

Sunday

The thaw . . . Let us assume that it will lead to a certain surrogate of freedom and truth in Russia and in Poland. To a 45% freedom, to a 47% truth. What of it?

If I had been an inmate of that prison, I would hang onto this with both hands. If up until now it was forbidden to leave the cell, then won't it be fun to take a walk in the garden under the alert gaze of the guards? Who doubts that, in practice, the smaller lie is better than the greater one? But beyond the immediate bit of freedom, there exists, of course, the matter of Polish form, Polish style, Polish development, and Polish becoming. Because I cannot bear what is ersatz and I will always, in life as in a restaurant, protest when I am served a cat as rabbit, even in this case, therefore, I cannot agree to this ersatz, surrogate, cosmetic and kitsch. Freedom by permission, concession to a relative freedom, what is this? Neither fish nor fowl. As far as the authenticity of Polish life goes, this is worse than a 100% gag, the kind that doesn't lie. This is the existence of a creature of mixed ancestry; unclean; weak, half-alive, incomplete in its real expression. . . .

For me, the most awful thing in our culture has been that we have always restricted our spirit, voluntarily or because we were forced to. Our entire literature, all of our art is a symptom of this. When Polish awareness was incarcerated in recent years, perhaps it was not all that bad for our soul. Our insufficient production of words was stifled and replaced with open lies, while a prisoner could talk to himself and these were probably honest conversations. Then life fell apart into an external deceit and an inner truth, a difficult state of things but not a lethal one. Who knows if stupidity did not just sharpen reason somewhere deep inside?

Releasing their spirit into relative freedom on the condition that it is to report twice a week to the nearest Bureau of Supervision would simply constitute a blurring of this sharp but salutary line of demarcation, which, up until now, has divided the imprisoned truth from free deceit. They would enter into an area of half-truth, half-life, incomplete creativity, intoxicating oneself with appearances. What would the result be? I do not deny that this opportunity for ramming the doors open for the future should be exploited politically. My field is not politics. I know only that style, form, expression, whether it be in art or in life, are not attained by making concessions and cannot be fabricated in measured doses. *Aut Caesar* . . .

Sometimes they say to me from over there that now my responsibility to my homeland would be to return. For what, I would like to know. So that I could become a person worthy of pity (because if an engineer or a worker has some right to respect in that system, then a writer, that "writer" of theirs, led by the nose and leading by the nose, is a repugnantly grotesque figure, a comic combination of schoolteacher and pupil—these are the two sides of didacticism). So when you tell me that I am wasting myself in exile, I will tell you about how important a national role I have earmarked for myself.

Using their dictionary, what type of "social need" could assure that my American existence is not deprived of meaning for at least certain people in Poland? For what kind of people? Not for those for whom a child's pants

are enough. It is certain, however, that beyond that artificial, childish, substandard timid reality, there is another penetrating, sharp, sober knowledge in Poland which does not want to cheat itself, the tone is different, more reasonable, more cruelly mature. My task was to get to exactly this Polish sound, get to this tragic and aware Pole. Not to stuff him with other delusions or to make anything easier for him. I want to express the ruthlessness of this Polish task, which clamors for full awareness and a full existence. Is it a paradox that I, who am at cross-purposes with this awareness in its philosophical aspect, that I have to—this is stronger than I am—insist on this, demand it, as a condition sine qua non of our humanity?

And one more thing. It would be important that tragedy not become a catastrophe. They got into the iron cogs of collective life without the appropriate historical preparation that would have made their individual life indomitable. Many of them today, therefore, simply do not know how to be themselves honestly, decently, vitally. They do not know how to endure in themselves, without appearing under any banner and without seeking refuge in a system, dogma, faith. They are helpless and humiliated. I claim, therefore, that one has to work out a style of individual life and one so extreme that it can withstand this pressure.

What could be more important for Polish culture, no matter what direction it takes, than the creation of this style that assumes our maturity? This *modus vivendi* must be set, as it is only on this will to awareness that Polish authenticity can be built in the future. If a man in Poland believes that he is base only because he is a conscious man . . . if he allows himself to be talked into impotence . . . well, then a long childhood still awaits us. This is not something that I can teach, however. I am not a teacher. I can only infect others with my manner of being, which is contained in my books, in this diary.

Tuesday

Poland, the thaw, the return, Communism, why have I waded into this, why do I discuss these details of my fate?

And morality? I delineate myself in the face of Catholic ethics or existentialism or Marxism but morality is only a fragment, just one of the faces that attack me from all sides, all sides! Reality is inexhaustible. What should I do with myself? What should I do with myself? This settling of accounts with my conscience didn't solve anything in me, once again I simply am—I am on this Argentine pampa, on this *estancia*.

