

Wioletta Grzegorzewska

Notes from the Isle of Wight

A step or two east, or west, and all you see changes...

Lawrence Durrell

Who can, resting, slowly turn their confusion to clarity?

Tao-Te-King

2006 -10 -01

Slowly, I am learning the streets of Ryde by heart. The nooks and the crannies of this town creep beneath my skin and into my irises. Some days, I wake at midnight and could swear voices speaking Polish are floating up from the street.

I was joking when I said that, in my altered state, I feel like Emanuel Swedenborg. I feel closer to ghosts than to the living. Daily thoughts escape me of late, same as my breasts evade my bra: engorged and pregnant with possibility. My dreams peopled with the dead. They come in the form of sedum shrubs, flower-people in stiff suits speckled with wax, wearing linen robes. Hanging above, trying to enter me, root by root. I recall other fragments of dream: indigo light from a gas lamp, a wooden tub filled with suds.

2007-09-19

I am no globetrotter, not one to dream of journeys. I've never felt like wandering the world, and yet the turn of events and words chases me without pause and I feel no end near. The Isle of Wight is too cramped for my needs. The local theatres stage farcical murder mysteries. By the High Street a homeless violin player, having long ago forgotten what he had once hoped to be, churns concerts out of a boom-box. The local populace puts on festivals in the name of Garlic and Tomatoes. Junk made in China spills into the streets. Yesterday, I enquired about work for a Polish friend in the "Long John" eatery. Standing by the counter, waiting to speak to the chef, I noticed an elderly woman smiling back at the reflection in her soup bowl.

2007-09-14

The Isle of Wight becomes me. A land, surrounded by water, speaking many tongues, filled with unexpected turns and events and colourful plots. Turning towards the city centre, I notice the street together with its pedestrians descending into The Solent. A mess of tourists drowning in Parisian blue.



Yesterday, I was startled by a group of Indian women floating out of Vernon Square like dragonflies. The fluttering of scarves, the aroma of the Orient. I turned to look. They did the same, their expressions denouncing me as a pale alien.

An anecdote for today, the reading of which made me stay home: Once upon a time, a man was told by an oracle that he would meet his death crushed beneath a building: he therefore decided never to live under anything with a roof, until one day an eagle flying overhead dropped a turtle onto his bald pate.

2007-09-14

I have become attached to certain objects, a sure sign of ageing. Following a dozen plus moves, I have learnt to evade everything; to leave no traces. Recently, prior to flying to the Isle of Wight, I burnt my personal letters, my private notes. They didn't find inside my suitcases, in my rucksack, my head. And yet when thinking about my last loft apartment in Czestochowa I felt certain objects tugging at me. A Secessionist era sideboard smelt of sandalwood when it rained. It seemed its previous owners had used it for storing incense. A picture of menacing branches against a messy evening sky, when looked at from a certain angle, presented itself as shapes of Argentinian tango dancers. Watercolours of town houses in Vienna and imaginary images of various details follow me on my travels. The residue of objects – pleasant baggage.

2007-09-12

In the morning, the Solent is invisible. The needle of the Spinnaker Tower pierces the mist. A dark yacht looms in the water like a fly drowned in milk. On Surbiton Grove I notice one red and two grey spots, which by sunlight will become cars. My five-month-old daughter looks out the window along with me. How many views will she have to collect for the world to become visible to her?

I turn slowly between dreams on this island, am split, ill with prolonged weeks. The Spinnaker Tower looks into windows, and gardens. Light and pale, like the local butterfly farms. Mists floating out of trees, weaving themselves into women's hair. Time finds a haven in chunky bodies, swells within ankles, thickens inside local hearts. At tide out, as boats nod on the sands, the shops along the High street smell of chips, peas and lamb in mint sauce. Holidaymakers squander their rare hours sipping rum in bars, dusk till dawn. Hovercrafts escape the waters like white crustaceans.

Peonies fall into tea cups: lips – petals – lips? The video game salons fill up, the golf courses emptying. Take me away from this paradise, where I feel as dull as milky tea. Take me away, please, before I evaporate.

translated by Marek Kazmierski