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A Review of Christina M.
Gschwandtner's *Postmodern
Apologetics? Arguments for God in
Contemporary Philosophy*
(New York: Fordham UP, 2013)

Gschwandtner begins by warning that the two “loaded” terms found in the title (*postmodernism* and *apologetics*) are, for many, incompatible. If *apologetics* is, as she contends, a “militant defense” of Christian beliefs (or at least of the existence of a monotheistic God), and *postmodernism* a “militant rejection” of any such worldview, how then can the two be reconciled? What’s more, of the twelve twentieth-century philosophers covered in the book’s thirteen chapters, how many could rightly be characterized as either postmodernists or apologists, let alone both?

These are the questions that Gschwandtner opens with. If the reader maintains a second-century view of apologetics and a 1960s view of postmodernism, these questions will remain unanswered. If, however, we stretch our understanding of apologetics to the exploration and justification of faith within contemporary thought, and limit our understanding of postmodernism to skepticism towards metanarratives (and of objective, distanced truth claims), we see how the two may relate. And, on these terms, they do.

Postmodern Apologetics? is a compelling study of how twentieth-century philosophy stemming from the phenomenological tradition has impacted on, and enabled, contemporary trends within philosophy of religion. The book is in three parts: “Preparations,” “Expositions” and “Appropriations.” Part 1 (“Preparations”) outlines the foundational contributions of three major thinkers: Heidegger, Levinas and Derrida. While often characterized by their ambivalence towards theological questions and concerns within their *oeuvres*, these three philosophers are seen by Gschwandtner to have set the groundwork for contemporary debates on both religious experience and religious language. Part 2 (“Expositions”) considers how

the phenomenological ideals identified in Part 1 were expounded upon by a variety of contemporary French thinkers, ranging from the late Paul Ricoeur to Emmanuel Falque. Part 3 (“Appropriations”) tracks how key aspects of twentieth-century continental philosophy have recently been appropriated by three philosophers in the United States for the purpose of formulating a modern Christian *apologia*.

PART 1: “PREPARATIONS”

The focal point of Part 1 is the commentary of Heidegger in the first chapter. Gschwandtner maintains that various aspects of Heidegger’s ontology set the phenomenological context in which all subsequent thinkers operated, “even when aspects of his thought were challenged” (38).

Gschwandtner begins by offering a précis of what she terms Heidegger’s phenomenology of religion. Her emphasis is placed on two fundamental concepts which would be seen to impact on the French and American based philosophers discussed in later chapters. The first of these is Heidegger’s understanding of *onto-theo-logy* as derived from his “deconstruction of the metaphysical tradition.” Here, Heidegger contends that ontology and theology had been problematically conflated from the very origins of metaphysics. By proposing a conceptual distancing of the two modes of thought, Heidegger is seen by Gschwandtner to have “opened a different way to speak about the divine” (30). This, in turn, has enabled much of the thinking of Marion and a host of other, more “religiously motivated,” theorists.

The second crucial concept, stemming from Heidegger’s hermeneutical writings, is his understanding of truth as *aletheia* (or “un-concealment”). Truth, in this respect, is seen as distinct from the objective, verifiable truth sought by the natural sciences. Though an often-neglected feature of Heidegger’s work, Gschwandtner correctly observes that his “existential” understanding of truth (and the concept of *meditative thinking* which follows from it) offers a basis for twentieth-century hermeneutical philosophy. This chapter discusses neither the romantic hermeneutical origins of this line of enquiry, nor how it was later developed by H. Gadamer. It does however convincingly argue that this is perhaps Heidegger’s greatest contribution to critical theory, underpinning the critiques of art laid out by Marion and Chrétien (33), and heavily informing Ricoeur’s conceptual distinction between “verification” and “manifestation” (34).

The remaining two chapters in this section outline the philosophies of Levinas and Derrida, and their contribution to religious thought. Due to the early emphasis placed on the legacy of Husserlian phenomenology,

the reader senses that these two theorists do not offer the same foundational contribution that Heidegger was seen to have. Indeed, as with the discussions in Part 2, much of the analysis of Levinas (and to a lesser extent Derrida) centers on the expansion and/or rejection of Heidegger's groundwork. Of particular interest in Chapter 2, however, is Gschwandtner's expansive commentary on Levinas's "critique of phenomenology," and how it engendered a new and lasting understanding of *alterity* (42-45).