Tomorrow I leave for Buenos Aires. I have to pack my things. There will be a long journey by boat northward, along the River Paraná.

Thursday

Geography.

Where am I?

I was walking along the eucalyptus-lined avenue for the last time. There I was, facing those trees, in the perspective of the avenue, on such frail ground, amid things distinct: tree, leaf, clod, stick, bark.

was separate and you could not see the water, you saw nothing around you, as if someone had confiscated everything. There was only the rain filling out the sailing in a double darkness. We sailed northwest and, as a result of the all-encompassing night, our sailing became, along with the rain, the only, the highest idea, the zenith of all things.

I returned to my cabin and undressed. While I undressed, lay down, and fell asleep, we sailed.

Wednesday, four in the afternoon

The sky is all feathers and flowers, flourishes of lights on a fluid expanse, while there in the distance, white pours out like a gate leading to worlds beyond. Yet we sail on. We have passed the monastery of San Lorenzo and continue to sail, on our right, the lands of Entre Rios, on the left, Santa Fe, and we sail.

One of the men has field glasses through which one can see an unknown shore, shrub, tree, or board, which, suddenly, appears black in the muddled waters and then is carried away. Today again I stood next to him and then he asked:

Do you want to look?

He said the same thing to me yesterday but today it sounded different. It sounded as if he really hadn't wanted to say it or as if what he said had not been completely said, as if it had been painfully interrupted. I looked at him, but his face was congenial, calm. We sail on. With the accompanying green (because we sailed near the shore), darker, lighter, the overflow saturated with light and gathered to bursting, until, it seemed, it was entering the sky. We, on the other hand, sail on. We sailed while I ate breakfast and when, after a game of chess, I went on deck, I saw that we were still sailing. Yellow water, whitish sky.

Evening of the same day. From behind the fence of the black cloud an enormous, spouting red face looked out and lashed horizontally with a stream of glistening water, as a result of which the mirror of waters became slanted and the most distant archipelagoes there, beyond the isthmuses, in the depths of the bay, ascended. And the sun struck the city Paraná, which, ruffling its turkey feathers and spreading its peacock's tail, became a bastion of colors, a fortress of hues exploding with a barrage, breathing fire, bombarding wildly in this silence and solemn calm. A choir of flashes rose from the waters. We quickly sailed out of this landscape and now we are sailing along a groove which widens at times to ten kilometers and the water is abundant, almost excessive, we, on the other hand, sail on, sail on.

I met a priest, who played chess with me, at the "prod" (the bow).

We sail, I said.

Yes, he replied, we sail.

Wednesday night going on Thursday

Again I woke up (in the middle of the night), not being able to bear the thought that it, the ship, sails without me, when I am not with it and I don't

At the same time, I was in South America, but where was north, west, south? Where am I positioned in relation to China or Alaska? Where is the polar cap?

Dusk and the enormous vault of the pampa casts the stars out of itself, one after another, their swarms show themselves extracted by the night, a palpable world of trees, earth, leaves, the only friendly and believable world, dissolved into some sort of un—, unseeing, nonexistence, faded away. In spite of this I walk, I push on and on, but not on the road anymore but in the cosmos, suspended in astronomical space. Can the globe of the earth, itself suspended, assure you ground under your feet? I found myself in a bottomless abyss, in the womb of the universe, and what is worse, this was not an illusion, only the truest of truths. You could go crazy if you weren't used to it.

I write in the train that takes me to Buenos Aires, to the north. Paraná is the enormous river on which I will sail.

I am calm. I sit. I look out the window. I look at the woman who sits across from me and has tiny, freckled hands. At the same time, I am there in the womb of the universe. All of the contradictions vent themselves in me: calmness and fury, sobriety and intoxication, truth and claptrap, greatness and smallness. Yet once again I feel an iron grip being applied to my throat, which slowly, so very imperceptibly, constricts.

THE RIO PARANÁ DIARY

Tuesday

At one in the afternoon, the boat left shore, but I had not noticed it as I was looking at the ships deep in port which slowly began to move and along with them, everything began to move, as if on an axle, to my left, and Buenos Aires moved. . . . We sail.

Six in the evening. Cutting across the entire width—about seventy kilometers—of the Rio de la Plata, we practically reach the green shores of Uruguay. We sail in the delta.

Eight in the evening. We are sailing along the delta. The waters are metallic, the sky angry, the clouds have unloosed their hair over Uruguay and it reaches the earth in strands of rain. Grief.

The waters swell, gather, and before us a cloud has plugged the horizon, the river swells with darkness, the cloud unrolls bolts of darkness from out of itself, the darkness steams from shores kilometers away. We sail on.

