

A black and white photograph of Leopold Tyrmand. He is shown from the chest up, wearing a dark suit jacket, a white dress shirt, and a dark tie with light-colored diagonal stripes. He is wearing dark sunglasses and looking slightly to his right with a neutral expression. He is holding a vintage, silver-colored microphone with both hands in front of him. The background is dark and indistinct.

Leopold Tyrmand

DIARY 1954

TRANSLATED FROM THE POLISH BY
ANITA SHELTON AND A. J. WROBEL

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Translators' Introduction

In 1954 a Polish writer, having survived World War II and finding himself and his country confronted by the Soviet-imposed regime in Poland, decided to write a diary to record and reflect on his daily life under communism. Thirty-three-year-old Leopold Tyrmand was already known in Poland as a provocative journalist, a wit, a member of Warsaw's intellectual society, "spiritual father" of the *bikiniarze* (hipsters in colorful ties and socks), and the former president of the Warsaw Jazz Club. Alienated by communism, identified as an ideological enemy by the regime, and deprived of his livelihood, as well as of a voice in the affairs of the nation, he struggled to find a way to survive and, what's more, to "be himself" when that was exactly what the regime would not allow. Tyrmand's *Diary*, which covers just the first three months of 1954, provides a snapshot of life under communism less than a year after Stalin's death and two years before the official launch in Moscow of de-Stalinization. Clear-eyed, sharp-tongued, scathingly funny, occasionally despairing, Tyrmand deserves a place next to Czesław Miłosz, Arthur Koestler, Ryszard Kapuściński, and Václav Havel as an incisive analyst of the fantastical experiment that was Soviet communism. However, unlike Miłosz, Koestler, and Kapuściński, Tyrmand was never a supporter of communism. Quite to the contrary, he openly rejected it, and his account is unique for its uncompromising stance, highly personal point of view, and razor wit. Like Havel, but much earlier, the well-spring of his opposition was a Herculean personal effort to live his own truth while surrounded by lies.

The many memoirs and diaries from the Nazi and Stalinist eras that were published from the 1950s to the 1970s typically came from those who survived the innermost circles of hell—Auschwitz and the Soviet Gulag. Eli Wiesel, Primo Levi, Varlam Shalamov, Evgenia Ginzburg, and Nadezhda Mandelstam

come to mind. More recently, diaries and memoirs of those who survived on the margins of these great and terrible historic times are being published and provide different insights. Victor Klemperer's diaries *I Shall Bear Witness* and *To The Bitter End*, covering the years 1933–1941 and 1942–1945 (published in English in 1998 and 1999), Jochen Hellbeck's *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary Under Stalin* (2006), Orlando Figes's *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin's Russia* (2007), and Erica L. Tucker's *Remembering Occupied Warsaw: Polish Narratives of World War II* (2011) all reflect and advance a more recent interest among historians in daily life, the construction of personal identity, and the history of emotion. Tyrmand does so as well, but once again his savage humor makes him stand out.

Tyrmand's strong revulsion to that filth and neglect which have "become a symbol of communism" for his generation (January 15) has led some to accuse the *Diary* of objecting to the system on merely aesthetic and civilizational grounds—a "hedonistic protest" in which "there is not a single word about the exiles, trials, Tito, Korea, spies, torture in prisons."¹ One must ask if those who have said so have read the book—since each of these issues does appear in it, and rather more than once. Of course there is no in-depth discussion of the Stalin-Tito conflict or an account of the Korean War, but then the *Diary* is a diary. Political trials of the regime's opponents, great and small, famous and unknown, were written about as they, not infrequently, impinged on the author's life and thoughts.² As for the communist methods of persuading the unpersuaded, especially the "captive audience," he did describe them in some detail.³ A memorable scene springs to mind when Tyrmand told his young girlfriend to stop whistling cheerfully as their bus passed by the ominous Ministry of Public Security (March 6). When Tyrmand says that "communism is just a Golem: sky-high, it's true, but made of clay and filth," it is not just the physical dirt that he refers to (January 16).

The *Diary* offers other major insights into the nature and weaknesses of communism that have been borne out by later events. Tyrmand was quick to realize that the system was ossified and fundamentally unreformable, unable to "break free of its monolithic nature, and become what it is not" (January 15). He stuck to this view also after the 1956 political thaw, and never engaged in it. Nor was Tyrmand, the commonsensical economist, fooled by the cant about priority for heavy industry and about the need for patience from the consumer—who, he realized, would have to wait till hell froze over (February 12). He also saw the shoddy work and shirking, just starting to spread as Poland was still in its very first Economic Plan, for what it was—people's "refuge in laziness from getting hounded and worn out," which meant that the communists indeed had "a class enemy—it's the whole society" (March 17). All this made him seriously doubt the view, not uncommon at that time, that in "another half century, Russia will gain advantage over America—economic, military, and even moral" (January 7). Half a century

on, the reality is rather different. Now that communism, staggering from Stalin's *perekovka* to Gorbachov's *perestroika* to oblivion, has completed its "difficult and tortuous route from capitalism to capitalism,"⁴ it looks ridiculously wrongheaded, but in the mid-1950s it was still fooling some sharp minds. Not Tyrmand's.

In avoiding that, he was also helped by the desire, which runs through the *Diary*, to remain his own man. Tyrmand's plea to be allowed to be himself resounds most hauntingly when it is understood to be that of not only a Pole of his generation (bad enough) but also one who was of Jewish origin—although, and perhaps even more because, he very rarely speaks of himself as a Jew. Yet, as a Jew and a Pole he was doubly unworthy of life in the eyes of the Nazis. He managed to survive World War II by hiding in plain sight; that is, by volunteering, under a false French identity, for labor in Germany. After the war, he was inevitably branded, along with the remaining Jews of Europe, as a "survivor"—heroic or cowardly, with "survivor's guilt" or possibly "Jewish self-hatred," but a survivor of the Holocaust. Under communism, he found himself again branded: this time, as a class and ideological enemy (not a proletarian and opposed to communism). Once again, at worst: life-threatening. At best: requiring reeducation and reformation. Or, if he refused: exclusion from public life. A triple whammy followed for Jews, who were proportionately over-represented among the communist regimes imposed on the East European countries "liberated" (occupied) by the Soviet Red Army; they encountered deep hostility among many in these societies as the carriers of communism. Then, in the anti-Trotskyite, anti-cosmopolitan (read: anti-Semitic) purges of the late 1940s, members of existing regimes were targeted from within the communist states themselves, by their own colleagues acting on orders from Moscow. Finally, in the last years of his life, Stalin personally planned a massive anti-Semitic purge (on the pretext of the "Doctors' Plot") in the Soviet Union—which would surely have been followed by anti-Semitic waves of repression in Eastern Europe as well, in the same way that Stalin insisted that the Soviet Five-Year Plans and purges had to be replicated in Eastern Europe. Where, when, in all of this, could a man in the prime of his life "be himself"? It is no wonder that Tyrmand was sympathetic to the hipster *bikiniarze* (whose name is said to have come from the flashy, Bikini-themed ties, some of them depicting an atom bomb exploding on the atoll) and was also attracted to jazz, that ultimate expression of individual being from black culture in the United States—a culture of people also defined by others and not allowed to "be themselves." Even after defecting from Poland and settling in the United States in 1966, Tyrmand found himself labeled. He who in Europe had embraced the best Western traditions of liberalism and the marketplace of ideas became an increasingly outspoken critic of the American opposition movements, and soon found himself branded an anti-communist reactionary in the America of the 1960s and 1970s.

