

experience becomes ever greater the longer and more intensely a man lives and reflects.” Developing that theme, he notes that “man is a rich, complex, and multifaceted being. Many empirical sciences study man as their object but it is man who possesses an immediate apprehension of the totality of his nature, the totality of the *I*.” On the other hand, no properly human cognition is purely sensory. Even man’s spiritual or intellectual experiences are never purely immaterial but always have some connection to the sensory.

Wojtyła then makes a subtle point. We do not come to know our souls directly and immediately as a result of introspection. We experience the self in an indirect way by drawing conclusions from the way we apprehend things. Put another way, philosophy arrives at an apprehension and explanation of human nature not through direct experience but by reasoning and inference. But that is not all. In our quest to know what man is, our Catholic faith adds to the picture. Faith proclaims the immortality of the human soul, a truth intimated by philosophy but beyond philosophical demonstration.

In the course of his lectures Wojtyła spends some time explaining St. Thomas’ treatment of the passions of the soul, what he calls “the sphere of desire and aspiration.” Cognition, he explains, is directed to the thing itself, to the object, whereas aspiration is directed to its value. St. Thomas divides the rich material of human feeling into the eleven *passions animae* of which six belong to the desiring sphere of the soul: love-hatred, desire-dislike, joy-sorrow, and five to the sphere of urges: hope-despair, fear-bravery, and anger (for which there is no opposite). Obviously, one can find and distinguish in the orbit of each of those feelings a higher or lower form of emotional experience.

In a subsequent discussion of freedom Wojtyła displays knowledge of the empirical studies of Wilhelm Wundt, Herbert Spencer, and William James. He acknowledges their insights in pursuing his own study. One must add that this early study is reflected in his later published work, especially in *Love and Responsibility*.

Whether they realize it or not, students and others who heard these lectures were exposed to a valuable course in Thomistic psychology. While Fr. Wojtyła was ever faithful to the texts he was explicating, one can detect in these lectures his signature touch, or the personality that subsequently endeared him to a worldwide audience when he became John Paul II.

This reviewer would be remiss if he did not recognize the very readable English translation of John Grondelski. △

To Our Children

Memoirs of Displacement

A Jewish Journey of Hope and Survival in Twentieth Century Poland and Beyond

By Włodzimierz Szer. Boston: Academic Studies Press (www.academicstudiespress.com), 2016. xii + 219 pages. Index, illustrations. ISBN 978-1-61811-478-5. Hardcover.

James R. Thompson

The author and main hero of this first-person narrative was born and raised in pre-Second-World-War Poland. Like a large majority of Polish families at that time, his family was poor but not destitute; it aspired to higher education for its children. These were the times of the Great Depression that Poland experienced no less than the United States. Włodzimierz Szer’s family lived in Warsaw before Germans and Soviets attacked Poland in September 1939. When the war started Włodzimierz’s father raced off to the Soviet-occupied part of Poland, whereas he and his mother remained in Warsaw. When in the German-occupied part of Poland (including Warsaw) Germans ordered Jews to wear the Star of David on their sleeves, Włodzimierz was shipped off to the east to join his father.

It should be added that unless he/she were a renegade and member of the prewar communist party, hardly any Polish Catholic would dream of escaping to the Soviet zone: it would mean instant death or being shipped off to the Gulag. The Soviets considered Polish Catholics to be

enemies slated for liquidation. These were the years of Soviet-Nazi friendship, so correspondence and relocation were possible. At that time the Soviets were bosom friends of the Nazis, and it was Polish Christians who were dispossessed, deported, or murdered wholesale by both Germans and Russians; the Jews were next in line, but did not know it yet. The fate of the Szers in the USSR was difficult but, in comparison to what happened to other deported Polish families, it was bearable: they were deported not to the Gulag, but to the depths of the Soviet Union where Włodzimierz continued his education. He chose a Russian school rather than Polish. Being a noncommunist Pole in Soviet Russia was a bit like being Jewish in the German-occupied zone.

The Germans betrayed the Russians and attacked them in June 1941. They were initially victorious, and Stalin became frightened. He called on the remnants of the several hundred thousand Polish Christians whom he had previously placed in the Gulag or in Asian *sovkhoses* and allowed them to form a Polish army to fight the Germans. He even allowed a Polish Consulate to be opened in Kuibyshev. General Władysław Anders was dispatched from England to create that army. Włodzimierz and his father were both of military age, and they both applied, but, the book implies, were rejected for anti-Semitic reasons. It should be remembered that 40 percent of those Poles who applied to the Polish Consulate in Kuibyshev were Jewish (Norman Davies, *God's Playground*, II:265); this was out of proportion with the Jewish population in prewar Poland (10 percent). It is therefore doubtful that anti-Semitism was the sole issue. A large number of Jews in Anders's army defected as soon as the army reached Palestine. Anders had the option of prosecuting the defectors: it was wartime and defection was punishable by death. He chose to not do so. One of the defectors was Menachem Begin, the future prime minister of Israel.

