

Two Refugees

I have been intending for some years now to write an account of our friends, Stanisław Seliga and Janka Blatt, but I have not had time. I still don't have time to do the thing properly, but I don't want to risk losing what little I know. Someone else might be able to make use of it, so I shall record as much as I remember of what I have heard about their lives, patchy though it is. They have no connection with each other, beyond both living in St Andrews between the 1940s and 1990s. They belong to two different periods in our lives, Dr Seliga to our youth, Janka to our middle-age.

I know considerably less about Dr Seliga than about Janka, and my account is in danger of becoming a string of anecdotes, which I'm anxious to avoid. Anecdotes can be illuminating and revealing, in the manner of caricatures or overheard conversations, but I feel that my subjects deserve something more. To tell anecdotes about people is a way of asserting a sort of ownership over them. I like a good story and in the past I've not been above the occasional embellishment, but I think I've now got beyond that. Still, even if I can resist the temptation to improve the story, there remains the equally insidious temptation to freeze the story so that it presents the subject as he or she was at one moment in time, in one particular set of circumstances – circumstances which themselves are only imperfectly represented in the story. The frozen anecdote perpetuates also the teller's attitude, working against any attempt to re-interpret the past or develop a more sympathetic understanding of the subject.

Stanisław Seliga

Dr Seliga came to Scotland from Poland. I don't know, but it should be easy enough to find out, whether this was before, during or after the war. I believe he went first to Edinburgh and then came on to St Andrews. Because Principal Irvine was kind to my other refugee subject, Janka, I have tended to assume that it was he who invited Dr Seliga and gave him a position within the University. We knew him, Anna and I, as a landlord. He owned several properties in the town.

I don't recall the circumstances of my first meeting with Dr Seliga. I know I was apprehensive, but that didn't mean much because so I was about any meeting with strangers. His reputation as a strict landlord may have fuelled my apprehensions. He was a small man, slightly stooping, with bright darting eyes and a bristling moustache. He looked fierce and alert, ready to defend himself as though expecting you to try to put one over on him. I cannot imagine that I came close to arguing with him about anything, if only because I found it difficult to understand what he was saying. I assume he was satisfied with me because we agreed on the spot that Anna and I should take the flat.

I have always assumed that he moved into his house, Seaton Court, in St Andrews before 1952, but my evidence for this is open to different interpretations. When I was helping him move some of his belongings he pointed to a cardboard box of letters, unanswered letters, he said in mock despair. I noticed that one of the letters bore a George VI stamp, and I pictured the box standing in the corner of the room since George VI's time, accumulating unanswered letters – it was in 1967 or 1968 that I saw them. However, it is equally possible that the box had been brought already full when Dr Seliga moved into Seaton Court. I'm sure some of the envelopes bore an Edinburgh address. If we are going to be pedantic, a letter with a George VI stamp need not have been posted before the end of the king's reign. Dr Seliga's correspondent may well have been using up stamps bought years earlier and forgotten about, or even re-using uncanceled stamps. Either of these actions would have been characteristic of Dr Seliga himself, so why not of his friends and acquaintances? Finally, for now, there is the question of why this George VI letter was on the top, when I could see Queen Elizabeth stamps on other letters in the box. So an anecdote which always seemed to me vividly expressive of the chaotic nature of Dr Seliga's affairs really serves only to highlight the gaps in my knowledge.

Before the war Dr Seliga had a career and a reputation as a classical scholar in Poland. The University Library possesses two articles published in Warsaw in 1929, one on Petronius, the other on Catullus. In St Andrews, at least in my day, he was not part of the Greek or Latin (Humanity) departments, but operated in the Buchanan Building, offering Russian and Polish lessons. After the inauguration of the Department of Russian I believe he was restricted to Polish. We knew one

student, called Dorcas (short for a longer Polish name) who studied with him, but I think she was more interested in her oboe and did not persevere with Polish. Geoff Russell also attended one or two of his classes. I remember seeing the announcement of his course at the start of term, written on a page torn from a small notebook (one of his rent-books, perhaps) intimating that classes in Polish would be held, giving the time and room number. The University is on the whole a tolerant place, and was probably more so in the more spacious days of the fifties and sixties. Still, you would hear even then academics who were impatient or scornful of Dr Seliga's activities. There can be no doubt that in the allocation of resources his Polish classes came low on the list. All he wanted was a room, however, for an hour or so a week. Ferdy Woodward was indulgent towards him, and let him use his office. Ferdy was a maverick, and his patronage is an indication of the extent to which Dr Seliga was operating on the margins of the University.

According to Ferdy Dr Seliga wanted the room for more than just teaching. Dr Seliga was always in need of storage space, and had at least one trunk in the outhouse of the Woodward house in Howard Place, but I'm not sure that he left many of his belongings in Ferdy's office. He did, however, cook his supper there, using the electric fire to grill a kipper or smokie. I have heard this from several sources traceable back to Ferdy who no doubt entertained the assembly at Douglas Gifford's coffee break with the tale. The story explains why people became wary of Dr Seliga; he would press home any advantage. It seems that this was not an isolated incident. Chris Carter reports that when Dr Seliga occupied an office beside his he would cook in the same way over an electric fire. Chris also told me that when the *Citizen* had a feature about Dr Seliga they included a photograph of him seated at a desk with rows of books behind him. On close inspection Chris recognised that it was his desk, his bookcase, his office. Another story about Dr Seliga's eating habits which I recall is of someone who saw him putting a bone into his porridge pot to make broth. Again, this story came from several sources, but I don't know who the someone was who witnessed the incident. It has the ring of truth, which may incline one to believe it - or may increase the likelihood that it was invented. When people are marginalised one consequence is that stories grow up about unsavoury and miserly eating habits, stories which in turn marginalise their subject still further.

In the sixties Dr Seliga occupied the basement flat on the south side of Seaton Court, an imposing double-fronted house high up above City Road. I visited him there several times, but never penetrated far, which left me with the impression of an extensive unexplored underground network of rooms. There was a notice on the front-door in his neat, spiky hand-writing: 'Bell out of work; please knock.' As this notice had to withstand the wind and the rain, he had used a catalogue card rather than his more usual scrap of paper from a notebook. I don't think I have ever seen a human habitation more suggestive of a burrowing animal. When you knocked Dr Seliga would appear at the door and look up at you with a nervous anxiety which I then interpreted as suspicion and hostility. I don't think I saw more than the entrance passage and one room, which was ill-lit and damp with narrow lanes between piles of newspapers and books. There were, I suppose, two motives operating here: first the academic's single-minded indifference to circumstances and appearances, living as it were on equal terms with the documents which were the raw material and tools of his trade; and then added to this, the insecurity of the refugee.

