



Highcastle: A Remembrance

Stanis?aw Lem , Michael Kandel (Translator)

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A “delightfully seriocomic memoir” (New York Times) from the celebrated science fiction writer that summons up a mischievous boyhood in Poland just before World War II. Translated by Michael Kandel.

Highcastle: A Remembrance Details

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From Reader Review **Highcastle: A Remembrance for online ebook**

Sophie Engstrom says

Fantastic memoars. Lem not only travells in time, but also explore what happens with a person that loses everything. Perhaps you need to be a rootless person, to understand the pain it creates to loose it's own world.

Wendy says

Full of wonderful things. Such a joy just to watch a great mind at work.

Maurizio Manco says

"Eravamo, ora si sa, come formiche che si affaccendavano vivacemente ed energicamente attorno a un formicaio su cui si era già sollevata la suola della scarpa. Alcuni ne intravedevano l'ombra, a quanto pare, ma tutti e anche loro, fino agli ultimi momenti, continuavano ad affaccendarsi intorno alle stesse cose con premura ed entusiasmo, per garantire, mitigare, ammansire il futuro. Adulti e bambini, eravamo tutti resi uguali dalla benedizione dell'ignoranza, senza la quale non si può vivere." (pp. 128, 129)

James F says

A short memoir by Polish science fiction writer Stanislaw Lem, whose novels I have been reading recently. It was not what I expected, an autobiography about the period when he was writing his novels, but rather about his childhood, ending with his graduation from high school in 1939, on the eve of the German invasion. The memories are sometimes humorous, and very frank -- Lem as he represents himself was a spoiled and destructive child, or as he puts it "a monster". However, the book also has very insightful comments on memory, on schooling, and on the nature of art. Many of the themes of his novels appear in his childhood activities; in reading about his "authorities" I couldn't help but think of *Memoirs found in a bathtub*.

Julia Jacobs says

Wspania?ym dziwakiem by? ch?opie? Lem, warto go pozna?. No i jeszcze spora doza b?yskotliwych spostrze?e?, zabaw my?lowych, teorii sztuki and what not. Bardzo lubi?.

Ruth says

This memoir discusses the pre-WWII childhood of this guy in Poland. For me, it suffers from that problem that memoirs can have when one person's experiences are interesting to him, but not necessarily to the reader. Every once in a while when he took a moment to meditate on time or memory, or wonder about why objects seem so important for memories, I got interested, but the actual stories didn't seem so great. Maybe something was lost in translation.

Marek Pawłowski says

Jest to w pewnym sensie fragment autobiografii Lema – nieusystematyzowany, momentami niezwykle chaotyczny zbiór przemy?le? na temat lat m?odo?ci, w którym na pierwszy plan wysuwa si? opis dawnego Lwowa. Generalnie poleci?bym t? ksi??k? jedynie osobom lubi?cym tw?rczo?? Lema lub komu?, kto ju? by? we Lwowie i chcia?by go zobaczy? od jego dawnej, polskiej strony.

In a way this is a small part of Lem's autobiography. The unordered and very chaotic set of thoughts about the years of his youth with a description of the old Lwow that comes to the fore. I would recommend this book only to the people who like Lem's works or someone who was in Lwow and wants to see this city from the older, Polish side.

Lorenzo Berardi says

I might be the only reader of this book who bought 'Highcastle' without having ever read anything by Lem before.

Sure, I heard wonders about 'Solaris' and 'The Cyberiad', written by the undisputed Polish master of sci-fi, but never had the chance to get them. To be honest then, the chief reason why I bought the (Italian) translation of 'Highcastle' is that I was interested in its setting, the former Polish and now Ukrainian city of Lviv / Lwòw.

As the story goes, a few years ago, my girlfriend and I were supposed to visit Lviv. A friend of mine living there had already confirmed me that she would have been happy to host us and show us around. In fact, we had already booked two return tickets to reach the city from Krakow by bus.

Unfortunately, we were right in the middle of a particularly harsh winter. The temperatures plummeted down to -25° between Poland and Ukraine so that the railway lines leading us to Krakow got frozen, local coaches got stuck in the icy snow and we were eventually forced to cancel our weekend trip. Which was just a pity.

Even though I didn't visit Lviv at that time, my interest for that place never ceased. Lviv is that sort of once multicultural and multilingual place that was badly treated by history due to wars, destructions, people displacement, dictatorship and, in recent times, inequality.

Suffice is to say that while most of the Jewish population of the town formerly known as Lwòw got deported and killed, thousands of Poles living there were forced to move to Wroclaw (once a German town named Breslau) after WWII when the renamed city of Lviv was annexed to the Soviet Union.

In this respect, Stanis?aw Lem childhood memoirs are interesting but not fully satisfying. Lem was born and

raised in Lwów and lived there til 1945, when his family had to be relocated to Krakow. He survived the war thanks to false papers and playing a part in the local underground resistance, but you won't find anything about that period in 'Highcastle'.

What Lem does through the pages of this book is narrating episodes of his early and young adult years before the conflict by focusing on objects rather than people. Those who love Proust, might find plenty of exquisite madeleine here, those who find the lack of a plot unbearable, are likely to get bored. I'm somewhat inbetween.

As much as I enjoyed the bits and pieces regarding young Stanisław tyrannizing his parents, destroying carillons and avidly perusing through the illustrations of his father's medical books, I found several pages redundant and repetitive. Lem is not partial to himself, but admits more than once (actually more than necessary) that he was spoiled and lonesome, a dreamy vicious kid without any close friends.

The few lines about life in Lwów in the late 1930s popping up here and there are excellent and portray a town of great beauty with its hills, its trams, its majestic theatre, its petty bourgeois inhabitants collecting expensive trinkets and sending their sons to study Latin at the Gymnasium.

Now, I like this stuff because it reminds me of a lovely bygone age where a Middle European life of that sort could be found as far as contemporary Lithuania (see Miłosz memoirs), Bulgaria (see Canetti's) and Romania (see von Rezzori's).

But Lem is well aware of not being Miłosz, Canetti or von Rezzori thus he doesn't even try to dig deeper into this old world of his ultimately leaving me disappointed. 'Highcastle' is a thin book with some frankly superfluous pages of clumsy introspection and gives you the impression of not having been finished and certainly not developed as much as it deserved.

While the first and the final 'chapters' here are very good, I must confess that I resisted to the temptation of skipping a few pages in the central part of the book; doing that would have not been fair to Stanisław Lem who never pretended to fly higher than he could here. And yet from an author who was that creative and innovative in writing science-fiction making up wonderful stories I would have expected much more in telling us about the day to day reality which influenced him.

Melanti says

I ought to finish this since it's so short and I like the writing style (as expected, since I like the author's fiction) but I just don't care what he did as a school kid.

It's dragging, so I'm moving on to something else.

Scott Murphy says

This book contains some worthy observations about memories and how they are with us, are not with us, etc. The first half of the book is laborious, but after awhile I caught its 'rhythm' and was quite happy with the remainder. Worthwhile. (And like another reviewer, I feel highly outnumbered to have not read anything else

by this highly regarded Sci-Fi writer.)

Teb says

You can enjoy it only if you are fan of Lem and/or Lviv. If not, it might be interesting, but I probably would not like it.
