

to picture clearly someone who has already passed away: “No, no, all wrong. / He should be alone” (“Portrait From Memory”). “In A Mail Coach” finds her transported to an early nineteenth-century mail coach, crossing Poland in the company of Juliusz Słowacki (1809–49), one of Poland’s great Romantic poets, where she enjoys bringing him the news that:

I’ve come from the Future, and I know how it turns out.

Your poems are loved and admired
And you lie with kings in Wawel Castle.

Was Szyborska smiling as she brought these glad tidings to Słowacki? How many other poets would offer this kind of generosity toward an earlier poet who is now long gone? Is she accompanying him now across Poland and into whatever exile awaits?

In “Metaphysics” Szyborska concludes her meditation on the inconclusiveness of being and nonbeing with the tasty recollection that at least “today you had a side of fries.” And she knows with certainty how quickly the dead are forgotten. “The Day After—Without Us” provides a weather forecast in twenty lines, coolly free of any gloomy emotion about the departed who are so quickly forgotten, even in the poem’s conclusion: “those still living / should bring umbrellas.”

Near the end of *Here* Szyborska conducts an “Interview With Atropos,” the Greek goddess who, for thousands of years, has been cutting the thread of each human life to end it. This meeting is a challenging undertaking that many writers would shy away from but Szyborska approaches it with her usual fearless grace. Atropos, however, is more than a little prickly and defensive about the deadly work she has been deeply committed to for thousands of years. They part with Szyborska’s “Au revoir” (*Do widzenia*). How many poets would conclude an interview with death with such a breezy “until we meet again”?

“Greek Statue” describes in relentless detail the wear and tear of time on this ancient and now decaying representation of what was once a young and beautiful human body:

It first removed the nose, then the genitalia,
next, one by one, the toes and fingers,

over the years the arms, one after the other

This memento mori inventory awaits us all. However, Szyborska’s various approaches to death are not grim or ghastly, but are leavened with a gentle humor that lifts the weight from these harbingers of finality. An exception to this lightness is “Labyrinth,” the penultimate poem in *Here*. It does not resemble Zbigniew Herbert’s quiet recollection of his Minoan visit in the *Labyrinth On The Sea*. Her way through the labyrinth proceeds with the ragged and edgy unpredictability of an implacable labyrinth that leads her.

to the very intersection
where your hopes, errors, failures,
efforts, plans, and new hopes
cross paths
so as to part.

Szyborska continued to write after she completed *Here*, and we can look forward to the posthumous publication of her final work, *Dwukropek* or *Colon*. In keeping with her commitment to reach into the past and make it present, the title of her next and probably last book, *Dwukropek*, is the last word of the last poem in *Here*. Her death came at home, peacefully in her sleep, surrounded by friends and relatives, “exactly as it should.” Δ

The Wall & Beyond

By **Joanna Kurowska**. Little Elm, Texas: eLectio Publishing (<www.electiopublishing.com>, 2012. 68 pages. Kindle edition, ISBN 13-978-1482371178, \$3.99; printed edition (2013), ISBN 10-1482371170. \$11.99.

Katia Mitova

“People have asked me, am I an American poet or a Polish poet writing in English? Maybe being a poet is supranational. It’s like being in a journey; in fact, my poetic ‘I’ often sits in a train,” states Joanna Kurowska in the fall 2011 issue of *Apple Valley Review*. There are, of course, different ways of traveling. Regular commuters tend to be oblivious of the

environment, usually absorbed by their own thoughts, the music in their headphones, or a book. Visitors from out of town look around, smile, and notice little things that normally wouldn't attract their attention. Kurowska's poetic 'I' seems to be traveling in both ways.

Some poems in *The Wall & Beyond* invite the reader to a particular place in Poland or to an internal space that has little to do with what is happening on the train. Other poems start with an observation—of an ant (27) or a sparrow (10)—and expand to include the larger world, philosophical abstractions, truth, and God. This variety of poetic perceptions makes the collection pulsate between the in and out, small and large, particular and abstract—it makes it alive. The mind of the poetic 'I' wanders freely and thoughtfully, even whimsically at times. The reader follows from the intoxicating smell of the lilies in Grandma's room in Ożarówo, through the credo that begins with "I believe in the silence of the invisible God" (13), to the sudden disillusionment of hearing one's own voice "singing in Polish" in an American shower and feeling like "an abysmal stomach / crying to be fed" (28).

What makes Kurowska's poetic meditations interesting is not so much the "pulse" of this collection but interruptions of the pulse: "being surrounded by a rough wall" (1), "wall-like silence" (4), understanding that the wall "too / is full of despair" and "becoming a wall" (21), or foreseeing that "one day, the roughcast / of plaster and flesh will fall off // the wall will stay naked and transparent // there will be only you" (41). Readers of Polish poetry may associate this stirring experience of a clash between physical and metaphysical with the poems of Czesław Miłosz and Zbigniew Herbert. The association with a fiction writer would be less likely unless one is aware of Kurowska's scholarly interest in Joseph Conrad's amalgam of material and spiritual.

Besides the poetic kinship with the legacy of Conrad, Miłosz, and Herbert, there is another reason to consider this book in a broader literary context. Conrad made a conscious choice to write in English from the outset of his literary career; Miłosz collaborated on the translations of his poems with several American poets; Herbert left it to his translators to capture and interpret

the many dimensions of his poetry. Joanna Kurowska, who published two poetry collections in Polish *Ściana* (1997) and *Obok* (1999) a decade after she immigrated to the United States, translated her Polish verses into English as she was writing, more and more often, new poems in English. A comparison of Kurowska's English poems collected in *Inclusions* (forthcoming from Cervena Barva Press) with her translated poems and their Polish originals may contribute to the understanding of bilingual writing as an aesthetic and cultural phenomenon. How is active bilingualism affecting the poet's voice, considering that poetry is shaped by the unique linguistic features of its medium? It will be interesting to see how Kurowska's bilingualism develops. English has already become her primary poetic language, and she has also published Polish translations of her new English poems. Thus far, a reading of *The Wall & Beyond* demonstrates that it is possible to reenact one's own writing persona in a new language. The musical instrument has changed, but the score is the same. Compare the Polish and English last stanzas of "Joseph Conrad":

Ból jest duchem ukrytym w muszelnicy istnienia
Postacią o boskich rysach, która otwiera drzwi
Wiodące do wnętrza dłoni i do wnętrza ziemi
Gdzie płyną po kamieniach zapomniane źródła. (29)

The spirit hiding in life's seashell is pain.
He is the god-figure that opens the door
and takes you to the earth's heart and the hand's palm
where long forgotten sources flow over stones.
(*Obok*, p. 60)

Nie można zdradzić Ewangelii Rozmowy z abp. Ignacym Tokarcukiem

By **Mariusz Krzysztofiński**. Rzeszów-Kraków: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej Oddział w Rzeszowie and Uniwersytet Jana Pawła II (ipn.gov.pl), 2012. ISBN 83-7629-348-6. 136 pages. Illustrations, bibliography. Hardbound.

John M. Grondelski

The Roman Catholic Church played a decisive role in Poland's struggle against