It was not only books and papers that Dr Seliga accumulated. He was a regular at Macgregor's Auctions. We attended the sales on a few occasions and he was always there. His large portfolio of properties to let required a lot of furnishing. He also bought stuff for himself, and for transmission to family in Poland. He showed me a shed full of old shoes which he said he intended to send there, and he may have collected other things for the same purpose. His purchases were marked down to 'Mr X'. This attempt at anonymity seemed futile, since everyone knew who he was, but the point may have been that Dr Seliga was, or wanted to appear to be, acting only as agent for someone else.

Ferdy believed, or claimed to believe, that Dr Seliga was, in some or all of his business and property dealings, a front-man for a Polish syndicate. This was given some credibility from circumstances surrounding Marshall Bisset's party. This was a party to celebrate the successful production of *O! What a Lovely War* in 1969. Anna was away at the Burn that weekend, and I de-camped to spend the night in Norman's room in Sallies, partly because I didn't like parties, and partly to escape

responsibility for whatever might happen. (Marshall was our sub-tenant at the time.) Mike Merchant said it was the best party he ever attended. A keg of beer was drunk in the half-hour before the police arrived to send everyone away. I suppose the trouble was partly the lateness of the hour since proceedings can't have started until after the performance, which was presumably ten o'clock at the earliest, and partly the sheer numbers involved as Marshall was a well-known and charismatic figure. We had already had problems due to the noise of rehearsals that took place around the piano in our living-room (one of Mr X's purchases), and no doubt the party similarly generated a good racket. I picture a sudden outburst of light and sound which, like a warning flare, brought Dr Seliga and the police running to the scene. There were reported to be several other members of the Polish community on the spot, who claimed to have an interest in the property. It could be that they were there solely as friends of Dr Seliga, to support him in what he doubtless felt was a moment of crisis, but it is possible that they did have a financial interest in the property, either because Dr Seliga really was just a front-man, or, more probably, because they had lent him money with Seaton Court as security. I assume that Dr Seliga and his friends were concerned at the notoriety that the party attracted, but it's possible that they feared for the fabric of the building.

I came back on the Sunday morning to find remains of the party still in evidence – glasses, bottles, pools of beer, everything that one might expect. Marshall was contrite – theatrically and ironically so, as he went on his knees to beg my pardon. I had to bear the brunt of Dr Seliga's anger: 'I am disappointed in you Mr Crowe, disappointed,' he said. I could not work out whether I gained or lost by insisting that I had not been present. Dr Seliga told me that he had found 'vagrant couples' on the stairs. These were presumably late-comers to the party who arrived after it had been dispersed. The thing was particularly annoying because we intended to hold another, more dignified party the following weekend to celebrate the publication of *College Echoes*. To get his permission I had to work upon Dr Seliga's kind heart, invite him to the party, assure him that there would be a member of the academic staff present (Adrian Gratwick) and promise that there would be no music after midnight. I was extremely unpopular with our party-goers when I enforced this ban. They all de-camped to the flat above and continued the party there. We were left to tidy up, satisfied that we had done our best to comply with the restriction.

We had done a good bit, by then, to earn Dr Seliga's good opinion and gratitude. For one thing, we never complained, nor did our parents complain on our behalf, unlike Flo Cormack's parents who caused the building to be inspected by fire officers. We were told that our paraffin heater was the only safe one in the building, which was not very reassuring, since we knew that underneath us Michael Bamber had a 'drip-feed' paraffin stove of a design that was notoriously liable to flare up in drafts, and Michael had told us that he found it a good idea to place it beside the door where it would 'warm the draft' as it came in. I'm sure it would not have passed inspection under the regulations as they are now, but things were more relaxed in those days. Perhaps undertakings of improvements were extracted from Dr Seliga without our knowledge. The only result of the inspection that we knew about was that we had to open up a door on the landing so that the girls in the upstairs flat had a second way out in case of fire – their front door was at the top of the south staircase, but they also had access to the north staircase which led down through our flat. There was no suggestion that we should be able to have access to their flat in case we needed to make an escape down the south staircase. Fortunately there was no fire, and the only advantage that the upstairs girls took of their access to our flat was when their lavatory was blocked and they had to use ours. Flo, when she came down, was shocked by the dry rot fungus on our ceiling.

Dr Seliga's reference to vagrant couples (with a short vowel but heavy emphasis on the first syllable of *vagrant*) recalls the anxiety felt by those in authority at the prospect of students sleeping together. As children of the 1960s we believed in free-love, but we were also children of the 1950s and as such we assumed that adults, University authorities and landlords and landladies would naturally try to impose the conventional morality of the time. But even if we could accept that this might be a matter of concern for the University when it came to halls of residence, and landladies with students living in their family homes may have had a legitimate interest, it was harder to see why those who let out flats to students thought they had a right to interfere. Nonetheless we accepted it as inevitable that

Dr Seliga would be angry if he found illicit sexual activity going on in Seaton Court. Of course, we were all right, being married, but we knew that Dr Seliga would make a scene if he found friends of ours making use of our flat for such purposes. We may have feared that he might complain to Miss Reid University Lodging's Officer), and cause more serious trouble for us or our friends, but in retrospect it appears very unlikely – his instinct, I'm sure, was to keep out of Miss Reid's way. In fact it was always unclear whether we were entitled to put up our friends at all. We didn't know what he would say if he found out. We were careful to let him know when we gave our spare bed for a few weeks to William Hegherty. He did not like us to let people use the flat while we were away. One night when we had just come back from holiday he let himself into our flat (we seldom locked the front door, but anyway he must have had a spare key), came into our room and shone a torch onto our faces. Terrified, we kept our eyes shut and pretended to be asleep. Elspeth sometimes used to stay with Michael in our spare bed, and she says she used to worry about Dr Seliga coming in and catching her and denouncing her. There would be a tense moment when she woke to hear someone coming in, and relief when it turned out to be Marshall Bisset and his friends raiding the kitchen.

During the summer Dr Seliga let off his flats to holiday-makers. We had taken ours for the whole year, but he asked us if we would move out into a smaller flat for July. We agreed to this, partly for the sake of saving a few (very few) pounds in rent, but mainly because we wanted to be obliging. This was in 1968. It was a mistake, because we were to be away from St Andrews at the end of the month, and would therefore not be on hand to move our belongings back to our own flat. We had friends staying in the flat while we were away, and they agreed to make the move for us, but we gathered when we got back early in September that things had not gone smoothly. I don't think we ever heard, from either Dr Seliga or our friends, what the problem was. I'm not sure now who the friends were. Dr Seliga probably realised that we could not help what happened (whatever it was), and in any case we had done our bit at the beginning of the summer, when we had helped him clean up the flats for the holiday-makers – not just our own but some of the others too.

