

Jacek Woźniakowski, *Ze wspomnień szczęściarza* [Memories of a Lucky Man], Kraków 2008, Znak, 310 pp., ill., index of persons

The author of these memoirs (b. 1920) is one of those unusual persons who like the dripping of water had for several decades been wearing away the rock of communist power in Poland, prepared its downfall and then co-created the foundations of independent Poland. This Officer Cadet, severely wounded in 1939, and Home Army officer during the German occupation, assumed many roles after the Second World War. He was the editor of the Catholic journals *Tygodnik Powszechny* and *Znak*, connected with the Cracow curia, which after the communist take-over in Poland were almost the only centres providing an antidote to the current communist propaganda (although they were subject to preventive censorship as well). An outstanding historian of art, he lectured at the Catholic University of Lublin and in foreign universities and was the author of many renowned publications. In the 1980s he engaged in the 'Solidarity' movement, was an adviser to Lech Wałęsa, and the first President of Cracow after the collapse of the communist system in 1989. Revered and honoured, this holder of decorations granted by many countries including Poland, the Vatican, Belgium and France, is now an unquestioned guru of the Polish Catholic intelligentsia.

The title of his memoirs, 'Memories of a Lucky Man', is in its ostensible simplicity annoyingly pretentious. From the very start it brings to mind Kingsley Amis' unusually talented but unfulfilled *Lucky Jim*, and the clownish memoirs *Jeden łatwy żywot* [One Easy Life] by Wincenty Lutosławski, a Polish 19th–20th century philosopher, renowned for propagating quadruple abstinence, from alcohol, tobacco, gambling and sex. Upon reading the book, however, we see it is closer to Graham Greene's *A Sort of Life*, for it expresses a similar sincere enthusiasm for life and the world as well as his own person. It is a noteworthy point that Woźniakowski knew both the latter authors quite well and writes about them in his book.

These associations are justified insofar as Woźniakowski's memoirs can be read with the same pleasure as the three authors mentioned above. This is due not only to his excellent writing skill, but also to the fascinating fortunes of his ancestors and his own. At the beginning we get a survey of the social and intellectual elite of Cracow and Polish Galicia at the end of the 19th century, for his closest ancestors were derived from these circles. His forefathers belonged to the families of greatest merit to the Polish culture of the 19th and 20th centuries:

such names as Rodakowski, Kossak, Pawlikowski and Czapski. Among his closer or more distant ancestors and cousins are such painters as Henryk Rodakowski and Józef Czapski, the famous collectors from the Pawlikowski family, the poet Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, née Kossak, musicians and men of letters from the Żeleński family, or the offspring of the aristocratic Tarnowskis. Many brilliant names of an even greater calibre can be found among his friends and associates. His accounts of the fortunes of the Woźniakowski, Rodakowski, Dąbski and Pawlikowski families in the 19th and 20th centuries make up one of the most interesting parts of his book. In the background he displays the most significant problems of the Poles in the partition era: the meanders of the Polish, Galician Polish and Austrian national identity, the fortunes of the émigrés, insurgents and renegades, social activists and crazy aesthetes.

This is followed by even more interesting material. Woźniakowski recollects his experiences in Polish and Swiss schools, his love for horses and the Tatras, his school days as a Cavalry Cadet, his participation in the 1939 September campaign and conspiratorial work during the German occupation. In his memoirs laughter merges with tragedy, trifling details with serious reflection upon Polish history and the Polish national character. Equally interesting are his post-war memories concerning the work of the editorial board of *Tygodnik Powszechny*, its members and their provenance, as well as the attitude of the highest dignitaries of the Catholic Church to this weekly.

The book consists of two parts: 'O tym, co było' [How It Was], which is a fluid, chronological narration based on the author's own memory, and partly (in relation to the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century) on the still living memory of his family; and 'Portrety i szkice' [Portraits and Sketches], devoted to the persons whom Woźniakowski regards as worth commemorating.