PART 2: "EXPOSITIONS"

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Part 2 is comprised of seven chapters and examines the thought of six twentieth-century French philosophers: Ricoeur, Marion, Henry, Chrétien, Lacoste and Falque. Chapters 4 to 9 are each dedicated to a separate theorist, and follow a similar schema. Each chapter offers a short review of the philosopher's more religiously centered publications. Following this, Gschwandtner provides an in-depth analysis of how their work built upon the theoretical concepts from Part 1 in order to explore the nature and "viability" of religious experience (and its articulation within text, art and contemporary culture).

In line with the focus of this edition of *Text Matters*, let us consider in some detail Gschwandtner's chapter on Paul Ricoeur, entitled "A God of Poetry and Superabundance."

Chapter 4 begins with a general overview of Ricoeur's encounters with religious (or, rather, biblical) texts and criticism. While the chapter touches briefly on his publications from the 1960s on primary symbols (86-88), as well as his work on poetic discourse from the 1970s (88-90), the focus is placed squarely on Ricoeur's late autobiographical reflections from the 1990s, and particularly his analysis of the relationship between philosophy and religion (as presented in *Oneself as Another*, *Critique and Conviction* and *Living up to Death*).

This chapter proposes that Ricoeur's two main contributions to twentieth- and twenty-first-century Christian philosophy were his exploration of biblical discourse and his analysis of the division between *critique* and *conviction*. From his early corpus, Gschwandtner highlights Ricoeur's assertion that biblical language utilizes polyphonic and hyperbolic rhetoric in order to engender a new, revelatory, understanding of the text, God and the world: "Ricoeur calls it 'biblical polyphony' and insists that the multiple voices heard are important and should be homogenized into a single univocal voice. God is named in many ways and this naming is therefore complex and multi-faceted" (90-91).

From his later work, Gschwandtner reflects on Ricoeur's conceptual division between philosophy and theology. In the sub-section "A Controlled Schizophrenia" she examines the reasons why throughout his career Ricoeur maintained a "water-tight division" between his philosophical body of work and his biblical hermeneutics (96). Drawing upon his late autobiographical publications, Gschwandtner argues that Ricoeur came to recognize the stark "and in many ways false" opposition between philosophical analysis and theological reflection. This chapter concludes that Ricoeur was ultimately unable to "resolve the dichotomy" (101) between these two modes of thought. She however proposes that, through his exploration of the relationship between philosophical *critique* and religious *conviction*, Ricoeur provides a platform for contemporary theorists to better understand the nature of biblical discourse (as well as a non-positivist understanding of religious *Truth* which it elicits).

This chapter pursues two, perhaps incompatible, objectives. On the one hand, Gschwandtner seeks to offer an introduction to Ricoeur's weighty contributions to biblical theology. On the other, she is intent on breaking new ground, and exploring how his later publications may be used to augment his earlier understanding of truth as "manifestation."

As regards her first aim, Gschwandtner focuses on several particular facets of Ricoeur's biblical hermeneutics, in lieu of offering a more superficial overview. As a result, she concentrates on his understanding of textual polyphony and "limit expressions." While her commentary on Ricoeur can be lauded for its clarity and concision, it fails to consider how Ricoeur's conceptual understanding of *biblical polyphony* and *parabolic limit expressions* derived from (and is wholly reliant upon) his non-religious/linguistic understanding of metaphor and metaphoric predication. This seems a notable omission, not least as the remainder of the chapter would presume a rigid conceptual separation between Ricoeur's religious and non-religious theories.

The second half of the chapter looks at the relevance of Ricoeur's autobiographical reflections and interviews (particularly those found in *Critique and Conviction*), which have garnered significant attention in recent years. Though the subjects of religious experience and religious truth were rarely the primary focus of Ricoeur's work, Gschwandtner ably demonstrates how Ricoeur's later publications can be used to expand the relevance of his earlier work in this direction.

