

TRANSNATIONAL LITERATURE

The Patriot

The claws are what distinguish her: beneath
the quiet delivery of dates and facts
is rapine. Lydia lectures to the tourists
in Krakow on betrayal that cries through
the bars of Chopin's music; how the flat lands
of grain were harvested in blood, and how
revenge is sweet. She taught at university
for twenty years until the Communists
discovered how she felt about the Russians
since Peter and before. She loves her grandkids,
her piano and clean underwear. She plays
the etudes with élan and passion, tries
to give up smoking twice a year, and guides
the buses. She tells you Poland had an empire
through half of northern Europe, till the Germans
and the Russians stole it all, and you can see
she hates them both impartially. If you
say to her the Nazis invaded Poland
she insists, "No – Germans did it, they just say
it was the Nazis so they can pretend
that things are different now, except they're not".
She insists the world is brainwashed, but that Poland
will rise again in time. Blood demands blood.

John Upton

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