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# Marian Pankowski: *Rudolf*'s Anti-Nationalist, Anti-Martyrological Project

*"46 333"*

*In this article, I argue that Marian Pankowski's most well-known work, the novel* Rudolf, *constitutes a radical political project in its struggle against the nationalism and martyrology Pankowski saw as deeply imbedded in, and ultimately ruinous of Polish culture. His condemnations of these systems are made through the use of an explicit, unabashed queer erotics that subverts all traditional Polish values. I will first briefly discuss two other works that bookend Pankowski's life and career; his 1959 novella* Matuga idzie: *przygody [Here Comes Matuga: Adventures] and his 2000 short memoir* Z Auszwicu do Belsen: Przygody *[From Auschwitz to Belsen: Adventures], which received the Nike Literary Award, one of the most prestigious literary prizes in Poland. Though both of these works add to his anti-nationalist and anti-martyrological project, I have decided to focus more on* Rudolf *as it represents a fuller development of it.*

At a conference of writers held in Poznań in 1992 entitled "Dni Polskiego Dramatu Emigracyjnego" [Days of Polish Émigré Drama], Marian Pankowski (1919-2011) gave a short talk on his status as a Polish émigré author. The title of the talk was "Garb" [The Hunchback]. According to Pankowski, Polish émigré society was a hunchback, and "though gilded in prayers and poetry, remained a hunchback" (161).[1] It was a culture weighed down by nationalist sentimentalism, by its attempts to maintain the Polish nation and to keep alive the Polish myth of tragedy and exile begun in the eighteenth century while outside the borders of the nation proper. Its writers wrote "about far-away Poland as about a cemetery" (162), as a murdered, victimized space. In this talk, he discussed his decision to eventually leave behind his "émigré identity" as he could no longer abide the messianic ideology of Polish Romanticism that continued to influence Polish cultural thought throughout the post-communist period. This decision was inspired by his studies with Claude Backvis, a Belgian Slavist who lectured on Polish literature. Of Backvis, Pankowski says: "He approached our Romanticism with admiration, but without

[1] All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

solemnity. With polite irony, he ignored messianism, and above all else praised the creativity" of the Polish Romantics (162). This approach to the study of Polish Romantic poetry was for Pankowski something utterly novel. Instead of the reader being struck dumb by awe in the presence of the almost mythical poets, their "artistry and craftsmanship […] became recognized as the main criterion" (162). Pankowski's rejection of Romantic messianism and his pointed criticisms of Polish culture became the central themes of much of his work.

Pankowski was born in 1919 in Sanok, in what is today southeastern Poland. In 1938, he began his authorial career with the publication of a few poems, and in the same year began his studies at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. These studies were cut short by the Nazi invasion of Poland the following year. He would soon after join the army, and later fight with the Polish Resistance, only to be arrested in 1942 by the Gestapo "on charges of belonging to the underground army Związek Walki Zbrojnej (Union of Armed Struggle)" (De Bruyn et. al. 468), which eventually became the AK, Armia Krajowa [The Home Army]. He would spend the rest of the war in several concentration camps–Auschwitz, Gross-Rosen, Nordhausen, and Bergen-Belsen. The numbers "46 333," the tattoo he received on his forearm after becoming an inmate, appear regularly in his works. After being freed from the camps, he moved to Brussels, where he found "an island of joy. Clad and fed by allied philanthropic institutions, he lived in an illusion of normality […] a miniature society, whose exilic myth was its constitution" (Pankowski, 161). He would from that point on be known as an "émigré" author, a moniker he was never comfortable with, preferring to be known as a "Pole living abroad" (De Bruyn et. al, 470), illustrating a distaste for the exilic mythos. He finally finished his PhD in Slavic Studies, writing his dissertation on Bolesław Leśmian, at the Free University in Brussels in 1963. He then became a Professor of Slavic at the same university, where he continued to work until the 1980s. He remained in Brussels until his death in April 2011.

Early on in his life abroad Pankowski began writing and publishing fiction. His most important work, *Rudolf*, published in 1980 and released in Poland in 1984, "created a scandal, and numerous critics accused Pankowski of pornography and immorality" (Adamowski). Renata Gorczyńska called it a "manifesto of sexual anarchy" (161). These criticisms, and Pankowski's incessant satirizing of Polish culture, would keep him from gaining wider notoriety in Poland until only quite recently. He spoke and wrote in French fluently, but never wrote in French first, though he knew the original Polish versions of his prose had very little chance of being read in

Poland. Despite this, he refused to give up publishing in his first language. This was even at a time when French and Dutch translations of his fiction and stagings of his dramatic work were becoming quite popular in Francophone Western Europe (De Bruyn, et. al., 471). Writing and publishing first in French would almost have guaranteed him a much wider audience, especially in the Anglophone world–*Rudolf* remains his only work ever translated into English.[2] It has only been quite recently that extensive study of Pankowski's work has begun.[3]

Pankowski's choice of language is another possible reason that only one of his novels has been translated into English, and that very little scholarship about him exists in English. In her essay "Furia słów Mariana Pankowskiego" [Marian Pankowski's Fury of Words] (1988), Renata Gorczyńska discusses Pankowski's heavy use of village dialect, local neologisms, and mixing in of foreign words. This style makes the translation of his texts extremely difficult. One is constantly trying to find words in translation dictionaries that do not even exist in Polish dictionaries. Gorczyńska goes so far as to claim that Pankowski is more interested in "*how* to say something rather than *what* to say" (159). I would suggest, however, that Pankowski is actually engaged in a postmodern move to erase the lines between form and content. While it is true that the language he uses is extremely experimental, the subject matter of his works is just as important. The subject matter is so extreme that the form of expression one must use to discuss it also takes on a radical character. In his essay "Ciemności Mariana Pankowskiego" [The Darknesses of Marian Pankowski] (1993) Ryszard K. Przybylski sees something similar in Pankowski's style. For Przybylski it is as if Pankowski had said, "I will connect what, in your opinion cannot be connected. I will mix oppositions. Everything will lose its distinctions: heaven and earth, soul and body. And also languages: hieratic or plebian, literary or low jargon" (163). As I will note in my analysis of *Rudolf,* Pankowski's style relied on the mixing of the high and low, the vulgar and the sublime. This again is a postmodern move–bringing the popular into the realm of the literary.