Many of Tyrmand's Polish essays, stories, and novels are available in English translation. These include *Explorations in Freedom*, *On the Border of Jazz*, *Seven Long Voyages*, and his most celebrated novel, *The Man with the White Eyes*, which was a runaway best seller in Poland in the 1950s and continues to be read in Poland today. After his emigration to the United States in 1966, Tyrmand also wrote and published in English in *The New York Times*, *Commentary*, *The New Yorker*, and *The American Scholar*, among others. Some of his essays from that period also appeared in the collection *Notebooks of a Dilettante*. Later, in the 1970s, he founded and edited his own conservative journal, *Chronicles of Culture*. Yet, what is today regarded in Poland as his most singular and outstanding work—his *Diary 1954*—has not until now been translated into English. The main reason for this is, we believe, the difficulty that the text presents to any translator because of its distinctive style, quirky sense of humor, use of colorful colloquialisms from all walks of life—from street slang to communist jargon—as well as many contextual and cultural references. Tyrmand's unique voice will take the English-language reader to a very different and fascinating world.

Discussion, even controversy, has arisen in Poland over the nature and authenticity of the *Diary* as a diary. An extreme view is that the original manuscript of the *Diary* was not written at the time Tyrmand claimed it was, in 1954, but later, and is largely invention. The evidence does not support this at all. First and foremost, there is the testimony of two trustworthy witnesses, Zbigniew Herbert and Stefan Kisielewski, to whom Tyrmand showed the manuscript as and when he wrote it. Second, as soon as Tyrmand got out of Poland in 1965, he deposited the manuscript in Paris at the editorial office of the Polish émigré monthly *Kultura* (it is now available to the public at the Hoover Institute at Stanford University). The literary critic Ryszard Matuszewski, who, in the first, 1992 edition of his textbook *Literatura Polska 1939–1991*, theorized that the *Diary* had been written only in the 1970s in the United States, soon declared this view a mistake, and removed it from later editions.

A related view is that, regardless of when the manuscript was written, the work is more of an autobiographical novel than a diary. Every diary is of course its author's own subjective account, which is what constitutes its greatest value, but, again, the evidence does not support any assertions of wholesale invention: there are numerous witnesses to the events of Tyrmand's life in that period, and public events are of course well documented. Another, more moderate, view is that the differences between the version edited by Tyrmand in the United States and published in Polish in London in 1980, and the raw, unedited manuscript, published in Poland after the fall of communism in 1995 and 1999, include substantive changes that Tyrmand made in order to make himself look more prescient and more consistent in his stances. Our own view is that the changes Tyrmand introduced in 1980 do not constitute major changes in substance and vastly improve the *Diary's* readability. For those reasons, it

is the 1980 version, edited by the author himself, and not the raw manuscript published after his death, that we have translated.⁵

A couple of paragraphs on the details of this translation. For obvious reasons, we have chosen to render Tyrmand's voice in the American English of the 1950s. We have chosen to translate some proper names, such as titles of publications, films, and so on, and the names of political parties and other organizations; footnotes give their names in Polish. The same goes for those of Warsaw street names which mean something evocative. Two adjectives derived from city names are used, also as demonyms: "Varsovian" from "Warsaw," and "Cracovian" from "Krakow" (the latter city name being spelled, exceptionally, as it is common in today's English rather than as "Cracov"). French, German, Italian, and Latin words and phrases are italicized, but so are some English ones—namely, those used by Tyrmand himself. Some foreign phrases, and quotes, are translated in footnotes. As for people, the well-known Westerners, and many Russians, are not footnoted, but there are numerous footnotes on Poland, and especially on the Poles (all the footnotes are ours).

We have, by and large, kept close to the original text, but in a few places we have intervened, as little as possible, to straighten out obvious stylistic lapses such as mixed metaphors; to translate such slip-ups faithfully would not have done justice to the work. We have also broken up some very long sentences or paragraphs. Occasionally, there is another kind of deviation. To translate in a way that conveys not only the meaning but also the wit, color, and texture of the original is no easy task, especially between languages as different as Polish and English. Almost inevitably, there will be places where something or other is, if not entirely lost, then somewhat weakened in translation. It seems right to try to compensate for this when an opportunity arises, and, to this end, we have allowed ourselves to add a few words here and there to sharpen a phrase or to work in a joke in a way that Tyrmand himself might have done, especially if he were writing in English—for sometimes it is the change of language itself that offers such a chance.⁶ We have also added brief explanatory inserts, where these may help the reader and can be worked in without interrupting the flow.⁷

Since the *Diary* begins in medias res, a brief biographical sketch of its author in historical context may be useful. Leopold Tyrmand was born in Warsaw on May 16, 1920. He had a great love for the city as it was before the Germans systematically destroyed it in 1944 in retaliation for the Warsaw Uprising⁸ (parts of the city were destroyed earlier in September 1939 and in the annihilation of the Warsaw Ghetto after its uprising in 1943). There are many passages in the *Diary* in which his detailed knowledge of and feeling for what had been a beautiful city shine through. Tyrmand was the only child of parents whom he remembers with fondness in the *Diary*. His father, a plain man who was a small-scale leather wholesaler, was able to support his family adequately, but without excess or luxury. With mixed feelings, though they were dominated by respect

and gratitude, Tyrmand traced to his father his own deep-seated and inflexible moral code, difficult to live with in the best of times—which his were not. Tyrmand's mother was known as a great beauty in a city famous for the beauty of its women. He recalls her as a kind and generous wife and mother. Yet, it seems that when growing up, he was not really close to either of his parents. His father was murdered by the Nazis at the Majdanek concentration camp. Alone of her family,⁹ his mother survived the camp and the war and then left Poland for Israel. Tyrmand maintained an affectionate correspondence with her while he still lived in Poland, and he later visited her many times in Israel.

By his own description, Tyrmand's secondary education was largely unremarkable, and he himself an unremarkable student. In his *Diary*, he remembers one teacher, of Polish literature, who singled him out as having a talent for writing, and he assigns to this man responsibility for his ultimate vocation as a writer. However, after graduating from high school in 1938, Tyrmand first went to Paris, enrolling in the *École des Beaux-Arts* to study architecture, an interest he maintained for the rest of his life, and which is reflected in the *Diary* in his educated, if not expert, discussions of the rebuilding of Warsaw by the communist regime after the war. It was in Paris that he first came to know and admire the Western cultural tradition. It was also in prewar Paris that Tyrmand discovered and fell in love with American jazz. Though a poor student who often went hungry, he managed to amass a record collection, on the strength of which he later, in 1946, launched the first Polish Jazz Club at the YMCA in Warsaw. A decade after that, in 1956, he organized the first annual Jazz Jamboree in the Baltic coastal city of Sopot. Since then, he has been universally recognized as the original "Guru of Polish Jazz." In his *Diary*, Tyrmand refers with great feeling to jazz songs he heard whistled by an ex-convict in Norway during the war and, later, listened to on Radio Stuttgart in his little room at the YMCA.

Tyrmand was at home in Warsaw on a break from his studies when Nazi Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. This was the beginning of World War II and the end of Tyrmand's studies. He made his way east, as did so many, especially Jews, to evade the grip of the Nazis, despite the fact that on September 17 the Soviet Red Army invaded Poland from that direction. He landed in Vilnius, in Soviet-occupied Lithuania, where in 1940 he joined the staff of *Komsomol Truth*,¹⁰ a Polish-language newspaper published by the Soviets. His daily pieces quickly earned him the reputation as the best writer on the staff, but his work for this particular paper at this point in time has been the subject of some controversy. Was he, in fact, working for the communist cause in this historical moment, in contradiction to his own insistence that he never felt any sympathy for communism, even in his youth, or was this an opportunity, as he claimed, however fraught, to keep open channels of communication to the Polish-language population?¹¹ In any case, he also began to cooperate with the Polish underground independence movement and soon

came to the attention of the NKVD.¹² In 1941 he was arrested, tried, and sentenced to “corrective labor” in the Gulag. Fortunately, if it is at all possible to use the word in connection with the war at that time, when the Nazis began to bombard Vilnius as part of Operation Barbarossa, the greatest land invasion in all history, the prison transport that was to carry Tyrmand eastward came under attack, providing an opportunity for his escape.

