

food from the Germans and from so-called partisans (yes, the Bielski partisans had their criminal side glossed over in the movie *Defiance*), and finally from Soviet soldiers. Then death, death, and more death—but not the anonymous death of millions, rather the loss of fathers, mothers, uncles, and aunts—sometimes in twenty-four hours, as when the incoming Soviets shot the narrator’s uncle in the street and shipped his wife and two sons to Siberia—all in twenty-four hours.

Poet John Guzlowski described similar things happening to Polish Christians under German occupation, but unlike Guzlowski, Trochimeczyk manages to insert a ray of hope. I cannot exactly describe how—I do not know how she does it. Perhaps the delicacy with which she approaches those who did not survive, whom the Holocaust commemorations discount because they were not Jewish—perhaps that delicacy and gentleness is the answer. In any case, these poems leave one reflecting on the beast that is hidden in some men and women. It is clear that the author does not believe, as some psychologists do, that anyone can become a beast under certain circumstances. I share her conviction in this regard.

This little book is quite different from many a volume of poetry that saw the printing press because the author wanted to see her work published. It has no authorial vanity. It is excellent and deserving republication by a major publishing house. The author is a poet who makes a living in a profession far removed from poetry, and who is also the author of scholarly works in literature and music. Order it from the publisher and you will not be disappointed. (SB)

War and Immigration

Becoming an American

Joseph A. Kotarba

The Long Way Home: An American Journey from Ellis Island to the Great War, by David Laskin. New York: Harper, 2010. xxiv + 386 pages. Sources, index. ISBN 978006123333-3.

Those of us who are second- and third-generation Americans of Polish ancestry can probably remember our grandparents’ stories about the great migration at the turn of the twentieth century. Key terms such as Ellis Island, Cossacks, Bolsheviks, Hamtramck, and turnips were the stuff of stories thick in old-country substance but never quite as important as the new lives forged in the United States. Less memorable were the very few stories about the Great War against Germany we entered in 1917. It seemed like starting a family, working a regular if difficult job, buying a bungalow on the south side, and nurturing a parish where only Polish and Latin were spoken marked the beginning of time. We heard heroic and sometimes gruesome stories of World War II from our uncles and fathers, but the Great War rarely came up.

In his intricately assembled history, David Laskin illuminates this period of American life by weaving two identities together into the portrait of an immigrant seeking a better life who becomes an American patriot fighting for his newly adopted country. As the author points out, when the United States entered the war in 1917 fully one-third of its people had either been born overseas or were the children of immigrants. In light of significant discrimination in America against immigrants from Eastern Europe, many turned to service in the armed forces during World War I in order to become full citizens. Other immigrants served simply because they were told to do so and they felt it was their duty. As Laskin notes, “some fought not for an idea, but because the sergeant told them to fight, because their buddy was fighting, because they were part of a platoon. But in the end, they also fought because they were Americans.” Army draftees and volunteers found themselves heading back to a Europe they thought they had left behind forever.

One really creative feature of this book is the sociological way Laskin traces and compares the biographies of twelve men—four Italians, three Jews, two Poles, an Irishman, a Norwegian, and a Slovak—from their homes in Europe, to the promised land of America, to their return to Europe as part of the American Expeditionary

Force. Nine of them survived the war. Laskin conducted dozens of interviews including with two surviving veterans, 106 and 110 years old, and collected family and regimental histories, military records, and historical archives. He has a taste for detail, both military and personal, and is particularly good at drawing parallels and contrasts between the polyglot AEF in which familiarity broke down barriers between people, and war-ravaged Europe where it seemed to have the opposite effect. Further, this group of twelve allows Laskin to explore different facets of the immigrant experience without relying on stereotypes: the Jewish junk dealer, the Norwegian bachelor farmer, and the Italian peasant boy had very different lives, both in their home countries and in this one.

Apart from all the death and destruction the war caused—described here in great detail—Laskin's main point is that the war very successfully helped the immigrants who served to integrate into American society. That was not an easy task. The men in one New York division spoke forty-three languages, and officers sometimes had to mime what they were trying to get the men to do. As one native-born soldier wrote in a letter home, "I think it is about the finest thing in the world for anyone, who like myself, has always suffered with race prejudice, to be mixed up in an outfit like this. The last six months of my life in the army, living and suffering with these fellows, has done more for me to get rid of race prejudice than anything else could have done."

The two Polish soldiers provide very interesting biographies. I briefly mention one. Joe Chmielewski's brother, Frank, migrated from the Russian Partition, otherwise known as Congress Poland, to South Fork, Pennsylvania in 1907. Frank worked at the Argyle Coal Company and quickly became a leader of the Polish community and the Catholic parish, St. Anthony's. His younger brother, Joe, arrived in 1912 and quickly found work in the mine, but unlike Frank, he did not find it very rewarding. Frank and Joe learned of the war in 1914 through their local Polish language newspaper, *Naród Polski*: "Battle on Polish Lands" read the headline of the September 2 issue. The complicated political situation in Poland left the

two brothers and other Poles living in America confused. Whose side should they take? What outcome is best for Poland? As Laskin put it, "Of all the newly arrived immigrants, the Poles were the first to grasp that the war in Europe was their war too." In 1917 Joe Chmielewski was young and restless, and his work in the mines and steel mills in Pennsylvania provided little satisfaction. He enlisted in the U.S. Army and was assigned to the 16th Machine Gun Battalion in Georgia. Joe saw no action with that battalion, but served two years in the army until his honorable discharge in 1919. Unlike his older brother, Frank, and other Polish immigrants who had deep roots in and commitment to their Polish and Catholic world and their families, Joe became a drifter. He worked at various jobs in Michigan, Minnesota, and Illinois. The message seems to be that whether Polish, Jewish, Irish, or American, we get our meaning for life from the communities to which we belong.

The Long Way Home is a good read, especially since it instructs us about foreign-born soldiers whose service to America shines.

In Paradise

By Peter Matthiessen. New York: Riverhead Books (riverheadbooks.com), 2014. 256 pages. ISBN: 1594633177.

John Guzłowski

For a book that hopes to be a serious novel about the Holocaust by a very serious and much admired and awarded writer (three time National Book Award winner), this is a surprisingly silly book. The novel follows Clements Olin, a respected Polish-American scholar of Holocaust literature as he goes to Auschwitz to do research on Tadeusz Borowski, the author of one of the great memoirs about this German death camp, and to consider his own roots as a Pole and an American. Set in Kraków, Auschwitz, and Oświęcim and ranging in time between Poland's World War II history and its postcommunist years, this is the kind of novel that should be of interest to Central Europe specialists. *In*