

Alternative Tourists' Guide in the Time of Globalisation: Introduction to Goerke's Essay "Ten Months and Two Days"

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Natasza Goerke was born in Poznań in 1962. She studied Polish at Mickiewicz University in Poznań and Oriental Languages at Jagiellonian University in Cracow. Goerke emigrated from Poland in the mid-1980s. After having traveled intensively in the East, she took up residence in Hamburg, Germany. Currently, she is constantly on the move between Germany, Poland, and Nepal.

At the beginning of the 1990s, Goerke began to publish her short stories in the important Polish cultural magazines, *Time of Culture* (*Czas Kultury*) and *Draft* (*bruLion*). These were included in her first collection, *Fraktale* (*Fractale* 1994). In 1997, *Book of Patés* (*Księga Pasztetów*) appeared followed by *Farewells to Plasma* (*Pożegnania plazmy* 1999), and, more recently, *47 with Full Force* (*47 na odlew* 2003), which was nominated for the Nike Prize, one of the most prestigious in Poland.

As we examine Goerke's view of the world, it is useful to keep the socio-cultural context of Poland in the 80s and 90s in mind. The above-mentioned magazines based in Cracow started in the 80s as underground publications, but differed from the prevailing model of independent culture, because they were critical of official and opposition culture. They introduced alternative cultures to underground publications, taking up subjects that did not fall into the mainstream of established and oppositional cultures. Breaking social, political, and cultural taboos, they aimed to show a clash of multiple, sometimes contradictory world-views.

In the process of political and cultural transformation of the 90s, these magazines produced many young writers who later became significant figures in Polish contemporary literature.

Goerke's international recognition can be only mentioned briefly. Her works have been translated into German, Slovenian, Macedonian, Serbo-Croatian, Flemish, and English. One reason for her international success is that in her writing Poland does not play a central role. Though well-known texts of notable Polish Romantic poets, Mickiewicz and Słowacki appear in her work, her interests playfully cross all borders of ethnicity, race, religion, sexuality, gender, and culture. Collective and individual identities are not fixed, but continuously redefined. As the Polish literary scholar, Alina Molisak points out, in Goerke's texts Poland as a space, where one can experience the otherness of the world, rarely appears. When it does, it is observed at a distance, with ironical humour and mild satire,¹ often from the perspective of a tourist with no permanent residence.

In her literary essay, "Ten Months and Two Days" (*Dziesięć miesięcy i dwa dni*), which Goerke read in its English version at our symposium held on September 28, 2014 at Rikkyo University, we find similar features to previous work, but some points are advanced to widen the discussion.

The original version of the essay was published in *Rita Baum* (2010) a Polish cultural magazine based on the concept of creating the image of a woman, Rita Baum, whose existence is not fully verifiable.² It is the central issue of this essay, too.

A considerable part of the essay concerns the phenomena of increased and diversified mobility as well as the worldwide diffusion and

1 Alina Molisak, "Ironie, Grotteske und Surrealism oder Universalsprachen. Das Beispiel Natasza Goerke [Irony, Grotesque and Surrealism or Universal Languages. The Case of Natasza Gorke]" in Daniel Henseler und Renata Makarska, Hrsg., *Polnische Literature in Bewegung. Die Exilwelle der 1980er Jahre [Polish Literature on the Move. The Wave of Exiles on the 1980s]* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2013), S. 117.

2 Natasza Goerke, "Ten Months and Two Days" (*Dziesięć miesięcy i dwa dni*), *Rita Baum*, 15, 2010, 4–6. On *Rita Baum*, see. <http://ritabaum.pl/oricie> (08/02/2015)

popularization of communication technologies. According to Goerke, “tourists” and “migrants” are poles apart in the model of the human journey. Firstly, tourists travel as a matter of choice for adventure. However, migrants leave their home from necessity and look for somewhere to settle down. Secondly, the spatial range of daily activities is, in her opinion, differentiated by external conditions and obstacles such as walls, legal borders, barbed wire, and patrol boats. Members of each group have few opportunities to encounter each other and exchange ideas. As a result, they have nothing in common except universal feelings, such as nostalgia.

I am not sure to whom Goerke refers exactly as “migrants,” and, perhaps, the term should be mentioned “refugees,” or whether nostalgia is a universal feeling. However, at least in this essay, these questions are not significant. What matters is that Goerke, after having made a clear distinction between “tourists” and “migrants,” points out the manifestation of globalization and cosmopolitanism in the worldview of the former. In her opinion, globalization is both fact and an illusion transmitted and promoted by the web, inexpensive flights, and telecommunication. People with access to these technologies, who are mainly urban residents, share this worldview. However, in the eyes of others, for example, residents in isolated areas, the world seems different.

Goerke is skeptical about images of “reality” transmitted by the media. Subjects of universal interest and absolute truth are, for her, less valuable than concrete phenomena directly experienced and perceived through the individual’s senses.³ She aims to reveal that accepted causal explanations of phenomena hide an infinite number of more complicated possible scenarios.

However, the essential function of fiction is to depict the way people perceive themselves and the world. In the last paragraph, Goerke appeals to artists, particularly women writers. Even in these times, she suggests, when few pay interest to artistic activities, we should not forget

3 According to Alina Molisak, Goerke’s interest encompasses cognitive as well as emotional spheres and this can be explained by using the theoretical framework of the aesthetic and the anaesthetic by the German postmodern theorist, Wolfgang Iser (Molisak, 125).

that creativity and imagination are still the most reliable tools. Even if they do not have any fixed abode, artists' task is basically no different from before. With the example of UFO, her light blue camping car, Gorerke provides an ironical point of view to discuss the "literary on the move"⁴; this might indicate the hidden subject of her essay.

4 "Literature on the move" (Literatur in Bewegung) is a phrase from the German literary scholar, Ottmar Ette. On this subject, see. Ottmar Ette, *Literature on the Move*, trans. Katharina Vester (Amsterdam/New York, Editions Rodopi, 2003).