PART 3: "APPROPRIATIONS"

The third and final part of *Postmodern Apologetics?* focuses on three notable American Christian philosophers (Merold Westphal, J. D. Caputo

and Richard Kearney) who have, in recent years, adopted and popularized elements of the phenomenological tradition. Gschwandtner contends that, as the three are writing to a somewhat skeptical American readership, they are similarly driven to demonstrate the potential value of twentieth-century French philosophy to contemporary American Christian studies. These three chapters open by considering the centrality of Heideggerian ontology and Derridean deconstruction theory within the respective philosophies of Westphal, Caputo and Kearney. Gschwandtner goes on to establish that Westphal and Caputo, in particular, appropriate concepts prevalent within French thought in order to explore the problems of faith in a postmodern world.

This section ends by considering the deeply hermeneutical nature of contemporary continental philosophy of religion, as well as the “similarities and parallels” between the various projects presented in the book’s three parts. Notably, Gschwandtner maintains that, from Levinas to Caputo, there is a shared interest in the use of excessive or hyperbolic language as a means of articulating religious *Truth*:

The one thing almost all of these ways of speaking about the divine and religious experience have in common is that such experience is always depicted in superlative forms. It seems that a defense of faith or even a mere use of religious imagery automatically pushes language to the very limits. (287)

Postmodern Apologetics? succeeds as a general introduction to a number of the main theorists who have instigated, or informed, a wide range of debates within twentieth-century philosophy of religion. Questions remain as to whether the French and American philosophers selected share a coherent (or even connected) *apologetic* initiative. Nonetheless, Gschwandtner successfully demonstrates the legacy of the phenomenological tradition within their works, and how they relate to one another. Her argument that these philosophies share an underlying interest in the boundaries (and superlative expression) of religious experience is also a provocative one, and has important implications for contemporary hermeneutical scholarship.

The Privilege to Write What You Want

Roddy Doyle Talks to Joanna Kosmalska¹

(University of Łódź)

JOANNA KOSMALSKA: In some of your recent works you tackle the issues of migration. Tell me, have you ever lived outside Ireland?

RODDY DOYLE: Yes, I have. I spent five months in West Germany. I lived in London for several periods, which, added together, amounted to about a year. Later I went to New York for six months. When I was a student, I worked in Germany and London. The summers were very long. I would leave the day after the exams finished and I would come back, not on the day when college started, but on the day when you'd be struck off the register if you didn't turn up. Once, I left in early May and I came back in November.

JK: How about New York?

RD: In New York I was teaching in a college in Manhattan for a semester. I loved the city and I wouldn't mind spending more time there. We

stayed in the States right through the winter. It was spectacular. Although we did not get any hurricane, we experienced the snowfall, which we have had a bit now in Ireland for the last few years, but at that point me and my children would have never seen snow and that was a daily occurrence in New York in the wintertime. As for the teaching side of it, I had been a teacher for fourteen years, I had enjoyed it but I wouldn't like to be teaching all the time. Even though it was college teaching, so it was quite different, I don't think it would be a good move for me to go back into teaching. Just as a variety now and then. Besides, it gave me the excuse to live in New York, which was wonderful.

JK: Have you had a chance to visit Poland?

RD: I was in Poland in 1977. It was a long time ago. I was a geography student in UCD back then and it

¹ This interview is a part of a literature project DEC-2011/01/B/HS2/05120 financed by the National Science Centre.

was a part of our programme. I travelled with a group of people on the bus. We went through West and East Germany into Poland, first across the country into Warsaw and then south to Wadowice, where the pope was born. It was a beautiful city.

JK: What were your first impressions?

