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- » 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



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**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 con-

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

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

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

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*Photo: © Archiwum Kultury*

Zygmunt Haupt was born in Podolia, studied architecture in Łwów, and originally considered himself a painter. Toward the end of the interwar period, however, he began to write. He took part in the Second World War as a soldier in the September Campaign in Poland, and later served in the Polish Army in France and Great Britain. After the war he settled in the United States (first in New Orleans, later in New York) with his American wife, and published his stories in the best Polish émigré periodicals and publishing houses (*Wiadomości*, *Kultura*, Instytut Literacki). In Poland, though, he remained virtually unknown until recently.

This thick volume of stories and journalistic essays by Haupt is the largest collection of his work published to date, and represents a literary event of great import. The stories are most often inspired by the author's own biography, and as a result the action takes place in Wolin and Podolia, in France, and in the southern United States – but the action is most often split into a number of separate threads woven loosely together. At first glance Haupt's style has the spontaneous quality of "gawęda," Poland's oral traditional; yet viewed with more depth, it reveals great internal discipline. His style is immediately recognizable, governed as it is by a roaming set of associations, a counterpoint of moods and ways of seeing the world. The writer imbues the telling of his own childhood with an adult's perspective, and manages to maintain a child's directness and freshness of perception in relating the experiences of his adult years.

Haupt sketches portraits of his friends and family members, but also of people met in passing. He recounts the social customs of Wolin's internal communities, those of: Polish and Ukrainian peasants, Jews, small-town intelligentsia, landowners, and soldiers. With the eye of a painter he renders scenes of nature and wonderfully foreshortened genre sketches, but above all he steadies his gaze on individual characters that in-

trigue or move him: people in love, or embattled, people at the beginning or at the end of their lives. In contrast to the apparent insignificance of what is portrayed in these stories, it is precisely the most important of matters that interest Haupt, who is both a scholar and a philosopher: meditation on human existence. He attempts to capture the shape of human life, of fates intertwined; he scrutinizes their murky symbolism, in search of meaning.

*Jerzy Jarzębski*

**Zygmunt Haupt (1908-1975)** one of the  
“great undiscovered” Polish writers of the 20<sup>th</sup>  
century.

On the window ledge, in a squat, bulbous jar, sour cherries were fermenting under a thick layer of granulated sugar. The neck of this jar was tied with cheesecloth, to keep the flies from crowding in. And in the entryway to the house I met, or rather ran face-to-face into Czesny-the-lawyer, who was carrying next to his ear an enormous, copper-sided pot, of the kind usually used for boiling underclothes, when it's washing time. This habit of busying himself with household chores, including carrying in or out enormous kitchenware seemingly unbefitting to him, testified once again to how very attached he was to material things: that even a wash basin of zinc-plated sheet metal is important and worth taking care of, not to be left lying about.

I arrived by train in the morning, but even before that my father had given me the address of the people I was to stay with. But not announcing myself to them ahead of time I gathered up my belongings, my poles, measuring tapes and prisms, and sought out the land registry: a long, gloomy, provincial office building, where over the entry gate hung a tablet with the official eagle and the inscription: "Land Registry I." The caretaker led me down a whitewashed corridor, where a few waiting petitioners clung like sleepy winter flies to the corners, and dust covered the window ledges.

The building was the former seat of the local magnates, but all that remained of that time was the walls, and these had been cut down to the height of the first floor and closed in with a slanting roof covered in sheet metal. Of the former glory there remained only the gate – sandstone, with protruding cornices and baroque cartouches held up by cherubs and zephyrs, on which stood out in relief the trumpets of the family crest, and the ancestral motto: "God Is Our Guide."

After familiarizing myself with the tasks for which I had been sent here, it was almost evening before I headed in the direction of Czesny-the-lawyer's home, where I was to stay. Mr. Czesny greeted me with deliberately measured politeness: neither too little of it, nor too much – but just the amount appropriate to my status as an awkward and unformed youth, about whom one couldn't yet say what he would amount to. Perhaps it was the lawyer's own short height that made the

pot he was carrying appear that much larger. His wife, too, towering over him by a full head, seemed even much taller than him than that. She was already an aging woman, who carried herself with dignity, in a long dress and with graying hair. She greeted me warmly, giving me her white hand, which I kissed, and I was invited to the other end of the house; we had to walk around it on the outside.

The house, which was set off from the street by a fence, looked quite ordinary from the front; but from the other side, from the garden, it was very different – unexpectedly different – with some kind of stone terrace and a gently falling garden, from the depths of which grew absolutely enormous trees – silver poplars. These trees were breathtakingly tall.

They were so huge that they towered over the little town both from close up and from far away, and their tops could be seen for miles and miles, and wherever you went in this town, no matter where you turned or which way you looked, that green, silver abundance of their foliage piled upward toward the heavens.

And there on the terrace was a group of people – and it is also there that I met Emma Bovary.

Either she had bleached her hair, or it was naturally that color; that hair, a little the color of bronze, a little of copper, combed smoothly back from her forehead and tied in a knot somehow at the back of her head. She had a pinkish-white complexion with faint traces of freckles, but only very faint, which she had concealed even more with powder. She was handsome, but somewhat ordinary. She had a pretty neck and very pretty arms and hands. I guessed already that she was tall – even now, as she sat there in a garden chair, somewhat listlessly, and yet guarded, and on edge. On the ring finger of each hand she had a few rings – one with a small diamond, one with an amethyst – and she played with them absent-mindedly, trying by turns to take them off, but prevented by her knuckles. She had on a frightful dress: a summer dress made of some kind of lilac-color, gauzy fabric – something hideous in itself, but on my Emma Bovary it took on a particular charm. When, having been introduced, I kissed her on the hand, I was struck by a wave of perfume or musk so strong that I almost fainted.

I remember a few things from the adventure of that summer perfectly. Even today I can still see the cherries in the glass jar on the windowsill, while other matters and even people I have long forgotten. Who was gathered there on that terrace, I don't remember. Some couple with a daughter – and not the slightest thing about them sticks in my mind. There was also some kind of local dandy – him too, I can't remember for the life of me. Instead I remember a detail like the fact that a little girl had black stockings and thin little yellow slippers, and when she ran around the chairs of the adults, that elegant local raconteur and joker called out after her, after the little one:

“Hey watch out there, Zosia, or your heel will run away from you!” – the little girl had a very noticeable hole the size of a coin in her heel.

And little Zosia and I even took it as a good joke – but her parents, no. Because it was, after all, a cutting, small-town, local gibe directed at her mother – that she was a slob, a good-for-nothing to take her child out visiting, with stockings not darned. You had to see the helpless, angry looks of the parents and the parochial delight of the others.

There were others there too: a married couple, in-laws of the Honorable Mr. and Mrs. Czesny, and the local police chief – the guy seemed nervous, cracking his knuckles so loudly you could hear them.

But let's get back to Emma Bovary. As it turned out, after being introduced around I found myself standing near her, and I felt her gaze on me. What kind? Indolent, flustered, spiteful, inquisitive, deer-like (she did have green eyes), imploring, defiant, arrogant, languishing. Who is this bitch? I thought to myself, and we began to make small talk.

*Translated by Karen Underhill*

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Photo: Anka Ptaszkowska

In the 1960s and 1970s Krzysztof Niemczyk was a famous, extremely distinct figure among the artists in Kraków, a creative maverick and dissenter who broke many social conventions and adamantly refused to cooperate with any official outlets for literary or artistic life. He painted and printed stories, but mainly made himself into a work of art using masks and costumes, organised scandalous public performances, and also wrote a legendary novel that no official publisher was willing to publish. Only in 1999 did it finally appear, but in French, in Paris, where it stirred great interest and got positive reviews.

*The Courtesan and the Little Chicks* is the semi-fantastical story of a professor who wants to use his works and inventions to create a new reality, so he cooperates with the communist regime; however, he cannot cope with his petty bourgeois family, greedy for material goods, who are waiting to grab all his money. Out of vengeance he decides to deprave and destroy some boys who are the offspring of his loathsome relatives, to which end he tries to employ the charms of his now ageing former lover. Rejuvenated by cosmetic surgery and make-up, she turns up at the professor's house and gets down to work, though the results go much further than the original intentions.

The novel is largely based on ideas drawn from *Faust*, and there are also lots of references to other classic works of nineteenth and twentieth-century literature. Niemczyk builds up large, glittering, often monumental scenes of pictorial as well as symbolic merit, using his characters' adventures to depict modern times as fallow ground for conflict between traditional values and the corruption of a new type to which the boys are subjected, and to which the courtesan, defender of Love and Beauty, ultimately falls victim. In this modern version of *Faust* the leitmotifs taken from Goethe undergo a disturbing

relocation and reinterpretation, which means the reader has to make quite an effort to identify the devil in this particular world. In the tale of the courtesan and the little chick-boys, Niemczyk is evidently mythologising his own life story: the history of a maverick rebelling against the modern decline in moral values.

*Jerzy Jarzębski*

**Krzysztof Niemczyk** (1938–1994) was a writer, painter, performance artist and dissenter.

As she looked at herself in the mirror, for the first time the courtesan noticed, to her horror, the highly distinct changes made to the architecture of her face by the feature-updating, rejuvenating plastic surgery. Her nose was no longer the one she had before; it seemed to have been greatly flattened. Now it was being saved by some exaggerated eye make-up: both one and the other eye had something like black wings attached, which as a pair lifted up her vulgarised nose and held it at the centre of the oval composition. Someone would also have to carry something as wide as a cornet or a swan's wing ahead of her during the funeral, treading very cautiously as if on a tightrope, to avoid leaning too far to left or right, which would disturb the balance of the eye arrangement, and at the same time shatter the symmetrical positioning of the breasts, which were vertically bisected by a line drawn into the décolletage as if with the use of measuring instruments. That someone would have to be very tiny, best of all a little lad. At once the courtesan clapped her hands together. The brothers! The brothers and their ears! Or rather the youngest of the brothers! Anyway, all three could solemnly walk ahead of her, one behind the other, at regular intervals. Only the colour of their ears would not harmonise impressively with the black of her dress emerging from the depths behind them, because either they were chalky white, or they suddenly went red with irritation or embarrassment, but it was not a red with the beauty of drapery or roses. It was more the sort of blush that colours the ears of a criminal, an onanist or a fanatic. They would have to be painted, avoiding red, a colour that the community was bound to regard as an expression of tasteless, insincere hypocrisy. Anyway, the courtesan was enough of a woman to indulge her impulse for some egotistical over-aestheticising and connoisseurship in this instance! So she'd have to seek out a noble, vital enough colour, a green, for example, to aggravate the black of the mourning outfit even more! The boys' ears would have to change into a wonderful, triple, symmetrically fanned green flame, borne as if on three levels by the smallest brother, the middle brother and the tallest brother... And from the back her white bust would approach, with floaty, black gauze draped over it, as if being

rolled along on wheels veiled by a pall. And above it all, on either side of the invisible perpendicular held up before the tip of her nose, a pair of black wings would arise, closing the picture: those eyes, painted with such panache, like a mourning flag split by the wind at the very top of a mast. Her plan was to animate nothing but her pupils amid all the virtually immobile pacing as they moved towards the graveyard. Well-practised in monotonous motion, they were to run from left to right and right to left, rhythmically reflecting a cold, disdainful, penetrating, provocative look from the very corners of her eyes.

She broke free of the emergency tailor's hold, and with her dress rustling, ran down to the dining room, as the hem of the mourning veil chased her down the stairs in a series of flat leaps.

The boys had finished being tested now, and were hurriedly eating a meal in the company of their parents. This was an occasional arrangement sponsored by Małgosia, who, also dressed in black, was chatting cordially with Lucjan's mother. Having magnanimously forgiven her sons for their sister's death, she wanted to have in them at least temporary allies to add some perfunctory cheer at the reading of the will. The boys were trying not to look at their father; the whole family were solemnly chewing the chunks they had voraciously torn off the sandwiches, which were being grabbed in quick succession, as if refined eating depended on having as many cubic centimetres of food as possible crammed into the mouth. They all turned to look at the courtesan, who clapped her hands and in a brisk tone that heralded a nice surprise, cried out:

"You're sure to have some green lacquer in the house... Come along, one, two three! Chop chop! Up from the table quickly and get looking! The first one to find it will be kissed as a reward. We need a brush too, the kind you paint, er, walls with... But hurry up, look lively! I'm going to paint your ears green right away!"

They had pushed back their chairs, but now they slowly sat down again. They were all staring at the courtesan with such a steady, bitter look, showing such a total lack of understanding and such rising severity that she was startled, so she

stammered “Pardon me!”, and withdrew, closing the door very gently behind her. There were tears in her eyes... Was she always going to be running around in ever decreasing circles, constantly coming up against obstacles like that look? Multiplied by several hundred pairs of eyes it was capable of creating an impassable wall of dumbness and insensitivity to beauty that threatened the very existence of a sensitive individual.

*Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones*



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*Photo: Elżbieta Lempp*

In spring 1999 Mr and Mrs Herling were invited to a small place called Pescasseroli in Abruzzo, southern Italy. Mrs Herling, daughter of the great Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce, was to grace events celebrating the publication of a book written by Croce in 1921, all about this small village where he was born. The couple decided to spend the following few days sightseeing in the area at their leisure, but they soon came upon the scent of the strange story of Bartolomeo Spada, and the rest of their stay turned into a frantic, fascinating investigation.

Local stories about Spada said that “he wanted to die but couldn’t”. He was born in the early nineteenth century – the records say either in 1809 or 1811 – and he was still alive at the time of the Second World War. When the fascists took power in Italy, Spada became an object of special interest, and was soon a cult figure. As a centenarian who had had six wives, he appeared to the fascist authorities to be an ideal combination of new values: longevity and vitality. By transforming Spada into an iconic image, at one fell swoop the fascists could get everything their propaganda needed: the living incarnation of a tradition that went back to a time before the struggle for independence, and visible proof of a vigour that testified to the revitalising strength of the new regime, a man who by being so old could bridge class and generation divides.

When the doctors discovered that he was ill, Spada entered a phase of doubt about the value of longevity. As he suffered a life of physical pain, he came to regard his longevity as a punishment, not a reward. Soon he was to face his next ordeal: when in 1938 Italy became a racist state and everyone’s lineage was examined, Spada turned out to be the offspring of a Jewish woman. However, Mussolini regarded the hero’s Semitic roots as confirmation of Italy’s claims to a thousand-year-old history. As a result, none of the gods of twentieth-century history was willing to bring Spada death.

But none of them were able to give his longevity any deeper meaning either. Herling did not have time to complete his story about the ancient man before his own death in 2000. However, it would be fair to say he regarded his hero the way Voltaire regarded Candide: in the French novel, the naïve young hero compromises the optimistic philosophy of the Enlightenment, while in Herling’s account the old man turns some twentieth-century notions inside out.

*Przemysław Czapliński*

**Gustaw Herling-Grudziński (1919–2000) was one of the greatest Polish writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.**

The fascist secret police, OVRA (Opera di Vigilanza e Repressione Antifascista) were given orders to reconstruct the Methuselah of Abruzzo's pedigree from [the day of his birth]. Naturally, the results of this painstaking reconstruction were not destined for the box we found at Sulmona. I decided to make a quick trip to Rome for a couple of days, to call at the Ministry of the Interior, where at lightning speed a friend of my wife's family provided me with a copy of OVRA's "confidential report".

Searching through archives sometimes provide an opportunity to [move] from rather boring research into the sphere of what we could call romance. So it was in our case – there we sat in our Sulmona hotel room, poring over the OVRA report as if we were watching a feature film.

Among the Italian archivists you sometimes come across people who have a disdainful attitude to the files and reports of the Italian fascist police – unjustly so. Once again, the example of the Italian fascists confirms the principle that the history of any totalitarian regime is born and flourishes in the files of the secret police. Whereas if it prospers badly, the Leader, Der Fuhrer, Il Duce, the First Secretary or whoever has the Right to cast the main instrument of his power to the four winds. Whether he can replace it with a better one is another matter, perhaps of the most glaring kind in the lands of the Bormanns and the Dzierżyńskis. OVRA, as I told my wife in approving tones, was probably the only efficient tool in the fatherland of the lictors' *fascies*.

It had quickly established that Bartolomeo Spada was born in December 1809 (a precise date at last) in Rieti, in the Lazio region. He was a child of the daughter of the local rabbi and a clerical student from the Catholic seminary at Teramo. The rabbi's daughter managed to keep her pregnancy a secret right up to the time of delivery. Once her son was born, for a large sum she handed him over to a professional wet nurse in Teramo, whose surname was Spada. His father, the clerical student, ran away from the seminary and disappeared without trace; it was said he had managed to enter another seminary in Sicily and supposedly he was ordained there under an assumed name. Finally the rabbi in

Rieti discovered the scandal and sent his daughter to relatives in England, who were also Orthodox Jews, but who turned a blind eye to various deviations from the faith of their fathers. She never tried to reclaim the child or buy him back from his wet nurse in Teramo. And so he became Bartolomeo (the first name was given to him at his christening by the wet nurse called Spada, the name written in the register at Rieti, next to the fact that he was an illegitimate child). At the age of seventeen he left his adoptive mother and began life as a seasonal agricultural worker in Abruzzo, until he settled near Sulmona on a purchased patch of land. He grew up to be a strapping fellow, but no one could have imagined he would one day be a wonder of longevity. He knew nothing about his real origins, nor did anyone ever come looking for him, neither the Sicilian priest, nor the rabbi's daughter, who in Liverpool soon became the wife of the local rabbi, and was gifted by bountiful nature with numerous offspring.

OVRA's conclusion, in reply to a question from Il Duce's secretary, was as follows: "According to our «racial charter» he is a Semite on his mother's side and an Aryan on his father's. He may be subject to the racial laws approved by the fascist government on 9 April 1939." Mussolini personally put a line through this conclusion, and instead of it added in capital letters, each one like a thump of his fist against his virile, hairy chest: "I decide who is and who is not the object of the racial laws." Of course in doing so he was aping Hitler's decision about the Aryan ennoblement of Erhard Milch, the German admiral who to his misfortune was born into a Jewish family, but could (and did) provide invaluable service in the anti-Semitic cause and the purely Aryan Third Reich.

In a way, in both these instances we can see a desire for mascots that is common among wartime leaders. Not entirely confident that a lengthy new era in history was beginning, Mussolini's main concern was to have a living symbol of the regime's longevity, hence his soft spot for the Methuselah of Abruzzo. The Semitic element, following the Italians' approval of the "race doctrine", was just an added extra, and the fact of his long-lived favourite's Semitic origin seemed to confirm his delusions about the thousand-year Roman Empire, as a special sort of guarantee. Hitler never doubted

for a moment that he was the founder of a thousand-year Reich, but like every rabid anti-Semite, deeply convinced of the power of the Jews, he preferred to insure himself on the quiet against the surprises of History by having the Jewish admiral Milch participate in his memorable plan to construct a world purged of Jews. One cannot fully understand historical events without recognising the caprices of the Leaders.

Except that Mussolini's caprice was stronger and longer lasting than Hitler's. Il Duce, as we may freely say at this stage of our narrative, fell in love with his guarantor of longevity [and] empire with the force of blind faith in superstition. Whereas Hitler was empowered to throw on the dust heap, or even condemn to death, the Jewish mascot of the thousand-year Reich at any time, a similar fate was unimaginable for the Methuselah of Abruzzo. On the contrary, Mussolini grew more and more fiercely attached to him, not without the hidden fear that any incautious step meant the threat of calamity. At Il Duce's wish Spada was nominated a colonel (comandante) and became spiritual (if not military) commander of an elite battalion of stormtroopers. Paradoxically, the revelation of the racial connections of the ancient charmer from near Sulmona strengthened his position among the soldiers, just as he had once gone up in the estimation of the young boys and girls of the fascist youth organisation "Balilla" because of his physical revival at the hands of an army priest who had power over the human body.

So as he grew into the years as if into a new skin, there was nothing to stop the man, who despite longing to die could not, from gradually becoming convinced of the truth of the biblical reward for obedience to the bidding of the Almighty (may His name wallow in infinite praise). Did he distinguish the God of the Old Testament from the God of the Gospels? He himself no longer knew. All he knew, and that by pure instinct, not in the language of prayer, was that a man who obeys the will of God in every aspect of life has no right to expect that eagerly awaited death is bound to crown the advance of years. In short, he came to terms in his spirit with his natural guarantee (or God's promise) of immortality.

*Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones*

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*Photo: Adrian Fichmann/EMG*

The action of Jacek Dukaj's sprawling new novel starts off in Warsaw, moves to the first-class luxury cars of the Trans-Siberian railroad, then finally to Siberia in the vicinity of Irkutsk. Events are set in 1924, but this is an alternative history, a fantastic history. The Tungus meteorite impact of 1908 has caused the bulk of Russian territory to be covered in ice, as a result of which the First World War did not break out, there was no October Revolution, Czar Nicholas II still reigns, and Poland is still under the partitions. Customs, fashion, orthography – none of these have changed since the beginning of the century. The czar, however, would like to push back the ice and for this reason his officials send a Pole, Benedykt Gierosławski, to Siberia. Gierosławski's father, in exile in Siberia, has succumbed to an extraordinary metamorphosis and – himself turned to ice – is apparently able to communicate with the mysterious quasi-beings who are causing the abnormal drop in temperature. Benedict is to seek out his father and secure his cooperation in getting rid of the ice.

This project meets with strong resistance from those who have made fortunes on the freezing-over of Siberia – the low temperatures are conducive to the formation of numerous new materials upon which new branches of industry are based. Thanks to this, Siberia is growing into an economic superpower, and religious sects for whom the frost heralds a new renaissance of the spirit are also flourishing.

The fierce battle between the novel's factions is fought on political, economic, mythological, and religious terrain. Dukaj adds to this a reflection on philosophical logic. The world of "winter" is – according to him – a world ruled by a logic of duality, in other words, the sharp opposition between truth and falsehood, but also some well-defined ideologies, and – what inevitably follows from this – historical necessities. The world of "summer," on the other hand – recently discovered and developed by Polish logicians such as Łukasiewicz, Kotarbiński, and Tarski (Tajtelbaum) – is governed by a logic of multiplicity,

here the law of the excluded middle no longer holds true, clarity of ideas dissolves, and so do all manner of determinisms, which had previously held the randomness inextricably associated with biological life at bay. It is the opposition between these two worlds that is the basis of the fundamental ideological debates of the early twentieth century.

*Jerzy Jarzębski*

**Jacek Dukaj** (born 1974) is a novelist, by training a philosopher, and is regarded as the successor to Stanisław Lem.

# Passed

a lone hackney cab waiting for the next crowd of passengers from the delayed Express; the hackney driver sipped from a bottle concealed in a shapeless glove. The gendarme on duty watched the peasant with envy from beneath the station's eaves.

"It comes and goes here, one month's warm, the next one's cold – and this place is a lot closer to ice country than your Warsaw. What is it that draws them to some cities, but drives them away from others?"

"Humpf!"

Two roads led off here at an angle from the wide road that ran parallel to the tracks; the one on the left led straight to the sparse lights in the windows of the third and fourth stories of the buildings of downtown Yekaterinburg. All the houses visible from the street near the station were built of wood and based on a long, rectangular design. They were more like oversized peasant cottages than noble manor houses, not to speak of Warsaw townhouses; low and sloping, they looked as if they were half-buried in snow drifts. Their wide windows were tightly shuttered, snow clung to them in cracks and niches, and piled itself on the slanted roofs in smooth, step-like patterns, as a weak wind blew the snow into the side-streets and walkways between the houses.

Walked on in silence.

"Mr. Gierosławski? Why do you keep looking around like that? Are you supposed to be meeting someone?" Fessar's smile was ironic and ambiguous. "I'm intruding, go ahead and say it, I'm intruding."

A sudden thought: it's him! him, him, damn Turk, of course! he left, waited, attached himself without asking, he could be carrying two hunting rifles beneath that fur coat, a dozen bayonets, and the way he smiles, it's him, him!

"You don't look very well to me," Fessar stopped. "It's not that cold out." He looked more carefully. "You're very pale. Your hand is shaking."

Lowered the hand with the cigar immediately. Look away – over there: a small group of men with coarse faces, probably workers from some foundry, are walking along the side of the road, exchanging comments loudly, raw material for

a quaint painting – look at them, don't look at the Turk, don't give anything away.

And he trailed on:

"There's a quite decent restaurant here in the hotel on the Isetska and if you would permit me to invite you to a very early breakfast, we'd have the chance to speak in private, which is of course impossible on a train."

"About what?" the question was asked sharply.

The Turk grimaced, the tendons beneath the skin of his face stood out as if with great effort, his cigar slid over to the other side of his mouth, and he rubbed the back of his neck.

"They can babble on all they want about spirits and other sorts of delusions, but I've been in this business for years, I've seen the Black Shining and the lights of the Church of Christ the Saviour, ... phew, hey, where are you off to in such a hurry?"

A cry cut through the Yekaterinburg frost – the broken wheezing of a dying man – a cry and wheezing; someone was dying in the midst of this snowy night.

Looked between the houses. Movement in the shadows there – a human figure – low down – a black shape rising and falling. Took a step. For an instant, the countenance of a dark-eyed youth emerged into the snowy luminescence. "Keep and protect us!" with his mouth wide open, a streak of dirt on his cheek, very pale. And his arm continued to rise and fall, with a rock in his fist, as with this rock he kept smashing the skull of a man stretched out on the ground.