I remember emptying the carpet-sweeper in one of the flats. It was packed tight, and as I emptied the felted dust I pulled it apart in morbid interest. I remember in particular a collection of huge toenail-clippings. Even when emptied the carpet-sweeper didn't work and we had to use our own. Although he clearly had pretty low standards he did notice that the kitchen floor in one of the flats was in a particularly bad state, good enough for students but not for holiday-makers. Laying new lino was the obvious solution, but that would have eaten up all the summer's profit, so was out of the question. Anna suggested painting the floor-boards white, and Dr Seliga immediately saw the merit of this, particularly as it could be done with the remains of the white paint that we had bought to paint the fireplace-surround in our flat. 'Ah, you are expert, Mrs Crowe,' said Dr Seliga, as he set us to work to put the plan into effect.

Dr Seliga had a knack of enlisting help in this way. One weekend a small army of people turned up with scythes, sickles, shears and rakes to cut the grass and weeds, front and back. I wish I could remember who they all were. Anna and I joined in. I wielded a scythe for the first time. I mentioned to Dr Seliga as he passed amongst us, urging us on, that I felt like Levin in *Anna Karenin*. Either because he was not an admirer of Tolstoy or because he thought I should be concentrating on the task in hand, Dr Seliga grunted and walked on.

The most memorable example of enlisted help was Mr Bunger the electrician. There was clearly something wrong with the electrics in our flat. Several of the wall-points didn't work, and the light bulbs in the central lights were failing. In our bedroom the main light was a strange sort of chandelier with light-bulbs on stalks. It took a non-standard, possibly obsolete, type of bulb, and in any case it was too high to reach it to change the bulbs without a ladder. There was a similar cluster of lights in the centre of the living room, though on a less grotesque fitting, and I once changed a bulb by standing on a chair on the table (possibly with some books to give additional height) but the experience was too alarming to be repeated. I seem to recall an electrician telling us that the wiring was of a type that had been superseded in the thirties, but I don't now remember when this was nor why the electrician had been summoned. Perhaps it was part of the fire survey. Most of the problems were not acute – there were still one or two bulbs functioning in the living room, and we could make

do with table-lamps in the bedroom – but at some point something occurred which really needed attention. Dr Seliga assured us that he had called in an electrician, Mr Bunger from Dundee. When eventually we were introduced Mr Bunger turned out to be Suresh Pandya, an Indian student who had been around St Andrews for many years. He was, I believe, a physicist, so no doubt he was qualified to advise on electrical matters. Probably he had, in the course of his long career in St Andrews, been a tenant of Dr Seliga, and had at some point offered an opinion on some electrical problem, at which Dr Seliga had declared, ‘You are expert, Mr Bunger, expert.’ Now I come to think of it, the problem may not have been anything directly affecting our flat, but rather a general problem to do with the wiring. But it required some fiddling about in our fuse-cupboard, and I do recall being told in advance several times to expect the visit from Mr Bunger imminently.

We liked Dr Seliga. Although we could see that he was in a sense exploiting us, both by getting us to help him and by providing sub-standard accommodation, we allowed ourselves to be exploited. We were always quite keen to please people, and so far as the flat was concerned we thought we should just take what we were given and think ourselves lucky. But there was more to our liking than that. We felt sorry for him. Often he would seem to groan under the weight of his burdens. ‘Problems, problems, Mr Crowe,’ he would say, ‘with property, always problems.’ We thought he was out of his depth, a scholar who should not be troubled by these things. But that wasn’t all. He was an engaging character. He was interesting to talk to, and, in his way, affectionate. We would look forward to his weekly visit to collect the rent and we would invite him in for a talk and, often, a cup of tea or cocoa. ‘The cup that cheers but does not inebriate,’ he would say. It helped that I was reading classics, and that our friend Mick Comber, who was often there, was doing his research on Tacitus. I’ve forgotten them now, but he would deliver long discourses on classical matters. One thing I remember him saying was that as a child before the first war he had been forced to learn Russian at gun-point. He hated the Russians.

When Mike and Ann asked us to look after their cat Charley we had to beg Dr Seliga to waive his ban on pets, and to our surprise he agreed. It seemed that he was fond of cats. One evening when I was on the steps calling Charley in, Dr Seliga sked me how *catus felix* was getting along. I was worried that Charley was not showing up. Dr Seliga told me not to worry, that cats always found their way home. It was a lovely autumn evening. Two mornings running, Charley brought in a dead guinea-pig. I was influenced by Dr Seliga’s extreme need to avoid trouble, and felt that I should propitiate the neighbour whose pets had been murdered. It appeared that the guinea-pigs belonged to the family of the pipe-major who lived in the OTC house next door, so I went round there to apologise for Charley’s depredations. The girl I spoke to seemed so unconcerned that it took me a while to explain just what I was apologising for.

I don’t recall the steps by which Seaton Court changed hands during the late summer and autumn of 1969. There was a rather nice looking middle-aged woman who lived on North Street who seemed to have something to do with the purchasers. She and Dr Seliga seemed very friendly at that time. We received notice to quit but at first we didn’t treat it with any urgency. Dr Seliga started to clear things out of his basement lair. Sacks and boxes began to appear along City Road. There were no restrictions in those days on how much you could expect the binmen to take away. Dr Seliga was assisted by a Maltese man called Joe. When we noticed that Joe had put some nice china out for the binmen we went in and asked if it was all right if we took it. He said yes, and then found us some more pieces. Over the next few days he offered us more. We are still using some of the china we acquired then. Joe also gave us some books, including a book on plain and decorative plastering which we still have, and a set of *Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland* which we rather idealistically gave to the local library.¹ Although Joe seemed at first to be helping Dr Seliga I had the impression later on that he was in fact employed by the new owners. The middle-aged woman from North Street became less friendly as time went on, and the purchasers became impatient for Dr Seliga, and his tenants, to get out.

¹ Joe at that time could not read English, which may be why he did not value books highly. In later years he became a bookdealer, with a saleroom in what used to be the betting shop behind South Street.

Although with Joe's assistance Dr Seliga threw out an enormous quantity of stuff, and probably sold off as much again, he was left with a good deal that he wanted to keep. He was moving into much smaller accommodation in one of his houses on the Lade Braes. He therefore had several trunkloads of belongings which he had to stow away. I knew of two of his caches, because I helped carry trunks there. One went in Ferdy's coal cellar, and the other in Rolland's paint store on City Road.