RD: You have to bear in mind that I was visiting a Communist country or what was an attempt at a Communist country. I'd just come through Germany, and I'd been to East and West Berlin, so the differences were very stark. Really stark. One of the things that struck me immediately while driving through East Germany was how flat it all was, and how few divisions of land there were. Just vast areas, like one huge field. It may have made economic sense but it was all dreary to look at. It was so boring. Then we went to Poland and it also seemed flat, quite in contrast with my own country. No sea I could see anyway. Warsaw struck me at the time as a place that had been built in a hurry, which was true. The reconstruction works were going on at the time, but it was still a very new project. That was interesting itself. The Palace of Culture was like something taken out from George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In fact, it may well have been. The couple of department stores that I went into were almost empty. Empty of variety. People queuing up outside

the shops. A lot of queues. A lot of vodka. People were friendly.

JK: Any second thoughts on the visit?

RD: My politics has always been to the left. What the visit had done when I came home and it all began to sink in was shape my beliefs. I was 18 when I went to Poland. By the time I turned 19 my political views were more precise and I wouldn't have considered myself a Communist. I didn't like what I saw after the Berlin Wall. I took a very keen interest in the Solidarity movement in the late 1980s. I kept myself up to date and when any books were appearing, I bought them immediately. I read virtually everything I could lay my hands on, especially a lot of Timothy Garton Ash. He had a great familiarity with Poland, East Germany and Czechoslovakia. As I started to write around that time, I realized what a privilege it was to write exactly what you want. People can react with it and say it is rubbish. But there is no one to say you can't write that whereas that was the case with the intellectuals in, what was then called, Eastern Europe. It was a fascinating visit. But it was almost like visiting history. Time travel. I haven't gone back yet, which is strange in a way.

JK: Ireland, in turn, took a leap forward. What would you say has been the most significant change in Ireland since the 1990s?

RD: I would say it is reflective in the census, in the proportion of people who weren't born in Ireland but are living their lives here. Effectively they are citizens, even though legally they are not. It is a huge proportion of population and it's a much more complicated picture than it used to be the case. That is for me the most important change.

JK: How did Irish people cope with this massive wave of immigrants?

RD: One thing that reassures me that we didn't cope too badly with it is the fact that immigration has never been a political electoral issue. Nobody has ever jumped up and claimed that there was an excessive amount of immigrants. Nobody has said there was a high number of unemployed people and if we got rid of the immigrants, we would have a lower unemployment rate. That has been a simple, stupid mathematics often in the UK and their far-right parties that have seats in councils and seats in Europe, not in the House of Parliament. I wouldn't call it racist as such, but that extreme negative point hasn't been made out loud in Ireland because nobody wants to hear it. If any politician or people who aspire to political ambition felt that it would grant them extra support, they would start shouting. And I haven't heard it. That is a good thing.

On the other hand, the fact that I've never seen a black Garda is worry-

ing. By now we should hear Garda speaking accents other than rural Ireland. We should be seeing Garda that either haven't been born in Ireland or whose parents haven't been born here. We haven't seen that in the public sector yet. I think that integration is needed. Efforts have to be made to bring immigrants into the institutions of the state to reflect the facts that have been revealed in the census.

JK: There are a lot of Polish people among the immigrants. How do the Irish perceive Poles?¹

RD: As far as I can make out, I've never heard about any hostility towards the Polish people. In fact, the attitude of the Irish is quite warm. They feel certain affinity. Even people like myself, who have no religion, but they were brought up Catholic. They understand it. If I am walking on a promenade outside on a Sunday, I can often tell who the Polish people are because they are dressed in their Sunday clothes. That used to happen here in the 60s and 70s when I was a kid. The Irish people don't do that anymore. But the knowledge of it is still bubbling away inside them. The Polish people are here to remind us what we used to be like. There is also a certain rhythm to the Polish life that is probably very similar to the

¹ According to the Central Statistics Office, the estimated number of Polish immigrants in Ireland amounts to about 123,000.

rhythm of the Irish life. The Poles are also similar in that they land in a new place and organize themselves into communities straightaway. The Irish do exactly the same when they go abroad.

JK: Is there a stereotype of a Pole in Ireland?

RD: All I ever hear is that the standard of work by Polish men is brilliant. And they clean up after work, unlike Irish guys. They turn up on time. You don't smell a drink. I've never heard anybody say "Bloody Poles" and I don't think there has been any change of the attitude despite the crisis.

