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SCHOOL OF CULTURAL STUDIES: ENGLISH

Box Of Chalks

A sequence of poems based on the
conscription of Polish boys into the German Army under the
Volkliste

by

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Thesis for the Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

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This creative thesis comprises a book length collection of poems entitled *Box Of Chalks*, and an accompanying prose commentary exploring issues of research, drafting and the forming of a narrative sequence of poetry.

The book of poems is based on the experience of Polish boys and men forcibly conscripted into the German Army by National Decree, 4th March 1941. This enforced conscription remains a little acknowledged fact which I discovered is still refuted in some Polish communities. The poems are written from the viewpoint of one conscript. They consist of dramatic monologues, a duologue and a voice of the *Volkliste*. The poems cover a period from boyhood to old age.

The accompanying prose commentary on the process of researching the historical material and the artistic drafting of the poems is formed of six chapters. Chapter One explores the genesis of the poems in the historical events of German conscription in Silesian Poland. Chapter Two discusses the ethics of using another's voice and the painful experiences. In this chapter, I trace the creative choices made from composite experiences as the voice of the sequence gradually developed.

In Chapter Three, I show how facts, memories and experiences were gleaned through interviewing survivors and one survivor in particular. This chapter further examines the history of the Polish war experience and shows how oral reminiscence is linked to historically recorded events. The chapter shows how gleanings from these 'rememberings' formed the basis of individual poems and discusses the difficulties of opening up delicate matters linked to emotions of shame and guilt in the surviving community.

Chapter Four examines the difficulties and rewards in finding the most appropriate opening for the narrative. I aim to demonstrate how the sequence of poems benefited from structuring techniques and a 'layering of imagery and sound', which, although discovered late in the process, helped to form a cohesive narrative.

Chapter Five discusses the drafting of key poems and the challenge of unexpected inconsistencies encountered when designing the poetic sequence. Here, I explore the demands of forming a longer narrative out of individual poems, for example the need for bridging poems, continuity and telling the larger story mainly through one voice.

Chapter Six demonstrates how a large part of the sequence was written transposing some of my own historical and cultural experiences through corresponding physical detail. Here, I explore experiments in creating characters and physical details to develop the world of the narrative and its accumulative progression. I conclude this thesis by acknowledging that the consequences of conscription continued long after the war had ended and has had an effect on later generations.

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Declaration of Authorship

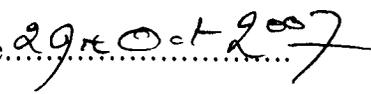
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Signed.....



.....date.....



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*

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Introduction

This collection of poems, *Box of Chalks*, was inspired by events which were related to me during the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Second World War in 1995, a time when friends and ex-service men were contacting one another to reminisce about their lives. I met several Polish ex-service men on occasional celebrations of the anniversary who told me about their individual war experiences. When they learned that I was interested in writing about the conscription of Polish boys into the German Army, a few of them reluctantly revealed that they had been conscripted as young boys, under the German Decree of 4th March 1941, known in Silesia as the *Volksliste*¹. The Polish ex-service men told me about their lives and their experiences during the war. Their stories were vivid and shocking.

Prior to my meeting the conscripted men, I had been researching the *Volksliste*, but found no one willing to say that they had been in the German Army. However, on several celebratory occasions during the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Second World War when I met Polish ex-service men who told me about their individual war experiences, it became evident to me that even after fifty years of living in the West, they were still very patriotic, but ashamed of having worn a German Army uniform which was anathema to them. German conscription had placed Polish boys and men in a dilemma that conflicted with their patriotism and their spirit, which lasted into their old age.

Few Polish conscripts have revealed their having worn a German Army uniform. Many have carried their secret to the grave never having revealed their experiences to wives or children. I believe that their histories and their experiences should be recorded as part of Polish and British history. To ignore their existence and their responses to their experiences would be to deny them, their descendants, and Poland, of a layer of heritage and history.

In this sequence of poems, I have created dramatic monologues to record the experiences of a Polish conscript from boyhood to old age. Recreating a layer of recent history from an individual perspective, I hoped to reveal the consequences of German conscription upon Polish men. The structure of the proposed poems was based on the form of film stills, or the shape of the Bayeux Tapestry. The plan for the

¹ See Appendices G 118 -120 and H 587 – 589.

project was that each poem should stand independently yet be crafted in a form which related to previous and following poems in some way, thus creating a fluid and continuous narrative. Each poem was intended to be a dramatic monologue in,

..the calm sober language of the witness, neither the lamenting tones of the victim nor the irate voice of [one] who seeks revenge¹.

The monologues in turn should create a larger biographical work.

I intended the work, *Box of Chalks*, to be chronologically, geographically, historically and politically as factual as possible and to be written using as few adjectives and similes as possible with the intention of creating sharp, concise and economic poetry. As the work progressed, ideas and images developed, and because of an incident experienced during the development of the work, the image of chalk was employed and became a major part of the project. That image provided the title of the sequence. Part of the planning was to install layers of imagery in the narrative to create cohesion in the work and a memory aid for the reader.

Similarly to the contrived sculpture² for which Cornelia Parker arranged to have an explosives department of the British Army blow up a garden shed with its contents so that she could reassemble the parts to exhibit at the London Tate Gallery, my work has also been reassembled, but reassembled out of historical, political, and emotional chaos. Gathering up the broken bits of a life blown up by the consequences of conscription into the German Army, I reassembled the fears, the yearnings, the guilt, pain, the noises, and the 'rememberings'³, and threaded them together with one voice to create a narrative form which would acknowledge Polish conscripts' experiences.

The poems were written on the understanding that their historical content had not yet been addressed in poetry. The work is the representation of a Polish conscript, who, like thousands of Polish conscripts, I believe, because of politics and national pride, did not, or could not tell of the experiences or of the injustices done by conscription under the *Volksliste*.

¹ Primo Levi, *If This Is A Man* (London: Sphere Books, 1978), p 382.

² Cornelia Parker, *A Meteorite Lands* (Manchester: Cornerhouse Publications, 2002), p 22.

³ I have used the word 'rememberings' instead of the word 'memory' when referring to the past because the events of war seemed to be very present in the men with whom I spoke. Their remembered experiences were vivid and instantaneous, unlike memories which can be distant, clouded and misty and needing keys to open a memory box to let one look at the memories.

Danzig "all quiet" as Nazis seize horses
and dig trenches. Daily Express
Staff Reporter Danzig Thursday

In a day so far free from clashes between Poles and Germans, the Nazis of Danzig today carried on their military preparations to make the Free City as much a part of Germany as Bavaria and the Rhineland.

In the city, in the thirty to forty villages scattered around on the flat Baltic coast and along the frontiers of Poland, they dug trenches, built barracks and strengthened the soggy banks of the River Vistula for pontoon bridges.

Hundreds of horses clip-clopped all day through the cobbled streets of the town down to the great barracks at Langfuhr, on the road to the airport, the former barracks of the Death's Head Hussars of pre-war Prussia.

All horse owners had been ordered to present their animals to the "police authorities" at the barracks for inspection and numbering.

Tonight they are presumably still there, for although I saw them go in, I did not see them come out, nor have I seen any sign of them in the city.

In the shadow of the old synagogue now being demolished I saw young men in dungarees under the orders of a black-uniformed S.S. officer camouflaging the new motor lorries which have been bringing men for the Free Corps from East Prussia¹

¹ *Daily Express* June 30 1939 Friday.

Poland's Way To Sea.
Declaration By President.
Value of Danzig And Gdynia
From our Own Correspondent. Warsaw. June 29.

The Polish "Sea Week" culminated today in national demonstrations throughout Poland under the slogan "We will not be forced from the sea".

The greatest manifestations were in the seaport Gdynia and in Warsaw. Forty special trains and other means of transport conveyed excursionists to Gdynia for the occasion, and it is estimated that the arrivals at this seaport for participation in the festivals there today number about 80,000.

In Warsaw at noon, Dr. Moscicki, the President made a speech which was broadcast to the nation on the importance to Poland of the sea¹.

¹ *The Times* June 30 1939, p 16. col. 4.

Ostatnie polskie powstanie

The Last Polish Uprising

Oplakujmy godzinę
kiedy się wszystko zaczęło,
kiedy padł pierwszy strzał.

Let us lament the hour
when it all began,
When the first shot was fired.

Oplakujmy sześćdziesiąt trzy dni
i sześćdziesiąt trzy noce
walki. I godzinę
kiedy się wszystko skończyło.

Let us lament the sixty-three days
and sixty-three nights
of struggle. And the hour
when it all ended.

Kiedy na miejsce, gdzie żyło milion ludzi,
przyszła pustka po milionie ludzi.

When the place where a million people had lived
Became the void, that remained after a million people.

Anna Swirszczynska

Anna Swirszczynska

PART ONE

1939 - 1955

Box Of Chalks

School Holidays June 1939

Superior, Mr Sroka the Head, stood straight,
Chalk-dusted, in baggy corduroy plus-fours
Waiting for the clatter of desk tops
And noisy voices to stop. He wiped
His glasses with a soft leather rag,
Joined his hands for afternoon prayers.

He'd taken the whole school once to the Beskid Mountains
In a cavalcade of horse-drawn carts, showed us the Wisla,
Rownica, Stozek, Chantorija, Barania Gora,
Played football with us in a mountain meadow.
He shared our rye bread and kabanos, gulped down
Cold buttermilk, and water from the mountain streams.

He'd stood that day before the assembly, which shuffled,
Anxious to break, and I remember him saying to the class,
I might not see you children again. If I don't,
Remember me in your prayers. Each one of you
Put your trust in God, and we spilled into fields
Filled with cornflowers and poppies and charged home,
Hot, to harvest the crop in the cherry orchards.

Telegraph Poles

Come and see!

Come and see

The poster on the tree

At the cross roads!

Rivulets of farmers' wives,
Their children, with their cries,
Flowed up the hill
To Alekzandrowicz road.

GENERAL MOBILIZACJA,
In black, clung silently,
Stuck to each telegraph pole,
Every road-side tree.

Horses

We each had a horse - my brother and I -
Called Szatan and Kasztanka.
We rode them bareback,
Burning our legs with their sweat.
A pair that pulled my father's plough
Brought him home weary,
Dozy with local wisnowka
From late-night farmers' meetings.

Those huge quiet beasts
Trimmed with brass and leather
Burst my heart
When they clop, clop, clopped
Away up our rutted road
Confiscated for the cavalry,
Mobilised to charge
Against tanks' long cannons.

Cursing in the River

From the foothills of the Beskid mountains
We watched the southern horizon bulging
In the moonlight. An incessant rumble rolled
On an eastern wind. An army emerged from the night
And spread across the land on the second of September.

I remember looking up at my father's stubbled face
Traced with lines I'd never seen before – gently,
He took my hand and we trekked home across the fields,
His curses darting the silence when he stumbled
On the stepping stones of our un-named river.

He cursed again to my mother,
*The bastard hyenas coming through the hills
With troops and tanks and guns.*
He was grey and helpless as she held him
Whispering, *Pray Janek, we don't lose our sons.*

Malinowski's Barn

Up Alekzandrowicz road,
They flowed towards Malinowski's farm,
Past the aerodrome
With their carts and bikes and barrows,
Aged women and men from Bielsko
Laden with cardboard cases,
Grasping at children, hiding their faces
From the grey-green swollen
Czech transporter
Heavy with Hitler's Czechs,
Its fat face smiling,
Tail cocked, dropping low
Overhead
Slowly droning out of sight
Above chained and bolting cows,
Aimed for Alekzandrowicz aerodrome,
Scattering the people
Heading for Malinowski's barn.

Box Of Chalks

Wojtek

He said I was his shadow.
I worshipped him.
He had everything I wanted.
Each day I'd slave for him
Just to be taken home on his bike.

A giant of a man, my cousin,
He'd carried me high on his shoulders,
Threatened to throw me to the forest wolves
If I didn't behave. He gave me a watch
When I came of age at my confirmation.

He'd carted rocks and stones and boulders
From the Wisla for our roads. Then he was sent
To the Russian front. Aunt Ludmila gave me
His gloves, his skis, his bike, his books,
Everything he'd owned.

German Lessons

School re-opened after Christmas.
The heating wasn't on.
Herr Meinhold was our new headmaster
In leather boots like ebony.
He put me in Herr Reisner's class.
I tried to be invisible.
The statue of Pilsudski
Was missing from its plinth.
High on the walls - behind Hitler
And the *hakenkreus* - stencilled shapes
In the form of a crucifix and the portraits
Of Moscicki, of Smigly-Rydz,
And Chopin, glowed.
I chewed my stubby pencil
When Herr Reisner paced the floor
Mouthing his dictation
That bounced from wall to wall
Over our lowered heads
And out through the door
Echoing down the hall,
His eyes watching everyone, and me.

Box Of Chalks

Volkliste

If you want to live
You have to be German.
If you want to be German
Get on the *Volkliste*.
We divide you in groups
One to four, not more.
To one and two
We give citizenship -
That's only for the few
Unconditionally, immediately.
Three, conditionally,
We want to see
How low you can crawl.
Four -
You have no choice
At all.
We declare you
Subject.

Leaving Home

I went by bike to Bielsko
With everything I owned on my back,
Overtaken by squads of motor-bikes.
Each side-car was filled
With a blunt-headed soldier
Binoculars strapped in a leather box
And slung across the shoulder.

I looked straight ahead
Neither left nor right. They fused
Into an army of toads. I pushed the pedals
Into the road and kept them turning,
Turning, burning with the knowledge
That I was the solution,
My family's contribution to the *Volksliste*.

Box Of Chalks

Arbeit Macht Frei

Apprenticed in the leather trade I was afraid
To be afraid of Herr Ullmann the craftsman.
His hands could crush a skull.
His iron tools - clenched on his apron - clanged
When he flung whole hides across the bench
As if they were bolts of silk.
His round wife watched with tiny eyes.

When he growled,
Cut straight, cut deep
Right through the skin boy
Till you touch the wood.
Keep a steady hand.
Hold the leather flat, boy.
Slit clean, end to end -
Careful boy - don't forget the brand,
I was drenched with sweat,
Danuta Ullmann never spoke
In their *safe* house.

The smell of their leather clung to me
When I went home on Saturday nights,
The air was tainted with the smell of flesh,
Of dyed and branded skins. I was proud
Telling my father about holsters, horses' tackles,
And the boxes for binoculars I'd made.
He looked at me long, then turned away.

Choice

Silently we mended fences,
Tied up netting to keep the chickens in,
Dug a cellar, propped it up
With timbers of silver birch. Silently,
Mamusia bottled plump pears
And fat morello cherries. She shredded
Cabbages for pickling and stuffed them
Into stumpy wooden barrels full of brine.
She never spoke of me working
For the Fatherland.

Above the silence, the beat of Beethoven's
Ta-ta-ta-tam, ta-ta-ta-tam
From the radio receiver
Resounded in my head
When she'd said, *they demand*
Photographs and fingerprints.
The choice is to register,
Be imprisoned, or dead. Silently,
I planted plum and cherry trees
Inside the fences to protect my father's land,
To keep us hidden and free.

Ambitions

After Mass the congregation kaleidoscoped,
Whispered, moved and drifted, joined up again
Immersed in quiet talk and ordered us
To *go straight home*, then dispersed
At the sight of mounted guards astride
Quivering-bellied mares.
Steaming floods of urine splashed darkness
On the cobblestones. Ammonia choked the air.

Rural boys - in hob-nail boots - we'd stare,
Intrigued by the gloss, the flare,
The disciplined elegance of the foreigner
Riding high to the hollow clip clop of hooves
Among the village people moving on.

We'd learned about England's George VI,
And dreamed of uniformed perfection. We'd played
At driving tanks, trains, gliders and planes.
To wear a cape, a four cornered hat
Like great Polish leaders, strut - be young peacocks
With power, flaunt our manhood,
Ride high on horseback - click the heels
Of long leather boots - salute, and be saluted
Was only a dream - after Sunday Mass.

Arbeitsdienst

When we left Katowice no one cried, nobody rebelled.
No one looked back with regret,
Yet, no one was happy, or joyous, or smiling -
Soberly, sombre - we just went. We went
With an unproud quiet thrill, as if
For some unmeasured secret pleasure
That could be touched, kept in the pocket
Like a puppy, then put aside again
Till we'd had our fill abroad, on an outing to the hills,
Our haversacks packed with extra bread and *kielbasa*.
We went around hilly terrains, across zones
On a train that shunted through the rubble of Berlin
To the *Arbeitsdienst* at Kreismecklinberg,
We just went - all together – naïve,
Ignorant, and meant for the 7th Army.

Kielbasa - sausage

Homecoming

*My! How you've grown child!
How you've cropped your hair!
You're much taller than the others now -
You look - handsome, son. Not so wild.*

I hated it, Mamusia! I wasn't angry.
I didn't disgrace myself. I stood
For fifteen hours with a full back-pack
In the sun, for misinterpreting an order.
I had to wear the *Hakenkreuz* -
Look! New boots!
I've brought the old ones back -
God! I didn't think it would be so hard
Or days would be so long, or that I'd be plagued
By disloyalty, or branded a coward. I think
It would be easier if I could speak good German,
If they wouldn't call me *Polak*. The food is good,
If you're fast. We sleep between alarms.
Exercise twice daily. Punished, if we fail a task.
Marszewski cried when Tadek Kroll hanged himself.
Our company went half mad -

*You'll manage lad. Don't despair. Never
Give up hope. Your father and your grand-father
Were the same – and they cropped their hair.
Everybody has to cope.*

Guard Duty

Deep-bellied drones fill the night
In the hills above Clermont-Ferrand
And slowly its rows of houses, tiny squares,
Its avenues of shops crumble
Becoming a flat white light.
A ball of fire crowned with flames
Erupts from the collapsing firestone shoulder
Of a rubber factory and rolls toward the sky.
Hiccups of light splutter through explosions
Shooting in all directions.
People stream to the hills.
Above the droning, corporals yell,
Check each one as they come through!
No bastard passes you without official papers!
They come, wave after wave weeping
In the dark and disappear. I see, I barely hear
The corporals yelling.

Box Of Chalks

Christmas Eve

Stille Nacht.

Heilige Nacht

Drifts

Into the star-pitted sky
Of a forest clearing in Issoire.
Hands solid around my rifle sling,
I stand frozen in boots clogged
With compressed snow,
Sleeping, or dreaming of a tree
In the corner of a room.
It's hung with silver threads
And I smell the aroma of ginger,
Cinnamon, candle wax and carp. I see
Mamusia at the scrubbed wood table,
Hair tucked beneath a kerchief,
And a million years of Poland
In the globes of her amber earrings
Caught by candle light.

Echoes of whispers fall from her hands
As she strokes off bits of sweetened dough.
My sisters roll it flat
Then flip it, gently pressing shapes,
Removing ragged clinging strings
From stars and angels.
They fall, *ploop, ploop-ploop,*
Ploop, on the snowy table.
Before the bake, she makes a hole
In every shape, to tie with ribbons
On the tree, and I remember how
We trudged arm in arm with lanterns -
Our boots clogged
With compressed snow -
To the Shepherds' Mass,
Singing
Cicha Noc
Swieta Noc.

Box Of Chalks

Nice

Look at the villas carved into the cliffs -
And the threads of road pencilled in
Slipping away
From the Mediterranean which heaves
So gently up
And down,
It's barely noticeable.
It's like being in heaven - and you see, .
In the morning sunlight,
Those great guns pin-cushioned to the rocks
Pointing out to sea,
You hear the deep drone overhead,
Overhead so high you can't see
But you can tell
By the trails of foil silver needles
Dangling in the sky,
Sprinkled on the rocks
On the camouflaged guns
Carved from the local trees,
It will be hell,
When the English - from Africa -
Come for you and me.

Box Of Chalks

Leave

When I applied I got, *Try later*
You sop, you know you won't get it.
You know there'll be the invasion.
Have no illusion you fool. You should run.
Get yourself picked off with a gun.

I wanted to go home in uniform -
My riding boots like ebony,
With spurs - so they'd see me
Sophisticated and worldly. I'd tell them
I'd been to the Mediterranean Sea,
Monte Carlo, Nice, Germany,
Slept under canvas, in barracks, hotels
And villas, and lived on white bread,
Red wine, and I'd smoked cigarillos.

I had mints for my Mother
Scent for my girl,
I'd bartered cigarettes for shoes.
My sergeant refused me leave for Poland
And I hadn't the courage to run.

Executioner

Hey! Boy! A cow to be milked.
She's full. She's in pain.
Get moving boy! No work, no gain!
I was the expert at milking,
And blowing out the brain
But I sat on my helmet bulging boots,
Watching a frog slip over my feet.
It plopped into my watery trench.
I scooped it out - neat - in my mess-tin
And poured it on to the grass.
Camouflaged, it slithered away, silently.
I milked the cow
Then put her out of her misery.

Beef Stew

On and on, forever on in the dark
In straw-filled cattle wagons
Beneath the whistle of the train
Through winds filled with coal dust
Pricking and burning our eyes.
On, on, till dawn, till the train
Stands still, stands still all day, hushed
Outside a town
Where we stand down to,
Stand to attention, and,
Quick march, quick march
Faster, faster, stand to attention.
Stand straight, quick march,
Eyes right, eyes left,
One two one two one two,
Quick turn, quick march,
One two one two one two
In harsh heat
Like pairs of running dead men
We stand down and stand still
Till our nostrils fill with the aroma
Of fresh beef stew
From the moaning dew-eyed grateful cow,
I'd milked in the morning damp.
Then on and on, to the Channel
With stomachs full, we'll sleep upright
Through the night and rattling wagons
The whistling, the wind, oblivious of the din.

Box Of Chalks

En Route to Calais

They yelled - cried - blasphemed
Swore, in German, Italian, and Polish
In a raid en route to Calais.
Water drums burst -
Hissing -
Mingling with blood and diesel
Making bronze and blue-white rivulets
In the June moonlight.
Everybody blamed
Each other for the pain,
The raid, the darkness, the deaths,
The stench, the shrapnel that rained.
Ted died crying he was ashamed.
He wanted forgiveness.
In the morning, as we shovelled
Bits of bodies
Into quick-dug graves,
Mercy was begged
In German, Italian, Polish,
And Rommel drove past in his
Hunchbacked Volkswagen beetle
Heading north-west to Calais.

Box Of Chalks

Legless

Don't laugh because he was German.
No!
He wasn't legless because he was drunk.
The bomb blast blew them into the trees.
They were not removed
By a smooth incision
Between the joints or into the marrow,
Nor with a blade that slips
Beneath solid bone
Separating the narrow ligaments -
He probably would have felt that -
But a sudden blow in his solar plexus
And a ragged lump of steel
Exploding from the wheel
Of the ammunition truck
Blasted them into the trees.
He fell to the ground
Minus his legs from the knees down.
I don't think he knew
They were missing -
He was muttering something
About kissing his wife and children -

Box Of Chalks

Front Line Games

Word comes from behind
That, *today is probably the day.*
That, *the Americans are playing*
Basket ball on the front line with a skull.
They're big, and black, and two meters tall
And they'll come like shadows in the night
With knives in their mouths
To cut off your hands
For your watches and rings;
They'll slit your throats
And smash your heads for gold teeth.
They'll take your boots with your feet.

And they come! They come in Sherman tanks
With pincer claws, from the west from the east,
From the north from the south, through the earth,
From the sky, and I fire, I fire.
I fire, fire, fire, afraid to die.

Falaise 1

God be kind. Let me be dead.
But don't crush me
Between rolling trucks
And leave me on an engine grid
Like you did with Ted.

Make mine quick!
Don't bury me alive
Under waves of muck.
Let me be dead where I belong,
Not in this trench
With the stench of dying life.

Jesus! God! Let me be home
Without fleas, without lice
And grimy finger-nails,
Without these two left boots,
Rags wrapped around for socks.
Christ! Jesus, have mercy on me!

Falaise 2

We stare up at a bolted belly
A brace of clay-filled teeth,
Its iron lace loosening,
Dropping sods on our faces
And it takes forever
For the Panzer
To pass over,
And the walls of our grave
Stay intact with tree roots, weeds
And chalk-white knots of clover.

Pounding guns with their ever-open
Retching mouths, hump and heave
Splitting the earth
In the intermittent flares and blackness,
Then tear out the heart of God
Who screams
Above the grumbling roar, the din.
Stasz and I lie in layers of limbs,
Entwined like twins
In a womb of gravelly mud.

Falaise 3

This was their anniversary,
Eighteenth of August, 1908.
Usually we'd celebrate -
Give them flowers
And little things we'd made.
They'd give thanks,
Touch hands; they'd smile at us
Around the scrubbed wood table.
She always wore the amber earrings -
His wedding gift to her -
They peeped beneath her kerchief
And coronet of lace. Often
She'd thawed me out
And hidden me when I'd raced
Late at night in the snow
On the willow skis
He'd forbidden me to use.
Angrily, he'd broken them with an axe
Knowing I'd make new ones, knowing
He'd plane and wax them for me.
Would he understand, or even know
That I'd curl up and hide, wallowing
In Falaise mud, afraid to rise, crawling
In this hole, weeping, bellowing,
God let me die on their Anniversary!

Box Of Chalks

Falaise 4

I saw the bread just after a bombardment.
It was big and white and round
Lying in bright daylight on the ground.
It wasn't there before.
It would take seconds to get it
Before the next volley. I heaved up
On my belly and crawled to it,
Held it tight, felt my fingers
Sink into it crushing the crust,
And scuttled back on my elbows,
Thinking only of bread
And rolled down into the trench.

A German officer slipped in on top of us,
Weeping, muttering, *Death! Death! Dead?*
He must have stayed about an hour
And not a word was uttered.
He shared the broken loaf of bread
So clean, surrounded by muck,
Helmets, rifles, dead horses' tackle,
Bags of soldiers' clothes in rags, churned up.
He thanked us for the bread and left,
Wishing us good luck. We watched
His feet stumbling over the ground.

Falaise 5

*Wake up! See - swarms of planes - so quiet
So high.
How gently they spurt pollen from their tails.
See how it swells into parachutes
Among the clouds of paper
Dropping from heaven, Stasz.*

Listen

*The guns have stopped.
Get up.
Move!
Get out of the mud.
Hear me!
Idiot.
Get up!
Stop playing about.
Come Stasz - see!
This paper says
We're free. Get up! Get out!*

*I don't mean to shout.
We can join the others
Going over,
If I can manage
To pull you.*

Box Of Chalks

A Box of Chalks

Once - a lifetime ago - Mr Sroka
Dropped a box of chalks
And only the dust fell out.
Though every stalk stayed in its place,
Every one was fractured.

And I think, if this American truck
Turned over, stuffed tight as it is
With Ukraines, Czechs, Germans, Poles,
Only dirt would fall from it
And the men would remain packed,
Stacked horizontal, and broken.

Box Of Chalks

The Tobacco Box

I had a watch without glass
Its strap was old,
The stitching sparse,
My confirmation gift,
And a photo of my mother
In a little leather purse
In a tin tobacco box
When I queued to register
At a prison camp in Caen.

Nationality?

Polish.

In a goddamn Kraut uniform?

He confiscated

My tobacco box.

It made a tinny crash

And was lost

When he tossed it in a sack

Of prisoners' precious trash.

Box Of Chalks

Against the Sun

Outside an American tent, alone,
In the sun, in full uniform, badges of rank
Gone, no weapon, no car, no batman
Nor gun, white hair groomed,
The German major lifted his face.
He looked at us sectioned off,
Under orders of a Polish Sergeant.
I looked straight into his eyes.

Turning his head slowly
From left to right he said - as if to himself -
I cannot believe what we have done.
Lowering his face into his hands
He murmured, *Good luck son.* I looked back,
His shoulders heaved against the sinking sun
Like a child cowering, chewing pencils
When a new term is begun.

On Leaving France

That I am happy
My back against a wall of steel
Wet, each seam welded, sealed
With rusting carbuncular bolts,

That I cannot see
Outside these walls, or feel
The crushing force trying
To burst this cavernous hall,
This hull of this troop ship,

That I can hear
Sucking gulps echoing
Beneath me, playing with
Half-dead swaying troops
Packed from stern to bulk-head,

That I am falling
Asleep, feeling the Channel
Heaving slipping round, down
Deep into blackness, means,
That this to me is heaven.

Orders

I wish I could dance with you
Elizabeth O'Donaghue
And give you cornflowers and poppies
And buttercups,
With clouds of sweet forget-me-nots
Tied up with a stalk of wheat
Instead of these blue flax flowers,
Off-cuts from your Scottish stacks,
But orders are not to dance
With land girls
Nor play the spoons on mess-tins
In the fields tonight,
Because today, Warsaw has fallen.

Between the Lines

In thin envelopes stamped *Censored* in black
Not once did she write, *hurry home,*
Come back, nor answer questions
About friends or neighbours. Her words
Didn't smile when I'd told her

I'm like a second-hand soldier
In an English uniform
With 'Poland' on my shoulder
Going down to Napoli
With Canadians and heavy artillery.

When I told her, *I'm zig-zagging in circles*
By Africa, the Rock of Gibraltar, and Rome
And from Trieste I can go home,
She wrote - after Yalta -
I hope you will like America, son.

English Lesson

I stare at the ceiling, at bulbs on cobwebby wires
In a ward in a snowbound Scottish castle.
Across the horizon of my counterpane
I see you at the end of whiteness, silently moving,
Your starched veil lifting,
Caught by a wind about your shoulders.
You glide past beds of airmen and soldiers
And I rise like Lazarus, my body in plaster
Legs and arms sprouting from the tubular case
Hoping that if I move faster I'll meet you face to face.
Again, I'm too late to reach you,
You, like someone I once knew in mists,
In winter snows in the foothills of the Beskid Mountains.

You let me prepare the breakfast table,
Serve as a ward orderly,
Feed the handless man and the airman
With half a face
Who follows you with his one good eye.
You smile at him with grace. For my reward
You teach me to pronounce 't' with an 'h'.
Looking at me face to face by the big porcelain sink
You place your tongue beneath your front teeth
And tell me to repeat,
Thank you and Thursday, and three.
I carefully and slowly put out my tongue and say
Fank you.... fursday.... free.

Box Of Chalks

After Yalta

*Don't go down to Harlem.
Don't go to the Bronx.
Don't ride late in the subway.
Don't get caught up with drunks.
Don't give to the legless beggar
On 42nd Street
He might look lame and helpless
He's probably got two feet.
'Cos everybody's out to take a dollar
With a flick knife or stiletto
They wanna make a fast buck here,
How, it doesn't matter.
And if you are found with your throat cut
Right here - above the collar,
Who d'you think'll give a damn?*

So on humid sticky nights
By the flat black River Hudson
I listen to the Puerto Rican musician
Playing for a dime,
Killing time against the growl of streetcars.
And I work and sleep, sleep and work
Seventy-two hours a week
There's no time to go to Harlem,
Nor down town to the Bronx.
I ride the subway every night
Weary, looking drunk.
I give dimes to the music man,
He gives his music free.
I give to the legless beggar
Who could easily be me.

PART TWO

1955 - 1970

Waiting

Leaving the Carnegie Hall soprano, Miss Franc,
Practising Puccini on the floor above me,
Knowing she'll leave the taps running once more
Flooding the old explorer's apartment - he believes
He is sculpted on Mount Rushmore - I open
The door, let it swing back and head for a bank.

Clutching wads of dollars bound up with bands
In the pockets of my Waldorf Astoria suit, gratuities
In ones and tens and twenties, hundreds left
By the generous ones, Stewart, Gardner, King Hussien
And Cecil B. De mille, beneath gold rimmed plates,
For me, the waiter they all call Mr Will.

