

*Dear*  
*Ms. Schubert*

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*Ms. Schubert*

Poems by  
*Ewa Lipska*

Translated by  
Robin Davidson and  
Ewa Elżbieta Nowakowska

Foreword by  
Adam Zagajewski

*Dear Ms. Schubert*

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POEMS BY

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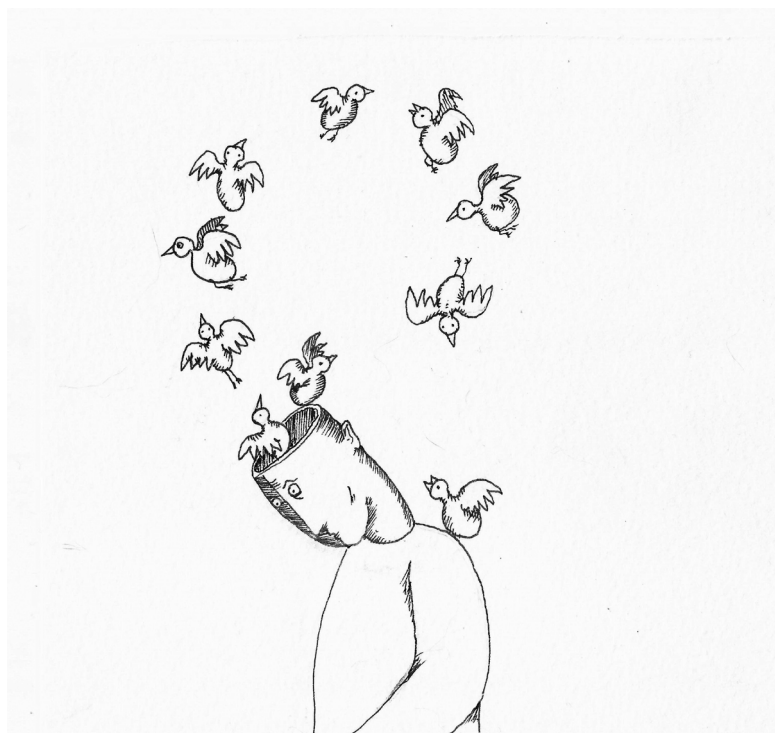
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## FOREWORD

Ewa Lipska is a poet, a friend, someone I've known and admired for decades. Our city is Kraków, where she was born and where I arrived at the age of eighteen (I'm always late). I've usually thought of myself as a solitary being, but when I look back I see—not without a strange envy—that while I participated in the activities of a poetic group (“Teraz” or “Now,” not a very sophisticated name), Ewa has been a rather solitary writer. Not in the sense of not having friends, not at all, but in that she kept her distance vis-à-vis any collective action, whether it concerned poetry or the oppositional political movement. In the times of communism, Ewa would entertain an ambivalent relation with her peers, with the literary milieu, and with institutions, a game of hide-and-seek. Ironic in her poetry, ironic in her social comportment, independent.

She was very close to Wisława Szymborska—as a younger friend, a confidante, a literary colleague, and an ally. Both of them revolted, without expressly saying so, against the conventional notion of “poetry written by women.” In Poland, the cliché had been strong: ladies write soft, sentimental poems about love and flowers and that is how it should be. Keep it so. Both of them (but also Julia Hartwig or Anna Świrszczyńska) totally changed the image of the feminine lyric. There's history, politics, philosophy, and wit in their poems. There's a powerful intellectual element in them, and a dialogue with the ideas of the time. We can find in them also love and flowers, but seen through the prism of much less sentimental themes.

Ewa is perhaps even more radical in this: the main fuel of her poetry is a kind of a surrealist wit, but applied quite differently from what the French fathers of the movement postulated. It's certainly

not “écriture automatique”; nor is it an exercise in “I don’t know where I am.” It is, rather, a distinctive voice in “the conversation of mankind,” to quote Michael Oakeshott’s beautiful definition of poetry: a conversation concerned with the dangers and pleasures of our time, with the stupidity and meanness of *Homo sapiens*. She ultimately defends our freedom—not the programmatic freedom of Surrealism or any other “ism,” but a much simpler freedom of humanness.

Her poems are not soft, they have a tinge of an anti-lyrical energy, and yet at the same time they surprise the reader with the freshness and richness of their images and metaphors. There’s no monotony here, no danger of boredom. This poetry jumps and leaps and runs.

—Adam Zagajewski

*from*

PEOPLE FOR BEGINNERS

(LUDZIE DLA POCZĄTKUJĄCYCH)



## Pochodzenie, droga pani Schubert . . .

Pochodzenie, droga pani Schubert, to uległość wobec pamięci. Seria katastrof z północnym akcentem. Grzech porównywania gorącej czekolady z wilgotną plażą łóżka. Nieochrzczone pasjanse, posępny róż akwareli. Stenograficzne zapisy umierającej astmy. Nie starczyło mi nigdy odwagi na odzyskanie wspomnień. Korekty odsyłałem, nie czytając . . . Fotografie odwracałem do góry nogami. Wszyscy jesteśmy cudzoziemcami przetłumaczonymi na język niemiecki. Łączy nas wspólne zakłopotanie, droga pani Schubert, i proszę na nie nie odpowiadać poleconym listem.