A piercing whistle rang out. There was a crash of wood. Turned around. Ünal Tayyib Fessar, drawn as tight as a bow-string, his cigar clenched in his teeth and his fur coat gaping, was raising his heavy cane with both hands over his head. He'll hit, crush bones. A rifle shot burst through the frost: one of the workers collapsed in the middle of the street, his face in the ice. A second worker just dodged the Turk's cane. They had knives. Another shot rang out. Whirled on the spot like a puppet on strings, always just one turn behind. The knife-wielders made off, stumbling into the darkness of a side-street; the last one glanced back in fear and fury – behind himself, at the entrance to a house on the other side of the street.

Feet flew from the ground, ran towards that gate. A man in a yellow coat turned and ran.

The street was wide and empty, snow fell softly on snow. Ran through this foreign city, shrouded in darkness, its doors shut, windows tightly shuttered, not a living soul, a single streetlamp at an intersection, the intersection empty, too, just the rustle of the wind, the crunch of ice beneath one's shoes, the hoarseness of one's breath, chasing after the man in the yellow coat.

The street ran straight as an arrow, though it stretched out a bit at the top of each low rise, undulated like a ribbon, up and down; he would appear then disappear behind the summit of each rise. Was afraid he might turn off to the side at one point, hide in the shadows – but no, he flew on ahead, not even looking back too often, he had a specific goal, he wasn't fleeing blindly.

Realised when the air temperature dropped enough to change hoarse breathing into a choking cough, frost twisted its way into the throat like a threaded icicle – and the man in the yellow coat kept on running, straight into the embrace of the Ice.

A few streetlamps shone along the river embankment, and a yellow glow floated out of the depths of a cross-street, too; the ice gleamed through the frozen snow in the twilight of the wintry summer dawn.

*Translated by Christopher Caes*

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*Photo: Michał Niedzielski*

*Marriage* consists of two related stories. The first one is the fictionalised biography of Antoni Malczewski (1793-1826), a romantic poet who published one work in his lifetime, a novel in verse called *Maria* (1825), and who was the first Pole to climb Mont Blanc (1818). Liskowacki focuses on the last five years of Malczewski's life, a stormy period marked by a public scandal (the poet's relationship with a married, mentally ill woman, which shocked contemporary society). The second story is about the holiday adventure of a boy called Muszka. It is set in the present at a summer resort. At the narrative level it is about an encounter between an emotionally neglected child and a Stranger, who is somewhere between a fugitive and a bandit, for whom the boy provides food and clothing. Although each story could stand on its own, Liskowacki has decided to put them together. What is his justification? Certainly the card metaphor of the title (there was once a card game called "marriage", and it is also the name for a pair of cards, a king and queen in the same suit). So we have a card-game image: Malczewski's life story is told from the end (the first chord struck is the writer's death in May 1826), while the story of Muszka and the Stranger is told the traditional way, as a sequence of cause and effect. Both stories feature not just the motif of card-playing, but also game-playing in various senses. Malczewski is playing a game of acceptance and recognition with his milieu, a game of overcoming social infamy, and a two-way psychological game links the boy and the dangerous man.

*Dariusz Nowacki*

**Artur Daniel Liskowacki** (born 1956)  
is a novelist, poet, essayist, theatre critic and  
journalist.

# Muszka

walked to the red square, believing that was where the Stranger had left the things he'd brought for himself. If not, he would never find them, and then they'd ask him about them. He'd shrug, or make something up, but she'd listen in silence, reach for a cigarette and start to crush it slowly, while staring out of the window. If the Stranger spent the night here, it was behind the half-timbered wall.

A simple idea, as long as he didn't startle it. Here it was, sticking out warily, like a worm coming out of the ground. You grab it and hold onto it until it goes limp in your fingers and lets itself be pulled out; you tug and it breaks off. That's how it defends itself. And later it grows back. He used to go worm hunting with his father. But not fishing. The dark spines of the roach in a small bucket, Mrs Surmaczowa's exaggerated delight, "how well you've done today!" A festive fry-up. The smell of oil pervading every corner. Bones between your teeth. Grab the worm, Muszka. You can see it. The Stranger hadn't said he would stay the night. All he had said was that Muszka could only come here after noon. Maybe he preferred not to say. Not to say more. Or maybe he couldn't say more. Or he really didn't know anything. And that might also mean he was there now, inside.

Muszka was already thinking about it as he approached the place. After all, it was likely. But it stopped being, because the Stranger didn't show up. He didn't come out to meet him. He didn't jump out of a hiding place. This one, for example.

And why should he hide there from Muszka? And sit hidden the whole time while Muszka traipsed around.

The whole time. Muszka glanced at his watch. Twenty to twelve. A funny time. He went inside. In a corner, under a bit of roof, lay a dark blue waistcoat. He picked it up; it wasn't wet, just heavy with dampness. He sniffed it, like a tracker dog. It was suggestive, rather than actually smelling of potato stalks, carrot tops, seedpods, chicken manure, and a decaying, stifling odour of jasmine water. He inhaled a deeper breath of air, but couldn't find any new, acrid smell of tobacco. That seemed strange to him – after all, rain and smoke smell similar.

All because of this pong. You could cut the air with a knife, Mrs Surmaczowa had said as she opened the window. He had once imagined it, a big, white blade flashing across the room. The suffocating, sickly smell clung to all four walls, though they had no door or windows. And you could see the sky above them now, shining with a rinsed-out sun.

He looked round for the net, but couldn't see it anywhere. He went out to check around the fruit trees.

He didn't immediately realise he was lying down. The push was strong and quick. All he knew was that he was lying on the ground, on his right arm. I fell over, he thought. I must have done something to myself.

Only then did he feel scared. And saw the Stranger standing over him, against the light high above, dark and motionless.

Yet Muszka made a move; his arm hurt, so he tried to shift the weight of his body onto his back. He did it, and the Stranger said nothing. But as he lay on his back, on the waistcoat which had ridden up and was poking something into his shoulder blade, Muszka thought he'd be better off turning over onto his stomach. To avoid seeing. An insect lies on its back. It plays dead. But even so you can push it along the sand with a stick, towards an ant hill, bonfire or puddle. So it really will be dead.

Unswallowed saliva flooded his throat. He began choking, until he was out of breath.

What's the bloody point of having a watch if you don't know what the time is, said the Stranger.

Muszka didn't answer. He wanted to squeeze his eyelids shut, but he didn't have the courage. He had to look. That's what the Stranger wanted. And why he was standing over him.

If you can't read an ordinary watch, you can learn to use the sun. Do I cast a shadow? No. That means something.

That you're a vampire, said Muszka.

He snorted, almost barked. A good sign, because it wasn't laughter.

It means it's noon, you little snot. The Stranger finally moved, put his hands in his pockets. He nudged Muszka with his foot. You shouldn't be here before noon. You don't have to be here at all. Muszka felt fairly safe. But the abrupt-

ness of the attack and the stifled stress Muszka could hear in his voice meant more than his words.

An answer was required, any answer, even though no questions had been asked.

I came for Mrs Surmaczowa's waistcoat. She was looking for it everywhere, so I had to.

Why are you lying?

The interrogation of a wounded prisoner, thought Muszka. He's standing and I'm lying down. It should be "You're lying like a dog". Maybe everything's like this. It isn't.

How do you know I'm lying and how can you see what I'm thinking.

The kick wasn't too hard and rather constrained, but it hurt. The Stranger hissed, as if it had hurt him too.

I've already told you, fuck it, you've got to answer my questions and not play the wise guy. Haven't you got that? Are you that dumb, or what?

Muszka automatically coiled up, expecting more blows. He was afraid again. The Stranger was afraid again. And Muszka was afraid of this fear. He knew he mustn't shout now, or cry. Or beg. Shit yourself or cry, get a fist in your eye. At school the ones who got beaten up most were the snotty kids who clung to the bully's knees and begged. They'd keep hitting that sort until they stopped blubbing. Then they stopped hitting too. I'm not playing the wise guy, you didn't ask me any questions. About anything.

The Stranger said nothing, as if examining what he had heard. Who joined you here, he finally said; Muszka could tell he was keeping his voice in check now.

No one. I'm alone.

You play the saxophone alone.

Muszka looked at him uncertainly. I wanted to come alone, he repeated and touched his leg where it should have hurt from the kick. He sought the spot with his fingers, along his calf. He couldn't find it.

Alone, alone. The great Alone. I know no one came with you. But back there, who have you told about me?

Now. He had to say it now.

No one. I came because I wanted to. I hoped you'd be here.

The Stranger took his hands out of his pockets. He wasn't holding a knife. He wiped his hands on his trousers, then knelt down and stared at the boy for a while in silence. Closely, not in a friendly way, but without any hatred either. Muszka took this look to be a chance. The kind that makes it even harder.

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*Photo: Elżbieta Lempp*

The subtitle of *A Window Onto the Crossroads* speaks for itself and tells us what is in this book. It is a set of short stories set just before or during the Christmas holidays. The seven independent stories are linked by the figure of the Christmas Eve Angel, who appears to people who are at a turning point in their lives and declares that their wishes will be fulfilled. The main characters usually want to escape from whatever trouble they are in, but the Angel does not always help them directly or in quite the way they would have hoped. You have to work hard for a miracle, which usually means considering your actions carefully, facing up to reality, and then looking for ways to resolve your problems.

There is plenty of magic here, as there should be in Christmas stories, but Joanna Rudniańska wants to show that the real magic is what a person has inside him – the ability to give, forgive and be self-sacrificing. And love, of course. Rudniańska wraps her moral message in some curious tales, such as a story called *Atelier Rotwand* about a young married couple, Agnieszka and Krzysztof.

Their problem is that they cannot have children. To dull the pain, they throw themselves into their professional passions – she does academic work and earns a living at a photography studio inherited from her adoptive mother, and he is a doctor. One day Agnieszka finds out that her husband is cheating on her and has a small son. When she encounters the Angel, she asks him for a happy family for the child, as she wants to divorce her cheating husband. Meanwhile on Christmas Eve Krzysztof comes home with the child, because his mother has gone abroad with another man. And so a miracle occurs, based on the one Agnieszka herself experienced years before when she lost her own mother.

*A Window Onto the Crossroads* is designed to stir the emotions. It is full of warmth and sympathy, but free of excessive sentimentality or pathos, thanks to the author's way of softening her protagonists' tragic experiences with a large dose of humour. Thus as he goes about selecting who to help, the heavenly visi-

tor appears in the off-putting guise of a tramp. Only those who are not disgusted by him or afraid of him are worthy of a miracle. One of the heroines, Ewa, who is battling a terminal illness with dignity and despite her son's wishes gives up the gift of life to someone more needy, would not have been friendly to the Angel "if he had been some well dressed guy".

This is not just a very successful product for a special time of year, but ready material for a television series.

Marta Mizuro

**Joanna Rudniańska** (born 1948), a mathematician by training, started by writing science fiction stories for children, and has won the international Janusz Korczak prize.

**Just** at that moment the sleet began to fall on Warsaw. Regina left the new Toyota showroom feeling terribly disappointed. She had wanted to buy herself a Corolla before New Year's Eve, so she could drive her new car in the New Year. But she'd been told she'd have to wait two months. She hadn't expected that. She was to get the money for the painting on the twenty-ninth of December, and she had thought she'd drive her new, shiny blue Corolla out of the smart, glazed showroom that very day and be off into the stream of cars on the highway along the River Vistula. But meanwhile she'd have to drive about in this wreck, the grey Tsarina as old as the hills. On top of that she had forgotten where she parked it, and in the twilight she was as blind as a bat. Instead of driving into the Toyota parking lot, for some strange reason she had left it in the street, and now in this blizzard she couldn't see it. But she was thinking that if it all went well, soon she'd be driving a Prius, blue as a computer screen, the vehicle of the stars. Just then she slipped on the wet tarmac and fell over. She felt a pain in her elbow, but the main thing she felt was extreme embarrassment at finding herself lying in the street like one of those frail old ladies who often break an arm or a leg. Luckily there was no one about – but no, there was someone, who took her gently by the arm and picked her up.

"Can you stand?" he asked.

He would have looked like a tramp, if not for the long, snow-white scarf wound around his neck. The scarf reminded her of Adam – he always used to wear that sort of scarf too. She took a close look at the man – he was a tramp after all.

"I'm fine," she said sharply and pulled her arm free, but her elbow hurt so much that she cried out in pain.

"You see," said the tramp. "It's your elbow. I don't think you should drive."

"But I'm going to," said Regina. "As soon as I find my car."

"It's here. Right in front of us," said the tramp.

And indeed, the Tsarina was standing by the kerb five yards away.

Regina quickly walked up to the car and opened her handbag to get out the keys. She couldn't find them, so she started

searching her pockets. She was upset, and didn't like the fact that she was standing in the street with a tramp. She wanted to get away as fast as possible.

"What would you like for Christmas?" asked the tramp in the tone of a journalist doing an interview. "What would you like most of all?"

"I want my plan to succeed, I want Henrietta to seduce Adam and..." she started saying, and fell silent, because her fingers had found her keys at the bottom of her coat pocket. She was slightly surprised by what she'd said. It was true, she was thinking about it non-stop, but why had she told it to this stranger, a tramp she'd met in the street?

She got into the car. She didn't look at the tramp, but just cast him a glance at the very last moment as she was driving away.

But it wasn't a tramp. It was someone else. A man so handsome that Regina would have given anything to have him.

Adam drank two glasses in a row, then sat in silence, smoking a cigarette. The tramp was holding his glass in both hands, smiling benignly, as if he had suddenly found himself in heaven.

"Do you have any dreams?" he asked Adam.

"Of course I do. Just like everyone else – I'd like to be rich and famous," said Adam.

"Is that all?"

"Well, I could do with a woman too. Young and beautiful. And not too thin. And for her to stay with me until I die. That's all."

"What about power?" said the tramp.

"I've never tried it. But I've never tried cocaine either. Just alcohol," said Adam and laughed.

"So what about power then?" asked the tramp.

"No, I don't think so. I'll stop at alcohol," said Adam.

That night Adam dreamed about the tramp. He had the wings of an angel. He was standing on the stair rail on the fifth floor, illuminated by rays of sunlight falling from above. He spread the wings and began to glide down in circles, all the way to a rosette pattern shining like a diamond in the depths of the cellar. And then he folded his hands above his head, flew up like a rocket and dissolved into the light.

"Mum, please don't smoke so much. I can't breathe," said Henrietta.

"Then go out onto the balcony. But first listen," said Regina.

"I won't hear any more of that. I can't go to a strange guy and pretend I'm his fiancée from forty years ago. It's like some stupid play. What on earth can I say to him? And what will I do if he throws he out?"

"You won't have to say anything, Henrietta. You look almost the same as I did... then, right then, though, well, you know, you're not quite as pretty... it hardly makes a big difference, as they say nowadays. Mainly you're fatter than I was. But to get back to the point, you look almost the same as me and he has to think it's me – he's old and alcoholic, so if he's drunk at the time, all the better..."

"God, and what if he does something to me?"

"Adam? No, he wouldn't be capable. When I kissed my cousin Marcin right in front of him he pretended he hadn't noticed. What an idiot – I know perfectly well he had. He didn't even slap me. No, he won't do anything to you. It's a brilliant plan. Let me go over it one more time. You'll go and see him tomorrow, on Christmas Eve..."

"Mum, why don't you go and see him? It was you he loved, after all."

"Henrietta, my dear girl. He won't give me anything, I hurt him when I went off with your father. We must go back to the time when I was still with him. I know him, he's impossibly sentimental. I am the love of his life. He's still single and I'm sure he thinks about me every day. But I have to be the me from years ago, because he doesn't know me as I am now, a mature woman."

"Mum, please don't have any more to drink. What you're saying makes no sense at all. If you hurt him, then even if he mistakes me for you, he's not going to give me anything. And you want me to con him out of all his pictures. But how do you know he's got any? You haven't seen him for a hundred years!"

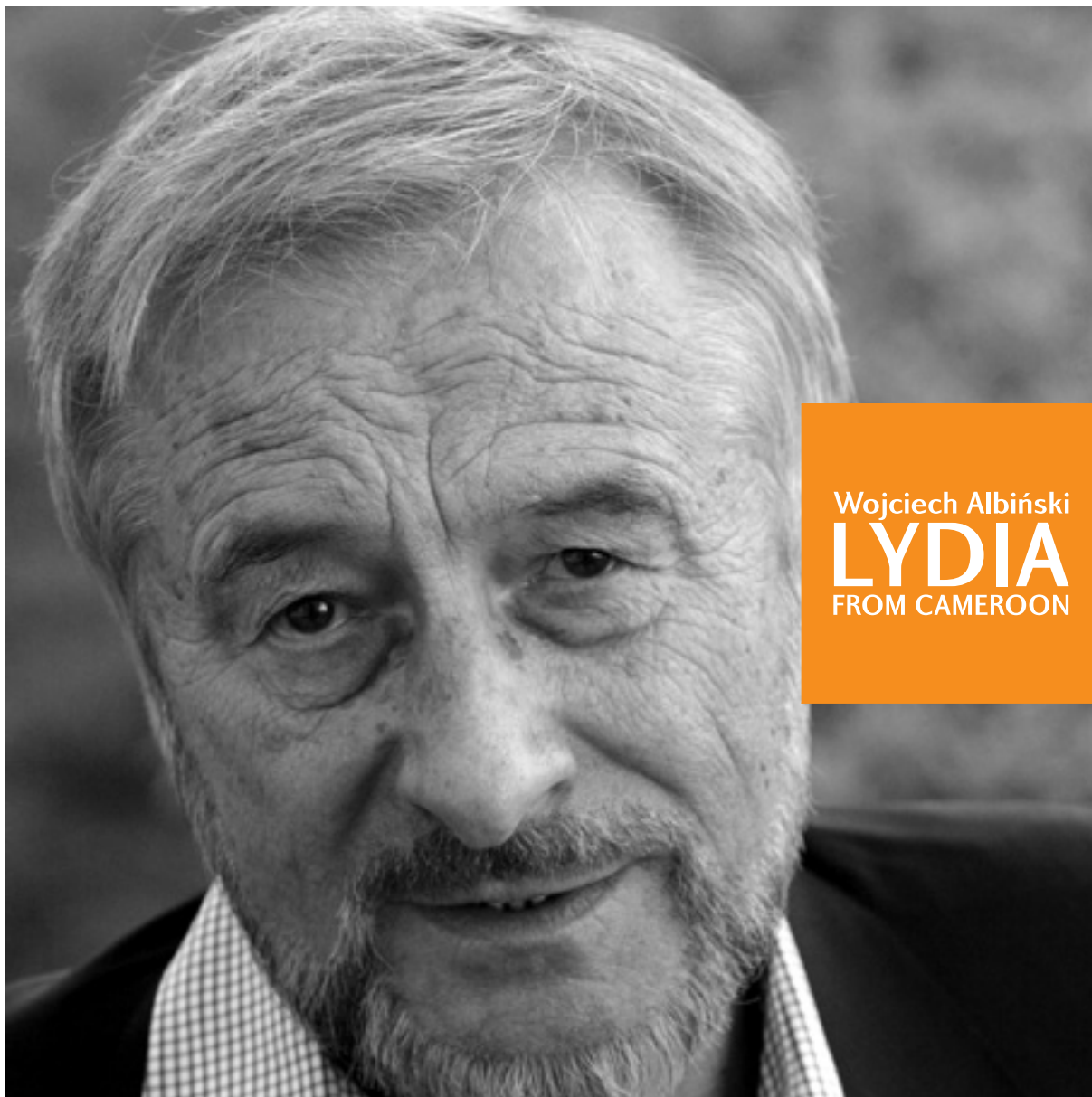
"Don't exaggerate, Henrietta, not a hundred, just about forty, thirty-eight to be precise. I know all about him. When that picture of his that he once gave me went to auction

I investigated him a bit. And I found out about him. I did an excellent job. He lives on his own, buys a lot of paints and orders a large canvas three times a year. And he only sells views of Warsaw, ugly little things painted on wood. Anyway, I can't really go and see him. I'll tell you a secret. I had a chat with him at the Paragraph bar. For half an hour. And he didn't recognise me."

*Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones*

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Wojciech Albiński  
**LYDIA**  
FROM CAMEROON

*Photo: Jakub Ostałowski*

*Lydia from Cameroon* is Wojciech Albiński's fourth collection of African stories, as he continues to discover new pieces of the picture of contemporary Africa that he is painting. However, anyone hoping to find an exotic world in this sort of fiction might feel disappointed on reading *Lydia from Cameroon*. To a large extent Albiński focuses on the universal problems that not just people living in the southern extremes of Africa contend with, but on other continents too. He writes about a middle-aged engineer who has been sacked from his job and has to overcome his fears about his own future and set up a new life for himself (in the story "An unexpected new career"), or about a young architect who gives in to the pressure of his ambitious, comfort and luxury-loving fiancée in order to obtain money and gets tangled up in deals with some suspicious, dangerous people ("Antelope seeks hunter"). Of course that does not mean Albiński entirely ignores any attempt to bring the reader closer to the unique features and problems of the Dark Continent. In depicting the fate of the president of a small African country, he shows us the workings of power (in the title story). He also writes about bloody tribal feuds and their sad consequences ("Which of you committed genocide?"). And in "Waiting for the Russians" – perhaps the best story in the whole collection – he tries, as it were, to touch the soul of the indigenous inhabitants of Africa by describing the shocking story of the self-destruction of the Xhosa tribe. It is worth stressing that in the process Albiński does not make judgements, instruct or moralise, but simply presents a variety of human examples, doing his best to show African reality in all its complexity. And he does it all in prose that is free of any linguistic fireworks, but is extremely lucid and disciplined instead. In short, this is a good piece of writing.

*Robert Ostaszewski*

**Wojciech Albiński** (born 1935) writes fiction. By profession a geodesist, he lives in South Africa.

**I**t was in these very hills that Jerry Fox was born. Two clay huts stood on a swept dirt floor, a naked boy was playing with a dog, and above him hung the leaves of a banana tree.

His father was a sergeant in the colonial army. He went about in khaki shorts and a pith helmet. He was wounded twice and awarded two crosses, and he used to welcome the recruits with a short speech ending in a command: down! He was proud of his uniform made of raw linen, and a brass buckle adorned his polished belt. On the sideboard in the drawing room the tea set shone. Every two days Jerry's mother gave the cups a fresh shine.

The boy's education began early, when he was sent to St Mark's. It was a school run by missionaries, the pupils included Indians and whites, and most of them were Africans. The children of senior officials were sent to school in England, but within the Colony St Mark's was also highly regarded. Rugby, tennis and developing the character were just as important as physics lessons. After his final exams the headmaster asked the boy what career he was electing for. Jerry stood to attention and replied: "Military". His own reports, as well as his father's long service, meant that his studies were paid for.

Then came his first voyage on a battleship, a new environment, and misty dawns doing drill training. Then lessons in tactics, new methods of commanding a platoon, and automatic weapons. From command points the cadets saw tanks burning on the fields of real battles.

At officer training school the snobbery was intense, which Jerry Fox ably picked up on. For social purposes he presented his family as ranchers and said his father was a colonel.

As he scrambled up muddy hillocks under the weight of his kit and with a gun slung around him, he was filled with feelings of reluctance and rage. And the whole time letters kept coming from home saying: "Son, you must stick it out".

Jerry Fox returned to Africa with the rank of lieutenant. A month later he was already a captain. He was assigned fourth company, entirely composed of black volunteers. Trained for half a year by Fox's sergeant, they did not conceal their joy at going into the field.

During a council of senior officers at the Governor's mansion, Jerry Fox was given a file containing his orders. What he read amazed him. The apparently peaceful Colony was living in a state of extreme danger, starting from the mood among the local elite... People who owed their prosperity to the Empire, belonged to clubs and fulfilled responsible functions, were now wavering in their loyalty to the Crown. They had been following events in the neighbouring countries and were dreaming of Uhuru. When cautioned they replied: "We shall govern in our own way... We have the right to make our own mistakes."

A thousand copies of a journal openly inciting rebellion were distributed. Its editor, one Gomo, was taken to court three times. By being smart, and thanks to some legal loopholes he wormed his way out of any serious penalties.

But the atmosphere among the wealthy elite was not the greatest threat to the Colony. The Army of the Lord God had taken over the northern provinces. Who called it that? Why of the Lord God? Maybe because Christ loved children, and the leaders of this army also had a weakness for little people. "Children make good soldiers," they often said, "smart and disciplined".

Jerry Fox moved his brigade north. He sent out undercover intelligence agents. He marked enemy positions on the map, leaving his tent for just a minute, rolled up the map and shut it in a metal box.

He soon discovered that the guerrillas had made a mistake. Instead of melting into the local population and burying their weapons, they had created a single, strong concentration. They had disappeared into some swampy flood plains, reckoning no one would track them down there. They reasoned that it was their country, and only they knew the strategic routes across it. Apart from that they were waiting for weapons deliveries; apparently the shipment had already left Libya. To kill time they were training the children in the art of removing fuses and disarming anti-tank mines.

They were camping out on a bend in the river, where under the crowns of some tall trees the morning mist and smoke from their bonfires gathered. A narrow, muddy road led there, which they had closed off with a system of forti-

fied positions. They had mounted rapid-fire cannon on Land Rovers, dug ambush pits and filled them with bamboo canes. They did not know that a plane had already been flying over them, and that pictures were being developed in labs.

