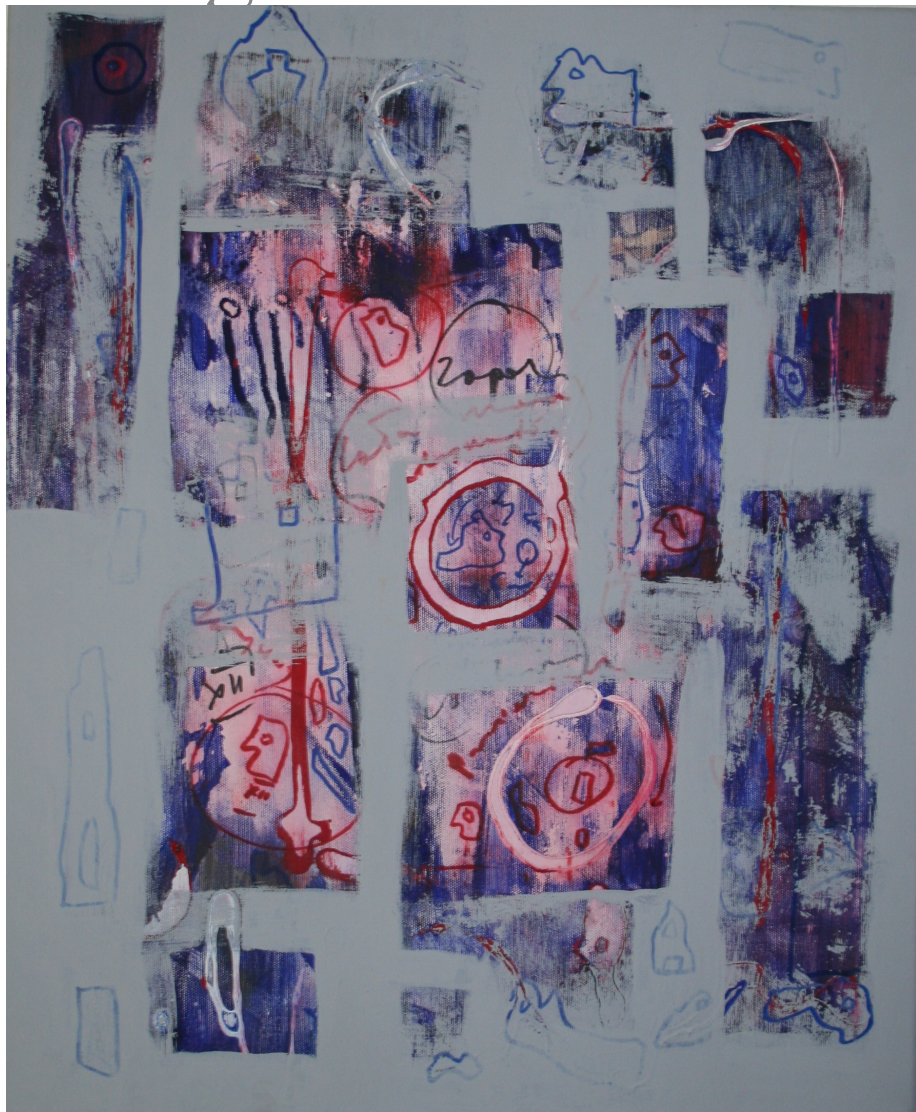


Grzegorz Wróblewski



THE LIFE OF A TENEMENT HOUSE

Translated from the Polish by Adam Zdrodowski & Ben Borek

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THE LIFE OF A TENEMENT HOUSE

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Front-cover image: "Don't Tread on Me"
by Grzegorz Wróblewski
(61cm x 50cm)

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SAMHAIN (UNHEALTHY ASSOCIATIONS)

I'd thought the rocks were used
only
for windowsills, but Talila Grey spheres!
I can't seem to focus, does granite
make you think of bugle calls?

Silver birch, PAVA
sprays.
(What's a CRKT Caligo knife doing in a woman's
handbag?)
The sound of Danish sirens.

Gangrene...
Watching a girl rolling
with her four-legged companion,
I visualize her burying it in black
mud.

She throws three old bones into the hole.
Afterwards her fourth or fifth
Newfoundland
she's had in a row does the same
with her as she once did with the first.

THE MAN WHO NEVER ATE TOMATOES

The man who never ate tomatoes
looked like a postman or a used
car seller.

He died the day before yesterday
at the age of 84.

His favourite conductor was James Conlon.
During a storm he always wore a warm
scarf.

He had a wife, of medium height and build.
Throughout her life she worked
at a toy shop.

Their only daughter, Lise, works at a bowling alley
on the outskirts of Copenhagen.

