

### **In Search of Our Heroes and Time Regained**

These dreams reminded me that, since I wished some day to become a writer, it was high time to decide what sort of books I was going to write. But as soon as I asked myself the question, and tried to discover some subjects to which I could impart a philosophical significance of infinite value, my mind would stop the clock, my consciousness would be faced with a blank, I would feel either that I was wholly devoid of talent or perhaps that same malady of the brain was hindering its development.”

- Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way*

Considerably sunlit room. Round dining table, six chairs around it. Each chair is already occupied with a person and their shadows beneath them on the wooden floor. „Mother! As a muse? Wife, girlfriend, or daughter would be much better choices!” – declared with his straightforward bluntness Henryk, sitting to the right of me. Slightly embarrassed I quickly turned toward Władysław. “Don’t look at me” – he stated immediately – “You know very well that it takes an entire village of characters to have meaningful thoughts leached onto multiple pages of paper”. “Ha! a village ... he literally said a village” – chuckled with his jolly mannerism Czesław, and added: “My dear Władzio, you still are hung up on *The Promised Land* and *The Peasants*”. “Czesio, you shouldn’t laugh...” interjected the petite, seemingly shy woman sitting opposite us: Wisława – “...as it is you who has *A Captive Mind*”. And added: “I, on other hand, admire refined, longer pieces like Henryk’s or Władysław’s despite writing only poetry myself.” “And there is nothing wrong with that” indicated promptly the delightful Olga and added: “One needs to remember that anyone and anything can be an inspiration. An elderly gentleman sitting alone on a bench in a park reminiscing about his life, or a charming, solitary mushroom lurking behind a tree”.

“Right, right..., which leads us back to why we are here... Our task is to guide this young man through his writing” competently declared Henryk to all gathered. “I’m sorry for my sudden reaction, disposing of your idea of having a mother as an inspiration. I said that only because such a narrative could quickly become a psychological horror, and I don’t want to have the likes of another Psycho on your hands.” “I understand..., thank you”, was my cautious response, looking slowly around the room, checking if another form of distress might be coming my way. “Very well then... - let’s get to work!” summarized Władysław adding: “But first... Tea!” I quickly turned to the cupboard, which was a few steps behind us and picked up a silver tray with large, strangely oversized, steaming tea pot. Inside of which patiently waited already unraveled long tea leaves and flakes of a variety of berries and scant shavings of orange peel. All these ingredients were complementing each other, creating an intriguing, yet carefully balanced herbal creation. I slowly approached my guests and poured everyone a cupful. Firstly, Wisława showed immense excitement with her bright eyes after an initial sip. Others joined in, quickly displaying their delight in sampling the freshly served, ostensibly simple, yet ancient in its tradition - exquisite deliciousness. Now each person at the table is once again eager to share their resourcefulness.

We started by placing a brand new, lined notebook in front of each writer. There was no need of distributing pens, as everyone pulled from their jacket pocket, bag or purse, their favorite pen. A couple of ink pens were carefully prepped, checked, and finally held in the air by Henryk and Władysław, while the rest of us either clicked once, twice or tapped a couple of times gently at the page of our notebooks with our ballpens. My thoughts immediately drifted to Rej and Kochanowski. Having them at the table could mean a quill pen would be getting to work as well.

Our first task was to contemplate who could become the main characters of the upcoming novel, and to determine which other people will have a shorter or longer presence. Therefore, we cannot start only with the principal character. Having a proper mapping technique will help develop partaking characters, followed by a specific and expanded setting. A variety of questions started to pile up, again obliterating my train of thoughts. What will be its overall purpose? Who will be its audience? Will it be appealing to readers' senses; will it deliver pleasure; will it be special, unusual; will it ignite the imagination; shatter beliefs? How about a theme! Tragedy, drama, comedy... Less complex was writing back in the days of Homer and Plato. No! It is a colossal mistake to assume that. Maybe a few plays were trivial. However, all others were elaborate, well thought out and very descriptive epic stories, or multiple philosophical theories and ideas which the ingenuity of feels very current to this day.

