

In Red

Magdalena Tulli

Bill Johnston, Translator

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Magdalena Tulli's new literary novel reads like poetry, replete with metaphor, unique syntax, and intriguing images. The author's inventive and graceful language lends this work the feel of a fable in which readers are whisked to a magical world where one almost expects to see fairies and wizards: "[G]usts of air" sweep red "silk threads" and "every man on whom a scrap of red silk thread came to rest [is] struck by a bullet in the war." Simultaneously believable and surreal, the book's imagery provokes the reader's imagination with its supernatural and mystical qualities.

The plot is composed of linked stories about a Polish town, *Stichings*, where Tulli chronicles the wartime experience of citizens and soldiers through the various lenses of her characters: Sebastian Loom, Kazimierz Krasnowolski, Felek Chumura, and Natalie Zugoff. The most intriguing is Chumura, whom Tulli spends a good deal of effort describing, and, who despite his villainous and counterfeiting ways, emerges as almost likeable. These shifting protagonists—readers are introduced to the voice of each upon the death of the prior—create a sense of the town's collective consciousness, of which the reader also becomes a part. At times the changes in perspective can be slightly confusing and readers may have to revisit prior paragraphs to anchor themselves. In this sense, the postmodern narrative pastiche of this tale is simultaneously one of its strengths and weaknesses; while the various protagonists construct a fascinating multi-dimensional world, at times—like a kaleidoscope—it can be dizzying.

Bill Johnston provides a sparkling translation of Tulli's book*. One of Poland's leading fiction writers, and author of *Dreams and Stones*, *Moving Parts*, and *Flaw*, Tulli is made more accessible to American readers in this slim text. Johnston received the Found in Translation award for a translation of Polish poems, was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Poetry Award, and won a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship for poetry translation*.*

In Red is an intricately woven text, entwining stories superbly and revealing to the reader the connections between these stories in ingenious ways. Readers who enjoy being immersed in other cultures and being transported to paranormal worlds will revel in this text. In the heyday of vampire mania, it is especially delightful to read a text that simultaneously captures the magical and the banal so beautifully.

BRACHA GOYKADOSH (September / October 2011)

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