The younger Szer joined the Soviet-created Berling army, an organization entirely different from Anders's army. He became an officer, but not before receiving training in Marxism-Leninism. He was in the Berling division when the Warsaw Rising of 1944 took place and the

city was wiped out while the Soviets watched from the other bank (General Berling was not allowed to cross the Vistula). The Red Army simply waited for the Germans to destroy the insurgents and the Polish capital.

The invasion of Poland by Germany and Russia in September 1939 was an unprovoked partition of the country. It is generally understood that the Poles were not pleased by the Russian occupation, but it may be thought that the Russian occupation was a minor annoyance compared to occupation by the Germans. In his book *Revolution from Abroad*, Jan Tomasz Gross carefully and with excellent documentation shows how wrong this notion is:

These very conservative estimates show that the Soviets killed or drove to their deaths three or four times as many people as the Nazis from a population half the size of that under German jurisdiction. This comparison holds for the first two years of the Second World War, the period before the Nazis began systematic mass annihilation of the Jewish population. (*Revolution from Abroad*, Princeton Univ. Press, 1st ed., 229)

Gross shows that for Polish Catholics the Soviets were even worse than the brutal Nazis. Essentially all the Polish professional and semiprofessional classes (doctors, lawyers, teachers, engineers, managers, foremen, farmers holding beyond a few acres) were rounded up by the Soviets and then either killed immediately or retained in prisons for shipment to slave labor camps in Siberia and Central Asia. Gross writes: "In Lwów, twenty-eight people living in a 11.5 sq. m cell relied on the geometrical skills of a gifted high school student who fitted them most ingeniously by size into an intricate pattern" (161). Sanitary conditions were appalling, with inmates frequently forced to urinate and defecate on the floors of the cells.

What was the situation of the Jews in the lands occupied by the Soviets and what was, by and large, their attitude toward the occupiers? Gross writes the following about September 1939: "Jews greeted the Soviet army with joy. The youth was spending days and evenings with the soldiers. . . . Jews received incoming Russians enthusiastically, they [the Russians] also trusted them" (*Revolution from Abroad*, 32). Gross also

quotes Celina Konińska: “It is hard to find words to describe the feeling — this waiting and this happiness. We wondered how to express ourselves — to throw flowers? To sing? To organize a demonstration? How to show our great joy? I think the Jews awaiting the Messiah will feel, when he finally comes, the way we felt” (34). Szer’s father was not in that number; he was a Bundist rather than a communist, was deeply suspicious of the Soviets and was eventually arrested by the NKVD. But the scenes described by Gross were common, and the Polish Christian reaction to them predictable.

What happened to Szer’s mother who stayed in Warsaw? We are slowly introduced to real anti-Semitism, one sponsored by a free and independent state (Germany) and unpunished by criminal law in that state. Szer’s mother was killed in the Holocaust together with other prewar friends and relatives. It was only toward the end of the war that Szer learned of the scale of murders not just sanctioned but organized by a *free* nation, i.e., Germany. I emphasize *free*, because citizens of a country under foreign occupation are not responsible for policies forced on that country by the occupiers. Germany was not occupied by the Nazis: it generated the Nazis and then surrendered to them. After the war Szer came back to Poland as a military man, and he was assigned to the city of Łódź where he also began his university studies. Upon receiving his doctorate in biochemistry, he began to work for a military establishment first in Łódź and later in Rembertów. He also married and had two children. By the standards of Soviet-occupied Poland, he and his wife Felusia were doing very well; however, life under communism involved so many restrictions that when an opportunity came he emigrated with his family to the United States. He was helped by Jewish relatives already in New York. His Polish Christian colleagues bid him farewell with regret.

From the book there emerges a modest and honest man, a fine scholar uninterested in politics and able to look at the world objectively. One involuntarily thinks of the thousands of such men and women who would have been happy and productive citizens in the country of their birth if politicians, in their mad criminality,

did not destroy their families and force them to seek refuge in faraway countries.

It is hard to empathize with others while one is being unjustly treated, and Szer generally avoids accusing his native country of heinous crimes against persons of Jewish descent. But there are paragraphs in the book that seem to be added by a copyeditor, rubbing in accusations of anti-Semitism in Poland sponsored by the Catholic Church. There is no question that old-fashioned anti-Semitism existed all over Europe before the Second World War. In Poland it was particularly visible not because Poles were more anti-Semitic than Germans or Frenchmen, but because the percentage of Jews among the population was ten times that of Germany and France. Thus the number of encounters between Christians and Jews was much more numerous than in other countries, and bullying in school or other acts of sometimes criminal nastiness were more abundant. Furthermore, as Szer mentions in the book, in prewar Poland only 20 percent of Jews bothered to learn Polish (21). A minority that does not bother to learn the language of the majority is going to be viewed with suspicion by the majority.

