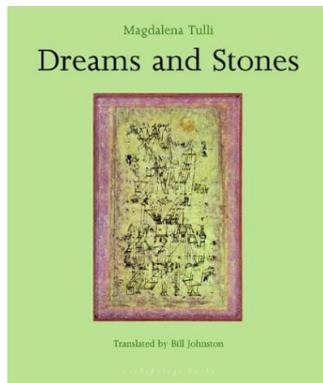

***Dreams and Stones* by Magdalena Tulli, translated by Bill Johnston, Archipelago Books, 2004, 110 pages.**



Magdalena Tulli is considered to be one of Poland's leading writers. Her first book, ***Sny i Kamienie/Dreams and Stones*** won her the prestigious Koscielski Foundation Prize in 1995. Her other novels, ***W Czerwieni*** (1998) and ***Tryby*** (2003) were nominated for the Nike award. She lives in Warsaw where she works as a psychologist and translator.

Dreams and Stones is an extraordinary book that defies easy classification. Officially called a novel, some critics have called it a tract and others a prose poem. Tulli's book is a parable about a new world told as the history of a city. Though the city is nameless, it is understood to be Warsaw, which was rebuilt after its destruction in World War II.

Reading the book is like wondering through a surrealist cityscape. Tulli's poetic prose, with powerful images and metaphors, constantly challenges the reader to glean her meaning. Comparisons have been made between her work and the stories of Bruno

Schulz.

The city is planned so as to avoid "the destructive influence of ambiguity." It is to be a perfect city, superimposed on an existing one. Tulli describes the construction of the city—the sure hand of the builders, bricklayers and foundrymen. She also explores the city's subconscious—the inhabitants whose unruly dreams of longing and doubt press against the rigid stone edifice, threatening its foundations. The planners and builders succeed for a time and the city "...blossomed moment by moment." The pace of life gradually accelerated out of control and "...the city hurled around like a carousel." It gradually became clear that the planners failed to make allowance for the "...chance obstacle that will stop an inscrutable thought in flight." They forgot that things go wrong and the unforeseen happens. The inhabitants of the city become disheartened. They knew how to repair only that which can be touched, not that which cannot be seen and is the most impaired. "Sorrow drifts among the apartment buildings like a fine mist.... "No one knew where it came from as it had no foundations and was not built from bricks. The city of stones and machines, divorced from its history, from the dreams of its inhabitants, cannot survive. Corrosion gradually sets in and Tulli dismantles her city piece by piece, speaking in the dual voice of architect and poet. Oblivion is inevitable—words don't help as definitions and meanings change.

Marek Zaleski wrote in ***Gazeta Wyborcza*** that "Tulli's perfect prose is a labyrinth of inexhaustible meanings [...] in which there circulate metaphors of emptiness and want, phantoms of unfulfilled emotions." One should avoid the temptation of assigning to the book any one simplistic meaning. It can be appreciated at various levels. It is the story of a city and it is also not about a city at all. It is about the way of the world, the inherent nature of things, the passing of all rigid, "perfect" systems, the inevitability of change.

Bill Johnston's rendering of the book into English is masterful. Johnston is Director of the Polish Studies Center at Indiana University. His translations include Gustav Herling's ***The Noontday Cemetery*** and Stefan Żeromski's ***The Faithful River***.

Monika Mieroszewska