Walking block after block in the shade of skyscrapers
Work permit almost expired, State Troopers on horse-back
Control the blacks, the whites, tired waiting for civil rights
Getting splashed with horses' urine. It darkens the street.
Ammonia chokes the air. I change my mind, pay my fare
On the Queen Elizabeth, for England, with the Cunard Line.

Box Of Chalks

A House

Stateless, jobless in England,
I want to live by the park
Where people parade poodles,
Schnauzers, Afghan hounds,
And carry cats in squeaky baskets,
Where that woman walks a duck
With dark fluffy down,
On the end of a silky string.
I want to live by that park
On that street of Victorian houses
With tiny manicured lawns
Bordered by marigolds, pansies
Forget-me-nots and roses that owners
Clip once a month and water
With stubby rubber hoses.
Where they advertise on little cards,
Clean rooms to let.
Quiet house. No cooking,
No foreigners no Irish no blacks
No children no dogs, no visitors.
Nineteen and six a week -
I buy seventy-seven Jedburgh Street
Between Clapham Common
And Clapham South and lodge
All sorts of foreigners.
I prune the roses, cut the grass,
Buy for myself a cashmere coat
And a dog with a tartan collar,
Knowing that in Poland I'd need
A state permit to keep a pig or a goat.

Box Of Chalks

My Father

Late in the evening when the air is heavy
With chorocking grunts from frogs,
And the hooting of an owl soars,
You sit alone on the front door stone
Against the walls a meter thick, their blind
Boxed windows bloodshot with geraniums.

You look across your furrowed land, gouged,
Pitted from shells, irrigated with the blood
Of Russians and Germans. Glancing up
The shadowed hill filled with carrots, cabbages
Unruly rows of potatoes, do you wonder
As I do now, how many were killed?

Pipe in your mouth, one hand cupped
Beneath its bowl, I watch you suck down
The flame from a match, oblivious of me
Here between the plum and cherry trees
I planted to hide the house, keep us hidden
And free. You didn't write, *Come home*.

I've overlooked the twenty-four-hour clock.
Can't think what my mother's face looks like.
Out of the years I call to you, *Ojciec*. You rise,
Arms outstretched pronouncing your blessing
Niech Bedzie Pochwalony Jezus Chrystus!
We expected you this morning, son.

Ojciec – Father

Niech Bedzie Pochwalony Jezus Chrystus – Glory be to the Lord Jesus Christ

Box Of Chalks

Skis

Monika, do you remember when your dad
Or mine would bellow our names?
Our cries and hoots hanging
Trapped in the night air would fall
On the silent snowy field
Somewhere between your house and mine
In the white-blue silver of winter nights,
When we flew on willow skis, sabre-sharp,

And do you remember the hollers hitting the sky,
Get your arses back home and dry
Or I'll set fire to your accursed skis
Or break them here and now, and we'd dart home
Like bats, sweating, with frozen hands and feet
Disguising the skis in the woodpile?
You nod your head Monika.
You look at me. You don't smile.

Box Of Chalks

Strings Attached

Arguing bitterly with your son
About parcel string you said
He'd won. *He'd never seen*
The real thing made of jute
Or cotton or linen,
Just puny communist twine
Made of paper that was rotten,
Snapped under pressure
And wouldn't last like the string
There used to be in the past
Before this communist lot came in.

Apologising for you he reassures
Nothing's better than
Living in Poland, advising me
That I should stay, and nothing
Would persuade him to leave. He's glad
They have no foreign capitalist thieves
Living off the fat of the land
And when he can afford a passport,
Could I arrange an invitation
And a visa for him to come to the west
To visit museums, the best galleries
And see for himself what's been stolen
From the rest of the world?
He thanks me politely for my visit,
Grasps my hand and bows, presenting me
With *Polish Bird's Milk*, and a torn-out ad
From Vogue and requests,
This cream silk shirt, from Men
In the Burlington Arcade.

Box Of Chalks

Capitalist Comrade

In your pale grey suit and matching leather shoes
You wish to impress me, take me where the tourists go
To show me what I've missed. To see the free
Choosing from everything on earth. So we walk
You and I through your cobbled streets, between hordes
Of people shuffling unsmiling, buttoned up in nylon macs
Their packages tied with paper twine.

We reach your gold mine, the people's pride
Aladdin's cave of alloy pans, tin pots, blue-edged
Enamel plates, golden china cups and saucers
With matching coffee pots, enamel mugs
Long brown dishes shiny as glazed Algerian dates
And shelves of tea glasses with delicate tiny handles.

*Six for half a dollar, the assistant says, No change
For foreign currency. You take another six.*
She wraps them up in thick flecked paper, ties it
With a flick, snaps the twisted twine and we return,
You in your nylon mac, I, pretending not to notice you
Glancing back, repeatedly, over your shoulder.

Box Of Chalks

Cluster

I walk with my father late in the night
To look at what he wants to show me -
Something perfect, bright
That would delight me -
To see the school by the lake, the ski slope
Cratered and pitted from shelling.
I smell the perfume of the moonlit earth,
See its clouds in flight over the Beskids
And in the darkness, darker hedgerows.

Lakeside bushes are lit. They seem to swell,
Heave with roving light.
On the ground a glowing cluster
Rolls around trembling, stumbling.
It disappears when he shines
The torch on ants fighting for their life
Beneath a swarm of glow-worms.
The clouds, now motionless
Are suffocating the mountains.

Box Of Chalks

Photos

There were no traffic signs, no traffic lights
No coned-off intersections, just a cavity in the road
And pairs of militia men pacing the pavements
Like blue-tits, in regular visitations
Overseeing kerchiefed women digging.

Their shovels - sharp as blades - on five foot shafts
Twanged, severing cobblestones and rocks
From the road, scooping up the rubble. They swung them
Up to a wooden cart and each load they flung
Made the horse judder. The wheels slowly bulged
At the base, threatening to burst under the pressure.

In their high-heeled sling-back canvas boots
And ankle socks they stopped, wiped their hands
On wrap-over pinnies and leaned heftily on the shovels
Expressionless, waiting, watching me photographing you
In your Mary Quant suit, swinging your matching
Yellow handbag, your little finger just slightly raised.

In the background another pair of militia men hung back
High on the steps of the *Prezydent*, note-books at the ready
Observing the women watchers leaning. They waved
Belligerent, shooed us away and you shuddered,
The women laughing loudly still leaned on their shovels.

Box Of Chalks

Wedding Present

You wanted a shawl, a Silesian shawl - something different
Unusual, something nice - when every coat and every skirt
In every shop was the same indifferent price, same size
Same colour, same buttons, same length. The only differences
Were the varying degrees of the shop assistants' miseries.

You wanted a shawl, a Silesian shawl, when a kilo of bread
Cost two zloty, a small bread roll, a grosze. Recall when
Every family with a garden plot grew peas, potatoes
Cabbage and beet. When there was no meat, no sugar,
No lemons, no spice, you wanted a Silesian shawl.

In a shop with a window big enough for a blouse
You spied one nailed to the wall. It was, you said,
Exactly what you wanted, with silky black fringes
Down to your feet, long enough to wrap around twice.
I imagined how you'd flaunt its roses, vine lines,
Its tiny yellow posies bordered with Paisley scrawls
On that finest wool worsted.

Opening the door we both squeezed in. She knew right away
We weren't local, demanded three thousand zlotys
In notes up front before she would let us touch it.
You had enough money from my brother to buy
Half a Silesian house. You bought the shawl, our wedding gift
And wore it to the Harvest Ball in the Hilton. You left that night
With a Warsaw man who spoke with an American drawl.

PART THREE

1970 - 1995

Box Of Chalks

Impossible

If I could balance on a barrel,
Or tread a log from east to west
Over land and across the ocean
To Boston, in unison with the sun's motion,
Through the Pacific
Over the Yabonkowi Mountains
To Kharkow, and Krakow, and Arnhem
And back again to London
With the sun ever on my face, then
Only then could I say, I never
Let the sun go down on my anger.

Box Of Chalks

A Colonel

Flourishing tea cloths, you look, listen, mouth shut tight
Because you know they'll snigger and grunt at your inability

To get your nouns, tenses, and pronunciation right.
You are too polite to interfere or lose your dignity

So you say nothing to the parties of schoolboys
When they roar and guffaw and coarsely comment

On the contents of their pornographic magazines
Smuggled in from their excursion to the Continent.

You serve them with the courtesy of an officer, towering
Head and shoulders above them and their teachers.

Surrounded by mountains of crockery
Baskets of silver cutlery waiting to be washed by you

An officer, who once served the Czar, now paid by the hour
You wait, and polish silver with me at St. Pancras, B.R.

Box Of Chalks

Airman

Barefoot, Malinowski walked backwards
Arms above his head
Beckoning a plane from the sky, directing it
Along a runway as he'd done at home
Minding cows, near Alekzandrowicz aerodrome.

The small silver drone passed overhead
Glinting wings outspread,
Malinowski's signals ignored
By the pilot, the passengers,
The Sunday morning football players.

Undeterred in his baggy trousers, big blue shirt,
Neatly knotted tie, he sat down on Peckham Rye
Smiled, and quietly began to sing,
Goralu czy ci nie zal
Odchodzić od stron ojczystych?
Swierkowych lasow I hal,
I tych potokow srebrzystych
Goralu czy ci nie zal?
Goralu wracaj do hal!

He looked at me. He didn't see me the last time
I saw Malinowski, and today he makes the headlines
In a south-east London freebie;
Polish Airman Drowns In Bath
In Psychiatric Wing.

Translation.

Highlander, do you not grieve?
You had to leave your country
With its spruce forests, its woods,
Its streams and silvery brooks, your home.
Highlander, do you not grieve?
Go Highlander, return to your home.

Box Of Chalks

New Lives

I thought it was you inside the cathedral
With a woman and three young boys.
Then, I knew it was you
Standing opposite me, outside
On the piazza and you couldn't
Hear me above the din that day,
The day of the Papal visit.

Much older than in the *Arbeitsdienst*
When you wept over Tadek Kroll.
Karol Marszewski, I called to you
And you looked straight into my eyes.

Czesc! Karol! Moj stary przyjacielu,
Thrusting out my hand.
Reserved, unsurprised, cold,
Your *Good Morning Sir*, hung paralysed
On the Westminster air. You couldn't
Quite place me in your memory.
You didn't introduce your family.

Czesc! Karol! Moj stary przyjacielu, - Hello! Charles! My old friend,

Box Of Chalks

Tick Tock

Tick tock ticking tocks from the clock
On the shelf in my head as I watch you
Kneeling on the big crude chair,
Thin brown feet pointing to the floor.
You scoop out cups of flour from a bag
To the bowl babbling, *one, two, three, four,*
Five, six, seven, eight.
With the back of the spoon
You smooth the surface flat, straight
And sprinkle on cochineal that runs
In rivulets of red on white and slowly
My head implodes with curses
In German, Italian, and Polish
And water-drums burst, hissing in my ears
And for a moment I'm en route to Calais
Hearing Ted beg, yelling for forgiveness,
Watching you smashing at the flour, exploding it
Over the table. I try to console you
Wipe your floury face - I can't control
Your bellow, your screaming,
I want to colour it yellow.
I want to whack you till you stop, till
The tick, tick, tocking stops;
Till it stops.

Box Of Chalks

Toeing the Line

With a sandwich box and a flask of lemon tea
Laced with honey, a slim school-bag
With a reading book and your list
Learned for your spelling bee
I follow you through the streets
Your green school coat flying out
From your flapping arms as you hop
And skip and hop and jump from tile
To tile, trying to miss the cracks,
Singing, babbling, giggling to yourself
In your just right *Startright* shoes
And when the big bronze bell is being rung
A world and two streets away in the school
You take my hand and walk tall, marching
Left right, click-click, left right
Click-click, click-click, click-click.
You fall into line, straightening your hat
Your uniform tie, disciplined already
At five, knowing and obeying rules.

Box Of Chalks

Wishing

School all week, then Polish Saturday-School
And in the afternoon Polish Scouts
Then by bike to the swimming pool.
Ballet classes Monday to Thursday,
Piano and violin lessons were the rule.

Friday night was kept for Polish dancing
And singing, with Mazury
Behind West London's Moscow Road,
Rehearsing at The Festival Hall for TV shows,
Charity Balls and tours in Spain and France.

But I wish you could have taken flight
Across snow fields at night, on skis of willow, shrieking,
Exhilarated, with a frozen nose, nursed tingling toes
And fingers instead of bandaging your blistered feet
In *pointe* shoes, praying you wouldn't grow.

Box Of Chalks

Blood Ties

Buried up to your lookouts in sand, tilting to the Channel
Your rough foundations skyward, a vulgar history wiped clean
From blood and cries, under the sun and the rain and the winds,

Beach-buttercups have taken root at your core, dry crude tendrils
Flagging tattered plastic, protrude like burnt barley sugar sticks.
Decay, surrounded by Kronenberg bottles, coke cans, condoms,
Disintegrating disposable nappies, little Ella took twenty minutes
To conquer you. She stood on you in triumph shouting, waving
In the sun, yellow cotton dress slapping at her sandy knees.

I didn't allow myself the luxury of curses nor damn you to hell
When she fell, pushed over by the wind, but cursed the rippling
Heat-hazed beach and took the dunes spiked with wild grasses,
Sand tumbling beneath my weight. I climbed on top of you
My hand slipping on the blood that oozed from her foot
Torn on rusting tendrils, your reinforcing rods.

Her sunburnt face, distorted and dirty, let out a primitive scream
That carried down the beach, echoed, got thrown back again
Reaching some subdued part of me that wanted to be free.
I carried her down leaving a red pool trapped on your concrete
To dry and mingle with the blood, the cries, and the quiet history
Of Todt's silent Slavs along the Channel to the Atlantic.

Border Crossing

Halt brings us all to order,
Our silence is like a boom.
We shunt by the inch in petrol fumes
And the smell of summer tyres.
Roadside weeds and grasses whisper
In the warm downwind stench
Of the open breeze-block loo
And we wait, wait, wait in the queue.

Our boot is stuffed with tights and tops,
Flocked fluffy terylene curtains
Paracetamol tablets, apricots,
Coffee, lemons, tea and currants,
A pair of Levis, Wranglers, nylon macs,
A bridal veil, a white lace dress in tissue
And the silence is like a boom.

Our visas and faces are scrutinised.
We'll be interrogated. We're bringing in
Too much stuff. We smile, nod, smile,
Nod again, co-operate, politely assisting
The uniformed guards extricate
Their finger nails
From the cobwebby-silk wedding veil
And thank them when we don't fail to enter.

Box Of Chalks

No-Man's-Land.

I drive slowly in first gear
Listening to stones crunching,
Catapulting away from the wheels,
And I glance at you checking
Our stamped passports,
Ink spattered transit visas,
Knowing cameras are marking every move,
Recording our unsmiling faces
As we are swallowed whole in our camper bus.

I inhale deeply
Going through the sinewy oesophagus,
Suffocating - sweating - silent.

Even with passports, blue, royal, crowned British,
Buttoned down deep in my pocket I feel
A lesser man, in no-man's-land.

Zig-zagging carefully
Between cement road-blocks
Set a third from the right,
A third from the left
Of the mesh steel curtain, we sway,
And I don't stop till I feel slapping wheels
Flap on the bumpety streets of Bratislava
And see its stained grey blocks -
Pocked with impetigo crust -
Which have wept rain from every window-sill,
Over cement tumours, and rot
At the end of their lifetime
On the other side of no-man's-land,
Where I exhale.

Amber

When I introduced my daughter to you
You bowed, took her hand and raised it
To your lips, I noticed her shudder
In an unsophisticated un-English way.

She had known about your striped uniform
With 'P' stitched to the back, the deep 'v' dented
Facial scar and your louse-free shaven head - but
I hadn't prepared her well enough. I expected
London toughness to disregard the stumpiness
Of your right hand, its first three fingers missing.

Reassuring her that Auschwitz got
Only your three fingers, their army part of my mind,
Laughingly you choked back tears, presented her
With bread and salt, her grandmother's wedding band
And amber earrings with a million years of Poland
Caught in the summer light.

Broken Cannon

Psychotherapy sessions at ten on the dot,
Turned out at quarter to eleven
Once a month with medication,
Three times a day with food,
And a visit to Daquise in Kensington,
Then the Sikorski Museum, where,
To the left of the heavy front door
On the floor, is a cannon
Made in a foundry in Katowice.
I think I know how it feels.

Yes. I know if that cannon could cry
It would wail, howl with the pain it felt
Once, when it was fighting for its life
In some campaign, firing, firing, firing,
Till it melted, till its metal mouth softened,
Caved in, and must have exploded
And got slapped back and grafted
To the side of its neck, like black meat,
And abandoned, left as scrap
In the long grass, to die in the rain.

Yes. A tired, old, cannon gun
Too broken to be repaired
Sitting quietly in Kensington
A Made in Poland plaque
On its back for the occasional
Visitor to see - almost complete
Except for a wheel, and a piece in the front,
At its mouth - which I touch once a month,
A consoling pat on the torn side of its barrel,
After my psychotherapy.

Box Of Chalks

Psychotherapy

Reading my notes
From the pile in front of you,
You haven't a clue who I am.
You're new in post.
I sit on this side of your desk,
You look at me, I look at you
You ask me how I feel.
I feel tissue thin. *Which army*
Did you say you were in?
Uncomfortable, I want to tell you,
Three,
Shadow of my ghost beside me.
You say,
You seem to be pulling through.
Do you want to talk about it?
Do the dreams still bother you?

I've told it all before
Every day for months.
Once a week for six months
Once a month for a year
There is no point in talking
Of conscription or the front,
I had no striped uniform
No number on my arm
No stitched-on star, no 'P',
Germany conscripted me
And I cannot get free.

Box Of Chalks

Dust

Kochana, my love!
I've used a ball point pen,
Not the special felt tips
On your new white board
The way you said I should.

Kochana, my love! Why
Can't we have a black-board
That can be used and used again?
We've got bits in the chalk box,
No point in hoarding them.

Kochana, my love! Where's my hat,
The shopping list, my walking stick
My watch? And a note in case
You come home, *Kochana*, I write
In the dust with my finger,
Gone to Maczkowski,
For rye bread and kabanos,
On the sunlit bedroom mirror.

Box Of Chalks

In The Imperial War Museum

I can touch you with both hands now,
Slide them along your body, so solid, mute,
Yet, half expect you to hump forward,
As you did in Bradley's battalions,
With your great scythes, clawing pincers that tore
Through the earth lifting whole hedgerows,
Trailing rocks and soil, blackberry bushes,
Wild roses' roots, ivy vine strung with frogs
And baby chaffinches beneath your rumbling belly
As you sped to Falaise, days, months, years ago.

Then - then, when you'd shuddered into view
With five pairs of telescopic eyes
Sweeping across every blade of grass,
I sat by my stacks of shells
With a fifty-five millimetre gun,
Dry mouthed, cold, afraid to run
Feeling as small as this school boy
Sketching you with a crayon, beside
His drawing of a black stag beetle.

Box Of Chalks

Winter

I walk with you around the park as promised
On a winter day in a precious bite of sunlight
Between late morning and invading early night,
Just before the street-lights snort quietly
And drench us with that yellowish orange glow.

You've thrown your last crusts
And slices of rubbery bread to the geese,
The ducks and the coots and remind me
To take my gloves and glasses,
My *Polski Gazette* from the bench,

Then you climb back into your push-chair,
Swivel round, flop down, red Wellington boots
In the air, their soles decorated with droppings
And feathers. You're yawning - chocolate stains
On your milk teeth - I'm half-heartedly agreeing
To come back with you again, in the morning.

Box Of Chalks

A Sunflower

She sits among the ants' dust-hills
On the sun-warm paving stones,
Her plastic cups and dishes clogged with sand.
She's taken the box of coloured chalks,
Untouched for years among volumes
Of Polish history, and she crushes
Blue and yellow, black and green
Getting an earthy brown, and rubs it
With muddy hands on the stones,
Creating a circle the size of a plate.

Round the edges she yellows in
Awkward oval shapes, then takes a stick
Of green and makes a stumbling line
All the way from the casement windows
To the border where the grass begins,
She maps a green leaf with unruly veins
Across the patio, her dusty bare feet
Catching the hem of her dress.
I've made a sunflower for you, Dziadek, she lisps.
Yellow chalk-dust stains her cheeks.

Chapter 1

Part 1

Genesis of the Poems

This collection of poetry, *Box Of Chalks*, is formed from a reverberation of World War II and its aftermath. The work is from the marginalised point of view of a young Polish boy, one of many, who found themselves in the German Army and on the German front line in World War II, conscripted in the spring of 1943 under the German National List known in Silesia, Poland, as the *Volksliste*. *Box Of Chalks* is not a study of war or a politically analysed text, but an artist's means of representing a conscript's experiences from boyhood to manhood to old age, in a sequence of poems. The subject matter had become a totemic issue for me as a poet, long before the poems were undertaken. The later research raised delicate questions which had to be answered before I could write the poems in a voice, or voices of men whose lives had imploded long after the Second World War.

Some of the silent voices of men, whose sacrificed lives have been overlooked or ignored, are now heard through the writings of their descendants such as Mary Penick Motley, the poet Jane Duran, and poets like Anna Swirszczynska and Anna Akhmatova. Akhmatova, standing in a prison visitors' queue in Leningrad during the Stalin Terrors, when asked by a 'woman with blue lips' '*Can you describe this?*' answered, '*I can*',¹. Although I have not had the tragic experiences of a woman like Akhmatova, or the experiences of war, it was important to voice the unvoiced trauma of Polish conscripts, through writing.

Mary Penick Motley² recorded the experiences of black American soldiers because, 'history texts have made little, if any, mention of the black soldiers in America's wars'. Jane Duran recorded her father's silence about the Spanish Civil War and recalls in her poems what must have been his unbearable pain when she addressed the *Spanish Peasant Boy* in his *loud stone boots and cropped hair*:

Perhaps you will see my father

¹ Anna Akhmatova, *You Will Hear Thunder*, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1976), p 87.

² Mary Penick Motley, *The Invisible Soldier*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), p 17. Penick Motley recorded the experiences of black American soldiers because 'history texts have made very little, if any, mention of the black soldiers in America's wars, as if the black had disappeared during wartime only to reappear when the smoke cleared away'.

*In the band of soldiers
With his hair cropped too,
the cypresses toiling
along the edges of your field.
Perhaps you will leave everything
as he did*

*and cross the borders,
go to France, America,
anywhere that will have you.*¹

Her poems are a detailed look at what her father lived and fought through during the Spanish Civil War, and are written in the author's voice. *Box Of Chalks* was intended to be otherwise and the main research question in forming the poems was that of voice. Consideration was given to the question of single or multiple voices and whether or not a single male voice, which was the original option, could be sustained throughout the planned project of between fifty and sixty poems. Incorporating various voices and their owners' experiences would possibly have extended and enhanced the text. However, of the men I met before the work started, each had his individual experience and unique coping mechanism for the experiences during his German conscription and after World War II. Therefore, I came to the conclusion that by incorporating various voices, the fluidity of the text and the narrative might be disrupted and inconsistent. The incidents which interested me, and which I hoped to illustrate in the project, would have been spread too thinly. The idea of multiple voices was eliminated and the development of one voice was pursued. I decided that the initial idea for a single voice would provide an organizing principle and direct me through a narrative.

The subject of the project, whom I shall call Stefan, felt that his and others' voices had to be heard. He had been frank about his conscription and front line experiences, but he could not write about it. Those related experiences became the foundations on which I worked. Stefan was fourteen years old and the youngest boy in his family when they were registered and their fingerprints recorded on the *Volksliste*. According to the records at Opole in Western Poland, ninety per cent of the inhabitants of Silesia [were] registered on the German National List even though,

'the great majority of the people included in groups III and IV had in no way

¹ Jane Duran, *Silences from the Spanish Civil War*, (London: Enitharmon Publishing 2002), p 29.

ceased regarding themselves as Poles¹.

However, when researching material for the poems, my experience has been that, although there is evidence² that conscripts complied with the law, anecdotal evidence after the war has been that few admitted compliance with the German law. Advertising in a Polish newspaper requesting information on 'Polish men's experiences, if, and when, they had been conscripted into the German Army'³ returned one negative and aggressive response. I also found that most people were unwilling to talk to me about where in Poland they had been born. That raised delicate issues - such as why, after fifty years, they still would not [or could not] reveal from which part of Poland they came. I also considered carefully, whether or not I could have the courage to say to Polish friends, "Yes, some Poles did wear the German uniform. These are the reasons why, and this is how some of them felt during and after the war, and, as a poet, I have written about the experiences of one of the conscripts". As Heaney said about the Polish poet Anna Swirszczynska,

A poet becomes an antenna capturing the voices of the world, a medium expressing his [her] own subconscious and the collective subconscious. For one moment he [she] possesses wealth usually inaccessible to him [her] and he [she] loses it when that moment is over⁴.

My 'antenna' caught the wealth of an unusual story and I could not let the moment slip. There was a compulsion to represent conscript survival in poetry. I believed that, if not recorded, it would do an injustice to those who have not heard and might wish to hear of their fathers', uncles', or grandfathers' voices. Therefore, it would be irresponsible not to record.

During the research, a chance encounter with an ex-military man at a museum was a revealing experience, he appeared to be:

An upright pillar
Of Polish society. He was aghast
That anyone should want to see
Records of Polish boys

¹ Kazimierz Popiolek, *Silesia in German Eyes* (Katowice: Slask, 1964), p 73.

² *Ibid.*, p 71.

³ *Dziennik Polski* 18th – 25th Pazdziernika 1998, [*Polish Daily*, 18th – 25th October 1998]

⁴ Seamus Heaney, *The Government of the Tongue* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), p 93. Heaney referred to the 'inspiration of the Polish poet Swirszczynska who wrote of it as a *psychosomatic phenomenon*'.

Conscripted into the German Army
Or captured in Normandy.
*You won't find that
At the Sikorski.*¹

His patriotism was so apparent as to generate two poems, *Changing Colours at the Sikorski*, written in response to his opinion on the Polish conscripts, and the second poem, *Advice*, was written from notes made on my experiences there during my research,

.....my dear
We knew they were Poles! But,
Silesian Poles.
They're not, at all, like us.
Except for the bloody Canadians
We'd have blown out the bastards' guts,
White flags or no white flags
We should have been allowed
To do our stuff.
Wipe them off the face of the earth,
That's what I always say...²

I found a layer of history which, in some Polish circles in England, has not and is not openly discussed; nor has it been openly acknowledged in Poland until recently when Alojzy Lysko³ published a small collection of accounts, photographs and letters to and from some Polish men who had been conscripted into the German army. According to Lysko, if the subject of 'Polish men in German uniform' was raised in Poland, it was denied, condemned or viewed negatively. People were afraid to speak on the subject, although it is documented in the archives of the Opole, Raciborz, Prudnik, Bielsko and other districts of Silesia, Poland⁴.

To be known to have worn a German uniform was, and still is, generally looked upon with horror⁵. In Polish circles in England after the Second World War, an ex-combatant who had worn a German army uniform, albeit involuntarily, would have been constantly alert to the responses of those not confronted with such a dilemma.

¹ See Appendix A. *Changing Colours at the Sikorski*.

² Ibid., B. *Advice*.

³ Alojzy Lysko, *To byli nasi ojcowie [These Were Our Fathers]* (Bojszowy: Gminny Osrodek Rozwoju w Bojszowach, 1999).

⁴ Kazimierz Popiolek, *Silesia in German Eyes*, (Katowice: Slask, 1964)

⁵ Prince Harry, son of Prince Charles, was condemned by the public and the media for wearing a German uniform even for the purposes of a fancy dress party. His picture appeared in the Sun newspaper on 13th January 2005.

During the research, I found that the wearers resorted to silence or isolation. Two Polish men prevaricated and told me different stories about how they had arrived in England. I had been aware that they also had been conscripted into the German army. Another said that his wife was from Holland. At a later date and unknown to him, his wife told me that she was German.

The choice was stark for Hitler's Polish conscripts who surrendered and were taken prisoner-of war by the Allies¹ in 1944. The conscripts were placed almost immediately into the Polish Army under British Command² till the end of the war then demobbed without a country, without language, without parents or family. Lysko remarks on their 'being pulled out at the roots from their homes in villages, and small country towns³'. The now ex-conscripts could either be silent and survive, or tell their true story and be shunned from proud and patriotic Polish communities and individuals. Remaining silent made life easier but it created shadowy skeletons which kept trying to escape from the conscript's past. Having to live with such thoughts and being unable to share them took its toll in the aftermath of World War II.

¹ Carlo D'Este, *Decisions in Normandy*, (London: Harper Perennial, 1994), p 430. n.i. Some 10,000 Germans perished in the Falaise Pocket and an estimated 50,000 were taken prisoner. There were thought to be nearly 80,000 Germans trapped, and though it later proved impossible to make an accurate accounting of how many escaped, the figure is thought to be about 20,000.

² Michael Hope. *Polish Deportees In The Soviet Union*, (London: Veritas Foundation, 2000), p 21. Wladyslaw Anders, *An Army In Exile*, (London: Macmillan, 1949), p 153. General Anders offered reinforcements to the British General Maitland Wilson for the II Polish Army, those 'Poles fighting on the Continent, all Poles, and, above all, those Poles who had been conscripted by force into the German army'.

³ Alojzy Lysko, *To byli nasi ojcowie [These Were Our Fathers]* (Bojszowy: Gminny Oszrodek Rozwoju w Bojszowach, 1999), p 7.

The division of Poland under the Yalta Agreement¹ had a devastating effect on Polish people. The Polish Government, which, having fled from a burning Warsaw² to Paris in September 1939, operated in exile in London³. England's prisoner-of-war camps were filled with thousands of German, Central European, and East European combatants in German Army uniform from 1943⁴. The talks at Yalta meant the repatriation of all Soviet Citizens to the Soviet Union, which, at that time controlled Poland⁵. The Ukrainian General Pavlo Shandruk and the Polish General Wladyslaw Anders, as did others, made representation to the British High Command setting out the position of those combatants who were not Soviet citizens. Nikolai Tolstoy in his examination of the consequences and aftermath of Yalta wrote of the fear in the people who wore a German uniform, for whatever reason. Of 10,000 'Soviet Citizens' to be repatriated under the Yalta Agreement, all except 112 of a Ukrainian division were *disputed* persons and *not* Soviet citizens⁶. It is therefore not surprising that Poles from all parts of Europe, whose

¹ Norman Davies, *God's Playground A History Of Poland Vol II 1795 to the Present*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp 487 – 8. At Yalta, 'between 4th and 11th February 1945, Churchill and Roosevelt made token efforts to reassert their influence on Europe. Despite the unilateral recognition of the Provisional Government of the Polish Republic, 1945, by the USSR, they insisted that representatives of the parties supporting the Government-in-Exile should be admitted to the Warsaw Government. They recognised Poland's right to lands annexed from eastern Germany without defining their extent. At Potsdam between 17th July and 2nd August, America, Britain and Russia settled most of the outstanding problems, approved the expulsion of Germans from Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary and insisted that free and democratic elections be held at the nearest opportunity to confirm the composition of the established government, and with that, the Western Powers left Poland to its fate'.

² *Ibid* p 437.

³ *Ibid* p 285. The Polish Government in Exile consisted of the pre-war and wartime politicians General Anders, President August Zaleski, Edward Raczynski, Marian Kukiel, Adam Ciolkosz and Jędrzej Giertych continued to operate from the *Zamek* (The Castle) at 43 Eaton Place in London up until the fall of the communist regime in Poland when the trade union *Solidarnosc* was legally recognised in 1989.

⁴ Nikolai Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton 1977), p 112.

