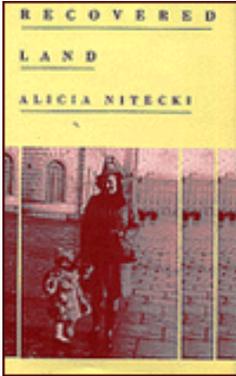

Recovered Land by Alicia Nitecki (1955), 108 pages.



These five essays have appeared in various American literary periodicals at one time or another. The author is a teacher of English at a small college near Boston and founding editor of a nature magazine. The book reflects her journeys through parts of Poland and Germany in an attempt to retrace World War II experiences of her numerous relatives, most of whom are long gone. Alicia (nee Korzeniowski) was born in 1942. She was only two years old when all inhabitants of the building on Warsaw's Leszno Street, including her mother and grandmother, were forcibly deported to a village in Germany's Black Forest near the Swiss border. The time was September 1944 during the Uprising. Thus her recollections of life in the home country are practically non-existent and she actually retraces the steps and experiences of her various relatives. An eloquent introduction by Professor Norman Davies is of great help to the reader.

The first essay, which was apparently written expressly for this book, is all-important as it sets the mood. Alicia lands at the Warsaw Airport in 1974, thirty years after her departure, accompanying her husband who attend a meeting of mathematicians. This is not a happy time in the old country, and Alicia finds the atmosphere depressing, life miserable, and the city not very attractive. Obviously she does not have any sentimental attachment to the city which does not evoke any recollections. But she follows her itinerary with determination, including a short reunion with her father from whom she feels, for good reason, completely estranged. The reader shares her relief when the writer boards the plane and flies back West.

The essay describing her stay in the Black Forest is particularly touching as she recalls a trying time when her mother worked for a former watch factory manufacturing bomb fuses. In a way this group of slave workers from Warsaw were lucky as they had their children, lived in a quiet village up in the mountains, and local residents took a liking to the little ones. This was particularly important in case of the local baker!

As expected, the essays devoted to the concentration camp experiences of her uncles in Buchenwald and Flossenburg are upsetting, while her educated mind tries to reconcile these sites with the proud traditions of Goethe and Schiller who lived in nearby Weimar. Throughout the book we feel that Nitecki has a compelling need to complete these sad peregrinations for the sake of people who perished.

Lastly, the essay from which the book takes its title covers an automobile trip through "Ziemie Odzyskane". This part is more cheerful as we are introduced to various cousins who are newcomers to these recovered lands. The writer's love of nature is evident. She emerges primarily as an author of lyrical prose rather than of reportage.

George E. Suboczewski