*Here Comes Matuga* was only Pankowski's second published work of prose after *Smagła swoboda* [Tanned Freedom] (1955), a small collection of short stories. Before these he had

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[2] This tactic has proven successful by other Central European authors, such as the Czech writer Milan Kundera who now writes in French first.

[3] 2011 saw the publication of a special edition of the journal *Russian, Croatian and Serbian, Czech and Slovak, Polish Literature* (*RCSCSPL*) dedicated entirely to essays on Pankowski's writing.

mainly written poetry and drama. With his break from writing poetry it became clear that Pankowski wished to devote his writing towards pointing a critical finger at the "various Polish complexes, [and] anachronisms" he found in Polish society (Adamowski). Pankowski even once called *Matuga* a "text of rebellion [. . .] the manifesto of a poet pounding against the voice of the national literature" (162). With his prose, Pankowski wished to engage in a very clear critical project against outdated modes of national identity creation. Jolanta Pasterska views Pankowski's prose as "a polemic against the national tradition and history, which are so strongly rooted in Romanticism" (527).

*Matuga* is made up of loosely bound stories centered on the character Władziu Matuga, an emigrant from a country the narrator names "Potatoland" [*Kartoflania*]. Krystyna Ruta-Rutkowska sees in *Matuga,* "a sarcastic destruction of codes of the great national literature; [in particular] the code of *Pan Tadeusz*" (35), the Romantic epic by Adam Mickiewicz. The work begins parodying *Pan Tadeusz* on the opening page. The first "chapter" is a kind of invocation entitled "To the Reader." It includes the line: "And all is girdled as though with a grassy ribbon… Not girdled. Cut through with a razor, straight and to the bone" (12). The first part of this line is a direct quotation of line 21 from "Pan Tadeusz" in Mickiewicz's description of the Lithuanian countryside. The narrator of *Matuga*, however, does not see the idyll Mickiewicz imagined. Instead, he bears witness to the destroyed landscape of post-war Poland, "cut through with a razor." Like Mickiewicz, who wrote while in exile in France and Dresden, the narrator of *Matuga* is also writing outside the nation. However, unlike Mickiewicz the narrator's experiences, which include internment in concentration camps–mirroring Pankowski's own life–will not allow him to romanticize the Polish situation. It is an audacious act on the part of Pankowski to set himself up against the bard of Polish literature. Ruta-Rutkowska sees this "anti-Mickiewiczian" move further illustrated in the heroes of each work. Whereas Matuga is continually moving on–"idzie," "going"–Tadeusz returns home to stay. "Thus he reverses the model of the static, neighbourly and social existence, inscribed in Mickiewicz's work. The provincial, naïve Pole has been replaced by a hero who has decided to have an adventure with the world" (542). The parodying of the Polish mythos continues in the following chapter entitled "Potatoland." This will be the moniker the narrator uses to refer to Poland throughout the rest of the work. In renaming Poland with this satirical title, Pankowski is criticizing the provincialism and small-mindedness he believed to be endemic to Polish culture. He makes an interesting word choice in Polish when he

uses "*Kartoflania*," from "*kartofel*," instead of creating a word from the more Polish "ziemniak." "*Kartofel*" is a borrowing from German, and though certainly understood in Polish, it is used more often in the countryside. The chapter tells of the wonders of the potato for Matuga's country, of its "eternal potatotude" [*kartoflaność wieczną*] (12). The coming of the potato to the land is described in an old book entitled:

> *On the Miraculous Bestowing of the Potato to Our Country: Or On the Undying Care of Heaven and Above all of Our Advocate, Written According to the Voices Coming from High by Justyna Of the Hunger, in the Office of the Franciscan Patala, In the Year of Our Lord Suchandsuch…* (13)

The rest of the chapter describes this "miraculous bestowing" of the potato, acting as a parody of a saint's hagiography. It also uses a more classic Polish vocabulary and grammar, such as the ending "ey" instead of "ej" for the feminine genitive. Not only is Pankowski satirizing Polish provincialism, but also religiosity and superstition. The rest of the novella continues unrelentingly in this satirical mode.

In *From Auschwitz to Belsen* Pankowski takes on the slightly different project of refuting the mythology of Polish suffering during the Second World War, especially as reflected in art about surviving the camps. Bożena Shallcross notes that "Polish concentration camp literature [is] dominated by a martyrological model" (513), a model to which Pankowski refused to adhere. While under communist control, rhetoric about the Holocaust in Poland was that Poles, and not Jews, were the primary victims of the Nazis. This would remain the official and only legal Communist Party line until the Round Table talks of 1989. Of course, this reading of history was rarely challenged within Poland during the PRL, and even remains a not-uncommon view among Poles today. This was clearly illustrated by the Auschwitz Cross disputes of 1998 and 1999 when hundreds of small crosses were erected just outside the concentration camp in protest to plans of removing a cross that had been placed there during a mass by the then Pope John Paul II.[4] The heroism of the martyr has played a central role in Polish culture since the Romantics' invention of the messianic notion of Poland as the "Christ of Nations" in the nineteenth Century. In *From Auschwitz* Pankowski constantly undermines this heroic narrative, going so far as to question the extent of his own suffering in the camps. He is approached by a group asking survivors of the

[4] See Genevieve Zubrzycki's discussion in *Crosses of Auschwitz: Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland*, University of Chicago Press, 2006.

camps to fill out questionnaires. At one point he says to himself, "the capos rarely beat us. It was dry and warm in the metal-works. And so what? After all I can't tell that to Professor X., the author of the aforementioned questionnaire" (15). Though his imprisonment was certainly horrific, and he was even tortured at one point, he admits that what he experienced was not equivalent to the fate of Jewish victims. Piotr Krupiński makes the excellent point of the importance in distinguishing the difference between the "concentration camp" and the "extermination camp" in his essay on Pankowksi's anti-martyrological literature (555). Yet the researchers and documentarians who create these questionnaires are invested in the same mythos of Polish suffering. He is asked, "there… in Auschwitz… you didn't feel unhappy?" He replies, "Maybe I did feel this, and maybe I really was unhappy, but I didn't know it. Probably because I had freed myself of my own time" (24). He avoids using his own suffering as a kind of moral capital, treating his imprisonment as insignificant in comparison to the experiences of others. He calls his camp experiences a "*wycieczka*," a "retreat" when compared to the "Warsaw boys who, bare handed turned over German tanks like turtles" (35). Despite the suffering he experienced, he feels guilty for having been in the "safety" of a concentration camp while the Warsaw Uprising was taking place.

