ต้นฉบับ

I

Like Death, Beyond Comprehension (1920-29)

> Nothing in this world…is ready-made. Each of us is born, then learns to crawl, then attends the first grade, then matures.
>
> Speech by Metropolitan Archbishop Wojtyla,
> 7 March 1964

When the new Polish republic was born in 1918, Wadowice was a very ordinary, nondescript town, except for the fact that it was relatively homogenous in race and religion. Of its population, estimated at between five and six thousand, more than four-fifths were Polish Roman Catholics, while 700 were Jewish. By comparison, in Polish Ukraine, where Joseph Conrad (an early favourite of Wojtyla's) was born, the people were of four different ethnic origins, speaking four different languages. Set in the foothills of the Capathian Mountains, in the province of Galicia, Wadowice was a remarkably balanced, even-tempered place.

Progress seemed to have passed it by. Although only thirty miles south-west of the historic cathedral city and one-time capital of Krakow, it possessed no great magnets for visitors, no shrines for pilgrims, no ambitious industrial enterprises. By the mid-1930s, when Karol was in his teens, Wadowice still had only a half-dozen or so cars, the prize being a Skoda Rapide owned by a local landowner. Even bicycles were rare.

'Horse-drawn buggies…remained common. The open platform truck was preferred for hauling goods, its driver balanced on spread feet and holding the reins of a study draught horse.' Social differences were marked, as a school friend of Karol's reported many years later: 'men and women in red-and-white peasant garb – the women in long, hem-embroidered skirts – and red-faced from a life of cold, wind, and sun

– kept to themselves. Shopkeepers and professional men invariably wore sober suits.'

Mr Kluk, the mayor, owned the Rynek complex, just south of the town church of St Mary of Perpetual Succour, a combined restaurant and consumer-goods emporium. Like a comic character from a novel by Elias Canetti or Jaroslav Hasek, he was famous locally for having two pairs of shoes from Mr Bata's Footwear made especially for his dog. As the country seat Wadowice had the district court and local-government offices, a teachers' college, good-quality secondary schools and mostly literate citizens employed in education, government or the military. It provided a quiet and genteel atmosphere for Karol's early life.

Jews, earlier in time debarred by Polish law from owning land, owned 40 per cent of the shops, yet even so they had much better relations with the Catholics than was typical elsewhere in Poland. Crime was virtually non-existent, while the only judicial killing that took place during Karol's teen years was that of the notorious murderer, Nikifor Maruszeczko, who was hanged at the prison on Slowackiego Street. His last words were, 'It's a beautiful life!'

Wadowice possessed one cinema, the Kino Wysoglada, but it had three amateur theatres, two of them part of Catholic establishments. Krakow, with its many cultural attractions, was within easy reach by train. Karol's mother, Emilia, had grown up in Krakow, and she often visited her three sisters who still lived there.

Karol's brother Edmund (nicknamed Mundek), was born in 1906. Eight years later Emilia gave birth to Olga, but she lived, it is believed, only a few days or weeks. The cause of her death is unknown. Karol Jozef was born on 18 May 1920. He was loyally given his father's indigenous Polish name, with the addition of Jozef because Emilia wanted him called after Christ's father. The army chaplain, Father Zak, baptized him over the road I St Mary of Perpetual Succour. Local rumour as it that Emilia, whom her second son much resembled, would tell neighbours while pushing his pram or chatting in their central courtyard that he would one day become a great man.

Karol (whose nickname was Lolek, a variant of 'Lulus' from Carolus) and his family lived in Rynek Street in a modest, rented, middle-class flat in the centre of

Wadowice. Karol's father worked in the army's quartermaster stores, and rose to the rank of lieutenant, retiring on a small pension in 1927 but continuing to serve part-time in the recruitment offices. His family stock was of 'hortulanus' – small farmers or tradesmen – similar in station to Emilia, whose family owned a saddlery.

The Wojtylas' flat was owned by a Jewish merchant, Balamuth Chaim, whose crystal-and-glass store occupied the front of the building. Situated on the second floor 'up a crooked flight of stone steps with iron handrail', it had three rooms, including a kitchen through which one entered, and overlooked a central private courtyard where children played and neighbours chatted. By the front door was a holy-water stoop in which the family would dip their fingers and make the sign of the cross as they passed in and out. Balamuth Chaim was not the only Jewish presence in the building: among the other tenants were the Beer family. In later years the Pope recalled his closeness to this Jewish community: 'Man lives on the basis of his own experiences. I belong to the generation for which relationships with Jews were a daily occurrence.'

The first seven years of Karol's life were an undisturbed idyll. He had quiet, a solitude of the kind to develop within him the creative soul, the romantic poet, the fierce devourer, even at such an early age, of myth and ritual. By the time Karol began at Marcin Wadowita elementary school, his studious and ambitious brother Mundek was studying at the Jagiellonian University, Krakow, to become a doctor. Karol had his mother's full and undivided attention. In their living room they had a prie-dieu to encourage family prayers. Before school each morning, Karol attended mass (school was behind the church), while after school Emilia read to him from the New Testament.

His mother's devotion was important, for he learned to listen and concentrate carefully on others. And the quietness of the age – the absence of the constant media, cartoons, advertisements and relentless peer pressure that is the lot of most small children in the Western world today – meant that Karol's childhood must have more resembled the life of an early Christian than that of a child born, say, into the Jazz era celebrated by Scott Fitzgerald, or one of Europe's great cities. The small provincial town had its villains, its criminals, its madmen and its cantankerous

characters – such as Mrs Anna Huppert, the rich Jewish lady (she owned eleven buildings with 210 tenants), or, at the other end of the scale, the penniless postman who spent everything he had on vodka. Everything and everyone had a human scale.

Everyone too was aware of their rank and position in this class-ridden society. An instinctive and constant assertion of dignity stems in Karol's case from being more or less in the position of an only child enjoying the full attention of his mother. Psychologists often suggest that the capacity to be alone in adult life originates with the infant's experience of being alone in the presence of the mother. Donald Winnicott, for example, suggests that without the sufficiency of being alone in the presence of someone, the capacity to be alone cannot develop: 'It is only when alone…(that is to say, in the presence of someone) that the infant can discover his personal life.' This would seem to have happened in the case of Karol. In early photographs of Karol his face and posture emanate a sense of power and self-confidence. He was, records a childhood friend, very much a physical presence, a handsome blond boy with large-boned Slavic features and blue eyes, stronger and taller than most, habitually cheerful.

Beyond and within him, every deepening, was preserved that sense of his mother's undivided love, recorded in many forms throughout Karol's life. In a series of poems he delineates how Jesus was taken from his mother: John the Apostle says to Mary,

Your arms now remember His space, the little head
Snuggling to your shoulder,
For the space has remained in You,
For it was taken from You.

It is revealing that he should depict Mary's amazement at Jesus, mentioning the 'luminous silence' of his presence that she experienced.

In that little town, where they knew us together
you called me mother; but no one had eyes to see
the astounding events as they took place day by day.

And again,

How attentive your stillness: it will always be part of me.
I life myself towards it…

A sense of wonder, a capacity for stillness, a direct and continuous experience of maternal tenderness with its comforting physical warmth: all these are evident in Karol's early relationship with his mother – and remained strong enough to become permanently part of him.

Motherhood is also centred in that personality which is, or becomes so for many, divinely inspired. This further influence of motherhood is symbolized in an early poem written by Wojtyla when John breaks the bread to give the sacrament to Mary, and says:

I stood for a moment amazed as I saw
the whole truth through one single tear in your eye.

And in his play *The Radiation of Fatherhood* (1964) he reveals a profound physical sense of what it means to be a mother. Adam tells his daughter Monica that when she was conceived:

first you had to penetrate the depths of her body, then to tear yourself out of it with the first impulse of independent life…

Karol underlines his early identification with the family of Jesus, with the Virgin's devotion to her only son. Except that, in his case, in the real terms of his life, the roles were to become tragically reversed.