Jerry Fox devised the plan of attack himself. They were to come in by boat at night and quietly disembark onto the overgrown riverbank. They would travel the distance of three miles to the enemy encampment by marching quickly, under cover. He summoned the British advisers, Major Wright and Captain Warren, to his tent. Officially he was not subordinate to them, but they to him – they fulfilled the role of liaison officers. The oil lamp swayed above the table as Jerry Fox pointed at the unfolded map. They fell upon it like a valuable piece of booty, recognising signs and symbols. The host presented his plan to them.

“Jesus!” cried Warren. “It can’t possibly fail to succeed!”

They clinked glasses of neat whisky, as the certainty of success went to their heads. They leaned over the map, studying the details.

“The ones on the river bend will be cut off,” remarked Wright.

“We’ll destroy their boats.”

“Won’t they swim across the river full of crocodiles?”

“I’m counting on it.”

“Will they hand over their weapons? Or make an about-turn?”

Jerry Fox looked suspiciously at the Englishman.

“What will you do with the ones who surrender?” asked Wright. “You won’t drown them, will you?”

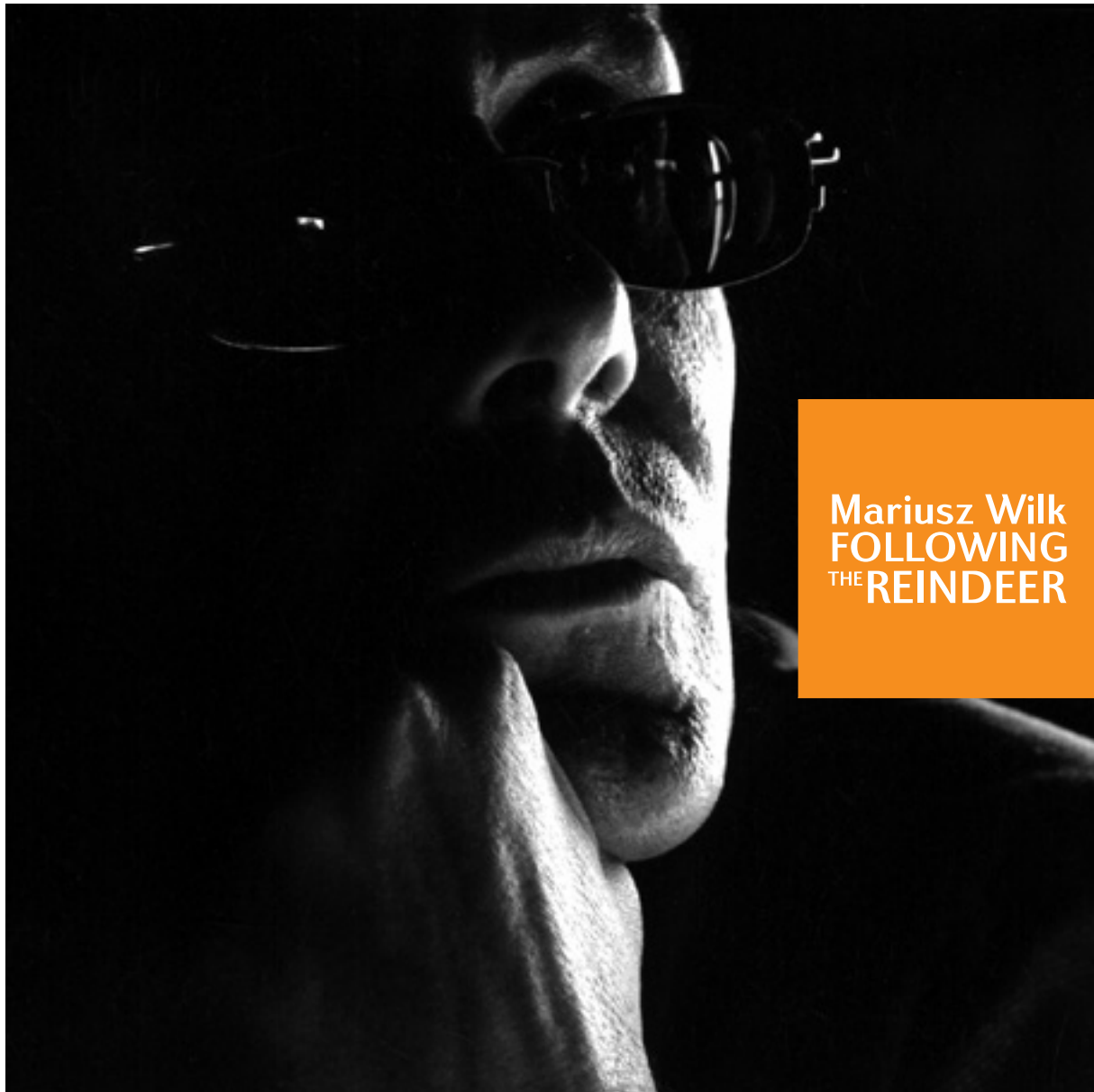
They went outside; it was a warm night. A long branch lay burned through in the middle, and Jerry threw both ends onto the campfire.

“I too place high value on the virtue of reconciliation,” he said. “You’ll board your battleships, but this country will have to go on living.”

*Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones*



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Mariusz Wilk  
FOLLOWING  
THE REINDEER

*Photo: Inna Kazakova*

In recent times Polish literature has been very lucky with nomadic writers who go to far-flung corners of the world that are rarely visited by tourists and give accounts of these journeys in travel writing. Without doubt one of the most interesting is Mariusz Wilk, who is particularly partial to the northern extremes of Russia. His latest book, *Following the Reindeer*, is the second volume of his “Northern Diary” and is mainly about his travels to the Kola Peninsula. This time the main object of his journey is the nomadic Saami people who live amid a harsh but beautiful environment north of the Arctic Circle. For centuries the Saami have been fishermen and reindeer herders, though in the latter case it is not entirely clear, because one of the locals tells the author straightforwardly: “It is not man that has tamed the wild reindeer, but the reindeer that have tamed people”. In general, the “aborigines of the North”, as Wilk calls them, are a closed people, reluctant to admit strangers to their secrets or magic rituals. In this book Wilk presents the history of this race, their tough battle to survive in the Soviet era, their customs, lifestyle, beliefs and legends (his free adaptation of the Saami legends in the chapter entitled “The Tale of the Crimson Trail” is extremely interesting). And of course he never fails to extol the beauty of the northern landscape. As he travels about the Kola Peninsula he also describes the realities of modern Russia, where the deep-rooted legacy of the communist past conflicts with the capitalist present. This problem also affects the Saami, for whom survival can only be guaranteed by the development of tourism in the territories where they live, except that it threatens them with irreversible destruction. Wilk interlaces his texts about the Saami with short portraits of writers and poets such as Sándor Márai, Li Bo and Bruce Chatwin. This is a travel writer’s homage to travel writers.

*Robert Ostaszewski*

**Mariusz Wilk** (born 1955) is a prose writer, journalist and traveller. In the late 1980s he left Poland to settle in the far north of Russia.

# 3 February

Alexander (Sasha) Kobelyev is president of the Saami Council, in other words head of the world's main Saami organisation, an association of the Saami of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. To put it another way, Sasha is president of Sapmi, as in the Saami language they call the land at the edge of northern Europe where the Saami have lived for a thousand years. The president sets off for Sapmi every two years.

We began our conversation with language, because without their language there is no question of a future for the Saami. The trouble is, to this day the Kola Saami have never actually had their own written language. Attempts to create one in the 1930s on the basis of the Roman alphabet ended up in the prison camps, and present experiences with Cyrillic, elaborated among others by Alexandra Antanova, author of the Saami alphabet, are not yet out of their infancy.

"But please note," sniggered Sasha, "that in the days when Alexandra Andreyevna taught Russian at the school in Lovozero, she used to rap us over the knuckles for chatting in Saami."

It was the Soviet school where they were taught in Russian that caused most of the Kola Saami to stop using their own language. In the tsarist era no one made them go to school, nor was there a school anyway, if you don't count the church school, which no one actually attended, because the children were out wandering the tundra with their parents. It was only the Soviet authorities that introduced compulsory education, built a boarding school in Lovozero and forced children apart from their parents as well as their native language. And once they finally realised that without a language there is no question of having a nation, they found that only the old people could still remember some of it. However, to preserve it without writing would be like trying to catch water in a net.

"Imagine your countrymen had forgotten Polish and only spoke in English. They'd be able to revive it at any time because they have Polish literature, in which they have immortalised their language. But what about us?"

A second problem is the Saami blood, in other words the

question of lineage, because until recently being a Saami was a source of shame. On the Kola Peninsula the Saami were the lowest class of citizen, after the Russians, Ukrainians, Jews and the Komi-Izhem. So whoever was able to wrote a different nationality into his passport. The paradox was that by the time they removed the "nationality" category from the passports in Russia, being a Saami was becoming an advantage. That was when people started making noises about the rights of the northern aborigines, contact was made between the Saami and Scandinavia, and dollars and grants began to flow in.

"There was a poacher," recalled Sasha, "a Ukrainian from Apatity, who got himself Saami status because he had found out we could get discounts on our hunting licences."

So then came the question, according to what criteria do we define who is a Saami and who is not? That is very important, if we're going to think seriously of creating a Saami parliament. Russia is the only place where they still haven't got one. In Finland it has been functioning since 1973, in Norway since 1989 and in Sweden since 1993. To establish a Saami parliament in Russia first we have to know who has the right to create it, selecting members from among whom? In other words, a list of Russian Saami needs to be drawn up... The criterion of blood has been adopted – at least one parent has to be a Saami.

"Anyway, we all know each other here, and we know who is who. All that's needed is a legal document."

The hardest thing is the issue of Saami land. Too many people have claims on it, from the Russian army and the lobbyists for the mining industry, to the new Russians and the tourist business. You only have to cast an eye over a map of the Kola Peninsula to realise how little living space there is left for the Saami. They have been driven away from the Barents Sea coast, where for centuries they hunted seals, but where now there's a nuclear submarine base. They've been displaced from the north-west, where the "closed" cities of Nikiel and Zapolyarny have been built. The railway has cut them off from Lake Imandra, which for the Saami was what Lake Baikal is for the Buryats. Finally the Monche tundra (in Saami "Monche" means "beauty") has been ruined by Monchegorsk, and the

Khibiny mountains by Apatity. Now they've started to dispossess them of the eastern part of the Kola Peninsula. The best fishing sites for northern salmon on the Ponoy river have been leased to Americans for twenty-five years, and new Russians have taken over the Iokanga. Not long ago a Swedish firm called Buliden planned to build an open-cast gold mine near Lovozero, on the river Voronya. That would have been the end of the reindeer, and consequently of the Saami in Kola too. Luckily this time they realised in time, kicked up a fuss and got some outside support, and the Swedes withdrew. But that doesn't mean someone else won't appear. As long as there is something to extract from Saami land, the Saami's existence there will be under threat.

"They're even taking reindeer moss from here to the West. Several hundred tons of dry lichen a year. You know what for?"

"I haven't a clue."

"To decorate graves with it!"

Silence fell. Sasha was lost in thought, while I chewed over his words. Quite by chance we had found a disturbing, yet at the same time apt metaphor for Europe, draping its corpses in life-restoring reindeer moss, which was a source of life for the primeval Europeans.

"Today's Europeans," said Sasha, glancing at me as if reading my thoughts, "build a house first, and only then decide what was growing under it. When they choose a place to build, they're guided only by their own benefit, not any advantage for the earth. To us the earth is sacred."

That is why they must act to save Saami land from ecological barbarism. It is not in the least about breaking the Kola Peninsula away from the Russian "motherland", as some people accuse them, but just about the Saami, the indigenous people of this territory, co-farming the land. That means having a legally binding say on the subject of its use. As, for example, the Canadian Inuit have in Nunavut. However, so far the Murmansk Duma has not adopted a law on the ethnic population. The Komi-Izhem are against, because they would like to get a piece of the action too.

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Małgorzata Szejnert  
**THE BLACK  
GARDEN**

*Photo: Andrzej Bernat*

*The Black Garden* is the vivid, dynamically written tale of a Katowice housing estate called Giszowiec and its residents. In the second half of the nineteenth century the German owners of a company called Gische (hence the name of the estate) developed large-scale industrial and mining activity in Upper Silesia. Demand was growing by the year for bituminous coal, which was in plentiful supply in the Katowice area, but it was harder and harder to find workers, until the managing director of Gische's mines and foundries hit upon an excellent idea: they should build an estate full of small houses in the style of rural cottages, steeped in greenery, with a small garden and a shed for each one. The farmers who had only just re-trained as miners would work better and more productively if they were guaranteed decent living conditions. The first residents of this unique estate, unprecedented anywhere in the world, moved into their homes a hundred years ago. Małgorzata Szejnert, who has sifted through hundreds of documents, diaries and chronicles, gives a colourful description of the daily life of the residents of Giszowiec and the neighbouring districts. On top of this tale about "good capitalists"

and the hard-working, virtuous Silesians come stories that are less pleasant, about the eradication of the German and Polish elements before the First World War, the three armed uprisings that led to Poland regaining part of Upper Silesia in 1921, the nightmare of the Second World War, the birth of People's Poland, and some subsequent social experiments that almost brought about the destruction of Giszowiec (part of the district was blown up in the 1970s to build skyscrapers). *The Black Garden* is a tale told by many voices, in which trivial issues blend in with major ones, and the fortunes of simple people cross paths with the life stories of Silesian-born political and cultural celebrities. Szejnert's in-depth book is an outstanding achievement in the art of journalism, one of the most important publications on Silesian history to have appeared in the past few decades.

*Dariusz Nowacki*

**Małgorzata Szejnert** (born 1936), journalist and reporter. She has written or co-written several works of non-fiction.

# Gerard

Kasperczyk, who has reached the age of seventeen and spends his time after work at Master Bochynek's running around Giszowiec and the area with his friends looking for girls, describes a lot of to-do at the American villas. The gate that has always guarded the inhabitants is wide open and everyone is going away. Some of them are leaving their furniture and kitchenware behind, but it's not clear whether they're doing so in haste or in the belief they will be back soon.

Mr and Mrs Georg Sage Brooks cross the Polish border on 29 August. They do it near Bytom and head for Holland.

Augustyn Niesporek tidies up the negatives, so many of which have now accumulated that they're cluttering up the workshop, but some of his ever increasing family have to live in there. The glass plates used in the photographic studio take up a great deal of space. Twenty-three-year-old Paul, Augustyn's oldest son, who is gradually taking over the photography workshop, comes to the conclusion that they should get rid of these plates, especially as they are becoming obsolete, just like the photos of veterans in Uprising uniforms celebrating their anniversaries. Augustyn accepts this decision with understanding. How the firm gets rid of the glass plates, we do not know. All we know is that they are soon gone.

The family of senior cavalry sergeant Andrzej Pawlak, who moved into two rooms with a kitchen in a three-storey house in Szopienice have only managed to live there for a couple of months. At the close of August Pawlak bid his family farewell. His troops are training in the woods near Giszowiec, putting on uniforms, arming themselves and obtaining means of transport, because they did not get a single car from the mobilisation store. So they are out in the Giszowiec woods, acting like the Silesian insurgents twenty years ago, requisitioning cars on the highway near the managing director's villa, and borrowing horses and bicycles from the local people, promising to return them once they're victorious.

The neighbours from the Szopienice tenement have encouraged Helena Pawlak to take the children and run away from the Germans, who are already entering Katowice and

are sure to be tough on her family. So Helena, a small woman with a round face, gathers up the three children, of whom the youngest is four, and they walk on foot to Sosnowiec. Luckily the oldest daughter, Halinka, is fifteen and can carry the bundles. They stop for the night outside Sosnowiec, and in the morning they head onwards to Strzemierzyce, where they squeeze into tin-plated cattle trucks, which are already full of refugees. In the Olkusz forest they come under bombardment and lose half their luggage, but they get to Wolbrom, where a wrecked locomotive finally refuses to move. They stay the night with some kind people and reach Ślawice near Miechów by horse and cart; the neighbours' hospitable relatives live there.

Meanwhile Sergeant Pawlak and his troops get orders to close the gap that between the Tarnowskie Góry (held by the 11<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment) and Siewierz (held by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment of Uhlans). They have some trouble in getting there because they only have maps in the direction of Berlin. They haven't been issued any anti-tank guns. They drag a train of thirty horse-drawn wagons after them like a ball and chain.

On 1 September Edward Schulte's son, nineteen-year-old Ruprecht, who wants to be a farmer and is doing summer work experience at a friendly estate in Lower Silesia, hears a swarm of aeroplane engines overhead. It is a squadron of Stukas and Junkers flying towards the eastern border of Germany. Wolfgang, Ruprecht's twenty-year-old brother, has had to give up a holiday trip to Switzerland and Italy and is probably just crossing into Poland with his unit.

In August the Giesche mine had 4,038 employees.

On 1 September there are 630 fewer.

Of these, 390 men have been called up for the Polish army. 240 have escaped, to wait it out and see what happens.

According to the Giszowiec scout's newsletter, the local scouts, some of whom have just come back from a camp at Ligotka Kameralna in the Zaolzie region, want to fight alongside the Polish soldiers. They are planning to defend the power plant at the Giesche mine. But under pressure from the Germans the Polish detachments withdraw beyond the river Przemsza and blow up the bridge. Seven scouts on bicycles, including the brothers Ludwik and Konrad Lubow-

iecki and Teodor Botor, try to find a mobilisation point, but they can see it is hopeless. They try to catch up with the Polish forces. Near Kozienice the Germans catch them, but let them go home. The boys must have explained in German that they were out on a bike ride.

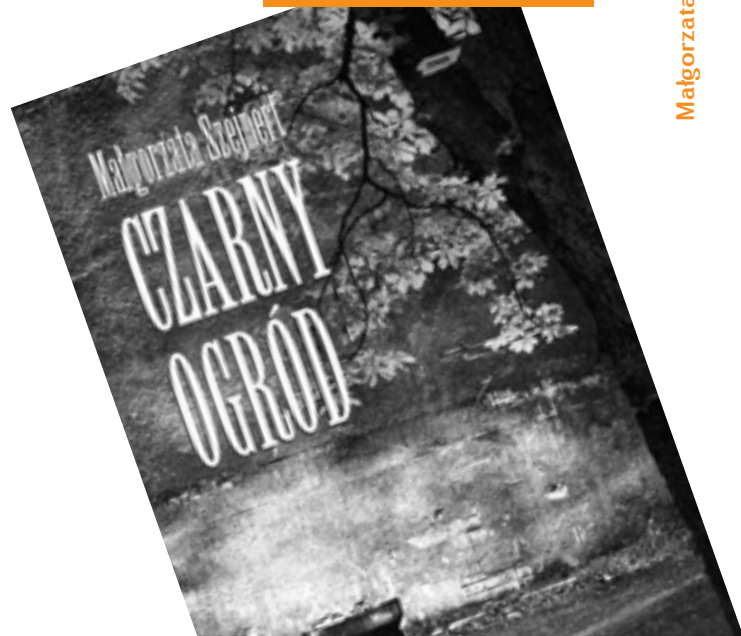
Gertruda Badurzanka has also been trying to fight, in communications. She and her friends from the Nikiszowiec girl scouts have trained as telephone operators. Team leader Stefcia Szmolówna assigned shifts manning the Katowice phones, and sat up all night in an office with her eyes glued to the receiver, but no one called. The Germans marched into Giszowiec on 4 September. Gerard Kasperczyk notices that a lot of people, especially the old ones who were educated at German schools and who remember the First World War, regard these troops with an interest close to sympathy. And some of the soldiers smile at the local people too. The self-confidence, energy and smartness of the conquerors make a better impression than the chaos in which the Polish troops abandoned the district, though they were supposed to defend it.

“The war had only just begun, and they were already here, those Germans. We saw the other army. That lot were poor, on ponies, on carts. But this lot came in vehicles.”

A friend of Dorka and Gertruda Badurzanka called Maryla Wacławkówna despairs when she finds that the bed of asters in her Giszowiec garden on Ogródowa Street, formerly and from tomorrow Gartenstrasse, has been ruined. Someone has broken in from the street, pulled up the flowers by the handful and thrown them under the soldiers' feet. Father Dudek, who returned not long ago from a holiday in Krynica, greets the Germans from the pulpit. He says the parish has been waiting for them for seventeen years. Zbyszek Stacha, son of Wincenty, hears this with his own ears and runs to tell his father, who only yesterday was a Polish state official.

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*Photo: Elżbieta Lempp*

This book consists of nine chapters, each about a dramatic upheaval in someone's life. On the surface these stories form a chronicle of accidents: a dozen high school pupils on a pilgrimage to Częstochowa are killed in a burning bus when no one makes a rescue attempt, and after the tragedy, in which the driver was killed too, his name is not listed on the obelisk commemorating the victims; Alina P., who publicises the fact that as a child she was abused by a priest, is outcast by the rest of her village; a grown man suffering from Tourette's syndrome feels trapped in the cage of his illness, where his parents who care for him are imprisoned too; a mother who lost her daughter in unexplained circumstances (she never came home from a disco) suffers social ostracism; Jan, who has lost his memory, is treated like a slave for years on end by various employers; a young man who has suffered from emotional disturbances since childhood commits long premeditated suicide; a homosexual priest who is HIV positive does not deliver a sermon in which he wanted to confess his life secret to the congregation...

Instead of looking only at the tragically afflicted individuals, we can also examine the relationship between those affected and society. Then we realise that this book is about stigmas as a social issue. A stigma only exists within a relationship. It is not expressed in terms of the attributes of the individual concerned, but in the behaviour of the community towards that individual. If we look at *The Rabid Dog* this way, we can see that it is a set of reports on how Polish society copes with some contemporary issues at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Tochman's book is an extremely dramatic testimony on the theme of the clash between the realities of recent modernity (new illnesses, new problems) and social consciousness,

which is unable (or unwilling) to perceive its new obligations. Within this society the fundamental traditions, both Catholic and modernising, act exclusively as stigmatising mechanisms. Narrow-minded normality, fearful, hypocritical reactions, a lack of social customs that would allow people to express fear... That is why Tochman realised we need someone who is prepared to start growling – the reporter as a rabid dog?

*Przemysław Czapliński*

**Wojciech Tochman** (born 1969) is a reporter and writer whose work has been translated into 7 languages.

The police interviewed fifty witnesses: Ania's granny and grandpa, her male and female friends, their parents, the local mayor, some of the neighbours, and the teacher who was in charge of the children during the disco.

They did not interview everyone who knew about the disco. Not many people did. No posters were put up in the village, nothing was said about it from the pulpit, only the schoolchildren were allowed in for the party. Apart from the schoolchildren and their parents, only the headmaster and the teachers knew about it. They were not asked where they were at the time and what they were doing. Not to cast suspicion on anyone straight away, but to avoid being accused of neglect years later.

The school is right on the tarmac road, but it is a side road, far from the main thoroughfare. The person who drove down here in a beige Fiat came specially. He must have known the children would be on their way home at night and at that particular time. He must have known which children would come this way: which of them would be walking in a group along the main road, and which on their own, towards the ponds.

If there was a beige Fiat waiting for Ania, and if it was the Fiat with black blinds, the prosecutor should have been asked what he thought about the interview with its driver, who was stopped the next day in a nearby town. The driver said he hadn't kidnapped the girl. We have that on record. But the police did not do a line-up – they did not show the Fiat driver's face to the teenage girls who a week earlier had been accosted by some strange men. Nor did they examine the car. They forgot the rules of the Police ABC; they didn't check if there was blood in the car, or hair or any other trace of the missing girl. They claimed the beige Fiat with the black blinds had nothing to do with the case. So at least it would appear from the records. Could that be wrong? Were there any operational efforts that aren't mentioned in the records? No one knows. At the Cieszyn police they don't remember much any more, and no one feels like checking in the archives. The prosecutor who supervised the investigation is now on leave for several months.

We know from the records that the police did check other beige Fiats registered in the former voivode of Bielsko. They seem to have covered all the owners of that sort of car. They asked all of them if they were in Simoradz that evening, and if they could have kidnapped ten-year-old Ania.

The prosecutor should have been asked what he thought about the police work.

Someone should have asked why they hadn't checked beige Ladas. The mayor wasn't sure if she saw a Fiat or a Lada.

Someone should have asked why some people saw a beige Fiat or Lada, while others spoke of a red Fiat 126, and others yet said there was no car when they walked down there a minute before Ania. An examination of the spot where the car was supposed to have moved off with a squeal of tyres showed no traces either on the gravel or the asphalt. The examination was made the next day, in daylight. It was clearly recorded in the documents that there was no snow, it wasn't raining and hadn't rained since the day before, there was just a slight breeze and it was three degrees. There must have been some evidence left of such violent acceleration, but there wasn't any.

Someone should have asked why the school girls from the local primary school hadn't told anyone that a week earlier they were accosted by some strange men. They only mentioned it when news went through the village about the beige Fiat seen by the mayor. Someone should have asked why the mayor, when she heard a child scream in the car that drove off so violently, had calmly gone home and spent the next two hours quietly watching a film on television.

Someone should have asked if the beige car had been seen by the pond at all.

Krystyna Jałowiczor asks herself questions like these. And she answers: if there was no beige Fiat here that evening, no strange car, it means someone from here did Ania harm.

"Stop it," her mother-in-law reprimands her. "Everyone round here is decent, there are no bad people here. You're not from here, you don't know that nothing bad has ever happened here. Except that occasionally God tries people with bad fortune, and punishes them for their sins. You have to pray, you clearly don't pray enough. You mustn't rebel."