⁵ Wladyslaw Anders, *An Army In Exile*, (London: Macmillan & Co Ltd 1949), p 257. The Provisional Government of National Unity was set up in June 1943, 75% of its members by Russia and many of them not Polish citizens.

⁶ Nikolai Tolstoy, *Victims Of Yalta*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton,1977), p 257.

disputed borders constantly shifted,¹ making it almost impossible to discern nationality, were in terror of being repatriated to the Soviet Union alongside the thousands of Soviet people. Millions died in labour camps, in squalor and in poverty, including ‘hundreds of thousands of Poles who were forcibly evacuated to the depths of the Soviet Union’².

When General Anders negotiated the release of deported Poles in the Soviet Union in September 1941, at the Buzuluk depot, he saw:

..17,000 soldiers paraded for [his] arrival. Most of them had no boots or shirts, and all were in rags, often the tattered relics of old Polish uniforms. There was not a man who was not an emaciated skeleton and most of them were covered with ulcers, resulting from semi-starvation. They were all well showered and shaved and showed a fine soldierly bearing³.

In September 1941, 11,000 Polish officers who were prisoners of war, were murdered in the Katyn Forest near Smolensk⁴.

¹ Norman Davies, *God's Playground A History Of Poland Vol II 1795 to the Present* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp 492 – 535.

² Wladyslaw Anders, *An Army In Exile*, (London: Macmillan, 1949), p 56-74. General Anders imprisoned in Lubianka for twenty months, and after the German attack on Russia was released in August 1941 to be Commander of a newly formed Polish Army with the consent of the Soviet Government. The Polish-Russian Military Agreement was signed on 14th August 1941. Anders recorded and referenced statements from Polish prisoners and deportees who joined his army and who witnessed Soviet camps at Bukhta-Nakhodka, Kolyma and Magadan. One witness, reference No.16020, reported that a camp at Magadan was occupied exclusively by those crippled with frost-bite in the mines. Even those who had lost both hands had to work pushing timber blocks with their feet. p 74.

With the gradual organization of [Anders'] Polish army there arrived ‘from all parts of the boundless Russian territory a flood of thousands and dozens of thousands of prisoners of war and imprisoned or deported civilians, who told of their experiences and of the fate of their families and friends. They were but a small proportion of the people deported to Russia....When they came together in the army it became clear to[the Poles] how the Russians had systematically drained from Poland all people of value to the nation, what-ever their racial origin, class or religion: Poles and Ukrainians, White Ruthenians, Lithuanians and Jews, landowners and farmhands, factory owners and workers, officers and other ranks, judges, tradesmen and policemen, Roman Catholic priests and Protestant ministers and Rabbis, all were torn away from their homes, absorbed by the monstrous machine of the N.K.V.D., and sent to the Soviet prison camps. Their deportation was followed by the forcible removal of their wives and families, old people and children, to the deserts of Kazakstan or the Siberian wilderness.’ pp 65 - 6.

Statistics from Poland confirmed the official number of deportees between 1.5. and 1.6.million. p 69.

³ Ibid. p 64.

⁴ Ibid. Anders records that most Polish officers were taken prisoner by the Red Army and put in three camps, Kozielsk, east of Smolensk, Starobielsk, near Kharkov, and Ostashkov near Kalinin in September 1939. At the beginning of 1940 there were 5,000 men at Kozielsk (4,500 among them officers); 3,920 men at Starobielsk (all of them officers, with the exception of about 100 civilians, cadet officers and ensigns); 6,700 men at Ostashkov, among them 380 officers and the rest N.C.O.s, frontier guards, priests and public officers of courts of justice. Of all the above 15,000 prisoners of war, only 400 were released after the Polish-Soviet agreement of July 30, 1941. p 119.

Anders was taken prisoner with Gen. Plisowski, 3 Colonels and 50 officers in September 1939. When released after twenty months, he learned that many of his officers had been held until spring 1940 at the Starobielsk camp. He approached the Soviet authorities when puzzled by the small number of officers reporting for service in the Polish Army and was reassured that all would be released. Anders learned ‘that

General Sikorski, concerned for the fate of Polish deportees to Russia, advised General Anders in a letter during the war that [he, Anders] was,

fully acquainted with the position of Poles in the U.S.S.R. A breach with Russia would be a sentence of death for hundreds of thousands of these people, and amongst them thousands of next of kin of our soldiers who still remain there¹.

I believe that the people referred to by Sikorski, and the combatants in Anders' army, would have recognized and understood the revelations in Alexander Solzhenitsyn's books, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, and *The Gulag Archipelago*. Anders records the arrival of new transports from Russia to the military and civilian camps at Pahlevi near Teheran and that he was heartened 'to see these emaciated men, women, and children express their joy to be free again, dash down to bathe in the sea and splash.'²

'Of the 112,000 men in the II Polish Army Corps at the end of 1945, only seven officers and 14,200 men applied for repatriation, 8,700 being men who had joined after the end of hostilities', writes Anders. 'Of those who had come with us from Russia, and had been with the Corps throughout the campaign, only 310 applied for repatriation'. He states two things which influenced the decisions not to return to Poland, first 'the considerable number of soldiers who, after repatriation, fled from Poland and found their way through Czechoslovakia and Germany back to Italy, where they gave the men eye-

the camps of Kozielsk, Starobielsk, and Ostashkov were broken up in the spring of 1940, the prisoners from them being taken in batches to an unknown destination. From that time their families received no more letters from them. The 400 officers who were later released were sent from these three camps first to one at Pavlishchev-Bor, and later, in June 1940, to the Griasovietsk camp'. 'Not one of the missing officers was recovered'. Anders and the Polish Ambassador Professor Kot made many approaches to the Soviet authorities 'backed up by the enclosing of lists compiled from information given by their fellow-prisoners'. 'The soviet authorities never gave a concrete answer to the question "What has happened to the missing Polish prisoners of war?"' pp 120 - 1

General Anders received a letter dated May 17 1946, from Dr. Stahmer, counsel for the defence for Hermann Goering in the Nuremberg trial requesting, 'for the German defence all the facts which [General Anders] would consider essential for the study of this historic fact, and also if it is possible the names of further persons and other evidence which would help to obtain the truth about the Katyn murder. General Anders felt that he could not give evidence at the direct request of the German counsel for the war criminals but he offered to Colonel J. L. Tappin of the Liaison Section, G.H.Q., C.M.F., to do so at the request of the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg. General Anders had in his possession 'a considerable number of documents concerning the affair, but [would] only agree to give these documents to the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg at their express written and official request'. p 295-7. In 1990 under *glasnost*, Russia released papers written by Josef Stalin that ordered the deaths of 27,500 Poles of whom 11,000 were officers whose bodies were found in Katyn.

¹ Wladyslaw Anders, *An Army In Exile*, (London: Macmillan, 1949), p 139.

² *Ibid.* p 127.

witness accounts of the events in the home country'. Second, 'was the significant wording of the letters sent back to Italy'¹.

The image of Polish men as heroes, unflinching, dedicated to Poland is noteworthy as in the recent lives of such people as Maxmillian Kolbe and Janusz Korczak² and more recently Pope John Paul II. However, images grow and take on mythical lives of their own, and

...inevitably, legends abound. Deprived of their due share of military glory in modern times, the Poles are constantly drawn to tales of their nation's valour in the past³.

Henryk Sienkiewicz's fictional heroes such as Pan Wolodyjowski, [By Fire and Sword] whose feats gain him stature in the midst of national catastrophe, would seem to reinforce Polish national characteristics. The literary romantic hero Zbyszko in *Krzyzacy*⁴ published in 1900 and set in the wars of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries at the Battle of The Grundewald was read in Poland before 1939⁵. *Krzyzacy*, the story of the young and handsome Zbyszko, an 'Ivanhoe type character' who rescues his sweetheart Danusia, was also read, recited and acted out in Polish Saturday Schools and Summer Camps in England by the children of Polish people who remained in England after the Second World War. Heroism and patriotism were prevalent in such settings, - stirring poetry and patriotic songs were taught and sung and an appearance of success, strength and cohesion was evident.

After the trauma of the war, deportation to Siberia, deprivation, starvation, and transportation to the Middle East⁶, Polish people in England⁷ clung to their memories,

¹ Wladyslaw Anders, *An Army In Exile*, (London: Macmillan, 1949) p 287.

² Maxmillian Kolbe, 1894 – 1941, Franciscan Priest who took the place of a father with children condemned to die in the gas chambers in Auschwitz. Kolbe died in Auschwitz in 1941. Janusz Korczak, writer, educator, director of orphanages for destitute children. During WW II in Warsaw, Korczak refused to abandon two hundred children when they were sent to Treblinka, a German concentration camp. He was never heard from again.

³ Norman Davies, *God's Playground A History Of Poland Vol II 1795 to the Present*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p 274.

⁴ *Krzyzacy*, Teutonic Knights

⁵ Henryk Sienkiewicz, awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1905, whose works include, *The Deluge*, (1886) *Children of the Soil*, (1893) *Quo Vadis* (1896) touched Polish people and described the Polish condition uniquely.

⁶ Wladyslaw Anders, *An Army In Exile*, (London: Macmillan, 1949), pp 111 - 3.

⁷ Michael Hope, *Polish Deportees In The Soviet Union*, (London, Veritas Foundation, 2000), p 57. Of the post-war figure of 127,000 military and civilian exiles, a slight excess of 80,000 of former deportees to the Soviet Union formed the backbone of the Polish community in Great Britain.

their language and their history, which, for many of them stopped in 1945 leaving them in a 'time warp'¹. Refusing to recognize the Soviet takeover of Poland, they adhered to their exiled Government's infrastructures of Polish boarding schools, Polish Saturday schools, welfare, advice centres, museums, libraries, social clubs, ex-combatant and air-force clubs as well as to the Polish Catholic Church in Britain up to the collapse of the Communist regime. Embittered by the failure of their aspirations for an independent Poland, and reluctant to put down roots in their involuntary exile, they lived in a spiritual ghetto of their own and made few contacts with British society at large'². Such was the atmosphere of the communities in which lived the Polish conscripts who had worn German uniform. Poland as a battered but unbowed nation of loyal heroes is a great and noble image. However, 'Poland's past is as chequered, and as complicated and in the last resort as inconclusive as anyone else's. Any pretence that it is otherwise can convince nobody'³. 'The apparent tendency to use historical scholarship as an instrument for reinforcing Polish national consciousness and by extension for obliterating all memory of the non-Polish cultures of the historic lands is bound to strike a note of discordance', says Norman Davies, 'it is a tendency all too reminiscent of the old German School of History whose conclusions about Eastern Europe are so earnestly contradicted by modern Polish scholars'. A people subjected to brutal traumas throughout their history 'can reflect with wonder and no small pride, on the events which have enabled them to survive, and sometimes flourish in face of great adversity'⁴, but there are parts of the nation's memory which should not be obliterated, that of the German conscription of those Poles who were forced to confront a moral dilemma, and, 'If Poles are to escape from the mental strait-jacket imposed by their political masters, [and the blind-folds removed by those who could look and see] they must start, as their forebears did, by re-examining their history'⁵.

¹ Sword Keith, *Identity In Flux*, (London: University of London, 1996), p 229.

² Norman Davies, *God's Playground A History Of Poland Vol II 1795 to the Present*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p 285.

³ *Ibid.*, pp 640 - 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p 642.

⁵ *Ibid.* p 640.

A layer of sacrifice remains mostly hidden both in Poland and abroad. I believe that that layer of unsung heroes, young boys who were illegally conscripted into an army, and, 'who lived in difficulty, in hardship, and in pain and in suffering for long years'¹, should be acknowledged. The Silesian conscripts to whom I have listened were a part of that hidden layer of history. Some concealed their conscription from wives, children, acquaintances and neighbours, ashamed of the position they found themselves in for that seemingly short time during World War II. They were, I am convinced, unwilling victims of war. They were left with psychological and emotional scars from suppressing their feelings of guilt and lifelong regret for having been disloyal [albeit forcibly] to their beloved Poland. Their experiences of fear, and exposure to death and killing made up the medical condition known as Acute War Neuroses².

The illness which was referred to as Shell Shock³ by medical doctors during and after the First World War and recognized today as, Post Traumatic Stress is still being treated. The BBC showed the care and support provided by the British Charity, Combat Stress⁴, to servicemen and women with combat-related psychological injury, and to ex-service men who still suffer the traumas of The Second World War. Those who have died and have taken the secret treasure of their experiences to the grave with them,

..may guard the treasure, but it's useless treasure unless it can be brought back into the land of the living and allowed to enter time once more – which means to enter the realm of the audience, the realm of the readers...⁵

As a poet I have delved into their past to reclaim their voices in poetry. Evidence of suffering and the fragments of histories of the Polish ex-service men, which I learned about during the anniversary of the Second World War, and the need for

¹ Neal Ascherson, *The Struggles For Poland*, (London: Michael Joseph, 1987), p 164.

² *The Lancet*, July 6, 1940. William Sargant, M.B. Camb., M.R.C.P., D.P.M., Psychiatric Specialist, E.M.S. and Eliot Slater, M.B.Camb., M.R.C.P., D.P.M. Clinical Director of a Neurological Unit, E.M.S. reported 'acute cases of war neuroses[created by] the accumulation of strains, both physical and mental, of great intensity - bodily danger, continuous physical exertion, loss of sleep, insufficiency and irregularity of meals, intermittent but perpetually recurrent bombardment, and the sight of comrades and civilian refugees being killed round them'.

³ Anthony Babington, *Shell-Shock*, (London: Leo Cooper, 1997), pp 3 – 6. Men with Shell Shock who became separated from their regiments or who were incapable of fighting because of nervous breakdown during the First World War were often not believed and accused of desertion or cowardice and executed by firing squad.

⁴ *Panorama*, a documentary shown on BBC television 17th July 2005.

⁵ Margaret Atwood, *Negotiating With the Dead, A writer on Writing*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp 178 – 9.

care and treatment in its aftermath by the charity Combat Stress, gave impetus to the creation of the poems. In association with that was my interest in Hitler's endless supply of people for labour ¹ and the German front lines. The anniversary threw up memories of comradeship alongside the media's offerings of Glenn Miller's ² Army Air Force Band recordings, reissues of newspaper war reports, war poetry readings on television, screenings of old war films, the issue of photographic collections, exhibitions of war-time domestic utensils and food, and clothing rationing. There were interviews with those who had lived through, and experienced the Second World War. Although a time for rejoicing, and a celebration of fifty years of peace in Britain and Europe, the anniversary was also a reminder of the tragedy of war. It brought back memories of hardship and acute sadness for the Polish ex-service men who had been conscripted into the German Army.

During the 1995 celebrations, ex-forces comrades and compatriots followed threads of contact with one another through the Red Cross and ethnic newspaper adverts. I was introduced to several Polish men from Silesia who had not returned to Poland after the Second World War because of the political decisions taken at the Yalta Conference ³. Good and bad news was exchanged about what had happened during the years in post war conditions. But after the initial meeting there was sadness and obvious grief. Then guilt and distress became evident because the details of the survivors' brutal war experiences began to emerge. They talked about feeling guilty for being alive and for having survived and living 'comfortably' in America and England. They felt guilty for not having taken time to bury their dead friends in the

¹ Gordon Craig, *Germany 1866 – 1945*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), Fritz Todt (1891-1942) German engineer became the General Inspector for the German Road System in June 1936. In 1938 Hitler appointed him General Plenipotentiary for the Regulation of Construction within the framework of the Four Year Plan Organization. Todt, responsible directly to Hitler, rapidly built an empire of his own which comprised a network of agencies for the planning and administration of projects like the construction of Germany's western defences and for the regulation of contracts with private firms and mobilization of labour. He was also Reich Minister for Armaments and Munitions.

² 1904-1944 American trombonist and band leader of the US Army Air Force Band in Europe, Miller was lost without trace during a flight between England and France.

³ Norman Davies, *God's Playground A History Of Poland Vol II - 1795 to the Present*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p 488. The Yalta Conference between the Allied leaders, Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin planned the final stages of The Second World War and agreed the subsequent territorial division of Europe. The Governments of the Western powers recognized the so-called provisional Government of National Unity imposed upon Poland by Russia and thus withdrew recognition from the legal Government of the Polish Republic in exile in London.

middle of a battle. They felt guilty for choosing not to go back to Poland after the war, guilty for having been safe in the prison camps, guilty for having eaten food in the west when families in Poland had stood in bread queues during the sixties, seventies, and eighties¹. But the utmost guilt was for having worn a German Army uniform when they were illegally conscripted as boys under the German National Register known as the *Volkliste* which was declared on Silesia, Poland, on 4th March 1941².

German expansion had been swift. In the Reichstag on 30th January 1937, Adolf Hitler formally withdrew Germany's signature from the clauses of the Versailles Treaty which had denied her equality of rights and laid on her the responsibility for the 1914 -18 War³. Germany wanted the corridor of land on her eastern borders which included Posen / Poznan, Pomerania / Pomorze, and Danzig / Gdansk which, by the Versailles Treaty, was granted to Poland and allowed her access to the sea. That area of land had been 'grabbed by Prussia at the time of the partitions when Prussia, Russia, and Austria had destroyed the Polish nation. For more than a millennium it had been inhabited by Poles – and, to a large extent, it still was'⁴.

The German National List, which provided the political genesis for the poems, was known as the *Deutsche Volkliste* or *DVL*. It divided the population of Silesia, Poland, into four groups according to people's quality of allegiance to Germany. To disobey the law under the List meant imprisonment or death. Compliance with the law created moral dilemmas, questions of patriotism, and a fissure in what appeared to be a patriotic and cohesive people. Dominik Stoltman⁵ a Polish man conscripted into the German Army wrote about dilemmas which he, his siblings and his parents faced in Silesia. The moral maze thrown up under the Nazi occupation forced his family and their neighbours to make unbelievable compromises, yet, said Neal Ascherson, 'the

¹ Norman Davies, *Heart Of Europe*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp 369 - 372. In 1970 the regular army units in Poland were ordered to fire on rioters in the Baltic region.

Neal Ascherson, *The Struggles For Poland*, (London: Michael Joseph, 1987), Warsaw Radio announced on December 12th 1970 that food prices would rise by 14% - 17%. Thousands of workers marched in protest to the party headquarters and police opened fire on the demonstrators. pp 180 - 2.

² See Appendix G. Document 2917-PS 1941 Reichsgesetzblatt, [Photo copy of German legal document] Part 1 p 118 and appendix H, pp 587 – 589. *Nazi Conspiracy And Aggression* Vol. V (Washington: United States Government, 1946),

³ Alan Bullock, *Hitler A Study in Tyranny*, (London: Penguin Books, 1962), pp 355 - 6.

⁴ William Shirer, *The Rise And Fall of the Third Reich*, (London: Pan Books, 1964), pp 558 - 9

⁵ Dominik Stoltman, *Trust Me You Will Survive*.(Edinburgh: Pentland Press, 1994).

compromises neither dishonoured nor diminished them, but reinforced their humanity'¹. At that time it was a struggle for most Polish people just to stay alive, especially in such circumstances as that of,

a group of small children being led by their teacher to the shelter of the woods. Suddenly there was the roar of an aeroplane. The pilot circled round, descending to a height of 50 meters. As he dropped his bombs and fired his machine-guns, the children scattered like sparrows. The aeroplane disappeared as quickly as it had come, but on the field some crumpled and lifeless bundles of bright clothing remained².

Staying alive and remaining loyal to Poland was not an easy task. Many years after the war, on his return to Warsaw in October 1956, Stefan Wyszynski, The Primate of Poland said,

A man dies once and is quickly covered in glory, but he lives in difficulty, in hardship, and in pain, and in suffering for long years - that is the greater heroism. It is harder to live for Poland than to die for her³.

This proclamation however, did not stop the guilty feelings and the life-long regret felt by the conscripted men who never talked about heroism. Fear and the basic natural instinct to survive, forced the Silesian youths to go, as *The Good Soldier Schweik*⁴, where their fate dragged them during the years of Nazi terror and the Communist regime.

There were thousands of men from all over Soviet Russia, 'men of races as diverse as Georgian, Turkestani and Tartar; there were even bemused men from the Pamirs'⁵, forced and otherwise, to work for Germany under 'The 'Todt Organisation'⁶ in factories, mines, farms, defence, and anywhere it was deemed necessary to contribute to the German war effort. Evidence of some of the labour still exists in the gigantic

¹ Dominik Stoltman, *Trust Me You Will Survive*, (Edinburgh: Pentland Press, 1994) p viii.

² Wladyslaw Anders, *An Army In Exile*, (London: Macmillan, 1949), p 3.

³ Neal Ascherson, *The Struggles For Poland*, (London: Michael Joseph, 1987), p 164.

⁴ Jaroslav Hasek, *The Good Soldier Schweik*, (London: Penguin, 1988).

⁵ Nikolai Tolstoy, *Victims Of Yalta*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977), pp 114 – 118.

⁶ Gordon Craig, *Germany 1866 – 1945*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1981), Doctor Fritz Todt, Engineer, answerable directly to Hitler built an empire of his own which comprised of a network of agencies for the planning and administration of projects like the construction of Germany's western defences and for the regulation of contracts with private firms and mobilization of labour.

concrete bunkers which can be seen along some sections of the Normandy Coast¹. Russians and the peoples of Ukraine helped swell the armies of The Third Reich² but it was either conscription by decree or imprisonment and inevitable death for the population of Silesia³. The men whom I met during the anniversary of the Second World War confirmed that they did not volunteer to fight for Germany. According to them, [though their claims would be difficult to validate in view of the shame they already felt in being conscripted into the German Army] they acted subversively by miscalculating distances, misjudging conditions in the field, misunderstanding commands, mistaking orders and misfiring at targets as and when they could. Through the research I learned that the lives of these men and thousands of others who, by order of the National Registration Law were declared German in Silesia⁴, are seldom if ever remarked upon nor has their powerlessness, vulnerability, and in retrospect, youthful naiveté about the ‘prospect of possible adventure’, and their ‘go-where-your-fate-leads-you’⁵ optimism, been presented in poetry previously. While creating the sequence, *Box Of Chalks*, in the voice, and from the experiences of some Polish conscripts, I wanted to examine conscription under the *Volkliste*, because I wanted to acknowledge the impact made by the same conscripts on the formation of those Polish Armed Forces abroad when the Allied Armies were to defeat Germany in 1945⁶. Parallel with the historical territory I was travelling in, I was immersed in the world of invention and creativity and have used both my imagination and my researched discoveries as material for the poems and as a justification for the thesis.

¹ The gigantic bunkers are gradually being removed from the coastline and beaches by the Local Authorities in Normandy. A few are currently retained and shown to tourists. See *Box Of Chalks* p 56.

² Nikolai Tolstoy, *Victims Of Yalta*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977), pp 256 - 7.

³ Kazimierz Popiolek, *Silesia in German Eyes*, (Katowice: Slask, 1964), p 72.

⁴ Ibid. p 54. Directives by Heinrich Himmler for the Germanization of the East German borderlands are listed.

⁵ *Box Of Chalks, Ambitions* p 15 *Arbeitsdienst* p 16.

⁶ Wladyslaw Anders, *An Army In Exile*, (London: Macmillan, 1949), p 157. General Anders confirmed to General Sir Harold Alexander, Commander-in-Chief, Allied Armies in Italy, that reinforcements for the II Polish Army Corps would come over from the other side of the front, as all Poles who had been taken by force to serve in the German Army would take the first opportunity to escape and join them or surrender to the Allies and become prisoners of war.

Alojzy Lysko records lists of Polish men conscripted into the German army in his book *To byli nasi ojcowie* [*These Were Our Fathers*](Bojszowice: Gminny Osrodek Rozwoju w Bojszowach, 1999) pp132-9.s

Chapter 2

Part 1

Genesis of the Voice

Researching historical and anecdotal evidence provided part of the material needed to write the poems. The challenge was to open up the experiences of men whom I felt had been damaged by injustice and whose suffering should be acknowledged. I considered that writing in the third person would not create the empathy I was seeking in my poems and was convinced that a first person narrative would create a relationship between subject and reader. The first person required finding and developing a voice which would interest the reader in an intimate relationship. Not having written in a male persona, it became a major challenge which, at times during the writing process, became overwhelming. During an MA course which prescribed autobiographical writing, I found it impossible to use 'I'. Learning that the poet Vicki Feaver resisted using the pronoun 'I' as a way of making her poems less autobiographical¹ I pursued my aims and by accident or design, did achieve the form by veiling it in masculine gender when I wrote a poem based on a boy who had been hit by shrapnel while on front line combat. The poem emerged from material I had absorbed from my childhood in the 'stagnant atmosphere of a dull and corrupt oligarchy'², the North of Ireland where the remnants of World War II seem to reverberate in its political disruptions up to the present.

As a child, I was very conscious of a neighbour's son with, what appeared to be, a 'caved in' face. I remember that he talked to me once. He made a blubbing of sound; his cheek flapped in and out like the sides of a little bellow. It seemed that there was air trapped inside his mouth, and his eyes probed down at me from his great height. I was terrified and ran. He called out after me, but I kept running. Neighbours used to say, 'Poor, poor Owen. Poor soul! Hit by shrapnel'. I can't remember when or how, but suddenly Owen seemed to have disappeared. I thought that the shrapnel must be responsible in some way.

¹ Tony Curtis, *How Poets Work*, (Bridgend: Seren Poetry Wales Press, 1996), p 140.

² Don Patterson and Claire Brown, *Don't Ask Me What I Mean*, (London: Picador, 2003), p 215. The Leeds-born Tom Paulin attributes his creativity to his Northern Irish upbringing.

I thought a lot about 'Poor Owen' and the word, 'shrapnel', and repeated it over and over again in my head. *Shrapnel, shrapnel, shrapnel*. The noise it made would not leave me. I did not know the meaning of the word, nor, I suppose, did I ask. But the noise that the word made was almost painful to me at that early age. Its first serrated syllable, 'shrap', seemed to clatter or burst out of the mouth and end abruptly, stunted with its final deadening 'p' in the syllable, 'rap'. In my childishness it reminded me of a body blow. The word made me feel that there was something unbearably painful and death-knellish about it.

Childhood curiosity about why the sounds of words made the noise they did, and my being aware that those sounds affected me somehow, were probably the initial consciousness of primitive onomatopoeic links to communication through sounds and emotions. It is possible that I was connecting the sound of the word 'shrapnel' to 'Poor Owen's' face and his disappearance. I believe that the people I saw and heard like our neighbour 'Poor Owen', with the flapping face, who had received head and facial injuries during World War II, had a significant influence in the writing of the poem during the MA course. I had absorbed many stories of fathers, uncles and brothers who did not return from the war, and what had or might have happened to them during the war. I recalled the story of a boy being hit by shrapnel. Owen's face kept getting in the way. Images from the story became my original poem, the details of which are clear in my mind and as vivid as 'Poor Owen's face. I could see a vision of a boy hit by shrapnel, and it is an odd memory because I could almost feel his pain. The scenario was vivid too. There were trees, open ground, churned up earth, a farmhouse in the distance, a small church, and noise, deep, deep noise heaving and spewing below the ground. The conditions of the dying boy were clear; but perhaps I am recalling a part of my 'own buried life', or, 'in recalling scenes and moments marking one's own fancied [experiences], one sets the scene with lucid clarity to give it a verisimilitude sufficient for an efficacious self-torment'¹. At the time of writing the poem, I considered how the boy would have felt and what he might have said, and what might have been said to him and by whom. I think I inhabited his head at times because I believe that I felt what it was like on his battle field. The ideas about the dying boy grew when I started to write about

¹ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p 327.

the incident and I was fired with the publication of my first poem, *A Camp Revisited*,¹ based on Auschwitz. I felt indomitable making the major decision to write in a male persona. I employed a boy's dramatic monologue to create the moment of dying thus allowing me to write in the first person 'I'. A later draft appeared on the page as:

The Unknown Knew

Sanctum at a rough stone wall
I survey each blade of grass
Each stalk of clover
And press close to the wall,
My long sleep over.
Unmoved. The sun still burns me
In St. Lo or St. Malo,
I do not know.

Belching rumbles move
Round my muddy stomach
As the earth is penetrated
By soft pumping thuds.
A tuft of green flitters alive
With a hundred grasshopper's wings
In an island of grass.
The convulsive storm tingles my hand.

Chin-strap loosened, I breathe and rise
To the level of shredded sunflowers
Decapitated, churned among worms
And torn daisies in crumbed earth sods.
I, in a wakening dream
Secure in foetal dampness
Legs still, numbed in blood and urine,
Wait to be born, warm, without pain.

A name-tag sticks to my face.
It's not my name. What is my name?
Legs? Intact?
I see a helmet swinging before the sun
Exuding a rifle from its empty skull
Its bayonet between the grasshoppers.
They lift me from the moist earth
Without a sound.

My legs slop in muddy blood.
My throat explodes with vomit.
I rise, weightless, and float, cool
Calm, above the turmoil

¹ *English, The Journal of the English Association* Vol.43 No 177, Autumn 1994, p 236.

As the earth gently splits apart
Moving sunflowers, and legs, and daisies
Covering them with the soft grey blanket of wall
And I wonder if...

It was a piece of instinctive writing where I was the vehicle for that particular voice. It was not autobiographical as prescribed in the MA module; however, the poem was acceptable, and I continued working on it. My aim was to experiment in capturing the instant of death - to create the moment when life slips away and a space between life and death, or white and grey, or noise and silence is left, as when the body transmogrifies and becomes earth or the earth becomes part flesh when it receives the body. In retrospect, I was trying to capture transubstantiation on the page. It was as if the poem and those which developed from it¹, which I was creating at the same time, had pushed their way through me and spilled on my pages. Therefore, my inability to find my own voice has created another voice which has permitted me to immerse myself in the character of a Second World War combatant for the purposes of writing these poems in a male voice.

A voice has filtered down to me from stories of my mother's experiences as a child in Ireland during the time of the Black and Tans², and from the upheavals which radiated out to me during the 'troubles' in Belfast, and from 'Poor Owen' with 'half a face' whose flappy noise was easily recalled and whose image I employed in the poem, *English Lessons*³,

You let me prepare the breakfast table,
Serve as a ward orderly, feed the handless man and the airman
With half a face who follows you with his one good eye...

The voice I looked for and found for my sequence of poems, *Box Of Chalks*, partly grew from those voices and stories from my background, and the voices and stories of Polish ex-combatants. The voice was intended to be a contribution to art, incorporating the consequence of the war on the descendants and the Polish conscripts who had,

.....no striped uniform
No number on my arm
No stitched-on star, no 'P',⁴

¹ *Box Of Chalks* poems *Falaise 1 – 5*, pp 27 - 31

² Richard Bennett, *The Black And Tans*, (Staplehurst: Spellmount, 2001), p 85-91.

³ *English, The Journal of the English Association*, Vol.53 No 207 Autumn 2004 p 245. *Box Of Chalks*, p 38.

⁴ *Box Of Chalks*, p 61.

Capturing voice was an intriguing concept. One can become anything or anyone when portraying a character from behind a mask. That method gave me freedom and confidence to write as a man, in a way that I could not have done had I used my own voice as a North of Ireland woman. In writing his female monologue in *Ulysses*, Joyce must have had an acute sense of hearing and an intuitive understanding and closeness to his subject, as Maddox¹ points out, to convey the emotions of sensuous Molly's complete ecstasy when she

‘..was a flower of the mountain yes when I put the rose in my hair
like the Andalusian girls used or shall I wear a red yes and how
he kissed me under the Moorish wall².

I found that before creating a male voice, and, conscious of being a woman with a woman's experiences and without the experiences of war or involvement with military hardware and weapons, I had to consider my ability to convey and sustain a voice other than my own.