THE SKY AND SPLIFFS

I have always enjoyed talking to retired bankers.

Even if the conversation was a silent watching of clouds.

Today, after so many years, I'm sitting with them again in the park and we're staring at the reddened sky.
Not a word is said.

When I was young my friends pointed at me.
Have you lost your mind, what do you need these living dead for?
Now, they're acting like I did, I can see them on the nearby benches.

What happened to the spliffs and rumours about the corrupt Cleveland Browns, what are their twittering supporters doing these days?

TRUTH HUNTERS

When asked “how are things?”, we reply
“I feel fine, no fever”, fearing the hunters
from the department of health.

The moon has long fallen to a nervous disease...
When at night he’s pestered by Chinese
telepaths,

he just gives them “sun”, and in a flash
escapes into dreams.

WITH LARSEN IN A DOG SHELTER

If I sat there for too long,
I'd surely get used
to one of the dogs, which would
then poison its heart.

The damned Earth! And you can't just visit them
for a little while.
The old Alsatians would think I was a grim carrier
of pork bones.

And yet lying to Larsen, saying I won't join him
because I'm going to see a film with Lone
about capturing desert islands, would be an act of common
cowardice.

CHIAROSCURO

In a moment she'll speak and move
I hear the bespectacled guy making a pass
at the student who makes sure

no one pours acid
on the painting resembling
“The Birth of Venus.”

This isn't Botticelli, the canvas will not
announce anything to the cross-eyed experts
on Masaccio's chiaroscuro.

This counterfeit knows people
only too well. Cowboys,
pimps, weed dealers...

She hears the same thing every day.
Grab her tits, and you'll win
the lottery the day after tomorrow!

It is only at night that she's visited
by silver stars. Silent, stately,
they don't want anything of her...

EPICENTRE

My transparency, and yours.

The pastry chefs are soaking
in blood!

(The definition of the working class
is back). After all
I'm only studying caterpillars.

And you'll pay for it after power
is seized. Surely you must be

a supporter?

Of what? How much, what for
and for whom?

Of the revolution! Dead souls...

Is it at least
global?

If we really must
melt down spoons
and family heirlooms...

Of course it's global.

STORY ABOUT MARY

You've got a crazy
rocking horse here.

*It's not a horse, says
Mary, taken aback.*

How come?

*'Cause it's
a dog...*

What's it called then?

It's called Horse.

NORMAL

The temperature's below the norm,
road accidents within it,

Syphilis
surprisingly below
but a while later above the norm.

Rapes below,
the pandemic below and suddenly above,
yet eventually
within the norm.

Gunnar died,
but two days later
it turned out he was better.
And everything was back
like it used to be.

The turnover of vitamin D3 above,
the glaciers below.
The sales of champagne
within the norm.

People have put on weight, and have birds have begun
to desert the cities en masse.
Their twittering, driving us
mad in the mornings,
below the norm...

THEY HAVEN'T DELIVERED FISH ON TIME

Quiet armoured vehicles drift through the city...
The king who rules the underworld goes outside only
on cloudy

Mondays.
The cartel deemed my head
worthless.

G20

A boy with the sign:

I'M HUNGRY

The first December freeze...

Will he get help from the men
in yellow boots?

Or maybe their partners in Polish
nutria fur hats?

After an hour of begging he goes into
the REMA1000 supermarket.

He comes back quickly, bearing a bag
full of local beer and a small pack
of dates.

He cheated us and the president,
the cold pavement murmurs.

Meanwhile the president told
the G20 chiefs that his country
is not ready yet.

The crucial thing is always to sow
confusion.

Somewhere deep inside the crystal ball, in concrete
groves,
in the country of quartz, salt
water,
someone felt an urge to pay me a visit.

When eventually he drops by, during an autumn
storm, it turns out he speaks no Danish whatsoever.
What's more,
he doesn't know Mongolian which I have no idea about
either.

My guest looks like a big hairy
hen.
We sit in the kitchen for a few days. In silence
we eat cheese, chasing it with cannabis
smoke.

Understanding without words is possible – the smoke
offers amorous solutions...
Our stash on the window sill
dwindles fast. Eventually the visitor
disappears for good.

The old people were right when they twisted
their lips funnily over my oak
cradle.
The crystal ball, the groves... Yes, certainly
understanding without words is possible.

A DRUNK SAGE REMEMBERING THE GOOD OLD DAYS

Intelligent people never
get bored.
I've always fallen asleep right after
sunset.

Where have all the sellers
of wicker baskets and
flypaper gone?
I had two fine horses,

and then I was left with a cat.
I wanted to become
a fire eater or a strongman
in an itinerant circus.