At this point, Tyrmand made the decision to travel westward. A gifted linguist who was fluent in French after his year of study in Paris, he secured false identification papers as a French citizen and volunteered for labor service in the Reich. Into the belly of the beast. But he was never able to find a way to realize his initial plan to eventually find a way into France. For the next two years he lived inside the Reich, working in a long series of jobs (including, as he tells us in the *Diary*, as a translator, agricultural worker, waiter, railroad worker, librarian, hotel clerk, and part-time pimp), a period of his life he later used as the raw material for what some regard as his best novel, *Filip*. In mid-1944, he took a job peeling potatoes in the hold of a German transport ship, with the intention of escaping when the ship stopped to refuel at the port of Stavanger in Norway, and from there making his way to neutral Sweden. Although he was captured and sent to the concentration camp of Grini, not far from Oslo, he managed to survive until the end of the war. The experience, and what it took to survive, is recalled in the *Diary*.

At war's end, Tyrmand stayed in Norway for a few months working for the International Red Cross as the correspondent for the Polpress agency. This was followed by a stint in Copenhagen, where he was director of the Polish Press Bureau. He returned to Warsaw in April 1946, and his Scandinavian adventures provided the material for his first published stories, “Sunday in Stavanger” (1946) and a collection under the title *Hotel Ansgar* (1947). He also found a steady job as a journalist writing for *Cut*, a current-events weekly with a critical and satirical bent. He wrote on a variety of topics, but was best known for his regular column, “Leopold Talks Sports.”¹³

Cut, and Tyrmand with it, struggled to maintain quality, autonomy, and integrity in circumstances that grew increasingly difficult over the next several years. This was still the period of “coalition,” during which the process of imposing communism as an integrated political, social, and economic system on the countries of Eastern Europe that had been liberated from the Nazis by the Red Army was a camouflaged and incremental one at first. The communists would gradually bring pressure to bear on the parties that agreed to work in a coalition with them, and on the society overall.¹⁴ The times were confusing, alternately hopeful and crushingly disappointing for those who, like Tyrmand, were trying to figure out what was really happening. Finally, in 1948, all pretense of coalition ended as the business of show trials, political purges, and economic centralization got seriously under way in all the states of the Soviet Bloc.

In the case of Poland, however, as Stalin himself is said to have remarked, “communism fitted the country about as well as a saddle would a cow,” and even during the stage of outright Stalinization, which continued until Stalin’s death in March 1953, the Poles, including Tyrmand, found ways to evade and resist. In 1950 he was fired from *Cut* and thrown out of the Professional Union of Journalists as a consequence of his candid account of a match between Polish and Russian boxers in Warsaw that ended in a near riot and arrests by the People’s Police. But, with the help of his closest friend, Stefan Kisielewski, he was able to catch on with the best and boldest of the still-independent publications: the now-legendary *Universal Weekly*, published by an extraordinary team of journalists, Catholic and Jewish, led by editor-in-chief Jerzy Turowicz under the direct protection, until his death in 1951, of the Krakow archbishop, Cardinal Adam Sapieha. Tyrmand remembered his years with the *Universal Weekly* as the high point of his professional, intellectual, and political life in Poland. This ended in 1953 when, after years of battling the tightening censorship, the *Weekly* was taken over and its editorial staff dismissed for refusing to publish a flowery obituary of Stalin. Tyrmand’s accounts of his experiences, and his professional assessments of the press publications that succeeded those journals for which he had worked between 1946 and 1953, figure prominently in the *Diary* and provide important insight into the communization of the press (January 13). It is in the wake of these events, and under the pressure of trying to survive physically, mentally, and emotionally—unemployed, unemployable, outside of a society that was being transformed by communism, and among people who were seeking and finding their own routes to survival and, in some cases, fame and fortune in the new order—that Tyrmand decided to write his *Diary*.

Thus the *Diary* was written in the period between Stalin’s death and the official launch of de-Stalinization in 1956. Various pronouncements of a “New Course” that backed off from the most extreme Stalinist practices were then being issued from Moscow, to be dutifully echoed in the satellite countries. Tyrmand carefully observed and commented on the changing currents of an ideological and power struggle during that post-Stalin, but pre-de-Stalinization period of cautious experimentation.

It must be remembered that the political thaw, such as it was, was only about to begin, and that the writing of such a diary still carried the threat of severe penalties: for example, up to fifteen years in prison or labor camp for “defamation of the Peace Movement” (as on February 20 and March 18) under the 1950 Protection of Peace Act.¹⁵ Having already been arrested, interrogated, and incarcerated by both the Soviet NKVD and the Nazi Gestapo, Tyrmand well understood the risk he was taking. At times he refers in the *Diary* to the dangers of keeping the manuscript in his tiny room.

Yet the *Diary* is not, though it would be understandable if it were, just a grim account of the hardships of life in opposition (or even if not in opposition) in

Warsaw *anno* 1954, as Tyrmand liked to say. His *Diary* is an expression of an individual life and mind that refused to don the drab, gray garb of communist expectation—literally. Tyrmand set tongues wagging all over Warsaw, as people speculated, sometimes dangerously,¹⁶ how he, persona non grata, managed without a steady income to maintain a standard of sartorial style and elegance that outclassed even the communist favorites who were able to travel to the West and afford to shop on Prince de Galles and Savile Row. He lets us in on his secrets: uncompromising daily grooming in the face of a general collapse of standards and the advent of the new “proletarian” anti-standard, taste and a flair for fashion, a sharp eye for quality jackets, fashionable ties, and colorful, patterned socks at the flea markets that sold hand-me-downs from the West, and a couple of like-minded tailors who would listen to his precise instruction, cutting off the tails and backs of old worn-out shirts to create new and stylish cuffs and collars. To Tyrmand, keeping up appearances meant more than that. When in the *Diary* he wrote “Clothes make the man,” he meant that he was staying true to himself (April 2).

It is abundantly evident from the *Diary* that Leopold Tyrmand liked women. A lot. Many of the *Diary* entries focus on women: friends and lovers. He enjoyed hearing confidences from female friends, who apparently enjoyed confiding in him. And he enjoyed sex. His erotic relationships with women were clearly another important component of “being himself” and, as he put it, “an expression of humanity in the midst of cruel efforts to dehumanize us” (February 27). One of the remarkable aspects of this *Diary* is his sometimes graphic descriptions of his sexual affairs, preferences, and disappointments, which give us a rare glimpse into the erotic life of one man during the early years of communism in Poland. The affair he was carrying on with the young girl he calls “Bogna,” whom he was tutoring, his sole regular source of income at the time, is a unifying thread that runs throughout the *Diary* and was a source of both delight and torment to him. This relationship has certainly been controversial—both then and now. Though Bogna was apparently going on eighteen in 1954, as Tyrmand himself says on March 17, in a few other places in the *Diary* he refers to her as being sixteen or “sixteen-plus.” He also provides insights into the hows and wheres of organizing romantic and sexual assignations under conditions of inadequate housing and transportation, and joint Catholic and communist sexual prudery (perhaps the only point of agreement between the two). One of his entries describes an absurd meeting at the Writers’ Union at which dried-up communist authors informed and instructed the best of Warsaw literary youth about politically correct sexual mores (January 21).

