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KRYTYKA LITERACKA

LITERATURE • ART • PHILOSOPHY



ENGLISH ISSUE

Ok Bae Kim • Józef Baran • Helen Bar-Lev • Andrei Bazilevski
Constantine P. Cavafy • Lidia Chiarelli • Yoon-Ho Cho • David Day • Robert Ghiradella
Niels Hav • William Heyen • Peter Thabit Jones • Dovid Katz • Alan Kaufman
Hee Jooh Kim • Dariusz Tomasz Lebioda • Larry Lefkowitz • Harry Nudel
Yoon Soo Park • Erik La Prade • Kyung-Nyun Kim Richards
Tomasz Marek Sobieraj • Jacek Świerk • Tomas Unger • Anne Weichberger

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Front cover: Bruno Schulz, *Beasts*, from *The Book of Idolatry*, cliché-verre, 1920 - 1922

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

This particular issue of *Krytyka Literacka* is an all-English issue. It is the first time the magazine has been published completely in English and not Polish.

The editor Tomasz Marek Sobieraj, spent a long time thinking of publishing this issue and asked the poet David Day, and myself, and others if it was a good idea. I know David and I both felt it was a terrific idea and I suspect other friends and contributors also encouraged Tomasz to do it.

And now he has!

Erik La Prade

Helen Bar-Lev

AN ARTIST IN PARIS

It was the year the Berlin Wall came down. The year of the big earthquake in San Francisco, 1989. I saw both on the TV of my hostess in Paris, Mme. Boehm. French by birth, 58 years old, she had converted to Judaism, was in the process of translating the Talmud into French. Her husband of many years continued to attend church on Sunday. What was even more distinctive about this couple, besides the above, were her disproportionately wide hips, their perfect English and the Volvo they drove. The only car in Paris I saw that was not French made.

Madame Boehm was a glaring contradiction to nearly all other Frenchmen who were not only sullenly anti-Jewish, but also anti-everything-not-French; they seemed to have perfected disdain to an art. As though it were a required course in primary school, or a matter of good etiquette—the manner in which they would snap their heads up and to the left so that you could see into their nostrils. Uttering a little “huff” to further emphasize their scorn. The women would, in addition, flick their elegant scarves over the right shoulder—head to the left, scarf to the right, and off they would trot. This happened time and again when I tried to speak the French I had studied semester after semester in college, listening to the French news at home, reading French newspapers. After a short while something inside me, not waiting for my permission, refused to speak the language. My psyche was on strike.

My first visit had been the previous year, and then, like everyone else who has never been to Paris before, I was enchanted. Nothing about the city nor its people had particularly disturbed me. Probably because I was there with a French friend, so perhaps I didn't pay attention to the hostility towards foreigners, strangers.

This time I had to be there for two months, more than the usual superficial touristy sightseeing. There was to have been an exhibition of my watercolours of Jerusalem at a gallery which had been agreed upon the year before. As prearranged with the gallery owner, I had sent forty-one paintings via a friend before I arrived. When I went there the gallery was gutted and undergoing extensive renovation. I was distraught, could not sleep for nights. Mme. Boehm somehow discovered that M. Le Chat had recently announced to his wife and four children that he was gay, sold the gallery and went to live with his lover. Through mysterious connections she had the paintings returned and arranged for an exhibition on Rue de Sienne, right in the middle of the gallery area on the Rive Gauche and a much more prestigious location. She even printed up invitations without telling me, knowing that this luxury was beyond my starving-artist means. They were beautiful—the picture she had chosen was of an old gnarled olive tree I had painted inside a French Monastery in Jerusalem, where I first met Mme. Boehm two years before. “Magnifique! You have captured its soul” she had exclaimed when she saw me working on it then. And invited me to Paris.

Opening night. An artist's nightmare. My paintings were in the very back of the gallery in an area where no one would think to go. No announcement of the exhibition on the window or outside or anywhere. “Oh, no, I cannot. The artist exhibiting in front will not permit me”, exclaimed the gallery owner, M. Poisson, and refused to discuss it again. What an elegant gallery, what a tattered man! His sweater stained, torn at the elbows. Eyes a bulging brown. Thin. Was this considered artsy? Was he starving in empathy with his artists? I wondered how much Mme. Boehm had bribed him to agree to exhibit my paintings.

After the opening the Boehms invited me and a few others to dinner at a posh restaurant, portions small and digestible, as the French sensibly do. Dessert though was an enormous goblet of chocolate mousse placed in the middle of the circular table. Everyone dipped their spoons in and ate. Suddenly the waiter came and whisked the unfinished mousse away while we were in mid-scoop, the goblet not nearly empty. Would he recycle it? Paris was full of surprises. And, surprise surprise, I did sell paintings, but behind M. Poisson's back. Friends of the Boehms and others who had seen the exhibition came to me and made whispered arrangements. It paid the

cost of the gallery and invitations. Sweet revenge, M. Poisson...

During this interval I strolled Paris' streets. Walked until my feet refused to respond to my commands. I explored all the arrondissements, went through the Louvre and the Musée d'Orsay (my favourite because of the impressionist painters) many times. Sipped tea at outdoor cafés and sketched and sketched. Went to concerts in musty old churches and sketched.

The rain renders Paris even more attractive. Its streets and boulevards transform into mirrors and its inhabitants see themselves walking colourfully upside-down. The impressionists took delight in it. But a drizzle is better, because you can walk and observe and yet not get drenched. It was on a drizzly November day that I discovered the Ile St. Michel.

To my right, a friendly entrance beckoned. Long and tunnel-like, it led to a circular courtyard in which many doors were symmetrically situated. In the courtyard stood a man wearing a silver-grey suit, umbrella held high in one hand, baguette under same arm, small white coiffed poodle tucked under the other. I asked him if it was permissible that I be here. He nodded a resounding "oui". I noticed that in each room, placed haphazardly on shelves and tables, were gems of various sizes, colours and origins. The doors were unlocked, not all were staffed. As though theft was a concept yet to be invented. Then he gestured to one of the rooms where the owner was seated behind a ponderous old oak desk and stacks of paper with crystal balls and gems used as nonchalant paperweights. He jumped to his feet, extended a warm hand, "Call me Jean-Luis!" "This is my brother Charles, and Fifi". Jean-Luis and I became friends over coffee and petite fours. He had a fondness for Jews, because, he told me, his mistress was Jewish. Yes, bien sur, he was married, but this is the way it is in France. Would I like to meet her? She is interested in Israel, would like to visit one day, after she finishes high school. Jean-Luis was close to fifty, if not a tad past. I blinked, swallowed my amazement, said, of course.

Madeleine was pretty, sixteen, in a school uniform. Mama knew of the affair. Yes, of course she approved, Jean-Luis is a very nice man. No, Papa didn't know; he might not understand. We talked about Israel, her studies, about Jean-Luis and his great need for her, considering that he did not love his wife. Maybe, I suggested, if he had no lover, he would have no choice but to become closer to his wife. She considered this and agreed. Anyhow there was an interesting man only ten years her senior, whom she had recently met and who was single. Jean-Luis never did find out about my indiscretion. Charles and he visited my exhibition and offered a trade: a large amethyst and a small crystal ball for a painting to which they had taken a fancy. Accepted with gratitude.

My meanderings took me to the seediest side of Paris. A different one to her many other personalities was the neighbourhood of the Gare du Nord. Here, even in bitter cold weather, the prostitutes stood, waiting, skirts slit up to pubis, blouses exposing well-worn breasts, cigarettes dangling from crimson lips, a la Irma la Douce. But without the youth or beauty. Here also lived the poor, which included African immigrants. They seemed to be the only ones who sympathized with a newcomer to France, patiently listened, spoke slowly, gave directions. Here also were clothing stores, reminiscent of New York's Lower East Side. And I bought a pair of white corduroy pants to wear at the opening of my exhibition, a sin for which I was duly chastised by men and women alike: the ribs of the corduroy were last year's—too narrow. That year, the year of a nasty earthquake and the destruction of the Berlin Wall, the ribs were wider. How could I not have noticed?

Precisely at twelve noon Parisians become aware they are famished. "J'ai faim" they groan in unison and scurry to nearby restaurants and bistros to eat modest but adequate meals. Jean-Luis, Charles and Fifi invited me to join them for lunch one day. At a bistro across the street from their courtyard, which was smoky and quaint and the waiters were old men. Charles took my hand, read my palm. He foresaw fame, fortune, love, happiness. And then the food arrived. "Tell me more" I implored. "Impossible! Je mange!" We discussed the intricacies and intrigues of exhibiting in Paris. When I mentioned M. Le Chat and his gutted gallery, Charles paused, paled, excused himself. "Bernard Le Chat was his lover" mumbled Jean-Luis in the midst of mouthfuls.

“He jilted him at the same time he left his wife”. I giggled, sipped my wine. Charles returned but declined dessert and further fortune telling.

When I could do no more sketching, no more walking, no more discovering neighbourhoods, museums, zoos, I took a day trip out of Paris. A double-decker train took me to a town further south where I had read there was an impressive castle. The station was small and stank of urine. On the walls were painted swastikas. Many, all sizes. Where there were none, the wall was a grimy mustard colour.

I strolled through the town, quite old and charming, which, unlike Paris, was hilly. I was lost. No castle, no people on the street. No one to ask. Resigned I would see nothing that day except for a picturesque town, I sat down on a bench and took out my sketchbook. Then a woman approached, looked at my hand streaking the page with outlines of lampposts, a bridge, trees. She was sixty? Seventy? Impossible to tell with French women who always looked chic and elegant, skin smooth and shiny—from wine? cheese? No matter. Oh, what a smile she beamed at me... My resignation not to speak French faded.

“Bon jour madam”.

“Bon jour madam”.

“Qu’est que vous cherchez dans cette ville?” What are you seeking in this town?

“Je cherche le chateau”, I’m searching for the castle.

Her smile broadened. She seemed to love my accent, adjusted her smart scarf, pointed just over there, beyond that building, turn left, go downhill, just after the patisserie turn right, you can’t miss it. And by the way, where are you from?

I watched her face carefully; I was a feline, waiting, knowing what was coming, and etched a cheery expression into my face. “Israel”, I beamed. Her smile plunged as though it had been dropped from the top of the Tour Eiffel. Fell off and turned into a scowl that added a thousand wrinkles to her skin. She huffed, turned her face up to the left so that I saw the underside of her nostrils, threw her scarf angrily over her right shoulder and vanished into a cloud of righteous superiority.

I returned to Paris without seeing the chateau. The Boehms told me about a fierce storm that had raged all day in Paris, knocking down big trees, knocking out power. They were surprised that not a trace of the storm had touched the town I had visited. I fell asleep musing on storms of mother nature and storms of human nature.

The exhibition came down, I returned home to Jerusalem, a city of more contrasts than France could imagine. But a helpful city, polite to its tourists.

I never visited France again. It wasn’t a vow. I simply didn’t.

Helen Bar-Lev was born in New York in 1942. She holds a degree in Anthropology from California State University, Northridge. Since 1970’s she lives in Israel and has had 34 individual exhibitions of paintings; her poems have appeared in numerous journals in Israel, USA, UK, Poland.



ANNE WEICHBERGER

Ashes ashes we all fall down
But yours ended up in the ocean
We all walked down to the edge
Of the water
I held the little can
Which used to be my husband
Small as a paint can
Pint sized remains
We read a poem
Written by 8 year old Laurent
About loss and confusion
Then we prayed
Then I threw you back to God
The ocean swallowed up all the
Pieces
Of you
I then finally believed
You no longer existed
And turned
And walked away

8/31/2016

Falling

When you're that
 far out
Beyond the realm

You pray harder
and ask forgiveness
Before

 the fall

Not
 after.

I've come to you dressed in Chanel.
I've peeled off
The layers and layers of lies;
Fake fur hiding the brain,
Jagged hemline of my emotion,
Frayed edges, holes to be sewn
Yards and yards of crumpled, wrinkled silks.
You undressed my soul.
You undressed my body with immaculate
Tenderness and caring.
You caressed me,
Touched by the breezes of jasmine fields
And the fragrance of love.
You encouraged the journey.
A new smile lightens your eyes,
My heart unclothed,
Open,
Painfully aware,
I continue to disrobe before you.

Were we together
So I could
Write about it?
Dredging up
Old fantasies
And adding
New endings?
Rerunning
Endless obsessions,
Fitting in new people.
It is a better way
To control
The gut-wrench void
Inside.

Anne Weichberger was born in New York City. She worked as an editor at *Glamour* magazine, 1973-1976, and other fashion magazines. Currently, she is a member of the PEN International women's writing group and is writing a memoir.

Alan Kaufman

TADEUSZ BOROWSKI: THE THROAT OF MY OWN SONG

I am trying to recall when and how I first encountered the Polish writer Tadeusz Borowski's slender, astonishing volume *This Way To The Gas, Ladies and Gentleman* and want to further extend that sentence to read: "an account of his experiences in the death camp, Auschwitz-Birkenau."

In fact, the book is not a memoir at all—in actual fact prisoner Borowski was a medical orderly in Auschwitz—but a collection of anecdotal short fictions narrated by a fictional kapo, a baton-welding camp overseer named Tadeusz Borowski who, in a kind of blunt infernal shorthand, destroys the very premises of Western Civilization by simply reporting in a normal, sometimes blasé voice actual scenes so unthinkable that one feels transported—as indeed one is—to a dimension that seems not of this earth, some Hell planet of sickening Terror and Death.

Yet it all seems so normal. For Borowski never lets us forget that Auschwitz was very much of this earth. By rights, it should have been the endgame of Mankind but incredibly the World continues on its way, relatively unchanged, as though Auschwitz were just a hiccup, a bump in the road.

How powerful is Borowski's little book? When R. Crumb asked me to recommend a text on the Holocaust, of course I suggested Borowski. I knew that Crumb hadn't heard of him. Very few Americans have. Soon after reading him, Crumb, no sentimentalist, wrote to me: "I went back again just yesterday and reread the introduction by Jan Kott, and the first story which the title of the book comes from. This, to me, is the most powerful story in the book, his eye witness account of the people pouring out of the box cars with all their suitcases, bundles, trunks; the crushed infants left in the cars... the details, the singular incidents that he describes... I started to try to tell my wife Aline about this story and I just broke down sobbing, weeping..." (e-mail of 07/12/2014, Robert Crumb to Alan Kaufman)

Chancing a guess, I'll say that I first encountered *This Way To The Gas* in 1973, during my undergraduate studies at the City College of New York—once known as "The Harvard of the Proletariat"—where I was enrolled in Elie Wiesel's seminar—the first of its kind—on the Literature of the Holocaust.

I was the Bronx-born son of Marie Kaufman (née Jucht), a Paris-born Jewish Holocaust survivor whose parents had emigrated to France from Warsaw. Despite Marine Le Pen's claim that French police were not responsible for the deportation of Jews to the Velodrome D'hiver, Drancy and Auschwitz, I offer this eyewitness account by my mother of the July, 1942 arrest and deportation of French Jews of Polish origin to the Velodrome D'hiver and from which they went to Drancy and then on to Auschwitz-Birkenau, to be gassed: "When we arrived in the street the spectacle we saw... would remain in memory for years & years. Thousands of people sitting on valises with little children, babies, teenagers, men & women of all ages and of course so many policemen running left & right, some of them yelling that some tenants would not open their doors... and were forced to break in! Of course there were French people who sympathized with the Jews that had been their neighbors and were screaming at the Gendarmes that they were collaborators of the BOCHES! To leave us alone... and so many French people looking out from their windows..."

Somehow she succeeded to escape from the transport but had she made the journey she would have been one of those about whom Borowski wrote: "Between two throw-ins in a soccer game, right behind my back, three thousand people had been put to death."

Before Wiesel's class I had regarded myself as an American writer very much in the vein of Jack Kerouac and William Faulkner. Disparate as they might seem, both authors were drunk with language and so was I. Kerouac expressed the joys and kicks of the Now; Faulkner the tragedy and humor of the Past.

I was torn between both.

I struggled, with little success, to make language perform both tasks—a neat, nearly impossible trick, and though the stories I then wrote were all published they were only the works of youth, of no real merit. I had talent but no idea of how to write or what to say. I had not found my voice.

In Wiesel's class I came up against something new: a subject about which, Wiesel professed, it was impossible for one who had not experienced it first-hand to write about.

No words, he taught, could ever capture the depravities, the sheer horrors of the Holocaust. He did not, per se, discourage us from tackling the subject in our writing but prepared us for inevitable defeat. Some of us, with the callow shamelessness of youth, muttered among ourselves that he was trying to “corner the Holocaust market.”

I read whatever Holocaust accounts and histories I could lay hands on. Leon Wells *The Janowska Road* stands out in memory, as do Lucy Davidowitz's *The War Against The Jews*. I recall disliking Primo Levi's *Periodic Table* as too tepidly cerebral and dismissing Wiesel's *Night* as schmaltz, though I had enormous respect for the man himself.