Nevertheless, the categories to choose from can be interchangeable. Besides classical: adventure, fantasy, and romance; now we explore mystery, science-fiction, or horror..., to name a few. Not to mention biography, history, religion... Furthermore, from one topic another theme can derive. People, their personas, back stories, troubles, their looks – will come later, as it all stems from their placement in time and space. Space: the final frontier... There is something appealing in writing science-fiction; my thoughts drifted again. The limitlessness of locations, the plethora of individuals and creatures, the infinite number of events, breakthrough inventions and gadgets. Nonetheless, one can write effortlessly historical fiction set on our old Mother Earth, if one has substantial imagination, vision of society or proper searchlight of sight which can transcribe observations into masterpieces. This is exactly what I meant to achieve by inviting my distinguished guests - Nobel laureates, most recognized Polish writers - to give me some pointers. Everything else must be of my own reflections and undertaking.

“So, what do you want to write about, my boy?” - said Czesław. “You told us you liked politics when you were younger”. “No politics! Everything is so saturated with it nowadays” – Olga cut in

immediately. “We should keep our distance from it”– agreed Wisława. “We know that you always dreamed about writing an autobiography, since you mentioned that your life already was encumbered with plenty of issues, episodes, happenings, which could fill a volume or two” stated Henryk. “That would require a tremendous amount of bravery, as you would have to describe your family, acquired hereditary traits, your friends and foes, places you lived in, and all by name. Not to mention all the deep thoughts...” – explained Władysław. “Exposing yourself like that could lead to the risk of becoming estranged with people that used to be close to you. Or you could be faced with lawsuits or with ridicule” – he continued. “Don’t scare him like that” – exclaimed Olga. “There are couple of solutions to the biography conundrum. First, have it sealed for a hundred or more years. In this way all potentially affected people will be gone. Two, change the names of all individuals and locations.”

With a soft, singular cough followed by a stern look, Wisława interjected: “That will never work. First, the publication of a biographical piece in the form of personal memoirs, a hundred years from now, runs the risk of becoming not current, and therefore not interesting anymore. Secondly, the idea of twisting and altering names will make it suspicious and untruthful.” She continued to look at me with her understanding and loving eyes, adding: “Stay with some form of fiction, young man. You can always include pieces of your private life into character development and the experiences of individuals in your novel.”

Everyone took another sip of tea, almost in unison. One could tell that they were deeply contemplating further ideas. “I understand that you composed some poetry,” Czesław restarted the conversation. “Yes, I have..., but all of my poems are just naïve and many times ordinary, quirky verses to accompany greeting cards for family and friends”, I responded unenthusiastically. “I used to write more elaborate pieces with romantic, amorous themes in the past; however, I don’t think it is something to consider anymore.” Looking around the room I added: “I’ve also authored specially ordered limericks commemorating historical or special events and I wrote a couple of short stories, for my

children, in the form of nursery rhymes”. I paused for a moment in reflection and a slight, happy smirk twisted my lips as I added: “Funny, as that might sound, my first two ever written stanzas were about important political events... I was barely fifteen then.” – I concluded. Everyone nodded and smiled with understanding at my petite witticism attempt, I squeezed there by referencing our agreement of not touching on politics anymore.

My mind promptly started contemplating the immense complexity of an inspiration. What gives people an urge to write? Is it their creativity, drive to be recognized and famous? What sort of passions writers must have to undertake prose specifically? We must consider that certain individuals have multiple talents; however, it is best to cultivate that one, which ensures at least a certain form of pleasure and feeling of accomplishment. Therefore, once we are confident with writing, we ponder what will inspire us to write stories? On one hand we have events, and on the other side are people and their lives interlaced with their struggles, problems, victories, or modest, unassuming, simple lives. Everyone has multiple possibilities of leading their life; to which they were led by specific events and encountered experiences. All of that can be used in the creative process of writing their story; for example, by describing traits of their character, which could stem from their specific upbringing or from the outcomes of major life changing incidents, or series of personal affairs.

Not wanting to extend the current moment of silence, I spoke up. “It is very much admirable what Henryk and Władysław did with their historical novels. By utilizing significant events of Polish and European history, they introduced a plethora of new characters to dance, fight, love..., side by side with real historical figures. However, what piqued my interest recently, was what Olga did by infusing the additional seeds of old wives’ tales with mixed and deeper allegory.” Czesław raised his eyebrows and asked: “Are you trying to tell us that you are not willing to write about what surrounds you in your world, and not to mirror it in your prose but rather you would like to take that realm and twist it ever so slightly by introducing something unknown to it?”. I thought for a moment about what was just said,

and nodded:” Yes, I think that this is what could be my preference. However, I would not venture deep into the meanders of an unreal world, but rather have an ostensibly simple story, which somewhere along or at least towards its peak, will drift mysteriously, by introducing the superficial; becoming real, suddenly implicating itself into the forefront of the story”.