In childhood, with a warmth of emotional contacts with neighbours and friends, Karol lived through untroubled years. Poland, too, passed through a halcyon period that gave its historically down-trodden and subjected people unexpected hope for the future. A symbol lives in the hearts and feelings. Symbols, both of nation and of soul, surrounded him on all sides: the flag of the new Polish republic, horizontal white above and red below in equal bands, was one; the emblem of the white eagle and crown, another (although the post-Second World War communists took off the crown). The Black Madonna of Czestochowar, 'Queen of Poland', an icon painted on lime-tree

timber, symbolized the Polish soul; the shrine of St. Stanislaw, Poland's patron saint, in Krakow's Wawel Cathedral, the Sygmunt Bell, the Szczerbiec or Jagged Sword used for coronations of Polish kings…the list becomes endless. The Roman Catholic churches too were full of symbol and ritual magic. In terms of the patriotic Poles themselves, in the consciousness of Karol senior, as transmitted to his son in these early years, this creation of a new Poland, a phoenix rising from the ashes, was a miracle.

Even after the 1919 treaty, fighting had gone on between Russia and Poland. In the summer of 1920, three months after Karol was born, the Red Army stood at the gates of Warsaw again. The second Polish republic, independent for the first time since the kingdom of 1795, was in the earliest months of its resurrection about to be crushed. But now there was a difference. The Red Army cavalry, commanded by General Budennyi, met its match in Marshal Jozef Pilsudski's army. Pilsudski had defeated the Red Army at Kiev ten days before Karol's birth in an attempt to drive the Russians from the Polish Ukraine, but then suffered serious reverse, before outmanoeuvring the Russians at the Battle of the Vistula. Here daringly, with few casualties, the Polish army routed a force which threatened not only to repeat the tragic domination, but to instill a puppet communist regime under the terror of the Cheka, the Soviet secret police.

In Poland this battle became known as 'the miracle of the Vistula'. It took deep root in patriotic national consciousness. The date of the victory, 15 August, was also the feast of the Assumption of Our Lady, and this coincidence of time and place became, in the mind of the young Karol, no doubt elaborated and embroidered on by his devout father, the first intercession in his life of the Divine Virgin, Our Lady, who was traditionally the 'Queen of Poland'.

To understand the character of twentieth-century Poland, it is important to appreciate the historic grandeur of its past. 'To Poland,' Wojtyla said shortly after becoming pope, 'the Church brought Christ, the key to understanding the great and fundamental reality that is man.' Few countries – except perhaps Israel or Russia -- had such a theocratic vision of history. Established as a Roman Catholic kingdom in the

eleventh century, Poland was at the height of its power and influence from the early part of the fifteenth century until the last quarter of the seventeenth, when it played a crucial part in the defeat of the Muslim Turks at the Battle of Vienna in 1683. The Polish cavalry – the winged Hussars – led by King Jan III Sobieski, won lasting military glory.

The Battle of Vienna was a turning-point, and from then on Poland became afflicted by its historic curse. In the eighteenth century its powerful neighbours – Prussia, Russia and Austria – invaded it three times, in what is now known as the Three Partitions – dismembering and devouring it, shifting its boundaries, its people, but fomenting an inner cultural war and resistance against their hegemony.

Early in the nineteenth century, with Napoleon's invasion of the East, hopes were raised for national revival, but in spite of Poland fighting bravely on the side of the French, Napoleon had fed a dream that turned out to be another transient fantasy. Poland, adapting the Romantic literary tradition prevalent in the rest of a Europe to which it always felt it belonged spiritually, 'elevated sacrifice and sorrow to sublime heights. Poland was compared to the Christ among nations, redeeming through suffering not only the Polish nation but mankind. Poland has a sacred mission to fulfil: to break the chains of absolutism and bring about universal freedom.' These were a grand sentiments of the revolutionary Apollo Korzeniowski, the father of Joseph Conrad.

The reality of the heroic Polish struggle for independence even became a playwright's and novelist's joke. Three nineteenth-century insurrections, in 1830, 1846 and 1863 – all of them heroic and ill-advised – cemented the legend that most Polish men dreamed of dying in a hail of rifle fire while leading a cavalry charge in a hopeless attack on foreign invaders. 'Show a precipice to a Pole and he'll make a leap,' wrote Honoré de Balzac in *Cousin Bette*. 'As a nation they are like cavalrymen; they think they can overcome all obstacles and emerge victorious.'

D.H. Lawrence wrote in *The Rainbow* of the aftermath of the 1863 insurrection, when his characters Lydia Lensky and her husband flee to England: '…Lensky, very ardent and full of words, went about inciting his countrymen. Little Poles flamed down the streets of Warsaw, on the way to shoot every Muscovite.' Alfred

Jarry's *Ubu Roi* (1899), fore-runner of the drama of the absurd, contained a stage direction for an imaginary country: 'En Pologne, c'est à dire mulle part' ('In Poland, namely nowhere').

These many defeats and residual griefs lived on in the national soul, confronting each young educated Pole as he or she grew up. One such defeat and decline concerned especially the *szlachta*, the Polish nobility. The *szlachta*'s knightly code was based on peacock pride in a supposedly exclusive ancestry, but 'was grotesquely unsuited to their miserable decline'. They became 'the laughing-stock of Europe, the butt which every radical wit from Defoe to Cobden could mock'. Their noble Republic became, in Carlyle's cruel words, 'a beautifully phosphorescent rot-heap', while they were 'the parasites who swarmed upon it'.

In exile the Pole often felt deeply alone and marked as an outside. The 'Count' in Iris Murdoch's *Nuns and Soldiers*, for example, passes his childhood in an ardent endeavour to become English: he was not displeased by his honorary title, considering it as a little English jest 'which bound him to his surroundings and gave him a shared identity'. When strangers sometimes took him for a real count 'never sure if this was a character or not…he increasingly felt, in every cell of his being, an alien'.

Emilia became ill when Karol was seven: his father as reported by some, taking premature retirement from the Polish army at the age of forty-eight, to care for her and raise Karol; by others, as retiring early through ill-health. Emilia, who had suffered from kidney disease and a weak heart since childhood, when, as fifth in a family of nine children, she had helped raise her younger siblings, had been severely demoralized by the death of her only daughter. Emilia had trained as a teacher and taught in primary school for a short period; she had taken in sewing to supplement the meager family income, but in Karol's early years she was seriously ill and she became virtually paralysed from her congenital weak heart and the kidney disease. It is said he wanted to stay with her when she went into hospital. She often refused to let Karol see her as she feared she could not hide her pain.

On 13 April 1929, with the official reason given as myocarditis nephritis, Emilia died at the age of 45. Three days later as her funeral mass began Karol faced her coffin before the altar of St. Mary of Perpetual Succour. The tree men in her family sat side by side in a front pew. Karol senior was fifty, Edmund twenty-three and Karol was soon to be nine. 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him,' the priest, Canon Prochownik declaimed. Later, when Wojtyla was consecrated bishop in 1958, her remains were taken to Krakow to be buried alongside those of her husband in the eastern sector of Kakowice Cemetery.

From now it was sadness and intelligence that became more etched in Karol's face, rather than plumpness and radiant optimism. Nine years later, when he and his father moved to Krakow, Karol commemorated Emilia's passing in a very simple poem of three stanzas, in which he referred to the passage of time and her white grave.

Over this your white grave
Covered for years, there is a stir
in the air, something uplifting
and, like death, beyond comprehension.

He cannot even then make full sense of it and perhaps will never be able to, as it appears, as it must have been, an unfinished love which will only be completed in the future when he rejoins her.

The First World War had now been over for ten years, and as the ensign told his young son, a million Poles, conscripted into the opposing powers of Russia and the Austro-Hungarian German axis, had died, often fighting each other. According to some historians the collapse of the Tsarist regime in Russia in 1917 had led to a larger and more independent Poland whose very existence became a threat and humiliation to Germany in the aftermath of the war. On 4 June 1917, before the October Revolution led by Lenin, Kerensky's provisional government recognized an independent Poland; France had raised an army of Poles in exile, and on 3 June 1918 proclaimed the creation of a powerful Polish state a primary objective.