The satire against nationalism in *Matuga,* and the anti-martyrological project in *From Auszwic* coalesce in his most well-known work *Rudolf*. Though rather short, consisting of only 110 pages, *Rudolf* is extremely dense in language and theme. The narrative relates the interactions between a Polish-born professor of Slavic at a Belgian university–which mirrors Pankowski's own biography–and a gay, German-Polish pensioner, the titular Rudolf. The narrative mainly focuses on their relationship, whether in face-to-face conversation or through the letters they write one another. The story begins with a kind of dividing and doubling–a device similar to what takes place in Witold Gombrowicz's *TransAtlantyk* when Gombrowicz-the-character first comes across Gonzalo. The narrator, whose name we never learn, begins a conversation with a retired gentleman sitting alone in the Grand Place of Brussels. He experiences a kind of recognition in this older man. Like the narrator, the Polish born professor living abroad in Belgium, the older gentleman is also a stranger. Eventually we discover that he is an ethnic German, born in Poland, now also living abroad in Belgium. When he first approaches

Rudolf the narrator tells him in French, "I live here, I belong here" (9).[5] Despite a claim to belonging to Belgium, the narrator understands that this belonging is complicated by his own biography as an ethnic Pole. The narrator and Rudolf are doubles because of their mutual "un-belonging." This becomes more apparent as they continue speaking. Though they had been conversing in French, Rudolf is able to see that the narrator is Polish, asking him, "You're a Pole?" (11). This flusters the narrator and he responds, "I don't see what that's got to do with … yes, a Pole … when we're here having a chat in French … besides, I've been here for thirty years … so that … you know … we … Europeans" (11). The narrator is not quite denying his Polishness, but he is making a choice to identify as a European instead. Soon after this Rudolf lets slip a "ja-ja!*"* The narrator realizes that he is German, thinking to himself, "he's reddened, because that '*ja-ja*' of his has betrayed a Germanic shirt. Let's take our chance, since our boxer has lowered his guard: 'You're … German?'" (11). This hiding and revealing of national backgrounds takes on an antagonistic character. By calling Rudolf a "boxer" the narrator reveals the conversation to be a kind of struggle between the two. It is a strange reversal of nationalistic disputes in which the antagonists' vocal admissions and declarations of their national identities are central to the argument. Here the two attempt to keep their national identities hidden for as long as possible, preferring the more cosmopolitan "European" moniker. Just like the narrator, when Rudolf's Germanness is revealed he also refuses it, instead saying, "Yes … but from now on ... we're going to speak Polish!" (11). They will use Polish throughout the rest of the text in both their conversations and the letters they exchange. Rudolf then relates his life's story, beginning with his birth in Łódź, Poland. Rudolf's biography, that of an ethnic German born and raised in Poland, demands the reader acknowledge the contentious history of post-Second World War Poland behind that biography. It creates a problematic ethnic and national identity for Rudolf, who appears to be one of millions of Germans forced to leave Poland after the end of the war. The contentiousness of the encounter is stressed further when the narrator likens their conversation to their being soldiers: "as we run we've crossed Europe, and by now each of us is seated in his own dugout, waiting. With a bayonet" (12). Again, however, the nature of their battle is a satirical reversal of the nationally and racially charged reasons Europe had gone to war

[5] All English-language citations from *Rudolf* for this article refer to the translation *Rudolf.* trans. John Maslen and Elizabeth Maslen (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1996). For Polish-language citations, I used Marian Pankowski, *Rudolf* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1984).

previously. Now, instead of nations warring with one another over national superiority, two representatives of nations are warring over who can hide their national identity better. What is most revealing in the exchange is Rudolf's insistence that they speak Polish. His attempt at a position of superiority is actually strengthened by subordinating his primary, "ethnic" language. It is in the third space of Belgium, neither Poland nor Germany, where this kind of soft war can occur, and the obstacles of their shared history can fall away.

Another doubling takes place during their conversation as the scene in the Place is intermingled with an erotic scene of two young men driving through the Belgian countryside. It describes the two men finding a stream where they wash each other, being observed the entire time by a young goatherd, who eventually becomes so excited that he must masturbate. The movements between the two scenes are sudden, with no obvious link between them. They are separated by setting and characters, yet Pankowski wishes them to be brought together. The erotic idyll in the one scene opposes the aged banality of the other. Eroticism, and more importantly, *homo*-eroticism becomes an important element of the story from the very beginning. The two scenes, though narratively and thematically unconnected, come to be structurally interlinked. This connectedness demands we read something of the youth and eroticism of the one scene in the other. It is a suggestion of some remaining youthful vitality still left in the two older men, a suggestion that despite their age they continue to be sexual beings. The mix of these two elements–the anti-national character of the conversation between the narrator and Rudolf, and the homoeroticism of the scene between the two young men–becomes the leitmotif of the novella; it is setting the Eros of queer desire against the Thanatos of nationalism and normativity.

