pain rolling through her, faster and bigger than its predecessor, bursts into the colours of the hollyhocks and dahlias from the garden in Zalesie. At the top of her voice Jadzia roars NO, never so determined in all her life, but sadly the effort is wasted. The clips holding up her stockings open their gobs in surprise, and Mother Earth opens too. Turbid waters full of sharp-pointed objects push towards the tunnel that only a trickle can squeeze through at most. I'll stop a car, thinks Stefan all of a sudden, but on seeing the group of people by the road the car just blinks its Cyclopean eye, accelerates and disappears. Jadzia howls, and screams NO again, because the bones in her pelvis are starting to come apart like tectonic plates in an earthquake. Why aren't there any taxis or phones in this bloody country?! weeps Stefan.



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Photo: Kamil Gubata

Daniel Odija (born 1974) has written three novels and two collections of short stories. He lives in Słupsk near the Baltic coast.

Five years have passed since Daniel Odija's last novel, *The Saw Mill*, was published, and in this time his fiction has gone through a lot of change. In the past, Odija wrote mainly gloomy stories about social deprivation, showing the consequences of the socio-economic transition of the past few decades in Poland. However, his new novel, *Don't Let It Be A Dream*, is a small-scale psychological tale about a man whose life has come crashing down. One after another, misfortunes keep descending on Adam Nowak, a writer well into middle age: his mentally ill brother commits suicide; his parents, to whom he was strongly attached, are killed in a car crash; his wife leaves him for a richer man who happens to be a friend of his from school; he loses touch with his sons, and on top of that for years he has been unable to finish the novel he is working on. Broken-hearted, in despair he goes away to a summer cottage in a village he associates with his happiest memories. The narrative runs on two lines. On the one hand Adam's struggles with his recollections are described, as he sinks more and more into the realm of memory (in a pathological way, because eventually he starts to see apparitions of his loved ones, and confuses reality and memory) in his efforts to understand what has reduced his life to ruins. On the other hand, Odija presents genre scenes from village life, and through anecdotes portrays the ordinary as well as the original local people whom Nowak befriends, who try their best to keep up his spirits. Odija tells a tragi-comic tale about the way memory works, getting used to misfortune and the strength of life. Finally Adam gets himself

out of his depression and recovers the will to live. Odija closes the novel with a happy ending – slightly bitter, but nevertheless happy.

*Robert Ostaszewski*

**DID** Ewa love him? Maybe at the beginning. What about later on? In the last few years of their marriage? What did they really have between them? She definitely dominated him, not just in bed but in life in general too. Later only in life, because in bed she became inaccessible. Despite her fiery nature she changed into a block of ice. At first Adam even found it convenient. He had no desire for passion – he was too absorbed in feeling sorry for himself. He was writing a book he was incapable of writing. And as Adrian and Kamil grew up, Ewa was kept busy with more and more things. There was a time when they kept themselves going from nothing but her little shop, which sold children’s clothes, push-chairs and nappies. She had a flair for business, and if not for the woman she employed, whom she trusted infinitely, but who notoriously cheated her, one might have said the shop brought better than expected profits. Meanwhile it only brought the expected profits. However, they had enough for the bills and a sort of life. Along the way, Ewa got involved in several women’s liberation movements and took courses – ran them too – in assertiveness and writing applications for grants from the EU for women’s cultural events. Adam watched her doings with quiet pride, but envy too, because he wasn’t capable of mustering more energy than to write a single page a day, with a dubious storyline.

Ewa meanwhile, speeding ahead and winning victories, began to put pressure on him to find himself a better job than his unproductive lectures at the Academy. The kids will be off to university soon, the expenses will increase. Adam must find himself some work, best of all abroad, because the rates of pay are highest there. He should find anything. Anything? Anything, as long as he did something... Adam gave in. He went to work in Ireland. Mixed in with a crowd much younger than himself he felt like a blind guide, lost at the start of the journey. Wiesiu, his mate from college, got him a good job building interiors. He learned a lot then – how to put up a dividing wall, how to lay tiles, terracotta floors and parquet, how to nail stairs together – it was no problem, it just took an effort and precision, and a little patience. It’d come in handy now for renovating the cottage.

He worked like that for two years, visiting the family for the holidays. Ewa was extremely nice to him in those days. If he had known that while he was over there with his hammer and saw, with nails between his teeth, she’d been on top of Baran, underneath Baran, tongue to tongue with Baran...

While he was slaving away in Ireland, Baran and Ewa were coming together in a common dream of a political career. They got onto the town council. In a place like Kostyń it wasn’t at all hard to do that. All it took was a little popularity, which Ewa had among her liberated women, a few interviews in the regional newspapers, on the local radio or television channel (all the journalists were mates, anyway, friends and friends of friends), and a little money to buy up a few hundred votes – Adam was assiduously sending money across to the family account. And one more tiny detail: Ewa was backed by the party whose regional leader was Baran.

So the hard, inflexible Ewa suddenly became soft and docile. Adam watched all this with embarrassment. His wife, the cold intellectual, the analytical mind that foresaw eventual pitfalls and eliminated them without batting an eyelid, and who taught their sons to fight dispassionately for their own affairs (“Darling boys, in today’s world conscience is obsolete”), was now dissolving in Baran’s charm, was dominated by his personality, with her eyes fixed on the countenance of the Lord! Or maybe she was just in love?

During the garden party she had laughed at every one of her boyfriend’s jokes. At the same time she’d kept a close eye on the reactions of Borusewicz, who was plainly flirting with her. Baran was vacuous enough not to see anything beyond the end of his own nose, but like any animal he had a strongly developed instinct. Whatever was happening, he could sense his own advantage over Ewa’s emotions. And although Ewa was excited by Borusewicz’s interest, Baran could tell it was nothing serious. So he calmly told his next story, this time about climbing, while Borusewicz and Ewa wallowed freely in their erotic imagination. Ewa had always been flattered when educated men took an interest in her. At the peak of their careers, moreover, and... rich.

It made Adam feel sick. He wanted to cry. He tried to smash the hard lump in his throat with sip after sip of beer. It’s hard to play the tough guy when the happiness and love we have known until now have proved false. And were nothing more than our imagination of what they ought to be like.

Adrian came up. He was trying to ask about something, maybe even to cheer him up, but he was too preoccupied by the party and soon left his father to himself again. That suited Adam fine. He watched from the sidelines, without really taking part in the fun. He could see the moving exhibits, whose shifts could be examined like the moves of figures on a chessboard. Baran bore himself like the king, Borusewicz was the hetman\*, and Ewa was the queen, or the female version of that same figure. Adrian’s mother-in-law was moving in between them like a knight, as was the golden-haired beauty moving between the two brothers, those two bishops from opposing teams who had more and more to say to each other. From their twisted mouths, flushed faces and abrupt movements one might never have concluded it was a conversation between two brothers who ought to be close friends. There had been enmity between them for as long as Adam could remember. He was truly tired of it by now.

And so he escaped into the remote past. His favourite memories were of his brother and his guitar-playing. Before Adam met Ewa, he and Sylwek had played in the same group for some time, which could have been called a blues-jazz combo. Young guys thrilled by music. Adam tried to make it on bass, but he didn’t do very well. If he hadn’t sung too, Sylwek would most probably have kicked his arse. And so he’d been gifted with the memory of hundreds of evenings spent at rehearsals, and the few dozen concerts they’d played! Somehow the faces of the girls they’d slept with had become blurred. So too had the parties they held at their parents’ flat, who went away to the country every weekend.

\* Translator’s note: In Polish, the chess piece known in English as the “queen” is called the “hetman”.



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WYDAWNICTWO LITERACKIE, CRACÓW 2008

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Photo: Instytut Książki

Wojciech Chmielewski (born 1969) graduated in history and journalism from Warsaw University. His stories and essays have appeared in literary journals, and he also writes reviews.

In his stories Wojciech Chmielewski portrays people at various stages of life. One of his heroines is only just starting it, as a little gypsy girl ("The Gypsy"), while another is a retired female painter who has had a heart attack and wants to bid the world farewell in a beautiful way ("The Buried Village"). But most of the people he depicts are in their prime, and he catches them standing at one of life's crossroads. They are lonely, resigned and exhausted, losing someone close to them, the purpose or meaning of their existence, or trying to get themselves out of a state of lethargy, to escape from depression. Most of them succeed. A busy manager returns on his birthday to his favourite place, a bar that he associates with his youthful lack of cares and duties ("The Birthday"). Meanwhile the heroine of "Dumpling", who as a student was once active in the opposition, now finds peace by buying a house in a small town and enjoying the freedom she fought for. In turn a young widower finds consolation in his love for his little son ("Short Story"). But there are other characters who seek solace through more desperate acts, like the hero of the title story "The Razor", an energetic training-course designer who reacts to stress by harming himself. In turn, the character writing the notes in the story "The Notebook" drops his studies, gets the first job he can find and embarks on an affair with his boss, who is much older than him. The setting for this escape from life is interesting – it is 1989 and the political system is changing, which the self-absorbed twenty-year-old hero fails to notice.

The gallery of portraits is built up in a disparate way; the narrators, depiction and language keep changing, and the length of the action varies too, from a few moments to an entire life remembered by a woman who has been seriously injured in an accident ("By the road"). The story called "The Sun" is a sort of summing up or short sketch about what stimulates or weakens a person, and is also proof of Chmielewski's talent; the characters keep changing, like a kaleidoscope, as each of them reacts differently to a heatwave. Wojciech Chmielewski knows how to seize life as it happens. He does not specialise in absorbing plots, but he is a sensitive analyst of human nature, and so the point here is what's going on inside. He is interested in people not when they're in action, but when they're at an apparent standstill, in a state of suspension that has various causes. He shows his characters at very intimate moments and in situations that the outside observer would regard as trivial. This is a book that proves that we shouldn't be too quick to make judgements.

*Marta Mizuro*

# THE BURIED VILLAGE

The street climbs uphill. There's a lot of traffic on it, cars and motor-bikes. There are shops and snack bars on both sides. There's a smell of fried fish, exhaust fumes and sun-baked pavement. She hasn't the strength to get up the hill, her brow is pouring with sweat. She sits at a café table and doesn't even wonder if it's a self-service place or if someone's going to come up to her.

Amber. It sparkled in her ring, reflecting the sharp sunlight. She stared at the stone, with her for so long now. She's worn the ring since her divorce, instead of a wedding band, some thirty years. There are some particles buried in the amber, like strange fish scales, tiny fragments that have survived for hundreds of thousands of years. And they'll still be here when she's not around any more.

"Yes?" says the waitress' pleasant voice.

She orders some water with ice and lemon. On this little street there's as much traffic as on Marszałkowska in the centre of Warsaw. She doesn't like it. She's sorry she set off for the beach this particular way, but it's the shortest route from the boarding house. The first time she came here was with the little Mikołaj the year before her divorce. He was four years old. Even then her ex already preferred to spend the holidays apart, though she believed he'd come back to her. She had tried, she had even made love with him every day, but none of it had convinced him at all. A pitiful, almost entirely faded memory, comical even. So the first time she came here the streets were quieter, in those days not so many people were coming here from Warsaw yet. Ancient history. Now there's traffic, people crowding the pavements, lots of children's pushchairs.