Moving out may have been difficult, but getting rid of Seaton Court was clearly a great relief for Dr Seliga. He was said to be triumphant when it appeared that the purchasers didn't have the resources to repair and restore the building. He still had several other properties to rent out. Mick Comber lived in one of them. There were still problems, such as the dispute over rights of way with a neighbour, Mr Thom, who placed a gate across the close leading from South Street to the house on the Lade Braes. It was in the course of an argument with Mr Thom that Dr Seliga was supposed to have said: 'I am man, Mr Thom, you are bogus gentleman.' 'Bogus' being pronounced 'boggus'. He was evidently proud of this repartee, because he reported it himself to Mick, who relayed it to us. I'm not sure whether this actually occurred before or after Dr Seliga moved to his new home. 'Bogus gentleman' was a phrase that appealed to Mick.

I have concentrated on Dr Seliga as property-owner and landlord - inevitably so, because that was the role in which I knew him. However friendly I might at various times have felt towards him he would always remain our landlord. We retained his good opinion above all by paying him promptly and causing as little trouble as possible. His roles as teacher and researcher have been touched upon, and I might also mention the part he played in the exiled Polish community. He was vehemently and understandably anti-communist. In 1953, for example, he wrote a letter with a London academic to the *Universities Quarterly* describing 'darker aspects of higher education in Poland'. Fifteen years later, following the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia, he used the occasion of a parade of the RAF in the town to write to the *Citizen* to contrast the freedom guarded by the 'boys in the blue' with the unfreedom behind the Iron Curtain. I don't recall now whether or not he was still alive when the memorial to Sikorski was put up in Kinburn Park. In addition to his polemical writings he contributed less controversially to a volume on *The University of Edinburgh and Poland* published in 1969, and the next year wrote a paper summarising the account left by the Czech Jesuit Georgius David's experiences in late seventeenth century Muscovy. The University Library's copy is inscribed in his attractive italic hand: 'To the University Library, St Andrews, 1.vii.1971 / SS.'

The first Christmas after we left St Andrews we sent a card to Dr Seliga. He replied with a re-used Christmas card containing a friendly message. We had told him of Jessy's birth, and he said: 'I imagine how pretty she is and how clever will be.' He added a warning for me: 'primum vivere, deinde philosophari'. We had no card from him the following Christmas. When we returned to St Andrews in 1973 he was still to be seen around the town. I spoke to him once, and he seemed to remember me, but he was uninterested in prolonging our acquaintance. We left again, and returned in the mid eighties. By then he was only rarely to be seen around the town. Remembering his response in 1973, I did not speak to him. I suspect that if it were to happen nowadays I would probably speak. I saw him once in the street wearing white kid gloves - I only remember it this once, but I have a feeling it may have been a custom with him. Soon one began to hear that he was in poor health.

For Anna and me Dr Seliga was a significant part of what is nowadays referred to as the 'student experience'. For us, and for many others during our time in St Andrews, his draughty rooms and rickety, miscellaneous sale-room furniture provided our first home. He must have known the minimum standard of salubrity which he had to meet in order to get on Betty Reid's list of approved accommodation, but beyond that I doubt if Dr Seliga had any interest in or understanding of what students wanted or required. We took what was there. Because it was our first married home it has always, in my memory, been invested with a glamour unmatched by anywhere else we have lived. I remember going from room to room thinking, This is ours! Of course it wasn't ours really, it was Dr Seliga's. He was, as landlord and as an old man, an authority figure in our lives. He was strict and could be fierce. The Rachman scandals were still fresh in people's minds, and because Rachman was Polish people referred to Dr Seliga as the Rachman of St Andrews. This was unfair, and really an

example of the casual racism of those days. He was nothing like Rachman, but still he was certainly not a satisfactory landlord. His properties were in poor repair, were cold and badly furnished, his rents were on the high side and he was slow, or worse than slow, at responding to complaints and dealing with problems. It was not only among students that his reputation was bad; members of staff and people in the town were aware of his faults. I remember Kenneth Dover commiserating with me on having Dr Seliga as a landlord.

Most of our contemporaries, I think, resented Dr Seliga and tried to get the better of him, but Anna and I first propitiated him and then grew fond of him. But although we saw him in odd moments when his bristling guard was relaxed, we never really got to know him. His experience was too far beyond us – growing up under Czarist tyranny, then a promising career in inter-war Poland, and finally exile in Scotland. He may have had many visions of his future as he worked away at Petronius and Catullus in Warsaw, but never can he have seen himself as Mr X in Macgregor's auctions. What was the thread that held together the fragments of a life torn apart by the impact of revolution and war? Perhaps religion, perhaps patriotism – I couldn't tell, I can't tell now. But although I didn't know enough to understand him, Dr Seliga holds an important place in my memory, first as a link with events so terrible that one can hardly believe that they occurred, and then as a reminder that life does not unroll for everyone along the same conventional lines.

Stanislaw Seliga and Leon Koczy Ph.D [Scotland and Poland: A Chapter of Forgotten History](#), 1969
[The University of Edinburgh and Poland](#) edited by [Wiktor Tomaszewski](#), M.D., Ph.D., Edinburgh 1968,
printed at the Aberdeen University Press

<http://homepage.ntlworld.com/josephd.ross/index.html>

1929 – “Opowieść o wdowie z Efesu,” trans. Stanisław Seliga, in S. Seliga, “Petronjuz, poeta-sceptyk,” in *Swiat i Ojczyzna* (Cieszyn, 1929), pp. 25-30 (article pp. 3-23). Available as off-print. Contains *Matrona*. Not seen.

1929 – “Z Petroniussa,” trans. S. Seliga, in *Kwartalnik Klasyczny*, 3 (1929), 524. Contains Frag. XXIX, Bücheler. Not seen.

(entries from *A bibliography of Petronius*, Gareth L. Schmeling, Johanna H. Stuckey, Brill Archive, 1977 ISBN 9004047530, 9789004047532)

Stanisław Seliga, *Pieśni miłosne Katulla* Warszawa, 1929

book listed at www.atticus.pl on 20 April 2009

The books on Petronius and Catullus are in the University Library. The following are also listed in SAULCAT:

‘Some darker aspects of higher education in Poland’, reprinted from *Universities Quarterly*, August 1953

‘Muscovy at the end of the 17th century as seen by a contemporary Czech Jesuit’, *Romae : Institutum Historicum Polonicum ; Londinii : Societas Polonica Scientiarum et Litterarum in Exteris*, 1970.

