

The first season in your own field is like childhood – colourful, euphoric, and the whole thing becomes a blur in the memory, though packed with clear-cut details. The next few seasons are like adulthood, where the years gone by fold up in your memory like a concertina. Month after month, muck after muck. To the rhythm of passing time we gradually became familiar with nature, by which I mean that we entered into a partnership with it. The mist of recurring enchantment faded. The reverent, myth-making attitude was gone. We loved nature, but sometimes we hated it. Most of the time we were indifferent to it, but when the Sejm passed a law permitting the mass felling of trees we were ready to jump into the fire for it, although from the perspective of the provinces it didn't look quite the same as in the city: the countryside sometimes needs weeding, ventilating.

The next summer I set aside the half-hectare where the broad beans had grown to be meadowland, so the rotten grass would feed up the clay. I waited for the first crop. It came up quickly and went green. I was sure that dense sowing would choke the couch grass, because it plainly hadn't surrendered – I was still digging up shoots by the bucketful from among the vegetables, saving their lives in the process. In spring a week's neglect is enough for your plot of land to become coarse and uncivilised, not just full of couch grass but also something that creeps like ivy, or a weed similar to horsetail with strong and endless roots.

You have to whack it with a hoe from dawn to dusk. There's dust everywhere, white dust. I'd forgotten about the cooperative. Saving some produce for our own needs seemed as much as we could possibly manage. Did I feel humbled? Perhaps. But at that point I still felt some disappointment too, because out in the field, contrary to what I'd always thought, not much yielded to human vision. I was all the more attentive to the words of the Old Man; one day, when once again we were working something out together, he told me something his grandfather used to say, which is that the earth never waits, and in the field it has to be like clockwork – and he tapped a finger hard as a beechnut against the face of his watch; if you're just a day or two late it's all in vain.

I remember one afternoon well. It was very hot. Half a day spent bullying the couch grass. Suddenly I felt a bit weak, which rarely happens to me. I leaned my chin against the hoe handle. I looked at the rye, completely weed-choked, full of poppies and lupins. Briefly everything went dark before my eyes. For those few seconds I clung to the world like a plaster. I couldn't have hurt a fly just then. It wouldn't happen again.

The Old Man said to screw it all. Not to take it personally. The battle can be won, but it demands greater ef-

fort. He kept repeating: year after year you have to harrow and reap, fertilise, then sow a mixture of pulses as a forecrop, and eventually something would come of it. By now it was harvest time. Each evening the combine drivers would be on their way back from the fields. They took up the entire road, forcing the cars to hug the fences like sheep. The Old Man brought in cartloads of rich rye from his field. Grain spilling through gaps between the boards lay on the asphalt. I wasn't sorry, although my weed crop was sizzling in the heat along with the maggots. Horseflies sliced the air like fat sparks. In the second half of the year the weeds grew more slowly and there was more free time. Lower down, by the road, a shed provided sleeping quarters for the carpenters I'd hired from near Żywiec who were finishing putting up the house.

Excerpt translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones



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**ANDRZEJ  
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**Selected books**

*Bez. Ballada o Joannie i Władku z jurajskiej doliny, 2020*

*Fajrant, 2017*

*Podkrzywdzie, 2015*

*Cyklon, 2015*

*Miedza, 2013*

*Południe, 2013*

**Selected awards**

Gdynia Literary Prize (2014, 2016, 2021) – nominations

Polityka Passport Award (2015) – nomination

Beata Pawlak Award (2013) – nomination