



ACCOMPANIED BY SONGBIRDS
JURI ANDRUCHOWYTSCH

Juri Andruchowytsh, Ukrainian writer, was born in 1960 in Stanislaw (today Ivano-Frankivsk), Ukraine. In 1985 he founded together with his friends Oleksander Irwanets and Viktor Neborak the nowadays almost legendary literary performance group Bu-Ba-Bu. He has published five volumes of poetry and five novels. He also writes literary essays and translates from German, Polish, Russian, and English. In 2000 he published together with the Polish author Andrzej Stasiuk *Moja Europa* (German edition: *Mein Europa: Zwei Essays über das sogenannte Mitteleuropa*. Suhrkamp, 2004). The Suhrkamp-Verlag also published his novels *Zwölf Ringe*, 2005 (*Dvanacjat' obruciv*, 2003), *Moscoviada*, 2006 (*Moskoviada*, 1993), and *Geheimnis: sieben Tage mit Egon Alt* 2008 (*Tajemnycja: zamist' romanu*, 2007). – Address: vul. Shevchenka 77 / 4, 76018 Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine. E-mail: yur_an@i.ua

Let me begin with what did not come true. In one of the letters written early in my stay at the Wissenschaftskolleg, I let myself fantasize a little on the topic of Grunewald and my nearest future: “Somewhere here in the late 1920s young Nabokov could be taking a walk, wearing shorts and a panama hat and carrying a butterfly net. It was right here that he succeeded in catching a new batch of butterflies for his collection. Grunewald is butterfly territory: lakes, canals, meadows, trees, mansions surrounded by gardens. It is good that I will live here through springtime, and then even catch a sizable chunk of the summer.”

Unfortunately during all this time I never saw a single butterfly in Grunewald. More precisely, once I did see, and more than one – but that was at James Mallet’s office, above his desk: a poster on the wall, *Butterflies of Germany*, listing no less than fifty species.

In other words, in the end even this came true, although not in the way I had originally imagined at the start of my residence.

On the other hand, how many live birds I have seen – and most importantly, heard! Instead of butterfly territory I got nightingale territory. As far as I understand, this is a highly reliable indicator of the cleanliness and health of the environment. Nightingales don't sing in polluted zones. Besides, I have learned from Cynthia Moss and Annemarie Surlykke that nightingales choose to live where water is plentiful. The aforementioned lakes, canals, parks, and meadows of Grunewald must be some kind of specialized nightingale nature reserve.

In May, when we started opening the windows of our great hall widely, our Tuesday colloquia were inevitably accompanied by birds singing. I remember how fitting they were for the theses of Per Øhrgaard's "European" talk. The nightingale can indeed be considered an essentially European – or, if you wish, Eurasian – bird. As it happens, I forgot to ask my American friends whether it was true that nightingales did not live in America. I could have easily asked and found out.

For the ten months at Wissenschaftskolleg were first and foremost a felicitous opportunity to learn from new friends what you would never be able to learn under any other circumstances. For instance, what is an "Italian torpedo"? Or what does a stick insect think before overcoming another obstacle on its way? Or where did experts come from in medieval Europe? And lots of other things that may be hard to remember precisely at this moment; however, they are sure to remind me about themselves and pop up from the depths of memory at the right moment.

And now, indeed, let's turn to memory. And also to imagination. In essence, I dedicated all the time granted to me at the Wissenschaftskolleg to the study of these two chimeras. My future book will be something between a "concise encyclopedia", a lexicon, a catalog, and a collection of essays, short stories, and poetry. I arrange in alphabetical order the cities that in my personal view deserve a story about them. I stopped at the palindromic number 111 – this is how many cities are going to be in my book, and all of them, with one exception, do exist in reality. Among them are giants like New York, London, and Moscow. There also are what at first glance might be entirely inessential small towns that find their place in my book only as a consequence of alphabetic necessity: Aarau, Ystad, Jihlava, Urbino. There are those that carry the most weight for me, and to them I dedicated not only the largest portions of the text but also, consequently, of my efforts, emotions, and fantasies. These are L'viv, Kyiv, Prague, and, of course, Berlin – I am deeply grateful that this city exists. This is

the city that I find exceptionally congenial for both living and writing. This is why I am so grateful to the Wissenschaftskolleg for this opportunity to live and write in Berlin.