Krystyna Jałowiczor isn't rebelling. She isn't from here and doesn't know many people here. They only moved to Simoradz after Ania's disappearance, when Krystyna decided to come and wait for her daughter here. Or for the worst possible news, which is better than having no news at all.

They moved in with her mother-in-law, got a piece of land from her and built a small house. As she and her mother-in-law stare out of the window, neither of them likes what they see.

She doesn't ask her mother-in-law why she didn't go and fetch Ania that night. The mother-in-law has never told her daughter-in-law that she too is suffering, pining and blaming herself.

She doesn't ask her husband why he has never had any grudges against his mother, not a shadow of regret, not a single bad word to say. She doesn't talk to her husband much at all now. Nor does he say much in reply.

She doesn't ask why no one from the school has ever been to see her or spoken to her since Ania's disappearance, neither the headmaster at the time (whose name is Stanisław Trzciński), nor her daughter's form teacher (who is called Janina Kajzer), nor the teacher who was in charge of the children at the time, and who for the past year has been the headmaster (he is called Krzysztof Błaszczak).

"It never occurred to me," says the new headmaster nowadays. "At the time I didn't feel up to it."

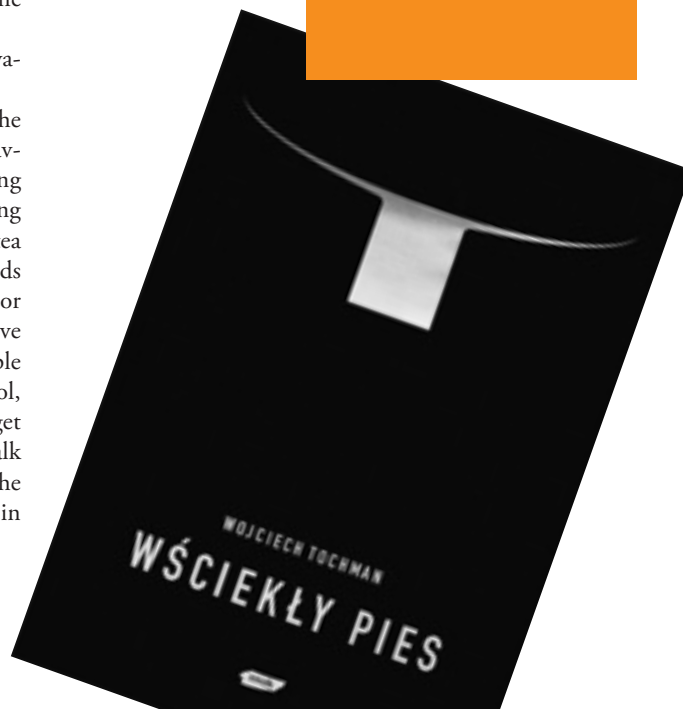
To this day no one in the village has felt up to visiting the mother of the girl who went missing eight years ago and having a cup of tea with her, giving her some support, or talking to her, not even about the clouds in the sky. Or just being with her, saying nothing for an hour, drinking a cup of tea and leaving. It's important – anyone who is suffering needs that. But no one knows if that's what Krystyna Jałowiczor wants. She doesn't frequent the village much, she doesn't give many opportunities for anyone to approach her. The people here know each other from the back yard and from school, but she's an outsider, a stranger. And she doesn't let them get to know her. She has never been to a parents' evening to talk about her son – she refuses to cross the school threshold. She sent her husband instead. Every day she travels to work in

Bielsk, where she draws films for children, frame after frame. When she comes home on the bus, she stares out of the window as if she doesn't want anyone to speak to her.

She doesn't go to the local church. She's afraid she'll sit down next to the murderer. She'll say to him: Good day, and shake hands with him for the sign of peace.

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Krystyna Kurczab-Redlich

# HEAD AGAINST THE KREMLIN WALL

*Photo: private*

This in-depth book speaks of today's Russia, and three of its spheres: society, power and war. All of these spheres are penetrated by the trend indicated in the title: imperial politics is being revived in Russia, and its symbol and centre-point is the Kremlin.

The first section is full of images that we know all too well from the media: poverty, bureaucratic arrogance, alcoholism and crime. If this tale is believable, however, it's because it was witnessed by the author herself, it's based on examples taken from daily life, and supported by reference to serious studies and statistics. All of this makes this book one of the fullest presentations of everyday life in Russian society. The picture that emerges is of a society that is powerless.

It is powerless in the face of oligarchic capitalism created through a tight alliance between businessmen, the underworld, and politicians. This kind of capital supports the corruption of the authorities, stirs up violence, and above all prevents wealth from getting into the hands of the ordinary people, which turns out to be the largest class of people pushed to the outskirts. It is powerless in the face of the undemocratic authorities, because the society has no traditions upon which to build a civic community. Kurczab-Redlich reveals the void that lurks under the surface of social life. Russians have neither a strong pro-civic tradition, nor strong support in their families. They did not forge strong civic ties in the 20th century, while the family has gone into a state of collapse. The high divorce rate, contempt for women, alcoholism, and low wages are the factors that put the individual in a lone confrontation with the state. As in feudalism, the citizen has no representation of his own, and so there is no party standing between him and the state to defend his interests.

The two remaining parts are in fact a confirmation of Clausewitz's famous thesis that war (and gaining power) are an extension of politics carried out by other means. Putin did not have to gain the presidency through democratic means, because neither his cohorts nor society believed in democracy or its significance. The Chechen thread, in turn, is an example

of how Putin learned new methods of managing a conflict less in the arena of war than in the symbolic theatre: by presenting the Chechens as terrorists, Russia received carte blanche from world opinion to fight his war with any means at his disposal. The weakest aspect of today's Russia, in the author's conviction, is its society. A weak society is the Kremlin's greatest weapon in rebuilding the Empire.

*Przemysław Czapliński*

**Krystyna Kurczab-Redlich** is a long-standing correspondent in Russia; she has made documentary films about Chechnya and has won many awards for her journalism. In 2005 she was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

# September,

capital city. Evening. A thin young man gets into the car. He doesn't smell so good: the bathrooms are in bad shape in the refugee camps, and he doesn't even have enough money for toothpaste. He doesn't want to give his last name. He talks in monosyllables. He's scared. Running from the Russkies. He's the brother of one of those women.

They showed her on television day after day when the crisis in "Dubrovka" was happening. Oval face, big eyes, long-arching eyebrows, and a brave stare – straight into the camera.

Her name was Asha. Twenty-eight years old. She was a teacher. She graduated from Grozny University.

And she had four brothers. The eldest lost his kidneys and lungs during torture. The middle one was made a cripple for life, also through torture. The youngest was shot during the night. The remaining one, Ahmed, was talking to me now.

She had also had two husbands. Both had fought. The first was killed in 1996. The second at the beginning of 2002. One day, she vanished. She told her mother she was going to Rostov for a check-up. She had breast cancer treatment. She left behind a three-year-old daughter.

My interlocutor has difficulty speaking about his sister. She has already gone. On earth there remains an eighteen-person family, which is being systematically annihilated: home burnt down, parents killed, and the rest of the relatives persecuted.

"Did Asha do the right thing?" I ask my interlocutor. "Sure," he says. "Everyone had forgotten about us. And they showed that we were still alive. And that we didn't want the war."

I find posthumous photographs of the terrorists in a magazine. Asha – or Ashot Gishlurkayeva – is smiling calmly. And mockingly.

The strangest part is that some of the women who participated in the terrorist attack on the Dubrovka Culture Centre were carrying return tickets. And wearing jeans under their black robes.

Ruslan M. has known me a long time. He's a television cameraman. We got to know each other back to front during

2003. An Eastern European

some times we shared in Chechnya. He knows that I'm looking for information on the Shakhids. In today's Chechnya this is very dangerous subject matter, and Ruslan has five children. He was silent. One gloomy January morning, when a few girls were raped during another cleansing operation in his native village of Alkhazurovo, from out of nowhere he started telling me this story while we sat in a cold automobile. It turns out he was Luiza's husband's best friend. After he died, Ruslan took care of Luiza and her child.

"She was no princess," he said. "she wasn't young, she was twenty-nine when they got married. That was an unusual Chechen marriage: her husband loved her so much that he wasn't ashamed to talk about it. It wasn't how Chechens do things. Like explaining yourself to your wife or asking for her advice in front of others. But he was proud of her intelligence. They had a small daughter. Three years old. An only child. Luiza was incapable of having more children.

That day a cleansing operation took place. Seventeen drunken soldiers descended upon her home. There was a cauldron of boiling water on the stove because she was about to do the laundry. The child was thrown into the boiling water. The soldiers laughed as they held Luiza back, not letting her make the slightest move. And then they raped her. All of them. With a bottle, too. They stubbed out their cigarettes on her forehead. They carved crosses into her with their knives.

She didn't go grey, she didn't go mad.

One day she vanished, and the next time she was spotted, it was on stage during an interrupted performance of Nord-Ost.

Her name was Luiza Bakuyeva. She was thirty-two years old when she died.

The affair of the crisis at Dubrovka heated up a year later, principally in the pages of a few low-circulation journals read by the intelligentsia. The state television news programmes gave it two minutes.

Russians are reluctant to speak of those days. People didn't go to see Nord-Ost, re-staged at the cost of millions of rubles, and so the authorities were forced to remove the musical from the repertoire. This was perhaps the only expression of their civic position.

Russian society, far from the model of a civic society, is like an ocean over which – way up high – loom the cliffs of authority. In this ocean live millions of separate individuals who can find no path to one another. Nor do they come near the cliffs. They are indifferent.

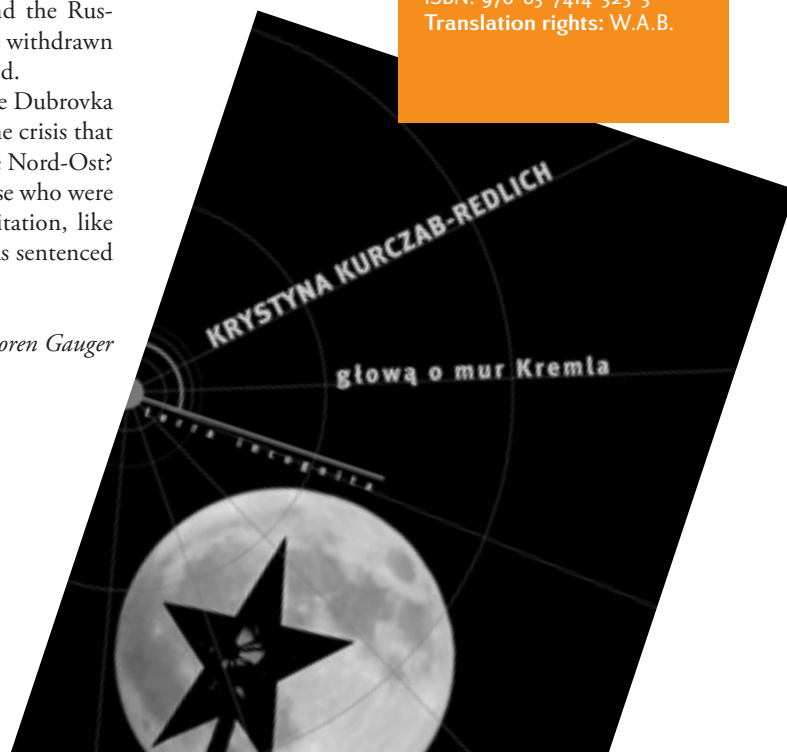
On October 23rd 2003, a father who had lost his son appealed to the listeners of radio Echo Moscow (the majority of whom are democratically disposed intelligentsia): “The terrorists defended themselves from five o’clock till six forty. During that time they could have blown up the building and killed their hostages. They didn’t touch a single one. So who took their lives more into account – the terrorists, or those who planned the storm? I appeal to you all: Our misfortune demands that we stand up to the authorities. Don’t wait any longer, fight them, while there’s still time.” To which the journalist responded: “I hope you understand that in today’s Russia, this point of view does not get across to our people?” “I understand.”

On the anniversary of the tragedy Moscow was just the same as it always is. Concerts, clubs, fun. Nobody went out to squares to demand the truth about the crisis at the Dubrovka Culture Centre. Let alone to demand the Russian Federation’s eighty-thousand-strong army be withdrawn from Chechnya. May Nord-Ost never be repeated.

Who was held responsible for the tragedy at the Dubrovka Culture Centre? Who was held responsible for the crisis that entered the Russian bloodstream under the name Nord-Ost? People who blundered into it by accident, or those who were “inserted” into the incident with utter premeditation, like the totally innocent Zaurbek Talkhigov, who was sentenced to eight and a half years of hard penal colony.

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*Photo: Piotr Zieliński*

Piotr Ibrahim Kalwas, Poland's only Muslim writer, has already made a name for himself as a travel writer describing his journeys mainly within Africa, so his latest book is a surprise, because it is all about India. What inspired him to go to this great country full of contrasts? He was not tempted by the cheap mysticism on offer for Western tourists, or India's famous ancient sites. *Mystic Race* is not designed for the sort of reader of travel writing who is hoping it will be an alternative, literary tourist guide. Typically, in most instances Kalwas does not even give the names of the places and localities he visits. His travels in India are just a pretext for a journey deep inside himself, because as he puts it, *Mystic Race* is "internal rather than external reportage". For him India is a sort of mirror, in which he tries to see through himself, and at the centre of that mirror there are always others to be found (perhaps I should write *Others*). It is his encounters with other people that afford Kalwas his most significant experiences. In India he comes across a wide variety of people, for shorter or longer periods of time: they include the three "Holiest of the Holiest", who have remained in the same poses without moving for years, a street bookseller, the family of a musician whom he met on a train... and so on – there are lots of these encounters. During many of them nothing is actually said, or Kalwas just exchanges conventional remarks with the Others. However, it is not conversation that interests him either, but coming face to face with the Other. It is no coincidence that in this book he makes frequent references to the classic philosophers of encounter and dialogue, Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas. What is the point of these encounters? Kalwas tries to see his own face in their faces, to go beyond the apparently fundamental differences and find something that brings them together. And as a result, to understand himself better.

*Robert Ostaszewski*

**Piotr Ibrahim Kalwas** (born 1963) writes prose, essays and television screenplays.

Yes, it was a small temple, made of stone, but not bright blue this time, not coated in paint at all. It was located in a pleasant, shady palm grove, where there were also some tombs. Outside the entrance sat a crowd of dejected, dozing beggars and two bizarre, sort of winged lion sculptures with bulging eyes and funny, sticking out fangs like cartoon vampires. And a swarm of chattering monkeys of course. My attention was also drawn to a sadhu who was standing by the temple wall, absorbed in prayer. Before him, just in front of his feet lay a white stone.

Next to the way into the temple there was a large billboard showing a man and a woman smiling, with three children. The message above their heads announced: “Family planning – small family, happy family!”

Under the billboard, on small woven seats sat two old men, who were using needles and thread to embroider elaborate patterns on pieces of coloured material that looked like duvet covers. Right beside them some women were filling a large hole in the road with hot asphalt, with two young girls carrying the steaming asphalt over to them again and again in bowls on their heads, from a metal barrel standing on the roadside. Silence reigned, the strange local silence. I could hear the flies buzzing.

I took off my sandals and went into the temple courtyard. As if from underground, a barefoot old fellow with a white beard and a metal bowl suddenly appeared in front of me. He shook the vessel and chanted in English: “O venerable traveller, may your ways of life be clean and straight, O immaculate stranger, please offer some charity for the holiest of holies, who are praying for you...”

It was incredible singing! It was from a completely different world, not this tropical one. The old man was intoning his song in mediaeval English style, or maybe Renaissance. It sounded like the beautiful, poetic verses of Anglican plainsong. This shrivelled, black old man, wearing a white loincloth and a turban, was singing like a monk from some mediaeval British abbey. He noticed my amazement and pushed his bowl towards me, addressing me in impeccable English:

“I am also capable of intoning my request in the manner of a French troubadour, a German Minnesinger, a mediaeval Christian monk, a Japanese komuso or Russian pop. Two hundred rupees, mister. Our babas need constant care...” It was elegant English with a refined accent.

Two hundred rupees – that was a lot, an awful lot, but the place, and the people, and the situation were all exceptional. Quite simply extraordinary. I extracted two crumpled banknotes from my pocket, tossed them into the bowl and asked quietly:

“Just as the Christian monk, please, mister...”

The Hindu smiled the pale smile of Savonarola, raised his eyes to heaven and chanted: “Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum, Virgo serena...”

And then I went inside the small ashram smelling of flowers and incense, greeted by the lofty, ultra-seriously mystical, marvellous, fervent singing of the half-naked old man, as if I had entered the gates of the Monasterio Benedictino de Santo Domingo de Silos. Above the entrance a notice read: “Under no circumstance, Do not touch the babas! One photo-shot = 50 rupees”.

Then for some time darkness reigned. I tripped over something. The air was heavy with smoke. More smoke, and more singing. Yes, out of the gloom came some calm, low, monotonous singing, a bit like the singing in the temple with the wall lamp. Gradually my eyes grew accustomed to the all-pervading darkness, and the weak light of a devotional candle broke through the clouds of incense smoke. By the walls sat several men, staring at the walls and wailing in gloomy voices. Then I also realised that the old man outside had not stopped singing either:

“Ave Maria plena gratia coelestia...” I could hear the Latin words.

It was quite incredible – a combination of Benedictine plainsong as performed by a Hindu ascetic and this dull, vibrating mantra, sung by naked men. The floor was strewn with hay and dried petals. I swept the clouds of smoke aside and saw a man standing by the wall opposite the entrance. He was barefoot, dressed in a long orange robe, and had a long, tousled grey beard. Drooping down the side of his body, his

skinny arm, the only one he possessed, hung totally immobile. He had a red trident painted on his forehead. In front of him, at roughly navel height, hung a small board, fixed to the ceiling, like a child's swing. He did not stir a muscle at the sight of me. He did not move at all. He just stood there. From outside the temple came the thunderous voice of the old man in the white turban singing:

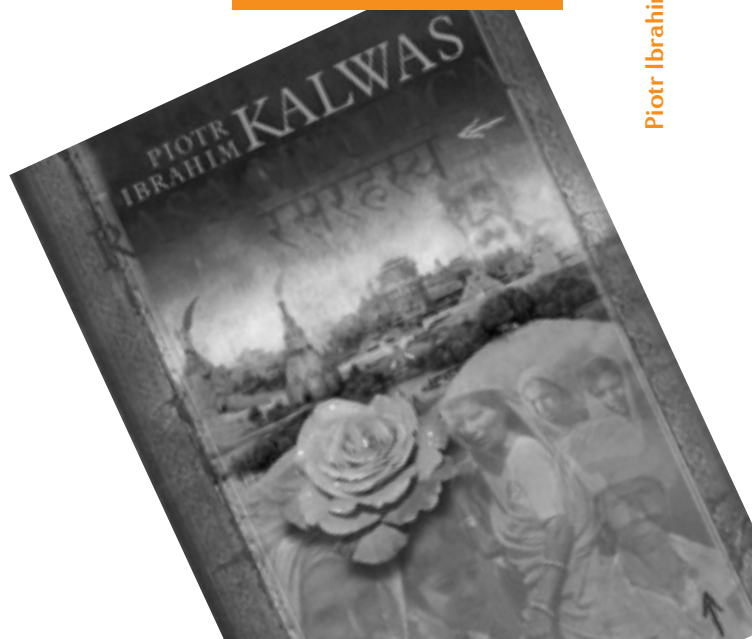
"Ave vera virginitas immaculata castitas, Ave praeclara omnibus angelicis virtutibus..."

How did he know Latin? Should I ask about that? Should I be wondering about anything else? The eyes of the man standing... his eyes... I had to get a close look at his eyes, it was very important to me. I took a step forwards, and only then did I notice a rope stretched about three metres in front of the standing man with a sign hanging on it saying: "Do not cross!"

His eyes had absolutely no expression. They only approximated life – they were motionless, like all of him, fixed on some inconceivable point in the distance that I couldn't possibly imagine. The men by the wall took up a higher-pitched phrase of the mantra. Without interrupting the song, one of them took a pipe out of a bag lying in front of him and moved close to the burning candle. I heard some sucking noises, loud inhalations and exhalations, and then I smelled the sickly odour of hashish. I turned my gaze to the standing man again, and just then, through the stupefying smoke, I caught sight of two men sitting in the corners, either side of the standing man. So it all fits – just as the rickshaw driver said, one of them stands and two sit. Bearded, with pieces of material around their hips, festooned in amulets, with their beards painted orange and long tangled hair, they sat without moving, each holding an arm up.

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Prószyński i S-ka





Henryk Dasko  
**GDAŃSK  
STATION**

*Photo: Family Archive*

Henryk Dasko came from a Jewish family and was the son of a prominent politician in the Stalinist era. His life took a stormy turn in an unusual way. So here we find the brief history of his family, its wartime fate and then, in more detail, the post-war era, the March 1968 student revolt against the communist regime, Dasko's decision to leave Poland, his attempts to make a new life in the west, and his path to financial and personal success, ending in a tragic denouement determined by fate when it put a terminal illness in the author's way.

Dasko's memoirs provide access from the start to another world that is not much talked about, i.e. the life of the privileged under the communist system. Here we can see that those privileges and benefits were not all that excessive by today's standards, but ensured a fairly normal standard of living, without all the shortages that troubled the average citizen in communist Poland. Equally valuable is his account of March 1968, which changed his view of the country's political regime.

Dasko's epic experiences in the period that followed is also extremely interesting, including his apprenticeship as a manager for some Western electronics firms, because alongside his description of his personal fate we also get a report on successive stages in the development of electronics, the story of its now often forgotten commercial hits. The newcomer from the east coped better than expected in this world, finally achieving financial success and stability.

Dasko is not one of those people who erase bits of their own life stories or memories that they might nowadays regard as unsuccessful, and he also understands a lot about an era that is now usually described in stereotyped, politically correct formulae. As a result his reports on the Stalin or Gomułka eras are credible, because there is no ideological thesis behind them. The book talks plainly about many difficult issues, and was written when Dasko was seriously ill, on the point of death, and thus it bears the hallmarks of reliability worthy of the testament of a lifetime.

*Jerzy Jarzębski*

**Henryk Dasko** (1947–2006) was a journalist, essayist, translator and traveller.

The trains were leaving from a small station in the northern part of Warsaw, which had already gone out of use then.

Each of the Warsaw stations had its own image, starting with the Central Station, celebrated in Sunday at the Central, the Polish version of the French cabaret song *Dimanche à Orly* by Gilbert Bécaud. Warsaw's Wilno Station in the Praga district was where the local drunks used to gather. The goods trains used to run through Warsaw West. Even the stations on the local EKD commuter railway had their own atmosphere, including the typical suburban Warsaw-Włochy line. The black narrow-gauge railway to Wilanów looked like a toy bought at a department store.

In the 1950s the Gdańsk Station was still associated with the Sopot luxury torpedo, a thoroughbred pre-war construction reminiscent of an ocean liner. But towards the end of the decade the station had gone out of service and was only used by international trains.

However, in 1968 Gdańsk Station took on a completely different symbolism as thirteen thousand emigrating Polish Jews passed across its platforms. Some claimed the Jews were getting privileges yet again, as indigenous Poles could not emigrate. The sentimental story of saying goodbye at the station has been described over and over and in great detail. For many, those concrete platforms symbolised the last scrap of home, and the most painful blow struck by their native country, saying "we don't want you". Some of the March émigrés took decades to say goodbye to that world, and some never managed to do it. Others cast off sentiment and tried to forget as quickly as possible.

For me the station meant nothing – the complexity of my relationship with Poland could not be reduced to a few strips of concrete and some railway tracks.

Not many photographs have survived – my collection must be the biggest. They show my parents, and Mama's last hug; Wiktor Kubar and another friend of my father's, Dolek Wendel. It was to Dolek, who lived right by Unia Lubelska Circle, a few kilometres from Parkowa Street, that I went at the age of nine when some yobs stole my bike. Now he had come to say goodbye to me.

Michał was there, as smart as ever, in light corduroys, a shirt with a buttoned-down collar and a pipe made of heather root, which he sometimes preferred to his father the general's Gauloises, twice-smoked sausage and export beer, all items obtained from special shops. We used to pinch these things, making the general mildly angry, but his wars were over now, and he put up with our weaknesses.

Agnieszka turned up too, and a few more of my friends.

One day, a little earlier, I had been surprised to see a fair-haired neighbour called Grunwald and his sister leaving for Sweden. I had no idea they were Jews.

It was the beginning of August 1969. In May an official announcement was made informing us that the Jewish emigration would end in October.

I chose Copenhagen. Denmark seemed harmless. I wanted to become an American, but it was the height of the war in Vietnam, and I had no intention of getting involved in that.

The decision "whether to go or stay" was the hardest choice in my life. It wasn't about parting from my parents; I realised that leaving the family home at some point is a natural thing. It wasn't even to do with Agnieszka. We hadn't seen each other for a whole year at the time when her father was sent on a work assignment to Turkey. It hadn't been easy, but we had survived. I wasn't afraid of being on my own – the gang had all gone off, one to Israel, two to Sweden, to Göteborg, not far from Copenhagen, and I knew they wouldn't abandon me.

Sorting out the exit formalities wasn't hard. Poland did not have diplomatic relations with Israel, but the country was represented in Warsaw by the Dutch Embassy. The emigrating families were using the services of the newly established minor industry involved in producing crates for household goods and their transportation.