[Review of] R. Turasiewicz: *Życie polityczne w Atenach*, *Erasmus* v 22 no 19-20

Janka Blatt

I first became aware of Janka as a member of St Andrews Labour Party when a student member told me about an old Polish lady who lived on the Lade Braes. It was a natural mistake for the student to assume that Janka was Polish, in view of the significance of the Polish community in St Andrews. It was also typical that a student should have known Janka before I did, because Janka was always interested in and attracted to young people. In those days (the late eighties) Janka was still active and would take part in the running of the coffee mornings we used to hold in the Town Hall Supper Room. She would bake cakes and run a stall – I don't recall now whether her preferred stall was the

cakes or the bric-à-brac. The Labour Party in St Andrews was companionable organization, rather looked down upon by the other branches because it was so dominated by University people. This is not the place to describe my experience of the Labour Party in NE Fife, or to consider how we might have appeared to others. So far as Janka is concerned the thing to remember is that she was one of just a handful who turned up regularly to branch meetings during the late eighties and early nineties. I think most of us would have regarded each other as friends as well as fellow-members – indeed friends first and fellow-members second, which may have been the problem from the point of view of outsiders. I remember the moment when I first felt myself to have become part of this circle. We were meeting at the time in a slightly depressing upstairs room in the Cosmos Centre. As I approached the Cosmos I saw Janka arriving in her taxi. For some reason which I don't recall (perhaps I was the last to arrive and someone asked if I had seen anyone else coming – we always delayed the start of the meeting as long as possible in the hope that someone else would appear) I remarked that I had seen Janka sweeping past me in her car. Somewhat to my surprise this way of putting it greatly pleased Janka and amused the others because, unknown to me, Janka's taxi was already a bit of a joke.

Janka liked cooking. We didn't know her in the days when she used to give dinner parties, but we went to high-tea with her several times, sometimes with the Dovers, who were great friends. These occasions were sometimes slightly embarrassing, with a fair bit of talking at cross-purposes, but Kenneth could be relied on to clarify things and keep things going. Janka discussed baking with Anna, and I think Anna went round to her house once to take part in a baking session – it was certainly proposed, but whether it took place I don't recall. It was only after Janka had begun to find it difficult to get out and about that I began to call on her regularly. Usually Anna and I would go together, but sometimes one or other of us would go. At one period I found myself visiting almost every Sunday afternoon. These visits were always a great source of pleasure to me, although latterly they were also a source of anxiety as Janka became increasingly confused and agitated. Except where I say otherwise the details that follow are derived from Janka in these Sunday afternoon sessions. Where I quote her words it is on the basis of notes I wrote immediately after our conversation.

The student who assumed Janka was Polish was nearer to being right than I realised. Janka's mother was one of a family of five sisters who came to Vienna from Poland. Janka never mentioned this Polish connection, and indeed there was no reason why she should have done. We learned of it from her cousin Ewa, who added that Janka liked to forget that her family was anything other than Viennese – not Jewish, not Polish, but Viennese.² Although Janka spoke a good deal about her life, I was conscious that there were things she was not saying, areas which she would not discuss. From her account I worked out that she must have been born around 1918, and I was very surprised to find when I visited her in hospital that her date of birth above her bed was shown as 1909.

The five sisters were very close. Janka's cousin Ewa said that her own father, when he married, was warned that he would be marrying the whole family. This may have reflected an element of antipathy among Viennese Jews towards a family from Poland: they are from the east, they are recent arrivals, they will stick together. Janka gave the impression that as a girl her mother had been more frivolous than her sisters, two of whom, Toni and Wari, were intellectual high-fliers, a psycho-analyst and a classics teacher. Another was disabled and eventually went into an asylum. The family were advanced in their attitudes; the sisters were permitted, for example, to travel alone on a train. One day on the train a handsome man fell in love with Janka's mother, asked for her address, sent her flowers, and before long married her. Adolf Blatt came from a brewing family, but his interests were in art and the classics, not business. He had no sense of how to manage money. Ewa remembers hearing Adolf Blatt ill-spoken of because he was unable to provide for his family. Whenever he could afford it he would buy his beautiful wife a hat. When he died his wife was left with two small

² In *The Hare with Amber Eyes* (Edmond de Waal, 2010) it's clear that the assimilated Jews of Vienna felt threatened by the Jews from the East, partly they knew they would suffer from the hatred felt by the gentile population for these new arrivals. De Waal's account of the assimilated Ephrussi family also goes some way to explaining why the Jews of Vienna did not see the danger sooner. They had invested so much (emotionally and intellectually, but also literally, in buying war-bonds right up to the bitter end of the first war) in supporting the Austrian state that they could not believe that their fellow citizens would turn against them.

daughters. Her brothers-in-law told her to put the girls in an orphanage and find another husband – she was very beautiful and would have no difficulty. Since she refused this advice she received little financial help from the brewers. She was reduced to earning money by sewing beads onto dresses, often working long into the night. Janka told us that the memory of her mother's terrible grief deterred her from contemplating marriage herself. The words 'Love overcomes the grave' were inscribed on Adolf Blatt's tombstone, and the girls were regularly taken to see it. The bereaved wife was so overcome by grief and beset by difficulties that her sister Idi came to live with her, giving up her own planned marriage.

When they went out, Blanka, the younger girl, would go with the mother while Janka went with Aunt Idi. Janka told us this several times, and because she evidently adored her aunt the arrangement seems to have been perfectly satisfactory. However, on one occasion Janka added something which suggested a lingering resentment beneath the surface. She said that Blanka was always 'hanging round my mother'. She said that her mother wondered why she never hugged and kissed her, but, said Janka, 'with my sister always with her there was nothing I could do'. It was hard to avoid the feeling that Janka did not altogether approve of her sister, that she felt she was perhaps spoiled, perhaps self-indulgent. One day Blanka was still asking for more food after the meal; their mother said, 'Haven't you eaten enough for today?' to which Blanka replied that she was 'still hungry from yesterday'. But when Janka told the story it was to illustrate the family's poverty rather than any greediness of Blanka's, and she clearly relished her sister's repartee.