Early into their conversation, Rudolf reveals his sexual identity to the narrator, saying, "Ever since my school days only one thing's mattered: boys" (14). This unabashed declaration shocks the narrator and his reaction proves to be a model for his future reactions to the descriptions of Rudolf's erotic life. The narrator attempts to make a logical, normative sense of Rudolf's queer desires. His first response is to say, "well … tastes differ [. . .] these things happen … and viewing the matter statistically …" (14). It is impossible for the narrator to understand one man's desire for another, yet ultimately his responses illustrate a denial of the importance of pleasure of any kind. He ends by telling Rudolf, "I feel quite simply that I'm a member of society in the full sense … in teaching … I try to keep faith with certain principles which for centuries … have been handed down from generation to generation" (15). This

statement draws an immediate, visceral reaction from Rudolf, the narrator describing him as "leaping up" (15):

> My good sir! What's this that's 'been handed down from generation to generation'? "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" no doubt? Society?! Rogues and sycophants always to the fore! And knowledge–good for riffling through rancid encyclopedias [. . .] to add new molds to old! [. . .] But my good sir, what's that got to do with a man of flesh and blood, with you, with me?! [. . .] Do you know what counts? Joy . . . pleasure . . . to . . . dilate in a flash, as if a good half-dozen lungs inside you are starting to breathe frosty air. (15-16)

Here Rudolf articulates his philosophy of *jouissance*, calling for "joy" and "pleasure" as opposed to received notions of "acceptable" morality. He begins by trivializing classically privileged values of Western culture such as tradition, society, knowledge, and Christian pieties, calling them "petty," and reducing them to little more than "new molds" that can be added to older ones. For Rudolf these values accomplish little, and he views them as only serving their own self-reproduction. He reverses the paradigm, valuing the corporeal, the human, the base, but also the present and fleeting as opposed to quasi "eternal" generations. Instead of privileging the ability to recite "the uses of the genitive singular"–the mind, the logical–he wants society to value the "frosty air" inside our lungs–the body, the sensual. It is a defense of joy and life against a self-destructive culture of death.

Immediately following Rudolf's "call to joy," the narrative moves into a flashback scene, related through a stream-of-consciousness. It is not conveyed by the narrator, but instead it is meant to be understood as a look directly into Rudolf's memories. The scene depicts what will be called the "forbidden ball." It describes a group of high-class gentlemen, Rudolf being among them, arriving at a manor house in winter after a day of hunting. They begin drinking, and then dance with the farmhands. Eventually the group breaks off into pairs, each gentleman going off with one of the workers. The class divisions of the group are underlined by the descriptions of "peasant trousers thrown down anyhow" and "the metropolitan *plus fours* right next to the trousers" (18). This is a dynamic that appears in several examples of twentieth-century Polish fiction, such as Witold Gombrowicz's *Ferdydurke* and *TransAtlantyk*, as well as Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz's *The Teacher*. In these stories, similarly to *Rudolf*, the country manor becomes a space where sexual transgression is perhaps not fully legitimized, but at least where it is accepted

as part of masculine life. It must be reiterated, however, that within these special loci of queer sex, one element common to them all is the presence of a hierarchical class system. The farmhand is never in a position equal to that of his sexual partner, illustrating that a transgression is not necessarily a productive act in dismantling normative regimes.

The text then moves out of the stream-of-consciousness mode. Reflecting on the forbidden ball, Rudolf says, "Ah, my dear man … that stink of sweat on a body you don't know, muscles [. . .] without ladies' lard, so that it's all tendons and just like a lumber yard, hacking and hewing away" (19). It is an unashamed, unapologetic articulation of Rudolf's desires. In the context of Polish literature, Rudolf's refusal to be ashamed and his celebration of the male body constitute a political act. He sets himself against the "society" that the narrator wishes to defend. This is stressed further when Rudolf describes how "Olek squirted over those family photographs, the horse boy, over those white ladies at watering places, over those children with little baskets for scattering flowers beneath the priest's feet, over those landowners with curved sabers–so it ran down the walls" (19). The description of his lover climaxing over these images is Rudolf's repudiation of not only heteronormativity but normativity of any kind. It is a debasement of family, society, religion, and–with the mention of "landowners with curved sabers"–traditional *szlachta* Polish life. He has undermined the social structures these images represent through Olek's defilement. Later, reflecting deeper on his relationship with Olek, Rudolf reveals to the narrator that he had first met him in a public restroom, and that they had first had sex in a park, "on the fresh green grass!" (28). It is a reminder of the danger gay people have endured, and in many places, continue to endure, in order to achieve even a modicum of intimacy. It is not always a "forbidden ball" in a country manor where local farmhands can be bought for two zloties. It is more often than not an endeavor fraught with the repercussions of social, and sometimes legal restriction.

Despite the seeming vulgarity of the descriptions of his encounters with Olek, Rudolf ends his story by saying, "We loved each other for twelve years, Olek and I" (31). The narrator, as a representative of normative hegemony, can only understand Rudolf's story about Olek if it fits into some kind of mythical order. When Rudolf asks if his relationship with Olek strikes the narrator as funny, he replies no, "Every way of keeping faith … or even … well .... In this earthly chaos of ours order deserves esteem" (31). Rudolf only laughs at this and replies, "Get away with your 'keeping faith' … We suited each other. That's all … my dear man, that's a lot!" (31).

Rudolf sees no need in making his relationships with men "mean" something more. The narrator, to the contrary, is driven to viewing this transgressive behavior as somehow "keeping faith" with some kind of universal order. For Rudolf, his love of Olek is enough. This poignant expression of love following such explicit portrayals of sex is the most jarring element of Rudolf's story. Love is not limited to the realm of heteronormative Romantic poetry. It is also expressed through the body and through sex, an act that involves "squirtings," "arses," "muscles," and "hewing away." For Rudolf love is physical, and involves the beautiful messiness of the human body. Rudolf's mingling of "poignant" love and the "vulgar" elements of lovemaking emphasizes the humanity of his affair with Olek, once again reiterating his privileging of joy and pleasure. In raising the base and vulgar, Rudolf is attempting to rob regimes of normativity of some of their power to regulate bodies and acts of love. He will not be regulated. His use of vulgar, explicit language in depictions of sex is a form of reterritorialization, deterritorializing heteronormative systems of morality and replacing them with his own morality of *jouissance*.

Rudolf's resistance to regulation is illustrated further when he and the narrator begin discussing the war. When asked how he spent the war, Rudolf says he continued "hunting," meaning having trysts with young men and soldiers, and avoided having to serve in the military until almost the very end. "And when the Germans came looking for partisans, I'd say: 'Partisans? Here?' They'd take a German at his word" (21). Rudolf's disinterested attitude towards serving the German nation in a time of war shocks the narrator, who again was expecting some kind of expression of nationalist sentiment. "Everything's topsy-turvy in my mind. I was just thinking I'd pin this vast black, yellow, and red butterfly down, and now the colors have scattered off its wings. Any minute … the next thing will be … it's he who's the patriot!" (21-22). Unlike Rudolf, the narrator is still invested in the battle between them to prove who is the more cosmopolitan, the more European. The narrator continues to define Rudolf only by his Germanness, as represented by the "black, yellow, and red" colors of the post-Second World War German flag. Rudolf, however, refuses "to be pinned down" by any mode of national identification. His refusal to fight for the fatherland, and his impulse to work against it, threatens the narrator's own self-definition as a defender of Polish culture and society. In an attempt to gain some kind of moral high ground over Rudolf, the narrator slowly rolls up his sleeve to reveal the tattoo on his forearm, the numbers "46 333," which he received in Auschwitz. It is a martyrological act, an attempt to use his suffering to validate and increase his authority.