Włodzimierz Szer came back to Poland in a Soviet military uniform, as did many other Jews that survived the war in the USSR and returned either of their own volition or because they were designated by the Soviets to occupy important positions in the Polish government and security apparatus (Stefan Korboński, a Pole honored by Yad Vashem, writes in *Poles and Jews in World War 2* that in the Ministry of Security the minister and all directors of departments were of Jewish background). For a crushing majority of Poles the Soviet uniform indicated “enemy.” Those Polish partisans who were still active in the 1940s and ‘50s killed people who came to Poland in Soviet uniforms not because of their background but because they were perceived as serving the enemy. It is grossly unjust to accuse those partisans of anti-Semitism. They themselves were soon to be killed by the Soviet-controlled security apparatus.

A particularly egregious accusation—again, it seems that it was inserted by an editor rather than by Szer himself—is directed against a saint

of the Roman Catholic Church (canonized by John Paul II) and a hero of Auschwitz, Fr. Maksymilian Kolbe, coeditor of a prewar religious newspaper for the less-educated segment of the population. It is said that this daily published anti-Semitic lies on its title page in virtually every issue (75). I doubt that Szer's editors have bothered to read this publication, yet they allowed these allegations to stand. Their lack of familiarity with the subject shows in their confusing the alleged sequel to this daily (*Nasz Dziennik*) with a Polish liberal paper published in New York (*Nowy Dziennik*), not to mention neglecting the fact that the accused priest (Fr. Rydzyk) has founded a chapel in Toruń dedicated to Poles who lost their lives helping Jews survive during the German Holocaust. Jonny Daniels ("From the Depths") is one of the promoters of this chapel.

Such persistent attempts to present Poles as anti-Semites detract from the value of this book, which is written in a level-headed and calm tone by a person who knows how to make fine distinctions. Without these distinctions the horror of what the Soviets and the Nazis did in Central and Eastern Europe remains incomprehensible and unredeemable. It was "the milk of human kindness," so hard to come by in hard times, that allowed some members of the Szer family to live and survive. Throwing accusations at the minor players (and victims) of the two totalitarian states is not a good way to deal with memory. Δ

Grotowski's Bridge Made of Memory

Embodied Memory, Witnessing and Transmission in the Grotowski Work

By **Dominika Laster**. Calcutta-London-New York: Seagull Books, 2015. xviii + 163 pages. Index, bibliography. ISBN 978-0857423177.

Virginie Magnat

This book will be of particular interest to performance scholars and practitioners already familiar with Jerzy Grotowski's

theatrical and posttheatrical research. Dominika Laster makes clear from the outset that her objective is to analyze as precisely as possible the complex nature of Grotowski's work through an examination of his own perspective and that of his closest collaborators, especially Thomas Richards whom Grotowski designated as his heir. The challenge in doing so lies in the necessity of quoting these artists at length so as to avoid taking shortcuts by means of inevitably reductive paraphrasing. Consequently the reader is required to patiently and attentively follow the author-guide as she skilfully navigates the idiosyncratic terminology rooted in the practical investigation of performance. To some extent, then, the necessity to stay focused and remain vigilant, to take on the roles of witness and co-participant, and to be open to the unknown through a letting-go of habitual discursive reflexes that inhibit experiential inquiry, in order to approach the practice this book seeks to explore.

Aware of the limitations of preestablished theoretical frameworks when attempting to grasp the subtleties, tensions, and contradictions that sustain this ever-evolving praxis, Laster boldly asserts the importance of becoming immersed in the creative depths and multiple layers of Grotowski's approach if one is to credibly assess its artistic value and historical significance. She proposes investigating embodied memory, which she argues connects all the phases of Grotowski's research and that she links to body-memory, body-life, organicity, impulses, and associations, key terms that recur throughout his work. Grotowski asserts that "body-life goes beyond memory" and encompasses potentialities because it is linked to "an important experience, that occurred or that *should* take place" (25). Richards suggests that "the body *is* memory [since] all of our experiences have been lived by our body" (26). Laster specifies that they both consider body-memory to be connected to "the totality of life experiences that are encoded in the body" and seek to rediscover a territory that precedes social forms of conditioning by creating "the conditions in which a *deconditioning*" can occur (27–28).

The posttheatrical period is marked by Grotowski's shift to the transgenerational