JK: Some of your recent works depict Polish characters. One of them is "The Bandstand." How did it come about?

RD: I approached the editors of *Metro Éireann*, Chinedu Onyegwale and Abel Ugba, and asked them if I could contribute to the multicultural magazine they were going ahead with. I started to write short stories for them, which were published in instalments. For the first time I had to work close to the deadlines, under more pressure than I'd been used to.

JK: Have you tried to mirror the way Polish people speak?

RD: I've noticed that most Eastern Europeans have really good English. They are very articulate and fluent. But their language is often unnaturally formal, as if taken from a course book. You can tell there's something not quite right. So I underdo the characters' English to mark that it is not their mother tongue. I put a little crack in the sentences now and then. It doesn't hinder the understanding but signals that it's their second language.

JK: Are your characters based on real people?

RD: No, they aren't. I know some African people but not many Polish. "The Bandstand" came out of an article I saw in *The Irish Times*. It was a story of a Polish guy who came here with a university degree but no English. He couldn't find a job and ended up homeless but was too proud to go home. That was a starting point. Then I did some observing in pubs and streets. It got my imagination going.

JK: Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with me today.

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Goodbye Polsko, Hello Anglio

Joanna Czechowska Speaks with Joanna Kosmalska¹

(University of Łódź)

JOANNA KOSMALSKA: You're a British writer but you have Polish roots. What is your connection to Poland?

JOANNA CZECHOWSKA: My father was Polish. He came to the UK during the war in 1942. He fled Poland when the Germans invaded and almost literally walked across Europe. He headed west through Germany, then France, and eventually arrived in England. Here he joined the air force and became a paratrooper and a pilot. He was stationed in Newark, Nottinghamshire. Near the end of the war he met my mother at a dance for service men. They married in 1948 and settled down in Derby. Then my father arranged for his mother to come over from Warsaw and live with us. She was a widow, had no other children and was living in very sad circumstances. My grandmother had been living with us when I was born. She looked after me. She couldn't speak English, so she spoke Polish to me, and it became my first language. I don't remember her dying but everyone tells me I was extremely upset and full of grief. Reportedly,

I refused to speak Polish until I see her again. My father decided to take me and my family over to Poland to see if it would comfort me. This was the first time he had been back since 1939. Up to 1965 he would have been in danger if he'd entered the country. I think he was a bit nervous about going back. He was very anti-communist, and he disapproved of the direction the country had been heading towards.

JK: What were your first impressions of Poland?

JC: We stayed with my great uncle in Warsaw. Poland in those days was very different to how it is now. Everyone had a very difficult life. My childhood memory of the country is that of queuing for food and a tiny flat we stayed in. The old building had bullet marks from the war on the outside. Inside, there was just one room, a kitchen and a bathroom. The beds hung down from the walls. In daytime they would go up and would be put down at night-time. The family had no television, no car. But they owned

¹ This interview is a part of a literature project DEC-2011/01/B/HS2/05120 financed by the National Science Centre.

a little garden, which was a separate allotment. You had to walk to it. There was a little summer house, where you could sit in and read. It smelled of fruit and vegetables that they grew. Different countries have different smells. The smell that reminds me of Poland is dill, which is not that popular in Britain, although amazingly where we are, Dulwich means “a field of dill” in Old English. We went back one more time before my father died in the summer of 1970. I remember somebody telling me that the best view of Warsaw is from the top of the Palace of Culture because from there you can’t see the building itself. But obviously the country has changed so much since then.

JK: Have you visited Poland since your childhood?

JC: I’ve been there a few times. I have a cousin in Gdańsk, and I stay with her every time I visit. She’s also a novelist, Anna Kanthak. Her penname is Hanna Cygler. Poland of 1965 was very different to the country I saw when I went in 2000 or 2004. My cousin and her husband have built this beautiful, open-planned, very Scandinavian-looking house to their own design. There is a supermarket nearby that has got something like 74 check-outs. I’ve never seen anything like that in this country. There are beautiful beaches with nice restaurants serving lovely food. Gdańsk is a really lovely city.

JK: Do you have any Polish friends living in England?