Influenced by the many voices in Joyce's *Ulysses*, I experimented for a time in that field of writing. Working from the biography of *James Joyce*³ and *Nora: A Biography of Nora Joyce*⁴, I imagined how James Joyce's 'eye' would have sounded (that is, if James Joyce's eye could speak) and might have said when Joyce was having his portrait painted by the Dublin artist Patrick Touhy⁵ and I wrote a dramatic monologue, *The Artist's Eye*⁶. That was followed by a voice created for Nora Barnacle in a poem, *The Artist's Wife*⁷, then a third dramatic monologue was written in what I imagined as his daughter Lucia Joyce's voice, *The Artist's Papillon*⁸.

Experimentation in dramatic monologue intensified my ambition to create a male voice for the purposes of the poems. However, creating voices and personae for dead characters was very different from what I intended in the sequence, *Box Of Chalks*. In

¹ Brenda Maddox, *Nora: A Biography of Nora Joyce*, (London: Mandarin Paperbacks, 1989), pp 495 - 6.

² James Joyce, *Ulysses*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p 732.

³ Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983)

⁴ Brenda Maddox, *Nora: A Biography Of Nora Joyce*, (London: Mandarin Paperbacks, 1989)

⁵ Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983) pp 565 - 6

⁶ *English, The Journal of the English Association* Vol. 50 No 196 Spring 2001 p 59.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p 60.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p 61.

the process, I was confronted with writing for people who were living, yet I felt compelled to write knowing that they were living in a limbo-like state, and that there might be consequences and repercussions due to any exposure of the fact of having worn German army uniform. Such issues as these disturbed me.

The question of whether or not I had the right to create a composite voice for the men whose stories I had learned about during the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Second World War was carefully considered. I had the 'right' and full permission and co-operation of one man, Stefan. However, I questioned the consequences of the voice opening wounds which some readers might not be aware of, and of the possibility of dormant pain erupting in other combatants whom I had never met. There was the possibility that friends and acquaintances might shun me. I felt as exploitative as Duffy's *War Photographer*,

.....alone
with spools of suffering set out in ordered rows.
... how he sought approval
without words to do what someone must
and how the blood stained foreign dust.
A hundred agonies in black-and-white
from which his editor will pick out five or six
for the Sunday's supplement...¹

Yet there was a compulsion to talk loudly about the subject of German conscription in Silesian Poland and a compulsion to write the poems. After discussing my feelings and concerns with Stefan, and enthused by the discovery of a small publication of photos and letters, *To byli nasi ojcowie*² [These Were Our Fathers] in Poland, I decided that I had a duty to the conscripted men, not only to those in the west, but to the men who remained in, or who returned to Poland, some of whose names, birth and death dates are recorded in Lysko's collection. When I had made the decision to represent only one character throughout the narrative, it became less difficult to take decisions about what and how I should use the voice in my writing. However, when I did embark on the task with the exhilaration and enthusiasm of the ignorant, I did not realise how painful and distressing it would be for Stefan, my subject and mentor, and for myself, as the writer, who found the experience of his oral journey both harrowing and exhausting.

¹ Carol Ann Duffy, *Standing Female Nude*, (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 1991), p 51.

² Alojzy Lysko, *To byli nasi ojcowie* [These were Our Fathers], (Bojszow: Gminny Osrodek Rozwoju w Bojszowach), Lysko published a small collection of photographs and correspondences from Polish conscripts and their families in the Bojszow region of Silesia.

Before Stefan had agreed that I could write his story, he had laughed. He believed that although it would be satisfying to show that Silesian boys had been placed in a terrible dilemma, it was too late an exercise at this time 'to voice their experiences'. According to him, 'it was all in the past and no-one but the conscripts would be interested', and there were a few still living. 'We were not important people,' he said. But I felt that his story was important. Few have recognised or acknowledged what has been done to Stefan, and all the other 'Stefans' who were forced into the German army. His story and all other untold stories form opinions in our present world. If their stories are not written down they are lost forever like the stories of the thousands of gypsies, Jews, communists, Catholics, politicians, homosexuals, the physically and mentally infirm without voices, who were killed in the camps in Nazi Germany and Stalin's Russia. People lost in wars become Governments' national statistics. But each lost individual is missed by someone else who is affected by the loss or damage.

The conscript's story partly developed because of the wrongful arrest of my young brother who, as a Royal Air Force engineer, was interrogated and beaten by the army in Ulster during the 'troubles' in the seventies. As an individual he had no redress, against the power and might of an army even though he was RAF personnel. At the time I resigned myself to the fact that he had not been 'an important person' and I lived with the injustice administered by the army and, whilst writing this collection of poems, I considered my own experiences and knowledge of the injustices and years of wrongful imprisonment of some people in Ulster 'in the name of the law'.

The Polish deportees to Russia¹ were not people of status according to Russia at that time. Polish boys conscripted into the Germany Army were not important according to the German rulers. However, it is important, and morally fair, that the descendants of conscripted Polish men know and understand what their fathers did in World War II, and the reasons for their actions.

The incidents in Northern Ireland with its shared borderlands, where injustices happened on a daily basis, were vivid in my memory while I was writing, and they raised questions of loyalty, patriotism and nationhood as I was questioning the creation of the combatant's voice. I believe that the injustice done to my brother contributed to the

¹ Wladyslaw Anders, *An Army In Exile*, (London: Macmillan, 1949), pp 52 - 6.

justification I needed to write the poems and to show that people at the bottom of the political hierarchy have no rights and are powerless under the directives of such decrees as the *Volkliste*.

There were conflicting thoughts about a Polish man's voice speaking in English, yet the work was directed at an English reading audience. Handling such a voice which was grounded in a multiplicity of experiences entailed that I write and create with integrity. I did not want a collage of prose and related historical details, or an objective observation of a *...smile that costs a packet / costs millions of lives / whole reservoirs tense with tears / as they sign away Poland...*¹. I wanted and searched for an intimate voice of a man, which would speak directly to a reader. I wanted to convey intimate details of a life in a voice one step 'deeper', and at a level 'beyond' the created voices in Carolyn Forché's fractured poems which resonate with the voices of Leninova, Jan Palach, and the children of Terezin where she used the plural 'we' in her poem XXVI,

*Storm light, bare orchards, the heavens briefly open.
My heart flew to his roof.*

We returned here after the war whose lives the war took.

Last summer a wind from Byelorussia brought us blue roses.

*Something was wrong with the milk.
Yellow brooks of waste lit the hayfields*².

Through the voices of those already dead - those, whose *lives* were taken by *war* – Forché's voices conjure up the horror of war through fractured voices. My aim was to research and create a voice, and craft it to come through one Polish boy, develop the voice from boyhood into a young combatant's voice, and process it into the voice of a man who had lived in moral pain³ retaining a life long secret. That required a constant change of male voices or roles, being carried in my head. The voices within the single voice created, required a different work form, and each 'voice poem' had to be created

¹ Tom Paulin, *The Invasion Handbook*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), p 141.

² Carolyn Forché, *The Angel Of History*, (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1994)

³ Peter Marin, 'Living In moral Pain', *Psychology Today*, New York, November 1981, p 71.

and drafted in consideration of age, circumstances and the experiences of the character.
Each piece formed an atom of the nucleus, *Box Of Chalks*.

Creative problems arose for the voice over the question of tense. It was apparent that whether using present tense or past tense, questions of authenticity would arise when I would reach 'current time' in the writing. As I had proposed to carry the 'voice' to that of an 'aged man's voice' in the 1990's, much time was given to drafting in both tenses because, the voice and its process of development, had to speak to a reader and sound authentic throughout the narrative. But I was apprehensive when employing the voice and capturing the spirit of a twelve or thirteen year old boy. I also gave consideration to the reality of a young boy having a competent voice, especially a boy whose schooling finished at about thirteen years of age. When writing up notes for the narrative I had been seeing and hearing the potential poems from an adult perspective. It was a view that, at times, had restricted my ability to create or expand material. Looking back at my notes and drafts, I see a ringed note dated 01.09.99 to 'change aspect. clarify child's view'. It was apparent that I must have been contemplating difficulties in developing a child's voice at that early stage. I struggled with the issue, yet, even though the poems are complete, I am not wholly satisfied with the authenticity of the voice in the first block of ten poems which should have represented a young voice. In the poems, *Horses*, *Cursing in the River*, *Wojtek*, *German Lessons*, and *Leaving Home*¹, I looked for images of a young, small boy's voice. I wrote, stressing the loss of his 'horse', his instant recognition of a change in his 'father's stubbled face / Traced with lines'. At the same time I portrayed him as being young enough to be taken by the hand and [trekking] 'home across the fields' with his 'grey' and 'helpless' father, whose curses are noted and recalled by the boy. In the poem *Wojtek*, the image of a young boy is made apparent by the lines directed towards his cousin 'I worshipped him.,' and, 'He'd carried me high on his shoulders, / Threatened to throw me to the forest wolves / If I didn't behave'. The text was intended to convey a large adult, 'A giant of a man, my cousin', so that the image of a small boy would be in contrast and emphasized. Again in *German Lessons*, the boy 'tried to be invisible.' He 'chewed' [a] 'stubby pencil,' was written into the text with the aims of accentuating the image of an immature and powerless child subjected to

¹ *Box Of Chalks* p 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12.

‘dictation / That bounced from wall to wall / Over [their] lowered heads / And out through the door’. I wanted my character to appear anchored in his childhood time, even though the poems have had to be written in the past tense. Representing a boy’s voice was challenging because I had to observe the historical setting and the fact that Polish schools in Silesia had been closed by the Reich in 1939¹ and I was in conflict with myself about whether to agree that the author is omniscient.

The further five poems, *School Holidays*², *Telegraph Poles*³, *Malinowski’s Barn*⁴, were written in a more mature voice than I had envisaged, but *Volkliste*⁵ is in the voice of the oppressor. However, I feel that *Arbeit Mach Frei*⁶ captures the spirit of a maturing boy, ‘Apprenticed in the leather trade,’ yet, ‘Afraid to be afraid’. I tried to capture the inner voice of the boy who was developing in the narrative, in character and capable of controlling his fear of ‘Herr Ullmann the craftsman, ‘...His hands could crush a skull’. However, being unable to represent a young boy’s voice and having transcribed the poems several times from the past tense into the present tense and back again, the past tense was decided upon.

The majority of the poems in the completed sequence finally appeared in the past tense with the exception of a few, such as, *Christmas Eve, Guard Duty, Nice, Beef Stew, Front Line Games, Falaise 1 – 5, A Box of Chalks, On Leaving France, Orders, and English Lessons*. I am not completely sure that what I have created in the early narrative is an authentic young boy’s voice but perhaps what I have written will ‘infuse’ into and remain with a reader. And hopefully a reader will experience the consequences of the political Decree which has absorbed me for so long.

¹ Kazimierz Popiolek, *Silesia In German Eyes*, (Katowice: Slask, 1964), pp 63-70.

² *Box Of Chalks*, p 4.

³ *Ibid.*, p 5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p 8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p 11.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p 13.

When I suggested writing poems based on the lives and experiences of the Polish boys and men conscripted into the German Army, I received various responses. Of the six men I met and spoke with, two said that they could never reveal their German conscription to their wives or families. It seemed to me that that part of their past had been sealed and put in a box. I did not enquire into how they dealt with their feelings or their lives. Another two talked with sadness, and difficulty - they said 'only their wives knew their secret; not their children'. Each of the six men had a different story.

[a] One said he had talked to his wife about his having been conscripted into the German Army, but, according to him, his children did not know of his experiences and background. He said however, that he was a volunteer paratrooper during the Arnhem drop with the British Airborne Division in September 1944¹.

[b] The second ex-conscript had a wife and one child. He said that he had never spoken of his time in the German army either to his wife or his child. His wife had left him after many years of marriage during which there were insurmountable difficulties. He said that he could not tell her what he had done during the war 'because she would not understand'. When I met him he had lost contact with both wife and child. He seemed to have difficulties in coping with the simple everyday tasks of life and could not manage a day without alcohol.

[c] The third had a wife and two children. He was a pillar of his community in a small town in England and was in close business and social relationships with doctors, lawyers, and the upper echelons of the local police force. He seemed to be comfortable with his life. He appeared to have told no one of his experiences and refused to discuss anything regarding the war or his life in Poland and became irritable when I showed an interest in Polish conscripts in the German Army. He said he had never returned nor did he have

¹ William Shirer, *The Rise And Fall Of The Third Reich*, (London: Pan, 1964), pp 1293 - 4. By September 1944 the Allied Armies were running short of supplies. Cherbourg was the only port through which supplies and petrol could be delivered three to four hundred miles to North West Europe and to Germany, to the advancing allies. A plan to seize a bridgehead over the Lower Rhine at Arnhem was agreed, and a massive drop of two American and one British airborne divisions, flying from bases in Britain began on September 17th 1944.

‘any urge to visit the place’ [Poland]. I therefore did not feel that I could discuss my project with him.

[d] The fourth ex-conscript did not see the point of looking at the past. ‘We Poles were used by all the bastards. Who cares about Poland? We were sacrificed. We were handed over to Stalin by the Allies and the communist f.....s are just as bad as the Germans. I had to pay the bastards a thousand pounds to get a telephone installed for my poor old Mum in Krakow. She doesn’t even have running water yet, fifty years after the bloody war! What kind of life is that?’ He said that he had not told any of his three wives, nor his only child, that he had been in the German army. ‘What is the point?’ He asked. ‘Who cares? When some bloody politician can wipe your country off the map¹ they can do anything to you’.

[e] The fifth ex-conscript was willing to discuss his experiences and reactions with me provided that I did not talk about his conscription to his wife to whom he had been married for about forty five years. They had had an early post-war romance and had married in a civil ceremony. He had become isolated from Polish friends, the Polish community, and the Polish Catholic Church which, in retrospect, he seemed to have regretted, ‘the Roman Catholic Church often being a melting pot of cultures, languages, and nationalities’². On the other hand it might not have been a support to him. He had some difficulty in remembering much of his natural Polish language having not spoken it for many years. When I hinted at and then introduced the subject of recording his experiences as a young conscript, he took a long time to think about what I proposed doing. He did not disapprove so long as I did not use his name. He did not want to reveal his past to his wife nor to her family at that late stage in their marriage.

[f] The sixth ex-combatant had never married. He was a successful businessman with a wide circle of friends. He was an extrovert. Each time I met him he was extravagant and dramatic, but he refused point blank to provide me with any information about his conscription into the German army. He knew that I was aware of his conscription. There seemed to be a controlled anxiety about him even though I explained

¹ Norman Davies, *God’s Playground, A History of Poland Vol II 1795 to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p 490. The map of Poland was non-existent between 1939-1945.

² Keith Sword, *Identity In Flux*, (London: Veritas Foundation Publication Centre, 2000), p 230.

exactly what I wanted to do and that I would not be using the names of anyone I knew or had met.

Although I met and spoke with a very small number of ex-combatants during the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Second World War, what I learned and believed was that something tragic and unjust had happened to them. If those few men had exactly the same experience at the same dates, then there must be many more men who experienced German conscription. I believed that the poems would speak for the men, or their descendants, who possibly have not yet heard of, or come to terms with conscription and the wearing of the German Army uniform. Alojzy Lysko also looks for recognition and commemoration of such men in his region of Bojszowy.

I would like to think that the men who remained in Britain would also be acknowledged and so I took the risk in writing poems grounded in The Second World War. Having no experience of war I transposed Stefan's experiences and his rememberings¹, which were instant and vivid, and created a narrative around the scaffold of my original MA poem, *The Unknown Knew*.

'One remembers with special vividness because military training is very largely training in alertness and a special kind of noticing. And one remembers because at the front the well-known mechanisms of the psychology of crisis work to assign major portent to normally trivial things like single poppies or the scars on a rifle-stock or the smell of rum and blood. Fear itself works powerfully as an agent of sharp perception and vivid recall².

I found evidence of such detail mentioned by Fussell when listening to Stefan and I tried to capture and magnify them in poems such as, *The Executioner*³ and, *Front Line Games*⁴

.....That, *the Americans are playing*
Basket ball on the front line, with a skull.
They're big, and black, and two meters tall
And they'll come like shadows in the night
With knives in their mouths
To cut off your hands
For your watches and rings;
They'll slit your throats

¹ As stated in the introduction, I have used the word 'rememberings' instead of the word 'memory', when referring to the past because the events of war seemed to be very present in the men with whom I spoke. Their remembered experiences were vivid and instantaneous, unlike memories which can be distant, clouded and misty, and needing keys to open a memory box to let one look at the memories.

² Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p 327.

³ *Box Of Chalks*, p 22.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p 26.

*And smash your heads for gold teeth,
They'll take your boots with your feet.*

Combining the microscopic detail of garden earth, tree roots and the tiny round spiky roots of clover and my physical examination of the underbelly of a Panzer tank during the research, I used the closely focussed and minute observations that Fussell mentions, and created the poem,

Falaise 2¹.

We stare at a bolted belly
A brace of clay-filled teeth,
Its iron lace loosening,
Dropping sods on our faces
And it takes forever
For the Panzer
To pass over,
And the walls of our grave
Stay intact with tree roots and weeds
And chalk white knots of clover.

The Second World War seen through the eyes of professional militarists, politicians, academics and historians such as William Shirer, General Wladyslaw Anders, AJP Taylor, General Omar Bradley and others is different from Stefan's and others' Second World War histories. Dominik Stoltman², conscripted into Hitler's Army, made a contribution to Polish history in narrative prose, recording his experiences and providing a lesson in moral dilemmas under Nazism. I believe that he has opened a door into the history of those other men and their descendants who have not yet confronted their dilemmas. On the other hand, I would question how many Polish conscripts would have read Stoltman's work, which was written in English. Or would the second or third generation of Polish conscripts' descendants, other than the author's immediate and intimate few, be enthused enough to read of his grinding experiences in German Army uniform? However, recording Stefan's oral history as a naïve, young boy conscript,

¹ *Box Of Chalks*, p 28.

² Dominik Stoltman, *Trust Me You Will Survive*, (Edinburgh: Pentland Press, 1994). Stoltman was born in 1921, that made him five years older than the Polish conscript whose story I recorded. I estimate that Dominik Stoltman would have been twenty one / twenty two years old on his conscription into the German Army.

proved to have many levels of spirit, intimacy and terror appropriate for the language of poetry.

The idea of Stefan's story being written in the form of poetry appeared less official, and different from the investigatory or prurient rifling into the past, which, he said, did not always 'tell the truth'. He had talked about The Katyn Murders¹ and referred to Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin as the three old men at Yalta, one drunk, one sick and all three liars, who decided the fate of Poland, and he was still looking forward to hearing the *facts* about General Sikorski's untimely death in an air crash at Gibraltar in 1943². I was convinced that he wanted his experiences to be made known but he was anxious about how others would feel and react to the public knowledge that so many of their age group, still living in England, had been in the German Army. But, he said that it would be 'good if people could know and learn about what had happened' to men like him. When he finally agreed that I write about his experiences, I decided that meetings would be at his convenience and that time should be set aside as and when it was suitable for him.

My method of recording in the initial stages was informal because I sensed that the situation was delicate and intrusive. I was unsure about what to look for or what I might hear. When the interviews began, I assured him that I would finish as and when he wanted. I said that I would be making written notes, and he was in agreement with that. When the project started I made the first approach each time I wanted to push it forward. Stefan never offered to talk to me. I tried to adhere to thirty minute 'rememberings' each time and spent about six months intensely listening to his experiences. There was no definite appointed time set aside for us to meet. I had to use my perceptions to ascertain whether or not to ask if he would like to talk to me, always giving him the option that, I could come back again later. Therefore in the initial stages of my research it was impossible to practice a disciplined or structured method of interviewing.

¹ Norman Davies, *God's Playground, A History Of Poland Vol II 1799 to the Present* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p 452.

Neil Ascherson *The Struggles For Poland*, (London: Michael Joseph, 1987), pp 122 - 3.

² Wladyslaw Anders, *An Army In Exile*, (London: Macmillan and Co. 1949), p 148.

Neil Ascherson, *The Struggles For Poland*, (London: Michael Joseph, 1987), p 125.

I chose not to use a tape recorder because it would have been intrusive and inappropriate in the circumstances, and I wanted to absorb everything I was hearing in a more personal way. During the listenings I developed a technique of noting single words on pages without looking down because I became aware that what he was telling me was, for him, like probing an open wound. He maintained eye contact with me at all times and I didn't want to interrupt the flow of his revelations. It was as if I was trying to digest his voice.

I soon came to the conclusion that it was difficult for him to be consistent. His rememberings leaped from one incident to another, one season to another, or one year to another, or one part of the world to another, or one person or group to another, or from one gun to a horse or a tank, often referring to different people as 'he' or 'him', and different things in the same sentence as 'it'. I became confused about ascertaining to whom he was referring during the interviews, and I tried not to show signs of impatience when following his train of thoughts. Most times the rememberings were chaotic, and I just listened and listened, because I would have created an artificial atmosphere had I stopped him in mid-rememberings and asked him to clarify what he had just said. Recording the oral history took longer than I had presumed. When I started making notes for the project, there were times when it was only possible to sit and listen to the sound and rhythms of his voice because it would have been inappropriate to write for fear of breaking the thread of his story as he talked about his experiences.

During the process, when I returned to him again and again to listen to his reminiscences, I did not write. For a long time - perhaps several months - it was still difficult to know what to say or what to ask him. I found myself sucked into his pain. I tried to retain every utterance that I was hearing. When I did make notes, I dated everything and recorded any miniscule and microscopic detail about his fears, his experiences, his friends, feelings and thoughts. For example, on Christmas Eve 1943, he had been on guard duty and had heard the carol 'Silent Night' being sung in German. He cried. Stefan said that, having stood in the snow for hours that night he had grown taller, because of the snow underfoot. I homed in on that detail and created images of him, elevated in boots clogged with snow¹. I also sensed that he must have been yearning to

¹ *Box Of Chalks*, p 19.

be home that Christmas and so I created an image of him, so cold, that he is, 'Sleeping or dreaming of a tree / in the corner of a room /'. When he revealed that he was deloused and disinfected in the prisoner of war camp, I imagined that he was probably resigned to his fate on imprisonment and, possibly he had lost his pride and dignity. Considering what it might have been like as his 'world was tossed in a sack of trash'¹, I noted it and created my writing from the notes. They were small details but, as Fussell confirms, 'fear itself works powerfully as an agent of sharp perception and vivid recall'², and I wanted to capture a sense of the fear in my poems by writing small details based on a conscript's vivid recall.

In the early interviews, or meetings and listenings³, Stefan was remembering the traumatic incidents of war, guns and bombs, aeroplanes and explosions, mud, hunger and terror. After some time, the listening periods extended, sometimes to whole afternoons. Though most times the rememberings were chaotic, a voice began to develop in the poems from what I was audibly absorbing. As he became more confident, sometimes he talked non-stop⁴. Sometimes he told me about the same incident again and again, repeating the same words, names, telling me who had been killed and how, making the noises that the aircrafts made when their guns tore up the earth, or imitating the sound of shells thudding into the earth. The material I had was jumbled and difficult to assess. After each listening I wrote up my notes immediately, recording and defining as best I could, each sound and intonation, facial expressions, each remembered experience and how Stefan had reacted when telling his story. I absorbed sensory experiences, tones and imagery that I had heard in his voice with the idea of transcribing the recall. I was at liberty to return to clarify those points of his story about which I was unsure. When I had recorded place names and deciphered approximate dates and details of his imprisonment, his journey and experiences fitted the published histories relating to the Second World

¹ *Box Of chalks*, p 33.

² Paul Fussell, *The Great War And Modern Memory*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p 327.

³ I used the word 'listenings' in the context of the project because I found that the episodes of time spent with Stefan were neither meetings nor interviews. The time was informal, protracted, or very short depending on his feelings and my understanding of the situation or atmosphere at the time.

⁴ Stefan had been ill and had received treatment for combat trauma fifty years after the Second World War, never having revealed what had happened to him.

War¹. But the short period of time from spring 1944 to summer 1944, which was so intense, was almost explosive and impossible to decipher. The period leading up to the spring of 1943 was erratic and confused. However, I had to be sensitive when probing to extract details in the emotional atmosphere of the remembering. Trying to ascertain dates, I began to gently probe for information about his family's situation and their responses to the war. A clearer picture of his journey seemed to assemble but when I divided my notes into what I thought was a chronological order under headings, points, and notes for my records, I realised that the dates were still inconsistent. My inability to grasp everything became evident to him because he then made allowances for me and tried to make it easier by getting out maps and atlases. My eyes followed his finger moving across an old map of Europe, as he attempted to retrace his boyhood journey from Silesia. It took a long time for me to understand the route of his journey. He got confused while he talked to me because he had been on the move constantly since he had been conscripted. Trying to link place names with the dates of Stefan's journeying proved frustrating. His remembering was clear but his thoughts leaped from one remembering to another so rapidly, that sometimes they merged. Then I had the idea of asking Stefan about the weather conditions during his journeys when he was referring to the maps. I thought that form of approach might give me a clearer indication of what time of the year it was during each of his experiences. I tried to make a point of asking 'What was the weather like?' or, 'Was it hot?', or, 'Was it very cold?' or, 'Was there fruit on the trees?' or, 'Were there wild flowers growing?' Directing the story sideways in what I thought a casual method of questioning, was rewarding. Stefan was happy to talk about the beauty of Europe, its mountains, flowers, rivers, deer and antelope and wild boar which was hunted in and around the region of his parent's home. There was an essence of poetry in him, and I was accessing some of the Polish poetic tradition. He knew and quoted *Sobotka* and *Nasz Swiat*, poems of the Polish poet, Maria Konopnicka² and he reminded me that Wislawa Szymborska had won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1996.

¹ Omar N Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1978), p 374-9.

Carlo D'Este, *Decisions In Normandy*, (London: Harper Collins, 1994), pp 430.1.

William Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, (London: Pan Books, 1964), p 1280.

² Maria Konopnicka, *Co Slonko Widzialo*, (Warsaw: Naza Ksiegarnia Warszawa, 1966) p 64. 81. See also appendices E, F.

Tracing the passage of historic events, I elicited the details of the journey from the spring of 1943 and discovered that Stefan had been sent west to Berlin with other young boys and men, then north to the *Arbeitsdienst* at Kreismecklinburg, then back to Silesia. He was then transported back to 'somewhere in Germany', the name of which he could not recall. From Germany, he was sent south to Nice and north again to Normandy, then, as a prisoner of war, to England and on to Scotland. After the 'Fall of Warsaw', he was sent south again to Italy with the Western Allies. I recorded the place names and the estimated dates and months as well as I could. A form of order began to appear out of the chaos and from that material and information I imagined and developed the group of poems, *Arbeitsdienst*, *Homecoming*, *Guard Duty*, *Nice*, *Leave*, *Executioner*, *Beef Stew*, and *En Route To Calais*.

The different stages of a maturing boy, the levels of emotions he would have felt and exhibited during his life up to the experiences and emotions of an elderly man in England in the late 1990s, had to be considered in detail to create fluidity in the narrative. I also considered that it was going to be emotionally demanding for Stefan to see his story on the page. However, as an artist, I aimed to create images and resonances which would infuse a reader with an emotion. Creating a receptive empathy to envisage a boy's state of mind took time. I often entered into a meditative process by isolating myself for long periods of time, concentrating, and trying to imagine what a conscript might have experienced and what he might have felt. Stepping into such a character's shoes to understand and to live naiveté as a youth, to understand an attraction for something new and the need to 'show off' and 'be brave', allowed me to inhabit a dramatic character completely opposite to my natural self. Stefan, like many young boys had,

Dreamed of uniformed perfection, played
At driving tanks, trains, gliders and planes.
To wear a cape, a four cornered hat
Like great Polish leaders, strut - be young peacocks
With power, flaunt our manhood for all to see
Ride high on horseback - click the heels
Of long leather boots - salute, and be saluted...¹

During the early stages of the writing process I had developed a method of imaginative

¹ *Box Of Chalks*, p 15.

empathy and had tried to project myself into the viewpoint of a combatant. I think I tried to create a 'transmogrification' through the writing, similar to that which I tried to capture in my original MA poem, *The Unknown Knew*. I had listened to the sounds and rhythms of Stefan's voice and watched his facial expressions and tried to retain them to conjure the character of a conscript on to the page. I was enveloped in his silences as he searched for words to express himself in English and his partly forgotten Polish. Concentrating on his efforts to express himself gave me an insight into the struggles he must have experienced when trying to communicate with German army personnel when he was conscripted, and I imagined that he would have thought that,

It would be easier if I could speak good German¹,...

When he arrived in Scotland as a prisoner of war² and struggled to learn English, I used my understanding of the difficulties in learning,

... to pronounce, 't' with an 'h'.

... to repeat,

Thank you and Thursday, and three.

...carefully and slowly put out [his] tongue and say

Fank you.... fursday.... free³.

Gathering the many layers of feeling and information from the listenings⁴ and melding them with my imaginings and experiences of bringing up my family, I considered what a conscript's mother might have said and felt when her son was conscripted. Those combined feelings and experiences gave me the textual interface for the narrative pieces *Arbeitsdienst*⁵, and, *Homecoming*⁶, which were created in the early stages of the writing process. I wrote *The Tobacco Box*⁷, *Orders*⁸, and, *A Box Of Chalks*⁹ as the crescendo, or the climax of the narrative, and I tried to weave layers of association and connotation

¹ *Box Of Chalks*, p 17.

² Wladyslaw Anders, *An Army In Exile*, (London: Macmillan, 1949), pp 153 - 7.

³ *Box Of Chalks*, p 38.

⁴ See note 3, p 98.

⁵ *Box Of Chalks*, p 16.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p 17.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p 33.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p 36.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p 32.

into the poems by writing of despair and loss, interwoven with a sense of dignity and decency about which Neal Ascherson comments in his foreword to, *Trust Me You Will Survive*¹.

Often, during the rememberings Stefan became tired, and I tried to bring the interviews to a close in as gentle and diplomatic a manner as possible. However, when the novelty of the idea had worn off, he was still willing to provide me with information on dates, times, places, weather, food, guns, tanks and horses when it came time for me to clarify my notes, and it was that image which I tried to absorb to help develop the character in the narrative. I took advantage of the remembering during which he tried hard to recall the time by the position of the sun, a day in August 1944², in which direction a German Officer had gone after having fallen into the trench. The snatches of information I received were the basis for the poem, *Falaise 4*³ (*Bread*) and an incident on the Normandy front line during which Stefan pulled his friend down into their trench as a Panzer tank passed over them, was the material used to create the poem *Falaise 2*⁴ (*Panzer*).

I have used the description of the night he, as the youngest and smallest, was sent to place an elevation bearing or orientation point on the horizon for the German gunners to aim their fire, when 'all hell' exploded around him from the guns on the other side. He, becoming totally disoriented, thinking he heard his comrade's voices calling his name, but did not know which way to run in the turmoil. Then he laughed and said to me, '*Matka Boska*⁵ didn't let the Americans kill me. I prayed to her day and night. His direct guilelessness or naiveté, or genuine faith, was apparent, and I tried to capture those images in the poem, *Falaise 1*⁶ (*Prayer*).

¹ Dominik Stoltman, *Trust Me You Will Survive*, (Edinburgh: The Pentland Press, 1994).

² Tony Hall, editor, *D-DAY Operation Overlord*, (London: Salamander Books, 1993), pp 186 - 7.

³ *English, The Journal of the English Association*, Vol 53 No 207 Editors Ken Newton and Peter Barry p 241. Published under the title *Bread*, but for artistic purposes in *Box Of Chalks*, p 30, the title has been changed to *Falaise 4*. There are slight textual adjustments in my final version.

⁴ *English, The Journal of the English Association*, Vol 52 No 202 Editors Ken Newton and Peter Barry pp 69.70. Published under the title *Panzer*, but for artistic purposes in *Box Of Chalks* p 28 the title has been changed to *Falaise 2*.