My drama was to do with saying goodbye to Poland and having to renounce my citizenship, which meant denying my entire life. I was afraid of losing my identity. Until spring 1968 the idea of leaving had never crossed my mind, however brightly the lights of the West may have shone.

My world was culture, and that meant Poland and only Poland. So why was I leaving? There were other possibili-

ties. I knew I wasn't going to become a Dane. Of twenty something thousand Polish Jews, about half left the country. Michał and Wiktor Kubar stayed behind. In my case no single factor outweighed the rest. It was about the dreadful atmosphere, the threat of extended military service in special units and the fact that so many of those around me, who were just as Polish as I was, had decided to leave.

"If you want to emigrate, please sign these papers."

It was an application to the Council of State for renunciation of Polish citizenship.

I signed. The document confirmed that I was no longer a Polish citizen. So who was I?

I felt a sense of confusion come over me. But I had taken the decision and there was no going back. I packed my things. The most valuable item was a green synthetic leather suitcase of wartime origin, crammed full of books by my favourite Polish authors. All those books are still on my shelf – I have not lost a single one despite many moves.

And so, on a warm afternoon on 4 August 1969 I found myself at the Gdańsk Station.

I left in a Soviet sleeping car running West.

It was a straightforward, comfortable journey, like going on holiday in Poland.

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Rest of the World:

Wydawnictwo Literackie



Grażyna Plebanek  
**PRZYSTUPA**

*Photo: Katarzyna Krawczyk*

For over two centuries the experience of life abroad has been integral to Polish destiny. It could even be included in Polish literature's top ten favourite topics. We often feel as if everything there is to say has already been said about it. So Grażyna Plebanek's latest book is quite a surprise, because for her basis she has used the format of the picaresque novel, but has thoroughly reworked it.

The vicissitudes of Przystupa (this is her surname, and we never learn her first name), a twenty-year-old from the country, seem on the surface fairly typical. Uneducated, brought up in a degenerate family, the girl has practically no chance of improving her social status. All she can do is housework or childcare, and she has no intention of doing either. On the whole she is happy to get her keep for free and a symbolic wage. The series of jobs she takes, first in Poland and then in Sweden, do not lead to a gradual improvement in her existence, but like the typical roguish heroine of a picaresque novel, she takes whatever fate brings along, and only aims to survive. True to the genre, she does not interfere in what is happening around her, but – this time contrary to it – nor does she avoid trouble by being street-wise. She has a catalytic effect on her employers, causing them to reveal their complexes and commit various evil deeds, and in one case even murder. The girl's various confrontations with each successive family provide an opportunity to view émigré society in all its diversity. So it is not the main character's dramatic adventures, but the ups and downs of the people she encounters that are a vehicle for illustrating why a Pole leaves his country, how he lives away from home and how it causes his character to change. And also how Polish society differs from Swedish. Do these confrontations teach the nameless heroine anything? Not necessarily; her journey ends with her going back to Poland and does not lead to any spectacular inner change. She does learn about one thing – love, but not the kind that would give

this story a romantic happy ending, which would strike a jarring note, as the entire story has been told severely, without a trace of sentimentality, and in a pointedly non-feminine way, although women are in the foreground here.

*Marta Mizuro*

**Grażyna Plebanek** (born 1967) is a journalist and author of three novels. She has lived in Sweden and now lives in Brussels.

The lift they had entered was large – a double bed would have fitted in there. All she could see reflected in the mirror was the broad shoulders of the policemen escorting her. They led her out into a corridor and opened one of about a dozen identical pairs of doors located on either side of the corridor. In the room there was a table with a computer under the window with a soft-backed swivel chair behind it, and two ordinary, wooden ones on the other side. They told her to sit down and went out.

She would happily have stood up and waited by the door. Or run away; everything was alien here, it smelled of the post office and hot lightbulbs. She put her hands on her belly – it wasn't rumbling any more, but it felt tight – that was because of the lift, she'd never been in one like that before. Now she had something to think about, when all at once the door opened and a man came in.

"Pratar du svenska?" he asked.

She shook her head. She'd spoken English to the plain clothes man at the front desk, so why Swedish now?

"You'll have to wait for us to get an interpreter."

She was left alone again, with a more and more restless stomach. She touched it through her shirt – something was turning over in there, pinching and cramping the rest of her body. She began to rub it with circular movements, and it eased a little, so she went on massaging it. Apart from that nothing else was required of her. They had brought her here and told her to wait, but she didn't know what for.

After a long time an interpreter came in, accompanied by the man who had asked Przystupa if she spoke Swedish. He sat down on the other side of the desk, and showed the interpreter to a chair. She had a slender nose and delicate eyelids that looked as if they let the light through and prevented the young woman from sleeping, as a result of which she had a sad look on her face.

"I tell people the verdict," she said in Polish as she sat down opposite Przystupa. "In hospitals, when they get test results. Here sometimes too."

Przystupa nodded. The policeman was about to start the questioning, when a young plain clothes man came in and

handed him a computer print-out. They leaned over it, swapping comments in Swedish about the Finn: how his body was arranged, his blood group, the way and time he died, his former state of health and the state of intoxication he was usually in. It sounded professional – any body could be described like that.

Suddenly Przystupa's stomach rolled into a tight ball. She understood that the Finn was no longer alive. There was a heap of medical and police terminology spoken in a foreign language; she understood a few words, but she didn't know their smell or flavour. They were like blunt instruments. They had killed him with those words!

"...and this is his own knife," summed up the young policeman, leaning over the print-out. "Why keep it to hand?"

"He's a Finn," muttered the man sitting at the desk. "They always carry knives, they stab each other fighting when they're drunk. This knife is Lapp, what fine craftsmanship..."

She leaned forward and was aware of a sweet taste in her mouth, the flavour of pears... They gave her a searching look, so she straightened up and sat stiffly in her chair again. The young man left, and the plain clothes man began to ask questions. She understood without any translation, but even so she would not have answered any faster, she was glad of the extra time the woman with the thin eyelids gave her.

To some of the questions she had simple answers. She was a Pole, she had come to stay with her cousin Mårten, but lately she'd been living with a Polish girlfriend. Her husband, the Finn, drank and also beat – not her – his wife, Mrs Słaba. She'd seen him attack his stepdaughter with a knife twice. He almost killed her. If she saw that happen, why didn't she tell the police, asked the policeman.

She was taken aback. She was supposed to inform on people! So they'd point their fingers at her and cry "spy, spy"?

The policeman raised his brows. Who'd point their fingers at her? What's wrong with trying to keep law and order? The young woman stopped translating and turned her sad face to the policeman. In Poland no one goes to the police to report on their family, in Poland that's shameful. In Poland people hate informers.

The plain clothes man leaned back and looked now at one woman, then the other. What's so shameful about it? Why be ashamed? Red spots appeared on the interpreter's chest, she took a deep breath and slowly let it out, staring at the window. What's the next question?

The question was about "dom viktigaste sakerna": he'd already seen the passport, now the book. What's it about? The interpreter took the old volume and glanced at the dark brown cover. Mickiewicz, *Ballads and Romances*. She opened it at random. "What an incredible tale, A female killing a male..."

"What does it mean? In Swedish, please," put in the plain clothes man.

"Att en dam draper en herre," she translated.

"A female kills...? Is that an instruction?"

"No, more of an inspiration..."

"To kill?"

The interpreter began to laugh. She laughed and laughed, until her thin eyelids closed. She said sorry, for her unprofessional behavior... And roared with laughter again. An "instruction"! Ha, ha, ha, an "instruction"!

It is not clear how this would have ended, because a discussion on the subject of the semantic fields of eleven-letter words beginning with "i" was not a topic of interest to the investigating officer in one of eleven identical rooms at the Stockholm Chief Police Station. Here at the centre there was a dead body.

Just as the fact that the interpreter would be fired from her job was gradually becoming obvious, so the suspicion that Przystupa had murdered the Finn under the influence of instruction/inspiration from an unwise Polish poet was still the subject of research. She had a weak alibi (a spur-of-the-moment trip to the seaside in the company of an underage girl), dubious status (visiting a cousin for family reasons and tourism), and a suspicious appearance (a rather dirty jacket with bloodstains that had been sent for testing).

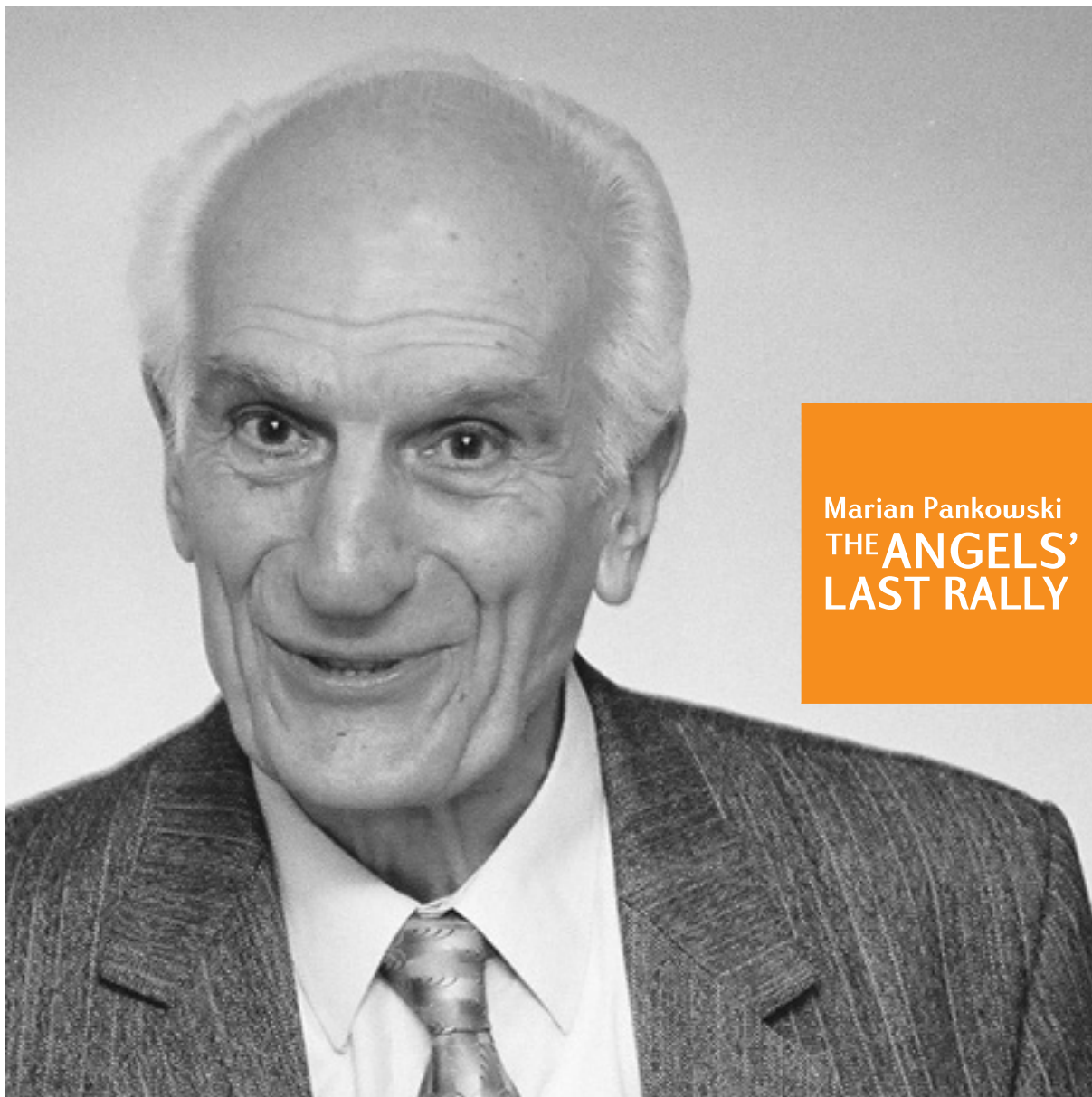
On the other hand, too many elements did not match up: the blood-stained clothing left in the bathroom did not belong to her, her bra size was not that one (she had smaller breasts), and to back up the alibi she had produced tick-

ets, for the train and the bus, which she extracted from the pocket of her orange jacket.

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Marian Pankowski  
THE ANGELS'  
LAST RALLY

*Photo: Patrycja Musiał*

In his latest novel Marian Pankowski, the grand old man of Polish fiction, gives the reader as big a surprise as usual. Widely regarded as a provocateur and iconoclast who isn't afraid to take up taboo subjects, this time he sends his hero to... the next world, to an angels' rally that's being held there. In the process he paints a picture of the next world which, to be honest, is extremely atypical, not to say weird from the off. The angels are organised into work brigades, like concentration camp prisoners. These include the "Defence of Original Sin Squad", the "Husbands' Squad", aka the "macho", and the "Post-Sodomite Squad". For ethereal beings, the angels have some rather unusual concerns, and are mainly extremely interested in anything earthly and corporeal. They organise a poetry slam, for example, at which they recite obscene verses. Is *The Angels' Last Rally* just an eschatological fantasy designed to scandalise ordinary mortals, and nothing more?

Of course not. In his characteristic way, using a rather frivolous, provocative format (where memories of the past are mixed with images of the future, reality is overgrown

with fantasy, and prose features alongside poetry), Pankowski discusses matters of the most serious kind. Here he develops themes that he took up in his novel *Pilgrims from the Motherland*, published over twenty years ago. Once again he asks questions about the place of God and religion in the modern world, about the sense of various religious practices, and about the relationship of early twenty-first-century man to the religious sphere; he also returns once again to his favourite topic, describing how the sacred and the profane, the mundane and the sublime merge and intertwine. Along the way he adds to the doubts rather than aiming for unambiguous conclusions as he tries to clarify his complicated attitude to religion and God. This short novel provides a lot of food for thought.

Robert Ostaszewski

**Marian Pankowski** (born 1919) is a poet, novelist, playwright, critic, literary historian and translator. He writes in Polish and French.

A veritable camp ground, on the eve of... on the eve of what? The new? But whose? It's a metaphysical fashion show. Here are some stout matrons, always in their Sunday best, and over there some jeans and T-shirts, clinging all too noticeably to the hallmarks of both sexes. I stop and look, and then I start to spin like a merry-go-round because I don't know which way to go, who to ask or how to make any sort of contact with these utterly... human-behaviour-displaying Angels. There's no one in my vicinity. There used to be a Jewish tavern here. Not even the remains of the smoke from it or from them is left in the air.

"You're surprised and amazed, eh?"

I turn around, and there stands a tall, El Greco style Angel. She smiles, amused by my dumbstruck silence. She sees I've noticed her jeans.

"My name is Helena, and jeans are the costume for Angels with a sceptical attitude to Heaven's traditional system..."

"Fallen Angels... Falling," I throw in, to shield my confusion. She smiles. She can see from my face I'm having trouble with my choice of words.

"You're now being escorted and will be escorted throughout your day among us... by not-quite-Angel, actually-still-woman Helena, still full of earthliness, but accepted on a seven-year course. On earth I was a sociologist, and here I'm researching the truths the monotheistic kingdom brought to mankind."

She can see the look on my face, that of a country bumpkin scratching his head as he stands before Picasso's "Guernica".

"You know... I'm still a rationalist... hence my lack of wings," she says, turning around to show the smooth oval shape of her shoulders. "There are no other trainees in my squad. We're all...er... how can I put it? If someone asks us what we are, we reply, in a rather plebeian way... Us? We're Knowers! Which doesn't in the least mean 'we know', but that knowledge, and nothing else, is what seriously connects us with the great mystery of the Universe. We are not airborne, but they," – she points her chin at a squad that's just going by – "are Believers, Angels who believe. That's the Defence of Original Sin Squad. Winged, of course. Their workplace is the dreams of earthlings. They suggest subtle

images to you, aiming to substitute them for your... naughty illusions" – she smiles, patently at her own earthly memories – "while we're involved with people infected by hatred, or obese with selfishness."

"Would they, the believers," I ask spontaneously, "couldn't they help you?"

"By their presence they authenticate the possibility of an exemplary existence. You've heard about the ideal of purity of soul and body from the history of myths and religion... Without it our faith wouldn't make sense."

She smiles, as if trying to express her neutrality, or maybe even sympathy for the alien from over the water. Now she's clothed in a sort of mist, and all I can see is her hair, like ears of ripe wheat, and her wingless shoulders, fading. Her right hand is still waving at me from the bottom of the valley. But now it has vanished too.

I am not alone. A new squad is coming out onto the main street of the camp. They're walking evenly, in perfect alignment, and now they're taking a right-angled turn on the right foot. I set off towards the hill where there's an extraordinary commotion. They're rolling up a green conference table on wheels, positioning it and putting stones under it to stop the surface from wobbling. WHAAAT?! My guide Helena is testing a microphone, blowing into it and tapping it, making sure everything's in order. She's in charge of the business of the day. Now she turns her blonde head to face east, from where some important person is clearly supposed to be coming. She's pretending she can't see me, the peeping tom, because I'm hiding behind a wild rose bush, in a lavish display of petals and anthers painting the bumblebees' noses. And what sweet little roses....

*A crown of them I'd wear,*

*Resting above each ear,*

*An innocent dewdrop so pretty,*

*Shining on each little titty!*

That's enough floral spell-casting, as Helena the sociologist, duty officer for today's heavenly seminar, gaily slaps her hand on the table top – thwack! And the hubbub stops.

"Yesterday, my dears, we held a discussion with a rather provocative title, 'Through the transcomical telescope to-

wards infinity'. We're not sure the title was to everybody's liking... I'm thinking of the degree of objective expression of questions and suggestions."

Somebody's hand goes up. From where I'm standing, I can see it's an Angel-ess of over fifty, a lady Angel.

"Yes please," Helena encourages her.

"The person who announced yesterday's seminar," she says, addressing almost the front rows, "seemed quite bewitched by the mere etymology of the word 'infinity', the semantic range of the term that nowadays has application in mathematical thought too... Yet the supporters of yesterday's interpretation were thinking of this concept... with a small letter. Were they perhaps trying to suggest that 'infinity'... is actually a sort of non-existence?"

She has not entirely sat down before a senior with wings that were probably too slicked down salon-style, raises his hand and stands up. He festoons his face in a dinner-party smile and makes this speech:

"Looking for holes in the entire thing is bargain-basement argument... even more so during our winged Rally, which may be the last ever. So for our doubting friends I'd like to suggest a slightly different title for yesterday's seminar, such as: 'With transcomical telescope towards new discoveries of the eternal laws that govern Order'. The last word is written with a big letter, a very big letter."

There was plenty of smiling and head shaking. And so? End of the second day of the Rally? Far from it. A stocky Angel is already pushing his way to the microphone on the table. Helena politely moves it closer. The stocky Angel waits a few seconds more, until the assembled company are more or less quiet. At that point he stifles their noise with his noise; though of medium height, he gives the audience a monumental look and says:

"Look at me and ask yourself what arch-angelic, arch-straight-talking thing is this old cove trying to tell us? What twopenny-halfpenny prayer, half-techno, half-blues, is he going to chant... in praise of Saint Whohe who's-never-here? To get us to chime in with him in thunderous chorus?" He shook his head most categorically. "No. I don't practise soap-box dialectics, and this is no time for choral catechisms...

Nor is it the moment for all that 'let's make a ring round the earth, let's join hands', not today, when the planet is shaken to its foundations! This year the deep-sea crusts under the oceans shook our world with no consideration for the will of God... And the place was swarming with thousands of widows and widowers, thousands of orphans... Of course we'll take care of them, we'll get them arms and legs made of stuff that doesn't age!"

*Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones*

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Wydawnictwo Krytyki  
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*Photo: Elżbieta Lempp*

Aleksander Jurewicz's new novel is a requiem for the writer's dead father. The author returns to events that took place over twenty years ago; his description runs through the three days from when news of his father's death was announced in his native village, until the funeral – three days of suffering and fear. Three days during which the world of the writer, then thirty-two years old, came crashing down. The trauma caused by this loss is still intense, even after so many years, which is why the writer is making this attempt to come to terms with it, writing with painful sincerity, sometimes even bordering on emotional exhibitionism.

The narrative is fragmentary and piecemeal. The author weaves two main plot-lines and mixes time-scales, writing not just about the days immediately before the coffin was lowered into the grave, but also recalling events from his childhood. Why?

Why are these scenes of despair following the death of his father juxtaposed with humorous or absurd recollections of days gone by, such as the anxiety that struck the village when a prophecy declared the imminent end of the world? The death of a loved one disrupts the set order of life and plunges it into chaos. Funeral rites, described in detail in this book, are helpful here – they work like painkillers, though their effects are limited. The narrator is ashamed that he is unable to conquer his fears. He has to appear in an entirely new role, one he is completely unprepared for. After his father's death, he has to support his mother and take care of his frightened younger brother. This is the source of the mood swings he has difficulty controlling.

He returns to the past, recalling who his father was for him, and some pivotal, often happy events. He tries to imagine how his life will be. In his head he has ongoing conversations with the deceased, more frequently even than when his father was alive, and more intensely, as if he wanted to atone for the lost time, when a burst of anger or his ambitions prevented him from

hearing his father out. This atonement is painful and difficult. Jurewicz has written a very beautiful, moving, nuanced and poetic testimony of a son's love for his father. This is a true rarity these days, and thus worth reading.

*Robert Ostaszewski*

**Aleksander Jurewicz** (born 1952) is a poet and novelist, and has written six works of fiction.

# Papa

had changed since yesterday evening, when I saw him locking up the chapel as if he had spent the night of our absence feasting with our friends and neighbours buried in the cemetery. I'd never seen my father like that before, and if I'd passed him on the street I might not have recognised him straight away. Although it was almost noon, lights were burning in the chapel. When I went in, holding my daughter's hand, I caught the singular smell of powerless mourning and melancholy – the smell of flickering candles, wilting flowers and a body wasting away. And undoubtedly Mama's lament had its own smell, as did the tears of Father's sisters and brother, and our orphaned dismay had its own smell too. And the smell of the September stubble fields and forest seeped in through the cracks in the windows and the open door. It was as if Father had gone even more grey. "It's happening too quickly, incomprehensibly fast, the pace is too abrupt, too crazed a gallop to this small pit in the graveyard." And again I recalled Father's panicked escape from the madhouse long, long ago. I looked at my sister, who was standing there with her head hung low, her hands folded on her swollen belly, as if wanting to shield her future child from the world of the dead, which we were now touching. If I could only drag her away from there right now and take her by the hand, like in our childhood, which we were on the verge of burying along with our father. If we could only go back there again, to how it was at the beginning, go back where the currants grew. If only we could hide there, I would wipe the tears from her cheeks, though they weren't as soft and warm these days as they were when we were children and we had a father, and I would say, pronouncing the words with difficulty through the stony tears gathering in my eyes:

"You know, Grażynka, our father is maybe just pretending to be dead. You must remember how he lay down on the bed that day when he escaped from the madmen and the spokes in his bike got all bent, and he lay there motionless till the next day. Remember?"

"I don't remember."

"You've forgotten?"

"No, I don't remember."

Those are the last moments in our lives when we see our father. His hands seem cast in wax, a thin stream of posthumous blood keeps trickling from the corner of his mouth, and his face is puffy. He's barely my father any more. Maybe the real one is at home now, patiently waiting for us and wondering where we are?

The messengers of Hades stood patiently by the wall in their black suits.

They were waiting for me to give the signal, but I still wasn't able to, although the mourning choir had finished their songs, and according to Father's watch it was already twenty past twelve.

Father wasn't bearing it well either, growing more purple and swollen, as if exhausted by the whole thing and wanting to rest right away.

An unbearable silence set in once the last song had ended, and in that silence I heard the choir flicking through their hymnbooks, the scraping of chairs, and a hubbub gathering in the courtyard in front of the chapel.

On the green clock face the large minute-hand was approaching twelve twenty-six.

I clenched my jaw and was unable to make any sort of gesture, though I knew it had to be done, that they were waiting for it, they were ready, that they had to remove the body that had once been the incarnation of Father, to begin their cleaning up after death. "God," I thought in despair, "I can't do it, I haven't the heart...."

In a panic, I started counting to seven in my head, and then counting once more. Only after the third count, which even today torments me before I fall asleep, when I have insomnia before dawn, in foreign cities and on the country paths of my childhood, when I wanted to count a fourth time for father, I shot a glance at my sister, and then looked father in his closed eyes one last time, kissed his hands wound with a rosary, and then said in a loud, quavering whisper:

"That's all now, mama...."

After that I only managed to register the lid of the coffin and, pushing my way through the crowd of mourners, leaving my mother crying behind me, I fled in a panic.

I got caught on something prickly, maybe a hawthorn bush, out of which flew some startled sparrows.

