

She left Poland

for America. She was an emigrant and spent Christmas Eve with other emigrants. They got into an argument about the Krakus ham sold in the Polish deli. Some wanted to protest in front of the store because by selling the imported ham the owners were supporting communism, while others doubted that a picket line would spell the downfall of either communism or Krakus ham. The hosts served *gołąbki* – cabbage rolls – stuffed with kasha and mushrooms from the store. They weren't bad, either, but hardly a match for the ones Hania's father used to make. He was a railway repairman who worked on utility poles fixing power lines. He was also a great cook – especially when it came to cabbage rolls. You wouldn't find any store-bought mushrooms in those! No one had ever heard of such a thing: they would turn their noses up at the very idea. His *gołąbki* had real mushrooms, wild ones he picked himself in the woods near Pogoria. He also made preserves from his own sour cherries – the kind that deserves to be eaten with good bread and good butter. Hania's grandmother made the best butter, she kept it in a tin bucket, in water from the well, but the butter from Tapkowice wasn't bad either. Aunt Hela delivered milk there, and the dairy sold special butter to its suppliers, and Aunt Hela always shared some with the family.

Someone told about a boy from Ligota. By some miracle he obtained a passport. He came to join his father but couldn't get used to America, he was so homesick for Ligota. No wonder – people tend to miss Ligota. Especially the bread. The boy's father looked all over for the bread his son was missing, and eventually found a bakery that was pretty far away: it took two hours to get there. He brought back bread with a dark, crackly crust and a lighter crumb – not entirely white, more like a mix of whole wheat and rye – and the boy was so happy he cried. That American bread looked and smelled and even tasted a little like the bread from Ligota.

The wind is blowing

bending but not breaking the branches of the trees. This was the time of year her father would sow tomato seeds in the planters. Her son is lost and confused the way he always gets when there's wind. He shouts out loud and slaps his palms against both cheeks, over and over, dozens of times per minute, with all his strength. His fingernails are short but they still cut into his skin here and there. She wipes the blood off his cheeks. She goes back to Rovelli and the mystery of time. Time as traces of memory. Interesting. "We are histories of ourselves, narratives." Very interesting.

Time for her, then, is the story of waiting. In this hospital or that sanatorium, in this plaster cast or the next – waiting for Mother. It is her father's patience as he shows her a new plant. It is the word "autism" she hears from the lips of an American psychiatrist. (That can be treated, isn't that right? – but the doctor shrugs his

shoulders: not really, there's no treatment, nothing to be done. What do you mean – nothing! Her son knows how to read and count, he cleans the bathroom and holds the door for her – and you call that NOTHING?) It is she herself reading about the mystery of time and who just a moment ago wrote that her son is lost and confused. Who wrote the word "son."

Carlo Rovelli explains to her that the brain builds bridges between past and present. The past leaves traces in the synapses, the junctions between the nerve cells. Synapses... Very interesting.

Excerpts translated by Philip Boehm

Extended sample translation available at booksfrompoland.pl



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**HANNA
KRALL**

Born 1935

Synapsy Marii H. [The Synapses of Maria H.]

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Selected works

Sześć odcieni bieli i inne historie, 2015

Biała Maria, 2011

Dowody na istnienie, 1996

Taniec na cudzym weselu, 1995

Hipnoza, 1989

Sublokatorka, 1985

Zdążyć przed Panem Bogiem [Shielding the Flame], 1977

Na wschód od Arbatu, 1972

Foreign language translations

Krall's works have been published in: United Kingdom, USA, Finland, France, Israel, Spain, The Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, Hungary and Italy.

Selected awards

Literary Award of the Capital City of Warsaw (2017)

Julian Tuwim Literary Award (2014)

Władysław Reymont Literary Prize (2009)

Journalist Laurels of the Polish Journalists' Association (2009)

Angelus Central European Literary Award – nomination (2007)

Herder Prize (2005)

Underground Solidarity Prize (1985)