JC: I know people like me, second generation Poles, whose parents came to England during the war. A lot of my school friends had at least one parent that was Polish. My father and his colleagues started a Polish Club in Derby that was called Dom Polski. Similar clubs sprang up all around the country. They were founded by Poles who came here during the war. As they couldn’t go home, they established what to them would be like a little home from home, a little Poland where they lived. The club offered a variety of weekend activities: Polish classes for children, girl guides, boy scouts, a Polish mass on Sundays, dances in the evening, a restaurant and a bar. My father was actively involved in that.

JK: Can you see any differences between the immigration waves of Poles in the UK?¹

JC: Yes, we tend to call them “old Poles” and “new Poles.” The old ones were refugees really. It was a forced immigration in a lot of

¹ The estimated number of Polish immigrants in Britain runs to over 532,000, and Polish is currently the second most popular language used for communication in the British Isles. The Polish diaspora is much larger if we account for two previous emigration waves, the former in the aftermath of World War II and the latter in the 1980s.

ways. They escaped the brutality and stayed here because they couldn't go home, often even for a visit. They hadn't expected to come and they had to make the best of it. They worked hard, put down roots, set up their communities and tried to live a life. It all happened against their will. I don't know much about those who emigrated in the 1980s. I know only one person who came in 1982. But those who have come recently did it voluntarily. It's their choice and they can go back whenever they want. It is a different situation.

I've heard there is some hostility between the old Poles and the new. There might be some jealousy behind it. The old Poles feel that they had no choice but to work hard to establish a community and try to fit in. The young ones don't experience any suffering and are free to do whatever they want. When I was interviewed on the Polish radio, we talked about the Polish clubs in London. The interviewer said that they seemed so old-fashioned with the crowned Polish eagle, like a time capsule, something from centuries ago. They represent a Poland that does not exist anymore, a fossil. It is like an isolated group that is no longer connected to the mainstream culture. As to what the young immigrants think of the old ones, I do not know. With new immigrants it's hard to fit them into any of the social groups in the British class system. They might be cleaning here but they would have

a degree in physics from the Kraków University. They are doing low-paid jobs but that is not really what they should be doing. Most British people would be aware of that and admire their bravery to come here.

JK: How do the British perceive Polish people?

JC: A popular idea is that Polish people are very hardworking and trustworthy. I remember a comedy sketch on television. The setting is a house. A woman comes in and starts talking to two workmen about putting in a shower. She seems happy with their arrangements. The two men speak with a very strong accent. Then she goes out and they start talking to each other normal English. It turns out they only pretend to be Polish to get the job.

Since 2004, Poles are everywhere, even in small towns. This is a completely new thing, almost revolutionary. As a result, now we are much more familiar with Polish culture. There are Polish shops "Delicatessy" everywhere and we learnt more about their food and drinks. A lot of people really like the Żubrówka Vodka. They know about Polish cakes and lunch meat. Kraków has become a popular holiday destination. This old, beautiful city is often compared to Prague.

During their trip to Kraków, British tourists sometimes visit Auschwitz. My father's first wife was a messenger in the resistance. She was caught

and sent to the camp. When I mention it to people, they assume she was Jewish, which she wasn't. They are not aware of many Polish Catholics who died in the concentration camp.

JK: What was an inspiration for your novels *The Black Madonna of Derby* and *Sweetest Enemy*?

JC: There is a quite established culture of novels about immigrant groups in the UK. There is a novel *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* that came out just before mine. The author of the book, Marina Lewycka, wrote to me a couple of times and said she really enjoyed my book, which was flattering. There is also a novel called *Small Island* about black newcomers from the 1950s and *Brick Lane* about Indian immigrants. There are things that link those novels because every human being that comes from one country to another feels lost and isolated. It's similar for all immigrant communities. But I didn't know about any book that was written about the group of immigrants that my father belonged to. The story hasn't been told and I thought it was worth telling.

JK: The publication of your first novel coincided with the new wave of Polish immigrants. Was it planned?