⁵ *Matka Boska* Mother of God.

⁶ *English, The Journal of the English Association*, Vol 53 No 207 Editors Ken Newton and Peter Barry p 240. Published under the title *Prayer*, but for artistic purposes in *Box Of Chalks* p 27 the title has been changed to *Falaise 1*.

However, it was problematic when there were long painful silences during which tears would well up in Stefan's eyes and he would look away. I had to wait in a kind of void knowing that if I moved, the spell would break and the moment would be lost. I could not speak nor leave, or move a muscle at such intense moments of pain from his past which was ever present, as it is still for today's combatants such as Tom Read¹ who wrote that, in his mind, he kept replaying what happened over and over, like a video recording. 'I rewind', said Tom Read, 'and see it all in slow-motion, freezing the frame'. All the time during the listenings I knew that it was a panorama of poems that I wanted to create, in the way that Tom Read refers to his experience 'freezing the frame', or my version of a modern Bayeux Tapestry.

There were cultural and emotional idioms to be considered and assessed, and although Stefan's experiences were related to me in English, the rememberings required many layers of interpretation and understanding before I could start drafting. Throughout the interviews Stefan used the same words for different things, and realising, he decided that he needed different words, saying, 'No, that is not the right word, I will explain better', and he would anxiously search through a Polish-English, then an English-Polish dictionary, looking for the right words, often deciding that there was no English equivalent. Idioms of nationhood arose when he wanted to make sure that I knew exactly where he had been at a particular time. Later in the writing process, a kind of translation was taking place. Stefan had produced maps and atlas and searched for the places he had been in because he wanted me to understand his exact geographical location and the historical events he was involved in and I had to respect that.

Some of the problems of memory posed research challenges for me as a writer because I had to be politically, historically, geographically, and militarily factual in addition to artistic requirements throughout the work. Stefan made strenuous efforts to remember whose, and which guns he had fired in the different stages of the war. Germany used their own guns plus a 'multiplicity of captured foreign arms'² and what

¹ Tom Read, *Freefall*, (London: Little and Brown, 1988), p 165. Tom Read 'jumped' or 'fell' from a small plane over the English Midlands and died.

²Matthew Cooper, *The German Army. 1933 – 1945 Its Political and Military Failure*, (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1978), p 496.

ever other means of warfare was available to them. He had difficulty remembering the sizes of the guns, often mixing up centimetres with inches, having lived and worked in Britain most of his life. Exact gun size measurements were required when researching the poem *In The Imperial War Museum*¹. He did not know which port he had arrived at when being transported as a prisoner of war to England. The ‘beautifully upholstered train seats’ he had sat on during the journey from England to Scotland to the prisoner of war camp² had left a lasting impression on him when he and many others were guarded by equally ‘young polite English soldiers’. I took the intimate detail of a conscript’s experience as an original source, and wrote the poems realising my inadequacy and how little I knew as a poet, trying to enter another person’s vast realm of experience. Yet I took advantage of the realisation of my inadequacy and wrote the poem, *Psychotherapy*³, to represent the inadequacy and the plight of ex-service men who lived on the front line as many still do in Afghanistan or Iraq.

¹ *Box Of Chalks*, p 63.

² Michael Hope, *Polish Deportees In The Soviet Union*, (London: Veritas Foundation Publication Centre, 2000), p 21.

Wladyslaw Anders, *An Army In Exile*, (London: Macmillan, 1949), p 105.

³ *Box Of Chalks*, p 61.

Chapter 4

Part 1

Opening the Narrative

Deciding how and where to open the narrative was a challenge. I knew that I wanted a male voice, but did not know what the voice would say, or how expressive it would sound. Initially I had considered a subdued voice that would emerge from the embers of devastation ‘which surpassed anything so far documented in the history of mankind’¹ and that would develop to maturity not knowing which road I, and the voice, would take. I decided against that opening because I did not have the courage or the sensibility to do justice to writing about devastation in Europe. In the early stages there was little information to work from. The Polish Army Lt General W Anders, briefly mentions Polish conscripts in his memoir² as does Hope³. I explored and rejected many poems in the decision making process. I experimented in writing from my own experiences of cross-border Ulster politics, economics and injustices with my understanding of

*‘Backlash’ and ‘crack down’, ‘the provisional wing’
‘Polarisation’ and ‘long-standing’ hate’⁴.*

I tried to approach the work from a monetary angle with a view to using German economic expansion and its consequences upon people in Western Poland as a setting for the poems which would be crafted to convey a Polish male voice. The monetary idea was also charged by my experience of having tried unsuccessfully to spend Northern Ireland and Scottish sterling bank notes in England. Because my ‘unacceptable currency’ was refused by shopkeepers I spent a weekend in London without food thus learning a monetary lesson and creating a long lasting irritation with banking systems and the absolute necessity of money. Added to that experience was my response and feelings about the appearance, weight, and texture of Polish groszy and zlotys, monetary coins which were mostly made of light aluminium during the communist regime. Thirdly, a strong impression was made upon me during a spate of Polish inflation when I became a

¹ Norman Davies, *God's Playground A History Of Poland*, Vol. II 1795 to the Present (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp 454 – 462.

² Wladyslaw Anders, *An Army In Exile*, (London: Macmillan, 1949), p 153. 157.

³ Michael Hope, *Polish Deportees In The Soviet Union*, (London: Veritas Foundation Publication Centre, 2000), p 21.

⁴ Seamus Heaney, *New Selected Poems 1966 – 1987*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), p 78.

'half a millionaire' on exchanging ten American ten-dollar bills instead of ten single dollar bills, thus giving me half a million zlotys at an East German /Polish border crossing sometime in the seventies. At that time there was little, if anything, to buy in Poland and I gave the money to anyone who would take it. With those three experiences in mind, I started writing. After many fruitless attempts I reached a drafting stage and finally produced, *Five Thousand to a Dollar*, and a further poem, *Decisions*, the early drafts being,

Five Thousand to a Dollar

I intended to steal it the minute I saw it
Piling up on the counter before me.
I knew from the start he was making a mistake.
This could break their bank,
The monetary system might disintegrate.
There were thousands upon thousands of zlotys
Spreading. My breathing grew steadily deeper.
I was damp with sweat, dreading the wait
The clock above me was ticking
As the pile got wider, slowly,
And gradually higher.
Shifting my weight from left foot to right
Wondering if I was losing my sight
I had no intention of telling him
He was about to lose a half a million.

My ten dollars were in his box,
Fifty thousand zlotys were all we needed,
He counted out five hundred thousand.
Lifting them carefully
Bundle by bundle, I placed them in my bag
And tried not to run to the car. I walked slowly,
Casually hummed, *I'll drive, Kochana, Don't ask why.*
Just let me do the driving! And I drove.
I drove till we got thirty miles up the road.

Our car was the only thing moving fast,
Passing occasional bicycles, horses and carts.
I said, *Look in the bag and count what's there.*
You paled at the sight on your knees.
Checking our 'spending-money'
I thought I would freeze when you said,
I think you changed ten tens, Sweetheart, (instead of single bills???????)
A hundred dollars are missing.

Decisions

Stand in the queue. Stay back from the counter.
Shuffle forward. Don't grumble.
Be patient till it's your turn to be served,
You may then point at what you want to buy.
The shop-assistant will unlock the drawer,
She'll remove the item, place it on the shelf behind her
Relock the drawer, pick up what you have indicated,
Turn, and place it on the counter before you.

She won't care if you're paying in zlotys,
Sterling, Deutsch marks or dollars.
She'll wait about thirty seconds
Looking straight at you, her face expressing
A 'do you want it or not that's all I've got'
Kind of look, to the rattle of her silver bangle
Wide as a drainpipe collar.

You'll want to pick it up and take it to the light,
She'll snatch it wagging a painted finger,
Nie wolno! Nie wolno! Her eyebrows meeting,
Lips pursed like a cherry tomato. It must stay in the shop
You can't take it outside. *Prose bardzo! Prose Pani?*
She'll invite the next in the queue to the counter.
The crowd will push forward, you will instantly buy.
The queue outside will be growing.

I believed that writing about monetary and economic differences in east and west would lead me to a field of different images, inspirations and unusual pieces of work, but it was a dull and unemotional subject. There was a very limited source of material to spark the beginnings of poems and I soon realised that I could not write from that viewpoint. Then I approached the work realistically and naturally, from the point of view of a man living in England in the shadow of secret conscription which was part of the genesis of the project. I focussed on the consequences of the conscription. The idea, as above, developed from an encounter with someone in a museum, while researching the work. Two poems developed rapidly and I arrived at,

Changing Colours at the Sikorski

An elegant man in a well-cut suit
Posed to be photographed -
He'd be about seventy-five -
His photographer asked me

To move aside, I smiled.
Politely, I complied.
The sitter approached me
After his session of smiles
And camera flashing, to say,
He was a Polish General's son
Having his portrait done
With the new colours

Of his father's old regiment.
His son, he said, was married
To a bishop's daughter - how dashing!
Almost aristocracy! An upright pillar
Of Polish society. He was aghast
That anyone should want to see
Records of Polish boys,
Conscripted into the German Army
Or captured in Normandy.
You won't find that
At the Sikorski.

Advice

Look my dear! You're wasting your time.
You wouldn't understand those things.
I am a General's son you see,
And at twenty-one I volunteered
For the Engineers, just as war had begun.
In '44, from the shores of France
We drove through Cherbourg
To Falaise. We fought for days
On every front, battled with bombs
And shells, with tanks, and field guns.
Then we encircled the Krauts,
Simply, closed them in.

Well of course, my dear
We knew they were Poles! But,
Silesian Poles.
They're not, at all, like us.
Except for the bloody Canadians
We'd have blown out the bastards' guts,
White flags or no white flags
We should have been allowed
To do our stuff.
Wipe them off the face of the earth,
That's what I always say. But the Yanks -
They kicked up a fuss. Took them off
To camps in Caen,
Thousands of the bastards there were,

Thousands of them dead
What?
The ones who went home?
They're dead. Stalin said they weren't Red.
They weren't Poles, they were Silesians!
I should know my dear. I remember,
I was old enough then to be their father.

The experience had made me uneasy but I considered that it could be an unusual angle from which to start the work. After much consideration the idea was abandoned because I was writing from a personal and subjective viewpoint which would have restricted the development of the work, and I believe I could not have sustained a counter voice. However, having also abandoned the monetary idea, I retrieved it at a later date and tried to weave, *Five Thousand To A Dollar*, into the narrative at the 'border crossing'¹ section of the narrative hoping that it would fit into the context only to drop it yet again because it did not 'sit' comfortably within the body of work in the final stages.

I tried writing from a combatant's views, opinions, and what might have been his experiences of military hardware and artillery and researched military weapons and heavy artillery². I soon discarded the military route because I was not sure that I could sustain the momentum. I saw that writing within that sphere would have restricted the narrative and limited me to a war time theme. On researching *Silesia In German Eyes*³, I focussed on details of the domestic political situation in Silesia during the Second World War and considered opening the narrative on the day after Germany invaded Poland. I imagined what the actual situation might have been like in rural Silesia and, very soon, I could imagine myself as a parent responsible for a child, and immediately set up a scene in my mind where I felt comfortable with such a simple and natural setting.

¹ *Box Of Chalks* p 57.8.

² Chamberlain and Gander, *Small Arms, Artillery and Special Weapons of The Third Reich and Light and Medium Field Artillery*, (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1978).

Eric Morris, Curt Johnson, Christopher Chant, H.P. Willmott, *Weapons and Warfare Of The 20th Century* (London: Cathay, 1975).

³ Kazimierz Popiolek, *Silesia In German Eyes*, (Katowice: Slask, 1964).

I wrote lists of my feelings and reactions to the imagined situation and created, *Cursing in the River*¹. Using the notes which I had made when researching on Salisbury Plain observing British army manoeuvres, I included in the second stanza the words ‘an army emerged from the night’, an image which impressed me, and with the intention of making the reader question my date, I wrote, ‘It spread across the land / On the Second of September / And I remember, looking up...’, this referenced the 1st September 1939, the renowned historic event of the German invasion of Poland. I hoped to gain the reader’s attention to and possible curiosity about the army arriving in that part of Silesia on the following day. Though satisfied at the time with that text as the ‘opening poem’, I soon reverted to my dissatisfied mind-set and began looking for an image of a younger child.

¹ *Box Of Chalks* p 7.

The poem *Cursing InThe River* seemed to limit my ability to create a voice. I found it problematic to move beyond the frame of reference of the work. At the time, I had the beginnings of the fictional young combatant and the fictional older man in the planning stages, but my imagination was being restricted somehow. I was still not sure that *Cursing in The River* was the right poem as an opening for the narrative. I then considered writing within and about a time period before the German invasion.

After evaluating the period immediately before the German invasion of Poland on the basis of having read *Silesia in German Eyes*, I reverted to small snippets of information from Stefan's rememberings of time in school. He had had a happy and mischievous school experience and related to me how he had jumped out of the first floor window for a dare, and how he had saved a boy from drowning in the local lake one morning on his way to school. The latter story was confirmed by one of the men who contacted Stefan during a Second World War Anniversary gathering, he being the same boy whom Stefan had pulled from the lake while hanging on to the branch of a tree. That information appealed to me because I already learned that Stefan had grabbed the same boy and pulled him into a trench in the face of an oncoming tank an image I would use in the later narrative. I was seeing Stefan as more than an ordinary man and that view of him gave impetus to the work. I wrote several drafts from the notes about the near drowning but considered the incident too far removed from the narrative which I wanted, but did not yet know how to write. My imagination was in collision with my empathy.

I returned to a school setting and started drafting work using some of my own school experiences of clattering desks, and giving discarded dying flowers to a teacher who generously put them in a vase. I recalled an outing to The Republic [to me then, another country] by train. I recalled my own naiveté and vulnerability and imagined my childhood behaviour, and I considered those teachers who had impressed me. Taking all those elements, I transferred them on to the image of Polish children in a Polish school with a Polish teacher and created the end of a school term scene. I crafted the frame of reference of carefree children bursting to get out of school, neither listening to, nor

grasping the message¹ being given by the headmaster. The fact that the Polish nation was concerned and alert to their political situation many months before the war started², and according to The Times and Express newspapers, German Jews were being deported to Poland in the autumn of 1938³, pogroms were being organized by the German government and on 9-10th November, 1938, *Kristalnacht* occurred, made me positively certain that the narrative should start in June 1939.

Considering the imminent invasion of Poland and its political situation, the British newspaper headlines, my own school experiences and Stefan's rememberings, I wrote, *School Holidays June 1939*⁴, my metaphor for the demise of Poland. I opened the narrative with what I imagined was a biblical promised land showing *Mr Sroka*, the headmaster as a Moses type figure, *Superior*, yet, a man, patient and human enough to be, *chalk-dusted*. The representation of the teacher is significant in that I planned his image to resonate in parts of the narrative. Creating the image of a headmaster gave me the opportunity to use such motifs as chalk, dust, leather, prayer, horses, and flowers which I planned to call upon in the later narrative. A highly significant motive in opening the narrative with the teacher, was to memorialize Stefan's teacher⁵, [whose name I have changed for the purposes of this project] because his death in Auschwitz was a painful remembering for Stefan, and I felt it was important to note such a man.

In order not to alienate readers I have used a short, easily pronounced, and I think, easily remembered name instead of a long and often [to readers of English] difficult to pronounce Polish name with few vowels and multiple consonants such as 'cycz' or 'szymcyk' or 'owski' in the middle or ending, as a hook on which to hang further poems

¹ *Box Of Chalks*, p 1. Daily Express June 30th 1939 reported Danzig "all quiet" as Nazis seize horses and dig trenches.

² William Shirer, *The Rise and Fall Of the Third Reich*, (London: Pan, 1960), p 554. On March 31, sixteen days after Hitler entered Prague the Prime Minister told the House of Commons: in the event of any action which clearly threatened Polish independence and which the Polish Government accordingly considered it vital to resist with their national forces, His Majesty's Government would feel themselves bound at once to lend the Polish Government all support in their power.

³ William Shirer, *The Rise And Fall Of The Third Reich*, (London: Pan, 1964), p 525.

⁴ *Box Of Chalks*, p 4. This poem was initially entitled *Iłownica June 1939*.

⁵ Kazimierz Popiolek, *Silesia In German Eyes*, (Katowice: Slask 1964), p 63.4. The declared prime objective of the Nazi administration in Silesia was to suppress the Polish population there. For this purpose the Polish leaders were physically liquidated and other people were deprived of the means of subsistence or were given the necessities of life only when they denied their nationality. One of the chief aims of the Nazis was to deprive the Polish minority of its future, by getting hold of the younger generation of Polish children.

in the collection. I planned to remove the headmaster in the poem, *German Lessons*¹, but was also developing ideas to use him again as can be seen in the poem, *A Box of Chalks*², and to further resurrect resonances of him in the much later work, *Dust*³, by writing about 'writing in chalk, pen, and dust'. I also took the opportunity to create a resonance of him by using the image of chalk in the final poem, *A Sunflower*⁴. Having decided that the headmaster would have known the political situation, and that he would have understood the consequences of his position as a Polish intellectual under Nazi German rule⁵, I could write him into the narrative as I did. I transposed my recall of the lush and fecund apple and cherry orchards in Poland and chose a Chekovian image of a cherry orchard as a setting for the opening of my narrative. The image was intended to anchor the text in Europe and to represent joy and innocence tinged with horror by the interjection of the head master's voice indirectly warning the class of his possible disappearance, that he,

might not see you children again - and if I don't,
Remember me in your prayers. Each one of you
Put your trust in God,...

Correspondingly, I was working on ten poems as the first part of the narrative with the intention of closing the ten poems with, *German Lessons*⁶, which was intended as an opening up of the Germanization period in the narrative. Having given much consideration to opening the narrative with a school closure, I carried the paradoxical idea to the closure of the narrative and planned the 'opening up' of a new generation in the image of a *Sunflower*. I also knew that the idea would permit me to continue to exploit the image of chalk as a motif which would reoccur in the narrative and again in the final poem. Once I had completed the introductory poem, *Summer Holidays June 1939*, I felt enabled to transport my imagination to Poland. I could recall the silences laced with the sounds of insects, clicking of grasshoppers, and the distant low of a single

¹ *Box Of Chalks* p 10.

² *Ibid.*, p 32.

³ *Ibid.*, p 62.

⁴ *Box Of Chalks* p 65. *Seam Poetry Magazine* (Issue 20 January 2004) Editor Frank Dullaghan p 6.

⁵ Kazimierz Popiolek, *Silesia in German Eyes*, (Katowice: Slask, 1964), p.51 ...there were no signs of Polish life. There were no organisations, no Polish schools, no Polish events, no Polish inscriptions, and no other symptoms of the Polish presence. The Polish leaders were in prison and in consecration camps.

⁶ *Box Of Chalks*, p 10.

cow tethered to a chain¹ in a field somewhere. I vividly recalled the smells of warm earth and dry dusty grasses during summer walks. Memories of having walked barefoot through the soft grasses after summer showers in rural Silesia and having observed the rolling landscape and the Beskid Mountains contributed to the creation of *Telegraph Poles*², *Horses*³, *Cursing in the River*⁴ and *Malinowski's Barn*⁵, the opening scenes for the narrative. I found that I could manipulate and adjust scenes and images.

Splicing the instinctual physical revulsion I felt, when small grass-green frogs slithered over my bare feet in the rain, with remembered smells and closeness to the moist earth, I drafted work incorporating a necessary brutality, *blowing out the brain*, which I intended to function as developing tension and anticipation of the war section of the narrative. I worked directly on the micro experience of the tiny frogs slithering over my bare feet in the wet grasses to create

The Executioner

*Hey! Boy! A cow to be milked.
She's full. She's in pain.
Get moving boy! No work, no gain!*
I was the expert at milking,
And blowing out the brain
But I sat on my helmet, bulling boots
Watching a frog slip over my feet.
It plopped into my watery trench,
I scooped it out - neat - in my mess-tin
And poured it on to the grass.
Camouflaged, it slithered away, silently.
I milked the cow, then
Put her out of her misery.⁶

Having used my recalled experiences and applied them to create a wider picture allowed me to prepare the character of young boy who was to become the conscripted youth who went,

*On a train that shunted through the rubble of Berlin
To the Arbeitsdienst at Kreismecklinberg*

¹ *Box Of Chalks*, p 8.

² *Ibid.*, p 5.

³ *Ibid.*, p 6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p 7.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p 8.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p 22.

...naïve
*Ignorant, and meant for the 7th Army*¹.

I planned that he would become an adolescent, and, naively, he would long to ‘go home in uniform,’ having ‘bartered cigarettes for shoes’². When I was sure about opening the narrative with my pre-war poem, I inserted as many motifs as it would take with the idea that images from the poem would take root and allow me to resurrect them later in the narrative. Once I had established my fundamental poem, ideas seemed to emerge and the work began to manifest itself in a vague form of what I had originally envisaged, i.e. a canvas for an extended painting in the form of the Bayeux Tapestry; a sequence of images threaded with a web of incidents, repeated names and materials such as leather, chalk, amber, ebony, flowers, Polish foods, and references to limbs, legs and backs, horses, and places. My original ‘cinematic frame’ began to appear structured. However, I would not have reached that stage of a concrete beginning had I not experimented with my different approaches.

¹ *Box Of Chalks*, p 16. I applied figures instead of characters in the text for artistic purposes when writing ‘Seventh Army’. I hoped to capture a militaristic image in the poem.

² *Ibid.*, p 21.

Chapter 5

Part 1

Drafting the Poems

Each poem was a combination of collected information, recorded words and phrases, snippets of conversation, my memories and experiences interwoven with an oral history. Depending on the circumstances of the chronology, I worked on the subject I needed in order to connect the different parts of the narrative. When the basic construction of a part of the narrative was under way I worked in a, 'piece-work / conveyor-belt' method. If I was dissatisfied with the text or the sound of the poem I would draft and redraft in longhand and sometimes disassemble it completely and start again as in the case of *German Lessons*¹. But a poem such as *Volkliste*, a given poem from its genesis, needed little drafting. [*Volkliste* will be discussed below].

The poem, *German Lessons*, was written with the aim of being both literal and metaphorical. The material went through many drafts before I was satisfied with its rhythm, sounds, and most important of all its understatement of upheaval. The challenge was to show as concisely as possible, that a complete transformation had taken place in the small Polish school, in the Polish language, and in all of Poland, without obvious exposition. The content of the poem remained the same from my initial hand written seventh or eighth draft which appeared as,

School reopened after Christmas ??
We were in Herr Menzel's class
My sisters were Frau Kapp's kinder
And I couldn't say (no one said that) Pilsudski's statue
Was missing from its plinth
And Sroka was not there
And bright clean (squares? marks? shapes?)
Of Smigly-Rydz, the crucifix, and Moscicki
Were aglow (glowing?) behind Herr Hitler and his hakenkreuz
But most of all I could not understand the lessons
I could not (learn? manage? master?) my German

The material was bulky, rough and cluttered. The line breaks were awkward and typical of early drafts. I was dissatisfied. I also spent a lot of time considering the name of the German teacher, *Kapp*.

¹ *Box Of Chalks*, p 10.

That aspect of the piece seemed to be important at the time and I kept trying to make the poem 'work' through the names. The names in the text became a stumbling block for me. I left the poem and returned to it again to find that the names still disturbed me. I then found the sound of the name of the German teacher, *Kapp*, when preceded by the word, *Frau*, resembled the English slang word 'crap' so I changed *Frau Kapp*, to *Frau Herschel*. At a later date I changed the gender from 'Frau' to 'Herr', and changed the name again to, 'Herr Reisner'. It was a time-consuming but probably a necessary task in the writing process which gave a name which sat more comfortably within the text. To impact upon the reader by 'understating' the removal of the headmaster, Mr Sroka, I extracted the line, 'And Mr Sroka was not there,' and inserted, 'Herr Meinhold was our new headmaster,' leaving it to the reader to assume or decide that 'Mr Sroka' the Polish headmaster, had disappeared from the school setting, thus allowing me to fulfil the prophesy in the opening poem, when he said, 'I might not see you children again - and if I don't, / Remember me in your prayers'. However, having worked so intently on the names within the text I could enter into the strongly imagined world, concentrate on the main aim of the poem, emphasise the disappearance of Poland in a way that would make a reader gradually realise what was being divulged in the writing. The removal of the paintings and statues of Polish rulers and politicians from the walls and stairs of the school was of major importance, but I wanted their removal to be conveyed in an indirect way, understating the political and cultural annihilation that had taken place rather than by stressing the fact directly. Paintings and statues might be seen as unimportant and ineffectual items in a classroom, but they represented history and culture. I chose to write about the brightness which glowed behind Hitler and the Hakenkreuz, installed, after the removal of pictures and crucifix. That way of seeing an oppressed people helped anchor their experiences in the everyday changes to their lives within the narrative.

Writing about the removal of artefacts seems trivial and different from factual and historic reportage, yet as a writer understating the upheaval, I have retained the facts at another level of understanding. Understatement can have an impact that accentuation fails to make, and in the process of *German Lessons*, I was compelled to emphasise that Poland was disappearing. There was a metamorphosis taking place in the class room, in

the language and in the culture and it was happening before the children's eyes. But it would have been insensitive not to observe the glow, almost obscured by 'Hitler and the hakenkreuz'. A significant draft appeared as,

School re-opened after Christmas:
Herr Menzel was the new headmaster,
He put me in Frau Herschel's class.
The statue of Pilsudski
Was missing from its plinth
And the stencils from the portraits
Of Smigly-Rydz, Moscicki
And the crucifix, were fading
Behind Herr Hitler and the hakenkreuz.
And I chewed on pencils
As Frau Herschel was tirading
Her dictation.

A major difficulty was, finding a word that would create a sense of a 'fourth dimension' or explain the marks which remained on the walls of the school room when, 'the portrait and the crucifix', were removed. I became fascinated by the marks. I saw them, and still see them as pale gossamer ghostliness, my metaphor for a Poland that was removed from maps between 1939 -1945¹, a shadow, and a nation of shadows at that time, both physically and politically. The brightness on the wall was not a mark or a stain, or an imprint, nor was it a shadow. It would appear to be a fourth dimension or the ghost of the crucifix and the ghost of the portrait which I imagined Poland became, after the Second World War².

I decided not to emphasis the school boy's inability to learn 'German grammar' as in the final lines of early drafts because I planned to pick up the image again in the poem *Homecoming*³. By changing the lines to show, 'Frau Herschel tirading her dictation,' I could make a cultural link with the dictator, 'Hitler' in the previous lines thus allowing a partial rhyming of the words, 'tirading,' and 'fading'. I portrayed the boy 'chewing on pencils', to convey the image of a vulnerable child struggling with an imposed language rather than writing his voice saying, 'I could not learn? manage? master? German

¹ Norman Davies, *God's Playground A History Of Poland Vol. II 1795 to the Present* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p 490.

² Neither The Restoration Department at Hampton Court Palace, nor The National Gallery, had a word for this condition / site on removal of an exhibit.

³ *Box Of Chalks*, p 17.

grammar'. Because the word 'pencils' rhymed with 'stencils' I began to feel more comfortable with the syntax, rhythm and structure, but I still questioned the correctness of the word 'stencils'. However, I could find no word for the 'mark left on walls' when pictures or other items are removed. That area retains and exposes its original state, marked out by a surrounding physical coating of dirt on the areas from the edge of an unexposed area which highlights the originally covered space. Having no choice I retained the word 'stencils' in the vain hope that readers will not refute it. It was difficult to express the images and the metamorphosis that had taken place in the classroom and I left the text temporarily. However, after the poem had rested unread for months, and after several further drafting transitions, it finally emerged as,

German Lessons
School re-opened after Christmas.
The heating wasn't on.
Herr Meinhold was our new headmaster
In leather boots like ebony.
He put me in Herr Reisner's class.
I tried to be invisible.
The statue of Pilsudski
Was missing from its plinth.
High on the walls - behind Hitler
And the hakenkreuz - stencilled shapes
In the form of a crucifix and the portraits
Of Moscicki, of Smigly-Rydz,
And Chopin, glowed.
I chewed my stubby pencil
When Herr Reisner paced the floor
Mouthing his dictation
That bounced from wall to wall
Over our lowered heads
And out through the door,
Echoing down the hall
His eyes watching everyone, and me¹.

I inserted the line, 'In leather boots like ebony.', with the intention of resurrecting the image later in the narrative so that I could portray a naïve boy in the poem,

Leave
I wanted to go home in uniform –
My riding boots like ebony,

¹ *Box Of Chalks* p 10.

With spurs – so they'd see me
Sophisticated and worldly – from abroad ¹.

Inserting such information as 'leather boots like ebony' into the poem *German Lessons*, allowed me to show the character progressing from childhood to a young boy with a sense of pride and ambition mixed with naiveté, characteristics which I inserted into the earlier poem,

Ambitions

To wear a cape, a four cornered hat
Like great Polish leaders, strut – be young peacocks
With power, flaunt our manhood for all to see
Ride high on horseback – click the heels
Of long leather boots – salute, and be saluted
Was only a dream...²

It was intentional in the poem, *German Lessons*, to create the image of the child with the, 'lowered head, cowering', in order to make a link with the poem, *Against the Sun*³, which was in the planning and development stage and would be slotted into the war section. My aim was to create a narrative paradox using the image of the 'lowered heads' in opposite circumstances in both poems i.e. the child and the German invader represented in reversed roles,

.....I looked back,
His shoulders heaved against the sinking sun
Like a child cowering, chewing pencils
When a new term is begun ⁴.

As stated above, on reading the account of *The German National List* ⁵, I was instantly compelled to write the poem *Volkliste*, and concluded that some poems, such as *Volkliste*, a found poem, simply slip onto the page unaided, almost organically, while others such as *German Lessons*, need a longer time to complete. Like Heaney, I believe that an artist's personal experiences and history makes a large contribution to their art.

Heaney recalled his experiences as a child when he wrote,

.....staring at the polished holster

¹ *Box Of Chalks* p 21.

² *Ibid.*, p 15.

³ *Ibid.*, p 34.

⁴ *English, The Journal of the English Association* Vol 53 No 207. 2004 Editors Ken Newton and Peter Barry p 244. *Box Of Chalks*, p 34.

⁵ Kazimierz Popiolek, *Silesia in German Eyes* (Katowice: Slask, 1964), p 71.9.

With its buttoned flap, the braid cord
Looped into the revolver butt...¹.

Working on the poem *Volksliste*, I called on my experiences as a teenager cycling home through quiet lanes in Northern Ireland when stopped and questioned by chin-strapped, peak-capped 'B' Specials with guns, and I felt very *relieved / Of the boot of the law*², when I was allowed to go on my way after answering questions on religion, and which school I attended. I used the image of the RUC Northern Ireland police, armed and heavily booted, and the sense of oppression which I experienced whilst living there. I thought about how my brother might have felt when he was arrested and I combined those feelings with how Polish people, especially Stefan, I believe, would have experienced oppression and threat under German occupation, and, holding on to those experiences I could 'distil' my poem, *Volksliste*. It was immediately after reading the four conditions of the National List that I wrote a few short notes about German categorisation on a page.

If you want to live you have to be German.
If you want to be German get on the Volksliste.
We divide you in groups, one to four, not more.
To one and two we give citizenship -
That's only for the few, unconditionally, immediately.
Three, conditionally, we want to see how low you can crawl.
Four - you have no choice at all!³

When I read them, I felt the discomfort of writing in a persona with whose viewpoint I disagree. It was a harsh revelation to see my written syntax on the page in comparison with official text. It was almost like being implicated in the act of issuing the Decree and it was not comfortable to see my handwriting inhabiting such statements on paper. I have removed nothing from the text since the first drafting though numerous small adjustments have been made to the line breaks and punctuation in order to obtain a menacing and commanding voice often associated with Nazi German accents. I worked through four or five drafts until they became eighteen short sharp lines to create a staccato effect. I wanted to stress the inevitable subjection of the Silesian people whom the National List addressed, then added the final declaration, 'We declare you subject.' I decided to place

¹ Seamus Heaney, *New Selected Poems 1966 – 1987*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), p 85.

