

Navigations



Are we drifting or navigating?

Marzanna Bogumiła Kielar's *Navigations* is poetry of exquisite subtlety. The collection rethinks and reimagines the well-established topos of life as a voyage, evoked by its title. Immersed in philosophical and literary traditions, the poems pose numerous questions and attempt to answer them with raw honesty. Are we drifting or navigating? Can we resist the winds dispatched by the immobile mover (***) *The wind turned...*? Is the juxtaposition of passivity and endeavour unequivocal? As Kielar suggests, attentiveness, distancing, contemplation of human existence – not that different from the life of plants and animals, matter itself – are the endeavour, too. They may well prove most meaningful. The goal is to read patiently the voices of the world, transforming from code to story.

Kielar employs her characteristically intellectual language: exact and imagistic. Like her masters, old Japanese painters studying a branch of a plum tree (*May Frost*) or the 19th-century Polish painter Aleksander Gierymski recording stone pines around

Villa Borghese (*Jan Cybis and Gierymski's Painting*), the poet wants to touch with her words the essence of reality. *Navigations* converses with the poetry of Czesław Miłosz and the Polish Romantics: Adam Mickiewicz's Lausanne lyrics or Juliusz Słowacki's poems, where landscape mirrors the onlooker's emotions.

In the thirty-eight texts of her precisely composed volume, Kielar explores the borderland between I and not-I. The poems, focused on transience as part of permanence, death as part of living in the incessant cycles of dark matter, emerge from private loss and teach difficult non-trepidation (***) *I am taught by granulation...*. Kielar's writing foregrounds the relationship between the primary fear of mortal beings and their delight in the momentary. The speaker's discretion in signalling private mourning in order to render it universal is particularly moving because of the book's dedication: *For my daughter Paula*.

Anna Spólna, translated by Elżbieta Wójcik-Leese

Luminous dawns of death,
once people were dying at home.
There was time to get used to dying,
work on it a little, starting early
with something small: back ache
or strained tendon.

Bit by bit the body's untying itself from life.
Looking around as if it paused at the border
and asked, 'Which of the two countries claims this soil?'

It has time still before it's shouldered by the colossal
dead wave
of unsheltered night.

Before dawns come, without brightness,
in the silence of the desolate world, neither islands
nor shallows, and the solitude
is already complete

Exercises in Non-existence

Fog was approaching in waves, once thin, then dense
again,
till it cut visibility off, erased us too. The garden departed
for hours.

Fog closed the door to reality.

The haze is thinning now, it reveals smoothed foothills,
a small town. Stumps of perennials unearthed,
in a long row

by the fence of coated planks.
Grey-winged birds wheel, calling

over the boggy sarcophagus of this autumn day,
brimful of leaf litter, slippery stems of dahlias
and sunflowers.

They return: roads cut short, houses with smooth walls,
no cornices
or details, roofs blown off like hats.

Dreams exhumed.
And we return – we are here where we are,
in the infinite now

Not comforting this
metaphor of the woods, where everything alive
– being born –
comes out onto the clearings of days.

And returns to the woods when it dies,
for ever written down.

Generations of people, swarms of green lacewings,
a lame dog. The almond white of our finite hours
grows
and turns into desert.

Someone whom we love steps in between
petrified trunks.
into the night with no wings.
Into the scree of dark shine

Translated by Elżbieta Wójcik-Leese



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Poetry collections published

Sacra conversazione, 1992

Materia prima, 1999

Monodia [Salt Monody], 2006

Umbra, 2002

Brzeg, 2010

Materia prima. Wiersze wybrane, 2015

Foreign language translations

USA, Germany, Bulgaria

UK, France, Israel, Spain, Netherlands, Lithuania, Switzerland,
Russia, Serbia, Slovenia, Sweden, Turkey, Ukraine, Italy – in
anthologies

Selected awards

Kościelski Foundation Award (1993)

Kazimiera Iłtakowiczówna Award (1993)

Czas Kultury [Time of Culture] Magazine Prize (1993)

Akademie Schloss Solitude fellowship (1999)

– chosen by J. M. Coetzee

Polityka's Passport Award (2000)

Hubert Burda Preis (2000)

Nike Literary Award (2000) – nomination