On the other hand, I had no idea whatever of what might deserve to be called both authentic Holocaust witness and Art. Over all our heads hung Theodor Adorno's hamstringing declaration that after Auschwitz there can be no Art. We all suspected him to be right, and yet...

Around this time I began to publish a little magazine called *Jewish Art Quarterly*, which made quite a minor splash in its own right. Wiesel published in it as did the poet and art critic Erik La Prade and Peter Wortsman, today one of the finest translators of German literature into English, and a first rate fiction writer to boot, became my Assistant Editor. It was Peter who introduced me to the works of Bruno Schultz, whom an SS man had shot down in the streets of his native town in Poland.

My search for Schultz's books lead me to the old Gotham Book Mart where I found a second hand four volume set of Penguin Books in a handsome white case, entitled *Writers From The Other Europe*, edited by Philip Roth. As one of the four volumes was Shultz's *Street of the Crocodiles*, I immediately stole the set, book theft by broke, hungry students being regarded at the time as perfectly honorable. The four volumes were Schult'z book, Danilo Kis' *A Tomb for Boris Davidovich*, *Laughable Loves* by Milan Kundera and a strange little item with the attention-grabbing title: *This Way To The Gas, Ladies and Gentleman* by one Tadeusz Borowski, of whom I'd never heard and whom Weisel had failed to mention.

I recall arriving home and removing the book set from the shoulder bag into which I had slipped it and while pretending to examine the other three volumes my heart beat furiously at the thought of reading *This Way To The Gas...* for I sensed, just from the title alone, that here would be a book unlike any I have ever read.

To this day I can recall, relive, the astonishment I felt at the very first lines of the title story: “All of us walk around naked. The delousing is finally over, and our striped suits are back from the tanks of Cyclone B solution: an efficient killer of lice in clothing and of men in gas chambers.”

Jolted, I slammed shut the book, reclined on my bed, stretched out with Borowski spread open on my chest, a warm spring breeze beckoning through the long arms of the curtains, and I thought about how the clear blue sky that I now saw past the curtains was the very same sky that Borowski too must have seen through barbed wire. Just one paragraph awakened that awareness, made the Holocaust not only real but personal in a way that no other writer had ever succeeded to. I now knew that I was not only going to read the book thoroughly from cover to cover but would do so several times; live the book for months to come; that all my plans not only for the rest of my day but the rest of the year were about to be altered.

I was wrong. It was not just a few months or even a year. Now 65 years of age, I have been living *This Way To The Gas...* for the last 45 years. It is a book, along with Isaac Babel's *Red Cavalry*, that I will take with me to my grave.

What do I mean by "living" the book? I mean that I have been possessed by Borowski's vision. In his introduction to the reissued edition of Knut Hamsun's long out-of-print novel *Hunger*, I. B. Singer wrote of writers who succumbed to the influence of Hamsun, that he took them captive in a sense.

I became a willing captive of Borowski. *This Way to the Gas...* inhabits my sensibility by a certain dry, wry matter-of-factness about the worst of horrors, a sidelong glancing witness of History's worst excesses; horror delivered from abstraction, broken down to elementals of hunger, greed, survival, power, mindless cruelty, the enormity of oppression, the minuteness of its victims, the desperate plight and inhumanity of humanity, and a certain bemused certainty that given the right circumstances humans are capable of absolutely anything.

Borowski also made me disdain Wiesel towards whom—I am ashamed to admit, I now became somewhat insufferable, contemptuous even. For there was nothing in his famed volume *Night* to compare with such passages as this in *This Way To The Gas...*: "Once, a car brought a young woman who had refused to part from her mother. Both were forced to undress, the mother led the way. The man who was to guide the daughter stopped, struck by the perfect beauty of her body, and in his awe and admiration he scratched his head. The woman, noticing this coarse, human gesture, relaxed. Blushing, she clutched the man's arm.

"Tell me, what will they do to me?"

"Be brave," said the man, not withdrawing his arm.

"I am brave! Can't you see, I'm not even ashamed of you! Tell me!"

"Remember, be brave, come. I shall lead you. Just don't look."

He took her by the hand and led her on, his other hand covering her eyes. The sizzling and stench of the burning fat and the heat gushing out of the pit terrified her. She jerked back, but he gently bent her head forward, uncovering her back. At that moment the Oberscharführer fired, almost without aiming. The man pushed the woman into the flaming pit, and as she fell he heard her terrible, broken scream."

The stories of *This Way To The Gas...* contain queasy moments of such cruelty and eroticism, even in the face of the agonies of annihilation: "I look at her without saying a word. Here, standing before me, is a girl with enchanting blonde hair, with beautiful breasts, wearing a little cotton blouse, a girl with a wise mature look in her eyes, Here she stands, gazing straight into my face, waiting. And over there is the gas chamber: communal death, disgusting and ugly." Or: "A few women were usually hanging around, dressed in pretty little pullovers and wearing sheer stockings. Any one of them could be had for a piece of bright silk or a shiny trinket. Since time began, never has there been such an easy market for female flesh." Or, in his account of the camp brothel, known as "The Puff" and in which male customers are termed "Romeos": "It is not unusual for a Juliet to have a steady admirer, and along with promises of undying love and a blissful life together after the war, along with reproaches and bickering, one is apt to hear exchanges of a more basic nature, concerning such particulars as soap, perfume, silk panties, or cigarettes." Such luxuries are obtained, of course, from the transports of the doomed whose possessions are ripped viciously from their hands as they are whipped and beaten into the trucks that will bear them to the gas. "The Juliets stroll along the narrow hallway, their fluffy robes carelessly wrapped around them."

Lust even lurks at the very gates to the gas: "And so the whole place swarmed with SS, and Schillinger, seeing what was going on, drew his revolver. But everything would have gone smoothly except that Schillinger had taken a fancy to a certain body—and, indeed, she had a classic figure. That's what he had come to see the chief about, I suppose. So he walked up to the woman and took her by the hand. But the naked woman bent down suddenly, scooped up a handful of gravel and threw it in his face, and when Schillinger cried out for pain and dropped his revolver, the woman snatched it up and fired several shots into his abdomen."

For years I have read and reread *This Way To The Gas...*, and when writing my own books have carried it around with me, as well as Babel's *Red Cavalry* to consult now and then—a page here, a paragraph there, touching base...

I now know that what compels me about Borowski is his ability to portray the struggle for normalcy under inescapable and completely abnormal conditions. The Tadeusz of the book is trapped. Eventually, he survives and yet his entrapment continues. He carries his imprisonment with him, into the post-war world.

Similarly, my three full-length prose works—two memoirs and a novel—portray the effort at normalcy made in the face of extreme and inescapable circumstances (though, of course, nothing to compare with a death camp!).

In my memoir *Jew Boy*, I depict my efforts to grow up as a normal American boy in the shadow of the Holocaust; in the novel *Matches*, based on my experiences as a combat infantryman in the Israeli army, I portray the struggle of average men caught up in the madness of war; in *Drunken Angel*, also a memoir, I chronicle my descent into the depths of incurable alcoholism and my eventual Recovery, a day at a time, with death perched on my shoulder.

In a very real sense, Borowski's sensibility guided my hand in the composition of these texts.

After his survival of Auschwitz, the young Borowski wrote and published some of the stories of *This Way To The Gas...*, with the result that overnight he was hailed as the new rising star of Polish literature, his stories so compellingly authentic that they were used as testimony in the Nuremberg trials, the only known instance of literary fiction serving as evidence in a war crimes trial. He also became intensively involved in the Polish Communist Party, rose in the ranks, became a powerful propagandist.

But the impact on his literary gift was corrosive. “I have stepped on the throat of my own song” he mused. When a close friend was arrested by Polish secret police in the very same flat in which Borowski and his girlfriend had been arrested during the war by the Gestapo, Borowski, three days before the birth of his child, placed his head in the oven of his quite normal home and gassed himself to death.

[Alan Kaufman's memoir *Jew Boy* will be reissued this Fall by Cornell University Press. A show of his archived papers and art is now on display in the Special Collections Library of the University of Delaware].

—
Alan Kaufman is an American writer, memoirist, poet and editor of Outlaw anthologies. His work has appeared in *Salon*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Partisan Review*, *Tel Aviv Review*, *San Francisco Examiner*, and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. He is the author of the memoirs *Jew Boy* and *Drunken Angel*, the novel *Matches* and volume of poetry *Who Are We?*



JÓZEF BARAN**The Hat**

at the beginning there was a hat
a circus hat
from which
to his own amazement
God pulled out himself

then he kept sticking his hand
in the hat
and for six days in a row
pulled out Heaven and Earth
as well as the five proofs
of his own existence

planets like ping-pong balls
leaped out of
the magic hat
and God
with his divine fingers
made each one spin

the planets multiplied
with terrifying speed
while he
hustled as if in boiling water
in the middle of the spinning planetarium
careful not to let even one drop off his finger

meanwhile in the audience
Adam and Eve had already been sitting
and to tell the truth
they couldn't believe
their own eyes

Woman With Cancer

She joins us at the table
And she burns from head to toe
But we sit next to her as if nothing had happened
With mouths full of unnecessary words

Someone pulls back a tiny bit
To stay clear of the fire
Someone else puts on ice shell
Pretending not to know
She talks and talks an talks

As if she wanted to talk down her ill fortune
And we don't know if we should laugh with her
Or cry over her

We don't know how to help her
When she is all in a fiery hoop
Trying in vain to escape
To another person

The earth burns under her feet
The sky burns over her head
The words burn in her mouth
Her whole world is on fire

She'd like to jump out of her burning body
But she doesn't know how

Poet's Prayer

after many years I see
that time is
an evil sorcerer
who changes beautiful girls
into old women with walking sticks
stars into grains of sand
and butterflies into hideous monsters

it curses with transience
everything it encounters
on its way

grant me God for the longest time
the power of good wizard
let me at least for a moment
break the spell
from the world
restore enchantment
to life
and change a toad
into a beautiful princess again

I am foremost a poet
of shy people
those with the aspen leaf of smile
stuck to their lips and quaking
at every stronger
flurry of words
those poor relatives of the Danish

prince Hamlet
who have poor diction
and even if with each step they say
to be or not to be
they do it so quietly and hesitantly
that no Shakespeare
has made a tragedy of it

ho ho but who can tell
what lies dormant in those small ones
and never opens its mouth
to the world

what enchanted sleeping knights
wait inside them for the sound of the trumpet
to advance with the flutter of eagle wings
and free the gates of lips
occupied since birth
by enemy guards

Translation by Ewa Hryniewicz-Yarbrough

—
Józef Baran was born in 1947 in Borzęcin, Poland; he earned an MA in Polish Literature from Pedagogical University in Krakow. His poetry appears in most Polish literary magazines and abroad—translated into several languages, i.a. English, German, Spanish, Swedish, Russian, Czech. He is the author of numerous poetry books, diaries, reviews and articles on poetry.



Tomasz Marek Sobieraj, *Street Games*, from *Colossal Mug of the City*, B&W negative film, 1998 – 2002

ANDREI BAZILEVSKI

HAPPY NEW END
(Verse on draught)

watchful waitin'

manyone
noself
what was it
that was there
unbeing?

down down
round round
underover
superout
upside down
inside out

soon soon soon

up and up
and up
i deepen

up and away

imagic inout

no cry in my soul
i'm not a beggar

let's fly over all that stuff
closer to the heavily edge

“out of the blue”

never too late
on the road again
happy xmas & war is over

yesterday has gone
no words
no time to waste

here comes tomorrow
it's just around a corner

may day
may day
subterranean breakaway

it goes hence

let me be here
wherever you are
but at the end of the ride
i hope not only
to see a star
but also to be a bride

Translation by the author

—
Andrei Bazilevski was born in 1957 in Kaluga, Russia. He is a Professor of Literature at Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow, translator of Polish and Serbian literature, poet, essayist and founder of “Wahazar” publishing house. Author of numerous poetry books, monographs, editor of anthologies.



Tomasz Marek Sobieraj, *Fortune*, from *Colossal Mug of the City*, B&W negative film, 1998 – 2002

Dovid Katz

WEST IS WEST, EAST IS EAST: THE SPECIFIC EAST EUROPEAN INCARNATION OF ANTISEMITISM

Antisemitism in Western Europe is nowadays overwhelmingly a product of the (far) left. Its practitioners are socially, educationally and demographically diverse. It is focused above all on Middle Eastern affairs and the Israeli-Palestinian conundrum, distinguishing—or not distinguishing, as the case may be—between Jews and Israeli policies, and further, between Jews on a multitude of scales of presumed “Zionicity” to determine which individuals and groups are to be designated as villains. Both before and after the insertion of West European jihadism and Islamic radicalism into the mix, there have been tragic acts of violence. There have also been curious cases of staunch anti-Zionists going to extraordinary lengths to prove they are not antisemites, including the young taxi driver in the UK who had the ancient Hebrew-letter version of his name tattooed on his wrist to make the point with panache (and permanence).

By contrast, antisemitism in the “nationalist” parts of Eastern Europe, comprising the new accession EU/NATO states as well as (western) Ukraine, has by and large thus far been thankfully nonviolent. It is overwhelmingly a product of the nationalist (far) right. Its practitioners tend to be suave, educated elites, and often include the establishments of the country’s politics, academia, and media. The vast majority of these folks are generally positive toward Israel, have no interest in Palestinian or other Arab causes, and have little or nothing against Jews abroad. I have heard hundreds of versions of the following during my seventeen years being based in Vilnius, the beautiful Lithuanian capital (where, I hastened to add, I have been treated splendidly by everyday folks): “Look Dovid, we love you, we love American, British and Israeli Jews! It’s just those local Jews here, they are awful, they think that our national heroes helped murder their families during the war and they think that the Russians saved their own families!”

So there we have it, in the nutshell in which ordinary people speak. To translate for our field of inquiry, East European antisemitism is a (far) right movement laser-focused on World War II and the Holocaust and local Jews’ (historically accurate) collective memory of the events. Their antisemitism is directed at fellow citizens who do not share their (falsified) historical narrative for the war years. There is more than a little irony in the circumstance that many younger Jews internationally think very little about the Holocaust while it haunts right-wing antisemites in Eastern Europe determined to “fix” the history. They want to fix that history because like many ultra-nationalists, they covet a history bereft of stains and errors (though such countries don’t exist). Deep in the Freudian core of today’s eastern antisemitism there lurks a serious case of Holocaust Envy, a phenomenon that merits study. They continue to suffer from aryanist models of imagined nationwide racial, ethnic and linguistic purity (with its concomitant disdain for local Jews, leftists, Russians, Roma, Gays, and the other Others targeted by the Nazis). Their ranks overflow with elites, historians, sundry other academics, and PR specialists. They have hit on a big-time project.

That project is the rewriting of history to in effect invert the Holocaust by an array of sleight-of-hand tricks and ruses that amount not to some conspiracy, but to a public program of revisionism supported by millions from governments. The components include the redefining (in fact downgrading via conceptual inflation) of “genocide” to include such Soviet crimes as deportation, wrongful imprisonment and deprivation of rights; the glorification of local Holocaust collaborators as “anti-Soviet heroes” (after all, virtually all the East European Holocaust perpetrators were reliably “anti-Soviet”); the vilification of Jewish ghetto inmates who fled to join the anti-Nazi (Soviet-sponsored) partisans in the forests, and are rightfully regarded in the West as heroes of the free world. These are components of the “Double Genocide” paradigm codified in 2008 by the Prague Declaration. (I was proud, in 2012, to team up with Prof. Danny Ben-Moshe to draft an opposing European Parliament declaration, the Seventy Years Declaration, that was presented to the European Parliament’s president in the spring of 2012).

The Double Genocide notion of “two equal genocides” (or “two equal Holocausts”) proposes “equality” of Nazi and Soviet crimes for European, Western, foreign Jewish and international consumption. Take for example the Prague Declaration’s (rather Orwellian) demand that Communist crimes must “inform all European minds to the same extent as the Nazi regime’s crimes did.” It is of course abject nonsense to say that the (Soviet) army that liberated Auschwitz is inherently equal to the camp’s murderers. But even that distortion, the “equality” paradigm sold to the West in an array of declarations, differs markedly from the narrative taught and promoted locally within Eastern Europe. Time and again, state sponsored museum exhibits, discourse and education in the region go rather further toward actual Holocaust Inversion: the notion that the actual genocide that occurred was that by the Soviets (supposedly “helped by their Jewish lackeys”) while the Hitlerist/local nationalist response entailed unfortunate civilian deaths but was really a bold rebellion against Soviet occupation and misrule. Since the Maidan revolution in Ukraine, the inversion model has been much emboldened there too, right down to artful photoshopping of Holocaust-era photos in major museums.

