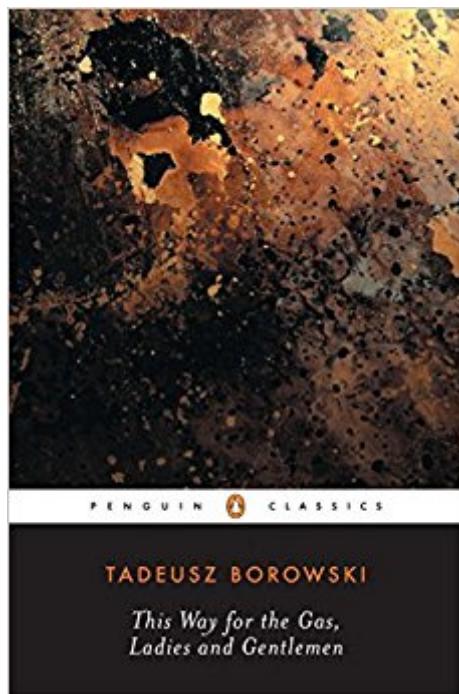


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This Way For The Gas, Ladies And Gentlemen (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

Tadeusz Borowski's concentration camp stories were based on his own experiences surviving Auschwitz and Dachau. In spare, brutal prose he describes a world where the will to survive overrides compassion and prisoners eat, work and sleep a few yards from where others are murdered; where the difference between human beings is reduced to a second bowl of soup, an extra blanket or the luxury of a pair of shoes with thick soles; and where the line between normality and abnormality vanishes. Published in Poland after the Second World War, these stories constitute a masterwork of world literature. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

Imre Kertesz, a concentration camp survivor and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature often asks in his work: is there life after Auschwitz? Can one live with the ineffable guilt that accompanies survival against all odds? For Borowski the answer appears to be no. On July 1, 1951, at age 29, Tadeusz Borowski opened a gas valve, put his head in an oven and took his life. There is no small

amount of irony in the fact that after escaping the gas of Auschwitz and Dachau Borowski would end his life in this manner. Borowski was born in Soviet occupied Ukraine to Polish parents. His father was sent to a Soviet work camp, building the White Sea Canal, but was released in an exchange of prisoners with Poland. Upon his father's release, the family settled in Warsaw. Although not Jewish, Borowski was arrested by the Gestapo in 1943 for subversive activities when he was caught surreptitiously printing his own poetry. He spent the rest of the war in Auschwitz and Dachau. The first piece of luck or fate that saved his life was the decision by the Nazis to stop exterminating non-Jewish prisoners two weeks before Borowski's arrival. The series of stories contained in *This Way for the Gas* are all written in the voice of one prisoner, Tadeusz. Not unexpectedly the stories appear to be loosely autobiographical. Borowski's writing is not overloaded with emotion. It is descriptive and matter of fact. The day-to-day tone of the writing, writing that describes death and deprivation as normal events adds an emotional impact to the stories. For example, in one scene the prisoner Tadeusz describes a football (soccer) match played by the prisoners. He served as goalkeeper and described his walk to retrieve a ball that was kicked way over the net.

Tadeusz Borowski was a teenager when the Nazis invaded Poland. He was eventually arrested by the Nazis for participating in the underground press (he had a copy of *BRAVE NEW WORLD* in his pocket at the time he was searched), and sent to Auschwitz. His girlfriend was also sent to Auschwitz. Borowski wrote a cycle of stories that spanned Poland under Nazi occupation, the experience of Auschwitz, and his travels after the war, to France, where he felt like a "walking ghost" amongst the exiles, and finally his return to Poland. He wrote a cycle of stories about these experiences published in two volumes in Polish, *FAREWELL TO MARIA* and *WORLD OF STONE*. His girlfriend had also survived Auschwitz and went to Sweden after the war. Borowski persuaded her to return to Poland and marry him. But life did not go well for Borowski. After he wrote his two volumes of stories, he, like many other young Poles, decided that communism might be the best thing for Poland, and subjugated his brilliant writing talent to churning out reams of "socialist realism" for the communists. But he was depressed and he was drinking heavily. When a close friend of his was tortured by the communists, he became completely disillusioned with the communists. One night in 1951, after visiting his young wife in the hospital, who was soon to give birth to their first child, he went home and killed himself. What lives on, however, are the two marvelous books of stories, among the finest ever written, detailing in a quiet, subdued way (much like the other masterpiece of man's inhumanity to man in the communist GULAG, Shalamov's *KOLYMA TALES*) the world he'd experienced.

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