Tyrmand was well known and well connected in both Warsaw and Krakow. Not only was he a player among the cultural and journalistic intelligentsia, and what he calls “good society,” but he also maintained contacts among non-conforming jazz musicians, small-time private entrepreneurs, and outright

shady dealers. Thus, his descriptions of individuals in Warsaw include people from a variety of backgrounds and social circles. While he protected or disguised the identity of certain individuals, he named many others, especially those making professional reputations and living well under communism, and pronounced on them judgments that were, more often than not, unflattering. The veracity of some of his accounts has, not surprisingly, been challenged by those so treated, or by their families.¹⁷ Tyrmand also had a handful of good and trusted friends: notably, the composer, music critic, and writer Stefan Kisielewski, to whom he dedicated the *Diary*,¹⁸ and the poet Zbigniew Herbert, whose talent Tyrmand recognized early while Herbert was still barely surviving in menial and degrading jobs, and who today is known as one of the best of Poland's postwar poets. The reader comes to know these people, famous, infamous, or anonymous, through their appearances in the *Diary*.

Tyrmand was acutely aware of his age (thirty-three at the time of writing the *Diary*) and of the swift, unforgiving passage of time. He expressed frustration and bitterness with being sidelined, stalled, silenced, during what should have been the prime of his life as a writer and as a man. He longed to make a career. He longed for material reward. He railed against a system that stifled the creative energies of its people. He longed for family and children, but knew he could never support them. But he was unwilling and unable to pay the price of hewing to the communist line.

The *Diary* breaks off in mid-sentence, on April 2, 1954. In a brief afterword, Tyrmand informs the reader that this was because the next day he signed a contract to begin writing what would become his best-selling novel about a mysterious avenger with supernatural powers on the loose in the streets of Warsaw. His nickname *Zły*, which is the novel's title in Polish, has shades of meaning—Bad, Evil, Angry, Peeved—that can hardly be rendered by a single word in English, but the word “Wicked” may come closest. In any event, the novel became a best seller in Poland and made Tyrmand a relatively wealthy man. It quickly sold out and, a year later in 1956, its copies would be touted by Warsaw vendors along with those of Khrushchev's “Secret Speech” on the “excesses” of Stalin's Cult of Personality with the cries: “*Wicked*, by Tyrmand! *Wicked*, by Khrushchev!”¹⁹

Tyrmand seemed poised to take off. In that annus mirabilis, 1955, he married a young art student, moved from his room at the YMCA into a better apartment at last, organized jazz concerts in Warsaw, saw a film made from a screenplay he authored, and was able to purchase the ultimate status symbol with his earnings from *Zły*: a car. The book also gave him an opportunity for travel abroad to promote it in translation; its title in English became *The Man with the White Eyes*. For a few years, things seemed to be going his way, with growing successes both as an author and as a jazz impresario. But by 1959 a chill began to settle on the political and cultural thaw of de-Stalinization, first in Moscow—as Khrushchev's various “reform schemes” began to go awry and he

himself came under criticism from his own Politburo—and then, inevitably, in the rest of the Soviet Bloc. In Poland, for Tyrmand, this meant refusal of permission to travel abroad, despite many invitations from editors now publishing his works in translation, and growing problems in publishing new work at home. His first marriage ended in 1958. Next year he married again, this time to an up-and-coming fashion editor and designer, Barbara Hoff, whose name quickly became synonymous with fashion in Poland when she became the regime's chosen designer of chic apparel for the state-run department stores.²⁰ Tyrmand chafed under growing pressure to make concessions to the regime in his work in exchange for the right to publish under his own name or to travel abroad. Permission was finally granted for a passport again in 1965. Tyrmand left the country by car, taking his *Diary* with him—as he tells it in his foreword to the published *Diary*, concealed somewhere in the vehicle's body.²¹ His travels included a long visit to his mother in Israel, where he became for the first time interested in his Jewish heritage, in the Jewish religion, and in the state of Israel. She apparently urged him to stay in Israel. However, he accepted an offer from the U.S. State Department to sponsor him on a tour of the United States and, falling in love with the country and the freedoms it offered, decided to stay.²²

Tyrmand's life in emigration began in poverty,²³ but with excitement and great hope. Although initially he looked for work as a doorman, because he was a celebrated writer from behind the Iron Curtain he was quickly taken up by the New York intelligentsia, publishing in the late 1960s in *The New York Times* and, even more prestigiously, in *The New Yorker*,²⁴ where he joined the staff, and his work was edited by William Shawn himself. He also established a relationship with, and published in, the Polish-language *Kultura* in Paris. But interest in what he had to say soon waned when his intractable anti-communism and attacks on American politics and culture began to irritate and, worse, bore the intellectual elite of New York, who were increasingly preoccupied with criticisms of their own establishment as that tumultuous decade drew to a close. He also quarreled with Jerzy Giedroyc, *Kultura's* editor. By 1971, his work was no longer sought after in either New York or Paris. *The Rosa Luxemburg Contraceptives Cooperative: A Primer on Communist Civilization*, which he published in 1972, was largely panned by critics and ignored by the public. For the next five years he was able to publish only occasional pieces in a few conservative journals (notably, *National Review* and *Commentary*), and found himself a pariah in the intellectual and social circles in New York that had briefly taken him up. Once more Tyrmand found himself swimming against the prevailing political and cultural tide.

In the last decade of his life, Tyrmand seems finally to have found something of what he had so long been searching for: the freedom to be himself. He was invited to work with the conservative Rockford Institute located in Rockford, Illinois, just outside of Chicago, a year later taking over as director

from its founder, John Howard. He began to publish his own *Chronicles of Culture*. While maintaining his customary critical stance, his disillusionment with the United States seems at least in part to have been tempered by a new recognition and appreciation for the size, scope, and diversity of the country, which accommodated many points of view—including his own. In the United States, he openly embraced his Jewish heritage. His third marriage, to Mary Ellen Fox, a doctoral student at Yale University, in 1971, brought him the family life he had always wanted. Twins, a boy and a girl, were born to the couple in 1981, and by all accounts Tyrmand doted on them. While living with Mary Ellen in Connecticut, he also edited and polished *Dziennik 1954* for the 1980 publication in London.

Leopold Tyrmand died of a heart attack in Fort Meyers, Florida, on March 19, 1985, survived by his wife, Mary Ellen, and children, Matthew and Rebecca. They have been the first readers of this translation.²⁵ Now, dear reader, it is your turn.

Anita Shelton and A. J. Wrobel

January 2013

Charleston, Illinois, and Warsaw, Poland

Notes

1. These are the words of the writer Józef Hen (b. 1923) as quoted by Henryk Dasko in his introduction to the 1999 edition of the manuscript (*Dziennik 1954: Wersja oryginalna* (Warsaw: Prószyński), 14. In Polish: “w Dzienniku nie ma ani słowa o wywózkach, procesach, Tito, Korei, szpiegach, torturach więziennych.” “Hedonistic protest” is an epithet of J. P. Gawlik as quoted by M. Urbanek in his 2012 book *Zły Tyrmand* (Warsaw: Iskry), 89.

2. For example, on January 10 and 13, February 10, 11, and 26, and March 24 (with January 13 especially describing the lot of recalcitrant clergy). Soviet trials are also mentioned (January 13, March 4).