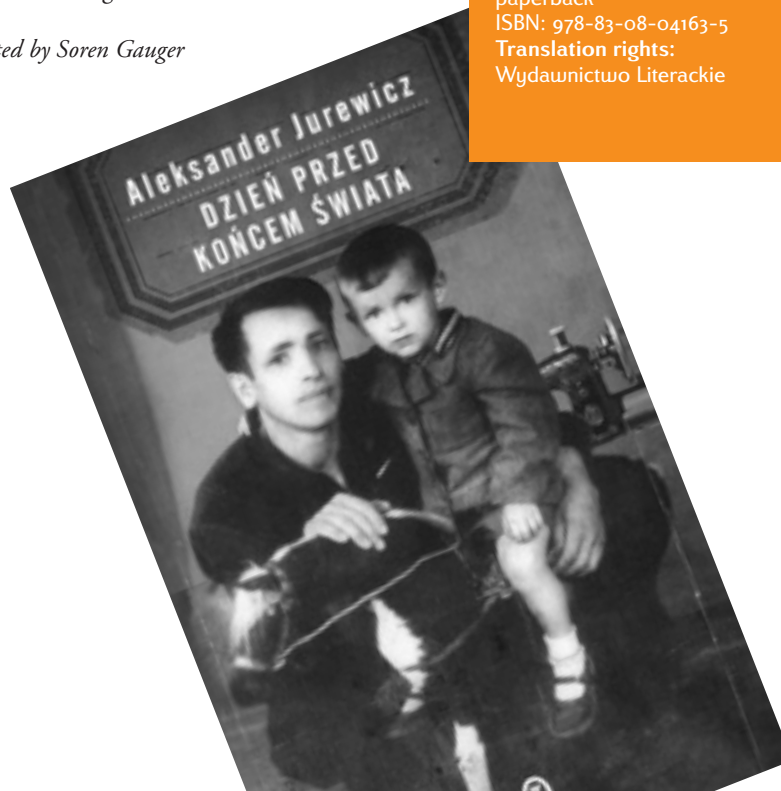
I heard the first powerful, hollow blows of the hammer beating down the coffin lid, then more blows, and a brief silence before the next nails came – the even, focused echoes of the hammer pounding the heads of the nails into the coffin. Then another brief empty moment, and the next nail draws a groan from the coffin planks, then another nail and another, as if there was to be no end. And when the silence lasts longer, I grasp that the final nail has been hammered in, and I will never see Father again; at best I'll recognise him from time to time in my dreams. Only now do I feel pain, as I untangle my fingers from the thorny branches.

I hear someone wrestling with the rusted hinges of the door, the bang of wood or iron, and the smell of death pouring from the wide-open chapel doors settles on the hawthorns.

A priest in a funeral cape came down the cemetery road in the company of two altar-boys.

The hollow ring of a bell resounded from the village.

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*Photo: Wojciech Modzelewski*

The 39.9 of the title refers to the age of the heroine and narrator of Monika Rakusa's book. She spends the nine months after reaching middle age trying to achieve a balance in life, in order to "grow up" at last and come to terms with herself. She sets about it in a radical way, not just with the help of a diary, in which she describes her entire life from childhood onwards, but also with the help of some specialists. To her mind, what she has been through and still cannot shake off requires psychotherapy. Aware that her life is burdened not only by a toxic relationship with her mother, but also her Jewish ancestry, she decides on a therapy called Hellinger's Constellations. Even though the therapy does not produce any spectacular results, the auto-vivisection the 39-year-old woman performs clearly brings the catharsis she seeks. She puts her life choices in logical order, gets to the origins of her complexes and step by step works out what has shaped her outlook on life. It all has its roots in Poland's post-war history, which in her case began at the end of the 1960s. Thus it is a tale where large-scale history on the social and moral plane clashes with small-scale history; quite literally small-scale, because the key events in the heroine's life story happened during her childhood.

Apart from evocatively describing reality, the book includes two remarkable portraits of women, the heroine and her mother. Both are drawn with impressive sincerity, made possible by the time lapse separating the narrator from the traumatic events. Only now can she judge her mother's strengths and weaknesses, her struggle with the limitations imposed by disability, and her heroic efforts to find a partner. In the daughter's account this search, finally crowned by success, takes on a tragi-comical form, featuring a whole series of conmen and perverted "uncles".

Rakusa's diary uses the same genre as *Bridget Jones' Diary*, but the form is the only thing they have in common. Rakusa's protagonist also battles with her disobedient body, or imposes decisions to improve on herself. However, she does it in a way that has no rationale within a genre designed to amuse. But as it turns out, the inflexible format can be truly inspiring.

Marta Mizuro

**Monika Rakusa** (born 1966) is a social psychologist, journalist and documentary film writer. She is working on her second book.

# 18 February –

*The day I find out what a man is.*

Mummy never had any illusions about men. She kept telling me her bitter views on the subject almost from the day I was born. In the process she gave me to understand that I had all the necessary equipment to manipulate them perfectly. “With your good looks, you’ll do what you want with them”. “Just make sure you never show them you depend on them”. “A relationship is a game. The person who comes out best in it is the one with the marked cards.”

I was four or five then. We were driving along in a Trabant. Mummy had committed some traffic offence and we were stopped by a policeman. I was extremely frightened. I started to cry and spluttered: “Please don’t take my Mummy to prison”. The policeman shrugged and let us go. From then on Mummy and I had a way with the traffic police in Wrocław and thereabouts. I could cry at will, and repeated the remark about prison several times a month. Mummy was delighted.

That was an important lesson. I could tell it wasn’t about some wretched fine (though she didn’t like paying them). It got through to me that I was her sweet little goddess of revenge. I knew one day I’d show them all, I’d pay them back for everything, but above all for her.

*19 February – The day of my Mummy’s lovers*

Mummy never had any illusions about her capabilities. Almost from the day I was born she kept telling me that a woman with bad legs has to pay dearly for a relationship with a man. She gave me an endless stream of examples of educated women who had got themselves involved with “men several classes beneath them”. “A woman called Ewa, for example, and my family law professor, Ludmila, and Krystyna, Wanda, and my doctor friend from Cieplice”.

The price my mother was prepared to pay for her relationships was always rising. First there was the artist who had lost a leg. She met him at Chylce. However, an artist without a leg ranked higher than a woman with two bad legs. So some other woman took him away, a completely healthy

one apparently. Then there was the chairman of the housing cooperative, but he wouldn’t get divorced for her. When I was seven there was a man called Adam. He didn’t seem to work at all. When he moved in with us, he spent day after day walking about the flat in tight green underpants. He was nice, he used to draw rabbits and horses for me. One day he decided to help with my bath, and as far as I remember, he even started washing me in a solemn way. My mother came in and put an end to this scene. But she didn’t leave him at once. She sent me back to Skorusy. Then, apparently, Adam stole from her, so she threw out his things.

I can remember a whole array of various “uncles” with whom she came to see me in hospital. One of them was having a chat with the lady they rented a room from. Mummy was busy with something and I was playing in the corner. The landlady came in and sat down for a moment.

“What a pretty, agile little girl,” she said.

I smiled very charmingly as usual and went on playing.

“And to think a cripple could give birth to such a pretty child.”

“She’d be quite a woman too, if she didn’t drag her legs like that,” added the man. Then they both sighed at how tough life is.

And I probably smiled even more charmingly. We went out to dinner, for which my mummy paid (though she didn’t like paying). Then they went back to Warsaw in the Trabant, and I suppose she dropped him right at the house.

In Warsaw there was our caretaker’s husband, a driver at the television station. Apparently he drove Maciek Szczepański himself. He knew the taste of a better world and he didn’t fancy his own wife any more. He used to come to our door after drinking and shout “Open up”. Once he asked me if I’d like him to be my daddy. There was also the friend of Zdzisia, the hairdresser Mummy went to in Ochota. And then Juliusz Wierusz Bielewski, the seventy-something-year-old military man who every time he introduced himself cried “I am Julius, but not Caesar”. And that was his only joke.

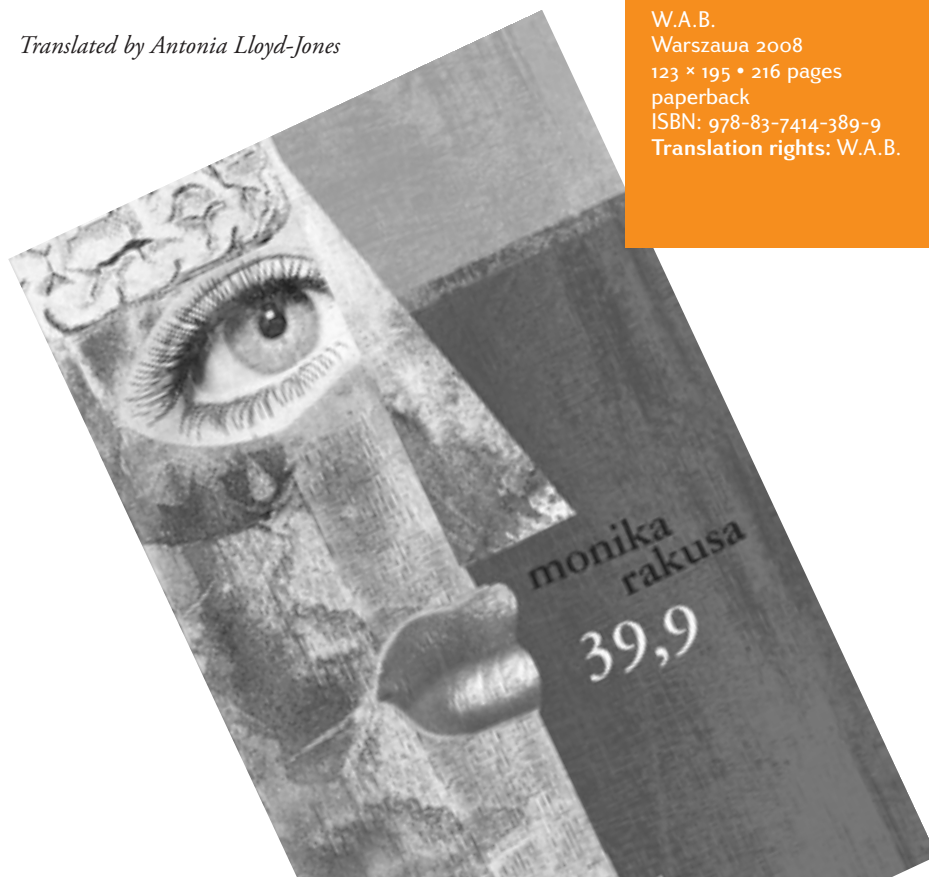
It ended with Robert. Mummy met him at a singles club in the 1980s. He was a bookbinder. When he came to our place he was wearing a purple suit. Mummy adapted him

and changed his clothes. She put his things in my wardrobe and sent me off to Szymanów. To make herself feel better, she used to dress him in a cravat to go to the theatre and the concert hall. When she broke her leg in 1984, she sat in a wheelchair, to make a “better entrée”. A few years after she stopped walking, her progressive dementia began. Robert, whom she called “Robcio” and I called “Robotcio”, turned out to be a decent person. He took care of her until she died in 2003.

*20 February – The day I found out what love is.*

Mummy had enormous illusions about love. I beat her hands down with my knowledge of the subject when I was a teenager. With a persistence worthy of a much worse case, she believed she'd succeed every time, and that if she invested more and tried harder, she'd become a forty-year-old Juliet on crutches.

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39,9

69

Monika Rakusa



Sławomir Shuty  
**MOTIONS**

*Photo: Bogdan Krężel*

Thus far, Sławomir Shuty has been chiefly known as a prose-writer who works within realistic conventions to present the ups and downs (but mainly the downs) of contemporary life, writing about over-inflated consumerism, the depression of corporate employees, and the tragi-comic fortunes of people whose income is below the national average. This is why his latest work, a novel entitled *Motions*, comes as a surprise. This is madcap grotesque, a true freak-show of bizarre and twisted images and situations. On the surface, the story takes place in a small town, in a community of young people, third-rate actors, small-time drunks and barflies, people who would like to do something big, but aren't quite sure what that might be. They drift around bars, go to parties, have flings with whoever comes along, and set up odd predicaments. They are caught in constant, anxious motion, in search of meaning, a goal of some sort that would be worth pursuing, but they only multiply the chaos of the world they've been thrown into. It would seem as though Shuty has decided to illustrate the chaos of the contemporary world, a chaos that embraces all spheres of life, language included. In his new prose, language is a garbage pit of threadbare phrases, words stripped of their content, in which kitsch mingles freely with the sublime. In *Motions*, however, nothing is entirely clear or unambiguous. The world created in the novel might be merely a projection of one of the protagonist's imaginations, a man whose ambition is to be a mad demiurge. Shuty writes: "the hooks binding reality slackened once and for all, and everything became one big accident, a muddle of sketchy fragments that shuffled and blended according to principles only they knew." Searching for those principles, tracing these winding narrative paths – some of which only lead you astray – might just prove fascinating for Shuty's readers.

*Robert Ostaszewski*

**Sławomir Shuty** (born 1973), also known as Shuty™, is a writer, photographer, underground film director, and the creator of a “disco-polo” opera.

“It’s been so long, hasn’t it, and here we are at last, aren’t we?” said Bulsza, trying to keep a tight rein on his heart’s amorous spasms, “What did you do when I wasn’t here?”

“Oh, honey...,” Lilka tenderly whispered, “we’ve only got a few moments to share, let’s not swap them for examining trivial circumstances.” And full of tender emotions she pressed her body to his, then backed off to snorting distance and gazed affectionately into his eyes. “I shall miss you terribly.”

With the instinct of an actor, he wiped away the tear that had appeared on her cheek.

“My dearest, in memory of the moments we spent together, I entreat you to take care!”

“My dearest!”

And even if a mysterious frost had come between them at some point earlier on, now all the ice floes had melted, they threw themselves into each other’s arms, as if they were never to see one another again, and it seemed as though there would be no end to the kisses, the caresses and the lingering gazes. The time of departure nonetheless drew relentlessly nearer, and finally Bulsza grabbed the girl by the waist, drank helplessly from her invitingly parted lips, struggling to fix in his mind their singular taste of cherry brandy, threw on his backpack and, guided by God knows what, set off without so much as a glance behind him.

The commanding tone of the electronic information signal tore her from her amorous reverie. “Have you already put together an outfit for the foam party?” Lilka had no time to respond before the telephone was pleasantly vibrating in the palm of her hand.

“Hey, what’s up?”

“Hey, just giving you a ring, what’s going on?”

“Nothing, how about with you?”

“Nothing, you going out somewhere tonight?”

“Is there something going on?”

“You haven’t heard? We’re celebrating the tenth anniversary of the acting craft of a certain extremely legendary figure.”

“Oh,” sighed Lilka, pressing the telephone to her breast.

Upon hearing of this event her body had experienced

a hormone-management disfunction, but then, as if scalded by holy water, she came to and decided she wouldn’t sully the marvellous melancholy of the coming evening, which was to be devoted in full to the contemplation of her happy moments with Bulsza.

She let herself be coaxed, begged for ages, persuaded and pleaded with, until she finally resolved to go and hang out for a bit with Marta, with whom she had some talking to do, and who had also announced she’d be giving the joint a brief inspection.

And thank God she decided to go!

The ceremony for the tenth anniversary of the acting craft of a certain legendary figure turned out to be a splendid experience. She’d never enjoyed herself so much, it was just as if all her imaginings of fun times had materialised into this evening; it was just like a scene from a film. She danced, sang, laughed and patted fleeting acquaintances, she heard all sorts of peculiar stories and said all sorts of peculiar things about her friends, both male and female, the sorts of stories that under normal circumstances would never have passed her lips.

But it must also be said that she blurted out a few interesting tidbits that had long been awaiting their public debuts. For example, the secret story about Borda, Paciula’s friend, with whom by the way she also had certain mysterious affiliations; or the intriguing tales of Tyrpak and his girlfriend from the countryside. There was no end to the questions and replies, and after she’d already been talking and talking Błachut showed up in the bar, a man with whom she’d once taken part in some peculiar ballroom dancing lessons, which were actually more like meditation workshops for some flaky religion, whose main ritual involved saying some secret words in exceedingly mystically-charged surroundings.

Błachut was an acquaintance of Skakuj, a decorator of unsophisticated interiors, who obviously had something eating him up inside, because he was always sour-faced and unresponsive, but over whom fit girls were always fawning, due to the position he had in the hierarchies, in the first place because he was in social contact with the local-culture-producing theatre troupe that was so admired in town and even

beyond its boundaries, and secondly because he was a good friend of chubby Borda, who in turn knew everyone worth knowing.

Everyone recalled that during the previous dance Borda had come to the bar dressed as a high-ranking religious official wielding power in town, and then, in a fit of passion, had thrown himself onto a barroom table, and proceeded to simulate copulating with it. All those assembled had been so taken aback by his theatrical interpretation of a familiar musical motif that no one had managed to click their cameras.

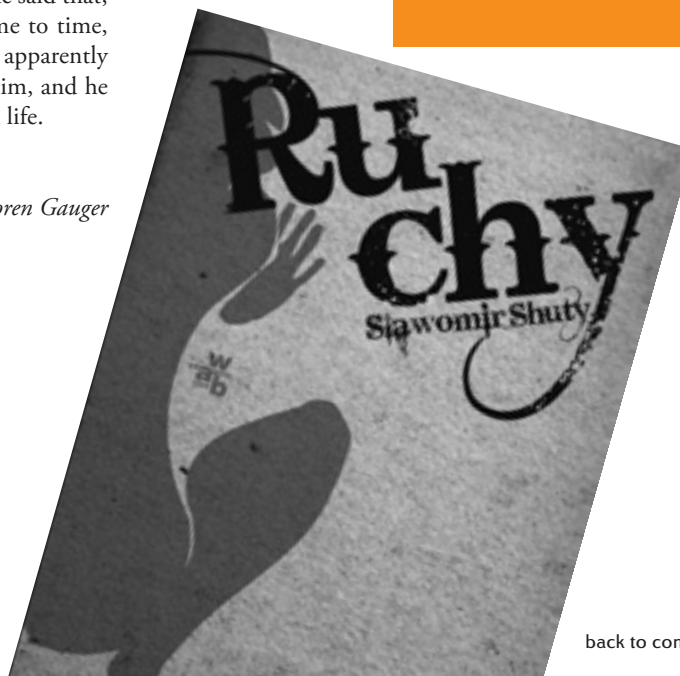
Word had it in the local community that Borda was carrying on enigmatic relations with Mariola. A great deal was said and heard about their mutual relations, all the more so since lately things had been rocky between them, and rockiness is a very tasty morsel for a social exchange of opinions. During the memorable evening, when Czcęzek and Lupta rolled a huge tractor tyre through the glass doors of the bar, completely demolishing Paciula's artistic installation, Mariola had publicly praised her partner's passion for causing a stir.

"Borda is really well built," she said, smiling over the counter, "he has some of the makings of a real actor: he's scatterbrained, messy, and uses fine colognes." When asked if it was true that Borda liked to sleep with his dog, she said that, naturally, he did have his extravagances from time to time, at which point he himself got interested, because apparently he'd overheard that the conversation was about him, and he added that all this had nothing to do with his sex life.

His friends begged to differ.

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*Photo: Janina Nasierowska*

Of the female writers who made their debut in about 2000, Leżeńska is one of the first to try to broaden the range of themes and genres of books aimed mainly at women. But not only; *A Stone in the Heart* is a psychological drama, in which gender equality applies, because one of the narrative threads is assigned to a man, and the other to a woman.

The story of Dasha and Marcin starts at the moment where most romantic books usually end. The thirty-something-year-old heroes meet at a class reunion, finally declare their long concealed love for each other, but are desperately scared of a permanent relationship. The process of coming to terms with traumatic experiences, failed marriages and a whole heap of other obstacles begins. On top of the psychological barriers there are also geographical ones, because Marcin has been living in the United States for some years, so for him returning to Poland would mean losing everything he has managed to achieve. Nonetheless the lovers overcome most of the obstacles, and the tale seems to be tend-

ing towards a banal family idyll. But that is just half the drama, because at this point Pola comes on the scene, Dasha's teenage daughter.

And then fate, which treats the heroes to yet another, this time tragic test of their emotions.

This novel's greatest virtue is its psychological refinement. Each gesture seems natural, and each sentence sounds like a spontaneous utterance. Leżeńska has taken such great care with the authenticity of her characters and situations that the reader inevitably follows their ups and downs in a state of suspense, which also derives from the fact that one would like to catch them out in some grand, inappropriately "literary" behaviour. But it's impossible – not only the main protagonists, but all the characters are three-dimensional and credible. Thus the unusual combination of quite trivial dilemmas with real tragedy also becomes credible. The drama is set in a local context, which affects the course of the action, but it also has a universal dimension.

Marta Mizuro

**Katarzyna Leżeńska** is a writer and editor. *A Stone in the Heart* is her fifth novel.

**It's** hard to say what I was thinking about as I set off to see Marcin's therapist. I was worried by that strange conversation about paternity. I guess I knew it was Marcin who was earning for all of us and for everything. I guess I could see he was barely alive, always late with something, always making up for something, from work to home, from home to work, here, there and everywhere, and always the same thing at home. But I too was barely dragging along. I too was giving up on everything. I too had no time for myself. That's why at the first instance I took the conversation more like permission, an encouragement for Marcin to move away from me. So maybe I wanted to evaluate the scale of the threat, I don't know.

I drove to see her feeling a bit ruffled, but in the course of the very first conversation I realised I'd been wrong.

It's not me who knows better, it's not me who sees more – for the simple reason that I am part of our arrangement and our situation. She, this calm, quiet woman, can see us like the back of her hand; what's more, for her we are one of many families affected by one crisis or another. She can compare us with others – without making any judgement – in order to show us how we look through the eyes of someone on the outside.

At first I was irritated by her endless questions about what Pola did today, what she learned this week, what we did and how we feel about it. Only after the second meeting did I understand what she meant.

To answer such questions sensibly, we had to force ourselves to root out of our memory the changes and novelties that had slipped our notice in everyday contact and in performing automatic functions. But indeed, maybe not by the day, but by the week something was always changing, whether it was that Pola had managed to walk a few steps on her own, holding a railing, or that her hair had started to grow back in funny little curls like after a perm, or that her words had increased and she was starting to say more. We even laughed at the idea that her vocabulary is already richer than the one used by the perfectly healthy people who come to night school at the WKD now.

We talked a lot about the norm, about returning to the

norm, about normality and the fact that we may be struggling now, but one day, later on, in a while everything's going to be fine.

"What does that mean?" asked the therapist one time.

She took me by surprise, and it took me a while to gather my thoughts. So many times since June I've repeated to myself and others that "everything's going to be fine", that I've long since stopped wondering what it means. Just as no one ever wonders what "mumbo-jumbo" means.

The therapist was silent, while I stared at her and at my own thoughts. Now I knew.

"Everything's going to be fine" meant that one day I'll wake up and Pola will run down the stairs and sing in the kitchen as she peels the potatoes.

"It means..." I shook my head and began to cry. Marcin got up from his chair and tried to take my hand, but I pressed my palms together and cried.

I was crying out of anger. I was crying out of helplessness.

"You shouldn't be doing this to me!" went spinning round my head. People can't be dragged into reality by force! It's not on!

And yet with every tear I wept the truth came through to me, which I did appreciate, but, like a child, I felt that if I didn't look at it, if I took no notice of it, it'd disappear, vanish into thin air, evaporate.

So I became conscious with full – yes, yes – "with full intensity" that my daughter would never run down any stairs ever again, because the cancer had irreversibly destroyed the part of her brain that corresponds to keeping your balance.

She will never peel potatoes, because her hands don't know how to perform such precise movements.

And she will never, dear God, she will never sing again, because she'll never recover full control of the muscles of the vocal tract, her voice will tremble and she won't be able to hit the right sounds. So what if she'll still know how to name them one after another, if she can't keep the melody.

Never! The door is closed.

I cried, and I couldn't stop, I used up half the tissues in the box on the table next to my armchair. Marcin sat without moving, with a hand over his face.

The therapist waited patiently until I calmed down a bit, then she said something that I spent the next few weeks digesting, but when I finally understood it, everything else gradually started to fall into place.

“You have to look at what has happened,” she said, “like a change. An irrevocable change, something that can’t be undone. It’s different, and that’s how it will remain. Not worse, not tragic, not monstrous, just different.”

I don’t know, maybe she used other words, maybe she didn’t say it quite so directly, but that’s how I remembered it. That things had changed, and I must come to terms with that change. I’ll never get back to the former situation, no matter how much I try.

Everything’s going to be fine, but only when Marcin, Pola and I come to terms with the fact that everything has irrevocably changed. Each of us has to do it in their own way, at their own speed, by their own means. And I must forgive myself first, then Marcin, and finally the rest of the world.

I must “be reconciled with the world”.

I have no alternative.