Her favourite thing was to stretch out on a towel and doze off, yielding to the effects of the sun. She didn't have to think, she didn't have to plan the next few days of her stay, or worry if tomorrow would be a nice day. Coated in sun cream, in a one-piece bathing costume, hidden behind a screen. The sky above her, a calm sea, small waves. She can hear its murmur. She can go for a swim.

The white walls of her room at the boarding house run by priests from the Society of the Divine Word – rooms, or rather cells, in which these missionaries rest after trips to various places all over the world. Recently during his sermon at mass in the chapel one of them talked about his trip to Colombia, the drug cartels and the leftist guerrillas in the mountains. They only kill priests there when one of them meddles in politics. But the ordinary people, said the young lad in the cassock, apparently they're wonderful, lovely, grateful for the work of madcap volunteers like him.

After returning from the beach she gazes at the ceiling. Yesterday a big black spider emerged. She flicked it off with a shirt. Silence. From the window she has a view of the Lagoon. There's a crucifix on the wall. Her son Mikołaj works in a foreign country too, he's building roads in Jordan. He and his entire family are already in their third year there, he even invited her for the holidays, but she didn't want to go. Too far, too hot, she said thank you, but she wasn't leaving the country and came here instead. It's ten years since she visited this place; she has chosen others. Something tempted her, maybe the priests' cheap offer, the good conditions here, peace, civilisation, no screaming from the other side of the wall, and no disco. And the beaches here are beautiful, wide and clean, with no glass from broken beer bottles or used condoms.

She had become especially fond of a spot just beyond the harbour, in a semi-circle formed naturally by the dunes. She wasn't bothered by the cry of circling gulls; she watched their uneven flight and subconsciously memorised the composition formed in the sky. Ever since she had closed, and then sold her studio, she didn't want to paint, but images captured her imagination anyway, crept in at various points in the day, enticing her. Roots protruding from under a layer of sand in the nearby woods where she went for walks after dinner, the crowns of trees and the misty shore beyond the Lagoon, which she gazed at from her balcony as she inhaled her first morning cigarette, though at the priests' boarding house smoking was forbidden.

Yesterday she had met one of them. He lives in the room opposite. There's a long, clean corridor with a grey terracotta floor. There are framed maps on the walls of African, Asian and South American

countries, and also portraits of missionaries, some of them were blessed holy men, saints too. The man with a tired face and several days' stubble who's occupying one of the rooms on her corridor surely thinks about saintliness too. Normally Father Dariusz, as he once introduced himself in the dining room, goes about in civvies, an open-necked polo shirt and sunglasses, but one morning when she met him gliding silently down their corridor, he was wearing a cassock with a wide black belt. He was heading for the chapel to celebrate mass. In the corners of his mouth as usual there was the shadow of a smile, which was a sharp contrast with the tiredness in his grey eyes.

The rolling mounds of the sandbar were incredible. Covered in mixed forest, they formed real gullies – you could ride a bike down them, go for a walk and get warm in the clearings, and then go down to the sea and cool off on the beach. This was where she spent the afternoons; she did run into other people, whole families, but she was always alone. Years ago she had gone off with little Mikołaj on a trip to a place eleven kilometres away, the last before the border that cut across the narrow strip of land between the sea and the Lagoon. They had eaten fish and gone bathing – there was a wide, clean beach there. They'd hitchhiked home. What year was it? Nothing remained in her memory. At home she kept a few black-and-white photographs of that trip. She wasn't doing badly in those days, she was selling a lot of pictures, mainly vases of roses, and regularly receiving alimony.



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Photo: private

Dorota Zańko is a translator and co-author of free-flow interviews with Father Józef Tischner and Archbishop Józef Życiński. She works for the editorial team at the Catholic Monthly *Znak*.

There have already been plenty of books depicting the grim period of martial law in Poland, and there are sure to be many more similar publications, because the experiences of this era had key significance for people of all generations. It might seem hard to add anything new to the fictional image of those years, but books still keep appearing that portray events of the early 1980s in an interesting way. I would undoubtedly include Dorota Zańko's novel, *Tales from a Photocopier*, among them. The story begins in December 1981, just before martial law is introduced, the troops appear on the streets and the Solidarity activists are interned. Despite fear, lack of confidence and the constant threat of arrest a small group of opposition members in Krakow, mostly from student circles, try to carry on with their activities, printing leaflets, preparing information bulletins to counter the communist authorities' lying propaganda, and helping the families of internees and those in hiding for fear of arrest. Zańko describes the fates of an entire group of characters of various ages, from a high-school student called Mariusz to a woman called Julia, who is already a grandmother, all of whom are involved in illegal activities. But the characters of Andrzej, a philosophy student, and his girlfriend Manya, a Polish studies student, play a leading role, and so does their difficult "love at the time of the plague", which is put to the test when Andrzej has to hide and break off contact with Manya, who falls into the hands of the secret police and is faced with the dilemma of whether to save herself or Andrzej. Zańko successfully recreates the stifling atmosphere of

the time, full of fear, despair and the ordinary daily problems of survival in a country plunged into crisis (it was a time when everything, even shoes, was on ration cards). At the same time, she gives us detailed psychological portraits of the "silent heroes" of those years, who risked a lot (even their lives, like the monk Paweł who is tortured to death by the secret police) as they tried to express their opposition to the regime.

*Robert Ostaszewski*

**SHE** kept still on the chair. The moon was hanging between the third and fourth bars. She was terribly hungry and wanted to go to the toilet. “Stork” went on writing something, as if she weren’t in the room. She didn’t know how long she’d been there by now. Maybe since yesterday.

She saw him put down his pen.

“Well?” He raised his head and gave her an inquiring look. “So what now? Can we reach an agreement? I’m sure you must want to get out of here by now, don’t you?” he said in a surprisingly warm tone.

She shifted on the chair and came to life.

“Yes, I do!” she said eagerly.

“Well of course. Let’s sort it out quickly. How long should I have to keep such a pretty girl, after all?” He smiled.

He leaned back and stretched his legs.

“So once again, let’s start from the beginning. Where did you meet?”

Manya dropped her gaze.

“I don’t know. I can’t remember.”

“When?”

“I don’t recall.”

“You helped him, right?”

“I refuse to answer.”

“All right then,” he conceded. “You’ve read up *The Little Conspirator*, you’re a diligent pupil. You already know it all and you’re well prepared, eh? So you also know I have the right to keep you here for forty-eight hours, don’t you? Two days. But they don’t tell you the whole story there. Do you know what you’ll look like in two days’ time? You’ll be as grey as this wall, hungry and dirty, and you’ll stink. You’ll be fainting with tiredness. And you won’t feel like saving the world any more. So better tell me at once – you’ll be saving us both some time. And you’ll be able to go. Where is he?”

She didn’t answer.

He stood up and began pacing the room, then suddenly went out, leaving the door open. Shortly after he came back in and sat down at the desk. He was holding some photographs.

More pictures, she thought. “Stork” took each one in turn and slowly inspected them. Now and then he looked up and stared at Manya. He put the photos down on the desk, locked his fingers together and didn’t say a word. Then he got up heavily and went out again, closing the door.

Manya straightened up and looked around the room. From where she was sitting she tried to see what was in the photographs, but they were lying in a spot where the light from a lamp was reflected in them. For a while she listened hard, but it was quiet in the corridor. She stood up and quickly reached for them. When she saw the first one, her heart began to pound like mad. With shaking hands she leafed through them. There were five or six of them. They all showed the same thing – the battered body of a young woman. Following an accident or a beating. Probably a beating. She may have been alive, or maybe... She was lying on the floor in an unnatural position with an arm twisted, and her clothes were torn and stained.

Outside the wind sprang up and the rumble of an oncoming storm resounded. As it stopped, she heard the sound of footsteps in the corridor. She threw the photos on the desk and went straight back to the chair. “Stork” came in. She didn’t raise her head. She thrust her hands under her thighs, trying to stop her body from trembling, and stared at her own trousers. She could still see that face. The girl’s face. Her face. Not that girl’s, but her own. Herself. Herself in an hour, in two hours, in a week? How long would they keep her here? What were they going to do to her? It’s not true they don’t beat people during questioning!

If I don’t tell them, I’ll look like her. So I’ll tell them. I can’t stand pain. I don’t want to die. What for? For an empty tin of fish?

A flash of lightning lit up the tiny window, then a thunderbolt struck somewhere nearby, making her jump in the chair.

I’ll tell them. 8b Szwedzka Street, she repeated Andrzej’s address to herself.

Because what’s the harm in giving them that address? He’s sure to have stopped living there, so it’s of no use to these thugs. And they’ll let me go. Yes!

No. No they won’t. In the manual, *The Citizen and the Security Services*, I think it was called, they write that you shouldn’t say anything during interrogation, and maybe they’ll let you go. Because a person who doesn’t say anything is useless.

It’s not true. He’s promised to let me go if I tell him, hasn’t he? So I’ll tell him. He’s not actually living there. He said then he’d be moving out in a week. So I can tell them.

But what if he went back?

He can’t have – why should he go back to the same place? He’s careful, he knows about these things. Various people are sure to be helping him. He’s not alone.

Sure, he’s not alone. That girl...

Well, so what about the girl? Maybe he’s working with her, maybe she’s actually helping him?

Working with her, yeah, right. He was laughing in response to her! He never laughs like that in my direction. She’s even quite pretty. It’s not such a bad occupation, that hiding. He goes out and about, travels around the city, meets up with girls. So he can get in touch with whomever he likes. Meaning he doesn’t want to get in touch with me. If he wanted to, he’d have found a hundred ways to see me.

No, maybe not, that’s not true, after all, I don’t know a thing.

Right. It’s over now. That’s obvious. And anyway... It doesn’t matter a bit what I say here. Who am I? No one. Can the entire opposition really come crashing down because of a single bit of evidence from some Manya girl? I can give them that address. It’s just an address. On top of which it’s out of date, because he doesn’t live there any more.

But what if he does?

Then he’ll escape from them! He’s not going to let himself get caught like I did! Of course! He’ll escape. Or hide.

Oh yes! it suddenly hit her. He’ll hide. Yes, obviously he’ll hide. After all, that day he had shown her that small door. Right behind the door of his room, a little door to the attic, and a hiding place in the attic – the homeowner had got it ready just in case.

She sat up in the chair, feeling pleased. How come she hadn’t thought of that at once? She took a look at the desk, at the photos. Then at that one photo, with Andrzej in it, which “Stork” had showed her at the beginning – it was still lying where he’d tossed it. She bent forward and curled up. She rested her elbows on her knees and hid her face in her hands.

Forgive me, she thought in despair.

Outside the rain was streaming down and flashes of lightning kept illuminating the room, one after another.



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# TERESA OLEŚ-OWCZARKOWA

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# RAUSKA

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Teresa Oleś-Owczarkowa (born 1948) is a psychologist who lives in Krakow... She has previously published poems and prose pieces in periodicals... *Rauska* is her first novel.