3. On February 13 and March 14.

4. An Eastern European definition of communism from the early 1980s.

5. We refer readers who are interested in pursuing these matters further to Christopher Caes's forthcoming comparative study of the two versions, provisionally titled *Rewriting Tyrmand: A Comparative Study of Leopold Tyrmand's Diary 1954 and Diary 1954: Original Version*, which is written in English and will likely become a major reference on the subject. In addition, we can recommend several pieces in Polish, for example, H. Dasko's introduction to the 1999 publication of the manuscript; K. Niciński's 2006 article “Two Versions of Leopold Tyrmand's ‘Diary 1954’: On the Problem of the Identity of the Text” (*Pamiętnik Literacki* 97, no. 4: 71–94); and perhaps M. Urbanek's 2012 book *Zły Tyrmand* (based on third-party reminiscences).

6. For instance, “as Bottom, the guy is tops” in January 4, where we have also added “a Midsummer Night's Nightmare.” As another example, in January 15 we have expanded the sentence “if he were alive, he would doubtless turn out to be a cosmopolitan or a Trotskyite” into a Kafkaesque “he would doubtless wake up one day to find himself transformed into a giant cosmopolitan or a Trotskyite.”

7. In January 4, for example, in the passage saying literally “something tells me that Berman prefers to discuss things with the likes of Jacques Maritain,” and so on, we have expanded the name “Berman” into “Stalin’s right-hand man Jakub Berman, our Beria.” The comparison to Beria is, however, the only judgmental one among such inserts.

8. The Warsaw Uprising was an attempt by the underground Home Army to oust the German forces and seize control of Warsaw ahead of the approaching Red Army. It got almost no support from the Soviets despite their promises and proximity; the Allied air supplies flown from Italy could only be very limited. Outnumbered and massively outgunned, the insurgents surrendered after two months of fighting, from August 1 to October 2, 1944. The Germans then drove out the whole population and destroyed the city itself. Earlier, they murdered many tens of thousands of civilians in mass executions, killing everybody captured up to August 5, and all males over the age of twelve through August 12. In sum they killed, or murdered, between 150,000 and 200,000 noncombatants and about 10,000 insurgents, while losing fewer than 10,000 of their own men (estimates differ). The main winner was the Soviets, who, by allowing the Germans to crush the uprising, got rid of the domestic military force of the Polish government-in-exile in London. This facilitated the communist takeover of Poland.

9. Krystyna Dąbrowska, “Leopold Tyrmand,” *Culture.pl*, December 2010, at www.culture.pl/baza-literatura-pelna-tresc/-/eo_event_asset_publisher/eAN5/content/leopold-tyrmand.

10. In Polish: *Prawda Komsomolska*.

11. For more on this topic, see K. Dąbrowska (2010), “Leopold Tyrmand,” *Culture.pl*; and M. Urbanek (2012), *Zły Tyrmand* (Warsaw: Iskry), 23–40.

12. The People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs—the dreaded Soviet secret police.

13. In Polish: “Leopold o sporcie.”

14. The orthodox Hungarian communist leader and something of a wit, Mátyás Rákosi, described this policy with cynical relish as the “salami tactics”—slicing the political rivals off one by one until all the salami was gone.

15. In Polish: *Ustawa o ochronie pokoju*.

16. In the *Diary*, Tyrmand discusses rumors that made the rounds in Poland that he must somehow be working for the security police (January 24, March 30). No evidence for this has ever surfaced. The Institute of National Remembrance, which now houses the archives of the communist secret police, contains nothing to incriminate him, just information provided by others about him that proves he was indeed of interest to the police.

17. Mariusz Urbanek’s *Zły Tyrmand* is largely devoted to examining the many controversies, claims, counter-claims, and hurt feelings that resulted in Poland from the 1980 publication of Tyrmand’s *Diary*.

18. Mary Ellen Tyrmand has told us that the relationship between the two men was “brotherly,” and that her impression was that Kisielewski had been Tyrmand’s “intellectual and spiritual guide.” Tyrmand’s own entries about Kisielewski in the *Diary* are certainly consistent with her characterization.

19. In Polish: “Zły Tyrmanda! Zły Chruszczow!”

20. A real entrepreneur, she went on to create a veritable fashion empire.

21. Mary Ellen Tyrmand recalls that he also told a different story—that the *Diary* made it out of Poland with the help of an American diplomat.

22. According to Mary Ellen Tyrmand.

23. This was confirmed even by those spying on him in New York for the Polish regime. Reports now in the archive of the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw state that he was living in a tiny apartment in a very bad neighborhood (Harlem).

24. Mary Ellen Tyrmand has written that Tyrmand regarded William Shawn as the “most gifted” of all the editors he ever worked with and his time with *The New Yorker* as the most professionally rewarding.

25. The translators wish to thank Mary Ellen Tyrmand for information about and insight into Leopold's experiences in America.

**DIARY
1954**

Dedicated to Stefan Kisielewski—

who was present in my life, and sometimes
necessary even. He was often as small as
we all are, but the fact that I held it against
him made him somehow greater, and it
put me in a better mood.

“Well, Sancho,” quoth Don Quixote,
“thou art a very peasant, and like them
that cry, ‘Long live the conqueror!’”

—MIGUEL DE CERVANTES

A quote from chapter 20 of *Don Quixote, Part Two* (*The Second Part of the History of the Valorous and Witty Knight-Errant Don Quixote of the Mancha*) as translated by Thomas Shelton in 1620. Tyrmand quotes it in a Polish translation. The Spanish original is: “*En fin,*” dijo don Quijote, “*bien se parece, Sancho, que eres villano y de aquéllos que dicen: ¡Viva quien vence!*”

Preface

The facts are as follows:

- I wrote this diary over the first three months of 1954.
- For twelve years, the handwritten notebooks lay at the bottoms of rarely opened drawers.
- In 1956 (it's obvious at what moment) the *Universal Weekly*¹ published an excerpt from the diary—the only one that has appeared in print in Poland.
- In 1965, after years of futile applications for a passport, I was finally going to the West in an oldish Opel. I hadn't decided to emigrate, but I took the manuscript of the diary with me, hiding it, with the help of a trusted mechanic, near the differential. It was an unnecessary precaution; what the customs officials at the border crossing wanted to know was whether my novel *Zły* was going to be reprinted. After that, their attention was drawn to an antique candlestick on top in the first suitcase they opened. They kept the candlestick and wished me a good journey.
- A few months later the notebooks were deposited at the editorial office of the Parisian *Culture*,² in Maisons-Lafitte, where they gathered dust for another four years.
- In 1968, when I chose freedom, the diary crossed the Atlantic and traveled with me from place to place for five years. Having settled down in New Canaan, Connecticut, I typed up the manuscript and prepared it for possible publication as a book.

1. In Polish: *Tygodnik Powszechny*, a lay Catholic journal of much importance. See a footnote for January 2.

2. In Polish: *Kultura*, a Polish émigré monthly published in Paris (except the first issue).

- In 1974, the London *News*³ began to publish the diary in installments; the last one came out in 1978. Around half of the full text saw the light of day in emigration in this way.
- The present book represents the entire diary, unchanged for editorial reasons, moral quandaries, political requirements, or concessions to friends and acquaintances.

While I was working on the diary in Connecticut my main problem was: what to do with my judgments about people? Judgments of that sort become dated and no longer current, which doesn't mean that they lose their aptness or in-aptness. "If you live long enough, you'll see everything," as the Scandinavian saying goes, which means you just have to wait a while to come to ever newer and sometimes astonishing opinions. It's obvious that the recording of daily news, moods, rumors, and information picked up on the fly is liable to misrepresentations and substantive factual errors—sometimes big ones, even distortions of the truth. Grappling with this problem, I decided not to change anything in the text—let it go on the historical record together with my poor vision, ignorance, carelessness, mistakes. However, judgments on individuals are another matter.

