

Jerzy the Composer

HE EVEN COMMANDS HIS SHOES, thought Jerzy, looking out through the centuries-old oozing panes at the twisted and curled up footwear of the hooded man in the parking lot, taping a shattered windscreen.

Behind that new idea three different ideas cycled constantly in Jerzy's mind: the unusual wall upholstery that was skins of red Anjou pear, avocado and pomegranate; the notion that his mother's schizophrenia might have become resolved—both characters finally separated—in her two offspring which would explain, simply, why they could never get along; and that Jerzy had reprised his own body and its capacity for living at a time when most would consider it already well in decline, too late.

The last, of course, was the most fallible of ideas since its ultimate veracity resided wholly within one person: Jerzy, and, even more delimiting, within the short part of his life dating from when he had begun to compose. For who could say when his peak would have been, or when the upward or downward points of inflexion would have occurred had he begun composing earlier? (To do so would mean roaming outside of Jerzy's and among the lives of others, including composers, quite different from Jerzy who was unique). The fact was that Jerzy acknowledged his talent—the disease the talentless are envious of; this umbilical cord that reconnected him to the world, though there was really no 're' about it, it was the first time—at 45, an age when regrets are usually more life-sustaining than conquests because they have begun to fuel what few may still lay up ahead.

But regret was not in Jerzy's repertoire, nor anything so self-assured. In its place was wonder. And when he saw the figure outside in the sleet, stocky and despotically deft in the economy and rapidity of his movements about the car, he wanted to allow him too some talent—a talent for fixing windscreens even, a talent for ignoring the cold, for repetition: all things that he, Jerzy, felt incapable of at that very moment. He wanted to because the figure presumed it at all times, even now, in the present circumstances. It was just a question of Jerzy guessing what that talent might be for, that this man assumed was obvious, and then granting what was deemed due.

The apparent divergence could be nonsense, Jerzy thought, as a heavy-set and bearded Jew plodded past in huge cushioned shoes, interceding and breaking up his former idea; his trousers were rolled up to reveal short thick rabbi's shins. It was one of those ideas that could be supported or crushed in accordance with one's present outlook. Hadn't Vera's mother (Jerzy's grandmother) been a bimetal strip? And hadn't it appeared to resolve into the characters of Vera and her steelhard brother, Jerzy's uncle Robart, who told Jerzy once he would kill him if he heard mention of Vera's name again? Then what had happened? What was still happening? Was it a neverending anastomosis from generation to generation that looked resolved, and neat, up until a certain point when the forking started to show anew?

For years Jerzy had been going the other way, as he called it; and now, seeing the segmental, choppy movements of the man outside he was somehow reminded of that fact so strongly that he weakened, physically, at the notion of trying to turn even a fraction towards the old way again, as he had had to do during the brief visit. The old way was the denial of his imagination—a systematic, minute-by-minute purging that he might better

soothe his mother's sensitivity, now the paradoxical fragility (that only Jerzy knew of) of the man in the parking lot. Tamp, tamp, tamp went the heel of the car-mender's hands in staccato. The sound barely reached Jerzy's ears but became amplified in his brain by his eyes and his helplessly vengeful imagination. The compression of time that brought the constraining past—the deadening suffocation with it—right up to the present, or to its brink, was incomprehensible. It was the greatest of all mysteries about himself. It was the perspective from inside the psychiatric ward, the one thing that he—Jerzy—and only he seemed to command. And only because he had dared to see it.

Outside, after he had finished taping up the shattered windscreen of his car, Jerzy's brother lit a cigarette and drove off. The loud rattle outside, echoing off the windows, merged with the rattle of the serving trolley behind in the corridor, telling Jerzy that it was time for the main meal of the day. ■