It is 1940. The six-member Przyczyński family is sent to do forced labour in Germany. They are very lucky, because all six of them – the parents and their daughters aged from a few years old to their teens – are chosen by some rich farmers who treat their captives very decently. Or at least that is how the narrator, ten-year-old Alusia, sees it. The little girl is delighted with her new situation – she has always wanted to get away from their small town to discover another world. Her dream comes true: at the Rauska estate she encounters modern gadgets, foreigners (Swiss, Ukrainian and French people who are also doing forced labour), and a different culture. So she is the only one who isn't homesick and quite quickly comes to terms with having to work in the fields like an adult. She also genuinely adores their hostess, a beautiful, wise woman, who during her husband's absence is coping so brilliantly with managing people and property. "The mistress" takes notice of the child's enthusiasm, honesty and intelligence, and employs her to work in the house, teaching her various domestic duties, and at the same time showing her genuine sympathy. To the concern of her parents, whom in fact the "employer lady" also helps a great deal, Alusia grows more and more attached to Hanna Langer and never has a second thought about going home to Poland.

Alusia not only becomes familiar with German order, but also the strange rules that apply in the adult world. Although she is aware that her childhood has been taken from her, she remains naïve and innocent, even when she is witness to some

shocking incidents – expressed in the simple tone of a child, they are even more disturbing. The book's greatest virtue is the natural way the author renders Alusia's state of mind, by superbly imitating childish language or showing the girl's generally comical attempts to rationalise things that are incomprehensible. Never for a moment does the story strike a false note; its authenticity can also be explained by the fact that late debutante Teresa Oleś-Owczarkowa has based it on her own mother's memoirs.

*Rauska* records the experiences of Polish forced labourers from an original perspective where, crucially, the image of the Germans is quite unlike the usual stereotype we find in accounts from the Second World War era. It is also the extraordinary story of the strength of a child's imagination, and about being hopeful – it is about the fact that it was possible to be free in captivity.

Marta Mizuro

**AT** the next stop I saw the mountains. Much bigger than our Castle Hill, and so blue on the tops. The train journey ended. It was a tight squeeze in the truck. People sat there silent and glum.

It's the first time I've seen even Daddy looking doubtful. And Daddy's not just very brave, he always knows what to do.

Now I was afraid something bad might happen to us. Maybe even the same thing as those people from the city in September? They were brought along in the same sort of vehicles... Maybe I've got it all wrong? Maybe there really is a doubtful fate awaiting us, as my aunties said?

I looked around. But all I got from looking was the same old feeling that we weren't in any danger. Because how could we be "the flower of the intelligentsia"? We're just poor people. Most of the women have warm chequered shawls around their shoulders. Only one is wearing an overcoat. We children aren't any better either. Our Marysia didn't want to go to school at all, so there's no intelligence there.

It's worse in my case, because I got nothing but As in second class and the teacher told Daddy I'm very intelligent. I'm glad that in the past few months since the war began I've hardly learned a thing, so maybe I've got a bit less of that intelligence by now.

I can shake off my fear. I remember well that the intelligent people looked completely different. No, no, we definitely don't resemble those people who were brought to our Podzamcze in September to be shot!

No one could possibly mistake us for them.

Meanwhile we've reached Striegau. Crowded inside the lorries, we're looking at a big square, where there's a platform built out of fresh yellow planks. There are vehicles and wagons standing around it, and lots of people milling about. There are also some German soldiers, but they look different from the ones who brought the people to Podzamcze that time to be shot. They're also different from the ones who came to Podzamcze at the start of the war. So many different kinds of German – who can make head or tail of them? Because at home in Podzamcze the Germans were very nicely dressed. They occupied a villa in the summer visitors' area.

I saw them for the first time at the Marketplace, when they were filling their mess tins with food from a field kitchen, the kind on wheels. I stared at them out of curiosity, and as I've always had a big appetite, I was extremely curious to know what they were eating. Cousin Antek, who was with me, dragged me to the back, but he couldn't keep me there. When one of the Germans called me over, I boldly went up to him and was happy to accept a mess tin full of goulash. Why not? The big chunks of meat were tasty and there were lots of them. The German watched me eating it up with relish and smiled. Then he handed me a flask and made a gesture to say wouldn't I have a drink?

I nodded. Well fed, I was happy to drink the unfamiliar liquid, which was sweet and fiery. After drinking it I felt merry. Antek and I took ages to walk home, because I felt very feeble. I kept laughing, and my head was spinning.

The whole family was sitting on the veranda when Antek finally led me into the yard. I sat down by the garden gate and refused to move any further.

"I think that German may have poisoned Alusia," Antek told Daddy.

"Holy Mary Mother of God! They've poisoned my child!" cried Mummy, cuddling me, but I immediately protested.

"It's not true! Such nice soldiers couldn't have poisoned me."

Then Antek came up with another suggestion: "If he didn't poison her, maybe he got her drunk?"

"Whaaat?"

I was tired and I had no strength to argue with them.

Daddy told Antek to tell the whole story, and soon after he knew what had happened. I was drunk.

Daddy found it quite impossible to cope with the idea that I liked the Germans.

"You must know, my girl, that only Polish soldiers are nice and very brave," he said seriously.

And although I listened to him politely as usual, wondering where I could have got so much boldness from, I asked: "But isn't it true that it's because of the Polish soldiers Daddy only has one pair of trousers left, the ones he's wearing? Because Mummy told Auntie it's all because of the Polish soldiers!"



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Photo: Anna Seitz

Anda Rottenberg (born 1944) is an art historian, art critic, and exhibition curator. She is the author of a compendium of post-war Polish art, *Art in Poland, 1945–2005*.

Anda Rottenberg's autobiographical book was written for at least two essential reasons. The first deciding factor came in 2008 with the end of the inquiry into identifying the body of her son, who had gone missing eleven years earlier. Severely addicted to drugs, he probably died as the result of a fatal beating. His mother would probably have managed to keep this tragedy private if not for the fact that as a public figure – a well-known art historian, curator of many exhibitions in Poland and abroad, former employee of the Ministry of Culture and for several years director of the Zachęta Art Gallery – Rottenberg has always aroused plenty of extreme emotions, and that is the second reason for writing this book. She was not allowed to conduct her mourning in private, just as earlier on she was not allowed to continue running one of Poland's leading exhibition spaces. *There You Are* is thus her personal confession, and also an attempt to present her own version of the truth before an anonymous tribunal – her readers. Of course there's no question of anyone being at fault here, unless that is how we regard being independent and controversial in one's decisions and views. Nor is it about "bad" parentage. Anda Rottenberg was born in 1944. Her mother was Russian, and her father was a Polish Jew. Her parents met in a Soviet labour camp. Although she was brought up in Poland, her mixed origin and her family's experiences have had a permanent effect on her life. However, she only started researching her family destiny and exploring the issue of her complex identity quite late in life, largely in order to understand how it had affected

her son and why she had been unable to prevent his tragic fate. Her family history and the tale of her own motherhood are just two of many themes in this book. First and foremost it is an expression of extraordinary self-awareness, the capacity to link up all the causes and effects, but also to recognise the role of accident, and to discover the ill fortune – or maybe perhaps the irony of fate – which undoubtedly came down heavily on the author and her loved ones. In her confession Anda Rottenberg brings things together that are hard to combine: the sincerity of introspection and narrative precision. At many points her story is hard to bear, nor can one deny a sense of shame at being curious to know "what will happen next", as well as a sense of feeding on tragedy. Perhaps the only thing that justifies the reader is that for Anda Rottenberg this book must have been a sort of therapy – of an extremely painful kind.

Marta Mizuro

**BUT** that year only Kaja and Cyryl are with us. “Żuk”, meaning “Beetle”, which is what we call little Joasia, Jola’s belated child, is playing with Cyryl like a doll, and he’s letting her, because it allows him to remain at the centre of attention. So he agrees to be the object of her game, to being laid on the sofa and put to sleep, though he’s not asleep for an instant. Our labradors are bounding about the flat, having a brotherly tussle. Fredek never stops wanting to play, but Kajtuś quickly gets tired. We don’t yet know there’s a fatal illness developing in him that will take him from us soon. And no one talks about the person who’s absent. We’re just thinking about him – Kaja, Jola and I. Then I take Kaja and Cyryl home to my place.

I check for messages on the answerphone. He hasn’t called. He hasn’t called once since the day he left the card. I’ve been looking for him for over three months now. I’m offering a big reward for any reliable contact. But everyone’s keeping quiet. Maybe tomorrow I’ll get a silent phone call? Maybe I’ll discover some secret sign, some letters on a door, or a small card shoved under my windscreen wiper? You can’t not get in touch at Christmas!

Though in fact there’s been a Christmas like this already, in 1994, before he went to prison for the first time. I remember the one-year-old Cyryl and Kaja’s entire family floundering in the uncontrollable, endless chaos of the cavernous flat on Stalowa Street, familiar to me for its close resemblance to the chaos of my mother’s flat in Legnica, constant traffic around the dinner table, exchanges of Christmas greetings, muddled good wishes and furtive glances at the empty plate “for the unexpected guest”. We had no idea that in Alicja’s very thin body a tiny bean was already sprouting, which in August of the following year would be given the name of Zosia.

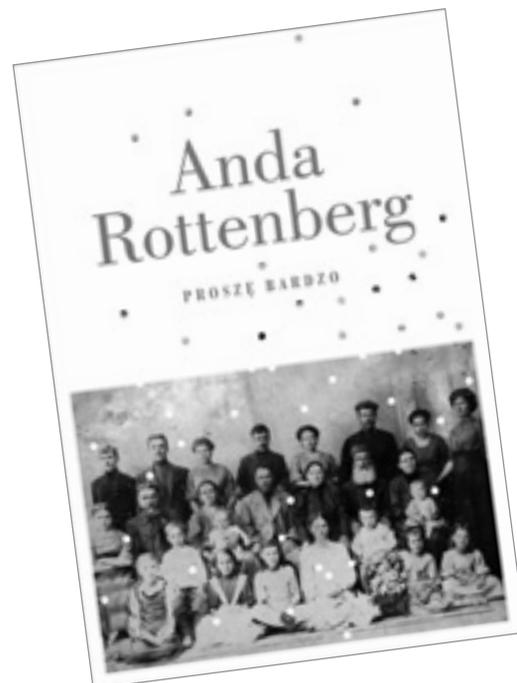
Now however, during this particular Christmas, Zosia is sixteen months old already, and tomorrow Cyryl and I are going to see her – the children should know they’re siblings, and I’m going to make sure they grow up with a sense of family connection. But there’s still today, Christmas Eve isn’t over yet, and Kaja is arranging to meet up with Hańka for Midnight Mass. They’re going to sing *Lullaby Little Jesus*, they’re going to welcome the Lord. I put Cyryl to bed. Kajtuś very quietly snuggles down next to him, they’re lying side by side, child and puppy. From Kajtuś’ point of view they occupy the same place in the pack. I’m left amid the silence of night by the shining Christmas tree. Maybe he’ll call?

