Tales of the Bizarre

A new book by one of the most acclaimed and popular Polish writers

By the Man Booker International Prize 2018 Winner

Olgia Tokarczuk became the first Pole to win the international edition of the Booker Prize, which only attested to her position in Polish literature, and Opowiadania bizarne (Tales of the Bizarre), published at the same time, confirms her writing class. "Bizarre" is not a word from the Polish dictionary, as the writer Polonised the French "bizarre", meaning "strange". By principle, even if it is the surrounding world Tokarczuk speaks about, she puts some surprising elements into it, such as in Preserves, where the hero finds marinated laces in a jar. Firstly, it is a realistic story about an alcoholic and a loser who tortured his mother all his life, secondly, it is a moving study of the story about an alcoholic and a loser who tortured his mother all his life, thirdly one has to ask if it is not a postponed driver had mentioned was in fact a few guest rooms I got a shock when I found out that the "pension" my driver clung to the steering wheel, leaning in: his ample aquiline nose pointed out our direction like the bow of a ship pulling us through a murky sea towards some port. The reason I was here was that I'd signed a contract to come. I was supposed to administer a test to a group of teenagers. It was a test I had come up with myself, and for more than thirty years, it had remained the only one of its kind, enjoying considerable renown among my fellow developmental psychologists. The honorarium they had offered me was very large. When I saw it in the agreement, I was sure they had made a mistake. I was also bound, however, by the strictest secrecy. The company that was conducting the test had its headquarters in Zurich, but I hadn't recognized its name. I can't say it was only the money had convinced me. There were other reasons, too. I got a shock when I found out that the "pension" my driver had mentioned was in fact a few guest rooms in a dark ancient convent at the base of the mountains. From the short story All Saints' Mountain, translated by Jennifer Croft

Extended English sample available (office@bookinstitute.pl)

From the /t/ world's turned on its head. Just take a look at that." He placed my luggage in the car and then potted to the darkening sky: “I've heard they're poisoning us with it, airplane fumes altering our subconscious.” I nodded. The grated horizon really did trigger a sense. We reached our destination late at night, traffic jams everywhere, cars’ wheels spinning in place, all of us moving at a snail’s pace – at best – in the wet snow. Gray slush accumulated along the roadsides. In town the snowplows were in full force, but further along, in the mountains, which we began to climb, very carefully, it turned out there was no one clearing the roads. The driver who was supposed to pick me up and who was waiting with my last name written out on the lid of a cardboard shoebox, was quick to state the facts:

"I'm supposed to take you to the pension – the road up to the Institute is completely snowed under. We won't make it there."

But his dialect was so strange I could barely understand him. I also felt like I had missed something. It was May, after all, the eighth of May. “The world's turned on its head. Just take a look at that.” He placed my luggage in the car and then potted to the darkening sky: “I've heard they're poisoning us with it, airplane fumes altering our subconscious.” I nodded. The grated horizon really did trigger a sense. We reached our destination late at night, traffic jams everywhere, cars’ wheels spinning in place, all of us moving at a snail’s pace – at best – in the wet snow. Gray slush accumulated along the roadsides. In town the snowplows were in full force, but further along, in the mountains, which we began to climb, very carefully, it turned out there was no one clearing the roads. My driver clung to the steering wheel, leaning in: his ample aquiline nose pointed out our direction like the bow of a ship pulling us through a murky sea towards some port. The reason I was here was that I’d signed a contract to come. I was supposed to administer a test to a group of teenagers. It was a test I had come up with myself, and for more than thirty years, it had remained the only one of its kind, enjoying considerable renown among my fellow developmental psychologists. The honorarium they had offered me was very large. When I saw it in the agreement, I was sure they had made a mistake. I was also bound, however, by the strictest secrecy. The company that was conducting the test had its headquarters in Zurich, but I hadn't recognized its name. I can't say it was only the money that had convinced me. There were other reasons, too. I got a shock when I found out that the “pension” my driver had mentioned was in fact a few guest rooms in a dark ancient convent at the base of the mountains.