However, the effect it has on Rudolf is unexpected. Instead of admitting the currency of the narrator's suffering he quips: "My dear man … what's to be said to THAT? It's a kind of holy mange … you don't know whether to wipe it away or put it in a little frame and stop living and do nothing but light a candle in front of it … That's why I've never liked looking at cripples" (22). On the one hand Rudolf acknowledges the "sanctity" of the suffering the tattoo represents–it should be treated as a holy icon. And yet, though it should be the ultimate symbol of suffering, Rudolf considers it mundane and insignificant, repudiating its martyrological value in much the same way Pankowski does in *From Auschwitz*. Despite Rudolf's reaction the narrator refuses to back down and presses the point: "I thrust this number right under his gaze. And he sees these corpselike figures advancing on his baggy eyes, sees that I'm driving these gray geese up to his muzzle" (22). In response Rudolf opens his shirt to reveal his own tattoo scrawled across his belly, "of Afro-Asio-design! Tattooed in violet and livid green. Not quite minarets, not quite pricks roused by a spring wind, as so much of it is dancing erection and bamboo parallels" (22). When Rudolf displays his tattoo, he is setting the "life" it represents against the "death" the narrator's tattoo represents. Instead of "corpselike figures" tattooed over the veins that might be sliced when a person commits suicide, Rudolf presents "roused pricks," "spring wind," and "dancing" that are tattooed across the belly, the locus of carnal pleasures. It is yet another repudiation of the thanatic with the erotic. This repudiation is stressed further when we learn that the tattoo spells the name "Yazit," a young Arab with whom Rudolf had maintained a long relationship years earlier, calling it "love" and not "jailbird filth" (24). Once again Rudolf conflates the vulgar and the sublime. Though Yazit had been a prostitute, he remembers him lovingly, and not as something lower than himself.

As a kind of epilogue to their war of tattoos, the narrator mentions seeing several tattooed men in the concentration camps: "One of them had … tattooed on his back … you know … a ginger cat. And this cat was chasing a pearly gray mouse half-hidden … guess where!" (23). Rudolf finds the story funny, but then replies: "Sure I can guess where … but you see … what they've done to you … mother, school, and priests! Instead of saying the mouse is running up his arse … you wrap it up in euphemisms, in stutterings" (24). He repeats this sentiment later when he tells the narrator that it is "women, teachers and priests who've instilled in us Poles that mania for washing our hands and a superstitious fear of breasts at the backs of our bodies, from between which oozes the unending serpent of our uncleanliness, expelled from paradise" (40). For Rudolf,

the systems that attempt to regulate bodies and desires are not supported by agents who represent a nebulous officialdom. Instead, these systems are maintained by the everyday proxies of morality. The fear of "breasts at the backs of our bodies" infers the fear of being a receiver of penetrative anal sex, "the serpent" symbolizing both the serpent of *Genesis* and the erect penis. This is a source of pollution, of "uncleanliness" and "ooze" that leads to punishment and expulsion from proper society. The "mothers" and "priests" have made it impossible for the narrator to even speak directly about the anus, let alone recognize its potential as a site of pleasure. In her analysis of a scene from *Here Comes Matuga,* Bożena Shallcross uses Guy Hocquenghem's work *Homosexual Desire* (1972) to note that the anus, as the source of distinction between normative and non-normative sexualities, "should not be exposed or even alluded to. Since the anus and anal penetration, associated with excrement, are excluded from social life, the very fact of homosexual desire and its satisfaction via anus implies crossing the boundaries of social normativity" (515). For Rudolf, the maintenance of the "boundaries of social normativity" implies stasis and death. He believes that one must transgress the laws of the "mothers and priests" in order to truly live a full life. He recognizes the productive power of transgression, and repeatedly defends it against the arguments of the narrator, who throughout their exchanges remains a stalwart supporter of Culture, viewing transgression as unproductive and wasteful. He continually disparages Rudolf's past actions, as when, in response to his relationship with Olek, he states that Rudolf was just a young man "from a good family" who wanted to "tear his Sunday clothes on a nail, as it were […] wanted to get free of the civilized world […] And on this impulse, you transgressed another city limit … But I repeat, you went with the *intention* of trespassing" (33). It remains inconceivable for the narrator that Rudolf might have experienced affection and love in his relationships with other men. According to him, Rudolf's affairs were little more than the actions of a petulant, rebellious teenager. For the narrator, Rudolf's lovemaking with men is bound up with transgressing "limits," or crossing borders. These are social limits, created and maintained by society's "mothers and priests." Again, he is unable to speak of non-normative sexual acts except through the euphemisms of "tearing clothes on a nail," or "transgressing limits." Ultimately the narrator sees these "transgressions" as breaking laws in that they end in "trespassing," which implies a more serious

element of illegality.[6] Rudolf's actions are not merely the breaking of social norms; they are dangerous, juridical offenses that must be controlled.

