

Sleepless nights in Silesia, induced by feelings of betrayal and treachery. Albeit without choice, I'd been up all night, questioning mine own heroism. For, I had put my life before pride, abandoning any loyalties I'd held by joining the very side history had taught me to despise. And now I sit amongst the infantry, some like-minded objectors, some true to the regime but all in being here, false to the land that raised us. Despite a shared internal resistance we all conform, parading the streets of Katowice, our birth place, and the city that had coloured our paszport navy, constantly reminded of our defection, if you could call it that given the damned conscription. Not only do many of us have to accept our betrayal, we are stationed around the very people we betrayed. Some... seem to enjoy this power, their former loyalties blinded by an urge to play god. Willingly relishing their hold on the trigger as we storm and subdue villages around the city. I almost envy their disgrace, it makes things simpler. But the rest, we were at a point, all trapped in the inextricable quandary between staying or dying for loyalty's sake.

Most envious of the degree of medics on hand from both sides, no force to fight, no reason to hate, whilst I am given no choice; it's death or disloyalty. Art was my forte, defiant of the sweep of conformism, I decided spirituality was more important than our own real life. In my catholic family's weekly pilgrimage to church, one remembers being more interested in the intricacies of the walls and ceilings than hearing about a power I was told I'd never get to meet. Having grown up in the farming town of Bielsko Biale, an agricultural, mountainous part of the republic, it was a given my career choice would've been subject to local controversy. And perhaps, if only my heart had stayed in being taught how to commandeer the mine shaft or bricklay instead of focusing on commandeering my platonic relationship with the canvas, I might've been headstrong enough to have made braver choice of this 'inextricable quandary'.

Had I been told I was to be conscripted to the Wehrmacht two years ago, I'd have laughed and refused to have believed it. Had I been told that I'd been given a choice between my pride and death, the radical within me would've guffawed at the idea of defending fascism but so far confronting death has blotted out my clearly fruitless protests.

We're being sent out, after weeks of waiting for word from the sergeant's sergeant, it's time to do an individual's search through the German's half of Silesia. Thus far, 8 citizens have been killed, we've stormed Pyrzowice, Gliwice and Bytom. 8 people. 6 men and 3 teenage boys. There's a growing sense of desensitvity amongst the boys and could I be feeling resentment for the males who chose pride over treachery? could it be jealousy?

If the line of hatred is only crossed at the pulling of the trigger, I'm yet to cross it. Heaven forbid.

What irks my muscle memory most as I lie awake these days, are the images of my judgement day painted across my mind, opposite from the frescoes that plague my memory of sweet ignorant days, the privileged position of one who had the time and financial security to ponder the existential. Now I simply bathe in the irony of my entrapment to the very oppressors I'd once rallied against. My mind wanders out of the immediate, not once during the day though, life as a soldier is scripted, with too much schedule for one to think. But the woes catch up around 1 past midnight, they always do, like a morbid alarm clock.

1938 Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme

'Lębowski captures the imagery of a post war Poland, depicting the side hidden by the republic. His most striking painting 'Sleepless nights in Silesia' shows a child in a cot lying in the middle of a barren wasteland. The toddler, seemingly oblivious or unknowing of the scenery around it as the wasteland upon closer inspection seems dotted with coins alike to the Polish Zloty. In the distance of the wasteland, a dozen animal eyes are pinned on nothing but the coin, this anthropomorphism represents the ignorance of European higher powers of agricultural reform over the last 20 years. {4.5/5}

'As an artist, one must understand the importance of political influence and the boundaries within it. Art will lose meaning when the artist is believed to be adhering to a specific demographic in order to seem radical. Ultimately it makes us question its substance. In this case Mariusz Lębowski is doing just that, focusing on the art, not its viewer.

Der Stürmer {1/5}

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The war effort is no place for a surrealist. Some say the experience could inspire some divine realisation about the so-called hardness of life, but when morning drills and operations become the norm it's hard to think of anything as anything. But one may begin to wonder about the true meaning of one's existence. Is pride taught? Have I been conditioned to feel obliged to repent for my artful ignorance of my own...

These misfortunate ramblings are the symptoms of my insomnia, not always a bad thing I'd remind myself religiously for a while. A time to catch up with myself, even if the 'catch' is the dwell. Although I often wonder, if stationed further afield, would my mind have still been so caught up in this self-loathing or would I have been so hedonistic as to ignore my own history and move on? The mind's voice has its own

opinions, a unique phrenology, like a fingerprint or a heartbreak dying every idea, every thought.

Though vertiginous from the usual night of pacing, I know the night the Baba Yaga came was much more than a moment of delirium. A message from the ancestors, from some messiah. Delivered by the archetypal old woman, one of warm rugged countenance worn away by her wisdom. The occurrence seemed like the filmline of a Henryk Szaro; a noir, a violent bad dream. I could swear I heard breaths from the array of string and horn players desperate to dictate the mood. Naturally, I too doubted her realness for many days to come. It was difficult to believe the ancient woman would have slipped into our dormitories undetected, a feat not even accomplished by french intelligence.

“skup się, chłopcze. Twoja lojalność będzie podporządkowana.”¹

She speaks but yet she says nothing. Her empty stare looks past me but her voice wrings the canals of my mind. Seemingly in some conscious state despite her antiquated clothes and demeanour. Something about her grandmotherly presence was etched by the heartaches of those who sought her out.

“wybierz własnych”²

She disappears. Leaving me alone and wondering just how my eyes had deceived me to the point of hyperrealism. What to do with the information...What I really lack is to be clear in my mind what I am to do, not what I am to know, except insofar as a certain knowledge must precede every action. To focus my loyalty.

¹‘Focus boy, your loyalty will be ordained’ - I’m at war a boy.

² “Choose your own” - My own? The subjectivity of the term is jaded. Does she know my origin?