

Microtics

**Micro-stories about
a city inhaled like nicotine
or a narcotic**



**SENSATIONAL DEBUT BY ONE
OF THE BEST POLISH SONGWRITERS**

In *Microtics* – twenty-three micro-stories by Paweł Soltys (he uses the stage name “Pablopavo” as a vocalist and a songwriter) – the city rules. Sprawling, fragmented, cobbled together from scrappy neighborhoods and housing blocks, sliced in two by the blue ribbon of the yet-to-be-tamed river, a city far from random or anonymous, and quite concrete: Warsaw. A city inhaled like nicotine or a narcotic, from which one longs to escape, but cannot, because it has crept deep into the soul, into the very core of you, it has become part of you, and you can no longer live without it. A city full of mangled, seemingly uncomplicated people from the side streets, quiet and meaningless. Who are Professor Kruk, Aunt Stefania, Uncle Madman, Anka the Hairdresser? Who are all those who have departed or vanished? It is them and their little stories that create the city – the city of individual memory, a micro-world throbbing with life.

Space in *Microtics* is an urban reality that stretches between the 1980s, the 1990s, and the present, one story blending into the next. This is a remarkable record of the memory of “passers-by,” episodic figures who linger only for moment, but sometimes return many years later, forever tied to the city, always present within it: the local produce woman, two brothers from school days who seem plucked out of the 19th century, the mad neighbor who never leaves his apartment... Soltys has made each of them protagonists for a second, has let them move us and amuse us, casting a shade of “gentle melancholy” over them. Their apparently irrelevant existence is in fact necessary for the life of the city, in both a real and a metaphorical sense, as they inhabit the city of the author’s memory, giving the physical metropolis a dimension that steps beyond reality.

Katarzyna Wójcik, translated by Soren Gauger

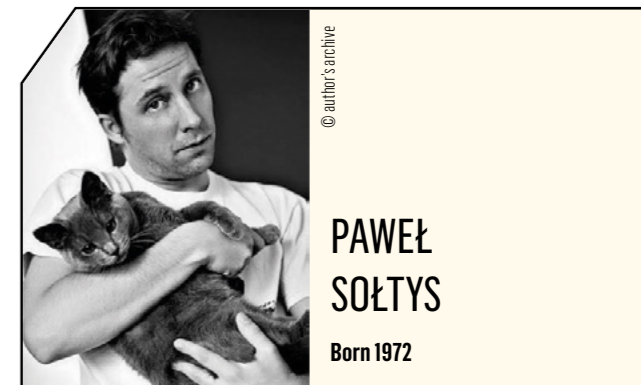
The Frying Pan

A side street in Warsaw. One of those more off to the side. One might be tempted to write “lined with villas”, but that’s not true. Houses and cottages, rather plain fences, balding lawns, and here and there some flower beds covered with tree branches that form shelters. A low wall makes me pause. It’s mossy, but without ostentation: a fine layer of green with a few holes. It makes you want to touch it: softness on concrete. Embarrassingly moving. Above are metal railings stained with rust; behind them, the thick trunk of a tree. This is where the green has flowed down from, or so it appears. The moss here is serious, spreading unchecked; you could comb it. I’ve lit a cigarette to stay a bit longer. There’s a brick house behind the tree. The December sky is grey, like the shell suits sold by the first post-Soviet traders near the stadium. There’s not much light, but enough. If I were making up this story, I’d throw in a skinny cat with a mistrustful gaze. Skinny cats always fit. But there isn’t one.

I walk on, and the houses and gardens start to rhyme. Not with perfect rhymes, but still. In front of one house there’s a plastic rubbish bin. And beside it, placed where it can be reached through the gap under the fence, a frying pan. Used but still quite good. Fairly deep, with a wooden handle; well scrubbed. In such instances, the mind often comes up with the weirdest things. I recall that a large group of Roma who arrived in Poland in the 19th century were the Kalderash. The Kelderari, meaning those who make pots, pans, cauldrons. I take a look around, and indeed, there are pots too, on the other side of the bin. Old, ordinary pots, same as my grandmother had, mass-produced, probably in the 1980s. Orange on the outside, with simple drawings of flowers. Suddenly my heart contracts. Hopefully someone has simply bought themselves new cookware. From a market vendor, in a designer shop or at the supermarket, with a suitable number of sales stickers attached. Because the way my mind works, it knows straight away: someone has died and left behind this frying pan and the pots. And the children or grandchildren are slowly clearing the house of all the junk. Nobody will buy these, that’s for sure, but someone might still find them useful. So I see this house that rhymes with the others as a house in mourning. Someone has probably lived here for sixty years, and my eyes seek out the colour black. In this light everything that’s dark is black. The branches of a

nearby bush, the ground where the grass is worn, the rubber doormat in front of the entrance. Two rooks are picking at the ground with their beaks, and I decide to call them ravens. It’s said that ravens are able to give each other names and tell simple stories.

Short story *The Frying Pan*, translated by Eliza Marciniak
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**PAWEŁ
SOŁTYS**

Born 1972

Mikrotyki [Microtics]

Publisher: Wydawnictwo Czarne, Wołowiec 1917

ISBN: 9788380495869

Translation rights: Andrew Nurnberg Associates Warsaw,
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Sales numbers

12,000 copies sold

Selected awards

Marek Nowakowski Prize for Literature, awarded by The National Library of Poland (2018)

Gdynia Literary Prize (2018)

Nike Literary Award (2018) – nomination

Foreign language translations

An excerpt in English will be published in *Best European Fiction 2019* by Dalkey Archive

Music

Under the stage name **Pablopavo** he has released 14 albums and played 1,000 concerts. He has also received Polityka’s Passport Award (2015).