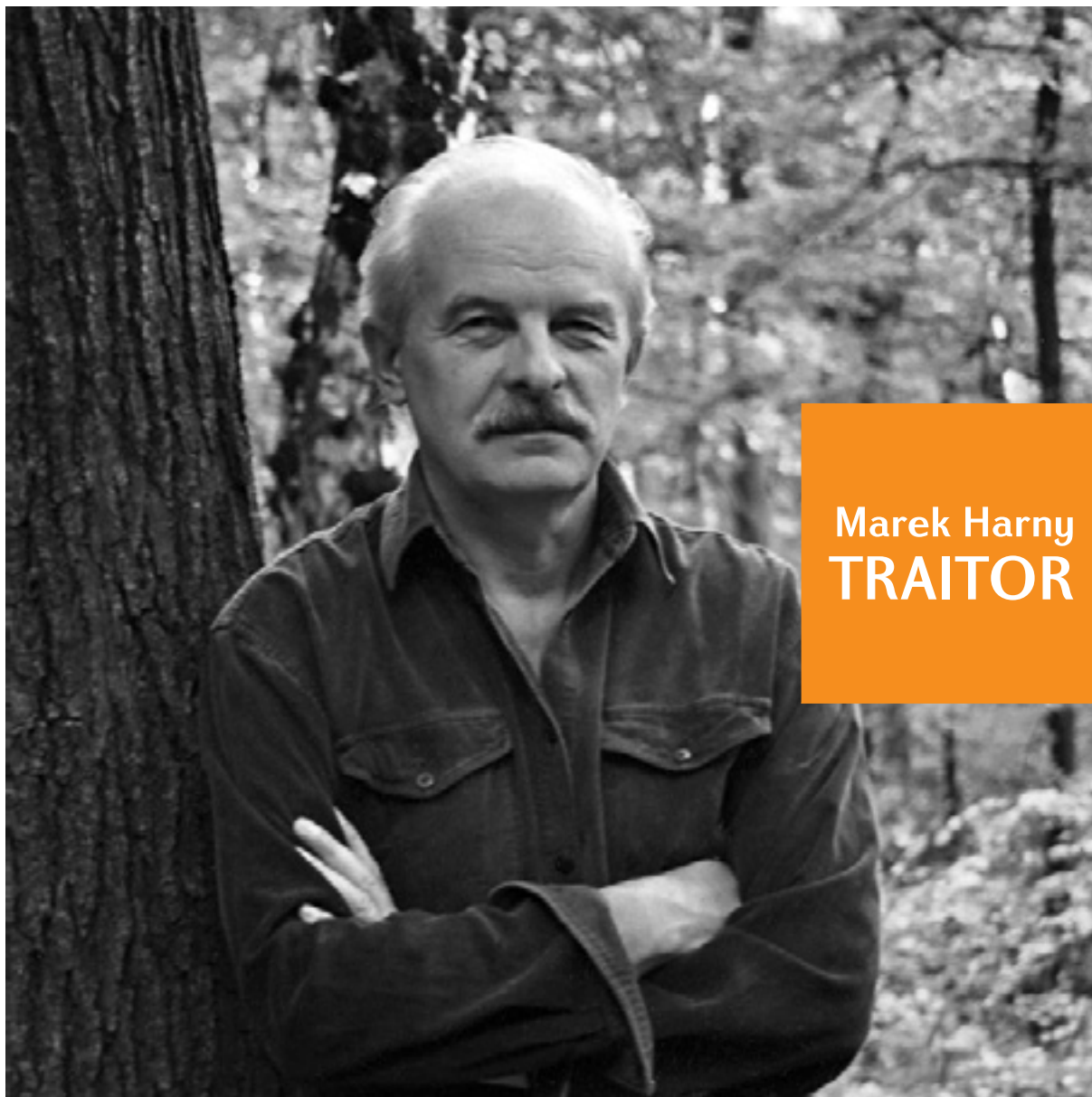
It has taken me a very, very long time. Maybe in a way it will take me the rest of my life, but it began there, in that woman’s cramped office when she told me something that a lot of people had been saying to me from the start. But she was the only one I heard. I believed I had already done everything in my power, I had won what could be won. But now I have to come to terms with what I have.

That’s how it works.

*Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones*



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Marek Harny  
**TRAITOR**

*Photo: Wanda Kosiorek*

The main theme of *Traitor* is “lustration” – the exposure of collaborators with the communist regime – within the Church, illustrated by the case of Father Konrad Halicki. The novel is set on three time scales. In numerous flashbacks Halicki’s childhood and youth are depicted, up to the moment when, already a priest, he is beaten up by the secret police. The heart of the novel is the investigation that goes on for several months, and which is conducted by the priest and a journalist whom he befriends in order to find out which of his friends and acquaintances informed on him in the 1980s. And finally there is a description of the dozen dramatic hours when Halicki has to survive the night high in the mountains during a raging snowstorm.

Harny has done a lot to make the main hero of *Traitor* an original character – for a priest, Halicki has an unusual curriculum vitae. He is the son of a writer who was highly regarded in the communist era and who was an avowed atheist and anti-clerical, so not surprisingly he was never christened as a baby. For years he is not at all interested in matters of faith. He is a rather troubled teenager and youth, quite a rebel. First he gets up to no good with his contemporaries, fails to study and has an affair with an older girl, then finally he gets a job at the Lenin Steelworks and leaves the family home. At the steelworks he experiences the turbulent strike period of the early 1980s and gets involved in opposition activities. He also meets a girl who gradually draws him into the Oasis Catholic youth movement, which will turn out to have key significance in his life.

Harny has succeeded in an interesting and convincing way to depict the psychological effects of “lustration”, describe a growing climate of mistrust and suspicion and show how a single secret police record or a single rashly cast accusation can result in people who have been close friends for years suddenly ceasing to acknowledge each other in the street. And how often those who claim to be seeking the truth about the past are actually only interested in common revenge.

*Robert Ostaszewski*

**Marek Harny** (born 1946) is a journalist and writer. *Traitor* is his sixth novel.

He did not yet fully understand the reason for this sudden summons to the Bishop's palace.

"So how was it? Was that the moment when you began to hate your father?" asked the Bishop, fiddling with a paper knife. "Because he spoke disrespectfully about our Holy Father, and just then you sensed which side you actually belonged on?"

"I don't quite follow..."

"Of course you do. You once told me about it, don't you remember?"

He did. He had said too much about himself to too many people, he had been too open, and trusted people too much. He had never got out of the habit.

"No, that's not right." He shook his head. "I never felt hatred for him. It wasn't that..."

"Then what?" asked Gawrysiak, staring into his eyes. "Shame?"

"It's a family matter. I don't see why you are exploiting some of my old confidences now, Your Excellency..."

"You do, you do... Because that was when it occurred to you that you would become a priest, or maybe I'm mistaken?"

He clenched his fists until it hurt, yet, furious that he was explaining himself and that he wasn't able to put up a tougher front, he replied:

"It wasn't like that... Not so quickly."

"But there's something in that, isn't there?" The Bishop gave him a concerned look. "You see, perhaps your problem is that at the heart of the matter you have never had a vocation? Maybe you just wanted to do it to spite your dad? He was a communist, so you decided to become a priest."

For a while he didn't know what to say in reply to such injustice. Not because of the suspicions that his vocation wasn't genuine. He had been used to that from the start, though he did not expect to hear such accusations from the mouth of the Bishop after almost twenty years of service that could not be faulted in any way.

But he was more hurt by something else. Zygmunt Haliński a communist? What nonsense. Never for a moment had he ever thought of his father like that. He may have been

a weak person, who tried to set himself up as best he could. But a communist? It's true he joined the Party. And so what? Could His Excellency have such a short memory that he had forgotten how many party members had marched behind his canopy?

"My father was never a communist," he said sharply, dropping the tone of respect due to the Bishop.

"Oh, really?" Gawrysiak's voice shook with not very carefully concealed mockery.

"What can you know about it, Your Excellency?"

"I can, I can. I'm not as young any more, but there are things I remember. For instance, there was a novel called *Comrades From the Front Line*, a book that poisoned the minds of an entire generation. Don't interrupt, I know your father disowned it, he must have wanted to wipe it out of memory entirely, I heard that ultimately he even tried to take up religious themes... Unfortunately, facts are facts."

"Your Excellency, you know perfectly well that it wasn't people like my father who tried to get on with the communists. Even the Primate of the Millennium, even..."

The Bishop raised his hand in warning.

"That's enough! Don't say a single word too many. Too many people, including priests, are already blabbing too much. They don't stop to think what that really serves. I have heard rumours that you too have started playing at a private investigation, tracking agents within the Church off your own bat..."

So that was what it was about. Now he knew. Some saintly little soul had already come running to denounce him, concerned that another dirty stain should not appear on the face of the Polish Church. Though in fact Konrad hadn't really started to do anything yet.

"I just asked for my file at the Institute of National Memory," he said. "Everyone persecuted in the communist era has that right."

"Yes, yes, it starts with your own file, and then... Curiosity has a strange way of growing."

Konrad was surprised. The Bishop evidently suspected him of wanting to follow in the footsteps of Father Abramowicz-Mirski. The renowned exposé of agents within the Church

had started from his own file. Reading the secret police documents had proved such a shock that it had changed his life, or so at least he had told the journalists. From then on he had been doggedly tracking down agent priests, like no one before him. He had stirred quite a panic among the hierarchy. Yet Konrad was convinced no one could suspect him of similar intentions. Now it seemed he was beginning to understand.

“Did the Cardinal ask you to stop me, Your Excellency?”

The Bishop sighed insincerely again.

“Do you really think the Cardinal hasn’t anything more important to worry about? It’s enough that he has to keep battling with that... you know who... with that... bearded fellow, right?”

Although he did not find the situation in the least bit amusing, Konrad almost smiled. His Excellency could not get the name Abramowicz-Mirski past his throat.

“No, Konrad,” the Bishop went on. “I asked you of my own accord, to spare the Cardinal new worries, and to spare you...”

“What? Punishment? Exile to a remote parish?”

“You see? I was right. There is anger in you. You don’t want the truth, just revenge. On whom? Just on your father, or...”

Konrad was overcome with fury, all the greater because the Bishop wasn’t entirely wrong. Yes, he did want to get even. But it wasn’t about what His Excellency thought at all – his suspicions were so unjust. A few weeks earlier Konrad had been convinced that investigating who within the Church had once informed for the secret police was none of his affair. He had something to do, he had a mission he believed in. He was definitely more needed by his God’s Trampers than some old papers piled up at the Institute of National Memory. He was drawn to the mountains with the young people, and they had already planned a trip to the Tatras for the holidays, to climb at least the five highest peaks, and if they succeeded, more even. He had rarely felt such a strong desire.

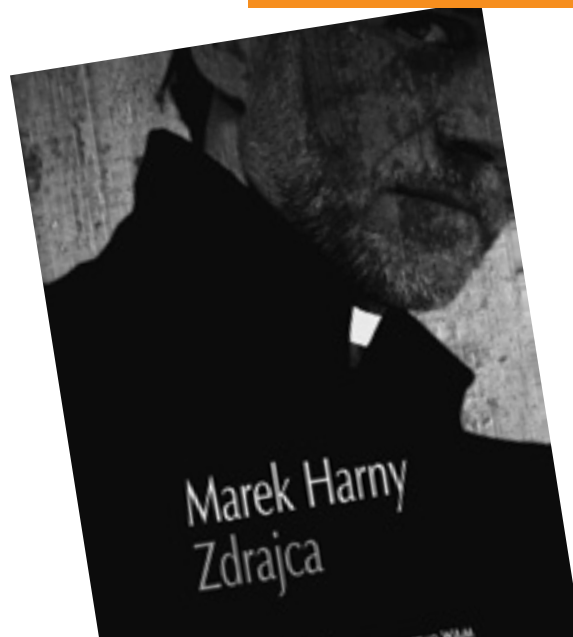
And did that Gawrysiak really think he’d prefer to fill his lungs with the dust off secret police files rather than mountain air? If it was really up to him...

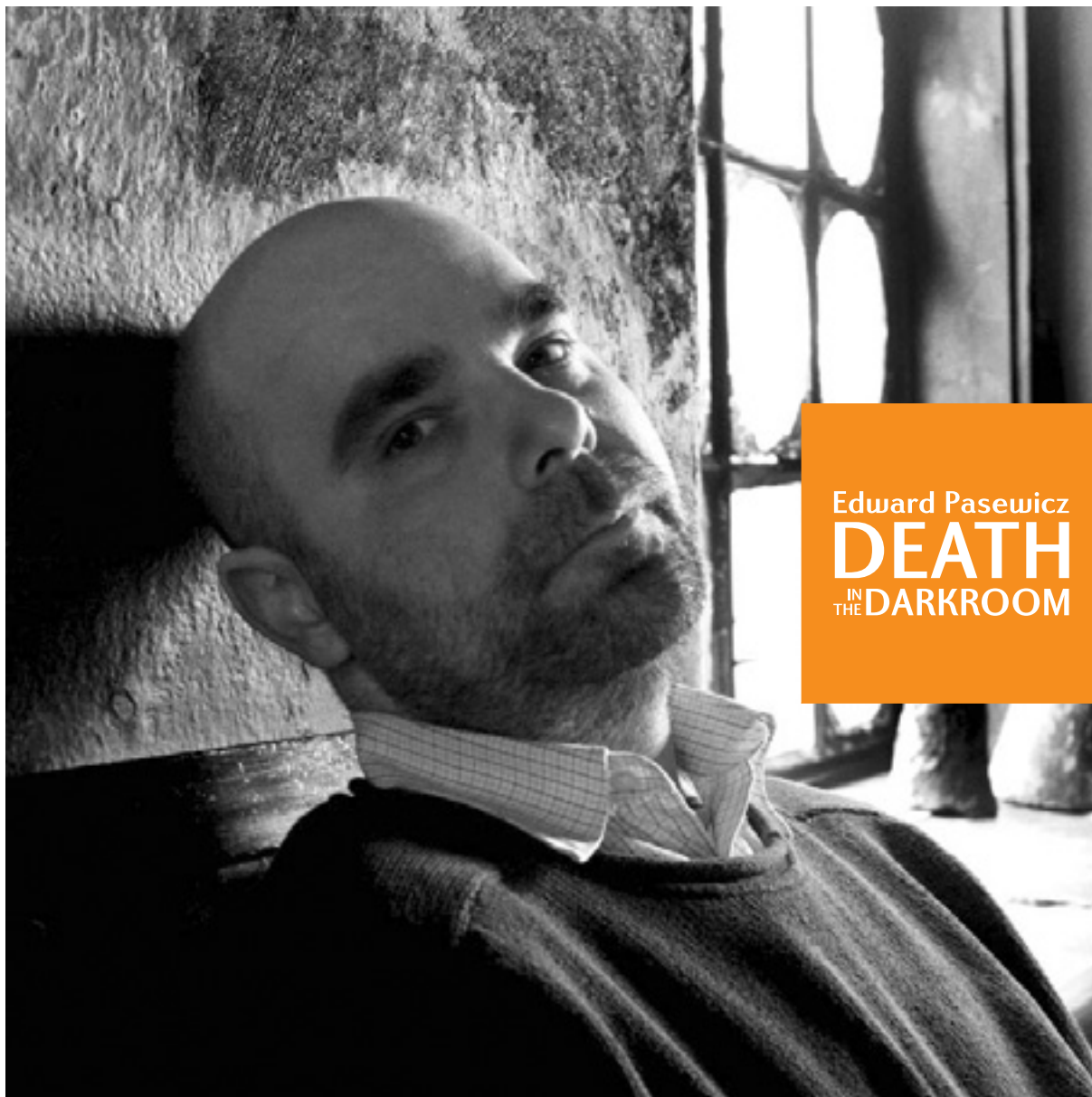
“I don’t want revenge,” he said. “I just have to defend myself, that’s all.”

“You are a priest, Konrad,” the Bishop reminded him carefully. “You should take accusations, even unfair ones, with humility. If you are innocent, the Church will clear you itself. And if you happen to have something on your conscience, sit quietly and don’t bring shame on the Church. Don’t make more noise, because there is already too much of it as it is. That’s just my friendly advice for now.”

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Edward Pasewicz  
**DEATH**  
IN  
THE DARKROOM

*Photo: Jarek Łukaszewicz*

Edward Pasewicz's *Death in the Darkroom* combines two opposing conventions. It is a detective novel deeply rooted in Polish reality, and simultaneously an anti-detective novel, in which the murder and the hunt for the culprit are mainly a pretext. The author is interested in showing how relationships between heterosexuals and homosexuals are formed. Because the author's sympathies lie with the latter, this book obviously falls in line with the "gay lit" movement. Pasewicz raises the stakes here, however, by introducing a new and essential issue: the issue of homophobia.

The private detective work carried out by the elder brother of the deceased, a young gay man killed in mysterious circumstances, does not aim at solving the mystery of his death, but at finding out who Igor really was. This is a belated attempt to understand and accept the life he chose. The gay world is therefore seen through the eyes of a man on the outside – a heterosexual man who would never have entered this confrontation if his marriage had not recently fallen apart. Having lost all faith in this "sacred" bond, Marcin Zielony has a different way of looking at homosexual romantic adventures. He also realises the extraordinary feelings that his brother and Mikołaj had for each other. He doesn't know Igor from the perspective the reader has after reading extracts from his diary, but he still manages to become aware of the person he has lost forever.

Edward Pasewicz's novel is original in that its protagonist is struggling to put together an accurate profile of the victim and uncover the socio-psychological motives for the crime. The writer also makes the culprit a rounded character: he kills less for personal reasons than because of social prejudices he cannot get rid of. As a result, he too is in some sense a victim. The fictional murder thus symbolises a real crime – a mental homicide.

*Death in the Darkroom* is Pasewicz's first work of fiction, having achieved acclaim mainly as a poet. Although we are dealing with a significant literary metaphor here, Pasewicz has certainly held on to the diction he has worked hard to develop. The effect is the creation of a brand new genre: the lyrical gay crime novel.

Marta Mizuro

**Edward Pasewicz (born 1971) writes poetry and fiction. *Death in the Darkroom* is his first novel.**

**Because** fags can be divided into factions, groups, mutual admiration clubs, or couch parties; and every fag is also internally divided.

At the office he's a model man with top-class standards, but as soon as he drops by the Grzechu Warte club for lesbian karaoke night – watch out, here comes his true nature. Mikołaj stared wistfully at Kropotkin the snake. Kropotkin was in a bad mood – the afternoon was the wrong time to pull him out and lay him on the table. That explained why Kropotkin was coiled up with irritation. Laszlo had gone to town.

"That always made me laugh," he told Kropotkin. "That was why they called us lefty fags. And it's just as well, it's just as well, Kropotkin."

The reptile gave no response.

Mikołaj looked at his glistening scales. He was healthy. It was important he was healthy, he was a good friend after all – cold-blooded, true, but a good friend nevertheless. Not easy being protein, is it? He looked through the window. Some punk kids were kicking a ball around the field.

"Kropotkin, you're not interested, are you? Not in football, nor protein, nor those kids. You have your own way of responding, damn it, it's like some kind of religion. The rules are plain and simple: eat, digest, and get away from danger. And what am I supposed to do, Kropotkin? You don't have a father, you don't have to have a bank account, and I'll tell you what else, Kropotkin, you don't drink in order to forget. You've got it good, Kropotkin. I'd join you in a flash. It's just that I'm not able to."

A patch of sun, and the snake coiled up tight in the centre.

"Snakes are no substitute for Igor. The way his 'r's came out soft. Or the way he made tomatoes with caraway. I loved it. That long, solitary hair on his neck. His hooded sweatshirt, black. His grey trousers we bought at the Old Brewery. It's a sad little rhyme, Kropotkin. I remember his hand on the brown floor we'd painted, and he said so beautifully: phthalic paint, phthalic paint. And if they taught you to speak, Kropotkin, would you say that death is black, like the gorilla on the Discovery Channel did?"

He gently stroked Kropotkin, but it didn't help, the snake was still annoyed.

"Lefty fag, well, of all things. It's just some kind of drama, and a cheap one at that. I was always afraid, you know, that if I stayed much longer with Igor we would turn into insects, too: a nice home, good jobs, garbage bags. We'd convince our mummies and daddies to accept us, and we'd live in a healthy gay family. Well, but now I can forget it. Those are just pipe-dreams."

He propped his elbows on the table, covered his face with his hands and watched Kropotkin through the gaps between his fingers. A sparkling snake in a patch of sun. And what now? He'd have to do something with this life. Buy a sofa from Ikea. Some bookshelves, nice little armchairs, mugs and cutlery. He didn't have any close friends, gays don't have close friends, they have something in-between. "Today's Sunday, so we'll just hug, Mikołaj, no gayness involved. And on Monday, why not a bit of sex, seeing as how you could use some."

But when they arranged to meet for the first time after Igor's death, when he saw the pubic hair above him, neatly trimmed into a triangle, he felt cold and awful. A stranger's body. But the body he loved was no longer around.

It was one of those fags who goes to the Klatka Club. They take care of themselves there, exchange the latest gossip, always with light irony, as if they saw right through all the conventions. But I know that's not true. They're all scared to death at the thought of what they'll be after they turn thirty. Will they be past their expiry dates? Will anyone want to touch their sagging bellies, their wrinkled faces? Is that why, when they go to the darkroom, they jam their dicks into each other's mouths and arses, as if wanting to stuff themselves full for later? And the fact is I'm the same way. I belong to that club. The gay community, sad as it may sound. Because what am I supposed to have in common with some bureaucrat from city hall who likes to slither into the darkroom and shut himself in a booth, waiting for guys to slip their pricks through a hole in the wall, so he can suck and moan. And then he goes home to his wifey and slobbers all over her, a glass of wine in one hand and kneading her

arse with the other, because it's high time someone jerked him off now.

Is it all just about sucking? No, that has to be too trivial.

And what about the straight boys. Get those fags to the gas chamber, one-two, one-two. They've got the law behind them, and us? Every time you've got to invent everything from scratch. A new guy means new rules.

He looked out of the window. The game was still going strong. The boys had torn off their shirts, their backs and torsos were glistening in the sun. He was hungry. A real physical kind of hunger. An unpleasant gnawing in his stomach.

"Well, Kropotkin, time for the terrarium."

He gently picked up the snake and put it into the glass box, right under its favourite branch. "Kropotkin, you're nice to touch, but you're not too goddamn talkative."

A gay theatre on sand? If somebody asked me to come in his mouth, I'd tell him it was unethical. Those unconsummated sperm in somebody's mouth. And all of Igor's poems and notes, gone to waste.

He was thinking about this because Igor's books were on his shelf. He once started reading one while he took a bath. He loved reading in the bathtub.

A scrap of paper scribbled in his clumsy handwriting. The beginning of a sentence about buying almonds in an underground station in Prague. And the names of the bars they visited when they were in Prague.

And nothing more. Nothing longer, although he did write. He wrote during the nights, he wrote in the daytime. Sometimes he forgot I was sitting next to him and that I needed some attention, too.

And then he thought that the best thing would be to have a room with no furniture, with a dark-brown floor, white walls and big windows, through which the light would fall on that piece of paper. Nothing more.

He took a large, juicy tomato from the basket and bit into it. He ate it unsalted, and the juice dribbled from his mouth and stained his shirt.

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Jarosław  
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**MERIDIAN 21**

Mariusz Czubaj  
 Marek Krajewski  
**SUICIDE  
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**COURLAND  
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Only a few short years ago, Polish crime fiction was almost non-existent. You could count on the fingers of one hand the number of new titles coming out each year, and new authors pounded in vain at the doors of the leading publishing houses. It seemed almost as if there was no room in the crime novel market for anyone but the indomitable Joanna Chmielewska... But suddenly, the situation changed as if at the touch of a wizard's wand – and to such an extent that with clear conscience we can say that the season of the Polish crime novel has officially arrived.

Why the change? What happened to make the selection of Polish mysteries and detective novels (as well as thrillers) on the market become increasingly richer and greater by the year? We can point to several factors. Undoubtedly, one is the effective promotional campaigns mounted by the Book Institute and “Corpse in the Closet”, the Detective Novels and Thrillers Fan Club, as part of the Festival of Crime Fiction which has had four editions up to date. The establishment of the High Calibre Award for the best detective novel /thriller of the year raised the prestige of this genre, and it was a clear signal to authors that it is worth devoting time to writing crime fiction. A new publishing house has also been founded, the Kraków-based EMG, which regularly publishes work in this genre as part of their new series The Polish Crime Collection, whose inaugural anthology of stories, entitled *Polish Stiffs* [*Trupy polskie*], came out in 2005. Even the bigger players in the publishing market are sold on the idea of crime fiction in Polish. It seems to me that to a large degree factors outside the world of literature have contributed to this renaissance of crime fiction – most importantly, the huge popularity of Polish crime serials on television, which are currently proliferating on the networks like mushrooms after rain.

As Polish crime novels increase in number, they are also becoming more diversified. In this necessarily brief outline, I will not manage to introduce all the crime authors writing today, or provide a full list of titles which have appeared on the market in recent months. Instead, I will focus on a few selected authors (who in my opinion have written either

the most interesting books, or the most original) – and also present the most characteristic sub-genres within contemporary Polish crime fiction.

Currently crime novels in the “retro” style are enjoying the greatest popularity. These are novels in which the action takes place – most often – in the period before the Second World War. This is mainly due to the success of Marek Krajewski and his cycle of novels about the adventures of Eberhard Mock. Krajewski has succeeded in painting a colourful portrait of German Breslau, and has developed a complex protagonist tormented by numerous traumas, who unravels the shady secrets of the city's underworld. Though it looked as if Krajewski would stop after completing a tetralogy, last year he published another part of the Mock cycle, *Plague in Breslau* [*Dżuma w Breslau*]. First-time author Krzysztof Maćkowski travels slightly further back in time: the action of his novel *The Badeni Report* [*Raport Badeni*] takes place in Kraków at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In this novel, just as important as the investigation led by inspector Gustaw Mahler – who is always having to explain that he isn't one of “those Mahlers” – is the author's rendering of the atmosphere of fin-de-siècle Kraków (he has announced that *The Badeni Report* is the first in a cycle of novels).

