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Holding hands with Grandma

Addition

In Karolina Kusek's *Holding Hands with Grandma*, a reader familiar with Polish poetry will find something new, innovative and, at the same time, familiar. Poems from this collection continue the notion of "family poetry" started by Jan from Czarnolas with his famous *Treny* and continued in this century by Julian Ejsmond (*Patrzac na moich synków*) or Julian Przybos' (*Wiersze dla Uty*). Never in Poland has been a "maternal" lyric poetry written as a counterweight of a "paternal" lyric poetry, although mother, as a subject-matter, was often present in the works of the most distinguished poets. Writing poems for grandchildren, blazing with them a trail through the garden of poetry, is the invention of contemporary poetry. Who knows if not Władysław Broniewski's, who one of his poems started as follows:

*I am a little grandpa,
I am writing a little poem for my granddaughter...*

How distant it is from XIX-century ethos, according to which grandfathers

– veterans were obliged to tell stories about their brave actions from the times they were in the army. It was their duty (sometimes, also grandmothers' from noble families) to tell about the history of their homeland, what was in Poland far more important than traditional storytelling. What does grandma have to do in the contemporary world where school and TV took away her monopoly even in these areas? If she isn't interested in pedagogy and doesn't want to compete with omnipotent media, with TV "evening cartoons", what's left for her? Will she decide to follow Broniewski's footsteps, will she ride the Pegasus and take her grandchildren on a journey to the Land of Poetry? – Why not, if for many years she's been acquiring practice in riding that horse and if her journeys

used to provide profound experience not only to adult critics. That is how we perceive lyrical situation of grandma-poet from Karolina Kusek's collection. This situation is different than it was in her previous collections: *Słonecznikowe nutki* (1982), *Na ziemi i wyżej* (1985), *Spacerkiem przez pole* (1988) i *Barwy lata* (1989). Then, the grandma was "mrs. poet" watching the world through children's experience and feelings. Now she becomes a kind-hearted grandma whose soul is filled with old passions and melodies. However, their intensity is changing, applying to an older woman's (who is warm and less strict) emotional horizon and to a younger child who is tightly holding grandma's hand and carefully listening to her words. This family idyll is overlapped by idyllic Polish landscape, filled with old Polish way of life in the countryside. The generation which once moved to cities but left deeply in their hearts the memories of their family houses, small gardens by their homes, the usual daily routine in the country, has not died out yet. This generation still has got in their memory a picture of a summer day, full of colours, sensual experiences impossible to liken to anything noisy and fast contemporary city life offers. Janina Porazińska talked to children in that manner before the war. She filled her poems with ethnographical elements.

In Karolina Kusek's poems the situation is different. The poet at most refers to symbols of life in the countryside, like a meadow, a windmill, a willow, a cowshed, ears, etc. However she adds to it some symbols of old age: white hair, glasses, a rosary. Her lyrical self-portrait is painted with the use of the same colours as in painting of the countryside landscape. As in Marc Chagall's memorable paintings, her face mirrors the look of all things which the way of life in the countryside consists of: a farm, a pear tree, a cow, a loaf of bread – the world which still exists beyond poetry, but only poetry gives it a proper smell and flavour. Travelling and holding hands with grandma is in Karolina Kusek's poetry a travel to Arcadia. Old age seems unimportant when one can feel the warmth of a child's hand, when one can show one's grandchildren the world's tale and in their statements and questions full of joy find the most important things in life, find what's in the heart. That is why poems from this collection are perfect for reading together by children and adults. One can even imagine a situation when some poems recited by a grandson, would add splendour on family occasions, especially on Grandmother's Day. What would happen if the roles reversed? Then, this collection of poems may be given to grandchildren as the most personal gift – a declaration of grandmother's love. Who will be first?