

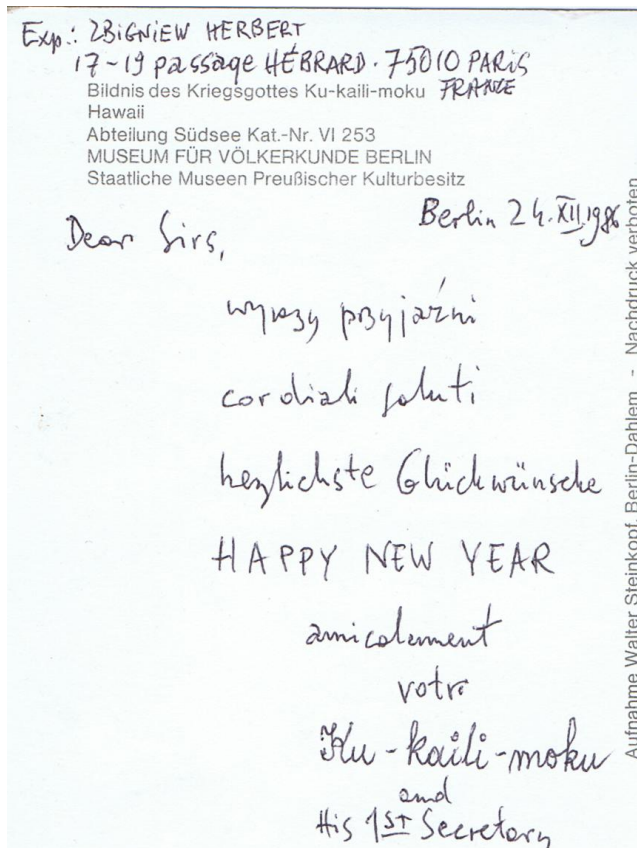
Metaphors of Dissent

Poetry from Beyond the Borders

Translations to English first published in the Pacific NW by

Mr. Cogito Press [John M. Gogol & Robert A. Davies]

and Trace Editions [Charles Seluzicki]



A representative *Mr. Cogito* sampler of poems by
and an essay on Polish poet Ryszard Krynicki



Excerpt: conclusion of “Smuggling Mandelshtam into Texas,” John M. Gogol
[“he” refers to a Texas customs official who stopped John in an old VW entering El Paso... first publication]

Slowly he pores over page after page
looking for the secrets
hidden in them.
If he'd only been able to translate
the message, the final lines of the essay

“On the Word and Culture,”
he would have trembled
in his Texas boots
to read:
“Classical poetry is the poetry of revolution.”

Citizen R.K. Does Not Live

A selection of poems by Ryszard Krynicki Illustrations by Tom Cassidy

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BY SAYING

By saying: "How can I fight
for human rights,
when I've got a wife and child?
you yourself sentence them to a punishment
whose measure is unknown even to
the executioners."

*Translated by
Stanislaw Baranczak & Clare Cavanagh*

ALMOST ALL

It's the twentieth century, so
I go to bed with a paper,
my glasses, pills and wristwatch
are in reach;
I don't know if I'll fall asleep,
I don't know if I'll wake up,
That's all

*12/1977 Translated by
Stanislaw Baranczak & Clare Cavanagh*

TONGUE, THIS WILD MEAT

For Zbigniew Herbert and Mr. Cogito
Tongue, that wild meat growing in a wound,
in an open wound of the mouth, the mouth that feeds on deceitful truth,
tongue, this bared heart beating outside, this naked edge
that is a defenseless weapon, this gag suffocating
the defeated uprisings of words, this beast day by day tamed
by human teeth, this inhuman thing growing in us and
surpassing us, this beast fed with the poisoned meat of a body,
this red flag which we swallow and spit out with blood, this
divided something that encircles us, this real lie that seduces,
this child that learning the truth, truthfully lies

Translated by Grazyna Drabik

MY LITTLE DAUGHTER IS LEARNING TO READ

My little daughter
until now infallible
is learning to read and write
and only now is she beginning
to err

and I relive
all my old human errors
again

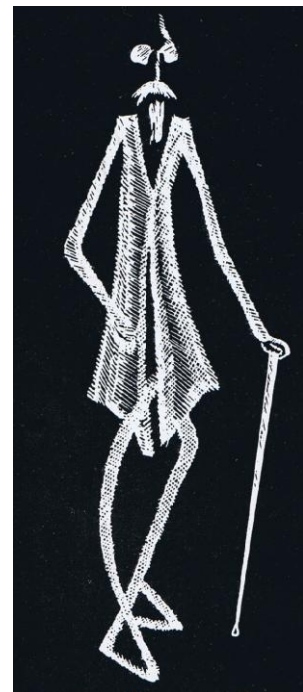
1-7/1977 Translated by Antony Graham

THE TIME OF TRIAL

I was lucky enough to overcome fear:
I didn't sign the loyalty oath
— and yet I'm free. Free?

My time of trial only now
begins.