It could already have been after the visit to that dreadful woman in Anin to see if maybe she could establish some facts thanks to her gift of clairvoyance. She was reluctant to see me. Downing the last mouthfuls of her supper, she took out some greasy cards, and told me to cut them, exactly like Janka from the ground floor in a distant era when, wreathed in “Sport” cigarette smoke, she said: “Cut the cards, Anda, two times with your left hand from yourself, from your heart,” and told me about faraway journeys, adventures with a fair-haired man in the evening and things happening at the state-run Home. The woman from Anin didn’t tell me to cut the cards from my heart, nor did she talk about any adventures. She said nothing. Several times she shuffled the cards, laid them out again and asked for a photo. “I’ll have to think about it,” she declared. “There’s darkness all round this case, so please call in a few days’ time.” When I called, she brushed me off with a curt: “I can’t see an aura, he’s cold!” I felt hatred. How dare she use such words? And I renounced the whole conversation. Press the delete key! I never mentioned it to anyone. On the contrary, I took Alicja to some place in Płock, to the police station where, as a friend of Mateusz’s called Karol claimed, they had a lead.

They had found each other in the Warsaw community, first the children’s one, then the youth one, driven by the mysterious force that attracts one bad egg to another. First it was with the son of a dying poet. Then with the son of a film star. For a while the son of a well-known designer hovered around them, and finally Karol had latched on, the son of a general, born after his father’s death. They once had a competition to decide whose father was the worst. Karol won, by calmly announcing that his father was a murderer. Victory in this sort of contest raised Karol above the other, more ordinary generals’ children and made it possible for him to be partners with some unusual civilians. It was them Mateusz had in mind when he said his friends were building careers, but he had decided to go to

waste. Indeed, all of them managed to cope with their fathers and with life. Except for Karol. Karol had kept Mateusz company in his drug taking, though he had broken off communications during his time in prison. One day he turned up at Dzika Street, thin as Piotrowin, with a sallow, aged face. “The methadone programme,” he explained. And that was when he told us about Płock: that Mateusz had a court case there, so he might have gone, and apparently he’d been found in the vicinity. He’s not so stupid, I thought, as to talk nonsense merely to get a reward. After all, he knows I’ll check first. Nor was he doing it out of friendship – drug addicts have no friends. I knew about the trial in Płock. And so I went there. The policewoman on duty explained that they weren’t holding anyone like him, but if they found him dead, they’d recognise him by his “dabs”. Such is their procedure. They had recently found an unknown man, compared his “dabs” – his fingerprints – to their files and he’d turned out to be someone else. I wonder why the people from the police station in Mokotów didn’t compare the prints with their files? Or perhaps they did, and it was someone else too?

So why after all this was I still waiting for a phone call? I wasn’t. Or rather it wasn’t that I was waiting. Waiting means not taking action. It’s the worst of all possible states. It means giving in to external factors, being dependent on someone else’s will. Waiting is contrary to my nature; I’m impatient. So it wasn’t waiting in the classic sense of the word. I wasn’t waiting in the textbook manner. I was living my life as if nothing had happened – a bit too busily, a bit too quickly. From one private view to the next, from one business trip to another, with breaks for crushing, joyless Easters, Christmases, and New Year’s Eves ticked off one by one. Only two years later did I decide to declare him formally missing. From that it appears that until then I had been hoping for something, that I believed in his return. I made an appeal on television for him to come forward. A very kind man from *Itaka*, the organisation that looks for missing persons, helped me to draw up a coded appeal, composed of a configuration of names that were familiar to him, so that only he would understand it, and so neither the police nor the City would be able to locate him. There was no news from the City either. The City was keeping mum. The City was sticking by the story that no one had seen him since December. Even if he has hidden somewhere very deep down, I thought, he’ll know how to decode the words we’re using to summon him. Such were my intentions. But no sign came to show he’d received the call.



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Photo: private

Joanna Tokarska-Bakir (born 1958) is a cultural anthropologist and ethnologist. She is a professor at Warsaw University's Institute of Applied Social Sciences.

This excellent book, nominated for several significant Polish publishing awards, is about the long-lived prejudice that ascribes criminal intentions and acts to Jews, including profanation of the host and ritual murders. Joanna Tokarska-Bakir seeks an answer to the question why within the imagination of Christian Europe, from mediaeval Portugal all the way to modern Kiev we find ourselves dealing with the demonic phantasm of the Jew. She is interested in the role of the dynamics (including myths and superstitions) involved in constructing a collective identity and building a personal culture, and which degenerate into a criminal incitement to commit pogroms and to persecute the demonised "foreign alien". Why is this phantasm so vigorous? Even today the myth of the ritual murder still belongs to the standard arsenal of anti-Israeli propaganda in the Arab countries, and is a lively residue that contributes to the collective imagination and fears in part of Christian Europe: it is a phantasm encountered to this day in Poland, as emerges from the field research Tokarska-Bakir conducted in Sandomierz, where there is an eighteenth-century icon in the cathedral depicting ritual murders allegedly performed by Jews on Christian children. Tokarska-Bakir traces the history and development of the phenomemon, which is one of the manifestations of so-called blood libels – "legends about blood", dating back to the twelfth century. By analysing sources including Rudolf von Schlettstadt's *Historiae memorabiles*, and also documents from eighteenth-century trials in Sandomierz, she demonstrates how prejudice became widespread, and

shows its many and varied consequences, evident not least in the anti-Judaic, anti-Semitic prejudices that are still alive today among some of the people she surveyed in the Sandomierz and Podlasie areas. Her book makes use of the conclusions of historians, ethnographers, sociologists and social psychologists, and applies the tools of philosophical anthropology, religious studies and psychoanalysis.

*Marek Zaleski*

## ANTI-SEMITISM AND ANTI-JUDAISM

My work on the logic of imaginary, Jewish violence designed to justify real, Christian violence has convinced me of the rightness of the following conclusion drawn by Sander L. Gilman:

...the periodization of anti-Jewish attitudes was inherently false. Speaking of Christian anti-Judaism, scientific anti-Semitism, or popular anti-Semitism meant examining the surface rhetoric in which universal attitudes towards the Other were clothed. Indeed, by tracing the continuity of a single attribute ascribed to the Jews, the deep structure of attitudes towards difference can be seen. I have therefore ignored the labels evolved by historians of anti-Semitism to describe their taxonomy of anti-Jewish images. Since I was not dealing with the political history of the use of these images, the historical terminology seemed to me to obfuscate rather than clarify the patterns I found.<sup>1</sup>

My topic too is not political events, but symbolic, phantasmal history: something that, like Jewish ritual murders, never happened, but which nevertheless conditions the present day. That is also why I will most often use the concepts of “anti-Semitism” and “anti-Judaism” in the meaning in which they function in colloquial Polish.

However, from a business-like point of view this is not a satisfying approach. For while anti-Semitism always draws on the work of anti-Judaism, anti-Judaism is often ignorant of the possibilities for this anti-Semitic self-application. Moreover, some phenomena that come under anti-Judaism belong to the realm of basic classifications connected with the difference; hoping for them to disappear is essentially hoping for the difference to be annihilated.

Thus in chapters 2, 5 and 7, in considering the Freudian *narcissism of minor differences* and Hanna Segal’s concept of *symbolic equation*, I shall propose my own precise definition of the distinction in question. In this understanding anti-Semitism will be not just a historical phenomenon that took shape towards the end of the nineteenth century, but absolutely any kind of anti-Judaism that affects the actual body of a person regarded as a Jew, resulting in persecution, exile or death. This definition means, firstly, the familiar observation that anti-Judaism is a necessary though insufficient condition for anti-Semitism. Secondly, it implies the statement that there can be non-anti-Semitic forms of anti-Judaism. In this book I call them classificatory, recognising that no realistically understood identity can manage without this kind of label. Their equivalent in Judaism is anti-Christian phraseology, arising as rivalry between the two religions sharpened and grew stronger in the Hebrew chronicles and hymns of the period of the First and Second Crusades.

In “normalising” anti-Judaism in this way, I am relying on a more pessimistic, but at the same time more realistic concept of human nature. I assume that both the differences and also their levelling can give “a start to violence and chaos”, but taxonomies built on the basis of denying (imagination of) the difference are essential to man for life. Only a society with clearly delineated borders can allow itself the utopia of a world without borders, whereas spreading this anti-prescriptive utopia to the rest of the world is a form of ethnocentrism. Man, and all the more so man under threat, cannot manage without classifications, which he employs for various purposes, immoral ones included.

Evil does not reside in classifications. The distinctions are equipped with an ambivalent potential that manifests itself in the ambiguity of the Latin word *discriminatio*. The stereotype of the Other, the basic source of identity for the majority group, can literally from one day to the next threaten those who as an anti-group helped to construct it. One day, under the influence of factors that usually remain hidden (a catastrophe, the accidental arousal of a myth through coincidence or the deliberate action of “ethnic entrepreneurs”, usually all of these at once – see chapter 6), the folk tale about the pig being the Jewish aunt (→ anti-Judaism) starts to be taken literally (→ symbolic equation), and people start treating the Jews as if they really were *Judensau* (→ anti-Semitism). The sequence of thus defined phases of anti-Judaism/anti-Semitism can be observed throughout the history of the Jewish diaspora. The new fact that my research introduces to the topic relies on problematising this transition with the help of the Freudian concept of the nar-

cissism of minor differences and Hanna Segal’s symbolic equation (see chapters 2, 5 and 7).

This way of formulating the initial problem could invite a charge of impaired criticism of the phenomena that can lead to pogroms, i.e. manipulation of the normatively weaker category of “anti-Judaism” to justify violence. However, there are more merits to emphasising the continuity of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism than there are defects (which in any case I have no intention of trivialising). The most important merit involves stepping back from our former exteriorisation of evil. In the categories of the post-war *sensus communis* created after the Holocaust, no one in their right mind calls themselves an anti-Semite nowadays. The phenomenon has not disappeared, but – as I have shown in the case of contemporary Polish public debate – has hidden itself in ambiguities. The point is that it should become visible again. The flipside of making something taboo, which is useful for public education, is the cognitive immunity of taboo as something that is non-standard, irrational and crazy.

The more worthy of contempt “they” are, the less reasons “we” have to worry.<sup>2</sup>

We can hardly fail to perceive the danger of unintentionally preserving the phenomenon, and prohibition has always played this sort of role. Viewed from a wider perspective, making things taboo is one of the cognitive methods that Odo Marquard called “exclusive reasoning”. Faced with difficult phenomena that did not fit inside whatever it identified with, this sort of reasoning was accustomed to simply eliminating them,

and did it mainly in this way: by stripping whatever was real, but did not suit it, of personal characteristics; in other words, it stylised it to be something less real or merely trivial. ... set to the permanent, it excluded the changeable; set to the infinite, it excluded the finite; set to the spiritual, it excluded the sensual; set to the necessary, it excluded the random; set to the general, it excluded the sporadic; set to the argumentational, it excluded the emotional; set to the indisputable, it excluded the dubitable, etc.<sup>3</sup>

Marquard’s phrasing can be extended and applied to anti-Judaism/anti-Semitism: set to the explicable, exclusive reasoning eliminates the inexplicable element within it; set to what is right and justified, it excludes the incorrect and unjustified element within it; set to the modifiable, it excludes the element that cannot be modified; in the two latter instances, from the exclusive perspective the entire phenomenon under examination disappears.