In a letter to Rudolf, the narrator describes seeing hustlers at work in the streets of Paris, and witnessing one going off with a customer. He then writes that one of the other prostitutes winked at him "significantly," which immediately made him run off, because "one cannot run the risk of ridicule after all" (38). In his reply, Rudolf writes:

> And if you had gone with the one who winked so "significantly," maybe you would have forgotten, if only for an hour, your […] foibles. […] and later maybe he would have begun to talk. And out from under that creature who was playing clever buggers on the street corner would have crawled a human being … no doubt lonely … like you … only less ingenious. Precision is blinding you […] And that is why you checked over the ones near the drugstore not as brothers in loneliness but as renegades from the ordinary world, to which you are proud to assign yourself. […] Because to fraternize means leaving your patent-leather shoes in the church porch and going barefoot, into the unknown … and that is not for you. (38)

Rudolf sees this as a missed opportunity for the narrator, a moment when he could have realized the freedom of transgression, to have finally gotten to know the humanity of the hustler and to realize that it is the same humanity as his own. However, as Rudolf understands, the narrator remains too invested in the "ordinary world," in the systems of normativity that regulate and maintain order. To admit the "renegades," the transgressors into society, is to admit to the artificiality of the borders that society has constructed. For Rudolf, this can all be blamed on the narrator's desire for "precision," a desire to be able to clearly define limits, whether national, gender, or any other. To allow oneself not to be restricted by this precision is to open oneself up to a wider world of joys and pleasures, to "fraternize," and to "go barefoot into the unknown." Pankowski's use of "fraternize," Polish "bratać się," literally "to brother," immediately brings to mind Gombrowicz once again. In his novel *Ferdydurke*, the character Miętus wishes to "fra..ter..nize" with a farmhand. The stuttering of the word speaks to the ineffability of homoerotic interactions between men. In both works "fraternizing," "brothering" is both an act of

[6] In the original Polish Pankowski differentiates between "przekroczyć," "to cross," and "wykroczyć," "to trespass."

simple communion between people, as well as a metaphor for gay male sex. The narrator, however, will have none of it. When they meet again later in the story, he tells Rudolf, "you're afraid of law and order … of nature's order … of health … You prefer a world drooling with secretions … festering" (94). For the narrator, the only thing that can come from Rudolf's transgressive desires is pollution; however, Rudolf retorts, "like the birch tree, like the body, like the thaw that makes valleys fertile with slime!" (94). This exchange succinctly illustrates the struggle between Rudolf and the narrator. Whereas the narrator sees Rudolf's transgressions as destructive, Rudolf sees them as productive. For the narrator, transgressive desire introduces corruption, but for Rudolf, it has an almost life-giving force, which view stands in opposition to nationalist, heteronormative values that see the homosexual as useless and wasteful, as death. Once again it is an illustration of the opposition between a cult of life–the erotic–and a cult of death–the thanatic. Ironically, they both see transgression as creating the conditions for permeability and fluidity; however, while the narrator believes this to be dangerous, Rudolf believes it to be absolutely necessary for life.

Rudolf's defense of transgression is at its core a defense of bodily joy and pleasure. It becomes an indictment of not just Polish culture, but of any culture that would restrict such pleasure, and the nationalistic maintenance of rigid bodies central to those cultures. Rudolf's critical stance against nationalism is seen early in the novella in his embarrassment in being "found out" as a German, and in his actions during the war refusing to support the invading German army. His response was to run from a national identity in order not to be "pinned down," as the narrator had attempted. Although he seemingly prefers a Polish identity at the beginning, it becomes apparent that he is critical of all national modes of identification when he directs his criticism toward Polish nationalist ideology. He tells the narrator that Poles:

> behave as though every single one of them, without exception spent his life on horseback … But on horseback, all you can do is give orders, knock off Turks' heads with your saber to add flavor to Viennese coffee, but you can't lower your pants either in front or behind. You can't use your body except for carrying a standard, lance, or holy images. […] You know … I believe in riding too. The African continent really thundered under us when I mounted Yazit … But when he'd stretch me at full gallop, spur and goad me on – to the point where Paris began to heal over! Man! Cavalry times! (79).

Rudolf's criticism of Polish nationalism is directly linked to his valorizing of transgressive desires, which are antithetical to normative values that seek to sustain tightly closed systems, such as bodies and nations. His referencing of "sabers," "cavalry times," "knocking off Turks' heads," and "Viennese coffee," all point to the last period of Polish history when Poland was a military power, the seventeenth Century. He is specifically referring to the Battle of Vienna in 1683, which was won by the Polish king Jan Sobieski III against the Ottoman Empire after he led a cavalry charge that broke the siege. This event remains an important touchstone of national pride for Poles. In Rudolf's mind their insistence to harken back to this moment from four hundred years earlier is worthy of satire and ridicule. He begins with the very practical concern of one being unable to lower one's pants, "either in front or behind." All the body-on-horseback can be used for is war. Poles' preoccupation with this mythical heroic past makes it impossible for them to enjoy the pleasures of the body, which is restricted to the job of maintaining the national mythos. He then contrasts this mythos with his own "cavalry" experiences–that is, his sexual exploits with Yazit. This "bare-back" riding is for Rudolf much more important than the Battle of Vienna as it reaffirms his devotion to joy and pleasure. That Yazit was an Arab, that Rudolf had been "fraternizing" with the enemy, strengthens his denial of the power this historic moment is supposed to have for national Polish pride. Reuel K. Wilson sees Pankowski as poking "fun at cliché-ridden Polish nationalism and its passion for myth-making" (829). I would suggest that what Pankowski accomplishes is more than mere "poking fun," especially in the context of Polish nationalism and mythos. In Polish tradition, these themes are vital components of the culture, and in the formation of a national identity. Any satirizing of them constitutes a serious break of the social contract. Rudolf finishes his invective against the Polish cavalry by telling the narrator:

> You're still young … try to escape. Try to leap clear of your horse while there's time, run to some alder stream, throw off all your worldly trappings, step into the water … And before you know where you are, some shepherd will be washing your head, shoulders, and back, so that all of a sudden you'll see the meaning of water, birds, light, and brotherhood with your body! (80)

Rudolf's advice to the narrator is to leave behind the "Polish cavalry," the ideology of restriction and traditional values. The narrator's best hope is to deny the cult of death fundamental to Polish nationalism, and instead to affirm the cult of life in joy and pleasure. Rudolf rejects the logos, and

calls for the narrator to understand the world "bodily," reversing the mind/body binary, privileging the "knowledge" one achieves through "fraternization." In mentioning a shepherd washing the narrator in a stream, the text ties the narrative back to the beginning of the story, referencing the two young men driving through the Belgian countryside and washing each other in a river alongside the road. This asks the reader to return to the earlier scene, folding the story on itself, once again adding an element of the double to the opening pages.