Holocaust inversion, the extreme form of East European Holocaust obfuscation, has unabashedly turned perpetrators into heroes and heroes into perpetrators, taking advantage of Western naivete and indifference, and the current geopolitical situation in which anything “anti-Russian” brings joy to much of the American foreign policy establishment, even when it entails rubbishing the Anglo-American-Soviet Alliance that brought down Hitlerism in Europe. In Latvia and Estonia, the local Waffen SS forces continue to be venerated, and both countries have passed laws criminalizing any who would dare disagree. In Hungary, pro-Nazi leaders who collaborated in the deportation of their fellow citizens to death camps are being idolized. In Lithuania, there are shrines, street names and exhibits extolling actual Holocaust perpetrators (they were after all, as noted, “anti-Soviet” activists). In central Vilnius’s Museum of Genocide Victims, there is a hall devoted to the “heroism” of the Lithuanian Activist Front (LAF), the white-armed nationalist goons who butchered thousands of Jews before the Germans even got there. The museum’s panels explain that the LAF rebelled against the Soviet army and drove them out, an utter nonsense (the Soviets were, of course, fleeing from the German invasion, the largest invasion in human history, not from the local Jew-killers). In 2012, the American Embassy in Vilnius helped cover for the reburial with full honors of the Lithuania’s 1941 Nazi puppet prime minister, who helped send his city’s Jews to their death. In Ukraine, the president, a darling of the West, has glorified Holocaust collaborators [Petro Poroshenko].

At the same time, the miniscule percentage of Jews who survived by escaping ghettos to join up and fight against Hitler with the Soviet partisans (the only force seriously fighting Hitler in this part of the world) are widely presented in a negative light within Eastern Europe, in a frankly ridiculous and offensive effort to “balance out” the local Nazi perpetrators. Only in Lithuania did this tendency reach the stage of prosecutors launching “pre-trial investigations,” without a shred of evidence, against veterans of the Soviet anti-Nazi partisans, naturally targeting only Jewish veterans, as pointed out in a remarkably courageous protest issued in 2008 by the Jewish Community of Lithuania.

We are today faced with a situation where classic Holocaust Denial has faded from mainstream discourse, while the East European “Double Genocide” movement, increasingly promoting a bizarre version of Holocaust inversion, turning perpetrators into victims and victims into perpetrators, is gaining steam without much opposition.

But why is there not much opposition or even open discussion of these issues?

Because of three major forces being effectively brought into play.

First is the American State Department, and particularly its neocon faction, supporting the revisionism because it seems vital to the Eastern European allies who “stand up to Putin,” and who argue that a revised version of World War II is a potent tool against future Russian threats. Second is the Israeli foreign ministry, which needs East European votes in the EU, UN, and other international bodies.

Finally there is a long stream of Western professors and Jewish organization chiefs who are showered with medals, honors and junkets to come and join the party, which often hides behind

legitimate Jewish studies, Holocaust memorials, Yiddish courses and other wholesome endeavors that are used as cover for the Holocaust revisionism that is central to East European antisemitism (even neo-Nazi marches feature on their lead banners images of Holocaust perpetrators rather than “straight” antisemitic slogans). Sometimes, the glories of Eastern adulation can reach even a top Yale history professor [Timothy Snyder].

These three “covers” have been artfully mobilized to prevent adequate coverage by the usually robust Western media, which has been less than robust on these issues.

Students and scholars of antisemitism need also to keep a vigilant eye on the east.

—
Dovid Katz was born in Brooklyn, NYC, in 1956; son of poet Menke Katz. He is a Vilnius-based Yiddish scholar, author, educator, and cultural historian of Lithuanian Jewry. He holds PhD in Comparative Philology from University of London. In recent years, he has been active as a human rights activist, and has been best known for combatting the so-called “Double Genocide” revision of Holocaust history. He is editor of the website *DefendingHistory.com*.



Tomasz Marek Sobieraj, *Jews to Gas, Zyklon B*, from *Colossal Mug of the City*, B&W negative film, 1998 - 2002

ERIK LA PRADE**Traveling in Disturbed Areas**

There is no language that will protect you
As you cross from border to border.
Someone will always hear the slightest
Accent in your speech and recognize
You are not a native speaker, and
Want to know where you are from.
Having an alternate schedule for the days
You stay in one location will not help much
As people notice the style of your
Clothes, the times you leave or return
To the place you're staying in.
Even good travel guides don't help much,
Since when you visit a landmark building or
Temple that has been destroyed,
What you read will be less accurate than
What is left for you to look at.
You might take away what you encounter
In cell phone images or videos,
But those memories are less accurate
Than your fear of not getting home.

Summer Notebook Poem

August is colder than usual
And makes me wonder if
The season isn't wrong,
Or my senses are confused
By the displaced weather.
Will a September snowstorm
Portend a hot winter
Or hurricanes next July?
Since weather reports are
Apparently problematic,
I should buy a divining rod,
At least I'd know how to
Get dressed.
But, I'm becoming certain
I won't have olives
To put in my martini to celebrate
The New Year if this continues.

Late Breakfast at the Bonbonniere

(To Harry Nudel)

A trendy, greasy spoon in the West Village
Crowded with old time regulars and hipsters.
Two Mexicans work the counter;
Two work the grill.
I order Chicken soup and toast.
The man next to me drinks coffee and reads from
A book with a hole in the middle of the page
And no front cover. I ask what happened to his
Book and he tells me it was in his backpack
And stopped a sniper's bullet from killing him
When he fled Sarajevo. He had to leave two thousand
Philosophy book behind. He works as a dog walker.
I tell him Picasso and Velazquez had lots of dogs
And he says so did Descartes.

Crisis Lyric

A friend is dead,
And you have come to speak
About the truth of the moment
And long ago stories.
Once truth was only a word for you
Since you were busy paying attention
To the sound of your own poetry.
Now, you talk about tragedy,
A Latin word from the Greek
Meaning, "goat songs,"
While I imagine Molly Bloom's
Soft tits in my mouth,
Her moaning in the New York night.

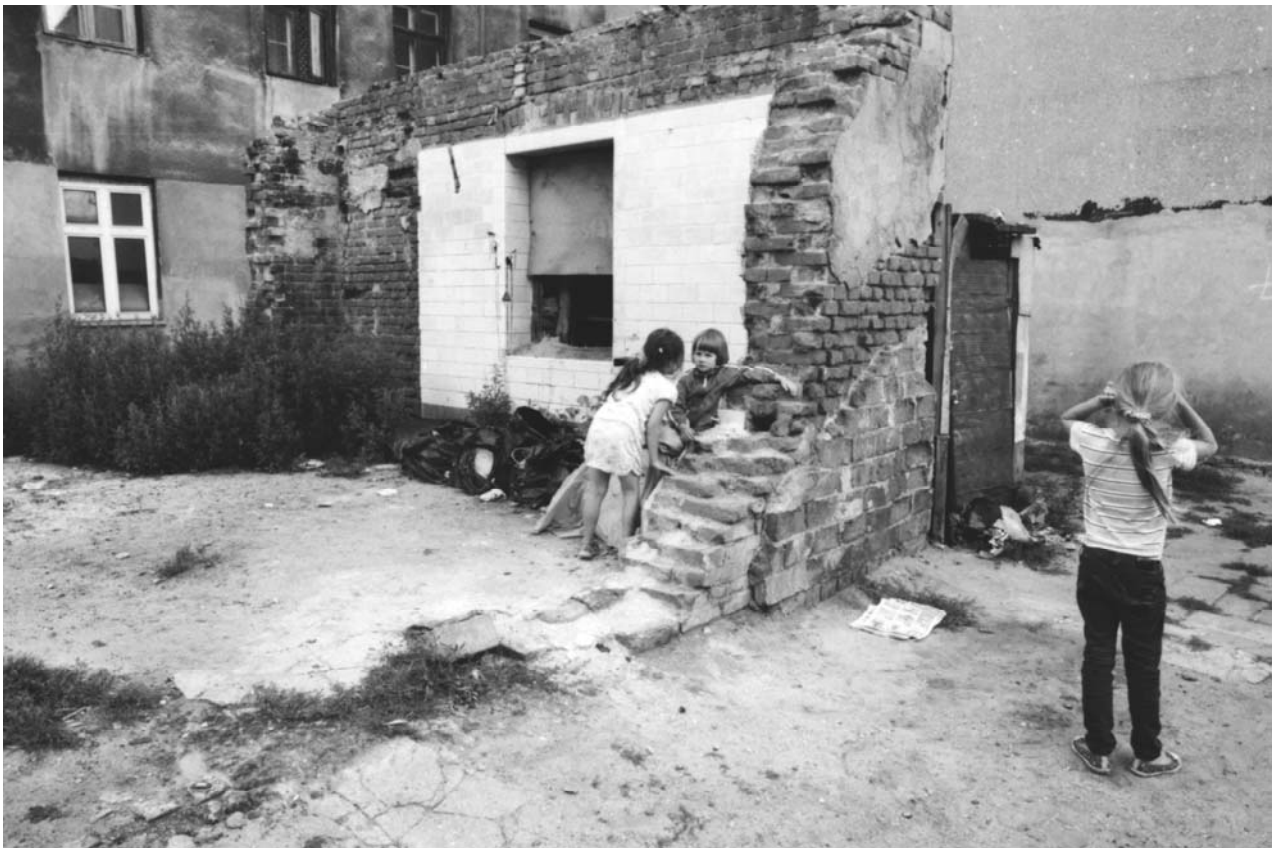
Late March

The first day of spring brings
Snow blossoms to the tree branches
But they will melt soon.
Meanwhile, I can't sleep;
My body's clock is adjusting
To the longer days and shorter nights.
Watching the morning begin
From my window is one
Of the nicest, useless things I can do.

The Physical World

Paper whites bloom on
An old horse trail
In Central Park, among
Dirty spots of snow
In the semi-hard ground.
Small pools of dirty water
Reflect the trees overhead.
The air is quiet.
I saw the same trees
In 1973, when I walked on
This trail listening to the sounds of geese
In the reservoir breaking
The water's surface.

Erik La Prade is a New York-based poet, non-fiction writer, poetry editor and photographer. He received MA in English Literature from CCNY. Author of five poetry books and a collection of interviews with artists *Breaking Through: Richard Bellamy and The Green Gallery, 1960–1965*. He has published articles, interviews, poems and photographs in numerous literary and art magazines in the USA.



Tomasz Marek Sobieraj, from *Behind the Walls of the Promised Land*,
B&W negative film, 2012

HARRY NUDEL**Giotto in Padua**

it was a job
that filled a
few years

the userer's
chapel

a rich fuck
with money
up his ass

& an eternity
not to spend it

blue eye
blue sky
blue sea

5 ten 15 twenty
per cent of
heaven

the babe
the boy
the man
the marked CHRIST

blue brushes
wiped clean
of blue air

another \$\$\$ maker
for the state

bringing in X
an hour

for those who live
proxiamate blue

at least it wasn't
the EURO of the Jew

Nov.

each nite
i lose
a noun in dream

moon of fingernail
split of tooth

like draining
a bucket of sand
into another
bucket of sand

goin' somewhers
forgets wheres i've been

grain by grain

Grand St. Lower East Side

The Chassidism
dark shadows on dark night

see the brightness
at the word's edge

the physical body
melts in the air

the world rings
in their ear

praise the dark
await the light

April—Hotwire Snapshot

Lori leans
carriage on one
book in other hand

midst swirling
april apple blossoms

next to the
Verizon store

O Ipad
O Tablet

Stop the
Floating World

The Gift
(For John Farris)

You can bullet bury it beneath
the flowering tree in the back

You can smoke enuf weed
so Ave C becomes Xanadu

You can run up a tab so large
you can smell A'S ASS in Latin

You can run away on a hobbled foot
but fate will find you, runner of dreams

You can declension the noun
& take her dancing on the rivers of the moon

It did you no good John
The Gift stayed put

A stone in yr heart
A flower in yr fist

The muse will exact it's due
blood, mud, & sky ever blue

—

Harry Nudel (Chaim Nadel) was born in 1946 in Gliwice, Poland (before II WW Gleiwitz, Germany) Since 1949 in the USA. Education: Salanter Yeshiva, Bronx High School of Science, CCNY (BA), SUNY Buffalo (PhD in English Literature). Soho bookseller, bibliophile, poet. Self-published circa 30 poetry books. Wrote a poem yesterday so continues to write.



William Heyen

AUDIENCE

The Wilkes U. low-residency MFA, summer week, 2016. I was on line in the cafeteria the morning after my reading. My reading had consisted of the final four poems in my upcoming book, *The Candle: Poems of Our 20th Century Holocausts*—"Insanity," "Angel," "Life," & then the poem I'd chosen to end my book with, "Art." What I wanted to do was to read "Art," talk about how I'd made my decision not to end *The Candle* with any poem of absolute colorlessness, absolute deadness, such as "Insanity":

Supposedly, this happened: a mother killed & roasted her baby
so that she,

by rubbing its fat into her husband's body, could soothe
his rheumatism.

Supposedly, this happened in Germany in the seventeenth century.
It could be

she loved him that fiercely, & there might be more babies, but just
one husband.

Such a marriage of patriotism & ingenuity: Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald,
Dachau, Gross-

Rosen, Ravensbrück, Treblinka, e.g., &, of course, not last & not least,
Auschwitz.

or "Angel":

I see a German housewife rubbing fat
onto her rheumatic husband's skin.
Oh how he has suffered, & this balm
cannot hurt. She must do whatever she can.

We don't know if she has told him,
or if he begged or ordered her.
We don't know if he'd rather have suffered
in their now forsaken German home....

She smooths the paste onto his arms,
his shoulders, neck, back, thighs....
A future angel of the camps puts out our eyes.
It may be he grunts with pleasure, or fear,

or is it just to try to thank her?
A future angel of the camps puts out our eyes.

or “Life”:

The dreaded ones arrived. They did not know what they'd be,
but did come to be.

They called themselves “Insanity” & “Angel.” They had no color, no life
left in them except

for how they candled themselves as though their perpetrator,
if that is what he was,

had abandoned them. No, but as though they were their own afterbirth
after several decades

of remembrance, astonishment that such had happened, & terror. They had
no color in them,

& their fat supposedly soothed papa who might have been better off
if he'd not

been born into such as whatever was his story. They did have, shadowing them,
a Reich whose mother

delivered children & then killed them for the fatherland. But they had no color,
no life left in them.

but with a poem I didn't quite understand but that maybe, maybe, left us some air to breathe from
within atrocity's gas chambers.

So I read “Art”:

To approximate a mass grave,
I bulldozed mud, bonemeal, maggots
into a viscous conglomerate,

then into a glass box
the size of a cattlecar.
I piped in classical music—

Beethoven, Brahms, Wagner—
& authentic recordings of trains
clacking on murderers' tracks.

I bought my mud in Poland,
stained glass in France,
found bonemeal in Deutschland,

buckets of maggots by chance
when I dug beneath an altar
into a cess of flesh, & hair,

& scripture. So far, so good,
but my work seemed too stark—
this inspired me to wire

three black lightbulbs to be switched
on or off
as with a work of art:

the first to illuminate its roof,
the second its lowest layers,
the third its sacred heart.

& then I spoke about it, wondering whether the “I” of the poem was crazy, & whether, hopefully, even if he was crazy—christ, he constructs a mass grave & then worries that maybe his work is too stark!—he somehow managed to remember, to make a work of art deranged but beautiful. I was glad that my book could at least end with the phrase “sacred heart.” So I spoke, & then I read “Art” again.

To approximate a mass grave,
I bulldozed mud, bonemeal, maggots
into a viscous conglomerate,

then into a glass box
the size of a cattlecar.
I piped in classical music—

Beethoven, Brahms, Wagner—
& authentic recordings of trains
clacking on murderers' tracks.

I bought my mud in Poland,
stained glass in France,
found bonemeal in Deutschland,

buckets of maggots by chance
when I dug beneath an altar
into a cess of flesh, & hair,

& scripture. So far, so good,
but my work seemed too stark—
this inspired me to wire

three black lightbulbs to be switched
on or off
as with a work of art:

the first to illuminate its roof,
the second its lowest layers,
the third its sacred heart.

The next morning, when I was in the cafeteria line, a student turned to me to say that she was glad I'd read my poem twice the night before, that this had helped her. When I sat down with my tray, a fellow faculty member told me she was glad I'd read that poem a second time, & in fact she wished I'd even read it a third time. When I was clearing my tray & getting ready to leave, a woman—student or faculty?—said to me that she'd enjoyed my reading but that I didn't need to read my poem twice, that she'd gotten it the first time.

...

But with a poem I didn't quite understand but that maybe, maybe, left us some air to breathe from within atrocity's gas chambers. So, I read a "Art"...

—

William Helmuth Heyen is a poet, editor, and literary critic. He earned a PhD in English from Ohio University and taught American literature and creative writing at SUNY–Brockport. His work has been published in numerous literary journals, anthologies, limited-edition chapbooks and broadsides. He is the author of 13 collections of poetry and a novel. Selections of his poems have been translated into Italian (by Frank Judge), Swedish (by Stewe Claeson), Polish and German.



Tomasz Marek Sobieraj, from *Behind the Walls of the Promised Land*,
B&W negative film, 2012

YOON-HO CHO**On Thin Ice**

Gingerly and fearfully
I walked on thin ice.