Therefore there is much to be said for including anti-Semitism – as the extreme form of anti-Judaism – within the scope of the rational debate of inclusive reasoning. Nonetheless, there are also contraindications. In considering the results of inclusiveness we come up against a paradox that Marquard warned us about, calling it “bonum through malum”. The contours of gnoseological evil (error), aesthetic evil (whatever is ugly, lofty, or romantic), moral (the asocial, the natural), metaphysical (perfection, changeability), become perceptible under conditions where the contrast with the corresponding “goods” is erased. Anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism undergo a similar process too, when treated as the dynamic phases of a single phenomenon. Certain things cannot be perceived while retaining one’s principal sharpness of vision. One can foresee however that there are costs associated with the loss of this sharpness which we are not yet fully capable of estimating.

1 Sander L. Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews*, Baltimore-London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990, p. X.

2 Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Ithaca N.Y., Cornell University Press, 1989 – this line is retranslated from the Polish edition.

3 Odo Marquard, *Glück im Unglück*, Munich, Fink, 1995 – this quotation is translated from the Polish edition.



W.A.B.

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Photo: Tomasz Stawiecki

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Marcin Wroński (born 1972) is a novelist, columnist, editor, lyricist and cabaret sketch writer. He lives in Lublin. The first in his series of retro crime novels was *Commissioner Maciejewski: Murder Under Censorship* (2007).

.....

For several years the label “Polish retro crime fiction” has had one single representative – Marek Krajewski, whose series of novels about the adventures of a policeman from Breslau called Eberhard Mock continue to enjoy vast popularity. But now Krajewski has some dangerous competition from a Lublin-based writer called Marcin Wroński. Over the years Wroński has moved from one genre to another, from the post-modern novel via children’s fiction to fantasy. Finally in 2007 he published his first retro crime novel, *Commissioner Maciejewski*, and a year later the next part of the series, *Commissioner Maciejewski: Cinema Venus*. And in my view he has done his best work as a writer of crime fiction.

The action is set in the early 1930s in the provincial city of Lublin. The leading character is Deputy Commissioner Zygmunt Maciejewski, known as Zyga, from the investigative department at the city police headquarters, the best sleuth in Lublin and the greater area. Once a promising boxer (hence the broken nose), he is a slovenly, arrogant man with an ironical, caustic sense of humour. He is also a passionate reader of Kafka and is inclined to be insubordinate – but at the same time he has “that special something” every good cop should have, an instinct that makes him extremely good at pursuing criminals. Although the action is set in the inter-war period, Wroński writes about issues that are still relevant today. In the first book, as he seeks the killers of the editor-in-chief of the city newspaper and the censor, Maciejewski uncovers an affair involving politicians, businessmen and media people. In the

second he has to enter the murky world of sex slave traffickers and the porn industry.

Here in Wroński’s novels the reader will find everything a good crime book should have: a carefully constructed intrigue, some interesting sub plots (not least the one involving Maciejewski’s professional and personal problems in the second book), a leading man whom it is possible to like, and some clear-cut supporting characters (here I am mainly thinking of the commissioner’s colleagues from the investigative department, Zielny, Fatniewicz and Kraft). And on top of that we get some bonuses: a portrait of pre-war Lublin full of details and curiosities, and a sophisticated style, because Wroński is an above-average stylist, which in the case of crime writers is fairly unusual.

*Robert Ostaszewski*

**THE** evening before Maciejewski had come home late, plainly not in a mood for romantically spending the last few hours with his lover before she left, like in a melodrama. Almost all night he had crashed about the dark house, until finally the half-asleep Miss Byoros had heard the sound of glass breaking in the pantry.

“Let him drink,” she’d thought, turning onto her other side.

He wasn’t keen to talk in the morning either. He hardly ate a thing, but just poured himself more coffee now and then.

“You’re hiding something from me, aren’t you?” he finally stammered.

Lilli looked at him closely and burst out laughing.

“What is it?” he asked in an offended tone.

“Nothing, just that you’re starting to resemble the jealous fool, Zyggie. Just like in your favourite film, *Pandora’s Box*. If I were Louise Brooks, I should shoot you.”

“It was Doctor Schön who wanted to shoot Lulu,” he grunted, and started looking for the matches.

“Well, then, you’d better hurry up.” Lilli quickly grabbed her bag and suitcase, because a horn had just hooted outside. “Bye, Zyggie!” she said, kissing him on the cheek.

“Bye, Lea...” muttered Maciejewski quietly.

She froze for a moment, but when she turned her head there was just an innocent smile playing on her face.

“What did you say?”

“That I think it’s time to say goodbye, Lea.”

He stood up and walked towards her like Doctor Schön in Pabst’s film – tall, well-built, seeming to tower over his petite lover in every respect except beauty. But Zyga wasn’t downcast like him, nor was he desperate. He looked as if the coffee had done its job and he had finally woken up.

He took out an old document, folded many times, showed it to Miss Byoros and then put it back in the pocket of his unbuttoned uniform.

“Lea Birsz, born 1906 in the appropriately named town of Wiedźmo, Baranowicki County.”

“Zyggie...” she said, faking amusement, and threatening him with her small clutch bag.

“I’m as much Zyggie as you’re Lilli,” he said, shrugging. “But I won’t say it’s been fun. Unfortunately you’re not going anywhere.” With two fingers he touched the girl’s shoulder. “Miss Birsz also known as Byoros, I arrest you in the name of the law on a charge of profiting from prostitution. When the lady police officer gets here, you’ll be searched.”

“Afraid to touch me, are you?” she snorted in his face.

“I’m sorry, unfortunately the law forbids me to.” He spread his hands. “You can wait in the drawing room. Do you want some coffee? There’s some in the jug, you’re welc...”

He didn’t finish his sentence, because suddenly he felt the touch of cold steel against his ribs. The bag had fallen to the ground, and a small Browning had appeared in Lilli’s hand.

“Another merit of a villa out of town,” she hissed. “No one will hear the shot. Especially from a small-bore pistol. Hands up!”

They heard the horn again.

“Oh yes, the chauffeur!” smiled Miss Byoros. “Call him in here. Quick, or I’ll shoot!”

Maciejewski opened the door and leaned out.

“Mr Florczak! We’ve got a problem. Please come inside.”

The taxi driver ran up, thinking he was coming to help carry out a trunk. And there wasn’t much time if they were going to catch the train to Warsaw.

“Oh bloo-dy hell,” he uttered in amazement as soon as he saw the barrel of the lady’s pistol pointing at his nose. “You’ve got me into a right mess!”

“Car keys,” demanded Lilli. “And both of you against the wall.”

“The bloody finale to a scandalous affair’, they’re sure to write in the papers,” noted Zyga calmly. “But you don’t have to hurry, you must have given up the idea of travelling by state railway, haven’t you? Let’s admit the truth here at the end, so it’s just like in the movies?”

“Oh!” cried Lilli, putting a hand to her brow in just the same way as Smosarska in *The Leper* whenever she was about to faint. “What

a *mésalliance*, what a drama! Till a bullet do us part...” She laughed. “I didn’t know you were a masochist. So you’re wondering what I needed you for?”

“No, in fact I know that very well.” Maciejewski leaned comfortably against the wall.

He took absolutely no notice of the taxi driver’s imploring look. But Mr Florczak had been reading *The Secret Detective*, and was well aware that if she told them everything, there’d be all the more reason why they’d have to die. Didn’t Maciejewski realise that?!

“There’s nothing like an undercover agent who doesn’t even know he gets it,” Zyga went on. “I’m more curious to know why you needed that lark with the phoney kidnapping. There, in Frascati, if my hand had shaken...”

“You might have shot me? I’d have died in your arms, and you’d have laid lilies on my grave...” She was clearly warming up now. Just as Maciejewski thought, she’d never be able to forgive herself if she ended this business with two shots no one would even hear. For her that would be like *ejaculatio praecox* for a man. “There’s the risk, there’s the fun. And the cash, of course. And you had to believe you were saving me from... how did they put it in your rag?... a gehenna of moral and physical torment!”

“They offered her up to you like a bitch on heat to a dog!” said the taxi driver, and spat on the floor.

“I thought you looked like a smart fellow straightaway, Mr Florczak,” smiled Miss Byoros. “Whereas you, Zyggie, are suffering from megalomania. Getting stool pigeons at your place was handy too, but we were more keen for you to arrest a couple of provincial pimps. Good reports for you, and less competition for us. And who’d have thought a closed case wasn’t so closed at all, right?”

“But someone did,” muttered Zyga, “and found your birth certificate. And even watched one of your filthy films that you shot here.”

“You saw it?” she said joyfully. “It’s good, isn’t it? Because who on earth would know better what guys want to watch?” She looked at her watch in a theatrical way. “Unfortunately it’s time for me to go. Aren’t you going to say something, Mr Florczak, that you’ve got a wife and children? Well, tough... And as for you, Zyggie, it wasn’t very wise of you. As you were so late to cotton on, you’d have been better off playing dumb to the very end. Now hand over my certificate, or would you rather I removed it from your stiffening fingers myself?”

“I repeat, you’re under arrest!” roared Maciejewski, and the taxi driver glanced at him in horror.

Just then some hinges creaked deep inside the house. Lilli drew back, and without taking her eyes off the two men, aimed the barrel at the back entrance to the villa.

“Good morning,” Zielny was standing in the doorway, and tipped his hat. “Would you please hand it over, Madam...”



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# ANTHOLOGY

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# GIRLS' BEDTIME FAIRYTALES

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As children we all read fairytales that give us a rough idea of the shape of the world and the rules that apply in it, until we grow up and discover it's actually quite different. In this fairytale world girls are assigned a special role, different from that of the boys. The boys fight dragons, win fairytale kingdoms and beautiful wives, and succeed in finding magical plants and other enchanted objects. The girls are less often the ones who achieve success, though they do marry their princes; instead their roles are passive, as they face up to their tragic destinies (like Hans Christian Andersen's *Little Mermaid* or his *Little Match Girl*). And so girls read fairytales differently from boys, perhaps more thoughtfully, or even with a sense of rebellion. Most of them would be happy to make changes to the fairytale world that gives them such a dismal role.

That may be how the idea originated of getting some adult women who were brought up on those fairytales to re-write some of them and bring their plots into modern reality. The results are sometimes funny, sometimes provocative, and sometimes bring a lump to your throat. The authors are not necessarily professional writers (though they do include Grażyna Plebanek and Agnieszka Drotkiewicz), but are mostly literary critics, teachers or artists, and thus a colourful cross-section of female Polish intellectuals.

An undoubted hero of the book is Hans Christian Andersen, not just as the classic author of fairytales, but of fairytales about girls. It is in his work that the authors of these contemporary stories found images of themselves in childhood. But they

don't always like the fate Andersen has cooked up for them – it prompts them to object and to offer alternative outcomes, sometimes mocking or ironical. The Little Mermaid sexually exploits a gay prince she has rescued from the waves and then disappears into the sea, Gerda from the Snow Queen wanders endlessly in search of Kay the dog, but never finds him, though as she wanders she imperceptibly slips into the routine of life in a fairytale kingdom; the Little Match Girl turns into a woman who is disappointed by her marriage and ends up burning the house down. But perhaps the most dramatic stories are the ones that transpose the cruel denouements of the fairytales (and Andersen certainly didn't show his heroines any mercy) to situations that could arise in modern times – as in the opening story by Justyna Jaworska, an adaptation of Andersen's fairytale *The Red Shoes*.