² *Ibid.*, p 85.

³ *Box Of Chalks* p 11.

the line break at the plural pronoun, 'you', allowing the word, 'Subject', to stand alone for emphasis.

The poem did not arrive without complications. There was a stage in the process where there was something missing. I did not know what it was. I was also dissatisfied with the rhythm. In the early stages the material did not evoke the quality of austerity and harshness that I was looking for. I tried simple things such as punctuating the text with exclamation marks to accentuate a staccato effect and it appeared as,

If you want to live
You have to be German!
If you want to be German
Get on the Volksliste!
We divide you in groups
One to four, not more.
To one and two
We give citizenship -
That's only for the few,
Unconditionally, immediately.
Three, conditionally.
We want to see
How low you can crawl!
Four -
You have no choice
At all!
We declare you
Subject!

However, at a very late stage in the project I saw that the presence of exclamation marks was still questionable and I removed them. Without exclamation marks the poem seemed less clichéd and to have gained a sense of power and gave me a sense of achievement. My found poem came out of the roots of the enemy literature and allowed the opportunity to create the official voice of the occupier. Although the sequence was planned to appear in a male Polish voice I feel that the tone of authority in the poem became an important part of the narrative to show that boys like Stefan and his compatriots, and men like Dominik Stoltman, and those recorded by Alojzy Lysko, were conscripted into the German army and forced to 'make compromises which [did] not dishonour or diminish them, but reinforce their humanity.'¹

¹ Dominik Stoltman, *Trust Me You Will Survive*, (Edinburgh: Pentland Press, 1994), p viii.

While each poem was an intense dramatic moment in the form of a still frame, the challenge was to create a panoramic narrative of the poetic sequence. The poems were planned and worked out strategically, then honed and crafted to fit into different parts of the narrative. Progress depended on what information had been collected and what content was needed to push the narrative forward. The nature of the narrative required that it be in chronological order. At each point of progression a poem was constructed around the scant information I had recorded, making sure that there was enough information for the reader to know what was happening and in which setting a particular stage in the history was placed. Although a small collection, large voids appeared in the narrative. Balancing the time-scape and the landscape became frustrating. Countless loose ends were being held together while a beginning, a middle and an end were being assembled. It became problematic to insert text which fitted every angle as from the end of the *Falaise 1 – 5* ‘We can join the others / Going over / If I can manage / To pull you.’¹ to the poem *Orders*, which was written to represent the combatant’s arrival in Scotland,

I wish I could dance with you
Elizabeth O'Donaghue,
And give you cornflowers, and poppies
And buttercups,
And clouds of sweet forget-me-nots
Tied up with a stalk of wheat
Instead of these blue flax flowers,
Off-cuts from your Scottish stacks,²...

Deciding how much information to provide for the reader depended on the factual material collected and my ability to create an artistic and poetic representation of a piece of history or an experience. The only information and emotion I had to work on for that part of the narrative was the sense of shame and humiliation that Stefan had felt when he had been taken prisoner at Falaise in Normandy wearing a German uniform. The scraps

¹ *English, The Journal of the English Association* Vol. 53 No 207 Editors Ken Newton and Peter Barry p 242. *Box Of Chalks*, pp 27 – 31. This poem appeared under the title *Stasz*. For artistic purposes in *Box Of Chalks*, the title has been changed to *Falsise 5*.

² *Ibid.*, p 244. *Box Of Chalks*, p 36. This poem appeared in the above journal under the title *Warsaw has Fallen*. For artistic purposes in *Box Of Chalks*, the title has been changed to *Orders*.

of painful information Stefan remembered such as his 'having a watch' gave me the small item needed to create the poem *The Tobacco Box*¹. Apart from that, the only concrete information I had, was, that he and many others 'were taken to Scotland'. It was problematic trying to resolve the void in the narrative and maintain a sense of fluidity and realism. I considered the risky decision of leaving the reader to make the meaning. However, in the late stages, each time I read it, the void seemed to grow and it appeared that additional poems were needed.

I assembled clues considering the distance between being taken prisoner and reaching the prisoner of war camp by researching the geographical positions. Falaise lay approximately 0.1 degree longitude and 48.6 latitude south east of Caen at 0.2 longitude and 49.1 degree latitude. I saw that a journey must have been made somehow. Did they walk? Suggesting to Stefan that a journey had been made, *Oh! Yes*, was the reply, *A very big American driver drove us. We put our mess-tins above our heads to catch the rain to get a drink*. It was an instant 'remembering', and like a flick of a film still. Stefan was upset. There followed a long silence. I didn't feel that I could press for more information. That presented a different aspect for the narrative. How many men were there, what were the road conditions, and how long did the journey take? Considering the possible conditions of transportation I tried to discover how I could present the journey to the prison camp in a truck. It was almost impossible to write words that would emit the depths of emotion which I was looking for. Nor could I find a unique and unusual way to say 'this is a truck load of prisoners of war going to prison'. I think it was the long silence which followed the sudden remembering that was getting in the way of creativity. However, the image of men holding mess tins above their heads for rain water was permanently with me. But it took about twelve months before the problem of how to write the image was solved, and it was solved in a most unexpected way. The youngest of our family had been drawing huge sunflowers on the paved area of our garden one hot afternoon. She had spent hours in the heat carefully choosing the colours from a new box of chalks. She rubbed the chalk into the broken tiles and from time to time stood back and viewed her creation. She was covered with grass stains, garden soil,

¹ *English, The Journal of the English Association* Vol 53 No 207 Editors Ken Newton and Peter Barry p 243. *Box Of Chalks*, p 33.

perspiration, and chalk dust. Suddenly she insisted on taking the box, grabbed it and promptly dropped it. I thought at the time that most of the pieces must have broken and considered that if the box been packed full and tight, the chinks would have stayed in place and might not have been broken in the fall. In an instant of poetic correspondence, the Polish boy - the school boy character at the beginning of the narrative who had waited for the headmaster, 'Mr Sroka', to finish 'afternoon prayers', - was before my eyes as a prisoner of war, being taken from Falaise to the American prison camp in a truck. Immediately there appeared to be a link for the narrative¹. The impact of the box of chinks on the ground made me imagine what it could have been like in tight and cramped conditions, on or in a truck when the troops surrendered, or were taken prisoner². I juxtaposed the different coloured chinks for the different nationals in the prisoner transportation truck (which, of course, was the chink box). I imagined 'Mr Sroka' the head teacher in the opening poem, *School Holidays June 1939*³, dropping a box of chinks and the dust spilling from the broken pieces, as had just happened to the child in the garden. I then adjusted the syntax in the opening poem and portrayed the character as being 'chink dusted', and inserted, '... Wiping his glasses with a soft leather rag...

Returning to the draft about the truck load of prisoners, I linked the child's unkempt state with the image of dry, dirty, unwashed men, standing, crushed together in the truck [like sticks of chink] holding *mess-tins above our heads to catch a drop of rain*. The poem, *A Box Of Chinks*⁴ was crafted as the central pivot of the poetic sequence and through a stream of significance the headmaster, 'Mr Sroka', was intended to create a memory in the reader, because,

Once - a lifetime ago - Mr Sroka
Dropped a box of chinks
And only dirt fell out⁵.

The image of 'broken chinks', a small epiphany, was provided by a child's natural demand for more. Whilst writing the poem *A Box Of Chinks*, I made a decision to

¹ From that incident I proceeded to use the image of chink and to set up a network of signifiers in the narrative.

² Carlo D'Este, *Decisions In Normandy* (London: Harper Collins, 1994), p 430.

³ *Box Of Chinks* p 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p 32.

⁵ *English The Journal of the English Association Vol 53 No207* Editors Ken Newton and Peter Barry p 243. *Box Of Chinks*, p 32.

incorporate the poem *Sunflower*¹, initially not intended for the narrative but written for my own pleasure. It was inspired by the afternoons in the garden when our patio and house walls were a sea of chalked colour. I crafted it to fit into the narrative as the closing poem when deciding how the narrative would be completed. Its text was toned to represent brightness, life and hope, as the child with 'dusty bare feet' lisps,

*I've made a sunflower for you Dziadek*²

As above, it was inserted into the sequence to act paradoxically as an opening up of a 'new generation' at the close of the narrative and to resonate with the 'closure of the school / Poland' in the opening poem, *School Holidays June 1939*³.

The poems *English Lessons* and *A House* were created in the early stages of the writing process and placed strategically in the narrative. However, there were problems of continuity when placed in the narrative. The reality of the time did not correspond with the character buying a house then, in London. A means had to be devised to provide the young ex-combatant with the ability to buy a house so that I could expand his potential and allow the narrative to progress so that I could write him into England. Having to be realistic about 'how the house was acquired', the idea of quick American money to provide a house was almost instantaneous. The idea came from my memories of the food and clothes packages sent from relatives in America in the nineteen fifties. I recalled the sweet smell of new cotton dresses and the taste of chocolate, and the sheer joy of reading 'the funnies' at the back of the enclosed newspapers and the feel of a wad of American dollars wrapped up in them.

As a child, *Superman* comic strips, *L'il Abner* and *Orphan Annie* gave me the impression that America could provide everything. I decided very quickly to place my character in America but that presented problems because I did not know how I was going to convey that idea to the reader. Placing the ex-combatant in America required that a journey had to be written the narrative. Not having contemplated a journey to America it was a delicate balance between closing the voids, or leaving the reader to decipher the narrative. However the only way I could 'give him money' was to send him

¹ *Seam Poetry Magazine* Editor Frank Dullaghan (Issue 20 January 2004), p 6. *Box Of Chalks* p 65.

² *Dziadek* Grandfather.

³ *Box Of Chalks* p 4.

on a journey to America and create the necessary textual bridge to connect the fracture in the narrative, so *After Yalta*¹ materialised.

Images of New York were almost immediate. Influenced by composers and lyricists such as Leonard Bernstein, (1918-1990) who composed *West Side Story* (1957) and the music for *On The Waterfront* (1954) and European Americans like George (1898-1937) and Ira (1896-1983) Gershwin, who composed the musical works, *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924) and *Porgy and Bess* (1935)², artists who made language 'sing', gave me the impetus to try writing an American voice into the narrative. Of course the writing could not be spoken in the voice of my character so once again I allowed the narrative to contain a new voice in the second person but spoken in interior monologue through my character's voice. I created what I thought might be an Arthur Miller's *Willy Loman* voice, or a *hick* voice that would give advice to a 'greenhorn'. I used italics to suggest a different voice and tried to accentuate the twang of a New York accent by incorporating an abundance of nasal consonants 'n' and 'm'

Don't go down to Harlem.
Don't go to the Bronx.
Don't ride late in the subway
Don't get caught with drunks.

By stressing 'b' 'd' and 'g' consonants I think I have created a brisk movement or a swing in the voice. Using two short sentences followed by a breathless tirade in short line breaks with sparse punctuation, I hope that I have caught the sound by which a reader would sense that the character was in New York and had been given advice on how to survive, and that he shouldn't give

..to the legless beggar
On 42nd Street,
He might look lame and helpless
He probably has two feet
'Cos everybody's out to take a dollar
With a flick knife or stiletto,
They wanna make a fast buck here,
How, it doesn't matter
And if you are found with your throat cut

¹ *Box Of Chalks* p 39.

² Further influences were, the works of Cole Porter (1892 – 1964) who wrote *Night and Day*, *Let's Do It*, *Begin the Beguine* and the lyrics for, *Anything Goes* (1934) and, *Kiss Me Kate* (1948), Oscar Hammerstein (1895 – 1960) who used the English language to create the lyrics for *Oklahoma!* (1943), *South Pacific* (1949), and *The Sound of Music* (1959).

*Right here - above the collar,
Who d'you think'll give a damn?*

Writing the over-voice in italics and studding the text with the signifiers, 'River Hudson', 'Puerto Rican', 'dime', 'streetcar', 'Harlem', 'Bronx', I hoped to evoke the New York of the fifties and sixties with a sense of threat and the clang of violence by applying the words, 'flick knife', 'stiletto', 'fast buck', 'humid sticky nights', 'growl', 'drunk' within the text. Using the image of the *legless beggar* in the penultimate line was meant to extend back to the poem, *Legless*¹, in the earlier narrative. I then took the opportunity to reinforce the character's humanity by writing him 'giving dimes to the legless beggar' against the advice from the italicized voice. Although I have pursued a complicated method to craft the poem, it allowed me to create a movement and a journey as well as a bridge for an Atlantic size void in the narrative. Addressing the voids was a necessary task parallel to monitoring every word to observe its effect, or consequence, upon others and other parts of the text within the poetic sequence to achieve fluidity.

¹ *Box Of Chalks*, p 25.

Within my envisaged narrative I had structure and an extended time frame, but the work being based on war, which in turn, creates upheaval, change, and the displacement of people, demanded the transference of the character from one imaginative setting to another. Writing images in the poems to show transition was more complicated than I had foreseen and it was challenging to incorporate a sense of shift within the work. Initially, I had imagined the narrative as an extended odyssey, then as the time-scape developed and the landscape widened, I found small odysseys were required to represent the movement and transition, because I did not want the written journeys to be obvious or direct. I tried to write in a form that suggested movement. The first transitional piece to be placed in the narrative was the contrived poem *After Yalta*¹. When that was in place, I then had the problem of transposing him from America to England. But, I also had to create a time slip to permit earning money before his return to England so that I could realistically create him as being in Poland. *Waiting*² was written to anchor the character in New York and then return him on a journey by sea, 'On the Queen Elizabeth, to England, with the Cunard Line'. Within the poem I had to provide images of his financial capacity because I had already placed him in *A House*³ at a very early stage in the writing which threw up problems of realism. Aiming to include an abundance of motifs, and recurring motifs, the condensed poem, *Waiting*, emerged from my drafts.

The challenge of chronology in the sequential poems demanded an organising principle which in the early stages was challenging. Within the principle, streams of significance had to be inserted to create memory in the reader. The poem *Waiting* includes images of 'State Troopers on horseback' and people 'getting splashed with horses' urine'. 'It darkens the street'. / Ammonia chokes the air'. The images were a resonance of those in the poem *Ambitions*⁴.

¹ *Box Of Chalks*, p 39.

² *Ibid.*, p 40.

³ *Ibid.*, p 41.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p 15.

...mounted guards astride
Quivering bellies mares.
Steaming floods of urine splashed darkness
On the cobblestones. Amonia choked the air.

Associated ideas from the poem *Waiting*, were then projected into the poem *A Colonel*¹ which included the parallel images of waiting, and transferred emotional territory, for the serving 'Colonel'.

The further poems of transition, *On Leaving France*², *BetweenThe Lines*³, *Border Crossing*⁴, and *No-Man's-Land*⁵, were written towards the end of the project. *On Leaving France*, as above, was an essential bridging poem in the central narrative but it had to be crafted to represent transition and continuity. I had the information to write the journey from France to England, i.e. that Stefan and other prisoners of war had received Red Cross packs and that he and many others had been sick and vomited, having not eaten for a long time on the front line in *Falaise*⁶. Stefan had related the conditions on the transportation vessels, the frustrations and fights over food and space, and arguments between the different nationalities which arose among prisoner troops during the voyage. I noted that Polish combatants had been transported to Scotland which was then the main training base for Polish Forces in Britain⁷. Stefan remembered the smooth upholstery on the train seats and 'polite English soldiers' guarding them. I attempted to write about a journey from an English port to Scotland but I could not substitute my experiences with a prisoner's experience. Tension between memory and fact became a further issue, an aim

¹ Ibid., p 50.

² Ibid., p 35.

³ Ibid., p 37.

⁴ Ibid., p 57.

⁵ Ibid., p 58.

⁶ William Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, (London: Pan, 1964), p 1280. 'By the middle of August 1944, all that was left of the German armies in Normandy was locked in a narrow pocket around Falaise where Hitler had forbidden any further retreat'. I understand from my subject that he and his compatriots lived off whatever they found lying around, which was lost or abandoned, while they were on the German front line.

⁷ Wladyslaw Anders, *An Army In Exile*, (London: Macmillan, 1949), p 105. The Polish General Anders met the Polish motorized and paratroop units and was proud of the 'crack Polish Squadron No.303 which made a great contribution to the Battle of Britain'.

Michael Hope, *Polish Deportees In The Soviet Union*, (London: Veritas Foundation Publication Centre, 2000), p 13.

behind my writing being, to show that the conscripts had made an important contribution to the Allies' war effort.

Nothing materialised from my attempts to write a train journey. The task seemed clichéd on the grounds of Auden's poem, *Night Mail*, and Edith Nesbit's, *The Railway Children*. Images from the old black and white film, *Brief Encounter*, started bubbling up somewhere within me and the sounds of trains wouldn't get out of my head. I found myself 'trapped' by images of trains. I decided against the idea because it was impossible to find a way in which could engage with any frame of reference and include the images I wanted. However, I realized that I had used a train image in the poem, *Beef Stew*¹, in the early part of the narrative and I decided not to repeat it.

I could not understand my inability to write the transition from France to England and began to question how 'writing from inside' was not functioning. I came to the conclusion that I was looking at the scene from a woman's point of view and not that of young man glad to be alive and wanting to stay alive. When I reverted to empathising with a young conscript in the midst of a troopship, I wrote it as, a young man glad to be alive and wanting to stay alive, in a paradoxical vessel of hell providing a comfortable, safe haven, albeit a '...wall of steel / Wet, each seam welded, sealed / With rusting carbuncular bolts'...²

I used my experiences of Channel crossings by car-ferry in all weathers when it heaves and tilts, and most especially in winter time when water drips down the metal walls of the hold and leaves rust stains at the joints. Although writing *On Leaving France*, as a transitional poem, I also wanted to create an image of resignation to represent the unvoiced - those who died in the English Channel in the Second World War.

Deciding how and when to send my character on a journey to Poland was equal to working within a cobweb. My intention was to make the movement subtle and to create a perception of journeying, which in turn was intended to appear as disruption in the whole work. I wrote and discarded material such as,

London Warsaw Train

The train fills up with uniformed guards with rifles,
Their dogs tugging on stunted leather leads.

¹ *Box Of Chalks*, p 23.

² *Ibid.*, p 35.

Motionless at the clump of heavy boots,
The scritch-scratching of ungripping paws
Sliding on the carriage roof, we wait
Amid board games, biros, books
And bottles of rainbow bubbles, packed
And carried to keep the children out of trouble.

Beneath the train, spills of stones tumble
Over unpolished boots of stumbling guards
Bent double - checking - meeting eyes,
Looking back, upside down, just above the track.

Tongue extended, body warm and panting,
Their Alsatian dog slips into our carriage
Slithering between and behind our legs, its claws clicking,
Sliding over our shoes. We smile with our teeth
Quietly offering the guards our passports, visas,
Evidence of exchanged money, and an explosion
Of rainbow bubbles, blown from a plastic wand¹.

Superimposing my experiences on to the character did not always work as in the above case. I had created a movement in the early stages of the project without having considered each point of reference and the consequences of the images I was inserting². That led to a lot of time spent on unproductive work such as *London Warsaw Train*. The piece did not fit into the frame, firstly because the text was not conveying a male voice, and secondly, I had not made provision for the character to have children at that point in the narrative. I removed the piece and left it to the reader to assume that he had visited his aged parents' home. After much consideration I still felt that the reader had to know how the journey to Poland had been made. Placing as many links within the text as I dared, I manipulated the syntax of the poem *My Father*³, and created a narrative within the narrative, which covered time past, as the returned ex-combatant reminisces and wonders, 'how many were killed?' and time present as his father looks across the 'furrowed' land, gouged / Pitted from shells, irrigated with the blood / Of Russians and Germans.' The character is unsure of the future reception he will get as he stands 'Between the plum and cherry trees, [he] planted, / Too close to the house. /'

I've overlooked the twenty-four-hour clock.

¹ *English, The Journal of the English Association*, Vol52 No202 Editors Ken Newton and Peter Barry p72-3

² As the work in progress grew, it became increasingly more difficult to balance and control every word and aspect of the narrative text.

³ *Box Of Chalks* p 42.

Can't think what my mother's face looks like,
And out of the years I call to you, *Ojciec*. You rise,
Arms outstretched, pronouncing your blessing,
Niech Bedzie Pochwalony Jezus Chrystus!
We expected you this morning, son.

The manipulated poem, *My Father*, rather than, *London to Warsaw Train*, provided the information needed to push the narrative forward. I engaged with the transference of images from the previously written work *Choice*¹, by including plum and cherry trees, motifs of significance recurring from the opening poem.

In removing my character from Poland and returning him to London, a different method was applied. Three poems were contrived including associated images such as *Peckham Rye*, *St. Pancras Station* and *Westminster Cathedral*, with the aim of showing that the character had made the transition to London. Parallel with writing the poems for transition and place, preparation for the later narrative was in the planning. Intermittent ideas suggesting emotional unbalance and the conflict of personalities were being envisaged and placed in,

*Airman*²,

..... he sat down on Peckham Rye
Smiled, and quietly began to sing
Goralu czy ci nie zal
Odchodzic od stron ojczystych?
Swierkowych lasow I hal,
I tych potokow srebrzystych
Goralu czy ci nie zal?
Goralu wracaj do hal!

He looked at me. He didn't see me the last time
I saw Malinowski, and today he makes the headlines
In a south-east London freebie;
Polish Airman Drowns in bath
In psychiatric wing.

¹ Box Of Chalks, p 14.

² Ibid., p 51.

and

A Colonel¹

.....surrounded by mountains of crockery
Baskets of silver cutlery, waiting to be washed by you,

An officer who once served the Czar, now paid by the hour,
You wait, and polish silver with me, at St. Pancras, B.R.

and

New Lives²

You looked older than in the Arbeitsdienst
When you wept over Tadek Kroll.
Karol Marszewski, I called to you
You looked straight into my eyes.
Czesc! Karol! Moj stary przyjacielu,
Thrusting out my hand.
Reserved, unsurprised, cold, your
Good Morning, Sir, hung paralysed
On the Westminster air. You couldn't
'Quite place' me in your memory,
You didn't introduce your family.

*No-Man's-Land*³ was written using my experiences of border crossings from South to Northern Ireland during 'the troubles', and crossings at 'checkpoint Charlie' in Berlin, and the German-Polish borders, the Austrian-Czech, and the Czech-Polish borders. I wanted to create an undercurrent of tension, suffocating in a campervan crossing *No-Man's-Land*, encapsulating the long second stanza with an inhalation of breath to be exhaled on the last line 'On the other side of no-man's-land'. The poems were placed at intervals in the narrative to imply a sense of place and transference of emotional territory in the work. Simultaneously writing transitional poems and poems to introduce the oncoming emotional fissure in the character was a continual and major challenge. Ensuring that each poem fitted in its relationship to every other poem yet stand independently became an artistic and administrative mission. I did not grasp what became my organizing principle until the writing was well established. In retrospect, I would approach a large piece of work differently another time.

¹ *Box Of Chalks*, p 50.

² *Ibid.*, p 52.

³ *Ibid.*, p 58.

Housman wrote, 'Poems seldom consist of poetry and nothing else; and pleasure can be derived also from their other ingredients'. He is 'convinced that most readers, when they think that they are admiring poetry, are deceived by [an] inability to analyse their sensations, and that they are really admiring, not the poetry of the passage before them, but something else in it, which they like better than poetry'¹.

Something strange takes place when long and short vowels, heavy and light consonants are placed on a page and carry a listener / reader to, '*lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore*', to hear an, '*evening full of linnets wings*', in *Innisfree*², perhaps touching a latent layer of memory. I am convinced that some kind of transportation takes place, as Housman says, 'something else which they like better than poetry'.

Capturing sounds of insects hitting a window, or the noise of thick two week old refrigerated soup slurping down the sink, or creating the sound of a child falling over, by the careful arrangement of vowels and consonants on a page to create an emotion in a reader, is a powerful element in poetry. The alphabetical codes on a page, like musical notes, need an involved voice, the instrument, to interpret the codes. The involved voice controls the levels of coded noise to flow and erupt from the tongue 'like a river of breath'³, allowing onomatopoeic noise or language to enter the reader / listener. What happens between the assembled hieroglyphic shapes on the page and in the reader's mind before it is verbalized and erupts from the reader's mouth and transfuses into the listener's ear or mind to create an emotion, or a sound, or the hint of smoke, or food, perfume, sea, or cut-grass is, to me, quite mysterious; like verbal alchemy.

While baking cakes and biscuits for a family Christmas celebration, I linked my sensory experiences with Stefan's related experiences of standing in the snow, on guard

¹ Alfred E Housman, *Collected Poems and Selected Prose*, (London: Allen Lane Penguin, 1988), p 363.

² *W B Yeats, Selected Poetry* Edited by Norman Jeffares (London: (Macmillan, 1972) p 16.

³ Steven Pinker, *The Language Instinct*, (New York: William Morrow, 1994), p 163. Pinker refers to the steps of language 'like a river of breath, bent into hisses and hums by the soft flesh of the mouth and throat ... The sounds of language, put together in several steps. 'A finite inventory of phonemes permuted to define words, the resulting strings of phonemes massaged to make them easier to pronounce and understand before they are actually articulated'.

duty and hearing Christmas celebrations in a German army camp. The chores and preparation I was involved in at the time, became the material for the poem, *Christmas Eve*¹. However, there was an artistic and technical problem in crafting the poem. Attempting to recreate the sound of floury hands being rubbed together, or 's'wiped, I failed to reproduce such noise/word. Experimenting through the baking chores continually rendered the noise as, 'whispery', and a soft 's'wiping sound which was barely audible, and proved impossible to conjure up. The only alternative for the 'dreamed of' noise in the text was to extend to an acoustic level beyond whispering, which, phonetically, I think, would be an echo and so, 'Echoes of whispers fall from her hands / As she strokes off bits of sweetened dough.' gave me, not the recreation, but the suggestion of a sound that I was seeking. The same problem occurred when searching for the noise of dough being pushed out from 'cutters' when the boy conscript dreamed of his sisters,

...gently pressing shapes,
Removing ragged clinging strings
From stars and angels.
They fall, ploop, ploop-ploop,
Ploop, on the snowy table.

Similarly to the problem in finding a word for the 'untouched areas' in the poem, *German Lessons*², and my failed attempts in the past to capture the sounds of insects hitting a window, or the noise of soup slurping down a sink, or the sound of a child falling over, all influenced by the noise of Arnold's, *grating roar / Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling / At their return, up the high strand..*, I persisted in writing what I thought was the noise made when dough is being pushed out of a metal biscuit shaper. I tried the word 'plop'. Its sound was heavy and liquidy. I constructed the word / sound, 'plup', and although it looked acceptable on paper, and because, when reading, I pronounced it, 'ploop', as in 'loop'. I retained the word in that form till my final draft. However, when the poem was first read aloud, each new reader pronounced the word with the long vowel 'u', as in 'pup'. I therefore decided to spell the word / sound, with a double 'oo', as in

¹ *Box Of Chalks* p 19.

² *Ibid.*, p 10.

'loop', to convey the quiet noise made when dough is being pushed out of biscuit shapers.

Creating words and sounds was a challenge. Avoiding the use of adjectives and similes as much as possible, I pursued the same noise seeking process in writing the poem '*My Father*¹, when conveying the noise of frogs in the evening. For example, instead of using a formal adjective to describe the croaking of grunting frogs, I spliced and blended the words 'croaking' and 'chirruping', giving me, onomatopoeically, the sound word, 'chorrocking'. The word 'chorrocking' seemed to be a 'natural noise' and I kept repeating it instinctively, whilst writing the drafts. The sound it made was heavier and darker than the words 'croaking' or 'chirruping' which seemed formal or grammatically clinical in the world of frogs. The long open vowel 'o', repeated twice in my created word allowed me to convey grunts in a froglike way by writing the noise, instead of describing it.

Parallel to creating words which were intended to be pronounced as sounds or noise in the poems, a further task in pronunciation had to be considered. At a late date in the project I discovered that the first two poems of the narrative were questionable. The two works, *School Holidays June 1939* and *Telegraph Poles*² which were originally entitled, *Iłownica, June 1939*, and, *Rudzica*, respectively, were completed and satisfactory to me. I had given much consideration to their development and drafting and to their associated beginnings which gave rise to their titles. I was satisfied with the titles and I liked the noise that, *Iłownica (School Holidays June 1939)*, and *Rudzica (Telegraph Poles)* made. Pronouncing the words as *Eee wov neet sa* and *Roo jeet sa*, the sounds of the drawn out vowels were like music to me. As writer and creator I could see clearly that the titles anchored the poems where I intended them. However, at the first experimental reading the mistake was devastatingly evident because there was a long pause by each reader who proceeded to pronounce the titles *Iłownica* as *I lau nika June 1939*, and *Rudzica* as, *Rudd zika*.

¹ *Box Of Chalks*, p 42.

² *Ibid.*, pp 4 - 5.

Although I, as writer, enjoyed the appearance of the words on the page and the sound that I was hearing in my pronunciation of the titles, and the interest that they might raise, it was important to clarify them. It became obvious that the titles gave the reader no information about the reason or content of the poems. That reminded me again to consider one's reader when writing. I also found during the writing process, that at times I was disadvantaged as an artist, having a one dimensional alphabet to work from, and concluded that music composers achieve more in the realms of sound and noise and emotion than do writers.

Writing abstract emotions such as anger or fear, into the poems was as challenging as writing noises without the use of adjectives. As in the poem *Leaving Home*¹, the boy cycles alone to an arranged *safe house*, everything he owned was in his back pack. The image of fear was approached by setting up contrasting images as the young boy is,

*Overtaken by squads of motor-bikes.
Each side-car was filled
With a blunt-headed soldier,...*

The squads of speeding noisy motor-bikes were intended to represent a leviathan swallowing the slowly moving, silent boy. My aim was to create two senses in the poem, might and powerlessness, an army, and a boy on a bicycle. To reinforce the image of power I placed a 'blunt-headed soldier' in each side-car, thus doubling the strength of the image of power. To write the sense of fear I made the boy look, '...straight ahead / Neither left nor right,' with the intention of creating tunnel vision, thus limiting his vision. It is my belief that a reader / listener would connect with the sense of fear and threat because the boy's vision is no longer one hundred and eighty degrees, but fixed, directly ahead, and tunnelled, making the army ahead of him 'fuse' or transmogrify, 'Into an army of toads'. The word 'fused', was intended to act both as a line break and as a means to 'transfuse'² the suggestion of an explosion, but I also considered that the image before the boy, and what was being seen by the boy, would be read as a suggestion that the was boy crying.

¹ *Box Of Chalks* p 12.

² Alfred E Housman, *Collected Poems and Selected Prose* (London: Penguin, 1988), p 352.

I used an incident which I experienced when driving with my children late one evening through Germany. Driving at about eighty miles an hour [120k] we were suddenly surrounded by what seemed, hundreds of hells-angels bikers. The bikers drove in front of us and behind us, to the right and to the left of us on the Autobahn. As the bikers waved and yelled at me they swerved in front and behind the car, revving their engines, hooting, and making their brakes screech. The incident lasted for about a kilometre and as quickly as the bikers appeared, they disappeared. From that recalled experience, I imagined my character on the road alone *Leaving Home* on a bike.

