

Other People

An epic rooted in the intuition and rhythm of hip-hop



OUTSTANDING LITERARY PERSONALITY

We can read *Other People* as an epic poem about a community's disintegration in language. We follow the destinies of jaded people, for whom consumption has become a secular religion, people who have no trouble making do without higher needs.

Kamil lives in an apartment block, has no great aspirations, and settles for pushing drugs and hitting the pipe in the morning. Any minute now his sister Sandra is going to choose a course that will lead her astray. Ivana, a nouveau-riche matron, is looking for a feeling that will set some distinctive tone for her boring, predictable daily life. Matthew, her husband, an internally shredded man of success, finds, among some exclusive narcotics, the ink he uses to print out his inner emptiness. He and his wife have enjoyed a union devoid of emotion, following the credo, "Therefore / what the bank has joined together, it won't be so easy for man to put asunder." The destinies of all these people become intertwined as their motivations are painfully exposed.

Their dreams bring about an unmitigated fiasco, their bonds fray. Masłowska has written a book about loneliness in which "no one counts on anyone, though everybody counts on something." Everyone in this world is missing the spiritual element, an internal depth. The author has an exceptional ear for language and her environment; she draws her characters quite convincingly in language, imbuing them with distinctive and refined qualities – obsessions, follies, and habits that give rise to high-flying linguistic jousting. Here is an epic rooted in the intuition and rhythm of hip-hop. Masłowska depicts a world that is taking the easy way out, gratifying itself with fast fulfillment, incapable of a moment's concentration. And this is just as much an epic about the modern city, urban life, losing touch with reality, of objectifying one's own self.

Bartosz Suwiński, translated by Benjamin Paloff

(Kamil is taking an evening tram through downtown)

He's staring at the sky
as he's sitting on the tram,
the dark surface chem-
trail-sliced, like an iPhone with a cracked
(horror-spattered) screen, but
over there flashes flashing, the embrace of urban
embers, the Not-So-Great New Worlds'
beguiling neon pass-through, Fall in Love with
Warsaw, some banner says he has to.
He's spent years trying, but for real? It's not so E-Z,
it's no done deal, as anyone can see
in the shitty jars filled with down-home fare splashing
out of minibuses onto Defilad Square—
it's out to mom's for the weekend.

(ANETA, buying a bus ticket: "To Radzyń, please."
DRIVER, brusquely: "No change!")

They're heading out of town to pay their taxes,
though they're all from Warsaw, if you're asking.
Some say they love the city, its entire groove,
though I Hate It! gets lots of clicks, too.
The clique, based on politicians and Mafiosi,
the street's apathetic apotheosis.
Even in the uterus they're mugging for the cameras,
career-craving hot lust,
no one counts on anyone, though everybody counts
on something, is counting something out,
applied mathematics always in effect / clever hand
washing hand at every step /
through the wine at little Lid's—people picking,
in the freezers dumping out the dumplings,
fries, or they get stuck with a dirt-cheap dainty
pawned off by some poor biddy.
For some it's poetry, for others it's life's prose.
For others still, a drama. Speaking of drama, he has
no scarf for his nose,
and the tram piss-reeks from someone's zipper-hose,
so his head starts to go the way a record goes...

[...]

Ashen faces, ashen faces, people with no dreams
or hopes,
days off, days off, after holidays off, a sell-off sale
on what they hope to own, they dream a screen
can kill
their germs. Holidays and afterwards,
it's a sell-off sale.

Ashen faces, ashen faces, they'll watch so many
things fail
that before the days off, pre-day sales, and after,
post-sale sales,

they're afraid of what fearsome things the News
will tell.
They dream whatever network wizards spell.

Excerpt translated by Benjamin Paloff



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Selected books

Wojna polsko-ruska pod flagą biało-czerwoną [Snow White and Russian Red], 2002 – over 120,000 copies sold;

adapted for the screen

Paw królowej, 2005

Dwoje biednych Rumunów mówiących po polsku [A Couple of Poor Polish-Speaking Romanians], 2006

Między nami dobrze jest, 2008

Kochanie, zabiłam nasze koty, 2012

Jak zostałam wiedźmą, 2014

Foreign language translations

USA, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Croatia, Sweden, Netherlands, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Ukraine, Russia

Selected awards

Polityka's Passport Award (2002)

Nike Literary Award (2006; 2003 – Readers' Choice Award; 2009 – nomination)

Gdynia Literary Prize (2018) – nomination