*Jerzy Jarzębski*

# THE LAST PAIR (THE RED SHOES)

Fifi saw them in the shop window. They were red, made of goatskin, with giddy stiletto heels and a little window for two toes tucked in tight like two little beans. The toenails would have to be painted blood-red to go with them. Somewhere she'd heard that Manolo Blahnik loves this style, and that they're called "peep-shoes", which sounded to her like "peep-shows" – definitely quite indecent. As she stood at the window she felt a massed attack of desire, enough to make her heart run down and pound beneath her respectable cotton knickers featuring Snoopy. She glanced at her... plimsolls? No way, plimsolls would at least have been a symbol of defiance, but what she was glancing at were her flat, eco-friendly moccasins with the straps, the immortal All-Purpose Shoes that she'd extricated from a pile of cardboard boxes at the cut-price shoe bazaar a few seasons ago. And then she looked in the shop window again. It had to be a really expensive shop, because there was only that one pair in the entire display, looking bored and haughty, with no price tag.

Like every woman who's addicted to gluing her nose to shop windows, once upon a time Fifi used to be a little girl, not an orphan perhaps, but a rather neglected child. Maybe it was through her parents' neglect that she'd been given a name that sounded like a punishment – "Fee-fee". And as if she were being punished, she'd been dressed in her cousin's hand-me-down corduroys, and her hair had been cut at home, with an original flight-of-stairs fringe. The acrylic sweaters were itchy, the socks were divided into ones with holes and ones that had been darned with a clashing thread – it was the early 1980s all over. ...

And now Fifi was standing outside the shop, opposite a pair of crimson stilettos with a growing feeling that she was going to give in. She could pay by credit card herself – it might even go through without an overdraft. The only thing she didn't really know was what they'd go with – for years she'd chosen colours that camouflaged her and had no taffeta dresses or stay-up stockings, no sequined tunic or dangly earrings – nothing in such a bold style. But it didn't matter any more, not now, as the shoes emanated magnetic rays. ...

The sales assistant greeted her with a sort of squint, because she didn't know which look to use: the unseeing one (for those mousy women in moccasins who always just looked) or the alert one (for the spoiled, fussy customers). Fifi looked like a mouse, but a very determined mouse.

"Have you got these in a thirty-eight?"

"Yes, in the window. The last pair."

Fifi tried them on. She wobbled, not just because she had suddenly become strangely tall. Standing in front of a slimming mirror, she felt as if her body was finally starting to belong to her. Her calf curved in an arc, into an upturned champagne-glass, with a gentle slash of muscle and a sharply outlined knee. Her thigh shot up, looking slender, and in the cotton Snoopy knickers her buttocks clenched together like a hard, crudely forged melon. Her belly flattened, her bust in a tatty push-up bra came sharply forwards, while her shoulders went back, like one of those wind-up models.

"I'll pay by credit card."

She didn't put them in the box – the moccasins ended up in there. She left the shop unsteadily, getting funny looks. She was only just hatching out as she glided down the pavement in her red torpedoes like a parody of Fashion TV, looking a little tipsy, a little bit detached from herself.

When she went to sleep, she put the shoes next to the bed. Next day she wore them about the house as soon as she got up, and that evening she went out in them to the Underscene Club, which the regulars called "the Andersen".

Before now she'd been wary of these places – stroboscopic lights, lots of jiggling about, a racket from the DJ's console, sweaty bodies on heat. But before now she didn't have her red Blahniks (that was her pet name for them, though on the soles they bore the logo of a company she'd never heard of called "ID"). She took trouble getting ready: vodka and orange juice before leaving, a packet of L&Ms and some condoms in her handbag, make-up a bit desperate perhaps. She'd never imagined it was so simple. She floated through the entrance as if in a trance, ordered her first Manhattan at the bar

and sailed onto the dance floor, under the fire of laser lights. The stilettos carried her along on their own, her hips went into motion, her shoulder blades relaxed as if at the tender touch of a Thai masseuse. Again she felt a pulse beating somewhere near her instep, tickling her calves and moving higher (this time the Snoopy knickers had stayed behind in the laundry basket; for the first time ever she had dared to put on a tiger-print thong). Purple apparitions flashed before her in convulsions as the violet fragrance of Fahrenheit grew stronger in the air. She felt someone's hands on her hips, from behind. She didn't look round, but started to wiggle her bum. The stilettos seemed to go into a slide, one move flowed smoothly into the next, and the hands on her hips became more and more persistent. Or more and more unstoppable. She couldn't believe how long she'd gone without a man.

She only took a look at him in the taxi, but not too closely in there either, because it was dark. In fact she only saw his face in the morning. He had acne scars, a shaved ginger nape and enlarged pores, so innocent in the sharp light from the window. He was breathing like a baby, panting a little. The bachelor flat was his, so she quickly gathered up her thong (by the mattress), dress (hanging on a chair like a gutted trophy) and stilettos (lying casually here and there on the way to the bathroom, pretending to know nothing). And her handbag. She got dressed and slipped away, like a real lady.

At home something strange happened. She tossed her handbag and keys in a corner, but the shoes seemed to have attached themselves to her swollen feet. She threw herself on the bed in them, and for a while she passed out. She must have, because an angel holding a sword came floating down from the ceiling and, in the alto voice of the lovely blonde film star Magdalena Cielecka, it said:

"You must dance! Dance in your red shoes until you are pale and cold, until the skin withers on your bones like a skeleton. Dance!"

The angel was right about the skeleton, because over the next few months Fifi really did lose a lot of weight. Maybe because of the drugs she started taking in the toilet at the Underscene Club, or maybe simply the effort – after all, she'd never danced so much before. Or maybe she'd stopped eating healthily? The bachelors she met each evening had empty fridges in their bachelor flats, and her own fridge was no better – anyway, after a couple of drinks she didn't feel like eating. ... She danced come rain come shine, all day and all night, but at night it was worst of all.

However, the crisis came by day, the day she tripped over while shopping. She landed quite softly on a pile of clothes at the sales and couldn't get up again. She just cried out: "Mercy!"

In hospital she slept for several days straight, but even in her sleep the spasms kept going through her calves. She was running breathlessly through rotten leaves, a ginger soldier was laughing towards her from behind a branch. She wouldn't let herself take off the shoes. Finally she was discharged with the diagnosis: "nerves, more magnesium", after which she took herself off to a torturer who, as it happened, received his patients at a smart consulting room in the city centre. He had manicured hands, and only his cruel, immobile face betrayed his real profession.



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# EUSTACHY RYLSKI

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## AFTER BREAKFAST

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AFTER BREAKFAST

EUSTACHY RYLSKI

34

Eustachy Rylski (born 1944) writes fiction, drama, screenplays and – thanks to this collection – essays. In recent years he has published *The Man in the Shadow* (2004), *The Condition* (2005) and a short story collection, *The Island* (2007).

*After Breakfast* is a collection of articles about literature, to put it as guardedly as possible. In the seven essays that make up this book, Rylski presents his literary favourites, profiles his ideal choice of writers and literary figures, conjectures on the art of writing, and above all talks about himself as a reader and sings the praises of reading. In a way, these meditations on literary matters are an excuse for Rylski to talk about the world of his youth, with which he has irrevocably lost touch. It was then, in the mid-1960s, that he read the books that largely determined his fate, shaped his character and captured his imagination for ever. And so a leading role in *After Breakfast* is played by nostalgia. Rylski re-visits his reading experiences of the past, and at the same time his former self. This is an interesting turn in the work of an author who has previously avoided writing anything that could be deemed autobiographical. Here for the first time he talks openly about himself, and about the places and people he was connected with in the distant past.

Although this book is quite modest in size, it is very thought-provoking. Perhaps the most interesting theme in *After Breakfast* involves reflections on the perfect reader. Rylski sketches a utopian image of the old-style reader who no longer exists today. Who was he? Someone who read heaps of books voraciously. If this ideal reader regarded any writer as his own – the way Rylski felt about Hemingway in the early 1960s – he not only read absolutely everything signed with his favourite author's name, but knew his work almost by heart. Whether

it was the characters or the plot, he treated it all as if it were written specially for us (this is the status he gives to a supporting character from one of Turgenev's stories). The heroes of novels (e.g. the main character in Camus' *The Plague*) took on the role of moral authorities, and the writers themselves – Rylski writes of Malraux in this way – became teachers of life, idols whom one wanted to imitate. Once, Rylski recalls, literature was serious and important, and coming into contact with it was just as much an encounter with someone else's imagination as "reading" or "experiencing" your own self. Unfortunately there is nothing to imply that those attitudes and practices have returned.

*Dariusz Nowacki*

# 1

I remember the days when the sun didn't cause melanoma, no one got cirrhosis of the liver from alcohol, arteriosclerosis didn't come from eating good food, sex was not accompanied by the risk of AIDS and, most importantly, cigarettes had nothing to do with lung cancer. In other words I remember the days when I first met Holly Golightly from *Breakfast at Tiffany's*.

I was eighteen years old at the time, and although I don't know how, I was convinced I had a good life ahead of me. Without going into detail, the entire world around me spoke against this conviction, but what spoke for it were the daydreams to which I utterly surrendered, and the ability that I've lost with the years to console myself with the sensual, and thus cost-free side of life. The blazing hot summer of 1963 will never be repeated. ...

# 2

Because without looking, without being pretentious and without perjuring myself, reading *Breakfast at Tiffany's* was one of my most memorable, and thus most vital literary adventures. Why?

I was already mature and had had all manner of literary initiation. I had read the Russian classics, Iwaszkiewicz, Camus and Mauriac, I was right up to speed on Hemingway and I had tried Faulkner; I couldn't fail to notice that compared with Bunin, the sex appeal in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* was negligible, compared with Iwaszkiewicz's stories it had no sensitivity, no emotion or sensuality, none of Turgenyev's charisma or the compelling simplicity of his tales; I knew that reading Gogol shows us the difference between having a sense of humour and faking one, and that in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* even the charm – that last resort of a writer – is about as enchanting as a bus ticket.

And yet every time I meet a girl with a boy's figure, Miss Golightly comes to mind, on a journey or on the spot. Whenever I find myself dealing with a bashful, simple fellow who doesn't understand a thing, I see the horse doctor from Tulip, Texas, whom Holly so insensitively, selfishly and crudely abandoned. Whenever I look at tall, fragile models, I see before me Mag Wildwood, who finally did so well with the millionaire, Rusty Trawler. Whenever I'm at a strained, overcrowded party with boredom congealing in the air and the sort of constraint that no amount of alcohol is capable of relaxing, I remember the one Holly invited the narrator to, at her cramped New York apartment.

And I try to stop a flood of words from any talkative young woman I happen to meet with the comment that she sounds like a girl from Tiffany's, though at first glance you can see she isn't. Naturally, there are other literary characters I have never forgotten, including my favourite animals, and with the passage of time in some cases I have had increasingly frequent, ever closer contact with them, but how come those puppets of Capote's have kept my memory captive for so many years? ...

The first merit of this story about the appearance and disappearance of a silly little tart and her buddies is lack of obligation. The author does not feel obliged to his characters, they are not obliged to themselves, the reader is not obliged to them and they pay him back in the same coin. Not just because they take life as it comes, they are bogus and common, or because at the same time the narrator's contemporaries are fighting tough battles on the Apennine Peninsula, and six months later will shed their blood on the beaches of Normandy, but because they don't demand anything of us, don't bother us with anything, and don't make us face up to anything. And let's not pretend that doesn't suit us fine.