This diary was written in relatively simple times. Communism was then a complex, but unequivocal, phenomenon; its apostles and practitioners were no more homogeneous mentally than anyone else, but fully understandable and sometimes crude. Already under Gomułka,⁴ communism lost its definition; it blurred into ambivalence and schism, camouflage, refinement, and perversion. Today in Europe, it's far from obvious how to disarm and defeat a communist, especially a Polish one. While I was still in the country, during the decade after I wrote the diary, I'd occasionally open it and find something about someone about whom I had changed my mind, and thought differently. It troubled me that I had perhaps been judging ruthlessly, even savagely, people who over the years turned out to be different from what they had appeared to be, morally and mentally, in 1954. But these concerns were misleading, too: it was enough to wait a few more years, and it would all change again, as the knave who had been remolded by History into a sensitive and decent personality lapsed anew into the old sins of nature and character. Because life goes on until the end, as the ancient Greeks knew so well when they conceived of tragedy. They knew

3. In Polish: *Wiadomości*, an émigré weekly published in London from 1946 to 1981.

4. Władysław Gomułka (1905–1982) became in 1943 the leader of the Polish Workers' Party (the communist party). From 1945 he was de facto leader of Poland until 1948, when he was replaced by B. Bierut and imprisoned from 1951 to the end of 1954. Brought back to power in October 1956, he persuaded Khrushchev to let him launch limited political and economic reforms. But central planning continued, and, as the economy stagnated, Gomułka's rule became inflexible and repressive. It ended in the food riots of December 1970.

that life unendingly accumulated positives and negatives; what is laid down over the course of a life is constantly being eroded by the very act of living. Which means that no judgment is final as long as the life goes on. It's no news that selflessness, humility, stoicism turn out after years to have been ordinary selfishness, greed, cowardice; that modesty is really vanity and pride; and that lofty grandeur is revealed to be plain baseness. Mastery in exploiting subtle demeanors, moods, friends and their feelings is most often masked as concern for others, reserve, tact, simple decency, not pushing oneself forward. Talent for such deceptions is an essential characteristic of masters of lifemanship. Novel and drama serve much better to expose these multilayered delusions. A diary is somehow helpless in the face of them.

Like everyone, I was surrounded by people generously offering poses and frailties, truths and untruths about themselves, and I recorded them in the pages of my diary as I saw them. The passage of time taught me my own naïveté and fallibility. For these reasons, in Connecticut I decided not to change anything,⁵ since any truth about people is just a truth of the moment. When I was writing the diary, I was thirty-three and felt genuinely old. Writing this foreword, twenty-six years later, I can see that feeling old was for me a support and a defense.

The conviction has always weighed on me that there is a certain moral shallowness lurking in the Franciscan tradition, in the same kindness, gentleness, and forgiveness for all. I don't like or value those whom all love, admire, and recognize as saintly, the best, the immaculate—those who show concern for every bird and understanding for every scoundrel, those whom all respect and rejoice in. It is my psychological reflex, and perhaps doesn't reflect well on me. There are among us such scoundrels who over long lives filled with successes manage to create around themselves such an aura of false modesty, vulnerability, and sensitivity that no one will ever be able to expose their slyness and venom. I know such people in Warsaw, and I believe that as they read these words, if they ever do, they will recognize themselves at once.

So, as I worked through the manuscript I was struck by how few revelations there have been in the last quarter century, how much I had gotten right already in 1954, despite my dulled, no longer youthful, sensitivities and sensations—so that what I'd believed then had not been eroded, but, rather, strengthened by experience. Immorality, stupidity, and evil do indeed mostly prevail, as a certain Warsaw lady who was then close to me tried to convince me. Scoundrels and fools aren't held back by either conscience or reason. But I now know that

5. Although this is not strictly true, as Tyrmand did edit the entire diary, including the entries about individuals, the spirit of his declaration is mostly borne out by a side-by-side comparison of the two texts (one exception is the passage about O. Budrewicz on April 1, which has no counterpart in the manuscript).

it is not the saddest thing that anguish is commonly the lot of those who do not want to be immoral and try not to be stupid. What is grim and painful is that, years later, scoundrels and fools appear respectable and sensible, without having fought for or sacrificed anything, merely by evading confrontation with evil until the time when truth and honesty have prevailed with the help of history or, perhaps, just fashion.

From my earliest years I have been inclined to gentle reflection on the facts and their interpretations, to exhaustive exchanges of views and many-sided arguments, which are also known in Warsaw as a gabfest. These were elements of innate liberalism, delighting in the charm of differing opinions, parleys, gossip. I was struck early on by the scumminess of all totalitarianisms, and by their sameness. In my mind, I vaguely saw socialism as an impoverishment of reality—as liberty, equality, fairness, and happiness drawn in suspect icing. This diary, written in the prime of manhood, and reread at the twilight of middle age, brings me a feeling of fidelity to my own self—which has always seemed to me something desirable and worthy of sacrifice.

And that's probably all I want to say about the diary before it begins its own life as a book.

Leopold Tyrmand
Last day of December, 1979
Rockford, Illinois

Volume One

*Tous nos malheurs viennent de ne pouvoir
être seuls . . .*

—BLAISE PASCAL

January 1, 1954

In the morning I humbled myself before God. As I always do to recognize holidays, beginnings, endings, anniversaries, birthdays, name days, consummations, and all other conceivable occasions. Generally speaking, for any reason of metaphysical pathos. And so, in the name of God, let's finally begin this diary. I do have vague hopes riding on it, so how could I set out without God on my side?

A diary is an auscultation of all the fine details that define a life. That's how a subtle and sensitive writer would put it. I have no idea how I came up with this line. But I do know that no one who has never tried to write a diary can have any idea of how difficult it is. The difficulty is a practical one. How does one write up the microbiology of a day? Or one's own psycho-magma? Or how one's existence fuses with everyday life, and one's own individual exceptional-ity becomes ordinary? But, since nothing can ever get done without making choices, even though there are those who would prefer not to, the text becomes selective. The diary ceases to be a confession and becomes a testimony. But to what? And is that what it's all about?

At least in part it is, let's not delude ourselves. It is a testimony to oneself. Firsthand testimony. By the best expert on the subject, though one prone to a touch of bias, for all his attempts to suppress it. But how can one suppress one's own sense of truth, justice, injustice? And how can one root out all embellishment of one's own rotten relations with the age in which one lives?

I also want to test myself. This is a classic longing of the marginalized. I have neither a philosophical bent nor the gift of creativity for its own sake. But, as Kisiel⁶ said the other day, I carry within myself a great need and ability to share with people what I can put out right away—and we all know what that is! That's what he said. It's true: I am a journalist by vocation. My conceptions are liable to go out of date abruptly. I don't know how to write other than for the here and now. My work is of the moment.

Will the diary bring relief? Make me productive at least, if I can't be creative? Diaries are Proustian: the effort to capture hours passing, the texture of imme-

6. Stefan Kisielewski (1911–1991) was a writer, journalist, composer, and critic of the communist regime. He was one of the group who created the postwar lay Catholic *Universal Weekly* (*Tygodnik Powszechny*), much discussed in the pages of this *Diary*.

diate memories, a shadow falling across a face, requires a detachment that isn't normally in me or in my usual work. I have never been fond of Proust, but I do see how he can fill you up like a comforting home-cooked meal.