One final scene that further illustrates the novella's satirical take against Polish nationalism occurs while the narrator is visiting Kraków, where he says he feels, "a feigned foreignness confronting this town that doesn't remember me" (68). He describes a parade with "lads impersonating scythe-bearing Polish rebels of two hundred years back, who are hurriedly stuffing their jeans in their boot legs so as to turn themselves into those authentic peasant heroes" (69). He notes the "rococo folksiness" of the people in Łowicz skirts (74). These costumes are muddled, taken from various areas of Poland, not uniform, and worn to profess a contrived patriotic feeling. The "scythe-bearing" men are engaged in a reenactment of the Battle of Racławice, in which Tadeusz Kościuszko lead a peasant army against the Russian Empire in 1794. The Łowicz folk costume has no place in Kraków, which has its own style of folk dress. What is more, he soon discovers that the parade he is witnessing is to celebrate the re-dedication of the Grunwald Monument, which took place in 1976, replacing the original 1910 statue that had been destroyed by the occupying Nazis. Not only, then, are the folk costumes muddled, but the history the reenactors are celebrating took place nearly 400 years later than the Battle of Grunwald. The narrator is describing simulacra upon simulacra: this Grunwald Monument is memorializing an earlier monument that memorialized a battle that took place centuries earlier in a place hundreds of miles from Kraków, in a ceremony attended by "inauthentic" peasants. In her reading of this scene Jolanta Pasterska sees in it "the artificiality of History being brought to life" (Pasterska, 531). These battles are important historical touchstones for Polish nationalist feeling, much like the Battle of Vienna Rudolf references earlier. However, in their insistence on clinging to these heroic legends, the participants are accepting a life of stasis, remaining in a mythical past. This satirical take on the contrived patriotism of ceremony is reflected in a sentiment Pankowski expressed in "The Hunchback" when he called for his countrymen not to be "repeaters of history while singing old songs under famous monuments," but to instead be "dissenters of dogmas" (162). The scene turns hallucinatory as the statue wrests itself from its

platform and begins chasing the narrator through the streets of Kraków. He is captured by the "insurrectionists" bearing scythes and forced into a folk dance. Ironically, he calls himself an "anachronistic civilian" (74) since he is the only one not dressed as a peasant or in period costume. His attempt to fit into the act is hindered when his "Parisian Saint-Laurent tie gets hooked on [his] neighbor's scythe" (74). His cosmopolitanism and "Europeanness" will not allow him reentry into Polish culture. Similarly to the satire found in *Matuga*, the scene is critical of the inauthenticity and simplemindedness found in rote expressions of patriotism.

A vital element in expressions of nationalist ideology is the belief that the individual should sacrifice him/herself for the good of the nation. The sanctity of national suffering was central to Polish Romanticism, especially to the messianic notion of Poland as a "Christ of Nations." Some of the most potent assertions of patriotic feeling are the memorializing of national tragedies, and the refusal of the nation to let go of past suffering. Indeed, the remembrance of past national tragedy is often a more effective means of creating patriotic fervor than the remembrance of national victories. It is quite telling that the largest yearly commemorations for the Second World War are observances of the massacre at Katyń, and the Ghetto and Warsaw Uprisings held at their respective monuments–two imposing monolithic sculptures–though they are essentially commemorating catastrophic defeats at the hands of the Nazis. On an individual level, Krystyna Latawiec notes that in their remembrances of local histories, "people fix their traumas and use them to build the basis of their identity" (544). Throughout the story, Rudolf repeatedly disavows this morality of suffering, as when he counters the narrator's concentration camp tattoo with his own. Rudolf refuses to acknowledge the martyrological authority such suffering is supposed to impart on its victims. This refusal once again reflects a devotion to his personal creed of joy and pleasure, and an opposition to what he sees as the Polish celebration of suffering. At one point the narrator himself describes this celebration of the martyr in Poland, saying that at every turn one sees "a plaque with an epitaph or a crucifix at a road junction. You can't avoid them. [. . .] The people have been walled in with graves, […] and they fatten themselves on the slime of the past" (78). In her discussion of Polish nationalism, Geneviève Zubrzycki sees "the cross as a dominant symbol and martyrdom as a core narrative" in the creation of Polish national identity (34). The narrator sees in these roadside crosses constant reminders of historical tragedies, and the nationalist morality of obliging every citizen to suffer as Christ had. For the narrator, this drive to celebrate martyrdom has created in

Poland a cultural cemetery, in which suffering and a devotion to the past have become the most important commodity one can own. When describing the émigré Polish society of Belgium in "The Hunchback," Pankowski declares that "previous suffering is its treasure" (161).

Despite this critical view of Poland, the narrator defends the notion of fighting for Culture, and Society. He describes reading about the Spanish Civil War in the papers as a child. He tells Rudolf that "anyone who believed… in man was walking through mountains and forests, at night, like a robber! Across the Pyrenees so as to enlist under the standard of the International Brigades" (47). He assumes that it will be impossible for Rudolf to remain "apolitical" about this, as he had spent the War "hunting" young men and soldiers instead of fighting for the fascists. "Anyone who believes in man" must defend the International Brigades and celebrate their heroic sacrifices. Rudolf, however, replies:

> You were–please forgive me–just a kid who wanted to perform some exploit. I suppose the barricades were a party treat for youngsters in poor countries … where "heroism" comes easier than a pair of boots. There old fellows pushing fifty get the booze and the whores while kids' heads are stuffed with all and sundry who wear fetters like adornments … and cut cannon to pieces with scythes … My dear man! In Europe at that time, how many shouted "no pasaran"? Maybe a few hundred. […] The rest lived for themselves. Please listen – because they had the right to live! And we in Paris had the right to live our lives without the seal of history on our naked, private arses! […] My dear man – what is a body guilty of that first these, then those order it to impale itself on bayonets? Get them off my happiness! […] our lot found themselves in this situation anyway … alongside the others from the barricades. You know very well the Hitlerites packed homosexuals off to concentration camps. But nothing is said about this today. (48-49)

Rudolf begins by trivializing the narrator's admiration of the International Brigades, suggesting he is stuck in an infantile fantasy of "performing some exploit." Despite the intentions of the cause, Rudolf sees in the narrator's naïve optimism the same Romantic, nationalist rhetoric of hero/martyr worship. In his cynicism he notes that those who did the dying and fighting were the young, "stuffed" with a petty idealism "adorned" with their own bondage, their suffering turning into a commodity. In his defense of "youth" he is once again privileging the life it represents over the death represented by "the old," who send the young to die. Once again, I must note the

apparent influence of Gombrowicz here. This notion of "the old" sending "the young" to die in wars again brings to mind Gombrowicz's novel *TransAtlantyk*, in which Tomasz, the representative of Polish culture, manhood, and "*ojczyzna*" [fatherland], wishes to send his son Ignacy, the representative of youth, and "*synczyzna*" ["son"-land] back to Europe to fight and probably die for Poland. Both Gonzalo–the gay Argentinian who attempts to seduce Ignacy–and Rudolf side with youth and life, while the narrators of both stories side with tradition and death.