But I needed to survive my son-in-law and two
boring wars.
I miss village idiots
in poorly cut suits.

Does anyone still collect rags
and empty jars? All of this is
history... Soon I'll be an authority
in the great beyond.

THE LIFE OF A TENEMENT HOUSE

It's good to be a painter splashed all over
with acrylics.

Those scooter guys from my building see me as
their mate.

Their matrons casually ask if I prefer pink over white
and whether I got sloshed on Samos.

Instead, I went to Barcelona, to the Picasso Museum,
I answer.

Ah! That perv who had all those
shrewd teenagers...

But you're
not into that, are you...?

Sometimes yes, sometimes no,
I explain. And now the scooter guys from my house
will have their revenge on
my windows.

It's good to be a painter splashed all over
with acrylics.

But you have to be mute. And quickly
get your tickets to Samos.

THE TOMB

Improve defence and the mental
sphere, quickly go back
to home page.

A pulse oximeter so that one day
you'll get to see a yeti,
salt waters, etc.

Oxygen, Black Friday,
the first cosmic selfie
up for sale.

Margrethe II among
the court's
calculating dachshunds.

She'll take every one of them
to Heaven.
Or they'll use them for terracotta.

Grzegorz Wróblewski was born in 1962 in Gdańsk and grew up in Warsaw. Since 1985 he has been living in Copenhagen. He is the author of numerous books of poetry, drama and other writings. A renowned visual artist, he has exhibited his paintings in Denmark, Germany, England and Poland. English translations of his work are available in *Our Flying Objects* (trans. Joel Leonard Katz, Rod Mengham, Malcolm Sinclair, Adam Zdrodowski, Equipage, 2007), *A Marzipan Factory* (trans. Adam Zdrodowski, Otoliths, 2010), *Kopenhaga* (trans. Piotr Gwiazda, Zephyr Press, 2013), *Let's Go Back to the Mainland* (trans. Agnieszka Pokojska, Červená Barva Press, 2014), *Zero Visibility* (trans. Piotr Gwiazda, Phoneme Media, 2017), *Dear Beloved Humans* (trans. Piotr Gwiazda, Dialogos Books, 2023). Wróblewski also authored a book of asemic writing *Shanty Town* (Post-Asemic Press, Minneapolis, USA, 2022). He has been awarded with scholarships from Danish Literature Council (Litteraturrådet) and Danish Arts Foundation (Statens Kunstfond).

Adam Zdrodowski, born in 1979, writer, translator, DIY musician (records under the monicker Moon Machinery), working in English and Polish; the author of four collections of poetry: *Przygody*, etc. (2005, Adventures, etc.), *Jesień Zuzanny* (2007, Susanna's Autumn), *47 lotów balonem* (2013, 47 Balloon Flights) and *Moon Machine* (2019). He translated authors such as Sarah Perry, Mark Ford, Rod Mengham, Vahni Capildeo, Henry Green, James Schuyler, Gertrude Stein, William S. Burroughs, Raymond Roussel, Harryette Mullen, and Grzegorz Wróblewski. His poems appeared in journals and anthologies, including *Jacket*, *Past Simple*, *3:AM Magazine*, the Danish *Polsk poesi* (transl. Frej Larsen and Paweł Partyka,

Forlaget em, 2022) and the Swedish *OEI*. He lives in Warsaw, Poland.

Ben Borek grew up in South London. His previous novel in verse, *Donjong Heights*, published by Egg Box, was a cult hit back in 2008 and his poetry has been published in *City State* (Penned in the Margins), London, *A History in Verse* (Harvard University Press), and *Dear World and Everyone In It* (Bloodaxe). He has read his work at festivals throughout the UK and Europe and audio of his work is available at the Archive of the Now (archiveofthenow.org). He lives in Warsaw with his partner and son and is employed variously as a copywriter, editor, translator and voiceover artist.

The tenement house was meant to house the influx of urban workers after the industrial revolution. It was a quick solution for the poor and desperate. We are piling on top of each other. More and more of us. These poems give voice to the forgotten. Whether it is the lonely Alsatians in the dog shelter, where “you can’t just visit them / for a little while. / The old Alsatians would think I was a grim carrier / of pork



bones." Or "The man who never ate tomatoes / looked like a postman or a used / car seller." Or the woman who "throws three old bones into the hole. / Afterwards her fourth or fifth / Newfoundland / she's had in a row does the same / with her as she once did with the first." In *The Life of a Tenement House*, Wróblewski continues his poetics of awe and compassion. This is poetry of our doomed and hopeful humanity trying to make the most of it. It is sharply honest and full of wit.

— Marcus Silcock (author of *The Green Monk*)

Photo by Karina Obara