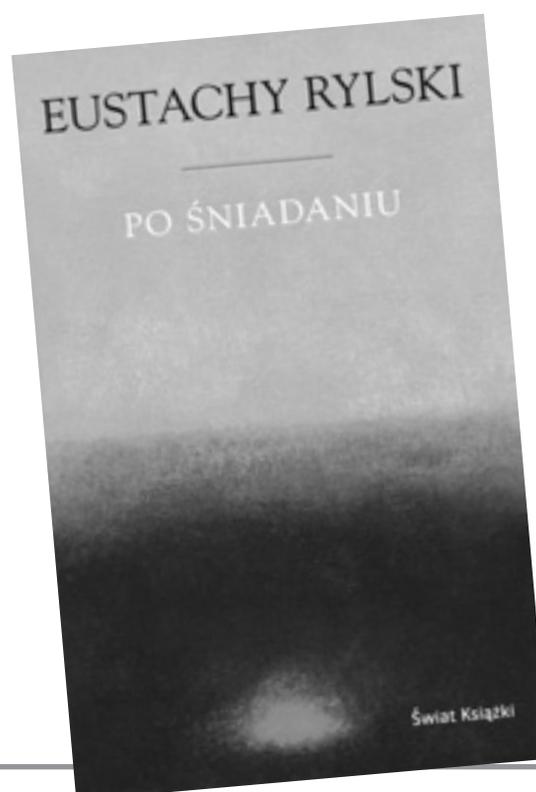
There's no Dr Rieux from *The Plague* here to intimidate us with his calm bravery. There's no Lord Jim to make us share responsibility for the *Patna* disaster. There's no Raskolnikov hanging about in this story with his unbearable moral shakiness, no bloody Karamazov terrorising us, no Prince Myshkin irritating us, no Bayard Sartoris out of Faulkner wanting to thrash us, and no Wiktor Ruben from *The Wilko* Girls to torment us with all his nostalgic feelings. ...

What Capote's characters say to us is: why not hang out with us here and there, get knocked about a bit, listen to us talking bullshit,

soak up some sun with the girls on the fire escape, have a chat with O. J. Berman about the movie career you'll never achieve, sit at the bar in Joe Bell's, and if you get bored of yourself or us, of the city or life, we won't hold you back. But in parting we'll say: don't you worry about the one-eyed cat, he'll be fine. If the first merit of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* is general lack of obligation, the second stems from it, which is youth.

The great Thomas Mann never managed to write anything that could have been under seventy years of age. His unjustly forgotten contemporary François Mauriac did not write anything younger either, and every novel by Virginia Woolf has instantly gone senile with old age. I value old age in literature, not maturity, but wise old age that has dropped its desires; it's the kind of literature I try to write myself, and if I'm at all capable of accepting artistic innovation, it's only on condition that the core of it is old age, as in Witkacy, with all his trepidation, but at the time I'm recalling it can't have been my preference. Marked by old age from childhood onwards, brought up by old people, subjected to old rigours and rituals, I yielded to tireless youth with all its energy, egoism and hopes for everything. I couldn't find anything else in literature that suited my state of being so well as Capote's story. And to this day I never have...

*Breakfast at Tiffany's* makes us feel sorry for ourselves, like women who have left us because we've lost our charm, gone old and ugly, and grown depressingly wise. We are not any worse for that, nor are they better, but they are the ones who leave, just like the girl with a boy's figure, who went away with her entire menagerie; whereas *The Magic Mountain* clings to me like a burr on a dog's tail. And there is no force strong enough to send that highest wisdom to hell, that most sophisticated sophistication, most beautiful beauty, most absolute literary perfection, and I won't hide the fact that sometimes my hand itches to do it. I'd blindly swap myself as I am for the me who first met Miss Holly Golightly that long hot summer of 1963. I'd swap writers I admire, in whom I have found support, with whom I am united by an affinity of souls, with whom, as I see it, I have made friends, for Truman Capote as he was then, when he wrote the story of Holly and her pals. I'd swap the former for the latter, just to be back before breakfast again, at any price, back before breakfast – at Tiffany's or anywhere else.



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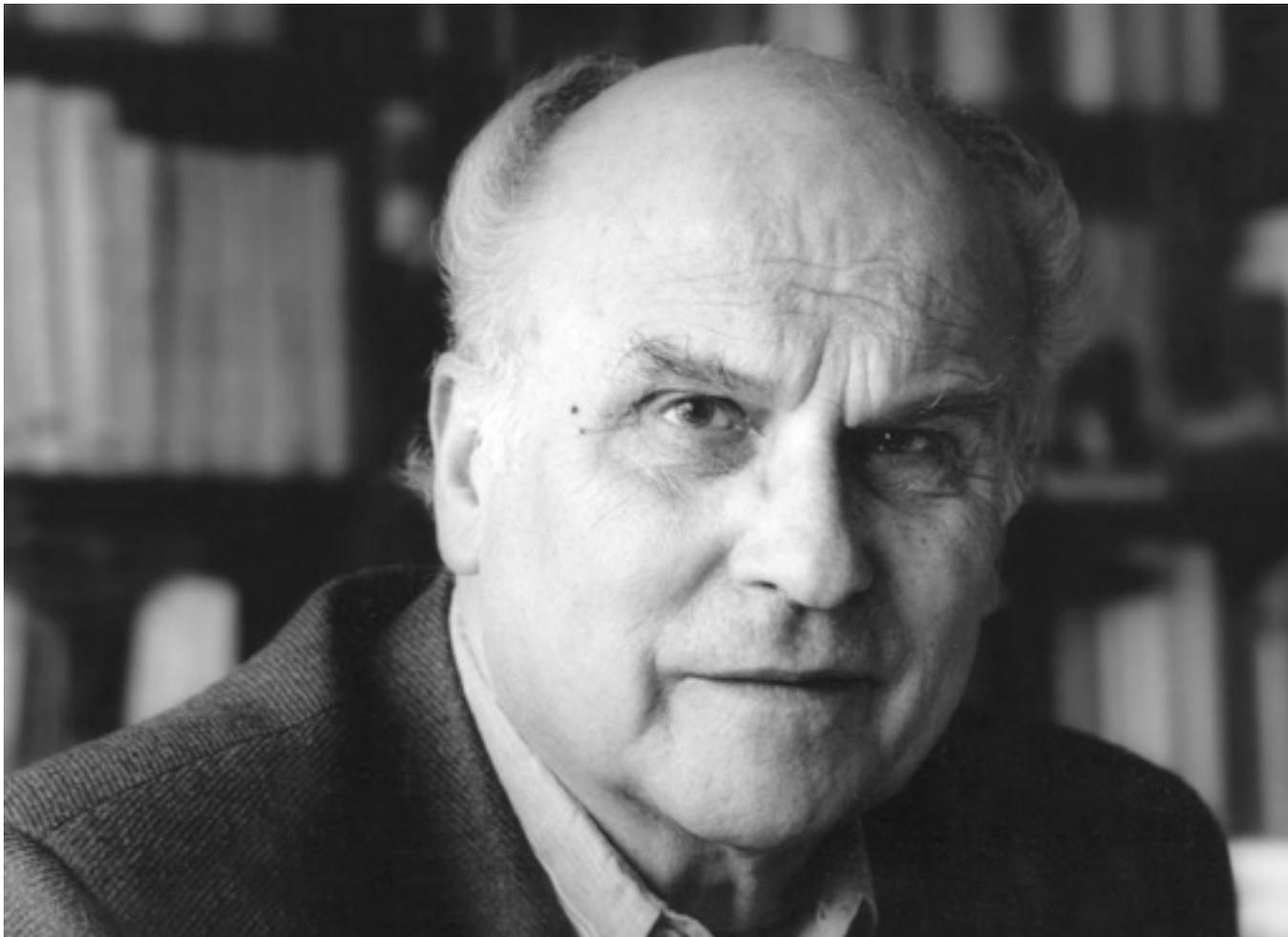


Photo: Elżbieta Lempp

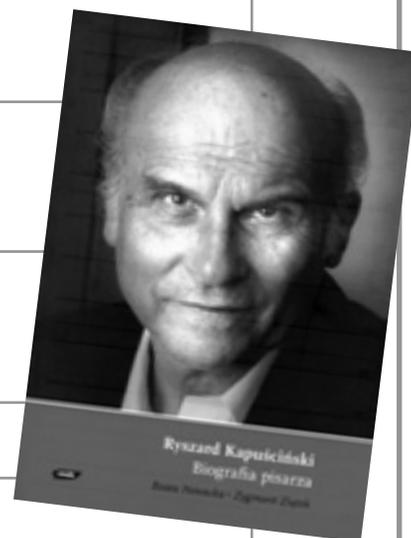
Ryszard Kapuściński (1932–2007) was the greatest Polish news reporter, who travelled worldwide, taking part in several dozen wars, coups and revolutions in South America, Asia and especially Africa.

Two years after the death of Ryszard Kapuściński new books about his life and work continue to appear. Of three books published recently, the most serious is *Ryszard Kapuściński – Biography of a Writer* by Beata Nowacka and Zygmunt Ziątek. The authors have taken the approach that we can only understand Kapuściński's work after gathering as much information as possible about his highly eventful life. He was born in a remote province of Europe and spent his childhood at a Stalinist school; later, once in Warsaw, he believed in the worldwide mission of communism, especially in the field of overcoming colonial dependencies; he started travelling abroad, and witnessed some great coups that brought liberty, but he also saw the births of new tyrants. As a result, he gradually let go of his Marxist faith in the inevitability and positive nature of left-wing revolutions, and then became a critic of despotism, whatever political banner it came under. This book shows the evolution of his views against the backdrop of a detailed picture of the era, with information about Kapuściński's life from a very wide range of sources. It also quotes various texts of his, often the less well known ones. Along the way, on the basis of secret service documents, Nowacka and Ziątek crack down on the recent shocking suggestions that Kapuściński may have cooperated with Polish intelligence. They prove that his writing arose out of his own life story as much as from the unusual events in world history in the twentieth century, and that his work is a sort of autobiography, developed in lots of phases. Hence the idea for this book, because as they describe

Kapuściński's life and analyse his texts, the authors show how his views on reality, his way of settling in the world and his intellectual gear changed. Like this they not only draw a portrait of an outstanding writer, but also produce a special biography of his generation and ideological formation, helping us to understand his successive political and philosophical choices and also his involvement in the great debates of the era. The next book is a collection of articles by lots of different authors. It is called "*Life Comes of Fathoming*" – *Sketches on the Work of Ryszard Kapuściński*, edited by Bogusław Wróblewski. This volume includes pieces by some of Kapuściński's personal friends and professional colleagues, as well as by literary critics, academics and even dramatists. Among those who write about Kapuściński and his intellectual legacy there are: Jerzy Bralczyk, Przemysław Czapliński, Małgorzata Czermińska, Michał Głowiński, Leszek Mądzik, Jarosław Mikołajewski, Jan Miodek and myself. These very varied texts are grouped into three sections with different themes. The first, entitled *Going Beyond Description*, shows Kapuściński as a writer who went beyond the usual range of reportage towards literary prose; the second, *Expressing Yourself*, is about his literary self-images; and finally the third, *Understanding the World*, presents him as a great interpreter of events. Alicja Kapuścińska, his widow, has provided a short afterword. In this series of books, the least "academic" but the most heartfelt is the last one: *A Sentimental Portrait of Ryszard Kapuściński* by Jarosław Mikołajewski. Mikołajewski writes

about Kapuściński's final years and their friendship, including some highly emotional scenes: " 'I'm dying', I heard him say, in two situations: once when he was feeling poorly on a train. The second time, or rather several times, when he saw something beautiful – for example, when we entered the Piazza Navona or when we took the train to Vienna and a valley straddled by a huge viaduct came into view ahead of us." This portrait shows the great reporter as a man whose heartbeat measured his reactions to the world: in expressing rapture at the beauty of what he saw, in his relationships with friends, and in his sympathy for the poor and the outcast. "Dying of rapture" and dying of heart failure form the mainstay of this book, which also includes some previously unpublished notes that Kapuściński made in hospital, on the eve of his final journey.