In the pursuit of writing abstract emotions, I also applied the repetition of words. Emphasizing fear and vulnerability in the boy character, isolated, knowing he 'was the solution', I repeated the words 'turning' 'turning' 'burning', as in the poem *A Constable Calls*¹, when Heaney wrote of the child who *assumed/ small guilts and sat / Imagining the black hole in the barracks*. I attempted to create a similar sense of fear and threat, which Heaney seems to achieve when he repeats in his poem,

.....*His boot pushed off*
And the bicycle ticked, ticked, ticked.,

Similar tensions between the North of Ireland where incidents of 'ticking time bombs' was common knowledge and often casually referred to in everyday conversation, and the conditions in which I imagined the boy character to be in, became prominent while drafting the poems. The same technique was applied in the poem *Front Line Games*² by repeating the word 'fire'

And they come! They come in Sherman tanks
With pincer claws, from the west from the east,
From the north from the south, through the earth,
From the sky. And I fire, I fire.
I fire, fire, fire, afraid to die.

¹ Seamus Heaney, *New Selected Poems 1966-1987*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), p 85.

² *English The Journal of the English Association Vol.53 No.207* Editors Ken Newton and Peter Barry p 239. *Box Of Chalks*, p 26.

Chapter 6

Part 1

Transposing Images

Writing the poems for *Box Of Chalks* to create a narrative demanded the observation of important points in history, political and military decisions, various types of military hardware, social conditions of the time, and a realistic portrayal of a life written in chronological order. The use of images and minute details was paramount while constructing each poem on the canvas. I used the recurring images of chalk and chalk-dust, crayons, letters and 'no-response' letters, censored letters with messages between the lines, images of amber in amber ear-rings handed down from one generation to the next, to create continuity in the narrative. I incorporated motifs of leather, binoculars in leather boxes, horses' leather tackle, dyed leather skins, foods, bread, Polish sausage / kielbasa and kabanos, and I used clinical images of limbs, legs, spine in plaster, and a portrayal of psychiatric breakdown. I wove names such as Mr Sroka, Malinowski, Marszewski, Tadek Kroll, Ted, and Mr. Will into the work. I contrived the need and wish to be known by name, the changing of name, and the refusal to acknowledge a name in order to portray what it is like to hide in public space with an adopted name, as in the poem *New life*¹ and a recurring name to show the marginalised life, lived by an *Airman*², Malinowski, my minor character on *Peckham Rye*.

The idea was to create echoes throughout the narrative and give depth and perspective to my material within a cohesive and fluid body of writing. The mesh net technique which I employed, although complicated, was a valuable principle within the work, and it allowed the creation of hooks on which to hang other poems within the narrative. The opening poem was installed with as many significant images as possible with the intention of resurrecting them in other parts of the narrative. 'Mr Sroka' was sent with 'the whole school' on a journey to the 'mountains'. 'Bread and kabanos' was shared and 'Mr Sroka' foretold his removal during the class prayer. To suggest naiveté and unconcerned children in the poem, I wrote that 'the assembly / it shuffled / Anxious to break' during the class prayer. It was important to introduce naiveté and prayer at that

¹ *Box Of Chalks* p 52.

² *Ibid.*, p 51.

early stage in the narrative because I intended prisms of innocence and spiritual religiosity to filter through the work from the initial poem into the war section as at, *Falaise 1*¹ by writing the poem in the form of a prayer being spoken by the boy combatant. Again in *Falaise 3*², I created him ‘weeping, bellowing / God let me die on their Anniversary’. The images of ‘cornflowers and poppies’ were resurrected from the opening poem and transcribed directly into the poem *Orders*³,

I wish I could dance with you
Elizabeth O’Donaghue
And give you cornflowers and poppies
And buttercups,...

In the poem *German Lessons*⁴, Mr Sroka’s ‘baggy corduroy plus-fours’ were replaced by ‘Herr Meinhold’s, leather boots like ebony’ and I inserted the image of leather boots into the poems *Ambition*⁵ and *Leave*⁶. Boots reappeared in the poem *Homecoming*⁷, and again in *Christmas Eve*⁸ and a resonance of the initial school journey was written into the poem *Arbeitsdienst*⁹ when the conscripts,

... went
With an unproud quiet thrill, as if
For some unmeasured secret pleasure
That could be touched, kept in the pocket
Like a puppy, then put aside again
Till we’d had our fill abroad, on an outing to the hills
Our haversacks packed with extra bread and kielbasa¹.
We went around hilly terrains,...

Chalk, and chalk-dust, and relative words such as, pencils, writing, and, ‘thin envelopes, censored, in black’¹⁰ ink were incorporated into the syntactical cohesive mesh net

¹ *English, The Journal of the English Association* Vol.53 No 207 Editors Ken Newton and Peter Barry p 240. This poem was published under the title *Prayer*. The title has been changed for artistic purposes in *Box Of Chalks*, p 27.

² *Ibid* p 240. This poem was published under the title *Anniversary*. The title has been changed for artistic purposes in *Box Of Chalks*, p 29.

³ *Ibid* p 244. This poem was published under the title *Warsaw Has Fallen*. The title has been changed for artistic purposes in *Box Of Chalks*, p 36.

⁴ *Box Of Chalks*, p 10.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p 15.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p 21.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p 17.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p 19.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p 16.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p 37.

technique. I used the image of pencils in the poem, *German Lessons*¹, i.e. ‘I chewed my stubby pencil / When Herr Reisner paced the floor...’ and repeated it in the poem *Against the Sun*², by writing a ‘child cowering, chewing pencils / When a new term is begun’. The image of writing was worked into the poems *Between The Lines*³ and again in the poem *My Father*⁴, the character saying to his father ‘You didn’t write, / Come home...

As above, the idea of chalk came late in the writing process. The associated images that came with it became fertile material. *A Box of Chalks*⁵, *Dust*⁶ and *Sunflower*⁷ emerged from the image almost spontaneously. I used chalk as a recurring motif at opportune moments in the work and made an early decision to incorporate it into the title for the sequence. Investigating the benefits of chalk as a material for writing and drawing, I inverted the idea of benefits and arrived at the image of non-writing and non-drawing which in turn became an image of blanking or blotting out print. Blank, or blotted-out print, led me to consider censorship, which was practiced under the then communist regime in Poland. From that association of ideas I devised the poem *Between The Lines*⁸. While I was in the frame of reference of print and non print, I rewrote the poem *German Lessons*⁹ and introduced the young schoolboy chewing a ‘stubby pencil’ cowering, head lowered, with the intention of creating a symmetric image of a German major, ‘Lowering his face into his hands // His shoulders [heaving] against the sun. I wrote the poem *Against The Sun*¹⁰ to connect the two poems through the image of the boy and the German Major in ironic roles within the narrative.

Chalk (calcium carbonate) which is formed from the skeletal remains of sea creatures, and the idea that, possibility, human life might have originated from the sea appealed to me. The theme of chalk became a supporting structure throughout the narrative. Although chalk is a dead material, I wanted it to be seen as part of living matter.

¹ *Box Of Chalks*, p 10.

² *English, The Journal of the English Association* Vol. 53 No. 207 Editors Ken Newton and Peter Barry p 244. *Box Of Chalks* p 34.

³ *Box Of Chalks* p 37.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p 42.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p 32.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p 62.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p 65.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p 37.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p 10

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 34

Associated images of chalk became manifest as written dust, 'wiped [away] with a soft leather rag'¹, and I wanted its image to filter through the narrative and its properties to create an image of *A Sunflower*² thus allowing the narrative to end on a positive note. Most importantly I wanted *Box Of Chalks* to be a metaphor for the conscripted men whose lives I envisaged as fragile, and as brittle as sticks of chalks. I was also still curious about the earth recycling everything, producing and reproducing³, and flesh becoming earth after death. In retrospect, within the major work, I was still trying to capture, or cultivate the idea of 'transmogrification' as I had been doing in the original MA poem *The Unknown Knew*, when I wrote,

Chin-strap loosened, I breathe and rise
To the level of shredded sunflowers
Decapitated, churned among worms
And torn daisies in crumbed earth sods.
I, in a soft wakening dream
Secure in foetal dampness
Legs still, numbed in warm blood and urine
Wait to be born, warm, without pain.

In the final stages of the narrative, three motifs, 'chalk', 'pen', and 'dust' were encapsulated within the poem *Dust*⁴, which I planned as acting as a filter through which I wanted the whole sequence of poems, and the aged and confused voice to slip. My intention was to create an image of an aged man fading from life or disappearing like dust from the narrative. That creative leap allowed me to present my intended positive ending in the form of the chalk-drawn Sunflower, in a small, 'lispings', voice saying, 'I've made a sunflower for you Dziadek'. I was trying to capture a phoenix-like transmogrification in the image of a sunflower and a representation of new life, or a new generation rising out of the garden soil and chalk dust. The images at the close of the narrative were contrived to link with the beginning of the narrative and to create resonances of Mr Sroka, who was also 'chalk-dusted' in the opening poem *School Holidays June 1939*, and to encapsulate the body of work in chalk, hinged on a central axis, *A Box of Chalks*⁵.

¹ *Box Of Chalks* p 4.

² *Seam Poetry Magazine* Editor Frank Dullaghan (Issue 20 January 2004), p 6. *Box Of Chalks* p 65.

³ Genesis 1; 24. And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds."

⁴ *Box Of Chalks* p 62.

⁵ *English The Journal of the English Association Vol. 53 No 207* Editors Ken Newton and Peter Barry p 243. *Box Of Chalks* p 32.

Further images were cultivated and developed from the most unusual yet ordinary circumstances. During the writing process, my earrings were mislaid, and I used the loss to explore an emotional territory in the work. I attempted to employ amber¹ as a recurring motif and was rewarded with poems which were pleasurable to write. The commonly known honey yellow colours of amber were intended to create a 'narrative prism' and to connect through colour to the yellow of *A Sunflower* in the final poem. Amber was a rich and rewarding image to me as a poet. A fossil encasing specimens of 'preserved life', it provided a territory of emotion in the work, and being found on the shores of the Baltic Sea, the northern coast of Poland, it allowed me to make a prehistoric link to the roots of the poems. It also represented for me, as a poet, the retained experiences and rememberings of the conscripts who contained their shame and guilt of conscription. The idea allowed me to create a metaphysical link between the generations within the narrative by the poem *Amber*² whereby the ex-combatant's 'daughter' was presented,

With bread and salt, her grandmother's wedding band
And amber earrings, with a million years of Poland
Caught in the summer light.

The image was also written into the poem, *Christmas Eve*³

..Hair tucked beneath a kerchief /
And a million years of Poland
In the globes of her amber earrings
Caught by candle light.

I used it again to show the young conscript remembering his mother's amber ear-rings at the poem, *Falaise 3*⁴ by the lines,

She always wore the amber earrings –
His wedding gift to her –
They peeped beneath her kerchief
And coronet of lace.

Artistically, by using amber as a recurring image I could connect large strands of the narrative, and technically, chalk, allowed me to anchor the body of work on geological

¹ Janina Grabowska, *Polish Amber* (Warsaw: Interpress, 1983), pp 8-9. Amber occurs in colours from 'nearly white through all shades of yellow to brown; green, blue red, black varieties are rare'.

² *Box Of Chalks* p 59.

³ *Ibid.*, p 19.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p 29.

foundations. I saw that I had a structural support through chalk and amber which would make a metaphysical connection in that, as well as chalk, and amber, everything and everybody derives from, and returns to the earth, a transmogrification, the image which I failed to capture in my original poem, *The Unknown Knew*.

Leather as an image, was inserted into the poem, *School Holidays June 1939*¹, to allow me to introduce chalk at the start of the narrative and it recurred in the poems *Horses*, *German Lessons*, *Leaving Home*, *Arbeit Macht Frei*, *Ambitions*, and *The Tobacco Box*². The text was further embellished with images of food such as, *kielbasa*, and, *kabanos*³, *buttermilk*, and *rye bread*, from the earliest poems, *School Holidays June 1939*⁴, *Arbeitsdienst*⁵, *Homecoming*⁶, and *Beef Stew*⁷ with the intention of emphasising the importance of food to a young boy. The image of hunger was then inverted to let me write about the casualness of sustaining hunger by 'Blowing out the brain' in the poem *The Executioner*⁸, simultaneously associating violence with the need to eat to survive.

Taking advantage of being in the imaginative world of food and, writing from a war situation where food was scarce, *Bread*⁹ was devised to show the combatant's human quality, a concept I wanted to project throughout the narrative. By portraying him sharing bread with a German officer who 'slipped' into the trench on the Normandy front line in the poem, *Falaise 4*¹⁰ I could continue the concept. Using images of food gave me an abundance of material to work on but experimenting in that field also led to time lost as experienced in *Advice*, *Changing Colours* and *The London Warsaw Train*. Much of my writing fell on the cutting room floor¹¹.

¹ *Box Of Chalks* p 4.

² *Ibid* pp 6. 10. 12.13. 15. 33. *The Tobacco Box* was published in *English, The Journal of the English Association* Vol 53 No 207 Editors Ken Newton and Peter Barry p 243.

³ Polish sausage.

⁴ *Box Of Chalks* p 4.

⁵ *Ibid* p 16.

⁶ *Ibid* p 17.

⁷ *Ibid* p 23.

⁸ *English, The Journal of the English Association* Vol 52 No 202 Editors Ken Newton and Peter Barry p 69. *Box Of Chalks* p 22.

⁹ *Box Of Chalks* p 30.

¹⁰ *English, The Journal of the English Association* Vol 53 No 207 Editors Ken Newton and Peter Barry p 241. Published under the title *Bread*, but for artistic purposes in *Box Of Chalks* I have changed the title to *Falaise 4*. p 30.

¹¹ See appendices, A – D.

The mesh net technique which I employed throughout the narrative was intricate and challenging, but it has worked as I intended. I envisaged the mesh as a web to hold the sequence of poems in close proximity to one another. Even though a time slip of forty years existed between, 'Marszewski' [crying] 'when Tadek Kroll hanged himself.', in the poem *Homecoming* on p. 17, to '...you wept over Tadek Kroll. / Karolej Marszewski, I called to you / And you looked straight into my eyes.' on p. 52 the associated images and transference of emotions in the mesh have held firm within the poetry. I wanted the technique to imply memory, and to function as a pattern of memory for the reader.

As the poetic sequence developed, my mesh net technique became of fundamental importance to the structure, and I used it as an organizing principle to balance ideas and images. The principle allowed me to create minor characters as a further layer of resonances within the narrative. In the poems *Malinowski's Barn*¹ and, *Airman*², I crafted, *Malinowski*, a composite character whose genesis stemmed from a newspaper report about a death in similar circumstances. The poem was crafted as a vehicle to show what had happened to some men who did not return home after the war³, and also with the idea that the image might enkindle an emotion in a reader through the character Malinowski, sitting down on Peckham Rye and singing a well known Polish folk song⁴. I gave Malinowski his own history within the narrative and created him as an airman, 'directing [planes] / Along a runway as he'd done at home / Minding cows, near Alekzandrowicz aerodrome.', implying that he was the son of the barn owner in the poem, *Malinowski's Barn*.

The poem *A Colonel*⁵ was written to portray the image of political exiles and their changed circumstances. Notes for the poem were written about 1963/4, and based on a friend's circumstances before I started researching the present work, and I used the original old notes to write the poem. During my research I came across other Polish professionals and military personnel⁶ employed in menial jobs in England where they remained as political refugees because of their refusal to recognize a regime imposed upon them by

¹ *Box Of Chalks* p 8.

² *Ibid.*, p 51.

³ Alojzy Lysko, *To byli nasi ojcowie, [These Were Our Fathers]* (Bojszowy: Gminny Osrodek Rozwoju w Bojszowach, 1999). Lysko collected and published letters and photographs from the relatives of Polish men who disappeared after being conscripted into the German Army.

⁴ If I read the poem aloud, I think that I would 'sing' italicised text in order to add authenticity.

⁵ *Box Of Chalks* p 50.

⁶ Englert L Julius & Krzysztof Barbarski, *General Maczek I Zolnierze I Dywizji Panczernej [General Maczek and the Soldiers of The 1st Armoured Division]* (London: Polish Cultural Foundation Ltd Great Britain, 1992).

Michael Hope, *Polish Deportees In The Soviet Union* (London: Veritas Foundation Publication Centre, 2000), p 54. n.41. Hope refers to professional and occupational degradation particularly among pre-war regular Army officers and he relates to the puzzlement of diners at the Learmount Hotel in Edinburgh who observed 'bowing and heel-clicking of many visiting Poles' when encountering General Maczek who worked as a waiter for many years at the hotel.

Russia¹. Both characters, *A Colonel* and *Airman*, allowed me to write about 'life on the west of the Iron Curtain'² and to emphasize the difficulties experienced by ex-combatants.

Cousin *Wojtek*³ had to be created to provide authenticity for a confirmation watch, an item which was represented half way through the narrative in the poem, 'The Tobacco Box, / I had a watch without a glass, / Its strap was old / The stitching sparse, / My confirmation gift,'⁴. The fluidity of the narrative at that section was questionable and it became apparent that the character, having a watch, in a prisoner of war camp, was unrealistic and I was faced with a creative problem. Because of the experiences of justifying the possession of *A House*⁵, as discussed above, I decided that realism had to be adhered to, therefore, a means was created to authenticate the 'possession of a watch', and so, *Wojtek*, materialized out of necessity. The character 'Wojtek' was strongly imagined and crafted to fulfill three tasks, he provided, 'a watch without a glass, / Its strap was old / The stitching sparse, in the poem *The Tobacco Box*⁶. He provided the bicycle for my character to go 'by bike to Bielsko' in the poem *Leaving Home*⁷, and he acted both literally and metaphorically as my portrayal of the conscripts whom the Reich sent to the Russian front, thus allowing me to acknowledge the men in Lysko's⁸ collection of recorded conscripts.

The character 'Ted' was part of the balancing principle. By his 'crying he was ashamed. / He wanted forgiveness...' in the poem *En Route To Calais*⁹ and recalled in *Falaise I*¹⁰, his image was designed to create memory in the reader and to reinforce the despair of the boy conscript, praying, 'God be kind. Let me be dead / But don't crush me / Between rolling trucks / And leave me on an engine grid / Like you did with Ted. I wrote

¹ Norman Davies, *God's Playground A History Of Poland Vol II 1795 to the Present*, (Oxford Clarendon Press 1986), pp 556-561.

² Winston Churchill referred to the Iron Curtain - a notional and political barrier that separated the Soviet Bloc from the west, in his *Sinues of Peace* Speech at Westminster College, Fulton, Missouri on March 5th 1946. The Iron Curtain came down in 1989 after the decline of communism.

³ *Box Of Chalks*, p 9.

⁴ *English, The Journal of the English Association* Vol 53 No 207 Editors Ken Newton and Peter Barry p 243. *Box Of Chalks* p 33.

⁵ *Box Of Chalks*, p 41.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p 33.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p 12.

⁸ Alojzy Lysko, *To byli nasi ojcowie [These Were Our Fathers]* (Bojszowy: Gminny Osrodek Rozwoju w Bojszowach, 1999).

⁹ *Box Of Chalks* p 24.

¹⁰ *English, The Journal of the English Association* Vol 53 No 207 Editors Ken Newton and Peter Barry p 240. *Box Of Chalks* p 27.

the character 'Karol Marszewski' in the same principle and extended him from his original creation in *New Lives*¹ back through to the early narrative and inserted him into the poem *Homecoming*² to add a layer of authenticity and pathos. The minute, incidental characters 'Stasz', in the poem, *Falaise 5*³, and, 'Miss Franc' who, 'Practised Puccini on the floor above'⁴, were dotted into the narrative and intended to create a sense of society and a peopled world.

¹ *Box Of Chalks* p 52.

² *Ibid.*, p 17.

³ *English, The Journal of the English Association* Vol 53 No 207 Editors Ken Newton and Peter Barry p 242. This poem was published under the title *Stasz*. The title has been changed for artistic purposes in *Box Of Chalks*, p 31.

⁴ *Box Of Chalks*, p 40.

The *Volkliste*, categorization by the quality of Germanness is a difficult concept to accept. Pigeon-holing and categorizing, by accent, dialect, language, dress, culture, personal and family names, are no longer accepted in a free society. But there was a time when defining individuals with informal titles such as, Kraut, Polak, Proddy, Teague was a common form of address or term of reference. I have used my recalled experiences of ill used titles and terms of address and reference and manipulated the use of names by a contrived theme of ‘use and misuse of proper names’, and I looked at how names can define, and relate to status and position, and how the use of names, naming, and change of names, can be used pejoratively, patronizingly, or to degrade, demoralize, or, as in the poem *New Lives*¹, changed to create a new life. The idea was used initially in the poem *Arbeit Macht Frei*², and again in *Homecoming*³ for the purposes of showing that, from the early stages under the *Volkliste*, the boy character was affected by many things that happened to him, starting with the experience in the *Arbeitsdienst*⁴. He was not being addressed by name and he thought that everything would be ‘easier if [he] could speak good German, / If they wouldn’t call [him] Polak’.

I filtered the idea through the voice of a military superior in the, *Executioner*⁵, when the young combatant is addressed only as ‘Hey! Boy! ‘Herr Ullmann’ had also addressed him three times as ‘boy’ in the poem *Arbeit Macht Frei*⁶. I pursued the idea further by making the American soldier demand ‘Nationality? and question the ‘Kraut’ uniform? in the text of *The Tobacco Box*⁷. I attempted the same idea in the poem *Waiting*⁸ by showing the patrons at the Waldorf Astoria leaving,

Gratuities, in ones and tens and twenties, hundreds
Left by the generous ones, Stewart, Gardner, King Hussien

¹ *Box Of Chalks* p 52.

² *Ibid* p 13.

³ *Ibid* p 17.

⁴ *Ibid* p 16.

⁵ *English The Journal of the English Association Vol.52 No.202* Editors Ken Newton and Peter Barry p 69. *Box Of Chalks* p 22.

⁶ *Box Of Chalks* p 13.

⁷ *English The Journal of the English Association Vol.53 No.207* Editors Ken Newton and Peter Barry p 243. *Box Of Chalks* p 33.

⁸ *Box Of Chalks* p 40.

And Cecil B De mille, beneath gold rimmed plates,
For me, the waiter, they call Mr Will.

Addressing the ex-combatant by the commonly used name, 'Mr Will' allowed me to show that 'the generous ones' did not know or care, that the name 'Will' is a diminutive of the name Wilhelm which is usually associated with German Kaiser Wilhelm¹. My intention was to show that the powerful were still powerful and capable of addressing servants as and how they wished, and that rich patrons at rich dinner tables did not try to find out the name of an unimportant 'waiter' and that his social status had not changed. However, I inverted the idea and approached it from a different viewpoint when writing, *New Lives*². I recreated the character Marszewski and showed him in another persona, denying himself, his past life, and his memories, thus creating a new life in the west. But the combatant, [without a name throughout the narrative] had not forgotten the friend from his, *Arbeitsdienst*³ days, who '...cried when Tadek Kroll hanged himself'⁴.

Writing within the mesh net technique that, 'Marszewski, / couldn't quite place /' his conscript friend in his memory gave me the opportunity to emphasize the consequences of the *Volkliste*, the conscripts' *Arbeitsdienst* experiences and secret pasts. By the artistic implication that his name was not Marszewski, I intended the character's silence and rejection of his past to be a denial of his own existence. Representing the character as hiding behind a mask was my image of him creating another identity. I believe that I was trying to make 'Marszewski' transmogrify metaphysically.

The idea of names, naming, and change of names, and its application in this context is complex yet crucial. It was a challenge to use the theme within the narrative because of the imposition and consequences of categorization under the *Volkliste*. As above, the conscript in the narrative, by design, has not been given a name. I decided that by creating a character without a name that there would be no identity and I wrote the poems with the intention that the character should represent Polish men who were not acknowledged.

Having lived in Ulster where it was part of 'everyday life' to be apprehended and questioned by 'B' Specials, I had learned the 'identifying signals' of names, their

¹ Wilhelm II 1859 – 1941 Emperor of Germany 1888 – 1918. Wilhelm II, abdicated and went into exile.

² *Box Of Chalks* p 52.

³ *Ibid.*, p 16.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p 17.

implications and consequences, and the necessity to change names in differing circumstances, names being part of the social and political diagnosis. I learned to know when, and what, not to say, *And whatever you say, you say nothing*¹. The poet, Seamus Heaney would have been conscious of the consequences of names when he wrote of his position when policemen crowded *round the car like black cattle, snuffing, and pointing / the muzzle of a Sten gun in[his] eye*² / and asked his name. In Ulster, 'the ministry of fear' would have known Heaney's background by the name *Seamus*. Using my own recalled experiences, as Heaney has done, provided me with emotional territory from which I could write poems based on naming.

Moving in and out of character was a strange concept for me. It was not fully an acting concept, but, through the writing process I had learned to become someone else for a short while and could create images suitable to the context. At the same time I was trying to shape and balance the work with subtleties and within the confines and economy of poetry. I was three people at different times and all three people at the same time when writing and creating. I was the writer, I was a 'voice', and I was outside of both as self. Stanislavski calls it 'the feeling of truth',

when it is necessary for the actor to develop to the highest degree his imagination, a childlike naiveté and trustfulness, an artistic sensitivity to truth and to the truthful in his soul and body. The feeling of truth as one of the important elements of the creative mood, can be both developed and practised³.

I practiced, and with practice and empathetic imagination, my character combatant who had become manageable in adult form and difficult in the form of a boy or a very young man presented almost insurmountable difficulties when I had to contemplate writing about the illness, Post Traumatic Stress. There was a part of me that did not want to play the role or to write about illness. Yet, having completed the war section, and the return-to-Poland section of the narrative, the theme had to be written into the narrative, that being a main genesis for the sequence of poems and to show the reverberations and consequences of war.

¹ Seamus Heaney, *New Selected Poems 1966 – 1987*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), p 79.

² Ibid p 83.

³ Constantin Stanislavski, *My Life In Art*, (London: Folio Society, 2000), p 357.

I did not know how to begin writing about a clinical illness such as Post Traumatic Stress. I did not intend writing directly about illness. I simply did not know how to write it. Cautious and apprehensive I thought for hours, days, weeks and produced nothing. I considered that Stefan had witnessed unbelievable poverty and ruin for land-owners in Poland under communism when he had returned there on his first visit. He had said, during a remembering, that he had been very angry from the time of his conscription into the German army, and became more so when he saw the deprivation and poverty in and around his boyhood home under the communist regime. He had asked himself ‘what was the point of living?’, and had decided that after his visit to Poland, he ‘must never allow himself to have strong emotions, nor think about the war, or the poverty in Poland, or the condition of his home which had been the Russian-German front line, ‘furrowed land, gouged / Pitted from shells, irrigated with the blood / Of Russians and Germans’¹. He had said that it was the only way he could live. It seemed to be an impossible discipline that he had imposed upon himself, yet, I wondered, would he have coped with life had he permitted his anger to run free? But he had decided that he could not cope without his firm discipline.

Examining his disciplined life style and how he had lived with the consequences of conscription and the pain it had created, I began to realize that I should approach the writing from the sense of repressed anger, and create poems on the basis of subtleties and suggestiveness, therefore avoiding writing directly about clinical illness. I planned an opening poem and a closing poem, and poems which would suggest an oncoming illness. I wanted one poem to represent the progression of the illness, another for treatment and one to represent recovery. The poems would have to be filtered, or orchestrated through the narrative and must capture a middle-aged voice which should fade to an aged voice. I was writing a timescape of approximately twenty five years. I wanted the introductory piece to be subtle and barely detectable. I had to capture an image of subdued and controlled anger and I was limited in number having then written about eighty poems for the project.

The first piece for that layer of the narrative was *Impossible*², a found poem which almost hopped on to a page as I watched a television programme made by Michael Palin the writer and traveller. Palin was circumnavigating the earth from one longitudinal, or

¹ *Box Of Chalks* p 42.

² *Seam Poetry Magazine* (Issue 20 January 2004) Editor Frank Dullaghan p 5. This poem was published under the title *If I*. The title has been changed for artistic purposes in *Broken Chalks* p 49.

latitudinal point to its opposite, completing the journeys at speed by any means possible and available to him. The idea of circumnavigating the earth at speed enthralled me. I imagined whizzing around the earth at great speed under my own power. I considered how long it might take and whether I would lose time or gain time depending on the journeying direction, east or west, and whether or not it would be light or dark, again depending on which direction I would travel. I recalled Stefan having said to me that one should ‘never let the sun go down on anger’ and so he ‘never got angry’. If one were to practice that discipline fully, then one would always have to face the rising sun in the east and keep moving backwards in a westerly direction to keep facing the sun, then the sun would never go down and one could have the opportunity to become angry. I believe it was the Biblical¹ quotation which would not allow him to express his own anger and the quotation had kept hovering at the back of my mind.

I followed Palin’s challenge and took off on a speedy trip around the world tracing my own route on a globe. The image and idea in the poem is impossible of course, but the idea of accomplishing the impossible, and therefore never having to let the sun go down thus allowing one to become angry, gave me the opportunity I needed to subtly inject anger into my writing. Considering controlled anger and a sense of devotional religiosity, the poem materialized rapidly, and part of the biblical quotation, ‘never / let the sun go down on my anger’, was the pinnacle for the development of the poem. The resonance of madness in the poem was intended to prepare the reader for a change in the character.

Pursuing the sense of emotional imbalance was a challenge both artistically and intellectually. I could not employ the principles of *creative mood*² because

Before creating it was necessary to know how to enter the temple of that spiritual atmosphere in which alone it is possible to create³.

I could not get into my temple to create clinical and medical text in the case of *Tick Tock*⁴, crafted as a hybridized piece of writing before it emerged in its final form. I had incorporated ideas from the poem *En Route To Calais* and images from the poem, *A Sunflower*. Using previously written text it was almost impossible to step away from a

¹ Ephesians. Cp4 v26.

² Constantin Stanislavski, *My Life In Art*, (London: Folio Society, 2000), p 357.

³ Ibid., p 352.

⁴ *Box Of Chalks* p 53.

summer garden filled with chalked drawings. I kept seeing the child from the poem *A Sunflower*, and allowing myself to write about a child, which, of course, was what I wanted to do, but with a subtle implication of madness or possible explosive behaviour in the poem *Tick Tock*. The poem did not gel for me until I added the noise of a ticking clock which I inserted into the beginning of the text to imply that all was not well with the character who hears, 'Tick tock ticking tocks from the clock / On the shelf inside' his head. By finishing the poem with the vocal explosion of a child screaming, and in danger of being whacked for as long as the clock ticks, allowed me to encapsulate the poem with an expectant Heaneyesque 'tick'.

Although I wrote the piece, *Airman*¹, to convey the combatant's return to London from Poland, it was revised to act as a vehicle to emphasize mental imbalance. The poem became an integral part of the Post Traumatic layer of writing. The poems *Blood Ties*², *Broken Cannon*³, *Psychotherapy*⁴, and *In The Imperial War Museum*⁵ were created as part of the layer. *Blood Ties* was based entirely on my own experience of having torn my foot on a rusting metal bolt on a German bunker when researching for *Box Of Chalks* on the Normandy coast. I superimposed that incident on to a child, 'little Ella', and I created a father who, in this case I wrote into the poem as the ex-combatant who heard,

...a primitive scream
That carried down the beach, echoed, got thrown back again
Reaching some subdued part of [him] that wanted to be free.

The imaginative transference of my experience into that of a blood line, and a representation of repressed anger interwoven with an image of a crying child, let me allude to the forced labourers⁶ who died working on Atlantic Defence Wall,

...leaving a red pool trapped on your concrete
To dry and mingle with blood, the cries, and the quiet history
Of Todt's silent Slavs along the Channel to the Atlantic.