Another very popular type of crime fiction is the “urban” crime novel, in which the landscape of the city itself, usually portrayed in great detail, is one of the novel's main characters. Virtually every one of the major Polish cities has now had its portrait painted in crime fiction. Marcin Świetlicki gave us Kraków – from the particular viewpoint of the pub-party nightlife around Kraków's Market Square – in his *Twelve*, and recently published *Thirteen* (the publisher has announced that there is yet another part to come – *Eleven*), which follows the ups and downs of a “fallen detective”, a washed-up alcoholic who goes by the name of The Master. This same city is also home to the action of the newest detective novel by Gaja Grzegorzewska – entitled *A Night from Thursday to Sunday* [*Noc z czwartku na niedzielę*]. We get an interesting view of Warsaw in *Tramstop Death* [*Przystanek śmierć*] by Tomasz Konatkowski (this is the first part of a cycle whose main protagonist is Superintendent Adam

Nowak), as well as in the novels of Jarosław Klejnocki – *Poser's Point* [*Przylądek Pozerów*], or his newest book entitled *Meridian 21*. Edward Pasiewicz offers an interesting snapshot of contemporary Poznań in his novel *Death in the Darkroom* [*Śmierć w darkroomie*]; and the team of authors Mariusz Czubaj and Marek Krajewski locate the action of *Suicide Boulevard* in the Tri-City (as Gdańsk, Gdynia and Sopot are collectively known).

The “crime novel/novel of manners” or “social” crime novel is also quite well represented. In this subgenre the criminal intrigue helps to address an underlying question or questions, about the condition of Poles and Poland today. Arkadiusz Pacholski offers examples of this in his cycle *Polish Chronicles* (to date two books in this series have been published by Rebis: *No One From the Family* and *The Man with 100 Faces*), as does Marek Harny in his novels, at least in *The Loneliness of Wolves* [*Samotność wilków*]. Authors of the “social crime novel” often take for their material current events and topics of heated discussion in Poland today. Chief among these in recent times has been “lustration” – the exposure of those who collaborated with the communist secret police, or other forms of reckoning with the past of Socialist Poland, a topic which stirs great emotions. Both Harny (in *Traitor* [*Zdrajca*]) and Zygmunt Miłoszewski (in *Entanglement* [*Uwikłanie*]) have taken this up in their most recent novels.

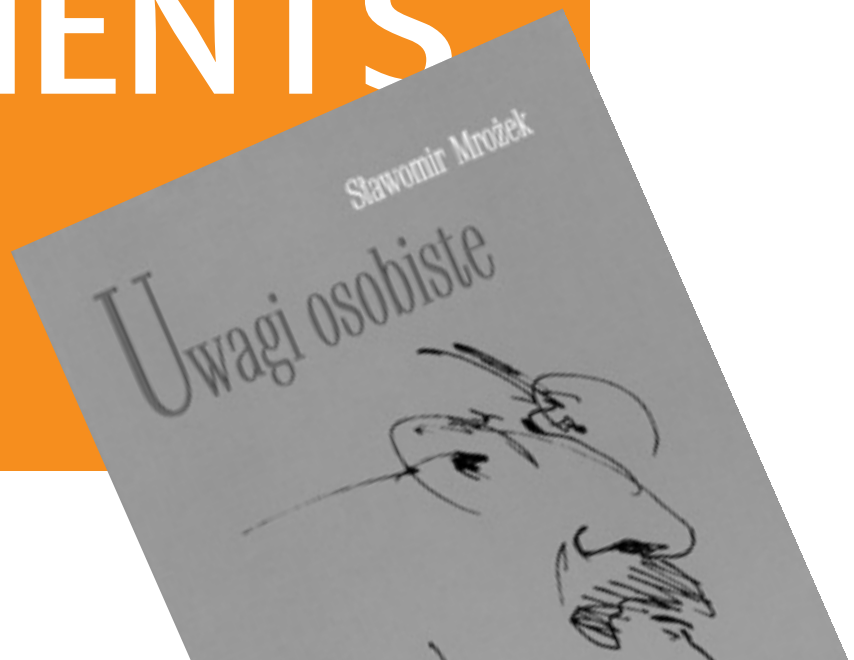
The types of crime fiction mentioned thus far definitely dominate on the Polish market. But there are also other interesting attempts to expand the existing conventions of the crime novel. I will offer two examples. Anna Końtoch manages very successfully to combine themes native to crime writing with elements of fantasy, in her cycle of stories about Domenico Jordano (for example, *The Devil on the Tower* [*Diabeł na wieży*]). Tobiasz W. Lipny writes comic mysteries for intellectuals, full of cultural references and allusions to various literary conventions, whose main hero is a young graduate student in art history (most recently – *Courland Trail*).

Of course, the types or sub-genres of crime fiction that I have mentioned here are merely a selection that I have mentioned to help readers who are not able to stay on top of

all the latest developments in crime writing to find their way around the ever growing “country” of Polish crime fiction. Most often, however, these types of prose rarely appear in a “pure” form: writers usually bring together in one book aspects or traits characteristic of several different types of crime writing. Thus, for example, in the retro detective novel there are often detailed sketches of the city, while in the urban crime novel we may find numerous social or psychological threads or subplots. But not to labour the fine distinctions of the literary critic – the main point is that the season for crime fiction is still in full swing, with dozens of interesting books for the reading public to choose from.

Robert Ostaszewski  
Translated by Karen Underhill

# Sławomir Mrożek PERSONAL COMMENTS



Amid all the brutal pushing and shoving of nouns and adjectives of as little value as the air they pollute, suddenly I read the following sentence: “Just in case, I’m saying farewell to the Public”. It comes from a very short introduction to *Personal Comments* by Sławomir Mrożek. He explains that since having a stroke on 15 May 2002 he has hardly written any so-called literature, and just in case, he is saying farewell.

Let’s get this straight and clear: “I’m saying farewell to the Public” is probably the most important sentence to have been written in Polish lately. And even though it didn’t come from the President, the Prime Minister or the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, it is more important than all their collective ramblings, for the simple reason that Sławomir Mrożek is incomparably more crucial to Polish intellectual life than all these gentlemen put together.

He has always been fanatical about fine craftsmanship and sticking to the point. In his quintessential, crystal-clear Polish he has done enough talking about the world and the human race that inhabits it for us to live on for decades to come. Many writers have stopped writing, not just because their pens have dropped with old age, or they have chosen to spend their time on something more interesting. There have also been some who discovered the metaphysical pointlessness of blackening paper and came to a standstill over a blank white sheet of it. Mrożek has not stopped wanting to write, nor has he been possessed by persecution mania. In any case, he has never been prone to any great passions, or at least he has never shown it in speech or writing. He has been more like a careful surgeon than a psychoanalyst, and more like a sober architect than an inspired sculptor. This book consists as much of the writer’s random material as – to be plain about it – his waste material. It includes a handful of solemn thoughts, but

also some short pieces of literary fun and games. But in the light of his remark about saying farewell to the public, it reads differently – like pebbles cast our way, as if to say “Remember me”. And suddenly trivial things start to take on weight.

Tadeusz Nyczek  
*Przekrój* No. 42/2007

**Sławomir Mrożek** (born 1930) writes plays, prose and satire, and is probably the most frequently performed modern Polish playwright in Poland and abroad.

**Sławomir Mrożek**  
**Personal Comments**

Noir sur Blanc  
Warszawa 2007  
125 × 172 • 152 pages  
hardcover

ISBN: 978-83-7392-245-7

Translation rights: Diogenes Verlag AG Zürich

# Julia Hartwig IT WILL RETURN



Alongside Wisława Szymborska, Julia Hartwig is the other *grande dame* of Polish poetry. In recent years she has been extremely productive, publishing new books of poetry, essays, diaries from her many journeys, and translations on an annual basis. *It Will Return* is her latest volume of poetry, carefully put together and equipped with a distinct message. So what is on her mind at an age when a person often starts taking stock of life? Firstly, she is searching for the secret of beauty, but she is perhaps even more intrigued by the secret of greatness, whether it involves poetic, artistic or musical genius. She asks all sorts of artists about it: Keats, Iwaszkiewicz, Goethe, Miłosz, Dante, Norwid, Van Gogh, Le Douanier Rousseau, Diabelli, Rimbaud, Lutosławski, Schubert, and Ravel, and as a rule their answers are simple – and involve impossible tasks, such as the demand to believe that our creations are real, which told Le Douanier Rousseau to be afraid of the tiger he had painted.

Julia Hartwig's poems are often short, just aphorisms in fact, written with great simplicity. However, as is often true of poetry by the older generation, it concerns things that are fundamental to the whole of a person's life. Thus it involves a moment of reflection, a sudden short circuit in an association of ideas; any connection with the material world can suddenly prompt a thought about infinity. We could say that simple events and experiences become more and more charged with a desire for them to have some essential meaning, as we apply this wish to the past, which is irretrievably lost and still not diagnosed, and the future, which for the individual concerned is becoming thinner and thinner. Perceiving the present within these two contexts, where we are looking for meaning and which finally overshadow and obscure whatever the present moment, replaced with a dream, may bring us, is perhaps extremely typical for Julia Hartwig's late poetry, so full of philosophical reverie.

*Jerzy Jarzębski*

**Julia Hartwig** (born 1921) is an eminent poet, essayist, translator and author of children's books.

**Julia Hartwig**  
***It Will Return***

Wydawnictwo Sic!

Warszawa 2007

135 × 205 • 56 pages

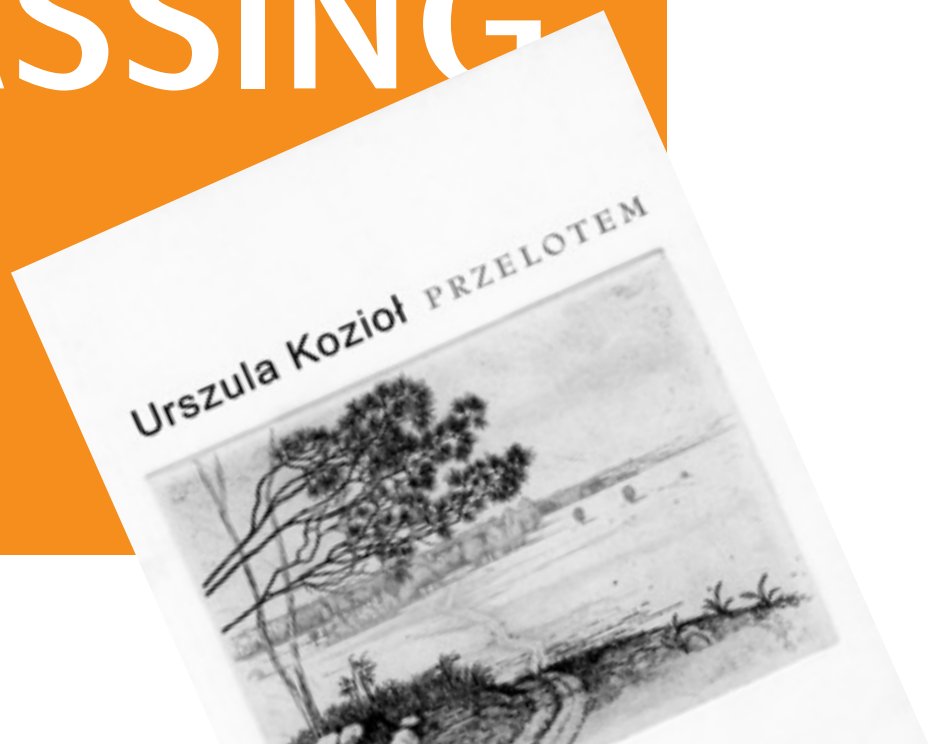
paperback

ISBN: 978-83-60457-44-3

**Translation rights:** Julia Hartwig

**Contact:** Wydawnictwo Sic!

# Urszula Koziol IN PASSING



Urszula Koziół's *In Passing* is a collection of poems about the ephemeral nature of our existence on earth, and that, in Koziół's words, something is always "erasing us from the *prae-sens*", "withdrawing us from circulation step by step", or "moving us beyond the threshold of the known". This overriding idea about the end features in at least three stylistically different tales about old age and dying to be found in this book.

Koziół tells some of these tales in a naïve folk style, and so they come close to poetry that sublimates and idealises difficult experiences. Thus in a sentimental tone Koziół often records "reports of final moments", which are half autobiographical, half fictional memories from childhood, involving partings with friends and relatives and conversations with her beloved. This stylisation into naivety and folk lyricism seems to express the attitude of the subject of the poem to the awareness that life is determined by death.

In a couple of other poems Koziół comes close to describing an old person's drama. In his mental images the world loses its familiar form, everything becomes horrible and totally unreal, because it is affected by illness. Thus the subject of the poem addresses someone snapping the thread of communication with the world: "tell me about your night/ that never fades". In this collection, observations on the strange state of being the first person I, as he or she starts to think about his or her life with increasing detachment, become individual obituaries.

But almost right at the end Koziół gives us some daring, joyful poems. In them she renounces her metaphor-rich language, replacing it with very sparing, almost haiku-style brevity. Here she writes that she is not afraid to be younger than herself and that she is not afraid to be in general. Such a confession thrown in among poems to life, and this display of a strong will to defeat adversity, testify to the consistency of a poet who in her writing relies above all on rational thoughtfulness.

Anna Kaluża

**Urszula Koziół** (born 1931) is a well-known poet, novelist, playwright and columnist. She has won a number of literary awards.

**Urszula Koziół**  
***In Passing***

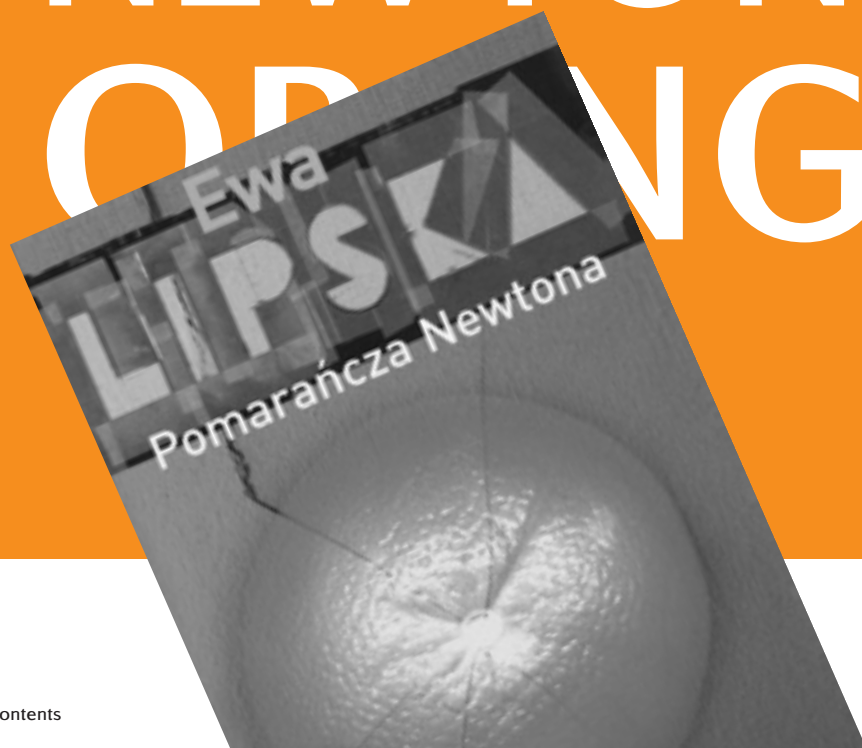
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Kraków 2007

145 × 205 • 112 pages  
paperback

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Translation rights: Wydawnictwo Literackie

# Ewa Lipska NEWTON'S ORANGE



In *Newton's Orange* Ewa Lipska itemises images of the post-industrial and post-historical world – instead of the earth's orb we have “the earth's billiard ball”, witnesses to history are the people from “the local chip shop”, and in the “fast-service theatre” we are on “MacHamlet's stage”. Presenting a shrunken, reduced, and at the same time hyperreal world is Lipska's speciality. This time she places more emphasis than usual on categories such as fate, transience and infinity, doing it with her characteristic linguistic discipline and metaphorical shorthand.

What Lipska draws attention to most in her writing is the ambiguous power of the cliché. She casts a ready-made net of language over reality, indicating that we live in a world that has always been talked about. As we sit between two sources of tension within her poetry – aiming for unique language and acceptance of a pattern – we might wonder what is the purpose of blending two orders in this way, the creative order (which is innovative, breaks language norms and draws attention to the singularity of the person speaking) and the derivative order (which picks up stereotypes and imitates various rhetorical tones, from the technical to the religious). At the limit of each of them are the results of failing to communicate and the conviction that it is impossible to say anything about one's own experience. This sense of impotence arises from the fact that our experience is expressed in code language, or stereotype language; thus it is either radically independent, or typical.

*Anna Kaluża*

**Ewa Lipska** (born 1945) is a poet. A master of the paradox, she has written more than a dozen volumes of poetry that has been translated into many languages.

**Ewa Lipska**  
**Newton's Orange**

Wydawnictwo Literackie  
Kraków 2007  
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hardcover

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Translation rights: Wydawnictwo Literackie

# Andrzej Mandalian DEPARTURE POEM



Andrzej Mandalian, born in Shanghai in 1926, is one of the oldest generation of Polish poets. He is also one of the “road people” whose lives were full of unusual adventures, because he was born, as he himself writes, “into a family of nomadic subversives, who as they travelled onwards failed to miss any major world upheaval, whether it was happening in China or in Spain.” He grew up with three different languages in succession, Armenian, Russian and Polish. So it is not surprising that his latest volume of poetry is entirely built around the theme of travelling by rail. But this sort of journey into the world outside cannot really be made to happen any more, and so rather than being travellers, the heroes of Mandalian’s poetry are the shady inhabitants of murky corners of Warsaw’s Central Station, life’s castaways watching the trains come and go as they await their final departure – towards death. Here the station is a symbolic area concentrating all worlds within itself, an area for everyday existence and chance encounters with people, or for farewells that are sometimes final, a place for dreams of renewing life through travel, and also a substitute home for the tramps and social outcasts who drift down there to the lowest depths of existence. The poet gives them respect and a sort of affection; for him they are the last companions in a life that is irrevocably passing by, and the gloomy expanse of the underground station is an earthly version of Hades. This is where we remember our dead, we look out for them and await our final encounter with them in the world beyond, this is where we keep on feeling the need for love and come to terms with our own death.

*Jerzy Jarzębski*

**Andrzej Mandalian** (born 1926) is a poet, novelist and translator.

**Andrzej Mandalian  
Departure Poem**

Wydawnictwo Sic!  
Warszawa 2007

135 × 205 • 52 pages  
paperback

ISBN: 978-83-60457-35-1

Translation rights: Wydawnictwo Sic!

# Andrzej Sosnowski

# AFTER

# THE RAINBOW



*After the Rainbow*, Andrzej Sosnowski's latest book of poetry, could just as well be entitled *The New World For Beginners*. Sosnowski takes us to the world "after the rainbow", in other words after dreams of harmony have been compromised and the myth of the shattered Commandment tablets has lost its value. Earlier he took us on a journey to the place *where the end of the rainbow doesn't touch the ground*, because that was the title of his previous book.

As we read *After the Rainbow* we are in a completely alien space: a pharmacological and technical one, disorted and "on drugs", where a rocket is sent to the sun powered by a shot of heroin. Generally the filter of the spontaneous tradition of dada means that in the post-rainbow world the subject's sensory detectors go crazy, and the Self must learn to register what is around him and inside him in a different way. The transfers of information, bodily experiences and smells are different, and the sense of reality is heightened, as if on amphetamines. In this way *After the Rainbow* could be

regarded as a science-fiction book. It features a literally cosmic landscape, the lucid metaphor of which could be a nuclear catastrophe, for

instance, and it presents the post-human Self, leaving the city, village or housing block, abandoning man's natural environment and going out into a state of weightlessness. The world of the future that lies open before us is provocative and distracting, but also amusing: we no longer know anything, and everything, from the simplest elements, has to be set up anew, without any context or cognitive foundations.

This is a superb, hypnotising book: it's very thin, but saying anything about it requires talking about lots of things at once, including theology, metaphysics, astronomy, computer games, love, betrayal and obsession. So if anyone were interested in what might result from a cross between the work of Philip K. Dick, J.G. Ballard and Ray Bradbury with speeded-up language set at its highest register, they should read *After the Rainbow* right away.

Anna Kaluža

**Andrzej Sosnowski** (born 1959) is a poet who lectures on American literature at Warsaw University.

**Andrzej Sosnowski**  
**After the Rainbow**

Biuro Literackie  
Wrocław 2007

160 × 215 • 48 pages  
paperback

ISBN: 97-883-60602-29-4

**Translation rights:** Andrzej Sosnowski  
**Contact:** Biuro Literackie

# Marcin Świetlicki

# NOT

# OBVIOUS



The reception given to the work of Marcin Świetlicki, one of the major poets of the middle generation, is rather paradoxical. Despite the fact that he often changes the masks he assumes, he is still invariably regarded above all as a poet of “black revelations”, a virtual nihilist. Another poet, Wojciech Bonowicz, has decided to change this image by putting together a selection of Świetlicki’s poems entitled *Not Obvious. 77 Religious Poems by Marcin Świetlicki*. This collection includes poems written over the past thirty years, the great majority of which have already been published in earlier volumes (only fifteen of the poems have never appeared in a book before). The title is a perfect reflection of the issues relating to Świetlicki’s religious poems. Why so? Firstly, the very concept of religious poetry is unclear, variously defined on different occasions. Secondly, the religious feeling that manifests itself in Świetlicki’s poems is very far from mainstream Polish religiosity – sometime so much so, that it really is not obvious at all. There is no alternative, as Świetlicki writes, for example: “...I have / not much of God inside me, I nurture / this shred”. In the poems Bonowicz has compiled the reader will not find any ecstatic hymns in praise of the Lord or His creation, or any accounts of intimate communication with God or the Great Mystery. It is poetry full of doubt and searching. As I see it, Świetlicki assumes that in the modern world there is a small, but real sphere that manifests the sacred in various ways, but reaching it or describing it in words is no easy or obvious task. To do so, you have to find your own, new language to express what is at heart inexpressible. Can it be done at all? A poem called “Universities” features the striking figure of the “deaf and dumb God”. Świetlicki seems to be hinting that the poet who wants to write about God is bound to become a bit of a deaf mute himself.

*Robert Ostaszewski*

**Marcin Świetlicki** (born 1961) is a poet, rock musician and author of some best-selling crime novels.

**Marcin Świetlicki**  
**Not Obvious**

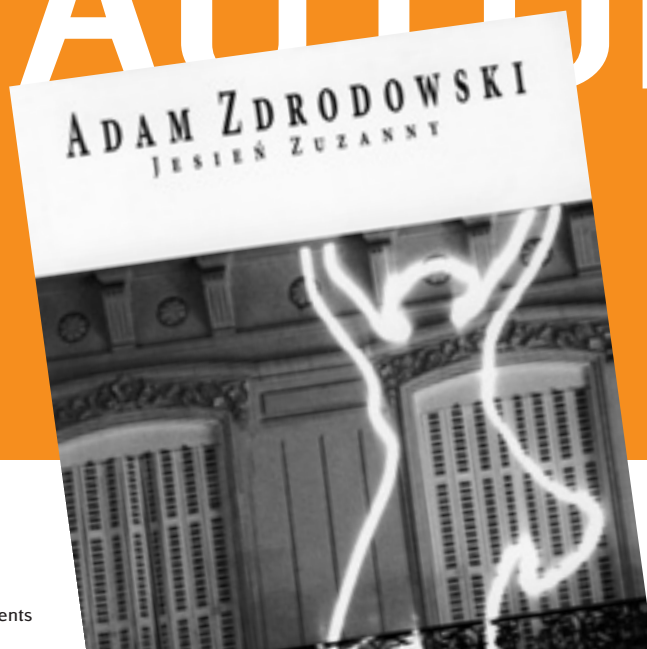
EMG Publishing house  
Kraków 2007

140 × 200 • 120 pages  
paperback

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Translation rights: EMG Publishing house

# Adam Zdrodowski ZUZANNA'S AUTUMN



In *Zuzanna's Autumn*, his second book of poetry, Adam Zdrodowski follows in the footsteps of the greatest experimenters in world literature. In poems that are always written under the pressure of a method and constructed according to rigorously observed principles, he succeeds in expressing extreme lightness, and at the same time sadness and melancholy, as if the method and the rigour made it impossible to take the world seriously. And although Zdrodowski talks mainly about how much one can get emotionally involved in life and how much one can be disappointed in the hope of that love being requited, one's disappointment with the world is entirely recompensed by language. And the aesthetic eroticism of Zdrodowski's language is convincing. As a result his heroes give passion above all to words that send them off into different worlds. So it is no surprise that the motif of travelling occupies a central place in this collection.

However, it is not travelling about real places, but rather, as in Italo Calvino, about "invisible cities" or, as in Raymond Roussel, geography as a sort of *trompe l'oeil*, an illusion or mirage. Zdrodowski is interested in constant migration, dislocation, and the way repeatable sequences of places, images and words can vary. His world is the world of the closed turn of phrase: everything is repeated, and at the same time nothing is repeated, because each time we are in the melancholy and phantasm of a different place. And these local mirages of the heroes – whether the Man Who Wasn't, or Zuzanna, or the Man in the Black Hat, Mrs Moreau or her dead husband – are full of charm in Zdrodowski's rendition.

Because *Zuzanna's Autumn* is above all Caribbean, in other words it enchants us with its diversity of language, and let us not be deceived by the fact that it is happening in Paris, New York, Tangiers, Lisbon, Ottawa or Warsaw.

Anna Kaluża

**Adam Zdrodowski** (born 1979) is a poet and translator. His translations include work by Gertrude Stein, James Schuyler and William S. Burroughs.

**Adam Zdrodowski**  
**Zuzanna's Autumn**

Biuro Literackie

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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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