Yesterday was New Year's Eve, so today it's a hangover and aching bones. On top of which I made up with Bogna, which astounds me immeasurably. Despite repeated warnings, Bogna, that demon of thoughtlessness and selfishness, is once again trying to suggest that we are "colleagues." What nonsense! Had this at least been a facade, for the sake of social convention, even if superfluous, it wouldn't hurt. But no! Quite the opposite. If she could, Bogna would take our crumpled sheets to school for show and tell. Our collegiality, she argues, should be between us. This is a complete misunderstanding: over sixteen years' difference in age and a monstrous disparity in intellect! Guardian, guide, teacher, friend, beloved, lover, husband even (God forbid!), but never a colleague. Bogna is nature's ultimate creation, that's true, but this makes her believe in the irresistible force of her sixteen-plus years, in the power of pure form. Recently she again played the colleagues bit in front of third parties, which I could not put up with, and so, for the umpteenth time, I threw her out of my home and out of my life. For two days there was no sign of her. She was cooped up at home with a stomach ache, which in her opinion is a sign of genuine suffering. Because Bogna loves me—so she claims and so she believes. What kind of love it is, I couldn't say. I wouldn't vouch for it, knowing her. But she does love in a way, in her way, without undue doubts or difficult questions.

On New Year's Eve I phoned her because I had promised I would. Typical, since what ties me to Bogna is a complex web of responsibilities—a little of a sense of duty, a little satisfaction, a little dependence. Bogna had been dreaming of this day for half a year. She fashioned herself a gown—the greatest creation of her short life. In the Warsaw of today, such a gown is a test of character, an accomplishment, a triumph. I couldn't deprive her of this gala. It might be our last outing together before calling it quits, but it had to take place.

I had an invitation to the Journalists' Club. Why they still keep sending them to me I don't know. Their New Year's Eve party is the height of exclusivity and snobbery in today's Warsaw: former diplomats, artists, writers, actors, a few communist press-and-propaganda bigwigs, bureaucratic potentates, and assorted dandies from the world of the planned economy, and survivors of the class struggle. The elite. The elite? Real power and influence—that is, the party, the government, and a few handpicked proletarians—are at the Polytechnic Institute for the official ball, behind a wall of Public Security goons. At the Journalists' Club, it's all tuxedos and smoking jackets from prewar days, or purchased abroad, or made to measure by the Foreign Ministry's own tailors' co-operative, as well as masks, balloons, and native girls in homemade organdy.

It wasn't at all easy for me. I'd recently had viral hepatitis and infectious jaundice, so I couldn't have even a dram of vodka. How am I to function? Warsaw is teeming with acquaintances of mine from all corners. At an event like

this, I know half the room's population. You have to be tough and on your toes, otherwise it's hard to survive. Counter-punches must be lightning-fast and on the chin. And me without a drop of booze, as if gutted, conversationally disarmed, a sitting duck for anyone who cares to shoot from the lip. I felt old, out of sorts and in the wrong. In these circumstances, I must admit, Bogna was as if heaven-sent. She looked gorgeous: tall, slender, with a sweep of dark hair, not a speck of makeup on her finely sculpted features, the coloring and fullness of her arms and breasts straight out of a painting by Ingres or at least Czachorski,⁷ a simple gown of dark-green taffeta, black ballet slippers. Styled, fittingly, like a shy schoolgirl who knows what lies in wait inside her, but supposedly doesn't quite know what to do with it. A faultless presentation. Older women can't resist giving advice, sharing that which they know but which no longer is for them. Men get sweaty palms. Heads turned to look at her as she walked into the room, which I do like. Some guys just back from France and playing the connoisseurs yelped "Juliette Gréco!"⁸ but that was off the mark—Bogna is better.

She didn't let my hand go from her slightly damp palm—this was the first such ball of her life!—she kept kissing my cheek as we danced, she could not be diverted from my tiredness and irritability. She was polite, shy, devoted, in short, everything she knew I wanted her to be. For show? A tactic? I think not. Her instinct told her that if we are to continue at all, she needed right then, at that moment, to provide the support I needed. A screenwriter, one of the handsome and famous who are now riding the communist wave, pulled her away for a moment, but she ran back to me after the dance as if chased. Could I stick to my intentions in the face of such generosity? I could, because I know the interest payable on each and every one of Bogna's impulses. I knew that if I showed even a little affection and credited her effort, she would go for it like a boxer for the knockout, straight into the breach of unguarded tenderness. Could I be indifferent to her success, which was also mine? That's harder. I have never been ashamed of my vanity in front of either others or myself. I could hear, "What a magnificent girl . . . how does he do it? With his lack of height, money, and prospects?" I owed her for that.

I escorted her before dawn to her iron gate and said, "Keep well. I wish you a happy New Year." It was meant to signal the end of the ball and of everything else. She said simply and with great humility, "Thank you so much for the evening." In other words, childishly, conventionally, and with sadness. It was windy and freezing, as always on Nowowiejska Street on a January morning.

7. Władysław Czachorski (1855–1911) was a Polish painter who is best known for his depictions of beautiful young women in sumptuous clothing and settings.

8. Juliette Gréco (b. 1927) is a French actress and singer of chansons who was involved in the resistance movement during World War II and became an icon of bohemian fashion, philosophy, and lifestyle after the war.

On the Square of Three Crosses,⁹ I stepped into St. Alexander's to sit with God for a few minutes on the new year. It was empty, just before the first mass. My feelings of age and exhaustion felt somehow wholesome and natural there. Balls are not for me. For Bogna everything is clear and straightforward. I had just finished a year of disasters, bitterness, illness, and disappointment. Ahead, nothing good, nothing to look forward to, to fight for or to work toward. Yet, somehow I didn't feel defeated. Don't let hope give way to despair. It's easier to think it than to believe it.

I went to bed at six. At eleven, I was woken up by Bogna. "I've come over after church," she announced, letting her sheepskin coat fall to the floor. An obvious gambit. Bogna comes from a family that is not deeply religious, which is a precise description, since no one in Poland is a complete unbeliever, even in the Atheists' Association. She goes to church only on sightseeing tours. At certain moments, however, when she's fighting for something for herself, she resorts to the most fantastic hypocrisies. So it had to be assumed that she sat in the Church of Our Savior for a while on the way over here because she couldn't sleep but was afraid to show up too early.

Because in the moments before she burst in I had been half-asleep, dreaming of her great success at the ball and basking in reflected glory, I couldn't immediately shout at her to get out. If you're going to shout out something like that you have to do it right off the bat. Once the moment has passed, it's too late. You lose your resolve. Bogna stood meekly in the doorway. She knew the game was over, the outcome in no doubt. "It's very cold outside," she said softly but brazenly. "So, what are you waiting for?" I answered crossly, but it was nothing but resignation.

We spent the rest of the day in bed, that shredder of man's resolve. Bogna didn't even become arrogant. Evening at Bogna's. We summed up the ball and concluded that New Year's Eves were nothing special. Finally, we chatted amiably with her father about how ugly the new hotels were inside, despite all the fortune Poland was lavishing on them, and about the creative writing of Wiech.¹⁰

January 2

In the morning I wanted to write, but Halszka came to talk over the ball: how she got drunk, how many people she patronized, and how it all turned out. She's aging, so her good deeds are her own private grace. Halszka dislikes

9. In Polish: Plac Trzech Krzyży.

10. "Wiech" was the pen-name of Stefan Wiechecki (1896–1979), a writer and journalist most remembered for his humorous chronicles of Warsaw street life, which feature the oft criminal or semi-criminal underclass.

Bogna, but just on principle—it's nothing personal. She told me that someone at the ball had described Bogna as the heroine of an Italian film five minutes after the rape scene. I loved it.