Methodically working through the writing plan for the progression of the illness and the treatment, led me to the stage of acceptance of the condition. I wrote the poem, *Broken*

¹ *Box Of Chalks* p 51.

² *Ibid.*, p 56.

³ *Ibid.*, p 60.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p 61.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p 63.

⁶ Nikolai Tolstoy, *Victims Of Yalta*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977).

Cannon, as a metaphor for the ex-combatant and progressed to write creatively about recovery showing that the ex-combatant was well, through *Psychotherapy*, and that he is angry and there is no point in talking,

Of conscription or the front
I had no striped uniform
No number on my arm
No stitched-on star, no 'P',
Germany conscripted me
And I cannot get free.

I had to insert multiple frames of reference into the poem and I tried to be subtle and objective while making sure that the reader knew that the illness was passing and that the combatant was recovering through *Psychotherapy*. The poem was created from recall of my own responses to experiences at doctor's surgeries and during consultations about my children's illnesses and infections. It was necessary to create the poem *In The Imperial War Museum*¹, to convey full recovery and to show that the combatant was able to 'touch a tank with both hands', and to allow for preparation of the close of the narrative.

The controlled anger approach and the inspiration of Michael Palin's television programme which I adopted for the purposes of writing the layer of poems *Blood Ties*², *Broken Cannon*³, *Psychotherapy*⁴, and *In The Imperial War Museum*⁵ was rewarding. When I revised *Airman*⁶, and when I finally revised the text of the poem *Tick Tock*⁷ the poems appeared to fit the narrative and to give an impression of an orchestrated fissure in the sequence. Being strategically placed at intervals in the narrative, the intention was to capture a sense of illness over a long period of time and, as with the transitional poems, an intangible swell of pathos. I do not think that I could have created the poems had I written directly about the clinical effects of post war illness or trauma, nor could I have written them from a weak, negative and unwell point of view. However, as I had experienced in searching for routes and methods to open the narrative, or to create movement within the narrative, many and diverse methods have to be approached to create poetry.

¹ *Box Of Chalks* p 63.

² *Ibid* p 56.

³ *Ibid* p 60.

⁴ *Ibid* p 61.

⁵ *Ibid* p 63.

⁶ *Ibid* p 51.

⁷ *Ibid* p 53.

Conclusion

When I set out to write a collection of poems in the voice of a Polish man conscripted into the German Army, I had little idea of what the task would involve. I wanted to acknowledge through the writing, that Polish boys and men had been in the German Army, albeit by illegal conscription under the *Volkliste*, a German National Decree of March 1941. I knew that I would need to write in the voice of the opposite gender and gave much consideration to the facts that I would be writing outside my gender, my nationhood and my experiences.

The historians [and poets] who have written about vagrants have almost certainly not been vagrants themselves, and the same goes for the history of crime. The recovery of the history of oppressed groups has had far more to do with the desire to expose fundamental structures of inequality in society than with any attempt to bolster political social ethnic or gender identities in the present ¹.

I took up the challenge that the writing would take me beyond gender, nationhood and experience, and combining these with the consequences of the German Decree, I produced the sequence of poems, *Box Of Chalks*. The experiment made many technical and artistic demands.

There was an urgency to make known German conscription, and its reverberations, fifty years on by recreating a voice and the experiences of at least one of the many thousands of Polish conscripts. The poems were written having in mind a Polish audience in Britain and abroad, and optimistically, in Poland. But most importantly, it was the after effects of war that demanded the poems some fifty five years after war had ended. I planned concise poems in a single voice that would develop through boyhood, youth, manhood and old age. However, I soon found that there was insufficient material to stretch across the timescape and landscape of the initially visualised canvas. The material I had to work on was that of remembered war happenings from the Normandy front line, a few snippets of prisoner of war incidents and some information on journeys made during transportation.

The original plan was to create a narrative form which would stretch across the Northern Hemisphere and extend over a period of fifty five years. Each poem was intended to be a dramatic monologue. Writing within one voice restricted the dramatic development. I found that my ambition to write the most distilled poems possible sometimes created limitations in the narrative which in turn blocked the

¹ Richard J Evans *In Defence Of History*, (London: Granta Books, 1997), p 212 3.

writing process, and so the plan fractured at an early stage. Writing within one voice restricted the dramatic development and although the voice was composite, the character had to appear realistic and his characteristics had to fit the narrative. There were occasions when I wished to move outside the character's persona but believed that that idea would have unbalanced the narrative. I think as a woman and speak as a woman and during the writing process I had to impose a strict discipline and place myself within the mind frame of the different stages of the developing male character. In retrospect I think that I allowed myself to be pressured by the nature of the voice itself. On the other hand I have sometimes considered that I gave the voice too much permission to stay within the sphere of its realistic existence and its history when I should have been more experimental and taken it in other directions.

At one point in the writing I gave consideration to creating dialogue, which I thought if employed, might have given me the opportunity to widen the narrative and possibly develop new ideas to create further dramatic monologues. However, I did not pursue the dialogue idea because I might have lost the power of intimacy which I felt I had achieved at certain stages of the process. Instead, the sixty two poems developed as a combination of dramatic monologues mainly in the voice of one speaker but with occasional other voices such as the interlude by the character's mother in the poem *Homecoming* or the voice of the *Volkliste*.

Out of the pinpoints of 'rememberings' came chaos. The chaos was developed into a landscape of war, and a timescape of guilt and shame, reinforced by patriotism and prejudice. I hope that there is some authenticity in the conscript's voice as he relates to the images of war, violence and injustice in the sequence of poems, and most particularly in *Falaise 1 – 5*¹.

Although I have not achieved as many of the initially envisaged dramatic monologues as originally planned, I hope that what the poems represent, and the noises that they make, will infuse a reader with an element of empathy and an understanding of the consequences and reverberations of German conscription. I think that the experiment of writing for a single voice has been partially successful even though it was a continuous challenge to sustain a dramatic monologue. The process was emotionally and intellectually demanding and if I were to attempt a similar exercise again, I believe that I would choose to work within a smaller

¹ *Box Of Chalks* pp 27 – 31.

landscape and a limited timescape. It could be suggested that I write the history and the ‘rememberings’ in a different genre and the most obvious is probably a novel, but without the lived experience of a soldier, it would have been impossible for me to create a work such as *The Forgotten Soldier*¹ or *Not for Queen and Country*² with the limited material I had when writing the poems. On the other hand, the economy of poetry hopefully lends itself to an intense and empathetic reception by the reader.

My concern is that, because of the nature of the poems it is possible that they will cause pain or discord. The subject matter, Polish boys and men being conscripted into the German Army, is not an easy fact to accept but it is my hope that the poems, initially written with a Polish English-reading audience in mind, will have an impact on a wider reading public. I believe that they will contribute an insight into the reverberations and consequences of war which I have found through my research still exists and is clinically diagnosed as Post Traumatic Stress.

I would like to think that the poems in *Box of Chalks* would lead to further research into the effects of war by proxy, on the children of war damaged people and possibly avoid what has been witnessed in the recent case of ninety one year old Gertrude Harris, daughter, and Janet Booth, grand daughter of Private Harry Farr. Private Farr’s descendants lived with the reverberations of war. Private Harry Farr was shot for cowardice during The First World War in 1916. He received a formal pardon in 2007 from the Ministry of Defence after his family strove for years to clear his name of cowardice. It is hoped that the voices in the poems will resonate in the towns and villages of Poland and that they will help to recall the tragedy of the Polish conscripts who might one day be recognised and acknowledged in their own country.

¹ Guy Sajer, *The Forgotten Soldier* (London: Orion,), 1993.

² Edward Denmark, *Not for Queen and Country* (Reading: Pharaoh Press), 1998.

Appendices

A

Changing Colours at the Sikorski

An elegant man in a well-cut suit
Posed to be photographed -
He'd be about seventy-five -
His photographer asked me
To move aside, I smiled.
Politely, I complied.
The sitter approached me
After his session of smiles
And camera flashing, to say,
He was a Polish General's son
Having his portrait done
With the new colours

Of his father's old regiment.
His son, he said, was married
To a bishop's daughter - how dashing!
Almost aristocracy! An upright pillar
Of Polish society. He was aghast
That anyone should want to see
Records of Polish boys,
Conscripted into the German Army
Or captured in Normandy.
You won't find that
At the Sikorski.

Advice

Look my dear, you're wasting your time.
You wouldn't understand those things.
I am a General's son you see,
And at twenty-one I volunteered
For the Engineers, just as war had begun.
In '44, from the shores of France
We drove through Cherbourg
To Falaise. We fought for days
On every front, battled with bombs
And shells, with tanks, and field guns.
Then we encircled the Krauts,
Simply, closed them in.

Well of course, my dear
We knew they were Poles! But, .
Silesian Poles.
They're not, at all, like us.
Except for the bloody Canadians
We'd have blown out the bastards' guts,
White flags or no white flags
We should have been allowed
To do our stuff.
Wipe them off the face of the earth,
That's what I always say. But the Yanks -
They kicked up a fuss. Took them off
To camps in Caen,.
Thousands of the bastards there were,

Thousands of them dead
What?
The ones who went home?
They're dead. Stalin said they weren't Red.
They weren't Poles, they were Silesians!
I should know my dear. I remember,
I was old enough then to be their father.

Lunch

We were treated like royalty - important foreign guests –
 Placed at the head of a table
 Almost as long and as wide as their room.
 At the banquet, laid on specially for us
 On a white linen damask cloth with tendrils
 Of yesterday's leaves and flowers, and wisps of wings
 Of long ago, decomposed moths,
 Agneszka served kabanos doused with lighted vodka
 Hot steaming bigos with thick rye bread,
 Chicken, and veal, and pork cutlets, breadcrumbed,
 Succulently dripping in juice
 With creamy mizeria, and buttery potatoes
 From their stores under the roof.

There were cakes standing upright, wide
 As Queen Victoria, and doughnuts the size
 Of bowling balls, filled with powydly cream.
 The littlest foreigner with new-found cousins
 Came in, gripping a squawking hen, one great wing
 Trapped beneath his arm, the other flapped, escaping
 Flapping, flapping, fanning flour in clouds
 Over the men, who roared, and guffawed. The women
 In a bunch, politely giggled, then stared at one another
 When his mother insisted he, Go back to the cornfield
 And play - like yesterday - with the goat tied to the rope.
 I prayed, Dear God! Let no one tell her
 She's just eaten it for lunch.

The London Warsaw Train

The train fills up with uniformed guards with rifles,
Their dogs tugging on stunted leather leads.
Motionless at the clump of heavy boots,
The scritch-scratching of ungripping paws
Sliding on the carriage roof, we wait
Amid board games, biros, books, and bottles
Of rainbow bubbles, packed,
And carried to keep the children out of trouble.

Beneath the train, spills of stones tumble
Over unpolished boots of stumbling guards
Bent double - checking - meeting eyes
Looking back, upside down, just above the track.

Tongue extended, body warm and panting
Their Alsatian dog slips in to our carriage
Slithering between and behind our legs, its claws clicking,
Sliding over our shoes. We smile with our teeth
Quietly offering the guard our passports, visas,
Evidence of exchanged money, and an explosion
Of rainbow bubbles, blown from a plastic wand.

Sobotka

Swietojanski wieczor -
 Uciecha dla dziatwy;
 Zapilily juz ogniska
 Te flisacze tratwy.

Idzie plomien w gore,
 Sobotka sie pali,
 Sypie iskry szczerozlote
 Po tej modrej fali.

A ten stary flisak
 Poprawia ognisko;
 Pal sie, pal sie, ty sobotko,
 Bo Warszawa blisko!

Sobotko, sobotko,
 Nocy Swietojanska,
 Widac ciebie od Warszawy
 Do samego Gdanska!¹

Midsummer Night

Saint John's Night -
 To the delight of young people;
 The bonfires are already burning
 Bright on the rafts, floating by.

And the flames rise up
 From the burning fires
 Spilling gluts of pure gold
 On the rippling waters.

The old rafts-man tends his fire
 Reflected on the waters;
 Burn, burn, keep burning bonfire
 You're within sight of Warsaw.

Bonfires, bonfires, on the night
 Of Saint John, in convoy
 On the Vistula, like a necklace of gold,
 Stretching from Warsaw to Gdansk!

Translation mgiemza.

¹ Maria Konopnicka *Co Slonko Widzialo* (Warszawa: Nasza Ksiegarnia 1966), p. 64.

I miasto, i wioska
To jeden nasz swiat!
I wszedzie, dziecino,
Twa siostra, twój brat.

I wszedzie, dziecino,
Wśród lasów, wśród pól,
Jak ty, czują radość,
Jak ty, czują ból.¹

Our World

Every field, every forest,
The villages even the towns,
Everywhere my child,
It's one world.

Everyone, every girl, every boy,
Is your sister and brother.
Like you my child, they feel joy,
Like you, my child, they feel pain.

Translation mgiemza.

¹ Maria Konopnicka Co Słonko Widzało (Warszawa: Nasza Księgarnia 1966), p. 80.

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Reichsgesetzblatt

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Im Teil II, Nr. 8, ausgegeben am 5. März 1941, sind veröffentlicht: Sechshundzwanzigste Verordnung zur Eisenbahn-Verkehrsordnung — Vereinbarung zur Durchführung des Vertrags zwischen dem Deutschen Reich und dem Königreich Jugoslawien über Rechtschutz und Rechtshilfe in Steuerlichen. — Bekanntmachung über Erleichterungen auf dem Gebiete des Patents, rechts in den Niederlanden. — Bekanntmachung über den Schutz von Erfindungen, Mustern und Warenzeichen auf einer Ausstellung. — Bekanntmachung über den deutsch-sowjetischen Vertrag über die Rechtsverhältnisse an der Grenze.

Erlaß des Führers und Reichskanzlers über die Errichtung eines Traktorenwerks im Gebiet der Gemeinde Waldbörl und über städtebauliche Maßnahmen in dieser Gemeinde.

Vom 28. Februar 1941.

§ 1

Der Reichsorganisationsleiter der NSDAP und Leiter der Deutschen Arbeitsfront Dr. Robert Ley wird beauftragt, die zur Produktion des von Dr. Porsche erfundenen Traktors notwendigen Fabrikanlagen im Gebiet der Gemeinde Waldbörl zu errichten und für die damit zusammenhängenden baulichen Maßnahmen die erforderlichen Anordnungen zu treffen.

§ 2

(1) Im Zusammenhang mit den Maßnahmen nach § 1 ordne ich die Durchführung der städtebaulichen Maßnahmen an, die zum Ausbau sowie zur planvollen Gestaltung der Gemeinde Waldbörl selbst erforderlich sind.

(2) Mit der Durchführung dieser Maßnahmen beauftrage ich den Reichsorganisationsleiter der NSDAP und Leiter der Deutschen Arbeitsfront Dr. Robert Ley. Er ist beauftragte Stelle im Sinne des § 1 Abs. 2 und § 3 des Gesetzes über die Neugestaltung deutscher Städte vom 4. Oktober 1937 (Reichsgesetzbl. I S. 1054).

Verordnung zur Änderung der Grenzonenverordnung.

Som 3. März 1941.

Auf Grund des § 1 des Gesetzes über die Sicherung der Reichsgrenze und über Verfestungsmaßnahmen vom 9. März 1937 (Reichsgesetzbl. I S. 281) und des Gesetzes über das Pass-, das Ausländerpolizei- und das Meldewesen sowie über das Ausweisdwesen vom 11. Mai 1937 (Reichsgesetzbl. I S. 589) wird die Grenzonenverordnung vom 2. September 1939 (Reichsgesetzbl. I S. 1578) in der Fassung der Verordnung vom 30. Oktober 1939 (Reichsgesetzbl. I S. 2114) wie folgt geändert:

§ 1

Die im § 1 der Verordnung vom 30. Oktober 1939 (Reichsgesetzbl. I S. 2114) angeordnete Erweiterung der Grenzzone wird aufgehoben.

§ 2

- (1) In die Grenzzone werden einbezogen:
im Regierungsbezirk Aachen
die Kreise Eupen und Malmedy,

Berlin, den 3. März 1941.

Der Reichsminister des Innern
Frick

im Reichsgau Kärnten

die Kreise St. Veit a. d. Glan und Spittal
a. d. Drau.

- (2) Im § 1 Abs. 2 der Grenzonenverordnung ist beim Land Bremen zu ändern: „den Stadtkreis Bremerhaven“ in „das Hafengebiet Bremerhaven“.

§ 3

In den durch diese Verordnung neu in die Grenzzone einbezogenen Gebieten laufen die im § 2 Abs. 2 und 4 der Grenzonenverordnung erwähnten Fristen vom Inkrafttreten dieser Verordnung ab.

§ 4

Diese Verordnung tritt am dritten Tage nach ihrer Verkündung in Kraft.

Verordnung über die Deutsche Volksliste und die deutsche Staatsangehörigkeit
in den eingegliederten Ostgebieten.

Som 4. März 1941.

Auf Grund des Erlasses des Führers und Reichskanzlers über Gliederung und Verwaltung der Ostgebiete vom 8. Oktober 1939 (Reichsgesetzbl. I S. 2042) wird folgendes verordnet:

Abschnitt I

Deutsche Volksliste

§ 1

(1) In den eingegliederten Ostgebieten wird zur Aufnahme der deutschen Bevölkerung eine Deutsche Volksliste eingerichtet, die sich in vier Abteilungen gliedert.

(2) Die näheren Bestimmungen über die Voraussetzungen für die Aufnahme in die einzelnen Abteilungen der Deutschen Volksliste trifft der Reichsminister des Innern im Einvernehmen mit dem Reichsführer SS, Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums.

(3) Eingetragen werden nur ehemalige polnische und ehemalige Danziger Staatsangehörige. Im Sinne dieser Verordnung sind:

- a) ehemalige polnische Staatsangehörige Personen, die am 28. Oktober 1939 polnische Staatsangehörige waren oder die an diesem Tage staatenlos waren, zuletzt aber die polnische Staatsangehörigkeit besessen hatten oder am 28. Oktober 1939 ihren Wohnsitz in den eingegliederten ehemals polnischen Ostgebieten hatten,
- b) ehemalige Danziger Staatsangehörige Personen, die am 1. September 1939 Danziger Staatsangehörige waren oder die an diesem Tage staatenlos waren, zuletzt aber die Danziger Staatsangehörigkeit besessen hatten oder am 1. September 1939 ihren Wohnsitz im ehemaligen Freistaat Danzig hatten.

(4) Nicht in die deutsche Volksliste eingetragen werden:

- a) die ehemaligen polnischen oder Danziger Staatsangehörigen, die am Tage des Inkrafttretens dieser Verordnung ihren Wohnsitz im Generalgouvernement hatten, es sei denn, daß sie ihn erst nach dem 1. Dezember 1939 dorthin verlegt haben,
- b) die ehemaligen polnischen oder Danziger Staatsangehörigen, die bis zum Tage des Inkrafttretens dieser Verordnung eine fremde Staatsangehörigkeit erworben haben,
- c) die ehemaligen Danziger Staatsangehörigen, die die Voraussetzungen für die Aufnahme in die Abteilungen 1 oder 2 der Deutschen Volksliste erfüllen.

§ 2

(1) Bei den Reichsstatthaltern (Oberpräsidenten) wird eine Zentralstelle, bei den Regierungspräsidenten eine Bezirksstelle, bei den unteren Verwaltungsbehörden eine Zweigstelle der Deutschen Volksliste errichtet.

(2) Beim Reichsführer *ff*, Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums, wird ein Oberster Prüfungshof für Volkszugehörigkeitsfragen in den eingegliederten Ostgebieten eingerichtet. Nähere Richtlinien über die Zusammensetzung und das Verfahren erläßt der Reichsführer *ff*, Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums, im Einvernehmen mit dem Reichsminister des Innern.

Abschnitt II

Erwerb der deutschen Staatsangehörigkeit

§ 3

Die ehemaligen polnischen Staatsangehörigen, die die Voraussetzungen für die Aufnahme in die Abteilungen 1 oder 2 der Deutschen Volksliste erfüllen, erwerben ohne Rücksicht auf den Tag ihrer Aufnahme mit Wirkung vom 26. Oktober 1939 die deutsche Staatsangehörigkeit.

§ 4

Die ehemaligen Danziger Staatsangehörigen erwerben ohne Aufnahme in die Deutsche Volksliste mit Wirkung vom 1. September 1939 die deutsche Staatsangehörigkeit, sofern nicht die beim Regierungspräsidenten in Danzig eingerichtete Bezirksstelle der Deutschen Volksliste bis zum 31. Dezember 1941 feststellt, daß sie die Voraussetzungen für die Aufnahme in die Abteilungen 1 oder 2 der Deutschen Volksliste nicht erfüllen.

§ 5

Die ehemaligen polnischen oder Danziger Staatsangehörigen, die in die Abteilung 3 der Deutschen Volksliste aufgenommen werden, erwerben durch Einbürgerung die deutsche Staatsangehörigkeit.

§ 6

(1) Die ehemaligen polnischen oder Danziger Staatsangehörigen, die in die Abteilung 4 der Deutschen Volksliste aufgenommen werden, erwerben durch Einbürgerung die deutsche Staatsangehörigkeit auf Widerruf.

(2) Die deutsche Staatsangehörigkeit auf Widerruf erwerben ferner durch Einbürgerung auch diejenigen ehemaligen polnischen oder Danziger Staatsangehörigen fremder Volkszugehörigkeit, die auf Grund von Richtlinien des Reichsführers *ff*, Reichskommissars für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums, besonders bezeichnet werden.

(3) Der Erwerb der deutschen Staatsangehörigkeit kann nur binnen 10 Jahren seit der Einbürgerung widerrufen werden. Den Widerruf sprechen der Reichsminister des Innern im Einvernehmen mit dem Reichsführer *ff*, Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums, oder die von ihnen bestimmten Stellen aus. Im Falle des Widerrufs geht die deutsche Staatsangehörigkeit mit der Zustimmung oder öffentlichen Bekanntmachung der Widerrufsvorschrift verloren.

§ 7

Die ehemaligen polnischen und Danziger Staatsangehörigen, welche die deutsche Staatsangehörigkeit nicht auf Grund der §§ 3 bis 6 besitzen oder sie später durch Widerruf verlieren, sind Schutzangehörige des Deutschen Reichs. Voraussetzung für den Besitz der Schutzangehörigkeit ist ein Wohnsitz im Inlande. Die Staatsangehörigkeit als Schutzangehöriger geht mit der Verlegung des Wohnsitzes in das Ausland verloren. Das Generalgouvernement ist nicht Inland im Sinne dieser Bestimmung.

Abschnitt III

Einführung des Staatsangehörigkeitsrechts

§ 8

In den eingegliederten Ostgebieten treten mit Wirkung vom 1. Dezember 1940 in Kraft:

- a) das Reichs- und Staatsangehörigkeitsgesetz vom 22. Juli 1913 (Reichsgesetzbl. S. 583), ferner § 3, § 4 Abs. 1, Abs. 2 Nr. 2 und 4, Abs. 3 der Verordnung über die deutsche Staatsangehörigkeit vom 5. Februar 1934 (Reichs-

gesetzl. I S. 85) und das Gesetz zur Änderung des Reichs- und Staatsangehörigkeitsgesetzes vom 15. Mai 1935 (Reichsgesetzbl. I S. 593),

- b) die Bestimmungen im § 2 Abs. 1, Abs. 3 bis 5 und § 3 des Gesetzes über den Widerruf von Einbürgerungen und die Aberkennung der deutschen Staatsangehörigkeit vom 14. Juli 1933 (Reichsgesetzbl. I S. 480) und unter Nr. I und II zu § 2 der Verordnung zur Durchführung des genannten Gesetzes vom 26. Juli 1933 (Reichsgesetzbl. I S. 538).

§ 9

Gebühren und Abgaben in Angelegenheiten der Staatsangehörigkeit werden nach Maßgabe der Tarifnummer 72 der preussischen Verwaltungsg-

gebührenordnung vom 19. Mai 1934 (Preuß. Gesetzsamm. S. 261) in der Fassung der II. Verordnung zur Änderung der Verwaltungsgebührenordnung vom 24. März 1936 (Preuß. Gesetzsamm. S. 84) erhoben.

Abschnitt IV

Schlußvorschrift

§ 10

Der Reichsminister des Innern erläßt im Einvernehmen mit dem Stellvertreter des Führers und dem Reichsführer ff, Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums, die zur Durchführung und Ergänzung dieser Verordnung erforderlichen Rechts- und Verwaltungsvorschriften.

Berlin, den 4. März 1941.

Der Reichsminister des Innern

Frid

Der Stellvertreter des Führers

R. Heß

Der Reichsführer ff,

Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums

H. Himmler

Einbanddecken für Reichsgesetzblatt 1940 Teil I, 1. und 2. Halbjahr,
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PARTIAL TRANSLATION OF DOCUMENT 2911 PS

SECRET STATE MATTER

Notes concerning the discussions between the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Ambassador Oshima at Steinort, on 9 July 1942.

He, the German Foreign Minister, had asked to see the ambassador at this time when the situation was as described, because now a question of fateful importance had arisen concerning the joint conduct of the war: If Japan felt itself sufficiently strong militarily, the moment for Japan to attack Russia was probably now. He thought it possible that, if Japan attacked Russia now, it would lead to her (Russia's) final moral collapse; at least it would hasten the collapse of her present system. In any case, never again would Japan have such an opportunity as existed at present, to eliminate once and for all the Russian colossus in Eastern Asia. He had discussed this question with the Fuehrer, and the Fuehrer was of the same opinion, but he wanted to emphasize one point right away: Japan should attack Russia only if she felt sufficiently strong for such an undertaking. Under no circumstances should Japanese operations against Russia be allowed to bog down at the halfway mark, and we do not want to urge Japan into an action that is not mutually profitable.

PARTIAL TRANSLATION OF DOCUMENT 2915 PS

GERMAN LABOR [Deutsche Arbeit]

42nd year, No. 6/7, June, July 1942, Pages 157, 170-171

It is not our task to germanize the East in the old sense, that is to teach the people there the German language and German law, but to see to it that only people of purely German, Germanic blood live in the East.

Signed: H. Himmler

The National Front [Volkstums front] in Warthegau by SS Obergruppen Fuehrer and General of Police Wilhelm Koppe, Higher SS and Police leader with the Reichstatthalter in Posen.

The victory of the German weapons in the East must therefore be followed by the victory of the German race over the Polish race, if the regained Eastern sphere—according to the Fuehrer's will—henceforth shall for all time remain an essential constituent part of the Greater German Reich. It is therefore of decisive importance to penetrate the regained German region with German farmers, laborers, civil servants, merchants and artisans

Up to the 15 November, 1940, the following were evacuated to the General Government:

From Prague, Vienna, and Moravian Ostrau	5,035 Jews
From Stettin	1,000 Jews
From the West Zone of the Reich	2,800 Gypsies

In the West 6,504 Jews from Baden and the Pfalz were deported into the unoccupied part of France up to 15 November, 1940; from Lorraine 47,187 who spoke French (Destination Lyon).

Total Number of Evacuees up to 15 November, 1940	
To the Government General	303,171
To Unoccupied France	53,691
	<hr/>
Total	356,862

TRANSLATION OF DOCUMENT 2917-PS

1941 REICHSGESETZBLATT, PART I, PAGE 118

Decree re the German people's list and German nationality in the incorporated Eastern territories, of 4th March 1941.

By virtue of the Fuehrer's and Reich Chancellor's decree of 3th October 1939 (RGB I, p. 2042) about the organization and administration of the Eastern territories, the following is ordered:

Section I.

German People's List.

Para 1.

(1) In the incorporated eastern territories a German people's list in 4 sections is instituted to include the German population.

(2) The more detailed regulations about the prerequisites for inclusion in the individual sections of the German people's list will be made by the Reich Minister of the Interior in agreement with the Reich Fuehrer SS, Reich Commissar for the consolidation of German race and culture.

(3) Only former Polish and former Danzig citizens will be entered within the meaning of this decree:

(a) Former Polish citizens are persons who were Polish citizens on the 26th October 1939 or who were stateless on this day but had last held Polish citizenship or who, on the 26th October 1939 dwelt in the formerly Polish, incorporated Eastern territories.

(b) Former Danzig citizens are persons who were Danzig citizens on the 1st September 1939 or who were stateless on this day but last held Danzig citizenship or whose abode was on the 1st September 1939 in the former Free State of Danzig.

2917 PS

(4) The following will not be entered on the German people's list:

(a) Former Polish or Danzig citizens, who, on the day this decree comes into force, dwelt in the General-Government, unless they moved thither after the 1st December 1939 only.

(b) Former Polish or Danzig citizens who by the day this decree comes into force had acquired foreign citizenship.

(c) Those former Danzig citizens who fulfill the prerequisites for inclusion in Sections 1 or 2 of the German people's list.

Para 2.

(1) A central office of the German people's list will be set up and attached to the Reich Governors (Provincial Presidents, a district office to district presidents, a branch office of lower administrative authorities).

(2) A Supreme Investigating Board for questions of nationality in the incorporated Eastern territories will be set up and attached to the Reich Fuehrer SS, Reich Commissar for the consolidation of German race and culture. More detailed regulations about composition and procedure will be given out by the Reich Fuehrer SS, Reich Commissar for the consolidation of German race and culture, in agreement with the Reich Minister of the Interior.

Section II.

Acquisition of German citizenship.

Para 3.

Former Polish citizens who fulfill the prerequisites for inclusion in Sections I or II of the German people's list obtain German citizenship with effect from the 26th October 1939, without taking into account the date of their inclusions.

Para 4.

Former Danzig citizens obtain German citizenship with effect from the 1st September 1939 without being included in the German people's list, unless the district office of the German people's list attached to the district President in Danzig decides by the 31st December 1941 that they do not fulfill the prerequisites for inclusion in Sections I or II of the German people's list.

Para 5.

Former Polish or Danzig citizens who are included in Section III of the German people's list obtain German citizenship by naturalization.

Para 6.

(1) Those former Polish or Danzig citizens who are included in Section IV of the German people's list obtain revocable German citizenship by naturalization.

(2) Revocable German citizenship by naturalization is also obtained by those former Polish or Danzig citizens of foreign race who are particularly designated as a result of directives by the Reich Fuehrer SS, Reich Commissar for the consolidation of German race and culture.

(3) The obtaining of German citizenship can only be cancelled within 10 years of naturalization. The Reich Minister of the Interior orders the cancellation in agreement with the Reich Fuehrer SS, Reich Commissar for the consolidation of German race and culture, or the departments designated by them. In case of cancellation, German citizenship is lost on the order for cancellation being communicated or publicly announced.

Para 7.

Former Polish or Danzig citizens who do not possess German citizenship under paras 3 to 6 or lose it later by cancellation are persons under the protection of the German Reich. The prerequisite for being a protected person is to dwell within the country. The quality of a protected person is lost by removing one's place of abode abroad. The General Government does not count as being within the country in the sense of this regulation.

Section III.

Introduction of citizenship legislation.

Para 8.

In the incorporated Eastern territories the following come into force with effect from the 1st December 1940:

(a) The law regarding Reich and State citizenship of the 22nd July 1913 (RGBl. p.583), and Para 3, Para 4, sub-para 1, sub-para 2, No. 2 and 4, and sub-para 3 of the decree regarding German citizenship of the 5th February 1934 (RGBl. I, p.85) and the law for the alteration of the Reich and State citizenship law of the 15th May 1935 (RGBl. I, p.598).

(b) The regulations in para 2, sub-paras 1, 3, & 5 and para 3 of the law for the cancellation of naturalizations and the deprivation of German citizenship of the 14th July 1932 (RGBl. I, p.480) and under Nos. I & II of para 2 of the decree of the 26th July 1933 (RGBl. I, p.538) for the execution of the said law.

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