But the Versailles Peace Treaty of 1919 had a calamitous effect in the long term. In particular, in the ceding of the Silesian provinces, the imposition of a Polish corridor on Prussia leading to its break-up and a redrawing of German-Polish boundaries would, it was feared, provoke future war. During June 1919 Lloyd George, the British prime minister, tried to mitigate the severity of the terms, and in doing so ended the entente cordiale between Britain and France. The French were set on revenge, and through Clemenceau's negotiation fostered the creation of a 'big' Poland, the occupation of the Rhineland, and huge reparations imposed on Germany. President Wilson refused sensible advice, especially from Maynard Keynes, the Cambridge economist, on the economic issues at stake. Keynes resigned as a delegate at the peace conference, considering the Treaty was a formula for economic disaster and future war. He wrote to Chamberlain, 'How can you expect me to assist at this tragic farce any longer?' He told Lloyd George, 'I am slipping away from this scene of nightmare.'

For Poland the economic problems came first. As a world wide depression took hold in the wake of the Wall Street crash, father and son became aware of the expenses of daily life, especially of any item from abroad. At the same time they witnessed ominous signs of the future conflict between Communism and Fascism, which would soon strike on both sides on Poland's long territorial frontiers.

For the moment Poland held its head high 'raised forever for a sign'. But what was the sign, and when would it be seen? For every maturing child, such as Karol Wojtyla, life was severely politicized.

2

I Became a Motherless Only Child

(1929-34)

Lieutenant Wojtyla, who had risen through the ranks, had years of experience of old-fashioned army regimentation. As quartermaster he had experienced an area of army life where pilfering, bribery and corruption of all kinds flourish. Wojtyla had commendable reports from his superiors on his qualities of character, but the Polish army was not a philanthropic institution, and officers who have risen through the ranks generally tend to have an extra toughness about them which reinforces the maintenance of discipline in the unit they serve. They become, more often than not, sticklers for rules. Karol himself said his father was a hard man, but 'So hard on himself that he had no need to be hard on me; his example along was sufficient to inculcate discipline and a sense of duty'.

Karol was seven when his father quit the army to look after Emilia. Karol senior had to take upon himself many of the functions of mother as well as father: no doubt the mentality formed in years of military service remained influential in the home. 'There was a moment, like a flash,' wrote Karol later in another dramatic work, in which he explored a fatherhood theme,

> *When I wanted to tear out of myself the meaning of the word 'father' …… Is it not true that in the word 'father' there is also fear?*

Although Karol did not fear his father unduly, he could well have felt, in the formation of spirit and character, that strength built on fear had nothing wrong or bad about it. It is reasonable to assume that Karol began to reflect at an early age on the nature of his parents, to see his father's shortcomings as well as his virtues, and above all to become curious about what these two human beings meant to him, and how what they were and had been might become important to his own life and future.

Freud asserted that 'Many women who have chosen their husband on the model of their father, or have put him in their father's place, nevertheless repeat towards him, in their married life, their bad relations with their mother'. Perhaps, reversing his

sexual roles, this could be applied to Karol's choice of career in the church. To take the place of his mother he marries the church by becoming a priest; and as a priest he repeats not the bad but the *good* relation he had with his father.

Again, as Freud observes, a child will replace both parents by grander people, but in doing so, 'these new parents…are equipped with attributes that are derived entirely from real recollections of the actual and humble ones', so that the child is not getting rid of his father but exalting him. The whole of Karol's childhood was severely of the 'freedoms' on offer in Wadowice society, so that he had little else to do than follow his studies assiduously. Yet he followed Freud's observation by selecting and following exemplary father and mother figures who were not only selfless but celibate.

What direct reminiscences from this period do we have? The lieutenant – having trained as a tailor before joining what was then the Austrian army in Krakow – re-cut and sewed the fine materials of his military uniforms to enable his son to look better dressed than other boys. A railwayman's son reminiscences that 'Karol and I were growing so fast that what fitted us today would be too short and too tight in six months'. Karol senior was also highly literate, fluent in German as well as Polish, and typed quickly. Others would say that when Emilia died he lost some of his fervour, his hair turned white, and he would collect his son from the houses of friends, not speaking to anyone.

But one friend was taught to swim by Karol senior, who cooked his son breakfast, took him daily to the restaurant of Alojzy Banas only yards away from their front door (*pierogi* are named as the speciality), then gave him supper. Father and son played football in the now-abandoned parlour of their flat (no television or radio in those days, and they had no garden). Karol had a narrow escape when Boguslaw Banas, a younger friend, picked up a loaded revolver which a policeman took off with his belt and left lying by the cash register of his parents' restaurant. Banas loosened it from its holster, aimed at Karol in sport, then fired, not knowing the safety catch was off. The

bullet flew past him, narrowly missing, and smashed a window pane. 'My God, I might have killed the Pope,' said Banas later.

Football, the national game, was pursued further and in greater interest at the Marcin Wadowtia state secondary school, a single-sex high school that Karol joined in autumn 1930. At this age Karol had already visited with his father the Carmelite monastery just outside Wadowice, where the monks heard their confessions and presented young Karol with the scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, which is the two holy pictures joined by strings which he would wear next to his skin for the rest of his life. The privacy and indeed maturity of Wojtyla's home life saved him from undignified exposures and humiliations, and his boyhood would seem to have been without them. He does record he was reproved by his father for not paying enough attention to the Holy Spirit, which stimulated him to rectify this in later life. 'When I was 10 or 12 years old I was a choirboy,' John Paul told André Frossard, the French author who became his friend and closest literary confidant,

> *'but I wasn't very dedicated, I must confess. My mother wasn't with us anymore…but my father, when he noticed my lack of diligence, said to me one day: "You are not being a very good choirboy. You don't pray to the Holy Spirit enough. You ought to pray to him." And he taught me a prayer to say.'*
>
> *'And you haven't forgotten it.'*
>
> *'I certainly haven't. That was a major spiritual lesson, longer lasting and more powerful than anything I got from my reading or from the courses I took later on. What conviction his voice held as he told me that! I can still hear his voice saying those words, even today.'*

To a person living in the secular world of today the fervent attention to religious duty will seem strange, even primitive. After his wife's death Karol senior prayed constantly, as his son would much later attest:

> *I had not yet made my first Holy Communion when I lost my mother: I was barely nine years old. So I do not have a clear awareness of her contribution which must have been great, to my religious training… Day after Day I was able to observe the austere way in which [my father] lived… Sometimes I would wake up during the night and find my father on his knees, just as I would always see him kneeling in the parish church.*

The piety was unforced, however, and everywhere the religious symbolism was evident; holy images on the walls, inside and outside the flat, a small altar in the parlour, the small font of holy water outside the front door. Laughter, too, accompanied prayer; learning was worn lightly. Karol senior delighted in historical parody, and backed this with a powerful gift for mimicry (able to convey the humanity of his target, a friend observed, as well as the ridiculous). The Marcin Wadowita secondary school teacher of Greek, Tadeusz Szekiski, becomes a vile kind of barley soup, 'Krupa'; when he denounces the use of tobacco, Karol mimics him chucking the forbidden substance discovered in class out of the window; the Latin teacher, affectionately mocked as 'Damazy' for his horror of perfume, comes in for similar treatment, while the German lady, Dr. Sabina Rottenberg, good-looking, flirtatious and Jewish, appears to provoke adolescent hearts (and more), pursing her lips into a pout and letting fall on her pupils her 'big, dark eyes … a delicious torture'. Karol remains motionless, bemused at this onslaught, but his friend Jerzy Kluger drops paper on the floor, falls to hands and knees and pretends to look up provocative Sabina's skirt. They laugh and the teacher responds, 'Ruhe, ruhe,' which Karol later impersonates perfectly, achieving just the right contralto pitch.