Afterward, Bogna stopped in, very confident and firm in the saddle. She declared that she was going to accompany me to supper, and that her holidays came first and my work second.

A difficulty cropped up: how could I leave her alone in the room with this diary while I went to shave? Yesterday Bogna already betrayed her curiosity about what I was writing. Left alone, she'd rip open the mattress to discover what I might be hiding there. A solution came in the form of Danka De Rosis,¹¹ my own private Madame Loulou¹² of early communism. Hers is an endangered species—we have to do everything we can to preserve it. This morning Danusia took a few punches in the face from her current boyfriend and came over to complain about it. She doesn't question the rightness, purpose, or even charm of this kind of impulse; she had come home at six in the morning after protracted negotiations with some Brazilians, and can understand why someone close to her might not like it. What she's afraid of is that this man, who showed her such heart, verve, and good hand-eye coordination, might disappear from her life, which would be a great loss, considering his financial resources and party connections, not to mention her feelings for him. I assured her that her fears were groundless and then left her with Bogna and went into the bathroom. When I came back, Danka was nearing the end of a lecture on the theory and practice of commercial intercourse with foreigners in a communist capital. Bogna was listening with flushed cheeks, which I regarded as basically a good thing. Let her learn about the jungle. It's nothing really new, but dialectical materialism did introduce a few innovations best learned about early and from trailblazers.

I read in *People's Tribune*¹³ that the Hohenzollerns and the Habsburgs fell as an upshot of the Great October Revolution. A trifle, but it tickles you pink.

At five I headed over to Mrs. Genia's place. She's the housekeeper where I live. I've known her for years and admire and respect her. She is a good and worthy woman, selflessly helpful and wise in her simplicity. Mrs. Genia is frail and worn out by years of toil. No one can understand where she gets the strength in her gaunt frame to sweep and wash floors. Halszka said once that only Leonardo da Vinci could do justice to her true dignity and paint her as *Lady with a Mop*, which I felt was spot on: she should be hanging under glass

11. Unknown, except as assistant editor in the production of several short documentary films in Sardinia in 1972.

12. Madame Loulou is a fictional character (a woman of easy virtue and pleasant nature about whom others gossip) from the Berlin cabaret scene of the 1920s. She is known in Warsaw from a famous song with words in Polish written by Konrad Tom.

13. The daily *People's Tribune* (*Trybuna Ludu*) was an official organ of the Polish United Workers' Party.

in a gilt frame at the Czartoryski Palace.¹⁴ The motor of her sputtering existence and the light of her faded eyes is Karol, an overgrown sixteen-year-old boy with a deformed eyelid. How Mrs. Genia, as a single mother who never raises her voice, managed to raise him so that they are like two peas in a pod in their moderation, good sense, and decency, I'll never know. Nor do I know how she managed it on the 400 zlotys a month that the communists' official wage scale provides her. What I do know is this: they care for each other dearly, like people in the movies. Which brings them happiness in the midst of a life downtrodden by communism, in their four-by-five-yard cubicle on Tamka Street, where the dining table barely fits between their two beds.

Mrs. Genia is a devout Catholic, passionately committed to public affairs and deeply interested in the lives of her tenants. The work I did for the *Universal Weekly*¹⁵ was her great pride. Leaning on her scrub brush in the bathroom, she would often discuss with me the clergymen known for their stance against the regime. The arrest of the primate of Poland¹⁶ the previous autumn put her in a combative mood. Explaining to her the generally less-known aspects of the case, I felt that through her I was instructing the entire devout population of the central Powiśle neighborhood. This gave me a sense of responsibility and a certain satisfaction.

I wouldn't have survived November and December had it not been for Mrs. Genia, who pulled me through the attack of infectious jaundice. Afterward, she claimed she had a particular reason to do so and, when pressed, mentioned a long-forgotten occasion when, through her mediation, I had helped some poor wretch. Which shamed me and made me feel even more in her debt.

Lots of people helped me out then, some with genuine sympathy. Even Bogna showed some concern, born mostly from the conviction that illness was a real bore and a threat to the coming carnival festivities. But Genia was the bedrock of support I leaned on during my slow recovery. After my illness I took to trying to pay her back—an awkward kind of enterprise. I offered loans, presented a box of candy for the holidays, and so on. Genia looked at me ironically and feigned indignation, as is customary among the common folk. Just before New Year's Eve she said she had a request to make. Here was my chance. She said she might be overstepping the bounds, but she wanted to invite me to

14. Leonardo da Vinci's painting *Lady with an Ermine* is on display at the Czartoryski Museum in Krakow.

15. The lay Catholic journal *Universal Weekly* (*Tygodnik Powszechny*) was, and is, very important on the Polish political and cultural scenes in the years 1945–1953 and, again, since 1956 to the present. During the years of communism, it maintained an independent and critical stance toward the regime. Tyrmand worked at the journal from 1950 to 1953, and refers to it frequently in the *Diary*.

16. Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński (1901–1981), the primate of Poland from 1948 until his death, was arrested along with other clergy in September 1953. He remained under arrest until 1956.

her place for a get-together. My eager acceptance aroused her suspicion, while I myself was surprised by the residue of the caste system in her consciousness. But somehow we both felt we were on the right track.

I bought another load of sweets and, for Karol, a copy of *In Desert and Wilderness* by Sienkiewicz.¹⁷ The novel saved me, because candy, in the popular code of etiquette, requires the recipient to show a somewhat ostentatious disdain to prove his refinement. Sylvestre Bonnard¹⁸ would not have been a success in Powiśle! But the book was received with appreciation: friends and relatives, crammed around the festive table in the tiny room, as neat as in a child's story, approved the gesture. On the table there was boiled ham, fresh carp sauté, hunter's stew, vodka, fermented fruit drink, tea, and compote. The petty-bourgeois proletariat of Warsaw knows how to be reverent: my neighbors at the table, shopkeeper-plump women with traces of Slavic good looks on their heavily made-up faces, whose snub noses and full lips retain a trace of sexual charm well into middle age, were embarrassing me with their overt show of respect. A female worker from the prewar Fuchs factory, now renamed The Mermaid,¹⁹ spoke about the war they were having with the dictatorial party bureaucrats over impossible work norms and perfidious wage cuts. "We will not back down," she said doggedly; her ruined face, covered in cheap powder, and her Sunday-best sweater inspired confidence. Everyone complained about the shortage of the simplest pots and pans in the stores and kept repeating, "But life must go on," as if living were something to apologize for. A deep truth shines out of this pathetic apology, illuminating much more than the conventional phrasing would suggest. Without it, the question of how Mrs. Genia could afford such ham on her 400 zlotys a month would spoil every morsel. But as it was, our consciences were clear, and nothing disturbed our discreet burping.

I went out into the snow on Tamka Street feeling proud of the people of Warsaw. This sense of pride was boosted by four vodkas ingested on doctor's orders: Dr. Rydgier has a theory that, after an illness, one should be careful but not slow about returning to life. I have a blind faith in that man. I was hating the commies and relishing it.

January 3

Today Bogna and I went to the exhibition hall Zachęta to see French textile art. I had already checked it out once before with Janek Szczepański,²⁰ from

17. Nobel Prize winner Henryk Sienkiewicz's classic book for young people.

18. A sweet-toothed, if otherwise acerbic, character (thought to represent the author himself) in Anatole France's 1881 novel *Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard*.

19. In Polish: *Syrena*, a sword-wielding mermaid that is the symbol of Warsaw.

20. Jan Józef Szczepański (1919–2003) was a Krakow-based writer and translator who