In the night when a lone star
shining in the dark
shone like a friend,

Rather than filled with terror of the ice breaking
and my falling into the water
to meet my last moment,
I ran.

Hoping for a big dream
thinking even the broken pieces of ice
would be better if they were larger.

Spring Rain

You are spring rain
I
a small flower in the grass.

Rain was coming down last night,
to awaken roots from their winter sleep.

The spring rain did not sleep
so that it can put on a new garment of green.

When the rain stops,
I will fill my mouth full of glorious sunlight
most iridescent.

With a grass flower blooming
on my bright face,
I will go into the forest
with you.

Scent of the Heart

When I smell an odor
I run away to avoid it.
I run far away
passing through time and space
and the tunnel of minds.

But everyone has their unique
scent of heart.
The smell of tears from a sad person.
The smell of joy from a happy person.
The smell of greed from a selfish person.

No matter how far I run away
the scents of such hearts
do not leave me.

Translation by Kyung-Nyun Kim Richards & Steffen F. Richards

—
Yoon-Ho Cho was born in Korea in 1938, since 1971 he lives in the USA. He is a poet and publisher/editor of *Korean Expatriate Literature*. Yoon-Ho Cho's poetry has been translated into English and appeared in numerous American journals, in Great Britain and in Poland. He has published five books of poetry.



Tomasz Marek Sobieraj, from *Behind the Walls of the Promised Land*,
B&W negative film, 2012

KYUNG-NYUN KIM RICHARDS**Falling Leaves**

When I think of how we leave this world,
empty hands and bare bodies all,
there is nothing I want or need.

What then can I possibly leave behind?

Perhaps love.

But love is not what
you keep piled up
in storage.

Like flower petals,
like leaves in the fall,
they should be scattered
in the wind.

2014

Lustrous Long Hair

Lustrous long hair,
muscles packed with vitality,
skin with elasticity,
shapely legs and arms.

Her back view gathers
the eyes of passers-by
as she runs on the sidewalk
like a gazelle.

Was there a time when
I looked like that?
Should I envy her?

Oh, no!
What would I ever envy?

I am the happiest now.

2014

Pulling Weeds

As monkeys in a zoo
pick their baby's bodies for lice,
I pull out weeds from our small yard—
blades, stems, roots, dirt clusters and all.
I pulled them out as if I would eradicate
"three generations of the weed clan."

But alas, their gazillion seeds
have already been scattered
all over the yard as if a bowl of
sesame seeds had been knocked over.

At the first spring shower next year
the weeds promise to return with a vengeance
to reclaim their right to their homeland.

Survival of the fittest!

6/6/2016

Kyung-Nyun Kim Richards is a poet, essayist, and award-winning translator of Korean literature. Bilingual and bi-literate in both Korean and English, she writes in both languages. Her publications include four volumes of translations and two collections of original poems.



Tomasz Marek Sobieraj, from *Behind the Walls of the Promised Land*,
B&W negative film, 2012

YOON SOO PARK**Roses**

Clear and serene sky,
Finding roses without season.
No need to prune risking thorn,
Blooming roses are always there.

Spread a sweet smell like spring rain
Roses with thorn embracing pain,
Loving the roses like flames
Toiled to cultivate.

For loved ones
Roses hidden in soft leaves,
On Valentine's Day I wanted to insert
Them In your heart.
When blood flows punctuated by thorns
Roses add blushing red.

Now no need to cultivate to watch,
Roses remind loved ones that you remember.
Bloom and bloom!

Longing

You are the spring breeze after the long and rough winter
You were not in sight when you were close to me
When you were away from me
You showed a great gesture alight with lamp in my mind
I saw you soaked with morning dew
At the Kwan-ak mountain in dense fog
I can see and hear the whispering stream
Even in the bright day time with my eyes closed
I used to play with my childhood friends at the foot of the mountain
Oh, I miss my hometown dearly
I am longing to return to my old days and to my dream land

Rising Sun on the Horizon

Far across the ocean
From the horizon that separates the sky and the ocean
A crimson sunlight flows out.

Who separated the sky and the ocean?
The sunlight flowing out from between

Appears utterly beautiful.
Will it bring forth joy today
Will it spread laughter and happiness
A day without sorrow and tears

A life full of richness
Sharing and aiding love
Oh the first light of dawn

Translation by Eunhwa Choe

—

Yoon Soo Park holds degrees in physics and taught at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Seoul National University, and Johns Hopkins University. He made his debut as a poet by winning the New Poet's Award from the *Korean Expatriate Literature*.



Tomasz Marek Sobieraj, from *Behind the Walls of the Promised Land*,
B&W negative film, 2012

HEE JOOH KIM
So What If It's Just a Dream

I opened my eyes
 The day inflates like a balloon
 The laughter streams our
 The one in the dream
 Looking as he was when he just turned twenty
 I blushed

So what if it's just a dream...

Rain Flower

It starts with one drop
 It always does, in the beginning
 The second drop enraptures
 But when it withers, only a circular tears tain remains
 Even so, it is cradled in the heart
 That first love.

Lunar Eclipse

Going, going,
 I've completely gone into your body, panting.

Going smaller and smaller
 fading out and gone.
 No one but you remains.

We have become one.

While the earth and the moon briefly live together
 I am in you, blushing even more.

Translation by Eunhwa Choe

Hee Jooh Kim was the recipient of the 17th Annual Korean Expatriate Literary Award. Her volumes of poetry include *Living Is as Much as Loving*, *Sound of Water*, and *Sound of Wind* (co-author).

OK BAE KIM

Rainbow

Just as the rainbow after the rain is beautiful,
 just as the sun of the soul shines, rising
 after pushing through adversity, so shall I live.
 When I overcome life's many crises and
 live while clutching to that fellow Hope, then before I know it,
 waves of peace surge and roll in my heart.
 In life, a stop sign can block the way,
 after a brief wait, the emerald-colored green light turns on,
 sometimes a detour sign appears.
 But, just as if I trust and follow, I shall find my way,
 if I endure and tolerate today,
 a resplendent rainbow shall bloom in my heart.

Forming Fruit

Without winter,
 spring does not come
 Without seasons of suffering,
 the tree does not grow
 With the passing of rain, wind, snow frost,
 thunder tree rings grow and the heart expands that much more
 Width and height grow together and patience deepens
 All this is the prelude for spring

Empty Nest

The nest where the male and female of an unknown bird
 Had diligently transported food to their young
 Lies solitarily empty.
 Leaving only traces of something missing
 In the meticulous nest built solely by beak and claw
 Birds too prepare to leave
 When it's time.
 They leave their roost without regret
 Heading towards a new world.

—
 Ok Bae Kim was born in 1938, and made her literary debut when she received New Poet Awards from *Segi [Century] Literature*. Her published works include three books of poetry. She is the editor of *Korean Expatriate Literature* and president of the Korean Expatriate Literary Association.

Yoon Ho Cho, Kyung-Nyun Kim Richards

NO POETRY BOOKS SELL

A dialogue between Yoon-Ho Cho, poet, editor/publisher of *Korean Expatriate Literature* and Kyung-Nyun "Kay" Kim Richards, poet, translator of Korean Literature, and advisor for *KEL*. An e-mail interview was conducted between Yoon Ho Cho and Kay Richards in Korean in July 2016. Translation by Kay Richards.

Kyung Nyun Kim Richards: Since 1996, you have single-handedly published 21 annual issues of *Korean Expatriate Literature* and recently started publishing *Bridging the Waters*, an international Korean/English bilingual poetry anthology with Stanley Barkan of Cross-Cultural Communications in Merrick, New York. What is your motivation for carrying on such active and steadfast literary activities?

Yoon-Ho Cho: My motivation is to make Korean poetry known in the US and in the world. It is to globalize Korean literature. Although modern Korean poetry has more than a hundred years of history, there are no well-known Korean poems outside of Korea. We may find that the absence of good translators is part of the reasons why. Through globalization, we may also gain some new understanding of modern poetry of other countries. Furthermore, through literary exchanges, we can develop friendships with poets in other countries and thereby diminish our sense of otherness as well as learn from their works.

KR: Majority of the poets being published in *KEL* are Korean-Americans or Koreans who live outside of Korea. What do you see in this Korean diaspora literature?

YC: Korean diaspora literature has two attributes: as Korean-American literature and as Korean literature. Among Korean-American writers, they can be further classified into two groups. The first group expresses the minority ethnic group's shock encountered in America and which has not found a way to enter into mainstream American literature. The second group expresses the minority's culture shock and, through communicating with American mainstream literature and other world literary groups, and assumes the role of building bridges between Korean literature and others of the world. This is a first in Korean literary history and this is the group to which *KEL* belongs. We have to get out of the narrow sphere of "literature among ourselves" and find an entrance to the wider mainstream literature.

KR: The Literature Translation Institute of Korea supports and tries to promote Korean literature in the world. In spite of that effort, Korean literature is still not very well known or recognized. What are your thoughts on this?

YC: Essentially two things. One is the issue of translation and the other is the literary quality of the original works. We need to learn from the works of the world writers and understand what literature the world wants. "The most Korean is the most global" may not apply in the case of literature.

KR: We live in an age of technology and our life is being more and more dominated by it. What do you think the role of poetry should be?

YC: As the development of technology pushes our life, we are becoming dehumanized. Human relationships get cut off, nature becomes desolate, the sense of crisis seems to deepen. Under these circumstances, poetry should awaken readers to become more aware of their senses, encourage their imagination as to how to enrich the quality of life, and broaden their mental

sphere. Because poetry broadens our imagination, I read in a newspaper that MIT, which is mainly an engineering university, started a poetry course a few years ago.

KR: But they say that no one reads poetry anymore and only poets read poetry. People also say that poetry is now irrelevant to contemporary life. What do you think?

YC: This may be in reference to the utility or practicality of poetry. Poetic usefulness should not be measured by utilitarian or calculable standards. These days, technological developments provide us with infinite possibilities for entertainment and recreation. So poetry cannot be used as a tool for leisure or entertainment. In other words, we've lost our poetry to multimedia.

KR: People seem to say that contemporary poetry is not interesting. What is your sense?

YC: I think it is the responsibility of both writers and readers. A poem has to be lyrical to be interesting and it has to contain some „philosophy of life.” But many poets do not know much about philosophy of life. The same is true of readers. If they don't know whether they have a philosophy of life or not, how can they enjoy poems? When we talk about philosophy of life in poetry, it doesn't mean philosophical treatise of philosophers. It refers more to the wise ways of living in this world. A poetry professor once said that 70 percent of the world-renowned poems contain lessons to learn. What he is referring to as lessons means wise ways of living, and that is what I mean by philosophy of life.

KR: Aren't there also poems without lessons?

YC: Some professor defined all writings by poets as poems, but I consider poems that do not contain lessons are simply playing with words.

KR: What is your view of the Korean "People Poetry" (Min-joong Poetry) of the 1980's, when prose poetry was very much in fashion?

YC: Korean poets during those years were strongly against military dictatorship. They realized that traditional lyrical poetry was not strong enough to stand against the military government. Poets started writing prose poems to make sure that people read and understood them. But the prose poetry became more like political sloganing. Once the military government gave way to civilian democratic government, engaged poetry disappeared. Many of the poets returned to lyrical poetry in the 1990s but they also hung on to modernist poetry too much and their poetry became difficult to read. Readers seem to stay away from them.

American poetry is also being threatened by multimedia. Is American poetry facing a crisis or a contraction? What do you think?

KR: I live in Berkeley which is in the San Francisco Bay Area. Because of the University of California at Berkeley, we have a very active community in terms of literature and poetry. Berkeley may be one of the most densely populated areas of writers and poets in this area or possibly the US, we have a poetry organization called "Poetry Flash" which used to publish tabloid papers almost weekly. Now they hold poetry readings almost every week in various bookstores in Berkeley and Oakland.

The radio station KPFA also features literature readings and interviews with poets and writers. Former US Poet Laureate Robert Hass also actively promotes poetry events both on and off campus. He is a professor in the English Dept. at UC Berkeley and he initiated the Lunch Poem program on campus. Prof. Hass is also very interested in Korean poetry and especially in Ko Un. He has invited him to campus more than a couple of times and also written about him in the New York Review of Books. He also invited Cathy Park and Myung Mi Kim and others to the lunch poem series.

Because I see so much going on in poetry in this area and learning about what is going on with Stanley Barkan in New York, I feel as though poetry is alive and well. We just don't make it big in the national scene, obviously.

YC: Do you think that people buy poetry books on Amazon and e-Bay?

KR: I am sure they do. It is so much easier to look up a title and read a few sample pages. This is all very helpful for readers and naturally they shop online. In Berkeley, so many of the local bookstores went out of business in the last ten years.

Getting back to the topic of the globalization of Korean literature, I feel that your efforts through *KEL* and other activities have been very successful in promoting cross-publications in various journals here and abroad. Korean poetry is now being introduced into Romania, Poland, Israel, Italy, and other countries.

YC: I have to thank many, many poets, translators, editors, and publishers. But most of all, Stanley Barkan of CCC, who brought us together to begin with. It is through him and his efforts that all this has happened. We are truly indebted to him and of course all those who share and participate in this effort. I cannot name them all but to Olimpia Iakob of Romania and Tomasz Marek Sobieraj of Poland, at whose suggestion we are holding this dialogue, I wish to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation.



Tomasz Marek Sobieraj, from *Behind the Walls of the Promised Land*,
B&W negative film, 2012

LIDIA CHIARELLI**November Sky**

I love that sky of steel
Charlotte Brontë

Flocks of black crows
 re-write
 the sky in November
 with ancient signs.
 The cold blaze
 an impalpable veil
 wraps
 the barren moor
 and your eyes
 gradually
 get lost
 in that
 magical metallic
 light

May on the Hills

I will touch a hundred flowers
And not pick one
Edna St. Vincent Millay

The fragrance of spring's
 intoxicating ether
 envelops you
 in the wavering light of sunset.

And as in a dream
 the meadows reveal
 magenta, purple and red
 myriad twinkling flowers:
 rubies and amethysts
 an ancient treasure.

Your hesitant hands
 gently touch
 those precious jewels
 while
 the last darting seagulls
 replay their games
 in the sky of May

Times Square

Switch on
switch on once more
lights at Times Square.

*Switch on for me
in my last night in New York.*

The hot air in the streets is a gentle cloak
that wraps me up.

Like windmills moving and moving
don't stop your dance.

Let my eyes get lost
again
into your
whirl
so sweet
so intoxicating.

26 July 2010

Translation by the author

—
Lidia Chiarelli lives in Torino, Italy. She earned master's degree in English from University of Torino. Artist and poet, co-founder, with Aeronwy Thomas, of the literary-art movement *Immagine & Poesia* (2007); author of two poetry books. Her poems has been translated into several languages, i.a. Chinese, French, Dutch, Polish, Romanian, English.



Larry Lefkowitz

LOST IN TRANSLATION

“Where a mistake has crept in, it stays,” says the Talmud. The Talmud said it in Aramaic, yet the proverb would be equally appropriate in Polish. At least in the case of the mistake that was to dog a certain translation of mine. I had not made the mistake; it was committed by the editor of an English language literary review who published my translation of a short story and wrote that the story was translated from the Polish. I had, in fact, translated it, not from the Polish, but from a Hebrew translation of the story from the Polish.

An understandable error on the editor’s part. I wasn’t bothered. Being a translator from Polish even afforded me a certain advantage over being a translator from Hebrew in a country not lacking in translators from Hebrew to English. Given the current popularity of East European culture and languages, I had lost nothing by being metamorphosized into a Polish language translator. And in any event, as far as I was concerned, the error was a minor incident. A forgettable error.

But if I had forgotten it, others hadn’t. And for them it wasn’t an error. It was a fact. Because some weeks after publication of the story, I received a letter. The first thing about it that caught my eye was the representation of an eagle which graced its upper portion. Today they call it an “icon” or a “logo”, but for me it was a “representation.” I am a conservative translator, an approach which has lowered my standing among publishers desiring “modern translations.” I call them “the lowest common denominator translations”, but why engage in polemics; I am an anti-polemicist in temperament. And what’s more appealing to a conservative translator than a conservative bird like an eagle? Not to my taste a communication bearing a “New Age” penguin or dodo. An eagle is solid. The eagle on the letter was a Polish eagle—a more robust eagle than the dyspeptic eagle which symbolized the former Austro-Hungarian empire, for which I harbored a certain empathy, being Galician in descent. The missive was from the Polish embassy in Tel Aviv. Signed by the Polish cultural attaché, it informed me that a Polish literary association had awarded me a prize for my translation (“brilliantly faithful to the Polish original”) of the story published in the literary review; a small financial remuneration awaited me together with a medal. The ceremony would be held at the embassy on a date specified.