In these early teenage years Karol made his reputation as a goal-keeper, gaining the nickname of Martyna, a star Polish footballer. Mainly he kept goal for the 'Cathos', although sometimes he would play for the Jewish team if their keeper Poldek Goldburger, was not available. While elsewhere in Poland Jewish football teams often encountered attack and abuse from Gentiles, in Wadowice the racial harmony on the

whole is markedly present. Canon Prochownik was prominently pro-Jewish while in the town's schools Catholics and Jews competed side by side or individually without outwardly at least showing any religious distinction.

There was, for all children, such a wealth of pastimes to choose from, 'that it was as if God had made that world for the young'. They swam in summer, in the Skawa, or walked to Grandmother Huppert's farm to pick cherries and gorge on them until their stomachs ached. In winter, they would take advantage of any good weather to hike into the hills for a few hours of skiing. Officers from the Twelfth Infantry who drilled and lectured the boys, rigged up a kind of trampoline to practice ski-jumping. Often Lolek, as his friends called him, and Jerzy Kluger, his Jewish friend, with the wooden, hand-fashioned slats on their shoulders, would wander off, far enough to worry about wolves, then race each other home as darkness fell (as early as three o'clock in January). 'Any frozen pond invited a makeshift hockey game, with sticks snapped from trees and a block of wood for a puck.'

On the far bank of the Skawa stood Venezia, a restaurant that was Italian in name only and was rather romantic, with a beautiful garden in summer and its own tennis court. It was a popular family gathering spot. On icy winter evenings, the court was flooded to make a rink and strung with coloured lights, and patrons skated to waltzes from a gramophone.

We may picture in scenes what happened next in Karol's life, and its impact on him in these years. Father and son visited 'Zebrzydowski's Calvary', a replica of the biblical Jerusalem, set among the hills a short railway or road distance from Wadowice. Built in the early seventeenth century by Mikolaj Zebrzydowski, a pious governor of Krakow, after his wife reportedly had a vision of Christ, the Calvary brought home to Karol the abstractions of Christianity, in the words of Shakespeare, about 'giving to aery nothings a local habitation and a name'. Pathways ran from a Bernardine monastery to forty-one stations following the way of the cross, depicting scenes from the Passion, death and resurrection. It was all very dramatically posed and, after its success, led the monks to construct a second circuit, of the life of the Virgin. The scale was such as to

appeal to children, ‘a prototype of Disneyland…with religion as its theme, and Christ and the Virgin the stars for an age of believers’, although it was a completely free and non-commercial enterprise maintained by the Bernardine brothers.

Here Karol senior often brought Karol during religious festivals, and here the image of his dead mother, as he prayed devoutly to her, was omnipresent to him, deepening the idea of a Mary who was not only the Redeemer’s mother but a queen of Poland. ‘Every child’s desire to build a playhouse and a secret garden is here fulfilled in the form of these little buildings [often not more than a hut with a single window at child’s height] except that as each is keyed to the Holy Mother’s life, the idea of a supreme, embracing maternal presence also settles on the mind of child and adult alike.’ At Kalwaria Zebrzydowska the incipient poet learned early to address those who were absent, and to look for replies or answers in non-verbal signs.

In this place of refuge and source of hope we may imagine the twelve-year-old Karol, then, proudly telling his mother Emilia of his brother Mundek’s progress as a doctor, for he was now fully qualified and had left Krakow for good. He worked in a hospital in Bielsko, a place which father and son found easier to visit.

Mundek was applauded for his high-spirited playfulness and his ability – shared with his father and younger brother – to entertain with his mimicry. While fourteen years separated the brothers, each saw much of himself in the other, sharing broad open highland faces and a facility in the local mountain dialect, and drawn together very closely by their mother’s early demise. But in 1932 a scarlet-fever epidemic struck the town of Bielsko and in selfless, round-the-clock care on the wards for his patients Edmund succumbed to the killer disease, diagnosing in himself first the severely sore throat, then the red spots. The fever isolated him and, although he was cared for intensively by other members of hospital staff, he died at the end of the year, on 5 December.

The death, only three years after that of his mother, struck a further shattering blow to Karol. He and his father placed a notice in a Krakow newspaper, thanking the doctors and nurses for their care of Edmund, while Karol viewed his death

as a gesture of self-sacrifice towards the sick and dying. 'But how much more could the young boy take?' was the sentiment of friends and neighbours. He was as yet unable to join suffering with love, and at this moment the suffering dominated: 'When I was young sick people used to intimidate me,' he remarked many years later, so that he would shy away from looking at people who were in agonizing pain, for they 'bore in their bodies a dread mystery'.

With a catch of recalled suffering in his delivery, speaking as pope on a visit to Jagiellonian University in 1979, John Paul mentioned Edmund: 'These are events that became deeply engraved in my memory, my brother's death perhaps even deeper than my mother's death – equally because of the special circumstances, one may say tragic ones, and in view of my greater maturity at the time.' He kept his brother's stethoscope all his life as a relic, taking it with him to the Vatican.

Life at school was tough and disciplined, a training for harsh times ahead. Karol wore a dark-blue uniform with 374, his school number, on it, at all times, both in and out of school. In summer it was compulsory to be indoors by nine at night – eight in the winter – and in the months following Mundek's death, Karol's class divided into two camps: One side, led by the cheerful Piotrowski twins, formed a Revellers' Club, dedicated to turn every possible occasion into a party. While not averse to parties, Karol led the opposing side, forming and leading a Circle of Abstinents, who took oaths not the drink alcohol or smoke but remain in physical and intellectual control of their faculties.

There was little to ameliorate the suddenness, as well as the sadness, of Mundek's death. But the influence of his father (exerting over him the consolatory power of the Holy Spirit) perhaps now gave way to a greater influence, someone whom Karol called in later years (as archbishop in 1964) 'the guide of my young and rather complicated soul'.

Father Kazimierz Figlewicz, a young bespectacled catechist and assistant at St. Mary's, had become his confessor when Karol was just ten. Figlewicz recalls him as 'a rather tall boy, but rather on the fat side … very lively, very talented, very quick and

very good. He had an optimistic nature, though, after a more careful look, one could discern the shadow of early orphanage'.

Karol became a fervent ministrant at the altar – 'Thanks to him I grew closer to the parish, became an altar server, and had a hand in organizing the group of altar servers.' Figlewicz left Wadowice to go to Krakow Cathedral in the old Royal Castle of Wawel. Karol remained in contact. During the boy's fifth year of secondary school Figlewicz invited him to Krakow 'to take part in the Sacred Tridum, beginning with the Tenebrae service on the afternoon of Wednesday of Holy Week. The experience made a profound impression on me.'

From the study of Latin and Greek Authors, and with his rapid facility for learning, Karol broadened his mind, memory and understanding of the European culture into which he had been born. Over the school gate through which he passed each day was written, in Latin, 'Come with pure robes, and with unsullied hands drink water from the source' ('Para cum veste venite, et minibus puris sumite fortis aquam'). Ever-present was the fusion of classical discipline with Christian purity.

The influence of a pre-Christian Rome and Greece became an integral component of his developing character. Roger Scruton, the English philosopher, outlines how Christianity is a creed community with a difference because from its beginnings in the Roman Empire, 'it internalized some of the ideas of imperial government; in particular … adopted and immortalized the greatest of all Roman achievements…the universal system of law as a means for the resolution of conflicts and the administration of distant provinces'. Scruton emphasizes how St. Paul, as a Roman citizen versed in the law, transformed the ascetic and self-denying religion of Christ 'into an organized form of worship…[and] shaped the early church through the legal idea of the *universitas*, or corporation'. Karol identified at once with both the structure of Roman law as incorporated into Christianity, and its foundation in the mystery and drama of the Passion.