At various stages of his life he met many unusual people; their extremely interesting characterizations, sometimes contrary to current opinion, are one of the assets of 'Memories'. Among them there are outstanding representatives of (not only Polish) art and culture, such as Henryk Rodakowski, Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (Witkacy), Józef Czapski, Czesław Miłosz, Zbigniew Herbert, editors of *Tygodnik Powszechny* with Jerzy Turowicz and Józefa Hennelowa at the head, Graham Greene, Isaiah Berlin and many others. There are pillars of the Catholic Church in the 20th century, Cardinals Adam Sapieha, Stefan Wyszyński and Karol Wojtyła, and the popes — John XXIII, and especially John Paul II. There are monarchs and politicians such as the King of the Belgians Baudouin I or Lech Wałęsa. There are finally many names that he saves from oblivion — of his relatives, tutors, teachers, friends he gained at school and during the war, a servant who showed a strong character or even secret service officers who pestered the author in communist Poland. Admirable, interesting, sympathetic, funny or sometimes frightful, all of them convincing and lively, though most of them are no longer alive. The pleasure of reading this book is enhanced by the language used by Woźniakowski — quite modern and colloquial, but adorned by many lovely 19th century anachronisms — as well as by many photos from his family albums, distinguished museums and press reports.

In the mirror of his memories Jacek Woźniakowski appears as an ideal representative of Polish 20th century intelligentsia, or rather Cracow intelligentsia,

now — just like a hundred years ago — living and flourishing as if in opposition to their counterparts in other regions, especially Warsaw. The intellectual elite of Cracow (and earlier also Lwów) developed in the 19th century, especially its second part, among the social, political and national realities of the Austrian Partition. Less numerous than in Warsaw, they, however, enjoyed a greater prestige because of their high standard of living and especially their family and social ties with landlords and aristocracy. Sincerely identifying themselves with Polishness and ready to sacrifice a lot for their country, they were at the same time cosmopolitan in the aristocratic style of the *belle époque*. Well-educated in the schools and universities of almost the whole of Europe, they were, however, closer to the model of a well-read dilettante and amateur-scholar, a private gentleman rather than a specialized professional. Averse to any radicalism, distrustful of plebeian mass movements arising at the end of the 19th century, they felt strong links with the Catholic Church whose representatives in the Austrian partition intellectually surpassed those in other regions; this tendency was even enhanced by the experiences of communism in the next century. Jacek Woźniakowski, whose genealogical tree has both counts and burghers, who feels at home in Paris, as much as in the Vatican and Zakopane, who is equally relaxed when talking to kings and labourers, in his right place at desk, while skiing and horse-riding — is the best son of this intelligentsia.

This is, however, also the source of all the weaknesses and inconsistencies of 'Memories'. Woźniakowski — a perfect gentleman — placed in it only nice reminiscences of his contemporaries (although he remembers the wound he suffered in the war, the uncertainty of the future, the cruel death of his friends and all the unpleasantness caused for him by the communist authorities). He puts his cautious words of critique — if they appear at all — in the mouths of other persons or conceals them in understatements, especially when it concerns the Catholic dignitaries, like Primate Wyszyński or John Paul II. Is it mere gentlemanship, or a wish to avoid what's unpleasant and controversial? — it is hard to say. The contemporary reader — especially if he does not come from Cracow — will perhaps be exhilarated or irritated by the author's earnest comparison of Cracow to Rome 'after the Gothic plunder' (p. 207) or his opinion that in 19th century Poland 'the possession of a village was the chief qualification for anything' (p. 199). If the reader is not a male, on the other hand, they may be repelled by the author's paternalism; for though he frequently mentions with some sentiment the women he has met over many years — he perceives in them mainly their girlish 'tendency to diffident enthusiasm and naively just indignation' (p. 267), while the greatest merit of a lady of the house is polishing the floor and being absorbed in the world of her husband's values. Certainly the weakest fragment of the book (both in respect of method and intellectual weight) is the subchapter 'Patriotism of Foreign Wives', where the author — on the basis of just a few examples from the circle of his family and friends — develops some psychological theories about the non-Polish wives of 19th century Poles.

Woźniakowski is, however, not only a man of great tact who skillfully handles his pen — but also represents impressive intelligence. As an author of memoirs he retains from the very beginning a distance to himself. He is well aware that imagination and memory can run riot or delude us with their reliability and

that '*nemo iudex in causa sua*, or nobody can be a judge in his own case' (p. 154). He is also aware of the fact that the models of Polishness and culture, the world of ideas and values into which he was born and which he defended for most of his life, diverge from the realities of the present day. He is irritated by the growing specialization at the cost of fragmentation of knowledge, the cooling down of patriotism, and the ethical *voltes*, made in the name of the principle of political correctness. And he himself happens to be irritating. However, we should be thankful for having more memoirs that will irritate us in such an exciting and elegant way.

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