There was money for the girls' education. Janka took her higher school certificate. Her ambition was to study philosophy at the University of Vienna and then do six years medical training followed by six years psychiatry. She wanted to follow her Aunt Toni. This did not happen because, she said, 'the University of Vienna would not let me in'. Kenneth Dover said that she had told him that she was kept out of the University by the Nazis, and I think she gave me the same impression, which was why we were surprised to learn her age. By the time of the Anschluss (1938) which brought the Nazis to power in Austria, Janka was 28 or 29, which would be late for starting a University course. It must have been over the previous ten years that she was kept out of the University. While Austria had had since 1933 a government under Dulfuss and then Schuschnigg that was influenced by Mussolini, I don't think the Austrofascists had an official policy of anti-semitism. Of course anti-semitism can and did flourish without official sponsorship, so it may well be true that it stood in her way. Without knowing anything about Austrian history I have the impression that Austria was, throughout the thirties, a deeply divided society, with left- and right-wing parties and militias, and violence never far from the surface. Janka was a member of the Socialist Youth, and used to go hiking with them, which must have become dangerous, and may not even have been possible, after the brief civil war in 1934 when the Social Democrat Party was outlawed and leaders of the Social Democratic militia were executed. She said something about a boy she liked, who turned out to be a Nazi. She recalled her sadness when she was no longer able to go hiking with him, which suggests memories of some more innocent moment before political divisions and prejudices were hardened. It could be that it was her left-wing affiliation that counted against her at the University. Ewa suggested that it was simply lack of money that prevented her going to University, and that she spent the missing years of the 1930s in some low-ranking civil service job. Even if it was not literally true that she was barred from the University by the Nazis, she was right to feel that the Austrofascist state blighted her youth because she was poor, left-wing and Jewish.

Her exclusion must have been the more painful because of her love of German and Viennese culture – Goethe, Schiller and, through her aunt, the Viennese psycho-analytic tradition. She urged me to read *Faust*, and I tried, but found it hard-going. Perhaps it is time to try again. These were the things that mattered to her, certainly not her Polish side, which she never mentioned. She did talk about being Jewish. She was emphatically a non-practising Jew, secular, atheist and anti-Zionist. When she visited her sister in Tel Aviv she was amused to note that while Blanka observed all the rules in the house so as not to hurt the feelings of her strictly religious husband, when she went out she behaved quite differently. Janka seemed quite scornful of this inconsistency, and I don't know whether it occurred to her that Blanka may have been relaxing her observance out of consideration for her.

Blanka had married the boy next door. As a tubby little boy known as Wumsi, he was present when Blanka spoke her first words, and declared in solemn amazement, 'Blanka has spoken!' From that moment he was devoted to her. Janka said her sister grew up to be a true Viennese girl, with many admirers, but Wumsi was sure she would come back to him, as indeed she did. She got out of Vienna and went with him and his family to Palestine. Although he ruled the family in matters of religion Wumsi (who had his own business in Tel Aviv as a chemist) was Blanka's admiring slave in other respects. When he died she wearied Janka by writing repeatedly that she, Janka, could never know what she, Blanka, had lost. Janka could only think of him as little Wumsi with his fat tummy.

Ewa said that the two sisters never got on well together, and that when her mother, Toni, organized a family reunion in Switzerland one of them, Ewa could not remember which, left in disgust. From what Ewa said it sounds as though Toni may not have managed the reunion tactfully. Whatever difference there was between them the quarrel was not permanent, and guarded and sporadic contact was maintained. I seem to recall occasions when Blanka telephoned Janka, but I'm not sure.

Ewa described how other members of the family escaped from Austria. Wari believed the problems would soon pass, until she found herself arrested along with a group of gypsies. Because she was not a gypsy she was released, an example, I suppose, of the bizarre attention that the Nazis paid to bureaucratic exactitude. Convinced now that things would not get better, she managed to escape to America, where she took a job as a children's nurse. Toni and her family, meanwhile, had made their way to Switzerland. They were safe, but unable to practise their profession because many of the Swiss sympathised with the Nazis and discriminated against Jews. Wari in America made a favourable impression on her employers' paediatrician (Dr Benjamin Spock) who helped her to find more work. It may have been his influence that helped to bring Toni and her family to America. The disabled sister was killed, along with everyone else in the asylum.

Janka's mother died of cancer. Janka was deeply affected by her mother's suffering and courage. She depended all the more on her aunt. With Blanka by now in Palestine, Idi's concern was to get Janka to safety. She used family business connections in Holland to make contact with a Dundee family called Watson who provided the necessary sponsorship to bring Janka to Britain. Janka described her aunt helping her to pack her things, taking particular care over her school certificates. The Watsons were to arrange for Janka to attend St Andrews University.

On the train journey the Nazis checked people's papers repeatedly.³ Some passengers were taken off the train and did not come back. Janka could not relax until she reached the Hook of Holland and was about to embark for Scotland. The sea was rough, and she had heard that brandy would help settle her stomach, so she went to the bar to buy some. There were two British men at the bar, perhaps amused at Janka's obviously unaccustomed tipping. She was relieved to find that at last she could speak to someone. She told this in a way which made her seem young and naïve, which was another reason why I thought she must have been only in her early twenties at the time.

The plan was that Idi would follow her to Britain, but it was too late. Was Janka expecting her to follow straightaway? Did she perhaps stay a while in Holland, waiting for Idi to join her for the last stage of the journey? Through the Red Cross Toni discovered what happened to Idi. 'She was burnt in Auschwitz,' Janka said. 'My Aunty Idi. If you looked in her face you knew she would never harm anyone.' It struck me that this was an oddly muted and even negative comment on Idi's life of devotion, but it reminds us that in addition to everything else one should say about the Holocaust it was also utterly futile. What was the point of killing Aunt Idi? Also, when she spoke, I'm sure Janka hardly thought about the second half of her sentence – she never really got beyond the first part, 'If you looked in her face ...'

Soon after Janka arrived in Britain the war broke out and she joined the Women's army. She believed she had an obligation to repay the country that had saved her life. Intelligent and hard-working, she

³ *The Hare with Amber Eyes* also explains something that always seems hard to grasp, why it was that the Nazis made it so difficult for the Jews to leave. Was it simply out of loathing? Perhaps it was, but it may have been rationalised as the need to check that the exit tax had been paid, to ensure that the fleeing Jews did not take their wealth with them.

prospered in the army and became an officer. As a completely unattached woman in her early thirties she must have been something of a rarity. I don't know what she did in the army, whether she used her knowledge of German, or whatever administrative skills she had picked up working for the Austrian civil service. She thought that as an incomer she was given unfair preference in being promoted over the heads of British colleagues.