*12/1981 Translated by
Stanislaw Baranczak & Clare Cavanagh*



Mr. Cogito in the ink

CITIZEN R.K. DOES NOT LIVE

Citizen R.K. does not live
with a wife: (or anything
of his): does not live off his pen,
the unpalatable pen of trademark “parker”
stuck in his throat: is sado-
(chews on the wings
of his “parker” pen)
masochistic (with his pen revivifies bodies
of former days, to
torment them): born (doesn’t know
why): though of a family
of workers: is a parasite (of
language): distinguished
blood donor (perhaps alien blood
flows in his veins): against our
death penalty: crossing a border,
what didn’t he try to smuggle: a birth
certificate, his organism
(collective), and a pen (“parker”): even though
takes no notes: (communicates
by telepathy): (is a tightwad
on the phone, and has corrupted generations
of wristwatches): before sleeping counts to 19
84: (does he count any longer on anything)) Lives
though it’s not clear
whether he has earned such a life

1974/1977

Translated by Frank Kujawinski

I DON'T KNOW

I don't know if the poet
can really be impartial
like a doctor who treats
two bitter enemies the same,

since he has to take sides
as only a sister of mercy can,
patient witness

to a patient's pain

July 1977 *Translated by
Stanislaw Baranczak & Clare Cavanagh*



BY ENTERING

“By entering the grand lottery
of the Center for Children’s Health
you honor the memory of the 2,000,000 children
who perished in battle and were brutally
murdered in World War II.
You bring help and relief
from suffering to thousands of children
crippled and afflicted with disease.
You fulfill your noble and honorable
civic duty.
You have a chance to win
many valuable prizes such as
the Fiat 125p and 126p car,
the C-330 tractor, television sets,
radios, refrigerators, sewing machines, washers
and a host of other attractive products.”

*Translated by Magnus J. Krynski
and Robert A. Maguire*

Excerpts from the *Foreword* by Stanislaw Baranczak (1985)

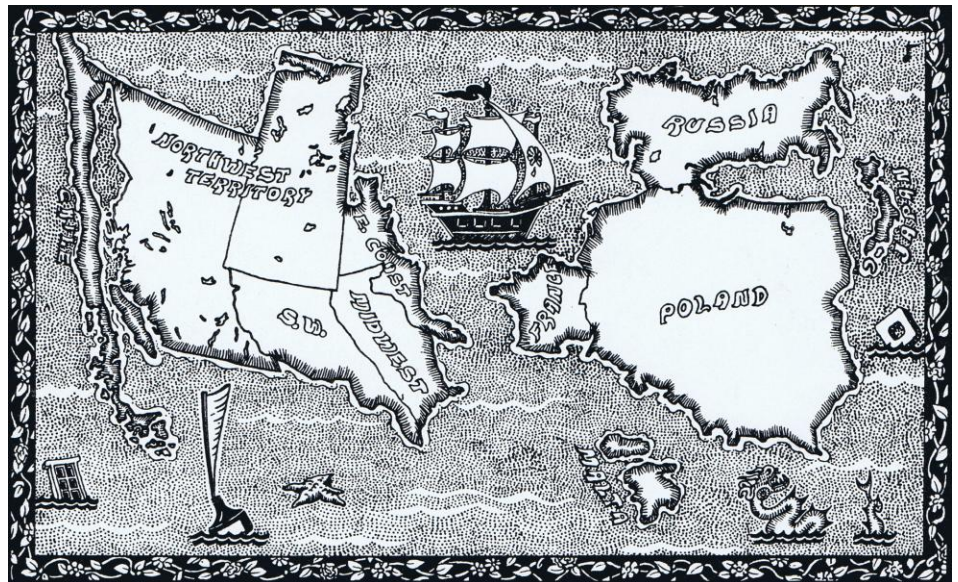
Recognized by many critics as one of the most individual voices in contemporary Polish poetry, Ryszard Krynicky is also representative of a wider poetic movement. He is one of the most outstanding figures of the “Generation of ’68,” an informal group of poets who entered the literary scene in the late 1960’s and soon contributed to what has been perhaps the most dramatic breakthrough in Polish culture since World War II...



In the case of the most talented of them, such as Krynicky or Adam Zagajewski, this discovery led to a new conception of poetry’s role in society; they began to view the lyric as totalitarianism’s natural enemy... In December of 1981, the poet was detained and given, like many other intellectuals, the chance to sign the “loyalty oath” (mentioned in the poem “The Time of Trial”), which he refused to do.

[This] could give the impression that Krynicky is a run-of-the-mill engage poet, a bard of this or that social or political cause. In fact, as the reader will certainly discover, he is simply too good a poet to be reduced to such a role. His “cause,” if any, is much more universal than any one ideology or doctrine; it lies in his personal search for the meaning of individual existence, his private crusade against the specter of despair, absurdity, “nothingness.” It may be the “nothingness” of a world in which entire countries disappear from the maps, people vanish into the dungeons of secret police, and meat never appears at the butchers’. But it may also be the “nothingness” of the world in a broader sense, a world in which the meaning of individual life is incessantly threatened by indifference, transitoriness, oblivion. The individual is seen here as subject to multiple pressures of various kinds—not simply political or social pressures, but also those of love, the fear of death, or metaphysical doubt—under which he must strive to maintain his shaky and frail integrity. It is worth noting how much Krynicky’s style changed in the course of his twenty years of writing...

[There is an] increasing importance in his work of the idea of the poem as a tiny splinter from some vast, ungraspable block of truth. While his early poems were simply mirrors multiplying the image of the world’s absurdity, his recent gnomic verse resembles rather a set of magnifying glasses, through which some inner sense of this apparently absurd world is patiently, though not passionlessly, scrutinized.



Reach OCHC: PO Box 3588, Portland, OR 97208-3588—encanto@ochcom.org

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