JC: No, I didn't plan it. I had this idea a long time ago, when I was in

my twenties. I wrote two chapters and a synopsis, then I forgot about it for years. When I found it again, I read it through and thought this could be a good story. I went ahead and wrote my first novel. People say it's quite complex with a lot of twists and turns but it all makes sense in the end. I tried to find a British publisher but had no success. I sent a copy to my cousin in Gdańsk. She contacted me saying she liked the book and was going to translate it and find a Polish publisher. It was published under the title *Goodbye Polsko* and I did a few promotional talks around Gdynia and Gdańsk in 2006. We ended up in Warsaw where we had a reception at the British Embassy. The English version came out in 2008.

JK: What is the story behind the books' titles?

JC: I was originally going to call the first novel just *The Black Madonna*. There is a copy of the icon in St. Mary's Church in Derby, which is one of the first Catholic churches built in England after the Reformation. The icon was a gift to the people of Britain as thanks for giving Polish communities a safe haven. I remember seeing it as a child. We did go to Poland one time to see the real painting. Then I decided to combine Polish and British aspects of the book in the title and call it *The Black Madonna of Derby*.

The first book begins in 1964 and ends in 1978, the year the Polish

pope was elected. The sequel, *Sweetest Enemy*, is set in the 1980s and 1990s and describes the Solidarity era in Poland and the years of Margaret Thatcher in the UK. I thought it would be interesting to bring the two countries and the two ideas together with the background of this Polish family, called Baran, who were still living in Derby. We were so used to this idea of a divided Europe, we never thought that would finish. The Soviet Union turned out to be more of a house of cards than we realized. The title *Sweetest Enemy* hints at key antagonisms illuminated in the novel. One of them is a painful relationship between the two main characters, Zosia and Wanda. They are sisters who have very different points of view on life. Because of it, they are enemies but they love each other, too. They are the sweetest enemy to each other. There is also a father and his son, who are opposed to each other. On the one hand, they have a loving relationship, on the other an antagonistic one. Finally, you could broaden it to the connection of the Baran family with the two countries. They have a strong link with Poland but their life is in England. The parting with the country is a sweet sorrow. “Love” and “hate” like “sweet” and “sorrow” don’t really go together. There is a conflict in terms.

JK: What part does language play in the books? Have you tried to mirror the way Polish people speak?

JC: Language plays a great part in the books. It is a feature that distinguishes immigrants. You wouldn’t necessarily know that they are different if it wasn’t for their language and their names. I wondered for a long time how to indicate in the book that somebody is speaking another language. At first, I thought about changing the typeface to make it seem different. But it didn’t look right. In the end I’ve just used about four Polish words, which, of course, no English person would understand but if I kept using them in context, the readers would work out their meaning. I would just put these four words in to indicate that the character is now speaking a different language.

There is a significant scene in the book where language becomes a weapon. Two sisters meet in a restaurant. They are opposed because one celebrates her Polish heritage while the other denies it. They haven’t seen each other for a while but when they meet the elder sister would just speak English while the younger one will only speak Polish. I remember a lot of children of my generation who would start to reject their culture. Parents would speak to them Polish and they would answer English. The mother wouldn’t give in on speaking Polish, and the child wouldn’t give in on speaking English. I’ve taken that scene and made it a part of the conflict. And there is the youngest child in the family, the boy, who forgets Polish altogether.

JK: What sources did you depend on while writing your novels?

JC: I had to research historical events to make them accurate. I didn't do a huge amount of research because it was not meant to be a textbook, but fiction and entertainment. The hardest challenge was to fit in the fictional figures with the true historical events. For example, the book starts in 1964. This is the year when the first film of the Beatles, *A Hard Day's Night*, was released. The eldest granddaughter, Wanda, is 14 so she is the right age to be interested in

the band. It was quite complicated to make everyone the right age for the events. You have got a fixed truth, fixed historical events in the background, and you have to get it right. Historical facts should be as accurate as possible to make people believe in the story. I had a lot of reviews saying that I captured the 1960s London very well and accurately. I was a small child living in Derby, so I don't remember it. But it's nice that people believe it.

JK: Thank you for taking your time to talk to me.

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