Two in the morning. A moment ago I awoke and immediately a slight trembling, permeated by a barely perceptible rocking, reminded me of where I was. I was on a ship, in its cabin. But where was the ship? I understood that I didn't know what was happening to the ship and it was as if I didn't know what was happening to me. The vibrations announced that we were sailing, but . . . where, how were we sailing? After having gotten hurriedly dressed, I went on deck. Rain . . . was going on. The rustle of rain and its drops suddenly grazing my cheeks, as well as the wet boards, the dripping roofs, railings, and ropes. Yet we were sailing. Not one light on the ship, whose darkness bored into the darkness, but these two darknesses did not join, each

know that it sails or how it sails. . . . The starriness of the sky. The ship pressed uphill, against the current, against the wind, and about a hundred meters later I saw the white wall of a lofty shore, which was moving astern without stopping, astern, astern!

The next morning

Powerless expanse, lazy river, the air stands, the flag droops, but we push on with the noise of motionless whiteness—constantly ahead—and we sail into the equatorial sphere, so that even though there is no sun, it is warmer.

The industrialist from San Nicolas spoke:—Lousy weather. . . . yet again this didn't sound right, as if he had wanted to say something else, yes, something else. . . . I had the same impression when, at breakfast, a doctor from Asunción, a political exile, told me about the local women. He talked. But he talked precisely so as not to say anything (this thought hounds me), in such a way as not to say what he really had to say. I looked at him but nothing, a congenial face, satiety and bliss, without a trace of any mystery. After breakfast when I went on deck, I realized that during our conversation, just as during breakfast, we were sailing. . . . And now we are sailing. . . . The wind struck me from the side. We sailed through the strait joining the two oceans, the ocean before us augured a boundless whiteness, the ocean behind us was a mass barely perceptible behind the shoals smoking with sand. The strait itself was a geography of bays, promontories, islands and islets and strange secret branchings, which led into an unknown incline. At one point, we sailed into a group of seven mirrored lakes, being the seven spokes of mystical raptures, each at a different height but all suspended in the subcelestial regions. After about a half hour, all of this fell away and settled in the river, which appeared once more and on which we sail, sail. . . .

Evening of the same day

Monkeys and clowns! Snakes and geysers! The parrots and frolicking of playful violet dandies! Fountains and parrot and heated fun, threaded onto rooster scarves, the water became a warble, this is the zoology, this is the ornithology on which we sail with the inevitable furrow and noise behind us.

Two women—the librarian in a coin necklace and the wife of the engineer—were talking on deck. I could not quite hear and this was surely trivial woman talk, unimportant, yes, but who knows if not too unimportant. I say “too,” aware of the disturbing idea that this word contains. However, there was nothing in this that was “too much,” everything was as it should be. . . . and while they talked, they sailed, just as I sailed, too.

Morning of the next day

The river is pale, rustling, stagnant. We sail. At night something happened. Or, to put it more precisely, something gave way, or, maybe something broke through. . . . Actually, I don't know what

happened and, to tell the truth, nothing happened. But it was exactly the “nothing happened” that was more important and worse than if something had happened. Behold the event: I tried to sleep and I fell into a deep sleep (because I have been getting too little sleep lately), when all of a sudden I woke up overcome to the bone with a terrifying, devastating concern that something was happening. . . . which I couldn't control. . . . something beyond me. I tore myself out of bed, ran out and there, on deck, the lines were taut, the vibrations, the tension of the whole pushing on in silence, at night, in the immobility and invisibility of the world, this movement the sole living thing. We sailed on. And all of a sudden (as I just mentioned), something broke and the seal of silence broke and a shout. . . . one resounding cry. . . . rang out. A shout that was not. I knew that there had been a shout. Because there was no one who could have shouted, I recognized my fright as nonexistent and returned to my cabin and even fell asleep. Upon awakening at nine-thirty, I noticed that we were still sailing along a river silver as a fish's underbelly.

What, therefore, had happened? The whole secret is that nothing took place. And nothing continues to happen and the best detective in the world would find no clue, nothing to latch onto. We eat abundantly and with relish. Our conversations are carefree. All are satisfied. The doctor, a Paraguayan, picks up a pack of Particulares, which a brown-haired man with bushy eyebrows dropped and then waved away with his hand as a sign that there were no cigarettes in the pack. At the same time, a child runs by, tugging on a small locomotive and, at the same time, an estanciero calls to his wife, who has just tied a scarf around her neck there on the stairs. Newlyweds on their honeymoon are having their picture taken. So what is so special about all this? What ship is more ordinary? What deck the more banal? Yet precisely because, oh, precisely because we are completely vulnerable. . . . in the face of that which threatens. . . . we can do nothing because there is no basis for even the least anxiety and all is in the most perfect order. . . . yes, everything is in order. . . . as long as the line, the line, the line does not snap under the unceasing pressure!