Behind, or underpinning, the law was the power of the word. Karol deeply appreciated the power of the word in his literary and linguistic studies: 'The word,

before it is ever spoken on the stage, is already present in human history as a fundamental dimension of man's spiritual experience. Ultimately, the mystery of language brings us back to the inscrutable mystery of God himself.' He inevitably drew closer to 'the mystery of the Word of which we speak every day in the Angelus: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us"'.

With his gift for the word, both in its use and in his precocious power of linguistic memory, Karol established himself as a star pupil at school, an exemplary scholar and leader in every respect. In records kept of his school year 1933/34 we glimpse him at meetings of the school chapter of the Anti-Aircraft and Gas Weapons Defense League, where he trained with rescue teams. The training was conducted by Boleslaw Drozdowski from the eighth-year class. Karol gave, notably, a presentation of 'Defending the City Against Gas Weapons'.

They had, so aware were they of national self-defence, an Anti-Aircraft and Gas Weapons Defence League week from 3-10 June 1934. Here Karol performed in a programme consisting of 1/ A medley of songs (performed by the school orchestra), 2/ An indoctrination lecture (given by W. Balon), 3/ School choir, 4/ Poetry recitation (K. Wojtyla), 5/ Chemical Warfare Defence Exercises in the school courtyard.

On 14 June 1934 he completed his fourth year with the grade of 'Very Good' in all subjects. A notation by the grade for Religion reads: 'exhibits special predilection for the subject'. 'Religion' and 'Chemical Warfare Defence Exercises' emphasise the semi-mobilised spirit of his secondary education.

But of all the influences and early formative pressures on the young Wojtyla, in the end we come back to his father. Now in his fifties, bald and ageing fast, the 'Captain', as he was now generally known, pursued his large appetite for Polish republican culture. He had not been educated beyond the age of thirteen, when he left school; and, brought up under the heel of an occupying empire, had had no access to Polish history, language or literature, which were forbidden subjects. Now, with the flowering of Polish nationalism, the glories of the Habsburg empire (which were drummed into his ears during the many years of military service – he won the Iron Cross

of Merit during the First World War for his part in the defence of Krakow against the Russians) faded before the exploits of Polish patriots, their martyrdom, bravery and the resurrection of the country. He would ask his son and their friends what they were reading. "Ah, the wars against the Swedes! Have you read Sienkiewicz? Do you want to hear about how we survived the Thirty Years War?" And so on.

Karol senior was an excellent raconteur, setting scene after scene. He brought to life 'the saintly Queen Jadwiga, who…united Poland with Europe's last un-Christian nation, Lithuania, and made her country into a bulwark against the Turks, and for a while, a European power'. He reminded his listeners that the tombs of these great Poles were on their doorstep in Wawel Cathedral. They saw a very different, more extrovert, Karol senior from the widower who was a solitary, devout and pious communicant who never remarried. He told also, his baritone voice rising and falling with dramatic inflection, stories of Ancient Greece and Rome – 'how Aeneas carried his father, Anchises, piggyback through the burning ruins of Troy on their way to an escape by sea that led him to found Rome. Every story conveyed some character isolated by a deed.'

Perhaps what Karol learned most from his remarkable father was the idea of the 'creative interaction' of persons. He meant by this that we become ourselves by virtue of our relationships with others. In terms of father and mother he believes that, although both are separate entities, they 'give birth' to each other as they assume motherhood and fatherhood. He imbibed from his own father 'the nucleus of a drama. One could argue that all dramas in the world describe the course of interaction – the creative one and the destructive one.'

From boyhood on Wojtyla saw life as drama. For the isolated child, communication became of paramount importance. He also saw fatherhood as of supreme value, asserting in *The Radiation of Fatherhood*, for example:

> *If you are to be born of your father, you must first penetrate the depths of his will…*

During his father's life, Karol never once spoke to him about a vocation to the priesthood, but later acknowledged that 'his example was in a way my first seminary, a kind of domestic seminary'.

His father taught him to be outward-looking and open to the world, to renounce the idea that anything is 'mine'. He could distill later from his extraordinary memory the feelings his father awoke in him, learning through him 'what it means to be a father; it means having the strongest bonds with the world…so let us shape the world together!'

If one lost 'faith in one's own fatherhood [think, child], then only pain is possible'; he understood also, in that dramatic sense of interaction, how 'Fathers return through their children'; and how 'The father always revives in the soil of a child's soul'; he was

> *embedded in me with his roots, like another, parallel, tree trunk …*
> *everything grows out of one system, out of common roots.*
> *So did father grow in me through mother,*
> *and I was their unity*.

Karol senior functioned not only as his son's first seminary; he was also his son's first playhouse. For here, bold in its appeal, was the direction his son followed in the next few years – the theatre.

3

When the Ship Is Sinking,
What is Private?
(1934-39)

The internal difficulties of the new Poland, a third of whose thirty million people belonged to racial minorities (the largest being four and a half million Ukrainians), grew enormously during the first five years of Karol's secondary education, and strongly affected his mental outlook.

The million white Russians (Belorussians) in the north-east, and the 750,000 ethnic Germans in the west threatened Poland's uneasy peace, for either of her powerful neighbours could foment trouble on their behalf.

The three and a half million Jews, spread all over Poland, had no power base inside the country, and no patron foreign power to support their rights and interests, so, as elsewhere in Western Europe in the worsening financial situation, they increasingly became targets of prejudice, and on a national and personal level blamed and attacked as scapegoats. Poland was also driven by active class distinctions, and its people's own extreme awareness of rank and hierarchy. Although a backward society, mainly agrarian and poor, it possessed an intellectual élite with strong cultural and political aspirations. The new constitution in principle introduced democracy, but ninety-two officially registered political parties had resulted in fourteen separate governments between 1918 and 1925 ('Three Poles,' runs the joke, 'four parties'). In 1926, after two days of heavy fighting with government forces, fourteen regiments under Marshal Pilsudski took over the country. Pilsudski exercised power benevolently, introducing reforms and allowing highly articulate and hostile opposition groups to continue in an elected parliament of heavily curtailed powers.

Pilsudski led an army which was tolerant of Jews and many officers were Jewish, fiercely patriotic, at the same time retentive of their religious practices. On the right of society there flourished a neo-fascist, patriotic National Democratic Party. This

stigmatised Jews as foreign and Christ-killers. On the extreme left was a small but vociferous communist party, containing paradoxically many Jews.

Marshal Jozef Pilsudski died of liver and stomach cancer in 1935. As decreed in his will, his heart was removed and taken to Vilnius, to be placed alongside his mother's remains, while his brain was sent to Warsaw's Institute of Anatomy for research purposes. The remainder of his body was buried in Wawel Cathedral along the kings of Poland. There was national mourning. While Pilsudski was criticized heavily on all sides, notably by Archbishop Prince Sapieha in the Catholic hierarchy, for his 1926 *coup d'tat*, after his death Poland sank into internecine conflict.

He had towered above other Polish leaders. He was the military hero and leader of stature, the *de facto* dictator (he took the title of defence minister) during the first decade and a half of Karol's life. Most of those fifteen years were stable, while for any young man of strong patriotic pride and deep religious devotion, Pilsudski must have remained a strong example. But in the 1930s the life of politics and the exalted life of the national myth were diverging too far. Karol drew a conclusion, perhaps only later when he reflected on it, from the example of Pilsudski, namely that a successful national leader has to have a vision to capture the secret imagination of his people, and so foster and enhance the vitality of his nation. Pilsudski, a severe realist who considered through his life that the relationships with France and Great Britain were illusory, 'exotic' alliances, had no such vision. He did not embody the fantasy or aspirations of the nation and create a republic which was to last after his death. Karol, in search of heroes, did not find them among dictators or military leaders or, it must be said, democratic leaders such as he saw around him in Poland. Already attuning himself to modern thought, by the age of seventeen he was reading Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* in German.

One of the bases of the 1920 republic had been Catholic-Jewish union and co-operation. In September 1935 the Nuremberg Laws proclaimed in Germany abolished German citizenship for Jews, defined as people who had three Jewish grandparents. These laws forbade sexual contact and marriage between Aryan and

Jews, reducing the latter to the status of a subject race. Jews, as for some time in practice, now legally could not be civil servants, doctors, journalists, farmers, teachers, actors, artists, writers, bankers, administrators or politicians.

