

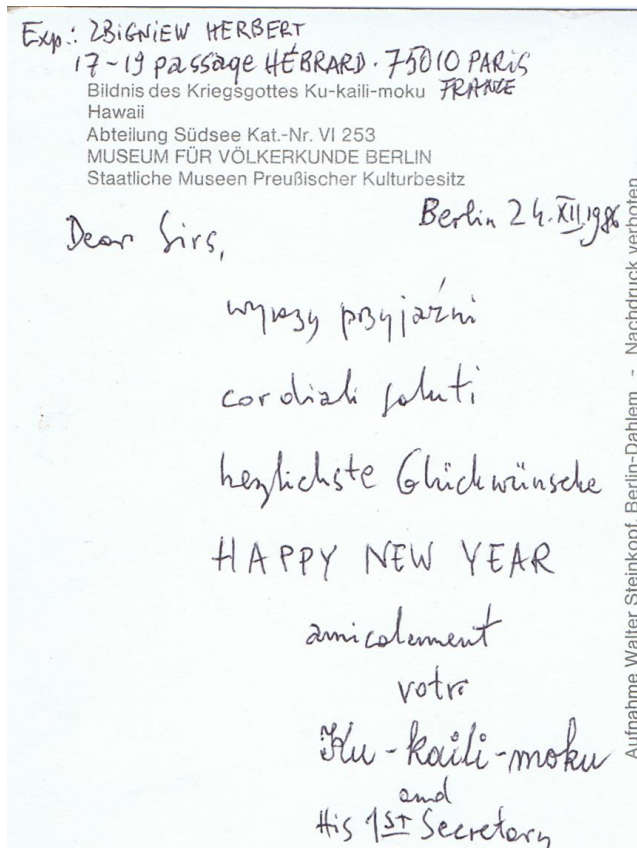
# Metaphors of Dissent

## Poetry from Beyond the Borders

Translations to English first published in the Pacific NW by

Mr. Cogito Press [John M. Gogol & Robert A. Davies]

and Trace Editions [Charles Seluzicki]



A representative *Mr. Cogito* sampler of poems by  
and an essay on Polish poet Ryszard Krynicki



Excerpt: conclusion of “Smuggling Mandelshtam into Texas,” John M. Gogol  
[“he” refers to a Texas customs official who stopped John in an old VW entering El Paso... first publication]

Slowly he pores over page after page  
looking for the secrets  
hidden in them.  
If he'd only been able to translate  
the message, the final lines of the essay

“On the Word and Culture,”  
he would have trembled  
in his Texas boots  
to read:  
“Classical poetry is the poetry of revolution.”

## *Citizen R.K. Does Not Live*

A selection of poems by Ryszard Krynicki Illustrations by Tom Cassidy

© 1985, 2008 Mr. Cogito Press Mr. Cogito Poetry Chapbook Series

### **BY SAYING**

By saying: "How can I fight  
for human rights,  
when I've got a wife and child?  
you yourself sentence them to a punishment  
whose measure is unknown even to  
the executioners."

*Translated by  
Stanislaw Baranczak & Clare Cavanagh*

### **ALMOST ALL**

It's the twentieth century, so  
I go to bed with a paper,  
my glasses, pills and wristwatch  
are in reach;  
I don't know if I'll fall asleep,  
I don't know if I'll wake up,

That's all

*12/1977 Translated by  
Stanislaw Baranczak & Clare Cavanagh*

### **TONGUE, THIS WILD MEAT**

For Zbigniew Herbert and Mr. Cogito  
Tongue, that wild meat growing in a wound,  
in an open wound of the mouth, the mouth that feeds on deceitful truth,  
tongue, this bared heart beating outside, this naked edge  
that is a defenseless weapon, this gag suffocating  
the defeated uprisings of words, this beast day by day tamed  
by human teeth, this inhuman thing growing in us and  
surpassing us, this beast fed with the poisoned meat of a body,  
this red flag which we swallow and spit out with blood, this  
divided something that encircles us, this real lie that seduces,  
  
this child that learning the truth, truthfully lies

*Translated by Grazyna Drabik*

### **MY LITTLE DAUGHTER IS LEARNING TO READ**

My little daughter  
until now infallible  
is learning to read and write  
and only now is she beginning  
to err

and I relive  
all my old human errors  
again

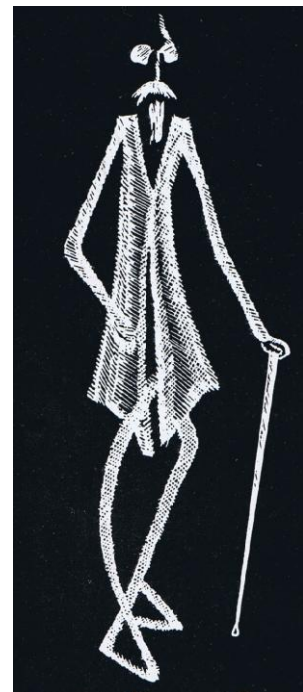
*1-7/1977 Translated by Antony Graham*

### **THE TIME OF TRIAL**

I was lucky enough to overcome fear:  
I didn't sign the loyalty oath  
— and yet I'm free. Free?

My time of trial only now  
begins.