So that my claim does not go unsubstantiated, I attach one of the Berlin fragments of my future book. This is how it looks as of 25 July 2009.

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As summer gets closer their numbers are on the increase. They are everywhere – in underpasses, at subway stations, and also in squares, parks large and small, frequently in front of cafés and restaurants that are open, and sometimes simply around a street corner. Berlin is not an exception here by any means; on the contrary, it is one of the typical examples. A journalist I know even plans to write a book-length study about Berlin street musicians. He has it good: as he is out of work now, he has all the time this might require.

He had an idea to start with a classification, and he managed to come up with five basic categories. The first is comprised of trained professionals, educated at college-level music programs but for various reasons unable to fit in the philharmonic routine. The second consists of lonely oddballs, remnants of the tribe of wandering minstrels and rockers, fallen angels of the underground that tend to be highly addicted to heavy drugs (they are the most numerous in the underpasses, as they cannot tolerate sunlight). The third category is composed of innovators and inventors, virtuosos of never-before-seen instruments or even entire orchestras – for instance, elaborate structures of various glass vessels, joined together and filled with water (or, perhaps, saliva?). The fourth is utter frauds: tanned middle-aged men who look Albanian or Romanian, wearing shades and with mouths full of gold teeth. They always move around in groups of three, usually with a saxophone, a guitar, and an accordion (or sometimes a tambourine). They play atrociously, and are utterly shameless about it; with cunning insolence and stunningly expressive cursing in Balkan languages that have powerful arsenals of such vocabulary, they comb the subway passengers for monetary donations. These guys still exploit the golden age of Kusturica and Bregović.

My acquaintance considers the Russian speakers from the ex-USSR to be the fifth category, usually much more professional than others. It seems to me he is making an error of logic here, as all the representatives of the fifth category could also be counted in the first one. All of them are true musicians; I have never run into any other kind. This is the result of solid middle-of-the-road Soviet musical education.

In January–February 2004, I lived near Lake Wannsee, at the far western edge of Berlin, so I usually traveled downtown by the S1 line, since service on the much faster S7 line at the time was cut by repairs between Charlottenburg and Zoo. However frequently I traveled, they always appeared in my train car somewhere between Schöneberg and Yorckstraße, for this was their spot. A fairly young couple, a man and a woman, both around thirty, the man carrying a guitar, the woman a mandolin. She was what local personal ads call the Slavic beauty type. You could not say the same about the man – he had neither the beauty, nor the Slavic type.

They would start playing; it was invariably Andrew Lloyd Webber, “Memories”. They played it rather decently, but since the length of the interval between stations allowed for more than one tune, they also played a second one. It was here that any lasting doubts were dispelled about their being, so to speak, compatriots. This was Ostap Bender’s song from the 1970s Soviet TV adaptation of *The Twelve Chairs* – the one about “my white sail gleaming, so utterly lonely”.

So, I traveled by this line dozens of times, and each time they would appear there, and always played the same tunes in the same order: first Lloyd Webber’s “Memories”, then Bender’s “But I don’t cry, no, I don’t sob”. And it made me think that if somewhere in this world a sort of specialized hell for musicians did exist, this was it: eternally, daily, including Sundays or holidays, every hour, every minute to walk from one train car to the next and play no more than two tunes, and always the same two tunes.

Then I left Berlin, and a year ago I came back but never again ran into them. And only last Friday – for the first time in almost a year! – they suddenly appeared out of nowhere, but rather than on the S1 line, on U2, between Wittenbergplatz and Bülowstraße. Goddammit, I muttered through my teeth. And closing my eyes, announced in my mind, “Andrew Lloyd Webber, ‘Memories’”. And they started playing exactly what I had announced. As always, with good technique, correctly, and cleanly. And for the millionth time. When they came to the end, I told Pat, “And now there’s going to be Ostap Bender’s song, have a listen.”

But here a miracle happened. They started playing something completely different, “Chattanooga Choo-Choo”. This was like a rebellion. This was a superhuman effort – they made it from hell to purgatory. They were met by applause and catcalls at the Chattanooga Station in Tennessee. When that guy with the guitar went through the train car to collect money, I gave him some change – for the first time.