Rudolf goes further in his criticism suggesting it was probably poverty more than their idealism that drove these youths to fight, heroism being cheap. He defends one's right to live for oneself instead of dying for the imagined ideals of the heroic sacrifice for the many. He defends the rights of the body, of keeping one's "private arse" safe. For Rudolf, it does not matter on which side of a conflict "these and those" who give the commands are. They are all representatives of the cult of death that he opposes. In demanding the sacrifice "on the barricades" they are denying the importance of the body, relegating it to a status beneath an intangible idealism. They wish to subjugate the unruly body so it can serve a certain principle–honor, martyrdom, the nation. He rejects the martyrological value of these actions and once again takes the side of life and "living for oneself." He is appalled by the opposing notion of "dying for your nation." Instead of rejoicing in the sacrificial act of "throwing oneself onto bayonets," Rudolf would rather rejoice in his happiness, a happiness he sees as constantly threatened by the patriotic fervor of "these and those."

Rudolf then articulates a rare expression of community, claiming membership in "our lot," that is gay people. It seems that if he had to, the only "nation" he would wish to be a part of would be a "queer nation." This sentiment is truly compelling. In their essay "Queer Nationality" (1993), Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman discuss the radical, direct-action group Queer Nation. They illustrate that in miming "the privileges of normality" the group "simulate[s] 'the national' with a camp inflection" (196). Their parody of the nation state "exploits the symbolic designs of mass and national culture in order to dismantle the standardizing apparatus that organizes all manner of sexual practice into 'facts' of sexual *identity*" (196). They re-articulate nationalist and heteronormative rhetoric but with a "camp" bent in order to destabilize these values. When Rudolf claims allegiance to a queer nation he denies the nineteenth century iteration of the nation state, an act that subverts its monolithic status. He finishes by mentioning the suffering this community had endured at the hands of the Nazis, along with those "from the

barricades." It is the only instance in which he comments on the suffering of "his people." In refusing to take part in the martyrological drive, despite the oppression experienced by his queer nation, he rejects the power of martyrology as expressed by others.

In a later exchange near the end of the story Rudolf returns to his condemnation of sacrifice and his defense of the body.

> All our heads have been inoculated with this cult of public mutilation and death on the barricades … and so on from generation to generation. It's reached a point where the head, drunk with heroic hysteria, gazes "with pride" and "with self-denial" … at the despair of the body that nourishes it … So that when the body falls, the head's still reciting a select number of little verses, you know, that force you to stand to attention automatically. (93)

According to Rudolf, we have been convinced to take a masochistic pride in our denial of the body and our worship of "the head," or rather the logos. We have become disgusted by the very necessity of the body in survival. We have been systematically programmed to die and kill for "little verses" that hold some kind of patriotic meaning. It is in this "heroic hysteria" and the demand for "public mutilation" that Rudolf sees the fraudulence of Society and Culture's claims of superiority over the Individual and Jouissance. In his fight for "an existence filled with physical enjoyment and abundant love" (De Bruyn et. al., 471), Rudolf must oppose these messianic systems of control and regulation. It is against Society and Culture that Rudolf defends "the body's freedom," its "right to reach for happiness" (94).

Near the end of the novella the narrator describes going to visit Rudolf's grave. He is surprised to discover that Rudolf had been married, and even had a son he named Olek.[7] When he reaches the grave the narrator kneels and writes "Yazit" in the sand (105). It is a simple gesture, but one that implies the narrator has in some measure reconciled with Rudolf. It is perhaps too much to suggest that this gesture indicates that the narrator has adopted or even accepted Rudolf's morality of *jouissance* and his rejection of the morality of self-denial and sacrifice. However, in rewriting the name of one of Rudolf's great loves, a name that had been scrawled

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[7] One must note the misogyny apparent in the description of Rudolf's wife. This is undoubtedly an important aspect of the story; however, it does not entirely fit in the goals of my project here. For an excellent feminist analysis of women characters in Pankowski's fiction see Inga Iwasiow's chapter "Whither from the Motherland? Some Comments on Female Characters in Marian Pankowski's Writings," in *Russian, Croatian and Serbian, Czech and Slovak, Polish Literature*, 15 November 2011.

across his belly, the narrator has certainly been opened to other possibilities of life and love.

## Conclusion

After moving from poetry and drama to prose, Marian Pankowski's writing took on a decidedly political character. Often through parody and satire, it questioned received notions of what constituted Polish identity. In his engagement with the Romantics, he undermined the power of their nationalism and messianic morality of sacrifice and suffering. As Janusz Termer notes, "He is perceived as a relentless critic of 'national holiness' and various hardened native myths, an irreverent iconoclast of traditional customs and unmindful religious sentiments" (69). While early critics saw this as little more than sophomoric, and unpatriotic, I would argue that it is a complex, and truly patriotic project. His criticisms are ultimately productive: they act as a mirror put up to Poland's face, forcing it to reflect on the value of the heteronormative and nationalist ideologies that have led the nation into a morality of masochism and the beautiful death (*la belle morte*). Through his "pounding against the national literature," Pankowski wished to reveal to Polish society its superstitious, stubborn reliance on out-of-date customs, and its self-destructive messianic nationalism. *Rudolf,* more than any of his other works, successfully achieves this. In its critical interrogation of Polish values, its undermining of Romanticism's messianic mythos, and its unapologetic use of queer erotics, *Rudolf* remains one of the most challenging works of modern Polish fiction.

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