The effects of this intolerance reverberated through Poland: the expression of the violent prejudice was no longer taboo. In the year following Pilsudski's death, as Poland drifted towards disintegration, Augustin Hlond, the cardinal primate of Poland, argued in a pastoral letter that there would be a Jewish problem as long as Jews remained in Poland: that it was a 'fact that the Jews are fighting against the Catholic Church, persisting in free thinking, and are the vanguard of godlessness, Bolshevism, subversion… It is a fact that the Jews deceive, levy interest, and are pimps. It is a fact that the religious and ethical influence of the Jewish young people on Polish people is a negative one.'

Marshal Edward Smigly-Rydz led the junta that took over power from Pilsudski with nationalist and Catholic support. Their popular calls to unity underlined the growth of the anti-Semitic virus that was now rapidly infecting Catholic-Jewish co-operation. Typical of the mood was the cartoon of a rapacious, bald-headed Jew with enormous nose, claws for hands, striped trousers and swallow-tailed coat of a banker, chucking an evicted Gentile family into a muddy ditch: it appealed to fellow countrymen that they are being murdered by Jews and yet kept supporting them. Polish consciousness had to wake up. 'Let the innocent blood of our comrades stand before you when you are about to commit a deed calling for God's revenge, when you are about to carry money to a Jew … Avoid your enemy the Jew.'

In a private meeting in December 1937 between French and Polish foreign ministers, Jozef Beck, who had fallen for the deceptive German call for *rapprochement* with Poland, raised the matter of his country's desire to be rid of her Jews, suggesting Madagascar as a possible refuge.

On the other hand the pro-Jewish Canon Prochownik (who had buried Karol's mother, Emilia) had a very different message for Karol. Now pastor of St. Mary's, he spoke out against the economic boycott of Jews, insisting that to be anti-Semitic was

to be anti-Christian. So did Pope Pius XI, a former Hebrew scholar and man of cultural distinction who had also written a book on mountain-climbing. He denounced anti-Semitism both in his measured encyclical *With a Burning Doubt* (specially published in German as *Mit brennender Sorge* instead of Latin) – 'Whoever exalts race, or the people, or the state distorts and prevents an order of the world crated by God' (14 March 1937) – and in informal, angry outbursts as he did before Belgian pilgrims on 6 September 1938: 'It is not possible for Christians to participate in anti-Semitism. Spiritually we are Semites!'

Despite such attempts at conciliation, an atmosphere if mistrust and isolation took hold. Karol's friend Jerzy was the son of the lawyer known as the head of the local Jewish community, and following new regulations he was obliged to print his name in Hebrew on his office door, to identify him as someone to be avoided by good Polish Catholics. While some in Karol and Kluger's class were anti-Jewish, mainly with the belief that Jews were Bolsheviks, tolerance remained the dominant note of Wadowice's religious and historical instruction. But even here the situation could suddenly deteriorate. When in the spring of 1938 Radical Nationalist thugs smashed Jewish shop-fronts in the Rynek, threatening those who did not boycott the shops, Professor Gebhardt, Karol's history teacher, a socialist who wore a bright red cravat (Poland, land of symbols again), severely charged his class not to be intimidated.

The Janus face of Poland was dramatically demonstrated by Kalwaria Zebrzydowska, to which father and son went at Easter and for the August Feast of the Assumption. The Polish version of the Easter passion play in particular, featuring the children of Abraham and Moses as Christ's killers, and the anti-Jewish Good Friday observances were often followed by violence against Jews. As Kluger reports, 'As with all melodrama, the touchstone of audience reaction is the loathsome villain.' While Wadowice itself remained more quiet, 'Jews in surrounding villages and towns dreaded Holy Week as a time that was sure to bring out the latent contempt and hostility among some members of the Catholic majority.' And in the passion play, without any basis in Scripture these inflammatory words were given to Christ: 'I have planted for thee My

most beautiful vineyard: and thou has proved very bitter to Me; for in My thirst thou gavest Me vinegar to drink; and with a spear thou has pierced the side of thy Saviour.'
In the main church of the Bernardine monastery in Kalwaria a large, anonymous, seventeenth-century painting was another Holy Week attraction for anti-Semitic Catholics. Each year its macabre imagery, prominently positioned, affected thousands, either repelling them or inciting them to racial feeling.

It showed Christ falling under his cross as a throng of Jews, made to look like animals – with claws for hands, stained, jagged teeth, and evil eyes – tore, kicked, and spat at him. After seeing this enacted on the stage, its image burned in the minds of pilgrims as they took their journeys homeward. That was when the trouble always started.

The Wojtylas traditionally attended the passion play, so we can be sure Karol saw and registered an experience which affected him profoundly.

Another extreme aspect of Polish religious life that engraved itself on Karol's memory and remained with him as an influence was the Mariavite schismatic church. Founded by a Sister of St. Clare, Felicja Kozlowska, in Plock, a small town on the Vistula north of Warsaw, this movement strove in its veneration of the Holy Sacrament to emulate Mary. It crossed over into heresy when its one-eyed foundress, from the miraculous visions and instruction she claimed to have received from God in 1893, furthered the idea of 'spiritual marriages' between nuns and priests (sexuality being conceived as a means of advancing their spirituality). In 1906 Pius X excommunicated the new order, which was now under the direction of a Father Jan Kowalski, but as a schismatic church it grew, continued to think of itself as Catholic, and three year later the Old Catholic Church of Utrecht, under its archbishops, received the 200,000 Mariavites into communion, while the Russian religious authority recognized them as a valid church.

Kowalski, ordained as bishop by the Archbishop of Utrecht in 1909, and now married, became with his wife progressively more heretical, celebrating the 'mystic' union between priests and nuns in the actual marriage ceremony, ordaining, in 1928,

nuns as priests. In their sacrilegious idealism the Mariavites believed in immaculate conception for themselves, and a new and sinless race of angelic beings. The Old Catholic Church of Utrecht repudiated its tie with the Mariavites, and later, when persecution of the Mariavites increased, Kowalski ordained more and more women and abolished confession and the use of holy water.

This episode, directly experienced by the devout Karol in early life, ended in savage suppression by the Nazis, who sent Kowalski to Dachau, where he died. From the start of Karol's life the ordination of women carried dramatic associations of heresy, persecution and unending religious conflict.

'Tell me who influences you and I will tell you who you are,' wrote Jean-Louis Barrault, the French actor who famously played Baptiste in *Les Enfants du Paradis*, but also incarnated the French poet and dramatist Paul Claudel's Catholic heroes in the French theatre from the 1920s to the 1940s. From the age of fourteen or thereabouts, Karol fell under the spell of the spoken word and the theatre.

Mundek had introduced him to Mieczyslaw Kotlarczyk, a Polish teacher who had a passion for theatre. Bu it was not until 1934 that Karol visited Kotlarczyk at home to find stage sets, people dressed in costumes, handling props and speaking in assumed voices. He sat in on a rehearsal, at once mesmerized, then joined Kotlarczyk's youth theatre group. From this time on, his leisure hours and entertainment were mainly filled by his own representations, in voice and action, of heroes and villains. Yet from the beginning religious conviction shaped Karol's view of art and of the theatre. No more powerful expression of this conviction in a writer can be found than in a letter written in 1905 by Claudel to Andre Gide; 'As for what people call "Art" and "Beauty",' Claudel tells Gide, 'I had rather that they perished a thousand times over than that we should prefer such creatures to their creator and the futile constructions of our imagination to the reality in which alone we may find delight.'

Claudel chastises Gide for 'the preferring of things of their own sake, and the considering of them as nothing more than that, and the liking of them for what they are not…' and sees the basis of a whole art, brilliant and generous, in the chapter in

Proverbs when the Spirit of God moves over chaos in sublime liberty. Art is 'an exclamation and an acclamation, a counting and a conferring of Graces, like the Canticle of the young men in the fiery furnace, like St. Francis of Assisi's Canticle of the Sun'.