*Jerzy Jarzębski*



<b>RYSZARD KAPUŚCIŃSKI BIOGRAPHY OF A WRITER</b>			
<b>BEATA NOWACKA AND ZYGMUNT ZIĄTEK</b>			
<b>PUBLISHER</b>	ZNAK, CRACOW 2008	150 × 200, 400 PAGES, PAPERBACK	
<b>ISBN</b>	978-83-240-1069-1	<b>TRANSLATION RIGHTS</b>	ZNAK



<b>“LIFE COMES OF FATHOMING” – SKETCHES ON THE WORK OF RYSZARD KAPUŚCIŃSKI</b>			
<b>EDITED BY BOGUSŁAW WRÓBLEWSKI</b>			
<b>PUBLISHER</b>	PIW, WARSAW 2008	160 × 245, 304 PAGES, HARDCOVER	
<b>ISBN</b>	978-83-06-03145-4	<b>TRANSLATION RIGHTS</b>	PIW

<b>A SENTIMENTAL PORTRAIT OF RYSZARD KAPUŚCIŃSKI</b>			
<b>JAROSŁAW MIKOŁAJEWSKI</b>			
<b>PUBLISHER</b>	WYDAWNICTWO LITERACKIE, CRACOW 2008	125 × 205, 96 PAGES, HARDCOVER	
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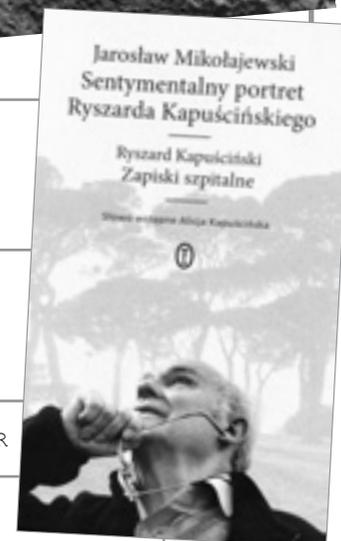




Photo: Elżbieta Lempp

Wisława Szymborska (born 1923) is a poet,  
 essayist, columnist and winner  
 of the Nobel Prize for Literature.



Every new book by Wisława Szymborska is a greatly anticipated event, and every unknown poem is sacred. So too on this occasion. Here is her third collection of new poems, following *Moment* and *Semi-Colon*, to appear since 1996, when she won the Nobel Prize for Literature.

“Twelve mini treatises on our state of being here, suspended between the sweeping past, full of mystery, drama, pain that’s over and remaining crumbs of beauty, and the unknown future. Between memory, which is the foundation of our conscious existence and which ever more insistently tries to take control of us, and the instinct for life”, wrote one astute reader of this volume.

Behind the linguistic precision we can feel an incredible concentration of thoughts and imagination. These poems stun us with their accumulation of details from the visible (and the invisible) world, which is a source of constant wonder – and that is the main key word for this poetry. What makes it possible is the gift of careful observation, perceiving everything as if for the first time, without any axioms, certainties or accumulated knowledge. We can say the same thing about Szymborska’s poetry as she says about the world: “The ignorance here is hard-earned”. Hence in almost every poem there is a wealth of surprises and discoveries.

Despite the fact that many of the poems are mini philosophical treatises, they do not change into abstract intellectual speculation at all. The last thing we might suspect these poems of doing is losing touch with red-blooded, solid reality. They speak of acutely painful experiences suffered by modern man – terrorist attacks, divorces, identifying the bodies of some plane crash victims... But they’re also about the essence and mystery of dreams, about memory, and the process of creating poetry. About Szymborska’s greatest loves – Vermeer and Ella Fitzgerald. About journeys (which is another important key word) within space (and beyond the limits of space), but even more readily within time. About a wonderful expedition by stagecoach with Juliusz Słowacki... It’s quite astounding how many worlds can be fitted into nineteen poems!

<b>PUBLISHER</b>	ZNAK, CRACOW 2009	135 × 210, 48 PAGES, HARDCOVER	<b>ISBN</b>	978-83-240-1123-0
<b>TRANSLATION RIGHTS</b>	WISŁAWA SZYMBORSKA	<b>CONTACT</b>	POCZTA@MICHALRUSINEK.PL	



Zbigniew Herbert (1924–1998) was a poet and essayist. He was a prolific writer and a unique artistic and moral authority, whose life was tragically caught up in the history of the twentieth century.

The year 2008 was “Herbert Year” in Poland, as announced by the Sejm (Parliament) to mark the tenth anniversary of the poet’s death. Besides a flood of publications, exhibitions and literary events to celebrate the occasion, it also produced some posthumous books by Herbert himself. The most important is the *Collected Poems* compiled by the eminent poet Ryszard Krynicki, who was a close friend of Herbert. Krynicki, who once called Herbert “the prince among poets”, has now established a lasting memorial to him that his readers have long awaited. Here we find all the poems that Zbigniew Herbert published in his nine collections of verse, from his debut, *String of Light* (1958), to the posthumously published *Epilogue of the Storm* (1998). As a separate supplement to this edition, his uncollected poems are also being published soon. Here there is an appendix including some poems that Herbert left out of later re-editions of his collections. Curiously, there are only three of them, and the fact that he left them out is sure to intrigue critics and scholars of his work.

Illustrated with manuscripts and first editions, equipped with footnotes and including facsimiles of some dozen poems, this edition of the *Collected Poems* makes us realise how multifaceted Herbert was, though he has too often been labelled and classified. Too often we insist on “our own” Herbert. Meanwhile Herbert did not have an own self. He once jokingly wrote: “The poet is a friend of Orpheus”. Orpheus is someone possessed, half god and half man, the epitome of contradiction, someone who is always transgressing, always forcing his way

into the secret inner sanctum. It is a paradoxical existence beyond good and evil, exposed to inevitable dilemma, as bard, high priest and scapegoat – this sort of portrait, of an author who in his own lifetime was recognised as a classic twentieth century poet, emerges from reading his *Collected Poems*.

*The Master from Delft* is a genuine rarity. It brings together a variety of unedited texts found among the poet’s papers after his death, including poems, essays, poetic prose, commentaries on his own work, and memoirs about people. They all first appeared in the literary journal *Zeszyty literackie*, and are here published as a compilation. The poems “Mr Cogito’s Dream” or “From Mr Cogito’s Love Poems”, which have never been published in book form before, the title essay about Vermeer’s paintings or the memoir of “The Armenian Aunt” and other such texts – what better gift could there be for fans of Zbigniew Herbert?

Another treat is *The Unknown Herbert: Conversations*, which includes Herbert’s improvised conversations with himself, the answers he gave in questionnaires, and above all conversations and interviews that have appeared in print before (though some were first published abroad, such as his replies to the famous “Proust Questionnaire” in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Magazin*). Thus it includes texts that he authorised. The first conversation dates from 1957, and the last from 1994. “The conversations we have collected reflect an image of Herbert like in a mosaic mirror – his gestures, facial expressions, charm and intelligence”, write the publishers. And they are not ly-

ing. In this book Herbert talks about himself and his attitude to communism, about his fellow writers, about the obligations of a poet, his favourite paintings and his own work. Here too we find memories of his youth and his comments about Poland after 1989.

Both books provide a highly ambiguous, complex and sometimes surprising portrait of Herbert. They plainly show that he was a poet of civic duty, but with foppish tendencies. He was an erudite man nourished by the cult of beauty, because it gives strength to existence; however, a vision of the world of culture as a temple of beauty full of museum statues suddenly coming to life, people and gods walking about amicably and chatting on eternal themes, was alien to him. With his sense of humour and irony, Herbert was more aware than most that worshipping nothing but masterpieces leads to a loss of one's sense of reality. It degenerates into aestheticism, which all too often turns out to be the mask of barbarity. Culture is a battlefield, where a fight for values is waged. Both books are proof of this.

In turn, *Family Correspondence* is the latest, seventh collection of Herbert's letters to be published (the previous ones included his correspondence with Czesław Miłosz). Here we have three blocks of letters. The first includes correspondence with his parents. Here in particular the relationship between father and son stands out, as his father encouraged him to found a joint enterprise – a lending library. The second includes correspondence after the death of his father with his mother, who was ill for years with depression (1964-1979), and the third includes correspondence with his sister (1953-1997). The letters are a mine of information on everyday matters (and on life in communist Poland), about problems to do with housing, health and finances, Herbert's way of working, journeys, literary plans, and how his work was received.

The publication of these four books, essential for any fan of Herbert's work, is enough of a reason to regard "Herbert Year" as a success. Personally he couldn't stand anniversaries. "Remember to die young," he quipped with a resigned smile as he entered the hall where we celebrated his sixtieth birthday in 1984. Those whom the gods love die young. Fortunately he wrote about this, and not only this, throughout his long life.

*Marek Zaleski*

## COLLECTED POEMS

EDITED BY RYSZARD KRYNICKI

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Zbigniew Herbert  
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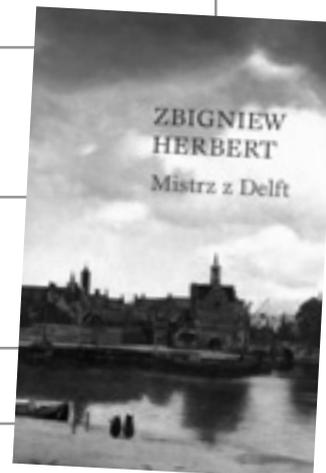
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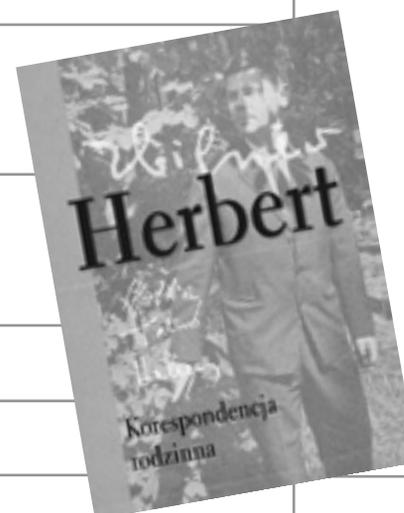
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