As I busied myself with preserving my deliberation on the first page of my notebook, which suddenly morphed into an Adler Tippa S typewriter, I looked around me and realized that I was alone at my study room desk. I could not contemplate further as to what happened to my guests, since a loud ring came from downstairs. I was about to get up to answer it. However, an inkling called me to quickly gaze at the page of paper loaded into the typewriter. The cruelty of my sudden shock pronounced itself in acute heart palpitations while I stared in terror at the frightening, repeated words: “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy”.

I was about to fall unconscious but somehow kept my composure, as another ring made me forget for a brief second about the page I had just encountered. While stepping towards the door, the doorknob of which was rattling like a doorbell now, I stumbled onto the corner of my comforter. Slightly amazed by it, I continued to extend my arm..., and as I finally reached the doorknob, it wasn't a doorknob anymore, but an alarm clock. I shut it off, opened my eyes little wider, looked around, and realized I was in my bedroom, with my beloved wife, the ever-patient pillar of stability. She was slowly awaking next to me. “Honey, you won't believe what a dream I had!” I exclaimed. “You can tell me all about it in a moment..., but first let's have some coffee” she answered calmly and lovingly with her delightful, beaming smile.

## REMARKS

*In Search of Our Heroes and Time Regained* was originally written over couple evenings during Memorial Day Weekend 2024. It was shortened on June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2024, from ~ 2400 words to 1999 words to comply with *Estelle Wachtel-Torres, MD Literary Competition* rules. Initial Quote, these Remarks, Characters, Persons, and Themes are excluded from the 1999-word count.

## CHARACTERS

CZESŁAW, CZESIO – Czesław Miłosz Laureate of 1980 Nobel Prize in Literature “who with uncompromising clear-sightedness voices man’s exposed condition in a world of severe conflicts”.

HENRYK – Henryk Sienkiewicz (1846 - 1916), Laureate of 1905 Nobel Prize in Literature for “his outstanding merits as an epic writer”.

OLGA – Olga Tokarczuk (1962 - ) Laureate of 2018 Nobel Prize in Literature “for a narrative imagination that with encyclopedic passion represents the crossing of boundaries as a form of life”.

WISŁAWA – Wisława Szymborska (1923 – 2012) Laureate of 1996 Nobel Prize in Literature “for poetry that with ironic precision allows the historical and biological context to come to light in fragments of human reality”.

WŁADYSŁAW – Władysław Reymont (1867 – 1925) Laureate of 1924 Nobel Prize in Literature for “his great national epic, *The Peasants*”.

I, YOUNG MAN, BOY – Author and narrator (1980 - )

WIFE – Narrators better half (1975 - )

## PERSONS

Kochanowski, Jan – Polish Renaissance poet (1530 – 1584) who wrote in Latin and Polish and established poetic patterns that would become integral to Polish literary language.

Rej, Mikołaj - Polish poet and prose writer (1505 – 1569). First Polish author to write exclusively in Polish language.

Homer – Greek poet (born circa 8<sup>th</sup> century BC) who is credited as the author of the Iliad and the Odyssey. He is considered one of the most revered and influential authors in history.

Plato – ancient Greek philosopher (c.427 – 348 BC) who is considered a foundational thinker in Western philosophy and an innovator of the written dialogue and dialectic forms.

## THEMES

*“All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy”* – is an old proverb that means without time off from work, a person becomes both bored and boring. It was newly popularized after the phrase was featured in *The Shining* 1980 film produced and directed by Stanley Kubrick, based on Stephen King’s 1977 novel of the same title.

*Psycho* – 1959 Novel by Robert Bloch focusing on Norman Bates, a deeply unstable individual due to his domineering relationship with his mother.



*“Space: the final frontier [where no man has gone before]”* – voice over introduction during each episode opening credits of *Star Trek: The original Series*; science fiction series created by Gene Roddenberry, airing from 1966 through 1969.