In the normal course of things, I would have pointed out the error and refused to receive the gifts, but I was busy at the time with an overdue translation of the poems of Benjamin Zeev Farkes for *Poetry Magazine* and also with moving to a different apartment, not to speak of fending off some bureaucratic challenges raised by the tax authorities (why do they bother with translators at all?) and so I left the letter on my desk. I had intended to get around to it soon afterward, but it, in the course of things, became merely one constituent of a mound of papers and folders heaped up on my desk, as a result of which I failed to notify the embassy of my non-candidacy.

When I chanced upon the embassy’s letter again some weeks later (I had pulled out a file from the middle of the pile which sent the letter in a spiraling descent to the floor), the date of the award loomed dangerously close, too late for me to refuse the honors intended for me. A feeling of panic engulfed me. *Déjà vu* panic. And then I remembered its source. Before I became a “plodding” translator, I had tried my hand at simultaneous translation, but it had proved too nerve wracking. As you are following the speaker, you, too, start a sentence. But as you start your sentence, you are taking a leap in the dark, you are mortgaging your grammatical future: the original sentence may suddenly be turned in such a way that your translation of its end cannot easily be reconciled to your translation of its start. Great nimbleness is called for to guide the innermost mind through this syntactical maze. Great nimbleness of mind I did not possess. I invariably felt like the translator in the old joke who introduces himself to the author: “Goodbye, I your new translator am.” I became a translator of the written word.

I racked my brain how to solve the Polish prize conundrum. And then I remembered Gurovitz. Gurovitz was an acquaintance from the Writers Union who knew Polish and who owed me

a favor—he could represent me at the ceremony. I would notify the embassy that I was to undergo a triple-bypass operation and so would have to “pass up” the ceremony. A “representative” would appear in my stead.

The favor owed me by Gurovitz was the result of my acceding to his request (“request” a euphemism for “nudging”) to translate his novel about a Middle-Ages Polish king named Wenceslas or Casimir (I forget which) and his beloved Jewish courtesan. The author wanted my help in translating it from Hebrew (it had failed to find an Israeli publisher) to English for a “world market.” Nu, Gurovitz is anything but bashful. The stories about his chutzpah are legion. My favorite one is how, once, Gurovitz sat in the front row of a play—a Gesher Theatre production of *The Adventures of Baron Muenchausen*; the Baron, incidentally, the bane of any translator, because of his purported adventures among a tribe of South American Indians he called the Apapurincasiquinitischiquisaqua. As part of the performance, one of the actresses, instead of going offstage, left the stage and sat in the front row in a seat apparently reserved for her precisely for this purpose, until she is to reappear in the play and remount the stage. The stage effect did not deter Gurovitz—whom fate or the muses had determined would be seated next to her—from proceeding, to the actress’ utter amazement, to describe to her how the plot of the play should, in his opinion, further develop. At the specified cue, the actress stood up in order to return to the stage. But Gurovitz hadn’t finished his dramaturging and grabbed her arm to hold her until he did; fortunately for the play’s denouement, she managed to pull herself free and mounted the stage. An apocryphal tale? you conclude. You don’t know Gurovitz. He was the living embodiment of the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze:

“What is the self but this habit of saying ‘I’?”

After scanning the manuscript (replete with coffee and other stains of unidentifiable origin, albeit chicken fat cannot be ruled out), I was convinced it would be foolhardy on my part to attempt to translate it for an English-reading market. It carried to excess the Hebrew-Yiddish literary tradition of “telling” rather than the Anglo-Saxon one of “showing”. It was like the Legend of King Arthur presented as Talmudic pilpul. It was—in a word—strange, and not in the “irreducible strangeness of the original” which Walter Benjamin said lay at the heart of a good translation. I am not unmindful of George Steiner’s dictum: “Any statement about literature is irrefutable.” But Steiner hadn’t read Gurovitz’s epic. No one could deem it anything but fatiguing at best, ridiculous at worst. Not even Derrida’s hermeneutical largess could save it. Derrida said that “the more one contemplates the written text, it reveals different ways of inner contradiction which violate the declared intention of the author”, a phenomenon apparently praiseworthy in Derrida’s eyes. Gurovitz’s work contained contradictions which would have left Derrida’s theory in tatters; in addition to which the declared intention of Gurovitz defied locating. Nu, without a text how can you expect a subtext? “Only one who is profoundly convinced of the impossibility of translation,” Franz Rosenzweig had proclaimed, “can really understand it.” I was convinced of the impossibility of translating Gurovitz’s effort but, alas, had difficulty understanding it. And so I convinced Gurovitz to forget about selling his magnum opus as a novel but that maybe it would do as the basis for a Yiddish play or even a musical, that such performances had traditionally been based on “lesser” material and anyhow in Yiddish performances the plot was less important than the theatrics—emotion and gesture.

Gurovitz agreed to receive a scenario (in Hebrew) instead of a novel translation, which saved me considerable time and work: in addition to translating the latter, I would have had to excise its multifarious verbiage and frequent, unending monologues. Gurovitz’s monologues epitomized Lacan’s concept of “nonrelation” in which monologues are arraigned side by side around a traumatic gap—in Gurovitz’s case, a plot. The novel’s considerable defects would have rendered its publication as Gurovitz intended it an embarrassment to Western, Eastern, and Hebrew letters. And so, in a deft application of the principle of Yergi Levy’s “Minimax for translators”—minimum effort, maximum benefit—I convinced Gurovitz that a scenario or “treatment” as they call it in the trade nowadays was the proper approach, after explaining to him that a “treatment” had nothing to do with a doctor. Doctors, Gurovitz maintained, were all charlatans because of his gall-bladder experience with Dr. _____, which jeremiad I had been treated to *ad nauseam* at

Writers Union meetings, to the point that I dropped out of that venerable organization. Some members spread the canard that I left because I was angered at Ben Maimon's remark that translators lacked the creativity of novel writers. Ben Maimon had then added insult to injury by brandishing somebody's inanity that "translation is an oedipal assault on the mother tongue." I immediately struck back with Walter Benjamin's "translation is that which usurps the place of the original while ensuring its afterlife." Jewish optimism triumphing over Ben Maimon's Greek pessimism.

Gurovitz gave the scenario to some of his Yiddish-speaking and writing cronies for their opinions (they also knew Hebrew), as to whether a Yiddish performance could be based on it, but fortunately (for me), each of them had his version of the "defects" of the scenario and what should be done to "save" it. Actually, most of the comments were motivated by criticism of the other writers' suggestions, largely because of past literary contretemps among them—*de rigueur* in Yiddish literary circles—the origins of which had been largely forgotten, though the grudges remained. A phenomenon entirely forgivable in our little country's circles in which the writers, critics and worse, writers-critics, not to speak of the readers, often knew each other personally. The project of my acquaintance for a Yiddish performance based on my scenario collapsed like a house of cards, although there exists surely a more fulgurous Yiddish expression than "collapsed like a house of cards", but my Yiddish is scarcely better than my Polish.

Gurovitz, my "representative" to garner my Polish honors, insisted on writing "his" acceptance speech and I acceded to his demands, despite my reservations, even forbodings, lest he, insulted, refuse to appear on my behalf. I made him swear on his grandmother's memory not to mention in his speech anything about his king and courtesan epic, let alone to try to promote the same with the Poles. Since Gurovitz was as long-winded in his writing as in his everyday speech, my thoughts of mercy went out to the Polish embassy staff and I could only hope that his acceptance speech would not bring about a worsening of Polish-Israeli relations.

Since the night of the ceremony, my representative avoids me and so I fear the evening was less than the triumph he expected. Or maybe his avoidance stemmed from the fact that he sent me the medal in the mail together with a curt note stating that there was no monetary prize. I refrained from checking this out with the Polish embassy as the amount was "symbolic" and also I didn't want to appear too healthy following my triple bypass. And in any event, Gurovitz's labors on my behalf entitled him, in my opinion, to the money, if he indeed had pocked it. My largess may have been influenced by my relief that my Polish translation woes were behind me. Or so I thought until communications began arriving from Warsaw and other Polish locations sent by authors requesting my services in translating their Polish "works"—the word preferred by most of them—into English. My reputation had apparently spread, thanks to the cultural section of the Polish embassy.

The "works" included, *inter alia*, novels about claimants to the Polish throne, a werewolf who terrorizes the Lublin area (the latter inspired me to consider recommending to Gurovitz that the courtesan in his novel become a werewolfess—non-Jewish in order to avoid antisemitism, but I no longer owed Gurovitz anything), as well as nonfiction, among which "The Definitive History of the Polish Polka" stays with me.

The solicitations I declined "due to the pressure of work," rejecting the temptation to soften the blow by borrowing the speech Franz Joseph used on all occasions to say of each book: "It was very nice and it pleased me very much." I did suggest to the authors interested in translation that they approach American publishers, adding that it was advisable for them to concentrate on publishers which possess Polish-sounding names.

I thought my occupation as a Polish translator truly belonged to the panoply of history. But I was rudely returned to the present when I received a second letter from the Polish embassy. It bore a Polish eagle even bigger than the one which adorned the first, although this may be only my imagination, and proclaimed—after expressing the hope that I was fully recovered from my operation—that an important Polish literary prize awaited me to be delivered at a gala celebration in my honor to be held at the Ministry of Culture in Warsaw. I would be expected to deliver an acceptance speech, suggested subject: "Polish Translation—its Problems and Rewards." So far

I had accumulated expertise only with regard to the former. It was fortunate that I really hadn't had a triple bypass, since I almost fainted on reading what was expected of me. I racked my brains to find an excuse to courteously decline. Gurovitz would never accept going to Poland and, in any event, he was miffed at me over my adroit escape from translating his novel (the cause of his reportedly saying that I didn't know the difference between being a translator and one who merely knows two languages), over my scenario that apparently failed to receive the imprimatur of his cronies, and perhaps even blaming me for the paltry sum of my prize money, which he pocketed nonetheless. Beside which, I doubted that the Polish embassy would agree to pay his expenses, (as it was prepared to pay mine, since he might be persona non grata in its eyes because of his last prize acceptance speech. I could not plead a second operation, even a quadruple bypass. And even a crash course at Berlitz couldn't promise me a sufficient level of Polish in time.

I considered, momentarily, confessing the truth to the Polish embassy, but this was out of the question—for one, I had mislaid the medal somewhere among the papers on my desk and, moreover, I would come out looking like a fool. My sole hope was the fortuitous occurrence of some diplomatic incident ruffling relations between Israel and Poland to justify a refusal on my part to appear as patriotic protest. Alas, relations between Poland and Israel were at that time on a particularly rosy footing: the Polish national football team was in the country to play a friendly match with our team while the Israeli piano virtuoso, Beryl Bromfman, was capturing Polish hearts—and those of Polish music reviewers—in a series of “electrifying” Chopin recitals.

In the end, I found another Polish-writing member of the Writer's Union, still on speaking terms with me despite my “defection”, who, in return for two tickets to the Betar Jerusalem-Hapoel Tel Aviv football game (at stake first place in the league), wrote a letter explaining that, unfortunately, I was presently undergoing treatment in a psychiatric hospital for “emotional stress”—which wasn't far from the truth. I dissuaded him, only with difficulty, from his inspired idea to peg my emotional distress to my effort to translate into Polish James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, clearly a projection of his angst at the very project upon which he had been working on and off over the years, “a labor of love” in his words (translation: failure to find a publisher), which apparently had caused him no little emotional distress. He sent off my prize acceptance speech which we worked on together. The substantial monetary award I donated equally to a Polish-Jewish charity and to establishing a literary fund—the Conrad Fund—which I named for the famous Polish writer Joseph Conrad who began writing in English at the age of 40. I declined to name the fund after myself, yet allowed a modest nod in that direction by defining the funds' purpose as that of encouraging promising young Polish translators “worthy of following in the prize-winner's literary footsteps.”

Epilogue: Two weeks ago Gurovitz ran up to me on the street and—much to my surprise and mystification—embraced me. A Polish publisher was interested in publishing his *Casimir and Maideleh* book. He, apparently, had not only represented me at the Polish embassy ceremony, but himself. So much for the value of oaths on one's grandmother's memory in this era of the emphasis on youth. Ruefully, I considered asking him for my monetary award back, but I lacked proof he had embezzled it. As *quid pro quo*, perhaps, Gurovitz regranted me the right to translate his novel into English for the American market. Immediately seeing on my face my dubious reaction to this generous proposal, confirming the contention of E. Levinas that “language does not begin with words but in the facial expression of another person”, Gurovitz said that he would make do with re-submitting the scenario (apparently he had failed on his first attempt) as a basis for selling the story to Hollywood, a prospect now “considerably bolstered” (his words) by his novel's upcoming publication “internationally.” Read: in Polish. “Treatment,” I almost corrected his use of “scenario”, but I was in no mood to be subjected once again to the tortuous unfolding of his gall bladder megillah. It was the reason I had not tendered my application to be re-admitted into membership in the Writers Union.

Post Epilogue: The other day the colleague who wrote my prize acceptance speech in Polish ran up to me on the street and embraced me. A Polish publisher was interested in financing his translation into Polish of *Finnegan's Wake*. It immediately entered my mind that he altered “my” prize acceptance speech to promote this outcome. Yet I would not stoop to engaging in pettiness

and upbraid him for having done so, or even reply ironically that surely Borges' statement that "the original is unfaithful to the translation" applied to his translation of Joyce. Besides, I had little to complain about: Thanks to him I was, perhaps, the most honored translator of Polish in history who didn't know a single word in Polish.

—
Larry Lefkowitz was born in 1937 in Trenton, New Jersey, and immigrated to Israel in 1972. His stories, poetry and humor are published in the USA, Israel and England.



Tomasz Marek Sobieraj, from *Behind the Walls of the Promised Land*, B&W negative film, 2012

Dariusz Tomasz Lebioda

SPIRITUALITY AND SHAMANISM IN OLD POLISH POETRY

For years there has been a considerable increase in the interest of shamanism in Western Europe and the United States of America. Such authors¹ as: Eliade, Lévi-Strauss, Castaneda, Andrews contributed to the development of sciences referring to this cultural phenomena. Moreover, the interest in Shaman as the manifestation of hypersensitivity stemming from primary nature of man and primitive initiations rituals, is growing, too. According to classical definitions: “Shaman is a neurotic and psychopath; shaman is the most sensible person in a society, feeling deeply and understanding the needs of others; shaman is a cheat and charlatan. All these contradictory features are ascribed to by outside observers, and you can easily agree that they all tell the truth about the personality and psyche of a shaman. (...) Only a person endowed with unusual abilities and skills is able to come up to the great tasks which shaman’s vocation entails.”² In such context “Shamanism is a visionary tradition, primordial practice taking use of different states of mind to contact gods and spirits of natural world. If you think about Shaman you imagine a mysterious and weird sorcerer or sorceress—somebody who through trance can take up a visionary quest for soul, traverse to holy places and communicate to the audience things of cosmic purport. Shaman could be a healer, capable of overcoming the spirits of illnesses, a magician winning the favours of the spirits in magical dealings, or a kind of mental detective finding the lost things. Sometimes he might seem to be a priest—mediator of the Spiritual and the real. Shaman is respected and feared of as he can sojourn in other worlds and come back with divine revelations.”³

These considerations are of general nature that’s why a lot of literary figures of different eposes (*Gilgamesh*, *I-cing*, *Mahabharata*, *Szah-name*) through Greek heroes and modern literature with such names as Don Quixote, Faust, Raskolnikov, Hans Kastorp, Aureliano Buendia and Wilhelm of Baskerville are here involved. Thus the figure of a shaman is a universal symbol with the new generations finding in him exciting meanings and references. This is so not because shaman probes into human ego but because he is a guard of the occult territories and a duty officer at the border of a sacred domain.

Needless to say, a romantic poet had something in common with a shaman—he always tried to enter where human mind failed to. At moments of creeping visions, split personality, spiritual quest he penetrated those terrains shaman reside in. Who else but shamans are the romantic heroes—Faust, Conrad by Schiller, and Polish also Konrad, magically reaching out his hands in *Dziady* and encompassing the whole world; who are those figures of hypersensitivity—mistic shamans in equally mystic realms? Romanticism is a manifestation of lyrical shamanism and it wouldn’t have existed in the minds of the public if it hadn’t reached, in the solitary peregrinations, the domains inaccessible for an ordinary, regular human imagination. The following words by S. T. Coleridge manifest such free shaman imagination:

He says how amazing the self-existent power of imagination is; at one time when it interprets painful experience at another time when happy mood and good health turn bleak and arid shapes and landscapes into images of bloom of live scarlet, green and snow-white. He then points out how strange the power of presenting the events and circumstances is—those of trial and those of triumph. The soul believes in them however mysterious and uncanny the events are but the pure mind turns away from “prolonged shadow of coming hope” as if from crime. But the result finally can be seen among the greyest clouds of the whole sky and gleaming light appears as if a harbinger of creation. [These are paraphrased words of Coleridge]⁴

Coleridge as well as Blake⁵, Novalis⁶, Tieck⁷, in absolutely outstanding manner, show how a romantic provides his mind and soul with new territories—how he follows the path of intuition, disregarding fear and a sense of unity of body & soul. The empathy with a primitive man, adopting

primordial self and primeval ecstasy practices—all this becomes shamanistic initiation. Mircea Eliade tries to clarify relevant texture⁸ of shamanistic self and enumerates all the initiation elements well-known by readers and literary researchers of the first half of XIXth century such as: ecstatic dreams and trances, shaman strategies, names and functions of spirits, mythology & genealogy of families and finally mysterious cosmogenic language—as if a cultural code with which a romantic poet contacts the primary, primeval mechanisms of perceiving the world and encompasses it with his heightened sensitivity and consciousness.