Evening of the same day

Enormous, anonymous waters. We sail on.

The doctor made fun of me when I lost the chess game to the fumbler, whom he introduced to me as Goldberg, the master of Santa Fe. He said:

—You lost out of fear.

I said: I could give him the rook and win.

But my and his words are like silence before a shout. We sail on toward. . . . we head for. . . . and I now see clearly that the faces, conversations, movements are loaded. They are defeated. Frozen in a pitiless leading of something to. . . . An unpredictable tension crouches in the smallest movement. We sail on. Yet this madness, this despair, this horror are inaccessible because they don't exist and because they are not, they are in a way that is impossible to refute. We sail on. We sail on the water, as if from another planet and night begins to steam in from all sides, our field of vision begins to narrow and we in it. Yet we sail on and in us grows without respite. . . . what? . . . what? . . . We sail on.

Next day

Whatever we do, whatever we say, whatever we devote ourselves to, we sail and sail. While I write this, we also sail. The faces are terrifying because they are smiling. Terrifying movements because they are full of calmness and marvelous bliss.

We sail. The ship trembles, the machine works, the rustling billows of water at shipside, sprays and dregs, we sail on, plunging deeper, ever deeper into . . . reaching. . . . Words are no help because while I am saying this, we sail on!

Next day

We sail. We've sailed all through the night and even now we sail!

Next day

We sail. The complete helplessness in the face of pathos, the incapacity to get at this power, which happens in us with a constant straining and tightening. Our unevenfulness, the most common unevenfulness, explodes like a bomb, like a thunderbolt, but beyond us. The explosion is unattainable for us, cursed in commonness. A moment ago, I met a Paraguayan at the bow and I said, yes, I said, ha, I said!

Good day!

He, on the other hand, answered, ha, he answered, yes, he answered, O merciful God, he answered (sailing all the while):

Nice weather!

GOYA

Monday

Then I sailed back slowly and sleepily from north to south and yesterday, at eight in the evening, I was transferred from the ship to a motorboat, which let me off at the port . . . Goya, a small town, 30,000 inhabitants, in the province of Corrientes.

This is one of those names which, when we see them on a map, sometimes arouse our curiosity because they are uninteresting and nobody goes there. What, therefore, could this be . . . Goya? The finger pauses at a name like this—villages in Iceland, towns in Argentina, and the temptation arises to go there. . . .

Wednesday

Goya, a flat town.

A dog. A storekeeper in front of the corner store. Red truck. No comment. Unworthy of a remark. Here it is as it is.

Thursday

The house in which I live is spacious. It is the old and worthy seat of a certain local *estanciero* (*estancieros* usually have two homes: one on the *estancia*, the other in Goya). The garden is full of mastodons: cacti.

Here I am. Why here? If someone had told me years ago in Maloszyce that I would one day be in Goya . . . If I am in Goya, then by equal right I could be anywhere else and suddenly all the places in the world begin to weigh heavily on me, demanding that I be there.

I stroll along Plaza Sarmiento in a bluish evening. An exotic foreigner to them. Finally through them, I become a stranger to myself: here, I lead myself around Goya as a person unknown to myself. I stand him on a corner, I sit him down on a chair in a café, I tell him to exchange meaningless words with a random partner and I listen to my voice.

Monday

I stopped by the Club Social and drank coffee.

I talked to Genaro.

Molo and I rode the jeep to the airport.

I worked on my novel.

I went to the little square overlooking the river.

A little girl, riding a bike, dropped a package which I picked up.

A butterfly.

Four oranges eaten on a bench.

Sergio went to the movies.

A monkey on a wall then, a parrot.

All of this happened as if at the bottom of a deep deep silence, at the bottom of my stay here in Goya, on the peripheries of the earth. Who knows why this town became mine. This abatement . . . Goya, why had you never appeared to me in a dream, why hadn't I ever sensed that you were fated to me, that you were along the way? There is no answer. Houses. A street latticed with angular shadow. A dog lying down. A bicycle leaning against a wall.

ROSARIO

Monday

Rosario. We reached port at about three A.M. after a seven-hour delay because the water in the river is low. Not wanting to awaken the Dziaottis, I strolled around the city until seven. Trade. Exchange, budget, balance, investments, credit, inventory, account, netto, brutto, just this, nothing more, the whole city is under the sign of accounting. The dullness of this fat America.

Rena and her husband and also little Jacek Dziaott, erupting with joy, which really is our sole victory over being and the only human praise. Why, though, is that pride and praise contained in a twelve-year-old child so that