After the war she came to St Andrews. As a student she made two lasting friendships. While surveying the notice boards at the start of her first term she met Elsie Orme and they formed an unlikely and lasting friendship – unlikely, because Janka's socialism had not abated with time and Elsie was the daughter of a Sheffield factory-owner. Like Janka, Elsie was older than most of the students. Janka often stayed with Elsie's family, and spoke admiringly of her father, who was an enlightened employer and had developed a new grinding process that avoided many of the appalling health hazards of conventional methods. Janka liked to tease her socialist friends with accounts of chauffeur-driven cars and socialising with the cutlers, the manufacturing élite of Sheffield. Perhaps she found an echo of the high-bourgeois life that she had glimpsed in pre-war Vienna. It's clear that Elsie and her family made her feel very much at home with them.⁴

The other friendship, according to Janka the most important of her whole life, was with her landlady, Miss Duncan. There is only one photograph that I remember from Janka's sitting-room, Miss Duncan's. Miss Duncan must have responded to Janka's loveable nature and her vulnerability. In Janka's eyes she was a saint, a friend who was wise, generous and comforting. Janka loved everything about Miss Duncan, including the religion which she did not herself share.

When interviewed by the Dean Janka was anxious not to claim more than her due; she was always conscious of being a foreigner. Her certificates showed that she had studied English, but she explained that she could not answer questions on English Literature. She took honours in Political Economy, a course which did not shake her socialist faith, but at the end of it she remained uncertain what to do with her life. She decided to take another honours degree in Psychology, her second interest, after socialism. Her first degree had presumably been funded by her army gratuity and under the arrangements that were made for ex-service personnel to enter higher education. For her second degree she thought she would need to fund herself, so she took a job as a cleaner. Principal Irvine would pass her on his early morning walk as she scrubbed her employer's doorstep in, I think, Murray Park. Now and then he would stop to talk to her and when he became aware of her situation he encouraged her to apply for a scholarship. When she was awarded one she felt it was wrong, as with her commission in the army, that a foreigner should get a scholarship ahead of a British person – she knew some of her fellow-students, ex-service people like herself, who were disappointed. Principal Irvine persuaded her to ignore these scruples, and she understood that no-one resented her success. Janka responded warmly to kindness, and Irvine became her standard of what a Principal should be, which may explain something of the ferocity with which she regarded a later Principal who failed to match the ideal.

After graduating Janka was accepted the post of psychologist at Balgay Approved School for Girls in Blackness Road, Dundee. She was characteristically reluctant to accept, assuming that it would be beyond her, but it was clearly the work she was put on earth to do. Her hesitation was probably due to a feeling that as a foreigner she would be less able to understand the girls' lives. She told a story against herself which illustrated one of the cultural differences she had to overcome. There was a local bridge club which used to donate their once-used packs of cards for the girls to play with. Assuming that cards and gambling must be against the rules, Janka confiscated and destroyed these packs as quickly as they appeared. But mistakes like this were trivial, compared with her capacity for understanding and sympathy. When we knew her, twenty-five or thirty years after she retired from Balgay, her girls were still sending her flowers and coming to see her with their children and grandchildren.

Some of the girls were violent. One of them threatened Janka with a knife – she had climbed up on something and was standing above her with a knife, and then suddenly leapt down and threw her

⁴ Elsie Orme combined a career in the family business with a close connection with the theatre.

arms round Janka's neck. That was Emily; Janka said that Emily eventually had to go to an asylum because she attacked her family. When girls absconded she was prepared to follow them into areas where the police themselves would hardly go. She understood why they absconded. One girl, Patsy, went to be with her mother when her abusive father came out of prison, and Janka trusted her to return once the crisis had passed. Patsy grew up to be a nurse, working on an AIDS ward. She kept in touch with Janka, who was very proud of her and supported her collections for AIDS research. Janka became a regular at the Police station in Dundee, where she was remembered from the days when she had had to report as an alien. They asked her why she couldn't lock the girls in so they couldn't abscond and so save trouble for them all. She replied that she couldn't lock them in, and that they always came back. Once the police in Glasgow contacted her about two girls they had picked up. She told them to give them their train tickets back to Dundee. The police didn't believe the girls would return, but Janka trusted them, and they justified her trust. Her view of her function in the school was that she was there to give the girls space. Life crowded in on them, forced them to grow up before their time. (When we were worried about Swithun she said we were doing the right thing by giving him space to make up his mind.) She won such affection and admiration that there was indignation throughout the school when it was known that someone had taken an apple from her room.

Janka's two loves came together when she brought groups of girls to St Andrews for Miss Duncan to give them a slap-up tea. What a remarkable combination: the elderly St Andrews spinster with her starched table cloth and good china, and the bunch of deprived girls from Dundee or Glasgow, brought together by the refugee from Vienna. Miss Duncan would send the girls away with a big box of toffees, and when they got back to Balgay School they would write to thank her.

Janka said she could never find the words to write about the girls of Balgay. Hearing her speak of those days one can see why – it was all too much part of her, and even in retrospect she could not put any distance between herself and her work in the school. I noted down as accurately as I could something she said about her girls: 'They had suffered so much pain, from their families, from strangers. You don't know what these girls had suffered. They were called delinquents, but they had suffered so much they were like saints. I still think of the ones I couldn't help and many I never knew what became of them. Some I know became respectable, but that is not what is important. What's important is that I helped them to respect themselves and to respect others.'

She was so caught up in the work that she could never relax, not even when she came off duty and back to Miss Duncan's for the weekend. At first she was quite sociable, going to dinner parties and the like, but after a while she stopped. It was when she was talking about these social activities that Janka told us about being afraid of marriage because of her memories of her mother's grief. Miss Duncan was worried and asked why she no longer went out. Janka replied that it was because all she ever wanted to talk about, the only topic that seemed important to her, was her work, and she had come to realise that St Andrews dinner parties were not interested in approved school girls – or at least their interest was too lukewarm to satisfy her own passion. Miss Duncan had a formula that she repeated again and again: 'You're not at Balgay School now. You're not at Balgay School now.' But she was always at Balgay School.

As time went on Janka's health began to fail. She was in her fifties, and she found to her dismay that whenever she came back to Miss Duncan she would be attacked by dreadful pain. In the end the doctor said it was due to the good food that Miss Duncan provided in the hope of lifting her out of her depressed state. Gall bladder trouble was diagnosed and Janka had to have an emergency operation. When she came out of hospital Miss Beattie (Miss Duncan's niece) was sure she could not live. She retired from the school with a good pension (more than she was entitled to, she thought) and Miss Duncan nursed her and restored her strength.