In the *Dictionary of Language* of Adam Mickiewicz which appeared in Poland there is no world like shaman because Mickiewicz wrote about shaman & shamanism only in French. However you do find some synonymous Polish words: “a sorcerer”, “magic”, “to conjure up.”⁹ Some of the words & phrases became significant in Polish culture, e.g. the verses from *Dziady*: “The wise of old times/ locked themselves look for treasure or medicaments/ Out poison—we, the innocent young sorcerers/ let’s look for it, to poison our own hopes.”¹⁰ (*The Innocent Sorcerers* it’s also title of Andrzej Wajda’s great film) There are similar words characterizing another hero of a poem—Halban, where, according to some chroniclers, he was a heretic, pagan, and perhaps a sorcerer.¹¹ Was Mickiewicz aware of the shamanistic rituals and strategies? Undoubtedly, yes, although he melted them with various symbolic meanings, individual features, Lithuanian pagan sacrum and his own modifications while standing at the alchemic melting-pot of his sprightly imagination. In his youth, Mickiewicz used to read J. F. Cooper in whose books you can find shaman practices and magic contacts with the Spirits of Nature. He took connotations seriously and the not very scientific explanation to *Konrad Wallenrod* is there to prove it: “Without moving a step, quietly folds his arms on his breast, and, striking the lion powerfully with his eye, subdues brutal force with that immortal talisman of the soul.”¹² These words indicate two aspects of voodoo practices—hypnosis and talisman. The preface to second part of *Dziady* is very characteristic as it implies a ritualistic nature of calling spirits descending from various cultures including Indian civilisations.¹³ You should highlight here the point that Mickiewicz perhaps had had in his life mystic, medium-like visions and dwelled—as the shamans do; in his dreams or trances beyond body. Here is a most fascinating poetic example:

I was struck with a sound—suddenly my body,
 like a meadow flower, surrounded by down,
 diffused, knocked off by an angel’s puff.
 And a soul’s seed stayed naked.
 And I seemed to have woken up
 from a horrid dream that weared me up.
 Like a woken man wiping the sweat
 I wiped my past deeds from the forehead
 that hang above me like peelings
 around newly-bloomed herbs.
 The earth and the world around
 [...]
 looked as if underwater,
 —black—with a beaming ray to fall on it.
 Then I saw enormous sea
 Coming from inside, from God
 [...]
 And I could fly in the air
 Run like a sunray together with the divine rays
 of God’s wisdom; and in this strange vision
 I was light as well as the pupil.
 [...]
 I became an axis of the infinite circle
 Myself motionless I felt it turning

I was inside the primary element of elements,
A place from which all spirits begin,
that turning the world. [...] ¹⁴

These were not mere fantasies, he resided in these worlds for real. Repeatedly he emphasized the fact in his works, and in conversations with friends he assured them about his metempsychic journeys. In a letter he wrote: “What I say to you is not from my mind; I do not create a dogma. I saw this world, I had been there several times, touching it with my naked soul. This world is not different from ours; believe me it is similar. A man dies and doesn’t change place, stays where he spiritually clung to. This is a puzzle of spirits that expiate. In the other world you live among the same spirits you lived here, you have to complete what in your body you began on earth. The effort without the body is extremely hard; you have to exert influence on earth, devoid of any earthy means. For almost five hundred years you wait and ache. It is a great fortune for the world of spirits when a man in his body animates it. It is as if a dog began speaking. It is a wonderful miracle. That’s why Christ descended with his body.” ¹⁵

A Polish Noble Prize winner, Miłosz indicates how strong the conviction of Mickiewicz about a soul devoided of body soaring in mystic space was. However Miłosz also pointed out a deviant nature of such a conviction: “There is no doubt that Mickiewicz believed in souls’ journey and that he set it against eternal damnation which he couldn’t approve of. (...) According to a friend he said: Human life is a page inside a book: in order to understand it you should know the earlier pages. You should get to the cradle and learn about your earlier life.” ¹⁶

Just like in shamanism of different cultures, the sorcerer of Mickiewicz’s, his hero is partaking of shaman-like features: “The shaman was sent by the gods to defend mankind from the demons; such a defense is even more needed after death, for men are great sinners, which makes them the demons’ rightful prey. But the gods, moved by pity for mankind sent the First Shaman to show them the road to their heavenly dwelling. As among the Tibetans, communication between earth, heaven, and hell takes place along a vertical axis, the *axis mundi*. The after-death descent to hell, with the crossing of the bridge and the labyrinthine passage through the nine precincts, still preserves the initiatory schema; no one can reach heaven without heaving first gone down to hell. The shaman plays the role both of psychopomp and of post-mortem initiatory master.” ¹⁷ The two poems by Mickiewicz, written in Rome in 1830 “Aryman & Oromaz” & “The Super-Master” allude to this kind of fight. Both are imbued with a cultural perspective and present a struggle between good and evil in its primary shamanistic—animistic view. They are also an expression of the poet to be like the Super-Master and continually fight against evil. The first one based on the beliefs of Persian people alluding to Zoroastrian mythology shows the constant struggle between the forces of light & dark. Unrhymed translation:

In the very centre of unfathomed abyss
In the very centre of thick darkness
Aryman settled dawn like a hidden thief,
Rough he was like a lion, virulent as snake.

Once he stood up and swelled
puking out enormous darkness.
Then upon the dark, like spider
he went high above where the light of God.
He leaned upon the night and day’s border
Straightend up his head and lifted his eyes. ¹⁸

Here Mickiewicz very plainly alludes to mentioned above by Eliade a spiral structure of being—where among its uncontrollable gyrations the mystery of existence dwells, being fixed to the *axis*

mundi and constantly struggling to be fixed at the same time. Miłosz is right by saying that: “Mickiewicz’s imagination never went away from the pre-scientific notions of cosmogony.”¹⁹ And also that: “you can spend years probing into the hidden quarry of his thoughts, they are so rich, the layers of Christianity & pre-Christianity.”²⁰ You can notice another aspect of such pre-Christian notion of the struggle of good & evil in a poem “The Super-Master”:

There is a Master who acquired all spirits to his choir
 And all the hearts he tuned well
 Strung all the elements like strings:
 Where winds and thunders strike.
 He sang one song from the very beginning
 But the world didn’t comprehend its meaning.

The Master who painted in the blue sky
 reflected the paintings in the water’s tract,
 Then he carved the mountains’ lines
 and cast them in bronze in the earth inside:
 Yet the world, for so many centuries,
 didn’t comprehend the works of Master.²¹

The Super-Master of Mickiewicz’s can be perceived as a Great Old Man, Great Old Shaman, an Old Wise Man known from many cultural stories. Accordingly, Jean-Charles Gille-Maisani noticed Jung’s complex of an Old Wiseman or a Prophet in Mickiewicz’s works.²² However, he himself was seen as being a prophet²³, sometimes as word-conjurer, capable of hypnotizing the audience. That’s why Jerzy Peterkiewicz, profesor of Slavonic and East European Studies at University of London points out that: “this experience of using language with the speed of a conjuring trick taught Mickiewicz to trust his inner voice for the duration of a trance, a state not unlike that of a shaman or a man possessed.”²⁴ Only this states of mind allowed the poet to be spiritually present in the depths of other reality. He could leave his body among his comrades and migrate like in a poem ‘Gdy tu mój trup’. Such communion has a lot of prototypes in mythologies and holy books. “But the bardic communication with the higher spirits—Peterkiewicz says—through dreams and visions has its model in the Bible. True poets, according to Saint-Martin, were seers before they put pen to paper; in Towiański’s teaching, obscure though it was, they were mediators capable of illuminating the secrets of this earth which is ruled by Prince of Darkness. The messianic pattern was built into the cosmic drama.”²⁵ Peterkiewicz uses the word “messianic” in its original meaning, where in Aramaic language it means anointed—*meshiha*—just like priests and kings were and are anointed before they begin their holy duties. Only a man steeped in infinitude, only a poet conscious of his eternity-touched imagination, is able to speak the truth that sounds like shaman incantations. He, in the act of imagination, creates development cycles—creates new times for a man. As Stanisław Vincenz rightly points out: “the criterium for advancement and the measure of the development in Mickiewicz is the idea of Man of Eternity. It is the content of history—as long as eternal man realizes himself. It is a form of a legend about an eternal Jude—but without a anathema. Man of Eternity is constantly travelling through history, recreating himself, changing nationality. (...) Political and Religious past, as if in one focus, is concentrated within himself. Whatever has been in the history of the true and the saint is covered in him.”²⁶ Both shaman and a poet-prophet suspend the laws of nature—they travel freely in eternal space and there they operate on human being. This is not without reason, as Peterkiewicz, associating Mickiewicz’s experience with Blake’s point of view, says: “After the loss of independence even ordinary words acquired rich emotional connotations – they echoed the great past, and this echoing dissolved the frontiers of time within the poet’s imagination. In his introduction to ‘Songs of Experience’, William Blake wrote:

Hear the voice of the Bard!
 Who Present, Past, & Future, sees;
 Whose ears have heard
 The Holy Word
 That walk'd among the ancient trees."²⁷

For Mickiewicz, a nation is a great tribe, and the whole mankind is regarded as one common people.²⁸ His role is that of a shaman—guide who leads his people to a destination, where the *Road to Eternity* begins, because:

Those who beyond time soared high
 Can sense the taste of eternity any time.²⁹

However the most interesting shaman—conscious experience can be traced in the greatest Polish romantic drama *Dziady*. The chorus leader in the second part of drama has all the features of shaman. He replaced the figure of a priest from the earlier version of the manuscript. Sometimes the interpretations of *Dziady* only refer to reserchers of Polish Romanticism, Stanisław Pigoń points out: “we should try to probe deeper and deeper. (...) everything in the poem is woven very strangely and unexpectedly. You think that into Christian religion motifs there penetrated superstitious, pre-Christian and pagan elements. However, it is not very clear and precise. It would be just right to say that the pre-religious magic elements weave into Religion. It’s well-known that these are different notions. While in religious practices, a man being humble to the Supernatural, tries to propitiate the Holy Spirits, in magical practices a man, aware of his own supernatural powers as well as natural ones, musters up his internal force and acts like a ruler. Thus in *Dziady* right in the beginning the elements of religion and magic interrelate. The priest says a prayer and after that, on his own behalf, without any commission, conjures up the Spirits with a sign of fire, like Prospero from Shakespeare’s drama, using a magic cane. He says the words of incantations and gives a sign. (...) Now a magic will of a conjurer rules over the whole space; it will call up and send away the spirits.”³⁰ According to Pigon, a sorcerer becomes something like a shaman communing with the spirits—he is the result of romantic monumentalization and the outcome of the brilliance of poet’s imagination.

Translation by Alina Żelazny

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Tomasz Marek Sobieraj, from *Behind the Walls of the Promised Land*, B&W negative film, 2012

NIELS HAV
Aphasia

When you see a monkey banging a clam
 against a stone it is like seeing one's self
 investigating a philosophical problem.
 No one can preclude that animals are cleverer
 than us, they manage life without words,
 we're unable to do that. Silence
 leads us astray in a psychic labyrinth,
 words flicker through the brain like fish
 deep down; they constantly shift meaning.

Each of us finds our self in a body;
 it is possible to make contact with caresses,
 but everything becomes more and more abstract.
 Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests;
 the mind remembers the settlements
 in raw nature. Now we live with bookcases
 full of dictionaries, in nameless castles of air,
 on separate floors.
 What do you call that?

Translation by P. K. Brask & Patrick Friesen

Dying is not a fringe benefit

People die wherever it suits them
 in traffic, on the sidewalk, in a war.
 Spontaneous deaths occur around the clock.

Most people prefer, reasonably,
 to die in their spare time, in this way
 avoiding any loss of pay.
 He who permits himself to die
 immediately forfeits
 the right to overtime, mileage
 and per diem (now when this would really

Come in handy). It's expensive to live,
 but dying is usually also
 bad business.

Translation by Heather Spears

The Cigar Cutter

As a confirmation gift, my grandfather gave me
a cigar cutter; the finest quality, mahogany and stainless steel.
He had great plans for me.
He himself was on the county council and the board of the bank;
he chaired the cooperative and was in the national guard—
always fond of a good cigar. He built his house in the middle of town;
there he sat in his office with a window facing the street
and kept an eye on traffic while he took care of business
and smoked his cigars.
High or low, people were greeted with even affability
and offered a cigar from the sturdy box by the telephone.
For him the cigar cutter was a useful tool.

No doubt, I've disappointed him. I never became really important;
as a rule I was too unambitious with my tobacco and was never a member
of the bank's board. I left the village with my head full of wild plans
and became one of the verbose windbags in Copenhagen.
Words are easy, but where do they lead?
The only form of love and respect worth the effort
comes from those back home.
Which, for good reasons, is never achieved.
My grandfather died without seeing me accomplish anything at all.

The cigar cutter still lying about here. With a little practice
you can also use it to uncap beer bottles—I'm better at that.
But, in private moments, I may, at times, feel shame.
There's no use in saying, "Dear Grandfather, they've changed the world,
smoking is no longer allowed, even the bank director stands outside
in the rain now and smokes on the sly like a schoolboy."
It won't do. So silly an excuse is worth nothing,
because that's not my business. I'm my own failure.

My grandfather looks skeptically at me from his high heaven above,
he cuts the tip of a Cuban, then he wets it with his lips
and lights it with a table lighter molded in granite.
Mercifully he buries my confused chatter in massive clouds
of first class smoke. He doesn't say anything,
but I know what he's thinking and deep inside myself
I have to agree with him.

Translation by P. K. Brask

—
Niels Hav in his native Danish is the author of six collections of poetry and three volumes of short fiction. His work has been translated into several languages such as English, Arabic, Turkish, Spanish, Dutch, Farsi and Chinese. In English he has *We Are Here*, published by Book Thug and poetry in numerous magazines.

Peter Thabit Jones

**A CRY AND A PRAYER: “DO NOT GO GENTLE INTO THAT GOOD NIGHT”
BY DYLAN THOMAS**

It was the chronic illness of D. J. (David John) Thomas, Dylan’s father, that inspired one of Dylan’s most famous poems, “Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night,” a villanelle that is a cry and a prayer, written in 1951. D. J. eventually died on the 16th of December, 1952.

In singing “for the love of Man and in praise of God” Dylan Thomas was always aware that every birth involves death, every death involves birth, for human life and the natural process are one. Out of this realisation comes what the American poet John Ciardi called “the prayer behind the prayer”, in other words the elegiac voice, the undersong of the brassy orator with the “lovely gift of the gab.”

Dylan was committed totally to the poet’s craft, which culminated in a tortured but dignified cry and prayer. The Welsh poet agreed with the poet Vernon Watkins, a Swansea friend, that “Cold craftsmanship is the best container of fire.” Dylan told an American student in 1951, the year when the “Do Not Go Gentle...” was written, “I am a painstaking, conscientious, involved and devious craftsman in words...”

This devious craftsman utilised the French poetic form the villanelle for an ultimate cry of desperation to a dying father to fight against death. It is also Dylan’s humble prayer of the real value of the light of life. The villanelle form originated in Southern France, where—like the ballad—it was sung by troubadours.

It was brought over to Britain during the Middle Ages and mostly used for pastoral verse but did not really take off as a poetic form. Eventually the late Victorian writer Oscar Wilde wrote several. It was William Empson, though, a poet and Cambridge academic, who brought it to real prominence in the 1930s. Empson wrote dozens of them.

The strait-jacket of the villanelle form consists of five tercets (stanzas of three lines) and one quatrain (a stanza of four lines). Just two rhymes echo throughout the structure. The first line of the villanelle is repeated as the twelfth, sixteenth and the eighteenth line; and the third line is repeated as the ninth, fifteenth and the last line.

Thus Dylan’s repeated lines, “Do not go gentle into that good night” and “Rage, rage against the dying of the light” become an incantation of a genuine plea via the poet’s “craft or sullen art.” The two lines, as they must in a villanelle, come together at the end with sheer force and directness.

It is a passionate protest against death, a son’s cry against the father’s submission to darkness. It has the desperation of sudden prayer. “Good night”, a familiar phrase, becomes an image of death.

The poem echoes lines by the Irish poet W. B. Yeats:

Did all old men and women, rich and poor,
Who trod upon these rocks or passed this door,
Whether in public or in secret rage
As I do now against old age?

