



Polish Literature

(GAINED, NOT LOST)
IN TRANSLATION

By
Ewa Bronowicz



BRUNO SCHULZ
The Street of Crocodiles (Sklepy Cynamonowe)
Translated by *Celina Wieniewska*
160pp. Penguin Books, New York. \$13.00

Polish Souvenirs

Bruno Schulz might have never been discovered had it not been for Zofia Nalkowska, a well-known Polish novelist, who read his stories and insisted on getting them published, right away. These days, when Poles talk about Bruno Schulz, they refer to him as one of the best Polish writers of the 20th century. And yet, Schulz's work is still virtually unknown outside of Poland. Maybe he would have preferred it that way anyway.

Bruno Schulz, who was shot by an SS officer in 1942 for crossing over to the "Aryan" part of town—he was a Jew—was a very private man. He taught art at a high school and spent most of his life in the same small town, writing and painting in his free time. Once he became famous, after his first stories were published in 1934, he claimed that the critics paralyzed him, and that he could no longer write intimately because he had to write for the "unknown." In fact, his first collection of stories, *The Street of Crocodiles*, was first conceived "intimately," in the form of the author's letters to a friend, a poet and a doctor of philosophy who lived in Lvov. It was the recipient of these letters who encouraged Schulz to seek publication. And that's how it all began.

The Street of Crocodiles, translated into English in 1963, is now a collection of short stories, many of which are autobiographical in nature. The stories, which might, at first, appear disconnected, have a number of things in common—the narrator, a young boy with a big imagination and a "boring" (as he puts it) life, invites us into a world of smells that "contained a marvelous synthesis" of people's lives, a Father who turns into a coach roach and one day simply "disappears," and cinnamon shops filled with the "aroma of distant countries." At times, the narrator seems removed from all this, as if the stories he told didn't matter; at other times, he is unable to hide his excitement and shares with us moments of joy, even if it means recounting the joy of encountering a strange face.

"Strange" is probably one of the best adjectives to describe the book, actually. Everything the narrator describes, he describes in a way slightly different from what we are used to. When the boy finds a dog, he describes it as, "The most essential secret of life, reduced to this simple, handy, toy-like form (...); of his house, he says that it is so similar to other houses on the street that one can easily walk into the wrong one and not even realize it; and Mr. Charles is a "grass widower," because his wife and children live in the countryside. The book is full of such revelations, which, depending on one's fancy, will seem either interesting or not.

The most moving, and perhaps the most serious moment in the book is when the Father loses his beloved birds. He orders bird eggs from Hamburg and soon starts a bird sanctuary in one of the empty rooms of the house. He locks himself up there, listening to the birds, and even believing he is one himself. One day Adela, the cleaning lady, enters the room and lets all the birds out, disgusted by the smell. The narrator comments on this calmly: "A moment later, my father came downstairs—a broken man, an exiled man who had lost his throne and his kingdom." And so it turns out that what really connects Schulz' characters is that they have nowhere to go.

Any questions or comments for Ewa.... You can contact her by visiting her website: www.literatka-nyc.com

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Remembered & Observed: Katyn Massacre 70th Anniversary

By Szymon Tolak

FAIRHAVEN, MA - Tears filled the eyes of many in the audience as the speaker read excerpts of letters that never arrived home to loved ones and roll-called, unanswered, the names of several of the victims of the calculated 1940 massacre at Katyn.

William Budryk, honored veteran of the U.S. Marines and a Polish historian, was the keynote speaker on Sunday, March 7th, at The Polish Cultural Center's observation of the 70th anniversary of the horrendous, cold blooded and disputed massacre of 21,857 Polish prisoners of war, intellectuals, army and police officers in April and May 1940 by the Soviet secret police in the forest of Katyn in Russia.

In 1943, German troops discovered the mass graves in the forest and accused the Soviets who, in turn, blamed the Third Reich. Despite incontrovertible forensic evidence by objective analysts that solely implicated the Soviet secret police, the charges were ignored at Nuremberg and continued to be denied by the Soviet Union for more than 60 years.

Only recently has the former Soviet Union acknowledged culpability, and have invited Polish Prime Minister Tusk to Russia, to mark the anniversary of one of the most ignored and despicable atrocities of WW II, a long awaited acknowledgement and overture that may spell an improvement in future Polish-Russian relations.

An audience of 50 from Boston, Chelsea, Worcester and New Bedford attended the Polish Cultural Center on the water in Fairhaven, MA to hear former Marine Budryk's strong and well documented presentation that laid out the historical backdrop that led up to the massacre, including the signing by Stalin of the order of execution. Budryk's own grandpar-



William Budryk, at podium, speaking to the guests



Rev. Roman Chwaliszewski (right) of Our Lady of Perpetual Help converses with young video-grapher, Malgosia Tolak (on left).

ents were refugees from Poland who immigrated to the U.S. His grandfather, Alexander, had been conscripted into and served in the Russian Army in the late 1890s-early 1900s before being discharged.

Complementing Mr. Budryk's lecture was a documentary with actual and reenactment footage of the Katyn massacre. Center Director, Szymon Tolak, created a touching and haunting visual photographic and documentary display of WW II maps and charts of the massacre, surrounding the walls of

the lecture hall, including actual archival portrait photographs of thousands of the victims.

Frank Budryk, a former history teacher who has traveled extensively in Poland, purchased the stunning property last year and realized a life-long vision by creating the Inn (a B&B) and Cultural Center, welcomed attendees to the event, one of a series promoting Polish cultural pride and awareness. CC.

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