Claudel scorns modern art, 'from which everything of real substance has been taken away, and with it that powerful source of youth inherent only in the heavenly *naturalness* that animates Homeric poetry, for example…' The classical education Karol received at school, the symbolism of Polish art and literature, the ritual drama of Catholic religious observance: all these propelled Karol towards developing similar feelings. In particular the 'great ethical power of the theatre' – as well as the actor's art of mimesis, of putting oneself into the skin of another and speaking in, and impersonating, a different identify – seized Karol from the very beginning. This power, as he says, is most manifest in *Hamlet*'s play within the play, when by depicting the murder of Gonzago by his brother he provokes Claudius's guilt and catches 'the conscience of the king'.

The friendship between Mieczyslaw Kotlarczyk and Karol flourished. Eight years older than Karol, Kotlarczyk was born in 1912 in Wadowice. By education a philologist, he was student, then master and doctor of Polish philology at the Jagiellonian. Karol said how he enriched, with his enthusiasm and original approach to drama – first of all in amateur theatre – the cultural life of Wadowice. Karol recalls Kotlarczyk went to Salzburg one summer festival to see *Jedermann* and *Faust*.

'In the same period he was awarded a doctorate for his thesis about the critical work of the X Society [a Warsaw group of theatre critics who from 1815-19 signed their reviews with the pseudonymous X], and his interests in religious theatre took shape.'

Kotlarczyk taught at the Carmelite Fathers' high school for girls. Temperamentally fierce, he answered a need in Karol for a more immediate passion and commitment than that which the church supplied. Kotlarczyk's father ran one of Wadowice's amateur theatres in which the son acted. From the start Kotlarczyk picked Karol to play leads. In his flat Kotlarczyk coached the sixteen-year-old Halina

Krolikiewicz, daughter of Karol's headmaster, who became his most frequent leading lady. Kotlarczyk's sister describes her brother giving demonstrations of how speeches should be recited, walking up and down the apartment while Karol followed, trying but not always succeeding in copying him.

'I got to know him,' said Karol later, 'as the pioneer of an original theatre, in the noblest sense of the word; as an exponent of the true Polish and Christian traditions of that art, traditions passed on to us by all our literature, and especially by the great romantic and neo-romantic literature.'

The well-known poet dramatists who became so much in vogue in the early days of the new Polish republic, such as Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Slowacki, and Cyprian Norwid, had much in common with Shakespeare and other patriotic English poets in Elizabethan times; by the standards of the West today, they can appear transcendental, high-flown and dangerously nationalistic. Mickiewicz's poetic drama *Dziady (Forefather's Eve)*, for example, identified Poland's destiny through its redemptive sufferings, as the Messiah among nations. Slowacki shared a mysticism of spirit with Mickiewicz, but he also had the gift of prophecy, foretelling a future Slav pope who – unlike the Italian Pius IX, who in 1848 ran away from Rome in disguise – would not abandon Poland:

Amid discord God strikes
At a bell immense,
For a Slavic Pope,
He opened the throne.
This one will not flee the sword,
Like that Italian.
Like God, He will bravely face the sword,
For Him, world is dust…
So behold, here comes the Slavic Pope,
A brother of the people.

Cyprian Norwid attracted Karol by his more quiet and searching intellectuality. He, like Claudel, rejected art for art's sake: 'A man is born on this planet to give testimony to truth,' he writes in the prologue to *Promethidion* – and the 'great truth' that has to be witnessed is that 'Christ had led man out of the realm of fatality and into the realm of freedom'. Literature was a means of seeking and testing the truth of reality. Through such works as *Portrait of an Artist* and *Promethidion*, a poetic exaltation of Polish freedom, Norwid became more of a lasting influence on Karol than Mickiewicz and Slowacki, for he had more of a philosophical, enquiring bent of mind. According to Jerzy Kluger, Wojtyla senior read aloud to them Norwid's critical essays on Chopin's music (Mazurkas, polonaises and of course the famous marching song that became Poland's national anthem in 1920 – 'Poland has not vanished so long as we live').

Influenced by his father, John Paul II retained a lifelong affection and respect for Norwid, regretting in later life that the playwright had fallen into neglect. But the autodidact father interspersed his readings with war stories, and interrogations on Polish history dates. As the Pope tells Andre Frossard, not without a touch perhaps of ruefulness – for how could he escape them or their influence? – 'during all my childhood, I listened to veterans of World War One, talking about endless horrors of battle.'

While still at school, Karol performed in ten plays between 1934 and 1938, invariably as the male lead, and he also, according to his Polish teacher, Kazimierz Forys, did much of the directing. As well as the two roles, chorus and hero, he played in Slowacki's *Balladyna*, he took over the prompting in Aleksander Fredro's *Virgins' Vows*, although still playing the lead, as he knew all the parts by heart (and therefore did not need the book). He acted Haemon in Sophocles' *Antigone* and the Apostle-narrator in a version of *St. John's Apocalypse*; he played the poet-hero Count Henryk in *The Un-Divine Comedy* by Zygmunt Krasinski, the title roles in *Kordian* by Slowacki and *Sulkowski* by Stefan Zeromski: all three, plays of revolution and national liberation. He enjoyed comedy, playing the leading roles in Fredro's *Lady and Hussars* as well as

Virgins' Vows, but he returned to serious romantic drama as the Polish king whose marriage to a commoner is opposed by the nobility (*King Sigismund Augustus,* by Stanislaw Wyspianski).

Finally he performed the title role in *Judas Iscariot* by Karol Hubert Rostworowski, whose mixture of verse and psychology with mystery and morality-play procedures caught his imagination and influenced him when he came to write plays of his own, which he began to do in his eighteenth year. He learned and performed two big parts a year and at such an early age this provided a formidable education in itself. Destiny had at once singled him out as a heavyweight.

The theatre also provided the backdrop for Karol's first romantic – and apparently platonic – link with a girl: Regina, the daughter of the Beers family who lived alongside the Wojtylas at No. 2, Rynek.

Ginka was two years older than Karol – black-eyed, beautiful and reputedly the most brilliant girl in her year at the high school. Living in such close proximity they must always have known one another, but the friendship reached a high point when the director cast Karol as Gucio opposite Ginka: she recalls, 'There was a lot of excitement in our building when, still a school-girl, I auditioned for the leading female role of a lover in a French [-influenced] play (*Virgins' Vows).* After I was chosen I heard Lolek also decided to try his luck. He was good-looking and as a result was given the lead as my stage lover.'

On stage she was impressive, with a talent for comedy and satire in particular; off-stage she was irrepressible. 'Her wit, her laughter that bubbled like a pot on the boil, the tiny space between her teeth – everything' – to Jerzy Kluger, at least three years her junior – 'was entrancing.' Top scholar in science, she hoped to follow in the footsteps of Maria Sklodowska (better known as Mme. Curie). Ginka's heroine was her headmistress, a war hero from the 1920 campaign and it seemed in Karol's homeland that women had a status, a list of achievements in science and warfare to their credit, that put them well ahead of their Anglo-Saxon equivalents in Karol's developing awareness of society and the world.

Ginka organized the school theatrical club into a thriving regional theatre, inviting well-known professionals to come down and judge and award prizes for performances. Together with Karol she was the driving force behind the productions. Ginka's husband in later years claims that 'Karol was crazy about her' – this out of earshot of his wife – Ginka demurely observed: 'I must admit that I enjoyed his company, but of course there was no question of a romance. What girl of eighteen thinks of a boy of sixteen in that direction? Anyway, he was a Catholic, and I never forgot I was Jewish, which was very important to me.'