Miss Duncan took thought for Janka's future, advising her that she should buy a house of her own. Innocently Janka said it wasn't necessary, as she would always stay where she was, with Miss Duncan. 'No you won't, my dear,' said Miss Duncan, 'nobody lives for ever.' Janka had thought her friend would live for ever. So Janka bought her house in the Lade Braes and had it repaired and

decorated. Miss Duncan saw it once before she died. Although her house was all ready for her Janka still found it hard to make the move. Miss Beattie said she could stay on in Miss Duncan's house for as long as she liked, but she soon found that it was a mistake. The house without Miss Duncan was, Janka said, a nightmare. She took refuge in her new house.

And so began Janka's long, prosperous and, one must assume, happy retirement. She gave dinner parties and tea parties, she helped to run the University Overseas Society, she attended the Debating Club and the Ladies Circle, and she was a member of the Labour Party. She rather liked the feeling of crossing between these different groups, much as she liked to think of herself as a red socialist sitting in a room decorated with gold – gold leaf, but she always said just gold. Ursula Hall recalled how beautifully dressed Janka always was, and I think even I was aware that her dresses were well made and the colours carefully co-ordinated. Her house was always clean and tidy and very comfortable, but there was a strange feeling about it which we eventually accounted for by the fact that everything in it had been purchased at the same time. She had many friends, including many she got to know through the Overseas Society, and a few well chosen enemies, of whom she would speak with a very innocent spitefulness. She remained close to Miss Duncan's niece Miss Beattie, and to Miss Beattie's nephew. I remember her declaring with great glee as she left a Labour Party coffee morning that she was going to lunch with a Conservative, meaning Miss Beattie. Visits to Elsie in Sheffield were also an important part of her life. Although she kept in contact with Blanka and Wumsi, and visited them once at least, the member of the family she had most in common with was her cousin Ewa, Toni's daughter. Much younger than Janka, Ewa lived in America working as a psychiatrist. She visited Janka, and I believe they may have gone on holiday together.

This was how she was when we got to know her. Her happy and active retirement was just drawing to an end. The dinner parties were over, but friends still came to see her. Her association with the Overseas Society meant that she received a University diary, and she kept abreast of University affairs, comings and goings, promotions and quarrels. I was always surprised to find how many people she knew. She was very partisan. She didn't like the Arnotts. It was a blow when the University re-arranged the affairs of the Overseas Society, making it more of an official arm of the University and side-lining the volunteers.

What was worse than the changes in the University and the depredations of the Arnotts, worse even than her own poor health – the greatest blow that Janka suffered at this time was New Labour. She was passionate in her support for the Labour Party. Before and during the 1992 election Willie Russell and I were quite anxious because every time the Party telephoned her she would send another large donation. I think we may even have intervened and told them to stop contacting her. After the election of Blair as leader there was the move to re-write Clause 4 of the Party's constitution, to remove the commitment to nationalisation. The Constituency Party held a meeting in Cupar to discuss the change. I don't now remember the procedure followed at this meeting, whether we voted on the change, and if so which way we voted. It's quite likely that we voted for the change, because at that time the CLP was packed with New Labourite students. All I remember from the meeting is Janka's speech in favour of Clause 4. I don't even remember what she said – it was quite incoherent, and I suppose a bit embarrassing. In fact it is only as a result of thinking about Janka's life while writing this memoir that I have realised the importance of that moment. Her arguments may have been confused and her grasp of contemporary economics was weak. Her passion was outmoded; she represented the past at a moment when most eyes were on a brighter New Labour future. She was speaking to us from a different world. This little old lady with the Viennese accent had once belonged to a Social Democratic Party which was banned by the Fascists, and its leaders executed.

Her last ten years of declining health and diminishing activity were, however, to bring her a new and unexpected consolation: Peter her driver. Where she used to walk, she now had to ride in a taxi, and it was convenient to have a regular taxi-driver. From being her driver Peter became first her factotum and then her friend. 'My best friend is my driver,' she would say. Peter was an extremely patient, resourceful and considerate man, and he responded to Janka's guileless selfishness. It was the golden room again – the socialist with her personal driver – but there was more to it. There was

nothing patronising or phoney about her attachment, she was genuinely and deeply fond of Peter, and, as time went on, increasingly dependent on him both practically and emotionally.

At first Janka's health problems were to do with her heart. She was slowing up physically, but mentally was as quick as ever. One day she told us that something had happened to her mind. She was standing in the kitchen, she said, when something went, she could feel it. She made it sound like a button bursting or a hook coming undone. The change was not immediately apparent in her behaviour or conversation, but before long we began to notice things. She became unreasonable about little things. Like everyone she had always had her little ways, small, hidden rules that had to be followed, such as those that governed the lay-out of her china cupboards. Once she had herself found this fussiness as amusing as the rest of us. The change in her mind introduced a new note of anxiety. Eventually two main obsessions emerged. The first had to do with her keys, but I don't remember what it involved. Ewa said it was something often found among elderly refugees and Holocaust survivors, a symptom of their deep and ineradicable insecurity. Janka's other obsession was the belief that her watch was running backwards. She showed a sort of perverse ingenuity in discovering problems arising from this, and we would sometimes spend a whole afternoon discussing them. Again, Ewa said that this was explicable in terms of Janka's life experience. I guess what she meant was that Janka was wanting the clocks to go back to give Aunt Idi time to make her escape.

She had one or two stays in hospitals. When she was in hospital in Kirkcaldy I went to visit her, only to find that she was being discharged. She said she had discharged herself because the nurses were Nazis. I accompanied her home in the taxi, and all the way she kept telling the taxi-driver about Peter, that he was her only friend, that although she was a socialist she had her own private driver. When she was in the St Andrews hospital she had the same suspicion of the nurses. Eventually she transferred to Craigmount and I was taken by surprise by how apathetic she suddenly became. I can date this last change to the summer of 1997, because I noticed it when I went to see her on my fiftieth birthday. From then on I found visits heavy going. Of course, visiting the sick and the old is an art that has to be learned, and in any case I was only a recent friend. Others who had known her longer were able to get through to her better. In particular, when Ewa came to St Andrews her in May 1998 the visit was a great success. Kenneth Dover told us, with evident delight, that they had spent the afternoon singing German songs. We met Ewa at the Dovers, and this was when she told us something about Janka's family background.

Janka had declared frequently and gleefully that she intended her body to go for medical research, but when the time came it was not needed. Proceedings at the crematorium were conducted, along strictly secular lines, by her old friend the Reverend Professor James Whyte.

There are always those who see a need to exclude the stranger. I wanted to record these memories, first because the two lives are worth remembering for their own sake, and secondly to express a belief in the value of the stranger in our midst. What Dr Seliga and Janka were to my little life, the generations of refugees and migrants are to the history and life of the nation.

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