There are also echoes of “Dirge Without Music” by the American poet Edna St. Vincent Millay, who was born in 1892 and died in 1951.

Millay’s poem, in fact, appeared in *The New Pocket Anthology of American Verse*, edited by Dylan’s American friend Oscar Williams, which contained some poems by Dylan.

These are some lines from “Dirge Without Music”:

Into the darkness they go, the wise and the lovely. Crowned
With lilies and with laurel they go; but I am not resigned.

And:

Down, down, down into the darkness of the grave
Gently they go, the beautiful, the tender, the kind;
Quietly they go, the intelligent, the witty, the brave.
I know. But I do not approve. And I am not resigned.

Dylan's elegiac voice, though, is more raw, more desperate, more touching, and more profound.

Dylan confronts D. J. with four types of men. The wise men, whose lifetimes of wise works failed to produce a light to lead them through the fear of death, still do not go gentle into that good night. The good men, whose good deeds ultimately are useless before oncoming death, still rage against the dying of the light. The wild men, the poets, with all their great poems of grief, do not go gentle into that good night.

Lastly, the grave men, the serious ones, see the tragic gaiety of mortality. Again, in this penultimate stanza there is an echo of Yeats "Lapis Lazuli":

Their eyes mid many wrinkles, their eyes,
Their ancient glittering eyes are gay.

All these men, the poet claims, rage against death and do not go gentle into it. So the father, on the "sad height" of this life's mortality, is begged to rage and rage.

It has been said that Dylan's father never cried, not even as a child. Thus Dylan implores, "Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray." I pray, Dylan states; and the poet does pray in this rhetorical and truthful poem. For this is a prayer for courage and dignity in the face of what Matthew Arnold called "the eternal note of sadness."

We are born to die. The poem is also a stark cry from a desperate son to a defeated father, who at the end was a semi-invalid and actually going blind. D. J. was also a committed atheist.

The Spanish poet Federico Garcia Lorca, whose poetry Vernon Watkins read to Dylan, said: "The artist, and particularly the poet... can only listen to the voices that rise up from within... three imperious voices: the voice of Death, with all its presentiments; the voice of Love and the voice of art."

Dylan achieves all three in this beautifully constructed and moving work. The emotional cry and the controlled prayer are one within the formality of the villanelle. This cry from the soul, this assertive prayer, should not surprise us. For this, of course, is the same poet who wrote in another poem "Fern Hill":

Time held me green and dying
Though I sang in my chains like the sea.

—
Peter Thabit Jones was born in Swansea, Wales, in 1951. He is a poet, dramatist, publisher, retired Literature and Creative Writing tutor at Swansea University, author of thirteen books and co-author of the *Dylan Thomas Walking Tour of Greenwich Village*, available as a pocket-book, guided walk from New York Fun Tours and a smartphone app. His work has been translated into over twenty languages.



ROBERT GHIRADELLA**After the Party**

You're sitting in the kitchen
Picking at the crumbs,
Late-night jazz on the radio,
A sink full of dishes,
Snow already falling in Newark.

Drunks

One strummed a guitar. Wyoming.
Montana. His misspent years.
The other was dancing.
No partner. Just himself.
Carefully. Dah de dah, dah de dah.

The Thracian Women

They roamed the mooned hillsides.
The story tells us,
Tearing wild animals apart
With their bare
Hands, and devouring them raw—

So drunk with the god,
In fact, one
Didn't know her own son,
Flashed down, apple—
Like, from a nearby tree.

The event is a warning,
And a dire one.
There are forces so terrible
Opposing them means death.
Not opposing them also means death.

Robert Ghiradella was born in New York City. He taught literature and creative writing at CCNY and is currently Professor Emeritus of English. Some of his poems have been published in *Kayak*, *The Plastic Tower*, *The Hat*, and other journals. He is a sculptor and collage artist.

JACEK ŚWIERK

Blessed Are the Poor

Money can't buy happiness.
 Sure. Husband is in heaven while his wife nags.
 Their kids jump for joy—
 They seldom eat sweets, never go on school trips.
 Daddy can't even afford a funfair ticket.
 The whole family is elated:
 Empty fridge, moldy ceiling, freezing cold,
 They gloat about the virtue of poverty as much as they want.

“Neighbors are so kind, so polite. We have
 Eighth newborn child. Daddy's sitting
 In front of the shop, staring at the trash can,
 Drinking beer all day long. People mock.
 Mummy buys food on tick
 In the rear of the store.
 Social workers stand up seeing us,
 Button up, correct sweaters:
Please, have a seat! How can I help you?
No, not at all, no problem.”

It really is a lucky strike,
 To lose a job and have plenty of time,
 To cherish friends, snooze after lunch,
 Read belles-lettres or watch artistic films.
 No doubt. Money can't buy happiness.

The Family Apocalypse

Monotony destroys marriage—
 Cruising around the angry point,
 Divorce vapors flow in the air.
 Mouths smoke rancor chimney-like.
 Ecologists in silence
 Still cry for help.

Climate is warming
 But glaciers are not melting
 On sardonic lips.

It's always snowing on wedding anniversary.
 It's acid raining from the eyes.
 The hassle sorting is necessary,
 The silent treatment makes it hard.

When all the species
Of fond glances will die,
The age of indifference shall come
At one time.

One child shall launch its mind in space,
The other, in smog of separation, will collapse.

Multiculturalism

My neighbors don't make any noise.
We always get along. Each one of us
Has faults, but we like one another.
None of us is nosey.
We are all glad about things we have;
Nobody's envious.
Some have spent dozens of years here
Side by side, others—little less.
Some are newcomers, some still don't feel snugly.
Here, we bury the hatchet.
One mind, one heart, one soul.
Room is ready for everyone in single-family houses,
Multilevel apartments, cabins. We are wide open
And in perfect harmony with people
Of different religions, races, social classes, cultures,
Opinions, orientations, mores.
Each new settler is welcomed.
The neighborhood is full of peace and quiet,
Here, at the municipal cemetery.

Translation by the author & Erik La Prade

—
Jacek Świerk was born in 1981 in Poland; poet, farmer. He has studied Polish Literature at Rzeszów University. Author of one poetry book (2017), lives in Blizne village in Southeastern Poland.



Tomas Unger

BOUND TO LIFE: ON CARLOS DRUMMOND DE ANDRADE

In José Saramago's *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis*, the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa crosses paths with one of his fictive alter egos ("Today, at last, we meet!" Carlos Drummond de Andrade exclaims during a similarly fantastic encounter with the shade of his father). In Saramago's imagining, Pessoa has this to say to one of the selves that gave him voice: "Loneliness is not living alone, loneliness is the inability to keep someone or something within us company." It's a thought that speaks to the heart—multitudinous, yes—of a poet who has become an elemental presence in the literary landscape and even the popular imagination of his native Brazil, where he is known simply as Drummond.

As Richard Zenith's sensitive new translations suggest, Drummond had many selves which he could not keep company: a slain milkman, a cross-dresser before her time, a stricken god, a boy crying in the night. Zenith's introduction makes much of Drummond's sense of himself as an "awkward misfit" (that self-characterization comes from one of his poems). How can such a man have become so beloved? There's the gentle spirit of self-deprecation, the almost boyish imagination, the sly humor of a sensible mind seeing a world ever so slightly askew—qualities which make Drummond strangely approachable even in his most remote moments (and they are numerous). He could almost elicit comparison with Frost, that other national poet, except that in this case no one has ever suggested that he's the half-willful victim of misreading, or that his attractive traits are some sort of veneer. The solitariness is certainly there. Yet listen long enough, and Drummond's quietly encompassing humanity becomes as unmistakable as his reticence—which is why that reticence has the unlikely effect of endearing him to us all the more.

There's a moment in a late interview that tells us much about the poet and the man. Drummond remembers riding one of the trams that dot his poetry (one reason the collection's title is apt: he's as democratic a traveler as Whitman) and spotting a young woman beside him, eating corn on the cob. Just ten or twenty years earlier, Drummond marvels, you couldn't have imagined such a thing, old-world manners being what they were. If the young Drummond won some infamy for a poem that celebrates the most vanishingly bland of happenings, finding "a stone in the middle of the road" ("I'll never forget that event," he says, in what could well count as canonical modernist utterance), we find the older Drummond as affected by a more intimately human non-event: by the contented solitude, the unselfconsciousness, of the young woman simply eating her corn.

Yet the interest of the interview comes in the way a second, contradictory self breaks in: "She didn't offer me any," Drummond goes on to say, almost plaintively. This too would have been unthinkable in the prior world. Mark Strand, who along with Elizabeth Bishop was one of Drummond's most devoted translators, remarked on the characteristic way in which humor and seriousness, irony and sincerity, commingle in his work. Sure enough, what we have in this instance is the sort of comic cry that comes again and again in Drummond's poetry, as in these amusing and oddly affecting lines from "Residue"—

If a little of everything remains,
why won't a little of me
remain? In the train
for the north, in the boat,
in newspaper ads?
A little of me in London,
a little of me somewhere.

—and it tells us how irresolvably, in Drummond and in how many like him, the wish for exchange comes up against the innate need and then the ingrained habit of solitude. This is worth

remembering since the latter impulse can be more plainly visible in the poetry, so much so that some have seen one of the most self-concealing travelers through Drummond's poetry as a self-portrait, and a definitive one at that:

The man behind the mustache
is serious, simple and strong.
He hardly ever talks.
Only a very few are friends
with the man behind the glasses and mustache.

From a certain standpoint, "serious, simple and strong" is everything the poet is not; these poems offer abundant proof of that. Unless we say that the three summary adjectives sketch only the outward semblance of a self, a self that is finally as hidden and—just possibly—as given to absurdity, complexity, human weakness as Drummond's. "All things are possible," he writes elsewhere, "only I am impossible." The displaced self-portrait is resonant for arriving in a poem that is otherwise so rife with the personal pronoun, with uncontainable confession. The stanza admits, then, to a marked tension between outward stoicism and that "inner hubbub" of which selves are made. Here is Drummond's "Seven-Sided Poem," which brings that hubbub well within our hearing, and—against whatever odds—makes it affecting:

When I was born, one of those twisted
angels who live in the shadows said,
"Carlos, get ready to be a misfit in life!"

The houses watch the men
who chase after women.
If desire weren't so rampant,
the afternoon might be blue.

The passing streetcar's full of legs:
white and black and yellow legs.
My heart asks why, my God, so many legs?
My eyes, however,
ask no questions.

The man behind the mustache
is serious, simple, and strong.
He hardly ever talks.
Only a very few are friends
with the man behind the glasses and mustache.

My god, why have you forsaken me
if you knew that I wasn't God,
if you knew that I was weak.

World so large, world so wide,
if my name were Clyde,
it would be a rhyme but not an answer.
World so wide, world so large,
my heart's even larger.

I shouldn't tell you,
but this moon

and this brandy
make me sentimental as hell.

“I shouldn’t tell you”: it’s often that we hear, or overhear, Drummond counseling himself against speech; it’s as if he spoke with the knowledge of being, at any point, just one step away from committing those acts of presence, those rueful immediacies, that make his poems impossible to disentangle from the personal. “Don’t tell anyone,” runs the close of another poem, this one more plainly in the mode of soliloquy, “no one knows or will know.” If the immediate referent there is a difficult love, the lines speak to us in the way they speak at the same time of a more than contingent condition; of the self that, through all its changing circumstances, in love or out, craves articulation even as the poet searches out some metaphor that might make it present:

And you keep walking,
melancholy and upright.
You’re the palm tree, you’re the shout
no one heard in the theater
and the lights all went out.

And yet, this saving caveat: Silence that begins as either a refusal or a failure of speech may become something else entirely. The need of connection sometimes finds other means than words. One of Drummond’s most moving poems, “Journey Through the Family,” owes its force to the way it gradually, feelingly persuades us of this. Here the poet finds the imaginative freedom to summon the shade of his father—yet remains possessed of the earthly hurt, the fidelity to the immovable fact of character, to know their encounter cannot culminate in speech. The poem achieves its hypnotic effect through the kind of patient repetition which quotation necessarily wrongs, but suffice it to say that the first few stanzas circle back to the same note:

In the desert of Itabira
the shadow of my father
took me by the hand.
So much lost time.
But he didn’t say anything.
It wasn’t day or night.
A sigh? A bird in flight?
But he didn’t say anything.

Many lines out, the poem hasn’t journeyed very far from its beginnings:

I saw sorrow, misunderstanding
and more than one old resentment
dividing us in the darkness.
The hand I wouldn’t kiss,
the food I wasn’t given,
refusal to ask forgiveness.
Pride. Terror in the night.
But he didn’t say anything.

The poem hasn’t journeyed very far, that is to say, on the surface. Franco Fortini once wrote of the “terror-stricken or brazen compassion” which compels us to give the dead new life in art, and Drummond’s pained refrain belies just what a forward work of compassion his poem accomplishes in its own time, just what a self-transporting listening he is all the while undertaking. “There were various silences / couched in his silence,” Drummond comes to see—other selves and other silences, not least his own. Finally the son’s hurts speak to the father’s, and

it is impossible to know that anything separates “my lack of friends, / his lack of kisses, / our difficult lives.” If such melancholy knowledge of self and other can be, at best, an imperfect solace, this does nothing to diminish the sense of closeness it brings. Drummond is moved to plainly impassioned utterance: “It’s as if all of me burned / with poignant love. / Today, at last, we meet!” What makes its way as memorably into the English, thanks to Zenith, is the plain mysteriousness of the poem’s close, its air of lingering hurt and interrupting ablution:

The waters no longer permit me
to make out his face in the distance,
on the other side of seventy...

I felt that he forgave me,
but he didn’t say anything.

The waters cover his mustache,
the family, Itabira, everything.

From the desert of Itabira, then, to his own desert places. Yet, here as elsewhere, a quality of yearning transforms what might otherwise prove a final isolation. In something so fragile and unmistakable as tone, maybe, rests the isolate speaker’s humanity, the deep vein of resemblance that effaces the awkward fact of his distance. Drummond, looking at a family portrait, is both self-conscious and self-forgetting, strangely apart from those he observes, but no less a part of them for it: “I’ve lost track of who went, / who stays. All I grasp / is the strange idea of family // moving through the flesh.” An equally affecting moment of vision comes in “Hand in Hand,” an *ars poetica* that becomes, more broadly, an expression of human solidarity—one that has transcended the political moment that gave it rise:

I’m bound to life, and I look at my companions.
They’re taciturn but nourish great hopes.
In them, I consider capacious reality.

That “man behind the mustache”—how changed he seems here, how much more multitudinous in number. Should we say that Drummond has made this hopeful revision by casting himself in his contemporaries’ image, or by casting his contemporaries in his own? Both at once. Drummond is making a case for transcendence (“consider” all but contains “find”), yet we couldn’t be further from the sage who said, “Let us treat the men and women well: treat them as if they were real: perhaps they are.” If the title line (“Let’s stay together and go hand in hand”) more plainly brings out what a common humanity is at work here, the striking thing is to find that selfsame humanity well-kept by the more taciturn lines above, for all their abstractness. These lines—the true texture of which, idle cry though this is, just cannot be gotten in translation—are more complete, and more completely human, than they realize; quietly, they set down a transfiguring vision; in their reluctant way, they already constitute an action on the world (Whitman’s determined gerund “compassionating” sees ahead to the mind that enacts these lines).

In a way this moment comprises one of Drummond’s most affecting, because most selfless, self-portraits; the original Portuguese places him just a little more concretely in his contemporaries’ midst—a fellow-traveler whose inner distance allows him, paradoxically, to get nearer to and see more *into* the “present life” to which he commits himself. Readers of this bilingual volume will want to take Zenith’s strong rendering hand in hand with the original. Here is Drummond in words—gentle and forceful, singular and simple—that could only be his own:

Estou preso à vida e olho meus companheiros.
Estão taciturnos mas nutrem grandes esperanças.
Entre eles, considero a enorme realidade.

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Tomas Unger is a poet and essayist; earned an MFA in Poetry from Boston University and worked as a lecturer at Creative Writing Department, BU. His work appears in *The Threepenny Review*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, and *Literary Imagination*. He lives in New York.



Tomasz Marek Sobieraj, *Life Like a Dream*, from *Colossal Mug of the City*,
B&W negative film, 1998 – 2002

Constantine Petrou Cavafy

PHILOSOPHICAL SCRUTINY

After the already settled Emendatory Work, a philosophical scrutiny of my poems should be made.

Flagrant inconsistencies, illogical possibilities, ridiculous exaggeration should certainly be corrected in the poems, and where the corrections cannot be made the poems should be sacrificed, retaining only any verses of such poems as might prove useful later on in the making of new work.

Still the spirit in which the Scrutiny is to be conducted should not be too fanatical.

The principle of personal experience is undoubtedly a sound one; but were it strictly observed it would limit tremendously literary production and even philosophical production. If one ought to wait for old age to risk a word about it, if one ought to wait for the experience of a violent disease in order to mention it, if one ought to experience every sorrow or perturbed state of mind in order to speak of it—one would find that what is left to write of is very little, and indeed many things might not be written at all about as the person who experienced them might not be the person talented to analyse and express them.