*12/1981 Translated by  
Stanislaw Baranczak & Clare Cavanagh*



Mr. Cogito in the ink

### CITIZEN R.K. DOES NOT LIVE

Citizen R.K. does not live  
with a wife: (or anything  
of his): does not live off his pen,  
the unpalatable pen of trademark “parker”  
stuck in his throat: is sado-  
(chews on the wings  
of his “parker” pen)  
masochistic (with his pen revivifies bodies  
of former days, to  
torment them): born (doesn’t know  
why): though of a family  
of workers: is a parasite (of  
language): distinguished  
blood donor (perhaps alien blood  
flows in his veins): against our  
death penalty: crossing a border,  
what didn’t he try to smuggle: a birth  
certificate, his organism  
(collective), and a pen (“parker”): even though  
takes no notes: (communicates  
by telepathy): (is a tightwad  
on the phone, and has corrupted generations  
of wristwatches): before sleeping counts to 19  
84: (does he count any longer on anything)) Lives  
though it’s not clear  
whether he has earned such a life

1974/1977

*Translated by Frank Kujawinski*

### I DON'T KNOW

I don't know if the poet  
can really be impartial  
like a doctor who treats  
two bitter enemies the same,  
  
since he has to take sides  
as only a sister of mercy can,  
patient witness  
  
to a patient's pain

July 1977 *Translated by  
Stanislaw Baranczak & Clare Cavanagh*



### BY ENTERING

“By entering the grand lottery  
of the Center for Children’s Health  
you honor the memory of the 2,000,000 children  
who perished in battle and were brutally  
murdered in World War II.  
You bring help and relief  
from suffering to thousands of children  
crippled and afflicted with disease.  
You fulfill your noble and honorable  
civic duty.  
You have a chance to win  
many valuable prizes such as  
the Fiat 125p and 126p car,  
the C-330 tractor, television sets,  
radios, refrigerators, sewing machines, washers  
and a host of other attractive products.”

*Translated by Magnus J. Krynski  
and Robert A. Maguire*

Excerpts from the *Foreword* by Stanislaw Baranczak (1985)

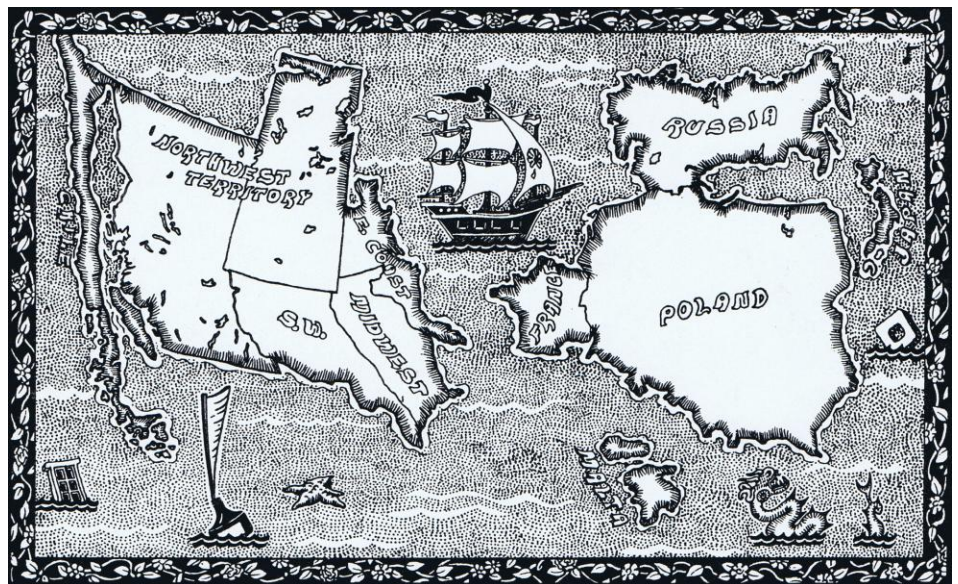
Recognized by many critics as one of the most individual voices in contemporary Polish poetry, Ryszard Krynicky is also representative of a wider poetic movement. He is one of the most outstanding figures of the “Generation of ’68,” an informal group of poets who entered the literary scene in the late 1960’s and soon contributed to what has been perhaps the most dramatic breakthrough in Polish culture since World War II...



In the case of the most talented of them, such as Krynicky or Adam Zagajewski, this discovery led to a new conception of poetry’s role in society; they began to view the lyric as totalitarianism’s natural enemy... In December of 1981, the poet was detained and given, like many other intellectuals, the chance to sign the “loyalty oath” (mentioned in the poem “The Time of Trial”), which he refused to do.

[This] could give the impression that Krynicky is a run-of-the-mill engage poet, a bard of this or that social or political cause. In fact, as the reader will certainly discover, he is simply too good a poet to be reduced to such a role. His “cause,” if any, is much more universal than any one ideology or doctrine; it lies in his personal search for the meaning of individual existence, his private crusade against the specter of despair, absurdity, “nothingness.” It may be the “nothingness” of a world in which entire countries disappear from the maps, people vanish into the dungeons of secret police, and meat never appears at the butchers’. But it may also be the “nothingness” of the world in a broader sense, a world in which the meaning of individual life is incessantly threatened by indifference, transitoriness, oblivion. The individual is seen here as subject to multiple pressures of various kinds—not simply political or social pressures, but also those of love, the fear of death, or metaphysical doubt— under which he must strive to maintain his shaky and frail integrity. It is worth noting how much Krynicky’s style changed in the course of his twenty years of writing...

[There is an] increasing importance in his work of the idea of the poem as a tiny splinter from some vast, ungraspable block of truth. While his early poems were simply mirrors multiplying the image of the world’s absurdity, his recent gnomic verse resembles rather a set of magnifying glasses, through which some inner sense of this apparently absurd world is patiently, though not passionlessly, scrutinized.



OCHC is pleased to receive a Community Cultural Participation Grant for 2008-'09 from the Multnomah County Cultural Coalition, powerful assistance in staging this season's Discovering Oregon Originals series.