They did enjoy playing passionate scenes together in *Virgins' Vows*. They were described in Wadowice's *The Voice of the Young* as 'an obsolute success. Gucio (Mr. Wojtyla) and Aniela were most convincing as young lovers.' This witty, Molièresque play, written in 1833, toured locally, giving rise possibly to part of the later rumours, just after Karol was elected pope, that he had a love affair in his youth. This 'investigation' of a mooted affairs, by two Italians, was published in their *Il Pastore Venutu* and featured on the front page of the *Corriere della Sera*. It was even suggested that Wojtyla married at this time. Yet, aside from these rumours, forcefully dismissed, Karol knew both directly and indirectly through the parts he played and those he played them with, the feelings of being in love.

Ginka applied to study medicine at the Jagiellonian in Krakow, but there was now increasing pressure to exclude Jews; formerly a quarter of the university population was Jewish, but towards the end of the 1930s only those with special privileges or connections were admitted. The school headmistress lobbied for Ginka, and as she had fought in Pilsudski's Legion and been decorated with the Virtuti Militari, the highest Polish military decoration, she prevailed. Ginka left to study, but shortly was back, for the girl she shared lodgings with in Krakow had a communist boyfriend, and one day he was followed by the police back to their rooms, where he was arrested. She felt guilt by association and feared action by the authorities against her.

Ginka obtained permission to go and work in Palestine, so she took her chance among the panic flight of thousands of Jews. South American countries were

tightening immigration controls, so was the United States – 'Fewer than seven thousand Jews, a figure that include both Catholics and Jews, succeeded in obtaining visas to emigrate there during the late 1930s.' You survived where you could.

She had to tell Karol she was leaving but felt deep reluctance, knowing how popular she was with Polish boys and girls. 'There was only one family,' she said, 'who never showed any racial hostility toward us, and that was Lolek and his dad.' When she went to say goodbye to Lolek and his father,

> *Mr. Wojtyla was upset about my departure, and when he asked me why, I told him. Again and again he said to me, 'Not all Poles are anti-semitic. You know I am not!'*
>
> *I spoke to him frankly and said that very few Poles were like him. He was very upset. But Lolek was even more upset than his father. He did not say a word, but his face went very red. I said farewell to him as kindly as I could, but he was so moved that he could not find a single word in reply. So I just shook the father's hand and left.*

Ginka and Karol met again in the late 1980s when, as pope, at a general audience in St. Peter's Square, he heard her name shouted out by fellow Wadowiceans who came to pay him homage. His recall was instant and when he summoned her she asked if he really remembered her: 'Of course I do,' he answered. 'You are Regina. We lived in the same house. How is your sister, Helen?'

She had to tell him that Helen and her mother died in Oswiecim (Auschwitz – which was only thirty miles from Krakow and thirty-five miles from Wadowice), while her father was killed in the Soviet Union.

'He just looked at me, and there was deep compassion in his eyes… He took both my hands and for almost two minutes he blessed me and prayed before me, just holding my hands in his hands. There were thousands of people in the Square, but for just a few seconds there were just the two of us.' In another report she described how 'Like the 16-year-old in Wadowice, again he was lost for words. As he returned back to face me I sensed immediately that he was as moved as I was to meet again.

The expression in his eyes also told me that he was the same lovely Lolek whom I used to walk with to and from the theatre.'

Kasia Zak was another member of the drama club; her attractive looks and aura of mystery tantalized the boys in the group and in audiences; while apparently her vagueness suited the abstract poetic quality of much of the Polish-Romantic repertoire they performed. Kotlarczyk's sister Janina described Kasia as having 'a sunburnt complexion, beautiful long blond hair, and very blue eyes'. In Slowacki's *Balladyna* in 1937 Kasia played love scenes with Karol, who played the hero. According to Janina, Karol ended one scene saying, 'I wish this was real.' Kasia gave him a high-spirited brush-off, 'Potrzebuje Tego' – 'This is just what I need!' – flattering Karol with her rejection.

Although there is scant evidence as to how deeply they were involved with one another, Halina Krolikiewicz was his most frequently mentioned girlfriend. She played many more leading roles opposite Karol than Ginka. Four months older than him, Halina was blode and statuesque, and she projected a precocious dignity similar to Karol's. Her father was headmaster of Karol's school, and he also taught Karol Greek. He was, according to Halina, a very severe and exacting man who would never countenance his daughter becoming a professional. When Halina and Karol were also rehearsing for *Balladyna*, the boy playing Kostryn, the evil villain, threatened to shoot one of the teachers at school if he gave him a low grade. Halina's father expelled the boy.

Halina recalls that this suspension forty-eight hours before they were due to open wreaked havoc and dismay among the cast. "Lolek suggested quietly, blushing with embarrassment, that he could play both roles because the noble Kirkor dies rather early, and he would have time to change costumes and to play the ignoble Kostryn.' She asked him how he could learn the role: 'Oh,' he told her. 'It's easy. I know it already.' It seemed he had all the parts memorized, as if this was any actor's normal preparation. "So it may be,' she told him, 'for you!'

Halina, like Ginka, denied any special romantic attachment, but it seems Karol came closer to her than to any other young woman. Halina tells us only that 'Once he was asked to play the part of a seducer with me as the girl who fell for his charms.' Both decided to study Polish literature at Krakow University. 'We liked being together. We talked very much walking along the River Vistula, which crosses Krakow. Our conversations were mostly about the theatre.'

How close or how deep the contact went is a matter of speculation. English journalist and editor Charles Moore, after a papal interview, claimed that Wojtyla surely had a direct experience of a love affair in his early years. A Roman journalist went even further, telling Moore, 'This pope – good-looking bloke and all that. He must have slept with a girl, mustn't he?' Biographers assure us that the answer to the question is 'no', added Moore, 'but the remark strikes me as a sort of compliment. This pope is in no sense worldly, but he is a man for whom the world, human flesh and blood, is utterly real.' Paul Johnson, in a book about the Pope published in 1982, guessed the same; exploring how little his upbringing had been sheltered, and how wide his experience became, Johnson goes on to speculate: 'He had girlfriends. He experienced the normal emotional relationships of a virile and exceptionally gifted and intelligent young man. After recognizing his vocation he embraced chastity.' The implication, plainly, is that before he became a priest he had some knowledge of the opposite sex from personal involvement. This would seem to be so.

Later, powerful and important relationships with women continued, although entirely chastely, yet this fired up the erotic energy, which was not acted upon but certainly there, and which was closely bound up with his creative power. The first were with female students with whom, after he took holy orders in 1946, he went on camping trips in the mountains, and with whom he held explicit discussions about sex. From the start it was always clear to everyone with whom he came into contact that Karol's attitude to women was far from that of the stereotype male who relegated women to the kitchen and the nursery. Always the centre of attention for admiring women of all ages, the intense 'cross-gender' friendships he formed in those years were to continue

throughout his life, and become centred on personal and intellectual preoccupations instead of the theatre. Unlike many who were to surround him later in the Vatican, he was a man before he was a priest.

There was of course nothing wrong with a celibate priest feeling desire. Was he proving to himself that in steering carefully through the perilous waters of desire, his celibacy was trustworthy? Was he testing himself? There was no reason to believe he put himself deliberately into occasions of sin. Yet as we shall see—and even as Nietzsche wrote – the degree and kind of a person's sexuality has repercussions on the very summits of his or her spirituality.

From 1936 to 1938 Wojtyla presided over his school branch of Marian Sodality, a religious body of persons established for devotions to the cult of the Virgin Mary. This began a very personal and life log commitment to the belief that everything could be entrusted to Mary because she was the 'sign of the woman' spoken of in the Book of Revelation. She was the sign of salvation for the history of the world. But there was nothing strident, or even very public, about Karol's commitment to faith. A classmate recalls him saying how, when asked, he was not going to become a priest – 'Non sum dignus' – 'I am not worthy' – while even a year or two later he told a historian that he decisively rejected the notion. A mixture of devotion, national service – he did this compulsorily in 1938, working the summer on the roads – theatrical activity, and a host of other interests such as music and learning foreign languages was forming a very complex human being.