Guess work therefore is not to be avoided by any means in a wholesale manner; but of course it must be used cautiously. Guess work indeed—when intelligently directed—loses much of its riskiness, if the user transforms it into a sort of hypothetical experience. This is easier in the description of a battle, of a state of society, of a scenery. By the imagination (and by the help of incidents experienced and remotely or nearly connected) the user can transport himself into the midst of the circumstances and can thus create an experience. The same remark holds good—though it presents more difficulty—in matters of feeling.

I should remark that all philosophers necessarily work largely on guess work—guess work illustrated and elaborated by careful thought and weighing of causes and effects, and by inference, I mean knowledge of other reliable experience.

Moreover the poet in writing of states of mind can also have the sort of experience furnished by his knowledge of himself and has therefore very reliable gauging of what he would feel were he placed in the imagined conditions.

Also care should be taken not to lose from sight that a state of feeling is true and false, possible and impossible at the same time, or rather by turns. And the poet—who, even when he works the most philosophically, remains an artist—gives one side: which does not mean that he denies the obverse, or even—though perhaps this is stretching the point—that he wishes to imply that the side he treats is the truest, or the one oftener true. He merely describes a possible and an occurring state of feeling—sometimes very transient, sometimes of some duration.

Very often the poet's work has but a vague meaning; it is a suggestion: the thoughts are to be enlarged by future generations or by his immediate readers. Plato said that poets utter great meanings without realising them themselves.

I have said above that the poet always remains an artist. As an artist he should avoid—without denying—the seemingly highest—seemingly, for it is not quite proved that it is the highest—philosophy of the absolute worthlessness of effort and of the inherent contradiction in every human utterance. If he deny it: he must work. If he accept it: he must work still, though with the consciousness of his work being but finally toys—at best toys capable of being utilised for some worthier or better purpose or toys the handling of which prepares for some worthier or better work.

Moreover let us consider the vanity of human things, for this is a clearer way of expressing what I have called “the worthlessness of effort and the inherent contradiction in every human utterance.” For few natures, for very few is it possible to—after accepting it—act accordingly, that is refrain from every action except such as subsistence demands. The majority must act; and though producing vain things their impulse to act and their obedience to it are not vain, because it

is a following of nature, or of their nature. Their actions produce works, which can be divided into two categories: works of immediate utility and works of beauty. The poet does the latter. As human nature has got a craving for beauty manifested in different forms—love, order in his surroundings, scenery—he purveys to a need. Some work done in vain and the shortness of human life may declare all this vain; but seeing that we do not know the connection between the after life and this life, perhaps even this may be contested. But the mistake lies chiefly in this individualisation. The work is not vain when we leave the individual and we consider the result. Here there is no death, at least no sure death: the result may perhaps be immense; there is no shortness of life, but an immense duration of it. So the absolute vanity disappears: at best only a comparative vanity may remain for the individual, but when the individual separates himself from his work and considers only the pleasure or the profit it has given him for a few years and then its vast importance for centuries and centuries even this comparative vanity disappears or vastly lessens.

My method of procedure for this Philosophical Scrutiny may be either by taking up the poems one by one and settling them at once—following the lists and ticking each on the list as it is finished, or effacing it if vowed to destruction; or by considering them first attentively, reporting on them, making a batch of the reports, and afterwards working at them on the basis and in the sequence of the batch: that is the method of procedure of the Emendatory Work.

It may also very well happen that the guess work or rather the intellectual insight into the feelings of others may result in the delineating of more interesting intellectual facts or conditions than the mere relation of the personal experience of one individual. Moreover—though this is a delicate matter—is not such study of others and penetration of others part of what I call “personal experience?” Does not this penetration—successful or not—influence the individual thought and create states of mind?

Besides, one lives, one hears, and one understands; and the poems one writes, though not true to one’s actual life, are true to other lives («Το πρώτο φως των», «Τείχη», «Παράθυρα», «Θερμοπύλαι»)—not generally of course, but specially—and the reader to whose life the poem fits admires and feels the poem: which is proved by Xenopoulos’ liking («Τείχη», «Κεριά»), and Pap.’s («Κεριά») and Tsocopoulos’ («Φωναι Γλυκείαι»). And when one lives, hears, and searches intelligently and tries to write wisely his work is bound, one may say, to fit some life.

Perhaps Shakespeare had never been jealous in his life, so he ought not to have written Othello; perhaps he was never seriously melancholy, so he ought not to have written Hamlet; he never murdered, so he ought not to have written Macbeth!!!

On Sunday (16 August 1903) I wrote some lines beginning «Σαν έρχεται καμμιά ημέρα ή μια ώρα». I was absolutely sincere at the time. In fact the lines as they now stand are not good, because they have not been worked: it was throwing on paper an impression. In the evening of the very same day I was ill, and the lines seemed to me flat. Yet they were sincere: they had the necessary truthfulness for art. So is every sincerity to be laid aside, on account of the short duration of the feeling which prompts its expression? But then art is at a standstill; and speech is condemned—because what is always lasting? And things cannot and should not be lasting, for man would then be “all of a piece” and stagnate in sentimental inactivity, in want of change.

If a thought has been really true for a day, its becoming false the next day does not deprive it of its claim to verity. It may have been only a passing or a short lived truth, but if intelligent and serious it is worthy to be received, both artistically and philosophically.

25 November 1903

Here is another example. No poems were sincerer than the “Two Months”, written during and immediately after the great crisis of libidinousness succeeding on my departure from Athens. Now, say that in time Alekos Mavroudis comes to be indifferent to me, like Sul. (I was very much in love with him before my departure for Athens), or Bra.; will the poems—so true when they were made—become false? Certainly, certainly not. They will remain true in the past, and, though not

applicable any more in my life, seeing that they may remind of a day and perhaps different impression, they will be applicable to feelings of other lives.

The same therefore must apply to other works —really felt at the time. If even for one day, or one hour I felt like the man within “Walls”, or like the man of “Windows” the poem is based on a truth, a short-lived truth, but which, for the very reason of its having once existed, may repeat itself in another life, perhaps with as short duration, perhaps with longer. If “Thermopylae” fits but one life, it is true; and it may, indeed the probabilities are that it must.

Κ. Π. Καβάφης, Τα πεζά (1882;-1931), Φιλολογική επιμέλεια Μιχάλης Πιερής, Ίκαρος Εκδοτική Εταιρεία, 2003

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Constantine P. Cavafy (Greek: Κωνσταντίνος Π. Καβάφης, 1863 – 1933) was an Egyptian Greek poet, journalist and civil servant. His consciously individual style earned him a place among the most important figures not only in Greek poetry, but in Western poetry as well. During his lifetime, he consistently refused to formally publish his work and preferred to print it out himself in broadsheets and give it away to anyone interested or occasionally share it through local newspapers and magazines. Cavafy’s most important poems were written after his fortieth birthday and his poetic Canon consists of 154 poems (he had repudiated 27 early poems) and was published posthumously in 1935.



Tomasz Marek Sobieraj, from *Behind the Walls of the Promised Land*, B&W negative film, 2012

DAVID DAY**The Old White Dog**

The old white dog with blue-green eyes
Collapsed on the floor near my desk
And could not lift his head when I called his name.
When he began to shine and cry I telephoned the vet.

The old white dog with blue-green eyes
Tried to walk but couldn't
So I carried him into the examination room
And laid him on a cold, steely table.

The old white dog with blue-green eyes
Stared into the Void and released his bladder
While the vet told me what was wrong,
What was humane and what had to be done.

The old white dog with blue-green eyes
Watched me nod my head, giving my permission.
I held his paw while the vet inserted the needle.
He told me it would only take a few minutes.

The old white dog with blue-green eyes
Died in a puddle of urine at the hands of a stranger
While I, his cowardly master, watched and wept.
When it was over I removed his collar and stumbled from the room.

The old white dog with blue-green eyes
Still runs through the field of my dreams
But, when I wake with a start in the night
And stare into the darkness, he is not there.

Fragments of Childhood

There were juicy pears in the orchard of my grandparents,
Golden fruit that spattered the earth like rain, like snow,
When my cousins and I shook the branches.
The sky glittered above the trees
And the sun shimmered through the leaves
While we laughed and played.
Sometimes, after supper or summer evenings,
We would sit on the porch
And watch the fireflies blinking in the pasture.
Grandpa would tell stories about working in the coal mines
When he was young and before he got crippled by a cave-in.
Grandma would sit in her rocking chair,
Sometimes knitting, sometimes churning butter

And sometimes just rocking back and forth, back and forth.
When it got dark, Grandma would say, "Time for bed, boys."
We would climb the stairs to our pallets in the attic
And kneel on the floor to say our prayers
With the moon and stars shining through the window.

The Homecoming of Ulysses

After ten years of war
And ten years of wandering,
I, Ulysses, slyest of all Greeks,
Washed ashore on the isle of Ithaca
To reclaim my wife and kingdom.

Rumor had reached me in a distant land
That I, the mighty Ulysses,
Strong as a bull and wily as a fox,
Had perished on the bloody plains of Troy.
And a band of foolish suitors
Had invaded my castle,
Like a flock of greedy vultures,
To overwhelm my beautiful widow
And devour her dead husband's fortune.

Fearing some unforeseen treachery,
Which is basic wisdom for a king,
I dressed myself in the rags of a beggar
And presented myself as a poor homeless stranger
To all who had known and loved me.

I gained access to my castle
By begging for food and a place at the fire
And, as is the custom of my country,
The request was granted.
Only Argos, faithful dog of my youth,
Sniffed out my identity
While I crouched in a dark corner
Of the great hall plotting my strategy.

It was simple, as most strategies are.
After the suitors had tried and failed,
I strung the mighty bow
And proceeded to slay them all, one by one,
Until there were none.
Old Argos wagged his bushy tail
And licked my hand with his warm tongue.

At that moment Penelope knew I was, indeed, her husband
And, with familiar charms,
Welcomed me into her waiting bed,

While toothless Argos howled with joy
And lapped a nearby pool of blood.

A few days later, Argos died in his sleep.
I buried him high on a hill.
Within the year, Penelope wove herself into madness.
I locked her in the castle's tower.
Time passed and blurred into old age
Until my son, Telemachus, ascended to the throne.

And then, seeking one final adventure,
I gathered a trusty crew and set sail
In search of virtue and knowledge.
But Poseidon waits for every man;
I perished at the end of the world
Beneath the waves of a cold and angry sea,
Thrashing my arms and legs,
Gasping for breath
And blinking at the stars.

Homer said, "Men are playthings of the Gods
And all their deeds have been foretold,"
But the blind poet was wrong.
I, Ulysses, slyest of all Greeks,
Warred and wandered, loved and killed,
All with a will of my own.

Van Gogh

That afternoon was blue sky
Pressing down on yellow corn;
The red road that led him there
And grass so green it tinted the clouds.
But, most of all, that afternoon was crows—
Crows over the cornfield:
Blue-black harbingers whirling round his head,
Brushing the rough canvas on the easel
With their wild wings
And cawing to the wind
Of the terrible thing to come.

Rimbaud in Abyssinia

The poet scowled at the moon
As he limped toward the sea
And the face of his mother.
The night was black gangrene,
And the stars were gold coins
He had counted many times.

He said nothing.
There was nothing left to say.
He would finish his poem in silence.

The Last Darkness

In the last darkness,
I will be a crow
Climbing in the black sky
Alone, and away from earth,
To an even darker place
That is beyond imagination
And understanding . . .

David Day was born in Chicago, Illinois in 1939. He began working as a young boy and as he grew-up, he worked a range of jobs from truck driver, longshoreman, furniture mover, business man. He served two years in the U.S. Army, studied literature, history and economics. During the 1980's, he was an active supporter of Solidarity and wrote numerous articles and letters for newspapers supporting the movement and participated in pro-Solidarity demonstrations. As of April 2016, he left New York and currently resides in Ostrołęka, Poland. His selected poems *Five Minutes to Midnight* will be published this year.



Tomasz Marek Sobieraj, from *Behind the Walls of the Promised Land*, B&W negative film,

TOMASZ MAREK SOBIERAJ

Fourteen Minutes

I know, journeys educate,
even if short, like that one
to the Chelmno-upon-Ner.

A wide valley,
white church on the scarp—
the “Station of undress,”
Mother of God
on the painting above the altar
watching blandly; a small ravine
separates the temple
from the place of genocide.

They were cordially welcomed
in the front of the palace, later
lounge in the ballroom,
and a narrow corridor
to the bath on the lorry.
The rasp of the closing door.
Driver chucks a stub,
starts the engine,
switches a small lever.
Fourteen minutes
of bath in the fumes
and excrements.
Fourteen minutes
of screams and vomits.
Afterwards peace
for always
in the hereabout forest.

In the evening,
after a hard day’s work
in Sonderkommando,
beer, laughter, and snapshot
to provide a memento.
Normally,
just like it is after a chore.

During World War II in Chelmno-upon-Ner was situated German death camp Kulmhof. Transports of Jews arrived mainly from Litzmannstadt Ghetto (today Lodz); over 200 000 people were murdered in mobile gas chambers—gas vans; the exhaust fumes were diverted into the sealed rear compartment where the victims were locked in and after fourteen minutes killed by asphyxiation.

Boy in the Fog

September morning. Birds are still dreaming
 about cornfields and gardens full of insects.
 The promise of autumn smoke hangs in the air,
 almost still now, but sometimes tremulous,
 like an animal resting after a long run.
 No sound breaks the mystery of the morning.
 The fog glides from the river, fills the valley,
 flows further, wraps meadows with a silent cloud
 of a taste of brown seaweed and oak leaves.
 It drapes low, covers the grass and herbs,
 but a clump of young birches
 sticks out above the volatile ocean.
 The sun already rises, climbing rapidly,
 loses the innocent color of raspberries
 to take on the lush eroticism of a ripe orange.
 A boy walks, cutting with his legs passionate
 fog tongues, around his fingers he winds
 pieces of the cool wadding, from invisible flowers
 of the late summer he throws down the dew drops. They fall down
 making noise that wakes residents
 of a small world—they do not know yet,
 they do not even have a hunch,
 that the jar in the boy's backpack
 will become the destiny for some of them,
 a train to extermination of small living creatures
 gassed with ether and pierced with a pin
 in a small Auschwitz of a child's room.

Grotto of Avernus

I've been sitting
 in front of a cavern
 wide open and dark.

I've been looking inside
 leaning dangerously
 over a dank abyss,
 breathing in
 the seductive smell of Inferno.

But I lack
 the courage of Aeneas.

Translation by the author & Erik La Prade

—
 Tomasz Marek Sobieraj was born in 1964 in Łódź, Poland. Poet, writer, art and literary critic, photographer; earned MSc in Geography and Hydrology from Łódź University. Worked as a GIS specialist. Author of 8 books. Translated into English, Spanish, Russian, Danish, Kurdish, Italian, Korean and Ukrainian.

THE WISŁA POLISH FILM FESTIVAL

The Wisła Polish Film Festival in Moscow celebrates its 10th jubilee this year. The upcoming edition, which runs from May 25th to June 11th, will deliver the Moscow audience 18 plentiful days with Polish culture—movies, books, spectacles, exhibitions, concerts and hours of creative discussions. This year we have managed to add couple of new venues to the roster, we will show films in five most popular Moscow's movie theatres. Replicas of the Festival will last in several Russian cities until the end of October 2017.

The international Wisła project shows the representatives of different cultures the most outstanding Polish films that outline the wide prospect over our country and its people. The Wisła Festival brings the nations together through the cinematic screen which is a platform of understanding not only in the cultural but also in the human dimension.

THE JOSEPH CONRAD-KORZENIOWSKI FESTIVAL

The Joseph Conrad-Korzeniowski Festival took place in Moscow from May 25th to June 1st, 2017. The autumn edition of the Festival will spread and widen, involving also Kaliningrad and Orenburg. The year 2017 was pronounced the year of Joseph Conrad Korzeniowski in Poland on the occasion of the 160th anniversary of the author's birth. The project organized by the Wspieram Foundation will be a crucial point in the calendar of the events commemorating and propagating the creativity and iconic personality of Joseph Conrad.

The Joseph Conrad-Korzeniowski Festival aims to restore remembrance, promote and widen knowledge among Russians about one of the most esteemed writers in the world. Conrad's works convey a universal message which is lucid to readers all over the globe. This personage is close to the hearts of literature lovers not only in Poland—Conrad's homeland, England, where he created, but also across the whole Europe. *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim*, *Nostromo*, *The Secret Agent*, are just some of Joseph Conrad's titles that bring up both global civilization problems and individual day-to-day issues. Due to the universality and multifaceted nature of Conrad's works, they have a timeless influence on contemporary literature and will forever remain relevant to their audience.





Albrecht Dürer, *Adam and Eve*, engraving, 1504
Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Mass.